Chapter 1

Marcion

What do we know about Marcion himself? Our sources on him are varied, each with its own agenda and place in a tradition of hostile attacks on him. They cannot always be treated as independent witnesses, because later writers may merely repeat the statements of earlier ones, and several of those earlier writings are lost, making it difficult for us to map literary interdependence.[1] We do not know nearly as much as we would like about how information circulated in late antiquity, and a late source is not automatically worthless, since it may preserve information from an earlier one we otherwise no longer have. Moreover, some writers, no matter how much closer to Marcion in time, may simply not have bothered to check their facts very closely, whereas later ones may have worked diligently with Marcion's own writings. In short, we face many challenges in sifting our sources for reliable information about Marcion.

No substantial new data on Marcion has been discovered since Adolf von Harnack made his compilation of it in 1924.[2] But the long-known materials have undergone constant reevaluation in subsequent decades. In the late 1980s, Gerhard May summarized the state of the issues. Building on the observations of his predecessors, he cautioned against conflating separate lines of tradition about Marcion's life into artificial syntheses, tempting as they are for filling out a life so poorly known.[3] Sebastian Moll has recently revisited the state of the field, with new suggestions.[4] In order to better understand the circumstances in which Marcion's creation of the First New Testament occurred, this chapter attempts to situate that creation in the very few bits of information about Marcion in which we have some confidence, contextualizing both man and

text within the social, political, cultural, and religious environment of the time.

The things we think we know with some confidence about Marcion's life—leaving aside his teachings and literary activities for the moment—easily fit into this paragraph. All of them are sufficiently attested by multiple, plausibly independent witnesses, and none of them is particularly suspect as serving a polemical portrait. Marcion came from the Roman province of Pontus, on what is today the north coast of Turkey.[5] He had his profession in the sea-trade, being a shipmaster, or shipowner (*nauclerus*, ναύκληρος).[6] Eventually, he made his way to Rome, probably early in the reign of the emperor Antoninus Pius (138–61 CE).[7] His understanding of Christianity differed enough from that of leaders within the Roman Christian community that they could not retain communion with each other, and Marcion became the organizer and leader of a separate Christian community that rapidly drew in adherents from across the Roman Empire. That is all we reliably know; but it is worth reviewing some of the more interesting elaborations of this information in our various sources, being alert to their questionable worth as historical data.

The most solid date we have connected to Marcion—one remembered in the Marcionite community itself, and therefore not suspect as a polemical invention (although Tertullian manages to use it to make a polemical point)—is "115 years and 6½ months between Christ and Marcion."[8] The point of reference with Christ can scarcely be anything else than the date given in the first verse of the Evangelion: the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, 29 CE. The calculation yields a date in mid-July 144 CE,[9] even if the exact event commemorated by this date is not clear. One might as well refer to it, in the witty expression of Sebastian Moll, as "Marcion-day."[10] Since the date connected to Jesus is the latter's public advent as a religious leader (not his birth), it seems reasonable that the corresponding event be some sort of advent of Marcion, either in the mundane or spiritual sense.[11] While Epiphanius nearly two centuries later gives a date approximating this one for Marcion's arrival in Rome,[12] Irenaeus of Lyons, writing much closer to the events, places Marcion's arrival in Rome slightly earlier, circa 138–42 CE;[13] and Clement of Alexandria, writing at about the same time, also seems to imply that Marcion started his religious activities already during the latter part of the reign of Hadrian (117–38 CE).[14] From all

of this information, we can place the broader dates of Marcion's life at approximately 95–165 CE,[15] but will continue to use 144 CE as the one certain date connected to Marcion, and therefore to the First New Testament.

Regarding Marcion's arrival in Rome, Tertullian refers to a letter in which Marcion had expressed in some way an original solidarity with the faith of the Roman Christians,[16] as well as to a remarkable donation of 200,000 *sesterces* he contributed to their community.[17] These two acts served Tertullian's argument that Marcion fit the profile of a typical "heretic"—someone who initially adhered to an orthodoxy from which he later deviated. Tertullian's wording[18] has been taken by some as implying that Marcion became a Christian for the first time in Rome.[19] But this interpretation demands too much specific information from a very broad statement made as part of a polemical theme.[20] Marcion need not have first converted to Christianity in Rome for Tertullian's argument to hold good, and Tertullian surely would have made much of Marcion's baptism at the hands of the Roman elders if he believed such a thing had occurred.

Marcion's falling-out with members of the Roman Christian leadership may have been expressed through rival interpretations of certain sayings of Jesus, regardless of the larger ideological differences that may have stood behind the argument.[21] Our sources seem to share the impression that such exegetical conflict lit the spark of dissension. Tertullian and Philastrius of Brescia (the latter probably dependent on the former) associate the conflict with two sayings of Jesus: concerning the good and the bad tree (Luke 6.43)[22] and the old and new wineskins (Luke 5.36–37).[23] Pseudo-Tertullian mentions only the first,[24] while Epiphanius mentions only the second.[25] Both images relate to Marcion's belief that Jesus brought a fundamentally new message and way of practicing religion at odds with the Jewish religious tradition.[26]

A number of dates and references connected to Marcion's later activities turn up in our sources. He was still alive at the time Justin Martyr was writing his *First Apology*, probably in the mid-150s, and by that time had achieved remarkable success spreading his version of the Christian faith.[27] None of our sources place him in Rome in the period between his break with the local community there and Justin's reference, and the latter likewise does not suggest his presence in the city. But other sources place him back in Rome in

the following decade, between 155 and 166 CE,[28] perhaps returning to edify the Marcionite community that most certainly remained in place there.

Unfortunately, the most colorful biographical anecdotes come from individual sources and cannot be checked against others for reliability.[29] Perhaps the story most worthy of credence is the one Irenaeus relates from Polycarp of Smyrna, whom he knew "in my early youth"[30] in their common homeland of the province of Asia (modern west Turkey). Polycarp had apparently rebuffed Marcion on some occasion, though whether before or after Marcion's time in Rome is unclear—just as it is unclear whether Irenaeus had learned the story directly from Polycarp when he knew him personally, or learned the story later through a third party, as he had learned other things about Polycarp's later life.[31] The rejection turns on a pun in the Greek in which the exchange occurred. When Marcion met Polycarp, he asked him if he recognized, or acknowledged (*epiginōske*), "us"—that is, the Marcionite community. With the Christian community divided, with whom would Polycarp keep communion? But since the word for acknowledgment also means to recognize or know someone personally, Polycarp played on that second meaning when he answered, "Yes, I recognize you: the firstborn of Satan!"[32] A similar story told by Philastrius of Brescia and other late sources about an encounter between Marcion and the apostle John(!) may be a distorted derivative of this episode involving Polycarp.[33] Irenaeus goes on to mention Polycarp's letter to the Christians of Philippi, without specifically pointing out that the expression "firstborn of Satan" is used in it by Polycarp to refer to an otherwise unidentified opponent within Christianity. Either this was a favorite expression of Polycarp's, or the person in question is Marcion. In the letter, Polycarp says:

> For anyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist; and whoever does not confess the witness of the cross is from the devil; and whoever distorts (*methodeuēi*) the words of the Lord for his own passions, saying that there is neither resurrection nor judgment—this one is the firstborn of Satan.[34]

The issues Polycarp raises here overlap with positions Marcion held on the transcendent nature of Jesus and the salvation of the human soul apart from the body by a deity who does not judge.[35] Nevertheless, that Marcion is in fact the referent of the allusions in Polycarp's letter remains uncertain.[36]

These scant notices are all the direct information we have on Marcion's life aside from his biblical and theological activities. We are left to fill out the context of these latter activities from related circumstantial evidence connected to Marcion's homeland, profession, and possible religious background.

Marcion's Homeland

From surviving Christian sources, we know next to nothing about the state of Christianity in Pontus in the earlier part of Marcion's life. The book of Acts (18.2) identified Pontus as the homeland of Aquila, a colleague of Paul's that the latter mentions in some of his letters. If we could be certain of this information, we might speculate that at some point Aquila could have returned to his native land and helped spread Christianity there. The First Letter of Peter is addressed to Christians in the neighboring (and at times administratively combined) provinces of Pontus and Bithynia, among other nearby regions, presupposing established communities there at the time of its composition, which unfortunately cannot be conclusively determined. One can observe a striking correlation between the letter's stress on Christians being "aliens" in the world, and the world-view Marcion inherited or developed, even if First Peter ultimately did not find a place in his New Testament canon.

Fortunately, however, we have a rare non-Christian source of information on the state of Christianity in the region in the time when Marcion would have been a young man there, in a letter of the Roman governor Pliny to the emperor Trajan, circa 112 CE. Pliny explains his procedure in enforcing a ban on secret societies, including Christian clubs. He considered Christianity "a depraved and extravagant superstition," which apparently had been present in the area for as much as twenty years (or at least there were people brought before him who had been Christians twenty years earlier, whether locally or in some other place). He also reports that two women slaves actually held important positions in the church as *ministrae*, or deaconesses, who probably distributed the ritual meal.[37] Under interrogation, some of the Christians provided Pliny with an account of their religious observances:

> On an appointed day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, not for the commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery and breach of faith, and not

> to deny a deposit when it was claimed. After the conclusion of this ceremony it was their custom to depart and meet again to take food; but it was ordinary and harmless food.[38]

Pliny's subtext in providing this description is that the secret activities of the Christians did not fit the suspicions that lay behind the ban on secret societies. This was apparently not a criminal or political organization, as other secret societies were, nor did it entail religious rites considered outright immoral by Roman standards. It was, however, having a deleterious effect on traditional religion in the province and, to Pliny's grave concern, had spread not only through the cities, but also the country towns and villages. Several modern researchers have pointed to features in common between Pliny's Christians and Marcion's brand of Christianity. These include the absence of Jewish characteristics in the service, the direct worship of Christ as something like a deity, and the relatively high position accorded women. What is missing, of course, is any reference to either the Old or New Testaments, or to any written texts, which we would have expected to catch Pliny's interest as a source of information on the secretive group.[39]

MARCION'S PROFESSION

Marcion's profession in the sea-trade may be the most significant thing we know about him personally.[40] Pontic shipmasters played a crucial role in supplying grain to Roman armies during two major campaigns in the reign of Trajan, the Dacian and Parthian wars.[41] For the latter expedition, conducted when Marcion would have been getting started in his career, Trajan reorganized the governance of the area and had new roads built across neighboring Cappadocia to expedite the shipment of grain from Pontic ports to the troops campaigning in the upper Euphrates and Tigris river valleys. Marcion would have learned of the Jewish resistance to Trajan's occupation of Mesopotamia, including attacks on supply lines, and of Trajan's brutal and ultimately futile efforts to suppress it. We can do no more than speculate about any impressions made on Marcion, or any connections he may have drawn between events under Trajan and the Bar Kokhba revolt of the Jews fifteen years later. We do know, however, that Marcion came to believe that the creator of this world favored the Jews, just as their scriptures stated, and ultimately would give them mastery of it at the hand of a messianic warrior. Conversely, he held that Christians had nothing to

do with such aspirations, and were called upon by Jesus and the god he spoke for to abstain from violence of any kind. David Balás sees an ironic historical moment in this exegetical alliance between non-Christian Jews and Marcion's de-Judaizing Christianity.

> Marcion may have found a way to effect this desirable separation by using Jewish self-interpretation at several main points. For instance, by accepting the anti-Christian contention of some Jews that Jesus Christ was not the Messiah promised by the Old Testament, a Messiah the Jews rightly expected to be political and warlike, Marcion made a counter claim that Christ was in fact the self-revelation of a previously entirely unknown, all-good God. . . . Paradoxically, it was precisely by having accepted Jewish scriptures and history, at least to a large extent, in their contemporary Jewish interpretation that Marcion arrived at his radical dissociation of the two Testaments![42]

Trajan's successor, Hadrian, quelled the Bar Kokhba revolt and issued laws against the free practice of Judaism, including an order to destroy copies of the Jewish scriptures. Hadrian's orders brought to a crisis the simmering issue of Christian ties to Jewish identity. Whatever the internal developments within Christianity that prepared the way for the creation of a New Testament, it is simply impossible to dismiss the coincidence in time of Hadrian's anti-Torah campaign and Marcion's call for the establishment of a distinct and separate Christian sacred scripture. Given the political and social circumstances, it is not at all surprising that it was precisely at this time that Marcion became a major voice for the clear differentiation of "Christianity" and "Judaism."

Marcion's business enterprises are potentially significant for his role as a religious leader. Ships were the fastest and most effective means of communication and transport of goods in the Roman Empire. Through the organization of his business, Marcion would have had agents or contacts in many major ports throughout the empire, and would have visited these far-flung places for business reasons. This means that Marcion would have been unusually well-informed about regional differences in the Christian movement, and would have had access to more local Christian literature and traditions than most other Christians of his time.[43] When, later in life, he realized that the form of Christianity with which he identified faced competition from rival interpretations of the faith, he had a tremendous advantage over the latter in his ability to spread his message rapidly and organize communities

on an empire-wide scale.[44] Many of those engaged in the sea trade were wealthy, prominent, well-connected people, and they formed exclusive guilds that coordinated ventures and built up solidarity in clubs. They were one of the only segments of the population to have channels of communication independent of government control. The role they may have played in spreading Christianity must remain for now mostly speculation. But it may be pertinent to note that, precisely at the time when Marcion was active, the emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius both found it necessary to issue laws against people not actually involved in the sea trade being admitted to membership in its professional associations,[45] suggesting that the latter were being employed for some sort of networking beyond their original purpose. Moreover, any explanation of the Christian innovation in adopting the codex instead of the scroll as the format for books must take into consideration the previous primary use of the codex as a shipmaster's almanac and businessman's account ledger.

MARCION'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

Christian texts dating to the lifetime of Marcion vary in their conception of Christian identity in relationship to its Jewish roots. Marcion's own position, severing any connection to Jewish scripture and the kind of God it extols, put him toward one end of the spectrum of Christian identity. At the other end of that spectrum stood the Roman Christian community, or at least a large segment of it, where evidently there was considerably more discomfort with the figure of Paul than with the Jewish heritage of the faith. From the evidence of the letter of Clement to Corinth[46] and the writings of Justin Martyr, Christianity in Rome was deeply committed to its Jewish roots,[47] and, when it did not outright reject Paul,[48] it relegated him to a very minor place in Christian thought.[49] Yet Christian literature produced by others in Marcion's lifetime reveals a diverse environment in which his break with Christianity's Jewish heritage was not a unique aberration.

Some of this Christian literature contemporary with Marcion reflects a struggle between followers of Jesus and others within the broader Jewish tradition over the meaning and lasting value of the Jewish scriptures. The author of the Letter of Barnabas, for example, insists on the obsolescence of literal application of those scriptures. The typological and allegorical interpretive tradition he promotes would come to dominate non-Marcionite forms of

Christianity from that point forward and would allow the continued authority of the Jewish scriptures, primarily as repositories of symbolic imagery whose meaning was detached from Jewish religious practice.[50] Claiming to be the "true Israel," such Christians laid claim to Jewish heritage while breaking continuity with more literal ways of reading and applying Jewish sacred texts.

Somewhat later than Barnabas, the seven letters penned by Ignatius[51] display considerable concern over the still ill-defined distinction between Christian and Jewish observances.[52] Ignatius apparently was involved in debates with fellow Christians about the trustworthy foundations of the faith. His opponents refused to believe anything not explicitly supported by the *archeiois*, the Jewish scriptures,[53] while Ignatius embraced the independent authority of "the gospel," the oral instruction and interpretive tradition of the Christian communities.[54] "For Ignatius," William Schoedel concludes, "the teachings and myths of Judaism are 'old' (cf. Mag. 9.1; 10.2)—a term that he uses to describe what is opposed to God (cf. Eph. 19.3). 'Judaism,' then, is not granted even a historically limited role in the unfolding of God's plan."[55]

From the same period, the Letter to Diognetus[56] goes even further in criticizing the Jewish tradition in a manner unqualified by any claim that Christianity is a truer Judaism, repeatedly emphasizing the newness of Christianity, instead of the more typical claim that it was something ordained from of old.[57] According to the author, no one had any knowledge of God before the coming of Christ,[58] and God held back his "own wise counsel as a well-guarded mystery."[59] The author concedes that the one God is the creator, and that the Jews worship this God, but they misunderstand his character. So while the author has not taken the step—which Marcion did—of distinguishing between the creator god of the Jews and the higher god of the Christians, the Jewish depiction of God comes in for sharp criticism as unworthy of Christ's Father. Moreover, the author says, nature in no way serves to direct attention to its ultimate creator; God conceals all until revealing it exclusively to his Son. All other faiths, both Greek and Jewish, are human doctrines[60] and earthly inventions.[61] God revealed his true character, his inherent goodness and power to save, only at the end of time.[62] His followers are aliens in this world.[63] This text, then, offers an ideology closely akin to Marcion's, and suggests the existence of a wider environment from which Marcion drew inspiration.[64]

In the world Marcion knew, therefore, some strands of Christianity displayed an effort to maintain close ties to Christianity's Jewish heritage in both symbolism and practice; others appropriated the Jewish religious tradition with increasing hostility to its contemporary Jewish practitioners; still others showed themselves to be on the verge of severing all connections with the Jewish origins of Christianity.[65] On the basis of such early Christian sources, Charles Nielsen concludes, "The process of dissociating Christianity from Judaism was already well under way within certain circles in Asia Minor before Marcion. Marcion pushed the process to its bitter end, but he really did not have very far to go!"[66] David Balás sees a role in the process for pressures connected to the Jewish revolts, noting that Marcion's decision to go to Rome was made at or shortly after the time of the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt and anti-Jewish imperial legislation. "Politically and socially," he writes, "the Christians, especially hellenistic Christians with no national or cultural roots in Judaism, found at this time their association with Jewish history an embarrassing and dangerous liability."[67] In contrast, Gerhard May reads Marcion's situation in terms of broad questions about authority within emerging Christianity:

> During the time of Marcion's appearance, the church was on its way to a crisis. . . . It was a crisis of the foundations as well as of the content of the Christian faith, and it developed gradually. . . . The question that became more and more urgent was: How does one verify the one original truth? . . . The problem of the authoritativeness of the Old Testament—in spite of Paul, never uniformly solved—was raised anew and pointedly: It was no longer just a question of the validity of the law. Could the Bible of the Jews, as a matter of fact, be the revelatory book of the true God?[68]

MARCION'S CHRISTIAN CONFLICT

We have no way of knowing whether Marcion was raised in a Christian community already disconnected from its Jewish roots, or later joined such a community, or whether he was himself an innovator in that direction. Whether due to expulsion from the synagogues, or dissociation connected to the recurrent repression of Jews, the circumstances of the time raise a historical question: what happened when Gentile Christian dependence on a Jewish Christian core group became untenable, and Gentile Christians ei-

ther willingly or unwillingly went their own way? One result was the sort of religious environment from which Marcion apparently emerged, in which the Jewish background of Christianity was minimized. Another outcome was the sort Marcion found prevalent in Rome: that is, a fresh appropriation of Jewish elements in a synthesis of formerly distinct Jewish and Gentile missions. These two different ways of responding to the same situation then came into conflict in the second century CE.

We do not know if Marcion set out for Rome with the intention of reforming the Christian community (or communities) there. He may have thought that any local difference of opinion he had experienced in the provinces came from ignorance, and that the Christians in the capital certainly would share the views he regarded as "orthodox." If so, he was in for quite a surprise. John Knox pictures such a scenario:

> Now imagine a zealous and forceful Christian of the early second century whose Christianity has been of a decidedly non-Jewish type, who has been nourished on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians and other writings of that apostle, who has found salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his God and Father, who has made little use, if any, of Jewish Scripture, thinking of it as the "law" which Christ has brought to nought—imagine such a Christian suddenly finding himself in a community where the historical continuity with Judaism is prized as one of the most precious values, where ultimate authority is vested in the Jewish Scriptures, where the sharp Pauline antithesis between law and gospel, between letter and Spirit, is softened, if not effaced. Do we not have in such a situation all we need to explain what seems to have happened several years after Marcion came to Rome . . .?[69]

If Marcion arrived in Rome with any illusion that he would find a community living according to his Pauline ideal, he must have quickly discerned the divergence between his vision and local reality. He began to urge Roman Christians to reform themselves, to shed the Jewish trappings of their faith, as well as their attachment to a fleshly rather than spiritual Jesus, and the closely related hope in their own bodily resurrection, rather than an ascent of their soul to heaven. His attempt to work out a theological and metaphysical setting within which to understand the sharp divergence he perceived between Jesus' characterization of God and the image of God in Jewish scripture only would have widened the gulf between him and other Christian leaders.

We do not know whether it was Marcion or his opponents who finally forced the issue. But there was a showdown of some sort, with Marcion no doubt calling on Roman Christians to join him, and the local leaders on their side presenting Marcion with an ultimatum of conformity, perhaps taking the form of a statement of faith close in form to the Old Roman Symbol, an earlier version of the Apostles' Creed, which seems framed specifically to rule out several of Marcion's key positions.[70] Marcion rejected the proposed creed, took with him those who had been won to his side, and organized a rival communion, which he endowed with a New Testament to replace the Old Testament that alone had scriptural status for most Roman Christians at the time.[71]

Those opposed to Marcion, including groups ancestral to later Christian orthodoxy, produced a string of writings against him, his teachings, and his New Testament—more than against any other rival form of Christianity prior to the fourth-century christological and Manichaean controversies.[72] Of this extensive anti-Marcionite literature, only one is preserved in its entirety: Tertullian's *Against Marcion* (*Adversus Marcionem*). As pointed out by E. Evans, this work, written in the first decade of the third century, has the distinction of containing "the earliest surviving Christian commentary on any book of the New Testament,"[73]—namely, on the books of Marcion's New Testament; we must wait another generation for the writings of Origen for the first commentaries on books now found in the modern Christian New Testament. Many more anti-Marcionite writings, such as those mentioned by Eusebius,[74] are now lost. There were works by Justin Martyr,[75] Rhodo,[76] Dionysius of Corinth,[77] Theophilus of Antioch,[78] Hippolytus of Rome,[79] Philip of Gortyna,[80] and Modestus.[81] Irenaeus intended to write one, as he says in his surviving work,[82] but Eusebius found no trace that he ever carried through this intention.[83] All of this anti-Marcionite labor suggests the extent of Marcion's success, noted with chagrin by Justin[84] and attested in the anti-Christian polemic of the second-century writer Celsus.[85]

It is remarkable that so many of these anti-Marcionite tracts are no longer extant, and one must wonder at the reason for that. Did they perhaps go too far in some of their remarks? Gerhard May suggests that what survives of Justin and Rhodo shows that they did not recognize the scriptural status of a New Testament, since they characterize the Marcionites as lacking (scriptural) proof of

their doctrines.[86] While some sought to appropriate the authority of Paul against Marcion, others apparently found it necessary to attack rather than domesticate Paul himself, and through him Marcion, under the thin disguise of the arch-heretic Simon Magus in the novelistic Pseudo-Clementine literature.[87] The early orthodox tracts against Marcion may have been considered largely worthless to later generations because they reflected views at odds with later orthodoxy, such as overt criticism of Paul, attacks on the Gospel of Luke, or a view of sacred scripture that did not recognize a place for a "new" testament.[88]

But Marcion also had his supporters, who became convinced as he did that the Law and Prophets, whose authority was severely qualified already in the ideology of Paul, could not serve as a sacred text for the Christians, and must yield its place to some set of the new Christian literature being written and circulated. He bestowed upon his community a formalized canon consisting of a single gospel (the Evangelion) and a collection of Paul's letters (the Apostolikon), perhaps deliberately modeled in this double structure as a replacement for the Law and Prophets.[89] His action appears to have served as a catalyst for discussions and debates about which Christian writings should be accorded this status. Arguments were made, new sources were sought out, and lists were drawn up[90] (including the so-called Muratorian Canon, with its explicitly anti-Marcionite concern, whenever and wherever it was actually compiled[91]). This process went on for another two hundred years before any of the proposed canons matched what modern Christians consider to be the New Testament. Any talk of a New Testament apart from Marcion's in the second and third centuries is anachronistic, and must be treated as a shorthand way to refer to individual books or subsets of texts recognized as authoritative amid an indeterminate larger set of Christian literature. Marcion, by issuing a delimited set of Christian texts considered exclusively authoritative as early as the mid-second century, was far ahead of his time.

Chapter 2

Marcion's New Testament

"The history of the development of the New Testament Canon," C. F. Evans observes in the *Cambridge History of the Bible*, "is the history of the process by which books written for the most part for other purposes and from other motives came to be given this unique status."[1] Historical hindsight all too easily creates the illusion of inevitability in this process; but we can discern a distinct before-and-after transformation of attitudes towards early Christian writings, with Marcion as the middle term. As Lee McDonald states, "Although the mid-second–century Church was gradually recognizing the usefulness of a body of *Christian* literature for its life and worship, there were as yet no fixed normative collections to which one could appeal. It was Marcion . . . who first saw the importance of a collection of authoritative Christian writings for worship and teaching in his community of churches."[2] It is important to stress here the broad modern consensus of scholars on this point. "It is denied by none," F. F. Bruce remarks about that consensus, "that Marcion played a crucial part in the formation of the New Testament canon."[3] Or, put more strongly (and perhaps more controversially) in the words of Hans von Campenhausen, the idea of a New Testament "came into existence at one stroke with Marcion and only with Marcion," and it "remains his peculiar and unique creation."[4]

In the time before Marcion we find few quotations from the books that were to be included in the New Testament. "At most," Bruce Metzger observes, "the Apostolic Fathers disclose for this or

that geographical area a certain (or rather, an uncertain) amount of knowledge and use of several first-century documents that later came to be gathered into what we know as the New Testament."[5] Metzger demonstrates a clear difference in how these writers informally handled material later included in the New Testament, in contrast to their more formal, precise citation of Jewish scriptures; the two sources of instruction simply did not share the same level of sacredness and authority for these authors. Marcion's contemporary Justin Martyr, for instance, made use of a collection of stories and sayings of Jesus culled from various gospels both known and unknown to us today, with little indication that he considered it important to preserve the exact wording of anything other than Jesus' own statements.[6] As Campenhausen characterizes the situation, "In the first one and a half centuries of the Church's history there is no single Gospel writing which is directly made known, named, or in any way given prominence by quotation. Written and oral traditions run side by side or cross, enrich or distort one another, without distinction or even the possibility of distinction between them."[7] Early in the second century, Papias of Hierapolis felt free to criticize the sequence of the Gospel of Mark, and to prefer oral traditions to written ones generally.[8] The various collections of Paul's letters in circulation were only looked upon favorably in certain circles and were not yet treated as scripture.[9]

All of this changed with Marcion. He formed for the first time "a coherent canon," displaying two crucial features by which Bruce Metzger justifies this characterization: (1) it contained a fixed number of books, and (2) it was put forward in place of the Jewish scriptures, as equivalently scriptural.[10] Through these moves, Marcion "first makes Christians conscious both of the idea of a new canon of Christian literature and of the identification of certain kinds of documents as carrying greater authority than others, and hence being 'canonical.'"[11] P. Rougier points out the contrast of perspective between Papias, writing probably before 130 CE, who shows not even an inkling of a notion of a New Testament canon and explicitly critiques reliance on texts for Christian tradition, and Irenaeus of Lyons, working half a century later, who argues for the acceptance of a four-gospel proto-canon.[12] Even Irenaeus was not seeking to define a closed "canon" of Christian scripture, but reported on and justified a tradition of use for individual authoritative texts within his community.[13] Several researchers have argued that the rapid formation and dissemination of this four-gospel "canon" be-

tween the time of Justin and that of Irenaeus suggests a deliberate, conscious decision by the leaders of the non-Marcionite party in the western Roman Empire, with Marcion's activities there serving as the catalyst.[14]

But in fact the process of canonization within non-Marcionite circles appears to have been a slow one, and we must wait two hundred years to find one as formally defined as Marcion's. Harry Gamble draws attention to the resistance of the mainstream Christian communities to Marcion's innovation, casting doubt on any immediate counter-move at canonization: "The fixation of a canon by Marcion did not in fact lead to an immediate or concerted effort in the church to delimit its own authoritative literature, and the number of writings valued continued for a long time to be large and fluid."[15] John Barton has argued similarly that the long delay in formalizing a New Testament canon among the non-Marcionite mainstream speaks against a direct influence of Marcion on that process, and might even be read as a self-conscious rejection of his scriptural move.[16] Ongoing debate among biblical scholars on Marcion's exact role in the formation of the Christian Bible, therefore, does not question that Marcion compiled the First New Testament, but proposes different assessments of how much his innovation directly shaped the modern New Testament canon. Yet even if Marcion's opponents did not follow him by quickly instituting a closed canon of their own, or by seeking to "restrict the compass of acceptable Christian texts"[17] to the same degree that he did, it nevertheless is difficult to deny that his New Testament remained the elephant in the room of deliberations over sacred scripture until the question was settled for the mainstream church as well, and some of the choices he made undeniably came to be incorporated into the ultimate form taken by the New Testament.[18]

Despite a number of qualifications, therefore, we still can affirm in large part Harnack's summary of Marcion's contribution to the formation of the Christian Bible:[19]

1. Christians owe to Marcion the idea of a New Testament. It had occurred to no one before and can best be understood as originating in the context of Marcion's rejection of an Old Testament base for Christianity.[20]
2. Christians owe to Marcion the particular form of the New Testament. The equal standing of the letters of Paul with the memoirs of Christ's life is something that would not be

expected in a sacred literature from any precedent up to that time.[21]

3. Christians owe to Marcion the prominence of the voice of Paul in the New Testament, and consequently in subsequent Christian tradition. Many of Marcion's contemporaries had all but forgotten Paul, or subsumed him within the broader apostolic mass.[22]
4. Christians owe to Marcion the push towards a Christianity rooted in its own distinctive scripture, rather than in an oral tradition of interpreting Jewish scripture, or in a scriptureless system of authority and practice like most Greco-Roman religions of the time.

Wolfram Kinzig has presented a strong case that it was even Marcion who first coined the expression "New Testament" as a designation appropriate to his collection of Christian scriptures—a name whose origin otherwise has proven difficult to trace.[23] The evidence shows not only some of the earliest appearances of the expression in discussions of Marcion's views, but also the degree to which anti-Marcionite Christian leaders initially resisted the name before yielding to widespread popular usage, which can be plausibly attributed to the extensive reach of the Marcionite mission in the second and third centuries. Kinzig's case is by no means proven, however, and the expression remained throughout the early Christian centuries primarily a theological rather than textual one. Our sources speak of writings "belonging to" the old or new covenants in the character of their contents, just as Buddhists at times speak of texts being "Hinayana" or "Mahayana." It took a while for the designation to narrow its reference to a specific collection of texts.

MARCION'S ROLE AS EDITOR

Did Marcion merely compile and "canonize" texts he found already in use among certain Christian communities? Or did he select some, reject others, according to ideological principles? Did he go on to edit those he selected, in order to bring them into conformity with his views? Or did he faithfully transmit the texts as he found them, while simply interpreting them in line with his beliefs? From the hindsight of the later New Testament canonized by non-Marcionite Christians and in use today, it has been easy to believe the traditional polemical suspicions of Marcion's "heretical" motives

and methods, in order to explain Marcion's smaller New Testament canon and shorter individual books within it. Tertullian, writing three generations after Marcion, assumed that he had taken an already existing set of Christian scriptures, universally recognized as authoritative, and had rejected some, edited others. But we are able to recognize immediately the anachronism in Tertullian's assumption. He was not aware that no such authoritative set of Christian scriptures is anywhere in evidence prior to Marcion, and that even in Tertullian's day agreement on such a set was far from universal.[24]

Multiple gospels had already been written by Marcion's time, and he almost certainly knew more than one of them. He may have commented negatively on some passages from the Gospel of Matthew in his only known composition, the *Antitheses*.[25] But we do not know whether he knew of Matthew already when he selected a different gospel for his New Testament, or only learned of it afterward. Nor do we have any evidence that he knew or commented on any other work not included in his New Testament, except, of course, the Jewish scriptures, or "Old Testament." The primary purpose of the *Antitheses* was not to debate "canonical" issues (note the anachronism involved in imagining that it would), but to compare the religious principles expressed in the Evangelion and Apostolikon with the ideas and narratives of the Jewish scriptures, in order to demonstrate the incompatibility of the two religious systems. Although Tertullian and other anti-Marcionite writers believed that Marcion had deliberately omitted Paul's "Pastoral Letters" (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus), we now know that his Pauline collection contained the same ten letters circulating among many non-Marcionite churches of his time. Since the earliest certain citation of the Pastorals occurs only a generation or two after Marcion, it may well be that he had no knowledge of them, or even that they had yet to be written (if they are, in fact, written by someone pretending to be Paul, as most modern researchers conclude). Even the priority given to Paul's letter to the Galatians in the Apostolikon, long explained as due to Marcion's particular ideological interests, has now been shown to have occurred also in the ten-letter collection of Paul's letters circulating among non-Marcionite Christians in Syria.[26] In short, we need to break free from anachronistic judgments that Marcion "omitted" or "rearranged" texts relative to a later New Testament canon that did not yet exist in his time. As the first compiler of a New Testament, Marcion was at liberty to select and arrange texts as he chose, just as were later

non-Marcionite Christian leaders when they compiled their own New Testament.

Tertullian further charged that Marcion "mutilated" (*caederet*) those texts he did include in his New Testament—that is, that he altered them by excising passages that contradicted his views, or occasionally making slight changes in wording for the same purpose.[27] More than a century later, Epiphanius similarly referred to Marcion having "excised" (*parekopse*) passages. Someone with Tertullian's and Epiphanius' presuppositions about the accuracy of *their* versions of these texts, and about Marcion's motives as a "heretic," would necessarily draw such an inference from the simple fact that Marcion's texts were shorter than the versions of the works in question known to them.[28] There was a well-known tradition of correcting corrupted manuscripts of the *Iliad* and other classic works of literature by excising what the editors regarded as inauthentic additions to the text, so it was easy to imagine that someone with Marcion's concern with the "corruption" of the "gospel"—that is, the message of Jesus—would take up the editorial knife in a similar fashion. Yet Tertullian and Epiphanius found it easy—remarkably easy—to cite apparent inconsistencies in Marcion's supposed editing: passages that were to be found in his texts even though they contradicted the very views he was busy promoting on the authority of these very texts.[29] Either Marcion was an incredibly inept editor, as Tertullian sometimes suggested, or he had never undertaken such an ideological purge of these texts.[30]

The way this issue has been handled by modern biblical researchers is instructive. Despite a number of questioning voices going back to the very beginning of modern critical study of the Bible, most have simply accepted the polemical claim that Marcion edited out portions of the texts he received. When it comes to the evidence contrary to this claim, modern commentators have either embraced Tertullian's answers—that Marcion was an incompetent editor or cleverly left in passages contrary to his views to allay suspicions that he had tampered with the text—or have worked to come up with ideological motivations for Marcion's editorial decisions that went unrecognized by Tertullian and others. The common supposition has been that the polemical testimony to Marcion's editorial activity is basically reliable, and fundamental, and everything else is to be explained in accord with it. Few researchers seem to have considered the fact that writers such as Tertullian were in no position to know the state of texts in or before the time of Marcion, nor

did they have any independent information that would have told them whether Marcion's or their versions of these writings were the earlier one.[31] For these reasons, the testimony of these opponents of Marcion on this question is utterly without merit. Many other critics of Marcion (e.g., Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Ephrem Syrus) say nothing about any tampering with texts.[32] Even Tertullian himself, in the heat of polemic, acknowledged that he could not actually prove the priority of his community's versions of the texts over Marcion's. Modern commentators rarely have been as careful to qualify their assertions.

In short, the acceptance by modern researchers of the claims made about Marcion's handling of the texts included in his New Testament is an example of uncritical adoption of polemic as history.[33] First, Tertullian and his associates in this charge against Marcion are working from an anti-Marcionite bias that shapes their assumptions. Second, they are writing from a position in time that makes it impossible for them to have any sure knowledge of the state of either anything like a New Testament canon or its constituent books at the time of Marcion. Third, we know for a fact that several of their assumptions are incorrect: there was no New Testament canon before Marcion, from which the latter rejected parts unsuited to him;[34] there was no larger Pauline corpus from which Marcion excised the Pastorals; there was no universal, undisputed orthodoxy from which Marcion diverged.[35] All of these are anachronisms that Marcion's later critics project back into the circumstances of his activity. In many cases, Tertullian and Epiphanius claim erroneously that the particular wording of the Evangelion or Apostolikon is Marcion's invention, when in fact we find the same wording in catholic biblical manuscripts. The almost canonical status afforded the accusations made against Marcion, therefore, shows a remarkable lack of critical historical assessment among modern researchers.

Adolf von Harnack, the great historian of Christianity whose 1924 study of Marcion is the chief reference point of all subsequent scholarship on the subject, helped to perpetuate this uncritical reading of sources hostile to Marcion, inasmuch as he sought rationales within Marcion's ideology for the differences between Marcion's texts and their catholic versions. Yet even he readily admitted, "No definite statements by Marcion exist concerning the grounds for proceeding as he does in his critique of individual passages from the Gospel or Apostle."[36] He likewise conceded that many passages

were apparently in Marcion's text that worked against his theology. A growing alertness to such issues with the evidence in the research conducted since Harnack has called into question his claim to have an accurate grasp of Marcion's dogmatic principles when it came to handling the biblical text.[37] Any conclusions drawn on this question must be based on the evidence of the texts themselves, not any assumptions about Marcion and his motives. Unfortunately, we lack the basis for a truly objective comparison, since we are in no better position than Tertullian when it comes to certainty about the shape of the texts in question before the time of Marcion. Moreover, conditioned as we are by a long tradition of making sense of these texts in the longer form in which they appear in modern Bibles, it may be hard for us to step back, dismantle that sense, and consider with an open mind the possible priority of Marcion's versions.

There is nothing inherently implausible about the idea that Marcion edited his texts to make them more representative of what he valued and considered important. In fact, he lived at a time when gospels were still being actively composed, often by reworking, merging, and elaborating on earlier gospels. The problem with attributing this sort of authorship to Marcion comes from an examination of texts themselves, and can be summed up in a series of questions: Why did not he not produce a more novel set of texts, fitted exactly to his beliefs? Why do his versions of the texts contain so much material in direct conflict with his own ideas? Why are the differences in his versions relatively minor in comparison with non-Marcionite versions, with minimal impact on the overall message? Why did he leave in passages expressing the exact same views for which he supposedly removed other passages? Why did he not add anything? As such questions pile up, it becomes increasingly difficult to make a case for the notion that Marcion's New Testament contained texts "mutilated" to conform to his distinctive beliefs.

The little that we know factually is that Marcion charged that "the gospel" adhered to by members of the Christian community in Rome was not authentic, that it diverged from the true record of "the gospel" known to him.[38] We know that he presented to those who heeded him an textual embodiment of "the Gospel and Apostle" that he considered authentic, along with a systematic interpretive exposition of how the faith embodied in these authentic texts was incompatible with the teachings of the Jewish scriptures. That is all we know. We do not have a single state-

ment of Marcion on those passages he supposedly excised from his texts as corruptions. We cannot be sure that Marcion's statements regarding a corrupt "gospel" in use in Rome even referred to a text, rather than to an oral teaching. In fact, the expression "the gospel" continued to be used in the latter sense of the religious message of Christianity in general long after Marcion, and his own innovation in titling a part of his New Testament "The Gospel" (Evangelion) may have been in pointed response to what he regarded as the instability of resting authority on an uncodified set of traditions. Even when Tertullian says that Marcion excised something from "the gospel," he often refers not to edits worked upon a specific gospel text, but to Marcion's failure to include in his New Testament all of the gospel materials accepted in Tertullian's community, including not only Luke but also Matthew, Mark, and John.[39] These remarks of Tertullian have been regularly misunderstood in modern scholarship.[40] Furthermore, as noted above, our sources frequently accuse Marcion of having changed the wording of passages, but it turns out that the "changed" wording also occurs in non-Marcionite manuscripts, so that wording once thought by researchers to be indicative of his ideology have since been found in lines of textual transmission outside the confines of his church.[41]

The reconstruction of Marcion's New Testament offered in this study, therefore, does not assume that Marcion edited the texts; neither does it accept uncritically Marcion's own implicit claims for the authenticity of the form of the texts he canonized. Rather, it makes use of the data we have on the content of Marcion's canon in a neutral way, in order simply to present the First New Testament as a historical event in its own right, and to establish a more secure base from which arguments may be made and conclusions drawn about the history of these texts both before and after this event. There is an important place for examining Marcion's collection of Christian scriptures in itself, and not primarily in terms of debatable suppositions about Marcion and Marcionism. It may be that an independent analysis of this collection of texts actually sheds light on Marcion, rather than the reverse. But, in any case, Marcion's New Testament holds its primary significance as the earliest substantial witness we have to texts ultimately incorporated into the New Testament used by Christians today, and potentially provides new insight into their literary history and the forms of Christianity they represent.

more plausibly have occurred prior to its canonization in Marcion's New Testament. Evidence of such harmonization to the wording of the Gospel of Matthew in some apparently reliable reports about the Evangelion, and not in others reporting on the same passage, suggests that Marcion may have adopted the Evangelion in multiple copies with varying degrees of influence from Matthew in their pre-Marcionite transmission.[115] In other words, the evidence points to the conclusion that Marcion did *not* edit a single exemplar of the Evangelion from which all copies of the Marcionite New Testament were made. Perhaps, then, he did not edit the Evangelion at all, and possibly the same was true of the Apostolikon. Definitive conclusions about these possibilities await further research.

Significance

Dominick LaCapra has observed, "Rarely do historians see significant texts as important events in their own right."[116] But the creation of the First New Testament by Marcion must be seen as such an event in its own right. Nothing necessitates that a religion, founded by individuals and spread through personal contacts, develop a written sacred literature, or that such a literature assume an authority superior in theory to any living voice of the faith. In past ages where illiteracy predominated, a written codification of a religious community's faith would have remained directly accessible to few, and treated by the rest as a precious object that symbolized continuity with the founders and a safeguard against innovations and deviation. The earliest Christians lived in an oral society that only flirted with literacy, and transmitted the teachings of Jesus, and the exemplary stories about him, primarily by word of mouth. The written word entered their world only sporadically, and even then only as a script to be read aloud. There were always a small number of more literate followers of Jesus who sought to put his ideas into conversation with textual traditions, but they could hardly be representative of the spirit of the larger movement. Fixity and referentiality give text distinct advantages in shaping our perception of the time and place from which it comes, with the result that the writer, however idiosyncratic in his or her own time, wins out historically over the now silenced voices of illiterate contemporaries. The conscious, deliberate adoption of text as a defining feature of a religious community marks a dramatic transition in the shape of belief and the character of authority over it.

Early Christianity had a fluid oral form in which various reductions of oral material to written form came and went without defining Christian identity as a whole until Marcion stepped on the scene. When those writings that predate Marcion make reference to the teachings of Jesus, "the custom is to refer not to documents" but to freestanding sayings known and remembered in the community, "applied rather than quoted, in the strict sense of that word; and never are they explained or 'expounded' in their fixed form like a sacred text."[117] No distinction is made between sayings now known from gospel texts and so-called *agrapha*, free-floating sayings of Jesus in the oral tradition. In the face of strong disagreement over the Christian message to be distilled from such fluid resources, Marcion sought to codify and secure an authoritative body of knowledge in a written form that would serve as a reliable touchstone of faith. Thus, Marcion could have taken the step to form a distinctively Christian canon, in the words of Helmut Koester, as a "conscious protest against the still undefined and mostly oral traditions to which the churches of his day referred as their dominical and apostolic authority."[118]

Marcion made his textual move in the context of competing traditions, where authority of both an oral and written form was at issue. The always-fraught relationship between the Jesus movement and its larger Jewish heritage arrived at a crisis, and Marcion proposed a set of sacred texts that could serve in place of Jewish scriptures for a form of Christianity that did not see itself as inextricably linked to Judaism. Marcion may have come out of and represented, rather than originated, such a form of Christianity, although he developed its outlook further. He lived at a time when the ambiguities of the Christian relationship to an equally emerging "Judaism" were beginning to sort themselves out into more starkly opposed alternatives. Marcion presented himself as safeguarding an original and authentic form of Christian faith against innovations that subordinated its message to the weight of the substantial Jewish tradition, which threatened to claim a kind of "parental rights" over its prodigal religious offspring. Contrary to the image of a Christian movement that headed in a straight line away from its Jewish origins, modern research has increasingly drawn attention to how much Christianity and Judaism "co-evolved," and the degree to which "orthodox" Christianity might even be said to represent a historical "convergence" with Jewish religious views and

values, in contrast to other forms of Christianity, such as Marcionite and Manichaean Christianity, where such a convergence never occurred.[119] If Marcion came from a Gentile Christian community already substantially separated from a Jewish religious background (such as the one described by Pliny in Marcion's time and place), he may have understood himself to be anchoring resistance to such a developing convergence, rather than leading a radical break from an existing religious identity. "Hence Marcion is better viewed as a conservative or traditionalist than as an innovator," suggests Harry Gamble,[120] summing up an assessment of Marcion offered by John Barton.[121] Yet this may be an unnecessary either/or. As with contemporary religious leaders who see themselves as "fundamentalists," anchoring a conservative position typically requires innovation—the creation or reformation of what will count as authoritative tradition.

Marcion's scriptural innovation can be understood as a direct consequence of his stance as a conservative or traditionalist over against ongoing developments in Christian doctrine and ethos. Much of the discussion about Marcion in contemporary scholarship involves debating his originality in raising specifically Christian texts to the status of sacred scripture. This debate gets bogged down, in my opinion, in endlessly circling the issue of what counts as handling a text as sacred scripture rather than as just an edifying piece of religious literature. It would be misguided to deny that the copying and dissemination of collections of Jesus' sayings, narrative accounts of his life, or Paul's letters suggests a heightened value of these texts on the way to an eventual recognition as sacred scripture. In this sense I agree with Geoffrey Hahneman (in turn building on a distinction made by Albert Sundberg) that, "it is entirely possible to possess scriptures without having a canon."[122] But I would like to suggest that it is precisely in closing a canon, however provisionally, that Marcion suddenly and exponentially elevated the status of particular texts, and launched them into an undeniably superior authority relative to any others, in a way no one before him had dared to do.[123] That is, he accentuated their place as scripture precisely by including them within a limited canon. In doing so, he set boundaries on what could be used as touchstones in evaluating various positions put forward as "Christian," narrowing the range of permissible variety within the Christian movement.

By rooting authority in text, Marcion displaced it from the personal and individual. This shift implied that the personal authority of Christian teachers, even Marcion himself, could no longer be self-sufficient, but should be dependent on and subordinate to an impersonal, objectified repository, on the basis of which any claim on the tradition would have to be made and assessed. Marcion's act of canon-making was simply the first of a whole set of subsequent efforts to define Christianity through rival canons. David Brakke is surely right when he says, "To speak of the history of the formation of the single Christian biblical canon may oversimplify the development and interaction of diverse forms of early Christian piety, which carried with them unique practices of scriptural collection and interpretation—that is, different kinds of canons."[124] If Barton is similarly right in his depiction of larger Christianity showing itself to be very reluctant and slow to follow Marcion's example, it suggests that many non-Marcionite Christians (for several centuries) preferred a more open-ended exploration of the possible meaning of Christianity, attentive to a greater plurality of voices that were treated as authoritative, if not as decisively so as those settled on by Marcion.

The sources on Marcion's New Testament show that it exhibited the fluidity of text typical of all early Christian literature. These writings were valued, copied, distributed, and refined, but not yet treated as "sacred." It is only when a text has been declared authoritative, and so much rests upon exactly what it says, that the concern arises to establish a fixed form of it.[125] When the Qur'an was canonized, rival versions were destroyed, and new copies made from the single sanctioned exemplar. Or so the story goes; and at least theoretically it was possible to do this just a few decades after the death of Muhammad. The evidence of the Evangelion and Apostolikon suggests that Marcion did not take such an approach; instead, he apparently identified existing texts as authoritative, which then were taken up in multiple copies full of variant readings. For all his focus on the merits of stabilizing Christianity in text, he apparently did not fully make the mental shift from the oral to the written gospel, or realize the issues regarding the proper fixity of a literary text. Much the same happened two centuries later when mainstream Christianity followed suit: the many variants in the existing manuscripts were carried over into the New Testament collections now given the status of canon. By this time, each text could have

existed in hundreds of copies, and the infrastructure simply did not exist to exert textual control on this scale. Nevertheless, canonization brought with it a fundamentally new attitude towards the text, opposed to fluidity and further adaptation. In the generation after Marcion, it was still possible for Tatian to edit Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John into a new gospel, the Diatessaron, and many less successful gospel reworkings date to roughly this period. But the followers of Marcion had already shut the door on this further literary innovation, and by the end of the second-century Irenaeus put forth a similar argument against new gospels on behalf of non-Marcionite Christians. These were arguments about the ultimate resort of authority, carried out among a literate elite of Christian leadership. Most believers remained illiterate, but they could appreciate the symbolism and ceremony of their leaders' appeal to a sacred text as an unchangeable reference point of authority that transcended any individual's claim to be the arbiter of Christian truth.

Introduction

Marcion placed greater importance on the authority of Paul than did any other Christian leader of his time. According to one of his early opponents, Irenaeus, Marcion taught that "only Paul, to whom the mystery has been given by revelation, knew the truth" (*Haer.* 3.13.1). A later writer, Eznik of Kolb, records a Marcionite tradition that makes Jesus' revelation to Paul an essential completion of the former's mission on earth, reporting to Paul the "purchase" of humanity, at the price of Jesus' death, from the god of this world.[1] The question naturally follows: how large of a role did Marcion play in elevating Paul to the central and determinative place the latter now has, both in the Christian biblical canon and in Christian doctrine?

It would not be at all surprising if those who see Paul as an essential part of Christian orthodoxy would be predisposed against crediting any role to Marcion in rescuing the apostle from obscurity. Yet the evidence is poor for widespread and sustained attention to Paul across the spectrum of early Christianity from his lifetime to the end of the second century.[2] Many writers of the period between Paul and Marcion (and well beyond) show no knowledge of Paul or his letters.[3] The exceptions acknowledge his stature in some way, while dealing with him as a problem: difficult to understand (2 Peter), in need of subordination and harmonization to other Christian authority figures (Acts), or in need of correction (James).[4] Of other writers before Marcion, only Clement explicitly cites and endorses statements by Paul—but notably in a letter to the Corinthian community Paul had founded, where it would be difficult to avoid his local authority.[5] Clement's testimony makes it

clear that some of Paul's letters were circulating beyond the places to which they had been sent; but it is not enough to prove that there existed a collection—a Pauline *corpus*—in which a set of letters had been edited together as a text of Christian instruction. The first clear evidence of such a Pauline corpus is the Apostolikon of Marcion.[6]

If Marcion was unique in his time for the amount of authority he vested in Paul, perhaps he was the one who first collected some of Paul's most important letters into a corpus. Adolf von Harnack explored this possibility in his classic study of Marcion, and others have endorsed it.[7] Accepting this hypothesis would require imagining that Marcion's opponents found it expedient to co-opt the authority of Paul, rather than throw out the Pauline baby with the Marcionite bathwater, and to adopt the Pauline corpus in a modified form more accommodated to "orthodoxy." If one assumes that Marcion's collection contained the original form of Paul's letters, then the additional material found in the catholic version of the letters would be second-century non-Pauline inventions, meant to "correct" the letters in a non-Marcionite direction.[8] Alternatively, if one assumes that Marcion had edited the letters to suit his own purposes, then it could be that his opponents retrieved pre-Marcionite copies of the letters (and even additional letters) in their original form for their own rival collection.

Harnack adopts the latter scenario of a post-Marcion revival of interest and retrieval of Paul's original letters; such a circumstance was the only way he could account for the appearance, in catholic copies of the letters, of readings he considered to be the product of Marcion's editorial hand, while still maintaining that the fuller catholic text reflected Paul's original compositions. He imagined that a Latin translation of the Marcionite Apostolikon had preceded a Latin translation of the catholic form of the letters, and that the former had profoundly influenced the latter. Perhaps even copies of the Apostolikon had been appropriated by catholic users, and had their omissions filled in by comparison to a catholic exemplar, saving labor by only making new Latin translations of the missing passages found in a Greek exemplar. Yet Harnack found the distinctive readings of the Apostolikon he attributed to Marcion not only in the Old Latin version of Paul's letters, but also in a set of Greek manuscripts as well as in the Syriac textual tradition. The work of others since Harnack, culminating in the study of John Clabeaux, has only increased the number of such identified parallels. Should we imagine, then, that the Apostolikon not only pioneered the text

of Paul in the Latin West and the Syriac East, but also worked its way into certain strands of the Greek textual tradition? If so, then we would have good reason to credit Marcion with rescuing Paul from obscurity and giving him the centrality he subsequently enjoyed throughout the Christian world.

Nevertheless, a number of researchers have expressed doubts that this is the best way to account for the evidence.[9] They argue that Harnack's scenario is too complex, and suggest a simpler explanation of why some of the distinctive readings of the Apostolikon turn up in various parts of the catholic textual tradition. According to this view, the variant readings found in some Greek, Syriac, or Latin manuscripts that agree with the Apostolikon against most other witnesses to the catholic text are not the product of Marcion's editorial hand, but come from the common textual tradition that Marcion shared with the ancestors of the catholic text. The very fact that these variant readings are found in catholic manuscripts, they argue, proves that Marcion is not responsible for them. Just because we *can* imagine ideological motives for any meaningful textual variant in New Testament texts does not mean that we *should*—if other, non-ideological reasons for the variant can be identified. Nor should we presume that only Marcion was capable of introducing ideologically-motivated changes into the biblical text; Marcion himself could have been on the receiving end of such prior "correction" of the text.

A great deal of study in recent decades has been devoted to reconstructing the origin of the Pauline corpus.[10] "The early history of the Pauline letters is a continuing enigma in New Testament scholarship," Harry Gamble acknowledges. "Despite a great expenditure of effort over the past century, we are able today to claim very few assured conclusions and cannot describe with any confidence the process by which the individual letters of the Apostle were gathered into a collection and came to form a substantial part of the New Testament canon."[11] Nevertheless, a few key pieces of evidence do appear to support the conclusion that "Marcion's Pauline corpus is derivative in both content and structure from another early edition of the letters."[12] Based upon the recent studies of Clabeaux and Schmid, Gamble observes that

> the large majority of peculiar readings attested for Marcion can otherwise be closely paralleled in the larger textual tradition of Paul's letters, especially the so-called Western text and some parts of the

> Syrian tradition. This means that Marcion is not to be credited with extensive tendentious emendations, and that his text of the epistles belonged to a common pre-Marcionite form of the Pauline text that was already current around the beginning of the second century.[13]

This would mean not only that Marcion did not create the first collection of Paul's letters, but also that he did not rescue Paul from complete obscurity, since others before him cared enough about what Paul had written to collect and circulate his letters. Both the Apostolikon and the catholic Pauline corpus go back to a common collection ancestral to both. "Consequently," Gamble concludes, "Marcion's importance for the history of Pauline texts has been substantially diminished."[14]

On the one hand, Gamble's conclusion of Marcion's diminished importance follows reasonably on what has been discovered about the Apostolikon's dependence on a preexisting Pauline corpus. The supposed role of Marcion's editorial hand in *shaping* the history of Pauline texts has been diminished. "The role of Marcion in all of this recedes further and further into the background," John Clabeaux concludes. "The text-type he used could have already enjoyed a fairly broad circulation."[15] On the other hand, the very same demonstration that Marcion faithfully transmitted a text of Paul already in place before him, unmarred by ideologically tendentious alterations (possible omissions aside), vastly *increases* his importance as a *witness* to the state of the text in the early second century, by providing a text "appreciably older than the text represented in P^{46}," the oldest manuscript of the catholic Pauline corpus.[16] A smaller role in making history results in a larger role for Marcion as a source for our knowledge of that history, by providing information about the content and wording of Paul's letters more than half a century earlier than our next source with a comparable amount of information. The Apostolikon ceases to be a sectarian byway and dead-end in the history of the transmission of Paul's letters, and becomes, quite simply, the earliest witness to their general transmission, and hence the first substantial source on their content prior to any possible further revision in the second century before the manuscript evidence appears.[17] "If we were speaking of a papyrus fragment from the first half of the second century," Clabeaux observes, "then even a few pages would be accepted as highly significant."[18]

Regardless of various hypotheses about the early formation of a Pauline corpus, therefore, it remains true that Marcion's Apostolikon is "the only second-century edition of Paul about whose shape we have fairly detailed information."[19] We know which letters of Paul Marcion included, and the order in which they appeared in the collection. The manuscript P^{46}, from about three generations after Marcion, is the oldest surviving set of the letters in their catholic form, and in an order that begins to approximate the later canonical one, based on the length of each letter, from longest to shortest.[20] The order of Paul's collected letters remained in flux throughout the first several Christian centuries; but the relatively unusual order in the Apostolikon, with Galatians first, was long considered to have been ideologically motivated. This sequence, clearly reported by both Tertullian and Epiphanius, was thought to be Marcion's conscious attempt to prioritize the content of Galatians, in which Paul dealt with "Judaizers" who were distorting the Christian message, much as Marcion saw in his own time.[21] This explanation remained plausible only so long as the placement of Galatians at the beginning of the collection could not be accounted for by anything other than ideological reasons.

The discovery of non-Marcionite collections of Paul with Galatians first has presented an opportunity to look into other possible reasons for the "Marcionite" order. With regard at least to the first several letters, we find the same order in a list of New Testament books preserved in a book from the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, the so-called *Catalogus Sinaiticus* (also referred to as the *Kanon Sinaiticus*),[22] as well as in the original sequence of a commentary on Paul's letters written in the fourth century by Ephrem Syrus.[23] A third example comes from a set of prologues to Paul's letters found in catholic Latin manuscripts, whose wording reveals an original order identical to the Apostolikon; for that reason, some researchers have proposed that they actually derive from the Apostolikon itself, and are referred to as the "Marcionite Prologues."[24] Prompted by this evidence of a wider circulation of a Galatians-first Pauline corpus, researchers have convincingly argued that such a sequence represents an attempt to arrange the letters in chronological order.[25] Marcion's imagined ideological motives for the sequence of the Apostolikon therefore evaporate, and it begins to appear that he simply received and transmitted an order already in place before him.[26]

Previous attempts to reconstruct the Apostolikon of Marcion have been made by Adolf Hilgenfeld,[27] Theodore Zahn,[28] and Adolf von Harnack.[29] The text of Galatians has attracted special efforts at reconstruction by Hilgenfeld,[30] W. C. van Manen,[31] and K. Schäfer;[32] and Hermann Raschke produced a similar focused study on the text of Romans.[33] The latest attempt at a reconstruction of the Apostolikon has been provided by Ulrich Schmid,[34] who thoroughly revisits the principal sources used in all previous studies. He attempts to reconstruct both *content*, where mere allusion suffices, and *wording*, where more exact quotations in the sources provide an opportunity to recover the original Greek phrasing. Schmid displays relatively greater restraint than Harnack in positing omissions not explicitly identified by the sources, and finds them only in Galatians, Romans, and one brief passage in Colossians. Yet, because he *does* presuppose the traditional model of Marcion as redactor, he relies on his sense of what Marcion would find ideologically problematic and suggests exactly which verses were omitted even when sources (principally Tertullian) refer to omissions in quite vague terms. Nevertheless, he follows the example of Clabeaux in explaining features of the text by ideological redaction only when no other explanation can be found, and entertains the possibility of "mechanical" scribal errors for textual variants in a number of cases where others have found ideological motives.[35]

Schmid's main methodological advance lies in checking the testimony of Tertullian and Epiphanius to particular readings of Marcion's text against their quotation of the same biblical passage elsewhere, where they can be assumed to be using their own catholic text. This comparison allows Schmid to assess how certain we can be that a particular reading belongs to the Apostolikon and not to the paraphrastic habits of the person discussing it, unconsciously influenced by the form of the passage more familiar to him.[36] But Schmid's rejection of the evidence of Adamantius, and his general neglect of other sources, shows that he has allowed the criteria necessary for establishing exact wording to intrude into his criteria for use of sources to establish content—that is, the presence of particular passages, however uncertain their wording.

The Character of the Apostolikon

A characterization of the content of the Apostolikon will not differ all that much from a summary of Paul's thought based on the catholic form of his letters (without the Pastorals and Hebrews). As

far as we can tell, the Marcionites read identical versions of 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians ("Laodiceans"), Philippians, and Philemon, while very minor differences affected their reading of Galatians and Colossians. Only Romans would make a substantially different impression. Arguably, nothing that deserves mention in a brief overview of Paul's core ideas would be left out if it were based on the Apostolikon.

Paul presents himself as a man of Jewish ancestry and heritage (Gal 1.13; Phil 3.4–5), called directly by "Jesus Christos" in a dramatic ascent through the celestial spheres that surround the earth (2 Cor 12.2–4), and commissioned to be Christ's emissary to the Gentiles (Gal 1.1, 11–12). The latter were formerly "the nations in flesh, those called 'uncircumcision' . . . without Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to their contracts and promises, having no hope and without a god in the world" (Laod 2.11–12). In fact, God chose "the low-born, the least, the despised" deliberately, in order to invert the world's valuation of things (1 Cor 1.28). God was not truly known to the wisdom of this world (1 Cor 1.21)—indeed even to the Jews (Rom 10.3)—at least in part because "the god of this aeon" blinds the minds of those who do not open themselves up to trust (2 Cor 4.4), but also because God hid his plans from the aeons (Laod 3.9). God reaches out to the Gentiles, according to Paul, not by extending Torah Law over them and incorporating them into the "old contract" based on specified commandments, but by establishing a "new contract" based on trust. By invoking trust, Paul draws on the legal discourse of his time, building on a distinction between criminal and family law. Torah Law functions like criminal law, he suggests, forming the basis of judgment, condemnation, and punishment (Gal 3.10, 22; 2 Cor 3.6; Rom 7.8; 8.1–2). By contrast, the "new contract" functions like a bequest given to adopted children, an image Paul employs repeatedly (Gal 3.26; 4.5–6; Rom 8.14–19; Laod 1.5). Not only are Christians adopted as God's children, but they gain that status from a previous life as slaves—slaves to "the ordering forces of the cosmos" (Gal 4.3; Col 2.8), "those who by nature are not gods" (Gal 4.8), "the rulers of this aeon" (1 Cor 2.6), or "the ruler of the authority of the air" (Laod 2.2). Paul can also characterize people as slaves to wrongdoing itself, by a kind of built-in compulsion to do even what one knows is wrong (Rom 6.19–20; 7.23–25). But Christians are purchased from this former owner by God at the price of Jesus' life (Gal 2.20; 4.5; 1 Cor 5.7; 6.20; Rom 5.6), and for this reason owe Jesus and God their

obedience like a dutiful slave (1 Cor 3.23; 6.19–20), with the promise that at the reading of God's last will and testament, so to speak, they will be freed and adopted as God's own children and heirs. All of this, of course, is analogy and metaphor—Paul's way of getting across a mind-boggling dramatic change in status in terms of more familiar experience.

In an apparently more literal way, he teaches belief in a future "awakening" of the dead, in which the spiritual, incorruptible, "supercelestial" body will be altogether different than the animate, corruptible, flesh-and-blood, "soily" body of this life (1 Cor 15.35–50; cf. 2 Cor 4.7–5.4; 7.1; Phil 3.21). Indeed, "in my flesh good does not dwell" (Rom 7.14). Even though Jesus came "in the likeness of a human being" (Phil 2.7) and "in the likeness of wrongdoing flesh" (Rom 8.3), he still provides the visible image of the invisible God (2 Cor 4.4, 6; Col 1.15; Phil 2.6), and therefore serves as a model through whose emulation the Christian can be transformed into a Christ-like child of God (2 Cor 3.18). He is the culmination and fulfillment of human nature, the anti-Adam who initiates a new kind of humanity (1 Cor 15.1–26; 2 Cor 5.17; Laod 2.10), and whose awakening from death foreshadows the same destiny for all (15.22). That destiny involves a future, dramatic descent of Jesus from the celestial spheres, and a meeting with him "in the air" by all the awakened dead (1 Thess 4.16–17; 2 Thess 2.7).

In many of his letters, Paul speaks of conflict with other interpreters of the message of Jesus, who in various ways drew Christians to practices that Paul considered inessential or even detrimental to the faith: circumcision (Gal 2.3–4), keeping kosher in food (Gal 2.11–14; Col 2.16), Sabbath and new moon observance (Col 2.16). These issues relate in an obvious way to Paul's core message that the Gentiles are brought into God's grace apart from Torah Law—"for Christ is an end of law" (Rom 10.4), and "abolished the Law" (Laod 2.15). Paul connects the religious observance of "days and months and seasons and years"—including such things as Sabbaths and holy days—with obedience to those "ordering forces" from whom God has purchased and freed the Christian (Gal 4.9–10; Col 2.16), or with the "commands and teachings of (mere) human beings" (Col 2.21–22). The slavery that characterizes life before God's grace included slavery to "Mount Sinai"—the Torah Law itself (Gal 4.5, 24; 5.1; 2.3–4; Rom 7.4–6). For Christians, the "entire Law" is fulfilled in the single commandment of "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal 5.14; cf. Rom 13.8–10), and carried out through spiritual guidance

which naturally produces good actions as its fruit (Gal 5.22–23). Yet the Torah Law remains valid and binding for those who choose to adhere to it and gain the reward of what it promises (Gal 5.3; Rom 2.12–13, 25; 7.12). Paul criticizes those who claim to follow the Law but fail to live up to its demands (Gal 6.13; Rom 2.21–24). He can occasionally cite the Torah as authoritative, at least symbolically (Gal 1; Cor 9.9; 10.1–11; Laod 6.2); but he can, in the same way, cite "pagan" Greek literature (1 Cor 15.33).

Despite the contrast of the relation of trust to the "Law of commandments," Paul still expects Christians to adhere to certain principles of good conduct—guided either by the spirit or by ways of thinking about themselves. Besides conceiving of themselves as purchased slaves who owe obedience to their master, Christians should think of their community or their individual body as the temple of God (1 Cor 3.16), as the body of Christ (1 Cor 6.15; 1 Cor 12.12–27; Col 1.24), or as the bride of Christ (Laod 5.21–32). Paul refers to the goal and outcome of this good conduct by a set of words built on the Greek root *dikē*, meaning something that is right, straight, in-line. Traditional translations of these terms include "righteous/righteousness" and "justify/justification." But within the context of the social and legal use of these terms in Paul's time, the sense may be better captured by expressions such as "rectify," "rectitude," "upright," "ethical" in the sense of adhering to a community's approved ethos, or "moral" in the sense of following a particular set of mores. Paul also describes a vibrant set of religious practices in Christian assemblies: baptizing (including surrogate baptism on behalf of those who are already dead, 1 Cor 15.29), a ritual meal symbolizing Christ's body and blood through which people were purchased from the masters of this world (1 Cor 10.16; 11.23–25), along with more spontaneous, inspired acts of prayer, prophecy, singing, healing, instruction, and uttering of unknown languages (1 Cor 11.4–5; 12.8–10; Laod 5.19, 6.18).

Marcionites and non-Marcionites alike could find confirmation of their views and ways of life in this material. But have these texts been custom-tailored to Marcion's positions, or were those positions determined by careful (selective?) attention to these texts? In previous scholarship, the main "proof" of Marcion's hand in editing the texts has been the omission of quotations from the Jewish scriptures, in accord with his well-attested rejection of the value and authority of those scriptures. Is not the absence of the biblical quotations of Gal 3.6–9, and of Romans 9–11 and 15, proof that a

Marcionite agenda shaped the Apostolikon? If it is, what are we to make of the many, many more biblical quotations left in place, including:

Gal 3.10 (Deut 27.26)
Gal 3.11 (Hab 2.4)
Gal 3.13 (Deut 21.23)
Gal 4.22 (Gen 16.15, 21.2)
Gal 5.14 (Lev 19.18; cf. Luke 10.27)
1 Cor 1.19 (Isa 29.14)
1 Cor 1.31 (Jer 9.23)
1 Cor 2.16 (Isa 40.13)
1 Cor 3.19 (Job 5.13)
1 Cor 3.20 (Ps 94.11)
1 Cor 6.16 (Gen 2.24)
1 Cor 9.9 (Deut 25.4)
1 Cor 14.21 (Isa 28.11–12)
1 Cor 15.32 (Isa 22.13)
1 Cor 15.45 (Gen 2.7)
1 Cor 15.54–55 (Hos 3.14; Isa 25.8)
2 Cor 13.1 (Deut 19.15)
Rom 2.24 (Isa 52.5)
Rom 11.34–35 (Isa 40.13–14)
Rom 12.17 (Lev 19.18)
Rom 12.19 (Deut 32.35)
Laod 4.8 (Ps 68.18; cf. Col 2.15)
Laod 5.14 (Isa 26.19, 60.1)
Laod 5.31 (Gen 2.24)
Laod 6.2 (Exod 20.12)

Not only do all these biblical quotations remain in place in Marcion's text, but not once is either a quotation or its context altered in order to treat the text critically or negatively. Marcion apparently left intact the extensive review of the experience of Moses and Israel from Exodus and Numbers in 1 Cor 10.1–10, including its identification of Christ with the rock that traveled with them. Likewise, he let stand the description of Christ in 1 Cor 5.7 as the Passover sacrifice. He did not omit the characterization of God as creator of all things in 1 Cor 8.6, or as fashioner of the human body in 1 Cor 12.24, and of animal and plant bodies in 1 Cor 15.38. The God of Genesis is the same God who shines in the hearts of believers

in 2 Cor 4.6. Marcion did not alter Paul's description of his cooperation with the Jerusalem leadership, and their partnership in a dual mission to Jews and Gentiles, in Gal 2.1–10. He did not remove references to believers as true Jews (Rom 2.28–29) or as needing to join Israel to be reconciled with God (Laod 2.11ff.). He allowed Paul to justify his positions on the basis of the Law in 1 Cor 14.37. Indeed, the Law is sacred, spiritual, just *and* good in Rom 6.12–14. The Ten Commandments are cited not once, but twice (Rom 13.19; Laod 6.2). Christ, on the other hand, brings retribution in 2 Thess 1.8, and God sends error, misleading people so that they might be judged in 2 Thess 2.11. If there were readings of these passages consistent with Marcionite views, they involved interpretation, not textual emendation. In light of such evidence, it simply is not plausible to propose ideological motives for the differences between the Apostolikon and the catholic text of Paul's letters.

The Question of Priority

As we have seen, very few of the differences between the Evangelion and Luke have an obvious ideological motive, leading to the strong likelihood that the two versions of the gospel arose out of non-ideological literary causes, probably before the time of Marcion. In the case of the Apostolikon, it is somewhat easier to understand why many have been convinced that ideological edits play a role, since certain specific themes appear to be missing from Marcion's text in comparison to the catholic one. Because of Marcion's close identification with Paul, it has been common to look at his Pauline texts first, and the impression they make has then carried over into assumptions about his gospel text. But now that we have allowed the Evangelion to stand apart from the Apostolikon in our consideration, we need to revisit the latter with fresh eyes, perhaps even illuminated by the possibility that it, too, might represent a form of the text that arose independently of Marcion's ideology.

Alongside the question of the authenticity of all of the Pauline letters now included in the New Testament canon, the integrity of the letters of Paul in their current form has been a matter of debate throughout modern biblical studies. "It has been a strong and growing conviction among many critics," Harry Gamble reports, "that the transmitted texts of at least some of the letters of Paul do not correspond in form to the letters actually written by Paul, but are to be regarded as 'editorial products' in which originally independent

pieces of Paul's correspondence are conflated."[37] Textual evidence, in the strict sense, has played a decidedly secondary role in that debate. Most proposals for composite or interpolated letters rely almost entirely on subjective judgments regarding tensions and contradictions in the content. For those making such proposals, the manuscript evidence from the third and following centuries comes too late to be of much assistance, as it derives from already composite and interpolated exemplars. The evidence of the Apostolikon rarely enters into consideration, due to the prevailing assumption that Marcion himself is responsible for its textual differences. Yet it offers the only means for checking whether various proposed combinations of letters or interpolations were already in place in the mid-second century, and in this way takes some of the subjectivity out of the proposals. "Whatever position may be taken on the integrity of any individual letter," Gamble observes, "it is generally granted as a firm critical principle that the form of the transmitted text of any letter should not be assumed, without further ado, to represent the original form of the Pauline correspondence."[38]

In point of fact, in the Apostolikon we are dealing with only a very few explicitly noted omissions relative to the catholic text. The sweeping redaction Marcion supposedly carried out to purge positive references to Jewish scriptures and to bring the text into harmony with his doctrines fails to materialize. Marcion's critics have no difficulty finding quotations of Jewish scriptures, clear references to Jesus' flesh and blood and the physical resurrection, characterizations of God as creator of the world and of humanity, and other such ideas to cite against Marcion's interpretation of his own scriptures. In short, an *ideological* redaction is quite difficult to substantiate, since the supposedly objectionable content of missing passages is found in other passages left in place. If there are some differences of content, therefore, we must seek a different sort of circumstance to account for them. Three possibilities present themselves:

1. Marcion's Pauline corpus derives from an "ecumenicizing" redaction that removed from the letters what were considered local issues or ephemeral details specific in time and place, in order to produce a body of instruction for general use.
2. Marcion's Pauline corpus derives from alternative editions of specific letters produced by Paul or his colleagues for

various reasons, such as versions addressed to different audiences (Gentile, Jewish), or versions actually sent versus versions recorded and later modified or expanded among Paul's papers.

3. Marcion's Pauline corpus is a product of the unregulated circulation of copies of Paul's letters, in which many modifications of the text freely occurred, prior to a settling and standardization of the texts where differences in the source copies were harmonized in various ways, generally tending towards inclusiveness (hence greater length).

The free-for-all nature of the last possibility would make it very hard to trace any consistent tendency in our source material, and amounts to a default hypothesis if the other two possibilities prove untenable. These other two scenarios both amount to some sort of "two editions" theory of the origin of the Pauline corpus; so we will consider the evidence for and plausibility of such a theory.

The idea that Paul's letters circulated in an alternative "ecumenical" version is supported by places in the manuscript tradition where the specific addressees of the letters are omitted, for example, in a number of manuscripts of Ephesians (at 1.2), and in some manuscripts of Romans (at 1.7 and 1.15)[39] and 1 Corinthians (at 1.2).[40] Some would attribute these ecumenicizing edits to Marcion, as part of his purpose of turning highly circumstantial letters into doctrinal resources.[41] But there is no evidence that the addressees were omitted in the Apostolikon; on the contrary, Marcion's version of Paul's letters quite clearly included the specific references to Rome, to Corinth, and to "Laodicea" in place of Ephesus. Harry Gamble looks instead to a "Pauline school" descending from the circle of Paul's co-workers, which at some point assembled the ten-letter collection found in the Apostolikon as an ideal set addressed to seven churches "symbolizing universality."[42]

Removing specific addressees would not have been the only, or even a necessary, modification in order to make the letters more "ecumenical." Paul's letters contained sections devoted to ephemeral matters, such as travel plans, arrangements for collecting funds, commendations of individuals, and so forth, which an editor likely would remove. The nature of Tertullian's and Epiphanius' remarks about the Apostolikon may provide evidence that the latter contained such "ecumenically" redacted versions of the letters. Both writers make repeated critical remarks about Marcion mutilating

and shortening Paul's letters, but neither cites very many specific passages that he supposedly omitted. This is in sharp contrast to their handling of the Evangelion, in which Epiphanius in particular regularly notes specific passages of Luke that would support his argument, if Marcion had not omitted them from his text. If we presume any kind of consistent purpose and plan of argument in Epiphanius' work, and at the same time credit his claim that the letters were lacking passages, then we would be led to conclude that these omitted passages had little relevance for the core doctrinal differences at issue between Epiphanius and Marcion. Neither Tertullian nor Epiphanius refer to any of the passages of ephemeral content in Paul's letters, that is, those passages where Paul discusses his past movements, his personal associates, or his future plans. Could it be that these sections were removed from the "ecumenical" redaction of the letters, for which such material had no purpose? On the other hand, precisely because such material offered little of use to their polemic, Tertullian and Epiphanius may have simply passed it by in silence.

As an alternative to the scenario of longer original letters, corresponding to those now found in the Christian canon, later shortened into "ecumenical" versions, it may be that Paul's original letters were shorter, and the longer canonical versions have been supplemented with expansions Paul or his followers added later.[43] The length of Romans and 1 Corinthians has in itself induced some researchers to propose that they represent either composites of several letters or that their original texts have been supplemented beyond the bonds of a letter. Others have pointed to apparent inconsistencies in the sort of audience presupposed in different parts of Paul's letters. For instance, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul introduces elaborate arguments based in the Jewish scriptures; this material not only would be indecipherable to the Gentile Galatians, but would undercut Paul's whole point in the letter to dissuade them from deepening their engagement with Jewish teachings. Did he develop a scriptural argument for a separate version of the letter meant for his Judaizing opponents, or in his own notebooks in preparation for further debate? Much the same can be said regarding Romans: an elaborate and scripturally dense discussion of the status of Jews in relation to God, understandable only to those deeply versed in the Jewish scriptures, occupies a strange place in a letter explicitly addressed to first-generation Gentile converts to Christianity. Not that the additional material is completely irrel-

evant to the themes of either letter. One could view them not as letters, but as theological treatises comprehensively dealing with a particular line of inquiry. Interpolations usually have a logic to their placement. But as parts of letters addressed to specific audiences, the passages would have been confusing, to say the least. Subjective observations such as these have always had their place in modern biblical studies, but they gain real traction when supported by concrete textual evidence that alternative versions of the letters, lacking the problematic passages, circulated in the earliest period of the Christian movement.

Our habits of reading the catholic versions of these letters predispose us to think that every section is a necessary part of a grand argument running through the entire letter. But this situation is much like our sense of Shakespeare's plays as "canonical" compositions with every scene, every line a necessary part of a great whole, despite the fact that Shakespeare himself apparently lengthened and shortened them as circumstances, or his own whim, dictated. Nor can the fact that Paul's compositions were letters sent out to specific locations undercut this comparison, as if at that moment the text was permanently fixed. We still must account for the collection of these letters, and for that we must abandon the romantic scenario of some lone devotee traveling from church to church collecting the autographs. Either the Pauline corpus was assembled from Paul's own recorded copies, which he could have revised and expanded at odds with the versions actually sent, or it grew gradually from the loose and unsupervised production of multiple copies circulating throughout the Mediterranean. Undoubtedly our current Pauline corpus goes back in some way to both sorts of sources, and that would mean that there was, for a time, competing copies in circulation.

Marcion's canon-forming activity occurred within this unregulated period. The very question of the "canonical" form of the letters had not arisen prior to Marcion. We cannot even speak very safely of "better" or "worse" copies of Paul. We cannot be sure that the longer catholic versions represent the full extent of what he wrote, versus some abbreviated version in Marcion's hands, since expansions may have been introduced not by Paul, but by later hands, as many scholars suggest. This possibility comes quite close to Marcion's own suspicion, that the teachings of Jesus and Paul had been enveloped by a Judaizing development in the movement. What if Marcion was right? What if Paul's letters circulated

in different versions, some of which contained greater engagement with Jewish tradition than others? These could have been the product of Paul's own efforts to persuade the Jewish leadership of the Christian movement that his views were right. Or they could be the result of such efforts instigated by Paul's successors in the Gentile mission, touching up his texts to develop his positions. Or it could have happened as part of a "domestication" of Paul, incorporating his ideas and authority into a wing of the Christian movement that did not entirely agree with some of his more radical positions. I do not pretend to know which of these scenarios actually played out historically; I merely wish to point out that we have no idea how these texts actually took shape, or any real sense of the vicissitudes to which they were subject in their early circulation in multiple copies prior to textual stabilization from the second to the fifth centuries. We can address the question of priority, therefore, only on a case-by-case basis, comparing the evidence of the Apostolikon to each individual corresponding letter in the catholic canon.

A. Galatians

The version of Galatians included in the Apostolikon lacked a set of verses found in the catholic version of the letter. Does this material represent a later addition to the text, or something edited out from the original?[44] The set of verses involved belongs to a passage that is "one of the most difficult in the Pauline corpus."[45] "There is agreement among the exegetes that Paul's argument in this section is extremely difficult to follow."[46] Paul appears to interweave two themes without successfully joining them. The first theme deals with reception of the spirit through trust, not through the Law (3.2–5, 10–13, 14b); the second theme, absent from Marcion's text, declares all those who trust to be like Abraham, and therefore his spiritual descendants as part of the blessing of the nations through him promised in Genesis (3.6–9, 14a; cf. Gen 12:3; 18:18).[47] This second theme then gets developed in 3.15–21, where God's promise in Genesis to bless the nations through Abraham's "seed" (in the singular) is interpreted as referring to Jesus, culminating in the idea that Christians, through Jesus, count as Abraham's "seed" and heirs (3.29). Meanwhile, the first theme resumes with an exploration of the tension between trust and the Law, and of the believer's union with Christ through the spirit, and culminates in the idea that the Christian, through Christ, is a child of God (3.21–4.7). An inescapable contradiction exists between the respective conclu-

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Many uncertainties shadow our knowledge of the origins, initial circulation, and compilation of Paul's letters. This brief survey has demonstrated that no objective evidence exists by which to settle the priority of one version of a letter over another, and different judgments rest largely on subjective impressions and relative plausibility. Once we set aside the deeply ingrained familiarity of the catholic text, the shorter Marcionite text cannot be simply dismissed as an ideological edit. In nearly every case, the omitted material represents unique ideas appearing in single passages, which Paul repeats nowhere else. Therefore we cannot easily conclude that some significant component of Paul's thought has been systematically excised. In several cases, the omissions fall in places where contemporary commentators find particular difficulties and obscurities in what Paul says, or unusual challenges in understanding how Paul progresses from one point to another. Interpolation therefore presents itself as a possible explanation, or alternatively the formation of a composite text in which originally distinct discussions were interwoven at the cost of succinct clarity. In one case—the end of Romans—the substantially shorter text is attested outside of the Apostolikon, and so can be attributed to Marcion's editorial hand only if we are prepared to credit him with bestowing Paul's letter on non-Marcionite Christians who had no previous knowledge of it.

But what about the impression that all of the omissions fall into the category of things to which Marcion would object, raising the suspicion of an ideological edit? After all, in Galatians Abraham is (almost) removed from Paul's discussion, along with the idea that Christians are "children of Abraham." Similarly, in Romans, Paul's reflections on Christians as branches grafted onto the tree of Israel disappears. Yet, in the Apostolikon's Galatians, Christians remain, in a vivid allegory, the spiritual children of Abraham (4.22–31). In Romans, Paul's characterization of Christians as true Jews, circumcised in their hearts, stands intact in the Marcionite text; while in Laodiceans, he speaks of reconciling Jew and Gentile in one body, remedying the latter's alienation from citizenship in Israel, and bringing them into the household of God (Laod 2.11–19). The list of ways in which the Apostolikon defies what would be expected of a Marcionite purge of the text can be easily multiplied.

Arguments in favor of the priority of Marcion's texts of Paul's letters are at least as good as those against it. The Apostolikon at-

tests with certainty a form of the letters in existence in the early second century, while the same cannot be said of the catholic form. The time has come, then, for a fresh approach to the history of the transmission of Paul's letters that fully incorporates the data of the Apostolikon on the same level as any other textual evidence, be it from a manuscript or the testimony of an Apostolic Father of the same era.

Implications for Biblical Studies

If we have grounds to stop consigning the Apostolikon to a heretical byway, and give it a place alongside of other early evidence for the state of Paul's letters, a number of important implications for biblical studies follows. First, the evidence of the Apostolikon corresponds with the consensus judgment of modern biblical research that the Pastoral letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are not authentic compositions of Paul, but are instead late (second-century?) efforts to "domesticate" Paul within the larger Christian movement. Biblical researchers reached this current opinion without any reference to the evidence of the Apostolikon, so the coincidence of the latter's evidence with that opinion is all the more striking. The same can be said of the relative certainty that Paul did not compose Hebrews, and its absence from Marcion's canon. On the other hand, many researchers would go even further, and question Paul's authorship of Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians. For all three of these disputed texts, Marcion is the earliest known person to identify them as letters of Paul. If that attribution is a mistake, we may very well have Marcion to blame for it, and for whatever ramifications have followed from their inclusion in the New Testament. The evidence of the Apostolikon allows us to say that they were already accepted among Paul's letters by the mid-second century.

Yet some of Marcion's copies of Paul's letters did have differences from the versions of them later accepted among non-Marcionite Christians. Those differences confirm the picture that has been developing in recent decades of research of a quite fluid phase of textual formation in early Christian literature. Any hand Marcion may have had in shaping these texts would be similar in kind to the many major or minor changes worked by countless anonymous redactors and copyists, and so there is no reason to set aside his collection as uniquely irrelevant to efforts to recover the history of the transmission of Paul's writings. Researchers have attempted to explain certain difficulties in the received form of these texts by

various hypotheses that individual letters are composites of several letters, or that certain passages are interpolations by someone other than Paul. These hypotheses only rarely have any basis in textual variants; usually they are based on subjective judgments about the coherence and integrity of the content. The Apostolikon provides a datable reference point by which we can check these proposals (see the Apostolikon Text Notes). Most of them fail this test. Nearly all of the rearrangement and interpolation of the letters that has been proposed would have to have occurred before Marcion, since they are in place in his texts. The few exceptions include: the last two chapters of Romans (with a broad consensus of researchers considering chapter 16 an originally separate letter); possibly the midsection of 2 Corinthians (distributed by some among three distinct documents that have been inserted between possibly two originally separate letters to Corinth); and possibly 1 Thess 2.15b–16.

Finally, identifying the heart of Paul's message has been a perennial issue in biblical studies. Among all the things he talks about, what stands at the core of his teachings, and what should be relegated to the periphery? In particular, a great deal of recent discussion has focused on exactly how he conceived of the coexistence of the "new contract" of Gentile Christianity with the "old contract" of Judaism, and perhaps of Jewish Christianity. In the past, Marcion had importance in these discussions as an interpreter of Paul, who in some ways may have been—in Harnack's famous characterization—the only one to understand Paul, and yet misunderstood him. But the possibility that the Apostolikon was the source rather than the product of Marcion's understanding of Paul resets the terms of this discussion. How might we redefine core and periphery in Paul based on these slightly different editions of his writings? Does the shift of perspective they provide clarify anything that was previously ambiguous? Does it bring to the foreground a different set of cultural reference points at the heart of Paul's thinking? Does it compel us to think of Paul in closer relation to elements of Marcionite and Gnostic Christianity than we previously recognized, particularly in the sharp contrast between the natural and supernatural governing forces of this world and the unknown God who kept his own counsel until he suddenly revealed himself through Christ? The answers to these questions await further research and reflection.