CHAPTER VI

THE PRESENT REALIZATION OF ESCHATOLOGICAL SALVATION IN THE THOUGHT OF MARCION OF SINOE

INTRODUCTION

In view of the importance of Syrian Christianity for the substructure of Marcion's thought, together with the more apparent influences of Paul and Gnosticism, it would be very appropriate to ask how (if at all) Marcion related the present and future aspect of eschatological salvation.¹ A satisfactory solution to this question can be formulated only after three significant questions have been answered: (1) what is the essential nature of salvation in the thought of Marcion? (2) how did he conceptualize future eschatological existence? (3) to what degree (if any) could aspects of this future eschatological existence be appropriated and experienced in the present time? Each of these questions will be considered at length in the first three sections of the present chapter. The final section will deal with the question of ascetic motivations common to Syrian Christianity and Marcion.

The very formulation of these three questions presupposes the hypothesis which forms the basis for the present discussion. Briefly stated, it is that Marcion's ascetic baptismal requirements reveal that for him the rite was the effective means for actualizing and inaugurating an individually and ontologically realized form of eschatological salvation which demanded present conformity to what he conceived to be the future mode of eschatological existence.²

¹ On Marcion's relationship to Syrian Christianity, cf. infra, pp. 215ff. In the early catholic church, Paul could appropriately (but not disparagingly) be called the *apostolus haereticorum* because of the abundant use which "heretics" made of the Pauline corpus (Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 3. 5; *idem De praescr. haer.* 23. 1-3; Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 3. 13. 1 [Harvey, II, 72]). On Marcion's relationship to Gnosticism, cf. *infra*, p. 198, n. 2.

² At this point it must be admitted that it is often difficult (if not impossible) to distinguish the original teachings of Marcion from the later elaborations of Marcionites. One of the criteria which will be used within this study to distinguish the emphases of Marcion himself with regard to asceticism will be the presence of eschatological motives. If the eschatological motivation for Marcionite asceticism can be established, its antiquity is
To claim that asceticism was a vehicle for the present realization of eschatological salvation is to give Marcion’s ascetic motivation a predominantly positive rather than negative intention. This positively motivated asceticism is closely related to the eschatologically determined asceticism of Paul, which was primarily grounded on the imminence of the Parousia. It is our contention as well that Marcionite asceticism is not only phenomenologically similar to the Christian asceticism of Syria, but that in fact the two are genetically assured. If Marcion’s asceticism can be traced back (through Cerdo) to an origin in Syrian Christianity, it certainly cannot have been an element added by later (non-Syrian) Marcionites.

1 In Harnack’s monograph on Marcion, the great Berlin scholar repeatedly attributes Marcion’s asceticism to an entirely negative motive. Harnack not only described Marcion’s asceticism as a protest against the flesh and against material nature (based on the Greek assumption of the metaphysical dualism of flesh and spirit), but also as a protest against the God of the world and law (Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott, eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche [2. Aufl.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960], p. 149). Cf. Harnack, History of Dogma, I, 273-74: “But the strict asceticism which Marcion demanded as a Christian, could have had no motive without the Greek assumption of a metaphysical contrast of flesh and spirit, which in fact was also apparently the doctrine of Paul.” Harnack’s judgment in this instance is no more justified in the case of Marcion than it is in the case of Paul. Although even an abbreviated summary of early Christian ascetic motivations is beyond the scope of the present study (see H. Chadwick, “Enkrateia,” Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, V, 243-65), a brief enumeration of the positive motives for asceticism would not be out of place: (1) In obvious dependence upon Paul, Tertullian reiterates the eschatological motivation for asceticism in De monogamia 7. 4: “At ubi et ‘Crescite et redundate’ euacuavit extremitas temporum, inducente apostolo: ‘Superest ut et qui habent uxores sic sint ac si non habeant,’ qui tempus in collectum est.” Cf. idem De pudicitia 16. 19. Otto Betz observes that the Qumran community also had an eschatologically motivated asceticism (“The Eschatological Interpretation of the Sinai-Tradition,” pp. 93f.). (2) Elsewhere Tertullian expresses the Hellenistic idea that ascetic practises are an anticipation of divinization: “Si enim deus aeternus non esuriat, ut testatur per Esaiam, hoc erit tempus, quo homo deo adaequetur, cum sine pabulo uiuit” (De ieiunio 6. 7). (3) In addition, the eschatological motivation to accelerate the coming of the kingdom of God by asceticism is stressed by both Erik Peterson and Arthur Vööbus (cf. infra p. 197, n. 1), a motive which they see as particularly characteristic of Syrian Christianity. (4) Finally, imitation of the ascetic earthly life of Jesus can also be a positive motivation for the practise of asceticism: “In primis de suo exemplo, tunc de ceteris argumentis, cum puerorum dicit esse regnum caelorum, cum consortes illis facit alios post nuptias pueros” (Tertullian De monogamia 8. 7). Georg Kretschmar sees this motive as being of particular significance in the origin of Christian asceticism in his article “Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese,” Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, LXI (1964), 27-67.