ST PAUL’S EPISTLES IN GENERAL.
MARCION AND HIS TEXT OF THOSE EPISTLES.
FORGED LETTERS ASCRIBED TO ST PAUL

Leaving aside the letter to the Hebrews, St Paul’s name at the head of all his Epistles makes it pretty clear who actually wrote them. And as for the most part they were addressed to particular churches where they were read in public meetings, they were then passed on to neighbouring churches, and eventually to all the faithful in the same way. I shall not spend time establishing in what order they were written or at what time, because whenever they were written, and in whatever order, it in no way affects the text which will always remain the same. Nevertheless, following St John Chrysostom, who diligently examined this question, we shall observe that although the Epistle to the Romans occupies pride of place it does not mean it was the first to be written.¹ There is clear proof that the two letters addressed to the Corinthians were written earlier. The learned bishop also believes that St Paul wrote to the Thessalonians before writing to the Corinthians. This is evident all the way through the preface to his homilies on the Epistle to the Romans, where he draws on the example of the prophets who have not been arranged according to the chronological order of their prophecies. Theodoret whose discussion of the matter is most often simply a digest of St Chrystostom, compares the published order of the Epistles of St Paul with the arrangement of the psalms of David. Just as David, inspired by God, he says, wrote the Psalms, and others subsequently arranged them in order which suited them without taking any account of the time when each was written, so it was with the Epistles of St Paul.²

Marcion, whilst removing some passages from the Epistles of St Paul, accepted most of them, arranging them in the following order. First of all, the Epistle to the Colossians followed by the two to the Corinthians.³ The Epistle to the Romans was only in fourth place; then came the two to

¹ John Chrysostom, Argumentum to Homilies on Romans § 1 (PG 60:392).
² Theodoret, Preface to the Interpretation of the xiv Epistles of the apostle St Paul (PG 82:38).
³ Epiphanius, Heresy 42 n. 11, 7 Refut. 1 (39), 8 (40) (Panarion, 1:288–289).
Marcion described his compendium of St Paul’s Epistles as an “apostolic.” In the Dialogue against Marcion’s sect, ascribed to Origen, the Marcionite speaker frequently refuses to accept the quotations from the Epistles as being by St Paul. When his opponent Adamantius quotes some of the apostles’ words, he says: “I do not believe in your false apostolic.” Elsewhere, when Adamantius asks him whether he believes in the apostle St Paul, he replies: “I believe in my apostolic.” Adamantius, therefore, in rebuttal, does not quote the Epistles of St Paul in the form in which they were read in the church, but as they appeared in what the Marcionites called their apostolics, their grouping of the Epistles. Adamantius says: “I have your apostolic.” In this regard, St Jerome, discussing the Marcionite texts, says that in their own way they forged the Epistles by the apostles, being astonished that such people could call themselves Christians.

St. Epiphanius records that Marcion had changed the Epistles of St Paul in some passages which I shall enumerate here, in order.

Ephesians 5:3. Where we have a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, the heretic had removed “unto his wife.”

Galatians 5:9. In place of the word leavens he had “corrupts.” This does not affect the meaning in this context so it may be a variant rather than a deliberate alteration. Moreover in the ancient Clermont manuscript held in the King’s Library, the reading is corrupt; and in the parallel Latin version, which is the old Vulgate, there is a concordant reading corrumpit as in the present day Vulgate.

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4 Also by W. Schneemelcher in E. Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, 2:132: see also supra, ch. 15 n. 19.
5 Though this work was earlier ascribed to Origen, the actual author is not known; Origen is sometimes called “Adamantius,” the name of a fourth-century anti-Gnostic writer. “Adamantius” is the name of the dialogue’s initiator: see introduction to Adamantius [sic], Dialogue on the True Faith in God: De Recta in Deum Fide, ed. and tr. R.A. Pretty (coll. “Gnostica,” Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 9–16.
6 Dialogue ..., section 1 (PG 11:1724).
7 Ibid., section 2 (PG 11:1765).
8 Jerome, Preface to Epistle to Titus (PL 26:555).
9 See infra, ch. 30 n. 4 of the present work.