

Chapter 2

The Historical Origin of the Pauline Letters

*De omnibus dubitandum:
One Must Doubt Everything*

My own observations as well as my occupation with Dutch Radical Criticism had brought me in the meantime to a place where the inauthenticity of all the Pauline letters was established for me. In spite of this, however, this negative result was not sufficient for me. In my mind, the primary task for all historical problems was not to determine what had not been the case, but what in fact had been. As I understood it, the historian must always finally be in the situation not only to submit the presumably historical course of history to criticism, but also to reconstruct what actually unfolded. In my opinion, the decisive and finally convincing argument against the authenticity of the letters that the Hollanders still owed us could only be the reconstruction of the real course of history. In my investigation until now two questions had still not been answered:

1. If Paul did not write the letters, who did write them?
2. If someone else wrote them in the name of Paul, who then was the *historical Paul*?

Since in the meantime I had reached a dead end in my research, I thought that a study-trip in the homeland of Dutch Radical Criticism could be useful for me. I hoped that a trip to Amsterdam and Leiden could help me discover additional radical-critical literature, that was not available in German libraries. Above all, I was interested in a book whose existence I had heard about [105] only in the Hollanders' writings, who mentioned it often. The mysterious book came from an Englishman named Edwin Johnson, and had a similarly mysterious title, *Antiqua Mater*.

If one left the highway, the city of Leiden was at first not much different from any average city in northern Germany. But I was nevertheless not disappointed: the city that had existed in my imagination existed in fact. I found it a bit later, when I came to the heart of the old town: a piece of old Holland, like a picturesque Grachten idyll, the gabled houses, the court yards, the cool, clear Vermeer-atmosphere.

I went from the Nieuwe Beestenmarkt on the Princess canal and then along the marvelous Rapenburg Canal in the direction of the university, and passed by the house of the famous philosopher R. Descartes, who had lived and studied here while he was in Holland. *De omnibus dubitandum*—this dictum of the philosopher, often cited by Loman, automatically occurred to me as I passed by the somewhat small and inconspicuous, gabled Dutch house. “Everything should be doubted”: beginning from this starting point, Descartes had found his certainty, the certainty of thinking. The reverse side of the maxim, the dark side of the picture, that everything is uncertain, everything should be doubted, he found in the dictum *Cogito ergo sum*: “I think, therefore I am.” Here the philosopher of the Enlightenment obtained firm ground under his feet. The doubt had led him not into despair, but into the certainty of rational thinking. For a person in the twentieth century, of course, this exercise could no longer be carried out again in the same way. In the wake of the Enlightenment, rational thinking had been too strongly disavowed for that. If something fascinated me about Descartes’ doubting everything and questioning everything, it was not what he discovered at the end of his long and certainly wearisome road; it was rather his starting point, the doubt. “Without doubt,” doubt represented the most powerful driving force in human intellectual life. Doubt is chaotic, unencumbered; it can lead to the highest heights and the lowest lows at the same time—thus obviously a vexation and a [106] devilish temptation for an orthodox person. And nevertheless, this temptation represents nothing else than life’s temptation of the intellect itself, which again and again impels our doubting eyes to be opened to disclose another side of itself.

Meanwhile, I arrived at the old university building in Leiden, which reminded me of a Gothic church. In fact, there was a nunnery on this spot before a university existed. I went purposefully to the modern library, which I suspected would contain a number of treasures for me, whose recovery would occupy me in the days to come. In the library I acquired a list of books from the estate of Bolland, the philosopher and radical critic of Leiden, that had been left to the university library after his death. The list was exceptionally comprehensive and, as I suspected, contained a number of books on radical criticism. Surveying the list, after a short time my eyes fell on the title of a book I had sought above all others and which had attracted my interest for weeks: the

Antiqua mater. Bolland had actually had this book in his possession. I quickly filled out a few loan-cards, so I could attend to the rest of the list. And indeed, in a few minutes a friendly library attendant brought me a stack of books among which was the *Antiqua mater*. The work of 308 pages, published in 1887 by Trübner & Company, was not as voluminous as I had expected.

On the first page of the book, beneath the title of the book, printed in beautiful old-English script, and the subtitle, there was a citation relating to its title. It came from a biography of the poet A. Cowley: “He had an earnest intention of taking a review of the original principles of the primitive Church: believing that every true Christian had no better means to settle his spirit, than that which was proposed to Aeneas and his followers to be the end of their wanderings, *Antiquam exquirite Matrem.*” *Antiquam exquirite Matrem!* [107]

The peculiar title of the book was thus derived from a citation from Vergil’s *Aeneid*. The author had appropriated it for his own theme, the history of the investigation of early Christianity. For him, the search for the “ancient mother” was the search for the origins of Christianity — The mother whom we revere without knowing her face to face. To take up the search for her means to devote oneself to the search for the spiritual origins of the Western world. This search was like a long, difficult journey, where we could not know how it would turn out and what would await us at the end, if we finally met her face to face—whether we would even recognize her, or whether we would be delighted, or disappointed, or perhaps even terrified.

In accordance with the theme of his book, the learned Bolland, who clearly loved to provide all his books with a personally written remark, attached a quotation from the poem *The Lost Church* by Ludwig Uhland:

One often hears in the distant forest
A muffled sound from above,
But no one knows from whence it tolls,
And tradition can hardly explain it:
Of the church long gone
Tolls the ringing with the winds;
Once the path was filled with pilgrims,
Now no one knows how to find it any more.

I did not know exactly what Bolland wanted to express with this quotation. Disappointment, because, in his eyes, the author of the book had not found the way to the *Antiqua mater*? Doubt as

to whether the way to her could be found at all by means of historical criticism? Then Bolland certainly would have misunderstood the title *Antiqua mater*, which for Johnson obviously referred only to the historical origin of the Christian church.

Be as it may, the citation from Uhland's poem was nevertheless splendid. In a very poetic way, it characterizes the spiritual-historical situation not only for someone in the nineteenth century, but also for our own situation. [108] If people take notice at all of their roots, and do not live rootlessly oriented on consumption and success in the present, they must be filled with deep sorrow precisely with regard to their religion, Christianity.

With the dawning of historical doubt, *de omnibus dubitandum*, and with the rise of historical consciousness, Western people lost the security their religion had mediated to them until now. The path to the ancient church was no longer possible, in any case no longer in the way generations before them had gone.

Once the path was filled with pilgrims,
Now no one knows how to find it any more.

Apart from such general considerations, however, I was more interested at the moment in the content of the *Antiqua mater*, concerning which I had previously read only a few allusions. What might be special about the book? Might there be pointers in it that went beyond the simple negation of the "It was not so"? For me, the question concerning the origin of the Pauline letters had still not been satisfactorily explained. Van Manen's assumption of a Pauline school, that even today still enjoys great popularity in a modified form, was completely unacceptable, even if one must recognize that the radical Dutch critics had already made many correct observations. A question remained open here, and I hoped to find information about it in the *Antiqua mater*. I was certainly not disappointed.

Antiqua Mater

Edwin Johnson began his investigation with the question concerning extra-Christian witnesses for early Christianity and the historical Jesus. According to Johnson, apart from the New Testament, we learn very little about the history and origin of Christianity. Most pagan writers show no acquaintance with Christianity, although the Jews are often mentioned. For Johnson, therefore, the silence of classical writers is finally more significant than the few places in ancient literature (in Pliny the

Younger, Tacitus, Suetonius) where we have to do either with later interpolations or, as for Tacitus, with a confusion of Christians at the time of Trajan with Jewish messianic figures from the time of Nero. On the whole, as a witness for the reality of everything that, according to what is mediated in the New Testament, supposedly took place with regard to Jesus and the apostles, the testimony of classical literature from the first two centuries is not very auspicious.

Johnson goes further. Among the extra-canonical Christian sources, the apostolic fathers are worthless for historical investigation, since we have to do here with anonymous writings, which are also difficult to locate with regard to time. Only with Justin (whom we mentioned above) in the middle of the second century do we stand on somewhat reliable historical ground. Of course, what Justin relates concerning Jesus, as a whole, has a very unhistorical character, since in addition to the virgin birth and the visit of the magi he reports only the crucifixion. From all this, Johnson concludes that Jesus of Nazareth was not an historical figure.

Most interesting now, of course, was what Johnson had to say about *Paul*. For Johnson, the “apostle of the heretics,” as Tertullian referred to Paul, and regarded the apostle himself with great mistrust, was also not a historical figure. Apart from the traitorous silence of Justin, he also calls attention to Lucian, who in his *Peregrinus Proteus* mentions this wandering Christian preacher’s great theaters of activity without betraying any knowledge at all of the famous apostle to the Gentiles. As Tertullian said, the identification of the sender of a letter as “Paul” and the appearance of Paul’s name in the address of a letter is still not sufficient proof for the existence of such an apostle. According to Johnson, there had nevertheless been a *Paul-legend*, which Marcion could appropriate for the benefit of his theology. For Johnson, the inescapable and reasonable conclusion can only be that the Marcionites themselves produced ten apostolic letters of their own. And if they ascribed these to an apostle from early Christian times, [110] this would have been entirely in accord with the practices of Christian theologians at that time.

According to Johnson, it is unthinkable that the mixture of heterogeneous elements represented by so-called Paulinism were united in a *single* historical individual. For Johnson, Paul was the apostle of Marcion, but in a different sense than was usually assumed: he was Marcion’s creation! Leaving aside their interpo-

lations, the Pauline letters speak for Marcion. One hears him speaking everywhere—e.g., in the characteristic Marcionite opposition between spirit and flesh, law and gospel, the God of mercy and the God of vengeance, etc. All these concepts that we regard as typically Pauline are, for Johnson, actually Marcionite.¹⁰⁰

Maybe Marcion himself was the author of the Pauline letters: “Whether this last apostle, the ‘miscarriage,’ as he refers to himself, in whose passionate declaration the contour of Gnosis can be clearly recognized... was Marcion himself, or Marcus, or some other student of the great ‘ship-owner from Pontus,’ must still be investigated.”¹⁰¹ In any case, for Catholics Marcion became a heavily loaded fruit tree to which, by plundering it, they must be thankful for their Paul.

By reading the decisive passages from the *Antiqua mater*, what I should have recognized long before became immediately clear to me: There was only one possible solution to the authorship problem of the Pauline letters and that was Marcion! I found it entirely incomprehensible that I had not recognized this until now. Just as unexplainable was the fact that—except for radical criticism—previous research, with downright reprehensible naiveté, had left the figure of the great second-century heretic completely out of view with regard not only to the reception of the Pauline writings but also with regard to their origin—even though, to be sure, many scholars today are nevertheless of the opinion that Marcion was the first person to assemble a canon of Pauline letters. [111]

The First Witness to Paul: Marcion the Heretic

Who was Marcion? He was certainly the most controversial and, at the same time, the most important theologian of the second century, the person whose real significance for both the *origin* and, as we will see, for the *content* of our present biblical canon, i.e., the collection of the twenty-seven New Testament writings, is still scarcely recognized. For his opponents, the Catholic Christians, Marcion was purely and simply the “chief heretic,” the incarnation of evil, the “firstborn of Satan.”¹⁰² On the other hand, his

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *Antiqua mater*, 294.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁰² So supposedly Polycarp from Smyrna according to the testimony of Irenaeus (*AH* 3.3.4).

friends and followers revered him as the great Christian teacher. When they looked towards heaven, they saw him standing at the left of Christ (the right side was reserved for Paul).¹⁰³

The enmity of the Catholic Church at that time for the arch-heretic is easy to explain when one considers that in their time Marcion and his followers represented one of its strongest and most dangerous competitors. Marcion was not only a teacher, but was also active as a *founder of his own churches*, which were named after him (as Lutherans were later named after Luther) and were spread through in the entire world from Rome to Edessa (in present-day Turkey).

In the second and third centuries the Marcionite church was simply *the opposition* to the Catholic church and for a long time was superior to it in power and influence. “Marcion’s heretical tradition has filled the entire world,” the Catholic Tertullian (following Justin) still complains at the beginning of the third century, in his mammoth work against Marcion, that had as its only purpose the extermination of the cursed Marcionite heresy. Even the Christian adversary Celsus, who debated with Origen, understood “Christians” to mean primarily *Marcionite Christians*—which permits a significant inference about the spread of Marcionism at this time.¹⁰⁴

As so often in early Christian history, the person of Marcion is more obscured than clarified by the all-consuming polemic of the church fathers. From what they report, however, one can nevertheless gather that Marcion was born around the end of the first century in Pontus in Asia Minor. Some reporters [112] want

¹⁰³ Harnack, *Marcion*, 143.

¹⁰⁴ Tertullian, *AM* 5.19; Justin, *Apol.*, 1.58. It is important to make this clear. We often believe that the picture of Christianity was obviously already established in the second century by the Catholic church, which was constituted in Rome under the followers of the apostles as the one (and only true) church. That is demonstrably false. In so doing, we unconsciously take over the Catholic picture of the church. The historical circumstances were different. For a long time, the Catholic church was also only one sect among others, that sect, to be sure, which finally proved to be victorious (above all, against the Marcionites); cf. M. Werner, *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas*, 85: “To tell the truth, measured by the same standards with which it condemns other groups and orientations as heretical, the developing Great Church itself is nothing else than a heresy, but just the most successful, which finally drove all others victoriously from the field”; so also W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 231: “What prevailed was a form of life and faith most unified, best suited to the needs of the people, and supported by the strongest organization, in spite of the fact that, in my opinion, long after the close of the apostolic age the totality of consciously orthodox and anti-heretical Christians was still less than the number of ‘heretics.’ ”

to be more precise, by making Marcion a fellow countryman of the philosopher Diogenes (“Diogenes in the barrel”) and having him make his appearance, like Diogenes, in Sinope, the leading city of Pontus, on the south coast of the Black Sea. Without doubt, the tendency to associate Marcion, who according to Hippolytus was supposedly a follower of Cynic philosophy (which at that time would not exclude being a Christian),¹⁰⁵ with the founder of this philosophical school (Diogenes) plays a role here. Marcion’s father was supposedly a bishop. Some church fathers report that the relationship between father and son was very strained and that the father excluded his son from the church because he purportedly seduced a virgin. This could simply be common gossip by the church fathers. But one can nevertheless explain very well how such stories could arise, since Marcion, who remained a bachelor for his entire life and later taught an extreme form of sexual asceticism (so that he even forbade married members of his church to engage in sexual relations), certainly provided sufficient material for all kinds of speculation.¹⁰⁶

As a ship-owner and merchant, Marcion is thought to have resided a long time in Asia Minor, where he obviously acquired a great amount of money, until finally, “already as an old man” (i.e., presumably around 60), “after the death of Bishop Hyginos” (140 CE),¹⁰⁷ he came to Rome. Whether and to what extent Marcion was already active as a missionary before he came to Rome is disputed. While Harnack and other investigators think that Marcion began to found Christian churches of his own *only after his stay in Rome*, many scholars represent the view that Marcion already began to build his Church before coming to Rome. On the whole, the latter view seems much more plausible. Since already in the middle of the century the Catholic Justin can observe that

¹⁰⁵ Cf. the example of the wandering Christian preacher Peregrinus Proteus, whose destiny is reported by Lucian in his satire with that name.

¹⁰⁶ To be sure, the Marcionite Church had many catechumens who were allowed to marry, or to live in marital fellowship (Harnack, *Marcion*, n. 1). It seems to have provided a generous institution of repentance; otherwise it could hardly have become a world-wide church: see Eshik of Kolb, *Wider die Sekten*, 199; also Harnack, *Marcion*, 379*: “The Marcionite sects reject marriage and eating flesh,... but they make a false vow; for because they do not resist the desire, they (the sinners) are subjected again to repentance.” Moreover, the peculiar circumstance should be noted that Marcion accepted a marriage that had once been joined and recognized the prohibition of divorce (deriving from the Creator of the world): Harnack, *Marcion*, 148, A.1). Altogether, the information mediated by the church fathers about Marcion’s strict asceticism may be a bit exaggerated.

¹⁰⁷ Harnack, *Marcion*, 24ff; Hörman, *Gnosis*, 52.

Marcionite churches are spread throughout *the entire world* (*Apol.*, 1.58), Marcion must have already been active as a missionary and have founded his own churches prior to his residence in Rome, whereby these churches, of course, could have had a loose relationship with the Catholic church in Rome. [113] The enormous spread of Marcionite churches throughout the entire Mediterranean region cannot possibly be explained if this took place in a decade and a half, apart from the fact that one can hardly credit such a gigantic missionary achievement to a man who was already “somewhat old.”

In Rome there now takes place an event with great significance for the further development of church history: Marcion is excommunicated (presumably in 144 CE, in July?). From this time on, the Marcionite and the Catholic churches stood in opposition to one another, as in our own time, for example, Protestantism and Catholicism stand in opposition to one another.

Of course, immediately following Marcion’s arrival in Rome there was a friendly relationship between Marcion and the Roman church. Marcion had attempted—clearly with some success at first—to win the Roman church for himself by presenting them a splendid sum of money amounting to 200,000 sesterces, which in present day buying-power would represent several million dollars (one sesterse = 2 ½ asses). Where this money came from is not entirely clear. It is not said whether Marcion had earned it by his profitable work as a ship-owner, as is most often assumed, or perhaps (which I hold as more probable)—like the “Paul” of the letters, who collected money for the church in “Jerusalem”—had asked his own churches for money before he set out for the “Jerusalem” of his own time, i.e., Rome. If one considers that in the entire affair the example, or parallel, as the case may be, of *Paul* obviously plays an important role, the latter explanation is in no way entirely improbable. W. Hörman also notes that here Marcion clearly emulates the apostle Paul as his great example:

His great example becomes visible: Paul. Did he not—and with much labor—plead for money from all his Greek churches for years in order to donate it, as had been arranged, to “the poor in Jerusalem”? Now, were there not also “poor in Rome”?¹⁰⁸

In spite of the impressive gift of money by the Marcionite Simon for the Roman Peter (Acts 8:18ff.), Marcion-Simon was not able to obtain the favor of the followers of Peter in the long run. [114]

¹⁰⁸ W. Hörman , *Gnosis*, 53.

“Part and lot” (Acts 8:21) in the Roman church can obviously not be purchased either with money or with nice words, which would certainly also not have been missing. The gift of money might have contributed to confusing the minds of the Roman church for a while, but it then came to an open break. In a short time, Marcion got his 200,000 sesterces back again by return mail.¹⁰⁹

What happened? Obviously, in the meantime, after the initial delight over the welcome improvement of his church endowment, the Roman Peter had sufficient opportunity to consider the matter a bit and to project a clearer picture of the remarkable traveler from the Near East. Even if it was only after a difficult inner struggle, for him it was therefore as if scales had fallen from his eyes. Like Peter in his judgment of Simon Magus, he now recognized: “For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” In the meantime, Marcion had become identified with heresy.

Marcion's Two Gods

The chief reproach made against Marcion was that he taught *two Gods*. Above all for Jewish Christians, who clearly had significant influence in the world at that time, the Marcionite teaching seems to have made their hair stand on end. By closer examination, Marcion's theology turns out to be an aggressive attack on everything that for Jews was dear and cherished. That includes, above all, the confession of *one creator God*, the father of Jesus Christ. Marcion claimed that alongside the (Jewish) creator God there was also *another* God, a second, or “foreign,” God. This “other God” is the good and loving God, while that God, i.e., the Jewish God, is the God of the creation and the law. While the good God revealed himself for the first time in Jesus Christ, the Old Testament is the revelation-writing of the Jewish God. The Jewish creator God is subordinate to the good God in every

¹⁰⁹ The entire incident seems to be reflected in the eighth chapter of Acts. It is transferred here to Simon (the spiritual father of Marcion and the Marcionites) and Peter (the representative of Rome). “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.’ And Simon answered, ‘Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.’”

way, who dwells above him in his own heaven (the third heaven).¹¹⁰ [115] The clearest proof of this is his *creation*, which with all its deficiencies and abominations, above all the loathsome dirt and filth of procreation, birth, putridity, etc., represents lamentable and ludicrous tragedy and shows itself to be entirely the work of a bungler, even the Jewish Demiurge. The entire imperfection of this God also finds expression in the fact that he is the God of the Old Testament law, with its unmerciful and primitive demands, e.g., “Eye for eye and tooth for tooth,” etc. As a righteous God, with the promulgation of his law he is at the same time a hard and cruel God with an explicit partiality for his chosen people. As the Old Testament also shows, he takes pleasure in wars and bloodshed, he is hot-tempered, changeable, unpredictable, and peevish. For this reason, those persons in the Old Testament who should be regarded as really *righteous* are not those who do the will of the *Righteous (God)*, as Abel and Abraham, for example, but, on the contrary, precisely those who rise up against him, like Cain, for example, who murdered his brother.

The *good God*, on the other hand, who was often referred to by Marcion and the Marcionites as the *Good* or the *Foreign*, is entirely different from God the creator and giver of the law. He is the creator not of the imperfect, material world, but of the perfect, invisible world. His outstanding characteristic is not righteousness, but love and kindness. The love and mercy of this God are so exceedingly large that, in contrast, they themselves disclose those who are foreign to him by nature, who as creatures of the creator God are imprisoned in the transitory cosmos, sighing under the yoke of his tyranny.

But quite unexpectedly, and without any of the prophets inspired by the muffled spirit of the Old Testament God being able to foresee anything about it, the good God released humankind from the dominion of transience and the law of the Jewish God by sending his Son to earth—to be sure, only in what seemed to be a body (phantasm), since the Deliverer could naturally not really enter into the dirty, material world, which of course represented only a concoction of the Demiurge. Since no external compulsion [116] made this step necessary, this was an act of pure *grace*, an outflow of perfect goodness and mercy, pure *gospel*. Through his Son, the good God frees humankind from the power of the right-

¹¹⁰ Cf. 2 Cor 12:2.

eous God. Or better, one must say he buys him out, in that he delivers to the righteous God as a purchase price the blood of his Son, who had been hanged on the Old Testament tree of shame (Gal 3:13). The goal of the salvation work of Christ is not forgiveness of sins, but liberation from the power of the creator God into the dominion of the good God. People everywhere can be set free when they believe the gospel of the cross of Christ, through which the power of the law has been broken, and where therefore *faith* now stands in the place of obedience to the law, love in the place of righteousness, and hope in an invisible kingdom of God in place of hope in an earthly-messianic kingdom, which the Jews (and many Jewish-Christians) anticipate.

When did Marcion Become a Heretic?

The enormous success that Marcion's message had in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire and would also continue to have—As W. Bauer showed, the majority of churches in Greece, Asia Minor, and the Near East seem to have been Marcionite¹¹¹—could not be repeated in the West. As his excommunication in 144 CE shows, after prolonged hesitation Marcion received a clear rebuff. A contribution to this was certainly the fact that in the Roman church, where Marcion presented his theology, Jewish Christians had especially great influence. Naturally, they could not accept Marcionite teaching in any way and obviously could only perceive it as one of the worst blasphemies of Israel's God.

After his excommunication in Rome, Marcion soon disappeared from the scene. In a letter that was supposedly still known to Tertullian, he seems to have defended himself against accusations that had been made against him. Unfortunately, however, [117] like so many documents that would have burning interest for us in this instance, this letter has been "lost." We do not know, therefore, how Marcion himself reacted to the accusations that had been raised against him. We only know that the Marcionite church continued to bloom in the second half of the second century and that "synagogues of the Marcionites" and Marcionite churches existed even longer in almost all the large cities of the Roman Empire—to the distress of the Catholic Christians, who still had to wait for Caesar Constantine so that the despised "heretics" could finally be finished off.

¹¹¹ W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*.

Marcion was supposedly in Rome still one more time, where he was offered fellowship with the church under the condition that he “integrate again into the church the others whom he had convinced of his perdition.”¹¹² Marcion purportedly acquiesced before he died. Without doubt, behind this tradition stands hardly anything else than Catholic triumphalism.

A rather important question in this connection is whether Marcion was already a “heretic” when he came to Rome or first began with his “heresy” in Rome. The church fathers attempt to present it as if it was in Rome that Marcion came under the influence of certain Gnostic teachers, Cerdo, the student of Simon, for example, or possibly also the Gnostic Valentinus, who resided in Rome at that time, and in association with them first arrived at his own teaching, which differed from Gnostic teaching above all by its rejection of everything speculative. That is certainly not very probable, especially when one considers that according to a tradition mediated by Irenaeus (after Papias), Polycarp, the bishop from Asia Minor, identified Marcion as the “first-born of Satan.”¹¹³ That allows only the conclusion that Marcion already represented his “heresies,” the “two-God” teaching and the rejection of the Old Testament, in his pre-Roman phase and so also that the Roman church certainly could not have been entirely ignorant of this teaching when Marcion arrived in Rome. Marcion was certainly not an unknown quantity for them. Then the gift of money that Marcion offered the Roman church first takes on a proper meaning, when one recognizes that Marcion (118) thereby wanted to obtain something *for himself and his teaching*. In this way, Marcion wanted to stir up sympathy for his theology, which he knew very well would not be uncontroversial in Rome. It was doubtless already a tactical maneuver, with which Marcion attempted to scatter sand in the eyes of his (already at hand) critics and to win those who were wavering for himself, to be sure, without success, as we saw. The influence of the Jewish-Christian faction in Rome and their clientele was stronger.

Now it is certainly clear that in later times—at least on the Roman side—people did not want to acknowledge all this. Especially the memory that they had received a Christian teacher with open arms and had accepted money from him must have

¹¹² Tertullian, *Praesct. Haer.*, 30.; cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, 23*; Hörman, 57f.

¹¹³ Irenaeus, *AH*, 3.3.4f.; cf. Harnack, *Marcion*, 3*ff.

been painful, if not unbearable, since—seen in retrospect—his heretical tendencies were already generally known. Only after Marcion’s Roman publicity campaign miscarried and his (Jewish-Christian) opponents were able to carry out his excommunication did they better understand everything. Now it was clear that the Roman church accepted the 200,000 sesterces so readily only out of ignorance of Marcion’s actual character, and that it was not that they perhaps wavered for a while, but that *he* had disguised himself.

Marcionism and Gnosis

With regard to Marcion’s *theology*, this fits together, by and large, with a religious movement in late antiquity referred to as *Gnosis*. In the opinion of the church fathers, we have to do here with a teaching going back to *the Samaritan Simon Magus*—according to statements of the church fathers, Marcion’s spiritual (grand-)father! (see below)—which we encounter in the entire Mediterranean region from the first century on in differing forms by different representatives. In addition to the Samaritan Simon, for example, *Valentinus*, the respected “star” among Gnostics at that time, would also be a representative of Gnosis, as well as *Cerdo*, the disciple of Simon, who resided in Rome at about the same time as Marcion. [119]

A characteristic feature of Gnostic as well as Marcionite teaching would be especially its *dualism*, which certainly finds its radical expression, above all, in Marcion’s teaching of two Gods. Like Marcion, Gnostics also make a distinction between the creator God and the foreign, or, as he is usually referred to, the *unknown* God. As with Marcion, contempt for the creator God is connected with ascetic, world-denying, and sometimes also libertine elements. (Slogan: “In order to give the creator God a cold shoulder, we do what we like.”) Like the Gnostics, Marcion also struggled with an ancient human problem: the question *Unde malum?* What is the origin of evil? How did suffering come into the world? And he solved this problem in a way similar to theirs, although a simpler way, less complex, and thus also more effective and more popular. He made a clear separation between *creation and the creator God*, on the one side, and the *good God* (who, according to his conception of God, as the “loving God” could not be made responsible for the misery on earth), on the other. It was a neat resolution of the theodicy question, at the cost of the unity of God. We might interpret Marcion to say that

the question as to why God allows evil to exist is misplaced, directed to the wrong person. The real God has nothing to do with this world. It is not *he* who allows that, but his subordinated colleague. For the suffering of the world is the responsibility of the one who created it, the Demiurge.

One could say that in his way Marcion popularized Gnosticism and made it a mass movement. That also finds expression in the fact that he reinterpreted the central Gnostic concept of *Gnosis*, i.e., the saving knowledge (*Gnosis* = knowledge), through whose mediation the gnostic person is set free from all earthly ties. Marcion turned the saving knowledge, that is reserved for only a few elite persons with understanding, into the (saving) *faith*: the faith in the gospel of the cross of Christ, through whom the foreign God set humankind free. This message, which Marcion moreover proclaimed in public, not in secret circles like the Gnostics, could be understood by everyone. His immense success showed that Marcion was right. [120]

An aggravating objection can be made to what was just said. It can be said, on the contrary, that this singular conception of faith was not at all the invention of Marcion, but already goes back to Paul, and that in other places as well Marcion links up with Paul again and again.

As a matter of fact, in the presentation of Marcion's teaching, the similarities not only with Gnosis but also with the decisive, fundamental ideas of Pauline theology must be taken into consideration. It is an old debate whether Marcion was more Pauline or more Gnostic. In the same way as for Paul, so also for Marcion the concepts of *law and gospel (of the cross)*, *grace*, *freedom*, *faith*, *redemption* and/or *deliverance* certainly play a central role, whereby the crucial difference only seems to be that the theology of Marcion is dualistically imprinted in a much more powerful way through the teaching of two Gods, so that the impression arises that as a student of Paul, Marcion sharply radicalized his theology.

Marcion did in fact represent himself as a student of Paul. It is known that Paul was highly revered in the Marcionite churches, and even had actual religious features. The high position that Paul occupied (next to Marcion) in the Marcionite churches can be explained from the fact that this was Marcion's best authority and security, the firm foundation-stone, from which he could wage the battle against what he perceived as a completely Judaized Roman Catholicism.

We will have to ask later how this came about—how Marcion hit particularly on Paul to ground his teaching through the authority of the apostle, and above all in opposition to all those who (from Rome) relied on Jerusalem, Peter and the Twelve, i.e., in opposition to the Catholic Christians. Above all, we must ask who this Paul was, whom Marcion referred as his authority and regarding whom he and his followers claimed that *he alone (solus Paulus)* had been granted the full revelation of God.

Here we would only emphasize that it would obviously not have been sufficient if Marcion had appealed to his own discernment as a basis for his theology. In the circles he addressed that would not have been acceptable. [121] “At that time it was necessary to legitimate the developing church and to appeal to documents that derive from Christ and the apostles. The Gnostic so and so did not release a publication, but he had been inspired by Paul, or Peter, or even words of the Lord himself suddenly spoke from his mouth.”¹¹⁴ In the same way as his opponents, if he wanted to achieve something, Marcion was dependent on *documents from the apostolic past*, and, indeed, obviously to such an extent that one almost has the feeling that if Marcion had not had the letters of Paul, he plainly would have had to fabricate them.

Marcion’s “Discovery”

It would certainly be a waste of time if we attempted to elicit an admission from Marcion as to whether he and/or his coworkers forged the Pauline letters, or at least some of them. We can not expect such a thing—i.e., the admission, not the forgery!—from such a shrewd theologian and churchman as Marcion. He would hardly have been so naïve as to give away his great secret. Nevertheless, there is a hint that should make us listen very carefully: the Marcionites claimed that their master had *found* a letter of Paul (the one to the Galatians)! Let’s turn our attention for a moment to the following highly interesting passage from Tertullian (*AM* 4.3):¹¹⁵

In this passage, Tertullian contests Marcion’s claim that the *sacramentum* (= secret) of the Christian religion began with *Luke* the Evangelist, who for Marcion was *the* Evangelist. Tertullian points out that, on the contrary, already before Luke there was an authoritative testimony (i.e., going back to the apostles) through

¹¹⁴ Lublinski, *Das werdende Dogma*, 47.

¹¹⁵ Tertullian, *AM*, 4.3.

which Luke himself first became a believer. Nevertheless, Tertullian continues, Marcion *stumbled upon* the letter of Paul to the Galatians, in which he vilifies even the apostles [122] for not walking in accordance the truth of the gospel, etc.: *Sedenim Marcion nactus epistolam Pauli as Galatas...* (“But now, since Marcion discovered the letter of Paul to the Galatians...”). *Nancisci* means “to attain by accident” (e.g., a suitable harbor: *idoneum portum*). Tertullian clearly seems to allude here to the claim by the Marcionites, or Marcion himself, that Marcion had accidentally and fortunately “discovered” the letter of Paul to the Galatians.

As we otherwise know from the history of pseudepigraphy and literary forgery, the publication of such writings, as a rule, tends to be preceded by their “discovery.”¹¹⁶ Some uncertainty remains, however, since from the concept *nancisci* it is not entirely clear whether the reference is to the discovery of something that was already at hand, which Marcion did not know about until then.

Mouse from Pontus—or Catholic Redactor?

Now comes, to be sure, still a further observation which in fact provides the strongest support for the suspicion that, in addition to the collection of the Pauline letters, Marcion and his circle could have also participated in their origin. It has to do with *the form of the canonical and Marcionite texts of the Pauline letters*, i.e., the field of *literary- and textual criticism*.

According to the prevailing conception even today, the form of the Marcionite text represents a version of the original, canonical text that had been abbreviated by Marcion. For his own purposes, on the basis of definite theological interests, the mouse from Pontus (the *Mus Ponticus*), as Tertullian maliciously referred to Marcion, simply “nibbled away” textual passages he didn’t like and made numerous abbreviations and changes.

Of course, this accusation against Marcion raised up by the church fathers, which seems to be repeated with reference to the Gospel of Luke being supposedly adulterated by Marcion, [123] has not remained uncontested by scholarship in the past. One could not ignore the fact that in the early church not only did the Catholics make the charge of textual adulteration against Marcion, but, vice versa, the Marcionites also made the same

¹¹⁶ W. Speyer, *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike* (Hypomnemat 25, 1970)

charge against the Catholics. Tertullian likened the debate between Catholics and Marcionites to a *tug-of-war*, in which both he and Marcion tested their strength and “with the same exertion pull back and forth. I say I have the truth. Marcion says he has it. I say that Marcion’s is falsified; Marcion says the same about mine.”¹¹⁷

With regard to the *Gospel of Luke*, the theologians A. Ritschl and F. C. Baur first contradicted the church fathers and advocated an *UrLuke theory*, i.e., the assumption that Marcion had been in possession of a more original edition of the Gospel of Luke than the (Catholic) church. Then this assumption must have soon retreated again—partly for good reasons, which do not need to be presented here in detail.

With regard to the *Pauline letters*, for which the problems are constituted somewhat differently, the theologian A. Hilgenfeld made the attempt to largely unburden Marcion from the suspicion of having consciously falsified the text.¹¹⁸ A decisive step beyond Hilgenfeld and Harnack, who was walking in a similar path, was taken by the Dutch New Testament scholar W. C. van Manen,¹¹⁹ who for the first time carried out a fundamental textual and literary investigation of the letter to the Galatians to examine the possibility that the Catholic church tendentiously reworked the Pauline letters, in which case the briefer Marcionite version would be the more original. The result of his investigation by and large confirmed this suspicion very impressively.¹²⁰

Even if it is objected that from the priority of the Marcionite readings over the canonical one cannot draw direct consequences for a decision regarding the authenticity of the letters, it must nevertheless be said in general that the thesis that with Pauline writings we have to do entirely with a product *fictae ad haresem Marcionis* [124], i.e., pseudepigraphic writings from the school of Marcion, receives an important foundation which elevates it from the sphere of pure conjecture to the level of the (textually) palpable. A more detailed investigation shows that consideration of textual and literary-critical problems can frequently produce important insights regarding the historical and theological (namely,

¹¹⁷ Tertullian, *AM*, 4.4.

¹¹⁸ A. Hilgenfeld, “Das Apostolikon Marcions,” *ZHTh* (1855), 426-484.

¹¹⁹ Van Manen, “Marcions Brief van Paulus aan de Galatiërs,” *ThT* 21 (1887), 382ff., 451ff.

¹²⁰ See Detering, *Paulusbrieve ohne Paulus?*, where van Manen’s work is discussed at length.

Marcionite) perspective of the author as well as the historical situation of the particular letter's origin, which then, in return, has direct consequences for resolving the question of authenticity.

Paul as an Apostle of Circumcision

A striking piece of evidence for the fact that the Pauline letters were reworked from a Catholic perspective is Gal 2:5, where the author of Galatians speaks of the apostle's visit in Jerusalem:

- 3 But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.
4. But on account of the false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us...
5. to whom we did [not] yield submission for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved with you.

While in the Marcionite text of 2:5 there is a "not," this is missing in texts of most of the Catholic church fathers. In their view, Paul gave in to the Jewish-Christian "false brethren" (who obviously required circumcision).

In spite of Tertullian's complicated argument, there can be no doubt, and it is generally recognized today, that the Marcionite text cited by Tertullian represents the original reading. The majority of textual witnesses—all the Greek manuscripts, for example, and the Syriac translation—have a "not" at this place. [125]

The omission of the small but crucial word, through which the uncompromising radical of the original text is unawares turned into a compliant pacifier, who for the sake of peace practices circumcision, makes it clear beyond doubt that the text in fact has been tendentiously reworked *from the Catholic perspective*, which in this case served to set aside the differences which existed between Paul and the rest of the apostles with regard to circumcision. In so doing, the Catholic redactor oriented himself on the picture of the conciliatory and compliant pragmatic figure in Acts, who could also calmly look the other way when the issue had to do with placating the somewhat difficult Jewish-Christian brothers:

- 6:3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

The give and take in the textual tradition shows what often enough remains unobserved or simply denied, namely, that the controversy between Catholics and Marcionites regarding the correct picture of Paul had the utmost relevance for the presentation of the historical course of early Christian events *in the theological discussion of the second century*. The issue here had to do not with questions concerning the past, but concerning the *present*, with the question of which party had the greater right to appeal to Paul for their theology. As the example shows, the temptation existed for both sides to resolve the controversy not only by theological discussion and their own writing of church history (Acts), but through massive intervention in the textual form of the Pauline writings. Thereby, however, the temptation also existed to actually produce documents which could be appealed to in defense of their own point of view. [126]

An Initial Visit with the Pope—An Interpolated “Trip to Rome”

What we have said regarding the significance of the Pauline letters in the confessional disputes between Catholics and Marcionites in the second century can be illustrated in an exemplary way by the following central passage from the letter to the Galatians. In Gal 1:15ff. the author speaks of the time following his call to apostleship:

- 1:15 But when he who had set me apart from my mother’s womb, and had called me through his grace,
 1:16 was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood,
 1:17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.
 1:18 *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days.*
 1:19 *But I saw none of the other apostles, except James the brother of the Lord.*
 1:20 *(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!)*
 1:21 *Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.*
 1:22 *And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea.*
 1:23 *They only heard it said, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”*
 1:24 *And they glorified God because of me.*

- 2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus with me also.
- 2:2 I went up according to a revelation (κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν). And I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles (and privately before those of repute), lest somehow I should be running in vain, or had run. [127]

As can be seen from Tertullian,¹²¹ who cites Marcion's text, in which only *one* visit by Paul in Jerusalem is mentioned, the verses in italics seem to have been missing.

Whoever wants to be convinced that the text was *expanded by Catholics* and not shortened by Marcionites only has to take notice of the (underlined) pronoun "them" in 2:2, which in the present context has no clear reference. One must go back to 1:17 to understand that the reference here is obviously to *those who were apostles before me*. All attempts to relate the little word to Jerusalem (Schlier), because "according to a well-known use of the pronoun, the residents of a previously mentioned city" could be mentioned in the plural, are not convincing, since Paul hardly laid his gospel before *all the residents* of Jerusalem, but only the leaders of the Jerusalem church.¹²²

The text in italics thus turns out to be a later interpolation.

1. because the Greek word for "to become acquainted" in 1:18 appears nowhere else in the Pauline letters;

2. the formula *before God, I do not lie* is highly suspicious and otherwise also only appears where one must suspect an insertion (Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 11:31);

3. because after the affirmation by the writer that following his conversion he *did not go immediately* to Jerusalem one would expect a longer period of time than just three years! The reference to fourteen years in 2:1 is much more plausible as a continuation from 1:17.

4. Apart from that, one should consider what B. Bauer already observed: "If he [Paul] spends fifteen days in Jerusalem, visits with Peter and James, and the presence of the other apostles in the holy city was something entirely taken for granted, as he shows by his oath, it would have been impossible for him not to see them."¹²³

¹²¹ AM 4.4: "Denique ad patrocinium Petri ceterorumque apostolorum ascendisse Hierosolimam post annos quatuordecim scribit..."

¹²² Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 66.

¹²³ B. Bauer, *Kritik der paulinischen Briefe. Erste Abteilung: Der Ursprung des Galaterbriefes*, 16.

How should one explain the insertion? — Obviously, the section reflects a refined attempt to closely connect Paul, whom the Marcionites appeal to, with Cephas-Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem party, whom people in Rome appeal to, [128] and indeed as soon as possible after his conversion, which is clearly interpreted not at all as his own revelation, but only as a *sign by God* that he should go to Jerusalem (as in Acts: see above, *Two Pauls*).

In other words, the insertion functions to remove sovereignty from Paul and make him dependent on Jerusalem. The letter to the Galatians, in whose introduction it is explicitly said that Paul is an apostle called by God, and indeed “not by men nor through a man,” and in which his independence from Jerusalem continues to be emphasized, has been reworked on the basis of the Catholic Acts of the Apostles. The tendency is the same: Paul had *no revelation of his own* (as the Marcionites claim with their *solus Paulus*), but had been with the apostles, or at least Peter. As a representative of the Jerusalem church, *Peter* (and not God) instructed him.¹²⁴ Two weeks is a long time. Consequently, the Marcionites could not appeal to Paul (“*solus Paulus*”)! Because they have no independent revelation, they have no right to be an independent Church! As Paul was dependent on Jerusalem, so also they are dependent on Rome (the legitimate follower of the Jerusalem church)! There can be no true Christian without Rome’s blessing!

To make this clear was not an easy task for the Catholic redactor, but also not entirely hopeless, since the period of time between Paul’s conversion and his first visit in Jerusalem had not been precisely set forth in Acts. Acts 9:23 speaks only of “many days.” Now it was certainly impossible to understand this as referring to the fourteen years spoken of in Gal 2:1, nor was it possible to place the journey to Jerusalem all too soon after the conversion, since in Gal 1:16 it is explicitly said that Paul did *not immediately* establish a connection with those who were apostles before him. As between Scylla and Charybdis, the redactor decided for a period of three years, perhaps believing thereby to conform somewhat with Luke’s reference to “many days” as well

¹²⁴ Bauernfeind, who notices this tension, rightly observes with reference to 1:18-1:20: “A remarkable shadow thus lies over Paul’s memory of the first meeting with Peter: If the gap in the apologetic proof were not insignificant, then the entire proof, on which everything else depends, could not be derived from such a strong position as Paul obviously thinks he has” (*Die Begegnung*, 270).

as not to expressly contradict the emphatic assertion in Gal 1:17 that Paul did *not immediately* establish a connection with those in Jerusalem [129] (which he would have done had he taken over the Lukan formulation).

As an objection to the explanation advanced above, one could ask why the redactor emphasizes with great force that in Jerusalem Paul saw *only* Peter and James, when his own interest consisted precisely in connecting Paul as closely as possible with the apostles in Jerusalem? The explanation for this is very simple, if one keeps before his eyes the difficult task that the redactor faced:

In Gal 1:17 Paul expressly denies that following his conversion he made contact with those who were apostles before him. The redactor could have deleted this sentence – or reinterpreted it. As a skillful redactor, who wanted not to write a new text, but rather to modify the existing text, he chose the latter alternative. Therefore, he interpreted 1:17 so that although Paul did see Peter and James, he saw none of the other apostles. This concession was necessary because of the context. This splitting apart, of course, was a rather artificial construction (as B. Bauer already saw: had the other apostles then just left on a journey? Did Paul then intentionally avoid them?), but in this way Paul was nevertheless connected with the Jerusalem tradition. Paul had seen Peter and James and was together with Peter for fourteen days! That should suffice to provide proof (for the Marcionites) that the Paul of Galatians, like the Paul in Acts, received no independent revelation.

The Pauline Christ as Son of David

The letter to the Romans begins:

- 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God
- 1:2 *which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,*
- 1:3 *(namely) the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh* [130]
- 1:4 *and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,*
- 1:5 *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,*

1:6 *including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ;*

1:7 To all God's beloved in Rome. who are called to be saints:

That the prologue to the letter to the Romans seems heavily overburdened has been noted by many interpreters. This is generally explained today by a citation-theory: At this point the author of the letter - i.e., Paul - cites a formula deriving from tradition.¹²⁵ This explains the related overburdening of the entire sentence as well as the eventual presence of tensions in content.

In view of the fact that the citation-theory seems very suitable for explaining the inner contradictions and inconsistencies in the Pauline letters, it is not surprising that it enjoys great popularity today and that New Testament scholars are widely occupied with scouring the Pauline letters for traditions and ferreting out creedal formulas, confessions, hymns, and the like. This tradition-historical orientation has meanwhile even effected the textual structure in newer editions of the Greek New Testament. If today one opens the "Nestle-Aland" (26th edition), one often has the impression, in view of the hymns, creedal formulas, etc., set off and distinguished in print from the rest of the text, that instead of the text of the New Testament, we are reading an operatic libretto.

The attractiveness of the citation-theory is obvious: whoever is of the opinion that the apostle cites tradition can in addition perceive the Pauline letters as by and large a literary unity—[131] and one has no need to concern oneself with the spiritual and mental state of the apostle if he writes this at one time and immediately thereafter the opposite, because one nevertheless knows for certain that at this point the apostle is only quoting.

If one does not want to impute to the self-contradicting apostle a total inability to logically discriminate, the alternative to the citation-theory is the *interpolation-theory*. With this theory one must assume that passages which, for whatever reasons, are not suitable for the present context or contradict the content of the context do not derive from Paul, but were worked into the text by a later redactor.

It is obvious that this theory has little appeal for many theologians. The picture of the Christian Church would now be quite different, not a confessing, singing, and dancing community, but

¹²⁵ Thus, Schmithals observes with regard to Rom 1:3-4: "It is almost generally recognized today that Paul... picks up a formula that did not originate with him" (*Römerbrief*, 48).

a quarreling, interpolating, and falsifying community, which seeks to be in the right even if it is contrary to the original author of the holy text.¹²⁶ Whoever interpolates wants to cut off the first author of a text, to undertake dogmatic improvements, to stamp the text with his signature—against the author.

All this does not fit the conception of many present-day theologians, particularly those who want to know nothing about conflicts and tensions in early Christianity and instead, in a catholicizing manner, conjure up an apostolic idyll of undisturbed harmony and unity at the beginning of church history. Instead of ominous interpolations they prefer sympathetic, church-friendly citation-theories.

Now, to be sure, even the citation-theory consists not of bright light alone, but also has some dark, shadowy sides—at least for the thinking mind. How is it possible, one asks oneself with great wonder, that the apostle, who came over to the Christian church only a few years after the death of Jesus, could already reach back to such an abundant reservoir of confessional formulas, hymns, and other traditional materials? How could these traditions originate at all in the brief time that the conventional way of looking at early Christian history allows us? [132]

Let's be clear. If Paul's conversion took place around 31/32-35 and the death of Jesus was in 30, and if we must further assume that Paul already knew about the Christians prior to his conversion, since he persecuted them, one must also assume that Paul was familiar with them from their first beginnings on—how can one speak at all of a “pre-Pauline” tradition? But even if one assumes that Paul first came into continuing contact with the earliest church and its Hellenistic branch in Antioch only shortly before the Apostolic Council (c. 48 CE), these churches, which in the opinion of some theologians perhaps first existed only since 40 CE,¹²⁷ had scarcely more than ten or fifteen years for the development of traditions which arose independently of Paul's influence. It should be evident to everyone that this time period is hardly sufficient to produce the wealth of fixed creedal formulas and confessions, as well as poems and hymns, which New Testament scholarship today claims to have discovered.

¹²⁶ Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2.27.

¹²⁷ Goppelt, *Theologie*, 357.

Of course, the observation that the author of the Pauline writings now and then employs citations, and thus makes use of Christian tradition, need not be entirely false. But then one should be clear about the difficulties which arise from this observation and, in such a case, draw the consequences. The only possible and sensible consequence is the recognition that the *period of time* between the author of the Pauline letters and the earliest Christian church was obviously substantially *greater* than we previously thought on the basis of our preconceived historical picture.

The existence of established traditions in the *Corpus Paulinum* thus represents one of the most important arguments for a later time of origin for the Pauline letters.

We would certainly point out, however, that in no way must *everything* be tradition that is regarded as such today, and that, on the contrary, in many cases we must reckon with the possibility of *interpolation*. That will certainly always be the case where the contradictions and tensions between the suspicious fragment and the rest of the text are so strong that a use of tradition seems to be excluded, [133] since the author would then have contradicted himself, or interrupted himself. Even if what the author cites need not always be in harmony with his own perspective, one should nevertheless expect, at least where it clearly contradicts him, that he would provide further clarification, commentary, and elaboration. In a great many fragments, however, where present-day theologians see a citation by Paul, an appropriation of tradition, that is not the case at all.

We would like to illustrate this with the prologue from the letter to the Romans cited above:

Scholars today generally begin with the assumption that in Romans 1:3-4 we have to do with a “pre-Pauline” formula. Above all, the “discrepancy between the preexistence-christology of Paul... and the adoptionist christology” is perceived as an “especially clear indication” for this.¹²⁸ While in other places in the letter, in a similar way as in the Gospel of John, the *Sending of the Son* (incarnation-christology) is spoken of (Rom 8:3; cf. Gal 4:4), in Rom 1:4 the writer represents the idea that Christ was first designated Son of God *through the resurrection*. In itself, one would think that the two different conceptions totally exclude one another, since only one or the other can be correct: *either* Christ

¹²⁸ Schmithals, *Römerbrief*, 51.

was already the Son of God at the time he became man, or he first *became* Son of God through the resurrection.

Nevertheless, as a rule, most theologians have no difficulties assuming, with help from their citation-theory, that what logically does not belong together could already be unified by the author of the letter to the Romans (Paul). For Schmithals, by citing the formula, Paul “expresses with deliberation that he recognizes the adoptionist formula as an expression of the common Christian confession: the differences that are evident in the various christological sketches do not harm the unity of the gospel but vary the unchanging kerygma with regard to the horizon of understanding of the respective hearers and in different times and cultures.”¹²⁹ The Catholic theologian O. Kuss expresses himself in a sense similar to Schmithals. Kuss speaks in this context of an “archaic” formula and declares: [134] “It must be taken into account, therefore, that Paul is indebted to preceding preaching for this formulation... He obviously regards it important to demonstrate his ‘orthodoxy’ by an emphatic connection with the tradition of the church in Rome that is unknown to him.”¹³⁰ Now, in this context the concept “archaic” is certainly very peculiar, especially for a Catholic theologian used to thinking in large historical time-frames. What does “archaic” mean in view of the fact that, according to Kuss, Paul wrote the letter to the Romans in the time between fifty and sixty CE, that the church had existed for perhaps twenty years, and that the formula therefore can be at most only twenty years (!) “old”?

Without doubt, given the presupposition that we imagine Paul to be already a churchman schooled in Catholic *both-and* *theology*, who, as is implied by the Catholic interpolation in 1 Cor 9:20ff., became “all things to all people,” it would not be impossible that Paul used the adoptionist formula as an expression of the common christological confession, or in order to demonstrate his orthodoxy; but one would not believe the unbending radical, who in Galatians curses everyone who preaches a gospel different from his own (Gal 1:8), capable of such a thing.

There are also other considerations that strongly support the suspicion that in the entire fragment we have to do not with a citation by Paul, but with an *interpolation* by a later redactor, who

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Kuss, *Römerbrief*, 8.

wanted to make the theology of the original letter accord with his own.

- The interest of the writer in the Davidic descent of his Christ is peculiar, if one considers that in 2 Corinthians the same writer (= "Paul") declares very clearly his total lack of interest in "Christ according to the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16);¹³¹

- The plural in 1:5 —"through whom *we* have received grace and apostleship"—does not agree with the singular in 1:1 and could be connected with the tendency of the redactor, that we already saw above, to exclude a *special revelation* to Paul (which was claimed by the Marcionites) and to incorporate him into the succession of the twelve; [135]

- Verse 1:1 anticipates 1:7 and shows very clearly that the person who wrote this already knew what stood in the following verse. "If he was free to do so, he would have taken care to provide a better transition to verse 7 and would not have spoken of "being *called* holy" right after his "including yourselves, who are *called*..."¹³²

All this shows very clearly that no citation is present in Romans 1:3-4, but that a *redactor* is at work, and indeed it is again our already familiar Jewish-Christian interpolator, who this time again takes the opportunity at the very beginning of the "letter" to the Romans to clarify a fundamental dogmatic position regarding which he believed the original (Marcionite) author of the letter to be dubious:

1. The gospel preached by Paul was promised beforehand through the prophets in the holy scriptures. The Old Testament has not lost its importance.

2. Paul received the revelation together with the other apostles ("we" in 1:5); there is no separate Pauline-Marcionite revelation and no separate church.

3. Even Paul could teach the adoptionist christology common in Jewish circles and

4. the Davidic sonship of Christ.

His letters, therefore, present no obstacle to an ecumenical fellowship of catholicized Marcionites and catholicized Jewish Christians. Each may retain their favorite christological conception. Both may dwell under a common Catholic roof.

¹³¹ "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer."

¹³² Van Manen, *Römer*, 32.

Paul teaches a Christ with only an apparent body

—*Paul as Docetist*

Once one has become aware of the numerous Catholic insertions in the Pauline letters, and, on the other hand, also the many Marcionite elements in the theology of the original “Paul,” one can find, even in the reworked canonical text, a series of concepts and ideas that can only be meaningfully understood in the context of the Marcionite system. [136] This has been referred to as the *point of contact* that Marcion found in Paul.¹³³ In truth, however, we have to do here not with a point of contact, but in a certain sense with Marcionite bedrock, that again and again shines through from beneath the Catholic grass that grows upon it. This Marcionite bedrock certainly includes a *docetic christology*, i.e., the idea, deriving from Gnosticism and present in the Pauline letters, that Jesus was not a real man of flesh and blood, but only had an *apparent body* (*phantasma*).

That finds expression, for example, in the peculiar formulation in Romans 8:3, where the writer says about Christ that (in his earthly life) he came “in a form that *resembled* sinful flesh”:

8:3 For (in order to do) what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do, God sent his own Son in a form that *resembled* sinful flesh, and for sin, and condemned Sin in the flesh.

In a corresponding way, in the Christ-hymn in Phil 2:7 it is said of Christ Jesus,

2:6 though he was in the form of God, he did not regard it as robbery to be equal with God,

2:7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming a *likeness* of men, and being found in appearance *like* a man.

Why does Paul not simply say that God sent his Son *in the flesh*? How does Paul, who presumably stands on the creation-friendly ground of Judaism, arrive at such a strange connection between flesh and *sin*? Why did the Son not become man, but only *like* a man? Why was he found “in appearance as a man” and not simply “*as a man*”? There is a simple explanation for this: the author of the cited text was most probably [137] not at all Paul the Jew, but rather the docetic Marcion, or one of his students (or teachers?), writing in the name of the apostle. Did not Marcion

¹³³ Hilgenfeld, in *Das Apostolikon Marcions*.

say that “our Lord [was found]... as a man in form and appearance and likeness, but without our body”²¹³⁴

One has the impression that the terminology which the author of Romans and Philippians employs in these passages was chosen consciously and with great care—presumably to express his opposition to other christological views of his time (those of the Catholic and Jewish Christians).

This also accords with the fact that in 2 Corinthians Paul explicitly describes a knowledge of Christ “according to the flesh” as an entirely false knowledge:

5:16 From now on, therefore, we know no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we know him thus no longer.

For the Marcionite author, the knowledge of Jesus “according to the flesh” must naturally also be incomplete and temporary because such a Christ was appealed to in Rome. It had long since been recognized there, with a definite trace of power being at stake, that a religion that wants to assert itself cannot be grounded on some kind of nebulous entity (e.g., the Spirit), but on something solid and positive: history, tradition, etc.

Paul and the teaching of two Gods

The Marcionite bedrock includes, in addition, language concerning the “aeon of this world,” the “ruler of the power in the air” in Ephesians 2:2, whereby no one else is meant than the Gnostic *Demiurge* and his subordinate angelic powers (also referred to as *stoichia*), i.e., the creator of the world, who according to dualistic-Gnostic thought is responsible for the creation of the evil, material world [138] and who stands in opposition to the so-called *foreign* God, who through Christ wants to free humankind from their entanglement with the material world and their subjugation to the law.

A well-known, “notorious” textual modification by Marcion would be the deletion of the tiny word “in” in Ephesians 3:9:

3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,
3:9 and to make all people see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages [*in*] God who created all things.

¹³⁴ So an unknown Syrian, cited by Harnack, *Marcion*, 362*.

Here Marcion supposedly adapted the original conception of the hiddenness of the secret *in* God to his own two-God theology by simply omitting the little word “in.” Thereby an entirely new, Marcionite meaning of Eph 3:9 results, because the secret is no longer hidden *in* God, but rather hidden *from the God who created all things*. In this way, Marcion is supposed to have expressed the idea that the salvation work of the redeemer God remained hidden from the *Demiurge*, since for Marcion he alone could be the “God who created all things.”¹³⁵

Here also the shoe should be on the other foot! Marcion had no need at all to introduce the conception of the *Demiurge* through the textual modification attributed to him in Eph 3:9, since the text before him very probably contained the original wording. It was the *Catholic redactor* who twisted the point of the sentence by inserting an “in” and thus blotted out the conception of a *Demiurge* so unbearable for Catholic thought—at the cost, to be sure, of the intelligibility of the now totally obscure statement. For anyone who tries to understand the meaning of this peculiar combination of words, the meaning of the “secret in God” will forever remain a mystery, while the Marcionite text, on the other hand, is very understandable. If Marcion, furthermore, perceived the “angels and powers” (Rom 8:38), who are no longer able to separate Christians from the love of God in Christ Jesus, [139] as the *angelic powers* of the creator of the world, he would then also certainly have found therein the original Marcionite meaning of the statement with its negative, even typically Gnostic-Marcionite qualification of the angelic powers so difficult for Jewish-Christian thought to accept.

Again, the same thing holds for the “elements of the world” (= *stoichia*, Col 2:8, 10) and the “principalities and powers” (Col 2:15), but also the angels concerning which the writer of 1 Corinthians warns the women in the church (1 Cor 11:10).

In this connection, typical Marcionite conceptions also include the idea of the hidden work of the Redeemer, who, unknown to the *Demiurge* and his powers, suffered death on a cross and thus redeemed humankind from their power. Accordingly, in 1 Cor 2:8 it says that the rulers of this world would not have crucified the Lord of Glory if they had known who he was:

¹³⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, 50.

- 2:7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.
- 2:8 None of the rulers of this age recognized this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.

According to Marcionite understanding, not recognizing the *doxa* (“glory”) of Christ was the presupposition for the success of the work of salvation, whose fulfillment would bring about the downfall of the God of justice by means of his own righteousness. Since the creator of the world and the powers installed by him (there are therefore no political powers in view) did not recognize Christ and allowed him, although innocent, to be condemned to death, on account of their own ignorance they are delivered up to their own unrighteousness and imperfection. Although Christ had the power to destroy them, he gave them his blood as a ransom, so as to redeem humankind from their power.

That Christ gave up his blood to the Demiurge and his powers as a ransom was obviously not first fully formulated in words by the Marcionites, but by “Paul”: [140] see Gal 2:21, a passage that in English can be translated as follows:

- 2:21 I do not spurn the grace of God [like my opponents]; for if righteousness came through the law, then Christ indeed died *in vain!*

The meaning of the “in vain” only becomes fully understandable if one recognizes that in the original Greek (= *dōrean*) we have to do here with an expression from the language of business, which literally must be translated “without any (service in) return” (cf. 2 Cor 11:7): “For if righteousness came through the law, then Christ indeed died without any return.” The return that the law-giving God exchanged for the blood of Christ is that humankind was released from the dominion of his law.

Paul — the Domesticated Marcion

For all the passages we have discussed (which only represent a small selection; more can be found in my book *Paulusbriefe ohne Paulus?*) it becomes clear that the Marcionism of the Pauline letters can be ascertained not only terminologically for individual Marcionite sounding words appearing here and there, but resides deep in the system of “Pauline” theology itself. The Pauline teaching about *redemption*, with its idea of ransom, originally presupposes a dualistic system of thought. One must ask: *from where* does Christ ransom humankind? From the law, which as

“almost a foreign power, standing in only a loose connection with God, is all but personally conceived,”¹³⁶ or, which would be most probable, from the “world rulers” (= *stoichia*) as the originators of the law (Gal 4:2-3) and so also from their highest commander, *the Demiurge*.

Without doubt, the original Pauline-Marcionite soteriology (teaching about redemption) is often distorted beyond recognition by Catholic reworking. The obscurity and vagueness of the Pauline doctrine of redemption arose from the fact that the soteriological ideas (relating to the teaching about redemption), originally conceived for a dualistic system and only really meaningful and understandable in this context, [141] were translated by Catholic, Jewish-Christian reworking into a monistic, or monotheistic, system, and moreover united with additional soteriological motifs (the theory of a sacrifice for sin). Its dark secret is truly a “secret in God,” with its overflow of motifs, which are incompatible with one another, allusions to ideas not completely thought-out — and which only can be thought-out at the price of heresy.

All in all, it may have become clear, in any case, that the author of the Pauline letters could hardly have been a Jew, not even a Diaspora Jew alienated from the religion of his fathers, but could only have been a Marcionite, or perhaps Marcion (and/or one/some of his students). In many cited passages what elsewhere has been skillfully retouched, corrected, and eliminated through Catholic redaction of the Pauline letters is glaringly evident: the subliminal defamation of the Jewish God, the Creator and Law-giver, by no one other than “Paul,” i.e., the original, Marcionite Paul himself.

The passages provide further support for the thesis that Marcion had in no way been a radical student of Paul, but that “Paul” was rather a domesticated (most extensively by Catholic reworking) child of Marcionism, in which the witness to his spiritual origin is still entirely evident. In short: Marcion is not the radical Paul, whom until today scholarship holds him to be, but “Paul” is rather a diminished Marcion (i.e., catholicized, tied to the Catholic dogma of the *one* God who is both Creator and Redeemer).

¹³⁶ Bousset, “Kommentar zu Gal 3.13,” 55: “And indeed in this connection the power which the representative handing-over of Christ summons is not God, or God’s wrath, but an almost foreign power, standing in only a loose connection with God, the almost personified, curse-imposing power of the law.”

Paul—the non-Jew

Corresponding with our thesis that the Pauline letters originally derived from Marcionite circles (which would mean, first of all, Gentile Christian circles) is the observation that the actual writer of the letters (as well as the redactor) again and again expresses himself [142] in ways that lead to the conclusion that—contrary to the claim he himself advances—he is not at all a Jew by birth.¹³⁷

Above all in Romans and the two Corinthian letters it can be shown that the author thinks and writes not from a Jewish consciousness, but from that of a non-Jew. For example, while a faithful Jew (similar to a Muslim today) divides the world into believers and non-believers (= *Goyim*), the author of Romans distinguishes in a good Greek way between *Greeks and barbarians* (Rom 1:14). The concept of a barbarian has a genuine Greek tone, and would have a peculiar ring even in the mouth of a supposedly Diaspora Jew from Tarsus.

In other places as well, one does not exactly get the impression that the author of Romans writes like someone who was raised in Judaism and is familiar with its customs and practices (1:16; 2:9, 10, 17, 28, 29; 3:1, 9, 29; 10:12).

Rom 3:9 is especially peculiar, where Paul asks the question: Τί οὖν; προεχόμεθα;, which is usually translated as “What then? Do we have an advantage?” The idea then is that at this point Paul wanted to ask whether Jews, whose advantages he has just discussed at length, have an advantage over the Gentiles because of these prerogatives: “What then, do we [Jews] have an advantage?” (cf. the English RSV). Literally, however, the text says something different: Not “Do we have an advantage?” (active), but, “Are we surpassed?” (passive).

Although this is the only grammatically correct translation, it is not found in present-day editions of the Bible only because it

¹³⁷ The Catholic redactor as well (whose redactional insertion is not specially discussed here) was probably also not a Jewish Christian, but a Gentile. When a Jewish-Christian redactor is nevertheless continually referred to here, this relates to the tendency of the redactional intervention, not the ethnic origin of its author. Justin was also not a Jewish-Christian, in spite of his relative (to be sure tension-filled Catholic) closeness to Judaism (and to the theology of the redactor). The possibility that Justin himself reworked the Pauline letters can certainly not be excluded, and could explain the “Pauline reminiscences” in his work. This thesis, of course, still requires a fundamental investigation. In any case, it can be said, along with H. Raschke, that “from the Gnostic Paul, a spirit much like Justin’s... created the Catholic Paul of the letters” (*Der Römerbrief des Markion*, 129).

cannot be reconciled with the assumption that the person who wrote this was a Jew. It would presuppose that the writer of this passage was a Greek, or at least a non-Jew, who from such an awareness writes: “What then? Are we [non-Jews] surpassed [by the Jews, whose prerogatives were just discussed in vv. 1-2]?” [143]

The writer of this passage had forgotten for a moment that, according to universal tradition, the person in whose name the letter is written is supposed to be a Jew by birth. If one understands that, the text immediately becomes clear. One need not regard it as corrupted, as many exegetes do; one does not need to give the words any other meaning than they grammatically acquire.¹³⁸

In the Corinthians letters as well one can find tell-tale indications of the real origin of the author. Of course, here also the author appears as a Jew (2 Cor 11:22); but the emphatic way he does this, to be sure, is already somewhat suspicious. In any case, in 1 Cor 14:11 the writer again uses the term “barbarian” in a typical Greek way. In 1 Cor 9:12 Paul the Jew says that “to Jews I became as a Jew.” One asks with wonder why he must first *become* what he has already been for a long time!

1 Cor 11:4 is also very remarkable, where Paul instructs the men not to pray with their heads covered, since this is a disgrace:

11:4 Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.

If one recalls that even until today Jewish men are obligated wear a head-covering in their worship service, one can perceive this instruction only as an indication that the author of this letter certainly could not have been raised in the Jewish tradition. If he had really been Paul the Jew, he would have at least paused for a moment here and attempted to justify his regulation (which would have been outrageous for Jewish ears). Instead, he connects here

¹³⁸ Van Manen, *Romeinen*, 186; *Römer*, 173. Until today, in most commentaries the passage is translated contrary to its language and grammar: e.g., Wilckens (*Römerbrief*, 172): “The reading προεχόμεθα; οὐ πάντως is early and widely attested. It is certainly original, since it is clearly corrected in the western text as the *lectio difficilis*. Προέχεσθαι (in the middle voice) is only documented with the meaning “to hold up as protection” (*aethHen* 99.3), “shelter,” which is just as inappropriate here as a passive understanding. All commentators, therefore, assume a meaning corresponding with the active voice: “to have an advantage” (cf. *Praecellimus eos?*).”

with Greek practice: “The free Greek man does not cover his head; he only covers his head in circumstances of great sorrow.”¹³⁹

As the citation from the Greek poet Menander (1 Cor 15:33) shows, the author of the Corinthian letter is very familiar with Greek literature. One might believe this could also be true for Paul the Jew. It is nevertheless strange [144] that the Paul who supposedly studied with Rabbi Gamaliel obviously had difficulty with the Hebrew language and was not able to read the Hebrew Bible in the original language, but instead always used the Greek translation (Septuagint), and even a version having a close relationship with an edition first originating in the second century (Theodotion).¹⁴⁰

In the margin, it should finally be noted that the following anti-Pauline tradition was supposedly circulating in Jewish-Christian Ebionite churches. Epiphanius knows an Ebionite Acts of the Apostles in which he says he found many errors, and in which Paul was characterized as a false apostle. Paul was said to have been born in Tarsus *from Gentile parents*, and accepted circumcision in Jerusalem in order to marry the daughter of the High Priest. After the marriage unraveled, he polemicized against circumcision, the Sabbath, and the law.¹⁴¹

What use was made of the Pauline letters in the second century?

An argument often advanced in the past against the radical denial of authenticity for the Pauline letters was that the problems addressed by Paul in his letters, e.g., circumcision, freedom from the law for Gentile Christians, etc., presuppose the historical situation in the first century, not the second.

This opinion was occasionally also shared by radical critics, for example, the English radical critic G. A. Wells, who in a series of publications disputed the historical existence of Jesus, but at the same time held fast to the authenticity of the Pauline letters. In a letter he wrote to me, he says that “in the Pauline letters generally regarded as authentic today the writer addresses questions—the question of circumcision, for example—which no longer had any significance at all when the Gospels and Acts were written.”

¹³⁹ Bousset, *Erster Korintherbrief*, 128.

¹⁴⁰ Regarding the entire question, see the nice dissertation by E. Verhoef, *Er statt geschrieben... De oud-testamentische citaten in de brief de Galaten* (Diss. Amsterdam, 1979).

¹⁴¹ Epiphanius, *Haer.* 30.16.8.

In my opinion, this often advanced claim can be refuted with relative ease, and, moreover, a deeper study of the question regarding the historical situation of origin of the Pauline letters must necessarily evolve into one of the most important arguments for their inauthenticity, since all observations lead again and again to the insight that the Pauline letters can only have the historical and theological situation of the second century as the fertile soil in which they are rooted. If one pulls them out and transplants them—heeding their own claim, or that of the pseudonymous writer—into the time of the first century, one falls into a thicket of difficulties and perplexities. In order to keep the tiny plants alive one must support them with many complicated and artificial hypotheses, so as to finally ascertain again and again that all this has been of no avail. On the other hand, if one leaves the letters there where they come from, in the second century, everything becomes clear and intelligible. The plants develop splendidly and in a short time each one has become a beautiful, large tree of knowledge.

With regard to the matter itself, it can be said that the fact that the problems addressed in the Pauline letters were all still very much alive in second century, and even at the beginning of the third, shows, as we have already demonstrated above,

1) with regard to the *history of influence* of the letters, from both a negative and a positive perspective:

Negative: We know nothing at all about the reception of the Pauline letters in the second half of the first century and in the beginning of the second.

We do not know in what way the Galatians reacted to Paul's writing, or whether the simple, war-like mountain people in Galatia would have understood it at all. Neither from that time nor from any later time do we have any kind of documentation as to whether he was granted success or failure. Furthermore, we also do not know what became of the people we meet in the Pauline writings—although some of them obviously had very great importance in the churches—like Apollos (1 Cor 1:12; 3:4, 5, 6, 22; 4:6; 16:4, 12; Titus 3:13; Acts 18:23, 24; 19:1), for example, whose name has a suspicious similarity to Apelles,¹⁴² the student of Marcion, and alongside Peter (= Catholic, Jewish-Christians) [146] and Paul (= Marcionism) clearly stands here as a symbolic figure for the stronger Gnostic Christianity.

¹⁴² BDF, § 125.2.

Everywhere a great black hole opens up, that can be filled in only with a great deal of fantasy and has been until today—with regard to the supposedly Pauline churches, for example, which in the second century must have completely disappeared from the scene; or the Pauline school and Pauline students, concerning which no one has ever been able to say anything about what later developed and what happened, for example, to Timothy and Titus and all the others after the death of their master. Apart from the letters and Acts, or later church legends, in any case, they do not surface again historically.

Positive: If we thus know nothing at all about the immediate reception of the Pauline letters, it should be even more surprising that after an initial phase of absolute silence in the second century the reception history of the letters suddenly takes on a highly dramatic development.

In this regard, the passion with which the Catholic theologian Tertullian battles Marcion and his interpretation of the Pauline writings, and debates with him about precisely those themes which supposedly should no longer be relevant in the second century, like circumcision and the law, for example, shows what was at stake for him—and for Marcion as well. The question regarding the historical Paul, which is answered in the Pauline writings and in Acts respectively in different ways, was in no way merely an academic controversy, but was an existential concern for the Catholics as well as for the Marcionites and Gnostics. It was not simply different pictures of Paul and different conceptions of Paul that stood over against one another here, but, what is often forgotten, also different Christian groups, or churches, each of which appealed to “their” Pauline letters for their own theological conceptions and reclaimed the apostle exclusively for themselves. *In the second century, Paul was the object of a church-political controversy which was a matter of life and death.*

In many exegetical works concerned with the relationship between Paul and Luke, or between Paul and Acts, this is largely overlooked. One has the impression from them that Luke stands here, working on his theological draft, as a solitary man of letters [147]—and they basically do not understand at all what could have moved him to produce such an ingenious, refined, detailed history a good half century after the death of the apostle. Still less, of course, they do not understand how, in this framework, also some letters, which seem to have been almost forgotten until now, suddenly take on great importance, because, even though

they were written in a much different time to much different Christians, in a wondrous way they provide precise answers for those problems with which Christians in this century are concerned. If the Marcionites' claim that God had entrusted Paul, and *him alone (solus Paulus)*, their highest patron of the church, with the secret revelation, and that only he knows the truth (Irenaeus, *AH*, 3.13.1), was then decisively rejected by Acts, in which Paul appears as subordinate to the Twelve, as the representatives of Rome-Jerusalem, and thus excluded as a source of "wild tradition,"¹⁴³ the Marcionites themselves then could now refer to the letter to the Galatians, where Paul thankfully furnished the most precise information regarding the historical circumstances of his relationship with the Jerusalem apostles before him, and indeed exactly the information the Marcionites needed now to legitimate themselves as the *sovereign* church.

That the protest in Galatians or even in 2 Corinthians against Luke's picture of Paul is perceived by us today only as peculiarly muffled need not be denied. But that has to do less with the original Paul, or the writer of these letters, himself, and much more with the Catholic redaction, or reaction, which, as I showed above, often regarded it necessary, at decisive places, to stuff a gag in the apostle's mouth. — When all is said and done, also and precisely in the insight that in the second century the Pauline letters were followed by a tendentious, Catholic reworking, as Galatians, for example, unmistakably shows, we have a further indication of their inauthenticity, since the special relevance of the writings in this time can hardly be explained if we had to do with purely historical documents.

Apart from other matters that cannot be pursued here,¹⁴⁴ that with problems addressed in the Pauline letters we have to do

¹⁴³ G. Klein, *Die zwölf Apostel*, 215.

¹⁴⁴ S. Lublinski, in his book *Das werdende Dogma vom Leben Jesu*, 93ff, rightly points out that in the Pauline letters regarded as authentic there are always two themes in the foreground: "the relationship between faith and law and between Jewish and Greek Christians. The first century was not the least concerned with these things, while the second century was full of such concerns. As long as the Pharisees and the sectarians got along with one another, there was no enmity between faith and law, since even the prescriptions of the law were attributed a magical significance in the sense of 'grace'... When, however, in the second century, as the consequence of powerful historical events a total separation took place between national and mystical Jews, and as the mystical Jews became Christians, a radical element strove to bring about a complete separation from all Jewish tradition. Not only circumcision and food laws should be done away with, but also the entire Old Testament and the prophets, because all this

with *problems from the second century* [148], not the first, becomes finally also clear if 2) one investigates the *opponents* battled in the Pauline writings.

The Opponents of Paul

Most of the perplexities in which research has often become entangled have to do with the fact that one endeavors to clarify the question concerning opponents in the framework and against the historical background of the first century and not *the second*, as would be presumed, after all, from the close relationship in content between Galatians and Acts. When one recognizes that the letters were written in the second century, it is immediately understandable that the opposing front that the author of the Pauline letters addresses is not at all one limited in each case by particular local circumstances, but is already *universal*. He addresses the entire (Marcionite) Church from Rome to Edessa, and has in view Judaizing and Catholic opponents outside as well as spiritual-libertine Christians in his own ranks.

That the writer has *Catholic opponents* in view is clearly indicated by the letter to the Galatians, which we have already mentioned so often. The writer basically does not battle here at all against the rejection of the apostle by Christian churches, unknown to us, in distant Galatia, but against their audacious takeover by Catholic Christians. This is shown, for example, by Gal 5:11, a passage totally bewildering for every reader, where Paul contests the claim that he still preaches circumcision:

5:11 But if I, brethren, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? The stumbling block of the cross would [then] be removed.

This is amazing! The opponents of Paul could certainly have made a host of charges against him, but there is one [149] that they in fact certainly *could not* make, namely, the charge that he pursues the same goal as they do, that he preaches circumcision like they do!

“law” was in opposition to the creative inspiration of faith. This radicalism was met with resistance, and in the resulting battle, that filled the entire second century and the beginning of the third, the relationship between law and faith was passionately discussed and many negotiations were attempted and the definitive determination of the boundary against Judaism was achieved. If we now come upon early Christian writings that deal with such problems at length, we can rest assured that these documents belong to the second century and not the first.”

The misunderstanding that Paul fights against cannot have existed either for Paul's opponents or for those who heard Paul's gospel preached in Galatia, and is just as fully incomprehensible as this correction. In may be then, one sees, that at this point the writer of the letter turns his pen against the *appropriation* of the apostle, as this takes place in Acts, against his being brought back home into the lap of the Catholic church. Paul also—so it was said in the group that the writer of the letter confronts (and which is articulated then in the Acts of Luke)—is one of ours and had had an attitude towards the law just as broadminded as ours, whereby as proof of this supposed practice of circumcision reference could be made to Acts 16:3 (the circumcision of Timothy). It is clear that the writer of Galatians can not idly watch while someone made the sovereign apostle of Marcion dependent on Jerusalem, a representative of the despised Jewish-Christian reverence for the law, or *both-and Theology*, for which in Rome one appealed to Peter. For him it was necessary to free the apostle from the frightful embrace of Jewish-Christian Catholicism and to reject the attempt to appropriate him in the sharpest way possible, so as to retain him for the Marcionite church as the sovereign protagonist of the law-free gospel, who was called to be an apostle not by men nor through a man—and certainly not at all by the twelve super-apostles appealed to in Rome.

Furthermore, how could the Marcionite author of our letter have better resisted, how could he have better pulled the ground from beneath the feet of his opponents than by allowing the apostle to be resurrected once more from the past and transferred from the dead to among the living, so that he might be allowed to speak to his church in a very personal way with his very own voice and with all stringency to pronounce his decisive No! to every Catholic tendency towards appropriation? [150]

That the writer of the Pauline letters opposed not only the Jewish-nomistic oriented Christianity of the second century and their motto, "We know however that the law is good" (1 Tim 1:8), but also the total rejection of the apostle on the Jewish-Christian side, is shown above all by 2 Corinthians, where the memory of the apostle is defended against posthumous defamation by Judaizers and where the writer explicitly makes known his intention to provide the church with arguments for those who slander him.

5:12 We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity *to boast on our behalf*, so that you have some-

thing against those who boast in outward appearance and not [the condition] of their heart.

But in Galatians as well the writer seems to have in his ears personal accusations raised up against the apostle, as when he asks—obviously alluding to a designation used by the opponents—whether he has become their *enemy* by holding up the truth to the Galatian churches.

4:16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

One wonders whether the founder of the churches in Galatia, the person who a few years earlier was first received as an angel (Gal 4:14) and whom those in Galatia have to thank for nothing less than their existence as Christian churches, from one day to the other could fall into such disrespect that, on account of a few false-teachers who have worked their way into the church, one is even carried away to characterize him as an “enemy”? In the context of the letter and of the relationship of the apostle to his church, this remark is just as incomprehensible as the missing counter-question of the apostle, with which he then earned this harsh designation. All this then becomes understandable when one recognizes [151] that the writer of Galatians obviously does not address a concrete situation or a concrete accusation from the churches, but already has before his eyes an *established theme* from the anti-Pauline polemic of his own time.

In fact, in this connection, whoever is knowledgeable about early Christian literature will remember that the designation of Paul as an “enemy,” or “hostile man,”¹⁴⁵ is very common in the *Judaistic-Ebionite polemic of the second century* and is found in many places. Thus, in the Jewish-Christian *Epistula Petri*, for example, the “lawless and irrational teaching of the hostile man” is mentioned, where, in the opinion of most scholars, by “hostile man” no one other than Paul himself is in view.

The assumption of two, or perhaps three fronts (in addition, there is also *Gnostic libertinism* on the left wing of Marcionism, which I can not consider in more detail here) against which the author of Galatians directs his teaching, need not be understood schematically. The transitions between Catholicism and Jewish-Christian Ebionite Christianity were at that time certainly still fluid. Many differences, which first become evident and clear as

¹⁴⁵ See *Hom.* 2.18.3; 11.10.11; 14.15; 15.6.7; 17.13; *Epistle of Peter to James* 2.1; *Rec.* 1.70.

day from a later historical perspective, obviously must have gradually become crystallized in extended and difficult discussions. In my opinion, that the total Judaizing rejection of Paul and the Catholic reception might not diverge as much as it must appear at first is shown very well by precisely the history of the literature to which H.J. Schoeps refers in his reconstruction of the history and theology of Jewish Christianity, namely, the history of the pseudo-Clementine writings, which originally stemmed from Ebionite and radical Jewish-Christian circles and could finally be united with a literary romance bearing the title of the man who as no other must be regarded as the symbolic figure for the approaching Roman Catholicism: Clement of Rome! As the bishop in Rome, the Roman Clement is at the same time the successor of the Jewish-Christian Peter.

In any case, if the observation that the author of Galatians in his writing expresses disapproval of three opposing fronts [152], against extreme Judaism, or Judaistic anti-Paulinism, Catholic Paulinism, and libertine Gnosticism, is an indication for the writing of the letter in the second century, and not the first, one finds oneself, beyond this, in agreement with what we know about Marcion and his church at this time. The threefold front corresponds in remarkable ways with the battle carried out by Marcion around the middle of the second century, which likewise was directed

- a) against *extreme Judaism*, on the one side,
- b) speculative and libertine *Gnosis*, on the other,
- c) as well as *Catholicism* in the middle.

Marcion as Author of the Letters?

Can it be concluded from all this that Marcion himself wrote the Pauline letters? On closer consideration, one will have to say, having once granted the presupposition that the Pauline letters are of later origin and that all clues indicate an origin in Marcionite circles, that the assumption that Marcion himself could be their author, or redactor, not only can not be excluded, but even has the greatest likelihood.

It cannot be denied that Galatians as well as 1 and 2 Corinthians and Philippians display a characteristic profile. The personal character of these letters, for which reason they have been regarded as authentic until today, in fact indicates an author, or collector and reviser, of distinct individuality. At that time, however, there were few such persons in Marcion's close circle. Since we know nothing about Cerdo, apart from Apelles, Marcion's

student, who was perhaps responsible for the writings regarded as “deutero-Pauline,”¹⁴⁶ only Marcion remains after all. In my opinion, it is very conceivable that Marcion attempted to resolve the problems in his churches [153] (that the recipients of the letters were in fact Marcionites—one thinks, for example, of the practice of baptizing the dead, found only by Marcionites, which the writer of 1 Corinthians refers to—can not be further demonstrated here) on the basis of documents that drew their authority from Paul, the legendary patron of the church, and that the battle reflected in the Pauline letters and which gives them their supposedly unmistakable and uncontrived character is nothing more than the reflection of those controversies that Marcion fought out in and with his churches.

In my view, that Marcion was the writer of Galatians is indicated by Gal 4:17, where the writer of Galatians charges that the (Catholic, or Jewish-Christian) opponents are zealous for the church only in order to exclude them (some textual witnesses even read “us,” i.e., Paul himself), which means, of course, to *excommunicate them*: “They zealously court you, not for good, but because they would exclude you/us, so that you zealously court them.” Now it is difficult to imagine that the apostle Paul or his churches were already in danger of being excommunicated. With regard to Marcion, however, we know for certain about his exclusion from the church in 144 CE. Obviously, the writer (= Marcion) makes reference to his own situation shortly before his excommunication, which he then projects back into the life of his apostle. The reader of the letter is obviously supposed to perceive the correspondence between the destiny of the apostle and Marcion’s own—and thus be won over for Marcion’s cause, that is so closely linked with the apostle’s.

¹⁴⁶ Regarding Apelles, we hear from the church fathers that he lived together with “the ecstatic virgin Philumene” – Tertullian refers to her as a “prostitute” (*prostibulum*), cf. Simon-Helen – “a prophetess with whom he worked together as a devoted adept by expounding his ideas to her and receiving her revelations and predictions in return” (Harnack, *Marcion*, 177f.; = ET, 113). In her visions, it is said that a youth appeared to her, who identified himself one time as Christ and another time as Paul! – Compare with this Lublinski (*Das werdende Dogma*, 47): “At that time it was necessary to legitimate the developing church and to appeal to documents supposedly deriving from Christ and the apostles themselves. It was not the gnostic so and so who published something, but Paul inspired him, or Peter, or even the words of the Lord himself suddenly spoke from his mouth. It need not always have been a case of forgery, but the real and spiritual conception of the poetic or religious inspiration must lead to deceptions that had begun in good faith.”