

At the Left Hand of Christ: The Arch-Heretic Marcion

by

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Franz Fröhlke, meinem Lehrer

It is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation.

Herman Melville

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Marcion is unanimously acknowledged to be one of the most important and most intriguing figures of the Early Church. In spite of this importance, there is no comprehensive up-to-date study on his life and thought. Thus, the desire to fill this gap within the academic world – which is inconvenient for both students and professors alike – has been my inspiration for writing this thesis.

However, this work does not only aim at providing a complete study on Marcion for the twenty-first century, but also at ridding scholarship from several severe misconceptions regarding the arch-heretic. The main argument of my study is that previous scholarship has turned Marcion's exegesis of Scripture upside down. He did not find the inspiration for his doctrine in the teachings of the Apostle Paul, it is the Old Testament and its portrait of an inconsistent, vengeful and cruel God which forms the centre of his doctrine. *Marcion does not understand the Old Testament in the light of the New, he interprets the New Testament in the light of the Old.* This insight casts a new light on Marcion's place within the history of the Church, as the initiator of a fundamental crisis of the Old Testament in the second century. But not only did he have an enormous influence on Christian exegesis, he also stands at the beginning of the epochal fight between orthodoxy and heresy. As the first man to ever officially break with the Church, and whose biography would become a stereotype for future heresiologists, Marcion can rightfully claim the title of 'arch-heretic'.

ABBREVIATIONS OF PATRISTIC SOURCES

Adam. Dial. = Adamantius Dialogue

Adv. Herm. = Tertullian, Adversus Hermogenem

Adv. Marc. = Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem

Adv. haer. = Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses

Adv. omn. haer. = Pseudo-Tertullian, Adversus Omnes Haereses

Apol. = Justin Martyr, Apologia

Bapt. = Augustinus, De Baptismo

Barn. = Letter of Barnabas

Carm. adv. Marc. = Carmen adversus Marcionitas

Carn. = Tertullian, De Carne Christi

Cat. = Cyril of Jerusalem, Catecheses ad Illuminandos

1Cle = First Letter of Clement

Comm. Os. = Hieronymus, Commentarii in Osee

Comm. Rom. = Origenes, Commentarii in Epistulam ad Romanos

Cypr. ep. = Cyprian, Epistulae

De bapt. = Tertullian, De Baptismo

De ieun. = Tertullian, De Ieiunio adversus Psychicos

De mart. = Eusebius of Caesarea, De Martyribus Palaestinae

De mens. = Epiphanius, De Mensuris et Ponderibus

De praescr. = Tertullian, De Praescriptione Haereticorum

De princ. = Origenes, De Principiis

Dial. = Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho

Div. her. = Filastrius, Diversarum Hereseon Liber

Haer. fab. com. = Theodoret of Cyrus, Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium

Hier. ep. = Hieronymus, Epistulae

Hist. eccl. = Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica

Hom. Ezecl. = Origenes, Homiliae in Ezechielem

Hom. Ies. = Origenes, Homiliae in Iesu Nave

Hom. Lc. = Origenes, Homiliae in Lucam

Hymn. c. haer. = Ephraem Syrus, Hymni contra Haereses

Mart. Pion. = Martyrium Pionii

Pan. = Epiphanius, Panarion

Philad. = Ignatius, Letter to the Philadelphians

Pr. Ref. = Ephraem Syrus, Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan

Ref. = Hippolytus, Refutatio Omnium Haeresium

Smyrn. = Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrneans

Strom. = Clement of Alexandria, Stromata

Trad. ap. = Hippolytus, Traditio Apostolica

PREFACE

Meet Marcion – this was more than just a title for my Master’s dissertation, it was the beginning of a most intriguing project. Not many people were willing to take me seriously when I proposed to present my dissertation in the form of a theatrical play which showed a (fictional) meeting between Marcion and his most ardent adversary Tertullian. However, not only was I awarded the title of ‘Master of Theology’ in the end; we even managed to perform the play at several occasions, including the unforgettable performance at the XV International Conference on Patristics Studies at Oxford 2007, featuring the incomparable Marty Lunde and Paul Parvis as Marcion and Tertullian. The actors may have gone off stage, but the wish to actually meet Marcion stayed alive and found its (preliminary) end with this doctoral thesis.

Terms such as ‘thankfulness’ and ‘indebtedness’ are so stereotyped in a context like this that they cannot adequately describe the nature of the relation to my supervisor Dr Sara Parvis and her husband Paul. Both of them have supported me (and my occasional extravagance) from my first day here at the University of Edinburgh, and it is certainly no exaggeration to say that without them I would not be where I am today. Moreover, it was a great honour and pleasure to work side-by-side with Dieter Roth, whose friendship as well as expertise have been invaluable to me. I am also most grateful to Prof. Timothy Barnes, whose critical review contributed largely to the final version of this thesis. However, I would also like to express my gratitude to my teachers on the continent, prior to my time in Edinburgh, in particular Professor Eric Junod of the *Université de Lausanne*, whose combination of German efficiency and French charm made him a truly inspiring example.

Finally, a word of thanks is due to the *Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes* as well as to the *Arts and Humanities Research Council* and the *School of Divinity at Edinburgh University* for both their material and non-material support throughout my entire studies.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo

Mainz, Easter 2009

All translations in this work, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

Biblical quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.

Introduction

My first contact with Marcion was, as it was for so many people before me, through the magnificent monograph by Adolf von Harnack¹. The work owes its glory not only to the lifelong research Harnack put into it and the almost complete collection of sources consulted, but also to Harnack's talent as a writer. The book casts a spell on the reader which is hard to escape from. The author manages to paint a portrait of Marcion so lifelike that we almost have the impression we knew him in person. In front of our eyes a man steps out of the fog of history and enters the scene of our modern world: we admire his genius and straightforwardness, but we also feel sympathy for this tragic hero, whose ideas were not accepted by the Church, merely because he was so much ahead of his time.

Harnack obviously admires Marcion. In fact, he is even 'in love' with him: "Er [Marcion] ist daher in der Kirchengeschichte meine erste Liebe gewesen, und diese Neigung und Verehrung ist in dem halben Jahrhundert, das ich mit ihm durchlebt habe, selbst durch Augustin nicht geschwächt worden."² There is absolutely nothing wrong with being fascinated by one's subject, nor is it wrong to express this fascination by a lively style of writing. However, when fascination turns into admiration and love, one is seriously tempted to see someone more the way one wants him to be than the way he actually was. It is truly ironic that at the head of his first monograph on Marcion³, which Harnack wrote at the age of 19, he placed, as a motto, the following quote from Goethe's *Faust*, in which Faust wisely warns his assistant Wagner:

¹ Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, ³1996 (first edition 1921).

² *Ibid.*, p. VI.

³ This monograph remained unpublished until recently and thus also remained without any actual influence on Marcion scholarship, see following note.

“*Mein Freund, die Zeiten der Vergangenheit
 Sind uns ein Buch mit 7 Siegeln;
 Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heißt,
 Das ist im Grund der Herren eigener Geist,
 In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.*”⁴

This passage from *Faust* is well known among German historians as a warning not to project their own thoughts and ideas too easily upon the historic personalities or situations they are dealing with. Unfortunately, this is exactly what Harnack did, and this over-enthusiasm of his shapes our picture of Marcion until this very day. Therefore, the examination of Harnack’s portrait of Marcion and its phenomenal influence on subsequent scholarship shall serve as introduction to my study, whereas the single features of Marcionite doctrine relevant to it (Marcion’s distinction between two Gods, his ‘Bible’, his church and so on) shall be discussed in the corresponding chapters.

The title of Harnack’s first monograph on Marcion already demonstrates the author’s anachronistic view on his subject: *Marcion, the modern believer of the second century, the first Reformer*. This title reveals precisely the misconception which characterises Harnack’s entire work on the arch-heretic, the misconception of seeing him as a “Martin Luther of the second century”⁵. At the very end of his second monograph on Marcion, the one which was to link the name of the heretic⁶ irresolvably to that of Harnack, he even expresses the following wish: “Dennoch kann man nur wünschen, daß sich in dem Chor der Gottsuchenden heute wieder auch Marcioniten fänden”⁷. The question is: What

⁴ Friedemann Steck (ed.), *Adolf von Harnack: Marcion. Der moderne Gläubige des 2. Jahrhunderts. Der erste Reformator. Die Dorpater Preisschrift (1870)*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003, p. 1.

⁵ Morton Enslin, “The Pontic Mouse”, *ATHR* 27 (1945), p. 6.

⁶ Throughout this study I stick to the traditional terms of heretic/heresy and orthodox/orthodoxy. Apart from the fact that I generally do not feel that the concept of so-called ‘proto-orthodoxy’ is of much help, in the case of Marcion, as I shall argue in Chapter II, we are dealing with a situation in which the terms ‘heresy’ and ‘orthodoxy’ do apply in their classical sense, which makes any replacement of them unnecessary.

⁷ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 235.

was it that all of a sudden turned a condemned heretic of the second century into a Christian role model for the twentieth century?

In order to answer this question, we have to realise that Harnack was not simply a historian, but also a theologian. Once again, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that, on the contrary, it is most positive when a man is able not only to reconstruct past times but also to give them significance for his own time. However, in this particular case, Harnack's own theological agenda seems to have led him astray: "das AT im 2. Jahrhundert zu verwerfen, war ein Fehler, den die große Kirche mit Recht abgelehnt hat; es im 16. Jahrhundert beizubehalten, war ein Schicksal, dem sich die Reformation noch nicht zu entziehen vermochte; es aber seit dem 19. Jahrhundert als kanonische Urkunde im Protestantismus noch zu konservieren, ist die Folge einer religiösen und kirchlichen Lähmung."⁸ It is exactly Harnack's critical attitude towards the Old Testament which made him believe that he had found a soul-mate in Marcion, and it is also exactly in this matter that Harnack made his crucial mistake in his evaluation of the arch-heretic. Harnack's critique of the Old Testament is the critique of a German scholar at the beginning of the twentieth century. It represents a discomfort with the way God is portrayed in the Old Testament which is very common among people of the modern era⁹. To modern believers the (negative) anthropomorphic traits of the Old Testament God seem indeed irreconcilable with their rather philosophical concept of God, which is exactly why Harnack wanted to see the Old Testament deprived of its canonical status within the Christian Church. Thus, in a manner of speaking, Harnack had a vision of purifying Christianity by getting rid of unpleasant ballast.

This is, however, precisely what Marcion did not do, and this calls for an explanation. If the Old Testament¹⁰ merely offered an unpleasant picture of God, why did he not simply

⁸ Ibid., p. 217.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 222: "Stammt doch die größte Zahl der Einwendungen, welche „das Volk“ gegen das Christentum und gegen die Wahrhaftigkeit der Kirche erhebt, aus dem Ansehen, welches die Kirche noch immer dem AT gibt."

¹⁰ Unlike the terms 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' (see above), the terms 'Old' and 'New Testament' are in fact anachronistic when used in the era of Marcion. In fact, I shall argue that it was Marcion who indirectly

exclude it from his canon or decide to interpret it allegorically, which was the common way of handling the problematic passages of the Old Testament among his fellow Christians? What Harnack did not properly acknowledge was that to his hero Marcion the Old Testament was *real* (see Chapter III). The heresiarch shared the same discomfort with the Old Testament (and its God), but he did not look at it with the eyes of a man trained in historical-critical methods. His were the eyes of an early Christian Biblicist, who accepted the testimony of the texts as he found it (see Chapter IV). That is why he could not simply bring himself to the step of considering the Old Testament to be a mere ‘fabrication’. On the contrary, to Marcion the Old Testament was *anything but obsolete*. The Old Testament God is a real figure, who had all the features the texts attributed to him, above all the feature of being the Creator of this world. He was, however, not a Creator in the sense of the Deist concept of the seventeenth and eighteenth century¹¹, a God who created the world, but who does not intervene in its operation afterwards. The God of Marcion does intervene, and he does so exactly in the way the Old Testament describes it. Marcion’s second God, the God of the New Testament, forms a clear antithesis to the Old Testament God, but *he did not in any way replace him*. The contrast between these two Gods forms the very centre of Marcion’s theology. Harnack realised this contrast between the Old and the New Testament in Marcion’s thought, but he reinterpreted it into the Pauline/Lutheran distinction of Law and Grace. However, Marcion does not think in such abstract theological terms, he simply believes in two different Gods. Still, it was to become Harnack’s legacy for all subsequent scholarship on the heresiarch that *Marcion was a loyal disciple of Paul, a Lutheran Reformer of the second century*.

It did not take long before reviews on Harnack’s book were published, and some of them criticised exactly this ‘legacy’. Hans von Soden strenuously protested against the

promoted the establishment of the two terms (see Chapters IV and VII). The fact that I shall still continue to use them in my work is this time merely for the sake of simplicity. There are just no other suitable terms which would properly describe these groups of texts.

¹¹ Harnack implied a connection between Marcionism and Deism when he compared Marcion’s theology to that of the English Deist Thomas Morgan, cf. *ibid.*, p. 221.

comparison with Luther, especially by pointing out “daß Marcion dem Schuldgedanken (und damit einem eigentlichen Sündenbewußtsein) völlig verschlossen ist”¹². Walter Bauer added to the critique by questioning Marcion’s dependence on Paul. He states: “Ich glaube nicht, daß M.[arcion] seinen guten Gott in den Paulusbriefen gefunden und daß er sich an ihnen in seinen Widerspruch gegen das AT und seinen Gott hineingelesen hat. Seine Gedanken müssen dem Heidenapostel zu gewaltsam aufgezwungen werden, als daß sie von diesem stammen könnten.”¹³

Naturally, a review is still a review and as such one cannot expect that either von Soden or Bauer could have provided us with a new complete portrait of Marcion. In what follows we shall examine subsequent scholarship on Marcion – in particular those monographs or articles which are concerned with the phenomenon of Marcion as a whole¹⁴ – and consider whether (and if so, in what way) these scholars managed to emancipate themselves from the impact of Harnack’s monograph and to provide us with a new portrait of the heresiarch. In this context, we have to distinguish two levels of such a portrait. For one thing there is the concept of Marcion himself, for another there is the concept of Marcion’s relation to his world and his time. The first level contains questions regarding Marcion’s point of departure, his interpretation of the Bible or his theology in general. The second level is concerned with elements such as Marcion’s influence on the development of the New Testament canon or his relation to the Gnostics. While these two levels obviously cannot always be completely separated, we shall see that there have been many critics questioning Harnack’s view of Marcion as far as his relation to other phenomena is concerned, but hardly anyone who criticised Harnack’s portrait of Marcion himself.

¹² Hans von Soden, “A. v. Harnacks Marcion”, *ZKG* 40 (1922), p. 204.

¹³ Walter Bauer, Review “Harnack. Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott”, *GGA* 185, (1923), p. 7.

¹⁴ This means that, for example, those works are absent from the following list which are particularly concerned with Marcion’s New Testament, such as the monographs by John Knox, Ulrich Schmid and Joseph Tyson. They will receive their due attention in Chapter IV. For a complete history of research on Marcion, see the impressive collection by Michel Tardieu, “Marcion depuis Harnack”, in: Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: L’évangile du Dieu étranger*, tr. Bernard Lauret, Paris: Cerf, 2005, p. 488-561.

1.) Robert Smith Wilson, *Marcion: A Study of a Second-Century Heretic*, 1932

Regarding Harnack's monograph Wilson remarks in his foreword: "As it is improbable that this book will be translated¹⁵, the present volume, which is often indebted to Harnack for material but does not always agree with him in conclusions, may serve as an introduction to the study of a man who is at once the most fascinating and not the least elusive of second-century Christians."¹⁶ What Wilson is adumbrating and at the same time trying to conceal here is that his work is in fact not much more than an English translation of Harnack's book in a concise form. In fact, he occasionally even literally quotes Harnack without acknowledging it.¹⁷ As far as the different conclusions are concerned which Wilson announced in his foreword, they are not actually noticeable throughout his study. Wilson does not enter into a real debate with Harnack, nor does he provide a new portrait of the heresiarch. He even agrees with Harnack on such issues as praising Marcion as an example in favour of the rightful demand to deprive the Old Testament of its canonical authority¹⁸. In short, Wilson's 'Marcion' is also Harnack's 'Marcion'.

2.) Edwin Cyrill Blackman, *Marcion and his Influence*, 1948

Just like Wilson before him, Blackman is very much indebted to Harnack. However, he deliberately included the term 'influence' in the title of his book and accordingly stated in his foreword: "The present essay is a study of Marcion's relation to, and influence on,

¹⁵ While Wilson was not entirely correct about that, he would have had to wait another 58 years to actually see an English translation of Harnack's work.

¹⁶ Robert Smith Wilson, *Marcion: A Study of a Second-Century Heretic*, London: James Clarke, 1932, p. ix.

¹⁷ Cf. for example *ibid.*, p. 71: "His [Apelles'] teaching is a combination of Marcionism and Gnosticism at the cost of the former", which is an almost literal rendering of Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 194: "Die Lehre des Apelles [...] ist eine interessant Verbindung des Marcionitismus mit dem Gnostizismus auf Kosten des ersteren".

¹⁸ Wilson, *Marcion*, p. 179.

this development [of the Catholic Church].”¹⁹ Thus, Blackman does not so much aim at providing a new picture of Marcion as such, but merely at pointing out that Harnack overestimated Marcion’s influence on both the foundation of the Catholic Church and the establishment of its canon. While this evaluation clearly means a certain deviation from Harnack’s theories, as far as Blackman’s overall view on Marcion is concerned, he has not emancipated himself from the German scholar and takes most of his findings for granted. Still, Blackman’s work probably forms the best English-speaking monograph on Marcion, which seems to be the reason that it was the only one ever to be blessed with a reprint²⁰.

3.) Barbara Aland, “Marcion: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation”, 1973

The title of Aland’s article raises the reader’s hope for a *new* picture of Marcion. Unfortunately, there is nothing essentially new to be found in her article. Like Blackman, Aland points out the “völlige Überschätzung”²¹ of Marcion’s importance on Harnack’s part, and she also questions Harnack’s strict separation of Marcion from the Gnostics²². However, as far as the centre of Marcion’s theology is concerned, she remains very close to Harnack: “Es kann kein Zweifel bestehen, von wem Marcion bestimmt ist [...] Marcion ist durchdrungen von der Theologie des Paulus”²³. In this context we can witness a mistake common among those scholars who see Marcion as a disciple of Paul, the mistake of interpreting Paul *for* Marcion. One should, for instance, refrain from countering the (correct) objection by Hans von Soden that feelings of guilt are completely alien to Marcion (see above) by simply pointing out that Romans 7:7²⁴

¹⁹ E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and his Influence*, London: SPCK, 1948, p. x.

²⁰ Published in 2004 by Wipf & Stock.

²¹ Barbara Aland, “Marcion: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation”, *ZThK* 70 (1973), p. 447.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 429-435.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

²⁴ “What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’”

was part of Marcion's canon²⁵. The fact that such a verse featured in Marcion's 'Bible' does not mean that he implemented it one-to-one in his theology, and even if he did, we would not know what this particular verse meant to him. In conclusion, with Aland's article we have once more encountered a portrait of Marcion which may differ from that of Harnack in individual aspects but is still very close to it in general.

4.) Joseph Hoffmann, *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity*, 1984

In his preface to Hoffmann's book Maurice Wiles notes: "Significant works of scholarship require a combination of two very different skills that do not always go naturally together. On the one hand there is need for a bold vision or hypothesis which enables the subject to be seen from a genuinely new perspective; but equally important is a readiness to check any such new insight by careful attention to the detailed evidence."²⁶ Wiles is certainly correct in pointing out that significant works of scholarship require authors who are equipped with the two just mentioned qualities. When a scholar, however, has the first skill while completely lacking the second one, we get a work like Hoffmann's.

As part of his 'bold vision' Hoffmann above all attempts to demonstrate that Marcion's activity has to be placed much earlier and in a different place than is usually assumed. He dates Marcion's birth about 70 AD (which is probably at least 30 years too early, as will be shown in Chapter II) and supposes that his main activity took place in Asia Minor in the years 110-150 (while it actually was in Rome in the years 145-165, see Chapter II). Unfortunately, with this dating being crucially wrong, much of the rest of Hoffmann's argument in his book collapses, and so his monograph was rightly torn apart by the critics (see below). Hoffmann then managed to undermine his own work further when he tried to defend it by stating that he simply "intended to argue a case (hence the

²⁵ Cf. Aland, *Versuch*, p. 436.

²⁶ Joseph Hoffmann, *Marcion: on the Restitution of Christianity: An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1984, p. vii.

very deliberate use of the word ‘essay’ in the subtitle) rather than to reach firm conclusions”²⁷. A few examples may suffice to demonstrate the dubiousness of Hoffmann’s approach of dating Marcion’s activity far earlier and outside of Rome.

First of all, he believed he had found anti-Marcionite attacks already in the letters of Ignatius²⁸, which would indeed indicate an activity of the arch-heretic in Asia Minor at the beginning of the second century. Hoffmann bases this theory among other things on a line from Ignatius’ *Letter to the Smyrnaens* (5,1), which he quotes as follows: “Ignatius identifies his enemies as ‘advocates of death’ who are persuaded of the truth ‘neither by the law of Moses nor by the prophecies’”²⁹. This sounds somewhat like Marcionite doctrine indeed, given that Marcion only accepted the Gospel and not the Old Testament as testimony of his good God (see Chapters III/IV). If, of course, Hoffmann had read the entire sentence he would have realised that Ignatius is referring to those people who are neither persuaded by the Law of Moses, nor by the prophecies, *nor by the Gospel*.

That Marcion came to (and settled in) Rome at some point in his life is one of the few elements of his biography which can be considered certain, as it is attested by virtually all the Church Fathers (see Chapter II). However, Hoffmann turns this whole situation upside down by pointing out the fact that the Fathers differ on the exact time when Marcion came to the Imperial capital, which brings him to the rather questionable conclusion: “For all this confusion, it seems doubtful that Marcion ventured to Rome at all.”³⁰ Based on this ‘insight’ of his, Hoffmann then ends his summary of the analysis of Marcion’s biography with the intriguing line: “The date which Irenaeus gives for the arrival of Marcion in Rome seems the most plausible date for his death.”³¹ This statement is, in fact, difficult to refute, simply because Irenaeus does not give any date

²⁷ Joseph Hoffmann, “How then know this troublous teacher? Further Reflections on Marcion and his Church”, *Second Century* 6 (1987/88), p. 180.

²⁸ Hoffmann, *Marcion*, p. 58-63. On the dating of the letters, see Chapter VII.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³¹ *Ibid.*

for Marcion's arrival in Rome. But even if we assumed for a moment that he did, it would still be difficult to understand how anyone could come up with the idea of identifying this date with the date of Marcion's death.

Such examples could be multiplied, but instead I would like to hand over to C. P. Bammel, who described Hoffmann's book as follows: "His writing bears the marks of an insufficiently pruned dissertation (e.g. rather involved and tortuous argumentation, overloaded and often irrelevant footnotes, copious background information of a rather elementary variety, the attitude that any assertion can be made so long as a footnote follows) [...] Hoffmann's work is marred by misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the sources referred to [...] Hoffmann makes elementary howlers [...] Misprints are too numerous to list in full here, but they involve many proper names as well as errors in Greek, Latin, and German quotations, and on occasion render the English text meaningless."³² The best way to end the presentation of Hoffmann's monograph seems to be in form of the wise words by Gerhard May: "Man kann leider nur hoffen, daß es [Hoffmann's book] bald vergessen wird und nicht eine lange, unfruchtbare Auseinandersetzung mit ihm in Gang kommt."³³

5.) Gerhard May (ed.), *Marcion and his Impact on Church History*, 2002

This book is a collection of all the lectures given at the International Marcion Conference in Mainz in 2001, and thus contains the most up-to-date contributions by Marcion scholars from all around the world, including articles by Gerhard May and Enrico Norelli, the two most productive scholars on Marcion of our time³⁴. However, due to the fact that all of these lectures address only particular aspects of Marcion's life and thought, the conference could once more not provide the scholarly world with a

³² C. P. Bammel, Review "Joseph Hoffmann. Marcion: on the Restitution of Christianity", *JTS* 39 (1988), p. 227-232.

³³ Gerhard May, "Ein neues Markionbild?", *ThR* 51 (1986), p. 413.

³⁴ Unfortunately, even the impressive quantity of their work has not led to a new complete portrait of Marcion.

coherent concept about the phenomenon of Marcion as a whole. Still, several of the articles contained in the book should be mentioned here, as they are of relevance to my own study.

There is, first of all, the article by Enrico Norelli entitled “Marcion: Ein christlicher Philosoph oder ein Christ gegen die Philosophie?”, which provides an important analysis of Marcion’s relation to philosophy, a question which will be discussed in the context of Marcion’s biography (see Chapter II). Then there is Christoph Marksches, whose lecture “Die valentianische Gnosis und Marcion” deals with one of the most disputed issues regarding the arch-heretic, his relation to the Gnostic movement (see above). This particular issue will be considered when we deal with Marcion’s dualist theology in Chapter III. Alistair Stewart-Sykes has chosen a less common, but all the more interesting topic for his contribution to the conference: “Bread and fish, water and wine: The Marcionite menu and the maintenance of purity”. In his paper Stewart-Sykes addresses questions of (liturgical) meals within the Marcionite community, coming to the interesting conclusion that, at least as far as liturgy is concerned, the Marcionites were guilty of no more than anachronism. This line of thought will be further pursued in Chapter VI, which is concerned with Marcion’s church and its liturgical and ethical practices.

While all of these articles provide an important contribution to Marcionite scholarship, I would like to mention one of the presentations given at Mainz in particular, which is Winrich Löhr’s lecture “Did Marcion distinguish between a just God and a good God?”. Löhr’s answer to his self-posed question is that it was no “central theological concern of Marcion to distinguish between the justice of the lower God and the goodness of the higher God”³⁵. His analysis of the sources was, as he admits himself, “incomplete”³⁶; however, simply by expressing this most important insight, Löhr has correctly

³⁵ Winrich A. Löhr, “Did Marcion Distinguish Between a Just God and a Good God?”, in: Gerhard May/Katharina Greschat (ed.), *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002, p. 144.

³⁶ Ibid.

questioned what seemed to be an undisputed consensus concerning Marcion's theology, and I shall attempt to take his idea further in my own work (see Chapter III).

Conclusion

All in all it must be a matter for surprise that the main weaknesses of Harnack's Marcion picture were exposed right away in form of the two excellent reviews by von Soden and Bauer, only to be forgotten immediately afterwards by all major monographs on the heresiarch. In view of all these insufficient attempts to replace Harnack's portrait, it can be stated correctly: "ein neues Markionbild, das an Geschlossenheit und Überzeugungskraft demjenigen Harnacks vergleichbar wäre, besitzen wir freilich noch nicht".³⁷ Even at the risk of sounding too bold I hereby declare: with this thesis I take up the challenge to fill this gap.

³⁷ Gerhard May, "Markion in seiner Zeit", in: Katharina Greschat/Martin Meiser (ed.), *Gerhard May. Markion: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2005, p. 2.

I. Problems of Sources

*Das Pergament, ist das der heil'ge Bronnen,
Woraus ein Trunk den Durst auf ewig stillt?
Erquickung hast du nicht gewonnen,
Wenn sie dir nicht aus eigener Seele quillt.*

Goethe, "Faust"

The sources on Marcion are more numerous than on any other heretic of his time, and many of them are of undisputed value for the reconstruction of his life and thought. There is first of all Tertullian, whose five books *Adversus Marcionem* (ca. 210 AD) form the most extensive argument with Marcionite theology available to us, and will thus be used throughout this entire study. Then there is Justin Martyr's *Apology* (ca. 153-154)³⁸, in which we find the first mention of Marcion's name, which makes it one of our few sources contemporary to the heresiarch and thus particularly precious for both the dating of his activity (see Chapter II) and the establishment of his original doctrine (see Chapter III). More than 200 years later, Marcionism is still an issue for Epiphanius, who, in his *Panarion* (ca. 375), provides us with an amazingly extensive analysis of Marcion's New Testament (see Chapter IV). The list of writers against Marcion in between these two is nearly endless; only a few shall be mentioned here: Irenaeus, who for the first time links Marcion to the name of his 'predecessor' Cerdo (see Chapter II); Rhodo and Hippolytus,

³⁸ This (approximate) date is suggested by both recent editions of the *Apology*, cf. Charles Munier, *Justin. Apologie pour les Chrétiens*, SC 507, Paris: Cerf, 2006, p. 28; Denis Minns/Paul Parvis, *Justin. Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, Oxford: University Press, 2009, p. 44. As far as the notorious question of the relation of the 'two' Apologies is concerned, I favour what Denis Minns and Paul Parvis call the "covering speech theory", according to which "the *First Apology* is designed as an actual petition, while the *Second* is either intending or pretending to be a little speech accompanying its presentation" (ibid., p. 26), which would mean that 'both' Apologies were written about the same time.

who inform us about the crucial changes within the development of Marcionite doctrine (see Chapter III); and Clement of Alexandria, who provides us with interesting information about Marcionite ethics (see Chapter VI). All of these sources will receive their due attention in the course of this study; the present chapter, however, is dedicated to those sources which are disputed as far as their relation to Marcion is concerned. Sources which used to be disputed but for which a scholarly consensus has been reached in the meantime are not extensively discussed. Among those there are

1. the so-called Marcionite Prologues to the Pauline Letters, for which Nils Dahl has conclusively shown that there is no particular reason to assume a Marcionite origin.³⁹
2. the so-called anti-Marcionite Prologues to the Gospels, for which Jürgen Regul has demonstrated that there is no anti-Marcionite tendency to be found in them.⁴⁰

We now turn to those sources which are still, in one way or the other, problematic.

³⁹ Nils Dahl, "The Origin of the Earliest Prologues to the Pauline Letters", *Semeia* 12 (1978), p. 262: "the conclusion that the Prologues were indeed Marcionite has turned out to be both unnecessary and improbable. Attestation and history of transmission make it improbable, and no single feature requires a Marcionite origin."

⁴⁰ Jürgen Regul, *Die antimarcionitischen Evangelienprologe*, Freiburg: Herder, 1969, p. 77-84.

1.) Polycarp's Second Letter to the Philippians

“Let us be zealous for the good and refrain from offences and from the false brethren and from those who bear the name of the Lord in hypocrisy and lead foolish people astray. For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an anti-Christ; and whoever does not confess the testimony of the Cross is of the devil; and whoever manipulates the words of the Lord according to his own desires and says that there is neither resurrection nor judgement, this one is the first-born of Satan.” (6,3-7,1)⁴¹

It has often been claimed that it was Marcion's heresy which Polycarp wrote against in the above quoted passage⁴², and it is true that the heresy here described shows some similarities to Marcion's doctrine, but also to Gnostic docetism in general.⁴³ However, none of the features mentioned in this passage refer exclusively to Marcion, some of them do not actually apply to him at all, and the really particular elements of his theology are completely missing.

Peter Meinhold nonetheless managed to find indications for anti-Marcionite arguments in just about everything within the letter, from his idea that Polycarp's mention of the Pauline Letters is directed against Marcion's use of them, to his assumption that Polycarp's reference to the Prophets as preachers of Christ is meant in opposition to Marcion's dualism, to his theory that the bishop's repeated warnings of the love of

⁴¹ ζηλωταὶ περὶ τὸ καλόν, ἀπεχόμενοι τῶν σκανδάλων καὶ τῶν ψευδαδέλφων καὶ τῶν ἐν ὑποκρίσει φερόντων τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου, οἵτινες ἀποπλανῶσι κενοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Πᾶς γάρ, ὅς ἂν μὴ ὁμολογῇ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθέναι, ἀντίχριστός ἐστιν· καὶ ὅς ἂν μὴ ὁμολογῇ τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν· καὶ ὅς ἂν μεθοδεύῃ τὰ λόγια τοῦ κυρίου πρὸς τὰς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας καὶ λέγῃ μῆτε ἀνάστασιν μῆτε κρίσιν, οὗτος πρωτότοκός ἐστι τοῦ σατανᾶ.

⁴² Perhaps most prominently argued by P. N. Harrison, *Polycarp's two Epistles to the Philippians*, Cambridge: University Press, 1936, p. 172-206.

⁴³ Cf. for example Joseph Fischer, *Die Apostolischen Väter*, Schriften des Urchristentums 1, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, ¹¹2006, p. 236: “Meines Erachtens kämpft Polycarp gegen einen gnostischen Dokerismus (vgl. 7,1), der nicht primär marcionitisch sein muß.”

money are to be understood as an attack on the rich ship-owner from Pontus⁴⁴ – features of which none can actually be considered as conclusive. Only the term “first-born of Satan” is indeed strikingly the same that Polycarp – according to Irenaeus’ report (Adv. haer. III.3,4) – addressed Marcion with when they met. To interpret this as indication that the letter is directed against the heresiarch⁴⁵ would, however, be misleading. There is no reason to assume that Polycarp used this term exclusively for Marcion. Moreover, it may be doubted whether the meeting between Polycarp and Marcion ever actually took place, and it thus seems quite plausible, as Regul suggested⁴⁶, that it was in fact Irenaeus who extracted the notion from the letter and worked it into the story.

The rebuke of denying the testimony of the Cross would, if Polycarp was in fact thinking of Marcion here, be completely unjustified as Christ’s death on the Cross was of crucial importance to the arch-heretic (see Chapter III). It could certainly be argued that Polycarp is unaware of this element, or that he is actually slandering Marcion, or that to him whoever denies the flesh of Christ automatically also denies the testimony of the Cross⁴⁷, the same being possibly true for the idea of resurrection, which Marcion would also not have denied as such⁴⁸. Still, the fact remains that we are dealing with points of critique here which do not actually apply to Marcion.

As for the missing, yet most characteristic elements of Marcion’s doctrine, such as his aversion against the Old Testament or his theological dualism⁴⁹, Harrison assumed that the letter dates from the time before Marcion came to Rome (that is, before 144/145, see

⁴⁴ Peter Meinhold, “Polykarpos”, in: *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften*, 42. Halbband (1952), p. 1685-1686.

⁴⁵ Cf. for example John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Regul, *Evangelienprologe*, p. 189.

⁴⁷ Cf. Harrison, *Epistles*, p. 175-176.

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 180-181.

⁴⁹ In his report on Marcion in his *Apology*, Marcion’s ditheism is in fact the only real theological feature Justin mentions about the arch-heretic, cf. Sebastian Moll, “Justin and the Pontic Wolf”, in: Sara Parvis/Paul Foster (ed.), *Justin Martyr and his Worlds*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, p. 145-151. Likewise, Origen identifies heretics mainly by their distinction between the God of the Old and the God of the New Testament (cf. Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d’hérésie dans la littérature grecque II^e-III^e siècles. Tome II: Clément d’Alexandrie et Origène*, Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1985, p. 509-510).

Chapter II), a time at which he did not yet hold these beliefs⁵⁰. However, there is hardly any evidence for Marcion's activity before 144/145 (see Chapter II), nor is there reason to believe, as Harrison claims, that it was Cerdo who added these elements to Marcion's doctrine (see Chapter II).

In conclusion we can state that there is simply not enough evidence to consider Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* to be directed against Marcion.

⁵⁰ Harrison, *Epistles*, p. 189-196. Meinhold, given that he found several characteristic features of Marcion's doctrine already (see above), considered Harrison's assumption to be unnecessary (*Polykarpos*, p. 1684/1687).

2.) Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*

Before we can approach the question of whether the *Letter to Flora* is concerned with the doctrine of Marcion, we have to answer a more famous question first: is the Ptolemy who wrote the *Letter to Flora* the very same Ptolemy who according to Justin⁵¹ suffered martyrdom under the Roman prefect Urbicus about 152 AD? The classical reasons to support this idea are well known⁵². Both men live in Rome at the time of the martyrdom⁵³; both men belong to the (rare) intellectual group of Christians in Rome; both men are teachers of a wealthy Christian woman⁵⁴. To these features Peter Lampe has added another most interesting one⁵⁵. Already at the beginning of the letter and as his very first example Ptolemy is extensively addressing the issue of divorce, which perfectly fits the situation of the woman of Justin's *Apology*, who was not sure whether or not to divorce her husband. While this element alone is already an indicator for the identity of the two men, there is even more to it than Lampe realised. It is surprising that Lampe maintained that the letter contained no direct conclusion as to the question whether it is legitimate for Christians to get divorced. For how could anyone interpret Ptolemy's statement⁵⁶ that the Law of Moses (which allows divorce) was contrary to the Law of God (which forbids divorce) other than in the way that divorce was against the divine law and thus forbidden for Christians? Given this message of the letter, it fits the situation of the woman in Justin's *Apology* even better, for it is said that her friends

⁵¹ 2Apol. 1-2.

⁵² For the following cf. Gerd Lüdemann, "Zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums in Rom", *ZNW* 70 (1979), p. 100-102.

⁵³ To be precise, there is no source about the Gnostic Ptolemy which would clearly determine either the exact time or place of his activity. That he lived in Rome around 152 AD can, however, be assumed as he is known to be a disciple of Valentinus about whom we can say with some certainty that he lived in Rome at that time, cf. *ibid.*, p. 100; cf. also Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The 'Church' of the Valentinians*, Brill: Leiden, 2006, p. 417-418.

⁵⁴ That the woman described in Justin's *Apology* was wealthy becomes clear from her husband's travel to Alexandria and from her servants (cf. Lüdemann, *Geschichte*, p. 101 n. 42). As for Flora, it is her obvious high level of learning (which is required to understand Ptolemy's letter) which labels her as a lady of the upper class.

⁵⁵ Cf. Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*, Tübingen: Mohr, 21989, p. 202-203.

⁵⁶ Pan. 33.4,10.

(among whom we may count Ptolemy) tried to convince her to stay with her husband⁵⁷. It is also striking, as Almut Rütten has pointed out⁵⁸, that whereas the biblical text being referred to (Mt. 19:8) argues from the perspective of the man divorcing his wife, Ptolemy adapted it to the wife's situation⁵⁹. Another element which makes it likely that the letter was at least partly motivated by the concrete question of divorce is the fact that it was obviously the first of its kind addressed to Flora with additional letters intended to follow. In other words, if we were to assume that the letter simply served as a general introduction to Gnostic teachings, we would expect it to deal with Gnostic cosmology and the origin of the different principles, and at the very end of his letter Ptolemy indeed promises to instruct Flora about all this soon. Again, the circumstances fit perfectly. The woman in the *Apology* had only recently become a Christian⁶⁰ (apparently within a Gnostic circle) and wished to be instructed in the Christian doctrine. Ptolemy was willing to take care of that but decided to start the lessons not with the main part, but with a topic that had immediate relevance to his protégée. All of these arguments taken together strongly suggest that we are actually dealing with one and the same person here.

The main argument brought forward against the identity of the two 'Ptolemies' is the fact that it must seem surprising that Justin would show so much respect for an obvious heretic. However, in his *Apology* Justin is in fact not so much after certain heretical movements, but only reports what he believes to support his cause, that is, to defend Christianity before the Emperors and to end the persecutions⁶¹. To this end, it was simply more useful to tell the tragic story of a heroic man who did nothing wrong and was still sentenced to death than to expose him as a heretic. It is also noteworthy in this context that Justin does not mention the Valentinians as heretics in his *Apology* at all,

⁵⁷ 2Apol. 2,5.

⁵⁸ Almut Rütten, "Der Brief des Ptolemäus an Flora. Ein Beispiel altkirchlicher Gesetzesauslegung in Auseinandersetzung mit Marcion", in: Hermann Deuser/Gerhard Schmalenberg (ed.), *Christlicher Glaube und religiöse Bildung*, Gießen: Selbstverlag des Fachbereichs Evangelische Theologie und Katholische Theologie und deren Didaktik, 1995, p. 59 n. 33.

⁵⁹ Pan. 33.4,5 (γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρός).

⁶⁰ 2Apol. 2,1-2.

⁶¹ Cf. Moll, *Justin*, p. 148-151.

which might in fact have two reasons. Either he did not identify them as heretics yet⁶², or he was worried that his pagan and philosophically educated audience might have been receptive to some of their teachings⁶³. Finally, we should not exclude the possibility that Justin simply did not know who he was dealing with here. There is no hint in the text that he actually witnessed the events he is reporting, so maybe he just heard a story about the martyrdom of a certain Christian called Ptolemy without being aware of his Gnostic doctrine.

The other contra-arguments are not really arguments against the identity of the two, but rather aim at weakening the pro-arguments. Christoph Marksches, referring to the article by Rütten⁶⁴ already mentioned, has pointed out that if the letter was concerned with the actual divorce problem of this particular woman it would be strange that Ptolemy did not raise the topic of mixed marriages between Christians and non-Christians⁶⁵. Apart from the fact that an *argumentum ex silentio* is always difficult, it should be noted that no one actually ever claimed that the sole purpose of this letter was to give some sort of marital advice. The letter is indeed, as Marksches described it⁶⁶, a form of διαίρετική εισαγωγή, but that does by no means exclude the possibility that Ptolemy related the topic of his letter to the personal situation of his addressee. Ptolemy's aim is a thorough elucidation about the different kinds of laws (see Chapter VII). In order to present his case he had to choose an example which would demonstrate this variety, and the different positions on divorce given by Moses and Christ were perfectly suitable. The problem of mixed marriage, however, would have been useless to this end. The same goes for Marksches' second objection, which tries to attack the divorce-argument by pointing out that Ptolemy's passage on divorce in his letter is best

⁶² Cf. Lampe, Christen, p. 203 n. 263; Paul Parvis, "Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: The Posthumous Creation of the *Second Apology*, in: Parvis/Foster, *Justin Martyr*, p. 32-35.

⁶³ Cf. Moll, *Justin*, p. 150-151.

⁶⁴ Rütten, *Brief*, p. 59 n. 33. Although Marksches is correctly displaying the point brought forward by Rütten, it should be noted that she, unlike Marksches, believes in the identity of the two Ptolemies, cf. *ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ Christoph Marksches, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus", *ZAC* 4 (2000), p. 248.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

understood as anti-Marcionite argumentation⁶⁷ (see below). Once again, however, one thing does not exclude the other. Certainly, Ptolemy may have used this as an anti-Marcionite argument, but he could just as well have used dozens of other examples, so the fact that he deliberately chose the topic of divorce seems to be no coincidence.

With the identity of the two Ptolemies being most probable, we may now turn back to our initial question: is the letter dealing with Marcion and his doctrine? At the beginning of his letter, Ptolemy speaks of two different opinions which are held concerning the Law:

*Some say it has been laid down by God the Father, while others take the opposite direction and strenuously insist that it was given by the Adversary, the pernicious devil, just as they attribute the creation of the world to him, saying that he is the father and maker of this universe. (Pan. 33.3,2)*⁶⁸

That the first opinion mentioned by Ptolemy reflects the position of the orthodox Christians is undisputed. The second opinion is also widely agreed to be referring to Marcion⁶⁹, although there are some critical voices, too⁷⁰. Especially when we consider the time and place we have just established for the letter, there can, however, hardly be any doubt that we are dealing with a Marcionite position here. Rome 150 AD is exactly

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 248.

⁶⁸ Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πατρὸς νενομοθετηῆσθαι τοῦτον λέγουσιν, ἕτεροι δὲ τούτοις τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδὸν τραπέντες ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀντικειμένου φθοροποιοῦ διαβόλου τεθείσθαι τοῦτον ἰσχυρίζονται, ὡς καὶ τὴν τοῦ κόσμου προσάπτουσιν αὐτῷ δημιουργίαν, πατέρα καὶ ποιητὴν τοῦτον λέγοντες εἶναι τοῦδε τοῦ παντός.

⁶⁹ Cf. Lüdemann, *Geschichte*, p. 106-107; Uwe Kühneweg, *Das Neue Gesetz. Christus als Gesetzgeber und Gesetz: Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Naturrechtslehre im 2. Jahrhundert*, Marburg: Elwert, 1993, p. 90; Rütten, *Brief*, p. 57.

⁷⁰ Harnack described this thesis as “mindestens nicht sicher” (*Marcion*, p. 315*). Bentley Layton states: “Scholars have been uncertain about the source of this opinion, but it may refer to Gnostics who followed a myth like that of BJn [The Secret Book according to John] or RAd [The Revelation of Adam], where the craftsman of the world (Ialdabaōth) appears to be identical with the God of Israel.” (Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, New York: Doubleday, 1987, p. 307). Winrich Löhr thinks it is possible that Ptolemy simply invented this position (“Die Auslegung des Gesetzes bei Markion, den Gnostikern und den Manichäern”, in: Georg Schöllgen/Clemens Scholten (ed.) *Stimuli: Exegese und ihre Hermeneutik in Antike und Christentum. Festschrift für Ernst Dassmann*, Münster: Aschendorff, 1996, p. 80 n. 11).

when and where Marcion's star was on the rise (see Chapter II). It seems obvious that Ptolemy had no intention of informing his addressee about some minor opinions. We must therefore be dealing with two positions here which are so widespread that they were probably known to Flora, so that her teacher felt the need to discuss them with her; and if there are two main opposing opinions concerning the Old Testament (Law) within the Christian movement in Rome at that time, they can only come from the orthodox side on the one hand and from the Marcionite camp on the other.

In summary, we have found that Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* provides a contemporary view on Marcion's doctrine and is also the very first literary controversy with Marcion known to us.

3.) The Elder in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*

In *Adversus Haereses* IV.27-32 Irenaeus refers to the teachings of a certain anonymous elder, teachings which are considered by many scholars to be directed against Marcion⁷¹.

That there is an anti-heretical motive in these chapters is beyond doubt; however, no heretic or heretical movement is mentioned by name. What is the content of this anti-heretical teaching? It is basically an apology for the Old Testament with the intention to demonstrate that the two Testaments speak of one and the same God. Certainly, this does sound like a treatise against Marcion, and there is no point in denying that these sections are directed against him, *too*.⁷² However, defending the cruelties described in the Old Testament was not just an object for those fighting against Marcion. When Origen explains the allegorical meaning of the battles of Joshua for instance, he explicitly addresses Marcion, Valentinus and Basilides⁷³. Thus, these other heretics could also be envisaged in the elder's preaching. In fact, there are certain lines which seem to indicate a Valentinian opponent: *"All those are found to be unlearned, audacious and also shameless who, because of the transgressions of those who lived in*

⁷¹ Cf. Harnack, *Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius I*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897, p. 338 n. 2; Friedrich Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien Adversus Marcionem und die anderen theologischen Quellen bei Irenaeus*, TU 46,2, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1930, p. 101-113; May, "Marcion in Contemporary Views: Results and Open Questions", p. 133 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 17).

⁷² Antonio Orbe ("Ecclesia, sal terrae según san Ireneo", *RSR* 60 (1972), p. 220 n. 8) tried to show that certain aspects of the elder's argumentation make it very unlikely that it was directed against Marcion, but his reasons for this view are most questionable. The first two may suffice to demonstrate this. Orbe claims that in an anti-Marcionite text one would not find frequent references to the Old Testament and to the Gospel of Matthew as both documents are of no value to an "auténtico discípulo de Marción"; but the whole point of this argument is to defend the Old Testament against Marcion's attacks. How is anyone supposed to do that without referring to it? Has Orbe not considered Tertullian's work against Marcion, in which the Carthaginian also constantly refers to the Old Testament in order to refute his opponent? To say nothing about the fact that it is not true that the Old Testament would not have any value to Marcion (see Chapters III/IV). This is true for Matthew's Gospel, but I am unable to see why a Christian opponent of Marcion's should not use it in an argument against him. Orbe's second point is that the allegorical exegesis would not be used against Marcion since he refused to accept it (see Chapter IV); but this is exactly the reason why! To point out the allegorical meaning of Scriptural passages is one of the most common ways to refute the arch-heretic, cf. for example Origen, *De princ.* II.5,2: "But they [the Marcionites] see these things in this way, because they have not understood to hear anything beyond the letter."

⁷³ Cf. *Hom. Ies.* XII.3.

earlier times and because of the disobedience of a great number (of them), say that one God was the God of those, the maker of the world, originated from deficiency⁷⁴, but that the other God was the Father declared by Christ, the one all of them [the heretics] have (allegedly) conceived in spirit” (Adv. haer. IV.27,4)⁷⁵. Two elements in this passage are both typical for (Irenaeus’ portrait of) the Valentinians and atypical for the doctrine of Marcion. There is firstly the idea of the Demiurge originating from deficiency which correlates with the Valentinian myth that the origin of the Demiurge is the result of a fallen eon⁷⁶, whereas Marcion never expressed any such theory about his origin nor did he establish a mythological system as such (see Chapter III). The second element is the idea that the heretics (and only they) have received the second God in spirit. It is a crucial element of the Valentinian Gnosis that only a few chosen ones, the Pneumatics, have access to the complete knowledge (*Gnosis*) about God⁷⁷, whereas Marcion does not preach any form of election of a certain group of people, nor that some higher form of knowledge is required to be saved (see Chapter III).

Fortunately, it seems possible to determine those parts of the elder’s teaching which are directed against Marcion by comparing it to Tertullian’s defence of the Old Testament in opposition to him (mainly to be found in the second book of *Adversus Marcionem*). This comparison shows that we find parallels for the story of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart⁷⁸ and of the Hebrews’ robbery of gold and silver from the Egyptians⁷⁹, but not for the rebukes against David, Solomon or Lot and his daughters. Although at first glance this might simply be a coincidence, a closer look reveals a subtle yet crucial difference between these stories. The latter group consists of rebukes against the behaviour of certain Old Testament individuals, the former presents accusations against the God of

⁷⁴ For the problem of the Latin *in diminutione* see Adelin Rousseau, *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les hérésies IV: Tome I*, Paris: Cerf, 1965, p. 264.

⁷⁵ *Indocti et audaces adhuc etiam et impudentes inveniuntur omnes qui, propter transgressionem eorum qui olim fuerunt et propter plurimorum indictoaudientiam, alterum quidem aiunt illorum fuisse Deum, et hunc esse mundi Fabricatorem et esse in diminutione, alterum vero a Christo traditum Patrem, et hunc esse qui sit ab unoquoque eorum mente conceptus.*

⁷⁶ Cf. Adv. haer. I.5,1-2.

⁷⁷ Cf. Adv. haer. I.6,1.

⁷⁸ Adv. Marc. II.14,4.

⁷⁹ Adv. Marc. II.20.

the Old Testament⁸⁰. Concerning the stealing of the silver and golden vessels for instance, neither Irenaeus (or the elder) nor Tertullian report that their opponent would blame the Hebrews for stealing but instead that he blames their God for ordering them to do so. In fact, there is no passage in all the Fathers which would ever suggest that Marcion reproached any Old Testament figure for doing something bad, but always their God (see Chapter III). It seems therefore that only chapters 28-30 of *Adversus Haereses* IV (containing both the justification of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the robbery of the Egyptians) are directed against the arch-heretic. This view is confirmed by other elements found in these chapters. When the elder states that the heretics oppose the things Christ did for the salvation of those who received him to all the evil which was inflicted by the Old Testament God on those who disobeyed him⁸¹, not only does this sound very much like a Marcionite antithesis, but the Greek term ἀντιτιθέμενος itself forms an “allusion transparente”⁸² to Marcion's work (see Chapter V).

Having established the anti-Marcionite character of the elder's reports, we now have to investigate from what time these reports date. Unfortunately, Irenaeus does not reveal the identity of this elder, and it seems impossible to establish his identity with any certainty. Charles Hill, in his extensive study mentioned above, tried to demonstrate that this anonymous elder can be nobody else but Polycarp. Although his thesis is not completely implausible, the evidence is still far too shaky to be used as valid proof for the identity of the two, especially as one basis for Hill's argument is that the section in question is solely directed against Marcion, something we have just found to be erroneous. Moreover, Norbert Brox, referring to Irenaeus' letter to Florinus (quoted in Hist. eccl. V.20,4-8), which Hill also used to support his argument, has shown most

⁸⁰ Charles Hill has correctly perceived these two different kinds of arguments in the elder's teaching, calling the reproaches against certain Old Testament individuals “the argument from God's friends” and the reproaches against the Old Testament God “the argument from God's enemies” (Charles Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp*, WUNT 186, Tübingen: Mohr, 2006, p. 33). He did, however, mistakenly assume that they were both directed against Marcion.

⁸¹ Adv. haer. IV.28,1.

⁸² Rousseau, *Contre les hérésies IV/I*, p. 265. I am generally a little sceptical as far as the reconstruction of the originally Greek text of *Adversus Haereses* by the *Sources Chrétiennes* edition is concerned, however, the Latin *contrario opponentes* is so close to Tertullian's wording *contrariae oppositiones* (Adv. Marc. I.19,4) that I believe it is justified to assume the above mentioned allusion (see Chapter V).

conclusively that although Irenaeus did know Polycarp in person, it must be doubted that he actually recalled any detailed teachings by the bishop of Smyrna, firstly because Irenaeus met him at a very early age, secondly because the things he reports about Polycarp in his letter to Florinus are nothing but very general information, which do not reveal any personal remembrance of Polycarp's teachings on Irenaeus' part⁸³.

There is even an uncertainty as to whether the original Greek text spoke of an immediate witness of the Apostles or of someone who had heard from those who had seen the Apostles⁸⁴. From a purely text-critical point of view one may lean towards the immediate disciple. However, the overall situation indicates a third generation witness. Irenaeus explicitly states that he himself heard these things from the elder, and it seems most unlikely that Irenaeus had personal contact with a man of the generation of the immediate disciples⁸⁵, at least not in a way which would allow for him to recall his teachings so precisely (see above). This seems to be confirmed by the fact that in all the other passages in which Irenaeus refers to those elders who were disciples of the Apostles⁸⁶, he never claims to have had any personal contact with them.

Thus, the elder in the corresponding passages was in all probability a third-generation Christian, just as Marcion was, which makes it most likely that he was in fact a contemporary of the arch-heretic. This feature alone, of course, does not mean that the elder ever actually came in contact with him, nor can we be sure as to what extent Irenaeus is literally quoting the elder's report and how much of Irenaeus' own words are mixed into it. However, even if the elder's report may not be as valuable a testimony as

⁸³ Norbert Brox, *Offenbarung, Gnosis und gnostischer Mythos bei Irenäus von Lyon*, Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1966, p. 146-148; cf. also Loofs, *Theophilus*, p. 310. Brox is strikingly missing from Hill's index of authors.

⁸⁴ There is a discrepancy between Adv. haer. IV.27,1, where the Latin translation speaks of an elder who heard from those who had seen the Apostles, and IV.32,1, where the elder is described as *discipulus apostolorum*. For a long time there was a scholarly consensus that the first notion was more precise and that the second was to be understood in a looser sense, until in 1904 a sixth-century Armenian translation was found in which IV.27,1 also described the elder as an immediate disciple of the Apostles (cf. Hill, *Lost Teaching*, p. 9). The *Sources Chrétiens* (1965) have adapted to the Armenian translation of the passage, whereas the *Fontes Christiani* (1995) stick to the Latin version.

⁸⁵ Cf. Brox, *Offenbarung*, p. 147 n. 104.

⁸⁶ For a collection of passages see *ibid.*, p. 152.

Ptolemy's letter, it remains one of our earliest (and probably contemporary) refutations of Marcion's doctrine.

4.) The *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*

Unlike our previous sources, the *Carmen* is undisputedly directed against the Marcionites; however, its exact relation to them remains a matter of debate as its dating is most difficult. Over the years, scholars have suggested every time of writing from the third to the sixth century. In the most recent edition of the *Carmen*, Karla Pollmann has proposed that it was written between 420 and 450.⁸⁷ However, she does not provide stringent arguments for her thesis. From the fact that the author of the *Carmen* uses the Hebrew term “phase”⁸⁸ instead of “pascha”, Pollmann concludes that the *terminus post quem* for the *Carmen* must be 400, the year in which Jerome finished his Latin translation of the Old Testament, which contains the first occurrence of this Hebrew term in Latin⁸⁹. Two things are to be said against this argument. First of all, the word “phase” occurs only once in the whole text of the *Carmen*, whereas the term “pascha” is found eight times.⁹⁰ It can thus hardly be stated that the term “phase” had already been “eingebürgert” at the time of the *Carmen*, as Pollmann suggests⁹¹. Secondly, Pollmann uses something of a circular argument here, as she already presupposes that the *Carmen* was written after the Vulgate when claiming that the latter contains the *first* occurrence of the word. Likewise, her theory of a dependence of the *Carmen* on Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, which she bases on a certain similarity in thought, and which brings her to the time after 419, is just as questionable.⁹² It is not without a certain irony that at an earlier point of her study Pollmann herself had stated correctly: “Imitationen von sprachlichen Wendungen oder Gedanken bei verschiedenen Autoren lassen nur selten eine Schlußfolgerung bezüglich des Prioritätsverhältnisses zu”⁹³. As *terminus ante quem* Pollmann establishes the year 450, based on the fact that there is no evidence to support

⁸⁷ Karla Pollmann, *Das Carmen adversus Marcionitas. Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, p. 32-33.

⁸⁸ *Carm. adv. Marc.* 2,65.

⁸⁹ Pollmann, *Carmen*, p. 27.

⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 212-213.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

the existence of Marcionites after the first half of the fifth century.⁹⁴ Although she is perfectly right in stating that the *Carmen* could not have originated after 450, we shall see that it must in fact have been written much earlier than that.

The main argument for an earlier dating can be found in the work of Hans Waitz⁹⁵. While the fact that the *Carmen*, beside Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem*, forms the longest single piece of anti-Marcionite literature known to us already suggests that it must have been written at a time when the Marcionite movement was still strong, its style of arguments demonstrates this even more clearly. Waitz remarks correctly about the author: "Behandelt er doch seinen Gegner nicht wie eine abgethane Grösse, an der man höchstens noch ein gelehrtes Interesse nimmt; bekämpft er ihn vielmehr als eine brennende Gefahr für die Kirche seiner Zeit!"⁹⁶ It is indeed this difference in tone which distinguishes the anti-Marcionite writings of a man like Tertullian (early third century) from those of someone like Filastrius (late fourth century). With the former one can feel the passionate fight against a real threat and accordingly the fear that his fellow Christians might fall for this heresy, whereas the latter only speaks of Marcion and his doctrine in the style of an article in an encyclopedia. Another typical element for the latter is the fact that his reference to Marcion is only descriptive, in other words there is no intention on the author's part to establish a counter-argument in order to refute the heretic, which is perfectly understandable in a time when the actual threat presented by this heresy is gone.

In the *Carmen*, however, it is exactly the other way around. Its author usually only briefly mentions the Marcionite positions in order to subsequently refute them extensively. Moreover, we can feel the poet's anxiety concerning his fellow Christians when he admonishes his brothers: "withdraw your foot from the cave of the cruel thief

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

⁹⁵ Hans Waitz, *Das pseudotertullianische Gedicht Adversus Marcionem: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur sowie zur Quellenkritik des Marcionitismus*, Darmstadt: Johannes Waitz, 1901. As a matter of fact, Waitz offers a huge variety of arguments for this dating in his work, but only the one mentioned above is really conclusive.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

as long as you still can and as long as our patient God, who is everlasting in his love, forgives the wretched all deeds which were committed in error”⁹⁷. These features are not the style of a man who simply wants to inform others about the characteristics of a certain heresy, but of one who is opposed to a real danger. Although it is hard to determine when this danger finally ceased, it seems safe to say that in the Western Church Marcionism did not pose any real threat beyond the third century. Pollmann, however, believes that she has found proof of a Marcionite movement in Augustine’s work *Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum* (ca. 420), which allows her to date the *Carmen* as late as the fifth century (see above). It is obvious that the *adversarius* Augustine is arguing against in his work shows a certain affinity to Marcionite theology. However, Thomas Raveaux observed accurately: “Mit den marcionitischen Elementen sind jedoch manichäische und allgemein gnostische Gedanken verbunden, so daß man nicht mehr von einem reinen Marcionismus sprechen kann.”⁹⁸ This is the crucial difference between Augustine’s text and the *Carmen*, since the latter is directed against a strikingly pure form of Marcionism. Certainly, the movement has already changed from a good-evil dualism to the idea of a just God, but this is typical for Marcionism in the third century (see Chapter III). Pollmann admits that the *Carmen* deals with a far more genuine form of Marcionism than Augustine does, but misjudges how genuine the form of Marcionism represented in the *Carmen* actually is, since she believes that she has found a difference from Marcion’s original doctrine. The poet accuses the Marcionites of inconsistency when he asks: “you disapprove the Creator, but you approve his creation?”⁹⁹ Pollmann interprets this as an indication that the Marcionites of the *Carmen* have reduced the originally strict anti-world attitude of their founder (see Chapter VI), since they now seem to enjoy the created objects¹⁰⁰. However, accusing the Marcionites of inconsistency because of their using of objects they actually despise is a common

⁹⁷ Carm. adv. Marc. 1,177-179: sed revocate pedem saevi latronis ab antro, dum spatium datur et patiens pietate perennis facta per errorem miseris deus omnia donat.

⁹⁸ Thomas Raveaux, *Augustinus. Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum: Analyse des Inhalts und Untersuchung des geistesgeschichtlichen Hintergrunds*, Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1987, p. 139.

⁹⁹ Carm. adv. Marc. 1,124: ipsum factorem reprobatis facta probantes.

¹⁰⁰ Pollmann, *Carmen*, p. 34.

element in anti-Marcionite polemics and can already be found in Tertullian¹⁰¹. It is thus not to be used as an indication for a change of doctrine within the Marcionite camp, especially as the author of the *Carmen* clearly states that the Marcionites praise the creation “without being aware of it” (*immemores*)¹⁰², so that one can by no means speak of a deliberate alteration.

In conclusion we can state that despite the fact that certain stylistic elements within the *Carmen* might be considered an indication for a later dating¹⁰³, the overall situation it originated in, that is, a situation in which Marcionism in a pure form still posed a real and immense threat to the Western Church, does not allow for a dating later than the third century.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the already established idea of a just God within the Marcionite system (see above) demonstrates that the *Carmen* was in all probability not written before the third century either, which leaves us with the middle of this century as a good estimate for its origin.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Adv. Marc. I.14,3-5.

¹⁰² Carm. adv. Marc. 1,123.

¹⁰³ Cf. Pollmann, *Carmen*, p. 26-28.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the very apt conclusion by Waitz (*Gedicht*, p. 32): “Ist der Inhalt des c.a.M. derart, dass man es noch in das 3. Jahrhundert versetzen muss, so kann aus der Form nichts gefolgert werden, was dieses Ergebnis in Frage stellen könnte.”

5.) Conclusion

Our analysis of the problematic sources on Marcion has brought forward a rather positive result. With the exception of Polycarp's *Second Letter to the Philippians*, all the sources discussed in this chapter are in fact concerned with Marcion and his doctrine. Moreover, we have also found that both Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* as well as the testimony of the elder in Irenaeus were written during Marcion's lifetime, which means that in addition to Justin's *Apology* (see above) we are now equipped with three contemporary sources on Marcion's activity. As for the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*, it certainly does not form a contemporary witness, but it still has to be dated almost 200 years before its currently received dating and provides a much more authentic view of Marcion's doctrine than is usually assumed.

II. Marcion's Life

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Albert Einstein

“Für eine Biographie Marcions fehlen die Unterlagen.”¹⁰⁵ It is not without its irony that Harnack began his analysis of Marcion's life with these most discouraging words only to subsequently deliver the most precise biographical and psychological portrait of this man ever to be written. Although his reconstruction might be erroneous in some parts, his endeavour is to be admired for its characteristic optimism and imagination, two things for which Harnack is occasionally smiled at but which are in fact absolutely called for in this matter. If we were to create a biography of Marcion solely based on hard facts, we would end up with not much more than a blank piece of paper. The line between evidence and speculation is most thin here, as it is with many characters of early Christianity. Naturally, this does not mean that the present chapter will not contain a thorough study of all the information on Marcion's life available to us; however, this study will be combined with an attempt to fill some of the black holes in his biography in order to present a complete portrait of the heresiarch's life.

¹⁰⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 3*.

All in all, there are six important questions to answer regarding Marcion's biography.

1. Where and when was Marcion born?
2. Was Marcion raised a Christian?
3. What did Marcion's education and professional career look like?
4. Where and when did Marcion start his movement?
5. What was Marcion's relation to Cerdo?
6. How and when did Marcion actually break with the Church?

1. Where and when was Marcion born?

One of the few elements of Marcion's life which seems certain is that he was born in Pontus. Virtually all the Church Fathers confirm this information, though without further precision. Whether they refer to the Pontic region¹⁰⁶ at the Northern coast of today's Turkey or to the coast region of the *Pontus Euxinus* (today's Black Sea) in general¹⁰⁷ we cannot say, although the fact that Marcion was raised in a Christian surrounding (see section 2) makes it likely that he was born in Asia Minor, the most Christianised area of the first centuries. Although Epiphanius' (and Filastrius') assertion that Marcion was from Sinope cannot be considered safe evidence (see section 4), Marcion's level of education (see section 3) suggests that he was in fact from an urban area. That he was

¹⁰⁶ The exact frontiers of this region were subject to several variations over the centuries. There was not initially a fixed *province* of Pontus either, as the Romans (after their final victory in 62 BC) immediately founded the double province *Bithynia et Pontus*.

¹⁰⁷ Ovid wrote his letters *Ex Ponto* in the city of Tomis in today's Romania, which could apparently also be referred to as a Pontic city.

from a seaport is also most likely due to his profession of ship-owner (see section 3). Thus, Sinope remains a plausible birthplace of Marcion, but only one among many.

The date of Marcion's birth is naturally nothing but an educated guess, based on the reconstruction of his life as a whole. The best approach to establish the date of Marcion's birth is to ask: how old was he when he arrived in Rome 144/145? First of all, Harnack's assumption that Marcion was born about 85¹⁰⁸ is highly unlikely. If this was true, Marcion would have been (almost) sixty when he arrived at Rome, and it seems simply improbable that a sixty year old man would start a revolution as Marcion did¹⁰⁹ (for the question of Marcion's *pre-Roman* activity, see section 4). This statement is not intended to suggest that a man of that age would not have the physical or mental *ability* to perform such actions, but I very much doubt that he would have the corresponding *mindset*. The desire to 'change the world' is characteristic for a man's twenties or thirties and perhaps his forties but usually not at sixty. Based on this it must seem unlikely that Marcion was born before 100 AD. But what is the *terminus ante quem*? Could Marcion have been born as late as 120, for example? He could have started his movement at a very young age, but we must allow for some more time for him both to develop his theological doctrine and to gain his respectable fortune (see section 3). All in all one may suggest that Marcion was probably born somewhere between 100 and 110 AD.

2. Was Marcion raised a Christian?

The decision whether Marcion was raised in a Christian surrounding is of crucial importance for his biography. For the following reasons¹¹⁰ it seems likely that he was.

¹⁰⁸ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 21

¹⁰⁹ I believe Harnack might actually have agreed with me on this point, but since he assumes that Marcion's heretical activity began long before Rome, he can also date his birth long before.

¹¹⁰ The idea of his father being a bishop, which would, if it was found to be true, already settle this question, has proven to be unlikely (see below).

First of all there is a psychological probability. It would be unusual for a man to join a particular religion deliberately at an advanced age and to subvert it subsequently.¹¹¹ Rather a man who is brought up in a certain tradition would develop such a critical attitude towards it. Secondly, it is Marcion's attitude toward the Old Testament and its God (see Chapters III and IV) which is of importance in this question. Again, only a man brought up with a strong reverence for the God of the Law and the Prophets would be likely to develop an almost obsessive despite for this God. This feature alone could, of course, also be explained if Marcion was of Jewish origin, as Harnack suggested¹¹². However, from a letter by Marcion himself (see section 5) we know that he was at least at some point in his life an orthodox Christian. Now, if he had been born a Jew, this would mean that he had gone through two conversions in his life, from Judaism to Christianity, and from Christianity to his own doctrine, which seems rather unlikely. It is, however, quite possible that Marcion was raised within a Christian circle which put great emphasis on the Jewish Scriptures, perhaps in the way we find it represented in the *Letter of Barnabas* (see Chapter VII). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Marcion's rootedness in the Church's traditions of his time can be demonstrated by the fact that he adapted several sacramental practices which clearly bear indications of the Old Testament (see Chapter VI). Since Marcion would never have consciously adapted any Old Testament practices into his church, it follows that he must have had grown up with these rituals, which, in his time, had already been firmly established, so that their origin had apparently already become hazy (see Chapter VI).

When it was exactly that Marcion turned his back on the tradition he was brought up in and developed his own doctrine is impossible to determine. We do not have to assume that he experienced a dramatic event of conversion, as people like Augustine, Francis of Assisi or Luther did (at least according to the legends). In all probability there was no

¹¹¹ Still today it can be observed that those people who join or switch religion at a later part of their lives often become its most conservative representatives.

¹¹² Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 22. Tertullian does indeed associate Marcion's heresy with the error of the Jews (Adv. Marc. III.6,2 et al.; cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, 30*), as they both deny that Jesus Christ is the Messiah foretold by the Prophets. However, since their conclusions are as opposite as they could be, this element does not indicate any Jewish influence on Marcion's upbringing or his education (cf. Chapter IV).

conversion overnight, but rather an extended process. Although it can, of course, not be dated safely, I think it is fair to assume that a development such as this usually takes place (and this also was the case for the three men just mentioned) somewhere between the age of 20 and 35.¹¹³

Finally, it should not go unnoticed that it is exactly this break within Marcion's biography which makes him the prototype of a heretic, just as Tertullian (see section 4) and other heresiologists always portray them: a man who is familiar with orthodox doctrine and then deliberately chooses to deviate from it.

3. What did Marcion's education and professional career look like?

To determine exactly what kind of education Marcion received is nearly impossible, but we are able to establish at least the educational minimum he must have had.¹¹⁴ Marcion performed textual criticism by 'cleaning' the Gospel of Luke and the Pauline letters from what he believed to be Judaist interpolations (see Chapter IV). Leaving aside the theological implications of this enterprise of his, the ability to accomplish such a project in the first place requires a certain amount of knowledge, a knowledge one would traditionally receive in the grammarian's school. It was here that the students learned to

¹¹³ This also corresponds to the findings of modern psychology of religion. James Fowler calls this phase "Individuative-Reflective Faith", which according to him usually begins in young adulthood: "In a way that parallels the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, we engage in critical analysis and reflection upon the symbols, rituals, myths, and beliefs that mediate and express our traditions of faith [...] This critical and reflective examination of our faith heritage does not mean that one must give up being an Episcopal Christian, or an Orthodox Jew, or a Sunnit Muslim. But it does mean that now one maintains that commitment and identity by choice and explicit assent rather than by fate or tacit commitment." (James Fowler, "Stages in Faith Consciousness", in: Gerhard Büttner/Veit-Jakobus Dieterich, *Die religiöse Entwicklung des Menschen*, Stuttgart: Calwer, 2000, p. 115). For Marcion, however, it did mean giving up his faith heritage and choosing to explicitly commit himself to his very own new doctrine. As a matter of fact, this development of his might have something to do with the dangers inherent to this stage according to Fowler: "an excessive confidence in the conscious mind and in critical thought and a kind of second narcissism" (James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, p. 182).

¹¹⁴ For the following cf. Lampe, *Christen*, 215-219.

perform textual *emendatio*, the art of correcting mistakes in a text.¹¹⁵ Students usually finished the grammarian's school at the age of seventeen. Whether Marcion went on for further studies we cannot say, but there is no evidence to suggest this thought¹¹⁶.

All in all Marcion, unlike his contemporary Ptolemy for instance (see Chapter VII), does not show the traits of an intellectual, and a close connection of his to any particular philosophical school is not to be found, either. It is true that the Fathers constantly attempt to link Marcion to a certain philosophical movement, but the variety and apparent arbitrariness of these attempts make this notion rather questionable. At one point Tertullian considers Marcion to be a follower of Epicurus, at another he sees him as a Stoic, Hippolytus associates him with Empedocles and with the Cynics, and Clement believes he took his starting-point from Plato.¹¹⁷ Lampe concludes correctly: "Die Palette widerlegt sich selber."¹¹⁸ However, the above stated associations are not entirely made up. It is indeed true that later generations of Marcionites took over the concept of (evil) matter from Platonic philosophy (see Chapter III). It is further true that Marcion himself shows a certain similarity to Epicurean thought when he states that God's goodness and omnipotence are irreconcilable with the existence of evil in the world (see Chapter III). It was this similarity which made John Gager conclude that Marcion was indeed influenced by Epicurean philosophy¹¹⁹. However, Lampe asked mockingly: "Schwingt sich nicht bereits ein Untersekundaner¹²⁰ ohne den Steigbügel Epikurs zur selben Argumentation auf?"¹²¹, and described the association of Marcion with pagan philosophers as "übliche Ketzerpolemik"¹²². More generally speaking,

¹¹⁵ Very well (and humorously) portrayed by Jérôme Carcopino, *La vie quotidienne à Rome à l'apogée de l'Empire*, Paris: Hachette, 1939, p. 137-138.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Lampe, *Christen*, p. 218: "Von einer Hochschulbildung Marcions bei Rednern oder Philosophen kann zumindest heute nichts mehr entdeckt werden."

¹¹⁷ Cf. Lampe, *Christen*, p. 218.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ John G. Gager, "Marcion and Philosophy", *VigChr* 26 (1972), p. 55-58.

¹²⁰ "Untersekundaner" is an old-fashioned term for a student in the sixth year of German secondary school, thus about the age of 16.

¹²¹ Lampe, *Christen*, p. 217.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 217-218. Cf. also Tertullian's view that the philosophers are "haereticorum patriarchae" (*Adv. Herm.* 8.3). In a similar way Jerome is probably to be understood when he (perhaps quoting Origen) refers to Marcion (and the heretics in general) as a man who is *doctissimus* and of *ardens ingenium* (*Comm. Os.*

Marcion's approach to theology is purely biblicist (see Chapter IV) and may thus rightly be labelled as "bewußt anti-philosophisch"¹²³.

Fortunately, as to Marcion's profession we have some more trustworthy testimonies. Rhodon (quoted in the work of Eusebius¹²⁴) calls Marcion a *sailor* (ναύτης), and Tertullian, both confirming and specifying¹²⁵ Rhodon's testimony, describes Marcion as a *ship-owner* (ναύκληρος)¹²⁶ and refers to the profession of his adversary frequently in his work. There is no particular reason to doubt the testimony of Tertullian in this regard. How Marcion started his career at sea we do not know. It is conceivable that he was from a wealthy family and simply took over their business. His family must at least have had the means to finance his education. However, Marcion was a man of action, a 'doer', and it seems safe to say that he had at least the potential to be a self-made man, especially as maritime commerce provided a real social springboard in his time¹²⁷. Marcion's organisational talent is beyond question. A man who is able to more or less single-handedly found a movement powerful enough to rival the orthodox church for some time must be granted a certain ability (see Chapter VI). Whether this was simply a natural talent or something he acquired through his business experience, we cannot say. At any rate, it seems quite possible that Marcion started his career as a mere sailor and then worked his way up to the top.

II.10,1). The author has hardly an actual compliment in mind, but rather seems to be referring to the fact that such people are misusing their gifts.

¹²³ Enrico Norelli, "Marcion: ein christlicher Philosoph oder ein Christ gegen die Philosophie?", in: May/Greschat (ed.), *Marcion*, p. 128.

¹²⁴ Hist. Eccl. V.13,3.

¹²⁵ Lampe observed correctly that Rhodon's term is in line with Tertullian's: "ναύτης ist ein Oberbegriff, nicht ein Spezialbegriff" (Lampe, *Christen*, p. 204).

¹²⁶ First notion in De praescr. 30.1. Although the Greek term *naukleros* is not limited to the meaning of our term ship-owner (for an extensive description see Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, ²1995, p. 314-316), I shall keep to this term for Marcion's profession as I believe it describes it best. It is Marcion's wealth (see below) in particular which suggests that he was actually an owner of a ship rather than just a skipper.

¹²⁷ Cf. Mikhail Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire I*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, ²1957, p. 172: "Most of the *nouveaux riches* owned their money to it [maritime commerce]." Cf. also Albert Stöckle, "Navicularii", *PRE* 16 (1935), p. 1911.

From his donation of 200,000 sesterces¹²⁸ to the Roman church (see section 4) we may conclude that Marcion was a wealthy man. There is no reason to assume – as Gerhard May does¹²⁹ – that this sum represented the major part of his fortune, or that Marcion quit his job after settling in Rome. For the latter theory May names three reasons: 1. Marcion could not carry out his profession without capital; 2. due to his theological activity, Marcion did not have time to go on long business trips; 3. Marcion would have refused to perform the religious rituals required on board.¹³⁰ However, none of these arguments is really conclusive. The first one is based on May's above mentioned thesis that Marcion gave all his money to the Roman ecclesia, a thesis for which he offers no evidence whatsoever. More importantly, May seems to be overlooking the fact that the church of Rome reimbursed Marcion the entire sum soon afterwards¹³¹ (see section 4). The other two arguments become irrelevant once we consider that a ship-owner did not have to travel himself. The strongest argument, however, against the theory that Marcion quit his job after he came to Rome is the fact that it is Tertullian who provides this information about Marcion's profession. Since his knowledge about Marcion is limited to the heretic's time in Rome (apart from his Pontic birth), we have to conclude that the memory of Marcion's professional activity was preserved within the Roman community until the time of Tertullian and it is hard to imagine that this was the case if he had not pursued his business (at least for some time) after he settled in Rome. This impression is further confirmed by the fact that the only other source to name Marcion's profession (Rhodon) is also located in Rome.

How wealthy Marcion actually was we can no longer evaluate. Still, as stated above, there is no reason to assume that the 200,000 sesterces, while probably forming a

¹²⁸ De praescr. 30.2. Although it is impossible to name an equivalent sum in today's currency, 200.000 sesterces was probably about the value of a house within the city of Rome, cf. Lampe, *Christen*, p. 208. For a more complete study of money and prices in the Roman world, see Richard Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, Cambridge: University Press, 1974.

¹²⁹ May, "Der ‚Schiffsreeder‘ Markion", *StPatr* 21 (1989), p. 148 n. 27 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 57 n. 29).

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 148 n. 28 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 57 n. 30).

¹³¹ Interestingly enough, May seems to be contradicting himself when later in the same article he states that Marcion used his money for the promotion of his movement, cf. *ibid.*, p. 151 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 60).

substantial amount of Marcion's fortune, represented all of his savings. Thus, it seems possible that his wealth qualified him for the *ordo equester*. Lampe has, however, denied this possibility, pointing out that a man who despised the world and its goods so much (see Chapter VI) would not save 400,000 sesterces (the *equestrian census*) in order to achieve social ascent.¹³² It should be noted, however, that one does not have to *spend* 400,000 sesterces to become a knight, one simply has to *own* them. Certainly, Marcion was not an *eques* in the style of Trimalchio¹³³, a *nouveau riche* who spends all his money on personal vanities. But there is no direct contradiction between an anti-world lifestyle on the one hand and success in business on the other, especially not when we assume that Marcion used his money first of all for the welfare of his church.

4. Where and when did Marcion start his movement?

One of the few elements of Marcion's biography which can be considered certain is that at some point in his life Marcion came to (and settled in) Rome.¹³⁴ One problem is to pinpoint the exact date of his arrival¹³⁵, another to determine whether Marcion had already been 'active' before he arrived in the Imperial Capital.

Unfortunately, the two most precise statements we have about Marcion's arrival in Rome are at the same time the most doubtful ones. In the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas* it is said¹³⁶ that Marcion came to Rome under the episcopate of Anicetus (ca. 155-166)¹³⁷. This date, however, would contradict our earlier and more reliable sources on Marcion's life and is thus not to be trusted. The same goes for Tertullian's report that

¹³² Lampe, *Christen*, p. 208-209.

¹³³ A figure from Petronius' *Satyricon*.

¹³⁴ The only one to ever actually deny this was Hoffmann, see Introduction.

¹³⁵ The information provided by Jerome that Marcion sent a woman to Rome beforehand to 'prepare his way' as it were is isolated and hardly reliable (cf. Hier. ep. 133,4: "Marcion Romam praemisit mulierem, quae decipiendos sibi animos praepararet.")

¹³⁶ *Carm. adv. Marc.* 3,296-297.

¹³⁷ Dates for the Popes are taken from J. N. D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Marcion (and Valentinus) came to Rome under the episcopate of Eleutherus (ca. 174-189)¹³⁸. Harnack remarked correctly: “dieser Anachronismus [...] ist Tert. nicht zuzutrauen”¹³⁹, and assumes that an early copyist has mistakenly replaced the original bishop Telesphorus (ca. 125-136) with Eleutherus. However, the dates of both Eleutherus and Telesphorus do not coincide with the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161), under which Tertullian places the activity of Marcion in the very same passage. Thus, even if Harnack’s theory is correct, there would still be a contradiction between the two dates, and it seems safe to say that the reign of Antoninus, especially as Tertullian refers to it repeatedly in context with Marcion’s activity (see below), is the more reliable one.

The only other rather precise date is given by Epiphanius, who asserts that Marcion came to Rome after the death of the Roman bishop Hyginus¹⁴⁰ (ca. 142). This is, however, probably just an imprecise rendering of Irenaeus’ statement¹⁴¹ that Marcion arrived in Rome after Cerdo¹⁴², who again came to Rome under Hyginus (ca. 138-142), since it would be hard to explain where Epiphanius (at the end of the fourth century) would have such precise information from. Nevertheless, if we consider Irenaeus’ report to be trustworthy, it is possible that Marcion came to the Imperial Capital a few years after Cerdo did, which might then indeed be shortly after the death of Hyginus, maybe in the mid-forties of the second century.

The really crucial piece of information in order to determine Marcion’s arrival in Rome is Tertullian’s assertion that the Marcionites put 115 ½ years and half a month between Christ and Marcion, a passage which has served for a long time as the “Grundpfeiler der Markionchronologie”¹⁴³. However, since the credibility of this report by Tertullian has recently been called into question, it is important to take a closer look at it:

¹³⁸ De praescr. 30,2.

¹³⁹ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 18* n. 2.

¹⁴⁰ Pan. 42.1,7.

¹⁴¹ Adv. haer. I.27,1; III.4,3.

¹⁴² Cf. Karl Holl/Jürgen Dummer (ed.), *Epiphanius. Panarion. Vol. 2 (34-64)*. GCS 31. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, ²1980, p. 94.

¹⁴³ May, *Markionbild*, p. 406.

A Tiberio autem usque ad Antoninum anni fere CXV et dimidium anni cum dimidio mensis. Tantundem temporis ponunt inter Christum et Marcionem. (Adv. Marc. I.19,2)

They [the Marcionites] put 115 years and 6 ½ months between Christ and Marcion, which is more or less the period of time from Tiberius to Antoninus.

In my translation I have deliberately changed the order of words to point out one most important thing. Reading Tertullian's first sentence one could easily get the impression that his calculation is simply referring to the time difference between the Emperors. But apart from the fact that the calculation from Tiberius (14-37) to Antoninus Pius (138-161) would then be entirely wrong, it is the use of the word *fere* which excludes this possibility. No one would make such an exact calculation down to the very day and say: it is *more or less* 115 years and 6 ½ months. Therefore it is obvious that Tertullian is referring to a calculation made by the Marcionites themselves, which he then approximately (*fere*) equates with the time between Tiberius and Antoninus.

This is where Hoffman launches his attack against the integrity of Tertullian's testimony: "Inasmuch as Tertullian expressly introduces the calculation as support for the prescription, one may doubt not only the resulting date, but also his attribution of the figure to the Marcionites [...] Tertullian's calculation is not offered, therefore, in the interest of supplying biographical information, but rather in order to prove that Marcion's teaching did not arise before the middle decades of the second century."¹⁴⁴ Hoffmann is referring to Tertullian's *credo* that the old always outweighs the new¹⁴⁵, which Tertullian states at the very beginning of his work against Marcion:

In tantum enim haeresis deputabitur quod postea inducitur, in quantum veritas habebitur quod retro et a primordio traditum est. (Adv. Marc. I.1,6)

¹⁴⁴ Hoffmann, *Marcion*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁵ For a thorough study of Tertullian's concept of *praescriptio* see Joseph Stirnimann, *Die praescriptio Tertullians im Lichte des römischen Rechts und der Theologie*, Freiburg in der Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 1949.

For in as far as that which is introduced later will be considered heresy, in so far will that which has been delivered previously and from the very beginning be held as truth.

On the one hand, Hoffman is perfectly right. Tertullian, like all of Marcion's opponents, has no interest to provide biographical information about the heresiarch, but uses this information to support his *praescriptio*. But that does not make his statement unreliable. Even if we were to assume, as Hoffman is trying to demonstrate in vain, that Marcion was already preaching his doctrine at the beginning of the second century, why would it make such a big difference to Tertullian? Even if Marcion had appeared already under Trajan, Tertullian would still have been able to demonstrate that the God of Trajan's reign was not the one of Tiberius' reign, and that therefore the God first preached by Marcion was not the one revealed by Christ¹⁴⁶.

Now, according to the Marcionites (that is, according to the Gospel of Luke, see Chapter IV), Christ appeared in the 15th year of Tiberius (= 29 AD). Unfortunately, it does not get any more precise than this. So, counted from any day of the year 29 AD, 115 years and six and a half months would take us somewhere between the middle of 144 and the middle of 145.¹⁴⁷ However, even if we are no longer able to determine the precise date, the most exact determination almost down to the very day by the Marcionites makes it clear that they had a very special event in mind. What could be the one event in history so meaningful to them that it would be worthy to be remembered so precisely? Since the one end of this interval is the advent of Christ it is only natural to assume that the other end would be the *advent* of Marcion (rather than his death¹⁴⁸). Harnack concludes: "Also

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Adv. Marc. I.19,3.

¹⁴⁷ I cannot see why Harnack automatically assumes that the 115 years and six and a half months have to be counted from the very beginning of the year 29 (bringing him to the second half of July 144), cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 20*. This is all the more surprising as in an earlier work Harnack believed that these years have to be counted from spring 29, which would then bring us to autumn 144 (Harnack, *Chronologie*, p. 306).

¹⁴⁸ Ernst Barnikol expressed the idea that this date would refer to the day of Marcion's death (Ernst Barnikol, *Die Entstehung der Kirche im zweiten Jahrhundert und die Zeit Marcions*, Kiel: Walter Muhlau Verlag, ²1933, p. 18-20). Apart from what has just been said about the unlikeliness of this theory, it is based on a complete misdating of Justin's *Apology* (ibid., p. 20-21), a document from which we can clearly see that Marcion was still alive in the early 150s (see below).

muß der Marcion-Tag, der hier zugrunde liegt, ebenso bedeutend sein wie der Christus-Tag. Dieser Tag war der Tag der Epiphanie Christi, mit der das Heil anhub, also muß der Marcion-Tag der Kirchengründungstag sein.”¹⁴⁹ Harnack is right in identifying the *Christ-day* as the day of Christ’s epiphany, but it is hard to see why he is so sure that the *Marcion-day* must be the day of the foundation of his church. Would it not be more logical to assume that it is simply the day of Marcion’s arrival in Rome?¹⁵⁰ When we further consider the phrase which immediately precedes the calculation offered by Tertullian, this becomes even more probable:

Anno quinto decimo Tiberii Christus Iesus de caelo manare dignatus est, spiritus salutaris. Marcionis saltem qui ita voluit quoto quidem anno Antonini maioris de Ponto suo exhalaverit aura canicularis non curavi investigare. A Tiberio autem usque ad Antoninum anni fere CXV et dimidium anni cum dimidio mensis. Tantundem temporis ponunt inter Christum et Marcionem. (Adv. Marc. I.19,2)

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar Christ Jesus deigned to pour down from heaven, a salutary spirit. This is at least the way Marcion would have it; in what year of the elder Antoninus his pestilential breeze breathed out from his own Pontus, I have not bothered to investigate. They [the Marcionites] put 115 years and 6 ½ months between Christ and Marcion, which is more or less the period of time from Tiberius to Antoninus.

It is obvious that for Tertullian it is these two ‘arrivals’ which correlate¹⁵¹. He knows that (according to the Marcionites) it was the 15th year of Tiberius when Christ came

¹⁴⁹ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 20*-21* n. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Still, Harnack might not be all wrong, as it is conceivable that the day of Marcion’s arrival in Rome was celebrated by his followers as the birth of Marcionism. After all, just because people celebrate a certain day as their foundation day, that does not mean that it actually was. Lutherans, for example, celebrate 31 October 1517 (the day Luther pinned his 95 theses to the door of the *Schloßkirche* in Wittenberg) as the start of the Reformation. It was a start, no doubt, but no one (and especially not Luther himself) at that point even considered an actual break with the Catholic Church much less the foundation of their own. Something similar might be true for the Marcionites.

¹⁵¹ Cf. René Braun, *Tertullien. Contre Marcion I*, SC 365, Paris: Cerf, 1990, p. 272: “Tert. ironise en opposant à l’apparition inopinée du Christ selon Marcion celle de l’hérésiarque lui-même, sa venue à Rome de son Pont natal.”

down from heaven, but he has not bothered to investigate the correlating event, that is when it was that Marcion's "breeze breathed out" from Pontus. Therefore he must 'rely' on the calculation offered by the Marcionites. One might thus paraphrase the entire line of thought as follows: Marcion says that Christ came down from Heaven in the 15th year of Tiberius. When it was that Marcion came from Pontus, I do not know, but the Marcionites say it was 115 years and 6 ½ months after Christ.¹⁵²

The more difficult question regarding Marcion's arrival in Rome is the question about his *pre-Roman* activity. It is above all the so-called *second tradition* about Marcion's life – represented by Pseudo-Tertullian, Epiphanius and Filastrius – which seems to suggest an activity of the heresiarch before he came to Rome, that is, before the year 144/145. I have already dedicated an article to this matter, in which I tried to demonstrate that this tradition is highly questionable.¹⁵³ These findings are listed here in summary.

The reports on Marcion's life presented by Pseudo-Tertullian, Epiphanius and Filastrius substantially differ from those of the earlier writers, Tertullian in particular, which is why Regul referred to the former as the *second tradition* about Marcion's life¹⁵⁴. While Regul correctly observed certain similarities between the three authors, they still by no means provide a coherent picture of Marcion's life. Therefore, it must strongly be doubted whether their reports actually go back to the lost *Syntagma* of Hippolytus, a theory formulated by Richard Adelbert Lipsius¹⁵⁵. This theory becomes even less likely when we take into account that none of the information Ps-Tertullian, Epiphanius and Filastrius provide on Marcion is to be found in Hippolytus' *Refutatio*, which was, in his

¹⁵² August Bill has offered a theory similar to mine concerning this matter, but comes to the conclusion that the day in question must be the day Marcion left Pontus (August Bill, *Zur Erklärung und Textkritik des 1. Buches Tertullians „Adversus Marcionem“*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911, p. 66-73). While this is a possible interpretation of the above mentioned passage, it seems hard to understand why the Marcionites would care about this day rather than the one of their master's arrival in Rome.

¹⁵³ Sebastian Moll, "Three against Tertullian: The Second Tradition about Marcion's Life", *JTS* 59/1 (2008), p. 169-180.

¹⁵⁴ Regul, *Evangelienprologe*, p. 180-188.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Adelbert Lipsius, *Zur Quellenkritik des Epiphanius*, Wien: Braumüller, 1865.

own words, his more detailed work¹⁵⁶. If, however, none of the works belonging to the *second tradition* go back to Hippolytus, this means that they probably date from a period later than Tertullian's, which does not help their credibility. Their credibility is further weakened by the fact that many of the elements they report about Marcion are – unlike Tertullian's – well suited to bring him into disrepute. Finally, it should be noted that all the earlier sources (Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian) only know of Marcion after he arrived in Rome, and that it is far easier to imagine later generations of heresiologists inventing a negative background story than all earlier writers being unaware of it. As for the credibility of the particular elements contained in the second tradition, we may state in conclusion: 1. The idea of Marcion's father being a bishop as well as the story of Marcion's abuse of a virgin are in all probability invented; 2. Sinope remains a possible birth place of Marcion, but is by no means as safe as generally assumed; 3. The debate with the elders may in fact have taken place, while the importance attached to it is probably overrated.

Beside this *second tradition*, there are also a number of even later sources¹⁵⁷ which mention an activity of Marcion before the year 144/145. In chronological order we have:

The Chronicle of Edessa (sixth century)

*Im Jahre 449 [= 137/8 AD] schied Marcion aus der katholischen Kirche aus.*¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ref. I. Prooemium 1.

¹⁵⁷ The testimony of Filastrius that Marcion was excommunicated by John the Evangelist in Ephesus before he reached Rome forms an obvious anachronism (cf. Moll, *Three against Tertullian*, p. 172) and will therefore not be discussed again here. The same goes for the similar report in the Prologue to John, cf. *ibid.* Likewise, Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians cannot serve as testimony for Marcion's activity before the year 144/145, as we can not state with certainty that Marcion is referred to in the letter (see Chapter I); however, even if we could confirm this, it would still be possible, while unlikely, that the letter was written after 144/145 (a possibility that even Harrison has to concede, cf. *Epistles.*, p. 197), in which case it would be of no value for our question even if it was directed against Marcion.

¹⁵⁸ Translated by Ludwig Hallier, *Untersuchungen über die Edessenische Chronik*, Leipzig: 1892, p. 89.

The Liber Chalipharum (eight century, Syria)

*Im Jahre 448 [= 136/7 AD] wurden die Häretiker Marcion und Montanus in Phrygien bekannt.*¹⁵⁹

The Fihrist of Muhammed ben Ishak (987/8, Baghdad?):

*Mâni trat im zweiten Jahr der Regierung des Römers Gallus auf, nachdem Marcion ungefähr hundert Jahre vor ihm unter der Regierung des Titus Antoninus und zwar im ersten Jahre seiner Herrschaft, und Ibn Deisân (Bardesanes) ungefähr 30 Jahre nach Marcion erschienen war.*¹⁶⁰

Harnack maintained the possibility that these three sources might be based on an originally Marcionite dating which established the first year of the reign of Antoninus Pius (138) as the arrival of Marcion in Rome, a date which the first two sources, however, somehow miscalculated¹⁶¹. Anything is possible; however, there is no reason whatsoever to assume that this is the case. Not only does none of the sources mention the city of Rome, but the *Liber Chalipharum* clearly states that Marcion's first appearance was in Phrygia (a fact which Harnack noticeably withholds). The mention of this area in context with Marcion is in fact a very interesting piece of information. Unfortunately, there is no credibility to it, as there is no other source that ever associates Marcion with Phrygia. There has apparently been a mixing up with the persona of Montanus, who indeed was from this region, although he by no means appeared as early as 136/7¹⁶². It almost seems as if the author combined Marcion's time with Montanus' place. If the three sources are connected at all, it rather seems to have been the other way

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Translated by Gustav Flügel, *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1862, p. 85. As to the location and dating of the source see *ibid.*, p. 30-31.

¹⁶¹ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 29*. Wilson also had much confidence in these sources for the reconstruction of Marcion's biography (*Marcion*, p. 56-60).

¹⁶² Although the date of Montanus' first appearance is disputed (cf. Christine Trevett, *Montanism*, Cambridge: University Press, 1996, p. 26-45), there is no indication that he was active before the 150s.

around from what Harnack assumed: the latest source was perhaps familiar with the dating of the earlier two, and then identified it with the first year of the Emperor. Be that as it may, due to the lateness of these sources' testimony and due to the fact that it is impossible to determine where they got their information from and that further none of them is directly concerned with a description of Marcion and his heresy, they cannot be used as reliable information about the time or whereabouts of the heretic's first appearance.

Another testimony which seems to suggest an activity of the arch-heretic before the year 144/145 is provided by Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* (ca. 200)¹⁶³:

That the human gatherings which they called were of a later time than the catholic church does not require many words. For the teaching of the Lord during his presence began at the time of Augustus and Tiberius Caesar and was completed in the middle of the time of Tiberius¹⁶⁴, the teaching of his apostles – until the service of Paul – was completed under Nero; but it was later, in the time of the Emperor Hadrian, that those appeared who came up with the heresies, and they extended to the time of the elder Antoninus; like Basilides, though he claims Glaucias for his teacher, who was, as they boast, the interpreter of Peter. Likewise they assert that Valentinus had heard Theodas; and he was a disciple of Paul. Marcion, who appeared at about the same time they did, indeed associated with those younger people when he was already an old man. (Strom. VII.17,106-107)¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ The dating of Clement's work is most difficult. For the best, yet still approximate dating see André Méhat, *Étude sur les 'Stromateis' de Clément d'Alexandrie*, Paris: Seuil, 1966, p. 54.

¹⁶⁴ Changed according to the most common emendation, cf. Alain Le Boulluec, *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates VII*, SC 428, Paris: Cerf, 1997, p. 318 n. 2.

¹⁶⁵ ὅτι γὰρ μεταγενεστέρας τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας τὰς ἀνθρωπίνης συνηλύσεις πεποιήκασιν, οὐ πολλῶν δεῖ λόγων. ἡ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ κυρίου κατὰ τὴν παρουσίαν διδασκαλία ἀπὸ Αὐγούστου καὶ Τιβερίου καίσαρος ἀρξάμενη μεσοῦντων τῶν Τιβερίου χρόνων τελειοῦται, ἡ δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων αὐτοῦ μέχρι γε τῆς Παύλου λειτουργίας ἐπὶ Νέρωνος τελειοῦται, κάτω δὲ περὶ τοὺς Ἀδριανοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως χρόνους οἱ τὰς αἱρέσεις ἐπινοήσαντες γέγονασι, καὶ μέχρι γε τῆς Ἀντωνίνου τοῦ πρεσβυτέρου διέτειναν ἡλικίας, καθάπερ ὁ Βασιλείδης, καὶ Γλαυκίαν ἐπιγράφεται διδάσκαλον, ὡς ἀυχοῦσιν αὐτοί, τὸν Πέτρου ἔρμηνεα. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ Οὐαλεντίνον Θεοδᾶ διακηκόειν φέρουσιν· γνώριμος δ' οὗτος γέγονει Παύλου. Μαρκίων γὰρ κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αὐτοῖς ἡλικίαν γενόμενος ὡς πρεσβύτης νεωτέρους συνεγένετο.

Harnack concluded from this passage “daß M.[arcion] schon im Zeitalter Hadrians ein gestandener Mann war”¹⁶⁶, and thus dated his birth as early as 85 AD (see section 1). However, Clement does not explicitly state that Marcion already appeared in the time of Hadrian. Like most of the early anti-heretical writers he is first of all concerned with the demonstration of the heretics’ *posteriority* compared to the Church, and he arranges the passage in question accordingly. After stating that the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles goes from Augustus to Nero, Clement puts the heretics in the time of Hadrian and Antoninus. However, only Basilides can safely be dated under the reign of Hadrian¹⁶⁷. Clement can hardly be seen as a precise biographer of any of these men, he merely offers a larger era in which they were active, an era which was, and this is what mattered to him, long after the time of Christ and the Apostles. In the end, it is hardly a coincidence that Clement mentions Marcion as the last of the three, thereby indicating a certain chronological order in which they appeared.

Still, there is also the piece of information that Marcion was older than Basilides and Valentinus. While this information is of little value for our question of Marcion’s *pre-Roman* activity – after all, it is perfectly possible that Marcion simply started his movement at a later age than Basilides and Valentinus –, it seems to make our estimated date of birth for the arch-heretic (100-110 AD, see section 1) appear a little too late. However, we may wonder how literally we may take Clement’s assertion, which is probably based on hearsay in this case. If Marcion was born 100 AD, he would have been in his mid-forties when he started his movement (see section 6). Given his rigorous way of life (see Chapter VI) and his demanding profession (see section 3), it seems quite possible that Marcion looked a little older than he actually was, especially compared to certain Gnostics, who are often portrayed as men of the upper class, sometimes even as charmers of (wealthy) women¹⁶⁸. Thus, Clement’s statement may make our estimation

¹⁶⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 15*.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Winrich A. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule: Eine Studie zur Theologie- und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1996, p. 325-326.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Adv. haer. I.13,3.

lean more towards 100 than 110 AD, but it does not call our general concept into question.

Finally, there is one passage in the work of Justin which has made some scholars believe that Marcion must already have been active before 144/145. In his *Apology* (ca. 153-154), Justin states that Marcion “has made many people in the whole world speak blasphemies”¹⁶⁹ and that he is “even now still teaching”¹⁷⁰. John Knox has commented on this as follows: “For one thing, it indicates that Marcion’s influence was more widespread than one would suppose possible if his career as a Christian teacher and leader had begun only a few years earlier. Besides, Justin’s phrase, ‘even until now’, suggests a longer period of ‘heretical’ activity than is allowed for by the usual theory that Marcion became an influential teacher only after he had reached the West.”¹⁷¹ Both arguments are inconclusive. First of all, we should be cautious to take Justin’s assertion that Marcion’s doctrine has spread “κατὰ πᾶν γένος ἀνθρώπων” too literally. A little exaggeration on his part is certainly possible since the success of Marcion’s movement was indeed frightening to him (especially as it mostly recruited former orthodox Christians, see Chapter VI), even if it did not yet affect the whole world. For this success, however, the time between Marcion’s appearance in Rome and the date of the *Apology* is quite sufficient. Even if we dated the *Apology* as early as 150, there would still have been at least five years for Marcion’s doctrine to spread successfully, which is more than enough for a doctrine which obviously appealed to the people, especially when it is proclaimed by a man of Marcion’s position and ability (see Chapter VI) . Justin’s statement that Marcion is “even now still” teaching becomes understandable if we take a look at the preceding sections of the *Apology*. According to Justin, all heretics were put forward by the demons after Christ’s ascension into heaven. He then mentions the heretics Simon, Menander and Marcion, of whom the first two are of course long dead already. The reason for Justin’s surprise that Marcion is *still* teaching is not his

¹⁶⁹ 1 Apol. 26,5: ὅς κατὰ πᾶν γένος ἀνθρώπων [...] πολλοὺς πεποίηκε βλάσφημα λέγειν.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.: καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἐστὶ διδάσκων.

¹⁷¹ Knox, *Marcion*, p. 8. A similar argument can already be found in Wilson, *Marcion*, p. 57-58.

impressively long heretical career, but the fact that he is still active so long after the demons had put forward the other heretics.¹⁷²

Summing up we can state that we have no safe testimony of Marcion's activity before 144/145. None of the later sources can seriously compete with Tertullian's testimony, and the reports by Justin and Clements have proven to present no actual contradiction to the Carthaginian's statements. The question is: does that mean that Marcion did not develop his doctrine before the year 144/145? Certainly not (see section 2). We have to ask ourselves what it was that made the Imperial Capital so attractive to Marcion that he decided to settle down there. First of all, it may well have been business reasons. Marcion was an overseas merchant and, as we have seen, probably not the smallest among them. As such, he might well have been involved in the supply of the Imperial capital.¹⁷³ However, his decision was probably also motivated by the religious atmosphere within the Roman church, a community which could be considered as the "great laboratory of Christian and ecclesiastical policy"¹⁷⁴. Besides the liberal and tolerant climate in general (see section 6), it can be assumed that within the Roman ecclesia, which was from the beginning dominated by Pagan-Christians¹⁷⁵, the break with Judaism was clearer than it was in the East¹⁷⁶, a feature which, needless to say, also attracted Marcion. If we suppose that his decision to stay in Rome after 144/145 was motivated by his intuition that the religious atmosphere of the Imperial capital was the perfect environment for his doctrine to be a success, we may also suppose that he had already developed his doctrine before 144/145. The fact that there are no witnesses for this might have two reasons. Either Marcion had developed, but not yet proclaimed his doctrine, or his preaching had been without much impact, which would be another

¹⁷² Cf. Moll, *Justin*, p. 148-149.

¹⁷³ Cf. Lampe, *Christen*, p. 205-206.

¹⁷⁴ George La Piana, "The Roman Church at the End of the Second Century", *HTR* 18 (1925), p. 203.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Lampe, *Christen*, p. 53-63.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 25, n. 1. See also Leonhard Goppelt, *Christentum und Judentum im ersten und zweiten Jahrhundert*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1954, p. 225: "Die sich im R[ömerbrief] andeutende Situation der römischen Gemeinde gegenüber dem Judentum begegnet weiterhin in den der Kirche des Westens entstammenden Zeugnissen der nachpaulinischen Zeit: überall ist ein den dargestellten östlichen Kirchengebieten unbekannter Abstand zwischen Kirche und Synagoge zu spüren. Das Judentum spielt im wesentlichen nur als der geschichtliche Ursprung des Christentums eine Rolle."

reason why he decided to try his luck in Rome. At any rate, it seems safe to say that Marcion's life before Rome was of little importance to his followers after Rome had become the *headquarters* and *point of departure* for Marcionism.

The important question is what happened at Marcion's arrival in Rome, or, to be more precise, what his *status* was when he arrived. Tertullian claims that Marcion came to Rome as a loyal son of the church.¹⁷⁷ However, this time it might indeed be the idea of *praescriptio* which dictates his version. Concerning the *praescriptio* it is not only important to Tertullian that the true precedes the false but – correspondingly – that a heretic always knows the truth first and then deliberately *chooses* the false.¹⁷⁸ The intriguing element in this matter is the letter of Marcion already mentioned that Tertullian refers to several times¹⁷⁹ (always in connection with the principle of *praescriptio*) in which Marcion himself confessed that he used to share the orthodox faith (see Chapter V). There seems to be no particular reason to doubt the actual existence of this letter, especially as it is indeed most likely that the heresiarch used to confess the faith of the orthodox church once in his life (see section 2), and as it would not be uncommon for a man like Marcion to provide autobiographical information about his conversion. The only mistake Tertullian makes is to automatically assume that Marcion's conversion took place in Rome. As we have seen this is rather unlikely and the only reason Tertullian would believe this seems to be the fact that he does not know anything about Marcion's life before Rome.

In a manner of speaking, it is true that Marcion arrived in Rome as a heretic, but only in so far as he had already developed his own doctrine. He was, however, not yet *outside* the orthodox church. Marcion came to Rome hoping that the local Christians would be receptive to his theology and so he joined the church donating the already mentioned

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Adv. Marc. IV.4,3.

¹⁷⁸ Adv. Marc. I.1,6: “destinari possit haereticus qui deserto quod prius fuerat id postea sibi elegerit, quod retro non erat”. Cf. E. P. Meijering, *Tertullian contra Marcion. Gotteslehre in der Polemik*, Leiden: Brill, 1977, p. 8: “Das Wort *eligere* soll natürlich die Grundbedeutung des Wortes ‚Häretiker‘ unterstreichen.”

¹⁷⁹ Adv. Marc. I.1,6; IV.4,3; Carn. II.4.

200,000 sesterces. To interpret this as attempted bribery (as Harnack apparently did¹⁸⁰) seems a bit too harsh, and yet it may not have been pure charity either. The truth is probably somewhere in between. Marcion honestly wanted to support the church of Rome, but perhaps he also thought that this welcoming gift might make things a little easier for him.

5. What was Marcion's relation to Cerdo?

The figure of Cerdo represents perhaps the greatest paradox in the history of the reconstruction of Marcion's biography. Although a considerable influence of this man on Marcion is one of the best attested features of Marcion's life, the scholarly consensus seems to be that this influence, at least in any substantial form, is made up by Marcion's adversaries, or that Cerdo did not even exist at all¹⁸¹. This consensus is all the more striking as those sources which usually report many different (and sometimes irreconcilable) things about Marcion's life not only agree on this point, but even provide a rather coherent picture of the role that Cerdo played in the life of the arch-heretic: Irenaeus states that Marcion *expanded* (adampliaivit) Cerdo's doctrine¹⁸²; Tertullian calls Cerdo the *informator* of Marcion¹⁸³; Hippolytus states that Cerdo was his διδάσκαλος¹⁸⁴ and that Marcion *confirmed* (ἐκράτυνε) his doctrine¹⁸⁵; according to Ps-Tertullian, Marcion was Cerdo's *discipulus* and tried to *prove* (approbare) the doctrine of his master¹⁸⁶; Epiphanius tells us that Marcion, after he failed to obtain leadership of the Roman church or to be accepted by it, *fled* (προσφεύγει) to the sect of Cerdo¹⁸⁷, and that Marcion took over his *manner* (πρόφασις)¹⁸⁸; Filastrius describes their relation as one

¹⁸⁰ Harnack, *Chronologie*, p. 305-306.

¹⁸¹ Cf. David Deakle, "Harnack & Cerdo", in: May/Greschat (ed.), *Marcion*, p. 188-189.

¹⁸² Adv. haer. I.27,2.

¹⁸³ Adv. Marc. I.2,3.

¹⁸⁴ Ref. X.19,1.

¹⁸⁵ Ref. VII.37,2.

¹⁸⁶ Adv. omn. haer. VI.2

¹⁸⁷ Pan. 42.1,8.

¹⁸⁸ Pan. 42.1,1.

between *doctor* and *discipulus* and states that Marcion *confirmed* (firmabat) Cerdo's *mendacium*.¹⁸⁹

All these reports agree on three things:

1. Cerdo was active *before* Marcion.
2. Cerdo taught a doctrine *similar* to that of Marcion.
3. Marcion met Cerdo in *Rome*.¹⁹⁰

The one point the sources do not agree upon is to what extent Cerdo had already developed what was later to become known as the system of Marcion, and it is exactly this element which has made scholars believe that the so-called doctrine of Cerdo is nothing but an arbitrary re-projection of Marcion's thought onto him.¹⁹¹ It is indeed true that the variety of portraits of Cerdo's doctrine reveals a certain arbitrariness on the part of the Fathers, so that it is most unlikely that they actually based their reports on first-hand testimony. An exact reconstruction of Cerdo's system of beliefs is therefore impossible. But could it have been similar to that of Marcion?

The best way to approach this difficult question is to analyse the testimony of Irenaeus. His report on Cerdo can be considered the most reliable, firstly because it is our earliest report on him (thus later reports might already depend on Irenaeus), but also because there is no motive to be found on Irenaeus' part to deliberately provide false evidence in

¹⁸⁹ Div. her. 45.1-3.

¹⁹⁰ The city of Rome is not specifically named by all of the above mentioned sources as the place of the encounter between Cerdo and Marcion, but none of them names a different place either. It is thus safe to assume that they all considered Rome to be the place where the two met.

¹⁹¹ Cf. for example Gerhard May, "Markion und der Gnostiker Kerdon", in: Alfred Raddatz/Kurt Lüthi (ed.), *Evangelischer Glaube und Geschichte. Grete Mecenseffy zum 85. Geburtstag*, Wien: Evangelischer Oberkirchenrat H.B., 1984, p. 243 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 71): "Den Nachrichten über die Lehre Kerdons fehlt jedes erkennbare eigene Profil. Man hat einfach die Anschauungen Markions auf Kerdon übertragen, weil man von dessen Theologie nichts mehr wusste."

this case¹⁹². The most striking part about his report is the fact that he does not, like most of the later sources, describe Cerdo as Marcion's *teacher*. To be precise, Irenaeus does not even speak of any kind of personal relation between the two. He just states that Marcion came after him (*succedens*) and that he expanded (*adampliavit*) his doctrine.¹⁹³ Taking the term *expanding* seriously, it does not sound at all as if Cerdo was Marcion's teacher. Could it not rather have been like this: Cerdo and Marcion had – independently from one another – developed somewhat similar ideas, but Marcion was more radical¹⁹⁴ and probably a better organiser. Cerdo and Marcion would thus not be teacher and student, but rather two theologians in Rome with similar ideas, of whom the former just happened to have come to the city first, whereas the later became undoubtedly more important and successful. The fact that there is no mentioning of Cerdonians in the sources¹⁹⁵ makes it probable that Cerdo's sect did not exist for long, and it would thus not be unreasonable to assume that Cerdo and his disciples joined Marcion's movement.

6. How and when did Marcion actually break with the Church?

Lampe has conclusively shown that the fractionising into different "Hausgemeinden" in the first centuries in Rome had led to a certain tolerance towards theological dissenters, which he explained by the simple formula: "Je weniger dicht man mit einem Andersdenkenden zusammenlebt, um so geringer wird die Notwendigkeit, sich mit ihm

¹⁹² It is occasionally argued that Irenaeus might have invented Cerdo's relation to Marcion out of his attempt to demonstrate the *successio haereticorum* (cf. for example May, *Kerdon*, p. 243 = *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 71-72). Although it is beyond doubt that this *successio* is the leitmotif for Irenaeus' reports, I cannot see why such an invention should have been necessary on his part. In the relevant chapter (Adv. haer. I.27,1-2) Cerdo is *directly* linked to the Simonians (as all heretics go back to Simon Magus in the end, cf. I.23,2) and Marcion is said to have come after him. If all that mattered to Irenaeus was the *successio haereticorum*, it would have been just as possible for him to claim a direct link between Marcion and the Simonians, especially as there seemed only to have been a few years between Cerdo and Marcion.

¹⁹³ Adv. haer. I.27,2.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Adv. haer. I.27,4: "only Marcion dared openly to cut around in the Scriptures and to work against God more shamelessly than everyone else".

¹⁹⁵ Only Epiphanius mentions a sect of that name in his *Panarion* (41), but the singularity and lateness of this report virtually prove that this is only a fictional construct based on Marcion's teachings (cf. May, *Kerdon*, p. 241).

auseinanderzusetzen und sich von ihm abzugrenzen.”¹⁹⁶ Lampe further demonstrates that due to this tolerance it was exceptionally rare that anyone (or a certain group) was actually excommunicated before the end of the second century.¹⁹⁷ Marcion, however, was an exception. What made this man so unbearable for the Roman ecclesia, if they even managed to be in communion with the Valentinians? The crucial difference is that the Valentinians did not consider the Church’s teaching to be entirely wrong, they just believed in some secret ‘extra revelation’ only they had access to. Thus, being convinced of their own superior level of knowledge, the Valentinians did not mind associating with their ‘ordinary’ brothers.¹⁹⁸ Marcion was made of different stuff. He believed that the Church had dangerously perverted the true teachings of Christ and he therefore started an *anti-movement*. Such a man could obviously not fit within the Church’s usual tolerance scheme.

It is this factor which demonstrates that it is incorrect to claim that Marcion’s movement was just another circle of Christians within the great laboratory of Rome, thus supporting the thesis that at this time there was in fact no such thing as ‘orthodoxy’ or ‘heresy’. Let us once more point out the significant difference between Marcion and a contemporary such as Ptolemy. For all we know, the latter was, despite the fact that his doctrine can hardly be considered orthodox in the strict sense of the word, never officially excluded from the Church; he probably even died a martyr (see Chapter I). Ptolemy certainly differed from other non-Marcionite Christians theologically, but he still saw himself more connected to them than to Marcion. This can be seen from his *Letter to Flora*, in which he, while disagreeing with both the Marcionite and the non-Marcionite concept, points out several times that Marcion’s system is far more absurd to him¹⁹⁹ (see Chapter III). One could almost say that Valentinians such as Ptolemy and

¹⁹⁶ Lampe, *Christen*, p. 323.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 324. See also Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, Tübingen: Mohr, ²1964, p. 135: “Zu jener Zeit [in the second century] was es durchaus noch nicht die Regel, dass die Ketzer sich „draußen“ befanden.”

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Lampe, *Christen*, p. 325-329. Cf. also Klaus Koschorke, “Eine neugefundene gnostische Gemeindeordnung”, *ZThK* 76 (1979), p. 30-60.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Lampe, *Christen*, p. 326-327.

other Christian circles joined forces against their common enemy Marcion²⁰⁰. It is this situation which makes Marcion the first actual outcast from the Church, it is this situation which makes him the *first actual heretic*.

Coming back to our original question of when Marcion broke with the Church, we may assume that he began preaching his doctrine from the very beginning of his arrival.²⁰¹ Given the radicalism of his doctrine and the fact that it was in direct opposition to the teachings of the Church, it seems hard to imagine that there was – as Tertullian reports²⁰² – much vacillation or wavering back and forth as to Marcion's status of membership of the church. The relationship probably ended rather quickly.²⁰³ At some point there may have been a debate between Marcion and the Roman elders over a parable, as reported by Epiphanius and Filastrius (see section 4), but it remains unlikely that this one event was the reason for the actual break between Marcion and the Roman church. It is also hard to say who actually broke with whom. In the end, it seems quite possible that the break happened in mutual consent.²⁰⁴

Just as with the date of Marcion's birth, so the year of his death can only be estimated. The most common date given is the year 160, an estimate which probably goes back to the thesis of Harnack²⁰⁵ that Marcion could not have lived until the time of Marcus Aurelius (161-180). Harnack based this theory on the above mentioned report by Clement of Alexandria, who states that the era of the heretics Basilides, Valentinus and

²⁰⁰ “Man wird daher behaupten können, daß [...] Ausgangspunkt und Gegner Justins und Ptolemäus' ein und dieselben sind” (Lüdemann, *Geschichte*, p. 110; see also Chapter VII). If I may offer a current comparison: different democratic parties may have very different political ideas, but they all stand united against parties of the far right.

²⁰¹ This might be an explanation for the fact that the day of his arrival in Rome could to some extent be seen as the foundation day of the Marcionite movement and was therefore so important to his followers (see section 4).

²⁰² De praescr. 30.2. Since the passage refers to both Marcion and Valentinus, it is possible that Tertullian mixed up pieces of information about the two. It is also conceivable that he attributes Irenaeus' report on Cerdo (Adv. haer. III.4,3) to Marcion.

²⁰³ This would also explain why the Roman ecclesia was so easily able to give Marcion his 200,000 sesterces back (cf. De praescr. 30.2).

²⁰⁴ Tertullian's claim (De praescr. 30,3) that later in his life Marcion made some sort of *Walk to Canossa* is obviously invented.

²⁰⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 14*-15*.

Marcion is the time of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. As demonstrated above, it may be doubted whether Clement had such specific dates in mind. He just states that the time of Hadrian and Antoninus was the heretics' main era, but it can hardly be seen as certain that Marcion could not have survived Antoninus, although he probably did not by far. We know that Marcion was still alive in the early 150s (see section 4). Moreover, Irenaeus states that Marcion gained influence under Anicetus (ca. 155-166), a statement which is most certainly untrue as to the beginning of Marcion's influence, but which indicates that Marcion was still alive under the episcopate of Anicetus. Combining this information with Clement's statements, it would be a good guess to say that Marcion died about 165.

What Marcion did exactly in the approximately 20 years between the beginning of his movement and his death, we have no information about, but we may assume that he invested most of his time in the support of his community. This means that for about two decades Marcion was in complete control of his church (see Chapter VI), something one cannot say about many founders of religious movements.

Conclusion

The main result of our investigation into Marcion's biography is that he has to be placed at a later phase of the history of the Church than is usually assumed. This conclusion is particularly triggered by the fact that there is not enough evidence to support the idea of Marcion's activity before the year 144/145. Combined with the fact that he was raised in a Christian surrounding, this means that Marcion was familiar with a church tradition that was already fairly advanced, an element which was to have a crucial influence on the establishment of his own church (see Chapter VI).

We have further established that Marcion deserves, in a double sense, the title of *arch-heretic*. On the one hand, because he is the first Christian ever to be actually outside the Church for doctrinal reasons, on the other hand, because his biography of a man who is familiar with orthodox doctrine and then deliberately chooses to deviate from it would become a stereotype for future heresiologists.

III. Marcion's Gods

*Da hat er eben leider recht.
Die Welt ist arm, der Mensch ist schlecht.*

Brecht, "Dreigroschenoper"

Marcion's dualism forms without a doubt the centre of his doctrine. The nature of this dualism does not seem to give rise to much doubt, either, ever since Harnack established his idea that Marcion distinguishes between a just and a good God, and thereby also established a scholarly consensus which lasted for almost a century.²⁰⁶ However, in the present chapter we shall see that this view is one of the greatest misconceptions concerning Marcion's teaching, for the heresiarch's distinction was in fact far less 'protestant' than Harnack imagined, as he simply distinguished between an evil and a good God.

²⁰⁶ The only real critique of Harnack's view in this matter was lodged by Walter Bauer in his review of Harnack's monograph, p. 8-11. Before Harnack, it was Wilhelm Bousset (*Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907, p. 109-113) who attributed a classical good-evil dualism to Marcion. More recently Löhr questioned Harnack's classical view (see Introduction). Löhr's analysis, while certainly inspiring, was, as he states himself, "incomplete" (*Did Marcion Distinguish*, p. 144) and thus called for a more extensive investigation of the sources, something I am trying to offer in this chapter.

1.) The Evil God

While recent scholarship has correctly pointed out that Harnack's perspective is due to his "Neoprotestant interpretation"²⁰⁷ of Marcion, it would be false to claim that there was no evidence in the sources to support his view of a just and a good God within Marcion's system. As so often, the sources do not provide a coherent picture of Marcion's doctrine in this matter; however, an extensive chronological overview of the sources' testimony will show that Marcion's original distinction was in fact between an evil and a good God, whereas the figure of the just God was only introduced by later generations of his followers.

1.1 The Development of Marcionite Theology

Marcion's original doctrine:

Good God vs. Evil God

Ptolemy, *Letter to Flora* (ca. 150)

Although most scholars agree that the second position referred to at the beginning of Ptolemy's letter is Marcion's (see Chapter I), they also mostly agree that Ptolemy is misportraying it. That the Law was given by the Creator is commonly accepted as Marcionite doctrine, but it is felt that Marcion would not have identified the Creator with the Devil/Adversary²⁰⁸. Having established that in this letter we find the earliest argument against Marcion's doctrine known to us (see Chapter I), we must attach the highest importance to Ptolemy's statement and, in an unprejudiced manner, ask if there

²⁰⁷ Löhr, *Did Marcion Distinguish*, p. 131.

²⁰⁸ Cf. for example Gilles Quispel, *Ptolémée. Lettre à Flora. Texte, Traduction et Introduction*, SC 24, Paris: Cerf, 1966, p. 76; Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1968, p. 103 n. 133; Lüdemann, *Geschichte*, p. 107.

is any reason to assume that his portrayal of Marcion's doctrine is in fact faulty. If it is faulty there are two possibilities. Either Ptolemy actually misunderstood Marcion's doctrine or he is deliberately presenting it wrongly. The first possibility is most unlikely. Ptolemy lived in Rome at the same time as Marcion (see Chapter I). Both men were prominent Christian figures in the capital at that time and further belonged to the rare group of educated Christians. It is thus almost certain that they knew each other in person, and even if not, Ptolemy certainly had contact with some of Marcion's followers. Thus, there is no reason to assume that Ptolemy would have been misinformed about Marcion's doctrine. As to the question of Ptolemy deliberately misportraying it, we have to ask what reason he might have had for doing so. Concerning the Fathers' reports on Marcion's life for instance, it has turned out that later generations of writers very often used obviously fabricated stories in order to make their opponent look bad²⁰⁹. Ptolemy, however, is about to engage in a real and above all topical theological dispute with Marcion, trying to expose his doctrine as deficient, and proving his own to be superior. He is therefore not interested in polemics but rather in an honest argument. Besides, as already mentioned in Chapter I, we have to assume that Flora was also familiar with these two different positions concerning the Law, so Ptolemy could not simply ascribe a certain doctrine to Marcion which was not his own.

The main reason, however, why the possibility of a deliberate misrepresentation of Marcion's doctrine on the part of Ptolemy should be excluded, is Ptolemy's own theology which he presents in the letter as an alternative to both the orthodox and the Marcionite position. Ptolemy's answer to the all-decisive question of who gave the Law is that it is neither the 'good God' nor the 'evil one', but the *just* (δίκαιος) Creator²¹⁰. Let us be clear about this: the orthodox Christians, Marcion and Ptolemy all agree that the Creator of the world is also the Lawgiver. For the orthodox Christians this God is again identical, so to speak, with the good God, the Father of Jesus Christ. This position is absurd to Ptolemy since the imperfect Law could not have been given by the perfect

²⁰⁹ Cf. Moll, *Three against Tertullian*, p. 176-179.

²¹⁰ Pan. 33.7,3-5.

God²¹¹. For the Marcionites, the Creator forms a second, evil deity who is in opposition to the good God. This position is even more absurd to Ptolemy, as it is obvious that the unjust Adversary cannot be the author of the Law which eliminates injustice²¹². Because of these two prevailing, yet in his eyes wrong positions, Ptolemy felt compelled to write a *rectification*. This rectification consists in the introduction of a third figure, the Just God, who is Lawgiver and Creator. Now, if Marcion had already proclaimed a just Demiurge/Lawgiver, as the Harnack-legacy maintains, Ptolemy's counter argument would lose its entire purpose. Ptolemy would come up with a figure already provided by Marcion. Therefore, are we really supposed to think that Ptolemy deliberately misportrayed Marcion's doctrine just so that he could claim to have come up with the idea of a just Demiurge himself? Ptolemy's testimony clearly labels Marcion's creator God as evil, and as long as this testimony is not refuted by other witnesses, it is to be trusted.

Justin Martyr, *First Apology* (ca. 153-154)

As for the characterisation of Marcion's Demiurge, Justin does unfortunately not provide any information. He does, however, clearly state that Marcion's system is dualistic: "And there is a certain Marcion of Pontus, who is even now still teaching his obedient followers to believe that there is some other God who is greater than the Demiurge. [...] And, as we have said earlier, the evil demons have put forward Marcion of Pontus, who is even now teaching to deny that God is the Creator of all heavenly and earthly things and that the Christ predicted through the prophets is his Son, and proclaims some other God than the Demiurge of all things and, correspondingly, another son."²¹³

²¹¹ Pan. 33.3,4.

²¹² Pan. 33.3,5; 7,3.

²¹³ 1 Apol. 26,5; 58,1: Μαρκίωνα δέ τινα Ποντικόν, ὃς καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἐστὶ διδάσκων τοὺς πειθομένους ἄλλον τινὰ νομίζειν μείζονα τοῦ δημιουργοῦ θεόν [...] Καὶ Μαρκίωνα δὲ τὸν ἀπὸ Πόντου, ὡς προέφημεν, προεβάλλοντο οἱ φαῦλοι δαίμονες, ὃς ἀρνεῖσθαι μὲν τὸν ποιητὴν τῶν οὐρανίων καὶ γῆινων

Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* (ca. 180-185)

In Irenaeus's work we have to distinguish two levels. First there is the (contemporary) argument of the elder against Marcion (see Chapter I). Here we do not find any specific mention of the term evil (or just) in connection with Marcion's Creator, but since the Marcionites – according to the elder – accuse, blame and rebuke (*accusare, exprobrare, imputare*)²¹⁴ this God for hardening Pharaoh's heart or for ordering the Hebrews to steal from the Egyptians, it seems unlikely that they had a very positive, much less just view of him.

Irenaeus himself on the other hand clearly states that Marcion distinguished between a good and an evil God²¹⁵. Apart from this general characterisation, which Irenaeus calls the *propositum initii* of the Marcionites, he further confirms this view of the Creator as being evil by providing things Marcion says about him, for instance that he is the creator of evil or that he has lust for war²¹⁶. It is true that Marcion, according to Irenaeus, also describes this God as judicial²¹⁷. However, being a *judge* is not the same as being *just*²¹⁸.

ἀπάντων θεὸν καὶ τὸν προκηρυχθέντα διὰ τῶν προφητῶν Χριστὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ νῦν διδάσκει, ἄλλον δὲ τινὰ καταγγέλλει παρὰ τὸν δημιουργὸν τῶν πάντων θεὸν καὶ ὁμοίως ἕτερον υἱόν.

²¹⁴ Adv. haer. IV.28,3; 30.1.

²¹⁵ Adv. haer. III.12,12.

²¹⁶ Adv. haer. I.27,2.

²¹⁷ Adv. haer. III.25,3. Note Irenaeus' most remarkable phrasing: *alterum bonum et alterum iudicalem* (not *iustum!*) *dicens*.

²¹⁸ It is interesting to note that unlike in most Romance and Germanic languages, in classical Greek, the language Marcion thought and wrote in, the terms judge (κρίτης) and just (δίκαιος) are not related etymologically.

**First deformation of Marcion's doctrine:
Good God, Just God, Evil Matter**

Rhodo, *'Against Marcion'* (ca. 180-190)²¹⁹

Like Justin, Rhodo does not mention any ethical quality of Marcion's Creator, but he does confirm that Marcion's original doctrine was dualistic and that it was Marcion's followers who introduced the idea of three principles.²²⁰ Rhodo thus marks a turning point in the history of the Marcionite movement, as for the first time Marcion's original doctrine is clearly distinguished from the one of his followers.

Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* (ca. 200)

In Clement we find for the first time the concrete distinction between good and just attributed to the Marcionites.²²¹ This distinction, however, is not explicitly referring to two different Gods, but arises in a discussion of the evaluation of the Law, which the Marcionites, according to Clement, consider to be just. Still, we also find the first notion of the Marcionites calling the Demiurge just²²². It is strikingly also the first time they are reported as considering matter to be evil²²³.

²¹⁹ Quoted in Hist. Eccl. V.13,2-7.

²²⁰ This is also confirmed by the reports of Apelles, Marcion's disciple (see Chapter VII), who, while not extending the number of principles, also clearly deviates from his master's dualism: "Marcion is wrong to speak of two principles: now I speak of one, which made a second principle." (Alastair H. B. Logan, "Marcellus of Ancyra (Pseudo-Anthimus), 'On the Holy Church': Text, Translation and Commentary", *JTS* 51 (2000), p. 96).

²²¹ Strom. II.39,1.

²²² Strom. III.12,1. Considering this passage, Bousset remarked correctly that already at the time of Clement Marcions's original doctrine had been deformed (Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, p. 113).

²²³ Ibid.

Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* (ca. 210)

“How can you be so impertinent as to establish a diversity of two separated Gods, a good God on the one side and a just one on the other?”²²⁴ With this question addressed to his adversary, we have the first notion ever of Marcion²²⁵ explicitly distinguishing between a good and a just God. It is, however, most important to note that Tertullian, just like Clement before him, also reports that Marcion considered matter to be evil²²⁶.

Origen, *De Principiis* (ca. 220)

To Origen the distinction between a good and a just God seems to be the very essence of Marcionite doctrine²²⁷. It is true that neither Marcion nor his followers are mentioned in the passage in question, but there can be no doubt that they are envisaged by Origen²²⁸. Erich Klostermann is probably right when he claims that Origen here uses definitions of goodness and justice which derive from the Stoic tradition, and thus it seems indeed likely that Origen put these definitions into the mouths of his adversaries²²⁹. These definitions, however, are of little relevance to us. The important thing is that we have once more found that a distinction between these two Gods is considered a common Marcionite idea.

²²⁴ Adv. Marc. II.12,1: Quo ore constitues diversitatem duorum deorum in separatione, seorsum deputans deum bonum et seorsum deum iustum?

²²⁵ It should be noted that Tertullian’s personal address to his adversary can by no means serve as indication that we are dealing with Marcion’s original doctrine here. The personal address is merely part of Tertullian’s polemical style.

²²⁶ Adv. Marc. I.15,5.

²²⁷ De princ. II.5.

²²⁸ Cf. Josep Rius-Camps, “Orígenes y Marción: Carácter Preferentemente Antimarcionita del Prefacio y del Segundo Ciclo del Peri Archôn”, in: Henri Crouzel/Gennaro Lomiento/Josep Rius-Camp (ed.), *Origeniana: Premier colloque international des études origéniennes*, Bari: Istituto di letteratura cristiana antica, 1975, p. 299-302.

²²⁹ Erich Klostermann, “Überkommene Definitionen im Werk des Origenes”, *ZNW* 37 (1938), p. 56-57.

Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* (ca. 225)

As far as Marcion is concerned, Hippolytus is a difficult source since his two reports on the arch-heretic are contradictory to a certain extent. According to his first report²³⁰ Marcion distinguished between a good and an evil God: “You say the Demiurge of the world is evil [...] you say the God who destroyed the works of the Demiurge is good.”²³¹ The second report, on the other hand, states that Marcion believed in three principles: good, just and matter.²³² Despite this obvious contradiction Hippolytus might in fact offer us the solution to our problem, for he calls the system of good and evil the *first and purest form of Marcion’s heresy* (πρώτη καὶ καθαριωτάτη Μαρκίωνος αἵρεσις), and continues to explain that it was Prepon, a disciple of Marcion, who introduced a third principle, the just.²³³ There can be no doubt that this elaborate statement takes priority over the later one, in which Hippolytus attributes the idea of three principles already to Marcion. He is obviously no longer thinking of Marcion himself here, but of his followers he is in contact with. An even more interesting remark in this context is Hippolytus’ observation that some Marcionites call the just one evil, others call him only just.²³⁴ Apparently, the varying designation of this God by the Marcionites is not only confusing to us today, but was so already in the early third century. Once more it is noteworthy that Hippolytus goes on to explain that the Marcionites believe that the just one has created the universe out of already existing matter.

²³⁰ Ref. VII.29-31.

²³¹ Ref. VII.30,2-3: δημιουργὸν οὖν φησὶ εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου ποιητὴν [...] ἀγαθὸν φησὶ εἶναι θεὸν τὸν καταλύοντα τὰ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ ποιήματα.

²³² Ref. X.19,1.

²³³ Ref. VII.31,1.

²³⁴ Ref. X.19,2.

Carmen Adversus Marcionitas (middle of the third century)

The author of the *Carmen* states that Marcion distinguished between a good and a just God²³⁵. Although matter is not explicitly introduced as a third principle, the refutation of the idea that there is uncreated, eternal matter²³⁶ can be seen as a strong indication that it was part of the opponent's system of thought.

Ephraem Syrus, *Prose Refutations and Hymni contra haereses* (middle of the fourth century)

Ephraem tells us that Marcion names three "roots"²³⁷, which are the good God, the Creator and matter. Despite the fact that it is matter which forms the third principle, Ephraem can still speak of Marcion's tritheism²³⁸. Han Drijvers comments correctly: "Since matter is uncreated, eternal being, Ephraem ascribes to Marcion even three Gods, namely two Gods and Hyle, because for him the notion of eternal being is identical with divinity"²³⁹.

²³⁵ Carm. I.73-84.

²³⁶ Carm. IV.21f.

²³⁷ Hymn. c. haer. III.7.

²³⁸ Pr. Ref. II, xxiv (none of the heretics is named in the passage in question, however, the addition of names is safe, cf. Edmund Beck, "Die Hyle bei Markion nach Ephräm, *OrChrPer* 64 (1978), p. 8-9). Beck's doubts about the credibility of this passage are unjustified, especially as he obviously overlooked the other passage in which Ephraem ascribes three roots to Marcion (see above).

²³⁹ Han J. W. Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics", *Second Century* 6/3 (1987/88), p. 158.

**Second deformation²⁴⁰ of Marcion's doctrine:
Good God, Just God, Evil God**

Adamantius Dialogue (ca. 350-360)²⁴¹

At the time of the *Adamantius Dialogue*, the Marcionite movement seems to have split into two parties. Megethius claims that there are three principles: the good God, the just Demiurge, who is also the Lawgiver, and the evil God.²⁴² Markus on the other hand, the second Marcionite, maintains that there are only two principles, the good God and the evil God²⁴³, which seems to indicate either a certain renaissance of original Marcionite ideas, or that a small group of Marcionites who remained faithful to their master's teachings had survived all the controversies within the movement.

²⁴⁰ Although this deformation definitely appeared later than the first, the development is not to be understood as a consistent sequence of different systems. For instance, Eznik of Kolb, writing in the middle of the fifth century, still speaks of a Marcionite system of two Gods and matter (Monica Blanchard/Robin Young, *A Treatise on God Written in Armenian by Eznik of Kolb. An English Translation with Introduction and Notes*, Leuven: Peeters, 1998, p. 181; cf. Wolfgang Hage, "Marcion bei Eznik von Kolb", in: May/Greschat (ed.), *Marcion*, p. 30-31). Such elements are, however, of small importance for our survey, which only aims at establishing Marcion's original doctrine, not its different implementations over the centuries.

²⁴¹ The dating of the *Adamantius-Dialogue* has been disputed for a long time. The dispute is mostly due to the two different versions of the text, which both place the *Dialogue* in completely different times. Whereas the *Dialogue* takes place in the post-Nicene era according to the Greek version, the Latin translation by Rufinus places the *Dialogue* in the age of the persecutions by the Empire. While scholars have for a long time believed that Rufinus preserved the original version of the *Dialogue* (for a history of research see Kenji Tsutsui, *Die Auseinandersetzung mit den Markioniten im Adamantios-Dialog*, PTS 55, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004, p. 1-21), it was Vinzenz Buchheit who showed conclusively that the Latin translation is not to be trusted (Vinzenz Buchheit, "Rufinus von Aquileia als Fälscher des Adamantiosdialogs", *BZ* 51 (1958), p. 314-328). This insight has been accepted by many scholars since (cf. Tsutsui, *Auseinandersetzung*, p. 16-21), with the exception of Robert Pretty, who, in his English translation of the *Dialogue* (Garry W. Trompf (ed.), *Adamantius. Dialogue on the True Faith in God*, Leuven: Peeters, 1997) did not even mention this important article, and Timothy D. Barnes ("Methodius, Maximus, and Valentinus", *JTS* 30 (1979), p. 47-55), whose hypothesis of Maximus being the author of the *Dialogue* has been conclusively questioned by both Ulrich Schmid (*Marcion und sein Apostolos*, ANT 25, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995, p. 203-205) and Kenji Tsutsui (*Auseinandersetzung*, p. 47). Schmid concludes (*Apostolos*, p. 206) that the *Dialogue* must have been written between 324 (beginning of the reign of Constantine) and 358 (composition of the *Philokalia*, in which we find a reference to the *Adamantius-Dialogue*). Kenji Tsutsui agrees with Schmid (*Auseinandersetzung*, p. 105-108), while pointing out that the *Dialogue* probably originated in the second half of the fourth century, which, together with the *terminus ante quem* being the composition of the *Philokalia* (ca. 360, Schmid's dating is by no means safe), brings us to the years 350-360.

²⁴² Adam. Dial. 1,2; 1,9.

²⁴³ Adam. Dial. 2,1.

Epiphanius, *Panarion* (ca. 375)

The Bishop of Salamis only knows of the group represented by Megethius in the Adamantius Dialogue. He reports that the Marcionites believe in three principles, the good God, the Demiurge, and the evil God/devil²⁴⁴.

Epiphanius marks the end of this survey. There are still several witnesses after him to report on Marcion's Gods, but none of them delivers a really new version of his doctrine in this regard. As interesting as a continuation of this survey might be for the history of the Marcionite church, for the reconstruction of Marcion's original doctrine it is of no value.

Conclusion

Let us categorise our observations about Marcion's doctrine in regard to the distinction between different Gods.

1. All the contemporary sources as well as Irenaeus and Rhodo (who form the non-contemporary sources which are temporally closest) describe Marcion's system as dualistic. There can thus be no doubt that the tripartite Marcionite system represents a later development after Marcion's death, just as Rhodo and Hippolytus report.
2. Our earliest source about Marcion's doctrine (Ptolemy) explicitly speaks of him as distinguishing between a good and an evil God. This is confirmed by Irenaeus²⁴⁵ and at least not denied by any other of the earliest sources.

²⁴⁴ Pan. 42.3,1-2.

²⁴⁵ It should be noted in this context that Irenaeus is aware of the distinction between a just and a good God, but he clearly attributes it to Cerdo (Adv. haer. I.27,1). This is all the more interesting as in the

3. We have seen that the idea of a just God attributed to Marcion is always combined with a tripartite system²⁴⁶, in the form of either ‘good God-just God-evil matter’ or ‘good God-just God-evil God’. As Marcion’s original doctrine, however, was without a doubt dualistic, the figure of the just God must have been introduced by his followers.²⁴⁷

Considering the reason for this development, it seems that the main problem which led to the division among the Marcionites was this: their first God combined two fundamental features, he is Creator *and* Lawgiver (see below). That the world was evil was the one unifying belief of all Marcionites at all times, and in order to explain the origin of this evil, it seemed only logical to assume an evil Creator as the cause of this status, in accordance with the idea that only a bad tree brings forth bad fruit (see Chapter V). Once they went down that road, however, they had to face the conundrum how the Law could have been given by an evil God, a problem which already compelled Ptolemy to introduce a third figure (see above). Another solution presented itself from Platonic philosophy²⁴⁸, as Ephraem Syrus remarks²⁴⁹. The Creator could be just and therefore the Law could be just as well, if he had to use already existing (evil) matter to create the world. Thus the Creator was absolved from being responsible for the world’s status. Another group of Marcionites apparently chose to follow Ptolemy’s idea of a tritheistic system, with the good God, the just Creator/Lawgiver, and an evil God instead of evil matter. It is obvious that (from a Marcionite point of view) only a tripartite system of

preceding chapter we have considered the possibility that Cerdo and his followers joined Marcion’s movement. Maybe it was they who brought the idea of a just God into the Marcionite system.

²⁴⁶ The only exception from this pattern is Origen, but it is most likely that he, just as his Alexandrian predecessor, also knew of the tripartite system, and simply concentrated only on refuting the distinction between good and just.

²⁴⁷ Ernst Schüle considered Marcion to be inconsistent in his view on matter, but only because Schüle did not realise that he was dealing with a development within Marcionite doctrine here (Ernst Ulrich Schüle, “Der Ursprung des Bösen bei Marcion”, *ZRGG* 16 (1964), p. 41). Likewise Tertullian makes fun of Marcion because of this, asserting that Marcion did not actually proclaim two Gods, but nine (Adv. Marc. I.15,5-6).

²⁴⁸ Plato had developed a similar idea in his *Timaios*, in which he states that the Demiurge wanted everything to be good “as far as possible” (κατὰ δύναμιν, 30 a 3), but his power was limited by the already existing material, cf. Johannes Hirschberger, *Geschichte der Philosophie I: Altertum und Mittelalter*, Herder: Freiburg, ¹²1980, p. 143. For the similarities to (contemporary) Middle Platonism, cf. Drijvers, *Syria*, p. 162-163.

²⁴⁹ Hymn. c. haer. XIV.7. Of course, even without Ephraem’s affirmation the dependence would be obvious, but it is interesting that he saw it so clearly.

thought leaves room for a *just* God. A good and a just God together can alone offer no answer to the crucial issue of the origin of evil. In other words, one axiomatic principle of Marcionite thinking is: *there has to be at least one evil player in the game*.

Nevertheless, when we take a look at those sources attributing a tripartite system, that is, a just God to Marcion, we cannot help wondering: did the actual beliefs really change or is it only a matter of changing designations?

When we analyse chapters 11-19 of Tertullian's second book against Marcion, chapters which René Braun entitled "Défense de la Justice de Créateur"²⁵⁰, and in which we find the first notion of a Marcionite distinction between a just and a good God (see above), we can detect that the actual accusation Tertullian is arguing against here is that God is a cruel judge²⁵¹. Therefore, this God may now be called 'just' by Marcion's followers, but it is certainly not meant in any positive or even neutral way, so that one could say that the wickedness of this God merely received a new label. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that the concept of evil matter does not seem to have been all that important to the Marcionite system, which already becomes obvious by the fact that Tertullian only mentions this idea once in his entire five volumes against Marcion²⁵² (see above), and it becomes even clearer in Tertullian's work against Hermogenes. Just like Marcion, this opponent of Tertullian is also concerned with the problem of evil, but he attempts to defend the idea that a good God could have created the world by introducing matter as a second principle²⁵³, an idea he obviously defends above all against Marcion²⁵⁴. In this

²⁵⁰ René Braun, *Contre Marcion II*, SC 368, Paris: Cerf, 1991, p. 79.

²⁵¹ Adv. Marc. II.11,1.

²⁵² Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 97-98: "Das Auffallende aber hier ist, daß M.[arcion] von dieser Annahme [that matter is evil], die er nicht weiter ausgeführt hat, weder bei seinen Exegesen noch bei seinen sonstigen Aussagen irgendwelchen Gebrauch macht". The testimony of Ephraem presents a similar picture. Although he clearly states that Marcion names three roots (see above), his arguments against him are primarily focused on the arch-heretic's distinction between the two Gods. Just as with Tertullian, matter, although part of the Marcionite system, does not seem to have occupied an important role in it, cf. Beck, *Hyle*, p. 30.

²⁵³ For a good summary of Hermogenes' doctrine see Katharina Greschat, *Apelles & Hermogenes: Zwei theologische Lehrer des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 158-164.

context, Tertullian compares two different solutions to the problem of evil: “Great is, o good faith, the blindness of the heretics in this kind of argument, when they either want to make us believe in another God who is good and only good, because they consider the Creator to be the author of evil, or when they set up matter next to the Creator, so that they may derive evil from matter, not from the Creator.”²⁵⁵ There can hardly be any doubt that the first group of heretics envisaged in this passage is the Marcionites, which means that Tertullian clearly distinguishes between their view and the one of Hermogenes, which again means that it was clear to Tertullian that the concept of evil matter was not an important part of the Marcionite system of thought, but was in fact part of a system that is directed against Marcion. It should further be noted that Tertullian names Marcion’s concern with the origin of evil as his point of departure and the famous parable of the good and the bad tree as Marcion’s answer to this problem, something Tertullian probably retrieved from Marcion’s very own letter (see Chapter V). It seems hard to imagine how the idea of a just God should have been able to fit this parable. After all, the parable clearly speaks of a bad/evil tree, not a just one, which is again bringing forth bad/evil fruit.

Concerning Origen’s report, it is striking that when it comes to the examples which the Marcionites provide for the justice of the Creator, he, just like Tertullian, only uses examples which show the cruelty of this God, such as the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moreover, it is remarkable that Origen himself questions the justice of the Creator, if the words of the Old Testament were to be understood literally. Thus, he asks how it can be considered just to punish the children for the sins of their fathers to the third and fourth generation.²⁵⁶ Origen perceived correctly that the

²⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 164-165: “Mit dieser Zielsetzung rückt Hermogenes an die Seite der Theologen des zweiten Jahrhunderts, die auf die Herausforderungen durch Gnostiker und Marcioniten reagierten und deutlich machen wollten, daß das Festhalten an Gott als des Schöpfers denkbar ist.”

²⁵⁵ *Adv. Herm.* 10,1: *Magna, bona fide, caecitas haeticorum pro huiusmodi argumentatione, cum ideo aut alium deum bonum et optimum volunt credi quia mali auctorem existiment creatorem aut materiam cum creatore proponent, ut malium a material, non a creatore deducant*

²⁵⁶ Cf. *Princ.* II.5,2.

Marcionites understood such passages literally²⁵⁷, but he did not see the consequences. It is almost as if we could hear Marcion reply: ‘That is exactly why I do not believe him to be just!’

As for those sources who speak of a Marcionite tritheism, it is striking that none of them ever actually deals with the third, the evil God. Their main concern is still always to demonstrate the unity of the good God and the just Demiurge. Even Megethius, the first Marcionite to appear in the Adamantius Dialogue, who opened his case with the statement that there are three principles (the good God, the Demiurge and the evil God)²⁵⁸ and who went on with the proud proclamation “I will prove from the Scriptures that there are three principles”²⁵⁹, never mentions the evil God during the entire conversation. His whole argument with Adamantius is only about the difference between respectively the identity of the Demiurge and the Father of Christ²⁶⁰. The same goes for Epiphanius who, although beginning his portrait of Marcion’s doctrine with the naming of three different Gods, dedicates most of his refutation to the demonstration of the identity of the first two Gods, without ever dealing with the issue of the evil one. Therefore, just as with the concept of evil matter, the idea of the evil God as such does not seem to actually feature in the system of the (later) Marcionites.

Despite the fact that these writers are technically arguing against Marcion’s just God, their testimony leaves no doubt that what their opponent actually had in mind was a wicked deity. It is most surprising that even those modern scholars who realised this situation correctly, still defend the idea that Marcion’s first God was not evil but just. Thus, Verweij maintains: “Er ist nicht schlecht – darin müssen wir Harnack zustimmen

²⁵⁷ Cf. *ibid.*; see Chapter IV.

²⁵⁸ Adam. Dial. 1,2.

²⁵⁹ Adam. Dial. 1,4: ἐγὼ γὰρ δεικνύω ἀπο τῶν γραφῶν ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν ἀρχαί.

²⁶⁰ See for example his statement in Adam. Dial. 1,23: “I will prove from the Scriptures that there is one God who is the Father of Christ and another who is the Demiurge.” This concept is further confirmed by the large number of antitheses that Megethius brings forward (see Chapter V). Cf. also Gerhard Rottenwöhler, *Unde malum?: Herkunft und Gestalt des Bösen nach heterodoxer Lehre von Markion bis zu den Katharern*, Bad Honnef: Bock und Herchen, 1986, p. 40: “Megethios äußert sich allerdings widersprüchlich. Neben der Annahme dreier Prinzipien spricht er an einigen Stellen von zwei Weseneinheiten, Naturen und Herren.”

– aber seine Gerechtigkeit ist doch höchst bedenklich, weil sie nur schadet und denen, die an sie glauben, nichts Gutes bringt.“²⁶¹ How an attitude which brings nothing but harm to everyone can still be labeled as righteousness, is beyond my comprehension.

It must therefore strongly be doubted that the distinction between goodness and justice was a major concern of the Marcionites, even after their master’s death. The idea of saving the constellation of a good and a just God by adding the concept of evil matter or a third evil deity seems to have been nothing but a ‘workaround’. Löhr sums up this complex correctly: “Even if Marcion had indeed designated the God of the Old Testament as ‘just’, it would have been only an abbreviation for his being a severe and cruel judge, a petty-minded and self-contradictory legislator.”²⁶² Löhr is probably also right when he affirms that Marcion’s opponents seemed to have deliberately focussed on this distinction of goodness and justice, in order to “refute Marcion with dialectical arguments”²⁶³. After all, that justice and goodness are two sides of the same coin, and accordingly that a good God can also be just, is far easier to demonstrate than to deal with a good-evil dualism.

All of this is, however, not meant to indicate that the opponents of Marcionism entirely made up the designation of a just God by their adversaries. The Marcionite movement apparently indeed switched from a simple good-evil system to the idea of a just God, but it appears that in actual fact they remained faithful to their master’s teaching.

²⁶¹ P. G. Verweij, *Evangelium und neues Gesetz in der ältesten Christenheit bis auf Marcion*, Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1960, p. 250-251.

²⁶² Löhr, *Did Marcion Distinguish*, p. 144. Bauer’s theory that Marcion used the word ‘just’ in connection with the Demiurge in a scornful manner (*Review Harnack*, p. 9) seems less probable to me. If this was the case, it would not have been necessary to add a third evil element to the system.

²⁶³ Löhr, *Did Marcion Distinguish*, p. 144.

1.2 The Evil God as the God of the Old Testament

According to his Biblicist approach (see Chapter IV), Marcion based his view of his evil God completely on Old Testament testimony. Therefore, in a manner of speaking, Marcion's evil God *is* the God of the Old Testament.²⁶⁴ Hence, he has the following features.

a) Creator

That the God described in the Old Testament is the Creator of the world is his foremost feature, and it is at the same time the feature which more than anything else makes Marcion detest him. Besides Marcion's Biblicism, the only real premise of his theology is the fact that he had nothing but disgust and hatred for the world and for life itself, hatred so huge that he even refused to promote the continuation of mankind (see Chapter VI). This irrational hatred apparently was the one unifying thought of all Marcionites throughout the centuries (see above). As much as the scholars' wish to find an explanation for this hostility to the world is understandable²⁶⁵, it is simply beyond explanation. It is not for us to look into a man's soul. What we can do is to comprehend Marcion's logic starting from this point of view, a logic we have already discovered above. Having realised that the world is a terrible place, Marcion needed to blame someone for this status, and there could be no doubt that it was the Creator's fault, a God who even admitted himself: "It is I who create evil."²⁶⁶

Marcion particularly blamed the Creator for the status of man. In fact, according to the heresiarch, it is the Creator's very essence, the soul which he breathed into man, which

²⁶⁴ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 97: "Der Gott, den nach Marcion Christus ins Unrecht gesetzt hat, ist [...] einfach der jüdische Schöpfergott, wie ihn das Gesetz und die Propheten verkündigt haben."

²⁶⁵ Lampe, for example, being surprised that a wealthy man like Marcion would develop such an anti-world attitude, believes that Marcion projected his negative experiences as a shipmaster under the Roman Emperor onto the Old Testament God (*Christen*, p. 209-211). It is needless to say that this theory is a little far-fetched (cf. May, *Schiffsreeder*, p. 152 n. 42; = *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 61 n. 46). Besides, I do not see why a wealthy man should not be hostile to the world. Since when does money buy happiness?

²⁶⁶ Isa. 45:7; cf. Adv. Marc. I.2,2.

is responsible for his evil actions²⁶⁷. Therefore, Harnack remarks correctly: “Da der Mensch trotz seiner sinnlichen Materialität doch ganz und gar die Schöpfung des Demiurgen ist, so trägt dieser die volle Verantwortung für ihn; ja da die Seele der Hauch Gottes und auch das sündigende Subjekt ist, so ist Gott direkt der Sünder.”²⁶⁸ Although it must be doubted whether Marcion actually thought this most radical idea through to the end²⁶⁹, we are definitely dealing with one of the most fundamental attempts at anthropodicy in the history of the Christian religion here.

b) God of the Jews

Again in accordance with the Old Testament, to Marcion the Creator of the world is also the God of the Jews, and of the Jews only, the *proprius deus Iudaicae gentis*²⁷⁰. Even after the Marcionite movement had developed into a tritheistic system, the identification of the Demiurge and the Jewish God remained.²⁷¹ Despite the exceptional character of this feature of Marcion’s theology, most modern scholars have hardly taken interest in it, much less tried to find an explanation for it. One of the few who did try was Bauer in his review of Harnack’s work. Bauer tried to explain this fact by expressing the idea that Marcion’s whole theology is fuelled by two different feelings of hatred: a strong aversion to Judaism and a huge disgust for the world. These two feelings, according to Bauer, then converged in hostility towards the Old Testament God, who to Marcion is both the God of the Jews and the Creator of the world.²⁷² As intelligent as this theory is, we completely lack any evidence that Marcion had any negative feelings about the Jews

²⁶⁷ Cf. Adv. Marc. II.9,1.

²⁶⁸ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 273*. Barbara Aland’s opinion that, according to Marcion, man is himself fully responsible for his sin, which consists solely in the non-acceptance of God’s grace (Barbara Aland, “Sünde und Erlösung bei Marcion und die Konsequenz für die sog. beiden Götter Marcions”, in: May/Greschat (ed.), *Marcion*, p. 150), has, from my perspective, no basis whatsoever in the sources, and is probably, as Löhr observed correctly, a projection of Bultmann’s theology onto Marcion (cf. Löhr, *Auslegung*, p. 79). For the concept of ‘sin’ in Marcion’s theology, see Chapter VI.

²⁶⁹ Braun even doubts that this concept was an original Marcionite one (*Contre Marcion II*, p. 64 n. 1), but I do not see any grounds for this assumption, cf. Norelli, *Christlicher Philosoph*, p. 117.

²⁷⁰ Adv. Marc. IV.33,4.

²⁷¹ Cf. Adam. Dial. 1,10; Pan. 42.3,2.

²⁷² Bauer, *Review Harnack*, p. 7.

in general. On the contrary, there is some evidence to refute this idea. Marcion seems to have deliberately refrained from ‘knocking’ the Jews. As already mentioned in Chapter I, there is no indication in all the Fathers that Marcion ever rebuked any Old Testament figure, but always their God. Even the obvious frailties of the Old Testament heroes (David’s adultery with Bathseba, Solomon’s polygamy and so on) were not mentioned even in Tertullian’s most extensive defence of the Old Testament against the heresiarch. As a matter of fact, whenever Marcion does mention the lapses of the patriarchs or other Old Testament figures, it is only to discredit their God. The Jews did steal silver and golden vessels from the Egyptians, but Marcion did not blame the Jews for stealing but instead he blamed their God for ordering them to do so (see Chapter I). Theodoret of Cyrus tells us that Marcion calls the patriarchs and prophets lawbreakers²⁷³, but immediately adds that he does so *in order* to expose the Demiurge as a lover of evil.

The best example to demonstrate Marcion’s explicit blame of the Creator instead of his people, however, is his concept of Christ’s descent into Hades²⁷⁴. According to Marcion, Christ, when he descended into Hades, saved Cain, the Sodomites, the Egyptians and all the others who were condemned by the Creator, whereas Abel, Enoch, Noah and all the patriarchs and prophets were not saved by him. The interesting, and often neglected part of this story is the reason why the latter group was not saved. One might perhaps simply assume that they did not follow Christ because they stuck to their own God²⁷⁵. However, Irenaeus clearly states that the patriarchs and prophets did not follow Christ because they knew that their God was always tempting them, and so they suspected that he was tempting them again. In other words, they did by no means remain faithful to their God and therefore refused to follow Christ, but their horrible experience with their God had blinded them and made them lose all hope for salvation.

²⁷³ Haer. fab. com. XXIV,41.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Adv. haer. I.27,3.

²⁷⁵ This version is in fact reported by Epiphanius (Pan. 42.4,3-4). There can, however, hardly be any doubt that Irenaeus preserved the original version.

A particular aversion against the Jewish people can thus not be claimed for Marcion.²⁷⁶ But what else could have made him believe that the Creator, this evil deity which he detests so much, was the God of the Jews? The answer is almost anticlimactic: because the Old Testament says so.

c) Lawgiver

As already mentioned above, the Law and its evaluation was one of the crucial questions for the Marcionite church, a question which may even have led to a change, or, respectively, a division within the movement. Already Ptolemy expressed his indignation in view of the fact that Marcion attributes the Law, which eliminates wrongdoing, to an evil God. Be that as it may, for Marcion there was no doubt that the Law was evil, and this time he found proof of this not only in the Old Testament, but also in the testimony of the Apostle Paul²⁷⁷, particularly in his Epistle to the Romans. The crucial passages are:

Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20)

The Law brings wrath; where there is no Law, there is no transgression. (Rom. 4:15)

The Law came in so that transgression might abound. (Rom. 5:20)²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Cf. Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 289: "Während sich der Antijudaismus der Kirche gegen das jüdische Volk wendet und es als verwerflich hinstellt, richtet sich der Antijudaismus Marcions gegen den Judengott, den Schöpfer dieser Welt." Cf. also Heikki Räisänen, who very fittingly entitled his chapter on Marcion 'Attacking the Book, Not the People' (*Marcion, Muhammad and the Mahatma: Exegetical Perspectives on the Encounter of Cultures and Faiths*, London: SCM Press, 1997, p. 64).

²⁷⁷ For the role of Paul in Marcion's theology, see Chapter IV.

²⁷⁸ The corresponding passages in Origen are: *Comm. Rom.* 3,6; 4,4; 5,6. Although Marcion is mentioned by name only in the last passage, the similarity of critique and especially the tree-metaphor in 3,3 makes it most likely that Origen's heretical adversaries are always the Marcionites. Cf. also *Adv. Marc.* V.14,10-14.

Put in a typical Marcionite manner: the Law is a bad tree, sin is its bad fruit.²⁷⁹ Marcion actually seems to have believed that there was no sin in the world before God gave his Law to man. Origen expresses this idea clearly when he points out that the Apostle said that the knowledge of sin comes *per legem* and not *ex lege*, so that it is obvious that sin did not arise from it²⁸⁰. But not only was it an evil motive which made the Old Testament God give his Law to man, he also gave a burden to man that he would be too feeble to bear, something which Tertullian tries to refute by pointing out the strength and free will of man²⁸¹. Marcion's rebuke is of course only consistent from his point of view. Since the Creator created man in this weak status, it was obvious that man would not be able to keep the Law, which again proves that the Law was only given so that sin may increase.

Apart from this critique of the Law as a whole, there are certain parts of it which Marcion detested in particular, such as the *ius talionis*, which, from his perspective, allows the "mutual exercise of injury"²⁸², and especially the meticulous laws on sacrifices²⁸³, which demonstrate the pettiness of this God and also his need for 'self-affirmation'.

d) Judge

"If he is really a judge, he is just."²⁸⁴ Maybe it was indeed this simple logic which caused a certain mixing up of the terms *just* and *judge* considering Marcion's theology. For even though it must be doubted that Marcion ever thought of the Old Testament God as just, he certainly saw him as a judge, and from what has been said about his role as Creator and Lawgiver so far, it can hardly be surprising that Marcion considered him to

²⁷⁹ The tree-metaphor is actually referred to in this context by Origen, see above.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Comm. Rom. 3,6.

²⁸¹ Adv. Marc. II.8.

²⁸² Adv. Marc. II.18,1: *inuriae mutuo exercendiae*.

²⁸³ Adv. Marc. II.18,3. See also Hymn. c. haer. XXX.10-12.

²⁸⁴ Pan. 42.6,4: *εἰ ὅλως κριτῆς τυγχάνει, δίκαιός ἐστι*. Cf. Adv. haer. III.25,3.

be a particularly cruel one. The Old Testament God created man as a compulsive transgressor, gave him the Law which he was too feeble to obey, and now judges him for his transgressions. Obviously this God is playing a very cruel game with his subjects.

e) Unworthy of a God

After these constitutive elements of this evil God, Marcion points out that the Old Testament God in fact lacks all the qualities of a truly divine being, as he has too many human flaws²⁸⁵:

he changes his mind about people (for example, regarding Saul or Solomon), choosing them first and later rejecting them²⁸⁶;

he feels repentance (for example, about the wickedness he wanted to do to the Ninevites)²⁸⁷;

he lacks omniscience (for example, he did not know where Adam was²⁸⁸, nor could he foresee that Adam would transgress his commandment²⁸⁹);

he is inconsistent in his commandments (for example, he forbids making any images, but commands Moses to create the brazen serpent)²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁵ Tertullian provides a very good summary of all these weaknesses in Adv. Marc. II.28.

²⁸⁶ Adv. Marc. II.23.

²⁸⁷ Adv. Marc. II.24,2 (Jonah 3:10).

²⁸⁸ Adv. Marc. II.25,1 (Gen. 3:9: "Adam, where are you?")

²⁸⁹ Adv. Marc. II.5,2.

²⁹⁰ Adv. Marc. II.22,1 (Num. 21:8-9).

f) The Creator's Messiah

Marcion not only distinguished two different Gods, he also distinguished two different Christs, “one who appeared under Tiberius, another who is promised by the Creator”²⁹¹. That the Messiah promised by the Creator could not be Jesus Christ is obvious from Marcion's point of view. The interesting part in this matter is that Marcion – once more he proves to be truly faithful to the Old Testament text – believed that the Creator's Messiah was still to come, just as the Jews did²⁹². Marcion thought of the Creator's Messiah, in accordance with the literal meaning of the Old Testament prophecy, as a great political and military leader, a warrior²⁹³, destined by the Creator to re-establish the Jewish state²⁹⁴. The Christ of the good God, however, has a completely different agenda (see below).

²⁹¹ Adv. Marc. I.15,6: alter qui apparuit sub Tiberio alter qui a Creatore promittitur.

²⁹² Tertullian is in fact correct when stating that in this regard the Jews and Marcion share the same error, cf. Adv. Marc. III.16,3.

²⁹³ Based on the military depiction of the infant in Isa 8:4 as well as on the words of the Psalm “Gird your sword upon your side” (Ps. 45:4), cf. Adv. Marc. III.13-14.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Adv. Marc. IV.6,3.

2.) The Good God

Just as Marcion's evil God *is* the God of the Old Testament, so *is* the good God the one of the New Testament, the God revealed in Jesus Christ and preached by the Apostle Paul.

2.1. The Testimony of the Gospel (according to Luke)²⁹⁵

a) Christology

*Subito filius et subito missus et subito Christus.*²⁹⁶ Emphasising the suddenness of the appearance of Christ is most important to Marcion in order to demonstrate that he is not the Messiah announced by the Old Testament prophets. Marcion's second God is in no way connected to the miserable world of the Creator and could therefore not have been known by anybody in this world before the good God decided to reveal himself in Jesus Christ. The fact that this God has been revealed "by his own self" (*semetipsum*) is often interpreted as a sign of Marcion's modalism²⁹⁷. However, when applying this term to Marcion's Christology, we have to be aware that it is slightly anachronistic. "Modalismus ist als Gegensatz zum Tritheismus Sammelbez. für eine heterodoxe Deutung der Trinitätslehre, die die göttliche Trias – Vater, Sohn und Geist – nicht als real verschiedene Personen versteht, sondern, um die Einheit Gottes zu wahren, lediglich

²⁹⁵ Marcion used only one Gospel, an abbreviated version of the Gospel according to Luke (see Chapter IV).

²⁹⁶ Adv. Marc. III.2,3.

²⁹⁷ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 123; Blackman, *Influence*, p. 98. Among other things, this theory is based on the fact that Marcion supposedly changed the first line of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians to read 'Christ, who raised *himself* from the dead' rather than 'God, who raised him from the dead'. This reading has, however, recently been doubted to be an original Marcionite one (cf. Tjitze Baarda, "Marcion's Text of Gal 1,1: Concerning the Reconstruction of the First Verse of the Marcionite Corpus Paulinum", *VigChr* 42 (1988), p. 236-256; see also Schmid, *Apostolos*, p. 240-241.) That Adam. Dial. 2,9 (ὁ θάνατος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ σωτηρία ἀνθρώπων ἐγένετο) can be seen as proof for a Marcionite modalism, as Harnack (*Marcion*, p. 286*) and Blackman (*Marcion*, p. 99) believed, has been conclusively questioned by Tsutsui (*Auseinandersetzung*, p. 234).

als Aspekte oder Erscheinungsweisen (modi) des einen göttlichen Wesens.”²⁹⁸ From this definition by Wolfgang Bienert it can be seen that a modalist doctrine was not yet an issue for Marcion, at least not in any deliberate way, as he was not yet faced with an elaborate Trinitarian concept. Blackman, while too easily asserting that Marcion was a plain modalist, remarks correctly: “Marcion would have subscribed to the statement that Christ is a mode of God’s manifestation to the world, but he would have added: the only mode; for the supreme God is revealed in no other way than in Christ.”²⁹⁹ The important thing to notice about this statement is Marcion’s intended emphasis, which is not to establish a certain ontological alternative, but to stress the exclusivity of the divine revelation³⁰⁰. Marcion saw this exclusivity proven in the Gospel, when Jesus states: “No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”³⁰¹

Beside the fact that the interest Marcion has in this passage is clearly motivated by his wish to point out that Christ preached a formerly unknown God, it also shows that he did indeed distinguish between the persons of the Father and the Son. Therefore, Barbara Aland sums up correctly: “Marcions Modalismus reduziert sich damit auf eine Christologie mit allenfalls gelegentlich modalistischen Zügen.”³⁰²

While modalism can thus not actually be attributed to Marcion’s Christology, docetism clearly can. According to Marcion, Christ manifested in human form³⁰³, that is, he did not have a real human body. That Marcion proclaimed a docetic Christology can hardly be surprising, as his Christ could of course in no way be linked to the created world, much less could he have been born in a *cloaca* – which is Marcion’s term for the

²⁹⁸ Wolfgang Bienert, “Modalismus”, *RGG* 5 (2002), p. 1370.

²⁹⁹ Blackman, *Influence*, p. 98.

³⁰⁰ Cf. especially the deliberate dissociation of other possible forms of revelation in Adv. Marc. I.19,1: *deus noster, etsi non ab initio, etsi non per conditionem, sed per semetipsum revelatus est in Christo Iesu.*

³⁰¹ Lk. 10:22 (cf. Adv. Marc. IV.25,10).

³⁰² Barbara Aland, “Marcion/Marcioniten”, *TRE* 22 (1992), p. 97.

³⁰³ Adv. haer. I.27,2.

womb³⁰⁴ –, this “disgusting curdling of fluid and blood” (*humoris et sanguinis foeda coagula*)³⁰⁵. Besides the fact that it was certainly Marcion’s disgust for the flesh which motivated his docetism, he believed that he had found proof for the idea that Christ was a *phantasma*³⁰⁶ in Lk 4:30, where it is said that Jesus walked through the midst of the crowd³⁰⁷.

It is not entirely clear where Marcion imagined his good God to have been or what he imagined him to have been doing before he revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Tertullian realised this problem and mockingly asked his opponent why his God waited so long to reveal himself.³⁰⁸ It would indeed be interesting to hear Marcion’s answer to that, but this question probably never occurred to him, once more due to his Biblicism. He accepted the revelation of the good God as described in the New Testament without questioning it. Unlike the Gnostics, he did not give in to mythological speculations about the Creator emanating from the Supreme God (see below) or anything like this. That is why it would be incorrect to designate the good God to be the *first* God in Marcion’s system, unlike in the Valentinian Gnosis for instance. We may assume that Marcion imagined both Gods to have been existing eternally, however, the Creator is definitely the one who took action first, whereas the good God merely reacted to this activity (see below).

b) Christ’s Battle against the Old Testament God

In one passage of the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas* the poet expresses his surprise at a certain problem concerning Marcion’s position: if Christ was not the one sent by the God of Israel, “why did he come to exactly this people and to this sacred land, and did

³⁰⁴ Adv. Marc. III.11,7.

³⁰⁵ Carn. IV.1.

³⁰⁶ Adv. Marc. III.8,1.

³⁰⁷ Adv. Marc. IV.8,3.

³⁰⁸ Adv. Marc. I.17,4; I.22,4.

not go to other people or other kingdoms?”³⁰⁹ This is without a doubt a legitimate question. If Marcion imagined Christ to be completely unrelated to the Old Testament God, as the Harnack-legacy wants to make us believe, why of all nations should he come to Israel? More importantly, why would he concern himself with exactly this God and his Law and not rather with the pagan cults such as of Mithras or Cybele for instance? The answer to these questions comes to light once we rid ourselves of the idea that Marcion’s good God is completely unrelated to the Old Testament, for nothing would be farther from the truth.

“He dissolved the Prophets and the Law and all the works of the God who made the world.”³¹⁰ This one line contains Irenaeus’ summary of the purpose of Christ’s coming according to Marcion, and, as so often, Irenaeus summarised very skilfully. Tertullian’s report about Marcion’s idea that Christ came to destroy the Law and the Prophets³¹¹ confirms Irenaeus’s impression, and also Hippolytus agrees when he states that, according to Marcion, the good God destroyed the works of the Demiurge³¹². The crucial phrasing in these passages is the terms *dissolve* and *destroy*. Tertullian repeatedly speaks of the *diversitas* between the Old and the New Testament and accordingly between the two Gods in Marcion’s doctrine. This term is often rendered by the obviously related English term ‘diversity’. Although this is not incorrect since Marcion’s Gods are certainly diverse, the Latin *diversitas* can also signify ‘contrast’ or ‘opposition’, and it seems to be the more appropriate translation in this case. Marcion’s Gods do not simply coexist in diversity, they exist in direct and unequivocal opposition to one another, or, to use an originally Marcionite term, they exist *antithetically*. The second God could not exist without the first, he is a pure *anti-God*. Tertullian grasped this situation precisely when he scornfully states that Marcion’s second God could only show his great work in man who was created by the evil God.³¹³

³⁰⁹ Carm. adv. Marc. V.116-117: ipsa cur in gente venit terraque dicata, non alios populos aut altera regna petivit?

³¹⁰ Adv. haer. I.27,2: dissolventem prophetas et legem et omnia opera eius Dei qui mundum fecit.

³¹¹ Adv. Marc. IV.36,11.

³¹² Ref. VII.30,3.

³¹³ Cf. Adv. Marc. I.17,1.

The good God has not only come to free mankind but to strike back against the Creator of all evil. The actual deliverance from the horrible world and the dreadful human condition as such – which is considered the main work of the good God by the Marcionites (see below) – will not happen before the afterlife. Once again, Tertullian realised this peculiar feature of Marcion’s teachings correctly and remarks: “Also it would have been befitting for perfect goodness that man, now that he is freed to believe in the supreme God, was removed at once from the domicile and the dominion of the cruel God [...] If your release is for the future, why not also for the present, so that it may be a perfect release?”³¹⁴ Indeed, in this world, Marcion’s good God does not seem to be helping mankind out of its misery. What he does instead, is to show some *Trotz*³¹⁵ to the Creator and his Law. *Trotz* is truly what marks most of Christ’s actions from Marcion’s perspective. By his death, Christ has purchased mankind from the Creator (see below), but it seems that during his ‘lifetime’, what mattered most to Marcion was neither his ethical teachings (see Chapter VI) nor his healing of people, but simply his defying and “exposing” of the Creator (*detectio creatoris*)³¹⁶.

Many parts of Tertullian’s discussion of Marcion’s Gospel demonstrate this. When we consider Christ’s attitude towards the Sabbath for example (Lk 6:1-11), Marcion believed that Christ attacked the Sabbath “out of hatred” (*odio*)³¹⁷. We can detect a similar notion in the story of the healing of the leper (Lk 5:12-14). Not with one word does Tertullian mention Christ’s healing of the leper as an act of love or goodness in Marcion’s view. The reason the Pontic treated this matter “with special attention”

³¹⁴ Adv. Marc. I.24,6-7: Erat et illud perfectate bonitatis, ut homo, liberatus in fidem dei optimi, statim eximeretur de domicilio atque dominatu dei saevi [...] Si de futuro erutus es, cur non et de praesenti, ut perfecte?

³¹⁵ Verweij’s already observed this correctly when he described the Marcionite faith as “trotzig” (Verweij’s, *Evangelium*, p. 265). In fact, the German term *trotzig* or *Trotz* is a perfect description of Marcion’s mentality. Unfortunately, there is no real English equivalent. The usual dictionary translation would be ‘defiance’, but defiance can be reflected and deliberate. *Trotz*, on the other hand, usually signifies defiance out of spite, very often in an almost childish way. I shall therefore stick to the German term in my work.

³¹⁶ Adv. Marc. IV.36,11. There is no reason to assume (as some editions do) the reading of *deiectio*, cf. Claudio Moreschini/René Braun, *Contre Marcion IV*, SC 456, Paris: Cerf, 2000, p. 453 n. 3.

³¹⁷ Adv. Marc. IV.12,4.

(*attentius*)³¹⁸ was rather his wish to emphasise that Christ performed this healing as someone who is “hostile to the Law” (*aemulus legis*)³¹⁹. The term *aemulus* is particularly interesting in this context, for it is exactly the emotion of *aemulatio* (jealousy/resentment) which the Marcionites attribute (in a negative way, of course) to the Creator³²⁰. Another example is the episode of the woman with a discharge of blood who touched Jesus (Lk 8:43-48). Once more Tertullian comments: “But this too he did as an adversary of the Law”³²¹, and this time he adds a most important exclamation: *O deum non natura beneficum, sed aemulatione!* From Marcion’s perspective, Christ did not heal this woman (at least not primarily) out of benevolence, rather “the Law commanded to stay away from contact with a woman who has a discharge of blood; because of this he felt the urge not only to allow her to touch him, but also to give her health”³²². It almost sounds as if Christ did not actually care for this woman, but since he was not allowed to touch her, he saw an opportunity to spite the Creator, an opportunity he could not resist.

Finally, there is Christ’s encounter with Moses and Elijah (Lk 9:28-36) which is of importance in this matter. If we were to consider Marcion’s Christ to be completely unrelated to the Old Testament, we would again have to wonder what possible business he might have with these Old Testament figures. However, Tertullian knows that according to Marcion Christ came as their *destructor* and that the voice from heaven “This is my beloved Son, hear him!” was to be understood as ‘Hear him – not Moses

³¹⁸ Adv. Marc. IV.9,3.

³¹⁹ Adv. Marc. IV.9,5.

³²⁰ Cf. Ekkehard Mühlberg, “Marcion’s Jealous God”, in: Donald F. Winslow (ed.), *Disciplina Nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans*, Cambridge (MA): Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979, p. 100-113. Barbara Aland’s theory that Tertullian is using this term, as well as the concept of *destructio legis*, as mere polemics against Marcion has no basis, especially since this terminology is confirmed by other sources (see above). Aland’s idea is probably once more due to an all too positive view of the heresiarch (Aland, *Marcion/Marcioniten*, p. 95).

³²¹ Adv. Marc. IV.20,9: Sed et hoc qui adversarius legis. For the elliptical structure of the phrase, see Moreschini/Braun, *Contre Marcion IV*, p. 258-259 n. 4: “T.[ertullien] multiplie les ellipses dans cette phrase qui fait entendre la voix de Marcion expliquant ce geste du Christ comme un nouvel exemple de son antagonisme à la Loi.”

³²² Adv. Marc. IV.20,9: Lex a contactu sanguinantis feminae summouet, idcirco gestierit non tantum contactum eius admittere, sed etiam sanitare donare.

and Elijah anymore!’³²³ With his characteristic incisiveness, Tertullian detects a problematic element within this interpretation. If the only meaning of this scene was for the voice to state that they should hear Christ, then it would have been completely unnecessary to involve Moses and Elijah in it.³²⁴ In this way, Tertullian has, apparently without fully realising it, once more stumbled over the key to Marcion’s *anti-interpretation*³²⁵ of the Gospel: it is not enough that Christ was heard, but it was imperative that he was heard *instead of* the Old Testament prophets.

Now, it is certainly possible that Tertullian might simply be making these things up in order to make his opponent look bad. However, anyone who wishes to accuse Tertullian of being dishonest in this matter has to consider the following aspects.

- A motive alone is not enough to convict someone of slander.
- There is no other writer in early Christianity who would clearly contradict Tertullian’s depiction at this point. In fact, when we shall consider Marcion’s ethics (Chapter VI), we shall see that Clement of Alexandria and Epiphanius support the Carthaginian’s point of view.
- Tertullian’s description provides a perfect answer to the question posed in the *Carmen* (see above). Whoever doubts Tertullian’s words must find another explanation for the problem why Marcion’s Christ of all possible places came exactly to Israel and was so eagerly concerned with the Law and the Prophets.

³²³ Adv. Marc. IV.22,1. Drijvers has dedicated an extensive study to the interpretation of the Transfiguration pericope by the Marcionites in Ephraem Syrus (Drijvers, “Christ as Warrior and Merchant”, *StPatr* 21 (1989), p. 73-85). Although Drijvers’ result that Marcion was portrayed by the Syrian Marcionites as a warrior confirms the portrait established above, we cannot ignore the fact that fourth century Syrian Marcionism is certainly no longer entirely true to the teachings of its founder, especially under the influence of Manichaeism. Although Drijvers is possibly right in pointing out that this influence might be overrated occasionally (cf. *ibid.*, p. 85), it is not to be denied entirely, and we should thus refrain from using Ephraem’s testimony for a reconstruction of Marcion’s view of Christ.

³²⁴ Cf. Adv. Marc. IV.22,1-2.

³²⁵ In another context, Brox used the very fitting term “Protest-Exegese” for Marcion’s approach (*Gegen die Häresien I*, p. 320 n. 118).

Having thus accepted Tertullian's report as trustworthy, these features grant us a look deep inside Marcion's way of thinking, and especially to its misunderstanding by modern scholarship. Harnack wanted to see the Old Testament deprived of its canonical authority³²⁶, and regarding this idea of his, he believed to have found a soul mate in Marcion. However, the ideas of the two men could hardly have been more different. Harnack, with the eyes of a nineteenth century liberal Protestant, felt that the Old Testament was no longer reconcilable with the beliefs of post-Enlightenment society, and therefore wanted to 'get rid of it'. Nothing would have been more unthinkable for the second century heretic, who was downright obsessed with the Old Testament and its God.

2.2. The Testimony of Paul³²⁷

"This one work alone is sufficient to our God, that he has freed man by his supreme and exceptional goodness, a goodness which exceeds all locusts!"³²⁸ This work of deliverance was performed by Christ's death, and it is in fact this idea which forms the only doctrinal parallel between Marcion and the Apostle Paul. Despite the obvious importance that soteriology has to Marcion, the traditional portrait of him being above all a loyal disciple of Paul must be regarded as more than exaggerated (see Chapter IV), for even in the two men's interpretation of Christ's death we find a substantial difference. This is not the time for a complete evaluation of Paul's position on this matter, but in order to point out the crucial difference to Marcion it will suffice to say that from Paul's perspective "Christ died for our sins" (1Cor. 15:3). Marcion probably cut these words out of his edition of the *First Letter to the Corinthians*.³²⁹ After what has

³²⁶ See Introduction.

³²⁷ For Marcion's collection of Paul's Letters, see Chapter IV.

³²⁸ Adv. Marc. I.17,1: Sufficit unicum hoc opus deo nostro, quod hominem liberavit summa et praecipua bonitate sua et omnibus locustis anteponenda. The Marcionites' comparison of the act of salvation to locusts is just another way of making fun of the Creator, pointing out that the one work of their God is still preferable to the (pitiful) creation.

³²⁹ Cf. Schmid, *Apostolos*, p. I/325-326.

been said above about Marcion's anthropology, it is clear that this interpretation of Christ's death must be excluded for him, since man is not responsible for his sin. Accordingly, Marcion completely lacks any feeling of guilt.³³⁰ Moreover, Marcion's theological dualism does not allow for the Pauline/Lutheran relation of sin and forgiveness, as sin and forgiveness are not dualistic but dialectical, as they presuppose one and the same God. More easily put, one can only be forgiven a sin that one has committed first, but this situation presupposes that the condemnation and the forgiveness of this sin is performed by one and the same agent, which for Paul and Luther obviously was the one God of the two Testaments. Once one separates these two Gods, however, the said dialectic expires, since it does not make any sense for Marcion's good God to forgive sins which only exist as a violation of the evil God's Law, the very Law that the good God has come to destroy (see above). Christ did thus not die for our sins, rather by his death he "redeemed us" (Gal. 3:13)³³¹. The term 'redeemed' (ἐξηγόρασεν) is to be understood as an actual purchase here, something Marcion put great emphasis on in order to demonstrate that Christ purchased people who did not belong to him but to the Creator.³³² Although this is also an action directed against the Creator, it is now beyond the pure *anti-behaviour* of Marcion's good God so far. As a matter of fact, this time it is the Creator who strikes back at the good God, plotting against Christ and having him crucified, because Christ was dissolving his Law.³³³ The redemption by the good God is an act of grace and mercy. The abundance of this God's love is shown by the fact that it was "poured out willingly and freely on strangers, without any obligation of social

³³⁰ Cf. von Soden, *Harnacks Marcion*, p. 204 (the pages in brackets refer to the first edition of Harnack's *Marcion*): "In dieser Hinsicht muß nicht nur gegen den gelegentlichen Vergleich mit Augustin (S. 264), sondern besonders gegen den oft wiederkehrenden mit Luther (S. 231. 247 Anm. 250f. 256) Einspruch erhoben und daran erinnert werden, daß Marcion dem Schuldgedanken (und damit einem eigentlichen Sündenbewußtsein) völlig verschlossen ist".

³³¹ Although Schmid did not include this line in his reconstruction of Marcion's *Apostolikon*, I believe it is very well attested in Adam. Dial. 1,27 and especially in Pan. 42.8,1, where Epiphanius clearly states that Marcion used these words of the Aposlte. Cf. Drijvers' most fitting comment: "Galatians 3:13 contains in a nutshell Marcion's concept of salvation" (Drijvers, *Syria*, p. 171).

³³² Cf. Pan. 42.8,2; Adam. Dial. 1,27.

³³³ Cf. Adam. Dial. 2,9. One more time we can observe how a certain blame (the killing of Christ being the cause for Christian anti-Judaism *per se*) is deliberately shifted from the Jews to their God (see above).

bondage”³³⁴. Out of pure goodness, he decided to bring salvation to people who are completely alien to him.

Due to Christ’s redemption Marcion and his followers are filled with hope for “the kingdom of God in eternal and heavenly possession”³³⁵. The salvation, however, goes not for the fleshly body, but only for the soul³³⁶. While this feature of Marcion’s theology may not be surprising at first, it is in fact rather puzzling. Since unlike the Gnostics (see below) Marcion believed that man belonged entirely, that is, with body and soul, to the creation of the Demiurge, it is not entirely obvious why the soul would have some sort of preference compared to the body³³⁷. It appears that it was simply Marcion’s disgust with everything fleshly (see above) that led him to this attitude. The hope for this salvation is also the only real change which Christ brought to the life of the Marcionites. Of course, the abolition of the Law also marks a decisive change, yet one cannot help wondering if this actually meant a practical improvement for the Marcionite community, given that their radical ethics, which were also motivated by an *anti-Creator* attitude (see Chapter VI), went far beyond the requirements of the Law.

³³⁴ Adv. Marc. I.23,3: sine ullo debito familiaritatis in extraneos voluntaria et libera effunditur.

³³⁵ Adv. Marc. III.24,1: regnum Dei aeternae et caelestis possessionis.

³³⁶ Adv. haer. I.27,3, cf. also Adv. Marc. I.24,3.

³³⁷ Cf. Greschat, *Apelles*, p. 129: “Hier war Apelles um einiges konsequenter und logischer als Marcion, der zwar ebenfalls betonte, daß sich Christus allein den menschlichen Seelen zuwandte, aber nicht recht erklären konnte, weswegen er nicht auch den Leib erlöste, der ja nicht weniger als sie Seele ein Werk des minderen Schöpfers war.”

3.) Parallels to Gnosticism?

No one familiar with the religious atmosphere of the second century can read the above description of Marcion's doctrine without feeling reminded of certain traits of Gnosticism. It is thus not surprising that the question of Marcion's relation to Gnostic thinkers and ideas has always been one of the most disputed concerning his character, from those scholars who see him almost completely separated from any Gnostic teaching³³⁸ to those who consider him substantially influenced by it³³⁹.

The subject of Gnosis is so complex that a mere definition of the term alone would be somewhat like a 'Herculean Task', which makes it all the more complicated to compare Marcion to the phenomenon of Gnosis as such. The best characterisation, from my point of view, is still the "typological model" which Christoph Marksches offered, defining the Gnostic movement by eight features³⁴⁰. These eight traits are in the following compared to what we have established about Marcion's doctrine, divided into those traits Marcion shows connections to, and those completely alien to him.

³³⁸ Most famously, of course, stated by Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 196 n. 1.

³³⁹ Cf. for example Ugo Bianchi, "Marcion: Théologien Biblique ou Docteur Gnostique?", *VC* 21 (1967), p. 149 : "Marcion [...] appartient de plein droit à l'histoire du gnosticisme. Il y appartient, c'est vrai, de façon originale, sur la base d'un certain radicalisme qui s'inspire des lignes simples décrites par Harnack, mais qui se nourrit de l'*humus* riche et polyvalent du dualisme de la gnose classique."

³⁴⁰ Cf. Christoph Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, tr. John Bowden, London: T&T Clark, 2003, p. 16-17.

3.1 Traits which link Marcion to the Gnosis

1. *The experience of a completely other-worldly, distant, supreme God*

This feature is as characteristic for the Gnostics as it is for Marcion.

3. *The estimation of the world and matter as evil creation and an experience, conditioned by this, of the alienation of the Gnostic in the world*

The first part of this sentence is certainly also true for Marcion, the second, however, is not and reveals one of the crucial differences between Marcion and the Gnostics. The characteristic Gnostic feeling³⁴¹ of ‘not actually belonging to this world’ is unknown to the Pontic. Marcion shares the same despite for the world, but he sees himself as part of it with, in the true sense of the word, heart and soul. For Marcion, man is entirely made by the evil Creator and there is no part in him which would not belong to his creation. The Gnostics, on the other hand, tend to view themselves as belonging to another, an other-worldly realm (see below), a conviction which makes them dislike the world they live in, but which at the same time gives them a feeling of being above it, a feeling completely absent from Marcion’s system of thought.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Hans Jonas defined the feeling of “fremd/Fremde” as the existential Gnostic experience (Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I: Die mythologische Gnosis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ²1954, p. 96-97).

³⁴² For the anthropological differences between Marcion and the Gnostics, see Aland, *Versuch*, p. 433-435.

4. The introduction of a distinct creator God or assistant: within the Platonic tradition he is called ‘craftsman’ – Greek demiurgos – and is sometimes described as merely ignorant, but sometimes also as evil

Again, Marcion shows enormous parallels to Gnostic thinking. Whether Marcion actually used the Platonic term ‘Demiurge’, we do not know, but it seems rather unlikely given his strict Biblicist approach (see Chapter IV). The more crucial difference to the Gnostics, however, consists in the fact that Marcion would never refer to the Creator as an ‘assistant’ to the Supreme God. In Marcion’s theology the Creator neither in any way originates from the good God nor is he in any way subordinate to him.

8. A tendency towards dualism in different types which can express itself in the concept of God, in the opposition of spirit and matter³⁴³, and in anthropology.

As far as his concept of God is concerned, Marcion is a clear dualist, probably even more radical than most Gnostic groups, which is one of the reasons he would never think of the Creator as ‘assisting’ the Supreme God (see above). In the other aspects named, however, Marcion shows no specific dualism.

³⁴³ Bowden’s translation reads “manner”, but that is obviously a misprint.

3.2 Traits which separate Marcion from the Gnosis

2. The introduction, which among other things is conditioned by this [the experience of a completely other-worldly, distant, supreme God], of further divine figures, or the splitting up of existing figures into figures that are closer to human beings than the remote supreme God

Marcion has no such thing as the introduction of said further divine figures in his system, unless one would consider the Creator to be such a figure, but he has already been covered by point 4 (see above).

5. The explanation of this state of affairs [as described in points 2-4] by a mythological drama in which a divine element that falls from its sphere into an evil world slumbers in human beings of one class as a divine spark and can be freed from this

Marcion never gave in to any mythological speculation and certainly refused any idea of predestination of a certain class of people, as implied in the idea of a divine spark slumbering in (and only in) a particular group.

6. Knowledge ('gnosis') about this state, which, however, can be gained only through a redeemer figure from the other world who descends from a higher sphere and ascends to it again

7. The redemption of human beings through the knowledge 'that God (or the spark) is in them'³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Bowden's translation reads: "The redemption of human beings through the knowledge of 'that God (or the spark) in them'", which bears a slightly different meaning than the German original.

Although Marcion certainly believes in Christ as a redeemer figure who “descends from a higher sphere and ascends to it again”, he would never emphasise *knowledge* as being crucial in any way. For Marcion, it is faith in Christ which leads to salvation (see Chapter VI).

3.3 Conclusion

The ancient heresiologists lumped Marcion together with the Gnostics, and it is not hard to see why. Marcion, like the Gnostics, preached more than one God, and to his orthodox opponents this was the greatest heresy of all, making any further differentiation marginal³⁴⁵. However, even though Marcion’s doctrine does show parallels to Gnosticism, this still does not mean he was immediately influenced by it. In the preceding Chapter we have seen that the reports of Marcion’s dependence on the Gnostic Cerdo are hardly trustworthy. Moreover, in our first chapter we have seen that Gnostics such as Ptolemy are in fact already *reacting* to Marcion’s doctrine. Whether one should go so far as to understand an entire Gnostic system such as Valentinianism as largely directed against Marcion³⁴⁶ must remain uncertain; however, we have to realise that we cannot simply claim that it happened the other way around, either. There is hardly any real evidence for an elaborate dualist Gnostic system before the time of Marcion. The early representatives of Gnosticism such as Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus or Basilides remain elusive figures since we have to rely on the rather questionable reports on them by Irenaeus and others³⁴⁷. How questionable these reports are can best be shown in the case of Basilides, of whose writings we fortunately have

³⁴⁵ Even Harnack admits: “Wo der Marcionitismus oberflächlich, d. h. nach seinen Lehren und nicht zugleich nach seinen Motiven aufgefaßt und angeeignet wurde, konnte er sehr leicht als „Gnostizismus“ erscheinen” (*Marcion*, p. 196 n.1).

³⁴⁶ Cf. Marksches, “Die valentinianische Gnosis und Marcion – einige neue Perspektiven”, in: May/Greschat, *Marcion.*, p. 174.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Marksches, *Gnosis*, p. 82: “We can demonstrate from both the reports about Simon and the fragments of Basilides that the systems which Irenaeus describes with a clear reference to his normal system represent at least secondary stages of theoretical development. Neither Simon in the first century nor Basilides in the early second century taught what Irenaeus asserted at the end of the second century.”

several fragments preserved, fragments which, however, stand in a certain contradiction to the reports offered by Irenaeus, especially as to the feature of dualism which Irenaeus attributes to Basilides³⁴⁸. For from the fragments themselves, which may be considered authentic and thus more trustworthy than the reports of the heresiologists, there is no clear dualism to be found in Basilides' doctrine³⁴⁹.

All in all we may state that Marcion, like everybody else, is a man of his time, and since his time was the age of Christian Gnosticism, he can by no means be seen as completely unrelated to the phenomenon as such. Still, his system of thought remains unique, and our knowledge of pre-Marcionite Gnosticism remains fragmentary, so that any *immediate* Gnostic influence on him and his theology is no longer traceable.

³⁴⁸ Löhr, *Basilides*, p. 271-273.

³⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 328-329.

4.) Conclusion

Marcion's first God is not just, he is evil – this is one of the most important results of this chapter as well as of this entire study. From this good-evil dualism we must, however, not conclude, as Bousset did (see above note 206), that Marcion simply projected an originally Oriental-Persian dualism of light and darkness onto the God(s) of the Old and the New Testament. There seems to be a certain idea that Marcion could have been only either a Biblicist (as Harnack believed) or a representative of a (simple) good-evil dualism (as Bousset believed). However, this idea turns out to be erroneous, since Marcion was in fact both. The heresiarch found the image of his two Gods in the two Testaments, and not anywhere else.

Another idea which seems to prevail among scholars is that the good God forms the centre of Marcion's doctrine. We have seen, however, that it is in fact the evil God, the God of the Old Testament, who rightly deserves to be called the *first* God in Marcion's system. The good God is a pure *anti-God*, who merely reacts to the malice of his counterpart; and he does so by an attitude towards the Creator which can be labelled as nothing else but *Trotz* (see Chapter VI).

IV. Marcion's Bible

*No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says.
He is always convinced that it says what he means.*

George Bernard Shaw

Marcion's Bible stands in a strangely dialectical relation to his theology: it is the *source* and at the same time the *result* of his doctrine. This reciprocity makes it most difficult to divide these two parts. Nevertheless, for the sake of lucidity I have dedicated the preceding chapter to Marcion's Bible as the *source* of his theology, by establishing those doctrinal elements he retrieved from the texts, and I am going to dedicate the present chapter to Marcion's methodology regarding Scripture, that is, both his approach to the texts as well as the formation of his own canon.

*Separatio legis et evangelii proprium et principale opus est Marcionis.*³⁵⁰ When Tertullian wrote this line in the beginning of the third century, he could not foresee that about thirteen hundred years later a German monk would also make the distinction between Law and Gospel one of his major theological themes, yet in a completely different way. The crucial element to realise in this matter is that when Tertullian uses the terms Law and Gospel, he does not refer to two different theological entities (as Luther did), but simply to two different testimonies, the Old Testament on the hand, the New Testament on the other. That the Carthaginian had this meaning in mind becomes obvious when we look at similar passages about Marcion's main exploit in which he

³⁵⁰ Adv. Marc. I.19,4. "The separation of Law and Gospel is the actual and principal work of Marcion."

clearly speaks of Marcion's opposition between the entire two Testaments.³⁵¹ However, Tertullian's statement has frequently been used by scholars to support their view – going back to Harnack³⁵² – of the Pauline/Lutheran distinction of Law and Gospel³⁵³ being the starting-point for Marcion's teaching³⁵⁴. Already in the preceding chapter we have seen that this idea is untenable, and the following analysis will confirm this result. Nevertheless, Tertullian was perfectly right in identifying the separation of the two Testaments as Marcion's main project, since this distinction – as we have seen – forms the basis for Marcion's entire dualism.

Marcion is a Biblicist. This designation is by no means to be understood as a commendation of his theology³⁵⁵. That Marcion misunderstood the biblical message goes without saying, but this is no argument against his Biblicism. There is no reading without interpretation, and thus the term Biblicism does not say anything about the content of a theologian's doctrine. Therefore, the famous question whether Marcion was a Gnostic *or* a Biblicist – as classically formulated by Ugo Bianchi in his article “Marcion – théologien biblique ou docteur gnostique” – is somewhat beside the point (see Chapter III). Gnosticism describes an entire system of thought, Biblicism is merely a theological *method*, the method of using the Bible as the only basis for one's theology, usually combined with a very literal understanding of it. This method has already been established in the preceding chapter, by realising that Marcion portrayed his two Gods entirely according to biblical testimony (see above). He is not a philosopher, he does not ask for ‘why’ or ‘how’, he accepts the things as they are reported in the texts,

³⁵¹ Cf. for example Adv. Marc. IV.6,1. Cf. also Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 243: “Dabei sind mit dem Gesetz nicht nur die am Sinai verkündeten Gebote des Mose gemeint, im Gegensatz zur Weissagung und Verheißung der Propheten, sondern das Gesetz meint die gesamte alttestamentliche Offenbarung.”

³⁵² Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 30.

³⁵³ Technically of course, there is no such thing as a Pauline distinction between Law and Gospel. Paul contrasts Law and Faith, Law and Spirit, Law and Grace, but never Law and Gospel. Still, the main idea, which Luther then later on systematised in his famous distinction, is indeed to be found in Paul, even though not with the exact wording.

³⁵⁴ Cf. for example Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 103; Aland, *Marcion/Marcioniten*, p. 93; Joseph Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts. A Defining Struggle*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006, p. 31.

³⁵⁵ Although he occasionally affirms the contrary, there can be no doubt that Harnack thinks of this feature of Marcion's theology as praise.

particularly the Old Testament, an uncritical attitude which Harnack correctly referred to as “das ‘Mitten im Denken stehenbleiben’”³⁵⁶.

³⁵⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 99.

1.) The Old Testament

1.1. Marcion's Literalism

Marcion's literal understanding of the Old Testament or, put negatively, his strict rejection of its allegorical interpretation, has occupied scholars for a long time, leading to a variety of different explanations for this phenomenon.

Several scholars have proposed a connection between Marcion and his contemporary and countryman Aquila³⁵⁷, a translator of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek. It is true that comparing these two men "we find an almost identical preference for the literal and historical interpretation of the Old Testament which is in marked contrast to the prevailing exegesis alike of Hellenistic Judaism and the catholic Christianity of the time"³⁵⁸. Although a connection between the two men cannot be excluded, it is certainly not necessary in order to explain Marcion's attitude. It goes without saying that Marcion did not read the Old Testament with the eyes of an orthodox Jew, as any Jew would have been appalled to see his God described the way Marcion did.³⁵⁹ But if this is the case, the whole idea of dependence becomes dubious. As with Marcion's relation to the Apostle Paul (see below), it seems questionable to assume that one man took over substantial ideas from the other when both came to the most different results possible: Aquila turned to orthodox Judaism, Marcion became a radical Christian dualist. Besides all this, we might reasonably ask whether understanding a text literally, which would presumably be the first instinct of any reader, is really something so extraordinary that one has to be influenced by a particular exegetical movement to come up with the idea.

³⁵⁷ According to Irenaeus (Adv. haer. III.21,1) Aquila was also from Pontus. Once more Epiphanius (De mens. 14) is more precise, stating that Aquila was from Sinope.

³⁵⁸ Wilson, *Marcion*, p. 45.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 278.

David Dungan, while correctly perceiving that there was “nothing at all ‘Jewish’ either in Marcion’s attitude toward the Old Testament or his manner of interpreting it”³⁶⁰, offered an alternative explanation of Marcion’s literalism which is unfortunately just as misleading, if not more. He interprets Marcion’s method as a “typical weapon in the arsenal of Hellenistic religious polemics, whether Christian, Jewish, or Pagan. More specifically, it was the way one interpreted rival ‘Scripture’ so as to destroy it, by making it out to be a worthless jumble of inconsistencies, bizarre absurdities, and morally repulsive spectacles involving the Gods.”³⁶¹ Dungan’s main misconception in this matter is that to Marcion the Old Testament was anything but *rival* Scripture, as he sincerely believed in its content (cf. Chapter III; see below). Marcion’s literal understanding of the Old Testament can therefore by no means be seen as a weapon against his enemies. Celsus, on the other hand, whom Dungan (erroneously) names as a similar case of refusal of allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament³⁶², was a pagan philosopher who considered the entire Old Testament to be a fabrication. His attacks against it are indeed made in an attempt to demonstrate how foolish and absurd the faith of the Christians (and Jews) is. Naturally, Harnack was inclined to see Marcion as exactly this kind of intellectual mind, but he thus failed to see him for what he really was (see Chapter III). For to Marcion, unlike his disciple Apelles (see Chapter VII), it was by no means an “obvious step”³⁶³ to consider these texts to be a fabrication (see below).

Besides these failed attempts to explain Marcion’s refusal of allegorical interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures, we have to ask whether this method was really all that substantial for his theology. Tertullian maintains that there are two categories of prophetic language which the Marcionites need to acknowledge.³⁶⁴ The first is the announcing of future events as if they had already happened, the second form consists of those cases in which

³⁶⁰ David L. Dungan, “Reactionary Trends in the Gospel Producing Activity of the Early Church: Marcion, Tatian, Mark”, in: M. Sabbe (ed.), *L’Évangile selon Marc: Tradition et rédaction*, Leuven: University Press, 1974, p. 191.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

³⁶³ Wilson, *Marcion*, p. 116

³⁶⁴ For the following cf. Adv. Marc. III.5; cf. also Braun, *Contre Marcion III*, SC 399, Paris: Cerf, 1994, p. 270-273.

things have to be understood figuratively instead of literally. The fact that Tertullian demands acceptance of these dictions indeed shows that the Marcionites refused to apply any of these interpretations. However, the only case in which Tertullian actually defends these methods against his opponents is the messianic prophecies within the Old Testament.³⁶⁵ As described in the preceding chapter, Marcion thought of the Creator's Messiah as a warrior, an idea which he based on the military portrayal of the infant in Isa. 8:4, where it is said that before the child knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother', he will take up the strength of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria against the king of the Assyrians.³⁶⁶ According to the categories just mentioned, Tertullian can counter this claim: "Now, if nature nowhere permits being a soldier before beginning to live, or taking up the strength of Damascus before knowing the words 'father' and 'mother', it follows that this is to be considered a figurative statement."³⁶⁷ Against Marcion's claim that such a warlike depiction of the Messiah can under no circumstances refer to Jesus Christ, Tertullian has thus established that this passage does not constitute a contradiction if understood allegorically. When we consider Marcion's negative view of the Creator, however, which forms without a doubt the main element he retrieved from the Old Testament, it is most striking that Tertullian never applies a figurative meaning of the passages in question, but always points out that Marcion misunderstood the literal meaning of the texts. A few examples may suffice to demonstrate this.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Cf. J. H. Waszink, "Tertullian's Principles and Methods of Exegesis", in: William Schoedel/Robert Wilken (ed.), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition*, Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1979, p. 29: "As we have already observed, Tertullian tries to accept the literal interpretation as far as possible. He seriously discussed this problem in two treatises – namely, in the third book of the *Adversus Marcionem* and in the *De resurrectione carnis*. In the former case his aim is to prove, or at least to bring out continuously, that Christ, the son of the good God, is announced all the time in the Old Testament."

³⁶⁶ Cf. Adv. Marc. III.13,1. The passage actually reads: "Before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother', the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria".

³⁶⁷ Adv. Marc. III.13,3: Enimuero si nusquam hoc natura concedit, ante militare quam vivere, ante virtutem Damasci sumere quam patris et matris vocabulum nosse, sequitur ut figurata pronuntiatio videatur.

³⁶⁸ For the following features of the Old Testament God in Marcion's view, see Chapter III.

When Tertullian argues against Marcion's use of the line "It is I who create evil", he does not counter the arch-heretic's understanding by an allegorical interpretation of his own, but by explaining that there are two kinds of evils, evils of sin and evils of punishment, and that God is only the creator of the second kind, which is not actually evil but befitting for a judge.³⁶⁹ The phrase "Adam, where are you?", which Marcion saw as proof for the Creator's ignorance, is explained by Tertullian as being meant not in an interrogative, but in an accusatory tone.³⁷⁰ One of his most interesting replies we find concerning the story of Moses creating the brazen serpent. Marcion considered this action to be inconsistent on the part of the Creator, since he had forbidden the making of images. Tertullian defends this alleged inconsistency by pointing out that the serpent had nothing to do with idolatry but was created as a remedy, and he adds: "I keep silent about the figurative meaning of the remedy."³⁷¹ In other words, Tertullian is aware of an allegorical meaning of this Old Testament passage³⁷², but he considers it unnecessary to refer to it in order to refute Marcion.

All in all it seems as if, at least to Tertullian, who is no less than Marcion's most important adversary, Marcion's rejection of allegory was a minor issue. Certainly, a writer such as Origen would disagree³⁷³, but this may have more to do with Origen's way of understanding the Bible than with Marcion's. To the Alexandrian, even Tertullian would probably have been a "crude literalist"³⁷⁴. In conclusion we can maintain: Marcion did understand the Old Testament literally, but the only case in which

³⁶⁹ Adv. Marc. II.14.

³⁷⁰ Adv. Marc. II.25,1-2.

³⁷¹ Adv. Marc. II.22,1: taceo de figura remedii.

³⁷² Tertullian is probably alluding to the common interpretation within the Early Church of the serpent being a foreshadowing of the Cross of Christ, cf. Braun, *Contre Marcion II*, p. 132 n. 3.

³⁷³ Cf. for example Origen's complaint about the Marcionites in Princ. II.5,2: "But they see these things this way, because they do not understand how to hear anything beyond the letter" (cf. Chapter III). For further passages in Origen concerning Marcion's refusal of allegorical interpretation, cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 260*.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Robert M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit*, London: SPCK, 1957, p. 104. Grant provides an excellent summary of Origen's exegesis (p. 90-104) and correctly depicts him as "the boldest allegorizer of the ancient Church" (p. 101). Cf. also Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 282: "Wenn Origenes von den Marcioniten sagt: "... et ideo purae historiae deservientes ...", so ist das die Meinung des Origenes und kein Anspruch Marcions selbst."

this method categorically differed from all of his orthodox opponents – and agreed with the Jews instead³⁷⁵ – was his idea that the messianic prophecies within the Old Testament did not refer to the coming of Jesus Christ.

If there is at all a concrete reason why Marcion interpreted the Old Testament literally, it would be that he had no reason to do otherwise. His genuine hatred for the world and therefore its Creator would not make him doubt that the Old Testament God actually means what he says in phrases such as “It is I who create evil” (see Chapter III). Thus, Verweij concludes: “*Nicht ein starrer Buchstabenglaube bestimmt die hermeneutischen Regeln Marcions, sondern sein fanatischer Haß gegen den Weltschöpfer.*”³⁷⁶

1.2 The Place of the Old Testament in Marcion’s Canon

The preceding chapter has already revealed of what great importance the Old Testament was to Marcion, given that it formed the basis for his portrayal of the evil God. It is further most interesting to notice that Marcion used the exact same Old Testament as the orthodox church, that is, he used arguably the same collection of texts without changing anything within them.³⁷⁷ This fact, although well known and undisputed, has hardly ever been appropriately acknowledged, for it tells us a lot about the relation of the two Testaments in Marcion’s thought. Marcion radically changed the (emerging) New Testament according to his doctrine, not only by limiting it to a very small number of texts, but also by cutting out passages within the remaining ones (see below). Within the Old Testament, on the other hand, he does not change one word and sticks to a literal

³⁷⁵ Tertullian repeatedly (cf. Adv. Marc. III.6,2; III.7,1; cf. also Chapter III) associates Marcion with the Jews in this matter, as they are both unwilling to interpret the Old Testament prophecies as pointing to the coming of Christ. This, however, is of course polemics and should by no means be understood to imply any real connection between Marcion and the Jews (see above).

³⁷⁶ Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 283.

³⁷⁷ Although this statement cannot be proven with certainty, to my knowledge none of the Church Fathers (nor any modern scholar) ever maintained the contrary.

interpretation of it. Harnack called this feature a “psychological mystery”³⁷⁸. However, the mystery is solved once one accepts a simple but crucial concept: *Marcion did not understand the Old Testament in the light of the New, he interpreted the New Testament in the light of the Old*. This fundamental idea has already become obvious in the preceding chapter. The Creator is the first God, the one it all starts with. This is why it would be a misconception to believe that Marcion would have needed the New Testament in order to ‘discredit’ the Old³⁷⁹, for it is in fact the Old Testament which forms his starting point. The evil God created a miserable world with weak creatures, gave them a burdensome Law and judges them cruelly. Then, Marcion’s good God enters the scene as a pure *anti-God*, with no other function than to spite the Creator and to free mankind from its horrible lot. It is exactly due to this *antithetical* relation of the two Gods in his system that Marcion could never have actually excluded the Old Testament from his church, “denn ohne die dunkle Folie des Alten Testaments war die Botschaft vom guten Gott und seinem Christus nicht wirkungsvoll zu verkündigen”³⁸⁰.

³⁷⁸ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 67.

³⁷⁹ This does, however, not mean that Marcion would not gladly embrace the New Testament criticism of the Old (for example, regarding Paul’s critique of the Law, see Chapter III).

³⁸⁰ May, “Markions Genesisauslegung und die ‚Antithesen’”, in: Dietmar Wyrwa/Barbara Aland/Christoph Schäublin (ed.), *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alten Kirche: FS Ulrich Wickert*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997, p. 194-195 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 48). Cf. also May, “In welchem Sinn kann Markion als der Begründer des neutestamentlichen Kanons angesehen werden?”, in: *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 88: “Die Schlußfolgerung könnte sein, deshalb anzunehmen, daß die Markioniten zusätzlich auch die alte Bibel in ihren Gottesdiensten lasen, nicht als Heilige Schrift, sondern als eine Negativfolie für das Evangelium und so das Alte Testament als Buch ansah[en], das historische Informationen enthielt.” In this second passage, however, May made the mistake of considering the Old Testament as a mere addition to Marcion’s religious practice.

2.) The New Testament

2.1 The Conspiracy Theory

“They [the Marcionites] say that by separating the Law and the Gospel Marcion has not so much innovated the rule of faith but rather returned to the one previously adulterated.”³⁸¹ This fundamental conviction was at the very heart of the Marcionite movement, the idea of re-establishing what had been falsified. Marcion was convinced that there had been a great Judaising conspiracy going on in the world aiming at perverting the Gospel by pretending that Christ belonged to the Creator. Responsible for this perversion are the representatives (*assertoribus*)³⁸² of the Creator. Who exactly are these representatives? The Jews are certainly not envisaged. For what possible reason could they have for linking Christ to their God, given that they so vigorously attempt to distinguish themselves from the Christians? Marcion relies on the testimony of Paul in order to identify his opponents. He refers to the Apostle’s *Letter to the Galatians*, in which Peter and the other pillars of the Apostleship (that is, John and James)³⁸³ were reprehended by Paul for not walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel³⁸⁴. This rebuke of Peter by Paul seems to have been of great importance to Marcion, as not only does Tertullian refer to it four times in his works against him³⁸⁵, but it already had been discussed in Irenaeus³⁸⁶. Furthermore, the general ignorance of Peter apparently also was an issue Marcion frequently referred to.³⁸⁷ Marcion supposed that when Jesus, after Peter’s exclamation “You are the Christ of God” (Lk. 9:20), ordered him and the

³⁸¹ Adv. Marc. I.20,1: Aiunt enim Marcionem non tam innovasse regulam separatione legis et evangelii quam retro adulteratam recurasse.

³⁸² Adv. Marc. IV.6,2.

³⁸³ Gal. 2:9.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Adv. Marc. I.20,2 (Gal. 2:11-14).

³⁸⁵ De praescr. 23,1-5; Adv. Marc. I.20,2; IV.3,2; V.3,7. Cf. May, “Der Streit zwischen Petrus und Paulus in Antiochien bei Markion”, in: Walter Homolka/Otto Ziegelmeier (ed.), *Von Wittenberg nach Memphis. Festschrift für Reinhard Schwarz*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989, p. 205-208 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 36-39).

³⁸⁶ Adv. haer. III.12,15. No specific mention of the Marcionites is made by Irenaeus in this passage, however, the context suggests that they are at least *also* envisaged.

³⁸⁷ For the following cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 37-39.

other Apostles to tell this to no one, he did so because Peter erroneously regarded him as the Messiah of the Creator³⁸⁸. Likewise, when Peter intended to put up three shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah (Lk. 9:33), he again erroneously believed that Jesus was their Messiah³⁸⁹. According to Marcion, it was due to this ignorance and insincerity of Peter and the other Apostles that Christ felt necessitated to choose Paul as a new Apostle who would take action against his ‘predecessors’.³⁹⁰

However, the former Apostles are, although contributing to it by their ignorance and weakness, not initially responsible for the falsification of the texts. For Marcion, this heavy guilt lies with the “false brothers” who, according to Paul, “had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves”³⁹¹. It was this (anonymous) group of people that attempted to pervert the Gospel through an “interpolation of Scripture by which they portrayed a Christ of the Creator”³⁹². Therefore, Marcion considered it his duty to free the New Testament from these interpolations. Tertullian sums up: “He erased those things that contradict his view, those that are in accordance with the Creator, as if they had been woven in by his representatives, but he has retained those that agree with his view.”³⁹³

³⁸⁸ Cf. Adv. Marc. IV.21,7. That Marcion considered Peter to believe that Jesus was the Messiah of the Creator is not explicitly stated in this passage, however, Tertullian returns to this interpretation in Adv. Marc. IV.22,6.

³⁸⁹ Adv. Marc. IV.22,4-6.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Adv. Marc. V.1,2.

³⁹¹ Gal. 2:4 (Adv. Marc. V.3,2-3).

³⁹² Adv. Marc. V.3,2: interpolatione scripturae, qua Christum Creatoris effingerent.

³⁹³ Adv. Marc. IV.6,2: Contraria quaeque sententiae suae erasit, conspirantia cum creatore, quasi assertoribus eius intexta, competentia autem sententiae suae reservavit.

2.2 The Corpus Paulinum³⁹⁴

2.2.1 Marcion's Use of Paul

In his typically self-confident manner Harnack stated: “Der Ausgangspunkt der Kritik M.s an der Überlieferung kann nicht verfehlt werden: er war in dem paulinischen Gegensatz von Gesetz und Evangelium, übelwollender, kleinlicher und grausamer Strafgerechtigkeit einerseits und barmherziger Liebe andererseits gegeben.”³⁹⁵ This idea is probably Harnack's main legacy to our view on Marcion as virtually all major works on the arch-heretic ever since have followed it³⁹⁶. As we have already seen in the preceding chapter, Marcionite doctrine is only related to Pauline teaching in terms of soteriology, and with substantial differences even in this field. But how is it then that Harnack was so convinced of seeing Marcion almost as a reincarnation of the Apostle? To answer this question, we shall take a look at a remark Harnack made about Marcion's view of the Law, a remark which is exemplary for Harnack's bias towards the arch-heretic: “M.s Stellung zum Gesetz unterscheidet sich also nicht stark von der des Paulus, wenn man die letzte Voraussetzung der beiden Götter wegläßt.”³⁹⁷ This argument is all fair and good, but it is like saying that Adam Smith's concept of economy is close to that of Karl Marx, if one leaves aside Smith's idea of the free market. Harnack's fundamental misconception, which we have already encountered in the preceding chapter, comes to light again. The German scholar, in the tradition of the Lutheran

³⁹⁴ By putting the Apostolikon first and the Gospel later, I do not want to create the impression that I would share Harnack's theory of a predominance of Paul over the Gospel in Marcion's system (see Chapter III). The order of subsections is merely due to better clarity.

³⁹⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 30.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Knox, *Marcion*, p. 14: “Marcion was not primarily a Gnostic but a Paulinist”; Enslin, *Mouse*, p. 6-7: “his point of departure was the Pauline antithesis between law and grace”; Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 103: “Certainly he was, and wished to be, a disciple of Paul”; Hoffmann, whose entire study is based on the idea that Marcion aimed at a “pauline renaissance” (*Marcion*, p. 99); Aland, *Marcion/Marcioniten*, p. 93: “So bleibt also, den Ausgangspunkt für Marcions Grundüberzeugung vom Gegensatz von Gesetz und Evangelium [...] von seinem einzigen Apostel Paulus her abzuleiten.”; Enrico Norelli, “Note sulla soteriologia di Marcione”, *Augustinianum* 35 (1995), p. 281-282: “resto convinto che l'Ansatzpunkt di Marcione si trova nella sua lettura del vangelo di Gesù nella versione paolina.”; Tyson, *Marcion*, p. 31: “Paul's writings about the justification of sinners through Jesus Christ must indeed have had a powerful effect on Marcion's religious life.”

³⁹⁷ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 108.

Reformation, wanted to focus on the New Testament and its message of love and forgiveness, thereby deliberately neglecting the testimony of the Old Testament. However, Marcion was the wrong role model for his plea. The Pontic did not neglect the Old Testament, but saw it as the testimony of the evil Creator who is opposed to the Father of Jesus Christ. Harnack may like it or not, but this evil God is as important for Marcion's doctrine as the good God is. To leave aside this dualism of Marcion's means to deprive him of the very centre of his theology.³⁹⁸ In the end, Marcion's system was so radically different from the one of Paul that it seems unlikely to assume any substantial influence of the Apostle on the arch-heretic.³⁹⁹

If, however, Marcion had to virtually force his own ideas upon Paul, it leaves us with the question why he included the Apostle in his canon. This question brings us to the subject of Paul's position within the Early Church. Harnack's depiction of Marcion as the loyal follower of Paul goes hand in hand with his view that Paul's teachings were widely unknown in Marcion's time.⁴⁰⁰ This way Harnack could portray Marcion as the one who made Paul known to the public in the first place. However, Andreas Lindemann in his impressive monograph has conclusively shown that such a view cannot be retrieved from the sources.⁴⁰¹ Paul had always been an authority within the Church, and was certainly used, but not 'revived' by the heretics. Apart from this general situation, Harnack's theory has another weak spot. Marcion's whole movement is based on the idea of re-establishment of lost testimonies, that is, the cleansing of texts from interpolation based on the above mentioned conspiracy theory. Now, if we are to assume that Paul and his Letters were virtually unknown in Marcion's time, this project becomes curious. Why would Marcion bother so much with changing the texts and justifying

³⁹⁸ Cf. Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 257: "Es ist also unmöglich, bei Marcion den Gegensatz der beiden Götter fallen zu lassen, ohne daß er zu einem anderen wird als er in Wirklichkeit ist."

³⁹⁹ Once again, Bauer was the first to correctly criticise Harnack's view in this point by stating: "Seine [Marcion's] Gedanken müssen dem Heidenapostel zu gewaltsam aufgezwungen werden, als daß sie von diesem stammen könnten" (see Introduction).

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 12. This theory has found, within certain alterations, many followers since Harnack, cf. Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1979, p. 6-10.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Lindemann, *Paulus*, especially p. 378-395.

these changes by a theory he retrieved from these very texts, if no one knew or cared about them anyway?

These insights bring us back to our initial question why Marcion was so keen on using Paul's writings in his canon, and provide us with the answer to that question, too. Marcion wanted to claim the Apostle's reputation for his own movement. In other words: *Marcion did not make Paul an authority, he made use of his authority*. Apart from Paul's soteriology, which Marcion adopted to a certain extent, and his critique of the Old Testament Law (see Chapter III), Paul serves above all as Marcion's guarantor for his above mentioned theory of the falsification of the Gospel. Therefore, when Marcion declares that of all the Apostles only Paul knew the truth⁴⁰², this is not so much intended to glorify Paul, but to discredit the other 'ignorant' Apostles, who, together with the "false brothers" (see above), are responsible for this falsification.

2.2.2 The Content of Marcion's Apostolikon

Based on the above mentioned conspiracy theory, Marcion felt entitled to change the text of the Epistles back to their 'original' form. Harnack's analysis of these changes and his corresponding reconstruction of Marcion's *Apostolikon*⁴⁰³ were, although impressive, subject to two main errors.⁴⁰⁴ First of all, Harnack was convinced that he completely understood the motives according to which Marcion revised the texts. This conviction entailed that Harnack went far beyond the sources' actual testimony for the Marcionite texts of the Epistles, for now he could simply deduce what Marcion *had to change* and what he *did not need to change*⁴⁰⁵. Secondly, Harnack tended to assume that text

⁴⁰² Adv. haer. III.13,1.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 40*-176*.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Schmid, *Apostolos*, p. 7-16.

⁴⁰⁵ Accordingly, in Harnack's reconstruction we find phrase such as "(Das Jesajazitat über die Unfruchtbare, Isaak und Ismael) sind unbezeugt und *müssen* gefehlt haben" (*Marcion*, p. 76*, my emphasis); "Wenn dieser Abschnitt nicht ganz fehlte (was wahrscheinlich), *muß* M. ihn geändert haben" (*ibid.*, p. 70*, my emphasis); or "Zu ändern *brauchte* hier M. nichts" (*ibid.*, my emphasis).

versions which show a Marcionite *tendency* must have a Marcionite *origin*, too. In other words, he mostly (not always though)⁴⁰⁶ excluded the possibility that such differences between the orthodox text and a particular manuscript could have other causes than Marcion's interference.

It is mainly due to the excellent study of Ulrich Schmid that these crucial mistakes have been exposed and that we thus have a far more reliable reconstruction of Marcion's *Apostolikon*. The main contribution of Schmid to the debate was that Marcion had much less influence on the composition of his *Corpus Paulinum* than had generally been assumed.⁴⁰⁷ Schmid, based on the study by Nils Dahl⁴⁰⁸, has conclusively demonstrated the existence of a pre-Marcionite collection of Pauline letters which was in many ways very similar to the one of the arch-heretic⁴⁰⁹. This collection contained the following letters in the following order⁴¹⁰:

Galatians

First/Second Corinthians

Romans

First/Second Thessalonians

Ephesians

Collossians

Philippians

Philemon

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 155*-160*.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Schmid's own summary (*Apostolos*, p. 310): "Das wichtigste Ergebnis im Blick auf den Beitrag, den Marcion selbst beim Zustandekommen seines Paulustextes leistete, ist, dass er weitaus geringer zu veranschlagen ist, als bislang angenommen."

⁴⁰⁸ See note 39.

⁴⁰⁹ Schmid, *Apostolos*, p. 286-289.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 294-296. Only the exact position of the Letter to Philemon is uncertain, but it is of little importance to us.

This composition is identical to that of Marcion⁴¹¹, which already diminishes his influence greatly, for it follows that he neither deliberately put Galatians at the top of his Corpus (as Harnack believed)⁴¹², nor did he deliberately exclude the Pastorals (as Theodor Zahn believed)⁴¹³. As to the differences between the orthodox text and Marcion's, Schmid has established a most important rule for their evaluation: "Wenn Singulärlesarten des marcionitischen Textes sicher etablierbar sind, dann muß gleichsam als Gegenprobe immer auch der Versuch gemacht werden, diese Lesarten auf dem Hintergrund von abschreibtypischen Phänomenen zu erklären. Nur wenn dieses Motiv ausgeschlossen werden kann, sind sichere Aussagen über marcionitisch-tendenziöse Textänderungen möglich."⁴¹⁴ Based on this methodological principle, Schmid comes to the conclusion that deletions are in fact the only safe textual changes we may assume for Marcion at all⁴¹⁵, and even those only in the form of deletions of longer coherent passages involving not more than four topics: 1. Abraham as the Father of all Believers, 2. Israel as point of reference for the Church, 3. judgement according to the Law, 4. Christ as the one in whom all things were created.⁴¹⁶ The only probable deletion of single words can be claimed regarding the *σάρξ* of Christ.⁴¹⁷ Concerning other alleged deletions by Marcion, Schmid has shown for instance that the above mentioned pre-Marcionite collection already contained a version of Romans in which the last two chapters were missing⁴¹⁸, so that this divergence cannot be attributed to the heresiarch.

⁴¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 286-289.

⁴¹² Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 168*-169*.

⁴¹³ Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons I*, Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1888, p. 634-637.

⁴¹⁴ Schmid, *Apostolos*, p. 31.

⁴¹⁵ Harnack, for instance, believed that Marcion not only cut out words or passages, but also changed or added certain words, although he realised that Marcion's main process was one of deleting (Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 61-64).

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Schmid, *Apostolos*, p. 254-255; p. 282. Schmid's evaluation concerning judgement according to works is not entirely consistent. In the first section mentioned, he considers it safe that Marcion cut out the corresponding passages. In the later summary, he considers it merely probable. I would consider it as safe as the other topics mentioned by Schmid, with the slight alteration that Marcion's emphasis would not have been on the judgement according to *works* (as Schmid described it), but according to the *Law*. The first one would once again be a Lutheran concept forced upon Marcion.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 255.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 289.

As for the many other differences between the orthodox text and Marcion's, they can mostly be attributed to the 'normal' corruption of the New Testament manuscripts.⁴¹⁹

2.3 The Gospel

The focus on the importance of Paul's testimony for Marcion by most scholars (see above) has made the Gospel take a backseat as source for his theology. However, after what has been established in the preceding chapter, there can hardly be any doubt that it was in the Gospel where Marcion found the basis for his doctrine of the good God. Here he found the story of Jesus Christ and his defiance of the Creator and his Law. This Jesus could not have been the Messiah of the evil Creator, but had to be the rescue Marcion longed for, the Christ who had come to destroy the reign of the evil one.

Marcion used only one Gospel in his canon, the Gospel according to Luke. The question why he chose precisely this Gospel has occupied scholars for a long time. However, before we address this question, we must wonder if it is put in the right way, in other words, did Marcion actually *choose* the Gospel of Luke? The term 'choose' implies a certain deliberate selection on the heresiarch's part, and Harnack indeed imagined Marcion to have examined all the (four) Gospels very carefully before making his decision.⁴²⁰ This again brings us to a preliminary question: did Marcion already find the Four-Gospel Canon? This question has also been a matter of most lively debate by scholars, however, not always from the right angle as it seems. A recent article by Schmid serves as a good example of this.⁴²¹ Having considered the different arguments from both sides, Schmid comes to the conclusion that it is possible to date a Four-Gospel

⁴¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 254-255.

⁴²⁰ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 249*-250*.

⁴²¹ Ulrich Schmid, "Marcions Evangelium und die neutestamentlichen Evangelien", in: May/Greschat (ed.), *Marcion*, p. 67-77.

Collection⁴²² as early as the middle of the second century, which means that Marcion could have been aware of it⁴²³. The problem about this statement is that the middle of the second century is the time when Marcion had already established his doctrine and when his movement was already on the rise (see Chapter II). Thus, the real question would have to be whether Marcion was already familiarised with a Four-Gospel Collection in his youth, that is, in the years 110-130, a question which in all probability would have to be denied⁴²⁴. It seems thus quite possible that Marcion was only familiar with one Gospel at his Pontic home community, which then obviously was the Gospel of Luke.⁴²⁵

Despite this rather personal reason for the use of Luke as the only true Gospel, it is still possible that Marcion was later on forced to justify his 'choice' in the light of the other Gospels. He then probably once more made use of Paul's authority, referring to Luke's connection to the Apostle⁴²⁶. Campenhausen, however, objected to this theory, pointing out that Marcion would never have relied on the name of Luke as he attributed no author's name to his Gospel. It is true that Tertullian informs us that Marcion indeed ascribed no author to his Gospel⁴²⁷, but this information should not be overrated to imply that Marcion imagined this Gospel to have simply dropped from heaven⁴²⁸. It seems more likely that Marcion, using only one Gospel, simply saw no need to attribute an author's name to it since he did not have to distinguish it from others.⁴²⁹ Thus, he could certainly accept the relation between Paul and Luke, while not (ostentatiously) naming the Gospel after Paul's companion.

⁴²² Schmid distinguishes a Four-Gospel Collection from a Four-Gospel Canon, pointing out that the final canonisation of the four Gospels might be as late as the fifth century, whereas a collection of the four may have existed much earlier, cf. *ibid.*, p. 72-73.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴²⁴ Even the earliest estimations usually do not date the canon before the year 140, cf. Darrell D. Hannah, "The Four-Gospel 'Canon' in the Epistula Apostolorum", *JTS* 59/2 (2008), p. 598-633.

⁴²⁵ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 42: "das erste Evangelium, welches in den Pontus gekommen ist, war wahrscheinlich das Lukas-Ev."

⁴²⁶ Cf. Lindemann, *Paulus*, p. 150.

⁴²⁷ Adv. Marc. IV.2,3.

⁴²⁸ The statement by Megethius (Adam. Dial. 1,8) that this Gospel was somehow 'co-written' by Christ and Paul deserves no credibility as an original Marcionite concept.

⁴²⁹ Cf. Lindemann, *Paulus*, p. 382-383.

The Church Fathers leave no doubt that just as Marcion had falsified the *Corpus Paulinum* so had he forged the Gospel of Luke. Nevertheless, there has been a long line of scholars who attempted to reverse this process, claiming that our canonical Luke forms an enlarged version of a ‘Proto-Luke’ which was also used by Marcion. This dispute, which was especially vivid in nineteenth century German scholarship⁴³⁰, appeared to be settled, as ever since John Knox’ *Marcion and the New Testament* (1942) no notable scholar had defended the theory of Marcion’s priority to canonical Luke. However, in 2006 two mutually independent publications renewed the Knox-Theory⁴³¹. Joseph Tyson in his “Marcion and Luke-Acts. A Defining Struggle” provided basically the same theory as his teacher Knox. Matthias Klinghardt’s article⁴³² “Markion vs. Lukas: Plädoyer für die Wiederaufnahme eines alten Falles” offered a slightly different point of view. Whereas Knox and Tyson believe that Marcion used and falsified ‘Proto-Luke’, Klinghardt asserts that Marcion used Proto-Luke as he found it, that is, Marcion’s Gospel and ‘Proto-Luke’ are identical.

At first glance one might think that the Knox-Theory shows similarities to what Schmid established concerning Marcion’s *Apostolikon*, since he also believed that Marcion used an edition of the *Corpus Paulinum* prior to the canonical one (see above). It is therefore most important to realise a crucial difference between these two concepts. Schmid suggested that a pre-canonical edition of the letters of Paul existed which contained only ten letters and which probably already contained some of the variants differing from the canonical texts which had erroneously been attributed to Marcion. But Schmid never

⁴³⁰ For a history of research, see Dieter T. Roth, “Marcion’s Gospel and Luke: The History of Research in Current Debate”, *JBL* 127/3 (2008), p. 513-527.

⁴³¹ Although Knox did not actually invent this theory, the recent discussions go very much back to him so that I shall continue to refer to it as the ‘Knox-Theory’.

⁴³² Matthias Klinghardt, “Markion vs. Lukas: Plädoyer für die Wiederaufnahme eines alten Falles”, *NTS* 52 (2006), p. 484-513. Christopher Hays has published a response to Klinghardt’s article (*ZNW* 99/2 (2008), p. 213-232), in which he engages critically with Klinghardt’s theories, coming to the conclusion: “With the current state of research, compelling evidence is lacking to disprove the univocal attestation of the Church Fathers that Marcion’s Gospel derived from longer Gospel of Luke” (p. 232). While I agree with the final result of Hays’ article (see below), Hays is, however, in accordance with the aim of his article, too much concerned with Klinghardt alone. Therefore, he does, for instance, not deal extensively enough with the argument of inconsistent redaction, which is the main argument of Knox and Tyson (see below), and which is also accepted by Klinghardt.

claimed that the existing text of the letters was later on systematically *enlarged*⁴³³. This idea, however, is essential to the Knox-Theory. Tyson has set up a very lucid three-phase model⁴³⁴.

1. 'Proto-Luke' is written. It dates from ca. 70-90 AD and is similar to our Luke 3-23.
2. Maricon composes his Gospel. He uses 'Proto-Luke' and omits many parts. This takes place ca. 115-120. (This step would be missing according to Klinghardt's theory.)
3. Canonical Luke is written. The author uses 'Proto-Luke' and adds several new pericopes with the intention (among others) of responding to the Marcionite threat. The final composition was finished about 120-125.

Since all our sources unanimously agree that it was Marcion who changed canonical Luke and not the other way around, the burden of proof lies with the followers of Knox. Correspondingly, most of their arguments are in fact counter-arguments against the idea that Marcion changed canonical Luke. The main reason they bring forward for the unlikelihood of this idea is that comparing the text of canonical Luke to that of Marcion, no consistent concept of redaction can be found on the part of the arch-heretic. In other words, there are too many passages he deleted for which there seems to be no explanation. Klinghardt categorically states: "Die angebliche Redaktion Markions lässt sich aus dem für ihn rekonstruierten Evangelium nicht erheben."⁴³⁵ Interestingly enough, however, he adds: "Diesen Versuch hat bisher auch niemand wirklich unternommen."⁴³⁶ Without addressing the question of how Klinghardt can know that something which apparently no one ever tried is impossible, in the following I would like to attempt this never before tried enterprise of reconstructing the rules according to which Marcion

⁴³³ The only case which may count as an exception would be the adding of Chapter 15-16 to the pre-canonical edition of Romans (cf. Schmid, *Apostolos*, p. 289-294).

⁴³⁴ Cf. Tyson, *Marcion*, p. 119-120.

⁴³⁵ Klinghardt, *Plädoyer*, p. 513.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

revised the Gospel of Luke from the text of Marcion's Gospel⁴³⁷. Unfortunately, a reliable reconstruction of Marcion's Gospel is not available at present.⁴³⁸ However, Knox based his theory on a particular list he made of passages that Marcion definitely (that is, according to Tertullian/Epiphanius) cut out, a list that Tyson accepts⁴³⁹ and which Klinghardt also seems to be working with. Thus, it should suffice to deal with this very list and see if coherent rules are to be found according to which Marcion proceeded. Now, if one searches long enough, it would certainly be possible to find some explanation for every deletion, however, this is supposed to be an unprejudiced analysis, so I shall refrain from finding an explanation at all cost. In other words, if a conflict between a certain passage and Marcion's doctrine cannot be explained in a plain and simple way, I shall count the deletion of this passage as unexplained.

The following list will start with naming the verse(s) deleted by Marcion, followed by the rule which caused this deletion. The rules themselves require no further explanation as they derive from the elements of Marcion's doctrine already established. In several cases more than one rule would apply, but I shall stick to the main one. Unless the conflict between the passage in question and the rule is obvious, a short explanation of this conflict will be given.

⁴³⁷ Harnack listed twelve motives according to which Marcion supposedly changed the Gospel, but it is pretty obvious that those motives were not actually retrieved from the text of Marcion's Gospel, but simply represent a summary of Marcion's doctrine according to Harnack, cf. *ibid.*

⁴³⁸ The most recent reconstruction was attempted by Tsutsui ("Das Evangelium Marcions. Ein neuer Versuch der Textrekonstruktion", *AJBI* 18 (1992), p. 67-132), but unfortunately it did not prove to be a real advance on Harnack's attempt (*Marcion*, p. 183*-240*), which, generally speaking, suffered from the same weaknesses as his reconstruction of Marcion's *Apostolikon* (see above). I am still longing for the forthcoming reconstruction of Marcion's Gospel by my friend and colleague Dieter Roth.

⁴³⁹ Tyson, *Marcion*, p. 86.

1:1-4 The Prologue

Rule (1): *The tradition of the Church is falsified.*

Conflict: not only does the prologue label the Gospel as one among many, it also attaches great importance to the testimony of the early eyewitnesses whom Marcion considered to be ignorant of Christ's true teaching.

1:5-80 The Foretelling of the Birth of John the Baptist and of Christ; Birth and Early Life of John the Baptist

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: the idea of Christ having John the Baptist as a 'forerunner' in the form of a prophet of the Creator as well as the announcement of Christ's birth by an angel of the Creator implies a connection between Christ and the Old Testament God which was intolerable to Marcion.

2:1-52 Birth and Infancy of Christ

Rule (3): *Christ is neither born nor raised.*

3:1b-3:22 John the Baptist 'prepares the way' for Christ and baptises him.

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

3:23-38 The Genealogy of Christ

Rule (3): *Christ is neither born nor raised.*

4:1-13 The Temptation of Christ

Rule (4): *The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ.*

Conflict: in the temptation pericope, Christ frequently refers to the Old Testament as his authority.

4:14-15 Christ in Galilee

Conflict: Marcion switched pericopes at the beginning of his Gospel, starting with 3:1 (“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar ...”) and immediately going to 4:31 (“he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee”).⁴⁴⁰ It seems that due to this change Marcion simply had no need for this intermediate section anymore.

5:39 “And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, 183*-184*.

Conflict: the parable of the old and the new wineskins was of great importance to Marcion for his distinction of the Old and the New Testament⁴⁴¹. However, this verse, which seems to suggest that the old one is better, was obviously untenable to him.⁴⁴²

8:19 Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd.

Rule (3): *Christ is neither born nor raised.*

9:31 They appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

Rule (4): *The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ.*

Conflict: this verse is part of the Transfiguration periscope, which Marcion used to demonstrate Christ's superiority over Moses and Elijah (cf. Chapter III). This verse, however, not only makes the Old Testament figures appear in glory but also states that they were able to prophecy Christ's future.

11:29b-32⁴⁴³ The Sign of Jonah

Rule (4): *The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ.*

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Adv. Marc. II.16,5; IV.11,9.

⁴⁴² However, this verse is also omitted by several other New Testament manuscripts (cf. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978. p. 228), so it might not be Marcion's change after all.

⁴⁴³ Knox believes that 11:29 was part of Marcion's Gospel, but Epiphanius' statement regarding this periscope (Pan. 42.11,6) makes it rather unlikely that the entire verse was contained in it.

11:49-51 “Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.”

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

12:6-7 “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: these words of consolation by Christ refer to a creator God who is concerned with things like animals or hairs.

12:28 “If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you.”

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: once again, this statement refers to a creator God who is concerned with material things.

13:1-9 Repent or Perish!

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: the Godhead portrayed in these verses is one of judgement.

13:29-30 “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Conflict: for these verses there seems to be no obvious reason why Marcion disapproved of them.⁴⁴⁴

13:31-35 Jesus’ Lament over Jerusalem

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: besides the citation of the Psalm we find here Jesus’ statement that no prophet can die outside Jerusalem, which is a clear reference to the prophets of the Creator.

⁴⁴⁴ Gustav Volckmar offers an explanation (*Das Evangelium Marcions*, Leipzig: Weidmann’sche Buchhandlung, 1852, p. 61-62), but it seems too complicated and too far-fetched to claim validity.

15:11-32 The Parable of the Lost Son

Conflict: of all of Marcion's deletions this parable seems to be the most problematic as it is the one which is brought forward the most in favour of the Knox-Theory⁴⁴⁵. Harnack suggested that the theme of the return to the father's house might have conflicted with Marcion's doctrine.⁴⁴⁶ In a similar manner Gustav Volckmar already believed that if Marcion understood the two sons to represent the Jews and the Gentiles, then the figure of the father would represent the God of the Jews as well as the Father of Christ, which was obviously unacceptable to him.⁴⁴⁷ It might also simply have been the fact that the lost son is rewarded with so many luxurious material goods which offended Marcion (see Chapter VI). Even though a completely convincing explanation why this specific pericope was intolerable to the arch-heretic seems hard to find, one should remember that he had no particular reason to appreciate it, either. The reason the deletion of this parable surprises scholars so much is that they feel that this parable should have been of special importance to Marcion due to its message of the forgiveness of sins.⁴⁴⁸ However, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, this idea is completely absent from Marcion's doctrine. Therefore, without a major reason to keep it, a minor reason to erase it may have been enough for the arch-heretic.

17:10b "Say, 'we are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: this phrase presupposes a demanding Godhead who requires works of duty of his servants.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. for example Tyson, *Marcion*, p. 89.

⁴⁴⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 65; cf. also Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 46.

⁴⁴⁷ Volckmar, *Evangelium*, p. 66.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 65.

18:31-34 Jesus predicts his passion and resurrection

Rule (5): *The Old Testament cannot be fulfilled in Christ.*

Conflict: Jesus clearly states that his passion and resurrection form the fulfilment of prophecy.

19:9b “because this man, too, is a son of Abraham”

Rule (4): *The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ.*

Conflict: the whole phrase reads “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.” This logic is obviously not valid for Marcion’s Christ.

19:29-40 Jesus approaches Jerusalem

Rule (4): *The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ.*

Conflict: Jesus’ disciples celebrate his entry into Jerusalem by citing a psalm and Jesus supports it.

19:41-44 Jesus weeps over Jerusalem

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem because they “did not recognise the time of God’s coming”, thereby implying a God of judgement.

19:45-46 The Cleansing of the Temple

Rule (4): *The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ.*

Conflict: Jesus cites words from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah as motivation for his actions.

20:9-18 The Parable of the Tenants

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: the parable clearly implies that Christ is the Son of the God of Israel.

20:37-38 “But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

Rule (4): *The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ.*

21:18 “But not a hair of your head will perish.”

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

Conflict: these words of consolation by Christ refer to a creator God who is concerned with physical things like hairs (see above).

21:21-24 Judgement upon Jerusalem

Rule (5): *The Old Testament cannot be fulfilled in Christ.*

Conflict: the passage speaks of the fulfilment of all that has been written.

22:16 “For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.”

Rule (5): *The Old Testament cannot be fulfilled in Christ.*

Conflict: the idea of the fulfilment of an Old Testament institution in the kingdom of (the good) God was intolerable to Marcion.

22:35-38 The Two Swords

Rule (5): *The Old Testament cannot be fulfilled in Christ.*

Conflict: once again Jesus speaks of his approaching passion and death as fulfilment of prophecy.

23:43 “Today you will be with me in paradise.”⁴⁴⁹

Rule (2): *Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God.*

⁴⁴⁹ Knox lists the entire pericope 23:39-43, but Epiphanius only mentions that Marcion cut out verse 43 (Pan. 42.11,6; Schol. 72). Unlike with several other pericopes, in this case I do not see why the statement by Epiphanius should call for a deletion of the entire section.

Although the term paradise is most common in modern English, the Greek term παράδεισος only occurs twice in the New Testament⁴⁵⁰ besides this passage. In the LXX it was used for the Garden of Eden⁴⁵¹. If this association was still alive in Marcion's time – which seems likely – the passage obviously became intolerable for him, since Jesus would never expect to enter the Creator's realm.

Result: of the 32 pericopes discussed above, only for two have we not been able to find a clear explanation for Marcion's deletion of them. Put positively, we can explain more than 93% of the changes as being due to five simple rules, which seems more than enough to consider the argument of an incoherent redaction by Marcion as invalid. However, the claim of inconsistency not only refers to those passages Marcion deleted, but also to those he left in. Especially Albert Schwegler⁴⁵² has tried to show that even though we might be able to give reasons for the passages Marcion erased from his Gospel, we would still be unable to explain why he cut those out and left other (similar) passages in. Schwegler's choice is problematic, however, since for only a few of his named passages can we actually be certain that the verses in question were in fact missing from or, respectively, contained in Marcion's Gospel. As to those passages for which such a certainty can be claimed, a few examples may suffice to demonstrate the weakness of Schwegler's argument.

Schwegler considers it astonishing that Marcion would cut out 8:19 ("Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd"), but would retain the following verse ("Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.'") However, there is no inconsistency to be found here. On the contrary, Marcion is very skillfully pointing out that Jesus did

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. 2Cor. 12:4, Rev. 2:7.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. Marshall, *Luke*, p. 872-873.

⁴⁵² F. C. Albert Schwegler, Review "W. M. L. De Wette: Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die kanonischen Bücher des Neuen Testaments, 4th ed.", *Theologische Jahrbücher* 2 (1843), p 577-582.

not have a mother or brothers, but that the *ignorant* crowd did not understand this. Schwegler also points out that it is inconsistent on Marcion's part to erase certain references to the Old Testament, such as Jesus' mention of the sign of Jonah (11:29b-32), but to retain others such as Jesus' reference to David taking the consecrated bread from the temple on the Sabbath (6:3), or Jesus talking about John the Baptist (7:27). This alleged inconsistency is based on the false judgement that Marcion would not allow for any Old Testament reference in his Gospel. As we have seen, however, Marcion's Christ is anything but unrelated to the Old Testament, he only refuses to use it as his *authority*. Jesus says about John the Baptist: "This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." This statement is by no means problematic for Marcion. On the contrary, Christ declared perfectly correctly that John the Baptist is the forerunner of the Creator's Messiah and as such excluded from the kingdom of the good God.⁴⁵³ Concerning the reference to David, the story is not explicitly set in any relation to the following "Then Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath'", which is obviously the important line of the pericope for Marcion. Therefore, 'his' Christ can tell the story of the consecrated bread "ohne darauf für sich selbst irgend eine Beziehung zu nehmen"⁴⁵⁴.

The most prominent case of assumed inconsistency concerning Marcion's revision of the Gospel is the one that Tertullian brings forth himself. At the very end of his fourth book against Marcion, in which he discusses his Gospel, the Carthaginian refers to the end of Luke's Gospel when Jesus appears to the disciples after his Resurrection.⁴⁵⁵ When Jesus saw them frightened he said to them: "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (24:38-39). Tertullian is surprised that the arch-heretic did not cut these verses out as they clearly seem to contradict Marcion's

⁴⁵³ Cf. Volckmar, *Evangelium*, p. 59.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Adv. Marc. IV.43,6-8.

docetic views on the body of Christ, but he also offers a most interesting explanation for this phenomenon. Instead of deleting the passage, Marcion supposedly had a strange interpretation for it, understanding “a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” to mean ‘As you see I do not have flesh and bones, just as a ghost’. Therefore, Tertullian believes that Marcion deliberately retained certain passages which he actually should have erased in the Gospel in order to create the impression that he did not erase anything at all or at least that he only did so for very good reasons.

This statement by Tertullian has often served as an argument for the Knox-Theory.⁴⁵⁶ Schwegler wonders: “Hat er [Marcion] einmal, die Feder in der Hand, gestrichen was ihm nicht gefiehl, warum diese Operation nur halb vollziehen und noch zu dem halben Mittel einer künstlichen Interpretation greifen?”⁴⁵⁷ This question would be legitimate, if Marcion’s interpretation could indeed be described as “künstlich”, that is, made up just to fit his purposes. However, this judgement may be a bit rash. Obviously, to Schwegler, to us today and already to Tertullian this understanding of the passage seems so far-fetched that we automatically picture Marcion sitting at his desk racking his brain to come up with some weird interpretation just in order not to be forced to cut these verses out. But is this interpretation really so much weirder than Tertullian’s assumption that the words “Adam, where are you” are not a question but an exclamation (see above)? In both cases, the grammatical structure of words, which is obvious to any unprejudiced reader, is twisted in order to ‘make it fit’. We have no idea how Marcion’s mind worked, but it seems not unlikely that a man of such fanaticism would really understand the passage above in a way that was convenient to him. However, even if we assumed that Marcion deliberately came up with a far-fetched interpretation, there would still be another answer to Schwegler’s question. After all, by interpreting the passage this way, not only could Marcion make it appear as not contradicting his view, but he had another piece of evidence for it.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. Klinghardt, *Plädoyer*, p. 487.

⁴⁵⁷ Schwegler, *Review De Wette*, p. 583-84.

Summing up, we may say that it can simply not be expected that we *completely* understand the editorial concept of a man who lived almost 2000 years ago and of whose own writings nothing survives. If a certain deletion is not entirely clear to us, this may simply be due to the fact that the meaning the text had in its own time is not entirely clear to us. The five rules established above can only serve as a guideline. Marcion did, in all probability, not even have a precise concept according to which he performed his changes. Let us not forget that erasing passages in the second century is neither done with an eraser nor by means of ‘copy and paste’. Shortening a text means to write it anew. The creativity and perhaps spontaneity which is involved in such a process should not be underestimated.

Beside the alleged inconsistent process of redaction, Knox and his followers also point to the fact that of the 283 verses missing in Marcion’s Gospel only 57½ have synoptic parallels, which means that almost 80% of what Marcion deleted belonged to Lukan *Sondergut*.⁴⁵⁸ According to the Knox-Theory this portion is too big to be a coincidence, and thus it is concluded that it is more likely that these passages were added later on than that Marcion deliberately decided to delete more of the *Sondergut* than of the parallels.⁴⁵⁹ However, this relation would only be problematic if we still assumed that Marcion deliberately chose Luke, since Knox’ argument is based on the idea that Marcion would never deliberately have selected a Gospel so full of problematic passages⁴⁶⁰. Since it is more likely, however, that Marcion used Luke because it was the only Gospel he was familiar with (see above), it cannot be surprising that the Pontic simply had more problems with the *Sondergut* than with the parallels, especially with the first two chapters of Luke, which alone form more than half of the *Sondergut* Marcion deleted.

⁴⁵⁸ The exact numbers in this matter vary between Knox and Tyson, due to “differences in judgement about the parallelisms or nonparallelisms of certain Lukan pericopes” (Tyson, *Marcion*, p. 86), but it is of small importance for the actual argument.

⁴⁵⁹ Knox, *Marcion*, p. 109-110.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Having established that the Knox-Theory brings forth no conclusive argument to question the traditional view, it will suffice to briefly point out some other weaknesses that the theory has in itself. First of all, the claim of an inconsistent redaction on Marcion's part raises one big question: if, allegedly, we are unable to explain why Marcion deleted the above mentioned passages, then it follows that we are also unable to explain why anybody should have added them in order to fight Marcion. Certainly, the defenders of the Knox-Theory would point out that the anti-Marcionite tendency was only one motive for the enlargement. Still, when we look at the passages brought forward by Tyson or Klinghardt in order to defend their theory of a post-Marcion redaction, it is striking that neither of them ever discussed either of the two passages we have not been able to explain as deliberate Marcionite deletions, and it seems indeed difficult to find clear reasons for the adding of the Parable of the Prodigal Son or of verses 13:29-30 because of some editorial concept.

Another problem is the very early dating of Marcion's activity that this theory requires. As we have seen in Tyson's system above, Marcion would have to be already active about 110-120 AD, which strictly contradicts the dating of his life we have established in Chapter II.⁴⁶¹

Moreover, there is the most questionable argument from analogy. Knox points out – based on the thesis of the priority of Marcion's canon (see below) – that the Church enlarged Marcion's *Apostolikon* by adding the Pastorals, by adding other Apostolic writings (Letters of Peter, James and so on) and by adding Acts as the beginning of the *Apostolikon*.⁴⁶² From this he concludes that it would be reasonable to assume that Marcion's Gospel was also enlarged. Knox is right when he states that “an argument from analogy is always precarious”⁴⁶³, and this is particularly true when the analogy used is completely wrong. The Church may have enlarged Marcion's Gospel by adding other Gospels to it, just as they may have added writings to the *Apostolikon*, but they

⁴⁶¹ Cf. Hays, *Response*, p. 228-230.

⁴⁶² Knox, *Marcion*, p. 160.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

never added any verses to the text of Paul's Letters⁴⁶⁴. Therefore, if the argument from analogy is used in this case, then it would be against the Knox-Theory, assuming that just as the Church never added anything to the text of the *Apostolikon*, so they never added anything to the text of the Gospel of Luke.

Klinghardt has introduced another feature to the discussion by referring to a passage in Tertullian's work against Marcion in which he states that the arch-heretic claims that the Gospel was *interpolatum a protectoribus Iudaismi ad concorporationem legis et prophetarum*⁴⁶⁵. The Marcionite idea that Scripture has been interpolated by Judaisers has already been established above, however, Klinghardt takes the view that this particular section does not imply that Marcion actually protested against certain passages which had been added to the texts, but against the integration of these texts (Gospel and *Apostolikon*) into a larger corpus, that is, the canonical Bible of the Old and the New Testament.⁴⁶⁶ Now, no one is going to deny that Marcion was opposed to the union of the Old and the New Testament, and it is quite possible that the above mentioned passage does indeed refer to that opposition⁴⁶⁷; but to conclude from this feature that Marcion did not delete any passages from the New Testament is highly questionable, since both ideas go hand in hand with one another: the conviction that the New Testament is opposed to the Old makes it impossible that the New Testament would contain any positive reference to it. Besides, Klinghardt seems to have overlooked the numerous other passages in Tertullian where the Carthaginian clearly accuses Marcion of having falsified the text of the Scriptures, such as Adv. Marc. IV.6,2 (see above): "He erased those things that contradict his view, those that are in accordance with the

⁴⁶⁴ As already noted above (n. 433), the only exception would be the adding of Chapter 15-16 to the pre-canonical edition of Romans.

⁴⁶⁵ Adv. Marc. IV.4,4.

⁴⁶⁶ Klinghardt, *Plädoyer*, p. 495.

⁴⁶⁷ Hays attempted to refute this possibility by stating: "to understand the lexeme [concorporationem] as a reference to a literary body, a *corpus*, is etymologically fallacious." Unfortunately, it is Hays who has succumbed to a fallacy here.

Creator, as if they had been woven in by his representatives, but he has retained those that agree with his view.”⁴⁶⁸

Auctoritas locuta, causa finita: Klinghardt points out the danger of such an attitude with good reason.⁴⁶⁹ Traditional concepts are always to be examined carefully to prevent them from being taken for granted just because earlier generations said so. However, this must not seduce us to question a traditional point of view simply because it is traditional. We have clearly seen that in the case of Marcion’s relation to the Gospel of Luke there is no reason to assume that the traditional position, which states that Marcion falsified Luke, would be incorrect.

⁴⁶⁸ *Contraria quaeque sententiae suae erasit, conspirantia cum creatore, quasi assertoribus eius intexta, competentia autem sententiae suae reservavit.*

⁴⁶⁹ Klinghardt, *Plädoyer*, p. 485.

3.) Marcion's Canon

“Idee und Wirklichkeit einer christlichen Bibel sind von Markion geschaffen worden, und die Kirche, die sein Werk verwarf, ist ihm hierin nicht vorangegangen, sondern – formal gesehen – seinem Vorbild gefolgt.”⁴⁷⁰ This fundamental thesis by Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen has shaped the canon-debate immensely over the last decades. Even though this theory must be regarded as the most extreme concerning Marcion's influence on the making of the Christian canon, most scholars would agree that Marcion played a substantial role in the process⁴⁷¹, although there are some critical voices⁴⁷², too. Be that as it may, the exact process of orthodox canon making is not the subject of this study, so the following section will above all focus on one question: can we call Marcion the founder of the first Christian canon?

Before we can consider the sources' testimony, we must reflect on one preliminary question: what do we mean when we use the term 'canon'? Bruce Metzger's distinction between a “collection of authoritative books” and an “authoritative collection of books”⁴⁷³ is most helpful in this regard. Marcion was surely not the first Christian to consider certain texts as authoritative. If at all, he was the first to *limit* the number of these texts. Since Marcion mistrusted the entire Church tradition as relying on the testimony of ignorant Apostles and Judaist forgers (see above), limitation is the key to the understanding of Marcion's canon making. It is with this meaning of the word canon in mind that we shall analyse whether Marcion can be said to be a pioneer in this field or not. The decisive factor is that by choosing exactly which texts to change, Marcion also defined which texts to consider as authoritative. Thus, the moment Marcion completed

⁴⁷⁰ Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1968, p. 174.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. May, *Begründer*, p. 85.

⁴⁷² Cf. John Barton, “Marcion Revisited”, in: Lee Martin McDonald/James A. Sanders (ed.), *The Canon Debate*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002, p. 354: “In short, Marcion was not a major influence on the formation of the New Testament.”

⁴⁷³ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 282.

his ‘revision’ of the biblical books was the moment his canon was born. The big question is: when was that moment?

Generally speaking, it is usually not the text that makes the institution, but the institution that makes the text. Therefore, Marcion’s church was not necessarily founded on the basis of his canon. Regul states correctly: “Das bloße marcionitische Neue Testament konnte ihm nicht viel Anhänger gewinnen.”⁴⁷⁴ Marcion had to establish and to promote his idea of the good and the evil God first, in other words, he had to promote his *Antitheses* (see Chapter V) first. After people became aware of this concept, the problem occurred that some passages within the Gospel of Luke and the Letters of Paul seemed to contradict Marcion’s claim. It was perhaps only then that Marcion saw himself necessitated to perform the above-mentioned changes in the Gospel, using Paul as his authority (see above). The exact moment for this event cannot be determined; however, given that by the time Justin wrote his *First Apology* (ca. 153-154) Marcion’s movement had already spread ‘in the whole world’⁴⁷⁵ (see Chapter II), we may assume that Marcion’s church could not have reached this status without inner coherence based on the *Antitheses* and the canon⁴⁷⁶. We would thus probably not be far off the mark when we suppose that Marcion’s canon was definitely set by the year 150. Therefore, even with a very early dating of the emergence of the orthodox canon⁴⁷⁷, we could still maintain that Marcion can legitimately be called the founder of the first Christian “authoritative collection of books”.

The reason Marcion was able to ‘outrun’ the Church in this process is twofold. First of all, it is simply due to Marcion’s powerful position in his church (see Chapter VI). A man who can more or less determine a canon on his own is likely to have set this canon

⁴⁷⁴ Regul, *Evangelienprologe*, p. 88.

⁴⁷⁵ 1Apol. 26.5.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 8* n. 1: “Eine universale Wirksamkeit M.s ohne die Unterlage dieser Werke [Antitheses and Canon] ist nicht leicht denkbar.”

⁴⁷⁷ David Trobisch’s (rather questionable) thesis of the final redaction of the New Testament in the middle of the second century (*Die Endredaktion des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) represents, to my knowledge, the earliest dating of the fixation of the New Testament canon; however, even Trobisch does not date it before the time of Marcion.

before an entire federation of single communities can agree on one. The perhaps more important reason for Marcion's quickness was his view of history⁴⁷⁸. In order to establish a corpus of Scripture the Church as well as Marcion had to reach a point at which they considered themselves to be in a posterior age compared to the *Urgemeinde*. Once this deliberate distinction had been made, they began to see themselves no longer as the 'producers' of Scripture, but merely as its interpreters. While it cannot be determined exactly when that particular moment arrived for the Church, for Marcion this moment came as soon as he conceived his conspiracy theory (see above). Thus, in Marcion's view there is the age in which the 'original' Gospel and Letters are composed, there is a second age in which these texts are being falsified, and then there is his age, in which he re-establishes the originals. It was because of this outlook on history that Marcion reached the awareness of a posterior age, which is necessary for the establishment of a canon of Scripture, before the Church did.

So far we have restricted our attention, in accordance with the focus of previous scholarship, on the question of the canonisation of Marcion's *New Testament*. As has been noted above, however, the Old Testament also forms part of Marcion's canon of Scripture, and it can thus not simply be ignored when considering the formation of Marcion's canon. We have already remarked that Marcion, in all probability, accepted the same collection of Old Testament texts as the Church did, so, unlike for the New Testament, we cannot detect any influence on his part in this regard. He did, however, – and this is certainly a most crucial contribution to the development – establish the first Christian *bi-partite* canon by opposing the Old and the New Testament. The question is: was he perhaps also the first to use the terms 'Old' and 'New Testament' for this bi-partite collection of his, as Wolfram Kinzig suggested⁴⁷⁹? Kinzig correctly points out that "two facts had to be established before the expression 'New Testament' could be used as book title. First, there must have been a corpus of writings which was perceived

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. May, *Markion in seiner Zeit*, p. 7: "Bei ihm [Marcion] zeigt sich ein neuartiges christliches Geschichtsbewußtsein: Die Anfangsphase der Kirche ist Vergangenheit geworden".

⁴⁷⁹ Wolfram Kinzig, "Καὶνὴ διαθήκη: The Title of the New Testament in the Second and Third Centuries", *JTS* 45 (1994), 519-544.

as a unity. Secondly, this corpus of writings as a whole must have been seen in opposition to those writings which so far had been considered as the only Holy Scriptures (that is, our ‘Old Testament’ which, however, had probably not yet been termed thus in the Church at large).⁴⁸⁰ Both of these facts had, as we have just seen, already been established by Marcion. Thus, the preconditions for allowing him to apply the terms ‘Old’ and ‘New Testament’ are fulfilled. The use of the term *διαθήκη* may seem questionable at first, since Marcion’s doctrine shows no signs of a theology of covenant; however, Kinzig has demonstrated that the term *διαθήκη* was not restricted to this particular meaning, but could simply bear the meaning of ‘Will’ and was thus suitable for Marcion to use in order to refer to a written document⁴⁸¹.

The only question which remains is whether Marcion would apply the terms ‘old’ and ‘new’ to these collections of writings, or, in other words, whether the terms ‘old’ and ‘new’ really represent the quintessence of Marcion’s dualism. Kinzig considers this most likely given that Marcion was very keen on pointing out the ‘newness’ of Christ’s Gospel⁴⁸². Marcion’s good God is indeed new insofar as he is alien and unheard of before (see Chapter III); but his relation to the evil God is not one of ‘new God replacing an old one’. Likewise, the evil God in Marcion’s system might be called old (although we have no evidence that Marcion ever did so) only insofar as he made himself known *before* the good God, but he is by no means old in the sense of ‘outdated’⁴⁸³. Once again we encounter the crucial misconception regarding Marcion’s view of the Old Testament. Kinzig quotes Campenhausen: “Das Alte Testament war für Markion erledigt und konnte in keinem Sinne mehr gelten.”⁴⁸⁴ As we have seen above as well as in Chapter III, this idea is most misleading. Marcion’s evil God is still very much present in this world and in fact still in control of it, without any real interference from the good God. It

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 534.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 538.

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 536-538. That the term ‘new’ was frequently to be found in Marcion’s *Antitheses* as Kinzig, based on Harnack, assumes is, however, rather unlikely given the disposition of the work (see Chapter V).

⁴⁸³ This is implied by Kinzig, *ibid.*, p. 541-542.

⁴⁸⁴ Wolfram Kinzig, *Novitas Christiana: Die Idee des Fortschritts in der Alten Kirche bis Eusebius*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994, p. 138.

is exactly because of the fact that to Marcion the testimony of the ‘Old Testament’ was anything but outdated or obsolete that we may doubt whether he would actually have used the term *old* for it.

Besides all of this, it also needs to be pointed out that the concept of the ‘Old’ and ‘New Testament’ as referring to two different covenants was in fact formulated *against* the arch-heretic (see Chapter VII). Kinzig acknowledges this fact, but assumes that the Church in fact adapted the terminology previously established by Marcion and then switched its meaning in order to, in a manner of speaking, fight him with his own weapons.⁴⁸⁵ This thought is certainly intriguing, but one might wonder whether Kinzig does not perhaps give more credit to the Fathers than is due. Instead of implying such an act of daring ingenuity it may be more reasonable to assume that men such as Justin Martyr, in reaction to the Marcionite and Gnostic threat, established the idea of a temporal development within the divine revelation without any ‘spadework’ by Marcion himself (see Chapter VII).

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

4.) Conclusion

The fact that the larger part of this chapter has been dedicated to Marcion's New Testament is most of all due to the emphasis of previous scholarship. As important as this analysis was, it should not distract us from the principal result of this chapter, which I would also consider the principal result of this entire study: *Marcion did not understand the Old Testament in the light of the New, he interpreted the New Testament in the light of the Old.* That this crucial concept has never been properly acknowledged by previous scholars is once again due to the overwhelming influence of Harnack, whose conviction that Marcion simply rejected the Old Testament's testimony has prevailed until the present day. However, in this chapter we have found that if we really want to understand the heresiarch's way of thinking, we have to start with the Old Testament and its God, the *first* God of Marcion's system (see Chapter III).

V. Marcion's Works

*The books that the world calls immoral
are the books that show the world its own shame.*

Oscar Wilde

When speaking of Marcion's works, I would like to distinguish his canon of scripture, which consists only of the use or, respectively, the revision of other texts (see Chapter IV), from those works that he composed himself. This chapter is dedicated to the latter. Unfortunately, Marcion shares the fate of most heretics of Early Christianity in so far as none of his writings survive. To make things worse, in Marcion's case we do not even have one authentic line from his works, which makes a reconstruction completely impossible and even a mere portrait of their content, which is the aim of this chapter, most difficult.

1.) The Antitheses

Even Harnack, who is usually convinced that he is able to reconstruct just about everything concerning Marcion's life and thought, has to admit: "Eine Rekonstruktion der Antithesen ist unmöglich, weil ja nicht einmal die Disposition des Werkes deutlich ist."⁴⁸⁶ The mystery of Marcion's *Antitheses* is so complex that it seems best to first consider all the different possibilities of what the work could have contained before coming to a definite conclusion.

The *Antitheses* could have been⁴⁸⁷

- a) a collection of antitheses in the literal meaning of the word, that is, contradictory passages from the Old and the New Testament, juxtaposed in order to demonstrate their discrepancy;
- b) an extensive commentary on Marcion's canonical books;
- c) a compilation of Marcionite dogmatics;
- d) a mixture of the above.

⁴⁸⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 84. However, Harnack would not be Harnack, if he had not at least attempted a reconstruction, cf. *ibid.*, p. 256*-313*.

⁴⁸⁷ Harnack believed that the *Antitheses* contained all these features, cf. Harnack, *Der erste Reformator*, p. 174-177. Subsequent scholarship has often questioned this list, but never amended it.

a) A collection of antitheses in the literal meaning of the word

Nam hae sunt Antitheses Marcionis, id est contrariae oppositiones, quae conantur discordiam evangelii cum lege committere, ut ex diversitate sententiarum utriusque instrumenti diversitatem quoque argumententur deorum. (Adv. Marc. I.19,4)

For these are the Antitheses of Marcion, that is, confronting oppositions, which attempt to establish the discord between the Gospel and the Law, in order to demonstrate from the contrast of statements from both documents a contrast of Gods also.

This phrase forms Tertullian's first reference to the work of Marcion, and it is one of the most valuable too, as it not only clearly provides the purpose of the *Antitheses* but also, at least to a certain extent, their style: they are designed to prove that there are two different Gods, one of the Law/Old Testament and one of the Gospel/New Testament, and they do so by opposing contradictory statements from both texts⁴⁸⁸. In other words, the work actually contained antitheses in the classical meaning of the word. We learn even more about the structure of these antitheses when Tertullian sets up several antitheses of his own in opposition to Marcion, 'counter-antitheses' (*antitheses aemulas*)⁴⁸⁹ as he calls them. These counter-antitheses are constructed in the style of "our God did this, *and so did yours*"⁴⁹⁰. While Marcion certainly did not think in categories such as 'my God' and 'your God', Tertullian's polemics indicate that Marcion's antitheses probably sounded something like 'the one God did this, *but the other God did that*'.

The very same kind of opposing statements can also be found in the *Adamantius Dialogue*. Tsutsui, following Harnack, has listed seventeen 'antitheses' for it, which he believes serve as structural elements within the Dialogue, as they usually mark the

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. the similar statement in Adv. Marc. IV.1,1.

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. Adv. Marc. II.28,1.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Adv. Marc. II.28.

beginning of a new discussion unit.⁴⁹¹ That these ‘antitheses’ indeed structure the Dialogue in a certain way is beyond doubt, however, given that we are dealing with a text written about 200 years after Marcion’s death, in a time when the Marcionite movement has already significantly alienated itself from its founder’s teachings (see Chapter III), we must wonder if we actually have original references to Marcion’s work in front of us here⁴⁹². This is in all probability to be affirmed for those statements mentioned in the Dialogue which can already be found in Tertullian, such as the antithesis between the Creator ordering the Hebrews to be well equipped when leaving Egypt and Christ demanding that his disciples take nothing for their journey, no shoes, no staff, no bag, no money, no extra tunic⁴⁹³; between the Creator’s Law which says to love your neighbour (and to hate your enemy)⁴⁹⁴ and Christ’s command to love your enemy also⁴⁹⁵; between the Creator demanding an eye for an eye and Christ’s command to turn the other cheek⁴⁹⁶; between the Creator sending bears to devour children and Christ’s statement “Let the children come to me”⁴⁹⁷. In these passages we find not only the exact same content as in Tertullian, but also the very same structure, an Old Testament statement in contrast to one from the Gospel. Some of Tsutsui’s ‘antitheses’, however, are more problematic when compared to Tertullian’s information. The latter leaves no doubt that Marcion’s antitheses are only derived from the Gospel, not from the *Apostolikon*. This becomes obvious from the fact that whenever Tertullian mentions the *Antitheses*, it is always in connection with the Gospel (see below), never with the works of Paul. As a matter of fact, the term ‘antithesis’ does not occur once in the entire fifth

⁴⁹¹ Cf. Tsutsui, *Auseinandersetzung*, p. 148-149.

⁴⁹² Cf. my forthcoming review of Tsutsui’s book in the *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*.

⁴⁹³ Cf. Adam. Dial. 1,10; Adv. Marc. IV.24,1-2.

⁴⁹⁴ This second part is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament. It does, however, feature in Mt. 5:43-44 (“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you), but it would be strange if a passage from the Gospel of Matthew would occur in Marcion’s work. The Manichean Adimantus opposes Christ’s command to love one’s enemies to Ex 23:22-24 where God declares “I will be an enemy to your enemies” (Contra Adimantum 17,1), which might also account for Megethius’ statement. Be that as it may, since Tertullian does not mention this second part, it is quite possible that it was only added in a later state of the Marcionite movement.

⁴⁹⁵ Adam. Dial. 1,12; Adv. Marc. I.23,4-6.

⁴⁹⁶ Adam. Dial. 1,15; Adv. Marc. IV.16,2.

⁴⁹⁷ Adam. Dial. 1,16; Adv. Marc. IV.23,4.

book of *Adversus Marcionem*, which is concerned with the *Apostolikon*. That is why those ‘antitheses’ in the Dialogue which contain a Pauline quote⁴⁹⁸ are in all probability not taken from Marcion’s original work. Furthermore, Tertullian indicates that Marcion’s antitheses always consisted of *exempla*⁴⁹⁹ from the two Testaments, that is, words or actions by Christ which were contrasted to words or actions by the Creator, something which is true for all those antitheses which are attested in both Tertullian and the Dialogue (see above). Although there is no need to assume that those examples always had to be quoted literally from the texts, it must be doubted whether a general fact would have simply been opposed to an Old Testament passage⁵⁰⁰ by Marcion or whether his work contained antitheses with only a Gospel passage⁵⁰¹ or without any scriptural reference at all⁵⁰². Many of the thoughts expressed in these ‘antitheses’ certainly go back to Marcion, but it seems that Megethius is no longer simply relying on his master’s work here. Be that as it may, we can still observe the same style of ‘the Old Testament God said/did this, *but Christ said/did that*’ in his argument, which is in complete accord with Tertullian’s description of Marcion’s method in his *Antitheses*, and therefore serves as confirmation of our findings so far.

Finally, there is Theodoret of Cyrus, who provides two antitheses in connection with Marcion⁵⁰³: the first is the contrast between the Law’s demand “an eye for an eye” and Christ’s command to turn the other cheek to anyone who hits the right cheek, the second is the opposition between the Law’s demand to love one’s friends and to hate one’s enemies compared to Christ’s command to love one’s enemies also. The fact that Theodoret’s *Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium* forms a very late source for the

⁴⁹⁸ Adam. Dial. 1,19; 1,13 (the passage “do not let the sun go down on your anger” is introduced as a saying of the Lord, but is actually taken from Eph. 4:26. Although it is not clear who is responsible for this mistake (cf. Tsutsui, *Auseinandersetzung*, p. 167), there is no reason to assume that it goes back to Marcion, so that it must still seem unlikely that this particular antithesis was part of the original work.

⁴⁹⁹ Adv. Marc. II.29,1.

⁵⁰⁰ Adam. Dial. 1,21; 1,24; 1,25.

⁵⁰¹ Adam. Dial. 1,26; 1,27.

⁵⁰² Adam. Dial. 2,4.

⁵⁰³ Haer. fab. com. I.24. Technically, Theodoret attributes these antitheses to Marcion’s teacher Cerdo, however, there can be no doubt that we are dealing with a re-projection of Marcion’s theology onto Cerdo here, cf. Chapter II.

analysis of Marcionism (ca. 452/453)⁵⁰⁴ makes it all the more striking that the two antitheses which the bishop of Cyrus mentions are also to be found in similar form⁵⁰⁵ in the *Adamantius-Dialogue* and in Tertullian (see above). We can also see once more that the original Marcionite form of these antitheses probably consisted of rather precise statements from both the Old Testament and the Gospel.

Beside these three major testimonies of actual Marcionite antitheses, we also find several allusions to this concept in the other Fathers. Irenaeus tell us that the Marcionites oppose (ἀντιτιθέντας) the things Christ did for the salvation of those who received him to all the evil which was inflicted by the Old Testament God on those who disobeyed him⁵⁰⁶, and when Hippolytus states that the Marcionites bring forward words of contrast (ἀντιπαράθεσις) between the good God and the evil God⁵⁰⁷, this again seems to reveal the pattern of Marcion's work.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. István Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 199.

⁵⁰⁵ As in the *Dialogue*, in Theodoret we also find the 'hate your enemy' element as part of the second antithesis. More interestingly, we also hear the Matthean version of the first antithesis, that is, the specific mention of the *right* cheek (Mt. 5:39), which is absent from Luke. One might simply assume that Theodoret is quoting the passage from memory rather than from Marcion's own work, which would account for the Matthean version. However, taking into account that the 'hate your enemy' part almost appears in Matthew (see above) as does the saying 'whoever calls his brother a fool is threatened by hell' (Mt. 5:22), which is also mentioned by Theodoret in connection with Marcion/Cerdo, it almost seems as if in the later centuries the Matthean Gospel, and the sermon on the mount in particular, featured in the Marcionite *Antitheses*. This impression is further confirmed by the fact that the very same saying about calling one's brother a fool is also reported by Eznik of Kolb in connection with the Marcionite *Antitheses* (De Deo 405).

⁵⁰⁶ Adv. haer. IV.28,1, cf. Chapter I.

⁵⁰⁷ Ref. VII.30,1; cf. also VII.37,1.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. Tsutsui, *Auseinandersetzung*, p. 149-150. Tsutsui further mentions a passage from Clement's *Stromata* (III.21,2), in which the Alexandrian speaks of certain ἐναντιότητες in connection with the Marcionites, which Tsutsui believes to be another hint at Marcion's work, cf. May, "Platon und die Auseinandersetzungen mit den Häresien bei Klemens von Alexandrien", in: Horst-Dieter Blume/Friedhelm Mann (ed.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie*, JAC 10, Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983, p. 127; cf. also Méhat, *Stromates*, p. 160 n. 45, who offers a different explanation. Although I agree with May and Tsutsui that we are probably dealing with an allusion to the *Antitheses*, it does unfortunately not tell us anything about the content of the work. The same goes for the *Carmen*, in which Pollmann believes to have found a reference to the *Antitheses*. However, even if the term *aemulanta* (IV.10) forms an allusion to this work (Pollmann, *Carmen*, p. 175), it would still be of little use as it does not provide any additional information. That the passages I.212-216 and II.176-179 are constructed in an antithetical style is technically correct (ibid., p. 155), but the analogy to Marcion's work is still very vague, since these passages are not concerned with the unity of the two Testaments or of the two Gods, as were Tertullian's counter-antitheses (see above). Finally, there is the

All of this taken together makes it most likely that *Antitheses* was not just a title for Marcion's work, but that it got this name from its content, that is, from actual antitheses, which were meant to establish an opposition between the Old Testament and the Gospel, and which probably went something like: "The Creator did/said this, but Christ did/said that". As a model case we may present the only antithesis which is attested in almost exactly the same form by three different sources⁵⁰⁹ (see above), and which in an exemplary manner describes Marcion's idea of contrast between the cruelty of the Creator and the love of Christ:

It says in the Law

'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth'

But the Lord says in his Gospel

*'If someone strikes you on one
cheek, turn to him the other also'*

b) An extensive commentary on Marcion's canonical books

At the beginning of his fourth book against Marcion, Tertullian explains his programme for this book: he is going to challenge Marcion's doctrine by means of the heretic's own Gospel. But, he continues, he is also going to consider the work Marcion has composed in order to establish credence for this Gospel (*ut fidem instrueret*), a work the heretic has added to it as some sort of dowry (*dos quaedam*) in order to protect it (*patrocinaretur*), the *Antitheses*. These remarks clearly show that the *Antitheses* are inextricably linked to

allusion to the *Antitheses* in the first Letter to Timothy (6:20), which, although certainly of interest for the dating of the Pastoral Letters, is not of any help to our aim, either.

⁵⁰⁹ The list of multiply attested antitheses offered by Rottenwöhler (*Unde malum*, p. 71-73) is slightly misleading, since for his classification of multiple attestation he not only considered anti-Marcionite sources, but also sources such as the *Acta Archelai* (which are directed against the Manicheans) as well as anti-Catharist sources. While Rottenwöhler clearly distinguishes the anti-Catharist sources from the anti-Marcionite ones, he mistakenly considers the *Acta Archelai* (that is, the antitheses to be found in them) as directed against the Marcionites.

the Gospel of Marcion. In fact, for the Marcionites, the Gospel was to be believed according to the *Antitheses* (*evangelio secundum Antitheses credendo*); they thus seemed to have been, in a manner of speaking, an instruction manual for reading it.

Although all these remarks make it look like the *Antitheses* indeed served as a commentary on Marcion's Gospel⁵¹⁰, we cannot ignore the following facts.

- At no point does Tertullian indicate that he is actually quoting an exegetical comment from the *Antitheses*.
- In many passages it is not entirely clear whether Tertullian is dealing with an actual or a fictional Marcionite objection.
- In those passages where he seems to be referring to an actual objection, it can not be determined where he got this information from. It could be from the *Antitheses*, from Marcion's letter (see below), from personal contact with Marcionites⁵¹¹, from other works of Marcion we do not know of, from earlier anti-Marcionite works we do not have anymore and so on.
- In several passages Tertullian provides two different Marcionite interpretations⁵¹², so at least one of them he must have acquired from a source other than the *Antitheses*.

⁵¹⁰ The term *commentari* (Adv. Marc. IV.1,1) cannot be understood in the meaning of "commenting" as Braun suggests (*Contre Marcion IV*, p. 57 n. 2). The phrasing goes *dotem quandam commentatus est*, which means that *dotem quandam* is the object to *commentatus est*, which again can thus only be translated as "contrive" or "compose" (cf. Ernest Evans (ed.), *Tertullian. Adversus Marcionem: Books IV-V*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 257).

⁵¹¹ A good example for such an objection can be found in Adv. Marc. III.13,3. Concerning the military depiction of the infant in Isa. 8:4, Tertullian explained: "Now, if nature nowhere permits being a soldier before beginning to live, or taking up the strength of Damascus before knowing the words 'father' and 'mother', it follows that this is to be considered a figurative statement" (cf. Chapter IV). He then goes on: "But, you say, nature does not permit a virgin to give birth, either, and yet they believe the prophet." Tertullian is even addressing Marcion personally here, and still it seems highly unlikely that Marcion would have written down an argument such as this in his work, since it only works as a counter-argument. It is thus quite plausible that Tertullian is referring here to a discussion he had with Marcion's followers. Another example for an argument apparently deriving from an actual discussion is Adv. Marc. I.16,4-17,1.

⁵¹² Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 174.

Bearing these things in mind, Tertullian's statements about the relation between Marcion's Gospel and the *Antitheses* could also be understood differently. The crucial thing to Marcion was that the Gospel was to be considered as being opposed to the Old Testament, and this is probably what Tertullian had in mind when he stated that the Gospel is to be believed according to the *Antitheses* or that they were meant to protect the Gospel and to establish credence for it. This aim, however, could have been accomplished by other means than a commentary. In fact, the above mentioned actual antitheses alone would have been sufficient to that end. For once one had accepted the opposition established between the Old Testament and the Gospel, it was only a small step to interpret the latter in Marcionite terms.

All things considered, we must say that there is not enough evidence to support the idea that the *Antitheses* served as an exegetical commentary to Marcion's Gospel, and it is even more unlikely that they provided a commentary on the *Apostolikon*⁵¹³ (see above).

c) A compilation of Marcionite dogmatics

“Was also an Sätzen M.s zuverlässig überliefert ist oder was das Gepräge seiner eigenen Gedanken trägt, muß aus ihnen [the Antitheses] stammen.”⁵¹⁴ Starting from this crucial conviction of Harnack, it is only logical to assume that the *Antitheses* also formed a summary of Marcionite dogmatics. However, as already stated above, there is absolutely no basis for the assumption that the *Antitheses* were the only source of Marcion's teachings for Tertullian⁵¹⁵. The only passage which actually seems to suggest that the

⁵¹³ As far as I can see, all scholars who believed that the *Antitheses* served as a commentary to Marcion's Gospel have assumed that they contained a commentary on the *Apostolikon* also.

⁵¹⁴ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 74-75.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. May, *Genesisauslegung*, p. 194 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 47): “Gegen Harnack ist grundsätzlich einzuwenden: Tertullians Informationen über Markion sind sicher auch aus anderen Quellen geflossen als aus den Antithesen. Wir müssen an persönliche Kontakte mit Markioniten in Karthago denken. Sehr wahrscheinlich hat Tertullian auch ältere christliche Schriftsätze gegen Markion benutzt. Vor allem das verlorene Werk des Theophilus von Antiochien gegen Markion kommt hier in Frage. Schließlich ist auch

Antitheses contained an evaluation of the falsification of the Gospel in Adv. Marc. IV.4,4, where Tertullian states that Marcion argues *per Antitheses* that the Gospel of Luke has been interpolated by the protectors of Judaism. Based on this passage, Harnack comments “daß M. in diesem Werk Interpolationen des Ev. nachgewiesen hat”⁵¹⁶. However, Tertullian does not state that Marcion proved these interpolations *in* this work but *by* this work. Therefore, just as the above mentioned statements concerning the relation between the *Antitheses* and the Gospel do not necessarily imply that they served as a commentary to it, so this remark by Tertullian does not mean that the *Antitheses* actually contained a section elaborating the falsification of the Gospel. Once again, the antitheses which the work in all probability contained could be used for arguing this case, for if the Gospel is antithetical to the Old Testament, then it is obvious that the orthodox version of Luke’s Gospel is interpolated.

In conclusion we can say that the only thing that Marcion’s *Antitheses* almost certainly contained was the antitheses in the literal sense, mentioned under a) above.⁵¹⁷ The fact that the work would thus have been a rather short one would also fit very well with another of Tertullian’s comments. He informs us about the highly important status the *Antitheses* had within the Marcionite church, calling them its “supreme book”⁵¹⁸, by which Marcion’s disciples are initiated and sworn into the heresy.⁵¹⁹ The *Antitheses* thus seem to have served as some form of catechism, maybe even used in the baptismal ritual

die Bekanntschaft mit weiteren Schriften Markions oder seiner Schüler, von denen wir nichts wissen, in Betracht zu ziehen.”

⁵¹⁶ Harnack, *Der moderne Gläubige*, p. 175.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. May, *Genesisauslegung*, p. 194 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 47-48): “Lösen wir uns von Harnacks Vorstellungen. Die Antithesen brauchen aus nichts anderem bestanden zu haben als einer Reihe von Texten aus dem Alten Testament, denen kontrastierende Abschnitte aus der Bibel Markions gegenübergestellt waren.”

⁵¹⁸ The wording *quod in summo instrumento habent* (Adv. Marc. I.19,4) is translated by Evans as “which stands at the head of their document” (Evans (ed.), *Tertullian. Adversus Marcionem: Books I-III*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 49). A similar interpretation is also proposed by Enrico Norelli (“Marcion, Tertullien et le lépreux”, in: Denis Knoepfler (ed.), *Nomen Latinum: Mélanges de langue, de littérature et de civilisations latines offerts au professeur André Schneider*, Neuchâtel: Faculté de Lettres, 1997, p. 171 n. 2). I follow the translation by Braun (*Contre Marcion I*, p. 305-307), which is still the most convincing to me.

⁵¹⁹ Adv. Marc. I.19,4.

of Marcion's church⁵²⁰, which would suggest that we are dealing with a concise work here. While one may have the impression that such a work of simply opposing statements from two documents over and over again is not exactly pleasing to the audience and thus slightly unusual, the *Disputationes* written by the Manichean Adimantus⁵²¹, for instance, seem to be a work constructed in precisely the same way.

That the *Antitheses* were prefixed to Marcion's Gospel, that is, bound together with it, forming one codex of Scripture, as Evans' translation suggests⁵²² is rather unlikely. The term *praestruendo*⁵²³ is probably rather to be interpreted as another way of saying that Marcion composed the *Antitheses* "in advance" in order to protect his Gospel (see above).

As to the question when and where Marcion composed his *Antitheses*, only speculations are possible. The *Antitheses* probably accompanied Marcion's movement from its early beginning, even before the 'revised' Gospel and *Corpus Paulinum* (see Chapter IV). A good estimate would thus be that Marcion wrote his *Antitheses* shortly after the foundation of his church, about 145-150, most probably in Rome.

⁵²⁰ This is at least one possible understanding of *initiantur* (ibid.), cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 76.

⁵²¹ The work is lost, but extensively discussed by Augustine in his *Contra Adimantum* (see above).

⁵²² Evans (ed.), *Adversus Marcionem: IV-V*, p. 275).

⁵²³ Adv. Marc. IV.6.1.

2.) The Letter

Beside the *Antitheses*, the only other work by Marcion we know of is a certain letter which Tertullian mentions several times.⁵²⁴ The content of this letter has been subject to many speculations. The only explicit information Tertullian provides is that in the letter Marcion confessed his former orthodox faith (see Chapter II). This information made Harnack conclude that it contained an elaborate account of the arch-heretic as to why he broke with the orthodox church⁵²⁵. Regul has correctly pointed out that this could hardly have been the only content of the letter⁵²⁶, without further elaborating its actual content though. It was Jean-Pierre Mahé⁵²⁷ who dedicated a more extensive analysis to Marcion's letter. First of all he tried to rid the discussion about the letter of one crucial false premise: the idea that the letter was addressed to the Roman ecclesia⁵²⁸, an opinion held by both Harnack and Regul. Although I agree with Mahé in his critique of this theory, his reasons seem questionable to me. That Marcion was indeed once a member of the orthodox church, which Mahé denies and uses as a reason for his position⁵²⁹, has already been argued in Chapter II. Mahé's second argument is that one cannot see what possible motive Marcion could have had to address his former brothers just in order to explain to them why he does not share their beliefs anymore⁵³⁰. This certainly sounds conclusive, however, Mahé himself is about to (correctly) demonstrate that the letter in fact formed an elucidation of Marcion's doctrine (see below), so this argument becomes invalid. But there is one passage in Tertullian's work which might refer to the actual

⁵²⁴ Adv. Marc. I.1,6; IV.4,3; Carn. II.4. There is no need to assume, as does Adolf Hilgenfeld (*Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums*, Leipzig: Fues, 1884, p. 525), that Tertullian is referring to several different letters in his work. The wording *in quadam epistula* (Carn. II.4) is hardly an indication for this, and the fact that every time Tertullian mentions a letter in context with Marcion he speaks of its content as revealing the arch-heretic's former belonging to the orthodox church strongly suggests that he is referring to one and the same letter.

⁵²⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 22*.

⁵²⁶ Regul, *Evangelienprologe*, p. 183. In all fairness it should be remarked that Harnack never explicitly claimed that the letter contained *only* this statement.

⁵²⁷ Jean-Pierre Mahé, "Tertullien et l'épistula Marcionis", *RSR* 45 (1971), p. 359.

⁵²⁸ Mahé, *Epistula*, p. 359.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

addressee of Marcion's letter. Regarding the story of the healing of the leper in Lk 5:12-14 (cf. Chapter III), Tertullian reports that Marcion treated this matter with special attention in the presence of (*apud*) one of his 'companions in misery and hatred'⁵³¹ – a truly insightful form of self-designation. This statement is usually seen as referring to the *Antitheses*, and thus as an indication that they were dedicated to a certain member of Marcion's community.⁵³² However, Adolf Hilgenfeld has suggested that Tertullian retrieved Marcion's extensive treatment of the above mentioned Gospel passage from his letter rather than from the *Antitheses*.⁵³³ Although it must remain speculation where the Carthaginian found these words, such an address is certainly more likely to be expected in a letter than in a dogmatic work, especially one that is, as we have seen, constructed in a rather formal, monotonous way.

Mahé has suggested that the letter was used by the Marcionites "pour vulgariser leur doctrine"⁵³⁴ and that it formed "un premier exposé sommaire de la doctrine"⁵³⁵. This idea seems to fit perfectly with our findings so far. Having established that the *Antitheses* probably did not contain an elaboration of Marcionite dogmatics, it seems indeed reasonable to assume that some other form of document existed to that end. Moreover, that the *Antitheses* probably served as part of the initiation into the community (see above) might suggest that there was some other means used for a first approach of potential converts⁵³⁶. This again would explain why the letter contained an autobiographic narrative about Marcion's own conversion from orthodoxy, as the main target group for Marcionite mission was in fact orthodox Christians (see Chapter VI).

⁵³¹ Adv. Marc. IV.9,3: συνταλαίπωρον, commiseronem, et συμμισούμενον, coodibilem.

⁵³² Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 77.

⁵³³ Hilgenfeld, *Ketzergeschichte*, p. 525.

⁵³⁴ Mahé, *Epistula*, p. 359.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., p. 369. The fact that the Marcionites allegedly refused to acknowledge this letter (Adv. Marc. IV.4,3) cannot be used as an argument against this theory. Tertullian is using a 'what if' construction here, so he is only dealing with a fictional Marcionite objection.

⁵³⁶ Cf. ibid. Mahé furthermore correctly points out the parallels to Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*, which also served as a first introduction to Gnostic teaching. Just as with Ptolemy's letter, we have to think of Marcion's as a form of διαίρετική εισαγωγή, too (cf. Chapter I).

As to the actual content of the letter, Mahé suggested that the very beginning of Tertullian's work against Marcion was inspired by it⁵³⁷. It is indeed striking that already in the first chapter of his first book against Marcion Tertullian mentions the heretic's letter⁵³⁸ (long before he mentions the *Antitheses*), and it therefore does not seem too far off to assume that the statements about Marcion which follow shortly afterwards⁵³⁹ are in fact retrieved from it. These statements concern above all the famous parable of the good and the bad tree as well as the quote from Isaiah in which the Creator declares: 'It is I who create evil' (see Chapter III). There are several reasons which suggest that Tertullian retrieved these features from Marcion's letter. First of all, there is no anti-Marcionite source known to us prior to Tertullian that mentions these features, so the Carthaginian probably got the information from a heretical source.⁵⁴⁰ Moreover, the frequent attestation of the parable of the two trees in anti-Marcionite texts⁵⁴¹ makes it likely that this element goes back to a written source. Additionally, the wording of Tertullian's passage indicates a source written by Marcion himself, since the Carthaginian appears to be amazingly well informed not only about the concepts of Marcion's doctrine, but also about how he arrived at them. It all started with Marcion's excessive curiosity (*enormitas curiositatis*) for the origin of evil⁵⁴². Marcion then found the inspiration for his delusion (*instinctus praesumptionis*) in the Gospel, namely in the parable of the good and the bad tree. Having found in the Old Testament that the Creator himself declares 'It is I who create evil', the arch-heretic identified this God with the bad tree that brings forth bad fruit. He then concluded that there must be another God corresponding with the good tree, a God that he found revealed in Christ. This section, which Braun entitled "Genèse du dualisme théologique de Marcion"⁵⁴³, attests such a deep insight into Marcion's theological development on the part of Tertullian that one is

⁵³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 361f.

⁵³⁸ Adv. Marc. I.1,6.

⁵³⁹ Cf. Adv. Marc. I.2.

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. Mahé, *Epistula*, p. 362.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. Ref. X.19,3; De princ. II.5,4.

⁵⁴² Tertullian assumes that the question about the origin of evil was one of the main motives for both heretics and philosophers (De praescr. 7,5). This does, however, not mean that he is projecting this idea of his onto Marcion. It is just as possible that he found this motive in Marcion's letter, which then led him to his general suspicion.

⁵⁴³ Braun, *Contre Marcion I*, p. 107.

indeed led to think that he had access to some source written by Marcion himself. There seems to be no reason to assume that Tertullian is making any of these things up. It is certainly not uncommon for anti-heretical writers to speculate about their opponents' motives, but if they actually do make them up, it would usually be corrupt ones⁵⁴⁴. In this way Epiphanius, for example, claims that it was Marcion's failed personal ambitions which made him leave the church.⁵⁴⁵ However, just as with the reports on Marcion's life (see Chapter II) Tertullian – unlike Epiphanius – does not seem to be inventing any of the heretic's motives here. Marcion's conversion is depicted as being due only to theological reasons, and, although Tertullian is naturally stressing that Marcion misunderstood the biblical message at this point, one cannot claim that these reasons could be called absurd.

Now, when we are looking for a source written by Marcion himself to contain these features, the first one that springs to mind might be his *Antitheses*. However, based on what has been said earlier about the character of this book, they do not seem to come into question in this matter⁵⁴⁶, so we probably have to assume Marcion's letter to be the source of these elements. We may thus imagine that Marcion composed his letter as follows⁵⁴⁷:

An address to his companion in misery

A depiction of his conversion experience

The fundamental question it all started with: Unde Malum?

The parable of the two trees combined with the Isaiah quote 'It is I who create evil' as the answer to that question: just as there are two trees, so there are two Gods, the evil Creator who is responsible for the state of the world and the good God revealed in Christ

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit*, p. 3: "Überhaupt ist es Meinung der Rechtgläubigkeit, und so muß es ja sein, wenn der Böse dahinter steckt, daß nur unlautere Beweggründe den Ketzler aus der Kirche treiben."

⁵⁴⁵ Pan. 42.1,8.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. Mahé, *Epistula*, p. 362-367.

⁵⁴⁷ Naturally, this must remain a very vague and certainly incomplete reconstruction of the letter.

A demonstration of Christ being opposed to the Old Testament God by means of the example of Jesus healing the leper

Unlike the *Antitheses*, for the letter we have at least some indications as to the whereabouts of its origin. The simple fact that Marcion addressed his letter to a fellow member of his community shows that this community must already have existed at least to a certain extent at the time the letter was written, which brings us to the time after 144/145. The fact that Marcion speaks of his conversion in the letter confirms this dating. Although there is no need to suppose that Marcion's conversion took place as late as 144/145 (cf. Chapter II), it is certainly reasonable to assume that he would only positively state his conversion after his movement was somehow established. Supposing that the letter served as a means of Marcionite mission, however, we may also assume that it originated at an early phase of the movement. Tertullian's knowledge of the letter (as the only one ever to mention it) suggests that it was written in the Western Church, and thus most likely in Rome. In conclusion, we come to a similar result as for the *Antitheses*, although with a little more certainty: Marcion probably wrote his letter in Rome, somewhere between 145 and 150.

3.) Marcionite Psalms

The so-called Marcionite Psalms are mentioned by Marutha of Maipherkat (early fifth century): “instead of the Psalms they [the Marcionites] have made themselves hymns for their services”⁵⁴⁸. In addition to this we also find a rather obscure passage at the very end of the *Muratorian Fragment* (Rome, late second century): “But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed a new book of psalms for Marcion”⁵⁴⁹. That the Marcionites used hymns in their services can hardly be surprising – especially given their many other parallels to orthodox worship (see Chapter VI) – so there is no need to doubt their existence. However, that Valentinus and others⁵⁵⁰ composed these psalms for Marcion is “auf alle Fälle eine starke Übertreibung”⁵⁵¹. The association with Marcion may simply have served to discredit the other heretics⁵⁵², however, Blackman remarked correctly that “it is possible that if Arsinous and Mitiades and Valentinus had written hymns Marcionites might adopt them when they made their own collection”⁵⁵³. Be that as it may, with the credibility of the *Muratorian* passage being rather questionable, and with Marutha’s statement dating from the early fifth century, we lack any sufficient evidence to identify Marcion as the actual author of any hymns or psalms. Of course, one cannot completely exclude the possibility that the *Antitheses*, being the supreme book of the Marcionites (see above), were used as hymns during their services; however, it is most doubtful that they are referred to in the above-mentioned passages.

⁵⁴⁸ Arthur Vööbus (ed. and tr.), *The Canons Ascribed to Mārūtā of Maipherqat and Related Sources*, CSCO 192, Lovanii: Peeters, 1982, p. 19.

⁵⁴⁹ Metzger, *Canon*, p. 307; cf. *ibid.*, p. 193-194, for the determination of time and place of the fragment.

⁵⁵⁰ The names of Arsinous and Miltiades – apparently heretics – are never mentioned in connection with Marcion or Valentinus apart from this passage.

⁵⁵¹ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 176*.

⁵⁵² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 175*-176*.

⁵⁵³ Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 64.

4.) The so-called ‘Pro-Evangelium’

An anonymous commentary on the Gospel⁵⁵⁴ mentions a certain *Pro-Evangelium* written by Marcion, which begins with the following words: “O Wunder über Wunder, Verzückerung, Macht und Staunen ist das, daß man gar nichts über es sagen, noch über es denken, noch es mit irgend etwas vergleichen kann.”⁵⁵⁵ Great mystery surrounds this work as it is not mentioned by any other author – at least, that is, not under this name. Harnack, for instance, was convinced that this *Pro-Evangelium* referred to Marcion’s *Antitheses*.⁵⁵⁶ However, the enthusiastic opening statement just mentioned does not seem to fit what we have discovered in this chapter concerning the rather monotonous character of the *Antitheses*. The only other work of Marcion known to us is his letter, but that is even less likely to be identified with the *Pro-Evangelium*. Therefore, this *Pro-Evangelium* is either a third work of Marcion we do not know anything about, or, and this is the option I would suggest, the name refers to nothing else but Marcion’s Gospel itself. Everything fits so well. We are dealing with a commentary on the Gospel, so it would make perfect sense for the author to refer to Marcion’s Gospel – as the competing one – at the beginning of his work, rather than to any other work written by the arch-heretic. Moreover, right before the author mentions Marcion’s *Pro-Evangelium*, he declared that all those writings are untrustworthy which are not based on the Law and the Prophets. This critique again applies perfectly to Marcion’s Gospel, since it was free of any positive reference to these texts (see Chapter IV). Finally, the name *Pro-Evangelium* (in the sense of ‘prior to the Gospel’⁵⁵⁷) would be most appropriate for Marcion’s Gospel, as he indeed believed his version to be prior to the one used by the Church (see Chapter IV). That the opening words to the Gospel are never mentioned by

⁵⁵⁴ Joseph Schäfers, *Eine altsyrische antimarkionitische Erklärung von Parabeln des Herrn und zwei weitere andere altsyrische Abhandlungen zu Texten des Evangeliums*, Münster: Aschendorffsche Buchhandlung, 1917, p. 3-115. The attribution of the commentary to Ephraem Syrus is certainly erroneous, cf. Peter Bruns, “Epräim der Syrer”, *LACL* (3rd ed., 2002), p. 222.

⁵⁵⁵ Schäfers, *Erklärung*, p. 4-5. The context suggests that ‘es’ refers to ‘faith’, which is why the correct German pronoun would be ‘ihn’. I do not understand how Schäfers can claim that the context was uncertain.

⁵⁵⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 74 n.3.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Schäfers, *Erklärung*, p. 4.

Tertullian or others may simply be due to the fact that they were added later on by Marcion's followers.

Naturally, even all of this makes the identification of these two works anything but certain; however, unless we are dealing with a completely unknown work of Marcion here, this still seems to be the most plausible explanation.

5.) Conclusion

In this chapter we have found that the importance of Marcion's *Antitheses* is largely overrated as far as their usage for the reconstruction of his doctrine is concerned, since the work did, in all probability, not contain anything but contradicting passages from the Old and the New Testament, and thus did not form the main source for Tertullian's knowledge about Marcionite doctrine. That does, however, not mean that the importance of the *Antitheses* for Marcion's church would be diminished, as they did constitute their supreme book. Still, if we are looking for a compilation of Marcionite dogmatics, we should rather turn to the so far much neglected letter written by the heresiarch himself. This letter probably contained some of the most crucial elements of Marcion's system of thought, including the tree metaphor and (combined with it) the Isaiah quote 'It is I who create evil'.

VI. Marcion's Church

The radical of one century is the conservative of the next.

Mark Twain

“Marcion was the founder not of a school, but of a church.”⁵⁵⁸ Thus reads the first phrase on the first page of Blackman’s monograph on Marcion, and it was with good reason that the British scholar pointed out this important fact right at the beginning. More than any other heretical group of early Christianity Marcion’s movement seems to have resembled the orthodox church as far as liturgy and organisation was concerned, and it thus may be the only heretical group of that time which actually deserves the name of ‘church’. Tertullian reluctantly concedes that Marcion and his “swarm” founded several *ecclesiae*, while of course pointing out that they are posterior and (thus) adulterated, sneeringly concluding: “Just as wasps make combs, so Marcionites make churches.”⁵⁵⁹ Likewise, Cyril of Jerusalem, apparently being concerned that his fellow Christians might enter a Marcionite church by mistake, advises them, when they come into a new town, always to ask for the *catholic* church, as the mere term ‘church’ might also misleadingly refer to an *ecclesia* of the Marcionites.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁹ Adv. Marc. IV.5,3: *Faciunt favos et vespae, faciunt ecclesias et Marcionitae.*

⁵⁶⁰ Cat. XVIII.26. One should not interpret this to mean, as suggested by Volker Lukas (*Rhetorik und literarischer Kampf: Tertullians Streitschrift gegen Marcion als Paradigma der Selbstvergewisserung der Orthodoxie gegenüber der Häresie. Eine philologisch-theologische Analyse*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008, p. 19; with an incorrect reference to Blackman, who does not hold the same opinion), that Cyril was worried his fellow Christians might actually mistake a Marcionite service for an orthodox one. The bishop of Jerusalem is not concerned with a similarity in practice, but simply in name.

1.) The Structure of Marcion's Church

1.1 Sacraments

“But he [Marcion's good God] has certainly not yet rejected the Creator's water in which he washes his own, nor the oil with which he anoints his own, nor the mixture of milk and honey with which he nourishes his own, nor the bread by which he presents his own body; even in his own sacraments he is begging for alms from the Creator.”⁵⁶¹ In this passage Tertullian is pointing out Marcion's inconsistency in his rejection of the creation, but he is also (unintentionally) delivering us a portrayal of the Marcionite sacraments, which seem to have been administered very similarly to the practices of the orthodox church. We find here three classical elements of the baptismal ritual of the Early Church: the immersion in water, the anointing with oil, and the subsequent Eucharist at which the newly baptised received a cup of milk mixed with honey (in addition to the bread and the wine)⁵⁶². According to Augustine⁵⁶³, Marcion baptised his members “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”, thus affirming even the exact same baptismal formula as in the orthodox church. Although Augustine's statement must be taken with a grain of salt due to its late date, there is no strong evidence to assume a different formula in Marcion's church⁵⁶⁴, much less one which would have distinctively differed from the orthodox one, given that Marcionite Baptism was accepted as valid by other churches, as can be seen from certain voices during the third-century Baptismal controversy⁵⁶⁵. We may thus conclude that “the baptismal liturgy of the Marcionites was little different from that known in the catholic churches, and that any variation between the rites of Marcion and, say, Hippolytus is no

⁵⁶¹ Adv. Marc. I.14,3: Sed ille quidem usque nunc nec aquam reprobavit Creatoris, qua suos abluit, nec oleum, quo suos ungit, nec mellis et lactis societatem, qua suos infantat, nec panem, quo ipsum corpus suum repraesentat, etiam in sacramentis propriis egens mendicitatibus Creatoris.

⁵⁶² Cf. Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992, p. 15-16.

⁵⁶³ Bapt. 3,15.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 22.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Cypr. ep. 73,7.

greater than the variety which might be found between the rites of non-schismatic communities”⁵⁶⁶. The same is apparently true for the Marcionite Eucharist. Some scholars have suggested, based on a statement by Epiphanius⁵⁶⁷ and on the silence on the part of Tertullian in his above mentioned description, that Marcion avoided the use of wine in the Eucharist.⁵⁶⁸ However, Alistair Stewart-Sykes has correctly pointed out that Epiphanius’ remark that Marcion used water in the Eucharist does not necessarily exclude the use of wine, “for the use of water, instead or as well as wine, is widespread in early Christian sacral meals”⁵⁶⁹. While Tertullian’s silence in the above mentioned passage might be considered an *argumentum ex silentio*, there is another passage in his work which seems to imply Marcionite use of wine⁵⁷⁰, and there is also the testimony of Ephraim Syrus and Eznik of Kolb, who both clearly indicate that Marcion used wine in the Eucharist.⁵⁷¹

All in all we may conclude that there is no sufficient evidence that the administration of the sacraments of both Baptism and Eucharist in Marcion’s church was performed in any way which an orthodox Christian would have considered as heretical *per se*.

1.2 Offices

Before we consider the order of office of Marcion’s church, we have to be aware of the difficulty concerning constitutional issues in the Early Church in general. First of all there is the dictum by Leopold Zscharnack, which is still true more than a hundred years after its publication: “Wer über praktische Fragen der Kirchenverfassung schreibt, der sollte stets im Auge behalten, was Firmilian in einem Briefe an Cyprian von Carthago

⁵⁶⁶ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, “Bread and Fish, Water and Wine: The Marcionite Menu and the Maintenance of Purity”, in: May (ed.), *Marcion*, p. 208.

⁵⁶⁷ Pan. 42.3,3.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. for example Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, p. 164-167.

⁵⁶⁹ Sykes, *Bread*, p. 213.

⁵⁷⁰ Adv. Marc. IV.40,5-6.

⁵⁷¹ Hymn. c. haer. XLVII.3 + 8; De Deo 409. Cf. Sykes, *Bread*, p. 212.

sagt, dass nämlich in Rom nicht alles galt, was in Jerusalem Regel war, wie denn auch in den meisten anderen Provinzen vieles je nach der Verschiedenheit der Gegenden und Menschen voneinander abwich [...] Man muß sich vor der Versuchung hüten, aus der besonderen Sitte einer Einzelgemeinde eine allgemeine kirchliche Einrichtung zu machen.”⁵⁷² To make things even more complicated, not only does a testimony about church politics from the church of Carthage tell us nothing about church politics in Alexandria for instance, a single testimony from Carthage does not tell us anything about the general situation in the church of Carthage, either. In other words, from the fact that Tertullian thinks that women should not be allowed in church offices⁵⁷³, we should not conclude that women actually were prohibited from offices in the church of Carthage. On the contrary, does the fact that Tertullian expresses his point of view so openly (and often aggressively) not rather suggest that not everybody in his community was of the same mind? While we are thus not able to make any safe general statement about either the order of offices within the Church or within Marcion’s community, we may still ask: can we detect (that is, prove) any distinctive general difference between the organisation of offices within these two groups?

The first testimonies for Marcionite offices appear rather late. It is one of the ironies of history that one of the oldest church inscriptions we possess is from a Marcionite church⁵⁷⁴. It dates from 318/319 and names a Marcionite presbyter called “Paulos” as being in charge of the building. Harnack drew a variety of interesting conclusions from the inscription⁵⁷⁵; however, the only thing important to us in this context is that the Marcionite church knew the office of presbyters. In the *Martyrium Pionii* we also find a Marcionite presbyter named Metrodorus mentioned⁵⁷⁶, Eusebius refers to a Marcionite

⁵⁷² Leopold Zscharnack, *Der Dienst der Frau in den ersten Jahrhunderten der christlichen Kirche*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902, p. 1 (referring to Cypr. ep. 75).

⁵⁷³ Cf. the collection of passages in Kevin Madigan/Carolyn Osiek (ed.), *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, p. 174-181.

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. W. H. Waddington, *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*, Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot Frère, 1870, p. 583-584 (nr. 2558). It is also the only Marcionite church inscription ever to be discovered.

⁵⁷⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, 341*-344*.

⁵⁷⁶ Mart. Pion. 21.

bishop called Asclepius⁵⁷⁷, and the *Adamantius Dialogue* even refers to a succession of bishops within the Marcionite church, naturally beginning with Marcion himself⁵⁷⁸. Harnack affirms that these testimonies are as early as one could possibly expect, thus concluding that Marcion himself already introduced the offices of bishops, presbyters and deacons.⁵⁷⁹ While calling fourth-century testimonies for second-century phenomena as early as possible is certainly bold, we can still agree with Harnack that Marcion in all probability introduced these offices in his church himself, or, to be more precise, that he retained these offices when he broke with the Church. For it is far more likely that these offices were retained from the beginning than that the Marcionite church adopted any kind of ecclesial practice during the period of schism in which the churches openly fought each other.

Something similar may in fact be true for the role women played in Marcion's community. The fact that Marcion gave women permission to hold office in his church⁵⁸⁰ is considered by Blackman to be a real innovation⁵⁸¹, but based on what we have observed so far about the similarities between the Church and Marcion's community, would it not be more reasonable to assume that Marcion was in this matter rather copying the Church, too? Harnack already maintained that it was perfectly common for women to hold offices in the Church up until the second century, and that the Church in fact only banned women from office in a deliberate opposition to the Marcionites, Gnostics and Montanists.⁵⁸² While this particular reason for the abolition of female office holders may certainly be questioned, recent research has further strengthened the position that "with the increasing development of the monarchical episcopate and a Christian priesthood since the third century, there has been a strong resistance to women, particularly in priestly functions", but that "the frequently

⁵⁷⁷ De mart. 10,3.

⁵⁷⁸ Adam. Dial. 1,8.

⁵⁷⁹ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 146.

⁵⁸⁰ De paescr. 41,5; Pan 42,4,5.

⁵⁸¹ Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 5.

⁵⁸² Harnack, *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4th ed., Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924, p. 602-603.

expressed opinion that there have never been women priests and bishops is not historically tenable”⁵⁸³. We should, however, not imagine the Church in the first two centuries to be some sort of utopian society. Female office holders were in all probability the exception rather than the rule, both within the orthodox communities and in Marcion’s church. Still, it seems likely that concerning the question of female office holders Marcion was, just as with the other issues regarding church constitution, rather conservative than innovative.

1.3. Conclusion

These results now lead us to the really intriguing question: how come Marcion’s church, which differed from its orthodox counterpart in almost every dogmatic way possible, resembled it so much structurally? As we have established in Chapter II, the complete break between Marcion and the Church was an unusual incident in the ecclesial world of the second century. The reason Marcion did not fit within the usual tolerance scheme of the Church towards dissenters was that he did not simply differ from the orthodox group in some way, but that he attacked what he believed to be a perverted church and thus started an *anti-movement*. Given this origin of the Marcionite movement it must surprise all the more that its founder would not attempt to distinguish its outer appearance more from the opponent. After all, Marcion believed that the entire teaching of the Church had been falsified due to a huge conspiracy (see Chapter IV), but apparently he did not feel that something similar was true concerning the outward structure of the Church. While it may be argued that the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist go back to the Gospel which Marcion was using also and thus simply derive from his Biblicist approach, this is certainly not true for the order of offices Marcion established in his church, as it does not immediately derive from the Pauline letters⁵⁸⁴ or the Gospel. But even concerning the

⁵⁸³ Ute E. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996, p. 219.

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Tübingen Mohr, 1953, p. 82-83: “Wir treten mit der Ältestenordnung somit in den Umkreis eines

administration of the sacraments Marcion was not completely true to his biblical sources. The use of milk and honey as well as the anointing with oil do not go back to the texts Marcion used. On the contrary, they clearly bear indications of the Old Testament. The giving of milk and honey is obviously related to God's promise of a land flowing with milk and honey⁵⁸⁵, and the act of anointing originated in Jewish practices⁵⁸⁶, too. Moreover, it must surprise that Marcion would use a baptismal formula which derives from a Gospel that he rejected, that is, the Gospel of Matthew.

It goes without saying that Marcion would never have consciously adapted any Old Testament practices into his church. Therefore, the best explanation for this phenomenon seems to be that by the time Marcion broke with orthodoxy the sacraments had already been established within the Church for more than one generation, so that their origin had apparently already become hazy. Thus, once again we find our theory confirmed that Marcion had been a member of the orthodox church for a considerable period of time before he broke with it. It was apparently this deep rootedness in the Church's traditions that made him take over the above mentioned elements rather unreflectively. As for the offices, they still seem to be a rather recent development in Marcion's time, but perhaps he simply saw no need to change anything here, as the particular offices originated less from theological reflection than from actual organisational needs of the communities. It is probably due to Marcion's "intensely practical nature"⁵⁸⁷ that he was wise enough not to change a system which was working just for the sake of change.

grundsätzlich andersartigen kirchlichen Denkens ein, das sich dem paulinischen Bilde der Gemeinde nicht ohne weiteres einfügen und daraus ableiten läßt."

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. for example Trad. ap. 21.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. for example Tertullian, De bapt. 7.

⁵⁸⁷ Thomas Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910, p. 220.

2.) Marcion's Position within his Church

“Marcion was my bishop.”⁵⁸⁸ These are the proud words of the Marcionite Megethius in the *Adamantius Dialogue*, replying to the provocative question whether he would renounce Marcion. There seems to be no particular reason to doubt that Marcion held the title of bishop in his lifetime, but even though we cannot be entirely certain that he did, the enormous reverence that he enjoyed in his church is beyond doubt. This reverence can already be seen by the simple fact that they named themselves after their founder⁵⁸⁹, or by the fact that they held the day he came to Rome in a special place (see Chapter II). The truly messianic status, however, which Marcion had in his community can best be seen by his followers' belief that after his death he ascended into heaven at the left hand of Christ (with Paul on the right)⁵⁹⁰. Although it is not uncommon that such forms of glorification only appear after someone's death, we also have Justin's contemporary report according to which Marcion was admired as the “only one who knows the truth”⁵⁹¹. Bishop or no bishop, Marcion most certainly held absolute authority in his church, an authority which among other things must have been due to an “inspiring and energetic personality”⁵⁹², but probably also to the utter sincerity in what he was doing which earned him credibility. Together with what we have established in Chapter II, we are now approaching the secret of Marcion's success as church founder and leader, a secret which is mainly due to three elements. Marcion was an organisational talent, he was wealthy, and he had great authority. In other words: Marcion knew what to do, he could finance it, and nobody was objecting – a truly powerful combination of qualities. No single man in the orthodox church of Marcion's time even came close to the status he had in his church. In a manner of speaking, one might even refer to Marcion as the first Christian pope.

⁵⁸⁸ Adam. Dial. 1,8: Μαρκίων ἐπίσκοπός μου ἦν.

⁵⁸⁹ That we are dealing with self-designation here becomes obvious from the above mentioned church inscription.

⁵⁹⁰ Hom. Lc. 25.5.

⁵⁹¹ 1Apol. 58,2: μόνῳ ἀληθῆ ἐπισταμένῳ.

⁵⁹² Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 3.

Marcion's powerful position is certainly one of the main reasons for the quick success of his movement. Already at the time of Justin's *Apology* (ca. 153-154), that is, not even ten years after Marcion's church came into being) we hear that it has spread all over the Empire⁵⁹³. However, success is always a combination of two elements: an individual's personal effort and the external circumstances. Marcion's success is without a doubt based on his qualities as a leader. Still, even the most talented man cannot rally people around him if he has no cause, something that stirs people, something people long for. Marcion had found his cause. It was probably a combination of three elements which attracted Christians to his movement: a widespread negative estimation of the world⁵⁹⁴, the unsolved issue of the place of the Old Testament within Christian faith (see Chapter VII), and, although this was not true for Marcion himself (see Chapter III), certain anti-Jewish resentments. Bauer described this phenomenon as follows: "Was bis dahin mehr oder weniger unbestimmt in ihrem [the Christians'] Inneren gelebt hatte, gewann durch Marcion die feste Form, die Kopf und Herz befriedigte."⁵⁹⁵ But not only had Marcion found an idea that would bring him a large following, he had also found the perfect timing to strike. For the Church, which had so far existed as a rather loose federation without united leadership, was simply unprepared for this kind of energetic attack.⁵⁹⁶

The position Marcion had in his church also accounts for the split that affected his movement soon after his death (see the several deformations of Marcion's doctrine described in Chapter III). If an entire institution completely rests upon one single man, it is almost bound to break apart once it loses its head.⁵⁹⁷ That does not necessarily mean

⁵⁹³ 1Apol. 26,5 (a statement which should not be taken too literally (cf. Chapter II), but which still indicates an enormous success).

⁵⁹⁴ This estimation was, among other things, undoubtedly conditioned by the persecutions the Christians were exposed to. How widespread this feeling must have been at the time can also be seen by the success of the Gnostic groups (see Chapter III).

⁵⁹⁵ Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit*, p. 197.

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, p. 193-194: "Die Plötzlichkeit und Energie, mit der Markion zu seinem Totalangriff gegen das bisherige Christentum angesetzt hatte, wirkte wie ein Schock, auf den man nirgends vorbereitet war."

⁵⁹⁷ Harnack, *Der moderne Gläubige*, p. 321: "Die Zerfahrenheit in der Secte macht sich frühe geltend [...] Es ist dies ein bleibendes Merkmal zu allen Zeiten". It is interesting to observe that Harnack changed this original and certainly correct view in his later work, in which he praises the inner unity of the Marcionite

that there could not have been a succession of bishops in Marcion's church, as reported in the *Adamantius-Dialogue* (see above). However, personal succession is no guarantee for the conservation of original doctrine.

church (*Marcion*, p. 161). This change is apparently due to Harnack's growing idealisation of Marcion's movement in his later life.

3.) The Members of Marcion's Church

3.1 Membership Profile

Non ethnicos convertendi, sed nostros evertendi – not to convert the pagans, but to pervert our members, that is the motto of the heretics according to Tertullian⁵⁹⁸, and it is beyond doubt that in this passage he has above all the Marcionites in mind⁵⁹⁹. Justin had already referred to Marcion as a wolf by whom his fellow Christians are snatched away⁶⁰⁰, and even the obviously invented story about Marcion's repentance later in life proves this point, for it is clearly stated that as a sign of his repentance Marcion was supposed to *bring back* everybody whom he had corrupted⁶⁰¹. That Marcion's movement appealed above all to pagans, as Wilson claims⁶⁰², is most unlikely. When we remember some of the key elements of Marcion's movement (the *antithesis* between the God of the Old and the New Testament, the conspiracy theory, the 'purification' of the 'perverted' tradition and so on), it becomes clear very quickly that we are dealing with *inner-church* problems here, which would have been completely incomprehensible to outsiders. In other words: why would a pagan care about oppositions between texts he never even heard about? It is the explicit Biblicist approach of Marcion's theology which makes it only appealing to people who are already familiar with the biblical texts, that is, to Christians.⁶⁰³ However, while many heretical groups tried to win members from the Church, Marcion's movement – due to its lack of natural progeny (see below) – *solely* depended on the 'poaching' of orthodox Christians⁶⁰⁴. This certainly unique concept entailed two crucial consequences. Firstly, it put Marcion's movement at a

⁵⁹⁸ De praescr. 42,1.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Dietrich Schleyer, *Tertullian: De Praescriptione Haereticorum/Vom prinzipiellen Einspruch gegen die Häretiker*, FC 42, Turnhout: Brepols, 2002, p. 58: "Der von Tertullian in *praescr.* 42,1 den Häretikern gemachte Vorwurf, nicht darauf aus zu sein, Heiden zu bekehren, sondern Christen der Großkirche für sich zu gewinnen, könnte vor allem den Marcioniten gelten."

⁶⁰⁰ 1Apol. 58,2.

⁶⁰¹ De praescr. 30,3.

⁶⁰² Wilson, *Marcion*, p. 65.

⁶⁰³ It goes without saying that Jews could not be attracted to Marcion's doctrine, given the way their God was depicted in it.

⁶⁰⁴ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 148-149.

colossal disadvantage in its competition with the Church, thus being doubtlessly one of the main reasons for its decline. Ironically, at the same time it made Marcion's movement more dangerous to the Church than any other heretical group, for these other groups, after at first probably recruiting mostly former members of the Church too, developed an independent existence at some point, whereas Marcion's movement remained something of an irritating parasite for the Church until its very end. The enormous threat that Marcion's movement posed to the orthodox church, as can be seen by the huge number of anti-Marcionite writings which the Fathers produced, is thus probably due to this particular characteristic, rather than to the high number of converts. Marcion was a most successful missionary (see above), but even though his group was certainly not the smallest, there is no need to assume, as Blackman implies⁶⁰⁵, that his movement ever actually rivalled the orthodox church in numbers. This impression probably occurred due to the Church's enormous engagement with the Marcionite threat, an engagement which is, however, best explained by the fact that the Marcionite church won their members exclusively from orthodoxy, thus being a greater rival to it than any other movement.

3.2 Ethics

Venio nunc ad ordinarias sententias eius, per quas proprietatem doctrinae suae inducit, ad edictum, ut ita dixerim, Christi. (Adv. Marc. IV.14,1)

I now come to his orderly arranged series of statements, by which he introduces the characteristic essence of his doctrine, I come to the edict, so to speak, of Christ.

What Tertullian refers to here as the edict of Christ is the beatitudes and woes from the sermon on the plain (Lk. 6:17-26), which featured in Marcion's gospel and, according to

⁶⁰⁵ Blackman, *Marcion*, p. 3.

many scholars⁶⁰⁶, were of great significance to the heresiarch and his ethics. This judgement is in all probability due to a misreading of the passage cited above. For what is said here about the sermon on the plain is not Marcion's wording but Tertullian's.⁶⁰⁷ It is the Carthaginian who considers the beatitudes and woes to be the *proprietas* of Christ's doctrine and thus his edict⁶⁰⁸. There is absolutely no reason to assume that this phrase refers to Marcion. He is not named in it or in the immediate context. That the *eius* refers to Christ is obvious, since the beatitudes are Christ's *ordinariae sententiae*, not Marcion's. Thus, it would be difficult to imagine Marcion being the subject to *inducit* and *suae*. A more elucidating, while less elegant, translation would therefore be: "I now come to *Christ's* orderly arranged series of statements, by which *Christ* introduces the characteristic essence of his doctrine, I come to the edict, so to speak, of Christ." Marcion may certainly have used the beatitudes and the woes to support his claim against the Creator, since Christ (antithetically) blesses those who are miserable in this world and threatens those who are doing well⁶⁰⁹; but Tertullian's entire discussion of these passages does not reveal any extraordinary interest in them on the part of the arch-heretic, especially not as far as ethics are concerned. Still, the words and particularly the actions of Christ do form, in accordance with his Biblicist approach, the basis for Marcion's ethics. As we have seen in Chapter III, to Marcion Christ's actions were first of all expressions of *Trotz* against the Creator, and it is exactly this attitude which Marcion demands of his followers. The Fathers provide us with several examples of this:

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. for example Aland, *Marcion/Marcioniten*, p. 95; Lampe, *Christen*, p. 208-209. Apparently this idea goes also back to Harnack, who called the beatitudes the "Magna Charta" of Marcion's religion (Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 127).

⁶⁰⁷ Cf. Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 255: "Denn was in *Adversus Marcionem* über das edictum Christi gesagt ist, stammt nicht von Marcion, sondern von Tertullian."

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. Lukas, *Rhetorik*, p. 249.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. *De Deo* 405.

They [the Marcionites] become abstinent not from moral conviction, but out of hatred for the Creator, thus refusing to use the things he made. (Strom. III.3,12)⁶¹⁰

He [Marcion] believes that he spites the Demiurge if he abstains from things which are created or designated for use by him. (Ref. X.19,4)⁶¹¹

He [Marcion] says to fast on the Sabbath for this reason: since it is the day of rest for the God of the Jews who made the world and rested on the seventh day, we should fast on that day so that we do not do that which befits the God of the Jews. (Pan. 42.3,4)⁶¹²

Thus, Marcionite lifestyle means above all abstinence from worldly things, however, not out of asceticism. Although Marcionite ethics and asceticism may lead to similar actions on the outside, the motivation is crucially different. Asceticism is usually motivated by an idea of bettering or purifying oneself. As we have already seen in Chapter III, feelings of such a kind are completely alien to Marcion. His motivation for abstaining from worldly things is simply *Trotz* against the one who created them.⁶¹³ How different this motivation is from real asceticism becomes most obvious in the passage cited above from Epiphanius. Marcion not only demands abstaining from certain things, he even demands doing things which are forbidden, and for no other reason than that they are forbidden.⁶¹⁴ In an almost childish feeling of revenge, Marcion actually believes that he would irritate the Creator by not using his creation or by deliberately disobeying his commands. As mentioned above, Marcion found the role model for his ethics in Christ,

⁶¹⁰ οὐ τῆ προαιρέσει γίνονται ἐγκρατεῖς, τῆ δὲ πρὸς τὸν πεπονηκότα ἔχτρα, μὴ βουλόμενοι χρῆσθαι τοῖς ὑπ' αὐχοῦ κτισθεῖσιν.

⁶¹¹ νομίζων λυπεῖν τὸν δημιουργόν, εἰ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γεγονότων ἢ ὠρισμένων ἀπέχουτο.

⁶¹² τὸ δὲ σάββατον νηστεύειν διὰ τοιαύτην αἰτίαν φάσκει· ἐπειδὴ [...] τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνάπαυσις τοῦ πεπονηκότος τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἐν τῇ ἑβδόμῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναπαυσαμένου, ἡμεῖς νηστεύσωμεν ταύτην, ἵνα μὴ τὸ καθῆκον τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐργαζώμεθα.

⁶¹³ Cf. Harnack, Marcion, p. 149: “man soll diesen üblen Gott ärgern, ihn reizen, ihm trotzen und ihm dadurch zeigen, daß man nicht mehr in seinem Dienst steht, sondern einem andern Herrn gehört.”

⁶¹⁴ Such actions are not as unusual as they may seem. Ulrich Zwingli, for instance, seems to have had a similar motivation when he ostentatiously held a big sausage-eating on the first day of Lent.

and when we remember Marcion's interpretation of Christ's actions as established in Chapter III, it is obvious how. In the pericope of the woman with a discharge of blood who touched Jesus (Lk 8:43-48), for instance, Marcion concluded that Christ did not heal this woman (at least not primarily) out of benevolence, rather "the Law commanded to stay away from contact with a woman who has a discharge of blood; because of this he felt the urge not only to allow her to touch him, but also to give her health"⁶¹⁵.

Speaking concretely, we only know of two things which were definitely forbidden to Marcionites: meat and sexual intercourse.⁶¹⁶ The first restriction is certainly of minor importance, with hardly any substantial influence on the Marcionite church, and is obviously again meant *ad destruenda et despicienda opera creatoris*⁶¹⁷, while in the particular case of meat it may also be seen as "opposition to the cuisine of sacrifice"⁶¹⁸. The second restriction is one of the most radical demands ever to be found in a Christian community and had far-reaching effects on it (see above). "Be fruitful and multiply", those are the words of the Creator, and of course Marcion, as always, refuses to follow his instructions⁶¹⁹, acting *in destructione creatoris*⁶²⁰. However, the refusal of procreation goes far beyond Marcion's usual *Trotz* behaviour. In fact, this time Marcion's aversion definitely shows pathological traits⁶²¹. Whether Marcion realised it or not, this principle ultimately aims at the complete extinction of mankind. Tertullian naturally detected this absurdity and legitimately comments: "Besides, I am not really sure whether completely suppressing the increase of the human race goes together with the idea of a supremely good God. How can he want the salvation of a man whom he

⁶¹⁵ Adv. Marc. IV.20,9: Lex a contactu sanguinantis feminae summouet, idcirco gestierit non tantum contactum eius admittere, sed etiam sanitare donare.

⁶¹⁶ Cf. Ref. VII.30; Adv. Marc. I.29; for the permission of fish, cf. Adv. Marc. I,14,4.

⁶¹⁷ De ieiun. 15.

⁶¹⁸ McGowan, *Eucharists*, p. 166. Cf. also Sykes, *Bread*, p. 214: "Although the avoidance of meat in sacred meals was normal in Christian circles, it would be given particular bite in Marcionite circles given the creator's love of sacrifice and the directions of the Old Testament for the offering of bloody sacrifices, which would lead to the extension of the prohibition beyond the sacred repast."

⁶¹⁹ Cf. for example, Strom. III.3,12: "they do not want to fill the world made by the Demiurge".

⁶²⁰ Adv. Marc. I.29,2.

⁶²¹ Cf. Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 271: "Hier [in the case of marriage] steigert sich die Ablehnung ins Krankhafte."

forbids to be born by taking away the very act from which he is born?”⁶²² In addition to his usual feeling of *Trotz*, Marcion also seems to have had an enormous, and again slightly pathological, disgust for sexuality as such, when he calls the womb a sewer in which to find a filthy concretion of fluid and blood⁶²³.

Marcion’s ethics are thus purely *negative ethics*. Christ is Marcion’s role model, but only as far as his negative attitude to the Creator is concerned. Nowhere in the sources do we find any mention of Marcion proclaiming the positive commandment of love. Harnack perfectly realised this situation, but still came to the conclusion: “mit welcher Stärke er das positive Gebot der Liebe verkündet hat, sagen sie [his opponents] uns nicht; aber gewiß hat er es in seinen Gemeinden in Kraft gesetzt, wenn doch die Gottesliebe der Mittelpunkt seiner Frömmigkeit war.”⁶²⁴ Once again, we experience how Harnack’s personal concept of Marcion outweighs the actual evidence of the sources, which made Bauer ask correctly: “Sollte das [the lack of evidence] nicht gegen die Richtigkeit der Voraussetzung bedenklich stimmen?”⁶²⁵

The Marcionites’ despite for the world and life itself is doubtlessly also the reason why we find a substantial number of martyrs within their church⁶²⁶. A striking exception from these reports, however, is Justin, who, in his *Apology* to the Emperor, maintains that the Marcionites are in fact not persecuted by the State⁶²⁷. The reason for this divergence may simply be Justin’s wish to underline the tragic fate of his own group in distinct dissociation from the heretics. Whether it is this reason or another, Justin’s single statement cannot withstand the unanimous testimonies of the other sources that

⁶²² Adv. Marc. I.29,7: *Iam vero sementem generis humani compescere totum nescio an hoc quoque optimo deo congruat. Quomodo enim salvum hominem volet quem vetat nasci, de quo nascitur auferendo?*

⁶²³ Adv. Marc. III.11,7; Carn. IV.1. Cf. Chapter III.

⁶²⁴ Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 150-151.

⁶²⁵ Bauer, *Review Harnack*, p. 7.

⁶²⁶ Cf. Hist. eccl. V.16,21; Adv. Marc. I.24,4 + I.27,5; Strom. IV.4,17. Clement clearly expresses his view that these martyrs do not truly bear witness, as they only give in to martyrdom out of hatred for the Creator. Although the Marcionites are not explicitly mentioned in this passage, there is a scholarly consensus that they are envisaged by Clement, cf. Annewies van den Hoek, *Clément d’Alexandrie: Les Stromates IV*, SC 463, Paris: Cerf, 2001, p. 85 n. 4.

⁶²⁷ 1Apol. 26,5.

Marcion's church definitely produced martyrs, and certainly more "als der Orthodoxie lieb war, der es große Mühe macht, diese Tatsache ihres Schwergewichtes und ihres bestechenden Glanzes zu berauben"⁶²⁸.

The last remaining question concerning Marcionite ethics is whether it can be said to have some sort of soteriological significance in Marcion's system of thought, in other words, the question is: did Marcion believe that his actions on Earth had any effect on his salvation? Tertullian, implying that he received this information from an actual discussion with Marcionites, states that they believe that on the final day every sinner will be cast away out of the sight of the good God⁶²⁹, and will consequently be seized by the fire of the Creator⁶³⁰. The uncertain element in this context is the term 'sinner'. What do the Marcionites, if it is not actually Tertullian's term, understand by this? The *Adamantius Dialogue* may offer an answer to that question when we hear the Marcionite Marcus say: "The good God saves those who believe in him, without, however, condemning the unbelievers."⁶³¹ In this case the term sinner is replaced by unbeliever, which may in fact be the Marcionite understanding. As we have established before, any kind of moral understanding of sin is alien to Marcion, so if he ever actually used the term in connection with his good God, then he did so only in the meaning of not believing in him⁶³². This element of Marcion's theology is in fact the only case where we can actually detect a certain resemblance to Luther. *Sola fide* – the salvation lies in faith alone, for Marcion as well as for the German Reformer. Only those who believe in Marcion's good God are saved by him. Tertullian satirises this situation by pointing out that the good God once again is in need of the Creator's element, his fire in this case, to punish sinners, but this time Tertullian's criticism is beside the point. For Marcion's good God does indeed, as expressed in the *Adamantius Dialogue*, not actively punish

⁶²⁸ Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit*, p. 95.

⁶²⁹ Adv. Marc. I.27,6.

⁶³⁰ Adv. Marc. I.28,1.

⁶³¹ Adam. Dial. 2,4: Ὁ ἀγαθὸς τοὺς πιστεύσαντας αὐτῷ σώζει οὐ μὴν κατακρίνει τοὺς ἀπειθήσαντας αὐτῷ.

⁶³² Cf. Aland, *Sünde*, p. 152: "Es ist dieses ungläubige Mißtrauen gegenüber dem göttlichen Heilsangebot [...] was präzise den Inbegriff der Sünde kennzeichnet."

anyone. Marcion's depiction of Christ's descent to Hades (see Chapter III) may help to understand this idea. Christ came to save everyone, but he could only save those who would let themselves be saved. Therefore, the Patriarchs had a chance to be saved, but they did not believe in Christ's words, and thus decided to stay behind. Viewed in this light, Marcion's good God does indeed not condemn the unbelievers, he only leaves them, based on their own decision, within the realm of the Creator, where nothing else awaits them than the Creator's fire on the final day. Coming back to our original question about a soteriological factor in Marcionite ethics, the answer is a clear 'no' – *sola fide*. Marcion probably believed, just as Luther did, that good deeds are the fruits of faith: everyone who believes in Christ and thus despises the Creator will do their best to defy him without any ulterior motive.

4.) Conclusion

As far as the organisation of Marcion's church is concerned we have seen that it shows remarkable parallels to the orthodox church, both in terms of liturgy and offices. These circumstances confirm what we have discovered in Chapter II, namely that Marcion was socialised within Christian circles, and at a time at which certain rituals and office structures had already been established in the Church, apparently even to the point where their origin was no longer known. Otherwise it would be inexplicable that Marcion preserved rituals which show an obvious relation to the Old Testament.

Another important result of this chapter is that the enormous danger which sprang from the Marcionite church for its orthodox counterpart was probably not so much due to their large number of members, but to the fact that they won their members exclusively from converts, without any natural progeny of their own. The reason for this situation was the Marcionites' general refusal of procreation, which was motivated by a feeling of *Trotz* against the Creator, a feeling which constitutes the very basis of Marcion's ethics. With this insight we have exposed yet another common misconception about Marcion's theology, the misconception – initiated by Harnack – that his ethics are above all motivated by love and forgiveness, when in actual fact he preaches a strictly *negative* code of conduct.

VII. Marcion's Time

Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire être un homme de son temps?

Yasmina Reza, « Art »

The second century in many ways shaped the future of the Christian Church. It is the time in which the Church definitively breaks with the Synagogue, the time in which Christians reach out to the pagan world surrounding them, and the time in which the New Testament canon is essentially formed. Another crucial development in this century, to which less attention is usually devoted, is what Campenhausen called “die Krise des alttestamentlichen Kanons”⁶³³. The underestimation of this factor is all the more surprising as it is immediately linked to the previously mentioned developments: the Old Testament was the decisive factor in the Christians' conflict with the Jews, it was one of the main obstacles for making Christianity accessible to an educated pagan audience, and its status and interpretation had immediate influence on the formation of its counterpart.

As we have seen in Chapters III and IV, the Old Testament was also the decisive factor in Marcion's system of thought as its literal and purely negative understanding forms the basis for his entire theology. Due to this crucial importance the present chapter shall be dedicated to the status of the Old Testament among Marcion's contemporaries, both those who were active before him and whose attitude toward the Old Testament may

⁶³³ Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, p. 76. Due to a misprint, the title of the corresponding chapter (instead of referring to the second century) erroneously reads “Die Krise des alttestamentlichen Kanons im dritten Jahrhundert”.

have influenced him, as well as his successors, who had to react to the heresiarch's radical approach to the problem.

1.) The Old Testament before Marcion

1.1. The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 120-140)⁶³⁴

“For I heard some say: ‘If I do not find it in the archives, I do not believe it in the Gospel’; and when I said to them: ‘It is written’, they answered me: ‘That is the

⁶³⁴ Ignatius’ Letters are most difficult to date. Their traditional dating of around 110 has recently been called into question with the proposal that they were written much later, even as late as the latter half of the second century (for a history of recent research, see Paul Foster, “The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch”, in: Paul Foster (ed.), *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, London: T&T Clark, 2007, p. 84-86). The Letters themselves give no hint at any contemporary event, and the date of Ignatius’ martyrdom given by Eusebius (under the reign of Trajan) is not very reliable either (cf. *ibid.*, p. 86), so they have to be dated by their theological content. Paul Foster has argued that the highly developed ecclesial concept to be found in the Letters indicates a date much later than 110 (cf. *ibid.*, p. 86-89). Certainly, when we compare the ecclesial concept of Ignatius to that expressed in the First Letter of Clement (ca. 96) for instance, the enormous leap forward is obvious. On the other hand, when we consider the exegetical concept in Ignatius’ Letters, especially considering his attitude toward the Old Testament and his emphasis on the oral character of the Gospel, and compare this to the concept to be found in Ptolemy’s *Letter to Flora* (ca. 150), it is striking how far behind Ignatius is in this regard (see below). However, Barnes has recently argued that a certain passage to be found in Ignatius’ *Letter to Polycarp* “makes it clear that Ignatius is quoting, answering and contradicting Ptolemaeus” (Barnes, “The Date of Ignatius”, *Expository Times* 120/3 (2008), p. 125), thus postulating the activity of Ptolemy as the *terminus post quem* for the dating of the Ignatian letters. While the similar sequence of (preternaturally rare) words in the passage in question is in fact striking, there are three things to be said about Barnes’ argument derived from it. First of all, Barnes is relying on a report by Irenaeus, not on an actual source by Ptolemy himself, and it is not even certain that this report is actually concerned with the Ptolemaean system (cf. Marksches, *Research*, p. 249-252), much less that Irenaeus is literally quoting Ptolemy here. Secondly, a similarity regarding language or terminology can be used as an argument for dependence in both directions. In other words, how do we know it is Ignatius who reacts to Ptolemy and not the other way around? Finally, if this particular word sequence was in fact a reaction to Ptolemy, and if we were thus to assume that Ignatius concerned himself with Ptolemaean theology, it would be most difficult to explain why he shows, as mentioned above, no awareness whatsoever of the far more important exegetical methods within Ptolemy’s system. In fact, this lack of awareness is the great difference between Ignatius and Justin Martyr for instance (see below), which is why Reinhard Hübner, who used an argument similar to that of Barnes while coming to a different conclusion, is incorrect when he claims a similarity in thinking between the two (Reinhard Hübner, “Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochien”, *ZAC* 1 (1997), p. 67). In conclusion, the evidence to support a dependence of Ignatius on Ptolemaean terminology is not strong enough to be used for the dating of his letters (cf. Andreas Lindemann, “Antwort auf die ‘Thesen zur Echtheit und Datierung der sieben Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochien’”, *ZAC* 1 (1997), p. 189-190). In the end, one may certainly date Ignatius’ Letters much later than 110, even as late as 140, but the appearance of such men as Ptolemy and Marcion remains the *terminus ante not post quem*.

question.’ *My archives, however, are Jesus Christ, the holy archives are his cross, his death, his resurrection and the faith which comes through him.*” (Philad. 8,2)⁶³⁵

While Ignatius never systematically addresses the question of the Old Testament in his Letters, this passage from his *Letter to the Philadelphians* offers at least some insight into the bishop’s position on the subject. First of all, however, there are several terms which call for clarification. Fortunately, a scholarly consensus has been reached for all the ambiguous expressions to be found here.⁶³⁶ The archives (ἀρχεῖα) which Ignatius opponents mention can refer to nothing else but the writings of the Old Testament, just as his own response ‘It is written’ (γέγραπται) does. Ignatius then takes up the term ‘archives’ of his opponents, but gives it a new meaning by relating it to the Gospel, which for him is not a book or a document, “sondern die in der Kirche gegenwärtige Botschaft des Heils”⁶³⁷. Thus, the reported discussion presents itself as follows: a certain group of people within the Christian community of Philadelphia refuse to believe any element of the Gospel message unless it can be confirmed by the Old Testament. Ignatius’ rather concise and almost clumsy response, which sounds a little as if he was saying ‘It *is* written, what do you want?’, can of course hardly be satisfying to his dialogue partners, and so they retort to him ‘That is exactly what we would like to see demonstrated’. Ignatius, apparently unwilling to engage in any kind of exegetical dispute here, then answers his opponents’ question for authentication of the Gospel from the Old Testament by asserting that the Gospel does not require any such thing as it is “self-authenticating”⁶³⁸.

⁶³⁵ ἐπεὶ ἤκουσά τινων λεγόντων, ὅτι ἂν μὴ ἐν τοῖς ἀρχείοις εὐρω, ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ οὐ πιστεύω· καὶ λέγοντός μου αὐτοῖς, ὅτι γέγραπται, ἀπεκρίθησάν μοι, ὅτι πρόκειται. ἐμοὶ δὲ ἀρχεῖά ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, τὰ ἄθικτα ἀρχεῖα ὁ σταυρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ πίστις ἡ δι’ αὐτοῦ.

⁶³⁶ For the following, see William R. Schoedel, “Ignatius and the Archives”, *HTR* 71 (1978), p. 97.

⁶³⁷ Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 171. Cf. also Charles Thomas Brown, *The Gospel and Ignatius of Antioch*, New York: Peter Lang, 2000, p. 205.

⁶³⁸ C.K. Barrett, “Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius”, in: Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Jews, Greeks and Christians. Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of William David Davies*, Leiden: Brill, 1976, p. 233.

Is Ignatius trying to play off the Gospel against the Old Testament here? He is convinced that the Old Testament Prophets were “disciples in spirit”⁶³⁹ and that their testimony as well as the Law of Moses can be used to refute the heretics⁶⁴⁰. Still, in his *Letter to the Smyrneans* he states: “It is proper [...] to listen to the Prophets, but *especially* to the Gospel”⁶⁴¹, and in a more extensive passage in *Philadelphians* we hear: “The Gospel has something *special*, the coming of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, his passion and resurrection. For the beloved Prophets directed their announcement toward him, but the Gospel is the completion of incorruption. Everything together is good, if you believe with love”⁶⁴². These lines by Ignatius can be seen as a “summary statement of his view of the relation between the prophets (Scripture) and the gospel”⁶⁴³. The crucial point is that for Ignatius there is absolutely no conflict between the Old Testament and the Gospel, since “everything (Scripture and Gospel) together is good”. The Gospel may have something “special”, as it represents the “completion” of what the Prophets could only anticipate, but it is still seen as *in line* with the Old Testament, not in distinction from it. Certainly, the Old Testament is temporally distinguished from the Gospel, “aber eine durch die Dialektik von Gesetz und Evangelium gekennzeichnete Offenbarungsgeschichte ist Ign unbekannt”⁶⁴⁴.

This brings us back to our original passage and to the question who the people are with whom Ignatius is debating and who have such a different approach to the Scriptures from the bishop of Antioch. Any attempt to categorise them into a particular religious

⁶³⁹ Magn. 9,2: μαθηταὶ τῷ πνεύματι.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. Smyrn. 5,1.

⁶⁴¹ Smyrn. 7,2 (my emphasis): πρέπει οὖν ἐστὶν [...] προσέχειν δὲ τοῖς προφήταις, ἐξαιρέτως δὲ τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.

⁶⁴² Philad. 9,2 (my emphasis): ἐξάριετον δὲ τι ἔχει τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ σωτῆρος, κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ πάθος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν. οἱ γὰρ ἀγαπητοὶ προφῆται κατήγγειλαν εἰς αὐτόν· τὸ δὲ εὐαγγέλιον ἀπάρτισμά ἐστιν ἀφθαρσίας. πάντα ὁμοῦ καλὰ ἐστὶν, ἐὰν ἐν ἀγάπῃ πιστεύητε. The term ἐξάριετον (special) in relation to the Gospel is the exact same as in Smyrn. 7,2 (see above).

⁶⁴³ William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch. A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, p. 210.

⁶⁴⁴ Johannes Kleivinghaus, *Die theologische Stellung der Apostolischen Väter zur alttestamentlichen Offenbarung*, Gütersloh: Mohn, 1948, p. 112.

group is foiled by the scarcity of evidence⁶⁴⁵. Still, William Schoedel may in fact be right when he suggests that the ‘troublemakers’ in Philadelphia are little more than well-educated Christians who were fascinated with the Scriptures and who “asked their leaders questions hard to answer”⁶⁴⁶, and that Ignatius, “who seems to have known precious little about the Scriptures”⁶⁴⁷, simply lacked the skills to answer them satisfactorily. This would mean that the conflict between the two parties was not so much between the Old Testament and the Gospel as two different forms of divine revelation, but rather between Scripture and oral tradition.

1.2 The Letter of Barnabas (ca. 130-138)⁶⁴⁸

“Moreover I ask this of you [...] that you take care of yourselves and not become like certain people who are piling up their sins by saying: ‘our covenant remains’. For this is how they [the Jews] lost it forever, although Moses had already received it, as Scripture says: ‘And Moses fasted forty days and forty nights on the mountain, and he received the covenant from the Lord, stone tablets written with the finger of the hand of the Lord. But they lost it by turning to the idols. For thus says the Lord: Moses, Moses, come down quickly, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted unlawfully. And Moses understood and threw the two tablets out of his hands.’⁶⁴⁹ And their covenant was smashed to pieces, so that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed on our hearts in the hope that comes through faith in him.” (Barn. 4,6-8)⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁵ Klaus Wengst’s identification of the attitude of Ignatius’ opponents with the position expressed in the Letter of Barnabas (see below) is not convincing (cf. Klaus Wengst, *Didache (Apostellehre). Barnabasbrief. Zweiter Klemensbrief. Schrift an Diognet*, Schriften des Urchristentums 2, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984, p. 117).

⁶⁴⁶ Schoedel, *Archives*, p. 105.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ “The developing consensus would seem to be for a Hadrianic date sometime in the 130s.” (James Carleton Paget, “The Epistle of Barnabas”, in: Foster (ed.), *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 75).

⁶⁴⁹ The reference to Scripture forms a free quotation of Dtn 9:12,16-17. An almost identical rendering of the story can be found in Barn. 14,2-3, thus demonstrating the enormous importance this narrative had to the author.

⁶⁵⁰ ἔτι καὶ τοῦτο ἐρωτῶ ὑμᾶς [...] προσέχειν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ μὴ ὁμοιοῦσθαί τισιν ἐπισωρεύοντας ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις αὐτῶν λέγοντας, ὅτι ἡ διαθήκη ἡμῶν μένει· ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνοι οὕτως εἰς τέλος ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν

The text of Barn. 4:6b is without a doubt the most disputed single half-verse within the letter, a fact which is due to the interaction of two factors. On the one hand, the transmission of the text is badly corrupted, offering three different readings for the passage, while on the other hand most scholars attribute crucial importance to this passage for the understanding of the purpose of the entire letter. It is mainly due to the recent exemplary work of James Rhodes⁶⁵¹ that the conundrum which this verse proposed for so long has finally received some clarification. Before Rhodes, the vast majority of scholars preferred the Latin translation of the verse⁶⁵², thus reading: “[...] certain people who are piling up their sins by saying: ‘The covenant is theirs and ours’. Ours it is indeed, but they have lost it forever [...]”. Rhodes, however, has conclusively questioned the almost undisputed status of this variant for the following reasons⁶⁵³: 1. it violates two basic text-critical rules (the preference for the *lectio brevior* and the *lectio difficilior*); 2. the Latin reading cannot explain the origin of the two Greek variants; 3. the Latin version of the letter as a whole shows many idiosyncrasies which make its fidelity to the Greek *Vorlage* questionable.

Due to the untrustworthiness of the Latin reading, Rhodes votes for an emendation of the Greek variant found in the *Codex Sinaiticus* (ἡμῶν μέν) into ἡμῶν μένει, which would be very close to the variant of the *Codex Hierosolymitanus* ὑμῶν ὑμῖν μένει. Both variants (‘our covenant remains’; ‘your covenant remains yours’) would then offer a statement of the opponent’s claim completely different from that of the Latin version,

λαβόντος ἤδη τοῦ Μωϋσέως· λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή· καὶ ἦν Μωϋσῆς ἐν τῷ ὄρει νηστεύων ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν διαθήκην ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου πλάκας λιθίνας γεγραμμένας τῷ δακτύλῳ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ κυρίου. ἀλλὰ ἐπιστραφέντες ἐπὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν· λέγει γὰρ οὕτως κύριος· Μωϋσῆ, Μωϋσῆ, κατὰβηθι τὸ τάχος ὅτι ἠνόμησεν ὁ λαός σου, οὓς ἐξήγαγες ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου. καὶ συνῆκεν Μωϋσῆς καὶ ἔρριψεν τὰς δύο πλάκας ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ· καὶ συνετρίβη αὐτῶν ἡ διαθήκη, ἵνα ἡ τοῦ ἡγαπημένου Ἰησοῦ ἐγκατασφραγισθῆ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν ἐν ἐλπίδι τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ (altered from the edition by Wengst according to the suggested emendation by Rhodes, see below).

⁶⁵¹ James N. Rhodes, “Barnabas 4.6B: The Exegetical Implications of a Textual Problem”, *VigChr* 58 (2004), p. 365-392. Cf. also idem, *The Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomistic Tradition: Polemics, Paraenesis, and the Legacy of the Golden-Calf Incident*, WUNT 2/188, Tübingen: Mohr, 2004, p. 24-30.

⁶⁵² Cf. Rhodes, *Barnabas 4.6B*, p. 368. The reading of L for our suggested ἡμῶν μένει is: *illorum et nostrum est. nostrum est autem*.

⁶⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 369.

but very similar to each other. In both cases Barnabas would “not want his audience to have a false sense of security because, in his view, the fate of Israel demonstrates clearly that the covenant can be lost if one does not live up to it.”⁶⁵⁴ Within the context of the chapter this meaning of the passage is much more likely than the one conveyed by the Latin version, given its striking similarity to Barnabas’ warning shortly after in 4:13: “That we may never fall asleep in our sins, believing we may rest just because we are called”⁶⁵⁵. Since the exegetical implications of the two Greek versions are almost identical, Rhodes bases his decision on the fact that his proposed emendation can more easily explain both the other Greek and the Latin variant⁶⁵⁶, and he is probably right in doing so. The only thing which seems not as certain as Rhodes believes is his conviction that the ‘certain people’ Barnabas speaks of would refer to the Jews⁶⁵⁷. While this is certainly possible, it seems more likely that Barnabas is concerned with a certain group of people within the Christian community. His concern with a false sense of security is simply more understandable when we assume that he was aware of people with such a sense in his own community, who might have a bad influence on others, whereas it is hard to imagine that Barnabas would be afraid of his fellow Christians imitating the Jews.

The clarification of this passage was necessary for our own investigation, since it forbids us to make extensive use of verse 4:6b, as is commonly done⁶⁵⁸, for the establishment of Barnabas’ attitude toward the Old Testament. Ironically enough, even though the Latin translator of the letter was probably not true to the original, he managed to point out something important, for the key to Barnabas’ understanding of the Old Testament is in fact the idea that there is no such thing as an ‘old’ or a ‘new’ covenant but only one, the one covenant which the Jews rejected and which was therefore given to the Christians.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 386.

⁶⁵⁵ ἵνα μήποτε ἐπαναπαύομενοι ὡς κλητοὶ ἐπικαθυπνώσωμεν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν.

⁶⁵⁶ Rhodes, *Barnabas 4.6B*, p. 386.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 382-383.

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. Klaus Wengst, *Tradition und Theologie des Barnabasbriefes*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971, p. 81-82; cf. also Reidar Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1996, p. 90-98.

We are, however, not dealing with a form of ‘replacement theology’ here, according to which the old covenant with Israel would have been superseded by the new covenant with the Church, as Israel never actually entered into a covenant with God. The Church thus did not take over the place of the Jews, “but they got the place *meant for* the Jewish people”⁶⁵⁹. Accordingly, to Barnabas the “history of Israel is not salvation history, but rather ‘damnation history’: it shows how the Jews are increasing their sins, until sin reaches its peak in their rejection of Christ”⁶⁶⁰. However, between the time of the ‘Sinai incident’, at which the Jews refused the covenant, and the Advent of Christ, through which the Christians entered into the covenant, there have been single individuals within the Jewish people, such as Moses, David and the Prophets, who understood the will of God and laid it down in the texts of the Old Testament. The meaning of these texts, the Law as well as the Prophets, is “obvious to us, but dark to them”⁶⁶¹. It may seem like the common statement by Christians that the Jews do not correctly understand the Scriptures, but that statement is usually made only as far as their reference to Christ is concerned. For Barnabas, however, the situation is completely different: “nicht ein christologisches Heilsdatum relativiert eschatologisch die Geschichte Israels und den mit ihr verbundenen Ritus und Kult, sondern die Schrift selber sagt, daß dieses Volk sich schon immer falsch verhalten hat und daß die Aussagen der Schrift nie anders gemeint waren, als sie jetzt christlich verstanden werden.”⁶⁶² The reason that the Christians, unlike the Jews, have rightly understood the commandments is that God circumcised their hearts and ears⁶⁶³. In fact, it seems that the grace of correctly understanding the Scriptures is, according to Barnabas, what makes a Christian a Christian. This grace has come upon them through Christ, who made them his “new people”⁶⁶⁴, and through whom the covenant became sealed on their hearts (see above). Thus, the Advent of Christ has changed the way Scripture is perceived, but it has not changed the *actual meaning of Scripture*. While most Christians would certainly agree with Barnabas that

⁶⁵⁹ Hvalvik, *Struggle*, p. 147 (author’s emphasis).

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁶⁶¹ Barn. 8,7: ἡμῖν μὲν ἐστὶν φανερά, ἐκείνοις δὲ σκοτεινά.

⁶⁶² Wengst, *Didache*, p. 132.

⁶⁶³ Barn. 10,12. Cf. also 9,3.

⁶⁶⁴ Barn. 5,7: λαὸν καινὸν.

the Old Testament Prophecies have always pointed to Christ, Barnabas is particularly concerned with understanding the Law in its ‘original’ form. This can best be demonstrated in regard to the laws of Jewish cult. For example, according to Barnabas, God never wanted any kind of sacrifice, which he attempts to prove from such passages as Isaiah 1:11: “‘What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?’ says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings, and I do not desire the fat of the lambs or the blood of bulls and goats.’”⁶⁶⁵ As pointed out above by Klaus Wengst, with this argument Barnabas does not attempt to annul the Old Testament practice of sacrifice by a christological interpretation, but *by the Old Testament itself*. Therefore, according to Barnabas, one does not need the New Testament in order to understand that the real meaning of the sacrifices does not lie with the slaughtering of animals, since it is already said in the Psalms: “a sacrifice to the Lord is a contrite heart”⁶⁶⁶. Likewise for Barnabas, the other Old Testament rites such as circumcision, fasting or the food laws were never meant in their literal way, but they all implied ethical commandments.

The important thing to realise in this matter is that this ‘reinterpretation’ of the ritual ordinances within the Old Testament into ethical commandments is far more than just a ‘workaround’ for unwelcome passages. Barnabas deeply believes in these commandments and is convinced that their observance is necessary for salvation⁶⁶⁷, which is why he is so concerned with warning his fellow Christians about negligence in the observation of the covenant (see above). Any kind of abolition of the Old Testament Law would be unthinkable for Barnabas.

It is widely assumed that Barnabas’ one-covenant theology would have been “rather unusual in early Christianity”⁶⁶⁸. Reidar Hvalvik, while admitting that “the theological terminology with regard to the covenant was not yet fixed in *Barnabas*’ times”, argues

⁶⁶⁵ Barn. 2,5: τί μοι πλῆθος τῶν τυσιῶν ὑμῶν; λέγει κύριος· πλήρης εἰμι ὀλοκαυτωμάτων, καὶ στέαρ ἄρνων καὶ αἷμα ταύρων καὶ τράγων οὐ βούλομαι.

⁶⁶⁶ Barn. 2,10 (Ps. 51,17): θυσία τῷ κυρίῳ καρδία συντετριμμένη.

⁶⁶⁷ “Das Gesetz ist nicht nur Norm des Lebens, sondern von seiner Befolgung und Nichtbefolgung hängt auch Bestehen oder Nichtbestehen im Gericht ab; es ist also Heilsweg.” (Wengst, *Tradition*, p. 89).

⁶⁶⁸ Hvalvik, *Struggle*, p. 92.

that “the idea of an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ covenant is clearly presupposed by the early Christian writers dealing with the subject”⁶⁶⁹. The sources which Hvalvik names to support this claim are, however, rather questionable. The first two (2 Cor. 3:6, 14; Heb 8:6-10) were written long before Barnabas’ time, and the other two (Dial. 24,1; 34,1; Adv. haer. 4.9,1; 4.33,14; 4.34,4) long after him. It is in fact rather telling that Hvalvik was unable to name any witness for his claim from the immediate context of Barnabas. As we have seen, Ignatius shows no particular distinction of two covenants, and neither does the *First Letter of Clement* for instance. As a matter of fact, Clement shows remarkable similarities to Ignatius in his view of the Old Testament.⁶⁷⁰ Johannes Kleivinghaus summarises correctly: “Die atl Offenbarung ist für Kl ihrem Wesen nach mit der Offenbarung Gottes in Christus identisch.”⁶⁷¹ Similarly to Ignatius, Clement views the revelation in Christ as a completion of the Old Testament revelation⁶⁷², and believes the Church to be blessed with “greater knowledge”⁶⁷³, but nowhere in his letter do we find a reflective distinction between two different covenants/testaments. On the contrary, both Clement and Ignatius demonstrate a rather unreflective view of this matter and take the Old Testament for granted as a Christian book⁶⁷⁴. It is thus a mistake to presuppose that a two-covenant theology would have been common either in the time immediately before Barnabas, or in those works written shortly after him such as the *Shepherd of Hermas* for example⁶⁷⁵, which expresses a one-covenant theology very similar to that of Barnabas by completely identifying the Law and Christ⁶⁷⁶. Therefore,

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁰ This similarity is one of the reasons which suggest an earlier dating of Ignatius’ Letters (see above).

⁶⁷¹ Kleivinghaus, *Stellung*, p. 75.

⁶⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 76.

⁶⁷³ 1Cle 41,4: πλείονος γνώσεως.

⁶⁷⁴ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1953, p. 110-111: “Ein Problem scheint für den Verfasser [Clement] nicht zu existieren; er nimmt vielmehr ganz naiv das AT als christliches Buch in Anspruch.”

⁶⁷⁵ “Mehr als einen statistischen Mittelwert aus allen Überlegungen kann man nicht formulieren: Der PH [Pastor Hermae] ist um 140 n. Chr. anzusetzen.” (Norbert Brox, *Der Hirt des Hermas*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, p. 25).

⁶⁷⁶ Sim VIII 3,2. Cf. Kleivinghaus, *Stellung*, p. 114: “Mit aller Deutlichkeit ist hier die Gleichung vollzogen zwischen Christus und dem Gesetz.” Brox is probably correct when he states: “Auf keinen Fall will H[ermas] die Anforderungen an den Christen auf das alttestamentliche Gesetz reduziert haben” (Brox, *Hermas*, p. 362); but Hermas is still worlds apart from an actual distinction between Law and Gospel.

Barnabas is by no means the isolated instance we occasionally see him as, but may on the contrary with good reason be called a man of his time.

2.) The Old Testament after Marcion

We have seen that in the Christian writings of the early second century until the time of Marcion there is no clear distinction to be found between the Old Testament and the Gospel/New Testament.⁶⁷⁷ It is taken for granted that the Old Testament is a Christian book, either unreflectively as in Ignatius, or in deliberate dissociation from the Jewish traditions as in Barnabas. Sooner or later this uncritical use of the Old Testament had to come to an end⁶⁷⁸, and it found its most radical end possible in Marcion. The heresiarch pointed out the contrast between the Old and the New Testament so fundamentally that there was simply no turning back after him. Even though his radical approach did not stand the test of time, the discrepancy between the two Testaments had once and for all been identified as an issue, and no Christian theologian after Marcion could any longer simply proclaim their harmony without offering some sort of explanation for this contrast.

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Verweij, *Evangelium*, p. 241-242. Verweij, in his otherwise excellent study, for some reason counted Justin among the pre-Marcionite Christians and thus erroneously applied the same attitude regarding the Old Testament to him.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, p. 86: "Auf die Dauer kann es bei dieser unreflektierten christlichen Übernahme und Anerkenntnis der Schrift jedoch nicht bleiben."

2.1 Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* (ca. 150)⁶⁷⁹

“Some say it [the Law] has been laid down by God the Father, while others take the opposite direction and strenuously insist that it was given by the Adversary, the pernicious devil, just as they attribute the creation of the world to him, saying that he is the father and maker of this universe.” (Pan. 33.3,2)⁶⁸⁰

At the beginning of his letter, Ptolemy opposes two different opinions held about the Law: the orthodox one, which identifies (the supreme) God and the Lawgiver, and Marcion's, who distinguishes between the two, and considers the Lawgiver (and Creator) to be evil (see Chapter I). Ptolemy considers both positions to be erroneous and is about to offer his own solution to the problem, a sort of middle way. First of all, he distinguishes different parts of the Law: 1. the part which belongs to God himself; 2. the part which belongs to Moses (that is, the part which originates from Moses' own ideas, in distinction from the Law that God gave through him and which belongs to the first group); 3. the part which belongs to the elders.⁶⁸¹

In order to distinguish the first part of the Law from the second part, Ptolemy uses the example of divorce. Jesus said: “It was because of your hard-heartedness that Moses permitted one to divorce his wife. But it was not this way from the beginning. For God has joined this couple together, and what the Lord has joined together, let man not separate.”⁶⁸² This, for Ptolemy, serves as clear proof that the Law of God is different from the Law of Moses. However, Ptolemy has, unlike Marcion, no interest in discrediting Moses. On the contrary, he is very much concerned with saving Moses'

⁶⁷⁹ For the dating of the letter, see Chapter I.

⁶⁸⁰ Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πατρὸς νεινομοθετῆσθαι τοῦτον λέγουσιν, ἕτεροι δὲ τούτοις τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδὸν τραπέντες ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀντικειμένου φθοροποιοῦ διαβόλου τεθεισθαι τοῦτον ἰσχυρίζονται, ὡς καὶ τὴν τοῦ κόσμου προσάπτουσιν αὐτῷ δημιουργίαν, πατέρα καὶ ποιητὴν τοῦτον λέγοντες εἶναι τοῦδε τοῦ παντός.

⁶⁸¹ Pan. 33.4,2.

⁶⁸² Pan. 33.4,4 (Matt. 19:8,6): Μωυσῆς πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν ἐπέτρεψεν τὸ ἀπολύειν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ. Ἄπ' ἀρχῆς γὰρ οὐ γέγονεν οὕτως. Θεὸς γάρ [...] συνέζευξε αὐτήν τὴν συζυγίαν, καὶ ὁ συνέζευξεν ὁ κύριος ἄνθρωπος [...] μὴ χωριζέτω.

reputation by stressing that he did not teach contradictory to God's Law because of personal ambition or vanity, but simply because of the circumstances, that is, because of the hard-hearted people, and thus merely chose the lesser of two evils.⁶⁸³

The third part of the Law, which belongs to the elders, is also identified by a saying of Christ: "For God said 'Honour your father and your mother' so that it may be well with you'. But you [the elders] have said 'Whatever help you might have received from me is an offering to God', and you have made void the Law of God for the sake of your tradition'. This is what Isaiah declared: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine the precepts of men.'"⁶⁸⁴

Having thus determined the second and third parts of the Law, Ptolemy now engages with the first part, the Law of God himself, which he again divides into three parts: 1. the pure legislation; 2. the law mixed with the inferior and with injustice; 3. the law which is typical and symbolic.⁶⁸⁵ The pure law is the Decalogue, a law which is, although pure, still not perfect, as it had to be completed by the Saviour. The second kind of law is identified as the *lex talionis*, a law which is mixed with injustice since two wrongs do not make a right. However, this law is still just, as it was necessarily given because of the weakness of those who could not keep the pure law, and thus merely forms, very similarly to the law of Moses (see above), the lesser of two evils. It is obviously not compatible with the nature and goodness of the Supreme God, which is why it had to be abolished by the Saviour. Finally, there is the figurative part of it, which includes the laws of Jewish cult, such as circumcision or the Sabbath. These laws also

⁶⁸³ Pan. 33.4,6-9.

⁶⁸⁴ Pan. 33.4,11-13 (Matt. 15:4-9/Isa. 29:13): 'Ο γὰρ θεός [...] εἶπεν· τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα σου, ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται· Ὑμεῖς δέ [...] εἰρήκατε [...] δῶρον τῷ θεῷ ὃ ἐὰν ὠφελήθῃς ἐξ ἐμοῦ, καὶ ἠκυρώσατε τὸν νόμον τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν [...] Τοῦτο δὲ Ἡσαΐας ἐξεφώνησεν εἰπὼν· ὁ λαὸς οὗτος τοῖς χεῖλεσί με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, μάτην δὲ σέβονται με, διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων. The canonical text reads *λόγος* instead of *νόμος*. Although Ptolemy is not the only source which uses *νόμος* in this passage, it is possible that he deliberately changed the word to emphasise his point.

⁶⁸⁵ Pan. 33.5,1-2. For the following cf. Pan. 33.5,3-15.

have been abolished, but only as far as their physical carrying out is concerned. They are, however, still to be observed spiritually, so that circumcision for instance is no longer to be performed on the bodily foreskin, but on the spiritual heart. For the existence of this third kind of law Ptolemy finds proof in Paul, who identified both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as images when he said “Our Passover lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed”⁶⁸⁶ and “so that you may be unleavened, having no part of yeast (and by yeast he means evil), but may be a new dough”⁶⁸⁷.

Although Ptolemy up until this point has always referred to the Law as being (or not being) of God, this God for him cannot be the Supreme Father, since the Law of God “is not perfect and needs to be completed by someone else”⁶⁸⁸. Since it is further obvious that a Law which does away with injustice cannot be attributed to the devil either⁶⁸⁹, this God must be an intermediate God, who is between the good and the evil one: he is the just Demiurge.⁶⁹⁰

Ptolemy’s approach to the Old Testament is a truly pioneering act for several reasons. First of all, Ptolemy does not treat the Old Testament as a whole, but he particularly addresses the problem of the Old Testament Law, which was obviously the really ‘burning issue’ at the time. That the Prophecies referred to Christ was common belief among Christians (except Marcion, of course) and did not need to be justified; the Law, however, was a real challenge, a challenge that Ptolemy accepted. By further distinguishing different parts within it, Ptolemy broke the so far undisputed unity of Scripture. Perhaps his most important innovation, however, was that he relied on the words of Christ and Paul in order to distinguish these parts, in other words, he uses the

⁶⁸⁶ Pan. 33.5,15 (1Cor. 5:7): τὸ δε πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.: ἵνα ἦτε ἄζυμοι μὴ μετέχοντες ζύμης – ζύμην δὲ νῦν τὴν κακίαν λέγει – ἀλλ’ ἦτε νέον φύραμα.

⁶⁸⁸ Pan. 33.3,4: ἀτελὴ τε ὄντα καὶ τοῦ ὑφ’ ἑτέρου πληρωθῆναι ἐνδεῆ.

⁶⁸⁹ Pan. 33.3,5.

⁶⁹⁰ Pan. 33.7,2-4.

New Testament as the *hermeneutical key* to understand the Old.⁶⁹¹ This concept is crucially new in Ptolemy's time. Marcion antithetically opposed the Old Testament and the Gospel, but only in order to show that they are radically different. He did not need the Gospel in order to discredit the Old Testament and its God, as the Old Testament itself was quite sufficient to that end for the arch-heretic (see Chapters III/IV). Barnabas, like Ptolemy, interpreted the Jewish Laws to be symbolic, but he never referred to the Gospel or Paul to prove this point and instead also attempted to demonstrate this from the Old Testament itself (see above). Ptolemy seems to be well aware of the concepts of his predecessors, and he combines them with his own. For example, he relates to one of Marcion's antitheses (see Chapter V) when he states that the commandment 'an eye for an eye' was abolished by Christ's command to turn the other cheek to anyone who hits the right cheek, since "opposites destroy each other"⁶⁹². Like Marcion, Ptolemy acknowledges the incompatibility of these two statements, but in distinction from the Pontic he does not use it to demonstrate the complete incompatibility of the Old and the New Testament, he only uses it to show the abolition of one part of the Law, the very *lex talionis* (see above). Also, Ptolemy interprets the Old Testament commandment of circumcision as a spiritual circumcision of the heart, just as Barnabas did; but again Ptolemy does not go so far as to use one example as a general rule. To him only one part of the Law is to be interpreted this way, which is the Jewish laws of cult. Moreover, Barnabas believed that the Law was always meant to be understood figuratively, whereas for Ptolemy only the Advent of Christ has changed the meaning of these commandments.

Ptolemy is, as he states himself in the beginning of his letter, concerned with an evaluation and a rectification of previous concepts regarding the Law. In a way, it is already this endeavour which greatly distinguishes him from his predecessors. Ptolemy's approach of saying 'there is concept a, there is concept b, both are insufficient, which is

⁶⁹¹ Cf. Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, p. 102: "Die bisherige ununterschiedene Einheit der Schrift ist zerbrochen; aber das Urteil über sie soll darum nicht einfach menschlichem Belieben überlassen bleiben, sondern wird allein an Christus und sein Wort gebunden."

⁶⁹² Pan. 33.6,2: Τὰ δὲ ἐναντία ἀλλήλων ἐστὶν ἀναιρετικά.

why I propose concept c' shows that we are about to encounter an almost scholastic analysis of the problem. Both Barnabas and Marcion were very radical thinkers, Ptolemy is far more differentiated and almost passionless. His letter reveals nothing of Barnabas' zealous concern with the right way of salvation or of Marcion's ardent hatred for the Creator. Ptolemy's style rather reveals the philosopher, the intellectual, the academic: all traits which Marcion in particular did not show.

2.2 Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (ca. 160)

“There will never be another God, Trypho, nor was there from eternity any other than He who made and ordered this universe. Nor do we believe that our God is another than yours, but that He is the one who led your Fathers out of Egypt ‘with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm’⁶⁹³. Nor have we placed our hopes in some other God – for there is no other –, but in the same as you, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. However, our hopes are not built up by Moses or by the Law, for then we would do the same as you. But now I have read, Trypho, that there shall be a final law as well as covenant superior to all others, which has to be kept by all people who seek for the inheritance of God. For the law given on Horeb is already old and is yours alone, but this one is for everybody without exception. But a law placed against another law abrogates the earlier one, and a covenant which originated later likewise replaces the previous one. As an eternal and final law Christ was given to us, and in the covenant we can trust, after which there shall be no more law, no more ordinance and no more commandment.” (Dial. 11,1-2)⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹³ Deut. 5:15.

⁶⁹⁴ Ούτε ἔσται ποτὲ ἄλλος θεός, ὃ Τρύφων, οὔτε ἦν ἀπ’ αἰῶνος [...] πλὴν τοῦ ποιήσαντος καὶ διατάξαντος τόδε τὸ πᾶν. Οὐδὲ ἄλλον μὲν ἡμῶν, ἄλλον δὲ ὑμῶν ἡγοῦμεθα θεόν, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἐξαγαγόντα τοὺς πατέρας ὑμῶν ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐν χειρὶ κραταιᾷ καὶ βραχίονι ὑψηλῷ· οὐδ’ εἰς ἄλλον τινα ἠλπίκαμεν, οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ εἰς τοῦτον εἰς ὃν καὶ ὑμεῖς, τὸν θεὸν τοῦ Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ. Ἠλπίκαμεν δὲ οὐ διὰ Μωσέως οὐδὲ διὰ τοῦ νόμου ἢ γὰρ ἂν τὸ αὐτὸ ὑμῖν ἐποιούμεν. Νυνὶ δὲ ἀνέγνων γάρ, ὃ Τρύφων, ὅτι ἔσοιτο καὶ τελευταῖος νόμος καὶ διαθήκη κυριωτάτη πασῶν, ἣν νῦν δέου

In a way, the Rome of the 140s belonged to the heretics. Marcion, Valentinus, Ptolemy: those are the names which shape the history of the Church in the imperial capital at that time, especially as far as the exegesis of the Old Testament is concerned⁶⁹⁵. It was thus overdue for orthodoxy to strike back, and it did in the form of Justin Martyr. Although his *Dialogue with Trypho* is designed as a dispute with the Jews, many topics addressed in it are in fact conditioned by an anti-heretical purpose⁶⁹⁶. In the above quoted passage, Justin first of all points out that there is only one God, who is both the Creator of the world and the God of the Jews, that is, who is the God of the Old Testament. This statement may be considered the anti-heretical truth *per se*⁶⁹⁷, as it was exactly these facts which both Marcion and Ptolemy denied and which more than anything else labelled them as heretics⁶⁹⁸. For with all the dissimilarity between the two, Marcion and Ptolemy have a common denominator: they both pointed out the differences between the Old and the New Testament, thus concluding that the two both documents did not attest the same God. It is here that Justin has to take up the fight with the heretics if he wants to defend the above stated truth.

In Dial. 94,1-2 Justin addresses a concrete problem which Marcion had raised, the problem of God's inconsistency in on the one hand forbidding the making of any images

φυλάσσειν πάντας ανθρώπους ὅσοι τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ κληρονομίας ἀντιποιοῦνται. Ὁ γὰρ ἐν Χωρῆβ παλαιὸς ἦδη νόμος καὶ ὑμῶν μόνων, ὁ δὲ πάντων ἀπλῶς νόμος δὲ κατὰ νόμου τεθεὶς τὸν πρὸ αὐτοῦ ἔπαυσε, καὶ διαθήκη μετέπειτα γενομένη τὴν προτέραν ὁμοίως ἔστησεν. Αἰώνιος τε ἡμῖν νόμος καὶ τελευταῖος ὁ Χριστὸς ἐδόθη καὶ ἡ διαθήκη πιστῆ, μεθ' ἧν οὐ νόμος, οὐ πρόσταγμα οὐκ ἐντολή.

⁶⁹⁵ Valentinus remains too elusive a figure to say anything substantial about his attitude toward the Old Testament, which is why he does not feature in this chapter. For a good overview on his life and theology see Thomassen, *Seed*, p. 417-490.

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, p. 106; cf. also Pierre Prigent, *Justin et l'Ancien Testament*, Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1964. Prigent's study is based on the idea that Justin's lost *Treatise against all Heresies* forms the main source for the *Dialogue* and the *Apology*, a theory which probably goes slightly too far (especially as far as the *Apology* is concerned), but which correctly points out the anti-heretical purpose of Justin's writings, the *Dialogue* in particular (cf. Robert M. Grant, Review "Justin et l'Ancien Testament", *JBL* 84 (1965), p. 440-443).

⁶⁹⁷ "In this passage the emphatic rejection of 'another God' is strikingly out of context [...] Not Trypho, therefore, but Marcion is here in view" (Theodore Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975, p. 25).

⁶⁹⁸ In his report on Marcion in his *Apology*, Marcion's ditheism is in fact the only real theological feature Justin mentions about the arch-heretic, cf. Moll, *Justin*, p. 145-151. Likewise, Origen identifies heretics mainly by their distinction between the God of the Old and the God of the New Testament (cf. Le Boulluec, *Notion*, p. 509-510).

while on the other hand commanding Moses to create the brazen serpent (see Chapter III), an inconsistency which Marcion used in order to demonstrate that the Old Testament God, due to such unworthy characteristics, was not the Perfect God to be found in the Gospel. Justin counters the claim of inconsistency by pointing out that through the ‘mysterion’ of the serpent God proclaimed that he would “destroy the power of the serpent, which has also caused Adam’s transgression, and he proclaimed the salvation of those who believe in the one who through this sign, that is, the cross, was destined to be put to death by the snakebites, which are the evil deeds, idolatries and other injustices”⁶⁹⁹. Thus, the allegorical interpretation, which Justin knows to be the best way of countering Marcion’s strict literal approach to the texts, and which had so far often served as a means in conflict with the Jews, is now for the first time used against a heretic.

In other passages, we can clearly hear Justin’s awareness of Ptolemy’s critique of Scripture, for example when he says to his Jewish dialogue partner: “But blame it on your own wickedness that God can be calumniated by foolish people who claim that He did not always teach everyone the same justice. For to many people these instructions seemed absurd and unworthy of God, since they had not received the grace to understand that He called your people, who did evil and suffered from illness of the soul, to conversion of the spirit [by these instructions].”⁷⁰⁰ Ptolemy is not mentioned by name, and he is certainly not the only ‘foolish’ one envisaged, but we can easily detect his critique of Scripture in these words. Justin is arguing against people who dissect the Law into different parts and/or who believe that the instructions are unworthy of (the Supreme) God, ideas which are both to be found in Ptolemy’s *Letter to Flora* (see

⁶⁹⁹ καταλύειν μὲν τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ὄφεως, τοῦ καὶ τὴν παράβασιν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀδάμ γενέσθαι ἐργασασμένου, ἐκήρυσσε, σωτηρίαν δὲ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τοῦτον, τὸν διὰ τοῦ σημείου τούτου τουτέστι τοῦ σταυροῦ σῶσαι αὐτοὺς μέλλοντα ἀπὸ τῶν δηγμάτων τοῦ ὄφεως, ἅπερ εἰσὶν αἱ κακαὶ πράξεις, εἰδωλολατρεῖαι καὶ ἄλλαι ἀδικίαι.

⁷⁰⁰ Dial. 30,1: Ἀλλὰ τῇ αὐτῶν κακίᾳ ἐγκαλεῖτε ὅτι καὶ συκοφαντεῖσθαι δυνατός ἐστιν ὁ θεὸς ὑπὸ τῶν νοῦν μὴ ἐχόντων, ὡς τὰ αὐτὰ δίκαια μὴ πάντας αἰεὶ διδάσκει. Πολλοῖς γὰρ ἀνθρώποις ἄλογα καὶ οὐκ ἄξια θεοῦ τὰ τοιαῦτα διδάγματα ἔδοξε εἶναι, μὴ λαβοῦσι χάριν τοῦ γινῶναι ὅτι τὸν λαὸν ὑμῶν ποιηρευόμενοι καὶ ἐν νόσῳ ψυχικῇ ὑπάρχοντα εἰς ἐπιστροφὴν καὶ μετάνοιαν τοῦ πνεύματος κέκληκε. Cf. also Dial. 23,1-2.

above), the second point being a critique lodged also by Marcion. Justin thus has to prove that God always taught the same justice, and that his instructions are in fact worthy of him, or, in other words, he has to prove that the Old Testament Law is compatible with the Gospel of Christ.

Justin's solution to the problem is the distinction between the Law of Moses and the eternal law represented by Christ⁷⁰¹. The eternal law is contained in the two precepts stated by Christ: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'⁷⁰². Christ has come to "actualiser et incarner ces préceptes éternels"⁷⁰³; however, they were already identifiable before his coming⁷⁰⁴, and they have indeed already been kept by people such as Noah, Enoch and Jacob⁷⁰⁵, which was sufficient for their salvation since "those who did what is universally, naturally and eternally good are pleasing to God"⁷⁰⁶. The fact that only these two precepts of Christ are necessary for salvation, as well as the deliberate mention of Old Testament figures who lived before the time of Moses, already adumbrate that the Mosaic Law can only have a subordinate function for Justin; and indeed it has. According to him, the Law of Moses was only given due to the hard-heartedness of the Jews: "As circumcision began with Abraham and as the Sabbath, sacrifices, offerings and feasts began with Moses – and it has been demonstrated that these things were enjoined because of the hard-heartedness of your people⁷⁰⁷ – so it was necessary that they, according to the will of the Father, found their end in Him who was of the family of Abraham and the tribe of Judah and David, born of a virgin, Christ the Son of God, who was proclaimed to come to all the world both as the eternal law and as the new

⁷⁰¹ Cf. Philippe Bobichon, "Préceptes Éternels et Loi Mosaique dans le Dialogue avec Tryphon de Justin Martyr", *RB* 111 (2004), p. 238-254.

⁷⁰² Dial. 93,1-3 (Matt. 22,37-39 et parr.)

⁷⁰³ Bobichon, *Préceptes Éternels*, p. 241.

⁷⁰⁴ This idea is particularly developed in the *Apology*, cf. 1Apol. 46.

⁷⁰⁵ Dial. 45,3.

⁷⁰⁶ Dial. 45,4: Ἐπεὶ οὐ τὰ καθόλου καὶ φύσει καὶ αἰώνια καλὰ ἐποίουν εὐάρεστοί εἰσι τῷ θεῷ.

⁷⁰⁷ Cf. Dial. 12-23.

covenant, as the aforementioned prophecies signify.”⁷⁰⁸ In this passage we can perceive Justin’s concept of a certain temporal development within the *Heilsgeschichte*, a concept which is also used in immediate opposition to the heretics⁷⁰⁹: there is the era until Abraham/Moses⁷¹⁰, the era of the Mosaic Law, and the era beginning with Christ. Christ as the new and eternal law for everybody abrogates the old and only temporary law for the Jews since “a law placed against another law abrogates the earlier one” (see above).

While this antithetical view of things may remind us of Marcion at first, it is actually formulated in immediate opposition to the arch-heretic, for Marcion does not think in categories of old and new nor is any kind of replacement concept to be found in his system. This is in fact the crucial difference between Justin and Marcion. Both men see Christ in opposition to the Old Testament Law (or the entire Old Testament in Marcion’s case), but for Marcion this antithesis consists in a permanent fight between two Gods (see Chapter III), whereas Justin believes that the antithetical new law has simply replaced the old one. Justin is, however, very close to Ptolemy in some of his thoughts. Both realise a contrast between the Law of Christ and the Law of Moses, both attribute the Law of Moses to the wickedness of the Jewish people, and both understand the Law of Moses allegorically. Nevertheless, the differences outweigh the similarities⁷¹¹, the main difference of course being Justin’s belief in one God in contrast to Ptolemy’s

⁷⁰⁸ Dial. 43,1: Ὡς οὖν ἀπὸ Ἀβραάμ ἤρξατο περιτομὴ καὶ ἀπὸ Μωσέως σάββατον καὶ θυσίαι καὶ προσφωραὶ καὶ ἑορταί, καὶ ἀπεδείχθη διὰ τὸ σκληροκάρδιον τοῦ λαοῦ ὑμῶν ταῦτα διατετάχθαι, οὕτως παύσασθαι ἔδει κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς βουλήν εἰς τὸν διὰ τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους Ἀβραάμ καὶ φυλῆς Ἰούδα καὶ Δαυῖδ παρθένου γεννηθέντα υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ Χριστὸν, ὅστις καὶ αἰώνιος νόμος, καὶ καινὴ διαθήκη τῷ παντὶ κόσμῳ ἐκηρύσσεται προελευσόμενος, ὡς αἱ προλελεγμένοι προφητεῖαι σημαίνουσι. In a very similar way already to be found in Dial. 23,3.

⁷⁰⁹ Cf. Quispel, *Lettre à Flora*, p. 10: “Les attaques des hérétiques ont poussé les auteurs catholiques à développer, à leur manière, l’idée d’un *développement dans la révélation divine*.” (author’s emphasis). Cf. also Stylianopoulos, *Law*, p. 167: “Justin’s historical interpretation of the Law, and his tripartite division of the Law, were a result of his debate with the great second-century heresiarchs. It was the challenge of gnostic and marcionite hermeneutic that led Justin, the first Christian author explicitly to do so, to recognize the variety of divine dispensations, while maintaining and defending against the heretical teachers the unity of God and the authority of Scripture.”

⁷¹⁰ Bobichon further distinguished this first era into two (*Préceptes Éternels*, p. 246), which is technically correct, however, Abraham only marks a minor change in history compared to the other crucial changes, so that Justin’s view of history may in fact be called tripartite.

⁷¹¹ Even within the similarities described we find differences between the two men. Justin, for example, attributes above all the laws of cult to the hard-heartedness of the Jews, whereas Ptolemy classes these laws among the law of God (see above).

polytheism. In order to safeguard his belief, Justin has to deviate from Ptolemy's system in several ways. First of all, if there is only one God, the Law of Moses cannot actually be opposed to the Law of Christ, for such an idea would play into the hands of those who claim that God did not at all times teach the same justice (see above). Thus, in Justin's thought, the Law of Moses and the natural Law are not mutually exclusive, rather the natural law, which is on its own sufficient for salvation, is contained in the Law of Moses⁷¹², which, on its part, *additionally* contains many laws only given because of hard-heartedness. Furthermore, Justin's historical approach to the divine revelation, which is completely lacking from Ptolemy's letter, implies that the second era, the era of the Mosaic Law, was merely an intermediate phase. As stated above, Christ incarnated the eternal law, but since this law is in fact eternal and naturally perceivable, it already existed and was kept before Christ and before Moses, so that the relation of the Advent of Christ to the time of the Mosaic Law is, in manner of speaking, as the Renaissance to the Middle Ages. For Ptolemy, however, at least as far as it can be retrieved from his letter, the Advent of Christ revealed something entirely new and never seen before.⁷¹³

Perhaps the most important difference between Justin and the Gnostic regarding their exegesis of the Old Testament is their use of the New Testament. Ptolemy embraces the words of Christ (and Paul) as his authority and checks the words of the Old Testament against them, something which we have found to be a real novelty in his time (see above). Justin's approach, however, is different: "Der hermeneutische Grundsatz, dem er folgt, ist nicht die Autorität des Worts oder der Lehre Christi, sondern die vorausgesetzte, lückenlose Einheit und Widerspruchslosigkeit der göttlich inspirierten heiligen Schrift."⁷¹⁴ This conviction is explicitly articulated by Justin in Dial. 65,2: "But if such a passage of Scripture was held against me under the pretext that it was contrary to another, I would still be absolutely convinced that no passage of Scripture is in contrast to another, and I would rather admit that I myself do not understand what it

⁷¹² Cf. Dial. 45,3.

⁷¹³ Ptolemy's statement that Christ has revealed the Father (Pan. 33.7,5) seems to imply that (as with Marcion) this God was never heard of before.

⁷¹⁴ Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, p. 120.

means”⁷¹⁵. Accordingly, Justin’s evaluation of the Old Testament derives from the Old Testament itself, not from the New as in Ptolemy. A good example of this difference is the use of a passage from the Prophet Isaiah which both Ptolemy and Justin refer to: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.’⁷¹⁶ As stated, both men make use of this quote, Ptolemy for his categorization of the Law, Justin for his general critique of the Jewish people. The more interesting difference, however, is the fact that whereas Justin quotes the Prophet himself, Ptolemy only uses his words indirectly through the mouth of Jesus, thus indicating that for him the actual authority lies not with the Prophet, but with Christ.

All in all, Justin’s concept certainly is in many ways related to the Gnostic’s, but is also a counter-concept, and as such it has to be seen in distinct dissociation from it. Especially Justin’s method of interpreting the Old Testament out of itself actually brings him closer to Barnabas than to Ptolemy, especially since both Justin and Barnabas, while not explicitly using the words of Christ as their hermeneutical key to understand the Old Testament, believe that Christ gave them the gift of understanding the Scriptures correctly⁷¹⁷.

⁷¹⁵ ἀλλ’ ἐὰν τοιαύτη τις δοκοῦσα εἶναι γραφή προβληθῆ καὶ πρόφασιν ἔχη ὡς ἐναντία οὐσα, ἐκ παντὸς πεπεισμένος ὅτι οὐδεμία γραφή τῆ ἐτέρᾳ ἐναντία ἐστίν, αὐτὸς μὴ νοεῖν μᾶλλον ὁμολογήσω τὰ εἰρημένα.

⁷¹⁶ Isa. 29:13, cf. Pan. 33.4,13; Dial. 27,4.

⁷¹⁷ Cf. Stylianopoulos, *Law*, p. 73: “Christ is the hermeneutical principle. But this does not mean that Justin appeals to the teaching of Jesus. Justin does not quote sayings of Jesus in his evaluation of the Law. Rather he appeals to the Christ who grants the spiritual gift of interpretation.”

2.3 Apelles' *Syllogisms* (ca. 160-170)⁷¹⁸

After having heard several different solutions to the problem which the Old Testament poses to Christians, with Apelles, Marcion's most prominent disciple, we now encounter what may be called the last possible option of dealing with the Old Testament, the option of considering it to be simply untrue. This is what Apelles tries to demonstrate in his *Syllogisms*, a work of which we fortunately have several fragments preserved.

An analysis of three of those fragments may suffice to illustrate Apelles' approach.

Fragment 8 (Ambrosius, *De Paradiso* 8,38)⁷¹⁹:

*Did God know that Adam would transgress his commandments or did he not? If he did not know, this is no proclamation of divine power; but if he did know, and still knowingly commanded things which would be neglected – it is not for God to command something superfluous. But he did command that first-formed Adam something superfluous, which he knew he would not actually observe. But God does nothing superfluous; therefore the scripture does not come from God.*⁷²⁰

This syllogism is ideal for a demonstration of Apelles' method. Not only is it concerned with one of the most disputed passages from the Old Testament, particularly discussed

⁷¹⁸ It is impossible to give an exact date for the origin of the *Syllogisms*. As *terminus post quem* we have Apelles' break with Marcion's doctrine, which we may assume did not happen before Marcion's church had been fully established, that is, not before ca. 150. Moreover, Justin never mentions Apelles in his works, so we may take 160 as a vague mark. As *terminus ante quem* the debate with Rhodon may serve, at which Apelles was already an old man (Hist. Eccl. V.13,5). The exact time of this debate cannot be determined, but it seems likely that it took place not later than ca. 180 (cf. Marksches, "Apelles", *LACL* (3rd ed., 2002), p. 44). Assuming that Apelles changed his attitude toward the Old Testament later in life (see below), we also have to allow for some time between the writing of the *Syllogisms* and the debate with Rhodon, which brings to us to about 170.

⁷¹⁹ The numbering of the fragments is according to Greschat, *Apelles*, p. 50-68, where one can also find the complete text and an analysis of all the fragments.

⁷²⁰ Sciebat praevaricaturum deus Adam mandata sua an nesciebat? Si nesciebat, non est ista divinae potestatis adsertio, si autem sciebat et nihilominus sciens neglegenda mandavit, non est dei aliquid superfluum praecipere. Superfluo autem praecepit primoplasto illi Adae quod eum noverat minime servaturum. Nihil autem deus superfluo facit; ergo non est scriptura ex deo.

by the Gnostics⁷²¹ and Marcion himself (see Chapter III), it is also one of the few Apellean syllogisms which seems to have been preserved completely, as it shows the classical form of a syllogism, or, to be precise, two in one.

Premise A: The scripture either says that God did not know Adam would transgress his commandment, or that he superfluously commanded something which he knew Adam would not observe.

Premise B: God is omniscient and never does anything superfluous.

Conclusion: The scripture does not come from God

This way of thinking reveals one, if not the crucial difference between Apelles and his ‘master’ Marcion. The latter had a Biblicist approach (see Chapter IV), he accepted the Old Testament ‘as it is’, and came to the conclusion that it is the testimony of a God who in fact *is* not omniscient and *does* superfluous things. That is why May, for instance, is incorrect when he characterises Marcion’s view of the Old Testament God as follows: “Markion hebt eben einfach jene anthropomorphen Züge des alttestamentlichen Gottes hervor, die jedem philosophisch gebildeten Zeitgenossen Schwierigkeiten bereiteten.”⁷²² The fact of the matter is that Marcion, contrary to frequent claims⁷²³, has absolutely no concept of θεοπρεπές, he established his view of the Creator simply based on the testimony of the Old Testament. Apelles, on the other hand, has a philosophical approach, he has an *a priori* concept of God, a God who has all the features which classical philosophy attributes to him, and he checks this *a priori* concept against the evidence of Scripture, bringing him to the conclusion that this Scripture can not come from God. What Marcion and Apelles have in common, however, is that they both share

⁷²¹ Cf. Peter Nagel, “Die Auslegung der Paradieserzählung in der Gnosis”, in: Karl-Wolfgang Tröger (ed.), *Altes Testament – Frühjudentum – Gnosis: Neue Studien zu „Gnosis und Bibel“*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Mohn, 1980, p. 49-70.

⁷²² May, *Schiffsreeder*, p. 152 n. 42 (= *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 61 n. 46).

⁷²³ Cf. for example Lukas, *Rhetorik*, p. 515-516.

the same rejection of allegorical interpretation and insist on a literal understanding of the texts. Moreover, both interpret the Old Testament as one unit (unlike Ptolemy and Justin), and for both their interpretation of the Old Testament is completely detached from the New⁷²⁴ (unlike Ptolemy's). Thus, one might say that mentor and student had more in common than is usually assumed⁷²⁵, at least as far as their approach to the Old Testament is concerned.

Fragment 13 (Origen, *In Genesim Homilia* II,2):

*Under no circumstances would it have been possible to bring aboard [the Ark] so many species of animals and their food, which was to last for a whole year, in such a short time. For if the impure animals are said to be led in two by two, that is two male and two female of each [...], and the pure animals seven by seven, that is seven pairs, how should it have been possible that the space which is written about could even have held four elephants alone? Thus it is certain that the story is fabricated; and since this is the case, it is certain that this scripture is not of God.*⁷²⁶

Apart from the fact that this fragment from Apelles' work is not technically a syllogism, it differs from the preceding one in another important way. This time Apelles is not concerned with a contradiction between his view of God and the portray of him painted in Scripture, but simply with a factual inconsistency within the text. In a way, this

⁷²⁴ Eric Junod correctly observed this point for Apelles, but is mistaken when he claims: "Pour Marcion, il faut l'Évangile pour disqualifier l'Ancien Testament." (Eric Junod, "Les attitudes d'Apelles, disciple de Marcion, à l'égard de l'Ancien Testament", *Augustinianum* 1982 (22), p. 122) ; cf. Chapter IV.

⁷²⁵ Cf. for example Meike Willing, "Die neue Frage des Marcionschülers Apelles – zur Rezeption marcionitischen Gedankenguts", in: May (ed.), *Marcion*, p. 231: "Wäre die Schülerschaft des Apelles bei Marcion nicht derart gut bezeugt, würde man aufgrund der überlieferten Lehre zunächst kaum auf den Gedanken kommen, in Apelles einen Marcionschüler zu sehen."

⁷²⁶ Dicit nullo genere fieri potuisse, ut tam breve spatium tot animalium genera eorumque cibos, qui per totum annum sufficerent, capere potuissent. Cum enim bina bina ex immundis animalibus, hoc est bini masculi et feminae binae [...], ex mundis vero septena septena, quod est paria septena, in arcam dicantur inducta, quomodo [...] fieri potuit istud spatium, quod scriptum est, ut quattuor saltem solos elephantas capere potuerit? [...] constat ergo fictam esse fabulam; quod si est, constat non esse hanc a Deo scripturam.

argument then still turns out to be a syllogism after all, which could be phrased as follows: the story is untrue; God does not speak anything untrue; thus this story is not of God.

Fragment 1 (Ambrosius, *De Paradiso* 5,28)

*How is it that the tree of life seems to contribute more to life than the breath of God?*⁷²⁷

What Apelles is referring to here is a certain inconsistency within the biblical story of Genesis: “während in Gen. 2,7 davon die Rede war, daß der Mensch sein Leben durch die Einhauchung Gottes mitgeteilt bekommt, erweckt die Erwähnung des Lebensbaumes im Paradies den Eindruck, als sei dieser Baum noch wichtiger zum Leben als die unmittelbar von Gott stammende göttliche Gabe.”⁷²⁸ We thus have in front of us a third kind of Apellean criticism of Scripture. This time he is not concerned with the Scripture’s presentation of God or the factual impossibility of a certain story, but with inconsistencies within the texts themselves. Once again, Apelles’ approach proves to be different from that of his teacher. Marcion also realised such inconsistencies (although this particular one is not attested for him), but he attributed them to an inconsistent God (see Chapter III). Apelles, however, could not accept such an idea of a God, and thus, although it is not explicitly mentioned by Ambrosius this time, it is obvious that the inconsistency within the text led Apelles to the same conclusion as before: the scripture is not of God.

While it is striking that all of Apelles’ preserved fragments are concerned with the book of Genesis, it still seems unlikely that he limited his effort to this book alone. First of all it would be rather strange if Apelles dedicated 38 volumes (or more)⁷²⁹ of *Syllogisms* to the book of Genesis only. Moreover, Pseudo-Tertullian clearly states that in his

⁷²⁷ Quomodo lignum vitae plus operari videtur ad vitam quam insufflatio dei?

⁷²⁸ Greschat, *Apelles*, p. 52.

⁷²⁹ Cf. *De Paradiso* 5,28.

Syllogisms Apelles tried to prove that “whatever Moses has written about God is not true but false”⁷³⁰ and Hippolytus concurs, reporting that Apelles “composed treatises [apparently the *Syllogisms*] against the Law and the Prophets, attempting to destroy them as if they spoke lies and had no knowledge of God”⁷³¹, and that he “reviles the Law and the Prophets, saying that the Scriptures are man-made and false”⁷³². Hence, the aim of the *Syllogisms* is clear: to demonstrate that the Old Testament contained nothing true about God and was therefore – at least this seems to be the obvious conclusion – to be abolished.

We could stop our analysis of Apelles’ *Syllogisms* at this point, if it was not for several testimonies which conflict with our picture so far. First, there is a remark by Origen according to which Apelles “did not in every way deny that the Law and the Prophets are of God”⁷³³. Then, there is Epiphanius, who reports that Apelles relied on the (non-attested) saying by Jesus ‘Become experienced money-changers’ (that is, become “capable of distinguishing between good and bad”⁷³⁴) and accordingly stated: “I make use of the entire Scripture and I keep what is useful.”⁷³⁵ These two testimonies certainly do not portray Apelles as the radical Old Testament critic we have encountered above, and seem rather to bring him in a certain connection to Ptolemy, who also distinguished between different parts of Scripture (see above). Eric Junod concluded that Apelles must have changed his position on the Old Testament between the time of the writing of his *Syllogisms* and his later work *Phaneroseis*.⁷³⁶ Subsequent scholars doubted Junod’s theory, without, however, any conclusive reason or any alternative solution to the

⁷³⁰ Adv. omn. haer. VI.6: omnia, quaecumque Moyses de deo scripserit, vera non sint, sed falsa sint.

⁷³¹ Ref. X.20,2: οὗτος κατὰ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν συντάγματα ἐποίησε, καταλύει αὐτοὺς ἐπιχειρῶν ὡς ψευδῆ λελαληκότας καὶ θεὸν μὴ ἐγνωκότας.

⁷³² Ref. VII.38,2: νόμον δὲ καὶ προφήτας δυσφημεῖ ἀνθρώπινα καὶ ψευδῆ φάσκων εἶναι τὰ γεγραμμένα.

⁷³³ *Apologia pro Origine* 33: licet non omnibus modis Dei esse deneget Legem vel prophetas. The German edition reads: “Apelles [...] obwohl er in jeder Hinsicht versichert, Gesetz und Propheten seien von Gott”, which is an obvious mistranslation (Georg Röwekamp (ed.), *Pamphilus von Caesarea: Apologia pro Origine/Apologie für Origenes*, FC 80, Turnhout: Brepols, 2005, 261).

⁷³⁴ G.W.H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 192005, p. 1400. See *ibid.* for the occurrence of this Agraphon.

⁷³⁵ Pan. 44.2,6: χρῶμαι [...] ἀπὸ πάσης γραφῆς ἀναλέγων τὰ χρήσιμα.

⁷³⁶ Junod, *Attitudes*, p. 131-133. His theory found support from Le Boulluec, *Notion II*, p. 526 n. 301.

apparent discrepancy found in the sources.⁷³⁷ Junod's theory must remain a theory, but it still seems to be the most plausible solution available. Unfortunately, we are no longer able to establish exactly what Apelles' later position on the Old Testament consisted of. Nonetheless, the simple fact that he changed his attitude toward the Old Testament during his life remains noteworthy, since such an action is, at least to the extent of our knowledge, singular among the men discussed in this chapter. Scholars have often assumed that Apelles, as he was growing older, lost the interest in and the energy for rational criticism and thus, under the influence of a certain prophetess named Philumene, became fascinated with prophecy and mysticism and gave in to "la croyance subjective"⁷³⁸. While the influence of the prophetess on Apelles is well attested in the sources⁷³⁹, it is doubtful that she was responsible for the change in his view on the Old Testament. There is a more plausible and more intriguing alternative. In this chapter we have seen what a powerful status the Old Testament had among Christians of all shades in the second century. It thus seems possible that Apelles' strictly rationalist approach to the texts was simply too radical for the Christians of his time, especially as it brought him dangerously close to some of the pagan critics of Christianity⁷⁴⁰. And so he learned his lesson: Christianity without the Old Testament does not work.

⁷³⁷ Greschat (*Apelles*, p. 110 n. 5) attempted to point out that as an old man, as he is depicted by Rhodon, Apelles still completely denied the divine origin of the Mosaic stories, thus questioning Junod's theory of a change in Apelles' life. She is, however, mistaken on this point, as Apelles, in his debate with Rhodon, only makes such a statement regarding the prophecies (Hist. Eccl. V.13,6). It is therefore quite possible that by the time of this debate he already had a more differentiated view of the Old Testament. Junod's theory was also questioned by Robert M. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism: The Search for Authenticity in Early Christian Literature*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 77-78).

⁷³⁸ Eugène de Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme: Étude critique des documents du Gnosticisme Chrétien aux II^e et III^e siècles*, Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, ²1925, p. 188.

⁷³⁹ Cf. Greschat, *Apelles*, p. 110-113.

⁷⁴⁰ Cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 195-196: "Durch diese Erkenntnis trat er an die Seite der gebildeten Griechen, die das Christentum bekämpften, und diese fatale Bundesgenossenschaft war er Verbreitung seiner Schule nicht zuträglich gewesen sein."

3.) Conclusion

Summing up the observations made in this chapter, the chronological development concerning the Christian attitude toward the Old Testament presents itself as follows.

The second century writers before Marcion (Ignatius and Barnabas) see the Old Testament in harmony with the Gospel – if understood allegorically. Barnabas, of course, is far more explicit in this matter than Ignatius. Perhaps Barnabas marks the climax of a tendency increasingly common in his time, the tendency “die Bibel schlechthin den Juden zu entreißen und sie von vornherein zu einem ausschließlich christlichen Buch zu stempeln.”⁷⁴¹ Unfortunately, Barnabas’ concept contained an obvious flaw. According to his system, only the coming of Christ revealed the actual meaning of the Covenant/Testament (see above). It does, however, hardly make any sense to continue proclaiming ethical commandments over the centuries while their understanding is ‘put on hold’.⁷⁴²

It is thus perhaps no coincidence that Marcion turned the whole affair upside down. In a manner of speaking, he gave the Old Testament back to the Jews, by denying the God attested in it to be the Father of Jesus Christ.⁷⁴³ Of course, we should refrain from understanding Marcion’s doctrine to be merely a solution to an exegetical problem. His conviction goes far deeper than that; however, the success of his movement may in part be due to this unsolved issue of his time (see Chapter VI). Still, Marcion’s solution could not be satisfying for long; too obvious was the forgery he had to perform on the New Testament texts in order to make his concept work. Nonetheless, there was no turning

⁷⁴¹ Campenhausen, *Entstehung*, p. 85.

⁷⁴² Cf. Bultmann’s sneering remark concerning the Letter to the Hebrews: “Wozu diese ganze Veranstaltung einer Vorabbildung des Heilswerkes Christi, die in der Zeit vor Christus ja niemand verstehen konnte, eigentlich geschehen sei, würde man den Verfasser [...] wohl vergeblich fragen.” (Bultmann, *Theologie*, p. 110).

⁷⁴³ At the same time, again completely unlike Barnabas, Marcion harbours no negative feelings against the Jews (see Chapter III). What may seem slightly paradoxical at first is in fact only consistent, for it is people like Barnabas who aim at depriving the Jews of any right of their own to the Scriptures, cf. Räisänen, *Marcion*, p. 76.

back after Marcion. From now on, Christian theologians had to deal with the contrasts between the two Testaments.

Ptolemy was the first to react to Marcion's system by introducing the idea of different parts within the Old Testament. His letter is not concerned with the Old Testament as a whole, but solely with the Law. Ptolemy thus identifies and addresses the actual problem the Old Testament posed to the Christians. Naturally, by attributing the Law to a God other than the Father of Jesus Christ, Ptolemy remains fairly close to Marcion, and it was in fact the Gnostic's polytheistic approach which made his solution unacceptable to orthodox Christians such as Justin⁷⁴⁴. The Apologist, on his part, in order to preserve the idea of one single God being responsible for both the Old Testament (Law) and the Gospel, introduces his own concept of a temporal development within the divine revelation, a concept which was to have a remarkable success in the history of the Church.

Finally, Apelles' attempt to declare the Old Testament as completely unusable was destined to be nothing more than an isolated 'intermezzo' without lasting significance on the development of the Christian use of the Old Testament, a fact which perhaps even Apelles himself realised later in life.

⁷⁴⁴ To say nothing about the fact that Ptolemy's system is far too intricate to ever have prevailed in the Church.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study I declared that I would take up the challenge to establish a new coherent portrait of Marcion. At its end, it is time for the reader to decide whether I succeeded or not. Let me therefore now try to bring Marcion back to life by bundling the results of the single chapters of my work into one complete picture (the Roman numerals in brackets refer to the chapters in which the corresponding elements are discussed).

Marcion is born ca. 100-110 AD in Pontus (II). He grows up in a Christian environment and receives an education at grammar school (II). The time Marcion grows up in is (theologically) marked by a feeling of complete harmony and unity between the Old and the New Testament (VII). As far as his personal development is concerned, Marcion's soul appears to be infested by a fanatical hatred of the world (III). Given this psychological precondition of his, he is most concerned to find an explanation for the 'terrible' condition the world is in, in other words, he longs for an answer to the question: *unde malum?* (III/V) It is probably this question which leads him to a literal understanding of the Old Testament (III/IV), instead of applying an allegorical interpretation like his contemporaries. For the Old Testament, understood literally, can provide Marcion with the image of a God who is responsible for the *status quo*, a flawed Creator, who even admits himself that he brings evil to the world (III). Thus, the Old Testament and its God become the starting point and the very centre of Marcion's doctrine.

The testimony of the Gospel and of Paul is most important to the heresiarch, too, probably even just as important as the testimony of the Old Testament; however, in the genesis of Marcion's system of thought it remains the secondary part, a fact which can best be seen by the way he treats these two groups of texts (IV). As far as the Old

Testament is concerned, Marcion completely adopts the collection of texts which is in use in the orthodox church, that is, the collection he grew up with himself, without changing anything within it. As for the New Testament, however, Marcion radically altered it, not only by limiting it to a small number of texts (the Gospel of Luke and ten Letters of Paul), but above all by cutting out all passages from those that remain which show any positive reference to the Old Testament (IV). Thus, the New Testament has to be adapted to the Old, not the other way around, which means that *Marcion does not understand the Old Testament in the light of the New, he interprets the New Testament in the light of the Old*. Marcion is convinced that Christ's original Gospel has been falsified by the Church, a theory which, as he believes, finds confirmation in the writings of the Apostle Paul (IV). In the 'original' Gospel (that is, the Gospel of Luke changed according to Marcion's doctrine) the heresiarch finds the counterpart to the evil Creator, the perfectly good God, the Father of Jesus Christ, who is completely unrelated to the world and its people, but who still sent his Son to save mankind from the reign of the evil God (III). This salvation, however, remains limited to the afterlife. In *this* world Marcion and his followers are still 'companions in misery', as they designate themselves (III/V).

In 144/145 Marcion settles in Rome (II). He joins the local church and donates 200,000 sesterces, part of his respectable fortune, which he gained as a ship-owner (II). By this time, Marcion has already fully developed his doctrine, and he now begins to proclaim it in Rome (II). Accordingly, it does not take long until he and the Roman ecclesia go their separate ways, which causes Marcion to found his own church (II). This church shows remarkable similarities to its orthodox counterpart as far as liturgy as well as offices are concerned, a situation which shows that Marcion was deeply rooted in the ecclesial system of his time and thus simply adopted many of its features without questioning them (VI). The arch-heretic rules his community with absolute authority, a fact which, together with his organisational talent and his financial means, accounts for the enormous success of his movement throughout the Empire (VI). A particular danger to the Church is the fact that Marcion's movement recruits its members almost exclusively

from former orthodox Christians (VI), for the complete ban on procreation among the Marcionites rules out any chance of natural progeny, and the explicit biblical approach of Marcionite doctrine (combined with an extremely negative view of the Jewish texts) makes the movement unattractive to Jews and pagans alike (VI). The prohibition of sexual intercourse just mentioned is part of the radical ethics practised in Marcion's church. These ethics are motivated by a feeling of *Trotz* against the Creator: a Marcionite is supposed to deliberately disobey his commands, such as the command to 'increase and multiply' (VI).

In the years after the foundation of his church, Marcion conceives those works which would form the doctrinal basis of his movement: the *Antitheses*, in which he tries to demonstrate the opposition of the Old and the New Testament and thus the existence of two different Gods (V); the letter, which serves as a concise introduction to Marcionite doctrine (V); and his edition of the New Testament, an edition which consists of the Gospel of Luke and ten letters of Paul, all texts being completely freed from any positive reference to the Old Testament (IV).

Marcion's ideas have an enormous influence on the development of the Church, especially as far as the Old Testament is concerned (VII). With the contrast between the Old and the New Testament having been pointed out so radically, there is no going back to the feeling of perfect unity between them common among Marcion's predecessors. Accordingly, within only a few years after the start of Marcion's movement, several prominent Christian thinkers, both within the orthodox and the heretical camp, dedicate their writings to this question, especially Justin Martyr, who introduces the temporal concept of an *Old* and a *New* Testament in contrast to the heresiarch (VII).

Marcion dies about 165 AD, probably in Rome.

Just as one cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, one cannot establish a new portrait of Marcion without questioning the predominant view of Harnack. Let us therefore remember and evaluate the main components of this view.

1. Marcion distinguishes between a just God and a good God.

The distinction between a just God and a good God is attributed to Marcion by later writers such as Tertullian or Origen (III). However, our analysis has shown that this distinction represents a later stage in the development of Marcion's doctrine, as the earliest sources clearly describe his theology as a dualism between an evil God and a good God (III).

2. Marcion bases his theology on the testimony of Paul.

In a way, the first component leads to the second one, as Harnack identified Marcion's (alleged) distinction of a just and good God with Paul's distinction of Law and Grace, and thus concluded that Paul's theology formed the *Ausgangspunkt* for Marcion's doctrine (III/IV). However, since we have found this distinction to be absent from the arch-heretic's system of thought, the conclusion must be considered erroneous, too. Still, the sources leave no doubt that Marcion attached high importance to the Apostle. But rather than being the inspiration for Marcion's doctrine, he was retroactively claimed by the Pontic in order to legitimise his movement. Certainly, Marcion adopted Paul's soteriology and his critique of the Old Testament to a certain extent (III), but the Apostle served above all as his guarantor for his theory of the falsification of the Gospel (IV).

3. Marcion considers the Old Testament to be obsolete.

In contrast to the previous concepts, which can be attributed to a misinterpretation of the evidence found in the sources, this time it was merely Harnack's wish which was father to the thought. He believed that he had found a role model for his own theological agenda, which aimed at an exclusion of the Old Testament from the Christian Bible, and thus projected this agenda onto the heresiarch (III). Not least because this idea represents above all projection on Harnack's part, it may be considered his biggest misconception regarding Marcion's theology. Our analysis has shown that the Old Testament was anything but obsolete for him (III/IV). Marcion does not think in such categories as 'replacement' or 'old' and 'new', his system is truly dualistic, which is why it cannot exist without the negative counterpart to the Gospel of Christ.

4. Marcion is a Protestant Reformer ahead of his time.

The three features above add up to Harnack's comparison of Marcion and the modern Protestant Reformers, Luther in particular. Indeed, Luther distinguished Law and Gospel (that is, justice and goodness), Luther based his theology on the testimony of the Apostle Paul, and Luther, while of course not entirely neglecting the Old Testament, attached less importance to it compared to the New Testament. Thus, if the first three features applied to Marcion, a comparison with Luther would be natural; however, they have all proven to be erroneous. Apart from the theological dissimilarity between the two men, however, there is another reason why Marcion does not qualify for a comparison with the German Reformer, a feature we have deliberately avoided in our previous chapters: the evaluation of Marcion's historical achievement.

Harnack saw Marcion as a man who correctly identified a wrong development within the Church of his time, and as a man who bravely fought against this situation, but who tragically failed because of the narrow-mindedness of his contemporaries; in short, he saw him as a genius ahead of his time. Given all we have discovered about Marcion in the course of this study, we can clearly identify this as a misleading characterisation. In fact, Marcion was anything but ahead of his time. Being ahead of one's time means that one has certain ideas which are not appreciated by one's contemporaries, but which will be commonly accepted by future generations. This is certainly not true for the heresiarch. He contributed to the development of the Church by initiating the crisis of the Old Testament in the middle of the second century; however, his 'solution' to this crisis consisted above all of text forgery. He thus may have initiated the situation, but his complete inability to offer a real and lasting solution to it labels his contribution, while crucial, as purely negative and indirect. Among other things, it is this failure on Marcion's part which makes him ineligible for a comparison with such great men as Martin Luther. It is no accident that Marcion's movement remained an episode in the history of the Church, whereas Luther's became an era.

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I, Sebastian Moll, have composed this PhD thesis. It is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.