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## The Myth of Marcion as Redactor: The Evidence of “Marcion’s” Gospel Against an Assumed Marcionite Redaction

The historical study of early Christianity continues to labor under the burden of assumptions carried over from traditional Christian heresiology. Marcion’s pioneering role in establishing the earliest Christian scriptural canon, and particularly the potential of his texts for the history of biblical literature, is typically devalued in secondary literature on the subject due to the ubiquitous assumption that he tampered with those texts to bring them in line with his ideological positions. But mere assumption it turns out to be, for close examination of the body of evidence on which it is based exposes serious problems with taking it as established fact. My task here is to briefly review this evidence and explain why I think it points to a different conclusion: replacing the traditional view of Marcion as an ideologically-driven redactor of texts with a redescription of him as a conservative transmitter of texts in the form he found them within Gentile Christian communities that form the background and context of his own distinctive positions. As regional varieties of the Christian movement began to harden into sectarian identities in the second century, Marcion can be placed alongside of other readers and interpreters of received first century writings, able to support his ideological innovations by interpretation rather than redaction.

The question is this: did Marcion edit a new set of texts for his church as it emerged following his break with the Christian community at Rome, or did he merely deliver to that church texts in the form that he had encountered them? The specific question of whether Marcion redacted a text of Luke much as we now know it, or made use of a proto-Luke, is one of the founding debates of modern biblical studies. The first scholar to raise the question independently of dogmatics was none other than Johann Semler, the founder of canon criticism, and “probably the most important biblical scholar of the

eighteenth century”,<sup>1</sup> who found reason to exonerate Marcion from the charges leveled in the heresiological tradition. Nevertheless, the traditional heresiological account of Marcion as tendentious redactor (initiated by Irenaeus and Tertullian in rather vague terms) was transferred to and successfully embedded in academic church history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Epiphanius’s fourth century observation of specific differences between his biblical text and that of Marcion formed the starting point, on the basis of which 19<sup>th</sup> century researchers considerably expanded the list of edits presumed to have been made by Marcion on canonical Luke. They did so by combing through citations of Marcion’s Bible by orthodox writers, who themselves did not necessarily note or comment on specific differences between Marcion’s text and their own, but simply reported Marcion’s citation of particular passages in support of his views. According to a picture of Marcion as a man laboring under a fixed idea, any variation from the received text found in these citations that could possibly be construed in line with Marcion’s views was attributed to his deliberate alteration of the text. This was considered as much true of variations within passages shared by the Marcionite and orthodox texts (which we might conveniently call the minor variations), as it was of the places where Marcion’s texts lacked material found in their canonical counterparts (the major variations). The same editorial manipulation was given as the explanation of the smaller (ten letter) collection and different order of the Pauline letters in Marcion’s canon.

Over the course of two centuries of research, however, many of these props of the traditional image of Marcion have been knocked away by advances in text critical study of the New Testament, even while the image itself has tenaciously persisted. We have learned from modern biblical research that there was no New Testament canon before Marcion, from which he might have rejected parts unsuited to him;<sup>2</sup> there is no evidence for the pre-Marcionite existence of the larger canonical Pauline corpus from which Marcion might have excised the Pastorals; there was no universal, articulated orthodoxy from which Marcion might have consciously diverged. In coming to recognize the anachronism of

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<sup>1</sup> W. Baird, *History of New Testament Research, I: From Deism to Tübingen*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1992, 126.

<sup>2</sup> Harnack assumes that Marcion was familiar with all the material later incorporated into the orthodox New Testament – it was not yet collected and canonized, but was known and to varying degrees authoritative, and Marcion worked as a selector and redactor (A. von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1924, 34; English translation by J. Steely - L. Bierma, Marcion, *The Gospel of the Alien God*, Durham, Labyrinth, 1990, 23). This is only a tiny concession to modern biblical research against Tertullian’s wholly anachronistic position. It assumes a universal circulation of just those texts that later became canonical, despite the fact that several books later included in the New Testament were unknown in vast tracks of early Christianity, and that second century Christian writers regularly cite texts and traditions not found in the later canon.

these rejected settings for Marcion, we remove one by one the terms by which he was made to fit the traditional category of heretic. The smaller Pauline canon found in Marcion has been amply demonstrated to be the only one attested in the first half of the second century, and even the supposedly ideological order of the letters in Marcion's *Apostolikon* is matched in non-Marcionite collections and can be explained on non-ideological grounds.<sup>3</sup> One by one most of the minor textual variants once thought unique to Marcion have been found in non-Marcionite manuscripts; and the same is true even of some of the major variations (such as the omission of chapters 15 and 16 of Romans).<sup>4</sup> E.C. Blackman significantly furthered Harnack's start in this area, surveying particularly the early Latin texts of Luke for parallels to Marcion's readings, and establishing a long list of connections. Unless we assume that the canonical textual tradition was significantly dependent on Marcion's New Testament, these variants must have already been present in the transmission of these texts before and independently of Marcion's work. To the degree that more correlations to Marcion's readings have been found in canonical biblical manuscripts, the amount of redacting attributable to Marcion himself has correspondingly shrunk, until today there are less than a dozen variants in passages common to Marcion's text and canonical Luke (the minor variations) for which no textual support is to be found in manuscripts of the latter, and most of these are as ideologically neutral as the many since found attested in the manuscript tradition of Luke. Given this trend of discovery, it is time to reconsider the possible explanation for the remaining differences (the major variations) between Marcion's text and that adopted by his opponents.

The primary reason that it is assumed that Marcion "circumcised" or "mutilated" the Gospel of Luke in order to produce his *Evangelion* is quite simply because his enemies say so. If we approach a comparison of the two gospels with that charge provisionally accepted, it is easy to interpret what we see in line with it. But there are fatal problems with accepting this testimony at face value, above and beyond its polemical

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<sup>3</sup> See N.A. Dahl, "The Origin of the Earliest Prologues to the Pauline Letters", *Semeia* 12 (1978) 233-277, esp. 252-254, 263; J.J. Clabeaux, *A Lost Edition of the Letters of Paul: A Reassessment of the Text of the Pauline Corpus Attested by Marcion* (Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, 21), Washington, Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Harnack himself had already built a list of "neutral" variants shared by Marcion and the Western text that earlier researchers had ascribed to Marcion's ideological editing. "I have investigated the tradition of the texts, restored the texts themselves so far as possible, and shown that the so-called W-text underlies Marcion's efforts and that the abundance of readings that earlier were regarded as Marcionite are simply Western readings – in a word: almost all those that are dogmatically neutral (even if they otherwise lack the attestation) – for it cannot be proved that Marcion intended also to provide a critical correction of the text of a purely stylistic kind, even though some passages could be interpreted thus", Harnack, 1924, 44; English translation by Steely and Bierma 1990, 30.

setting – both with the testimony itself and with the evidence provided by Marcion’s texts to the degree they can be reconstructed.

## I. THE PROBLEMATIC POSITION OF OUR SOURCES

Those who provide the testimony claiming that Marcion had redacted earlier texts to bring them into conformity with his views were actually in no position to know what they claimed to know. Irenaeus and Tertullian were men of a couple generations later than Marcion; Epiphanius much later still. None of them knew anything about the state of the relevant texts in Marcion’s time. Therefore their testimony on this question is wholly without merit. They simply assumed that the forms of Luke and Paul used in their church conformed to the original, and with that given concluded that Marcion’s version of these works had been altered. But the opposite relationship could just as well have been the case, and they would not have known it, and never considered it a possibility, given their commitments. Irenaeus faults Marcion for rejecting other gospels given authority in Irenaeus’s community without actually having any information on whether Marcion had ever been exposed to any of them. Similarly, Tertullian repeatedly says Marcion has rejected or expunged or removed things from “the gospel” that never were in any text of Luke; instead Tertullian means that Marcion has refused to accept teachings accepted in Tertullian’s community from such sources as Matthew and John.<sup>5</sup> In fact, no writer ever quotes Marcion saying anything about editing or correcting anything. Admittedly, this is an argument from silence. But given the polemical gold such a statement would provide to those on whom we rely for information on this question, and who were seeking to substantiate precisely this claim, the silence is rather deafening. Certainly Marcion interpreted the text in his own way, and certainly he faulted the version of “the gospel”, oral and perhaps written, that he found in use in Rome; but nothing explicit from his pen claims the glory of having “restored” the true text.

Several of Marcion’s critics make no note of any charge that he tampered with texts: these include both close contemporaries such as Justin or Rhodon, as well as writers of subsequent generations such as Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus. For them, the problem was his erroneous interpretation of Christian teachings.<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, in fact, is at times

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<sup>5</sup> This character of Tertullian’s critique is clarified expertly by D. Roth, “Matthean Texts and Tertullian’s Accusations in *Adversus Marcionem*”, *Journal of Theological Studies* (n.s.) 59 (2008) 580-597.

<sup>6</sup> Von Campenhausen notes that Polycarp’s charge that someone, perhaps Marcion, was “distorting” the words of Jesus referred to interpreting them, not altering a text of them, and this is “one further piece of evidence, how little ‘falsification of the text’ as such was regarded

quite frank that there is no objective position from which to judge the rival claims of having the authentic text of the gospel. To the degree that Tertullian comments directly on differences between his text and that of Marcion – which is quite rare – he evidently is simply looking at both texts and presuming that his is trustworthy. With that presupposition, he would necessarily conclude by the simple fact that Marcion’s text was shorter that Marcion had cut things out of the text. But Tertullian himself cites “inconsistencies” in Marcion’s editing: passages that were to be found in Marcion’s text even though they contradicted his interpretation of Christianity. The ease with which he (and to a lesser extent Epiphanius) succeeds in pointing out such passages, which show Jesus much more connected to the Jewish tradition than Marcion accepted, must give us pause.<sup>7</sup> Either Marcion was an incredibly inept editor, as Tertullian sometimes suggests, or he had not actually undertaken the editorial purge that Tertullian and Epiphanius presume he did.

The crucial reinforcement of the traditional image of Marcion as redactor, which has allowed it to withstand substantial contrary evidence and argument thus far, came with the compelling psychological and ideological portrait offered by Adolf Harnack. Harnack’s interpretive premise was that Marcion worked with a fixed idea that supplied the principles by which he excised passages from the text. “As to the *motives* that prompted the excisions and emendations, in most cases these are evident when one calls to mind Marcion’s chief doctrines”,<sup>8</sup> and “One can, without any difficulty, read these twelve self-contained motives” which Harnack derives from Marcion’s dogmas “in Marcion’s excisions and emendations”.<sup>9</sup> It is important to keep in mind that Harnack’s primary project was reconstructing a portrait of Marcion from very limited evidence. He was deeply motivated, therefore, to find in text variants additional information on the thinking of Marcion. In this way, Harnack’s principles of text analysis were wholly subordinated to his biographical, psychological interests.<sup>10</sup> Harnack’s work is based ultimately on the presumption that one can guess Marcion’s thinking,

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as the crucial offence” of Marcion in the first generation of reaction to him, Von Campenhausen 1972, 179 n.159.

<sup>7</sup> Denis Farkasfalvy remarks, “Marcion’s Scripture suits his purpose so poorly that it is hardly believable that its origins are adequately explained by reference to this purpose”, in W.R. Farmer - D. Farkasfalvy, *The Formation of the New Testament Canon: An Ecumenical Approach*, New York, Paulist, 1983, 101, yet offers no clear alternative perspective on the question.

<sup>8</sup> Harnack 1924, 64; English translation by Steely and Bierma, 1990, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Harnack 1924, 65; English translation by Steely and Bierma, 1990, 46.

<sup>10</sup> In the words of Von Campenhausen, “if there is one fundamental objection to be made to Harnack’s classic presentation it is this, that he all too quickly changes the dogmatic phenomenon that is Marcion into the picture of a particular man, and interprets it as a psychological expression of his personality and beliefs”, Von Campenhausen 1972, 148.

and this presumption has been generally accepted ever since.<sup>11</sup> On the perceived logic of Marcion's position, Harnack posits additional omissions on which our sources are silent, and in this way builds up an image of Marcion as a severe redactor of his sources well beyond anything explicitly attributed to him by any ancient witness. Even though there are passages lacking in Marcion's text for whose absence no rationale within his known thought can be made, as well as passages included in Marcion's text for which a strong rationale can be found in his ideology for their exclusion, Harnack dismisses such evidence as merely contradictory behavior on Marcion's part.<sup>12</sup> But what if we looked at things the other way around? Since, as both Tertullian and Epiphanius enjoy pointing out, Marcion had in his *Evangelion* many passages for which we can imagine reasons for him to cut them out, it may be no more than coincidence that we are able to imagine such reasons for passages he lacks.<sup>13</sup> The explanation for those textual absences may be entirely different.

We know that Marcion presented to those who heeded him an approved textual embodiment of "the Gospel and Apostle", along with a systematic interpretive exposition of how the faith embodied in these authentic texts was incompatible with the teachings of the Jewish scriptures. That is all we know. We do not have a single statement of Marcion on those passages of Luke and Paul he supposedly excised as corruptions. What few statements we do have from him involve attacks upon other texts, other trajectories of interpretation, other forms of Christian faith. The sources on which we rely, such as Tertullian and Epiphanius, are themselves speculating in the Harnackian mode when they surmise why a particular passage is lacking in Marcion's scripture compared to their own; they never have a direct remark from Marcion to cite on such matters – which is another way of saying that Harnack simply codifies and gives academic respectability to a tendentious tradition whose purpose was to secure the priority of one sectarian scripture over its chief rival.

To his credit, Harnack made three cautionary points. He acknowledged that many passages are uncertain because Tertullian or other witnesses pass over them in silence, and may simply have had nothing to critique in Marcion's handling of them.<sup>14</sup> He likewise conceded that

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<sup>11</sup> E.g., R.M. Grant, "Marcion and the Critical Method", in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare*, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier, 1984, 207-215; E.C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence*, London, SPCK, 1948, 42-43.

<sup>12</sup> Harnack, 44, n.1/E149, n.8.

<sup>13</sup> See J. Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1942; reprinted by AMS, 1980, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Harnack 1924, 44 (Steely and Bierma, 1990, 31), 52 (Steely and Bierma, 1990, 36), 65 n.1 (Steely and Bierma, 1990, 150 n. 21).

many passages were apparently in Marcion's text that work against his theology. Finally, and most significantly, Harnack himself admits, "No definite statements by Marcion exist concerning the grounds for proceeding as he does in his critique of individual passages from the Gospel or Apostle".<sup>15</sup> And just to clarify, the "critique of individual passages" to which Harnack refers is nothing stated, but their mere absence from Marcion's text, which Harnack assumes is due to some criticism of them on Marcion's part. For at least some working after Harnack, these three qualifications made by him are enough to call into question our claim to have an accurate grasp of Marcion's dogmatic principles when it comes to handling the biblical text. And in general confidence in what we think we know about Marcion has diminished rather than grown. To quote Von Campenhausen again, in accepting Harnack's portrait of Marcion as redactor, "we constantly forget that we know absolutely nothing directly... about the personal assumptions, character, and development of the man himself".<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, even though much of Harnack's reconstruction of Marcion has been questioned, his portrayal of him as an ideological redactor continues to hold sway, and blocks fresh appraisals of the evidence. A quote from D.L. Dungan is illustrative:

[I]f someone had no more than the text of Marcion's *Euangelion*, it would be very logical to resort to one of several possible source-hypotheses to explain why it both resembles Luke and Mark, yet lacks so much of the former and still has more sayings-material than the latter. One might be inclined to consider it a rather 'primitive' gospel, on the assumption that 'shorter is (usually) earlier'. But all such conjectures would be instantly dispelled by a single reading of Marcion's *Antitheses* as it became obvious that he was obsessed by a compulsion to rid the Church's Savior of every taint of 'Jewishness' and thus carved a Gospel suitable to his theological requirements out of the Gospel according to Luke!<sup>17</sup>

By juxtaposing Marcion's contrast of the message of Jesus to that of the Jewish tradition with the fact that the texts he canonized contain relatively less references to the Jewish tradition than their literary counterparts in the non-Marcionite canon, Dungan offers a plausible correlation. Yet what this proposed correlation lacks are two essential pieces of evidence that one might come away from Dungan's remarks

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<sup>15</sup> Harnack 1924, 64 n. 1 (English of Steely and Bierma 1990, 150 n. 19, slightly corrected according to Harnack's original German).

<sup>16</sup> Von Campenhausen 1972, 148.

<sup>17</sup> D.L. Dungan, "Reactionary Trends in the Gospel Producing Activity of the Early Church: Marcion, Tatian, Mark", in M. Sabbe (éd.), *L'Évangile selon Marc: Tradition et rédaction*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1971, 179-202, at 185.

thinking we have. We do not have any clear statement from Marcion in the surviving quotes from the *Antitheses* that he expurgated anything from his biblical texts, and neither do we find in those biblical texts any consistent pattern of excising Jewish elements. Dungan fails to consider two alternative possible correlations between Marcion's ideology and his biblical texts: (1) Marcion may have chose texts that already sufficiently accorded with his views, without requiring further redaction; or (2) Marcion may have developed his views on the basis those very texts in the form he subsequently canonized them. There are plenty of possible scenarios that might explain the differences between Marcion's texts and their canonical counterparts without accepting uncritically the notion that, as a "heretic", Marcion would edit them to fit his beliefs, rather than simply read his beliefs into already existing texts.

Since we in fact do not know for sure the origin of Marcion's biblical texts, nor do we have any first-hand information on which variants from the canonical texts are attributable to Marcion and which were already present before him, our only legitimate option is to investigate the texts in their own right as early second century witnesses to material canonized within the New Testament, first by Marcion and later, in alternative forms, by the emergent catholic church. This is not to accept uncritically Marcion's explanation for the differences between his version of Christian materials and those of his opponents. Rather, it is to reach the conclusion that Marcion's Bible must be examined separately from Marcion and Marcionism.

## II. THE PROBLEMATIC EVIDENCE OF MARCION'S GOSPEL

Our principal sources for the most part agree in identifying Marcion's gospel as a version of the same gospel found under the name of Luke in the later catholic canon (only Hippolytus refers to it as a version of Mark),<sup>18</sup> even though Marcion's book was not attributed to Luke, or to any particular author (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.2.3; 4.3.4-5; *Adamantius* 1.5). The earliest direct mention of the *Evangelion* is that of Irenaeus who, not insignificantly, is also our earliest witness to the existence of a Gospel of

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<sup>18</sup> In *Ref. Haer.* 7.18, Hippolytus alludes to "Mark" and "Paul" as Marcion's scriptural authorities. Since Hippolytus knows Irenaeus's *Adv. Haer.*, this divergence is all the more noteworthy. Hippolytus only cites three passages from the *Evangelion*, corresponding to Luke 3:1/4.31-33 (7.19), 6:43 (10.15), and 18:19 (7.19); but since all three citations occur in contexts that include their respective Marcionite interpretations, he is working either from Marcion's *Antitheses* or from other Marcionite sources, and not from the text of the *Evangelion* itself. Thus he may have had only a superficial acquaintance with the *Evangelion*, which in some of its features (such as lack of a birth story and substantial overlap in content) may have given the impression of being a version of Mark.

Luke. We know as much as we do about the text of Luke around the beginning of the third century only because Tertullian quotes so extensively from Marcion's *Evangelion*. It is noteworthy that both Marcion and his opponents agree on the Pauline connections of the gospel they shared.<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus goes on to indicate (*Adv. Haer.* 3.14.3) that the Marcionite gospel was shorter than the Gospel of Luke known to him, "for curtailing that (gospel) according to Luke... they boast in having the Gospel [in what remains]. In another place (1.27.2), he specifies that

he mutilates the Gospel which is according to Luke, removing all that is written respecting the generation of the Lord, and setting aside a great deal of the teaching of the Lord, in which the Lord is recorded as most clearly confessing that the maker of this universe is his Father.<sup>20</sup>

Tertullian similarly refers to Marcion's text as "adulterated" (*Adv. Marc.* 4.2.1) and "mutilated" (*Adv. Marc.* 4.2.4) compared to the text of Luke known to him, but does not bother to provide much information on the differences.<sup>21</sup> Epiphanius supplies the details for these charges a century and a half later, listing passages of varying length missing from Marcion's text when compared to that of canonical Luke, at least those that Epiphanius would have liked to cite against Marcion's views.

But when we undertake a detailed textual investigation,<sup>22</sup> we find the evidence usually cited for a systematic, dogmatic redaction of the

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<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus records a tradition, *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1, that Luke was "the attendant of Paul", who "recorded in a book the gospel which Paul had declared" (cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.2).

<sup>20</sup> It merits noting that (1) no passage lacking in Marcion's text but found in Luke happens to make this explicit identification of God and Creator, and (2) Marcion's text does identify God as governor and caretaker of the world, in contradiction to Marcion's view of God as a transcendent "stranger" to creation.

<sup>21</sup> Even though Tertullian says, "I pass on next to show how this gospel... is in places adulterated: and this shall form the basis of my order of approach" (*Adv. Marc.* 4.2.1), he does not in fact take this approach, and offers almost no comment throughout book 4 about differences between Marcion's *Evangelion* and catholic Luke. He opts instead to show how Marcion's ideas are contradicted by the text of his own gospel.

<sup>22</sup> Our ability to recover Marcion's texts in any detail has been called into question most forcefully by D.S. Williams, "Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel", *JBL* 108 [1989], 477-496, and generally the confidence of Harnack's "maximalist" reading has been challenged by (among others) U. Schmid, *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1995, and D. Roth, "Marcion's Gospel: Relevance, Contested Issues, and Reconstruction", *Expository Times* 121 (2010) 287-294. I agree that Harnack's approach is untenable. But I also find minimalist views about our ability to reconstruct Marcion's texts somewhat overstated. Both Tertullian and Epiphanius quite clearly had the texts in front of them, and each in different ways endeavored to pay close attention to what was and was not present in those texts. Many other sources supply valuable supporting evidence. While a complete reconstruction is out of the question, a partial one can be achieved based on those passages our sources quote as certainly present and those they note as certainly absent, on which there is no major disagreement in our sources. See J. BeDuhn, *The First New Testament: Marcion's Second Century Scriptural Canon*, Salem, Polebridge, 2013.

text from its canonical form into its Marcionite form to be problematic. Passages are missing from Marcion's text for no obvious ideological reason, and passages remain in his text that contradict his ideology. Tertullian himself expresses amazement that Marcion "left intact" so many passages whose obvious meaning and context are against Marcion's views. We do not need to pause over Tertullian's guesses as to how or why this happened – nor over more recent hypotheses. All alike presume something they have not proven – that Marcion edited the text at all. To illustrate this failure of the established paradigm of Marcion as redactor, we may consider two post-Harnack attempts to identify his redactional principles.

In an appendix to his justly celebrated, *The Letter and the Spirit*,<sup>23</sup> R. M. Grant sets out, against those who propose that Marcion possessed an "original gospel", to match differences between Marcion's *Evangelion* and Luke with Marcion's ideological stances. Examining only those passages that Tertullian and/or Epiphanius explicitly report as omitted,<sup>24</sup> he proposes that these can all be explained by five editorial principles. Yet, contrary to Grant, the case for material being consistently *omitted* according to these principles can be shown to be untenable in light of what these very same sources report about passages *included* in Marcion's *Evangelion*. According to Grant:

1. Marcion omitted references to the Father as Creator (Luke 12.6-7) or as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Luke 20.37-38).

But in the *Evangelion* God is explicitly described as the caretaker of creation in the case of the ravens and lilies, and indeed of all creation (12:24-31); a woman is entitled to healing as a "daughter of Abraham" (13:16); and Lazarus is in a positive state in "Abraham's bosom" (16:22ff). And if the principle proposed here by Grant implicitly includes the God of Moses, one would need to account for the multiple positive endorsements of the Law by Jesus in the *Evangelion* (5:14; 10:25-28; 17:14; 18:20-22; 22:8; 22:15).

2. Marcion omitted references to prophecy or to the Old Testament generally (3.1b - 4.30; 11.29b-32; 11.49-51; 17.10b; 18.31-33).

But the *Evangelion* cites Old Testament passages multiple times: 4:27; 5:14; 6:3; 7:27; 9:30-33; 9:54; 10:24-28; 11:47-48; 17:14; 17:26-32; 18:20-22; 18:38; 20:41-44; 22:8; 22:15. As can be seen from this

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<sup>23</sup> R.M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit*, London, SPCK, 1957, Appendix I, 115-119.

<sup>24</sup> Grant falls short of this methodological principle, listing two additional passages, stating "We assume that 24.27 and 24.44-46 were deleted since Marcion certainly removed 18.31-33".

list in comparison with Grant's list of omitted passages, the *Evangelion* contains three-quarters of the Old Testament references found in Luke. Moreover, both Elisha and John the Baptist are affirmed as exemplary prophetic figures in continuity with both Jewish religious prophecy and Jesus.

3. Marcion omitted references implying concern for the Jews (13.1-9; 15.11-32; 19.9b; 19.29-46; 20.9-18; 21.21-24; 22.16).

But the *Evangelion* places Jesus' preaching activity in the synagogue even more than does Luke, and, as mentioned above, Jesus states the worthiness of a woman to be healed because she is a "daughter of Abraham" (13:16).

4. Marcion omitted references implying resurrection of the body (12.28; 21.18) or immediate entrance into Paradise (23.43).

This is a problematic category, since it combines two contradictory ideas present in the text of Luke, and only the former is known to be contrary to Marcion's teaching. Yet the *Evangelion* describes Jesus' resurrection in clearly physical terms, and contains references to the future resurrection of humans generally.

5. Marcion omitted the story of the human birth and growth of Jesus (1.1 - 2.52) and mention of his mother and brothers (8.19).

The mother and brothers of Jesus are mentioned in 8.20, however; and insisting that the absence of a birth story must be explained by Marcion's ideology seems somewhat high handed given that both Mark and John escape suspicion of tendentious omission while likewise lacking such a story. Thus, for every redactional principle Grant identifies as standing behind an omission, at least one and often more passages are known to have been found in the *Evangelion* that violates that principle.

In a more recent effort along the same lines as that of Grant, Sebastian Moll seeks to explain the absence from Marcion's *Evangelion* of a number of passages by similar editorial rules.<sup>25</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will consider only two such rules Moll proposes. According to the Marcionite position that "Christ is not the Son of the Old Testament God", Moll contends, any connection or continuity between Jesus and the prior Jewish tradition should have been excised by Marcion. Under this explanatory principle, Moll seeks to explain the omission of material about John the Baptist as Jesus' forerunner in Luke 1-3. But John

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<sup>25</sup> S. Moll, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2010.

the Baptist does appear as forerunner (even with quotation of the Old Testament to that fact) in the *Evangelion* (Luke 7:17-28). Moll notes the absence of some material referring to Old Testament prophets (11:49-51, 13:31-35), but fails to note places where they are mentioned (4:27; 10:24, 11:47-48). This rule also applies for Moll to the absence of passages that portray God as judging and threatening (such as 13:1-9); but other such passages seem to have slipped by this rule (12:1-10, 12:16-20, 12:46-49, 13:27-28). The same rule also extends for Moll to any reference to God caring for material creation; this accounts, he thinks, for the omission of Luke 12:6-7, 12:28, and 21:18. But Moll takes no notice of the presence in the *Evangelion* of the lesson of the ravens and lilies (12:24-28), extending even to the explicit promise that God will provide material well-being (12:29-31).

Another of Marcion's supposed editorial rules proposed by Moll is, "The Old Testament or its figures are no authority for Christ"; yet Abraham (13:16, 16:22ff.), Moses (5:14, 9:30-33), Elijah (9:30-33, 9:54), Elisha (4:27), and David (6:3, 18:38, 20:41-44) all find mention in the *Evangelion*, typically in exemplary or honorable roles, contrary to Moll's assumption that they are not handled positively. The episodes of Noah and Lot are mentioned as models of tribulation to come (17:26-32). Jewish scriptures are quoted authoritatively (e.g., 7:27, 20:42), and Jesus directly affirms prescriptions of the Law on multiple occasions (5:14, 10:25-28, 17:14, 18:20-22, 22:8, 22:15). Thus Moll's repeated assertion that Marcion's biblical texts were "completely freed from any positive reference to the Old Testament" (e.g., 160) is a formula the author has not bothered to check against the accessible details about the content of those texts. In a further example, Moll cites the absence from the *Evangelion* of Luke 19:9b from the episode of Zacchaeus, "because this man, too, is a son of Abraham" while failing to note the presence of 13:16, "this person, who is a daughter of Abraham". It must be noted, moreover, that Tertullian in his remarks on the former passage himself assumes that Zacchaeus was a Gentile, suggesting that his own text of Luke also lacked 19:9b. Thus, in two efforts a half-century apart, we see similar sweeping assertions that clear and consistent redactional motives can be identified behind the differences between Marcion's *Evangelion* and Luke, and in neither case can these assertions be sustained by the evidence.

The same close textual comparison between the *Evangelion* and Luke that undercuts the myth of Marcion as redactor also provides the evidence from which we may propose an alternative understanding of the origin of Marcion's text. This evidence concerns the relative presence or absence of harmonizations in the texts of the *Evangelion* and Luke. Both the *Evangelion* and Luke at times show harmonized texts in comparison to the other. For instance, the notorious "Minor Agree-

ments” between Luke and Matthew against Mark are almost entirely lacking from the reconstructible text of the *Evangelion*; but the latter contains other, novel “minor agreements” with Matthew in comparison to Luke. What are we to make of this evidence?

The working assumption of modern text criticism is that, in the case of variant readings of a gospel passage in the manuscripts, where one reading agrees with another gospel and the other reading shows a more independent form, the latter is to be preferred as original, and the former considered a harmonization. Harmonizations are, by definition, secondary developments of the transmission of the text. Now it is extremely unlikely that any manuscript of Luke in circulation in the second century was as harmonization free as the modern eclectic critical text. But it is noteworthy that even the accepted eclectic text has readings that, in comparison to Marcion’s, appear harmonized to other gospels, but have simply passed unnoticed as harmonizations because a more independent reading is not attested apart from Marcion. By the tenets of modern text criticism, then, Marcion’s less harmonized readings should be accepted and preferred as more original, especially considering that he is our earliest witness to the text by some fifty to one hundred years. It would be hard to explain how Marcion managed to produce unharmonized passages from a Lukan exemplar that, to the best of our knowledge, contained harmonized readings.

Yet Marcion’s text itself is harmonized to Matthew or Mark in a number of instances where modern textual criticism has been able to identify a more independent original reading for Luke, or even where no other witness to Luke has the harmonization. In other words, Marcion’s Gospel and the Gospel of Luke often switch roles in relation to harmonization to the other gospels; neither text has consistent priority over the other. This suggests that both texts were equally and independently subjected to harmonizing influence. Now this observation could simply be taken – in accordance with the traditional view – as indicating that the manuscript of Luke from which Marcion worked in crafting his edition already had undergone some harmonizing influence not shared by other lines of transmission. But in fact, the evidence suggests a more complicated scenario.

The testimony of Tertullian and Epiphanius to Marcion’s *Evangelion*, separated by a century and a half, conflicts in several verses where harmonization is a factor, showing that Marcion’s text, like canonical Luke, was influenced differently by harmonizing influence in different lines of transmission. But this should not be, based upon the traditional view that Marcion issued a definitive edition of the text from which all copies used in the Marcionite church derived. Even if we assume that some harmonizations were present in the exemplar from which Marcion made his edition, from the previous transmission of the text

in a context where other gospels were read, we should not find any new harmonizations introduced in some lines of transmission and not others within the Marcionite church after Marcion, where they would not be exposed to other gospels. If Marcion indeed issued a definitive edition of his gospel by making significant editorial changes to a manuscript of Luke, any harmonization that had occurred in the transmission of the gospel up to that point would have been frozen in his edition. In the generally accepted scenario, therefore, even with other kinds of textual variation due to conscious or unconscious scribal changes, we should not see any variation in harmonization between the text known to Tertullian in the third century, and that known to Epiphanius in the fourth century. But we do.

Even the extremely conservative core text-base established by David S. Williams – consisting of a mere twenty-three passages in whose exact wording in Marcion’s text he feels confident – shows both the failure of the model of ideological redaction and the same surprising inconsistency in harmonization. And it is largely for these reasons that Williams himself rejects Marcion’s dependence on canonical Luke.<sup>26</sup> The evidence therefore suggests that Tertullian and Epiphanius were dealing with manuscripts of Marcion’s gospel that had undergone different degrees of harmonization in the copying process. But there could be no such harmonizing copying after the creation of the Marcionite Bible, circa 144 CE, since after that decisive move, Marcionite copyists would not be exposed to the other gospels, and the circumstances in which harmonization occurs would not have been present.

Since any harmonization must have occurred prior to Marcion, and since individual harmonizations apparently differed between manuscripts of the *Evangelion*, the best explanatory scenario would be that Marcion did not, in fact, produce a definitive edition of his gospel, but rather took up a gospel already in circulation in multiple copies that had seen varying degrees of harmonization to other gospels in their transmission. The process of canonizing this gospel for the Marcionite community therefore took the same form as the later canonization of Luke in the catholic tradition, namely, through the adoption of an existing text, circulating in multiple copies with varying lines of transmission, and sanctioning its use and further copying, with only limited attention to bringing variant readings into conformity.<sup>27</sup> This

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<sup>26</sup> Williams 1989, 478.

<sup>27</sup> Less plausible alternative explanations of the varying harmonization found in the *Evangelion* would include (1) the possibility that Marcion and his associates worked in assembly-line fashion with multiple copies of Luke, striking out material to be omitted without bringing the rest into conformity between manuscripts, or (2) Tertullian and Epiphanius themselves introduce the harmonizations into their quotes of Marcion’s text. The first has little to commend it; it would be far easier for Marcion to produce a single exemplar, and have copies made from it.

is the scenario that best accounts for the evidence, and it supports the pre-Marcionite, independent existence of what would become identified as “Marcion’s” gospel.

One might attempt to make the case from this evidence that Marcion, in fact, preserves the original text of the gospel, and that canonical Luke is a later post-Marcion expansion, shaped at least in part by an effort to insulate the text from Marcionite interpretation. The existence in canonical Luke of unharmonized readings in passages where some manuscripts of the *Evangelion* apparently had harmonized ones does not preclude this if, as I have argued, Marcion simply plucked some manuscripts from the broader circulation of this proto-Lukan text, while the proposed later redactor of Luke worked from a manuscript with a different set of harmonizations. This position, long relegated to the radical fringe of biblical studies, has recently been taken up by Tyson<sup>28</sup> and Klinghardt,<sup>29</sup> and is consistent with often noted internal evidence that canonical Luke and Acts belong rather to the early second century than the late first.

Or we might settle on an independent derivation of Marcion’s text and canonical Luke from a common proto-gospel – an idea first proposed by the founder of canon criticism himself, Johann Semler, in 1783.<sup>30</sup> Semler identified Marcion’s text as a product of the same age of gospel formation to which the canonical gospels could be ascribed, and as one among the larger set of gospels from which the Church selected the contents of its later canon.<sup>31</sup> Many of the leading biblical scholars of the time quickly agreed.<sup>32</sup> Others strongly upheld the traditional account of Marcion as redactor of catholic Luke, and their reaction largely carried the day. Still others, as I just mentioned, pushed beyond Semler to argue for the priority of Marcion’s text, and catholic Luke as the later

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The second is belied by the evident care both writers take to cite the Marcionite text as it stands and make their case on its basis, as demonstrated by the large number of variant readings they reproduce for Marcion’s text which have been discovered in other manuscripts of Luke, and so cannot plausibly be ascribed to their own inaccuracies in quoting.

<sup>28</sup> J.B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts. A Defining Struggle*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> M. Klinghardt, “Plädoyer für die Wiederaufnahme eines alten Falles”, NTS 52 (2006) 484-513.

<sup>30</sup> *Vorrede zu Townson’s Abhandlung über die vier Evangelien*, 1783.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Corrodi, *Versuch einer Beleuchtung d. Gesch. des jüd. und christl. Bibel-kanons*, 1792, II, 158ff.; Löffler, *Marcionem Pauli Epist. et Lucae Evang. adulterasse dubitatur*, 1794, I, 180-218; Bolten, *Bericht des Lucas von Jesu dem Messia*, 1796, 29-30; J.J. Griesbach, *Curae in hist. textus epist. Pauli*, 1799, 124ff.; J.E.C. Schmidt, *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung ins Neue Testament*, Giesen, 1804; J.G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Leipzig, 1804, I, 76ff.; Bertholdt, *Einleitung alte und neue Test.*, 1813, III, 1293ff.; D. Schultz, *Theol. Stud. und Krit.*, 1829, 586-595; F. Schleiermacher, *Einleitung ins neue Testament* (Sämtliche Werke 1.8), Berlin, 1845, 64-65, 197-198, 214-215.

redaction.<sup>33</sup> Karl Reinhold Köstlin was the principal sustainer of Semler's original thesis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>34</sup> and this position was taken up in the twentieth century by Knox,<sup>35</sup> and later by Townsend.<sup>36</sup>

I think a form of this middle position best accounts for the evidence in the text of Marcion's *Evangelion*. I find the claim of sharply ideological motives behind an expansion of the text known to Marcion into canonical Luke to be as weakly supported as the long-standing assumption of such motives behind a supposed cutting down of the text by Marcion. In general, the tendency to explain every variation among early Christians in terms of a battle of ideologies, in my judgment, involves a characteristically academic narrowing of the processes and forces involved in religious communities. We need to attend more closely to non-ideological divergences involving changes in a religious movement's ethnic, cultural, and social location, as well as the practical dimensions of proselytism and community formation, particularly during the fluid period of one religion's emergence from another.

### III. MARCION AS RECEIVER OF AN EXISTING GOSPEL

If we take seriously the possibility that Marcion found a text already substantially in the shape in which he disseminated it, our next task would be to identify a setting in which a text such as the *Evangelion* would have been circulating for Marcion to encounter it. To this end, we need to re-

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<sup>33</sup> J.E.C. Schmidt, "Über das ächte Evang. des Lucas, eine Vermuthung" in Henke (ed.), *Magazin für Religions-philos.*, III, 1796, 468ff., 482-483, 507-508, later pulling back to the Semler thesis; J.G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, I, 1820, 43-84, pushing beyond his original espousal of the Semler thesis; A. Schwegler, *Theologische Jahrbücher*, 1843, 575-590, and *Das nachapostolische Zeitalter in den Hauptmomenten seiner Entwicklung*, Tübingen, 1846, 260ff.; A. Ritschl, *Das Evangelium Marcion's und das kanonische Evangelium des Lucas*, Tübingen, 1846, later won over to the traditional view; F.C. Baur, *Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien*, Tübingen, 1847, 393ff., later moderating his views to a position very close to that of Knox in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, allowing for some redactional cuts by Marcion and some post-Marcion expansion of canonical Luke of a common proto-gospel.

<sup>34</sup> *Der Ursprung der synoptischen Evangelien*, 1853, 303ff.

<sup>35</sup> J. Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1942. Knox thinks it likely that both Marcion and the redactor of Luke made changes to their common source, but in different directions, with Marcion's gospel produced mostly by deletions and catholic Luke the result mostly of additions. He maintains that some of the passages of canonical Luke absent from Marcion's gospel were probably cut out by Marcion, because they are both deeply rooted in the synoptic tradition and contrary to Marcion's theology (e.g., baptism, temptation), while other absent passages might turn out to be "non-interpolations" where Marcion has the more original text (85-86).

<sup>36</sup> J.T. Townsend, "The Date of Luke-Acts", in C. Talbert (ed.), *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar*, New York, Crossroad, 1984, 47-62. Although Townsend characterizes himself as sharing Knox's position, his emphasis on anti-Marcionite motives in the redaction of Luke-Acts places him quite close to the views of Tyson and Klinghardt.

construe Marcion as less of a *de novo* innovator and more of a representative of a particular wing of the still loosely defined Christian movement. Perhaps the massive success of the Marcionite mission reflects not the compelling genius of Marcion, but the validity of his contention that he represented an already existing Christianity at significant odds with the one he encountered in Rome. Marcion may hold his place in Christian history more for being in the right place at the right time, and his church may have been simply the solidification of a community identity around a set of existing local Christian groups just beginning to acquire a sense of being a distinct religion.

Let us revisit one of our key sources on what Marcion actually had to say about his gospel, Tertullian:

I say that mine is true: Marcion makes that claim for his. I say that Marcion's is falsified: Marcion says the same of mine. Who shall decide between us? Only such a reckoning of dates, as will assume that authority belongs to that which is found to be older, and will prejudice as corrupt that which is convicted of having come later... If that gospel which among us is ascribed to Luke... is the same that Marcion by his *Antitheses* accuses of having been falsified (*interpolatum*) by the upholders of Judaism with a view to its being so combined in one body with the law and prophets that they might also pretend that Christ had that origin, evidently he could only have brought accusation against something he had found there already (*Adv. Marc.* 4.4.1, 4).

Of course Tertullian's attempt to take Marcion's complaint against an "interpolated" gospel as evidence that the Roman version of Luke has historical priority is as tortured and counter-logical as anything we have from the pen of this master of polemic. If a comparison of literary gospel texts is actually the subject of Marcion's criticism (a big if, as we shall see), then logically he must have had a rival text of his own on comparison to which the Roman text appeared interpolated. Let's follow through on this scenario a bit, before turning to doubts that Marcion was talking about literary gospel texts at all.

If we take the information as Tertullian himself seems to have understood it, then Marcion came to Rome in possession of a gospel substantially like the one he incorporated into his canon, but found the expanded canonical Luke already in circulation in Rome. Hence his charge that the text had been corrupted was not a supposition on his part, based on a fixed idea, but an observation of differing texts that led, in turn, to his belief that someone had been at work corrupting the text – a mirror image of the conclusion that would be reached by Irenaeus and Tertullian on their side on the basis of a similar comparison of their text of Luke to Marcion's gospel. Given everything we know about the fluidity of Christian literature in the second century, and the fact that many texts were being

redacted and re-redacted, generally in the direction of expansion, who could blame Marcion for assuming that texts sharing substantial content with those known to him, but considerably longer, had been the victims of interpolation, and that the shorter text would necessarily be the more original?

But notice that Tertullian himself is only hypothesizing that Marcion was talking about Luke in attacking “the gospel” he found at Rome. He evidently had no direct statement or explicit comparison from Marcion that made such an identification clear.<sup>37</sup> Not only are we lacking any clear evidence that Marcion was speaking about or even had ever seen canonical Luke, but we must be cautious about assuming that in speaking about an “interpolated gospel” he was talking about a written text at all. It is well known that the term *euangelion* generally referred to the message and teaching of the Christian religion, rather than to a written text, until well after Marcion’s time. In fact, Marcion may have been instrumental in redirecting the term towards a literary reference by his decision to title the account of Jesus in his Bible *Evangelion*. Therefore, avoiding anachronism, the most likely meaning of the charge that “the gospel has been interpolated” in Marcion’s own time would have been that the message of Christianity had been corrupted. Note again the wording of what looks to be a more or less verbatim remark of Marcion in the *Antitheses*: “Marcion in his *Antitheses* accuses the gospel of ‘having been interpolated by the upholders of Judaism with a view to its being so combined in one body with the law and prophets that they might also pretend that Christ had that origin’”.

A second passage furthers the impression that Marcion was speaking of the teachings of Christ, but that Tertullian took it to mean a text.

If however the gospel which the apostles compared with Paul’s was beyond reproach... and yet false apostles have falsified (*interpolaverunt*) the truth of theirs, and from them ours are derived, what can have become of that genuine apostles’ document which has suffered from adulterators – that document which gave light to Paul, and from him to Luke?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Harnack’s assertion that, “Never and nowhere has M(arcion) asserted that he discovered anew the unfalsified gospel in an exemplar, but always only that he has *restored it again*” (Harnack 1924, 250\*), can only be characterized as a figment of Harnack’s imagination; and it does not help his case that he tendentially edits the key passage. Tertullian says, “If that gospel which among us is ascribed to Luke... is the same that Marcion by his *Antitheses* accuses of having been falsified by the upholders of Judaism with a view to its being so combined in one body with the law and prophets...” (Si enim id euangelium quod Lucae refertur penes nos... ipsum est quod Marcion per *Antitheses* suas arguit ut interpolatum a protectoribus Iudaismi ad concorporationem legis et prophetarum). Harnack quotes this without the conditional: “the Gospel, said to be Luke’s which is current amongst us..., Marcion argues in his *Antitheses* was *interpolated by the defenders of Judaism*, for the purpose of a conglomeration with it of the law and the prophets” (Harnack 1924, 41 n. 4; English translation by Steely and Bierma 1990, 149 n. 6).

<sup>38</sup> *Adv. Marc.* 4.3.4 (Evans translation, slightly emended for clarity).

Here Tertullian appears to be paraphrasing a comment by Marcion on Gal. 2.1-10, where Paul writes of comparing his “gospel” to that of the apostles in Jerusalem. The distinctively Marcionite twist on this passage that appears to authenticate its derivation from the *Antitheses* is that it appears to be the Jerusalem apostles whose gospel must be checked against Paul’s, rather than vice versa as Paul actually says. Based on this passage, Marcion apparently absolved the original apostles of any responsibility for the subsequent falsification of the gospel, which was the work of the pseudo-apostles mentioned by Paul. But we must be suspicious about Tertullian’s changes and additions to Marcion’s wording to score his point, including probably the shift to the plural, his treatment of the “gospel” compared between Paul and the apostles as a document (*instrumentum*), and his introduction of “Luke”. A number of modern researchers have found in this passage evidence for a fundamental misprision by Marcion of what Paul meant by the “gospel” he checked in Jerusalem. That remains possible; but the anachronistic reading may in fact be Tertullian’s. Even Tertullian shifts back and forth between the conceptual and textual reference of “gospel”.<sup>39</sup> In assuming that Marcion’s remarks referred to differing texts of his and the Roman church’s gospel books, Tertullian shows the same tendency towards anachronistic pictures of Marcion’s situation that we see in his general handling of his opponent.

So let us imagine for a moment a Marcion who is less of an innovator, one who is more a receiver and transmitter of both texts and a form of Christianity that preceded him, but who then perhaps firms up the boundaries of both in confrontation with a more sharply differentiated other. Once we do not assume ideological motives behind the differences between “Marcion’s” gospel and canonical Luke, it becomes quite difficult to find any consistent ideological shift in either direction. Shifts in emphasis, in assumed audience, in degree of intertextuality with other sources there may be. But the core themes and concepts persist. We might propose, then, a simple scenario of two editions stemming from the same author, or at least the same community. Copies of the original edition are made and go into limited circulation somewhere in the eastern Roman empire, probably in Anatolia and the Aegean region. At some later point, it is reissued in a new edition, whose circulation eventually follows different channels than the first. The most likely form taken by this new edition would be an expansion of the original narrative; that would be best in keeping with the typical tendencies of text revision at

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<sup>39</sup> Such as when he accuses Marcion of excluding parts of the “gospel”, and proceeds to cite material from Matthew – already correctly understood as a generic use of *euangelion* and not informative on text critical questions by G. Volkmar, *Das Evangelium Marcions*, Leipzig, 1852, 4 n. 4.

the time, but we need not insist on it. We could offer several typical reasons why an already issued text is revised: newly acquired information, the need to address new issues, corrections of errors or of passages prone to misconstrual, new developments of ideas, etc. But as often happens in such cases of new editions of texts, copies of the original edition survived in some places, and so it could have been that copies of one of the editions came into Marcion's hands prior to the mid-130s CE, while copies of the other edition followed a different track of circulation.<sup>40</sup>

We need a scenario, however, that not only helps to explain this text in itself, but also permits us to locate Marcion as its receiver, transmitter, and interpreter. What circumstances in the early Christian movement might provide the context for the issuance of two different editions of the gospel from the same author or community within a short span of time, or even simultaneously, that takes those two editions on widely separated paths of dissemination? I would propose a very pragmatic situation that provides our answer: the need or desire to produce one version of a gospel for the Jewish Christian mission in which intertextuality with the Jewish scriptural tradition would be at a premium, and another version for the Gentile Christian mission in which such intertextuality would burden rather than support the text's serviceability. This would explain why Marcion's *Evangelion*, while far from devoid of reference to Jewish scripture and religious themes, possesses nonetheless relatively less of such material.

Analogous editorial projects can be cited. Josephus, an author roughly contemporary with our two gospels, issued two version of his account of the Jewish War, one for Jews and one for Hellenes. Ulfilas edited the biblical text with missionary work among the Goths in mind. Further afield we might think of the handling of Buddhist texts by missionaries bringing the religion to China, or the more recent selective editing of Hindu or Buddhist literature for European and American consumption. The pragmatics of comprehension, effectiveness, and appeal control these projects, rather than ideological motives.

Wherever one comes down on the much debated issue of the "God-fearers"<sup>41</sup> the fact remains that the Christian movement early on found

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<sup>40</sup> Tertullian himself remarks on the difficulty of replacing earlier editions of his *Adv. Marc.* with the new and significantly expanded versions he composed later in life. Augustine of Hippo had the same problem with some of his books. It was a common predicament of literary culture for authors who revised their opinions, developed their arguments, and enjoyed long, productive lives. In this light, the addition of more quotes elucidating one's views, of more explanatory prose illustrations of key points, and of narrative sections covering periods left out of the initial story, are typical of "second editions" in ancient literature, and these are exactly the sort of things found in canonical Luke-Acts that are lacking in Marcion's Gospel.

<sup>41</sup> See A. T. Kraabel, "The Disappearance of the 'God-Fearers'", *Numen* 28 (1981) 113-126; J. Reynolds - R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias*, Cambridge, Cambridge Philological Society, 1987.

a non-Jewish audience as well as a Jewish one, and developed a dual mission addressed to these two distinct audiences. This led in turn to a process of emergence of Christian communities apart from the Jewish synagogue at different paces in different locations. It is against this background that I would trace a line that leads from the issuance of a gospel text in two versions to the sort of community from which Marcion came. The very passage in Galatians 2 to which Marcion ascribed such importance already implies the formation of a dual mission taking distinct forms, whose ongoing unity was a matter of finesse that Paul already saw unraveling. The events of 66-71, 115-117, and 132-135 CE, and the conditions that followed in each instance, would have forced the issue in many Christian communities, with differing outcomes. I think it is quite reasonable to see Marcion personally in the context of the last of these crises; but I think it equally plausible that he came out of a community already out of touch with Jewish Christianity – a vanguard community of a process of emergence not yet underway everywhere.

Researchers into the origins of Luke have found indications within its text that it was composed in a deeply Hellenized, urban environment, in Greece or neighboring Anatolia, and this puts its origin very close to Marcion's native soil. It would not be a matter of Marcion "choosing" Luke as his gospel, therefore – a subject often repeated in discussion of Marcion that depends on an anachronistic view of the literary environment of late first century Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Rather, in the circumstances of early second century Pontus, the gospel Marcion adopted may have been the only one known, at least in the circles familiar to Marcion.<sup>43</sup> While several Christian writers of Marcion's time laid claim to the Jewish scriptures as a foundation of Christianity, and depicted the latter as a continuation of the Jewish religious tradition (albeit in various ways reformed or corrected), for others of this period Christianity already stood effectively on its own independent footing.

Ignatius, for instance, apparently was involved in debates with fellow Christians about the trustworthy foundations of the faith. His opponents refused to believe anything not explicitly supported by the *archeiois*, the Jewish scriptures,<sup>44</sup> while Ignatius embraced the inde-

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<sup>42</sup> This question uncritically follows an unsubstantiated premise of Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.2.4: "For out of those authors whom we possess, Marcion is seen to have chosen Luke as the one to mutilate."

<sup>43</sup> Harnack himself remarks: "The first Gospel to reach Pontus probably was the Gospel of Luke; Marcion would have been familiar with it before any others, if indeed it was not for some years his only gospel in his Pontic homeland. So he may have clung to the gospel book which he had first come to know" (Harnack, 42; English tr. 29). Yet remarkably, Harnack does not follow through on this picture, and give Marcion the benefit of the doubt as the faithful transmitter of a text he had received.

<sup>44</sup> This reading of the issue was proposed by William Schoedel, "Ignatius and the Archives", *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978) 97-106, and is embraced by F.F. Bruce, "Some Thoughts

pendent authority of “the gospel” the oral instruction and interpretive tradition of the Christian communities (*Philadelphians* 8.2).<sup>45</sup> “For Ignatius” William Schoedel observes, “the teachings and myths of Judaism are ‘old’ (cf. *Mag.* 9.1; 10.2) – a term that he uses to describe what is opposed to God (cf. *Eph.* 19.3). ‘Judaism’, then, is not granted even a historically limited role in the unfolding of God’s plan”.<sup>46</sup> Another near contemporary of Marcion, Aristides, divides humanity (in the most likely restoration of the original text) into three religious orientations: polytheism, Judaism, and Christianity, of which only the latter worships the one true God directly and correctly. While affirming the identity of the Jewish and Christian God, Aristides dismisses the Jews as misguided into worship of God’s own cosmos-managing servants.

But it is particularly the *Ad Diognetum* that goes even further in its dismissal of the relevance of the Jewish tradition, unqualified by any claim that Christianity is a truer Judaism, and in its repeated emphasis on the newness of Christianity (as opposed to the more typical claim that it was something ordained from of old).<sup>47</sup> According to the author, no one had any knowledge of God before the coming of Christ (8:1), and God held back his “own wise counsel as a well-guarded mystery” (8:10).<sup>48</sup> The author concedes that the one God is the creator, and that the Jews worship this God, but they misunderstand his character. So while the *Ad Diognetum* does not take the step (which Marcion did)

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on the Beginning of the New Testament Canon”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65.2 (1983) 37-60, at 41.

<sup>45</sup> Ignatius specifies that by “gospel” he means Christ’s death, resurrection, and the faith he taught. Von Campenhausen notes that, “despite the strenuous theological controversy both parties agree in affirming the fundamental character of the biblical ‘documents’, and neither knows of any canon other than the holy ‘archives’ of the past to put alongside of the oral preaching”, Von Campenhausen, 1972, 73.

<sup>46</sup> W.R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985, 119.

<sup>47</sup> It needs to be noted that only chapters 1-10 of what is often published as the *Ad Diognetum* actually belongs to the treatise in question. The work survives in a single manuscript, with a break clearly indicated at the end of chapter 10. The additional material that follows, and that is usually published as chapters 11 and 12, does not share the vocabulary and thought-world of the rest, and has been added from elsewhere as a supplement. C. Nielsen, “The Epistle to Diognetus: Its Date and Relationship to Marcion”, *Anglican Theological Review* 52 (1970), 77-91, contends that the additional material represents an adaptation of the original to suit the catholic position after the appearance of Marcion. The “Law and Prophets” suddenly appear as scripture in this last section, along with repeated references to “the apostles” and one to “the gospels” in the plural (11:6) which, if dated as early as the rest of the treatise, would make it the earliest known such reference. This should be contrasted to the extensive arguments against the Jews in chapters 1-10, all made without a single quotation of the Old Testament, that is, without any effort to make the usual appropriation of Jewish Scriptures against their former possessors. See also B. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers II*, (Loeb Classical Library 25), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003, 124. But since the manuscript is late and still distinguishes the first ten chapters from the later, the combination is perhaps to be attributed to a scribe copying what he saw as related material from different sources, and not as a formal re-edition of the original work.

<sup>48</sup> See Nielsen 1970, 85.

of distinguishing between the creator God of the Jews and the higher God of the Christians, the Jewish depiction of God comes in for sharp criticism as unworthy of Christ's Father. Moreover, nature in no way serves to direct attention to its ultimate creator; God conceals all until revealing it exclusively to his Son. All other faiths, both Greek and Jewish, are human doctrines (5:3) and earthly inventions (7:1). God revealed his true character, his inherent goodness and power to save, only at the end of time (9:1-2).<sup>49</sup> On the basis of this analysis, Nielsen concludes:

The process of dissociating Christianity from Judaism was already well under way within certain circles in Asia Minor before Marcion. Marcion pushed the process to its bitter end, but he really did not have very far to go!<sup>50</sup>

The unknown author of the *Ad Diognetum*, therefore, would appear to represent a strand of Christianity that has severed virtually all connections with the Jewish tradition, even as a useable heritage. If we do not consider this text to be itself Marcionite, then it bears witness to a religious environment from which Marcion and his gospel may have come.

Similarly, if Nils Dahl is correct that the original set of seven Prologues to the Letters of Paul are *not* Marcionite in origin, although of the second century, then they would be a further witness to a strand of Christianity at this time sharply separated from its Jewish roots and deeply concerned about too close of an association with Judaism. The Prologue to Paul's Letter to the Romans goes so far as to say the Christian community there had been led astray "into the Law and Prophets". In the colors of stark opposition between the Christian message and the Judaism from which it was emerging, this characterization fits well the condition of Christianity in Rome in the first half of the second century, where we find considerably more discomfort with Paul than with the Jewish heritage of the faith. From the evidence provided by such texts as the letter of Clement to Corinth and Justin Martyr, Christianity in Rome was deeply rooted in its claim on the Jewish tradition and, when it did not outright reject Paul,<sup>51</sup> it relegated him to a very minor place in

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<sup>49</sup> This dramatic act of salvation evokes from the author of the *Ad Diognetum* the exclamation "O unfathomable work of God! O blessings beyond all expectation!" which Nielsen notes is startlingly close to the opening lines of Marcion's *Antitheses*, Nielsen 1970, 87.

<sup>50</sup> Nielsen 1970, 90-91.

<sup>51</sup> Justin does not quote or mention Paul at all in his extensive literary output (nor, for that matter, does Hermas). Clement gives him perfunctory recognition as the founder of the Corinthian church to which he addresses his letter. Hegesippus, a Jewish Christian with close ties to the leadership in Rome in the latter half of the second century, directly rejects Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 2.9 as a false understanding of the faith (Von Campenhausen 1972, 178).

Christian thought.<sup>52</sup> As we have seen, the continuing close connection to Judaism characteristic of Roman Christianity reflected only one strand of the faith at the time, while individuals and whole communities in other locations had effectively reduced Judaism to the ranks of paganism as another inadequate spiritual path in light of the radical newness of Christ's message.

According to our sources, the split between Marcion and Roman Christian leaders came over differences of interpretation of passages found in Marcion's *Evangelion* (as well as in the Roman church's *Matthew*). The good and bad trees, the old and new wineskins, of which Jesus spoke set in place for Marcion a sharp distinction between old and new world orders that he did not see fully acknowledged by the Roman leadership. Certainly, the degree of stress placed on this distinction could be a matter of nuance, and one imagines some room for compromise. But evidently something in the response of his dialogue partners revealed to Marcion a gulf between them he could not imagine finding a way across. Although details are lacking, it seems reasonable to conclude that Marcion confronted an unwillingness to accept that Jesus was speaking critically of Jewish values and practices. The irony is that, of course, Jesus *was* speaking of Jewish values and practices, but as part of an intra-Jewish conflict over defining the form Judaism would take. This same conflict was still being waged a century later, but now in terms that placed one side of the debate outside the boundaries of the Jewish tradition at its broadest possible conception. As ambiguous and ambivalent as the distinction between Judaism and Christianity was in the first Christian century, Marcion's confrontation with the Roman leaders marks the definitive emergence of a new religion. Other Christians would cross this frontier in their own time and in their own way, as this emergence process continued in the coming centuries.

Returning for the last time to the testimony of Tertullian, it seems evident that Marcion's complaint against an "interpolated gospel" to which he alludes should be understood as a reference to the form Christianity was taking in Rome compared to that which from which Marcion

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<sup>52</sup> Rome was by no means unique in its neglect of Paul. Papias of Hierapolis, a contemporary of Marcion and Polycarp, either did not know or deliberately ignored Paul in his collection of sayings of Jesus (even though Paul would have supplied valuable material for this purpose) and, interestingly, is equally silent on the Gospel of Luke (R.M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament*, New York, Harper & Row, 1965, 72). According to Robert Grant, Eusebius' negative view of Papias and his writings indicate that "they reflected a form of Christianity close to Judaism which did not later survive. It may be doubted that he had anything like a 'canon' of New Testament writings" (R.M. Grant, "The New Testament Canon", *Cambridge History of the Bible*, Volume 1: *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, 284-308; comment cited, 291). R. Annand, "Papias and the Four Gospels", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 9 (1956) 46-62, likewise sees Papias as representing an anti-Pauline, Judaizing minority in the largely Pauline environment of Anatolia (49).

had emerged in Anatolia. The Roman gospel, Marcion felt, had been instigated by “the upholders of Judaism with a view to its being so combined in one body with the law and prophets that they might also pretend that Christ had that origin” (*Adv. Marc.* 4.4.4). We see in this complaint the confrontation of two separately evolved forms of Christianity, one that had effectively severed its ties to its Jewish past, while the other, in very different circumstances, maintained substantial ties to the older religion from which it stemmed. We can attribute the dramatic shift in historical context that allowed Tertullian to read the conflict as one over texts rather than oral teaching largely to the effects of Marcion’s own strategic deployment of an authoritative scripture in a bid to solidify his party against its rival.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The gradual emergence and differentiation of one religion from another is a process that we can study comparatively, and within which we can redescribe Marcion more as a consequence than a cause. Marcion had company, and almost certainly predecessors, in the evolution of non-Jewish Christianity. Pliny the Younger’s description of a Christian community in Bithynia – contemporaneous with Marcion’s youth in neighboring Pontus – shows no recognizable connection to Judaism, and it bears noting that he stresses the spread of the new religion to the smaller towns, where there would be little reinforcing contact with Christian or non-Christian Jews found in the larger cities. We can draw upon similar, better documented situations in religious history to help us think about this process, such as the emergence of the Sikh and Kabir Panth religious communities against the background of north Indian Hindu and Islamic traditions, or the formation of the Druze religion distinct from Shi‘i Islam. In both of these cases, we witness a crystallization of distinct identity, differentiated in strategic ways from the antecedent religious community, and involving the canonization of various foundation documents as reference points for a newly defined normativity. These canons, of course, are engaged through the frame of an interpretive tradition that controls how they are read, but their referentiality provides a valuable stabilizing point around which community identity is articulated. We should consider Marcion, therefore, alongside other canonists, who by identifying a usable past in the literary relics of intra-religious debate, serve as midwives to the birthing process of new religions out of prior ones.

Nothing necessitates that a religious movement, initiated by individuals and spread through personal contacts, develop a written sacred literature, or that such a literature assume an authority superior in theory

to any living voice of the faith. In past ages where illiteracy predominated, a written codification of a religious community's faith would have remained directly accessible to few, and treated by the rest as a precious object that symbolized continuity with the founders and a safeguard against innovations and deviation. The earliest Christians lived in an oral society, and transmitted the teachings of Jesus, and the exemplary stories about him, by word of mouth. The written word entered their world only sporadically, and even then only as a script to be read aloud. There were always a small number of more literate followers of Jesus who sought to put his ideas into conversation with textual traditions, but they could hardly be representative of the spirit of the larger movement. Its fixity and referentiality gives text distinct advantages in shaping our perception of the time and place from which it comes, with the result that the writer, however idiosyncratic in his or her own time, wins out historically over the now silenced voices of illiterate contemporaries. The conscious, deliberate adoption of text as a defining feature of a religious community marks a dramatic transition in the shape of belief and the character of authority over it.

We better understand such past transitions from oral to literate environments of faith through studying similar developments in our own time. Philip Kreyenbroek has recently reported on such a transition in the Yezidi communities of larger Kurdistan.<sup>53</sup> He has been able to observe the impact of the publication in recent decades of transcripts of the oral religious poems (*Qewls*) whose performance has been the centerpiece of Yezidi religious ceremony for centuries. In the past, local Yezidi communities gathered around itinerant poets who composed, elaborated, and performed these pieces. In such an oral setting, people heard the tales and teachings that defined their community, taking in the words as they were recited, the living voice of a living faith. Their encounter with the sacred words therefore occurred as a communal event, not a private one, and the teachings could only be reflected upon in the memory, not by parsing and manipulating them on a page. As the Yezidis have moved to textualize traditional oral sources of their tradition in recent decades, an orthodoxing feedback-loop has taken these newly canonized texts as the standard by which community practices are to be assessed. "Whereas... in traditional Yezidism the authority of the *Qewls derived from* that of the tradition as a whole, these texts are now increasingly seen as the basis which *lends authority to* that tradition".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> P.G. Kreyenbroek, "Yezidism and its Sacred Literature: eastern and Western Perceptions", in Dieter Weber (ed.), *Languages of Iran: Past and Present. Iranian Studies in memoriam David Neil Mackenzie*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2005, 69-80.

<sup>54</sup> Kreyenbroek 77.

Early Christianity had a similarly fluid oral milieu in which various reductions of oral material to written form came and went without defining Christian identity as a whole. In the face of strong disagreement over the Christian message, Marcion sought to codify and secure an authoritative body of knowledge in a written form that would serve as a reliable touchstone of faith. Appeal to text and the subsequent sacralization of text should be seen as a byproduct of competing constructs of the lived faith. As in the Yezidi case, Marcion was impelled towards his textual move through confrontation with competing traditions, and in conditions where authority of both an oral and written form was at issue. The always fraught relationship between the Jesus movement and larger Judaism reached the point in some corners of the Christian mission where the Jewish scriptural tradition was no longer serviceable or no longer relevant to the forms religious life was taking. In such a circumstance, texts which may originally have been shaped by purely pragmatic considerations connected to proselytism, but had taken on an independent authority with the severing of close connection to the original missionary project, could find themselves taken as articulations of a distinct form of faith, now set in opposition to other texts deriving from the same original movement.

Marcion's appeal to text, and the canonization process he advanced as part of his bid to define the Christian movement, must be accounted one of the key turning points of Christian history. In many corners of the tradition, it took quite a while for this development to catch on. When it did, the terms had been largely set already by Marcion. Even the Christian adoption of a fairly non-standard medium for text – the codex – appears around the time of Marcion's canonization project, and therefore it is worth pondering the role Marcion played in this development, since Marcion's canonical revolution depended upon binding together Paul's letters in a single, ordered volume, the *Apostolikon*. But most of all, Marcion's textual and canonical turn enabled a disembedding of Christian religious authority from an environment of traditional *paradosis* in which the assumptions of Jewish religious culture quite naturally prevailed.<sup>55</sup> By vesting unique authority in these particular texts, Marcion pressed further their prior purpose – as proposed here – of delivering religious teaching originating in one culture to people of another. In severing their connection to the culture in which Christian teachings originated, Marcion deprived the *Evangelion* and *Apostolikon* of their previous cultural referentiality. Seeking, perhaps, to make the texts themselves the point of reference for a new religious culture, Mar-

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<sup>55</sup> On the concept of “disembedding” of Christianity from Judaism, and more broadly of religion from culture, see S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society from 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, 179.

cion in fact made them available for rereading within any number of new cultural contexts, and in this way contributed to the emergence of Christianity as a *religion* – a system of practice and belief independent of any particular ethnic or cultural heritage. In this light, the mantle of Paul indeed rests upon him quite comfortably.

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