

Chapter 3

A Legend and its Historical Kernel

A Final Open Question

When I had finished dealing with Marcion, I still had many unanswered questions. If it was true that we have Marcion or one of his pupils to thank for the Pauline letters in their original form (for me there was hardly any more doubt about this), who then was Paul, i.e., that figure *in whose name* the letters were written in the first half of the second century?

I certainly was faced here with a question just as difficult as that concerning the author of the letters, and a question as well that for lack of an answer had become the rock on which all previous attempts to demonstrate the spurious character of the Pauline letters had obviously run aground. The question concerning the person in whose name the letters are supposed to have been written is closely connected with another question, which for naïve readers of the Pauline letters still represents the most persuasive argument for their authenticity: namely, the question of how it comes about that a number of passages in the Pauline letters give us the impression, by a host of personal indications, of something that absolutely could not be fabricated.

Fabrication Impossible?

Above all, the writings characterized by Baur as the primary Pauline epistles contain a number of statements which provide us with hints concerning the person and character of the presumed author. Not only in the historical-biographical sections of Galatians but also in other places, above all in 2 Corinthians, the author steers the reader's attention, consciously or unconsciously, to his own person—or, as the case may be, that person in whose name he authored his writing. [155] In so doing, he seems to often defend himself against false accusations and charges that had been raised up against him. From Gal 1:10, 2 Cor 5:11, and 1 Thess 2:4 it can be inferred that the apostle is accused by his opponents of *attempting to please men*; 2 Cor 12:16 clearly shows that this was accompanied by the charge of *deception*. The accusations and insinuations against the apostle could even climax in the assertion that he had become an *enemy* of the church (Gal 4:16). On the other hand, the person of the

apostle seems to be carefully depicted by the author. The figure of the apostle is recommended to the churches as worthy of imitation (1 Cor 11:1; 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17); the *kindness, patience, and gentleness* of the apostle are strongly emphasized by the author (1 Thess 2:3ff.); the apostle is a visionary, and receives revelations that elevate him over other men (2 Cor 12:1ff.). Long catalogues of perils provide information regarding his numerous tribulations and afflictions (2 Cor 6:4ff.; 11:23ff.); In Ephesus he even fought in the arena with wild beasts (1 Cor 15:32). He bears on his body the *marks of Christ* (Gal 6:17), for which reason the churches in Galatia could even regard him as an angel of God and receive him as Jesus Christ (Gal 4:14), and indeed in spite of the “temptation” in his “flesh” that this represented for them and which seems to be associated in some way with his external appearance or with a mysterious suffering, which may be related to the “thorn in the flesh” mentioned by the author of 2 Corinthians (12:7f.).

In the past, alongside the particularities concerning the life of the churches that we learn from the letters, precisely such remarks and details relating to the person of the apostle were very often regarded as the most certain confirmation of the authentic, unmistakable, and unfabricated character of the primary Pauline letters. For W. Wrede and many other scholars this constituted the primary argument against the radical rejection of the authenticity of the entire collection of Pauline writings. For them “the forger capable of inventing such unintentional, individual, purely personal, momentarily-born remarks, as are found here in abundance, and, moreover, to simulate thereby in all the letters a uniform, original personality as the author is still to be born.”¹⁴⁷ [156] Nevertheless, this argument, newly advanced again and again until today in different formulations and expressions, on the basis of which it is thought, for example, that the Dutch radical criticism of the Pauline letters might be seen as a “grave aberration of criticism,”¹⁴⁸ seems to me, on the contrary, much too general and all-inclusive to seriously set aside the doubts concerning the Pauline authorship of the letters, and indeed for the following reasons:

¹⁴⁷ W. Wrede, in K.H. Rengstorf, ed., *Das Paulusbild in der neueren deutschen Forschung* (1969), 2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

1) It is a mistake to think that by contesting the authenticity of the Pauline letters the “original personality” of their author is also denied. The letters could be inauthentic—and at the same time have an original author’s personality with its own style and unmistakable profile. To put this another way, no one would deny that in the letters of the young Werther we have fictional prose, but there can nevertheless be no doubt that in the case of their author, J. W. von Goethe, we have to do with an original personality.¹⁴⁹

2) What one understands by a “uniform, original personality” is still far too dependent on the subjective feeling of individual scholars. Instead of speaking in a general way of an “original personality,” it is far more important, in my view, to first give an account of the “personal items” we encounter in the letters of Paul by systematic collection and sifting of individual passages as well as by their differentiation. The references to the person of the apostle in the letters, mentioned above at the beginning of this section, should rather already make one skeptical. Whether a man who recommends himself to others as an example to be imitated and who, among numerous other severe afflictions and adventures, also survived a battle with wild animals unscathed can be accepted as a historical person without further examination seems very questionable.

To deduce from personal remarks the original personality of the author, and thereby the “authenticity” of his writings, is by no means compelling, and it is especially inappropriate where on closer observation the “personal items” underhandedly show themselves to be literary devices. In the Pastoral Epistles we also encounter a picture of Paul with a definite, characteristic stamp, and indeed [157] a picture that, as most scholars recognize, is not identical with the person of the author but which serves the pseudepigraphical author as a literary device to tie together the

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Steck, *Galaterbrief*, 351f.: “The assumption that the primary Pauline letters do not derive from the apostle but belong in the second century will always encounter the reservation that in form and content they give the impression of being the work of such an intellectually powerful personality that they could only be hypothesized in the creative milieu of earliest Christianity, in the circle of the apostle himself. There is a basis for this impression. We have no other writings in the New Testament in which such a powerful and original religious thinking finds expression as in these... But the conclusion which is drawn from this impression must be challenged. It says that because these letters are so incomparable they must have an apostle as their author. But who tells us then that only the apostles were such original thinkers?... Is one or more such personalities impossible for later times?”

myriad moral and doctrinal statements in the letters as the self-testimony of the apostle and to authorize them at the same time.

To be sure, in comparison with the picture of Paul in the rest of the letters, it is frequently observed that the picture in the Pastoral Epistles exhibits greater formality and idealization. But apart from the fact that, as we already noted, the picture of Paul in the letters generally regarded as authentic at times does not lack a certain schematizing and idealization, it does not yet follow from this that, in contrast to the Pastoral Epistles, the remaining letters must be authentic. One must also consider the possibility that the picture of Paul offered by the writer of the primary letters was more complex and differentiated than that available to the author of the Pastoral Epistles. Finally, one must also consider the possibility that the author of the primary Pauline letters was a more sensitive and more distinguished man of letters than the person who wrote the Pastoral Epistles—even an “original (authorial) personality.”

3) Just as the authenticity of a Pauline letter cannot be deduced from individual personal remarks, so also its authenticity cannot be inferred from the personal passion of the author. The personal zeal with which the author of Galatians, for example, or the author of 2 Corinthians, goes to battle against his opponents in no way needs to be feigned, since, as we showed above, it can be understood very well against the background of the second-century theological discussion between Marcionites and Catholics.

4) Even the controversy about the figure of the apostle need not be a special artifice of the pseudepigraphical author, who in this way seeks to give his writings the impression of greater authenticity. Rather, this seems much more to reflect the actual state of the discussion in the second century concerning the image of Paul. The author of Galatians and 2 Corinthians obviously only attempts to defend the image of the revered patron of the Marcionite churches [158] against defamations, like those expressed by Jewish Christians, for example, or against appropriations from the side of Catholic Christians (Acts).

Debates about fundamental theological principles are often enlivened with personal questions. As an example, one can point to the discussion between Catholics and Protestants concerning Martin Luther. History has shown that the question regarding characterization of the reformer remained very much alive in confessional polemic long after his death, and the discussion

about it was just as controversial as that concerning his teaching. One only has to recall the heated debates still ignited by the books of the Catholic theologians H. Grisar († 1932) and H.S. Denifle († 1905) some centuries after the death of the reformer and in which posthumous accusations were made against Luther, for example, that he had been not only a pornographer, a propagator of dirty stories, a drunkard, a glutton who eats like animals, and grossly ignorant, but also a despicable fabricator and liar.¹⁵⁰

The image of the reformer, therefore, was contested for a long time after his death—in the very same way as the image of Paul, which was still contested in the middle of the second century by Gnostics, Marcionites, Jewish-Christians, and Catholics. Now we possess sufficient biographical and auto-biographical witnesses to the life of the reformer on the basis of which Protestant scholars could easily refute the defamation of their reformer. What would have happened if this had not been the case and the reformation had taken place in a time in which the fabrication of pseudepigraphic writings was in no way perceived as objectionable, but was entirely an everyday occurrence?

Who would want to exclude the “discovery” of pseudepigraphic letters of Luther in which the deceased reformer once more announces his desire to speak and posthumously counters all the accusations against which he had not been able to defend himself in his own lifetime, or perhaps did not have to.

The Legendary Paul

This is the question: Who then does the figure of the apostle Paul—to whom especially the Marcionites adhered as their church patron and in whose name Marcion and his pupils composed letters for the edification of their churches but also to ward off attacks by opponents—have in view? In other words, what are the historical and literary fundaments, the “foundation stones,” from which the image of Paul in Galatians and in the other so-called Pauline letters is constituted?

In theory, we do not need at all to envision a particular historical person (in the modern sense), i.e., a *Paulus historicus*, as the Dutch radical critics called him. It would also be entirely conceivable that the author of the Pauline letters did not begin at all with a historical figure into which he projected himself (as a

¹⁵⁰ H. Boehmer, *Luther im Lichte der neueren Forschung* (1906, ⁵1918), 61ff.

present-day writer projects himself into a historical person), but with a *legend*, and in particular a legendary Paul (which does not necessarily exclude the possibility that this legend has a historical kernel). In other words, it is possible and even very probable that the (Marcionite) author of the letters came to know his hero, the apostle Paul, exclusively from oral or written legendary traditions of his time and that even in his letters he does not imagine him as a historical person, but as he is portrayed in the legends: as the great hero of the faith in the past, powerful in words and deeds. — At the very least, in a time when everything historical very soon becomes enveloped and absorbed by the legendary this would be possible.

At the same time, this would also explain the presence in the letters of the peculiar and occasionally downright presumptuous self-stylization of Paul, e.g., when he urges his readers to imitate his example (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17) or boasts of wondrous deeds (Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12). In these passages the author of the letters actually does not speak about his own person at all, concerning whom he could have hardly said all these things without being accused of human arrogance by his contemporary readers, but about [160] his revered example, as he had come to know him from the legends. The readers expect nothing more from him, and certainly nothing less, than they knew about the Paul of the legends. The splendor of the image of Paul, magnified and transfigured by legend, must necessarily also radiate in the letters that the apostle supposedly wrote in his own lifetime.

That a legend concerning Paul in fact existed in Christian circles in the second century cannot be denied. The best proof of its presence, among others, is Luke's Acts of the Apostles. That from a historical perspective the picture of Paul sketched out in Acts by Luke the "historian" is almost totally unusable has been recognized by most theologians since Baur. U. Ranke-Heinemann placed what Acts tells us about Paul and his colleagues under the heading *The Fairytales of Acts*. We are told there, as we already heard above, about all kinds of wondrous deeds of the apostle, about healing the sick and raising the dead, about a miraculous release from prison in the middle of the night, about angels who suddenly appear, etc. With good reasons one is able to say that in Acts we do not have to do with a presentation of history, but that a legend is spun out here, not only about Paul, of course, but about all those who belonged to the earliest churches and their apostles.

The presentation of Paul in Acts, to be sure, is certainly not the only form of the legend about Paul; it represents rather only a very particular version, namely, that of the Lukan (Catholic) church. If we look around outside the canonical literature, we ascertain that stories and anecdotes were also passed around in heretical circles (Gnostics, Marcionites) in which the life and work of the apostle was presented in similar wondrous and legend-embellished ways. This found literary expression in the so-called *Acts of Paul*, to which the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* belong. If we are concerned with the literary and/or tradition-historical sources for the picture of Paul that the writer of our letters could have had before his eyes, then we cannot disregard precisely these apocryphal sources. [161]

Paul and Thecla

The picture of the apostle we encounter in the *Acts of Paul* is entirely different from that in the canonical Acts. Of course, here also Paul is at work as a missionary; he is active in the entire region of Asia Minor; the stations of his journey are Damascus, Jerusalem, Iconium, Antioch, Myra, Sidon, Tyre, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, and finally Rome, where he dies as a martyr. But there are nevertheless great differences.

The differences have to do with the *external frame* of Paul's work—while Acts reports three missionary journeys of the apostle, the *Acts of Paul* relates only a single great journey of Paul, which finally leads him to Rome—as well as the *content of his preaching*. At the center of Paul's preaching in the *Acts of Paul* stands not the message of the resurrection, as in Acts, but the preaching of (sexual) continence (Greek = *enkrateia*). At the center of Acts stands Paul the *Jew*. The hero of the *Acts of Paul*, on the other hand, scarcely makes an appearance as a Jew; he is primarily a (Hellenistic) ascetic and a preacher of an ascetic lifestyle and piety.

We can best clarify the differences between Luke's picture of Paul, that we know from canonical Acts and which we have already characterized in more detail above, and the picture in the *Acts of Paul* if we take a look at the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which represents the most famous piece of this apocryphal literature and was transmitted independently.

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is a peculiar mixture of religious edification literature and ancient adventure and love stories. They relate how the apostle comes to the city of Iconium and wins a

virgin named Thecla for the Christian faith. At the center of Paul's sermon [162], which Thecla follows from the window of her house, stands the *requirement of (sexual) abstinence*. A beatitude enunciated by Paul, which reminds one of Jesus' sermon on the mount, goes: "Blessed are the wombs of virgins, for they will be pleasing to God, and will not lose the reward for their purity."

The preaching of Paul awakes in Thecla the desire for a life of chastity. Much to the distress of her future husband, Thamyris, who, for understandable reasons feels that his future wife has been deceived by the apostle's preaching, endeavors to stir up the people and the authorities against the apostle. Thamyris blames the apostle, not entirely without justification, of corrupting the women of the city of Iconium through his preaching by dissuading them from marriage. In fact, he thereby soon causes Paul to be arrested and thrown into prison. But a secret meeting nevertheless takes place at night with his devoted Thecla. By bribing the guard, she is able to come to him in prison in order to sit at the apostle's feet, listen to his preaching, and kiss his chains.

After Thecla is discovered in the prison, Paul is brought before the judgment-seat of the governor. In the meantime, Thecla, who remained behind in the prison, rolls about on the consecrated place where Paul had taught while he sat in prison.

But the governor heard Paul gladly concerning the holy works of Christ. And when he had taken counsel, he called Thecla and said: 'Why doest thou not marry Thamyris according to the law of the Iconians?' But she stood there looking steadily at Paul. And when she did not answer, Theocleira her mother cried out, saying: 'Burn the lawless one! Burn her that is no bride in the midst of the theater, that all women who have been taught by this man may be afraid!' And the governor was greatly affected. He had Paul scourged and drove him out of the city, but Thecla he condemned to be burned.¹⁵¹

Thecla is immediately brought to the theater, where straw and wood have been gathered for the burning. [163] "As she is brought in naked, the governor wept"—obviously less tears of sympathy than of amazement—for he "marveled at the power that was in her." The executioners stacked the wood and ordered

¹⁵¹ This and the following citations are from E. Hennecke, W. Schneemelcher, and R. McL Wilson, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, revised edition, 1992), pp. 242-245, 253.

her to ascend the pyre. But in that moment when the fire was ignited a powerful rumble beneath the earth shook the theater and, by intervention of the Almighty, great masses of water and hail poured down, “so that many were endangered and died, and the fire was quenched, and Thecla was saved.”

The events in Iconium constitute the prelude for a series of further wondrous events involving Paul and Thecla. In Antioch an obtrusive Syrian named Alexander provokes the next mischief when he embraces the virgin on an open street and is rejected by her. Because Thecla ripped away his cloak and knocked the crown from his head, she is brought before the governor and condemned to fight with beasts. Taken to the arena once again, tumultuous events unfold in the course of which Thecla throws herself in a pit filled with water and baptizes herself. All the seals in the water are killed as by a lightning flash. Likewise, the bears and lions fall into a kind of overpowering sleep and do not touch her. Thecla herself is surrounded by a cloud of fire so that she could not be seen in her nakedness. Having been saved once more, Thecla returns again to Iconium. Her fiancée is fortunately no longer alive, so Thecla can now pursue her calling undisturbed and proclaim the word of God. At a great age she finally passes away peacefully.

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* are only a small excerpt from a great amount of Pauline literature, now partly lost, in which the adventures of the apostle are related in “edifying” legendary ways. The *Acts of Paul* stemming from Gnostic-Marcionite circles are interesting in that a series of connecting points can be ascertained between them and the author of the Pauline letters. I would like to provide the following examples: [164]

The Face of an Angel

In Gal 4:14 Paul relates that the churches in Galatia had received him “as an angel of God.”

4:14 “And you did not scorn or despise the temptation for you in my flesh, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.”

The Dutch radical critic Loman already wondered about this and asked how the Galatians arrived at this remarkable conception.¹⁵² The passage from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* with the familiar

¹⁵² Loman, *Galatenschap*, 68; cf. Detering, *Paulusbrieve ohne Paulus?*, 297.

portrayal of the apostle could offer an explanation. The picture of Paul presented here has influenced the iconographic representation of Paul until the present:

And he saw Paul coming, a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness, now appearing like a man, and now with the face of an angel.

As this passage shows, the face of an angel is obviously a common feature of the picture of Paul in the Pauline legends.

The same is true for the conception we meet in Gal 4:14 that the figure of Christ appeared in the figure of the apostle. Here also there are remarkable parallels in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (21): As Thecla is led into the theatre to be burned “she sought for Paul as a lamb in the wilderness looks around for its shepherd. And when she looked out over the crowd, she saw *the Lord sitting in the figure of Paul.*” This passage shows that the author in fact had the Pauline legends in view [165] from where he knew about the wondrous appearance of the apostle.

Fight with Beasts in Ephesus

What Paul says in 1 Cor 15:32—“If in a human way I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, what gain do I have?”—has been puzzling for exegetes, first of all because as a citizen of Rome Paul could not be condemned to fight wild beasts (*ad bestias*) in the arena, and secondly because the prospect of surviving such a fight was extremely small. Also remarkable is the unusual emphasis on the *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον*, concerning whose meaning—“according to the will of man” or “in a human way”—exegetes differ, as well as the word “in Ephesus,” which one would not expect under the usual assumption that Paul authored his letter to the Corinthians in Ephesus.

One finds the solution for these problems when one again understands what is said in 1 Corinthians against the background of the *Acts of Paul*, in this instance as a reference by the writer to the legendary portrayal found there of a fight with wild beasts that Paul endures under wondrous circumstances. It is reported in the *Acts of Paul* that in Ephesus Paul was forced to fight with beasts in the stadium. When a wild lion, who had been captured just shortly before, was set upon the apostle, Paul recognized it to be that lion for whom he had only shortly before administered the holy sacrament of baptism. A conversation takes

place between Paul and the lion, who it turns out can also speak: “Lion,” asks Paul, “was it you whom I baptized?” To which the lion answers, “Yes!” But Paul speaks to him again: “And how were you captured?” To which the lion replies, “Even like you were, Paul.”

As the spectators, in view of the friendly relationship between the two, begin to become impatient and let still more animals loose against Paul, there takes place—as already in the theater in Iconium at the burning of [166] the beautiful Thecla—a direct intervention of heavenly divine power, who obviously no longer wants to be an idle observer. Like a bolt from heaven, a powerful and violent hail-storm forms over the stadium and pouring forth from heaven assures that most of the spectators are struck down and die or take flight, while Paul and the lion remain undisturbed. Finally, Paul takes leave of his animal companion; he exits the stadium and sails off to Macedonia. “But the lion went away into the mountains”—for further missionary work?— “as was customary for it.”

Once one is clear about the fact that the pseudepigraphic author of 1 Corinthians makes reference here to the legendary tradition presupposed by the *Acts of Paul*, which in contrast to the canonical Acts knows nothing about Paul’s *rights as a Roman citizen*, it also becomes understandable why it expressly speaks of a fight with beasts “in a human way.” The author clearly wants to say that in the fight Paul did not battle in a human way, but that—entirely in accord with the presentation in the *Acts of Paul*, which at this place has the apostle rescued by a *divine miracle* (the talking lion, the hail-storm)—he has only the help of God to thank for his deliverance. If on the contrary, Paul had fought in Ephesus only *in a human way*, i.e., without divine help, only with his own human power, he would certainly have died. For this reason the author of 1 Corinthians can rightly ask what Paul would have gained from this without hope in the resurrection. Even in individual details it becomes clear here that the author of 1 Corinthians connected with the Pauline legend and its wonderful portrayal of the fight with beasts in Ephesus and obviously completely identified with his hero.

From Paul of the Legends to the Historical Paul

Even with the reference to legendary literature of the second century, in which the wonderful deeds of the apostle are related, all the elements of the picture of Paul [167] we encounter in the letters are still not completely explained. In addition we

have to ask whether the Paul of the legends might not be based on a historical kernel that points to a *particular historical person*?

Even in the past where the authenticity of all the Pauline letters was contested one could not, and generally did not want to, exclude the view that the letters pointed back to and made reference to a historical figure. Since the radical critics did not regard this figure as identical with the author of the letters, they referred to him in contrast to the author¹⁵³ as *Paulus historicus*. As a rule, of course, there was not much that could be said about this person. For the Dutch radical critic Loman, for example, *Paulus historicus* remained only a very schematic figure about which he could say little more than that it had to do with a man “who hellenized Christianity in the Diaspora from Syria through Asia Minor and Greece as far as Rome by his zealous propaganda on behalf of the messianic movement.”¹⁵⁴

We learn somewhat more from Van Manen. For Van Manen the *historical Paul* probably was “a somewhat younger contemporary of Peter and the other disciples of Jesus”; he probably was “a Jew by birth” and had been “a resident of Tarsus in Cilicia.” After at first having a hostile relationship with the other disciples, he later joined with them and became a wandering preacher, who on his journeys through Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece, finally came to Italy. Presumably, he was one of the first Christians to proclaim Christianity outside of Palestine to the Gentiles.

The picture Van Manen sketches of the historical Paul, whom he does not regard as the writer of the letters, is therefore by and large identical with the picture of Paul in Acts. In other words, in searching for *Paulus historicus* the radical critic Van Manen, who by rejecting their authenticity had lost the Paul of the letters, finally ends up with the Catholic Paul of Acts! To be sure, Van Manen expresses the reservation that Acts contains “truth and fiction at the same time”; but with regard to the relationship between Paul and the other apostles Van Manen esteems [168] the historical value of Acts more highly than Galatians. Van Manen can go so far as to say that there is no indication of decisive opposition between Paul and the other apostles.¹⁵⁵ In view of the fact that the picture of Paul in Acts is regarded even by conservative scholars as Luke’s own fabrication without any

¹⁵³ Referred to by Pierson-Naber as *Paulus episcopus*.

¹⁵⁴ Loman, *Het oudste Christendom*, 47.

¹⁵⁵ Van Manen, “Paul,” in *Encyclopedia Biblica*, p. 3632.

claim to historicity, Van Manen's discussion of the historical Paul can hardly still be convincing. Moreover, the question arises as to why a letter like Galatians, for example, could ever have been attributed to precisely the person Van Manen described as a "faithful attender of temple or synagogue."

If with regard to the historical Paul Van Manen knows *too much*, Loman's description of *Paulus historicus* remains unsatisfactory because he knows *too little*. It must be granted, to be sure, that he and other radical critics do not go so far as to throw out the baby with the bath water and entirely deny the existence of a historical Paul. But the historical rubble that is left over by criticism is merely a schematic figure. What we finally learn from them about the historical Paul is only *that* he had lived and worked as a missionary, and that at a later time letters were written in his name. The question arises as to why, in spite of his obviously successful missionary work, apart from the letters written in his name, hardly more than a weak reflection of the historical Paul was left behind in the consciousness of his churches and/or contemporaries, and how he could be regarded as *apostolus haereticorum* (apostle of the heretics) if those persons who took care to preserve his memory after his death are to be found precisely in the Catholic and Jewish-Christian storehouse (Acts).

In their search for the historical Paul, Loman and Van Manen landed in a blind alley because they let themselves be guided too much by the picture of Paul in Acts. Although they recognized more clearly than other scholars that the Pauline letters stand in a suspicious proximity to Marcion and Marcionism, with regard traditions relating to the historical Paul they still began with the picture of Paul in Acts and sometimes very uncritically took those traditions as a basis without posing anew the question of their origin. [169] So there arose the paradoxical picture of the "orthodox" Jewish apostle and wandering preacher who was misused by later heretics to legitimate their theology, a picture that understandably could not be very convincing.

What Loman and Van Manen did not yet recognize was, as we indicated above, that the picture of Paul that Luke sketches is already *derived*, a reaction to the Pauline legends circulating at about the same time in Marcionite and Gnostic churches (in Asia Minor), and that, in spite of their often reworked and catholicized final form, the latter seem to contain at the core older and more original material than Acts.

If the Pauline legend was originally at home in Marcionite-Gnostic circles and Acts represents only a Catholic reworking of this legend, then clues leading from the legendary to the historical Paul can point only to the Marcionite-Gnostic churches, not the Catholic. For the question concerning *Paulus historicus* this obviously means that he must be sought only within the Marcionite, or Gnostic, movements of the first and second centuries, not in the “orthodox” churches. In other words, the Marcionite-Gnostic picture of the apostle comes closer to the historical Paul than the picture of the Catholic Jew in Acts.

The Doppelgänger: Paul and Simon

At this point in our investigation a surprising possibility, never before considered in previous research,¹⁵⁶ comes into view: from the writings of early Christian commentators we know that the Church fathers regarded the Samaritan Gnostic *Simon Magus* as the spiritual father of the Gnostic-Marcionite heretics. This was especially true for the Marcionite heresy, which the Church fathers connected with Simon in different ways, some direct and some indirect. [170] According to Irenaeus (*AH* 1.27), Marcion was indirectly connected with Simon through his teacher *Cerdo*.¹⁵⁷

A certain Cerdo, who was associated with the Simonians (*ab his qui sunt erga Simonem*), came to Rome under Hyginus, the ninth bishop in apostolic succession... Marcion from Pontus, who followed him (*succedens*), extended his teaching... At this point we must mention him [Simon] in order to show you that all those who in any way corrupt the truth and contravene the

¹⁵⁶ Hilgenfeld supposed that the name Simon was an old, forgotten surname of Paul (*ZNW*, 1903, 326f.), which is close to the theory represented here; see H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 419.

¹⁵⁷ In light of Irenaeus' witness, Beyschlag's assertion (*Simon Magus*, 68, n. 138) that F. M. Braun's claim that the Gnostic Cerdo was a Simonian "is entirely without basis" requires more detailed justification. F. M. Braun (*Marcion et le gnose simonienne*, *Byzantion*, 25-27 [1933-57], 631-648) regards Irenaeus' note as a heresiological theory, but nevertheless also holds fast to the Simonian roots of Marcionism. For him the Gnostic Saturnil establishes the connection with Simonism. In light of the grave differences between Marcion and Saturnil, however, this assumption seems very questionable to me. In this regard, see also K. Rudolph (*Gnosis and Gnostizismus*, 360). Rudolph finds it highly "remarkable that the Pseudo-Clementine sources, which according to the discussion by A. Salles (*VigChr* 12, 1958, 197ff.) were certainly anti-Simonite oriented, later took on a moderate anti-Marcionite dressing." In my opinion, one should consider these and other observations if one speaks of "pre-Marcionism." From an historical perspective what one characterizes as pre-Marcionism is clearly nothing else than Simonism, or post-Simonism.

preaching of the church are students and successors of Simon the magician from Samaria (*Simonis Samaritanu magi discipuli et successores sunt*). Although they do not mention the name of their teacher, in order to deceive others, what they teach is nevertheless his doctrine. They set forth the name of Christ Jesus in a deceptive way, and in various ways introduce the impiety of Simon, thus destroying many by spreading false teaching under a good name.”

Marcion is then directly associated with Simon by Clement of Alexandria. In Clement’s *Stromata* (7.17) we read in what is certainly a “very controversial passage, which if taken literally leads to the nonsense that Marcion was a contemporary of Peter,”¹⁵⁸ that Marcion had been *a student of Simon*, who himself had heard the preaching of Peter. This testimony is peculiar, above all, because, as far as we know from his writings discussed by the church fathers, Marcion himself never mentioned Simon at all; Simon’s name appears nowhere in his writings! If Marcion is in some way “connected” with the Samaritan Gnostic Simon Magus (which there is no reason to doubt), it must seem odd that he refers to this nowhere in his writings.

Against this, one should not object that his writings are only transmitted to us very incompletely. For it can hardly be doubted that the church fathers would not have hesitated to transmit to us such information about Marcion if they had found only a single reference to this in the writings of Marcion himself. [171]

When Marcion speaks of his spiritual father, he speaks nowhere of Simon, but exclusively of *Paul*! How can this be explained?

Perhaps because Simon and Paul were *one and the same person* for Marcion? Is it possible that in Paul perhaps nothing else is to be seen than the transfigured image of the one who preceded Marcion and his students as a spiritual father and who, according to the unanimous opinion of early church commentators, was the head of all heretics and heresies in early Christianity, even and especially the Marcionite: namely, the Samaritan *Simon Magus*, with whom, as Irenaeus relates, Marcion was connected through Cerdo.

Without doubt, against the identity of Simon and Paul seems to stand, first of all, the banal circumstance that “Paul” certainly

¹⁵⁸ H. Waitz, *Simon Magus*, 125.

does not mean “Simon,” or that “Simon” does not mean “Paul,” and that the different names seem to refer to different persons. However, precisely with regard to Paul and Simon this argument is of very dubious value, since it is generally known that already within early early Christian literature itself there is a branch where this distinction, indeed, is not carried out and where *Simon in fact stands in place of Paul*, i.e., *is identified with Paul*. This would be the so-called Pseudo-Clementines and the *Kerygmata Petrou* associated with them, coming out of Jewish-Christian, Ebionite circles. The complete identification of Simon-Paul found there—one of the most difficult problems for New Testament scholarship working until now with the assumption of authenticity for the Pauline letters—certainly represents one of the strongest arguments for the identity thesis presented here.

One certainly should not oversimplify the problems associated with the pseudo-Clementine literature, which is significantly named after Clement the Roman bishop, the third follower of Peter in Rome. Nevertheless, I believe that the basic problem here can be fairly well stated with the following formulas:

- 1) In the Pseudo-Clementines Simon is known and opposed by name.
- 2) The heresies ascribed to him are Marcionite, and
- 3) —even more strange—the words that are placed in his mouth are those of Paul!

There are a number of solutions for this problem. In my book *Paulusbriefe ohne Paulus?* I described in detail the Tübingen solution, which saw Simon as a characterization of Paul; and today the problem is usually solved in complicated, literary ways. However, there is still another, much simpler solution, which one can only maintain if one is prepared, first of all, to give up the authenticity of the letters, which is certainly the primary reason, in spite of its simplicity, it has not been considered until now: Why do we not understand the Pseudo-Clementines in a completely literal way? Why do we not take seriously the fact that for the writer of this Jewish, anti-Pauline literature Paul is in fact no one else than Simon?

If words from Galatians are placed there in the mouth of Simon,¹⁵⁹ or if he is portrayed as a missionary to the Gentiles like Paul,¹⁶⁰ who converted Gentiles to Christianity before Peter, if in

¹⁵⁹ *Clem.Hom* 17.19; Gal 2:11ff; Hennecke-Schneemelcher, II, 77f.

¹⁶⁰ *Clem. Hom* 2.17.3; 11.35.4-6.

the *Epistula Petri* (2.3f.) reference is made “in a hardly concealed attitude” to the “lawless and foolish teaching of a hostile man”¹⁶¹ (i.e., Paul), all this obviously means, first of all, nothing other than that the author knew the preaching of Paul only under the name of Simon and that for him Paul and Simon were in fact identical. With regard to Simon and Paul, therefore, we have to do with *two names for the same person*, whereby the Roman word *Paul* (= *the Small*) need not be understood as an additional proper name, but rather as a surname or nickname (*supernomen*),¹⁶² like, for example, Albert the Great or—an example nearer at hand—Simon Peter.

That in addition to a person’s actual name one can attach still more names which in some way express something about the person’s character or outward peculiarity is a practice also attested elsewhere in antiquity. It can even go so far that the actual name is no longer known. In the work [173] of the well known satirist Lucian, for example, we meet the figure of the ancient wandering philosopher Peregrinus Proteus. Both names, *Peregrinus* as well as *Proteus*, are personal surnames: *Peregrinus* = “one who is nowhere at home,” *Proteus* = “one who is always wandering.” In this example, the real name of the man, who at the same time was a Christian, can no longer be determined.

Moreover, that the name *Paul* could already be conceived in a figurative sense by the writer of the Pauline letters can be clearly seen in 1 Cor 15:9, where “Paul” speaks of himself as the last and the smallest, like a “miscarriage” as it were. B. Bauer correctly commented about this: “He is the last, the unexpected, the conclusion, the dear nestling. Even his Latin name, Paul, expresses smallness, which stands in contrast to the majesty to which he is elevated by grace in the preceding passages of the letter.”¹⁶³

Bauer rightly calls attention to the *theological* significance in the concept of smallness. In fact, beyond Bauer, who did not yet have this connection in view, one must consider that precisely for the Marcionites—and obviously already for the Simonians as well, to whom this goes back—the word “Paul” expressed everything that constituted the core of their theology and for which the

¹⁶¹ Hennecke-Schneemelcher, II, 69f.

¹⁶² Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 399, n. 1: “It was in Egypt of the Macedonian period that a fourth name, with which one was addressed by intimates, was introduced: the so-called *signum* or *supernomen*”

¹⁶³ B. Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren*, 381.

“letters of Paul” provide continuous testimony. Where is the freely occurring, unannounced and unconditioned, election by grace better illustrated than precisely by the inferior, the incomplete, by a child, by a small one?

So while Paul, like Peter, was originally nothing more than a surname for Simon, which was first employed only in the Marcionite churches (not in the least because of the theological associations just mentioned which the name could awaken), the name *Simon* seems to have been more common primarily in Jewish circles. This explains the gradual separation and division of the names in the course of time, which finally led to the division of the person of Simon-Paul himself.

One could say that *Paul* is the transfigured image of Simon among the legitimate disciples and followers of Simon, Marcionites, Gnostics, etc. (recall that the name “Simon” significantly appears nowhere in all the works of Marcion!); [174] and *Simon*, on the other hand, stands for the picture of the same person [Paul], more and more consumed by polemic, even as the Antichrist, for the opponents of Simon, the Judaizers.

Accordingly, Simon meets us in the Marcionite-Gnostic literature as Paul, while in extreme Jewish-Christian circles Paul is represented as Simon, or even as the Antichrist or “hostile man.” Finally, the separation of the names and the separation of the persons was completed in that moment when the Catholics definitively took possession of patrons of the Marcionite church and doctored them up in their own way, which took place in Acts. After Simon-Paul had once been officially established as Paul in the pantheon of great figures from early Christian times, and thereby a more moderate, even more Catholic Marcionism found entrance into the Catholic church, the continuing polemic against Simon-Paul fermenting in Ebionite, Jewish-Christian circles, in so far as it related to the Catholic Paul, became a heresy and was no longer tolerated. The moderation of the continuing Jewish polemic directed against Simon-Paul did not take place in such a way that it was simply rejected or combated as false, but

1. in that Simon became expressly distinguished from Paul, and Simon alone, or Simon Magus, as he was now called, was represented as the bearer of all negative attributes, i.e., in a certain sense was built up as the “bogeyman” in place of Paul; and

2. through the Catholic redaction of the Pauline letters, following very soon, which made their far-reaching Jewish-

Christian reception possible and took the edge off the polemic (still directed against the Marcionite Simon-Paul).

The process of separation was already completed in Acts and can be observed with ostentatious clarity in chapter eight where in direct connection with the first appearance of Paul Luke immediately speaks of Simon Magus. As the Tübingen scholars already correctly observed, Luke thereby rejects an identification of Paul and Simon, as this takes place in the Pseudo-Clementines, for example.¹⁶⁴ In that Luke depicts Paul and Simon as two entirely different people, the anti-Simonian polemic [175] now has no relationship with the Catholic Paul and thus beats the air.

The Sinful Woman

Against the theory of names just set forth, it could be objected that there are no parallels at all in the history of Christian tradition for such a division of a person. But that is not correct: the division of one person into two different persons, which obviously serves the express (polemical) purpose, in the face of contrary views, of excluding a particular identification, is a literary technique for Luke observable in other passages as well, and which is employed once more in the story of the sinful woman (Lk 7:37ff.). Luke is plainly concerned here to counter the speculation current in Gnostic circles concerning Mary Magdalene as the (fallen) female companion of Jesus Christ and to show that there is no relationship at all between Mary Magdalene and the sinful woman mentioned in the story of the anointing in 7:37ff. This is clearly the reason why immediately after the anointing story he attaches a short list of the female disciples of Jesus, in which Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna are explicitly mentioned by name. For the reader the conclusion—desired by Luke—necessarily follows that at least none of the women named is identical with the sinful woman (not mentioned by name) in the anointing story. In fact, however, from the perspective of tradition history there can be no doubt about the Gnostic origin of the anointing story (with a wealth of erotic motifs and variations on the theme of the fallen Ennoia, Helena, or Sophia, in the form of a historical account).¹⁶⁵ Contrary to

¹⁶⁴ Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 305: “The Tübingers therefore concluded that Luke intended to protect Paul from such disparaging associations by here depicting Simon as an entirely different person.”

¹⁶⁵ See Beyschlag, *Simon Magus*, 184; and W. Henss, *Das Verhältnis von Diatessaron, christl. Gnosis und Western Text... Materialien zu... Luk 7,36-50*, BZNW 33, 1967.

Luke, later church tradition clearly recognized this and—as the Gnostics had already done, but now, to be sure, in a time when Gnosticism had been excluded as a danger for Catholic Christianity—again identified the sinful woman with Mary Magdalene. [176]

Historically, therefore, the various features of the picture of Paul represented by the author of Galatians go back to the figure of Simon Magus in the first century. The figure of Paul himself, therefore, is first of all nothing other than the transfigured picture of the legendary founder of religion and patron of the church to whom the Simonian-Marcionite churches were indebted and whose teaching they preserved as the legitimate spiritual successors and heirs.

This explains the peculiar circumstance that in the Jewish-Christian polemic of the second century Simon, who was denounced (by Jews and Jewish-Christians) as the Antichrist, or Beliar, etc., exhibits characteristics of the apostle Paul, and conversely why the figure of Paul, who meanwhile has become revered by the church, exhibits characteristics of Simon Magus, the Heresiarch and Antichrist. We have to do here basically with one and the same person. While in the second century both Jewish-Christians and Marcionites were naturally still conscious of this, through the Catholic separation of Simon Magus from Paul and through the usurpation and catholicizing of Paul (who by the surname Saul was also tied to the Old Testament tradition: see Tertullian, who could only trust his Paul after he found him prefigured in the Old Testament)¹⁶⁶ this consciousness gradually passed away and by the beginning of the third century (leaving Tertullian aside, who seems to have still maintained a faint memory of the actual origin of the apostle) was almost completely gone.

Who was Simon Magus?

For our further historical search for traces of the origin of the Christian picture of Paul, who the (Marcionite) author of the letters had in mind in his work, it is necessary that we still occupy ourselves somewhat more deeply with the figure of Simon Magus, or Simon from Samaria, as the case may be. As we have already implied and as we will see still more clearly below, we have to do here with one of the central figures in earliest

¹⁶⁶ Tertullian, *AM*, 5.1.

Christianity, if not even the central figure as such. [177] The immense significance of this Simon, later stigmatized by the church as the Heresiarch and Antichrist, can scarcely be overestimated.

If the emphasis on his great significance seems inappropriate and out of place to a reader who in his or her journey through the world of early Christianity possibly encounters the figure of Simon for the first time, one should consider that the *picture of early Christianity* that has been normative until today is determined by *the church's picture of early Christianity*. The primary sources employed by scholars for this are still Christian: The Catholic Book of Acts, the catholicized letters of Paul, the Gospels, etcetera. Christian sources that could provide us with a *different* picture of the situation in the first century either do not exist or were done away with by the Church, for it is self-evident that in a time when Paul and the letters written in his name became accepted as church documents every writing in which Paul was (correctly from a historical perspective) identified with Simon the Heresiarch must be disparaged as satanic. It is probably not entirely accidental that the Jewish writings in which this identification is still made (after corresponding Catholic reworking and tranquilizing) have been preserved for us. In any case, in the picture the church produced of its own beginnings, which still imprints us today, the person of Simon became painted over with dark colors for such a long time that, contrary to his real significance, he stood in the shadows of history.

As a dark, insignificant figure, the magician also meets us then in Luke's Acts. When we previously spoke of the close religious-historical relationship existing between the figure of Paul in the Christian legends concerning Paul and those concerning Simon Magus, we already encountered the reference to the magician in Acts 8:9-24:

- 8:9 But there was in the city a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was someone great. [178]
- 8:10 And they all gave heed to him, from the least to the great, saying, "*This man is the power of God that is called great.*"
- 8:11 And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.
- 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

- 8:13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he remained with Philip. And seeing the signs and powerful deeds taking place, he was amazed.
- 8:14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,
- 8:15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit;
- 8:16 for it had not yet fallen on any of them; but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- 8:17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.
- 8:18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying,
- 8:19 "Give me this power also, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
- 8:20 But Peter said to him, "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!
- 8:21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.
- 8:22 Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you,
- 8:23 For I see that you are in the fall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."
- 8:24 And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."
- 8:25 And when they had testified and spoken the word of God, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Most scholars agree that the picture of the Samaritan Simon Luke presents here is once again a tendentious characterization. While Luke portrays Simon only as a great sorcerer, who amazed the Samaritans with his sorcery, there is wide agreement today that Simon was certainly more than a successful magician. In the claim to be *the great power of God* is still reflected the prophetic self-consciousness of one of the most influential spiritual leaders of heretical Gnosticism.

In Christian teachings against heresy, the origin of Gnosticism is generally traced back to Simon Magus. Thus, even Irenaeus saw Cerdo and his student (or colleague) Marcion as offshoots of Simon the Samaritan. But not only Gnostics characterized (in the narrow sense) as Simonians, but also Valentinians,

Basilideans, Marcionites, etc. were regarded by the church fathers, directly or indirectly, as followers of Simon. Even if “modern research in Gnosis,” as K. Rudolph, one of its most important representatives, writes, “no longer holds the conviction that Simon Magus has to be considered the ancestor of all gnostic religion,”¹⁶⁷ one nevertheless certainly recognizes that Simon Magus is of decisive significance for the origin of heretical Gnosticism.

Apart from Acts, whose picture of Simon we have already determined, by and large, to be historically worthless, and setting aside Acts 8:10, which could contain an echo of a corresponding Simonian saying, there are a number of other sources in which we meet the Samaritan magician: in Justin, whom we have already often mentioned, [179] in Irenaeus, Hippolytus, the Pseudo-Clementines, and the Alexandrines (Clement and Origen). According to the theologian Beyschlag, we have to do here with the five “pillars” of the patristic Simon Magus tradition.

In non-Christian sources we have a notation of Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities* (*Ant* 20.7.2), where a “Jew named Simon (*Atomos*), who comes from Cyprus and calls himself a magician” is mentioned (we will discuss this in more detail below). Also in the Jewish Apocalyptic writings and the Sibyllines (Oracles), where an Antichrist appears, many scholars believe this figure to have the features of Simon Magus.

If one attempts to make a rough picture of the figure of Simon Magus from the sources at hand, it would be something like the following:

The author of the Pseudo-Clementines, which certainly represents a very late stage of the Simon legend, reports that Simon came from the village of Gitta in Samaria and that he obtained a Greek education during his stay in Egypt, to which he also brought “extensive knowledge and skills in magic.” Simon appeared with the claim to be a “mighty power” of God, and occasionally also referred to himself as the Messiah or as the Standing One, whereby he intended to imply that he would endure forever and that “it is not possible for his body to be subject to corruption.”

The writer of the Pseudo-Clementines characterizes Simon’s teaching as follows: Simon denies “that the God who created the world is the highest God, nor does he believe in the resurrection

¹⁶⁷ K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 294.

of the dead. He turns away from Jerusalem, and sets Mount Gerizim in its place. In the place of our true Christ he claims that he is the Christ. He interprets the content of the law according to personal whims. He does speak of a future judgment, but does not take it seriously: for if he were convinced that God would make him accountable, [181] he would not have dared in his wantonness to turn against God.” (*Clem. Hom. 2:22.5-6*)

Here we have the same, or very similar, ideas as we later meet in Marcion. They archetypically exhibit the already familiar features of the Gnostic system, whose basic principle includes—as Marcionism does later—the crass separation between the creator of the world (Demiurge; Jewish God) and the highest God (the unknown, or foreign, God).

Remarkably, the writer of the fictional pseudo-Clementine work regards John the Baptizer to have been Simon’s teacher. Simon was among the thirty pupils of the Baptizer. A woman named Helena, or Luna, is also mentioned as a pupil of John (we must also consider her later). Although Simon was regarded as the most important and most capable pupil of John, he was not able to install Simon as his successor, because at the time of his death Simon was in Egypt, and another pupil of John, named Dositheos, succeeded in taking over the leadership of the baptism sect.

After his return, Simon at first pretended friendship and contented himself for a long time with second place after Dositheos. Only when Simon began to claim that Dositheos did not correctly transmit the teaching of John did it come to a break. When Dositheos noticed that “Simon’s well-calculated slanders were weakening his own authority among the great crowd so that they no longer regarded him as the Standing One, he struck out at him in anger one time when Simon came to the usual meeting. But the stick seemed to pass through Simon’s body as if it were smoke. Shocked by this, Dositheos cried out to him: ‘You are the Standing One, so I will pay homage to you.’”

The expression “the Standing One” (Greek = *Hestos*) is especially known from the work of the Jewish philosopher Philo. For Philo it refers to God (conceived in the categories of Greek philosophy) as eternally standing still, unchanging (*Deus imm*). If Simon is referred to as the Standing One (*Hestos*), it seems therefore to be a form of honorific title elevating Simon, clearly an expression of his very special [182] nearness to the highest

Hestos. Even for Philo, the one who draws near to God (= *Hestos*) must himself become a *Hestos*.¹⁶⁸

It is possible that it was from conceptions of this kind, created from the world of Hellenistic philosophy and mysteries, that the impression arose for later church reporters that Simon had regarded himself as God. The Catholic Christian Justin, in any case, writing around the middle of the second century, knows of three heresiarchs who incurred this (even for Christian heretics somewhat strange) accusation: the already well-known Marcion, Menander, and their common ancestor Simon from Samaria. Justin further reports that, through the influence of evil demons, Simon also practiced his arts in Rome during the time of Emperor Claudius. According to Justin, in the same way as in his homeland, Samaria, where almost everyone had become his follower, here also Simon was held to be a God. Justin relates that on the Tiber river a statue had been erected that bore his name: *Simoni Deo Santo*.¹⁶⁹

According to Justin and other church reporters the aforementioned Helena was at Simon's side. In contrast to the Pseudo-Clementines, we meet Helena here not as a pupil of John the Baptizer, but as a prostitute, whom Simon became acquainted with in a brothel in Tyre. According to Irenaeus, Simon and the Simonians perceived this as an allegorical event with central significance for the teaching of Simon:

He led a woman named Helena around with him, a prostitute from the Phoenician city of Tyre whom he had purchased. He called her the first Ennoia (thought) of his mind, the mother of all, through whom, in the beginning, he decided in his mind to create angels and archangels. After this Ennoia sprung forth from him she recognized what her father desired, and she descended into the lower spheres and brought forth angels and powers, by whom also he said this world was made. After she brought them forth, she was held captive by them because of jealousy, because they did not want to be regarded as descen-

¹⁶⁸ See Hans Leisegang, *Die Gnosis* (1985).

¹⁶⁹ The dedication inscription was discovered in 1574 on a Tiber island in Rome. It referred, however, not to Simon Magus, but to an ancient Roman God of oaths, Semo Sancus (*Semoni Sanco Deo Fido Sacrum*.... Justin's confusion and that of other church fathers could be related to the fact that "possibly the Simonians themselves were responsible for the identification, since they worshipped their founder as a divine being (as Zeus among others.)," K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 295.

dents of someone else. He himself (Simon) is completely unknown to them; but his Ennoia was held captive by the powers and angels [183] that came forth from her, and she had to suffer many humiliating things, so that she could return to her father above. And it went so far that she was even enclosed in a human body, and in the course of time, as from one vessel to another, wandered in ever changing bodies of women... For this purpose Simon came, to take her as the first to himself, and also to bring salvation to other people who recognize him. (Irenaeus, *AH*, 1.23.2-3)

In the teaching of Simon and his followers, the Helena-event obviously symbolized the relationship of human souls to God, or their redeemer. The brothel, in which Helena is held captive, is usually interpreted as the world, in which the souls are imprisoned and in which—far from their heavenly home—they become defiled. The heavenly “fiancé” Simon, then, is no one else than the divine redeemer himself, who frees the souls from their prison and takes them with him back to their heavenly home. In the *Exegesis of the Soul*, a later Simonian-Gnostic writing, we again meet these ideas, which, as we already said, constitute the core of the Simonian salvation drama and in their significance for Gnostic religiosity and spirituality can hardly be overestimated (one thinks, for example, of the Gnostic sacrament of the “bridal chamber”).

As long as she [= *psuche*, soul] was alone with the father, she was a virgin... But when she fell down into a body... there she fell into the hands of many robbers... She [lost her] virginity and prostituted herself in her body, and gave herself to one and all... She gave up her former prostitution... and cleansed herself in the bridal chamber. She filled it with perfume; she sat in it watching out for the true bridegroom.¹⁷⁰

Whether Simon himself wrote down his teachings is a debated question. Hippolytus knows a writing with the title *Great Proclamation (Megalē Apophasis)*, from which he cites a few fragments. In the opinion of Rudolph and other scholars, “this text is hardly to be considered Simon’s work”; rather the entire writing “is probably a kind of philosophical-speculative interpretation of sayings attributed to him by his school [184] in the

¹⁷⁰ *The Exegesis of the Soul*, NHC II, 6, in J. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 192-198.

second century.”¹⁷¹ For Leisegang, on the other hand, who saw in Simon the model of the Hellenistic prophet (Empedocles) and regarded him as a “renewer of the ancient Hellenistic prophetic message,” the *Apophasis* largely derived from Simon’s pen: “In its basic elements, it is really to be traced back to Simon.”¹⁷²

Remarkable about this work is the *apophatic* style, the majestic “I”-tone with which the writer, like a mystagogue, proclaims his teachings as supreme revelations. The introductory words already give this impression: “This writing— a proclamation, a voice, and a name—stems from the decree of the great, unlimited Power. For this reason, it should be sealed, hidden, cloaked, deposited in the abode where the roots of the All are found.” Here again, one is reminded of the writer of the Pauline letters, who now and then employs a very similar way of speaking (Gal 1:11; 1 Cor 15:51; Col 1:26; Eph 3:4; etc.), which, to be sure, in comparison with the *Great Proclamation* seems only like a weak imitation.¹⁷³

The content of the *Proclamation* presents a complex religious-philosophical system, at the center of which stands an elaborate cosmology and theology. Like many other scholars, Leisegang was reminded by these teachings, which again and again characteristically unfolded in three steps (for example: “The one, who [once] stood, stands, and will stand [again].”), of the German philoso-

¹⁷¹ K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 295.

¹⁷² H. Leisegang, *Gnosis*, 67.

¹⁷³ In this regard, reference should also be made to a puzzling passage in the writing *Philopatris*, by Pseudo-Lucian, in which one generally sees a characterization of Paul. Here also, however, it cannot be said for sure whether we have to do with a characterization of Paul or Simon. Triephton tells Kritias about his meeting “with a certain bald-headed, large-nosed man from Galilee”: *Triephton*: “...By the son of the father, the spirit, who proceeds from the father. One out of three, and three out of one! You are Zeus! who is called God!...” [Simon’s trinitarian system!] *Kritias*: “But I don’t understand all that well what you want to say with your one three and three one. Do you refer to the Tetraktys of Pythagoras? or the Ogdoad and Triad [of Valentinus]?” *Triephton*: “Be silent, friend, about things that are unspeakable!... I will teach you what the All is, and who he is, and, above all, who he was, and according to what plan the All is led out [the beginning of the *apophasis*!]. For then it was no different for me than for you. But I happened to meet a certain bald-headed, large-nosed Galilean, who while wandering in the air came as far as the third heaven and presumably learned the marvelous things that he again taught us. By water, he made me a new person, freed me from the dominion of the godless, and placed me on the path of the blessed ones, to walk further in their footsteps. And if you will listen to me, I can also make you a new, true person.” —According to Jerome, there was a tradition in which Paul came from Galilee, not Tarsus. (Lublinski, *Das werdende Dogma*, 225.)

pher Hegel with his “Spirit in itself, Spirit for itself, Spirit in and for itself.” Thus, in the trinitarian system of Simon one could see an ancient Gnostic prologue to Hegel’s philosophy.¹⁷⁴

We have only legendary reports of Simon’s end. The *Acts of Peter* relates that in Rome, where Peter, his stereotypical antagonist, has followed him, he attempted to fly, in order to demonstrate his wondrous power. Peter, of course, by calling upon Christ, is able to have him crash, so that Simon’s leg is broken. His followers finally take him to Aricia (South of Rome), where he dies.

According to Hippolytus, Simon had his students bury him, in order to show that he could [185] be resurrected on the third day. The resurrection did not take place, however, because Simon was certainly not the Messiah, as he himself had claimed.¹⁷⁵

In Jewish and Jewish-Christian writings Simon is finally portrayed as a true pariah. In Jewish Apocalypses the figure of Simon is styled by his opponents as the Antichrist and portrayed in the blackest colors.

In what follows, we will attempt to verify our thesis that the particular elements from which the writer of the Pauline letters constituted his picture of Paul go back to the figure of Simon by means of a comparison of the pictures of Simon and Paul.

The Flatterer

Simon attempts to please men, or flatter them—he is sincere, gentle, and peaceable—he accepts no gifts—he feigns sincerity.

In an apocryphal Acts of the apostles it is said concerning Simon: “With the help of his father, the Devil, this man pleases all people.”¹⁷⁶ One can see very clearly that the Marcionite author(s) of the Pauline letters often pick up this feature of the Simon-Paul picture. In Galatians the writer asks his readers:

1:10 Am I seeking to win over men or God? Or am I seeking to *please men*? If I still wanted to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians he asks in a similar rhetorical way:

¹⁷⁴ So also Kreyenbühl, *Evangelium der Wahrheit*, 225 and passim.

¹⁷⁵ Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.20.

¹⁷⁶ *Acta Pt. c. Sim*, 55, ed. Lipsius Bonnet, I, 203, 1f.; cf. also *Clem Hom* 18.10: ἀρεσκόντως τοῖς παροῦσιν ὄχλοις. In this regard, see Schoeeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 301, 418ff.

5:11 Since we now know the fear of the Lord, do we seek to *win over men?* [185]

The writer of 1 Thessalonians also expressly emphasizes:

2:4 So we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts.

The visionary, miracle worker, and missionary

Simon has visions— He performs miracles— He is a successful missionary.

Simon the visionary is the central theme of a passage in the pseudo-Clementine literature where Peter disputes Simon's claim that it is possible to experience the same thing by means of a dream or a vision as on the basis of direct eyewitness.¹⁷⁷ As Simon hears this, he interrupts with the words:

You have claimed that you came to know the teaching of your master very accurately because you heard and saw him directly when he was present, and that, on the other hand, it is impossible for someone else to experience the same thing by means of a dream or a vision. I will show you that this is false... On the contrary, the vision provides, together with the appearance, certainty that what is seen comes from God.

In addition, the Pseudo-Clementines report an attempt by Simon to fly, ending in failure (with a deathly crash). This seems to be a parodistic variation of the Simon as visionary motif.

The author of the primary Pauline letters also portrays Paul as a visionary. Paul is called to his task as an evangelist through a revelation (Gal 1:16), and his trip to Jerusalem for the apostolic council is brought about by a revelation (Gal 2:2). Above all, however, one naturally thinks here about the well-known passage in 2 Cor 12:1ff, where "Paul" reports his having been caught up into the third heaven where he heard unspeakable words (words which Marcion could say that *he* had heard).¹⁷⁸

12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up into the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

¹⁷⁷ *Clem. Hom.* 17:13ff.

¹⁷⁸ Esnik of Kolb, 180, cited by Harnack, *Marcion*, 377*: "The apostle says: 'The words that I heard are unspeakable,' and Marcion says: 'I have heard them.'"

- 12:3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—
whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God
knows—
- 12:4 and he heard words which cannot be spoken, which a
man cannot utter. [187]

All this shows—not that the author of Galatians and 2 Corinthians himself had visionary experiences, but—that he knew how great a role revelations and visionary-ecstatic experiences played in the biography of his hero in whose name he wrote the “letters”—i.e., Simon-Paul.

The same is also true for *signs and wonders*, which play a large role in the historical reports concerning Simon Magus, or as the case may be, Simon the heretic, referred to as Antichrist /Beliar. Consider the following passage from the Sibylline writings (3.63ff), where it is said concerning the coming of Beliar, which most scholars believe relates to Simon Magus:¹⁷⁹

From the Sebasternines Beliar will come afterward, and will make high mountains rise up and make the sea stand still, the great fiery sun and the bright moon, and he will raise up the dead and perform many signs for people. But fulfillment will not be in him, but [only] deception, and he will thus lead many people astray, faithful and chosen Hebrews as well as other lawless persons, who have still never heard the speech of God. But when the threats of the great God draw near, and a fiery power comes through the billowing water to land and consumes Biliar and the arrogant people, all who have put their faith in him...

Other texts relating to the Antichrist (= Simon) also refer again and again to his miraculous deeds.¹⁸⁰ The miracle-working activity of Simon is extensively portrayed in the Pseudo-Clementines, and Acts also reports that Simon, who was referred to as *great power* (Acts 8:10),¹⁸¹ had “amazed” the Samaritan people for a long while.¹⁸²

Corresponding with this, in 2 Corinthians, as evidence for his apostolic legitimacy, [188] “Paul” can appeal to the fact that “the

¹⁷⁹ Geffcken, *Komposition und Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina*, TU NF VIII (1902); cf. Kippenberg, *Garizim*, 123, n. 148.

¹⁸⁰ Preuschen, *Antichrist*, 184f.

¹⁸¹ In this regard, see Beyschlag, *Simon Magus*, 99ff.

¹⁸² Acts 8:9, 11.

signs of the apostle were performed among you... with signs and wonders and mighty works" (12:12).¹⁸³

In the passage from the Christian Sibyllines it is said that Simon misled many people [through his preaching], and indeed not only Hebrews but also "other lawless people, who had never heard the speech of God." It can be inferred from this that Simon had also turned to the Gentiles and carried out missionary activity here as well. Even the Pseudo-Clementines could not avoid mentioning Simon's great missionary success; through him, even before Peter, many Gentiles were supposedly converted to Christianity. Peter is speaking:

While I am going to the Gentiles, who believe in many gods, to proclaim through my preaching the one God, who made heaven and earth, and everything that is therein, so that they might come to love him and be saved, evil has anticipated me, according to the law of the syzygies, and has sent Simon ahead, so that people who reject the gods who supposedly dwell on earth, and speak no more of their great number, should believe that there are many gods in heaven... I must quickly follow him so that his lying assertions will not gain a footing and establish themselves everywhere.¹⁸⁴

In the same way, Paul is also called by a revelation to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal 1:16), and at the end of the letter to the Romans he can look back on a preaching mission that reaches over the entire world from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Rom 15:19). Since he no longer has any more room for work here (15:23, 24), it is necessary for him, after the visit in Rome, to go further to Spain. — The situation which Peter refers to in the Pseudo-Clementines seems to be identical with the situation reflected in the Pauline letters: The mission of Simon-Paul is followed by the Judaizing counter-mission.

The Son of Lawlessness

Simon as the "Son of Lawlessness" — Simonian Soteriology — Simon as "Libertine" — Simon as Persecutor of the Saints — Simon as "Enemy"

¹⁸³ Cf. also Rom 15:18ff.

¹⁸⁴ *Hom* 3.59.2; cf. *Hom* 2.17.3: Peter says, "I came after him (Simon) and followed him"; cf. *Hom* 11.35.4-6: Peter says, "Now he (Satan) has sent Simon upon us, preaching under pretense of the truth, in the name of the Lord, and sowing error."

The primary accusation made against Simon by the Jewish anti-Simonian polemic as well as by Catholic Christian polemic was that he had *rejected the Law*. The Simonian antinomianism was grounded in the Simonian doctrine of redemption (Soteriology), in which a theologian of the last century already perceived “a magical prelude or counterpart to the freedom from the Law proclaimed by Paul...”¹⁸⁵ To be convinced of this, one should compare the teaching of Paul [189] with the following brief summary of the Simonian teaching by Irenaeus:

Whoever, therefore, placed their trust in him and his Helena no longer needed to be concerned about them [the angels who made the world], but, as free persons, could live as they pleased. They were saved by his grace, and not by works of righteousness. The works are not good in themselves, but only by accident. The contrary teaching was devised by the angels who made the world in order to enslave people by means of precepts. He promised them, however, that when the world decomposes they would be set free from the dominion of those angels.¹⁸⁶

The teaching represented by Simon, according to which the law is abrogated by grace (the spirit) is, as the Gnosis scholar K. Rudolph correctly remarked, “a formulation familiar also to Paul which Marcion then extended into a reformation of the gospel, without however paying homage to libertinism.”¹⁸⁷ Indeed, that Simon ever paid homage to libertinism at all, as some church fathers asserted, is very doubtful, and is contested by Rudolph. We seem to have to do here rather with Jewish or Jewish-Christian defamation. Much of what was represented as “licentiousness” and “debauchery” by Jews in the first century or by observant Jewish-Christians in the second century was certainly not always the same as libertinism. The author of the seven letters in Revelation can mention the eating of meat sacrificed to idols and “fornication” in the same breath (Rev 2:14). And one should not forget that Protestantism was also often represented in Roman Catholic polemic as libertine blundering.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ A. Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums*.

¹⁸⁶ Irenaeus, *AH*, 1.23.3.

¹⁸⁷ *Gnosis*, 255.

¹⁸⁸ The Catholic monk H. Denifle, for example, could thus set forth the thesis regarding Luther and Lutheranism that Luther “invented the doctrine of justification, along with the *sola fide* and the *sola gratia*, only for the purpose of

The Antichrist (Simon) also meets us as the Son of Lawlessness in the Jewish *Apocalypse of Elijah*. Here it is also said that he *persecuted the saints with extreme agony*.¹⁸⁹ To a certain extent, it seems like this has to do with Simon-Paul prior to his conversion to Catholicism! Indeed, this feature of the picture of Simon-Paul (Paul as persecutor) seems to have been consciously ignored by the Marcionite author of the Pauline letters. He had no reason to report this because his hero did not need [190] to justify himself for the persecution of the saints (i.e., the earliest Jewish-Christian churches), which for him, as an early representative of the Jewish-Christian church, was a matter of indifference. It was the Catholic redactor who first introduced the persecution passages into Galatians, presumably on the basis of the presentation in Acts. For Paul had now become a church patron for Catholics as well. And as long as the memory of the persecution activity of Simon-Paul was present among Jewish Christians, this had to be appeased and compensated for by the introduction of a conversion experience. The conversion of Paul, therefore, is most probably not a biographical fact at all, but only historical in so far as it reflects the beginning of Catholicism with its fraternization of Paul and the twelve. Only now did it first become possible for Jewish-Christians and Marcionites to live peacefully with one another under a common Catholic roof. The historical Simon-Paul was most probably not a convert, but a renegade! — As a lawless Gnostic, Simon is finally identical with the *enemy*, or the *hostile man*, who is spoken of not only in the Pseudo-Clementine literature, but also in the Jewish writings directed against Simon, among others, the *Epistula Petri*, where the “lawless and senseless teaching of the hostile man” is mentioned, namely the teaching of Paul. Even Paul asks the Galatians: “Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth [of the gospel]?” (Gal 4:16).

pursuing his dissolute life with all the more indifference and assurance” (B. Löhse, *Martin Luther*, 242).

¹⁸⁹ *ApkElj.* 4.20-23 = James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 1, Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), p. 748. That in the portrayal of the Antichrist we in fact have to do with the (polemically skewed) picture of Simon is shown by the remarkable agreement in the sun and moon miracles *ApkElj.* 3.5-10). That the Antichrist in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* can raise no one from the dead (*ApkElj.* 3.11-13) is Jewish and Jewish-Christian polemic. In Acts as well the gift of raising the dead is reserved only for (the Jewish-Christian) Peter: see the Tabitha miracle, Acts 9:36ff.; and on the other hand, Acts 20:9ff., where a raising of the dead is intentionally not reported for Paul.

The Match-Maker

Up to now, in our search for historical traces of Simon Magus we had to be satisfied primarily with the distorted picture of the Antichrist and the hostile man in Jewish, or Jewish-Christian, polemic. But the magician did not frequent only the confused fantasies of the apocalyptic writers; the Jewish historian Josephus also mentions him in a brief but highly informative note in his *Antiquities*. [191]

Moreover, for this reason every doubt regarding the existence of the Samaritan Simon, which was once expressed here and there, should be excluded. The passage from the pen of the worldly historian Josephus irrefutably shows that the Samaritan Simon is not a figure of fantasy. And apart from this, the energy of the hatred which the Jewish and Jewish-Christian writings concentrate on the figure of the *Antichrist* and *hostile man* testifies positively that the object to which they relate has a historical basis. No one polemicizes against a phantom.

In the passage from *Jewish Antiquities* 20.7.2 (= 29.141) Josephus attests that the historical Simon was a contemporary as well as a confidant of the Roman governor Felix (51/51-ca. 60 CE). Josephus reports that the Roman governor made use of Simon's magical abilities, or special persuasive skill, in a delicate situation by employing Simon to mediate a marriage for him.

Felix had fallen head over heels in love with Drusilla, the granddaughter of Cleopatra and Antonius (Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9), and also a sister of Bernice, and wanted to marry her. Although Drusilla was already married to King Azizus of Emesa—or had become married to him through her brother Agrippa—and even though Felix, who was famous for his cruelty, having had a “multitude of revolutionaries” crucified daily in Palestine, was a highly questionable specter, from both a human and a political perspective, so that even the Roman historian Tacitus could characterize him as a “downright servile person,” Simon, being called upon here, obviously had no moral reservations about helping prepare the way for the contemplated marriage.

Felix, the Governor of Judea, had scarcely seen Drusilla, who was distinguished for her beauty, when he was enflamed with great love for her. He sent to her, therefore, a Jewish friend of his named Simon (*Atomos*), who came from Cyprus and represented himself as a magician, to attempt to persuade [!] her to leave her husband and marry him [Felix]. He had him

tell her that if she did not reject him, [192] he would make her a happy woman. In order to avoid the envy of her sister Bernice, from whom she had to suffer many things because of her beauty, Drusilla acted badly, let herself be persuaded to transgress her native laws, and married Felix.

The episode related by Josephus is very interesting because we meet both leading protagonists once more in Luke's Acts—although, to be sure, here it is not Simon who converses with the now married couple, but the imprisoned Paul:

24:24 After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess; and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

24:25 As he spoke, however, about righteousness and [sexual] continence and the future judgment, Felix was filled with fear and answered, "Go away for now! when I have an opportunity I will summon you."

24:26 At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.

Against the background of the prevalent way of looking at this today, according to which Simon and Paul still represent two *different* historical persons, one could perceive the passage in Acts as a further extension of our knowledge about the Roman governor and his wife. After the two were married, with the help of Simon, they met the apostle Paul. On this occasion, he appealed to their conscience in a fundamental way by preaching to them about sexual continence, which could be related to the fact that Felix had married a divorced woman. In his relationship with Felix, Paul appears then as preaching a kind of prophetic warning, comparable to John the Baptizer in his relationship with Herod.

So far, so good. Since in the meantime, however, we have become wary, and know that Simon and Paul are not so different, as Luke would like us to believe, but that in the Jewish-Christian polemic of Luke's time the two rather flow into one another in an undifferentiated way, [193] so that words spoken by Paul can be placed in the mouth of Simon, and conversely the picture of Paul exhibits all the features of Simon, we therefore view the entire passage in a somewhat more critical way.

Could it not rather be the case that Luke, as indeed otherwise conforms with his manner, once again engages in apologetic? Could it not be the case that for Luke the entire passage only pursues the goal of removing once and forever the suspicion, that seemed plausible for some, that Paul and Simon Magus were one and the same person? That Paul preaches sexual continence to the freshly-baked married couple could indeed have an entirely different basis than the fact that Felix had just married a divorced woman. With this portrayal of Paul preaching a prophetic warning Luke could have attempted to set aside another picture of the apostle very well known to him, namely, that of the match-maker spoken of in Jewish and Jewish-Christian circles.

A similar apologetic intention seems also to underlie Acts 24:26. Luke remarks that Felix hoped for a bribe from Paul. This remark as well, which in view of the financial situation of the hardly wealthy tentmaker makes no sense, and for which exegetes have been unable to provide any reasonable explanation, can only be understood when one recognizes that Luke engages here in apologetics. J. Kreyenbühl rightly observes in this regard: “The motif of money is... only introduced here to counteract the slanderous accusation by Jews that, as match-maker for Drusilla, Paul had often visited with Felix and was paid for his service.” Luke blunts this accusation “by attributing the motive of avarice to the procurator and making Paul the source of money. If Felix hoped to get money from Paul, the relationship between the procurator and Paul invented by the Jews would be relegated to the realm of fable.”¹⁹⁰ In other words, the absurd supposition that the governor expected money from Paul, the wandering preacher and tentmaker, obviously serves to refute the accusation (known to Luke) of a close personal relationship between Felix and Simon-Paul. [194]

Simon Atomos — Simon Paulus

Of special interest in this connection is finally that fact that, instead of Simon Magus, some manuscripts of Josephus have the reading *Atomos*. Since the word “*Atomos*” is nowhere else attested as a personal name and must therefore again be understood as a nickname (*signum* or *supernomen*), one must proceed from the assumption that this was a nickname of the magician from Cyprus, which—for whatever reasons—was

¹⁹⁰ J. Kreyenbühl, *Evangelium der Wahrheit*, 214.

deleted, or, as the case may be, substituted for the name Simon Magus.

Now the translation of the name is very illuminating, and in my opinion another significant piece of evidence for the thesis represented here of the identity of Simon and Paul, or the original unity of the two names. “Atomos” is Greek and—when referring to a person—must be translated as “tiny one”; or in Latin, “Paul”! Simon Atomos is Simon Paul!

From Paul to Saul

According to a common conception, that has also become a figure of speech, the effect of the conversion at Damascus was that out of Saul emerged a Paul. This conception is widespread, but is nevertheless incorrect. “The name,” as Ben Chorin correctly writes, “has nothing to do with this transformation.” In the vision Paul is addressed by Jesus in Hebrew as *Schaul*, and in Damascus the message is brought to Ananias that *Schaul* from Tarsus has arrived. Ananias addressed the guest as ‘brother *Schaul*.’ It is not true at all, therefore, that here from Saul a Paul came into being; rather, precisely *in* this vision and directly *after* it Paul is addressed with his Hebrew name *Schaul*, with which he also appeared previously.”¹⁹¹

The name change from Saul to Paul thus takes place in Acts not in direct connection with the conversion, but on the first missionary journey of Paul, while he was on the island of Cyprus, together with his companion Barnabas, and there converted the governor Sergius Paulus [195] to the Christian faith. In 13:9 the reader is parenthetically informed that Saul also means Paul (“But Saul, who is also called Paul”). It was not at all uncommon for Jews to take a Roman name alongside their own Jewish name, and the practice is attested elsewhere. This need not occupy us further here. We should rather pursue the question of what the fact that the author of Acts knows about a second name for Paul signifies for our theory. The fact as such could indeed be conceived as a serious argument against our Simon = Paul thesis. In contrast to Paul, the name Saul cannot be understood as a *supernomen* (i.e., as a nickname of Simon’s). If Paul’s Jewish name was Saul, our Simon = Paul theory would collapse.

Now, we already observed above, of course, that Tertullian, in settling accounts with Marcion, had remarkable interest in

¹⁹¹ Ben Chorin, *Paulus*, 35.

finding the figure of the apostle, whom he viewed with great mistrust—which many exegetes today could well take as something to emulate—, already prefigured in the Old Testament (*AM*, 5.1ff.). What is peculiar here is that only when he sees Paul already signified in the person of the Old Testament king Saul can he set his mind at rest with regard to the apostle whose legitimacy has been questioned in a kind of cross-examination over several paragraphs [!]. What does this mean? If we consider in addition that the author of the letters speaks only of Paul, and never of Saul, and that the use of the name Saul is thus a *peculiarity of the Catholic Acts* which we find nowhere else, this could mean that Tertullian and the Catholic tradition, as whose representative he appears, obviously had a strong *dogmatic* interest in tying the apostle Paul (in the same way as the twelve apostles) into the Jewish tradition. In view of the fact that in early Christianity dogmatic concerns as a rule preceded historical concerns and surpassed them in importance, it could mean that the Jewish name Saul was later attached to the apostle Paul, and indeed for the purpose of indicating in an unmistakable way the Jewish roots and origin of the apostle. In other words, [196] the name Saul was very probably given to the apostle not by his parents, but by the Catholic church of the second century—presumably for the first time by the resourceful Catholic who wrote Acts! It is not the case, therefore, as one often assumes, that the name Paul was derived from Saul (which moreover is not convincing in itself because there is only a tonal connection between Saul and Paul, and no connection with regard to content: i.e., Paul = “the small one” is not a translation of Saul = “the requested one”!), but, on the contrary, with regard to tradition-history, the name “Paul” took on the Jewish name “Saul” as a later attachment.

The intention of the person who attached the Jewish name Saul to Paul was to integrate the apostle into the Jewish tradition. Through the name, the figure of the apostle could thus be tied forever with the Jewish tradition, in which until the present day nothing is known about a student of Gamaliel by the name of Saul. In such a way, the ground could effectively be cut from under rumors, like those spread, for example, in extreme anti-Pauline circles, in which it was said that the apostle was never a Jew at all.

*Simon the Leper and Paul's Sickness**Simon and the cross — his outer unsightliness — his illness*

In the *Apocalypse of Elijah* it is said that at the coming of the Antichrist (= Simon) he will be preceded by a cross. For Paul as well, the preaching of the cross is of highest importance: one thinks of the familiar passage in 1 Corinthians:

1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Now and then, the “Paul” of the letters emphasizes his *outer unsightliness*, as in Galatians, for example, [197] where he points out that the Galatians responded to the temptation for them in his flesh neither with disgust nor disdain (Gal 4:14); and in 2 Cor 12:7 he speaks of a “thorn in his flesh,” which refers, as has correctly been observed, to a sickness that seems to have left behind some kind of marks. This corresponds with the picture of the Antichrist (= Simon) sketched—to be sure, in skewed polemic—by the Jewish apocalyptic writer. The *Apocalypse of Elijah* describes him as follows:¹⁹²

He has skinny legs; at the front of his (bald?) head there is a tuft of white hair; his eyebrows (?) reach to his ears, while leprous scabs cover his hands. He transforms himself before those who see him; he becomes a child; he becomes an old man. He will transform himself in every sign; but he cannot transform the signs of his head. By this you will recognize him, that he is the son of lawlessness.¹⁹³

As E. Preuschen correctly determined, the portrait presented here is that of a person smitten with leprosy disease.¹⁹⁴ In addition to the unmistakable reference to the “leprous scabs” on the hands, this is indicated by the reference to “clump of white hair” on the front of the head, which is likewise related to this sickness and belongs to its manifestation. Preuschen is also able

¹⁹² Translator's note: this attempts to replicate Detering's translation; cf. however, the translation by O.S. Wintermute, in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 1, Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 746, and the textual variations discussed there.

¹⁹³ Compare also the portrait of Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 3: “A man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body. with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an Angel” (W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Westminster/John Knox, 1992, p. 239).

¹⁹⁴ E. Preuschen, *Antichrist*, 192ff.

to persuasively demonstrate that Paul's sickness too, which the author of the letters repeatedly mentions, seems to be leprosy.

Paul suffers from leprosy. In Hebrew, leprosy is called *צָרַע*, from *צָרַעַ*, whose basic meaning is 'to strike,' or 'strike down.' ... The leper is actually 'one stricken (by God),' which is the meaning of *צָרַעַ* in Lev 13:44; 22:4, etc. One now sees what horrible truth the *κολαφίζειν* [= 'to strike'] has for the apostle, and that with the 'thorn in the flesh' he was bloody serious. Since leprosy attacks the skin and builds abscesses in it, Paul was justified in speaking of 'thorns' or 'goads.' Since the head is affected first of all, the expression 'slap in the face' is a very drastic euphemism for this malady.¹⁹⁵

It becomes clear here that when the author of the letters speaks of Paul's malady he obviously has the sickness of "Simon the leper" in view. [198] Finally, attention should be called to the remarkable parallels in the *outward appearance* of Simon, on the one hand, and Paul, on the other. One should compare the portrait of the Antichrist (= Simon) just cited with the picture of Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* already given above:

He saw Paul coming, a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting at the nose, very small and projecting somewhat, full of friendliness, now appearing like a man, and now with the face of an angel.

Although in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* the externals of the portrayal are a caricature and in the *Acts of Thecla* an idealization, as Preuschen already showed, even after the fantastic exaggeration is removed, there can be no doubt that one and the same person is portrayed: the Antichrist (Simon) is none other than Paul — Paul is none other than the Antichrist (Simon).

Simon and Helena — Paul and Thecla — Jesus and Mary Magdalene

In contrast to the Simon legends and the Acts of Paul, in the Pauline letters there is no figure who plays a leading role here and whose destiny is closely linked with that of Paul (or Simon, as the case may be)—like Helena, as the companion of Simon, or the virgin Thecla, who in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* becomes a symbolic figure for the chastity preached by the Paul of the Acts

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 194.

of Paul. The close connection of the Thecla legends with conceptions of ascetic-chastity¹⁹⁶ could also be the reason why, if the figure of Thecla was ever mentioned in the letters, which in my opinion is certainly not improbable, she was deleted by Catholic redaction.

The English radical critic Johnson already called attention to the fact that the relationship of Simon and Helena seems to be reflected in the relationship of Paul and Thecla, if only in a broken way.¹⁹⁷ [199] It is very probable that Thecla was a (tradition-historical) pendant to the Simonian Helena. As Helena, who in symbolic disguise serves as the representative of the human soul, was set free by Simon from the brothel in Tyre (= the world, in which she defiled her soul; cf. the Simonian writing *The Exegesis of the Soul*), so Thecla is set free by Paul for a life in purity and continence.

Apart from all the other parallels that could be mentioned here, one common element is particularly interesting. It is said that Thecla listened to the preaching of Paul day and night, and indeed from her window.¹⁹⁸ The mention of the window is in no way accidental. The window motif also appears with regard to Helena, where it is said that "once, in the middle of a great crowd of people, she looked out of all the windows of a tower at the same time."¹⁹⁹ In this regard, the theologian Beyschlag rightly observes that "the prurience of Helena is probably alluded to" here, "for to peer out of a window was regarded in the ancient world as a *gestus merertida*, i.e., as a wanton gesture."²⁰⁰ Reflected here is the motif of the psyche looking around out the window of the body (= prison), which includes the "uninterrupted watching for the bridegroom,"²⁰¹ of which this is a variation. Thecla and Helena

¹⁹⁶ From the Greek *enkrateia* = "chastity" or "sexual continence."

¹⁹⁷ E. Johnson observes, *Antiqua Mater*, p. 215: "One may well ask whether the Thecla with whom Paul is associated in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is not in some way a repetition of the Helena of Simon."

¹⁹⁸ *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (1991), p. 240.

¹⁹⁹ *Clem. Recog.* 2.12: "Once, when this Luna of his was in a certain tower, a great multitude had assembled to see her, and were standing around the tower on all sides; but she was seen by all the people to lean forward, and to look out through all the windows of that tower. Many other wonderful things he did and does, so that men, being astonished at them, think that he himself is the great God" (A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, p. 100.

²⁰⁰ Beyschlag, *Simon Magus*, 66, n. 135.

²⁰¹ Dietzfelbinger, *Apokryphe Evangelien aus Nag Hammadi*, 165.

are obviously only different names for the same figure: embodiments of the human soul as the object of the Gnostic process of redemption.²⁰²

In his book about *Gnosis als Weltreligion*, the Dutch theologian Quispel, of the school of C.G. Jung, occupied himself intensely with the figure of the Simonian Helena. In his view, the story of Helena was interpreted allegorically by the Simonians. This is especially the case with the motif of the window, as well as with the motif of Helena standing over the castle with a torch. This reflects Gnostic cosmology, the Gnostic conception of the origin of the world.

The story wants to suggest that at the beginning of the genesis of the world the goddess Helena... showed the lower archons of the chaos the higher original light (Epiphanius, 23.3). That is [200] the Gnostic myth par excellence, which is found in innumerable variations and can be very briefly summarized. In the beginning were the world of light and the world of darkness; then a hypostasis, usually called the original man or sophia, showed the demons of the world of darkness the original light. These archons, usually conceived as the seven planets, became lustful and pursued the light, which attempted to flee.

How the light then becomes mixed with the darkness is portrayed in various ways. It soon comes to pass that the light figure itself becomes lustful and peers down with curiosity (*spectandi libido*), and sacrifices itself to prevent the demons of darkness from gaining entry.²⁰³

Thus, for Quispel the Simonian Helena was “originally... the cosmological potency, which standing on the towering house of the world lets the original light shine forth...”

In addition to Helena, Quispel regards a series of other ancient female figures as so-called “tower virgins,” i.e., as a tradition-historical reflection of the Helena myth, in which the same basic pattern is reflected once again under different names in other, often much stronger historicizing, ways.²⁰⁴ He also

²⁰² Because Helena (= Athena) is ransomed by her “redeemer” Simon, faith in redemption becomes the faith of Helena, the figure of Helena becomes the symbol for faith itself; for the Simonians, faith is Helena. A reflection of this is to be found in Eph 6:14, where, in the same way as Athena, faith is conceived as an armored virgin.

²⁰³ Quispel, *Gnosis als Weltreligion*, 66.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.19.1; *Clem Recog.* 2.12.4.

regards the figure of *Salome*, who appears primarily in Gnostic traditions, as a “tower virgin.” At this point, one could also call attention to the book of *Joseph and Asenath*, which derives from Jewish circles, but which contains the same motif, further developed, of course, in a more romantic way. It is also said about the beautiful Asenath that her father Pentepheres made her live in a garret on a tower with ten rooms and that no man was ever able to see her, until one day Joseph saw her sitting *in the window* of the garret and finally married her. As has often been rightly perceived, Asenath also represents here the human soul, who is shut up in the body (the tower) and who is set free by Joseph, her savior of souls, who is also referred to as “Messiah” and “Son of God” (4.7; 6.6).

Finally, there is still another motif-historical version of the same material, found in the anointing story of the New Testament, which we already met above. As Quispel also suggested, [201] *Mary Magdalene* obviously belongs in the series of tower-virgins we just mentioned.

We have already indicated that in the figure of the woman whom we meet in the anointing story of the synoptic Gospels (Luke calls her a “sinner,” which in the language of that time meant a prostitute) we most probably have a tradition-historical reflection of the (revered above all in Christian-Gnostic circles) *Mary Magdalene* (presumably from the Hebrew מגרל = the tower). The tradition-historical origin of the entire account, which all the evangelists reflect in very different ways, is still visible in the name of the host, with whom Jesus stays. While Luke cleverly concealed this name (for good reasons), and only relates that Jesus was eating in a house of a Pharisee, we learn from Mark that it was *Simon the leper*.

14:3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of very costly ointment of pure nard, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

As we have seen, however, *Simon the leper* is none other than *Simon Magus*, who was also stricken with leprosy. The Aramaic word מִצְרַע, from which the Greek λεπρός probably derives, has a double meaning. In and for itself, it means “leprosy.” Since it has tonal similarity with מִצְרָה, however, one could also think of the Aramaic “from Tyre.” *Simon the leper*, then, would be none other than *Simon from Tyre*. And here also the name *Simon Magus*

immediately comes to mind, who ransomed his wife Helena from a brothel in Tyre.

After what has been said, there is no doubt that the Tyre-Helena motif, that obviously stood at the center of the Simonian doctrine of redemption, in a secondary, tradition-historical process, was carried over to (the “savior of souls”) Jesus. We suddenly begin to understand the erotic motifs of the entire story, [202] which, to be sure, were mostly eliminated by Mark and Matthew, but still clearly shine through (ointment/perfume, foot-washing) in Luke’s version (Lk 7:36ff.).

Finally, it could become clear to us that Gnosis was not a Christian heresy, but that Christianity represents a heresy, a “by-product” of Gnosis—and certainly the most successful.

At the end of our investigation of the remarkable similarities between the Gnostic Simon and the Paul of the New Testament, which led us to the conclusion that we obviously have to do here with one and the same person, I want to once again emphasize that the Pauline letters were indeed *not* written by the historical Paul (= Simon), but by this person’s later follower Marcion, or perhaps another Marcionite Christian (Apelles).

Only with this presupposition is the riddle of the Clementine literature solved—which is indeed three-fold, in that in addition to Paul and Simon, there is also Marcion, who is invisibly present in the speeches of Simon—and along with this the question concerning the origin of the Pauline letters.

All in all, given the arguments that have been presented, the thesis that in the case of Simon and Paul we have before us only *one* person, not two, does not seem to me at all too daring. I am certainly well aware that the decisive proof, able to set aside absolutely every doubt, has not yet been produced. But where at all do we find such decisive proof in the field of research of early Christian history? Therefore, I would propose that the thesis at least be understood as a working hypothesis and to test it for a while under this presupposition. It could indeed be that even more light will fall on the darkness of early Christian history. Where this is not the case, as far as I am concerned, one may safely forget it again. But as long as the problems that I have attempted to identify remain unanswered, the question at least remains: does Simon = Paul; and does Paul = Simon?