

Markus Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) V + 276.

The thesis that Markus Vinzent pursues in this relatively slim and yet wide-ranging book is both more and less than the title might suggest. On the one hand it is about much more than Christ's resurrection. This is indeed the hare that sets the chase going: Vinzent is seeking to resolve his own surprise on finding that beyond Paul the 'theological meaning of the resurrection' does not retain a focal place in Christian thought but is routinely abandoned, obscured, or merely reduced to a testimony to God's powerful acts. Only towards the end of the second century does this situation begin to change, producing a 'resurrection "mania"'. Yet his trawl through the texts to demonstrate the problem simultaneously illustrates his solution: namely the pivotal role of Marcion, who rediscovered the centrality of the resurrection, but conceived of it in a disturbingly docetic fashion, disturbing at least to his opponents who thereafter were driven not only to recover the resurrection for themselves but also to defend the physical reality of Jesus's body, both prior to and subsequent to his death and resurrection. Yet more than this, they were also driven to deal with Marcion's elevation of Paul as his sole authority and consequent dismissal of the other ('Judaising') apostles, with his demotion of the created world and its Creator, and with his denigration of the Law and prophets, or what, on Vinzent's account, he called 'the Old Testament'. On the other hand, there is little here about the making of the New Testament as such: many of texts that would come to form the New Testament — a title he also credits to Marcion — do form part of his galaxy, for he sees the majority, together with many more writings, as stimulated by Marcion's activities, but the processes by which they came together fall largely outside his purview.

As Vinzent himself notes, he is not the first to puzzle over the function of the resurrection in early Christian thought, although it is not completely clear what the origin and yardstick are for the function it might be expected to have played, nor does he explore other articulations of what might be called a resurrection- or exaltation-faith. Likewise, he is not the first to represent Marcion as the catalytic figure in what some would identify as the institutionalisation of Christian thought and structures in the second century; indeed, whether or not Marcion should be so described is probably one of the most consistent issues in study of the period. What is distinctive is the dogged persistence with which he lays out problem and solution through a systematic setting out of a long list of primary sources. Indeed, one of the virtues of the book and difficulties for the reviewer is the range of material he catalogues that needs to be engaged with by anyone who would seek to deal seriously with his thesis but also with the numerous ancillary questions that it provokes.

The strength and the weakness of the book lie in its argumentative method. Because Vinzent weaves together problem and solution, Marcion becomes the lens through which both are projected, and also the fixed temporal point to which are anchored, with shorter or longer chains, the many writings which simultaneously illustrate the problem and demonstrate its solution. The central chapter of the book tells a narrative, cataloguing the writings, with carefully chosen quotations, and allowing their combined witness to carry the day. All this is premised on an assumption of chronology, 'before Marcion' and 'after Marcion', although Vinzent is in many cases markedly vague about any more precise dating, and in some cases (1 Peter, *Barnabas*) inconsistent. Perhaps surprisingly, although not unreasonably, he accepts the traditional date, based on Tertullian, of Marcion's break with the Roman church in 144 AD. Some recent scholars have argued for an earlier date, or, more

particularly, for major pre-Roman activity; their chief evidence for this has been the supposed presence of anti-Marcionite polemic in Ignatius, Polycarp and the Pastoral Epistles. Vinzent agrees with the diagnosis, but he chooses the in-principle equally cogent solution that these writings are to be dated later than is conventional. The problem with both positions is that they are too quick to assume that certain broadly conventional formulae, both overtly polemical and non-polemical, must be targeted against a single identifiable position, and that that position can only be identified with Marcion. As so often, and perhaps inevitably given the fragility of any certain temporal or geographical anchors for the majority of the writings of the period, there is a danger of a closed circle which can only be breached by painstaking demolition, or undermining, brick by brick — something for which there is not the space here.

Even so, there is much to frustrate those acquainted with the period and its problems. Vinzent rarely acknowledges that nearly every text he cites carries with it a host of interpretive difficulties. The innocent reader would not know, for example, that assigning Papias to the 140s, or denying the use of the term ‘Gospel’ with reference to a written document before Marcion (p. 82) would be heavily contested. The former allows him to argue that, ‘Papias’ not mentioning *the* authority of Paul [... *i.a.*] contribute[s] to an anti-Marcionite profile’ (p. 97), a striking example of a style of proof that appeals equally to silence as to express mention and so that can never fail. The latter presages what many will see as the most radical of his claims, that each of the now-canonical Gospels was written in immediate reaction to Marcion, all in Rome (pp. 86-90). With this he takes up a long-lived thesis, which goes back at least to the Tübingen School of the mid-nineteenth century and which has enjoyed some resurgence in recent times, that rather than Marcion radically curtailing Luke, as claimed by his opponents, canonical Luke is an expansion of ‘Marcion’s Gospel’; he reinforces it with what in context is surely a mis-, or naively literalistic, reading of Tertullian, *Against Marcion* IV.5, that Marcion himself claimed that *his* Gospel had been falsified — the reference is undoubtedly to Marcion’s claim to have removed the corruptions imposed on Paul’s Gospel (see *Against Marcion* I.20, ‘they say Marcion did not innovate ... but rather recovered what had subsequently been corrupted’); he caps this by the startling assertion, ‘World literature, and that is what has been written with *Luke, Acts, Matthew, Mark* and *John* [...] does not grow naturally in fields as far apart as Rome and Jerusalem, Alexandria [...]’ (p. 92), a position to which he is forced by the need to explain the complex literary relationships between these without the luxury of the years available to a more conventional hypothesis.

Of course, the conventional solutions are precisely that, ‘hypotheses’, and those who will quickly dismiss that offered here would do well to ask themselves just how secure are the foundations on which those ‘solutions’ are built. The circularity of dating and supposed internal contextual references and ‘fit’ is, as already noted, an inevitable hazard of this period, and to be reminded of this is no bad thing. One effect of Vinzent’s model is that the Gospels and other writings have no distinctive ‘biography’ of their own, except in their relationship with Marcion’s enterprise. Thus the Fourth Gospel joins the Synoptics as a post-Marcionite phenomenon, but why it is as it is, how it relates to the letters which now bear the same name, or whether it draws on a distinctive set of traditions, are simply not questions on the agenda — except, oddly, as evidence of Samaritan influences in early Christianity. Theories of ‘Gospel communities’, or of the interplay of oral and written traditions reflected through a variety of multi-faceted redactional lenses, are ignored, but it is not clear that they could survive this repositioning.

In the book's failure to address these issues — although Vinzent has suggested that he will do so elsewhere — readers may detect a certain myopia driven by its focus on an all-explanatory thesis. The same effect emerges in other parts of the argument. Vinzent accepts the now conventional account of the diversity of early ('pre-Marcion') Christianity, in company with other scholars helpfully locating its expression within the various philosophical 'schools' in second century Rome. For him Marcion is a rigorist in every sense who challenges the instabilities in such diversity, insisting on a holistic reading of Paul, on the necessity of a body of *written* texts for the new religion, and on the consequences of Paul's attitude to the Law for the reading, or rejection, of the Old Testament. However, 'after Marcion' that diversity becomes almost entirely determined by response to him, although it still explains the variety of forms taken by that response, namely express opposition, deliberate silence, or a more nuanced blend of influence and rejection. The possibility that some were unaware of Marcion, dismissed him as of no consequence, concentrated their interests or anxieties elsewhere, or carried on regardless, is not entertained. So for example, Vinzent dismisses the option that some texts, such as the Epistle of the Apostles might be against some other 'heretic', even a named one such as Cerinthus (pp. 129-32). Marcion, and Marcion alone, acts as the catalyst that suddenly causes the swirling suspended particles to crystallise into a recognisable solid mass; no other figure or event is allowed any creative role, neither are writers or the development of ideas allowed any motivation other than a polemical one. The single interpretive lens can too easily become a set of blinkers.

Similarly, Vinzent tends to flatten the various conceptions of Christ's post-resurrection, and hence for Marcion equally his pre-resurrection, flesh. By allowing that Apelles 'has carefully developed Marcion's concept without negating his master's principles', and dismissing Tertullian's and more recent scholars' detection of significant differences between the two, he is more confident about precisely how Marcion did understand Jesus's body as of 'not just an angelic but also a glorious sun-like, astral and sideric nature' (p. 122) than the sources permit; at the same time he readily identifies a variety of anti-docetic or quasi-docetic positions as all provoked by Marcion, ignoring the range of different theories of 'bodiliness' available at the time. More generally, his understanding of Marcion's thought beyond the exegesis of the resurrection account lacks depth and is as much assumed as argued in detail from the sources. It also owes much to Harnack; most notably that Marcion proclaimed 'one loving God ... revealed by the Lord, the incarnate Love Himself' (p. 116) comes more from that scholar's concluding eulogies than from the early sources which identify Marcion's God as '(the) Good'.

Accordingly, and in particular on matters on the periphery of this single narrative, Vinzent appears at times remarkably conservative, accepting the 'victory of pharisaic-rabbinic Orthodoxy at the "Synod of Jamnia" at the end of the first century AD' (p. 33), that Paul was a disciple of Gamaliel I, and even events found in his late-dated sources, such as the Markan account of the question of the Sadducees or the possible link suggested by Acts between Stephen, Philip, the Hellenists, and the Samaritans. At the same time he relies on a curious mix of single authorities to provide the background information on such matters, on Harnack for his explanation of the Septuagint, on Jaubert on the calendar, on Goulder on the Samaritans, and on McKay on Synagogue worship. Despite a lengthy bibliography his treatment of the secondary literature is selective and often feels cavalier, sometimes relying on a patchwork of extensive quotations to make his point while ignoring the scholarly

debates behind them or even the qualifications voiced by the same author; he appeals to Stuart Hall's edition of Melito's *On Pascha* that 'Melito had also composed several books *On the Incarnation of Christ* "against Marcion"', but fails to note that Hall expressly rejects the authenticity of the fragment in question (p. 176-77 where the reference [n. 665] should be to Fragment 6; S. Hall, *Melito of Sardis On Pascha* [Oxford, 1979] xxx, 68). Some footnotes are inconsequential, while in others a bland 'See ...', even regarding significant issues, obscures whether the scholar cited agrees, disagrees, or simply makes some only loosely related point. Likewise on occasion he appears to have misread his primary source, or an existing translation of the same, for example taking Kirsopp Lake's Loeb translation of *eis ton kyrion*, 'as touching our Lord', as a reference to the physicality of Jesus's flesh (Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 1; p. 153).

These are perhaps the consequence of undue haste, and of the author's unwavering commitment to his explanatory narrative, and his determination to persuade others of it, too. The confidence he exhibits may well prove more successful than the discursive equivocations of others. On the other hand, he will not be the first person who, once having seen a particular ghost in the shadows suddenly, with almost paranoid insistence, finds it lurking everywhere; perhaps the most common ailment to beset scholars is that, once having found a solution to one problem, it becomes the solution to every problem, the answer to the question of the universe. Readers, then, should approach this provocative volume with a proper 'hermeneutic of suspicion', but in so doing they should not neglect the challenge to justify with equal comprehensiveness any alternative narrative they may offer, or a refusal to attempt to do so.

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