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## Marcionism in *To Diognetus*: a plea for Christians at the expense of Jews

### ABSTRACT

The early Christian writing *Ad Diognetum* clearly exhibits Marcionite features. It is, however, impossible that Marcion himself wrote it, as some authors argue, because the writer strongly stresses the *monarchè*. The text has striking similarities to the ideas of Apelles, to the extent we know them from Eusebius, though here too are differences. The last two chapters have Gnostic traits, though these cannot be fully separated from the rest of the writing.

The conclusion is that the booklet is a product of neo-Marcionite circles who are influenced by Gnosticism and who represent a type of Christianity that does not fit precisely in schematic divisions of Christianity. The character of the work on behalf of Christian apologetics is anti-Jewish, since it argues that Christians do not separate themselves from normal society. It is a plea for acceptance of Christians at the expense of Jews.

The early Christian text *To Diognetus*<sup>1</sup> is generally considered a jewel of Christian apologetics.<sup>2</sup> Particularly the fifth chapter, which sketches the Christians' manner of living, stirs the heart. Yet much about this text is uncertain. That is true of the date of its composition, the authorship, and thus also its status. I will here examine these three aspects, and propose a new thesis, with my argumentation, particularly with regard to last of these questions.

### 1. THE RELATION WITH MARCION

We are entirely dependent on the text itself for its dating. No other early Christian author whose work we know mentions this text, which only surfaced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Constantinople. On the basis of style and content, almost all researchers have placed it in the second, or at the most the third, century.<sup>3</sup> For a long time the discussion has focused on the question of whether it must

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1 Text edition Thierry 1964.

2 Conolly 1935:347, "It is considered a patristic gem." Bunsen 1852:138, "... jenes patristischen Edelsteins". Cf Le Gras 1725:1, "L'Épître à Diognète est un monument ... précieux de la lumière, du zèle & de la piété des premiers siècles."

3 The datings "range from before 70 to about A.D. 300" (Conolly 1935:347). Old datings are sometimes somewhat later than Conolly indicates. For instance, Overbeck 1875 places it in the post-Constantinian period (end of the fourth or fifth century, 1875:74) and Donaldson (1866:141-142) even sees it as a forgery from the 16th century. More recent datings vary from early in the second century (Lienhard 1970), on the basis of the primitive Christology, around 125 (Andriessen 1946) the middle of the century (Meecham 1949), around the end of the century (for instance Marrou 1965; Brändle 1975) and between the end of the second and the beginning of the fourth century (Wengst 1984).

be placed at the beginning or the end of this century, or, more precisely, whether it must be dated before or after Marcion. The argument of Charles Nielsen ultimately appeared decisive: “It is hard to believe that if *Ad Diognetum* 1-10 was written between 190 and 200 the obviously intelligent author would not have protected himself against a possible charge of Marcionism.”<sup>4</sup> On the face of it, Nielsen would seem to be obviously correct about this. There are phrases that sound so much like Marcion that after his appearance one could not have used them any more without second thoughts, and if one still did go ahead and use them, one would have to make explicit one’s position vis-à-vis Marcion.<sup>5</sup> Nielsen however assumes a premise that cannot be verified: that *To Diognetus* is by an orthodox author. Indeed, that is anything but certain. That orthodox Christians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century find it an attractive text counts for nothing on this score. We must establish whether it fits into the orthodoxy of the second century. And on precisely that point doubt is justified.

In their time Bunsen,<sup>6</sup> and after him Buonaiuti,<sup>7</sup> argued that *To Diognetus* was from the hand of Marcion. This hypothesis was quickly dismissed, because there are repeated explicit references to the Creator, and the Creator is identified with Christ. “It was really the Lord of all, the Creator of all, the invisible God Himself, who ... sent the Designer and Architect of the universe in person – Him by whom He created the heavens ... whose inscrutable counsels all the elements of nature faithfully carry out” (VII,2).<sup>8</sup> This does not fit with the theology of Marcion in any way whatsoever. But this does not dismiss the arguments that led Bunsen and Buonaiuti to their hypothesis.

Nielsen cites two striking peculiarities of the text in relation to Marcion:

- the Old Testament is nowhere cited.<sup>9</sup>
- the writer nowhere explicitly distances himself from Marcion, as do all orthodox Christian authors of the end of the second century. “The author writes in such a way that it is quite difficult to believe that he could have ever heard of Marcion.”<sup>10</sup>

In these observations Nielsen limits himself to the portion of *To Diognetus*, which beyond any contention is to be considered as a unit, chapters 1-10.<sup>11</sup> The last two chapters, 11-12, exhibit a different style and theology. Initially we shall follow his lead in this. The portion he deals with indeed shows many Marcionite features. This is true not only for the use of Scripture, but also for the fierce anti-Jewish attitude.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the Jews are better than the heathen, because they do not have graven images, but then, by bringing God offerings, as if the Creator of all things had need of offerings, they show no real respect for Him (III,3-5). The author therefore accuses the Jews of superstition (I,1), and general stupidity and delusion (IV,6). The intensity of the opposition to the

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4 Nielsen 1970:82.

5 See especially Nielsen 1970:81f.

6 Bunsen 1852:138.

7 Buonaiuti 1921:19.

8 The translations are derived from Kleist 1948.

9 Following other authors, Nielsen 1970:78 correctly states that in this *To Diognetus* is similar to Aristides. The content of Aristides’s theology is however entirely different; cf Harris 1891:13. That is also true for the comparison with Polycarp (Nielsen 1970:79).

10 Nielsen 1970:81.

11 Nielsen 1970:77.

12 Von Harnack 1924:22 supposes Marcion, or at least his family, belonged to circles of Jewish proselytes, before he became a Christian. Thus he is a renegade, which explains his fierce attitude.

Jews is greater than that with regard to the heathen. In this case the opposition is also not so much to contemporary Judaism, against which later Church fathers such as John Chrysostom could sometimes lash out. After all, in the second century it had been quite some time since the Jews brought offerings any more.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, when the author derides the bringing of offerings, he is taking aim directly at the Old Testament.<sup>14</sup> It is viewed as a book of the Jews that propagates superstition, which every right-minded person must look upon as nonsense and impious (III,3). In contrast to the Jews, the Christians have a religion that was not made by man (IV,6; V,3). Such a thoroughgoing rejection of the Old Testament is not to be found with any orthodox author whatsoever.<sup>15</sup> That is true not only after Marcion, but also before Marcion. Orthodox early Christian authors can search for other interpretations of the Old Testament. As in the Epistle to the Hebrews, they can point to the fulfilment of the offerings in the one Offering of Christ, but the Old Testament is handled respectfully. That here the Old Testament is thrown out together with the Jews can only indicate a writer from outside orthodoxy, and then particularly one in Marcionite circles. Gnostics spiritualised the Old Testament, and therefore could not reject it.<sup>16</sup> With this, Nielsen's argument for an early date crumbles, because even before Marcion an orthodox writer could not have written that way.

That sentences sometimes appear in *To Diognetus* that remind one of orthodox authors does not undermine this conclusion. One must not make judgements about a text on the basis of individual elements, but on the whole. Some scholars have attempted to discover the authorship by tracing the relationship of ideas in *To Diognetus* with those of other authors. For instance, Conolly<sup>17</sup> suggests that Hippolytus could be the author, on the basis of the assertion found in *To Diognetus* (and which also appears in Irenaeus), that in God there is no violence (VII,5). But the appearance of a statement such as this says nothing in and of itself. Not only, as Conolly himself already admits, is the point different here, but the rest of the text has quite a different air. For example, VII,2 inclines to a moralistic theology, while Hippolytus powerfully rejects that. The same is true for the relation of IX,2 and *Protreptikos* IX,82,2 by Clement of Alexandria. The literal agreement of the two citations is not sufficient to therefore attribute the authorship to Clement. Rather we must assume that the undoubtedly erudite writer of the present version has picked up material from various backgrounds and used it for his own purposes.<sup>18</sup> A comparison with Clement, however, yields more than merely identical isolated phrases. Marrou 1965 and Brändle 1975 point to a number of similarities. They remind us that Christianity of around 200 is not to be judged by

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13 That the author speaks in the present tense was reason for Le Gras 1725:4-5 to date the text before the year 70. The nature of the subjects that are dealt with makes that very unlikely. This does not, however, detract from the fact that the author does aim his denunciations at the offering rites, and thus not at contemporary Judaism but rather against the sacrificial cultus in the Old Testament. Also, he does not take this as a concession to human weakness, as according to Le Gras (1725) other early Christian authors do. According to *To Diognetus*, the whole concept of the offering rests on a false conception of God.

14 Cf Brändle 1975:61, "Mit dieser Konzeption unterscheidet der Autor des 'Ad Diognetum' sehr deutlich von den eigentlichen Apologeten ... Zwischen Altem und Neuem Testament klafft für ihn ein Bruch. Für die Apologeten hingegen ist das Alte Testament Vorstufe des Neuen." How Brändle can subsequently say (230) that the author of *To Diognetus* "nichts lehrt, was der Kirche seinerzeit widersprochen hätte" is a riddle to me.

15 Cf Overbeck 1875:30 who argues that no other author from the second century is so anti-Jewish. However, he does maintain that *To Diognetus* in fact contains some references to the Old Testament.

16 Meijering 2001:30.

17 Conolly 1935:347.

18 Kihn 1882:87 correctly observes that agreements do not imply dependence.

the precise lines of later orthodoxy. Thus they conclude that *To Diognetus* must be placed in the Alexandrian Christianity of the end of the second century, with some relationship to Clement. This thesis can only be maintained, however, if one accepts certain aspects and disregards others. The similarities are rather to be attributed to the general cultural climate of the time, which also made itself felt among certain Christians, particularly if they belonged to leading circles.<sup>19</sup> From our present-day perspective, that suggests similarity. But one must be sensitive to divergences within that cultural climate. With that sensitivity, one must acknowledge that on the points, which then led to a division of minds in Christianity, the thinking diverges. Just as little as one can say Clement is a Gnostic because of superficial similarities in language, can one say *To Diognetus*, with its sharp rejection of the Old Testament, is a kindred spirit with Clement.

Because of the striking similarities with Marcion, we will have to seek the author of this text outside orthodox circles. Against the inclination to integrate it into Alexandrine theology, we will once again examine those aspects, which relate it to Marcionism. Not only is the Old Testament rejected, together with the Jews, but also the author's New Testament references are almost entirely limited to Paul, and Paul is the only author literally quoted. In the other New Testament references it is a matter of free associations, which also could have come from the general body of Christian thought without a text from the New Testament having played a role. Paul is the canonical author par excellence.<sup>20</sup>

The position with regard to Marcion and orthodoxy can be further clarified by a theme that the author states directly in his introduction. Immediately in I,1 the author defends himself against the objection that Christianity is a new religion. Why had it not come into being earlier? This accusation played an important role at the end of the second century. Usually it is concentrated on the appearance of God in Christ. Why had He only come now, and not earlier? Irenaeus and Tertullian demonstrate to Marcion the absurdity of the late coming of the good God. If He comes so late, then He has apparently left men to their fate for a time. Then He is nowhere near as good as Marcion wants to make it appear.<sup>21</sup> In turn, orthodox Christian theologians encountered a variant of this accusation from Platonic philosophers. Is God not inconstant, in that He at first does not reveal Himself to the world, and later does?<sup>22</sup> Orthodox theologians found it easier to reply than did Marcion. In the first place, they did not have to maintain a good God of the Marcionite type. They confess that God created this broken world. For them, God's goodness is embedded in the hiddenness of his dealing with the world. But more important, they can duly point to the revelation preceding Christ: to Moses and the prophets, and even already to Adam, as the Old Testament describes. Thus God did not entirely begin with his revelation only later. Immediately raising this point in I,1 thus indicates a familiarity with this discussion. What is striking, then, is that the author does not defend himself as Irenaeus does, by reference to the Old Testament. That confirms his rejection of it.

In VIII,7-IX,2 the author presents his own defence. That God did not intervene earlier has to do precisely with God's goodness, because God is patient (VIII,7). He permitted us "to be carried away, just as we chose, by unruly passions – victims of unbridled desires" (IX,1). God is thus absolutely not inconstant, only later arriving at the idea of being good. He has always been goodness itself, by suffering so much. With this argument not only is the unchanging goodness of God powerfully established, but also, entirely in line with chapters III and IV, the whole time

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19 Cf Baumeister 1988.

20 Cf Nielsen 1970:88.

21 See Meijering 2001:133-138. See Irenaeus, *Adv Haer* IV,22.

22 Origen, *Celsus* VI,78. For the history of this theme see the locations listed in Meijering 1998:267 in the index under "Zeitpunkt".

before Christ, including the world of Moses and the prophets, is painted as a wicked epoch. But that waiting had not only to do with God's patience; it was also a preparation for really knowing his goodness: that God had such love for these impious men that He wanted to give his Son for them, the holy one for the lawless (IX,2). Only when iniquity is complete can the overwhelming compassion and love of God be known. Thus, the love of God can only be revealed over against the fullness of sin. All the patience of God is thus for the sake of the revelation of who He really is: perfect love.

That the author must deal with the late coming of God so thoroughly means that the accusation was already current and points at the earliest to a date later in the second century. The nature of his defence is Marcionite. Nielsen is right about that: one can not imagine an erudite orthodox theologian in that time ignoring the Old Testament just like that, any more than he could come up with such Marcionite views without at the same moment clearly distancing himself from Marcion. That does not say that orthodox theologians also did not defend the late coming of God on the basis of God's patience. But they never did so without reference to the Old Testament.

Entirely in line with Marcion, the emphasis lies on the completely new thing that has come in Christ (I,1; II,1; VIII,1).

## 2. NEO-MARCIONISM

*To Diognetus* is thus a Marcionite-sounding text that is certainly not orthodox, but at the same time because of the identification of Christ and the Creator, certainly cannot be Marcionite. Now, in the early Church we have one author for whom all this seems to be true: Apelles.<sup>23</sup> This idea was earlier advanced by Dräseke,<sup>24</sup> without however having a thorough rationale given for the suggestion. Apelles was a pupil of Marcion, but returned to the idea of the one *archè*. The information we have on him is limited. We can derive the most from Eusebius,<sup>25</sup> who himself refers to Rhodon, and a citation from Origen by Ambrose.<sup>26</sup>

Like Marcion, Apelles taught that the Old Testament was good for nothing.<sup>27</sup> According to him it is a lying human document, even as *To Diognetus* teaches. But Apelles also deviated from Marcion. According to Rhodon, Apelles taught that there is only one fundamental principle.<sup>28</sup> A striking detail in Rhodon's report is that Apelles could not say anything about the nature of the *archè*. Everything that we say only circles around the ultimate mystery. Even that there is one *archè* is not to be proven, but is exclusively a matter of faith.

Because Apelles stemmed from Marcionite circles, he had to accent precisely that point in which he diverged from Marcion. We note the same thing in *To Diognetus*. There is an unusual amount of emphasis laid on the omnipotence of the Creator. It is "really the Lord of all, the Creator of all, the invisible God Himself, who, of His own free will, from heaven, lodged among men the truth" (VII,2)<sup>29</sup>

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23 The best information on Apelles is still to be found in Von Harnack 1924:177-195. In the appendices of this source (S 404\*-420\*) one can also find texts from early Christian authors with regard to him.

24 Dräseke 1881:123, "Besonders nahe liege der Gedanke an den Marcionitismus und, wenn man auf einen einzelnen Namen aus wäre, an den Marcioniten Apelles."

25 *Hist Eccl* V,13.

26 Particularly in *De paradiso*.

27 See Von Campenhausen 1971:74. Junod 1982 nuances this thesis and argues that Apelles first rejected the Old Testament and had a more balanced opinion on it later.

28 Eusebius *Hist Eccl* V,13,5 and 7.

29 Regarding God as Creator, see further III,4; IV,2; VIII,7. The repeated use of the word *pantaktistes* (Creator of all) is striking, and always in combination with another word which indicates the *monarchè*: the Lord of all, the Creator of all (VII,2); the Lord and Creator of the universe (VIII,7); cf VII,2: the Designer and Architect of the universe.

According to Rhodon, Apelles laid great emphasis on the unknowableness of God.<sup>30</sup> *To Diognetus* also plays on this theme. Of course, that also appears in orthodoxy, but what is striking is that *To Diognetus*, like Apelles, immediately links this with the almighty Creator. He is not only invisible, but the preservation of the cosmos is under the influence of the mysteries of God (VII,2). The Creator kept his plans and his decisions secret to Himself until He revealed Himself in the Son (VIII,7-11). Even the Word is beyond understanding, while it is given to mankind. Rhodon would ask here, just as he asks Apelles, what sense it still makes to be able to speak about God if you do not understand what has been revealed to you.

Through the overemphasis on the *monarchè*, it becomes difficult to conceive of a human birth for Christ. That is explicitly the case for Apelles; he rejects the birth of Christ.<sup>31</sup> He is rather a person descended from heaven, who brings his body with Him from the sphere of the stars, a body composed of the four classic elements (warm and cold, wet and dry). It is a real material body with a real material history. But after the ascension the body is again disbanded into its elements.<sup>32</sup>

There is also no physical resurrection for man; only the immortal soul is saved.

*To Diognetus* exhibits a Christology in which, it is true, the birth is not explicitly denied, but which does concentrate on the descent of a divine person who is come to us to reveal truth. Now, the latter is also the case in most of the orthodox apologists in the second century. But even the most rationalistic among them,<sup>33</sup> Justin, explicitly maintains the birth from the Virgin.<sup>34</sup> The absence of the birth points rather to a Christology such as that which was on the rise in heterodox Christianity in that time. The reference to the elements that themselves are not God (VIII,2-3) in the context of the Christology is also reminiscent of Apelles. Yet, unlike in Gnostic circles, this Christology leads to a Christ who as the Righteous one bears the sins of the world and gives Himself as a ransom (IX,2-5). But on the other side, it is also said that our nature makes it impossible for us to receive life (IX,6). There it appears to lie more in the nature of mankind than in his guilt, that he was lost. Just as in Apelles, the creation thus exhibits “ein tragischer Zug”.<sup>35</sup> The idea that the soul is imprisoned in the body, which does not argue for a physical resurrection, also is similar to Apelles’s thought.

The remarkable combination of aspects that are found in *To Diognetus* – rejection of the Old Testament, the fiercely anti-Jewish attitude, the newness of revelation and the *monarchè* – thus exhibits a striking likeness with the theology of Apelles.<sup>36</sup> Yet it appears that we must exclude him as author, because the *monarchè* is carried through still further here than in Apelles. He does indeed stress this powerfully, but subsequently allows various created powers to appear under the one God, powers which represent the contradictory aspects that are present in the world, and that Marcion reduced to his two principles and Prepon to his three.<sup>37</sup> Thus, according to Apelles there

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30 Eusebius *Hist Eccl* V,13,5-6.

31 Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VII,38; X,20; Epiphanius, *Haer* 44,2.

32 Filastrius, *Haer* (CCSL 9, 1957: 217-324) 47, 5f, “He gave each of the elements, that He had accepted from the world, back: the dry, the warm the wet and the cold ... and He Himself is without flesh ascended to heaven” (cf Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VII, 38; Epiphanius, *Haer* 44,1).

33 Loofs 1959:93.

34 *Trypho* 127,4.

35 Von Harnack 1924:188.

36 It is therefore remarkable that authors after Dräseke have hardly dealt with this question. Kihn 1882:25 mentions this but does not refute it. He merely rejects the “vermeintlich ‘stark gnostischen Charakter’ des Briefes” in Dräseke’s interpretation. Apparently he took this so lightly that the only thing that he said about it further is that Overbeck (*Literaturzeitung* 1882:30) only mentions the suggestion of Apelles jokingly (Kihn 1882:95). He opposes it only with his own early dating. Apparently the positive approach that has been dominant from that time onward has stood in the way of a unequivocal reference to a status in heterodox Christianity.

37 Von Harnack 1924:167-171. Others also arrived at three principles: for instance, Syneros (Eusebius, *Hist Eccl* V,13,4).

is indeed one *archè*, but under him there is a distinction between the Creator derived from him, who created an imperfect world,<sup>38</sup> the Angel which inspired Moses, the power that symbolises the perversion of complete evil,<sup>39</sup> and finally the true Virtue that is the saving Son.<sup>40</sup> Von Harnack concludes that in the distinction between the demiurge and the Power of the Old Testament, even the anti-Jewish position of Marcion is surpassed: the God of the Jews is worse still than the imperfect demiurge.<sup>41</sup> On this point *To Diognetus* diverges from Apelles.<sup>42</sup> The fierce rejection of the Old Testament and the Jews remains standing, but the Creator and the Saviour are identified. That makes the anti-Jewish feeling all the stronger. The world is not strange to the Deliverer who loves it as his own and guides the whole cosmos: Creator and Deliverer are one. But the Old Testament is a figment of human imagination, stupid and untruthful.

Thus the Creator is no lower deity that is less than the God who reveals Himself in Christ, but He is the source of all that is. Christ is his Son. At the same time *To Diognetus* says that the Son Himself is the Designer and Architect of the universe (VII,2). In this, the author goes further than the most orthodox authors with regard to the one power of creation and salvation. It is true that many early Christian authors can closely link facets of the confession of the almighty Creator and Christ, but they do that preferably to indicate the paradoxicality of the incarnation. What happens in *To Diognetus* is a direct identification of Christ and the Creator. Here the *monarchè* is very rigorously carried through.<sup>43</sup>

The text thus shows features of Marcion and of Apelles, but also has its own body of ideas. It seems as if the author has taken up all sorts of ideas, thought them through, and worked independently. We will have to seek him in neo-Marcionite circles in which pupils of the “Helmsman” tried to remedy the weaknesses of his system. Apelles and Prepon belonged to these circles, but so did the author of *To Diognetus*, who takes his own position in them.

If the text does not come from orthodox circles, then it is also understandable that it was lost and only much later surfaced by chance.<sup>44</sup> Almost no texts by persons who were considered heretics have survived the centuries. We know them only from quotations by their opponents. Then

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- 38 Filastrius, *Haer* 47, 2f: “He said: This God, however, who made the world, is not as good as He who made Him.”
- 39 According to Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VII,38 and X,20, Apelles makes a distinction between the fiery angel of Moses (from the burning bush) and the angel that is also the cause of evil. Thus he arrives at four sub-principles. Epiphanius does not mention this distinction and thus appears to come to three sub-principles. In any case, it would appear from Hippolytus’s text that Apelles did not identify “Moses” and absolute evil unequivocally.
- 40 Epiphanius, *Haer* 44,2.
- 41 Von Harnack 1924:189.
- 42 The conclusion of Dräseke 1881:128 that in any case it would be difficult to prove that the text was not from Apelles would be rebutted by this.
- 43 Lienhard 1970 concludes from the missionary terminology in the Christology of *To Diognetus* that it has a subordinationist and early Christology. That does not in the least have to be the case is proven by Origen’s *Princ* I,2,2, where the perfect obedience of the Son is precisely the cornerstone of a Trinity of essential equality: there is neither a temporal nor a logical succession of the Father and the Son, but only an immediate unity of will. Similarly, with *To Diognetus* the Son is also the way in which God is Creator (*dèmiourgos*) and the way in which He is Saviour. Cf also Meecham 1949:27, “All this suggests a dignity inherent in the Son comparable with that of the Father Himself.” With this the Christological argument in Lienhard 1970 for an early dating also drops away.
- 44 That it is nowhere mentioned or cited in early Christian texts should thus be obvious rather than remarkable, as Klijn 1967:96 thinks. If this text is not by Marcion, as Buonaiuti supposed, his conclusions about the text becoming lost remain entirely in place, when we consider “marcionita” in its

again, the apologetic text *To Diognetus* is not such a threat that one must quote from it to refute it. Ultimately, it does not challenge orthodoxy.

### 3. THE CLOSING CHAPTERS

Thus far we have limited ourselves to chapters 1-10. The last two chapters exhibit other features.<sup>45</sup> That is not to say that an orthodox patrimony is represented. Quite the contrary; here the body of thought regarded as heretical is even more explicitly present. Only this time it is not Marcionist, but Gnostic. We find the most striking phrase in XII,7, which tells us that Eve was not tempted, but that she is worshipped as a virgin. I cannot imagine that this could have come from the pen of an orthodox author of the second or third century,<sup>46</sup> but in the Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi we find exactly the same idea. According to the text *The Origin of the World* Eve deceived the archons who wished to have intercourse with her by identifying with the Tree of Life and leaving behind only her likeness with Adam.<sup>47</sup> The same story is also recorded in *The Essence of the Powers*.<sup>48</sup> In the likewise Gnostic text, *The Secret Book of John*, we find a somewhat different version. Here the divine woman is identified with Sophia, who in the form of Epinoia descends on the Tree of Knowledge, through which Adam and Eve attain perfect knowledge. Sophia is the heavenly Eve, the mother of all living things, who is linked with the terrestrial Eve by Epinoia. Before Eve loses her virginity, however, Epinoia has already departed. The Eternal Pronoia (Prescience) that foresaw what would happen took the life away from her that she had through participation in the True Knowledge. It was thus a lifeless mannequin without knowledge that was defiled.<sup>49</sup>

Just as in these Gnostic myths, in *To Diognetus* heavy emphasis is laid on knowledge. The Tree is no longer the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but only the Tree of Knowledge. And this tree does not kill, but gives life. It is, thus, the source of true life, and the true Eve is not seduced, but is a pure virgin.

Also, the treatment of the Aeons in XII,9 sounds Gnostic. Here we are not dealing with periods of time, but with gifts, which stand under the power of a certain Aeon. In the Completion these will all be collected and receive their proper place.

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broad sense as "Marcionite", "La paternità marcionita del nostro documento ne spiegherebbe la nessuna fortuna nella letteratura cristiana dei secoli successivi" (Buonaiuti 1921:19). Kihn 1882:148-150, who considers the text as orthodox and dates it early, has another solution. According to him it was part of a secret correspondence with the Emperor Hadrian, who was initially interested in Christianity. Such correspondence of course could not be published. But that a correspondence so confidential should suddenly surface fourteen centuries later in Constantinople with old paper is absolutely improbable.

45 Cf Nielsen 1970:82-84.

46 The suggestion by Rizzi 1989:148-151 that this involves the restoration of Eve's situation from before the fall strikes one as laboured. In the comparable text from Justin, *Trypho* 100,5, the passage involves a contrast between Eve, who as a virgin allowed herself to be seduced by the words of the serpent (*nota bene*, while mankind was not yet weakened by sin), and Mary, who (while mankind was under sin) assented to God's word. In *To Diognetus* XII,7 it is on the other hand stated that Eve was not tempted. Around it, Rizzi cites texts from Hippolytus and Ambrose that do not mention Mary. But here too it is a matter of a contrast between the fall and salvation. Hippolytus speaks explicitly of a *new* Eve. The Gnostic idea that Eve was not fallen is foreign to these texts. Just as the contrast between the old and new Adam does, the contrast between the old and new Eve implies the fall.

47 *Origin of the World* 116 (Nag Hammadi Library, Robinson 1988:172f).

48 *The Hypostasis of the Archons* 88f (Nag Hammadi Library, Robinson 1988:154).

49 *Apocryphon of John* 23f (Nag Hammadi Library, Robinson 1988:111f).



In its present state *To Diognetus* must thus be seen as a compilation of two heresies.<sup>50</sup> That does not say that these two sections are independent of each other. An explicit link between the two bodies of thought is found in *To Diognetus*.<sup>51</sup> Gnostic features do already appear in I-X. Christians are held fast in this world as in a prison, even as the immortal soul is imprisoned in the body (VI,7-8). That Christians are aliens in this world is an idea held in common by all parts of the early Church. But that the world is a prison for them is a thought not found in orthodoxy. Because of the comparison made with the soul imprisoned in the body, there is a strong correspondence with the Gnostic idea of the eternal soul that is imprisoned in the body, by which all pure souls know themselves to be prisoners in the material world. Further, just as in XII,4-5, it is also said in X,1 that the beginning of the Christian life is in knowledge.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, the Gnostic character is also nuanced. The warning against conceited knowledge without love (XII,5-6) would seem to include a critique of Gnostics who are not oriented to a life of love. Such people are themselves deceived by the serpent. The real cause of death is therefore also not lack of knowledge, but disobedience (XII,2).

The relation of Marcionism and Gnosticism becomes particularly clear in XII,3. XII contains a discussion of Genesis 3. It says of that chapter, "What is written is not unimportant" (XII,3).<sup>53</sup> One only says something like that if one assumes that the reader thinks Genesis is indeed unimportant. The presumed reader is thus thought to take a Marcionite position, which flows out of chapters I-X. But, the author then says, that story still has a certain meaning. Then he advances an allegorical explanation that fits with Gnosticism. The Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life stand in the middle of the garden. Thus men receive life only through knowledge (gnosis), and knowledge only through life. People will only understand this meaning, however, if they are in the circle of the saints where mysteries are revealed and the Aeons are proclaimed (XI,5). There the law has meaning; there the grace of prophecy is known (XI,6). This would appear to be a full acceptance of the Old Testament, as law and prophets. But a step further on the author reveals that the text of Genesis is untruthful, because Eve was absolutely not tempted, as Genesis says. Thus the Old Testament has certain correct thoughts that refer to the unutterable mysteries of the knowledge of the unknowable God (in this the author agrees with Gnosticism), but (as Marcion says) it does not provide real truth.

Because of this last, there is all the more cause to seek the author in circles related to Apelles. That is true thus not only for the first part, but also for the whole. Von Harnack points to the same double linkage of Marcionism and Gnosticism for Apelles as well, "Die Lehre des Apelles ... ist eine interessante Verbindung des Marcionitismus mit dem Gnostizismus auf Kosten des ersteren."<sup>54</sup> Marcion is corrected, but at the same time the intellectual heritage of Marcion remains present in Apelles in full, particularly when it comes to the use of the Old Testament. Eusebius reports that Apelles "has made countless scandalous remarks about the Law of Moses; and in various works he has slandered the Holy Scriptures by undertaking great efforts to dispute and refute them according to his views".<sup>55</sup>

50 Filastrius, *Hier* 47,4, makes also a connection between Apelles and Valentinus.

51 Wengst 1979:58-61 in particular has pointed out the intrinsic linkage of the two parts with regard to the Gnostic ideas.

52 Dräseke 1881:129 also sees Gnostic elements in VII,2.

53 Own translation, because Kleist 1948 does not represent the precise meaning of the passage.

54 Von Harnack 1924:194f.

55 Eusebius, *Hist Eccl* V,13,8.

From this perspective, perhaps XI,6 must be interpreted otherwise. There is considerable tension between the extremely negative attitude with regard to the Old Testament in III and IV and the interpretation of XI,6 as praise of the law and prophets.<sup>56</sup> Even if one considers the text as a compilation, that remains problematic. Now, it is possible to ease the tension by saying that only the Christians have the true interpretation of the law and prophets. But then the law and prophets ultimately retain their value, which the text would also appear to suggest. However, one must be careful: the text does not say the “law and prophets” but “law” and “prophecy”. It must therefore be asked if this really refers to the Old Testament, and not to contemporary prophesy in the community. Early Christian authors report that Apelles was under the influence of a prophetess named Philoumene.<sup>57</sup> Thus his community knew prophecy. It did not read the false prophecy of the Old Testament, which arose from a hostile spirit, but knew the true prophecy. Here prophecy is under the aegis of enlightened knowledge. In this case, we no longer have to read “law” as the Law of Moses, but as the law of the *monarchè*, the order according to which the Creator rules the cosmos (VII,2) and carries out his plans, which He had first hidden within Himself but has now revealed (VIII,7-11). To *Diognetus* XI,6 must then be read not as praise of the Old Testament but precisely as the antithesis of that. Knowledge of God comes not on the ground of old books that men could manipulate, or of human philosophy (IV,6-V,3), but on the ground of the newly revealed mysteries (VIII).

It is possible that the obscure phrase in XI,5, where we are told that the believers “do not break their plighted troth”, can also be explained in this context. According to Eusebius, Rhodon forced Apelles to affirm under oath that his knowledge of the *monarchè* rested on faith and not on knowledge.<sup>58</sup> For this you cannot call on reasoning but only on God himself: the vow has the last word. It is not a matter of knowing, but of inclination.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND STATUS

Our conclusion is that the text in its present form must be considered as neo-Marcionite, in which the author strongly defends the *monarchè* and makes use of Gnostic ideas in the process.<sup>60</sup> Even if he does that by adding two chapters to an earlier text, the earlier version still exhibits the same basic ideas, only without the conspicuous influence of Gnostic speculation. A date at the end of the second or beginning of the third century therefore seems most plausible. We will have to seek the author in the context of a community influenced by Marcion, of the same type as that to which Apelles belonged, without it being likely that the text is by Apelles himself. That we can advance no name for the author is of little importance in this. Of greater importance is that we are able to indicate the theological context of the document. It is a text, which cannot be placed in one of the distinct currents such as Gnosticism, Marcionism, modalism or what later was called orthodoxy. It is a document that indicates that the boundaries were fluid, and that is an expression of the dynamics of Christianity in the second century.

56 For instance in the translation by Klijn 1967.

57 The first to do so were Tertullian (*De praescr* 6 and 30; *Adv Marc* III,11; *De carne Christi* 7) and Rhodon (according to Eusebius, *Hist Eccl* V,13,2). Later authors also readily refer to the relation between Apelles and Philoumene, and like Tertullian do so in a suggestive manner.

58 Eusebius, *Hist Eccl* V,13,7.

59 Eusebius, *Hist Eccl* V,13,6.

60 Cf Dräseke 1881:129, “Solch eine in Sprache und Anschauungsweise gnostisch gefärbte Uebergangsbildung repräsentiert aber unzweifelhaft eben der Brief an Diognetos.” I cannot, however, agree with the remainder of the sentence: “und, mit ihm in vielen Stücken eng verwandt, das Johannes-Evangelium”.

With this, the status of the text is other than has regularly been accepted. It is an original document from traditions that were expelled from the early Church and thereby can be compared with the Nag Hammadi texts. It grants us a look at another version of Christianity. That this Christianity nourished on Marcionism was more positive and humane than orthodoxy appears to me to be an illusion. Precisely the chapter, which is most appealing, chapter V, must be read in this context. When the author says, “They nowhere settle in cities of their own; they use no peculiar language; they cultivate no eccentric mode of life ... [They] conform to the customs of the country in dress, food, and mode of life in general, [and yet] the whole tenor of their way of living stamps it as worthy of admiration and admittedly extraordinary” (V,2 and 4), taken out of the context that sounds splendid. But if we consider that the chapter before that is a denunciation of the Jews, it takes on another guise. The civilised heathen must clearly understand that the Christians are not Jews, and are loyal citizens of the Empire. They claim no exceptional status. They are merely representatives of a higher religion, of which even the enlightened heathen must conclude that it is better than the worship of idols. But please, do not confuse us with the Jews.

In this conclusion we come close to the position of Wengst. According to him the text is the product of an elitist, Gnostic influenced Christianity, for which ecclesiastical organisation was of little importance.<sup>61</sup> According to him, it was a form of cultural Christianity that attracted little notice because it was largely in accord with the culture. Yet his position must be nuanced. Baumeister (1988) has already noted that for the author persecutions were certainly very much a reality. Even if Gnostics were in harmony with tendencies in the culture, that still does not say that they were not persecuted. That is just as true for Marcionites. Not just those whose position in society was weaker were victims of persecution. Therefore we do not have to follow Wengst’s inclination to move the dating forward.<sup>62</sup>

For the theological status of the text, it is important that Wengst bestows little attention on the explicit Marcionite ideas in it, or rather, that he does not distinguish between Marcion and Gnosticism.<sup>63</sup> Therefore the sharp anti-Jewish edge disappears from sight. It is precisely the radical rejection of the Jews, of their scriptures, including Moses, and of their customs, that is characteristic of *To Diognetus*, as Overbeck correctly contends.<sup>64</sup> Theologically, this coincides in part with the author’s philosophical understanding of God. God is *aorgetès* (VIII,8), in contrast to the God of the Old Testament. But this does not have only a general theological significance, as Wengst<sup>65</sup> argues, but receives a concrete focus in the apology: if Jews are tolerated, how much more must Christians be accepted, who not only adapt to the society, but also contribute to its structure by their virtuous lives. Overbeck has tried to link “die auffallend schroffe Behandlung des Judentums” with a concrete event: the attempt of Julian the Apostate to rebuild the temple has spurred the author to his attack on the Jews.<sup>66</sup> If, however, we date the text earlier, then that is not possible. Moreover, the author is not referring to an event but to the religion and practices of the Jews. The provocation for the attack must not be sought so much by the Jews, as with the attitude of the pagans to the Christians. The author is remarkable mild in his critique of paganism. This is limited to commonplaces, which would not overly upset the cultivated heathen.<sup>67</sup> This makes his

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61 Wengst 1979:59-62.

62 Wengst 1984:308-309.

63 See Wengst 1979:58, where he elucidates Gnosticism with a citation from Marcion.

64 Overbeck 1875:30.

65 Wengst 1979:51.

66 Overbeck 1875:74

67 Cf Overbeck 1875:21-22.

judgement of the Jews all the sharper. In this manner the cultured Christian can make it clear to cultured pagans that they stand next to one another, and thus Christians should not be persecuted – and that at the cost of the Jews with their silly religion and strange customs.

That almost all interpreters to date have overlooked this undoubtedly has to do with Overbeck's thesis: that modern authors enjoy *To Diognetus* so much that they recognise themselves in it.<sup>68</sup> That rests primarily on the fifth chapter, where it is said that Christians do not distinguish themselves outwardly from their environment. It is precisely this chapter, which plays the central role in the apology. If, however, we overlook the anti-Jewish character of the apology, it is easy to open the door to the conclusion that religious people who do not adapt to the customs of their day are properly targets of persecution.

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68 Overbeck 1875:74. Cited by Wengst 1979:62, with approval.

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