

5. How did Marcion, Valentinus and Justin describe the relationship between Christianity and Judaism? Is one description friendlier to Judaism than any other?

In one sense, I found Justin's description of the relationship friendlier to Judaism than those of Marcion and Valentinus. At the same time his concepts were also quite hostile to the Jews. In trying to legitimize Christianity, all three philosophies reached to Judaism with its cachet of antiquity and establishment within the Roman Empire.

Marcion effectively separated Christianity from Judaism with his two gods (redeemer and creator) concept, and rejected the Hebrew sacred texts.

Valentinus, in adopting Gnostic philosophy, seems to break with a very basic Jewish idea of inclusion in the faith by ancestry dating to Abraham. At several points in the reading, there was an intimation that each human was seen with a predestined nature—one did or didn't have the “spark.”

Justin appropriated extensively from both Hebrew and Greek philosophies. Imitation being the highest form of flattery, that seems pretty friendly. On the other hand, failure to credit those earlier philosophies by insisting that the ideas were exclusive to Christianity is pretty unfriendly. I was amused at the depiction of Plato as Moses speaking Greek; seemed like pretty fancy footwork (of the mind).

I'm Eve, a 70-plus retiree. This is my first CALL course, and I feel like I'm off on a new adventure. Since I completed my B.S. degree directly out of high school, it's been a long time since I took a formal course of any sort, and online is a totally new experience. In the intervening years I taught secondary social studies, traveled to Brazil, lived on the economy in Korea, raised two children, and spent a couple of decades as a food and crafts writer and editor. Although it seems kind of crazy to me, I feel called to the diaconate, so this curriculum is just one more step in discerning that call.

Poor was probably a norm for people who lived under Roman rule. The Roman Empire was a civilization built on conquest. While nobility in Rome, military leaders, and high officials in the provinces had lavish lifestyles, wealth held by the conquered was appropriated and/or taxed out of existence. Populations were enslaved. And the very soldiers who did the conquering, while usually fed and clothed, were not well paid. In short, the poor were everywhere, and Jesus' concern for them was unusual.

The Montanists

2 One branch of Christians in the 2nd and 3rd Century, the Montanists, laid heavy emphasis on the direct communication of the Holy Spirit to the individual Christian. Their early leaders were Montanus (a man) and Prisca and Maximilla (two women). (See pp. 82-83, also the Wikipedia entry for Montanism.) The imperial church with its clear hierarchical authority and order eventually checked the Montanists and preserved orthodoxy, but how might have suppressing the Montanists, their visions and direct revelation put the mainstream church at risk? Did the church lose anything of value for its mission?

The My reading of the Wikipedia entry on the Montanists is that the sect practices were more than just

the communication between the Holy Spirit and an individual. New Prophecy was public prophecy.

The topic fascinated me, partially, because I have an on-again, off-again interest in spiritual gifts. Paul's list of spiritual gifts in 1st Corinthians 12 includes prophecy as well as speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues and I occasionally wonder why these gifts are seldom seen today. At the same time, it's not surprising that the use of prophecy, even ecstatic babbling, was used by factions of the early church. Although I've heard of Pentecostal sects that have sessions of tongues and interpreting today, it's outside my experience. Still, it's hard to imagine how a religious body determines what is true prophecy in any era. Much easier to avoid it completely.

Certainly prophecy is an enormous part of Jewish writings, Christianity, not so much. I can't help wonder if incorporating prophecy into the faith might have impacted the myriad of schisms, dissensions, and reformations that came later in Christianity.

Having watched the growth of women cleric in the Episcopal church, I certainly think we are only beginning to see the value of female deacons, priests and bishops. Had the Montanists been incorporated into the imperial church instead of regarded as heresy, we might have benefitted from two millennia of nurturing.

Kate, I have to agree with you for myself. I haven't traveled to Palestine to see the holy places, nor do I have a burning desire to do so. I do find the call of the Spirit in my daily life.

That said, I also think there are many people who need the tangible to enhance their relationship with Christ. I'm guessing someone in your acquaintance, as in mine, speaks almost rapturously about seeing the holy shrines, and we both probably think they're over the top. One friend of mine had been a lapsed Catholic for 20 or 30 years, went to the Holy Land, and returned to become an active church member.

But I also remember an experience I had with something precious and tangible more than 40 years ago that remains a strong influence on my faith today. Holding my 2-week-old firstborn son on Christmas morning, I was struck with the miracle he was. Then I had this flash of awe in my brain, "And the Christ child was more wondrous than this." I haven't figured out how that can be yet, but that moment is as real today as it was then.

The real question for me is how to use these tangible experiences to move the church beyond those visible things to the true mission

8. Anselm and Aquinas both sought rational proofs for God's existence. Did either of them produce proofs that satisfy you? Why or why not? Is proof of God a necessary element of our (your) theology? Or, more provocatively, for your faith?

I'm going to start with the last piece of this question. The proofs of Anselm and Aquinas were interesting, but for me personally, not a necessary element for my faith. In those Spiritual Gifts workshops that I spoke of earlier, I've always tested high in faith. At first that was surprising, but over time, I've realized that I do trust God to take care of me, and as I look back, I don't remember doubting God existed or that He had a plan, even when I didn't understand it.

That said, as I came to understand my own gift, I also understood that many people really need proof that God exists. In that light I really do like their proofs. The problem for many is that God is intangible. Because Anselm and Aquinas begin with the tangible, I think their proofs could be very helpful to persons I might encounter in ministry.

O.K., I can't post this without a shout out to Anselm for questioning the gender of the God-Man/Woman. I really didn't realize the masculinity of God or Jesus had been questioned before the 20th century.