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From â??Most Useful Bookâ?? to Scriptura Non Grata: Canon, Ecclesiastical Constrictiveness, and the Loss of the Shepherd of Hermas in Early Christianity

Robert Donald Heaton
University of Denver

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From "Most Useful Book" to *Scriptura Non Grata*:

Canon, Ecclesiastical Constrictiveness, and the Loss of the

Shepherd of Hermas in Early Christianity

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A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Robert D. Heaton

June 2019

Advisor: Gregory A. Robbins

Author: Robert D. Heaton
Title: From "Most Useful Book" to *Scriptura Non Grata*: Canon, Ecclesiastical
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Advisor: Gregory A. Robbins
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ABSTRACT

With its roots in the first century CE and claims to special revelation from various apparitions, the *Shepherd* of Hermas portended an alternative Christian trajectory to the prevailing Christocentrism. But some in the second, third, and fourth centuries also deemed it compatible with the synoptic Johannine-Pauline metanarrative for Christianity, such that prominent bishops Victorinus, Eusebius, and Athanasius labored to depict it outside the scriptures of the New Testament. While their data and other early patristic writings presage the *Shepherd*'s frequent appearance among scholarship on the biblical canon, this often manifests as little more than a curiosity, absent a proper context for the book's popularity and subsequent omission from the canon.

In the first study of such length on the extracanonicity of the *Shepherd*, this dissertation contextualizes Hermas's book as interested not merely in the limits of repentance for grave postbaptismal sins. Hermas also prophetically propounded an alternative aretological scheme of Christian salvation—one in which the Son of God was primarily a virtuous exponent, rather than a savior. Still, certain Christians received the book as scripture, and a critical reevaluation of patristic reception reveals that occasional elite, localized, and idiosyncratic judgments against the *Shepherd* failed to hamper its wider approbation, particularly in Egypt, until the irruptive intervention of Athanasius.

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Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter (367 CE) has long been acknowledged for its milestone New Testament, but this investigation expands the traditional focus on Athanasius from canon list to canonical designs. The Alexandrian bishop's eventual imposition of scriptural boundaries was forged deep into a divisive career struggling against alternative doctrines, forms of authority, and modes of Christian piety. Crucially, this dissertation argues that Athanasius wielded four constrictive forces under evolution since the second century—heresiology, Christology, openness to prophetic authority, and ecclesiastical organization—to isolate the *Shepherd* of Hermas as an incompatible and unwelcome source for Christian doctrine and unity. This focus on the ecclesiastical-political dimension of the canon, an instrument declared by *fiat* and accepted over time by an episcopal "gentlemen's handshake," heralds new potential for future canon research not offered by the dead ends of the so-called canonical "criteria."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

> Reason dictates that those who are pious for truth and lovers of wisdom to honor and desire the truth alone, refusing to follow the opinions of the ancients, should they be worthless (*1 Apol.* 2.1).[1]

Justin Martyr's appeal to the Roman emperor Antonius Pius became the mantra instilled in me by my guru and mentor, Fredrick H. Shively, now Professor Emeritus of Anderson University, who quenched an inquisitive mind with frequent conversation and the license to pursue burning questions wherever the answers might lead.

More proximally, Greg Robbins and Pam Eisenbaum have each shared in the beginnings of this study in subsequent courses on the formation of the New Testament canon. Their encouragement in the early stages and throughout a dissertation seminar has borne significant fruit, and I am grateful that both have served on my committee, along with Victor Castellani, overseeing this project to its completion. Thanks also to Josh Schachterle for poring over every word with me as we have dissertated together in 2018 and 2019, and to Peggy Keeran for her eager assistance with primary sources. I also owe a debt of gratitude to those scholars who have previously worked on the *Shepherd* of Hermas, on the biblical canon, and on Athanasius, whom I know only through the written word and by academic association; this kind of magic or alchemy or intense study would not have been possible without their prior engagements with the material.

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful wife and best friend Lauren, whose sacrifice during my eight years of graduate study has exemplified genuine love, patience, and trust. I am in awe of your compassionate spirit and your tireless work for justice.

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A NOTE ABOUT STYLE

A few oddities about working with the *Shepherd* of Hermas merit explanation before this dissertation proceeds. Scholarship on this enigmatic text often features idiosyncratic stylistic decisions, and the present study is perhaps no different.

First, the title of the work in antiquity was simply (The) *Shepherd*—Ὁ Ποιμήν in Greek, or *Liber Pastoris* in Latin. The title known today to most, "The *Shepherd* of Hermas," is a comparatively modern convention used to disambiguate from other herdsman imagery in early Christianity (e.g., the shepherds of the Lukan infancy narratives, the "Good Shepherd," or *kriophoros* portraiture in Christian catacombs) and to prevent from the repetitious use of a custom like "Book of the *Shepherd*." Though I employ the fuller well-known title in what follows, I exclusively italicize *Shepherd*, rather than the whole. However, when quoting other scholars or citing their works, I follow whatever system they employ. In some cases, "Shepherd" appears in unadorned Roman font, while in others, *Shepherd of Hermas* is italicized in its entirety, or alternatively, *Hermas* stands in for the fuller title by synecdoche.

Second, some consistent practice was warranted to distinguish between the title of the work and its titular character. So while *Shepherd* describes the book written by Hermas, the lowercase "shepherd" designates the apparition who attends him throughout the Commandments (Mandates) and Parables (Similitudes). In rare cases, it becomes necessary to differentiate between Hermas's shepherd and another shepherd, like the Good Shepherd, and I hope that the protocols I employ become obvious. Related to this, I have adopted the custom of referring to the "woman Church" to depict Hermas's earlier

apparition from his Visions, while using the lowercase "church" to refer to localized churches in Rome, Alexandria, Caesarea, or even for the worldwide catholic church.

Third and finally, the bewildering length and tripartite arrangement of the *Shepherd* of Hermas—a book of five Visions, twelve Commandments, and ten Parables—has caused significant difficulties over the years for scholars citing its text. Some who refer to the *Shepherd* and its divisions do so out of extreme unfamiliarity with this scheme, and so omit any indication of the section (i.e., Vis., Mand., or Sim.) where their episode is found. Others use only the newer continuous classification system, pioneered by Molly Whitaker in the 1960s, reckoning the *Shepherd* as a unified 114-chapter production. Instead, I follow the composite reference system for the *Shepherd* as described in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd edition (2014), 133; 331-2. Although Hermas himself was urged not to be double-minded (Herm. Vis. 4.1.4 [22.4]), this duplex norm of reference, once one has become acclimated to it and the source text, permits an uncanny dexterity with the *Shepherd*. Wherever possible, these composite citations appear in footnotes, so as to prevent undue body clutter.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Seeking the Lost *Shepherd*

1.   A Snapshot from the 5th Century and Introduction

A curious exchange takes place in the 5th century between John Cassian, an Egyptian monk who relocated to Gaul to found Eastern-style monasteries, and Prosper of Aquitaine, the protégé of Augustine. In the *Conferences*, a sort of memoir of Cassian's ascetic heritage, he had written how "Scripture testifies that two angels, one good and one bad, are attached to each one of us" (*Conf.* 8.17).[1] As proof of this assertion, Cassian cited several passages from the scriptures where angels or demons individually attend to human beings—from Matthew, the Psalms, Acts, and Job—in addition to the one place where this doctrine is stated explicitly: Commandment 6 from the *Shepherd* of Hermas.[2] In a later recapitulation of this passage from the *Shepherd*, Cassian elaborates on its significance: if a good and bad angel inhabit a man, he possesses free will and the ability to choose whether to partake in God's grace (*Conf.* 13.12).

Now, Prosper had already fought against Pelagianism for years, and in Cassian's statements, he smelled blood. For if goodness and other virtues were already within humankind, he reasoned, this denied the necessity of God's grace and wreaked havoc on

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[1] Translation per Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Conferences*, vol. 57 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 302.

[2] Herm. Mand. 6.2 (36.2).

the doctrine of original sin. With scriptural proof-texts and argumentation of his own, Prosper countered Cassian, whom he derided as the "collater," at significant length. But regarding Hermas, a different tactic was in order. Here Prosper found it sufficient to discredit that "unauthoritative testimony (*nullius auctoritatis testimonium*) inserted into his discussions from the book of the Shepherd."[3] Cassian's doctrine, inasmuch as it was sifted from the extracanonical *Shepherd* of Hermas, was unsubstantiated.

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The *Shepherd* of Hermas attempts, by means of revelations to its main character and author—one Hermas of Rome—to present extensive paraenesis, commandments, and moral instruction otherwise absent from Christian scriptures at the time, to the degree that Philippe Henne has dubbed the work "le manuel de vie chrétienne."[4] In the annals of Christian history, however, this supposed "manual of Christian life" has been an immensely undervalued book. Scholars have been unable to answer many questions about the *Shepherd* conclusively, though not entirely for lack of effort. Instead, there are many puzzles that, barring some remarkable epigraphic discovery, will likely never find universal resolution. Two such questions concern the identity of Hermas and the date of his work. In spite of ancient attempts from such diverse figures as Origen and Jerome to link our Hermas to the individual Paul once greeted (Rom 16:14), no internal or external evidence demands such a connection.[5] Indeed, Hermas was a rather common name in

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[3] *Liber contra collatorem* 13.6; translation per J. Reginald O'Donnell, "Grace and Free Will: A Defense of St. Augustine against Cassian," in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 7, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1949), 386.

[4] Philippe Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," *Revue Thomiste* 90.1 (1990): 89.

[5] Simultaneously, the likelihood that the *Shepherd* could be deemed in any sense a forgery intended for connection to this Hermas is exceedingly low: there is little added value to claiming the name

antiquity for enslaved persons, particularly in Rome,[6] as our author presents himself.[7] In

such an evidentiary gulf, the authorial insistence of Origen may have even provided

Eusebius, who was likely familiar with some critique of the author,[8] with a convenient

route to discredit the *Shepherd* as a νόθον—a text illegitimately endowed with the

Pauline stamp of approval.[9] In truth, we can say little more about the author than the

autobiographical breadcrumbs he left behind: he lived in Rome but had free access to the

Italian countryside, was possibly exposed as an infant or abandoned as a child, was

enslaved and later manumitted, had both a wife and children, associated in the ranks of

freedmen and women, had mixed success at business,[10] and most importantly, he was an

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Hermas, at least as compared to the instant legitimacy gained via the names of Paul, Peter, or another apostle.

[6] Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 42.

[7] Such biographical information for Hermas can be found immediately at the outset of the book (Herm. Vis. 1.1 [1.1]), but also finds affirmation in unexpected ways, as in the parable of a slave who tends to his master's vineyard and is eventually revealed to be the "Son of God" (Herm. Sim. 5.5.2 [58.2]).

[8] Whether Eusebius, like the author of the Muratorian Fragment, understands Hermas to be the brother of a mid-second century bishop in Rome, and therefore ineligible to have lived during the life of Paul as Origen claimed, cannot be ultimately known. Given that authentic apostolic authorship serves as Eusebius' primary criterion for enconvenanted texts at *Hist. eccl.* 3.25, where the *Shepherd* receives one of its first blows of the fourth century, he must have some reason to regard the book as spurious—or alternatively, he considered the book apostolically illegitimate. See Gregory Allen Robbins, "Eusebius' Lexicon of 'Canonicity,'" in *Studia Patristica XXV: Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1991*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 134.

[9] Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32 n.8, has previously entertained this likelihood.

[10] Herm. Vis. 3.6.7 (14.7); Jörg Rüpke's argument that Hermas was a salt farmer, based on the χονδρίζεις of Herm. Vis. 3.1.2 (9.2) original to Codex Sinaiticus, is generally convincing, but I see no reason to carry such an observation to the extent as does Harry Maier in a forthcoming article. Hermas's orientation in the *Shepherd* is toward other Christians or likely Christians across a range of professions, and not a confederation of salt farmers, in spite of the certain existence of trade organizations to protect the interests of workers and owners. See Jörg Rüpke, "Apokalyptische Salzberge: Zum sozialen Ort und zur literarischen Strategie des ,Hirten des Hermas,'" *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1.1 (1999): 148–60; Harry

early Christian with an unquenchable curiosity about normative behaviors and beliefs attending such a designation.

The possibility that our Hermas was indeed the one greeted by Paul cannot be ruled out *prima facie*, but neither could it ever be conclusively proven. Instead, this study regards it plausible that this Hermas lived and was active in this very early period of Christian development. Despite a growing realization that the Muratorian Fragment builds a specious case against the *Shepherd* and post-dates it to the mid-second century, a relative dating for the *Shepherd* after the texts later welcomed into the New Testament has been difficult to shake.[11] Assignment of the *Shepherd* to the late first century, rather than the second, has been scattered and not won significant favor.[12] Fortunately, some unexpected relief comes by way of scholarship on *1 Clement*, the only other Christian document this early certain to originate from Rome. Whereas the late date suggested for

O. Maier, "Romans Watching Romans: Christ Religion in Close Urban Quarters and Neighbourhood Transformations," *Religion in the Roman Empire* (*forthcoming*, 2020).

[11] Carolyn Osiek has suggested that a consensus dating for the *Shepherd* in the "first half of the second century" could be observed, though she was only able to dispute against the earliest dating offered by Wilson locating the *Shepherd* close to Nero. Osiek, Hermeneia, 19.

[12] Several complexities conspire to make the *Shepherd* a difficult book to date, ranging from the internal clues that Hermas's text has grown significantly over time to the "tyranny" (so J. Christian Wilson) that the Muratorian Fragment has exerted on scholarship since its publication. J. Christian Wilson, *Five Problems in the Interpretation of the Shepherd of Hermas: Authorship, Genre, Canonicity, Apocalyptic, and the Absence of the Name 'Jesus Christ'* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), 13. In the last decades, Harry Maier has spurned this tyranny and observed that the ecclesiastical organization referenced in the *Shepherd* itself, as well as the preferable single authorship of the text, suggests an earlier date of composition "some time near the end of the first century." James Jeffers has also argued for a late first-century dating on similar grounds. Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991), 55–8. James S. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: Social Order and Hierarchy in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 106–112. Because of these difficulties, however, and perhaps relying on the substantial weight of received interpretive tradition, most scholars continue to fall back on a second-century date for the *Shepherd*. If properly unmoored from the Muratorian Fragment, I concur with Maier and Jeffers that at least elements of the *Shepherd* fit rather comfortably into the range of 85–115 CE, though later dates cannot be entirely ruled out for the finishing touches and final episodes of the book.

the *Shepherd* by the Muratorian Fragment has previously been cited as reason to deem

Hermas's reference to one Clement, who functions as a scribe to outside communities,[13]

as possible verisimilitude, Barbara Bowe has recently found the contemporaneous

activity of Hermas and Clement trustworthy.[14] A dating of *1 Clement* (and therefore the

Shepherd as well) deep into the second century would preclude our Hermas from

proximity to or equality with Paul's Hermas, but at the very least we must entertain the

possibility that the *Shepherd* was written earlier than current consensus would permit it.

Authorship and relative time of composition were merely two issues considered

by early readers of the *Shepherd*, and which found varying interpretations among those

who accepted or rejected the book on theological grounds. To these unsolved mysteries

could be added questions of more recent academic provenance, from the degree to which

the *Shepherd* may be regarded as a proper "apocalyptic" text, to the possibility that the

book is a compilation of contributions by two, three, or as many as five different authors,

to attempts at understanding why a text with obvious Christian elements would avoid

both the title Christ and the name Jesus. These puzzles and others continue to perplex

scholars; none could be regarded as solved. Each merits our attention, for there is little

justification in the field of Christian Origins for neglecting the *Shepherd*'s alternative

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[13] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3).

[14] Barbara Ellen Bowe, *A Church in Crisis: Ecclesiology and Paraenesis in Clement of Rome* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 3. In particular, Bowe accepts the *Shepherd* as positive reinforcement of a historical Clement's position in the Roman church, and the *Shepherd*'s more traditional dating in the mid-second century supplies for her a *terminus ante quem* for *1 Clement*. So too, however, does she freely dispute the common dating of 95 CE for *1 Clement*; as with other scholars, she contends that there is insufficient evidence to so narrowly locate the letter to an immediate post-Domitianic period, and instead offers a viable range of 80–140 CE. Andrew Gregory is willing to extend the *terminus a quo* to a full decade earlier on similar grounds, to 70 CE. Andrew Gregory, "Disturbing Trajectories: *1 Clement*, the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the Development of Early Roman Christianity," in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002), 144–9.

trajectory, especially when it might portend different foci for "popular" Christianity

during its chaotic first century of existence than the high theological universality often

imagined as uniformly central to the faith.[15] But the enigma that this dissertation aims to

comprehend is intricately connected to the quarrel between John Cassian and Prosper: the

Shepherd's failure to attain canonical status within the church's New Testament.

Indeed, Prosper's determination about the *Shepherd* would have come as a major

surprise to many Christians of the previous three centuries. While he may represent an

official and final judgment on the *Shepherd*, his statement usurps and annuls a surprising

acceptance of Hermas's work as authoritative or normative for earlier Christianity. For

example, the *Shepherd* spread rapidly from Rome into both halves of the Christian world,

achieving quick translation into Old Latin[16] and arriving in Egypt by the end of the

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[15] Recently, Larry W. Hurtado has been especially prone to such assumptions that universalize Christ-devotion in early Christianity; see his recent slim monograph *Honoring the Son: Jesus in Earliest Christian Devotional Practice* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018). But even Ramsay MacMullen, who has otherwise attempted to call attention to an early church erased from history, has neglected to consider whether the *Shepherd* and other early texts could provide clues toward popular Christianity. Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

[16] The precise date of the Latin Vulgata translation has not been universally established, and the editors of its very recent critical edition opted not to weigh in forcefully on the matter. Repeating a prior scholarly consensus, they only suggested, "[I]t seems that [the Vulgata] was composed around 200 A.D. Possibly already the earliest Latin Christian authors (e.g. Tertullian) read the *Shepherd* in this version." Christian Tornau and Paolo Cecconi, eds., *The* Shepherd *of Hermas in Latin: Critical Edition of the Oldest Translation* Vulgata (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 10. Indeed, Tertullian constructs an argument Vis. 5.1 (25.1) better suited to the Vulgata translation of the *Shepherd* than its Greek original, and beyond this he displays a curious awareness of certain terminology in the Latin Visions. Osiek, Hermeneia, 99 n.6. More recently, Dan Batovici, ignoring the evidence of Tertullian, has argued a case for reopening the date of the Vulgata translation to the range of 150–325 CE, taking as its *terminus post quem* the persistent dating of the *Shepherd* in the middle of the second century, and as its *terminus ante quem*, an uncannily late date for the anonymous Latin sermon *De Aleatoribus*, which quotes from the Vulgata translation of the *Shepherd*. See Dan Batovici, "Dating, Split-Transmission Theory and the Latin Reception of the Shepherd," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 60 (2017): 83–90. It seems more likely to me that the prior consensus for the Vulgata translation by or near the turn of the third century is correct.

second century.[17] Irenaeus of Lyons[18] and Clement of Alexandria[19] received it favorably, both quoting it as scripture (ἡ γραφή) in support of doctrinal arguments, directly alongside other texts that would later become part of the biblical canon. Moreover, available evidence indicates that the work was exceptionally popular during the period of pre-Constantinian Christianity. Most significantly, we have recovered more manuscript copies for the *Shepherd* of Hermas dated prior to about 325 CE (11) than every canonical book except the Psalms (16-18) and the Gospels of Matthew (12) and John (11-15).[20] While this could be a mere fluke or an accident of history, the *Shepherd* found its way to nearly every early textual technology: codices of papyrus and parchment, miniatures "intended to be worn as amulets or for handy reading," opisthographs, and fresh, single-sided scrolls.[21] So valuable was the *Shepherd* to these early readers that it was copied wherever it could fit, for personal or communal use. It was catalogued among the prized books of a church or monastic library in Egypt,[22] quoted in early Latin Christian

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[17] Four of the manuscript fragments from Egypt have a possible paleographic dating in the second century, one of which is a papyrus opisthograph upon which the shepherd's second commandment, about generosity in giving, has been scribbled on the back of a register of land holdings. Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 82; Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 45.

[18] M. C. Steenberg, "Irenaeus on Scripture, *Graphe*, and the Status of *Hermas*," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 53.1 (2009): 29–66.

[19] Dan Batovici, "Hermas in Clement of Alexandria," in *Studia Patristica LXVI: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 41–51.

[20] Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 20–23; 28.

[21] Osiek, Hermeneia, 2; Bagnall, 42. Bagnall insists that this technological blossoming is unparalleled even for canonical scriptures.

[22] P. Ash Inv. 3; C. H. Roberts, "Two Oxford Papyri," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 37 (1938): 184–88.

homilies,[23] celebrated effusively by both Origen and Clement of Alexandria,[24] who

regarded its contents as the genuine issue of divine revelation (*Strom.* 1.29), and

interpreted by an anonymous scribe to align with the Christian metanarrative of Jesus's

nativity from Mary,[25] knowledge the *Shepherd* otherwise lacks. At opposite ends of the

fourth century, both Eusebius and Jerome attest that the book was read aloud in churches.

In addition to its early, complete Latin edition, the *Shepherd* would be translated at least

six times further before the Greek manuscript history disappears after the sixth century.[26]

Its scenes were part of early Christian material culture, as in the magnificent third-century

fresco depicting Hermas's vision of the Church as a tower under construction, preserved

in the Neapolitan catacombs.[27] Finally, in the middle of the fourth century, the *Shepherd*

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[23] See the discussion below on the sermon *De Aleatoribus*, pp. 116–22.

[24] Each of these authors cites or quotes from the *Shepherd* of Hermas over 15 times. For the full catalogue of the *Shepherd*'s appearances in the writings of Clement and Origen, see Philippe Henne, *L'Unité du Pasteur d'Hermas: Tradition et Redaction*, vol. 31 of *Cahiers de la Revue Biblique* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1992), 18–19; 29–31.

[25] Though too fragmentary to make any conclusive determinations, this manuscript, P.Oxy I.5, suggests an attempt to provide commentary on the *Shepherd* of Hermas (Herm. Mand. 11.9-10 [43.9-10]). After quoting the relevant section, the scribe adds: "For the prophetic spirit is the corporate life of the prophetic order, which is the body of the flesh of Jesus Christ that became mingled in with humanity through Mary. But that he is a fitting recipient…"; see also pp. 207–8 below, esp. 208 n.42.

[26] The other extant translations for the *Shepherd* during this period include Ethiopic, Akhmimic and Sahidic Coptic, Middle Persian, Georgian, and a second Latin translation known as the Palatine (as distinguished from the earlier Latin translation, the Vulgata). Osiek, Hermeneia, 2–3. The *Shepherd* only exists in complete form in Latin and Ethiopic. Tornau and Cecconi, 2–3. The Georgian text likely comes via a lost Arabic translation, while the Ethiopic translation appears directly related to the earliest corrections to Codex Sinaiticus and was perhaps translated from Greek concurrent with the rest of the Ethiopic New Testament. George H. Schodde, *Hêrmâ Nabî: The Ethiopic Version of Pastor Hermae Examined* (Ph.D. diss., University of Leipzig, 1876), 15; 36; Bernard Outtier, "La version géorgienne du *Pasteur* d'Hermas," *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes* 6-7 (1990-91): 213.

[27] Carolyn Osiek, "The Shepherd of Hermas: An Early Tale that Almost Made it into the New Testament." Biblical Archaeological Society, October 1994, https://www.baslibrary.org/bible-review/10/5/19.

was reproduced as the terminal book of perhaps the first pandect Bible, the Codex

Sinaiticus—making it the exclamation point of the earliest bound New Testament.[28]

So well favored into the fourth century was the *Shepherd* that Athanasius, the

young bishop of Alexandria, approved of it as a "most useful book" shortly after the

Council of Nicaea (*Inc.* 3.1).[29] This high praise, equating the shepherd with Moses as two

veritable mouthpieces of God, would later disintegrate in the doctrinal and political

crucible of constrictive fourth-century Christianity. For despite the many implicit

appraisals of the *Shepherd*'s authority over the previous two centuries, Athanasius would

later locate it outside of the New Testament in his famous list of approved books in the

Festal Letter of 367 CE. Suddenly, the *Shepherd* was an unwelcome book in Athanasius's

canon—it had become *scriptura non grata*, much as it would be for Prosper and other

ecclesiastical heavyweights after the fourth century. And needless to say, Hermas's "most

useful book" can be found in no Bible today. This prompts the question: given its

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[28] For a recent discussion of the meaning of the *Shepherd*'s inclusion in Sinaiticus, see Dan Batovici, "The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus," *Biblica* 97.4 (2016): 581–605; see also below, pp. 175–86. Batovici, significantly, delineates two primary threads within scholarship: those who view Sinaiticus as evidence that its copyists and collaborators saw the *Shepherd* of Hermas as canonical and/or scriptural, and those that regard the *Shepherd* as part of an appendix of texts merely useful to be read. Though he attempts to eschew the descriptor "appendix" in favor of a conception of its secondary status, Batovici locates himself within the latter of these two categories, while I incline toward the former—recognizing, of course, the difficulty of sifting "canon" from "scripture" on the basis of such a limited set of pandect manuscripts from antiquity. It is worthwhile to note that "canonical," while serving as the obvious terminology for modern scholarship on this topic, may be of limited value with respect to lists of texts from early Christianity; see Robbins, "Eusebius' Lexicon of 'Canonicity,'" 139.

[29] The superlative employed by Athanasius, ὠφελιμωτάτης, is very rare in Christian writings before the fifth century but also finds attestation in Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius, who also uses it to describe one of Tatian's treatises. For more, see below, p. 150, esp. 150 n.92. More significantly, though Athanasius's τῆς ὠφελιμωτάτης βίβλου appears prominently in the title of this dissertation, his is a judgment also shared by Jerome, who knew the *Shepherd* as a *utilis liber* written by Hermas but also considered it outside the church's scriptural canon (*Vir. ill.* 10; *Pro. Gal.*). Furthermore, these judgments serendipitously cohere with one of the underappreciated mantras found in the *Shepherd* itself: εὔχρηστοι γίνεσθε τῷ θεῷ, or "become useful to God" (Herm. Vis. 3.6.7 [14.7]). On the centrality of Hermas's call to personal usefulness to his primary message about salvation, see pp. 102–10 below.

demonstrable popularity in early Christianity, what accounts for the loss of the *Shepherd*

from the canon of Christian scriptures?

Despite previous attempts to solve the puzzle, this remains an unsettled

problem.[30] Answers have generally been sought from the writings of the church fathers,

most prominently a generation ago by Henne and Antonio Carlini. Certain sectors within

the guild, leaning heavily on the Muratorian Fragment, have been keen to portray the

book as always non-canonical and even unscriptural,[31] but this determination is now

harder than ever to maintain. More recently, David Nielsen regarded the canonical

rejection of the *Shepherd* a "worthy study," given that no solution to the question has yet

found wide acceptance.[32] Problematically, the patristics saw little need to explain

themselves in any degree of detail. As J. Christian Wilson has quipped, the most frequent

reason given for the exclusion of the *Shepherd* is "no reason at all."[33] Given the air of

decisive finality that authors like Prosper and Jerome could project by the fifth century,

answers must be excavated from the constrictive environment of imperial, episcopal

Christianity in the fourth century—even if they must be explored "on the basis of sparse

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[30] A useful recent survey of the problem can be found in Dan Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon: A Review Article," *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 34.1 (2017): 89–105. Batovici offers no new proposals here, but adequately covers the *status quaestionis*. See also pp. 218–37 below, where the last generation or so of scholarship touching on the *Shepherd* and the canon is reviewed in greater detail.

[31] For one example, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, "The Muratorian Fragment: The State of Research," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57.2 (2014): 242.

[32] David Nielsen, "The Place of the *Shepherd of Hermas* in the Canon Debate," in *"Non-canonical" Religious Texts in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James H. Charlesworth (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 166.

[33] Wilson, 70.

and fragmentary evidence and with a measure of conjecture."[34] In this period, proto-orthodox Christianity was emboldened by unprecedented imperial support, lending enforceability to various trends that had arisen in previous centuries, from heresiology and Christology to the centralization of the religion. Athanasius, it seems, turned against the *Shepherd* once he found (or fabulated) that his Arian opponents had exploited it to transgress the Nicene definition of Christ (*Decr.* 5.18, *Ep. Afr.* 5).[35] However, this explicit evidence only tells part of the story.

I contend that Athanasius's connection of the *Shepherd* to heretics likely served as convenient cover for other reservations with the book. The church of Athanasius—the church of Constantine and his successors, the church of unified vision and belief—was becoming something different than the irrestrainably multivalent church of centuries past. The Christianity that the *Shepherd* attests, dating near the turn of the second century that Winrich Löhr and others have recently deemed the age of the doctrinal and religious "laboratory,"[36] was being stamped out in favor of an authoritative, Christocentric faith. This judgment hints at my understanding of the canonical process: the church's biblical canon was not determined by any democratic method adjudicated by open-ended criteria, but rather by Athanasius's imposition of "a certain kind of canon" amenable to episcopal

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[34] Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Meaning and Making* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 23.

[35] Not incidentally, Prosper would all but repeat this tactic with Pelagianism.

[36] Judith Lieu, "Modelling the Second Century as the Age of the Laboratory," in *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 294–308. See also pp. 97–9 below.

control,[37] around which leaders of the church loyal to him, or the memory of him, rallied and eventually accepted by ecclesiastical-political maneuvering and an episcopal "gentlemen's handshake." Athanasius retains his crucial position as the articulator of the New Testament generally, and the *Shepherd*'s exclusion specifically, thereby commending deeper inquiry into the context for his canonical designs. Thus, I argue that while Athanasius explicitly justified the exclusion the *Shepherd* from the Christian canon by its novel association with the "Arian" doctrine that Christ was a created being, he also opposed the *Shepherd* for deeper-seated reasons of its doctrinal dissonance and alternative authority. The *Shepherd* was incompatible with Athanasius's heresiological and Christological needs, even under the force of interpretation, and its tendencies to privilege prophetic gifts and enable independent interpretation from Christian academics posed challenges to episcopal authority. Under such ecclesiastical and political exigencies in the fourth century, Athanasius decisively constricted Hermas's book from the New Testament, and with some good fortune and an abundant hagiographical tradition that lionized his unparalleled orthodoxy, he supplied precisely the bishop-centered religion and authoritative clout that could forge, for the first time, a Christian "rule of scripture" relegating the deficient *Shepherd* to the sidelines.

2.   A Brief Glimpse into the *Shepherd* of Hermas

In his recent popular book *The Lost Way,* Stephen Patterson illustrates how attention to ultimately disfavored texts can enhance our understanding of the complexity

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[37] David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth 'Festal Letter,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 87.4 (Oct. 1994): 398.

of early Christianity. For shrouded behind the dominant martyrdom cult "built around the death of Jesus, his resurrection, and his eventual return" was a vibrant wisdom religion evidenced by *Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*.[38] These believers, unlike the Pauline tradition that prevailed, treasured the often paradoxical and hard-to-stomach sayings of Jesus. However, even Patterson's premise buoying this one "lost way" should be problematized, for the *Shepherd* of Hermas does not fit comfortably into either of his characterizations of Christian origins. Though the *Shepherd* contains numerous possible allusions to Scripture, it features no overt quotations beyond four words from the apocryphal *Book of Eldad and Modat*.[39] The *Shepherd* offers no reflection or insight on Jesus's death by crucifixion or his resurrection, those elements of the Jesus story so central to Paul's Gospel (1 Cor 2:2, 15:12-14). Similarly, Hermas harbors no apparent interest in Jesus's earthly life and does not reverence his words, as do the gospels. Salvation, a prominent and consistent theme spanning the whole of the *Shepherd*, is possible not because of the recent actions of God in Jesus Christ, but through participation in the church, individual moral ascension, repentance, and remaining steadfast—free of double-mindedness, or the tendency to doubt God—to the very end. The *Shepherd* is the cumulative revelation to Hermas explaining how to accomplish these goals, supplemented with much motivational material and encouragement. In short, Hermas's work attests a completely alternative locus of authority for Christianity than the salvific Messiahship of Jesus. It instead relies

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[38] Stephen J. Patterson, *The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 250. This evidence holds even if one no longer sees fit to uphold the traditional way that *Q* has helped to "resolve" the Synoptic Problem.

[39] Eldad and Medad are prophets contemporaneous with Moses in Numbers 11. Beyond the four-word quotation in Herm. Vis. 2.3.4 (7.4), nothing else is known of this lost *pseudepigraphon*. See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (1983; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013), 463–5.

on the kind of ἀποκάλυψις that Paul imagined could arrive at random to members of early Christian congregations (1 Cor 14:30).

Structurally, the *Shepherd* has been divided into three sections known as the Visions, Mandates (Commandments), and Similitudes (Parables) since antiquity. Hermas, a manumitted slave, narrates the entire book from a conversational, first-person perspective. What little plot or narrative fiber the *Shepherd* can claim is limited to the Visions, where various characters appear to Hermas as he goes about his everyday business in and around Rome. These figures—his former master Rhoda, plus an elderly woman and a younger woman, both personifying the Church—deliver rebuke, instruction, and hidden knowledge to Hermas. For example, the elderly woman reprimands Hermas for neglecting his responsibilities to his household, as his wife and children have apparently forsaken Christianity and become an embarrassment to him. For their blasphemy, the prescribed remedy, presented rather as a general elixir for "all the saints," is to "repent with all their heart and drive away double-mindedness from their heart."[40] *Metanoia* of this variety, which Carolyn Osiek regards as "conversion,"[41] has been counted as the primary message of the *Shepherd* for at least the last century of scholarship, though by thematic saturation, its crispness tends to dilute. Instead, as this dissertation argues, μετάνοια for Hermas is a means to the end goal of salvation.

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[40] Herm. Vis. 2.2.4 (6.4). The translation used here and wherever not otherwise attributed is that of Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 454–685. Otherwise, I follow Holmes's Greek text unless citing another edition or noting my own translation in the footnotes.

[41] Osiek, Hermeneia, 29–30. However, a translation that avoids ecclesiastically loaded terminology altogether may be preferable; see p. 69 n.176 below.

Readers and hearers of the *Shepherd* learn alongside Hermas from his inquisitiveness and his unyielding penchant for misunderstanding what other characters have revealed. The most important of these characters is the apparition whom Hermas receives in the last chapter of the Visions, "a man glorious in appearance, dressed like a shepherd."[42] This titular figure remains with Hermas to the end of the book, delivering Commandments and Parables and ordering that these frequent demonstrative interpretations[43] of symbols unveiled before Hermas, like the preceding Visions, be written down.[44] Only then can Hermas read and obey them and be driven to repent. The shepherd's Commandments and Parables traverse a great menagerie of themes, from stating what Hermas is to believe about God's creation,[45] to an admonition not to remarry after divorce,[46] to more metaphysical concerns like the angels of righteousness and wickedness that inhabit each person. Various metaphors and images accrue and serve as

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[42] Herm. Vis. 5.1 (25.1).

[43] In this, the *Shepherd* of Hermas shares a curious affinity with tours of hell and paradise, generally regarded as a later subgenre of apocalyptic literature, which Martha Himmelfarb attributes to the influence of the Book of the Watchers. The relationship of the *Shepherd* to Enochic literature has not been adequately examined, and Himmelfarb passes over the *Shepherd* as irrelevant to her inquiry. See Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), esp. 45–67.

[44] Herm. Vis. 5.3-7 (25.3-7).

[45] Commandment 1: "First of all, believe that God is one, who created all things and set them in order, and made out of what did not exist everything that is, and who contains all things but is himself uncontained." This, one of the *Shepherd*'s few overt theological interpositions, becomes the passage most quoted by the church fathers. Herm. Mand. 1.1 (26.1).

[46] Herm. Mand. 4.1.1-11 (29.1-11). Given that Hermas is apparently married, this is one of several commandments delivered not for Hermas's own benefit, but for his community's.

instructional material: two cities,[47] a vineyard, a willow tree, and, at significant length,

the tower still under construction, recapitulating and expounding upon an earlier Vision.

Perhaps most surprisingly for a Christian book, the *Shepherd* of Hermas avoids

the name "Jesus" and the title "Christ" completely. The closest the book comes to

referencing Jesus is found in its repeated encouragement to receive, suffer for, or trust in

"the name," or in Hermas's oblique allusion to the one "to whom I have been

entrusted."[48] Into the second half of the book, the shepherd tells Hermas parables about

the "Son of God," but the portrait presented here only confounds. In one parable, the Son

of God is a slave who, through hard work tending to his master's fields, is promoted to

co-heir with the master's son, a character representing the pre-existent Holy Spirit.[49] In a

later parable, the Son of God is revealed as the holy spirit that appeared to Hermas earlier

in the book, but the holy spirit is also apparently an angel.[50] Later still comes a statement

that elevates the Christology of the *Shepherd* to unforetold heights, even if it later would

become a tenet derided as "Arianism": "The Son of God is far older than all [God's]

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[47] In perhaps a prefiguration of Augustine's *City of God*, Hermas is instructed to reject the "foreign city" for a prosperous inheritance in the heavenly one (Herm. Sim. 1.1-5 [50.1-5]).

[48] Herm. Vis. 5.3 (25.3). Even so, the book contains no internal hints that the character of the shepherd should be understood as Jesus himself, and we also lack external evidence that the book was ever interpreted in such a manner. Clement of Alexandria only granted that Hermas received his revelations from ἡ δύναμις ἡ φανεῖσα (*Strom.* 2.3.5), and at another point strongly contrasts the figure of the shepherd with "the Lord himself," as though the two are separate entities, though they are imagined as delivering similar messages (*Strom.* 4.74.4).

[49] Herm. Sim 5.2.1-11 (55.1-11); Sim. 5.5.2 (58.2); Sim. 5.6.5 (59.5).

[50] Herm. Sim. 9.1.1-2 (78.1-2). Incidentally, the shepherd also declares himself to be an angel, ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς μετανοίας (Herm. Mand. 12.6.1 [49.1]). On the prevalence of angelic beings in the *Shepherd* and its relationship to Hermas's Christology, see Bogdan G. Bucur, "The Son of God and the Angelomorphic Holy Spirit: A Rereading of the *Shepherd*'s Christology," *ZNW* 98 (2007): 120-142.

creation, with the result that he was the Father's counselor in his creation."[51] What

scattered and occasional attention the *Shepherd* pays to conceptions of the Son of God is

thus not univocal, attesting to a time when Christology was still doctrinally fungible and

undergoing development in the laboratory of early Christianity. Hermas dabbles in

Christologies that could be variously described as adoptionistic, "exaltationist,"[52]

angelomorphic, or even pre-existent, but none of which could be construed to view the

Son as God's co-equal, consubstantial, or eternally generated, as would become key

tenets of orthodox doctrine in the late fourth century. Revelation about practical concerns

was more pressing than a consistent theology or Christology, and on these matters the

Shepherd offers far less equivocation. More than two centuries removed from its

composition, it was perhaps this concerted ministration toward paraenesis or praxis,

combined with a perceived theological inconsistency, that would relegate the *Shepherd* as

merely catechetical[53] in the minds of the fourth-century episcopal elite.

3.   The Need for a Reassessment of the *Shepherd*

Discussions of factors involved in the extracanonicity of the *Shepherd* have

primarily been relegated to book chapters or journal articles, and few new proposals have

been offered to the question since the mid-1990s. For example, Carlini noted that the

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[51] Herm. Sim. 9.12.2 (89.2).

[52] Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 150.

[53] This observation is similarly offered by Choat and Yuen-Collingridge, who follow it to explain the *Shepherd*'s bountiful manuscript history. Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, "The Egyptian *Hermas*: The *Shepherd* in Egypt before Constantine," in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 202–3.

Shepherd and others were suppressed from Christian scripture by means of authoritative intervention on the textual tradition.[54] Henne performed an exhaustive reception history tracing the patristic attitudes toward the book in the Christian East and West, emphasizing the *Shepherd*'s continued, if largely hushed, survival in Latin manuscripts after its disappearance in the East.[55] Its exclusion from the canon factored only briefly in Henne's article, where he was keen to portray the *Shepherd* as a book that found its home properly in the domestic, moral life of Christians, comfortably away from impacting upon the church's theological life.[56] Notably, both of these authors wrote in foreign languages and their work made little domestic impact. Carolyn Osiek, in a four-page section on "Reception and Canonicity" of her magnificent *Hermeneia* volume on the *Shepherd*, cited both Carlini and Henne but offered no concrete reason for its rejection beyond unspecified "objections to its theological content."[57] Against this current, Wilson spurned conventional thinking and claimed novelly that the *Shepherd* was rejected because it could not have stood as the longest book of the New Testament.[58] Indeed, the *Shepherd* is arrestingly long. Modern reckoning counts 114 chapters of varying length, consisting of anywhere from sixty Greek words to several hundred. One ancient tabulation, the stichometric list of scriptures inserted into the sixth-century Codex Claromontanus,

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[54] Antonio Carlini, "Tradizione Testuale e Prescrizioni Canoniche: Erma, Sesto, Origene," *Orpheus* 7.1 (1986): 40–52.

[55] Henne, 81–100.

[56] Choat and Yuen-Collingridge, though attempting to make sense of the book's popularity from a papyrological perspective, reach a similar conclusion: the *Shepherd* was always and only a catechetical text.

[57] Osiek, Hermeneia, 6. Osiek finds the reasons given for the *Shepherd*'s rejection in the Muratorian Fragment to be spurious.

[58] Wilson, 54–55, 70.

provides appropriate context.[59] It counts 4,000 lines for the *Shepherd*, or 1,100 lines more

than the Gospel of Luke, the lengthiest book of the canonical New Testament.[60]

However, given the contributions of canon studies and the absence of such reasoning in

antiquity, Wilson's line of argumentation is puzzling.[61] It supposes that the true answer

lies in the realm of book production and not from the *Shepherd*'s internal contents, when

in fact pandect Bibles were an exception rather than the rule prior to the printing press.

    In short, the question this dissertation asks is as-yet unresolved. My project

contributes to academic knowledge and the field by approaching the question robustly,

not only by examining patristic statements and by weighing its history against the

commonly cited criteria for canonicity,[62] but also by reviewing evidence from manuscript

recoveries for the *Shepherd*, and by pursuing a thorough contextualization of major

constrictive trends affecting fourth century Christianity, when the canon was essentially

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[59] The provenance of this list remains a matter of some dispute. Henne, 92–3, regarded it as a 3rd century product of Egyptian origin, while previous generations of scholars (as catalogued in Gregory Allen Robbins, "Codex Claromontanus," in Vol. 1 of *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 1072–3) assigned it to the 4th century, with some postulating instead a Western setting. Also up for debate is whether five *obeli*—one of which sits in the margin of the *Shepherd*'s line—belong to the 3rd/4th century, the 6th century, or sometime later than this.

[60] Bibliothèque Nationale de France, "Grec 107: 0601-0700," last accessed June 1, 2019, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84683111/f870.image. Were it included in the biblical canon, the *Shepherd* would be bested in length only by Genesis (4,500 lines) and Jeremiah (4,070 lines).

[61] Notably, Wilson fails to account seriously for the *Shepherd*'s inclusion in Sinaiticus, the stichometric list of Claromontanus, and other evidence that suggests its length was unproblematic to its readers and transmitters.

[62] The strict definition of such criteria is a modern, retrospective scholarly phenomenon, albeit based upon determinative hints left by the church fathers. Bruce Metzger, for example, entertained three primary criteria in his monograph on the New Testament canon: **(1)** theologically orthodox content, **(2)** apostolic authorship, and **(3)** traditional and widespread use within the worldwide Church. To these, Lee Martin McDonald has added a fourth criterion of "antiquity," which I also intend to explore. Other criteria sometimes proposed—including McDonald's "adaptability" and "inspiration"—could also be probed to strengthen the case for the *Shepherd*. Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 251–254; Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 430–439.

settled. These forces, which evolve from the second century and find as their perfect

constrictive spokesperson Athanasius of Alexandria, are **(1)** the proliferation of

heresiology,[63] **(2)** the rising importance of Christology, **(3)** attitudes toward prophecy and

claims to special revelation, and **(4)** different ecclesiastical organizations, typified by the

conflict between the authoritarian, hierarchical, or institutional church and academic,

monastic, or de-centralized Christianities. My conclusive focus on Athanasius in the

formation of the canon may not itself be novel, but depicting him as the embodiment of

these four constrictive trends is.

Beyond the *Shepherd* alone, my project contributes to the field of canon studies.

Despite the existence of three, four, or more criteria of canonicity for several decades, I

am unaware of any instances where they have been put to a prescriptive test, particularly

in the case of an extracanonical book. From a certain point of view, I suggest that the

Shepherd largely satisfies the prevailing criteria of apostolicity, antiquity, use by the

church-at-large, and orthodoxy, thereby necessitating a re-evaluation of the viability of

the criteria. At a time when canon now denotes not just accepted books but exclusion and

finality in terms of a closed list,[64] these four principles are presented without any method

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[63] For now it should be enough to note that I define heresiology primarily as the polemical worldview of religious truth and falsehood that disallows others from claiming a particular identity. Heresiology can and does appear across numerous genres, from theological treatises of various stripes to heresiography, the systematic cataloguing of the beliefs and practices of named others that organizes the data and people of the world epistemologically along a binary of "in" and "out," often demonizing them, exploring their origins from other known heresies, and relating them to beasts or diseases.

[64] Whereas the final canon has now become encapsulated by the concept of a closed and exclusive list, the so-called canonical criteria remain principles of inclusion, and thus can no longer serve the purpose for which they were designated. For further discussion, see pp. 189–218 below. As regards the canon lists produced within the early church, I have late become aware of a new volume intending to bring the various primary sources through the early fifth century together for the first time in both original languages and English translation. At the same time, the authors are conscious that their volume "is not a full canon history but a tool for such research"; see Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists*

for understanding how they were utilized for exclusion, and thus should be demoted from the lofty status of "criteria," which imprecisely suggests the ancient pursuit of an open-ended, juridical process, to something more akin to "factors" meriting the eligibility of texts for canonicity. Secondarily, though studies have been conducted on borderline, but accepted, books like Hebrews and Revelation, my investigation of the *Shepherd* requires a new focus on the ecclesiastical-political dimension of the canon, exhibited so potently by the full context of Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter. As a robust case-study on a rejected book, this investigation of the *Shepherd* becomes the first of its kind, but it portends an enlivened interest in the role of episcopal authority in the church's imposition of its canon, rather than the dead ends of the so-called criteria.

However, even beyond the subdiscipline of canon studies, the *Shepherd*'s place in early Christianity is somewhat poorly understood and even underexplored. For example, in addition to Patterson's inability to account for a work like the *Shepherd* in his description of the two ways of early Christianity, Larry Hurtado's recent considerations of factors contributing to the success of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world have almost entirely avoided the evidence of the *Shepherd*. Instead of modes of belonging to the church or "the name" in ways that transcended class and offered opportunities to a character like Hermas, Hurtado has opted instead for the theological distinctiveness of a more "canonical" early Christianity: the prospect of a singular loving god, the availability

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from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), xv–xix. Excellent and indispensable though their work may be, Gallagher and Meade admit that much attention must be paid to the development of the canon that took place *before* the production of lists, and this case is conclusively made by their treatment of the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Though they afford the *Shepherd* various introductory nods as a popular early Christian book (and one, perhaps, on a canonical trajectory), and a few blurbs rehearsing the most pertinent evidence for the book among both canon lists and early patristic reception, they are unequipped by the confines of their study to engage in a discussion of reasons for its exclusion from the biblical canon lists. For example, see Gallagher and Meade, xvi–xviii, 53–5, and 279–80.

of immortality to all, the essentials of the Pauline gospel, and the promise of a new

"translocal and transethnic" religious identity.[65] Even more startlingly, a recent edited

volume with nearly 20 contributors writing about trends in second-century Christianity

only found reason to mention the *Shepherd* twice in a context virtually circumscribed to

highlight its relevance, given that its editors outwardly claim to eschew a story of

"hierarchies and institutions."[66] In contrast to this tendency to downplay or sidestep the

Shepherd as a text indicative of a prevalent strand within early Christianity, the present

study contends that it behooves scholars to consider whether it, like the *Didache* before it,

may also be a "missing piece of the puzzle" in the story of Christian origins.[67] Inasmuch

as my project intends to draw attention to the contexts for the genesis, celebration, and

disappearance of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, its rise and its fall, this dissertation also

furnishes fresh resources toward comprehension of this distinctive, popular, early

Christian text more broadly within the guild.

4.   Scope, Methodology, and Chapter Outlines

While other noteworthy and useful books from the early centuries of Christian

development also failed to achieve canonical status, this study evaluates the *Shepherd*

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[65] Larry W. Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 124–129; Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 77–82. By sifting unique elements of early Christianity from its proto-orthodox epigraphy alone, Hurtado falls somewhat into the trap, elucidated by MacMullen, xi, of unduly privileging the remains of an elite who "together count as no more than a hundredth of one per cent of the Christian population at any given moment."

[66] James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu, eds., *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 4–5.

[67] See Jonathan A. Draper and Clayton N. Jefford, eds., *The Didache: A Missing Piece of the Puzzle in Early Christianity* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

alone. No other early Christian book ultimately excluded from the New Testament achieved the popularity of the *Shepherd*, and thus I contend that Hermas's work was the one most on the precipice of canonicity. The trends I explore from the fourth century may broadly apply to other excluded books, but would need to be weighed alongside their contents and reception history on a case-by-case basis. This lies beyond my scope. And while this study focuses on developments in fourth century Christianity, when decisions on the question of canon were definitively made, it occasionally plumbs beyond this temporal barrier to demonstrate, for example, how writers of the fifth century considered the *Shepherd* excluded, how the Gelasian Decree regarded the *Shepherd* as apocryphal and anathematized it,[68] and how the book lived on in elite and monastic circles despite these declarations. Furthermore, I must recognize and examine the second- and third-century origins of the major constrictive influences on fourth century Christianity.

The dissertation features two distinct sections calling for different methodologies. First, I explore the "rise" of the *Shepherd* over the course of three chapters. In a chapter labeled "Text and Context," I present the highlights of my reading of the *Shepherd*, before examining the factors that caused the book to flourish. This chapter features a reception history of the *Shepherd* through the middle of the third century, traversing from Irenaeus to Origen to the Neapolitan catacombs diachronically to analyze their evaluations of the book. Here I consider what factors contributed to the creation of a text like the *Shepherd*, and why was it popular in pre-Constantinian Christianity. The chapter concludes by arguing that the *Shepherd*, rather than serving as a treatise on the contours

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[68] "Decretum Gelasianum," The Latin Library, http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/decretum.html. For more on the impact of this decree, see p. 163 below, esp. 163 n.125.

or limits of repentance, or as a generic "manual of Christian life," rose in popularity because it was *the* book of practical salvation—salvation achieved not through one's passive acceptance of Christ's sacrificial actions, but rather though an active progression in virtues and qualities that "built up" the Church.

The following chapter continues the reception history through the end of the fourth century, a period when the *Shepherd* came under critique from different angles, ranging from the Muratorian Fragment to Eusebius and finally to Athanasius. However, at the same time, Hermas's book maintained a certain currency among other Christians, attested particularly in its plentiful manuscript history but also in anonymous sermons, library and scriptural catalogs, and Didymus the Blind, culminating in its appearance in the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus. Ultimately, I suggest that though the *Shepherd* had its detractors prior to and including Athanasius, a route toward canonization was just as available for the *Shepherd* as other contested texts if the decision-makers of the fourth century deemed the book otherwise acceptable. A briefer middle chapter then proceeds to apply the criteria commonly cited in recent scholarship to determine both how the *Shepherd* measured up scripturally and canonically, and whether the criteria themselves remain a viable tool for determining the limits of the biblical canon. Finally, this chapter states a preference for the canon as an ecclesiastical-political instrument that guides the remainder of the dissertation's investigation into the exclusion of the *Shepherd*. Cumulatively, these three chapters seek to convey the popularity of the book in early Christianity, and to demonstrate that, viewed retrospectively, it was on a canonical

trajectory into the fourth century, a trajectory that would be disrupted by an episcopal claim to a particular biblical canon.

Following this illustration of the *Shepherd*'s "rise" comes two major sister-chapters contextualizing its "fall" and exclusion from the canon, a story requiring a careful, nuanced historical-critical approach to differentiate the second-century "laboratory" of Christian development from the constrictive environment of the fourth century. Given that all signs point to the irruptive break for the *Shepherd* coming in the fourth century, I examine the development of four trends attested in the writings of Athanasius for their evolution from the earliest epigraphic layers of Christianity. In the hands of its empowered elite, these four constrictive forces each sought to restrain some facet or aspects of early Christianity deemed undesirable. **Heresiology** represented a Christian adaptation of philosophical doxography to plot the actual diversity of doctrines and practices resulting from the Jesus movement along a genealogy of falsehood and error, thereby limiting true doctrine to an ever-narrowing subset of beliefs. More than just a genre of literature, however, heresiology constituted a potent worldview that all Christians shared, even those who would later be framed as heretics. Closely related to heresiology is the rise of hyper-defined **Christology**, especially along the Johannine *Logos*-framework that provided elite Christians a charter narrative of Jesus's simultaneous humanity and divinity. In such an environment, the logic of heresiology could be marshaled against anyone or any doctrine deemed Christologically deficient. Next, I negotiate how the early Christian openness to **prophecy and special revelation** as valid forms of authority deteriorated especially as a result of the perceived excesses of

the New Prophecy movement, leading to a conception in the third century that prophecy had itself come to an end. Not only could bishops now retort to claims of special revelation that the Spirit was dispensed to all Christians, but considering the argument of the Muratorian Fragment against the *Shepherd*—that this book appeared after the prophets and apostles—this could also be weaponized against texts that assumed the authority of special revelation. Finally, the struggle for **ecclesiastical organization** under the singular bishop exerted certain constrictive forces on the direction of the religion, privileging an empowered hierarchy and incriminating would-be challengers to their authority. As a result of this analysis, along the spectrum of each trend the *Shepherd* sticks out as a dated, incompatible product of the second century, offering no resources for a figure like Athanasius to support his doctrinal and ecclesiastical-political platforms.

Following the concerted discussion of four constrictive trends that reached their pinnacles in the fourth century, this section on the "fall" of the *Shepherd* concludes with a look into Athanasius of Alexandria, the embattled but emboldened bishop responsible for our first canon list featuring the New Testament as we know it (367 CE), as the embodiment of these constrictive influences. In particular, he manipulated the four constrictive trends, in many ways eternally shaping Christianity. Athanasius, a young attendee at Constantine's Council of Nicaea, staunchly defended the Nicene construction of Christ, employing as his primary weapon the scourge of heresy. The fight against "Arianism" consumed his entire life, causing him to privilege "the distinction between Creator and created at the centre of his theological discourse."[69] Though exiled five times

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[69] David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 145.

from his episcopacy, the immortal bishop eventually secured imperial favor over his opponents and emerged as something of a hero for his defense of "proper" Christian faith. Asserting that the scriptural canon cannot be dissected from the forces in the fourth-century church that forged its imposition, this sixth chapter primarily examines the writings across Athanasius's 45-year episcopal career, finding ample attestation for all four of the constrictive trends not only in the development of his theology and counter-Arian polemics, but also within his vaunted 39th Festal Letter that imposed his episcopal canon upon the Egyptian church loyal to the patriarch. By shining a light onto the facts of Athanasius's episcopacy and the theological wars he waged, I locate the exclusion of the *Shepherd* in a heresy-obsessed environment of increased episcopal authority. After demonstrating how Athanasius viewed the *Shepherd* amenable to Arianism, all the while opposing its undercurrents of a more primitive and uncontrollable Christian faith, I also offer a case for Athanasius's functional influence on the canon—and therefore, the *Shepherd*'s irrevocable extracanonicity—in the centuries following his death. Not only did Athanasius benefit from a hagiographical tradition that memorialized his episcopal contributions, but his canonical designs received a major boost from their reuse, in only slightly modified forms, by Jerome.

This dissertation begins, however, prior to the existence of any canon of scriptures, before four gospels were collected and used in tandem, and perhaps even in advance of any collection of a Pauline corpus. A little-known, minority religion attracted a sparse following in the imperial capital city, where stories circulated about a Savior who had been crucified and raised in the far-off province of Judaea. These stories

provided adherents with a view of what happened in the recent past, but even so, and in spite of a later attempt by the author of the Acts of the Apostles to chart an organized growth of authentic Christianity, very little could be marshaled as normative for these believers. Even Jesus himself was not a certain element of the narrative for everyone, as we will experience. The future for Christianity, and even some of its would-be scriptures, had yet to be written. In this void, with this blank slate, one Hermas felt the spark of revelation and responded to injunctions to write his visions, commandments, and parables down for the benefit of others.[70]

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[70] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3); Vis. 5.5-6 (25.5-6).

PART I — RISE OF THE *SHEPHERD*: THE BOOK AND ITS EARLIEST READERS

CHAPTER TWO

The *Shepherd* of Hermas: Text and Context

1.   Introduction: The *Shepherd* and "Apocalyptic" in Early Christianity

It is often taken for granted by scholars and laypersons alike that "apocalyptic" and related language connotes something well-defined and agreed upon within early Christianity. The canonical sway of John's Revelation has produced a range of definitions for "apocalypse" privileging the existence of a dualistic, eschatological worldview,[1] requiring the mediation of both salvation in the last days and a supernatural world to come,[2] or elevating transition from "this world, era, or state of being to another one."[3] However, when one looks into the earliest epigraphic layer of Christianity—the seven authentic letters of Paul—one finds a surprising multivalence of "apocalyptic" language, etymologically speaking at least. Paul's 19 uses of the noun ἀποκάλυψις and

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[1] Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul and Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 173.

[2] John J. Collins, *Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 (Chico, CA: Scholars' Press, 1979), 9.

[3] Barry Brummett, *Contemporary Apocalyptic Rhetoric* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 7-9.

the verb ἀποκαλύπτω fall rather evenly into three broad categories,[4] as related to (1) the

partial revelation, generally of Jesus Christ or the gospel, in the recent past,

(2) the full revelation of the divine plan in the anticipated future, and (3) revelations of a

mundane or ordinary character that can apparently be received by anybody.

Recognition of this fact bears directly on the *Shepherd* of Hermas, a text whose

"apocalyptic" language most appropriately fits into the third category observed in the

authentic Pauline corpus, as when Paul could assume that revelations might come to

believers at random and attempted to outline orderly processes for sharing them (1 Cor

14:30). Functionally, there is no denying that Hermas's Visions are littered with

apocalyptic language,[5] and that once the terminology fizzles out, the shepherd remains to

perform revelatory exposition in the form of commandments, parabolic imagery, and

allegory. And Hermas, perhaps more so than any other figure we could name from the

early centuries of Christianity, fits the bill of an everyday Josephus who was reputed to

have received revelations.[6] But Hermas manifestly did not write a text to fit the confines

of a genre,[7] even if John's Revelation preceded his. And as William Adler notes, the

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[4] Rob Heaton, "Apocalypse Then (and Now!): Paul, the Corinthians, and 'Apocalyptic'" (Denver: Unpublished seminar paper, May 23, 2016), 18-9.

[5] In the 25 chapters of the *Shepherd* of Hermas that constitute the author's five Visions, the noun ἀποκάλυψις appears 15 times, and the verb ἀποκαλύπτω another 17 times.

[6] Other contenders may include Montanus and the various women associated with the New Prophecy, including Maximilla and Priscilla.

[7] The functional presence of revelations in the *Shepherd* of Hermas has not always convinced scholars that the book belongs to the genre of apocalypse. Such judgments of the Shepherd as "pseudo-apocalypse" and other qualifiers belong mainly to past generations of scholarship, conveniently recapped by Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 10-11. But even when she demonstrated that the *Shepherd* boasts a higher-than-average concentration of the 28 scholastic markers of the apocalyptic genre, Osiek hedged somewhat by claiming that the function of its revelations entailed a modification of form, "open[ing] apocalyptic genre to new

Jewish works often cited as forebears of Revelation were not circulated under any uniform title, let alone called apocalypses, and the term was probably never used of a written document before Revelation[8]—and there perhaps as a direct challenge to the "revelation of Jesus Christ" claimed so vehemently by Paul (Gal 1:12, cf. Rv 1:1), whose credentials John found deficient and wished to counter.[9] Genre classification thus becomes a highly circular and obfuscatory endeavor, enshrouding more complicated historical realities with a convenient, and in this case, *canonical*, macro-narrative.[10] For the late first and early second century, it is preferable to conceive of "apocalyptic" not as a settled genre but as a mode of storytelling that attempts to authenticate one's message, the reception of which determined the essential validity of authorial claims.

Perhaps the field of Christian Origins can improve upon its genre-defining methodology, which maintains an all-too-keen interest in the New Testament canon when

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possibilities." This kind of qualification is only necessary in an environment overdetermined by the canonical Revelation as *the* normative apocalyptic text, foisting weighty thematic expectations upon the objects of revelation. It better reflects the scholarly need to categorize, rather than an openness to fluidity that seems to have characterized the first century CE. Carolyn Osiek, "The Genre and Function of the *Shepherd of Hermas*," in *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Semeia* 36 (Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 115; 119. Richard E. Sturm, "Defining the Word 'Apocalyptic': A Problem in Biblical Criticism," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 37.

[8] William Adler, "Introduction," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), 8-9.

[9] Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, ed. Bernard J. McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 2003), 172-3; Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, & Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 43-45; 54-55. Whereas de Boer is content to note the similarity of language and epistolary form between Paul and John, Pagels helpfully demonstrates the divergent character and function of their apocalyptic, and particularly John's misgivings with Pauline Christian praxis. John the Apocalypticist, therefore, is *also* not a participant in a genre, but has emulated certain exemplars in fashioning his "singular" apocalypse, one that in nearly every respect reads as a "minority report" among early Christianity. Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 186.

[10] As Leonard L. Thompson recently observed for some scholars, "a work may be called an apocalypse if it resembles the Revelation of John." Thompson, 18.

attempting to understand the earliest developments in the veritable black hole that

remains much of the first century CE and the first half of the second. This interest spills

over from extant versions of books to hypothetical documents ranging from *Q* and the

Johannine Signs Source to interrogating the extent of Luke's sources for the Acts of the

Apostles or the precise contents of the Corinthian church's letters to Paul. Certainly,

source criticism is a valid endeavor, but this scholarly investiture in hypothetical texts

perhaps comes at the expense of other, often marginalized works like the *Shepherd* of

Hermas. That Hermas manifestly offers a different spin on "the Christian thing"[11] in the

religion's first century of existence does not invalidate his work as unworthy of inquiry;

quite to the contrary, the production and popularity of the *Shepherd* in the early church

practically demands that a book so countervalent be properly accounted for. Instead, it is

worth the time to attempt to understand the purpose and utility of Hermas's revelations.

     None of this should be taken to suppose that I am making either a qualitative or

chronological assessment in favor of the *Shepherd* of Hermas over John's Revelation.

Even if John's Revelation were written before the *Shepherd*, it need not have become

instantly determinative of a universally recognized genre. Instead, we should not easily

dispense of Paul's sense of ordinary, everyday apocalypses in favor of a univocal concept

of apocalyptic. Multiple conceptions of the purpose and meaning of revelation persisted

at the same time, dating back to *1 Enoch* itself. Given that the earliest documented strand

of Christianity allows for a multivalence of "apocalyptic" not always permitted by

canonical or generic trends, I suggest that the *Shepherd* of Hermas receive a fair hearing

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[11] As far as I am aware, this term originates from G. K. Chesterton, though I have encountered it as wielded by David H. Kelsey, "The Bible and Christian Theology," *JAAR* 48.3 (Sept. 1980): 385-402.

first without the evaluative demands of orthodox or heterodox, of canonical or extracanonical, or of fitness to a genre that had not yet established itself. To that end, this chapter on the text and context of the *Shepherd* of Hermas begins with a detailed overview of the book's central contents and what these contents might signify contextually for the *Shepherd*'s place in the earliest centuries of Christianity. I consider both why a book like the *Shepherd* was written in the first place, and why it apparently flourished in the second and third centuries, aided as such by a reception history that spans from Irenaeus, the earliest writer of the church to mention the book, to Origen, and finally to the Christian "underground" in Naples—covering the period up to c. 250 CE. Throughout this period, I contend that but for the turbulent Tertullian, whose opinion of the book appears to have shifted over his lifetime, the *Shepherd* of Hermas curried surprising favor among ostensibly orthodox writers, meshing well within a milieu where Christianity was still under significant theological development. In this period, Hermas's work—an early Christian book of salvation—met needs not always satisfied elsewhere, standing alongside other ultimately canonized texts unproblematically, even while it portended differing priorities for the Christians who welcomed the book into their trusted scriptural collections and whose Christian experiences were shaped in some manner by a now-disfavored, but undeniably influential, tradent of the religion's development.

2.   Hermas's Book of the *Shepherd*: An Early Christian Treatise on Salvation

Before proceeding further, however, it is necessary to begin by overviewing the crucial contents of the early Christian book in question. While no level of effusion in this

short space could substitute for a full reading of the text in a critical edition, or sifting

through the groundbreaking detail contained within Carolyn Osiek's *Hermeneia*

commentary on the book,[12] establishing some common ground on the concerns,

preoccupations, core imagery, and *raison d'être* of the *Shepherd* will allow for quicker

comprehension and essential recall as this dissertation unfolds. And though there are

several thematic or topical methods to guide such an overview, it seems most sensible to

follow the tripartite divisions present in the text of the *Shepherd*. Thus, the next handful

of pages covers the Visions, Commandments, and Parables attested in the same

manuscript as early as the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus,[13] but now believed to have

been present since earliest days of a text that migrated beyond Italy. Throughout this tour

of the *Shepherd*, I progressively unfurl my case that the text be viewed as an early

Christian book of salvation.

The Visions

The *Shepherd* begins with the character of the shepherd nowhere in sight, and

with a series of visions that Hermas experiences, often but not always during his sleep.

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[12] Carolyn Osiek's 1999 *Hermeneia* commentary from Fortress Press remains the only such sustained work on the *Shepherd* in English. Similar, but now dated, German and French commentaries have appeared in the last century from Martin Dibelius (1923) and Robert Joly (1968).

[13] While at one time the exact confines of the text of the *Shepherd* in Codex Sinaiticus was in question, given that its extant material ended in the middle of Commandment 4, recent discoveries of new leaves at the Monastery of St. Catherine from Parable 9, published only this decade, confirmed suspicions that the text was more or less complete in the pandect Bible. Furthermore, while scholars once concluded that the Commandments and Parables were transmitted separately from the Visions, it now seems that the Visions and Mandates circulated together in one of the earliest Egyptian manuscripts, P.Oxy. 4706. A better conclusion from the bountiful manuscript evidence for the *Shepherd*, which includes amulets and opisthographs, might be that it was a text in demand, and thus copies were made widely that sometimes included only individual sections or passages, to suit one's resources or desires. For more on the manuscript history for the *Shepherd*, see chapter 3 of this dissertation, esp. pp. 165–86.

Though officially enumerated as five, also dating back to the Codex Sinaiticus and its manuscriptural forbears, the Visions feature several disjunctive appearances of different beings to Hermas. An editor presented today with the text would have little justification, for example, to bundle the appearance of a young man—who expounds upon the three forms of the woman Church that Hermas has already seen[14]—within the lengthy vision of the tower under construction, other than that it is apparently linked temporally with the departure of the third woman. Importantly, however, Hermas's storytelling does not unfold in a consecutive narrative style, supposing to recount every event from that period of time. Instead, the storytelling style is episodic,[15] propelled apocalyptically by the various appearances and revelations to Hermas. Between the relevant episodes, great expanses of time are passed over, ranging from approximately a year,[16] to fifteen[17] or twenty days,[18] to "on the same night."[19] Given that each of these episodes is driven by visions, revelations, and things made known to Hermas, "apocalyptic" functions in the Visions not as a genre to which the author conforms but as the primary mode of

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[14] His appearance begins at Herm. Vis. 3.10.7 (18.7) and remains through the conclusion of 3.13.4 (21.4).

[15] Episodic storytelling does not preclude a snowballing narrative, where each subsequent act depends on and relates to that which has preceded it. The arrival of the shepherd in the book is therefore prefigured in the visions and paraenetic material already delivered by the woman Church, and they explain one another symbiotically even if absolute consistency on every fine point is not one of Hermas's major concerns.

[16] Herm. Vis. 2.1.1 (5.1).

[17] Herm. Vis. 2.2.1 (6.1).

[18] Herm. Vis. 4.1.1 (22.1).

[19] αὐτῇ τῇ νυκτί; Herm. Vis. 3.1.2 (9.2). This vision of the Tower as presented to Hermas by the elderly woman apparently transpires on the same night as Hermas received a vision to write and disseminate two little books to Clement and Graptē. Herm. Vis. 2.4.2-3 (8.2-3).

storytelling, as the means by which Hermas's story is driven forward from one episode or act to the next.

In spite of the prevalence of visions, the text paradoxically opens not with a heavy-handed claim to special revelation but with a rare autobiographical episode that introduces Hermas as a *threptos*—in the days of Trajan, a term designating "free persons who were exposed at birth, but then brought up in slavery by those who rescued them."[20] If the opening words of the text, Ὁ θρέψας με, are to be trusted—and most interpreters do—then, combined with the woman Church's later expectation that Hermas has the ability to read and write,[21] it would seem that Hermas was trained to perform some scribal or bookkeeping functions from an early age. It becomes not improbable that Hermas might have served in an upper class Roman household, thereby gaining material advantages not available to him had he been freeborn.[22] But Hermas dwells not on his own status, for it is his former master, a woman named Rhoda, who quickly takes center stage: he recounts seeing her bathing in the Tiber River, and subsequently helping her out of the river. Hermas has almost certainly imagined the episode, for as Carolyn Osiek

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[20] Pliny the Younger, *Ep. Tra.* 66.1. Translation per Betty Racide, in *Letters, Volume II: Books 8-10. Panegyricus.*, LCL 59 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 251. Trajan supplies this definition. Notably, though the correspondence of Pliny and Trajan is in Latin, Pliny's legal question about the emancipation of θρεπτους serendipitously retains the Greek term intact, leaving no doubt about the official meaning of this term in the early second century. In prior centuries, by contrast, a *threptos* could have meant several things, including "foster-child, adopted child and slave child." William Linn Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1955), 30 n.39.

[21] See, for example, Herm. Vis. 2.1.3-4; 2.4.3 (5.3-4; 8.4.3). When he arrives in Vis. 5, the shepherd can also assume Hermas's literacy; see Herm. Vis. 5.5 (25.5). Hermas's inability to comprehend the initial message that he copies from the woman Church is no argument against his literacy, for he knows to look in a written text for the syllables even if he is reduced at first to copying grapheme by grapheme.

[22] K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 15.

argues, it defies belief that a wealthy freewoman would bathe openly in the river.[23] But

its expression opens Hermas to accusation, not by just anyone, but by Rhoda herself, who

appears to him during prayer and indicts him before the Lord of desiring her

inappropriately.[24] Though Hermas insists he wished to have a wife of Rhoda's beauty,

and nothing else (ἕτερον δὲ οὐδὲν), he quickly relents and laments about the possibility of

salvation when even his inner thoughts, which he soon acknowledges, are brought to bear

against him. The orienting questions he asks internally are worth considering in full, for

they weigh heavily on Hermas's concerns as his book unfolds.

> After [Rhoda] had spoken these words, the heavens were closed, and I was
> completely shaken and aggrieved. And I said to myself, "*If this very sin is
> inscribed against me, how can I be saved?* Or how will I propitiate God for
> my certain sins? Or with what sort of words might I ask that the Lord be
> gracious to me?"[25]

Hermas is concerned primarily about the relationship between himself and the divine, and

his initial question about securing salvation suggests that it remains an unsettled problem

in the early church.[26] At first this exists as a matter of Hermas's self-interest—and

indeed, the initial appearance of an elderly lady, whom Hermas later learns symbolizes

the Church,[27] proceeds to explain the nature of God's anger against him and his family

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[23] Osiek, Hermeneia, 42-3.

[24] Herm. Vis. 1.1.5-8 (1.5-8).

[25] Herm. Vis. 1.2.1 (2.1); trans. mine, emphasis mine.

[26] The *Shepherd*, like other early Christian texts, is less interested in describing what salvation actually means or what the afterlife might entail. Hermas might be disinterested in the speculative content of 1 Cor. 15, but content with Paul's answer in 1 Thess. 4:17: "...in this manner we will be with the Lord always." In any case, Hermas can presume that salvation is a goal shared among his audience; he writes out of a concern about how to properly achieve it. Paul's comment to the Philippians, whom he encouraged to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), may be an appropriate analog to Hermas's aims, though he need not have heard or read it specifically.

[27] Herm. Vis. 2.4.1 (8.1).

specifically. However, with the passage of a year, the woman beckons Hermas to share her pronouncements against sin and for righteousness more widely with his family, his sister,[28] someone named Maximus,[29] and with the church both in Rome and in other cities, with the assistance of one Clement.[30]

The longest of the Visions soon follows, when "having fasted often and begged the Lord to manifest to me the revelation (τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν) that he promised to show me through the elderly woman," Hermas is then lifted upon an ivory couch and allowed to see a tower under construction at the behest of the elderly woman.[31] Every part of the lengthy tower episode carries symbolic significance, from its construction upon the waters,[32] to the six young men building it—"the holy angels of God, the first creations"[33]—to the identities of the stones accepted and rejected by the young men, described in an exhaustive taxonomy that stretches from the apostles who fit together perfectly at its base to stones deemed "useless" (ἄχρηστοι) for the building.[34] In a reveal that simultaneously surprises and confounds the reader, the woman Church explains that

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[28] Herm. Vis. 2.3.1 (7.1). This may be an allusion to Hermas's wife, whom the woman Church said was becoming a sister to him. Herm Vis. 2.2.3 (6.3).

[29] Herm. Vis. 2.3.4 (7.4).

[30] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3).

[31] Herm. Vis. 3.1.1 (9.1); trans. mine. Herm. Vis. 3.2.4 (10.4).

[32] Herm. Vis. 3.3.5 (11.5). In apparent symbolism toward baptism, though creation myths may also be in view. Osiek, Hermeneia, 68-9.

[33] Herm. Vis. 3.4.1 (12.1); trans. mine.

[34] This taxonomy stretches from Herm. Vis. 3.5.1–3.7.6 (13.1–15.6), but for the appearance of ἄχρηστοι, a suspiciously phonetic callback to Christ (or "non-Christ"!), see, e.g., Herm. Vis. 3.6.2 (14.2).

the tower Hermas sees is also the Church.[35] When Hermas asks to have the meaning of his vision explained to him at length, he learns that the stones must be properly hewn to be useful (εὔχρηστοι) for inclusion in the tower, and furthermore that this can be accomplished through a purity of trust in the living God, the opposite of which is double-mindedness (διψυχία). A more elaborate answer to one of Hermas's questions about salvation arrives when the elderly woman introduces him to a group of seven women attending the tower, the first of whom is given the name Πίστις: through her, Hermas learns, "the chosen ones of God are saved."[36] Lest one receive a Lutheran, Pauline vibe from such a statement, however, Hermas's vision expounds on this thought. Somewhat like Russian nesting dolls, the seven women are sequential daughters of Trust/Faith, and bear names like Self-control, Knowledge, Innocence, and Love; it is by serving these qualities and "master[ing]" their works that one secures his or her place "in the tower … with the holy ones of God."[37] The Church, imagined here as a tower, stands for Hermas as a participatory and salvific reality demanding moral improvement[38] as a prerequisite to one's personal enshrinement in its cosmic edifice. Hermas himself, for example, is

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[35] The Greek here literally reads: "Now the tower you see being built I am, the Church, who appeared to you both now and previously." ὁ μέν πύργος ὃν βλέπεις οἰκοδομούμενον ἐγώ εἰμι, ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ ὀφθεῖσά σοι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρότερον. Herm. Vis. 3.3.3 (11.3).

[36] Herm. Vis. 3.8.3 (16.3).

[37] Herm. Vis. 3.8.8 (16.8); trans. mine.

[38] This would not be too far from the Book of James's insistence on "perfection" or "completion," a linguistic family (ὁλόκληρον, Mand. 5.2 [34.2]; ὁλοτελεῖς, Vis. 3.6.4 [14.4] and Mand. 9.6 [39.6]) also found in the *Shepherd*. In spite of their shared moral imperatives and a similar shared interest in διψυχία, the relationship between James and Hermas has not been adequately plumbed or explained.

instructed to "become useful (pl.) to God, for you yourself (sing.) are to be used as one of these stones."[39]

A brief but powerful vision follows some three weeks later when Hermas, walking into the countryside, pleads for the Lord to send him another revelation. Hermas attests that he then encountered a great beast nearly one hundred feet in length, but was able to face it down merely by "having put on … the faith of the Lord" and remembering not to be double-minded.[40] When subsequently met by a young lady also representing the Church, Hermas was congratulated for avoiding double-mindedness, and for "trusting that through nothing else could [he] be saved except through the great and glorious name."[41] Other episodes that precede this in the Visions call to mind the importance of avoiding double-mindedness, and in fact, the elderly woman informs Hermas at one point that he has been chosen to receive revelations in part "because of the double-minded, the ones who ponder in their hearts whether these things are or are not."[42] Hermas's mission includes sharing his revelations with those on the believing or doubting fringes of the church. But this fourth vision stands out for its insistence that a singularity of trust in the

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[39] Herm. Vis. 3.6.7 (14.7).

[40] Herm. Vis. 4.1.8 (22.8). Though linguistic parallels never last for more than a word or two, the idea of "putting on" (ἐνδυσάμενος) some quality of God, as if it were an item of clothing, is one of several possible echoes of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4–5, esp.) in Hermas's Visions; cf. 1 Thess. 5:8. Hermas also echoes a concern for the καιρῶν (Vis. 3.8.9 [16.9]; cf. 1 Thess. 5:1) and neatly pairs the κεκοιμημένοι with the living in his vision of the tower (Vis. 3.5.1 [13.1]; cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-15).

[41] Herm. Vis. 4.2.4 (23.4); trans. mine. Lest we ascribe some agency to the "name" or its referents here, one must take note that Hermas is saved through *his own* maintenance of trust, which then seems to trigger the intervention of the angel Thegri, "who has authority over the beasts." The upshot is to maintain one's trust in the Lord, for "he can do all things." Herm. Vis. 4.2.3; 6 (23.3; 6).

[42] Herm. Vis. 3.4.3 (12.3); trans. mine. Hermas does not seem to be among the double-minded himself, at least in the Visions, though he is sometimes accused of double-mindedness in the Parables. In the Visions, Hermas is more often than not affirmed for his moral fortitude, as when the old woman Church calls him Ἑρμᾶς ὁ ἐγκρατής. Vis. 1.2.4 (2.4).

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Lord can empower one to pass successfully though the "great tribulation that is coming,"[43] or any beasts that would challenge the faithful in the interim.

Whereas proper "apocalyptic" terminology ceases at this point in the book, after these several revelatory episodes comes the first appearance of the book's titular character, the shepherd to whom Hermas was "entrusted" (παρεδόθης).[44] We need not jump to any conclusions about the precise identity of this shepherd, however. While it would be convenient to imagine the shepherd as in some way equatable to Jesus, like in some New Testament texts,[45] this is never stated explicitly in Hermas's text or by its earliest readers. In fact, as we will see, hints from both Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria suggest that Hermas's shepherd was interpreted and received otherwise, and it is necessary to note that the *kriophoros* served broadly in the ancient world to depict roles of guidance, well beyond Judaism and Christianity, and especially to shepherd the human soul to its resting place.[46] Stories of Greco-Roman deities are regularly infused with the theme of shepherding. As with Hermas's initial guess that the woman Church was the Sibyl,[47] this may represent a marriage of Greco-Roman practices and religious expectations with otherwise recognizable Christian themes. For his part, Hermas only describes the shepherd as "a certain man glorious in appearance" and as "the angel of

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[43] Herm. Vis. 4.2.5 (23.5).

[44] Herm. Vis. 5.3 (25.3).

[45] Cf. Jn 10:11-16; Heb 13:20; 1 Pt. 5:4.

[46] Eric C. Smith, *Foucault's Heterotopia in Christian Catacombs: Constructing Spaces and Symbols in Ancient Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 59–60.

[47] Herm. Vis. 2.4.2 (8.2).

μετανοίας," which is imagined in the *Shepherd* as a significant re-orientation to living one's life τῷ θεῷ.[48]

Whether the appearance of the shepherd properly belongs to the Visions or exists only as connective material to introduce the sections that follow, as has long been debated, the shepherd's entrance fits the episodic storytelling method the reader has come to expect. Moreover, the shepherd's explicit instructions to Hermas continue in the same vein as his previous visions, whereby Hermas receives instruction both for his own benefit and so that he can record and circulate them for the wider church. In his instruction that Hermas record his commandments and parables,[49] the shepherd conveniently introduces the final two divisions of the text that would quickly circulate under his authority.

The Commandments (Mandates)

With little fanfare, the recently arrived shepherd launches into a set of twelve commandments, numerologically intended for a Christian audience in replacement or augmentation of the Torah's ten.[50] The entrance of the shepherd may mean that apocalyptic terminology has disappeared, but the shepherd performs a similar function to

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[48] Herm. Vis. 5.1 (25.1); 5.7 (25.7). I follow the typical translation of this idiosyncratic but characteristic saying of Hermas as "live *to God*." Though it has undoubted eschatological significance, it also implies a here-and-now reflection of that which will only become solidified at the end: one's ultimate salvation. See further discussion in Osiek, Hermeneia, 104.

[49] Herm. Vis. 5.5 (25.5).

[50] The number twelve quietly bears significance for Hermas, though he nowhere connects this explicitly to the existence of twelve apostles or the twelve tribes of Israelite lore. Beyond the shepherd's twelve commandments, the Parables section introduces readers to an abundance of twelves: twelve mountains from which individuals come into the tower, supposedly representing the twelve nations of the world, and twelve virgins attending the tower.

Hermas's prior revelations: his commandments are more concrete, formalized, and authoritative, even if Hermas "do[es] not know if these commandments can be followed by a human, for they are very hard."[51] The first commandment bears a clear echo of the Israelite *Shema*, but replaces specifics about God's relationship to the Israelites with questions of greater philosophical recency: "First of all, believe that God is one, who created all things and set them in order, and made out of what did not exist everything that is (καὶ ποιήσας ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ πάντα), and who contains all things but is himself uncontained."[52] While this commandment becomes the most frequently quoted passage from the *Shepherd* by church fathers over the next few centuries, it is one of the few explicit, non-negotiable theological assertions found in Hermas's text. Granted, several of the commandments contain declarations intended for intellectual assent,[53] but a paraenetic concern for practical, individual self-improvement consistently lies at the heart of the shepherd's mandates.

Figure 2.1 on the following page, a table of the shepherd's twelve commandments, attempts to unmask the imperatives delivered to Hermas from their husks of verbose elaboration. Uncovering an "essential" commandment from these lengthy discourses is not always an easy task, for the passages sometimes digress onto a

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[51] Herm. Mand. 12.3.4 (46.4).

[52] Herm. Mand. 1.1 (26.1). This is one of the earliest statements of a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in Christian history, but scholars tend to downplay its significance—as if Hermas does not quite understand what he insinuates (or more properly, what the shepherd has relayed to him). For more, see the section below on Irenaeus's reception of Hermas.

[53] Among these in particular are the shepherd's contention that "there are two angels with a person, one of righteousness and one of wickedness" (Herm. Mand. 6.2.1 [36.1]), and the apparent possibility of only one post-baptismal repentance/conversion in cases of reversion into a life of sin (Herm. Mand. 4.3.6 [31.6]).

tangential matter, as in Commandment 2, where the shepherd's initial instruction to become simple and guileless perseverates on how one who donates should give freely to all, without consideration of worthiness. In many cases, the "essential" commandment appears in the first line of the passage, but in others, as in Commandment 11, the instruction must be excavated from a lengthy parable. And Commandment 4 quickly moves from a general interest in purity to very specific interests about the limits of μετάνοια and instructions for both husbands and wives in cases of infidelity. However, this table should convey the inherent paraenetic direction of the shepherd's commandments to Hermas.

Fig. 2.1: Table of the Shepherd's Twelve Commandments

	"Essential" Mandate
Commandment 1	"Believe that God is one . . . and fear him, and fearing him, exercise self-control."[54]
Commandment 2	"Be simple and guileless."[55]
Commandment 3	"Love truth, and see that every truth comes forth from your mouth . . . "[56]
Commandment 4	"Therefore, maintain purity and reverence, and you will live to God."[57]
Commandment 5	"Be patient and understanding . . . and you will overcome all evil deeds and will accomplish all righteousness."[58]
Commandment 6	"Therefore trust (the angel of righteousness) and his works. . . . But shun the angel of wickedness, because his teaching is evil in every respect."[59]

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[54] Herm. Mand. 1.1-2 (26.1-2).

[55] Herm. Mand. 2.1 (27.1); trans. mine.

[56] Herm. Mand. 3.1 (28.1); trans. mine.

[57] Herm. Mand. 4.4.3 (32.3); trans. mine.

[58] Herm. Mand. 5.1 (33.1).

[59] Herm. Mand. 6.2.3; 7 (36.3; 7).

Commandment 7	"Fear the Lord . . . and keep his commandments."[60]
Commandment 8	"Exercise self-control over evil, and do not act thusly; but do not exercise self-control toward the good—just do it."[61]
Commandment 9	"Rid yourself of double-mindedness . . ."[62]
Commandment 10	"Rid yourself of grief . . . [and] therefore put on the cheerfulness that always curries God's grace . . ."[63]
Commandment 11	"In this way you can test the prophet and the false prophet. By his life, weigh which person possesses the divine spirit. . . . See that you trust in the spirit coming from God and that has power, but never trust in the earthly and empty spirit, because it is powerless, for it comes from the devil."[64]
Commandment 12	"Rid yourself of all evil desire, and clothe yourself with the desire that is good and holy . . ."[65]

Given the marked difference between an opening section propelled by apocalyptic visions to Hermas and the Mandates, where imperative-laden exposition dominates the story-scape, it is crucial to take stock of the thematic similarities as revelation elides into commandment. Fortunately, continuity is maintained in three primary manners. First, double-mindedness, which frequently stands in the Visions for doubt or a disconnect of trust in the Lord, persists through to a commandment of its own and is described as "an earthly spirit from the devil, having no power."[66] So significant is double-mindedness to Hermas that immediately following this statement, readers learn that the authoritative antidote of double-mindedness is none other than Trust/Faith, through which the woman

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[60] Herm. Mand. 7.1 (37.1).

[61] Herm. Mand. 8.2 (38.2); trans. mine.

[62] Herm. Mand. 9.1 (39.1).

[63] Herm. Mand. 10.2.5; 3.1 (41.5; 42.1); trans. mine.

[64] Herm. Mand. 11.7; 17 (43.7; 17); trans. mine.

[65] Herm. Mand. 12.1.1 (44.1).

[66] Herm. Mand. 9.11 (39.11).

Church has already informed him that "the chosen ones of God are saved."[67] Second, of the seven women or feminine qualities supporting the image of the Church as a tower in Vision 3,[68] five of them (Πίστις, Ἐγκράτεια, Ἁπλότης, Ἀκακία, and Σεμνότης) receive conscious embellishment throughout the Commandments, in many cases more than once.[69] Examples where these qualities appear in the Mandates can be found within Fig. 2.1, where their translations are marked in red text within the "essential" commandments. These first two observed continuities from the Visions to the Commandments indicate similar concerns for character-building from its author, lending further credence to the *Shepherd* as an accreted text developed over time in a communal feedback loop of give and take between a creative rhetor and his audience.[70]

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, both the Visions and the Mandates demonstrate a sustained interest in how a person can be saved or "live to God," which overlap in enough instances to be considered synonymous, though the former denotes an ultimate soteriological achievement and the latter also includes an element of the "here and now." In one example from Commandment 4, the shepherd teaches Hermas via a negative example about how someone can forego life by sinning repeatedly. Hermas understands this as a pathway to being saved, given that he plans to cease sinning, and the shepherd so affirms him: "You will be saved . . . and so will everyone else who does

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[67] Herm. Vis. 3.8.3 (16.3).

[68] Herm. Vis. 3.8.3-5 (16.3-5).

[69] It may not be a coincidence that the only two missing from this scheme, Ἐπιστήμη and Ἀγάπη, are described in Vis. 3 as powers that develop sequentially last. Thus, mastery of the first five may be understood as generative of Knowledge and Love. Herm. Vis. 3.8.7 (16.7).

[70] Osiek, Hermeneia, 14.

these things."[71] Statistically speaking, concerted language about being saved or attaining

salvation appears in half of the twelve commandments, and all but Mandates 5 and 11

contain the "live to God" formula, usually by way of some concluding statement.[72] The

sustained appearance of this language calls to mind both the initial motivational question

that beleaguered Hermas, who wondered how he could be saved with a record of his sins

tallied against him, and the powerful image of the tower, inclusion into which denotes

one's salvation. It is therefore no surprise that the shepherd's mini-epilogue contains final

reminders that to neglect the commandments means Hermas "will not have salvation,"

but that keeping them ensures he and his audience "will live to God."[73] The same concern

for salvation inspires both Hermas's revelations and the shepherd's instruction; the latter

is best viewed, then, as a more direct restatement of imagined or envisioned fictions at

first relayed parabolically. If the apocalyptic visions are the _hyperreal_, the shepherd's

mandates represent the _real_ for Hermas's audience. Though the Commandments begin by

informing Hermas and his audience what they must believe about the one God, from that

point forward they firmly moor salvation to personal development, refinement, and

ethical concerns.

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[71] Herm. Mand. 4.3.6-7 (31.6-7).

[72] As one instructive example: "All who keep these commandments and walk in them will live to God." Herm. Mand. 8.12 (38.12). This formula universally includes some verbal form of ζάω, often in the future tense to convey conditionality, plus τῷ θεῷ in the dative case, producing an awkward but essentially understandable expression.

[73] Herm. Mand. 12.3.6; 6.3 (46.6; 49.3).

The Parables (Similitudes)

While teaching Hermas in parables has been anticipated by the Visions and by the chiefly parabolic storytelling of Commandment 11, the official Parables section—easily the lengthiest of the three in the *Shepherd*—begins with similar concerns for salvation, the destinies of individuals, and marks of moral improvement. The opening parable, strikingly, stands alone as a thematic outlier, orienting hearers who are servants of God to view earthly life as a foreign place, "for your city is far from this city."[74] Payoff for this parable comes very quickly, as the shepherd instructs Hermas and his audience to "buy souls that are in distress" rather than tending to businesses, fields, and belongings that are the domain of the earthly city.[75] Immediately, therefore, it becomes clear that the new section heading of "Parables" does not denote the end either of the shepherd's commandments or the mantras that are by this point familiar to the reader: following the shepherd's instructions will allow a person to be saved,[76] "inscribed into the books of the living,"[77] and live to God.[78]

A quartet of parables featuring heavily horticultural imagery follows, each of which aims at concretizing a different moral. At first Hermas marvels over the relationship of mutual benefit displayed by the elm tree and the vine, and in the course of this kernel of a thought, the shepherd reappears to him to impress this symbiosis as the

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[74] Herm. Sim. 1.1 (50.1).

[75] Herm. Sim. 1.8 (50.8).

[76] Herm. Sim. 1.11 (50.11).

[77] Herm. Sim. 2.9 (51.9); trans. mine.

[78] Herm. Sim. 5.1.5 (54.5).

basis for relations between rich and poor in the church. The parable is sufficiently vague

to allow for the rich and the poor to fit both the descriptions of the elm and the vine, and

indeed, a singular interpretation of its allegory has not proven decisive in recent

decades.[79] In lieu of a certain way to read the metaphorical signs, one is struck by the

parable's conservative ethic. The shepherd does not imagine a deconstruction of wealth

and poverty, and neither does he romanticize an ideal of pooled resources among the

church (cf. Acts 4:32-37). Instead, the rich are admonished to provide for the poor from

their material wealth, and the poor are likewise expected to reciprocate from their deeper

wells of spiritual and intercessory resources.[80]

Parable 5, the last of this early quartet of horticultural stories, contains a

complexity heretofore unseen, but its expansive and multivalent nature also foreshadows

the lengthier centerpiece parables to follow. This fifth parable begins with Hermas

explaining his own religious practice—an early morning fast, which he refers to as a

στατίων[81]—and allows for the shepherd to issue a corrective. True fasting, per Hermas's

angelic interlocutor, is not a period of abstinence from food, though he later concedes that

self-denial of sustenance does play a role in one's march toward perfection.[82] Instead, the

shepherd redefines fasting in terms of the μετάνοια or re-orientation of one's life to

serving God that permeates the book up to this point:

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[79] Osiek, Hermeneia, 163.

[80] Herm. Sim. 2.7 (51.7).

[81] Osiek quips that this remark, a loan-word taken from the Latin *statio*, confuses the shepherd as much as it does modern commentators. Osiek, Hermeneia, 169.

[82] Thus, subsequent to following the commandments of the Lord, "on that day in which you fast," the penitent is permitted only bread and water, and must furthermore donate to the poor the amount of money they would have spent on food had they not been fasting. Herm. Sim. 5.3.7 (56.7); trans. mine.

But fast a fast to God in this manner: Do no evil in your life, and serve the Lord with a clean heart. Keep his commandments, walking in his precepts, and allow no evil desire to arise in your heart, but trust in God. And if you work on (ἐργάσῃ) these things and fear him and abstain from every evil deed, *you will live to God*—and if you work on these things, you will fulfill a great fast that is acceptable to God.[83]

By now it should be clear enough that an interest in salvation, life, and being reckoned into the books of the living persists throughout the *Shepherd*, virtually from its starting point of Rhoda's appearance to Hermas. Few interpreters dwell on this interest, in spite of its ability to envelop and explain the other seemingly high-level theological concerns of μετάνοια and διψυχία. Carolyn Osiek seems puzzled at some points of her commentary when "living to God," the "formula that concludes many of the *Mandates*," reappears unexpectedly in the Parables.[84] However, when even a cut-and-dried concept such as fasting can be realigned from its universal connotation with food and drink to living an all-encompassing Godly praxis, the signal should sound that Hermas is centrally occupied by the sort of life that will lead one to ultimate salvation.

Rather than tracking the rest of the Parables beat-by-beat, a task that could almost continue unabated forever, the remainder of this account will deal primarily with new and otherwise remarkable elements introduced to the *Shepherd*. The first of these arrives immediately from the shepherd's redefinition of fasting, when after a rather commonplace parable of a slave who tends a master's vineyard reinforces the need for a true fast, the shepherd overlays the parable with an explicit theological allegory. While the master of the field is rather obviously imagined as the creator God, the shepherd

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[83] Herm. Sim. 5.1.4-5 (54.4-5); trans. mine, emphasis mine.

[84] Osiek, Hermeneia, 183.

declares that the master's son is the Holy Spirit, and the slave who so expertly tended to the master's vineyard—thus earning him a share of the son's inheritance—is the Son of God.[85] The parable simultaneously teases an allegory and an implied Christology that would undoubtedly be uncomfortable to later readers in the church, one that has been variously described as a servant Christology, or as adoptionist or exaltationist.[86] Hermas soon after interjects with a question that implies the Son-as-slave imagery was met with some resistance, but the shepherd's response only perplexes further[87] and seems to redirect readers to consider the great power and duty with which God entrusted the slave/Son.

Speculative theology, or at least that which would introduce reforms to the *Shepherd*'s apparent melding of Hellenistic Judaism with early Christian elements, lies somewhat outside of Hermas's comfort zone. At one point, this aversion is mapped onto the shepherd's instruction to Hermas: "You are unable to see what lies behind you, but you do see what is in front of you. Let go, therefore, of what you cannot see, and do not strain yourself with it; but become master over (κατακυρίευε) what you do see, and do not busy yourself about the rest."[88] That this admonition subtly privileges Hermas's paraenetic agenda cannot be meaningfully disputed, but it loses some of its force as the

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[85] Herm. Sim. 5.5.2 (58.2).

[86] Considering the first- or second-century setting of the *Shepherd*, where there existed no proper roadmap, Trinitarian doctrine, or victorious Christology guiding Hermas to a theological destination, this allegory perfectly exemplifies a great working-out of beliefs in the laboratory setting of open give and take. For more on the portrait of early Christianity as a laboratory, see pp. 97–9 below.

[87] In particular, a nasty text-critical issue confounds intelligibility; it is unclear whether the shepherd concedes that the Son of God was a slave or whether he denies this. Herm. Sim. 5.6.1 (59.1); see Osiek, Hermeneia, 178.

[88] Herm. Sim. 9.2.7 (79.7); trans. mine.

author yet continues to accommodate his message to incipiently ascending Christologies. With a view of the *Shepherd* as an accreted text, growing in length and depth over the course of feedback with his audience, one example of a latecoming addition is the sudden abundance of the Son of God. While the word υἱὸς appears some 46 times in the text of the *Shepherd*, 45 of these instances come in the Parables, strongly suggesting a newfound need to incorporate other elements of Christian confession with which Hermas has become familiar.[89] However, Hermas's message about the Son of God is not univocal, and reflects a nervous grappling toward his precise placement. Beyond the allegorical depiction of the Son of God as a slave who earned an inheritance through his exceptional work, Hermas's shepherd also describes the Son of God as the law of God,[90] as a herald who calls people to God,[91] as the spirit who previously spoke to Hermas in the feminine guise of the Church,[92] and as the sustainer of all creation[93] as well as God's counselor (σύμβουλον) through the creative process,[94] and finally as the door through which people who are saved enter the kingdom of God, in spite of only having been revealed in the "last days of the consummation."[95] Readers of the *Shepherd* can therefore observe a great

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[89] To further break this down, the word son appears 15 times in Parable 5 (in about half of these instances, the referent is to the master's son in the parable, who readers later learn is the Holy Spirit), twice in Parable 8, and a remarkable 28 times in Parable 9.

[90] Herm. Sim. 8.3.2 (69.2).

[91] Herm. Sim. 8.11.1 (77.11).

[92] Herm. Sim. 9.1.1 (78.1).

[93] Herm. Sim. 9.14.5 (91.5). This is expressed with a finite verb: τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ . . . τὸν κόσμον ὅλον βαστάζει. In the sentence that immediately follows, τὸ ὄνομα becomes removed from this equation.

[94] Herm. Sim. 9.12.2 (89.2).

[95] Herm. Sim. 9.12.3 (89.3).

ascent of the Son of God's import, even if a singular story does not emerge and the Son is never named or attributed as the precise mediator of salvation.

In the midst of a slew of new imagery, the latter Parables carry over the significance of the tower as a symbol of the Church and a model of salvation. By modern reckoning, more than half of the Parables' 65 chapters are spent in Parable 9, where the construction of the tower receives further elaboration in finer detail. This parable alone, to which 33 chapters are dedicated, is therefore longer than both the Visions (25 chs.) and the Commandments (24 chs.).[96] The shepherd, who now explains the parable to Hermas, justifies this recapitulation by insisting that he needs to learn its meaning more accurately (ἀκριβέστερον) and see more ably, without his previous timidity.[97] New elements accrue to the parable, including twelve mountains from which stones are brought for placement into the tower and the character of the Son of God, described varyingly as the master (ὁ δεσπότης) and lord (κύριος) of the tower.[98] Furthermore, the seven women supporting the tower in the Visions have now become twelve virgins, four (Trust/Faith, Simplicity, Innocence, and Love) of whom retain names given to the women in the Visions.[99] In spite of the palpable presence of the Son of God in this parable, the shepherd stops short of imagining the Son of God as salvific agent. Instead, the message of the earlier vision is

[96] Beyond this, the tower also appears unexpectedly in Parable 8, which imagines believers of varying degrees of commitment and spiritual development as branches of a willow tree, specifying which believers might be worthy of inclusion in the tower.

[97] Herm. Sim. 9.1.3 (78.3).

[98] Herm. Sim. 9.5.7 (82.7); 9.7.1 (84.1).

[99] Herm. Sim. 9.15.2 (92.2). Of the new names for the virgins, only "Power" (Δύναμις) is particularly surprising; others like Truth, Understanding, and Harmony fit well into the pattern of Hermas's established moralizing program. In a new development, these twelve virgins also have "wild" (ἄγριαι) counterparts that lead men astray bearing rather on-the-nose names like Distrust/Unbelief, Self-indulgence, Disobedience, and Evil.

reinforced: taking on the name of the Son of God may be a prerequisite to entering the kingdom of God, but one cannot be considered for inclusion in the tower unless he or she has attained the names or powers of the virgins, "for even the Son himself bears the names of these virgins."[100] In other words, one must be known both as a Christian and as a morally complete individual to achieve enshrinement with the saints, earn salvation and life, or become useful (εὐχρηστοι) in the building of the tower.[101] This message is buttressed further as the parable evolves into a lengthy explanation of the twelve mountains, recalling the various taxonomies of kinds of believers already encountered throughout the book but also introducing a new translocal awareness about the reach of the worldwide church. In the midst of this, Hermas dwells on qualities ranging from double-mindedness and lawlessness to hospitality and bearing fruit.

By reading between the lines, it becomes apparent that the author himself could be taken as a paragon for the moral improvement expected of Christians. For though Hermas is reprimanded here and there for misunderstanding the shepherd, or for being overly curious about the things he is told, in the midst of the parable of the tower, the shepherd inexplicably leaves him for a night, entrusting him in the company of only the twelve virgins. Given that Hermas was accused in the Visions before the Lord for unwittingly falling prey to sexual temptation—and that he became convinced of his own guilt as well—the episode appears to be a trap. Indeed, Hermas does not trust himself in such a scenario, for he feels ashamed (ἠσχυνόμην), or perhaps morally tarnished and

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[100] Herm. Sim. 9.13.3 (90.3).

[101] Herm. Sim. 9.15.2; 6 (92.2; 6).

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convicted by the set-up, and wishes to go home.[102] But in spite of the perceptible

eroticism of sleeping outdoors with the virgins, and of being kissed and hugged first by

Trust/Faith alone and then by the remaining eleven as well, Hermas spends the night with

them frolicking around the tower—singing, dancing, praying, and dining on "the words

of the lord the whole night."[103] On the basis of his learning from the shepherd and the

Church, Hermas succeeds morally where he thought he was bound to fail, viewing the

virgins not as a man or husband (ἀνὴρ) would, but as a brother (ἀδελφός) should. With

this transformation complete, the shepherd and another angel commend the virgins to live

with Hermas the rest of his life, and the book dawdles toward its happy conclusion.[104]

Hermas is never quite commended as saved, or assured his place in the tower, but the

conditions are favorable for these to be satisfied if he perseveres, keeps the

commandments of the shepherd, and pursues his ministry while the tower remains under

construction.

As Hermas's lengthy book was disseminated into the Christian world in the

second century, far beyond an Italian audience attuned to a man acclaimed for his visions,

revelations, and special relationship with a shepherd, there would be no guarantee that the

themes inspiring the book's initial dispersal would remain at the forefront of the

conversation. The earliest church fathers writing about the *Shepherd* did not produce

book reports or commentaries, but found themselves mired in theological controversies

and discussions for which an appeal to the *Shepherd* sometimes proved handy. Before

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[102] Herm. Sim. 9.11.3 (88.3).

[103] Herm. Sim. 9.11.8 (88.8).

[104] Herm. Sim. 10.3.1-5 (113.1-5).

returning at the end of this chapter to factors that contributed to the popularity of Hermas's work, the next section focuses on the earliest reception of the *Shepherd* in extant writings from the second and third centuries.

3. Early Reception of the *Shepherd* of Hermas (c. 180–250 CE)

Just as scholars cannot be certain when the *Shepherd* was written or completed, precise clues regarding the book's dissemination are not readily available. Instead, it must suffice to note that an intention to send the book εἰς τὰς ἔξω πόλεις, and therefore to spread its expansive message of re-orientation to trust in God and a moral life for the purpose of salvation, occupies the earliest layer of the book and persists through the appearance of the shepherd.[105] Furthermore, like Luke-Acts and other books that faced no significant opposition to inclusion in the canon, the *Shepherd* receives its first certain external citation in the writings of Irenaeus, during the final quarter of the second century. Perhaps by this same period, the book had already achieved a certain popularity in the Christian East; in one of his major works, the *Stromateis*, Clement of Alexandria repetitively quotes the *Shepherd*. Extant manuscripts buttress the book's availability during this period, with nine manuscript fragments dated on paleographic grounds before the end of the third century and several others that may fall into this timeframe.

This section on the earliest reception of the *Shepherd* unfolds by examining the four writers who, before the middle of the third century, shed light on the esteem in

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[105] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3). The shepherd, like the elderly woman in the guise of the Church, also commands Hermas to write down what he is shown and told; see Herm. Vis. 5.5-7 (25.5-7). Furthermore, the shepherd's commandments to Hermas often alternate between an imperative singular and imperative plural, and instruction to "tell these things to others" finds repetition at the end of the Parables. Herm. Sim. 10.2.2 (112.2).

which the book was received. Their favorability toward the book does vary, such that we find no univocal portrait of the book's reception. By no means do these authors reflect a full digestion of the *Shepherd*, though Hermas's work enjoys such recall among them that it can be cited in surprising ways and places. Finally, after treating the relevant writings of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen with an eye toward their essential contexts, I examine another artifact of early Christian material culture also dating from this period: the marvelous catacomb fresco depicting the tower under construction from Naples, Italy. However, this section begins, as do many topics of early Christian theological development, with the second-century Smyrnan bishop of Lyons.

Irenaeus of Lyons

In spite of Hermas's pronounced orientation away from the specific requirements for theological assent, our earliest writer to mention the *Shepherd* focuses precisely on this minority interest of the book. For at some point in the second century, the "laboratory" environment of the earliest church became intolerable and a need arose to rein in the chaos and protect supposed true belief, necessitating a sifting from the many doctrines that had found a home in Christianity's incipient decades. As Frances Young explains for one example that especially earned Irenaeus's ire, "It took the church in Rome a while to recognize that Valentinus was not an acceptable member. Gnostic groups functioned inside the church and on its fringes, and it was subtly attractive. That was what made it so subversive, and that was that led to the efforts to suppress it."[106] Irenaeus, the first extant heresiographer of the early church, therefore quotes the *Shepherd* deep in the midst of

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[106] Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 18.

argumentation against Gnostic cosmogonies that, among the many so-called heresies, receive the bulk of his attention. Book 4 of a work originally entitled the *Expose and Overthrow of What is Falsely Called Knowledge*, but known today as *Against the Heresies*, chiefly refutes Gnosticism by citing Christian scriptures.[107] This refutation or overthrow also includes elements of proposing positive theology from scripture, though centuries of refinement would lay ahead and many of Irenaeus's theories, especially as related to Christology, would be regarded as insufficient and abandoned by later writers. However, his concern in the middle of Book 4 centers on the doctrine of God and of creation, which itself had not been solidified for the church-at-large by the middle of the second century. Immediately after appealing to Genesis to demonstrate that neither angels nor any other non-God being played a role in the creation of humankind, Irenaeus supplements his reasoning with quotations from Malachi, Ephesians, Matthew, Revelation, 1 Peter, Colossians, and, first of all, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, all to stress the oneness of God:

> Right, therefore, is the γραφὴ that says: "First of all believe that God is one, who established and brought about and made everything from what was not so that all things would exist, who contained all things but who was contained by none." And right also among the prophets was Malachi, who said… (*Haer.* 4.20.2).[108]

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[107] Though Irenaeus wrote in Greek, this work—Ἔλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπὴ τῆς ψυεδωνύμου γνώσεως—survives intact only in "an early and quite literal Latin translation," per its most recent English translators. Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 1*, vol. 55 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: The Newman Press, 1992), 2-3. At some unknown point, the book became known by its current shorter and sweeter Latin title, *Adversus haereses*.

[108] Trans. mine, from the Latin text in Adelin Rousseau, ed. and trans., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies, Livre IV*, vol. 100 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1965), 628. The rigid and literal nature of the Latin translation, which often follows the word order and brevity of the Greek of the *Shepherd*, is evident even in this short quote. For example, *unus est Deus* translates εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός, thematizing *unus* at the expense of a preferred Latin subject-verb ordering used in the official editions of the *Shepherd*. Moreover, a similar concision is maintained, tracking the Greek, with the clause that concludes the quotation of Herm. Mand. 1.1 (26.1)—almost at the expense of sense. In comparison, the

Thus, in a disputation against Gnostics who held that creation was effected by a demiurge rather than the supreme God, Irenaeus responds by quoting several texts he identifies as γραπή,[109] the first of which is the *Shepherd* of Hermas, and its first Commandment in particular.

Before examining the meaning of γραπή in Irenaeus's text, it is important here to pause and consider why Irenaeus viewed the *Shepherd* so useful at this point, for his quotation is often passed over without significant comment on its function in the greater argument. Philippe Henne, for example, attempts to discern what the ordering of quotations from Genesis to Malachi to Ephesians to Matthew might mean for the orderly development of Irenaeus's thought, a task that is altogether muddled by the surprising appearance of the *Shepherd* between two books of the Old Testament.[110] Granted, he is more concerned about what ἡ γραφὴ signifies for Irenaeus, and for the *Shepherd* in particular, but this line of investigation highlights the difficulty in determining the precise status of scripture from a treatise whose focus is directed elsewhere. Instead, Hermas's primary advantage here is his concision, and the force of the shepherd's imperative:

Latin Vulgata translation of the *Shepherd* requires 14 words here to say here what both the original Greek of the *Shepherd* and the Latin translation of Irenaeus's Greek both accomplish in seven.

[109] The Latin reading *scriptura* here translates Irenaeus's original ἡ γραφὴ, which is felicitously preserved in a quotation of Eusebius at this point. Interestingly, Eusebius takes this isolated reference as evidence that Irenaeus "not only knew, but also accepted the writing of the Shepherd" (οὐ μόνον δὲ οἶδεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀποδέχεται τὴν τοῦ Ποιμένος γραφήν), apparently as "scripture" rather than simply "writing." Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.7. While Eusebius's statement should not in and of itself be decisive for the perspective of Irenaeus over a century earlier, curiously Charles E. Hill ignores this more proximal testimony to Irenaeus in his attempt to portray γραπή simply as "writing." Charles E. Hill, "'The Writing Which Says …' *The Shepherd* of Hermas in the Writings of Irenaeus," *Studia Patristica LXV: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 128 n.4; 133.

[110] "Il est aisé de voir une gradation de l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament, tout en accordant une place particulière aux *Logia* du Verbe incarné. Mais le problème est de déterminer la place qu'occupe le *Pasteur* dans cette échelle du valeur." Philippe Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," *Revue Thomiste* 90.1 (1990): 84.

"Believe." Irenaeus regards the shepherd's statement as an acceptable theology to hold, one that wards off aberrant Gnostic beliefs in a divided creation. Much like John Cassian's use of the shepherd's sixth commandment, when he wishes to prove that both an angel of righteousness and an angel of wickedness inhabit every man,[111] this first commandment packed a powerful punch, for it made explicit—and a matter of active assent—something to which other scriptures had only alluded.[112] But Irenaeus would not cite the *Shepherd* here unless he could construe the doctrinal assertion as fitting a growing Trinitarian theological system. In that light, we should review the context of Irenaeus's argument immediately preceding the reference to the shepherd's first commandment. He primarily contends against the possibility of a separation in creation which allowed for distinctions between the creative acts of the ultimate Father and a Demiurge. Substituting angels for any lesser creative beings in a Gnostic system, Irenaeus argues:

> For angels did not make us, and neither did they form us, nor were angels even capable to make an image of God, nor could anyone else except the true God, and nor did such far-reaching power depart from the Father of the universe. For God did not stand in need of these for the purpose of making what he among himself had predetermined to be made, as though he did not have his own hands. For always present with him were Word and Wisdom,

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[111] See the Introduction above, p. 1.

[112] But it also culminated a long process of doctrinal refinement that saw a predominantly Jewish confession interact with philosophical considerations, such as the relationship between the divine and matter. Though it is not always allowed that the *Shepherd* of Hermas means what it says in a philosophically rigid fashion, the first commandment is apparently the first place in Christian writings where creation is described as made from matter that did not exist (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος/*ex nihilo*), or which "was not" (*ex eo quod non erat*), in the Latin translation of Irenaeus's text. Frances Young will only accept that Hermas's statement is "surely a natural development of the biblical insistence upon the mighty difference between God the creator and all his creatures." Absent further elaboration, she does not permit the possibility that Hermas could be reacting to negative implications of an incipient Gnosticism, or to the prevalent Greco-Roman belief that matter also pre-existed, for an insistence on creation out of nothing is "first clearly enunciated as a positive doctrine a bit before the time of Irenaeus by Theophilus of Antioch." Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 29; 25.

Son and Spirit, through whom and with whom he made all things freely and voluntarily, to whom it was also spoken, "Let us make man according to our image and likeness," taking from himself the substance of creatures, the example of those created, and the form of the world's ornamentation.[113]

For Irenaeus, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, though he does not cite it by name, "rightly" supports the notion that one God made all things and that all things can be contained (*omnium capax*) under this one God's creative activity. Crucially as well, the shepherd's assertion that "God is one" does not run afoul of a growing confession that includes other beings participating in creation, such that the Son and Spirit, imagined in the preceding analogy as God's "hands," can be subsumed under the singularity of God. Clearly, Irenaeus treads carefully over a tightrope when asserting on the one hand that lesser beings were not participants in creation but also that God means something more than God the Father, but in no respect does he insinuate that Commandment 1 of the *Shepherd* of Hermas disallows the latter statement. For only a couple of generations after the *Shepherd*'s completion, this preeminent bishop of the proto-orthodoxy quickly cites it without reservation among what we now recognize as otherwise uncontested canonical texts. Instead, so useful was the shepherd's Commandment 1 to Irenaeus that he also quoted it in a moderately paraphrased form in his only other extant treatise, the brief *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.[114] Whatever the precise status of the *Shepherd*

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[113] Trans. mine, from Rousseau, SC 100:626.

[114] While this is universally recognized by scholars who work on the *Demonstration*, it does not always appear in the context of Irenaeus's reception of the *Shepherd*, which may help to determine the text's status to Irenaeus. Early in the *Demonstration*, a treatise written for one Marcianus "to demonstrate, by means of a summary, the preaching of the truth, so as to strengthen your faith" (*Dem.* 1), Irenaeus insists on the necessity of the rule of faith and then passes on doctrines of God and creation that he attributes to "the elders, the disciples of the apostles" (*Dem.* 3; by which he normally means Polycarp and/or Papias). Shortly thereafter, Irenaeus continues into an adaptation of the same portion of the shepherd's Commandment 1 as he includes in *Against the Heresies*, into which he inserts "the Father" appositionally

in Irenaeus's conception, it must be counted as remarkable that Commandment 1 serves

as the starting point for his doctrine of God and of creation, ripe for use both against

deficient forms of belief and in the construction of positive doctrine.

Even so, the precise meaning of γραφὴ here has been contested over previous

decades, with older generations of scholars—including R. M. Grant, D. J. Unger, A.

Rousseau and editors of the *Sources Chrétiennes* edition of Irenaeus, and others—

generally aligned against a translation with the weight of "scripture." While in my

translation above I have preferred simply to retain the Greek γραφὴ attested of Irenaeus

in Eusebius's quotation of *Haer.* 4.20.2, I concur with M. C. Steenberg's recent

argumentation for a translation in the opposite direction. His decision chiefly focuses on

the place afforded the *Shepherd* in Irenaeus's argument—an admirable philosophical

resistance to pinning the decisions of later centuries on Irenaeus's more fluid use of

written texts—as well as a thorough overview of the meaning of γραφὴ, both singular and

plural, throughout the five books. Particularly convincing is Steenberg's observation that

Irenaeus characteristically uses an unqualified or "unspecified γραφὴ . . . always in

application to a scriptural text. To say simply 'The writing declares' without further

qualification, as we see done here, is to refer to the writing of what Irenaeus considers the

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after "one God." Trans. per John Behr, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 39-42; see also Joseph P. Smith, trans. and ann., *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, vol. 16 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 35-6. Adelin Rousseau regards it "une frappe remarquable" that the *Shepherd* could have retained such value for Irenaeus, especially since he thinks the bishop of Lyons did not consider the text scriptural. Adelin Rousseau, ed. and trans., *Irénée de Lyon: Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique*, vol. 406 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995), 238. Perhaps more notably, Hill has catalogued six other possible "borrowings" from Mand. 1.1, even while simultaneously calling into question whether Irenaeus takes the citation from the *Shepherd* or some "common stock of Christian and Jewish teaching." Hill, "'The Writing Which Says,'" 136 n.33. It has been resoundingly doubted that Irenaeus found this quotation detached from the *Shepherd* of Hermas (i.e., in a hypothetical document) since Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," 84.

sacred corpus in its Christian embrace."[115] This method is advantageous in comparison to

prior scholars, who would typically contest a view of *Shepherd*-as-scripture by appealing

briefly and dismissively to other non-canonical texts, such as *1 Clement*, that Irenaeus

considered a form of γραφὴ (i.e., "written text").[116] Correct as Steenberg's conclusions

seem, a substantial paradox must be noted, for he weighs Irenaeus's many uses of γραφὴ

and settles on a claim that the bishop of Lyons privileges as sacred scripture those texts

that are "apostolic in [their] witness of the Christocentric truth typologically proclaimed

in the received witness of the Old Testament and fully manifest in the cross and

resurrection of Christ."[117] Our reading of the *Shepherd* earlier in this chapter cannot

exactly uphold this scriptural or canonical criterion, and yet somehow, for Irenaeus, ἡ

γραφὴ it remains.

Clement of Alexandria

Shortly after Irenaeus's approval of the *Shepherd*, Hermas's book would receive

its strongest and most effusive esteem in Egypt, thousands of miles removed from Gaul.

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[115] M. C. Steenberg, "Irenaeus on Scripture, *Graphe*, and the Status of *Hermas*," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 53.1 (2009): 62. Shortly after Steenberg's article, Charles E. Hill offered a tepid rebuttal and restatement of the earlier position that Irenaeus's use of γραφὴ for the *Shepherd* is not an indication that he welcomed it into a conception of "Scripture." For Hill, the *Shepherd* is to Irenaeus merely "a 'writing' which said something exceptionally well." Hill, 136. Key to his argument were 1) the idea that Irenaeus maintained ideas of distinct collections of texts—Law, Prophets, Gospels, and the Apostle—that the *Shepherd* did not fit into, and 2) the claim that, contra Steenberg, ἡ γραφὴ ἡ λέγουσα constitutes a "qualified" use of γραφὴ more indicative in Irenaeus of non-scriptural texts. Hill's claims are generally unconvincing, especially as they are buttressed by specious reasoning surrounding the manuscript history of the *Shepherd*, the translation of *Against the Heresies* from Greek into Latin, and other matters.

[116] R. M. Grant is especially notorious for this method, which fails to consider that *1 Clement* might have also enjoyed the status of "scripture" for Irenaeus. However, Steenberg also contends against the more substantial but equally flawed reasoning of A. Rousseau in SC 100:248-50; see Steenberg, 60-1 n.56.

[117] Steenberg, 56.

Writing roughly concurrent with Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria (d. 215 CE) became

perhaps the greatest patristic champion of the *Shepherd*, setting the stage for its later

popularity in the East. Clement quotes from or references the *Shepherd* some 14 times

exclusively in his *Stromateis*, a patchwork treatise emphasizing concordance between

prior Greco-Roman philosophy and Christianity.[118] Dan Batovici has recently given

proper context and discussion for each of Clement's uses of the *Shepherd*, a task that

need not be repeated at length here.[119] Instead, some highlights will suffice.

First, the beginning of Clement's manuscript is defective and missing its proper

introduction, leading to a situation where our present text of the *Stromateis* begins mid-

sentence with a quotation from the shepherd's first appearance to Hermas (*Strom.* 1.1).

The context suggests a transference of the shepherd's words to Hermas—encouragement

to write down the commandments and parables that he hears, so that they can be shared,

remembered, and maintained—to Clement, supplying a scriptural basis for documenting

the knowledge that he has cultivated.[120] Among other references to the *Shepherd* are

affirmations of the metaphor of the church as a tower under construction, both in its

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[118] The full title of this work is *Miscellanies of Notes of Revealed Knowledge in Accordance with the True Philosophy.* The book has been hard for Clementine scholars to place in an orderly catalogue of his writing; some allow that this caps a trilogy of works dedicated to character formation, action, and teaching, but it seems preferable to listen to Clement's own hints that it is "a somewhat unorganized collection of flowers or trees which have grown together naturally." John Ferguson, trans. and ed., *Clement of Alexandria: Stromateis, Books 1-3*, vol. 85 of *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 10-11.

[119] Dan Batovici, "Hermas in Clement of Alexandria," in *Studia Patristica LXVI: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 41–51.

[120] The extant quotation that opens the *Stromateis*, bolded in what follows, comes from Herm. Vis. 5.5 (25.5): "'This is why,' he said, 'I am commanding you to write down the commandments and parables **so that you may read them at once and be able to keep them**." Though only nine words in Greek, this is one case where Clement quotes the *Shepherd* verbatim and without interpolation or a textual variant. See also Batovici, "Hermas in Clement of Alexandria," 43.

recapitulation in Parable 9 (*Strom.* 2.9) and in the earlier appearance in Vision 3 (*Strom.*

2.12), where Clement focuses his attention on the seven women who, as personified

virtues, support the tower:

> Accordingly, that which holds together the Church, as the *Shepherd* says, is the virtue **Trust/Faith, through** which **the chosen ones of God are saved. And the manly one is Self-control.** Following them are **Simplicity, Knowledge, Innocence, Reverence, and Love.** All these are daughters of Trust/Faith (*Strom.* 2.55.3).[121]

While Clement at times quotes verbatim from the *Shepherd*, this is one case where he

retains impressive recall ability from the text, as the reference loosely paraphrases the

content of Vis. 3.8.2-5 (16.2-5). Clement records the seven virtues in their proper order,

even if he recalls just one of the woman Church's expressions of their filial relationship

to one another,[122] and other word-for-word agreements with the text of the *Shepherd* can

be observed in the bolded text above. Another noteworthy element of this quote, beyond

its utility to demonstrate the primacy of Trust/Faith with respect to the other virtues, is

the characteristic way that Clement either ascribes all revealed information from

Hermas's text to the character of the shepherd, as some interpreters assert, or as seems

equally plausible, how he uses ὁ Ποιμήν to refer at times not to a character but to the title

of the book of the *Shepherd* itself. Whatever the precise referent of the noun, Clement

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[121] Translation mine, from the Greek text in Claude Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates (Stromate II)*, vol. 38 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1954), 78.

[122] So Osiek, Hermeneia, 78: "That Faith is first the mother only of Restraint (v. 4), then of all the virtues (v. 5), is not a contradiction. Such allegorical relationships are arbitrary, and the language of filiation makes of any ancestor a mother or father." "Arbitrary" may be less preferred to "fungible"; to Hermas it seems significant and rather in line with his salvific program that Trust/Faith comes first and the others follow from her. Dan Batovici is too rigid when he pins on Clement a misunderstanding of the text— the *Shepherd* refers to the virtues both as sequential daughters of one another in the order Clement named them, and also summarizes the six as τὰ ἔγρα τῆς μητρὸς αὐτων. Herm. Vis. 3.8.5 (16.5); Batovici, "Hermas in Clement of Alexandria," 46.

continuously affirms the content of the book without ever appearing defensive about it or regarding it in any way than he does other clearly scriptural texts. The *Shepherd* of Hermas can stand next to texts like Romans, Isaiah, Genesis, Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and others, with no discernable qualification as to its scriptural character. In particular, Clement appears to take to heart the *Shepherd*'s message about the possibility of only one post-baptismal μετάνοια, immediately after referring to the μετάνοια-heavy fourth Commandment of the shepherd (*Strom.* 2.12-13).

Significantly, Clement seems to distinguish between the *Shepherd* as a book, or the shepherd as its revelatory agent, and Christ. At one point in Book 4 of the *Stromateis*, for example, the argument runs from quotations of "Paul" (Titus 1:16) and the *Shepherd*,[123] and finally to the words of Jesus (Lk 22:31-32). "For example, the shepherd says, 'You will escape the activity of the wild beast, **if your heart becomes pure and unblemished**.' But the Lord himself also says (Ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος), 'Satan has demanded you for the winnowing, but I have interceded'" (*Strom.* 4.74.4).[124] The specific context in which Clement so argues is less important than what it suggests about the difference between the character of the shepherd and the person of Christ: nowhere do the church fathers posit an equivalence between the two, tempting though this may be to

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[123] Again, the quotation is actually from the woman (now not elderly but young and marriageable) who represents the church in Herm. Vis. 4.2.5 (23.5).

[124] Translation mine, from the Greek text in Claude Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates (Stromate IV)*, vol. 463 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 178. Αὐτίκα ὁ Ποιμήν φησιν, ἐκφεύξεσθε τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ ἀγρίου θηρίου, « ἐὰν ἡ καρδία ὑμῶν γένηται καθαρὰ καὶ ἄμωμος. » Ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος « ἐξητήσατο ὑμᾶς ὁ σατανᾶς, » λέγει « σινιάσαι, ἐγὼ δὲ παρῃτησάμην. » Clement again perfectly matches the text of the *Shepherd*, and also uses a conjugated verbal form of the infinitive (ἐκφευγεῖν) found in the same sentence.

assume when reading about the "one to whom Hermas has been entrusted."[125] Whatever

might be valuable from the *Shepherd*/shepherd, this book and this character are not

equivalent to "the Lord himself." But Clement accentuates the authority of the

shepherd/*Shepherd* several times in the *Stromateis*, as when he insists that Hermas was

the authentic recipient of a "power" (*Strom.* 6.15), sometimes elaborated on as "the

power that shows things" (ἡ δύναμις ἡ φανεῖσα; *Strom.* 2.1). Clement's strongest

statement of the *Shepherd*'s authority appears near the end of Book I of the *Stromateis*,

where he makes a case for God's explicatory power as wholly preferable to the "puerile

fables" of Greek antiquity. In turn, it serves as one of the weightiest affirmations the

Shepherd ever receives. "Divinely (Θείως), therefore, did the power that came speaking

to Hermas by revelation (κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν) say, 'The visions and revelations are

because of the double-minded,[126] **the ones who ponder in their hearts whether these**

things are or are not.'" (*Strom.* 1.29).[127] This is high praise for Hermas's text and for

Hermas himself, and together with his other testimony, it signals that Clement viewed the

shepherd as an authority distinct from, but perfectly harmonized with, Christ.

Some further takeaways from Clement's treatment of the *Shepherd* of Hermas

may be noted. First, the text was materially complete by the time it reached Egypt by the

end of the second century, as Clement knows and refers to all three sections of the text

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[125] Herm. Vis. 5.3 (25.3); note that this is a loose quote from the *Shepherd*.

[126] Clement construes the double-minded as the Greeks who grapple in the infancy of their reason about whether or not to trust the one God of the universe. Though this does not match the perspective of the *Shepherd* in any way, it illustrates the allegorical plasticity of the book, similar to other Christian scripture.

[127] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in Marcel Caster and Claude Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates (Stromate I)*, vol. 30 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1951), 176. The quotation from the *Shepherd* appears Herm. Vis. 3.4.3 (12.3), where again the elderly woman is speaking. Again, impressively, Clement can riff off the text of the *Shepherd* while quoting it accurately.

(Visions, Commandments, and Parables). His knowledge of the language of the text is high, but does not preclude him from paraphrasing or adapting as necessary to support his own argumentation—and so he can evolve the double-minded from Christians who waver in their belief to Greeks who claim to have reason and knowledge but are deficient in their propensity to disbelieve in God. Most of all, Clement, though he may draw from other texts more frequently, endorses the *Shepherd* with a surprising tenacity and prophetic quality, given that he also regards the ancient Hebrew prophets as recipients of "powers." Dan Batovici thus observes from his study of all of Clement's quotes, paraphrases, and references to the *Shepherd*: "Clement believed Hermas' visions to be genuine. Not a literary genre, not the book of a venerable man, or gnostic or saint, but an account of genuine revelation, where Hermas is technically a prophet."[128] Furthermore, whatever Hermas's actual intentions for avoiding the story of Jesus or the title Christ, Clement encountered no difficulties putting forth a synoptic view that featured both the shepherd and "the Lord himself" speaking in unison. They affirmed and were both constituent elements of the same story, especially as regarded the relationship between the recently revealed "true philosophy" and other forms of knowledge inhabiting the world.

Tertullian of Carthage

Returning to the Christian West, Tertullian, active from about 196/7–212/3 CE, attests a more contentious relationship with the *Shepherd*, such that a recent biography

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[128] Batovici, "Hermas in Clement of Alexandria," 51.

could claim that Tertullian "particularly disliked" Hermas's work.[129] This may, however, be an unwarranted conclusion transferring Tertullian's caustic final determination about the *Shepherd* onto his entire Christian literary career. First, in a treatise written about prayer,[130] Tertullian discusses a number of practices he finds superstitious and not in any way connected to the Lord or his apostles, those whom he considers to be inaugurators of all authentic prayer methods and corresponding Christian temperament.[131] One such bizarre act he has encountered is the ritual move to sit after finishing one's prayer. With his characteristic bite, he writes:

> Moreover, regarding the habit that some have of sitting by which to conclude prayer, I do not perceive a rationale, except that which children offer. What, for instance? If that Hermas, whose *scriptura* is commonly attributed as *The Shepherd*, having completed his prayer not sat upon a bed, but had in fact performed some other deed, should we also appropriate that for observance? Certainly not. Plainly, in fact, even the present arrangement, "When I had prayed and sat down upon the bed," is to the order of the narration, not to a manner of discipline. Otherwise there will be nowhere to pray except where there is a bed! Indeed, one will have acted *contra scripturam* if one sits on a chair or a bench![132] (*Or.* 16.1-4)

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[129] Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian*, The Early Church Fathers Series (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13.

[130] This treatise, like many of Tertullian's, has been hard for scholars to locate in his short writing career. Timothy D. Barnes found it to be an early treatise, perhaps dateable between 198–203 CE. Dunn, 5, on the other hand, entertains the possibility that *On Prayer* may have appeared toward the tail end of Tertullian's corpus, since it is plausible "that Tertullian could have written a work in his Montanist years, as he did with *To Scapula*, which displays no signs of Montanism, particularly if its contents would not have been the subject of debate between Montanists and other Christians." The concentration of Tertullian's interest in the *Shepherd* in *On Prayer* and *On Modesty*, one of Tertullian's final works, lends credence to Dunn's preference that this may have appeared later in Tertullian's career. Timothy D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 55.

[131] Two examples of superstitious practices Tertullian rejects, which immediately precede his reference to the *Shepherd*, are the washing of hands immediately before prayer and the removal of one's cloak (*Or.* 13-15).

[132] Translation mine, from the Latin text in E. Dekkers, J. G. Borleffs, R. Willems, R. F. Refoulé, G. F. Diercks, and A. Kroymann, eds., *Tertulliani, Pars I: Opera Catholica—Adversus Marcionem,* Corpus

This remarkably multivalent reference to the text of the *Shepherd* has been interpreted in a rather wide range running from neutral to negative, but it is important not to allow Tertullian's eventual clear disapproval of the *Shepherd* to color our analysis prematurely. First, it is not entirely certain that Tertullian has encountered Christians who use the *Shepherd* in the manner that he has alleged; the conditional "what if" (*Quod enim? Si…*) must leave open the possibility that this example came to him independently. At any rate, Tertullian's obsession about a bed or another specific sitting platform is surely of his own design. Furthermore, surprisingly, Tertullian knows the text of the *Shepherd* well enough to quote freely from it in support of his argument, even while shooting down a hypothetical practical exegesis with which he disagrees.[133] Osiek remarks that Tertullian's use of the *Shepherd* indicates its "literal and authoritative" reception as scripture by the early third century in North Africa,[134] but even if Tertullian offers a conjectural explanation for why some move to sit after finishing their prayers, the accuracy with which he quotes and speaks about the text itself alludes to the tremendous respect Hermas's book had earned—for even if he did not favor the book, he had internalized it well enough to explain why. Moreover, his concern for acting *contra scripturam* in the case of the *Shepherd* must emanate from somewhere; Tertullian is able

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Christianorum, Series Latina I (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 265-6. For the reference to Hermas sequentially finishing a prayer and then sitting, see Herm. Vis. 5.1 (25.1).

[133] So well does Tertullian know the *Shepherd*, in fact, that he refers to all three sitting platforms in *De Oratione* matching the book's Latin Vulgata translation: the *lectum*, the *cathedra*, and the *subsellium*. This observation belongs to Carolyn Osiek, Hermeneia, 99 n.6.

[134] Osiek, Hermeneia, 99.

to assume that some in his community would not wish to flout the text when it contains elements worthy of emulation.

Philippe Henne seems particularly convinced that Tertullian, ever the turgid rhetorician, speaks about the *Shepherd* with a thinly veiled contempt. Henne writes, "Pour éviter toute fausse interprétation, le lecteur doit se rappeler le caractère polémique de ce passage. L'ironie est partout présente. L'attaque est cinglante. . . . C'est avec dédain qu'il prononce le nom d'Hermas, et surtout le titre de son œuvre."[135] Certainly, Tertullian affords the *Shepherd* none of the reverence and approval he displays in the same treatise toward the gospels and some books of the Old Testament, but this reference in *De Oratione* should not be stretched to suppose that Tertullian unequivocally rejects Hermas's book. Tertullian opposes not the *Shepherd* here, but various heteropraxies surrounding prayer, one of which carries his mind off to a piece of Hermas's book.

Toward the end of Tertullian's career, however, his perception of the work takes a decisively negative turn. Sometime around 207 CE, Tertullian became attracted by the New Prophecy movement, leading to a hardening of his pre-established rigorism especially around sexual behaviors: adulterers must be treated severely, virgins must behave in certain ways, and not just the clergy but also the laity must be held to strict monogamy—practically, meaning no remarriage was permitted—and so on.[136] His comments about adultery in *De Pudicitia*, on the whole, suggest that the New Prophets are the only ones in the church who concern themselves with adultery, like canaries in the

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[135] Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," 87.

[136] David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41-43; 50.

coal mine pointing out inappropriate sexual behaviors to which the church at large would

rather turn a blind eye.[137] In his usage, therefore, adultery becomes not only extra-marital

fornication, but also second marriages and other infelicitous behaviors like marriages

without sanction by the church. This necessary context sheds light on Tertullian's

citations of, and caustic reaction to, the *Shepherd* of Hermas in the same work *On

Modesty*: he is a rigorist in the extreme, with a radar uniquely attuned to the great sin of

adultery that, with a few select others, must lead to "the automatic exclusion of the

perpetrator—and forever—from the ranks of those privileged to be the sons of God."[138]

Tertullian thus engages in a diatribe against a straw man who, believing that God will be

merciful to him, willfully sins because a second repentance will be furnished to him.

Tertullian repudiates this point of view with gusto:

> In fact, I would accede to you, if the *scriptura* of the *Shepherd*, which is the
> only one that loves adulterers, had been worthy to be appointed to the divine
> record (*divino instrumento*)—if it were not adjudged by every meeting of the
> churches, even of your own, among the apocryphal and false (writings); itself
> an adulteress and hence a mistress of the kindred (writings). . . (*Pud.*
> 10.12).[139]

Tertullian seems to be projecting his own determination about the *Shepherd* onto church

councils that he claims, bombastically, have universally considered the work apocryphal.

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[137] "Tertullian asserts that 'etiam apud Christianos non est moechia sine nobis' (Even among Christians there is no adultery without us). By this he means not that the New Prophecy group provides the prime examples of fornicatory behaviour, but rather that unless they expose and condemn such practices, the latter would probably go unnoticed and unchecked within the Catholic church!" Rankin, 32.

[138] Rankin, 96.

[139] Trans. mine, from the Latin text of Charles Munier, ed. and trans., *Tertullien: La Pudicité (De pudicitia), Tome I,* vol. 394 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993), 198-200. As the diatribe continues, Tertullian depicts the Christian who derives discipline, actions, or doctrines from the *Shepherd*, such as second repentance, as committing adultery in some way with the Church's pure beliefs, as taking a mistress rather than Christ.

Every commenter that comes across this hyperbolic statement affirms that we have no

evidence to support it[140]; his verdict is more invective than veracious.[141] But Tertullian

continues by driving a wedge between the Lord and Hermas's work, adding that he

follows not the *Shepherd*, but "the *scripturam* of that Shepherd who cannot be weakened"

(*Pud.* 10.13).[142] In all likelihood, Tertullian is reacting most directly to the *Shepherd*'s

requirement that a man, after divorcing his wife for her adultery, remain unmarried so

that his wife has a chance to repent and return to him.[143] Though there is much in

Commandment 4 that might commend Tertullian to conservative and rigorous elements

of Hermas's design, it is not extreme enough for his sensibilities, which Tertullian even

admits places him in the minority of the church.[144] It thus becomes difficult to know the

precise meaning of the North African's forceful claims. On the one hand, they are

reactions to the currency of the *Shepherd*, which seems to have been read in liturgical

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[140] Henne, 88; Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 63; Osiek, Hermeneia, 5.

[141] In another case, Tertullian suggests that the supposed consensus against the *Shepherd* is less of an in-versus-out paradigm than it is a case of more or less acceptable: thus, the Book of Hebrews, which he regards as written by Barnabas, is "more received by the churches . . . than that apocryphal *Shepherd* of adulterers" (*Pud.* 20.2). Trans. mine, from SC 394:262. It is another case where the rigorist Tertullian fumes against the possibility of a second repentance, which he suggests is negated by the more apostolic letter of Barnabas (cf. Heb. 6:7-8).

[142] Trans. mine, from SC 394:200. Tertullian refers to the Good Shepherd discourse of Jn 10:11ff., smashing together this particular "I am" statement of Jesus with his injunction, located elsewhere, to "sin no more/no longer"; cf. Jn 8:11. In spite of a metaphorical context that Tertullian imagines of drinking from a (possibly Eucharistic) chalice, my translation of "weakened" is preferable to the literal translation of "broken" for the passive infinitive *frangi* (as in *ANF* 4:85 and the French "se briser" of SC 394:201)—for Tertullian's entire argument rests on depicting Hermas's shepherd as loosening rigorous expectations for Christians. See discussion in William P. Le Saint, trans. and ed., *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity*, vol. 28 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959), 234 n.285-7.

[143] Or vice versa; Herm. Mand. 4.1.4-8 (29.4-8). Tertullian also seems to reject the premise of a second repentance altogether, which permeates Commandment 4.

[144] Rankin, 31. Tertullian proudly identifies among the "pauci" compared with the "plures" of the church-at-large, wearing his rigorism somewhat like a badge of honor.

assemblies and was well known, even to its opponents. Tertullian's is the strongest voice

against the *Shepherd* until after it becomes struck down from the canon for good, but at

the same time, Tertullian's is no ordinary voice—motivated as he was by such extreme

rigorism. And whatever the content of his claims, they would not temper the *Shepherd*'s

reception in the East, where it would continue to find its most hospitable audience.

Origen in Alexandria and Caesarea

Back East, Clement's appreciation of the *Shepherd* of Hermas rubbed off on his

understudy Origen, neither of whom were apprised of Tertullian's supposed church

councils that ruled Hermas's book apocryphal. Four times in his early Alexandrian

treatise *On First Principles* does Origen quote the *Shepherd* approvingly, although

perhaps unremarkably so in the first three books: in two cases, when discussing the

creation of the world, Origen approves of the same Commandment 1 that Irenaeus also

found acceptable (*Princ.* 1.3.3, 2.1.5), with little elaboration other than to place these

statements unproblematically among the declarations of Scripture. And further on, he

affirms Commandment 6 of the shepherd, which would also be repeated favorably by

John Cassian, that every person is attended by both a good angel and an evil one, each

speaking to the individual to entertain righteous or wicked thoughts (*Princ.* 3.2.4). In the

course of these arguments, Origen also sees fit to quote approvingly from books like the

Epistle of Barnabas, Tobit, and 2 Maccabees.[145] Like Clement's, Origen's Bible would

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[145] Origen also cites the *Shepherd* in league with 2 Maccabees in the first book of his commentary
on the Gospel of John; in both cases (*Princ.* 2.1.5, *Comm. Jo.* 1.103) he approves of their agreement on
creation *ex nihilo*. In all, Origen cites the *Shepherd* some 15 times. See Antonio Carlini, "Tradizione
Testuale e Prescrizioni Canoniche: Erma, Sesto, Origene," *Orpheus* 7.1 (1986): 44.

be quite an expansive one, had "canon" been a matter that occupied him. One reference

to the *Shepherd* in *On First Principles* stands out above the rest, however, for Origen,

then headmaster of Alexandria's famed catechetical school, admits that the book is

"despised" (καταφρονουμένῳ) by some whom he does not name, but nevertheless

develops a moderately sized allegory from it:

> For just as the human consists of body, soul, and spirit, the same course holds for Scripture, which has been planned by God to be given for the salvation of humans. Because of this we presume to describe fully the two books assigned for Hermas to write—even from that book despised by some, *The Shepherd*—after which he was to proclaim them to the presbyters of the church what he had learned from the spirit.
> . . .
>
> Now Graptē, who admonishes the widows and the orphans, is the bare letter, admonishing those who are children in their souls and not yet able to address God the Father and because of this are called orphans, and also admonishing those no longer proclaiming themselves to a lawless husband, but still widows not themselves yet worthy to belong to the bridegroom. But Clement, who has already surpassed the letter, is said to send what is written into the cities abroad, as if to declare these the souls, who are beyond bodily needs and the mind's designs. And no longer through letters, but through living words, the same disciple of the spirit is commanded to proclaim to the presbyters of the whole church of God, those who have grayed with wisdom (*Princ.* 4.2.4).[146]

This allegory, which derives the moral and seemingly ascetic advance of the Christian

from the old woman Church's instruction that Hermas write and disseminate his book,[147]

stands alone among the early reception of the *Shepherd* for its length and treatment,

aligned in Origen with his willingness to allegorize from Christian Scripture. It captures

particularly well the tendency of "academic Christians" in Alexandria to self-locate

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[146] Trans. mine, from the Greek text of Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, trans. and ed., *Origène: Traité des Principes, Tome III (Livres III et IV)*, vol. 268 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1980), 312-16.

[147] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3).

"within wider Christianity by dividing believers into subgroups based on their progress—or lack thereof—in the intellectual understanding of the scriptures."[148] Origen undoubtedly counted himself and his companions among the spiritual ones administered to by Clement, and fostered this understanding from no less a text than the *Shepherd*.

Something curious happens to Origen after he transfers to Caesarea in 234 CE, however. No longer is he able to call upon the *Shepherd* of Hermas as evidence for his argumentation without reservation. Philippe Henne relays the vital quote, which is preserved in Rufinus' Latin translation of Origen's *First Homily on Psalm 37*: "À Césarée, il devint plus prudent. Il s'excuse presque de recourir au *Pasteur*. Il emploie alors des formules comme celle-ci : «dans la mesure où ce livre semble devoir être reçu.» La résistance au *Pasteur* était plus forte en Palestine qu'en Égypte."[149] Still, Origen was not ready to give up on the *Shepherd* altogether—his *Commentary on Romans*, also preserved by Rufinus and likely complete by 244,[150] is the earliest extant attestation of the work's authorship to the Hermas addressed by Paul in the lengthy salutations of Romans (Rom 16:14):

> But I think that Hermas is that writer of that book called *The Shepherd*, a scripture that seems to me very useful and, in my opinion, divinely inspired. I think he has ascribed no praise to him because, as that writing declares, he seems to have been converted to repentance after many sins. And therefore he has written no reproach to him. For he had learned from Scripture not to reproach a man who is converting himself from sin. Nor has he bestowed any

[148] David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth 'Festal Letter,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 87.4 (Oct. 1994): 401.

[149] Henne, 91. In context, Origen refers to the reproof performed by the angel of repentance (*Comm. Ps.* 37.1.1.150). See Henri Crouzel, Luc Brésard, and Emanuela Prinzivalli, *Origène: Homélies sur les Psaumes 36 à 38*, vol. 411 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995), 268-70.

[150] John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 30.

praise upon him because he was still placed under the angel of repentance, by whom he was obligated to be offered in return to Christ at the opportune time (*Orig. Comm. Rom.* 10.31).[151]

Beyond Hermas's geographical placement at Rome possible within the first century, desperately little commends Origen's assumption that the Hermas whom Paul greeted penned the *Shepherd*, but it may have arisen out of a realization that in Palestine, in contrast to Egypt, the book was not innately authoritative. Thus, a credible backstory placing Hermas under the ultimate apostolic authority and within the earliest decades of Christianity was developed to retain for the church a book that Origen still found valuable, in spite of its detractors. It would not quite be a last-gasp attempt at preserving the book's currency, but perhaps instead signals that the *Shepherd*'s message was coming in need of a boost. Beyond this epigraphic story predominantly of approval and sometimes overly exacting contempt, however, lie hints that the *Shepherd* continued to minister most effectively to the Christian subaltern.

The Catacomb Fresco of San Gennaro, Naples, Italy

The preceding four authors, heavy hitters in the field of patristics, are indispensable for what they contribute to our knowledge of attitudes toward the *Shepherd* of Hermas in the second and third centuries. Crucially, however, they only allow us to see one side of the puzzle that the *Shepherd* of Hermas, an atypical Christian text, comprises: the range of opinions held by elite, literate treatise and commentary writers whose literary output was preserved. Though Hermas's instructions from the shepherd were to share his

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[151] Translation per Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6-10*, vol. 104 of *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 296-7.

book far and wide, this upper echelon of Christian thinkers may not have been the target audience he felt most compelled to reach. Ramsay MacMullen offers some food for thought: these theological "heroes," all the while meriting a sizeable portion of our attention in the field of Christian Origins, "count as no more than a hundredth of one per cent of the Christian population at any given moment."[152] Wherever possible, therefore, it behooves us to attend to the meager output of that great majority of Christians who left behind something other than the written word.

The fresco from the Catacomb of San Gennaro, which scholars have universally recognized as a depiction of imagery from the *Shepherd*, has not been wholly ignored by interpreters. It is clear that the fresco shows a group of three women surrounding the exterior of a small tower, and back in 1938 this unique specimen among catacomb décor was recognized as a "paleocristiani" remnant "di contenuto dottrinale d'innegabile importanza."[153] Though all three women may be involved in the selection and placement of stones, the central woman most clearly serves a role building the tower. Given that women are building the tower, and not male angels, Carolyn Osiek's suggestion that the scene depicts Herm. Sim. 9.3.2-5 (80.2-5) prevails as the most likely textual referent of the fresco,[154] though we must entertain the possibility that like Clement of Alexandria, the artists or patrons responsible for the fresco depicted their source material somewhat in freestyle rather than simply mirroring the image established in the text of the *Shepherd*,

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[152] Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), xi.

[153] Antonio Bellucci, "La notizia a Napoli del ΠΟΙΜΗΝ di Erma e la datazione delle piu antiche pitture del cimitero di S. Gennaro," in *Atti del IV Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani* (Rome: Instituto di Studi Romani, 1938), 111.

[154] Osiek, Hermeneia, xxi, 7.

that of the Church as a tower into which the deceased who are saved are permanently enrolled. Osiek found this image significant enough to utilize as the inside front and back covers of her commentary in the *Hermeneia* series—space normally reserved for images of early manuscripts—yet she only devoted a brief paragraph to the fresco under a heading of "Representation in Early Christian Art," for which it serves as the only certain example.[155] However, the fresco has rarely been described in its context within the Catacomb of San Gennaro; it has been treated more often as a curiosity pointing toward the enigmatic authority of the text than as something that may be allowed to signify for itself. But lest we exclusively privilege the written word, or find some reason to dispute the fresco's antiquity, I can find little rationale for excluding this vignette as an example of the *Shepherd*'s reception from the second and third centuries. Using appropriate interpretive tools for the format and medium, it may even boast an advantage in comparison with the literary remains discussed previously in this section. For instead of an appearance in a contextually displaced theological treatise, the painting illustrates how some in a community of early Christians cherished, lived out, and took to heart precisely the message about salvation that Hermas wished to convey.

The fascinating specimen, which is reproduced below, appears in the oldest room of the catacomb, called A1, alongside a plethora of generic funerary images like garlands, birds, sea creatures, fruit, and so on.[156] The only other "Christian" painting in the room, where some of the artwork has admittedly faded away, is a portrait of Adam and Eve;

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[155] Osiek, Hermeneia, 7-8.

[156] Jenny R. Kreiger, "The Business of Commemoration: A Comparative Study of Italian Catacombs" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2017), 94; 131.

Fig. 2.2: The Catacomb of San Gennaro fresco of the "Celestial Tower" from Naples, Italy dates to the late second or early third century, making it an apt companion to the literary remains from Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen. Photo courtesy of Jenny R. Kreiger, University of Oregon.

other rooms in the Catacomb dated later contain more normative Christian portraiture. A1, however, may have been planned to hold some 100 bodies before it was expanded in later centuries and is regarded by Umberto Fasola as the earliest Christian community tomb in Naples, dating most probably to the early third century but possibly also to the late second.[157] For its part, the fresco of the tower from the *Shepherd* appears on the vault

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[157] Umberto Fasola, *Le Catacombe di S. Gennaro a Capodimonte* (Rome: Editalia, 1975), 22; 26-29.

opposite the room's sole entrance. It is one of three scenes called out by an arched

geometric outline of red and gold, but the eyes of a visitor to the room are drawn most

immediately to the tower, given that she enters and looks directly at it. I submit that we

are looking here at solid evidence for the soteriological tower's *bona fide* reception in

early Christianity, before the constrictive enforcement of a canon or even of a particular

soteriology,[158] when a community living in the "new city" not far from Hermas's home

could aspire to have earned their places in the tower and express their collective identity

in terms unique to the *Shepherd*.

My understanding of this fresco has greatly benefitted from interaction with Eric

C. Smith's theoretical analysis of out-of-place imagery in early Christian catacombs.

Borrowing and applying the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia, Smith focused on

Christian meaning-making stemming from texts in the Cubicula of the Sacraments in

Rome, one of the oldest sets of catacombs in the Italian capital. Beginning in the late

1960s, Michel Foucault adapted a diagnostic word in use as medical terminology—for

misplaced parts of the human body—deeming it constructive for a growing spatial theory

whereby "certain spaces relate to other spaces by mimicking, mirroring, subverting, and

critiquing those spaces."[159] Smith's work blended traditional biblical hermeneutics with

spatial studies and empire criticism, contributing to a method of reading the

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[158] Fasola interprets the fresco typically conservatively and follows the conventions of previous generations that understood the *Shepherd* as a mid-second century text. Thus, he regards the room A1 as indicative of primitive Christianity given that it stands among "i più antichi affreschi cristiani di Napoli," yet calls the tower "un soggetto non certo sacro," all the while asserting that the Son of God is somehow operative in the stones' inclusion in the tower. On the whole it is a confused depiction of the fresco that takes pains to deny the scriptural status of the *Shepherd* while subtly fashioning the scene as normatively Christian. Fasola, 26.

[159] E. Smith, 3.

embellishments adorning the Cubicula of the Sacraments as a vast heterotopian tableau. As one primary example from his study that appears frequently in Christian catacombs, Smith could describe the portrayal of Jonah and the whale as characteristic of the early Christian experience: a trial of estrangement during one's life, deliverance from great peril, a world to be imminently destroyed, and the hope of resurrection.[160]

The *Shepherd* of Hermas features heavily in Smith's analysis, though this owes more to a recognition of the clear heterotopian nature of the text itself, as well as its origin in the heart of the Roman empire, than to any specific imagery found in the Cubicula.[161] Recall, for example, that Parable 1 of the *Shepherd* issues a critique of the business transacted in the human city under its human governors and human laws, and reminds its audience that "your city is far from this city."[162] Instead, Smith works hard to explain the prevalence of the figure of the herdsman or *kriophoros* in the catacombs as connected in some manner to the *Shepherd* of Hermas, even to the point of claiming that the text's popularity "in Rome, and its composition and setting there, is likely the primary source of the ubiquitous shepherd images in the catacombs."[163] This notion is attractive, but on the whole, unsupported and unsupportable without staking a preference for the primacy of either the chicken or the egg. And to clarify, beyond Hermas's initial

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[160] E. Smith, 53-4. See also his pp. 94-5, where Smith discusses the relationship of the Jonah imagery to the Christian interpretation of the "sign of Jonah" attested in both Matthew and Luke.

[161] The *Shepherd* is one of four primary heterotopian texts discussed in E. Smith's analysis, with the main examples coming from Sim. 1 and Vis. 3; see esp. his pp. 88–9.

[162] Herm. Sim. 1.1 (50.1).

[163] E. Smith, 90.

receptive audience, and one sermon plausibly delivered in Rome,[164] it is difficult to say anything meaningful or solid about the popularity of the *Shepherd* in Rome itself. Of the book's earliest readers who we know by name and geography, only Irenaeus had regular contact with Rome, but this need not be the source of his approval of the book. Furthermore, the *Shepherd*'s most fertile soil was found not in the West, but thousands of miles away in Egypt.

Instead, Smith's analytic orientation better fits this catacomb fresco some 160 miles to the south of Rome in Naples, which has as a certain referent the *Shepherd* of Hermas. This fresco contains more than just the figure or outline of a shepherd, and is neither randomly drawn nor selected for its meaningless beauty, but rather serves a patently heterotopian iconographic function, expressive of the highest aspirations of nearby deceased Christians. For as their bodies decompose in the earth, the departed recompose to form the stones of the cosmic tower that is the Church. As their remains petrify and ossify, a sure sign of the end of their earthly existence to a surviving friend or relative who would later visit the catacombs, the image of the tower under construction communicates a hope for permanent collective enshrinement with the saints. What is chiefly indicated in the fresco of the tower is to look for the dead not in their underground tomb, but rather in the imperishable structure of the ἐκκλησία—a literal redirection from the subterranean crypt to a cosmic *other place*, an iconographic heterotopia. The image may also fulfill a deeper purpose to call to mind the *Shepherd* of Hermas's other heterotopian imagery or to direct one's focus to its aretology that guarantees usefulness

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[164] See the discussion below on *De Aleatoribus*, pp. 116–22.

for the construction of the tower,[165] but it predominantly expresses the desire for enrollment "in the tower with the holy ones of God" as a symbol for personal salvation.[166] Some caution must be taken, of course, not to impose all aspects of our reading of the *Shepherd* onto the inhabitants of the catacomb. However, we must also be open to the unique story that this combination of imagery—generic funerary art, Adam and Eve, and the cosmic tower of the Church—might signify.

In Egypt, Clement may have affirmed the metaphor of the tower and the women as personified virtues who supported it. He even took a further step by endorsing Hermas's revelations as genuinely divine. Elsewhere, Origen vouched for the book in sometimes hushed terms, all the while imbuing the *Shepherd* with a plausible apostolic origin-story. Decades earlier, Irenaeus could unproblematically describe the book as ἡ γραφὴ, a probable testimony to its scriptural status—a determination both Clement and Origen appear to have supported. These all tell a story of snowballing support for the *Shepherd* within the early church up to circa 250 CE, along which Tertullian's tempered turn-face against the book seems but an unduly rigorist speed-bump. Tertullian, at any rate, knew the text exceptionally well, if we only see within his written corpus the remains of a prior acceptance of the text that could be weaponized as he staked out extremist positions. The earliest users of the *Shepherd* in the East, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, quote from all three divisions of the work.[167] Combined with Tertullian's use

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[165] E. Smith, 97-8, aptly covers the striking coded message of Similitude 1, which encourages readers to consider the eternal city that is the destiny for Christians—one not of the present world.

[166] Herm. Vis. 3.8.8 (16.8).

[167] Osiek, Hermeneia, 4.

of both the Visions and the Mandates in North Africa, we can observe a situation of "systematic dissemination" as reflected in the text itself, where Hermas records that he was instructed by the old woman representing the church to deliver "two little books" (δύο βιβλαρίδια) to Clement and Grapte so that Clement could send the text to cities abroad.[168]

But here on dank stucco walls underneath the city of Naples, where loved ones of the deceased ornamented an otherwise macabre space with their aspirations for the afterlife, is a sparkling example where the shepherd's heterotopian message was received and echoed with a simplicity of belief. The dead and buried may very well have heard the shepherd's message and trusted, themselves undergoing the virtuous transformation necessary to embody an authentic expression of the Church's words to Hermas: "Become useful to God, for you yourself are to be used as one of these stones."[169] Their belief in this parable merits further attention to the story Hermas and his shepherd wished to tell, its derivation from the early decades of the Christian movement, and its surprising underground persistence when measured against more normative ideas privileging the work and person of Christ that would prevail in subsequent centuries.

4.   The *Shepherd* of Hermas in the "Laboratory" of Early Christianity

Having surveyed the essential content of the *Shepherd* of Hermas as well as its reception, both from treatises of the church fathers and Christian material culture, datable

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[168] Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 109; Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3).

[169] Herm. Vis. 3.6.7 (14.7); trans. mine.

with reasonable confidence up to the midway point of the third century, this chapter now turns to a consideration of possible reasons for the text's popularity in the early church. Given the lack of elaborate testimonials from which we can draw, however, such efforts may be deemed irreparably speculative. And yet it is a question that merits our attention. What needs did a text like the *Shepherd* of Hermas satisfy for an early Church awash in more "sophisticated," theologically rich, and Christologically developed scriptures?

The *Shepherd* of Hermas occupies a unique space in the annals of early Christian scriptures, for by scholarly consent, it is one of very few orthonymous documents preceding the middle of the second century.[170] But unlike Paul, Hermas suffers from being effectively anonymous: no one bothered to remember this visionary of the Roman church properly, leading to a situation where competing accounts of his authorship equally grasped at straws to construct arguments highlighting his sure inspiration or his defective credentials.[171] In his catalogue of 135 illustrious men from the church, for example, Jerome could affirm Hermas as number 10, in the company of the four evangelists, prominent disciples of Jesus, the brothers of the Lord, and the apostle Paul, but he can say little about Hermas other than that he wrote a useful (*utilis*) book.[172] In

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[170] Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32 n.8; 74 n.16.

[171] Jörg Rüpke has argued that, paradoxically, Hermas's effective anonymity permitted his book's popularity in the early church, given that he opens by incriminating himself for sins against his former master. "The text (that is, the message) has an author, and this author is 'transparent,' honest to the point of confessing his own mistakes and admitting that others mistrust him. He is, therefore, credible. Thus laid bare, the author remains present not only as a narrator but also as a partner in dialogue, within which he exposes himself as fainthearted and lacking in understanding, and is again and again rebuked." Hermas writes not as an expert, but as a chosen novice with whom, perhaps, his audience could relate. Jörg Rüpke, *On Roman Religion: Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 146-50 [quote: 148].

[172] *Vir. ill.* 10. Jerome likely places Hermas so high in his list because of the association of the *Shepherd* with the Hermas greeted by Paul in Rom. 16:14, which he accepts.

such a situation where the acknowledged author of a text carries no prior notoriety, and where the subject matter appears so discordant with the Jesus movement's Pauline and Johannine Christological inclinations, scholars have sought answers from the message or unique purpose that the text itself conveys. And while the purposes for writing a text are manifold and sometimes difficult to pin down,[173] I too concur that for the *Shepherd* of Hermas, we can expect to find a strong correlation between the popularity of the text and the author's message or purpose.

Interpreters have nearly unanimously surmised that the *Shepherd*'s popularity must stem from a unique or innovative facet of its message. Working backwards from the two most recent editors of critical editions will serve to exemplify this trend, for the estimable Bart Ehrman declares that "*the entire book* is driven by an ethical concern: what can Christians do if they have fallen into sin after being baptized?"[174] Similarly, Michael Holmes finds that the book recounts its author "wrestl[ing] with whether repentance and forgiveness of postbaptismal sin are available."[175] Publications with less

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[173] As recently elucidated for a Christian text plausibly contemporaneous with the *Shepherd*, the canonical Acts of the Apostles: "Modern readers will quite likely never know why Luke wrote Acts. While this work has shown that there is a clear convergence between the pragmatic choices of the author and the representational trends circulating across the empire, the motivations of individuals, whether they be ancient or modern, are always difficult to untangle. It is probably impossible to distinguish whether any given cultural production is designed as a conscious strategy for self-promotion from that generated from an unconscious internalization of wider cultural values." Drew W. Billings, *Acts of the Apostles and the Rhetoric of Roman Imperialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 189.

[174] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 392; emphasis mine. An analog also appears in the introduction to his critical edition recently published in the Loeb Classical Library series; see Bart D. Ehrman, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume II: Epistle of Barnabas. Papias and Quadratus. Epistle to Diognetus. The Shepherd of Hermas.* (LCL 25; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 162.

[175] Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 443.

scholarly bona fides have found reason to agree, such that "the core of 'The Shepherd' is an uncomplicated guide for repentance and moral living that will lead mankind to justification in the sight of God."[176] Philippe Henne, beyond denoting the *Shepherd* helpfully as "le manuel de vie chrétienne," could also adopt a reductive shorthand for Hermas's "long traité de penitence."[177] And nearly a century ago, Martin Dibelius could refer to "die ‚Heilung' der Christensünden durch die Buße" as the cause most dear to Hermas.[178] This collective refrain is long in the tooth and owes to a majority view expressed in a most overstated manner by Robert Joly, the editor of the *Shepherd*'s most recent edition in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series:

> Tout au long du *Pasteur*, Hermas s'intéresse presque exclusivement à la pénitence. Si nous pouvons tirer de son œuvre des renseignements d'autre sorte, c'est en fonction de la pénitence qu'il les livre, tout le reste est secondaire à ses yeux.
> . . .
>
> Éclairé par cette « Tauftheorie », le message d'Hermas est très clair : Hermas apporte à la chrétienté une révélation céleste qui affirme la possibilité d'une pénitence postbaptismale. Il réagit donc—le premier—contre le rigorisme ambiant, mais la nature même de cette pénitence montre à quel point lui-même en est encore imbu.[179]

None of this, of course, is meant to dispute the prevalence and significance of μετάνοια as a theological theme in the *Shepherd*. Not only does the woman Church deliver this to

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[176] William Jardine, *Shepherd of Hermas: The Gentle Apocalypse* (Redwood City, CA: Proteus Publishing, 1992), 23.

[177] Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," 89.

[178] Martin Dibelius, *Der Hirt Des Hermas*, vol. 4 of *Die Apostolischen Väter*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament Series (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1923), Vorwort. See also p. 423, where Dibelius offers similar sentiments at greater length: "Auch sie steht, wie der ganze paränetische Teil des Buches im Dienst der einzigen Verkündigung, die dem Verf. wirklich am Herzen liegt: der Predigt von der Buße. Mit ihr ist das leitende Interesse des „Hirten" bezeichnet; diesem Interesse sind alle Teile des Buches untergeordnet."

[179] Robert Joly, *Hermas: Le Pasteur*, vol. 53 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 22-23.

Hermas as the earliest message he must spread to his social circle—in that case, his family[180]—but the shepherd himself is also revealed as the "angel of μετάνοια" and his most distinctive commandment to Hermas establishes a policy of one μετάνοια for the servants of God.[181] But as persistent as this word and theme are in the *Shepherd*,[182] and granted its antiquity in the prologue to the Latin Vulgata translation of the book,[183] it lacks meaningful explanatory value for much of the text, from the shepherd's issuance of twelve commandments to the two ways discourse and the first seven (admittedly shorter) Parables—even when repentance does crop up in unexpected places or taxonomies. Moreover, the *Shepherd* features μετάνοια in more than one fashion, moving at times from the ordinary and modern constellation of sorrow, recognition, and confession of one's sins to a more totalizing turnaround and change-of-mind.[184] Perhaps for this purpose, Carolyn Osiek has reimagined μετάνοια not as repentance but as something more akin to conversion, all the while maintaining that "the whole purpose of the book is

[180] Herm. Vis. 1.3.2 (3.2).

[181] Herm. Vis. 5.7 (25.7); Mand. 4.1.8 (29.8).

[182] Carolyn Osiek gives both the distribution and complete tally of μετανοεῖν/*paenitentia* in the *Shepherd*: it appears 156 times in total, most frequently in Vis. 3, Mand. 4, and Sim. 8 and 9. Osiek, Hermeneia, 28 n.218. Moreover, its persistence mostly tracks the relative length of each of the three sections. Following the continuous chapter count in the modern reckoning, for example, the Parables comprise 57% of the book's 114 chapters, and it contains 66% of the 156 appearances of repentance. The Visions (21.9% of length, 14.1% of repentance) and Commandments (21.1% of length, 19.9% of repentance) tell a similar story of rather even distribution.

[183] Many of the manuscripts of the earliest Latin translation feature a prologue explaining some context to readers perhaps unfamiliar with the *Shepherd* that opens with: *Liber Pastoris nuntii paenitentiae*. For the fuller prologue, see Christian Tornau and Paolo Cecconi, eds., *The* Shepherd *of Hermas in Latin: Critical Edition of the Oldest Translation* Vulgata (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 39.

[184] Moreover, in Commandment 4, where the shepherd elucidates a policy of one μετάνοια in cases of infidelity, here it suggests a secondary quality to the main thrust of the mandate, which was to encourage one's maintenance of purity. See p. 44 above. The policy only arises via Hermas's engagement with the shepherd over the limits of repentance.

the dissemination of a message of conversion to all believers."[185] But even so, Osiek joins the others in mistaking the primary remedy that the *Shepherd* proposes to ineffective, lapsed, or conspicuously sinning Christians for the more sustained macro-problem that Hermas is concerned to address.

Joly's assertion above, that we only find information of a different kind in the *Shepherd* in the course of its primary message of repentance, is therefore Exhibit A of a near-unanimous interpretive miscalculation over the last century of scholarship, a case of missing the forest for one of its more remarkable trees. It would be preferable to find a comprehensive context enveloping all of the text's many themes, including its lengthy moral exhortation and parables as well as μετάνοια and διψυχία.[186] Instead of repentance, I submit that Hermas obsesses over *salvation* from the outset of the book, as when Rhoda appears to him and accuses him of the subconscious sin of lust:

> After she had spoken these words, the heavens were closed, and I was completely shaken and aggrieved. And I said to myself, "If this very sin is inscribed against me, *how can I be saved*? Or how will I propitiate God for my certain sins? Or with what sort of words might I ask that the Lord be gracious to me?"[187]

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[185] Osiek, Hermeneia, 30. But "conversion," too, is a concept with a lengthy and complicated history in ecclesiastical definition, and most often refers to one's adoption of Christianity from a prior non-Christian religion. Her redefinition of μετάνοια in the *Shepherd* is therefore admirable, but because Hermas primarily calls those who have previously accepted the Name to μετάνοια, my preference is for terminology with a comparatively blank slate, such as **re-orientation of one's life to God**.

[186] I am cognizant, of course, of the possibility of undue reductionism that can occur when attempting to elucidate an "author's purpose." Emerging scholarship has simultaneously attempted to understand the existence of pagan motifs in the *Shepherd*, its discourses about masculinity, and relationship to the practices of Second Temple Judaism, all endeavors which I wholeheartedly endorse for a book that has all too long been pigeonholed in familiar ways or plumbed, more fruitfully, for its reflections of poverty and wealth in the early church. Thus, I offer "salvation" as a fresh way of reading this old data that can encompass both old approaches and those more recent, not to the exclusion of any of them but as a roadmap or a corrective lens through which its various themes and preoccupations become more understandable.

[187] Herm. Vis. 1.2.1 (2.1); trans. mine; emphasis mine.

While his attention to the problem of salvation is therefore piqued by his own self-interest, he comes to view it in a more extensive manner, heralding both an ethical program of Christian commandments and wide-ranging metaphorical imagery to characterize salvation as enshrinement in a growing structure, as acceptance into a holy city, and as a laboring toward Trust/Faith and other virtues that permit one to easily bypass a great beast when the "great tribulation" arrives.[188] In the midst of this grasping for salvation, this working out of salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), Hermas addresses a great range of issues that could prevent one's deliverance. Included among these are subconscious sin, which he admits to having experienced, as well as more serious deficiencies in faith ranging from double-mindedness to outright apostasy. Other topics into which Hermas wades can also be traced to the root problem of salvation, from an insufficient conceptual understanding of the church's role in the process to a lacking account of the Christian way of life, and from the problems caused by wealth in the church to other ethical failures exhibited among its adherents. Conceiving of the *Shepherd* as a great treatise of salvation, fostered in the laboratory environment of early Christianity, also carries added explanatory value for its popularity. For it is far easier to grasp how a salvific how-to book achieved such widespread fame in the early church, and how it then survived among monastic institutions so interested in matters of praxis, than if the book must be portrayed as a technical argument delimiting the quantity and quality of cases where repentance may be ecclesiologically acceptable.

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[188] Herm. Vis. 4.2.5 (23.5).

I have found just one scholarly voice that takes seriously the preeminent problem of salvation in the *Shepherd*,[189] and it comes not in an expansive monograph on Hermas's text but rather in a study of dreams and dreamers in the early centuries of the common era. Writing in the mid-1990s, Patricia Cox Miller was fascinated by the ways that dreams operated psychologically on thinkers, and particularly religious minds, from late antiquity. In the process, she found Hermas's visions—often the byproduct of sleep or trance-like states—fruitful for the analysis. Her approach is admittedly tangential to the present study, for she was interested in how these dreamers "revealed their understanding of the human person as possessed of an interiority, indeed of a lively interior 'space' in which analysis of very particular aspects of the person's life was conducted."[190] With a framework like hers, it is only too understandable that Cox Miller focused the great bulk of her energy on the Visions, where Hermas's oneiric revelations are situated.

Dreams, she notes, transport the human to a space well suited for the discovery of a resting-place, whereby the dreamer can receive assurances of deliverance from life's troubles. The theme of salvation is therefore shared among the *Shepherd* and other late antique texts she analyzes.[191] Simultaneously, dreamers can also become aware of challenges to their personal security, revealed fortuitously in Hermas's sudden crisis

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[189] Other scholars have not ignored Hermas's interest in salvation, but have often treated it as a secondary theme. Lage Pernveden, for example, expressed an awareness that Hermas "wanted to arouse men to consider their salvation," but this appears amidst his stronger insistences that Hermas's worldview is "consistently ecclesio-centric," that the message Hermas wishes to convey is primarily about the Church. Lage Pernveden, *The Concept of the Church in the Shepherd of Hermas*, trans. Ingrid and Nigel Reeves, vol. 27 of *Studia Theologica Lundensia* (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1966), 298-9; 293.

[190] Dreams, furthermore, were characterized as "projections of desire that alter existing frameworks of understanding." Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 127-8.

[191] In the case of Asclepius, she notes that dreamer even names his experiential partner "Savior." Cox Miller, 132.

about his own salvation. As Cox Miller writes, "Hermas' question after his first dream, 'How shall I be saved?' can be read as the question to which the rest of the book is answer."[192] She finds, therefore, that Hermas constructs for himself a "conscious awareness of dwelling in an invisible safe place in the midst of everyday earthly reality," or a psychological salvation that evolves his personal consciousness to enforce meditation on "aspects of himself that he would rather not see."[193]

But Hermas's text is not entirely or even predominantly self-interested, in spite of his own psychosomatic entwinement with the revelations and visions that he experiences. Cox Miller's short chapter on the interior mental struggle and development of the book's main character therefore serves as a springboard to the influences of a Jewish-Christian conception of salvation, wrapped up in eschatological expectation for the "great tribulation that is coming," that involves the church as a body rather than simply the personal life of the individual.[194] To achieve this salvation, Hermas's revelators insist (and in turn, Hermas himself insists) on the necessity of μετάνοια for a great multitude of church members, often whose lamentable actions are simply characterized in taxonomies of behavior rather than whose names are named. And yet, μετάνοια is neither an academic exercise nor the elucidation of an early official penitential doctrine[195]; speculative deliberation about cases in which repentance will be effective is not, in and of itself, Hermas's goal. Rather, the purpose of clearing one's sinfulness and committing to

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[192] Cox Miller, 132.

[193] Ibid., 133-4; 139.

[194] Herm. Vis. 4.2.5 (23.5).

[195] As some have proposed; see, for example, Joly, 30 (who advocates for this) and Osiek, Hermeneia, 28 (who dismisses it).

"live to God" weighs so heavily on Hermas because of the time-limited opportunity for salvation, in light of an impending eschatological arrival that he and not a few others in early Christianity ardently expected. This, then, helps to explain the popularity of the *Shepherd* in the early church: beyond its ability to lend insight to the complicated reality of the individual psyche, and the angelic and spiritual forces at work on the self, the *Shepherd* discussed salvation simultaneously in real and hyperreal terms, supplying both a paraenetic roadmap for the believer and a powerful fantasy-image through which to conceptualize the soteriological endgame. It was perhaps these qualities, rather than a technical discussion of the limits of repentance, that propelled Hermas's work to surprising heights in the early centuries of Christianity.

It is possible that the metaphor of the church as a tower, the "central image of the book, incorporating the eschatological, paraenetic, and ecclesiological" themes that occupy and inspire Hermas, helped the *Shepherd* reach these surprising heights.[196] The remainder of this chapter seeks to offer an account of the grand tower of Hermas's revelations. For the *Shepherd*'s apocalyptic storytelling supplies solutions to the problem of salvation by two primary methods: paraenetic instruction and parabolic imagery. They are not completely separate domains, and thus it is common enough to encounter paraenesis within the parables. However, admonitions in the hortatory plural and commandment lists of *dos* and *don'ts* are biblically unexceptional; both have a long ancestry in Jewish and Christian traditions. The image, metaphor, and parable of the Church as a tower, on the other hand, stands as a striking innovation of Hermas's own

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[196] Osiek, Hermeneia, 64. She goes on to say, furthermore, that "the revelation of the tower is the ultimate revelation and the centerpiece of the book. It does visually what the call to conversion does verbally" (68).

imagination,[197] and from the first question he asks the woman Church after being shown

the tower, he learns that it is a parable about salvation—thus the tower is constructed

upon water "because your life was saved and will be saved through water."[198]

Furthermore, several clues point to its positive reception by audiences. As noted above,

the appearance of the tower fresco in the Catacomb of San Gennaro conveys plainly

heterotopian aspirations, while Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Didymus the Blind

betray knowledge of the tower metaphor in a more traditional quotation. But even before

the text could travel beyond the Italian peninsula, the recapitulation of the tower at

significant length in Sim. 9 indicates that Hermas, perhaps encouraged by his inquisitive

audience, had much more to add to this distinctive image. Combined with Vis. 3, where

the parable is introduced, these tower-heavy sections of the *Shepherd* comprise some 40

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[197] The search for antecedents to Hermas's conception of the Church as a tower has not often strayed from biblical imagery, such that the Tower of Babel and the Jerusalem Temple are the two ideas most commonly marshaled to comprehend it. Recently, G. A. Robbins has observed the fidelity of elements of Vis. 3 and Sim. 9 to Prov. 18:10 ("The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe") as well as to echoes of the Lord as a refuge in the Psalms (Pss. 18:2, 59:17, 61:3, 144:2). Osiek adds that 1 Cor. 3:9-17 relates Paul's ministry to a building project, yet there we notice the uncomfortable tension that whereas Paul insists the foundation of the building must be Jesus Christ, Hermas—at least in Vis. 3—has no special place for Christ. Hermas does not appear overly dependent upon any of the foregoing, and at any rate develops his metaphors well beyond any scriptural precedents, as when he instead describes the building materials and their origin from "the deep" far more than he does the tower itself. About the tower we cannot say much more than that its best stones are square and white, and it is built upon the water (Vis. 3) or the primordial rock, the foundation of which becomes the Son of God (Sim. 9). The towers that might come most clearly to the modern mind are defensive installations related to castles, but the constellation of ideas that Hermas proposes might suggest an alternative idea: the magnificent lighthouse on the island of Pharos at Alexandria, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, which was also built "upon the waters," contained white marble stones, and played a role of guidance for seafarers—one not dissimilar to that of a shepherd. These connections are, of course, unvoiced in the text and should not be unduly imposed onto it. But given these thematic similarities, and furthermore that the Pharos was emulated even further afield from Egypt than Italy at Dover (U.K., c. 50 CE or late first century) and La Coruña (Spain, c. 110 CE) in the same temporal ballpark when the *Shepherd* was likely completed, the tower of the Church may well have been inspired by this, the tallest tower in the world for over 1,200 years. Osiek, Hermeneia, 64; Erwin Heinle and Fritz Leonhardt, *Towers: A Historical Survey* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1989), 10, 32-35; R. Allen Brown, "Dover Castle," *Grove Art Online* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), http://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T023512.

[198] Herm. Vis. 3.3.5 (11.5); trans. mine.

percent of the entire text.[199] Such sustained imagery begs further investigation of its

salvific function, its growth out of the laboratory environment of earliest Christianity, its

eschewal of Jesus Christ as the agent of salvation, and its place in the annals of Christian

soteriological thought. I find it fitting to refer to the tower as a fantasy-image[200] that

helped Hermas bring the ineffable and unknowable technical experience of salvation into

comprehension. But first, it is appropriate to briefly take stock of the state of Christianity

in the late first and early second centuries, when the *Shepherd* of Hermas likely first

appeared.

It is tempting and theologically comforting to think of Christianity as spreading in

its fledgling decades after the death of Jesus in an orderly and divinely ordained manner,

and not coincidentally, this is just the version of history that the only canonical

historiography and "legitimating narrative," the Acts of the Apostles, attempts to sell.[201]

A version of this view of earliest Christianity carries over to conservative scholars

claiming to approach the canon "from a divine perspective," who apply to the concepts of

scripture and truth an ontological quality, such that the gospels, for example, became

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[199] This calculation does not take into account the out-of-place appearances of the tower in other sections, such as Sim. 8, where people—conceived as fruitful or fruitless branches of a willow tree—are variously described as destined or not destined for the tower.

[200] The social communication theories of fantasy theme analysis (FTA) and social convergence theory (SCT), adapted for evaluation of Pauline apocalyptic eschatology by James D. Hester, are especially fruitful for understanding Hermas's image of the tower as a dramatizing message that privileged revealed knowledge, centered around "a coherent vision of social reality" that encouraged insider-outsider thinking, and fostered new imaginative webs by a process of "chaining out" the rhetorical vision. All of these apply to the *Shepherd* and Hermas's vision of the tower under construction and have tremendous explanatory value for the recapitulation of the parable in Sim. 9. James D. Hester, "Creating the Future: Apocalyptic Rhetoric in 1 Thessalonians," *Religion & Theology* 7.2 (2000): 192-212.

[201] Billings, 40; Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 21. See also the nods in this direction from a prior generation in Robert L. Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings: History's Impact on Belief* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), esp. his ch. 2.

canonical mere minutes after they were written.[202] In such accounts, no wiggle room is

permitted for trial and error, for doctrinal development, and for the testing and

exploration of beliefs. And beyond this, a borderline book like the *Shepherd* of Hermas

must be deemed ontologically noncanonical, which flies in the face of much of the

evidence presented in this chapter. Such orderly accounts retain their power because of an

understandable need to attempt to delineate the temporal relationship between orthodoxy

and heterodoxies, but as scholars have come to recognize the coexistence of what would

be deemed orthodox and heretical, both in terms of theological positions and texts, the

value of such a binary approach has rightly been called into question. Even Walter

Bauer's iconic and landmark study, *Rechtglaubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten*

Christentum, operated by these same rules, though he wished to prioritize heresies in

certain places relative to later orthodoxy. Fortunately, a more recent model has offered a

way forward that pertains to Hermas's creative output:

> Talking of a spectrum of theologies has the advantage of keeping us aware of
> both the differences (the reader is reminded of P. Veyne's definition of history
> as an 'inventory of differences') and the continuities between various
> theological positions. The story of the emergence of the laboratory of
> Christian theology is not a simple linear or even teleological narrative of the
> emergence of orthodoxy (proto-catholic, catholic or otherwise), but rather the
> story of the emergence of a spectrum of conflicting theological positions and
> of corresponding debates.[203]

Winrich Löhr's laboratory model for early Christianity, operative not simply in the

second century but in the earliest decades of the movement, helps us to account for a

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[202] Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 40.

[203] Winrich Löhr, "Modelling Second-Century Christian Theology: Christian Theology as *Philosophia*," in *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu, 151-67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 164.

wide range of texts, beliefs, theological positions, and discourses swirling in Christian

communities. Moreover, before the heresiologists arrive in the second half of the second

century, no discernable controls govern this laboratory. The state of Christianity in the

early second century might be described as follows: many texts have been written, but no

"canon" or Bible has yet materialized; perhaps an early corpus of Pauline letters has been

collected and distributed, but nothing can be described as universally accepted.

Communities may have only had a single gospel at their disposal—perhaps Matthew or

John—and may well have been guided more by a text like the *Didache* than any Pauline

corpus. An argument for using four gospels—no more, and no less—would not appear

until Irenaeus produced the five books of his heresiography, traditionally dated near 180

CE. At the turn of the second century, some would-be canonical texts may not have even

been written yet, ranging from Luke-Acts to some of the catholic letters like 1-2 Peter.

And texts aside, theology itself was still only brewing: at this stage, we have no

expressions of "Trinitiarian" doctrine, one particular Christology was not yet universally

agreed upon or enforceable, and even where otherwise orthodox writers like Irenaeus

attempt to provide a view on Christology at the end of the second century, in later

centuries it quickly becomes obvious that these early constructions were insufficient.

These points cannot be overstated or explained away under the guise that they were

always ontologically settled yet waiting to be discovered by church. Though we can look

to places like the Ignatian correspondence or *1 Clement* and recognize adumbrations of

proto-orthodoxy, their success was not evident or obvious in the day. Instead, many

would-be "heresies" also flourished within the bounds of the church, from the Gnostics

whose cosmogonies Irenaeus lampooned to "Jewish Christians" like the so-called

Ebionites, who maintained Jewish practices while believing, apparently, in a natural-born

Jesus. This model of the laboratory perfectly encapsulates the testing and development of

theology that we can observe in the *Shepherd* of Hermas, for we can especially see the

growth in his experimentation around the developing importance of the Son. But the

model of the laboratory perhaps is best exemplified by the primary problem that Hermas

needs to conceptualize and solve as a result of his initial revelatory experiences: how to

achieve one's salvation.

To dwell on the implications of the *Shepherd*'s soteriological scheme is, in one

sense, to face a disquieting fact: whether Hermas received his revelations and wrote in

the first century or the second, he had certainly heard other solutions to the problem of

salvation, including those that became part of the New Testament, and saw fit to conceive

of something new. Headlining this rejection of existing Christian soteriologies is a

dilemma that has puzzled interpreters for decades: the absence of Jesus in the book as a

whole and particularly Hermas's total avoidance of Christ as the agent of salvation.

Scholars have sometimes attempted to explain the absence of Jesus in the *Shepherd* as a

bulwark against the potential of persecution, or out of total reverence for the "Name" in a

manner compatible to contemporaneous Jewish hesitancy to utter the name of God,[204] but

my reflection on Hermas's soteriological designs has convinced me that he stood in a

somewhat adversarial relationship to theologies that advanced passive salvation through

the agency of Jesus. I can fathom no better reason to completely avoid the work of God

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[204] J. Christian Wilson, *Five Problems in the Interpretation of the Shepherd of Hermas: Authorship, Genre, Canonicity, Apocalyptic, and the Absence of the Name 'Jesus Christ'* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), 78-9.

through Christ, and the salvation made possible through the Christ-event of crucifixion-resurrection, so persistent throughout other Christian scriptures,[205] than that Hermas observed the moral deficiencies that were not corrected in individuals who claimed membership in the church under such a scheme, from the rich to the double-minded to those whose behavior remained so discordant with what he deemed a Godly life, and reacted strongly against it. Consider, for example, a recent study of the soteriologies present in the New Testament. Though there are nearly as many as there are books of the New Testament, Jan G. van der Watt still has seen fit to describe the broad outlines of a "master story" of salvation in early Christianity. These elements include the following: (1) a gap that separates the human individual and God, brought into sharp relief by the anthropological reality that human beings are prone to sins of various kinds; (2) an intervention of some kind by God, be it through his grace, love, or some other activity; and finally, (3) the person of Jesus Christ, who either died a sacrificial death, fulfills the expectation of a Davidic messiah, culminates a long salvation history from the founding of Israel to the present, or satisfies the crucial salvific role in some other way. As van der Watt explains, "Jesus does what is necessary to restore the relationship and ensures an enduring and glorious result—people will be with God forever."[206] If these three elements—the sin gap, the intervention of God, and the agency of Christ—may be fairly

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[205] In particular, it would be unfathomable to think that Hermas does not know the story of Jesus's crucifixion-resurrection, especially given that he writes of Christians suffering on crosses (see Herm. Vis. 3.2.1 [10.1]). If it is the case that Hermas knows the dramatizing message so central to Christianity—Jesus's death on the cross—and rejects it as soteriologically relevant, then we have an extraordinary case of a Christian document in the laboratory of early Christianity placing the focus of his religiosity on something other than Christ.

[206] Jan G. van der Watt, ed., *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 519-20.

enumerated as a soteriological trinity in early Christianity, however, Hermas resoundingly dissents from the final item and asserts what no other salvific scheme will allow, save perhaps for that of the Book of James: the human individual is capable of saving himself or herself, after having taken on the "Name," by ascending in virtue.

As indicated above in my lengthy overview of the *Shepherd*'s contents, both appearances of the Church-as-tower parable emphasize the method by which an individual wins his or her place in the tower, by striving toward the qualities personified by the women/virgins. This remains the case even when the Son of God becomes a recurring figure of variable importance in Similitude 9, where, the shepherd insists, "Whoever bears the name of the Son of God ought also to bear their names, for even the Son himself bears the names of these virgins."[207] This subtly reduces the Son of God's role, for being known as a Christian is not enough to achieve one's permanent place in the tower. Further in the same chapter, for example, Hermas learns that some of the stones, in spite of having "received the name of the Son of God," were led astray and seduced by the women personifying negative qualities, and thus were "thrown out of God's house," rejected from their ostensible places in the tower.[208] Vision 3 limits the Son of God's role in the Church to simply the name to which Christians belong and by which they are known, but in spite of a heightened awareness of the need to properly account for the Son of God in Parable 9, a major supersessionist soteriological tactic carries over from Vision 3 surrounding the phonetics of the title of Christ.

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[207] Herm. Sim. 9.13.3 (90.3).

[208] Herm. Sim. 9.13.7-9 (90.7-9).

In Vision 3, the old woman Church who reveals the details of the tower and its stones to Hermas develops a shorthand method for referring to the stones rejected and accepted into the tower: stones are either useful for the construction of the tower, εὔχρηστοι . . . εἰς τὴν οἰκοδομήν, or useless for that same purpose, ἄχρηστοι. This shorthand is only utilized on a handful of occasions throughout the whole of the *Shepherd*, nine times in Vision 3, twice in Vision 4, five times in Commandment 5, and three times in Parable 9, and thus it cannot be described as an overwhelming theme by sheer magnitude.[209] However, its impact extends beyond numbers alone, for it appears in both sections where the tower is imagined as the cosmic representation enshrining those who are saved by their ascension in virtue. Moreover, in the native language of the *Shepherd*, it possesses a coded phonetic quality to ape the name of Christ while pointing to what is, for Hermas, a superior soteriological method. The two categories, εὔχρηστοι and ἄχρηστοι, more famously materialize in the singular as descriptors of Philemon's escaped slave, in an apparent wordplay where Paul reveals that Onesimus has become a Christian under his apostolic guidance (Phlm. 11). As Eduard Lohse indicates, Hellenistic Greek in the first century and beyond was characterized by a convergence in the pronunciation of the η and the ι, such that there would be no perceptible pronounced difference between Χριστός and χρηστός.[210] In Paul's writing, where we can find no lack

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[209] Three further appearances are plausible toward the tail end of Sim. 9, but as these occur at a place where no Greek text is extant, it is impossible to know the precise original language used. Sim. 9.32.3-4 (109.3-4).

[210] Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 200-1. Lohse gives a number of cases primarily from the second century where Christian authors like Justin Martyr and Tertullian capitalized on this phonetic convergence; Justin Martyr can write, for example, "from the name we are accused of, we are most excellent (χρηστότατοι) people" (*Apol.* 1.4.1). To these could also be added Suetonius's brief note about "Chrestus" in Rome at *Claud.* 25.4. Lohse, 200 n.36.

of the name or title of Christ, this pun is readily accepted as a bit of the Apostle's wit.

Hermas, on the other hand, acts cleverly in another direction, instead using the wordplay

for a subversive purpose: not only has Jesus been all but written out of his soteriological

scheme and replaced with a moral or ethical advance, but his name/title has been

appropriated to serve as validation of virtuous achievement and one's enshrinement in the

tower. Those who will be saved are the εὔχρηστοι, the useful ones for the church who by

ascending in virtue, themselves literally become their own "good christs."[211]

A couple of examples will demonstrate how Hermas's subversive wordplay

unfolds in the initial vision of the tower and its recapitulation in the Parables. First, one's

ability to become enshrined in the tower is tied strongly to his or her ethical behavior. As

Hermas receives explanation about the stones thrown a short distance from the tower and

those crushed into pieces and ejected far away from it, he learns that the former are

sinners who can still become useful (εὔχρηστοι) if they repent (ἐὰν μετανοήσωσιν) and

recover while the tower is still being built[212]—that is, as the woman tells Hermas shortly

thereafter, before the end comes (ἔχει τέλος).[213] However, others are not so lucky, and

have been cast further away from the tower. The woman Church explains why:

> These ones are the sons of lawlessness—they believed, but with hypocrisy,
> and every evil did not withdraw from them. Because of this, they do not have
> salvation (οὐκ ἔχουσιν σωτηρίαν), for they are not useful (ὅτι οὐκ εἰσιν
> εὔχρηστοι) for the building on account of their wickedness. Because of this,

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[211] Others have recognized the useful/useless matrix in the *Shepherd*, but I believe I am the first to perceive its function in Hermas's program of salvation and the way that it acts to supersede the soteriological agency of Christ. Osiek, Hermeneia, 73, notices the wordplay but only calls it "reminiscent of" Paul in the letter to Philemon. Lohse, 200 n.35, merely lists the *Shepherd* of Hermas as one of a number of texts, including Plato's *Republic*, that play useful/useless off one another.

[212] Herm. Vis. 3.5.5 (13.5).

[213] Herm. Vis. 3.8.9 (16.9).

they were broken apart and cast far away, because of the wrath of the Lord, for they infuriated him.[214]

As the taxonomy of rejected stones continues, they come to be called useless (ἄχρηστοι), and Hermas learns that among them are a group of rounded white stones that cannot fit in with the others, because the tower is being sensibly constructed with properly rectangular or cubed stones. These stones are meant to signify people who are faithful, but who are rich in possessions and will fall back on their wealth when times get difficult for Christians. The verses that follow display the heaviest concentration of the useful/useless phonetic code:

> And I responded to her and said, "Lady, when therefore will they be useful (εὔχρηστοι) for the building?" "When," she said, "the riches that lead their souls astray are severed, they will be useful (εὔχρηστοι) to God. For just as a spherical stone cannot become square unless it is hewn and has part of itself discarded, so also are the rich in this age—unless their wealth is cut away, they cannot become useful (εὔχρηστοι) to the Lord. Know this in the first place from yourself (sing.): when you were rich, you were useless (ἄχρηστος), but now you are useful (εὔχρηστος) and valuable to life. Become useful (εὔχρηστοι) to God, for you yourself are to be used as one of these stones."[215]

Hermas's personal value to the Lord is directly inverse to his financial wealth, such that as he lost his earthly riches he could transition from ἄχρηστος to εὔχρηστος, from non-christ to good-christ. But we should not suppose that poverty and affluence are the sole example of this disparity between uselessness and usefulness, for the *Shepherd* often takes a singular case and elaborates on it in demonstration of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in the plural.[216] Here Hermas himself stands in for the various useless stones,

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[214] Herm. Vis. 3.6.1 (14.1); trans. mine.

[215] Herm. Vis. 3.6.6-7 (14.6-7); trans. mine.

[216] Mandate 9, where double-mindedness is tied strongly to one's boldness in petitioning the Lord for supplication, is especially indicative of this method.

demonstrating how reformation to a place of acceptability for the construction of the tower can be achieved. Later in the Visions, a related metaphor of purification comes to the forefront, as when the woman Church explains that the color gold signifies all who are able to become useful for the building of the tower.[217] Another way of explaining how one secures his or her place in the tower is apt for the comparison, even though it lacks the coded wordplay of εὔχρηστοι. Referring to the seven women, Trust/Faith and her daughters, who support the tower, the woman Church informs Hermas, "Whoever serves these and has the strength to master their works will have a dwelling place in the tower among the holy ones of God."[218] While we must take some care before assuming that there exists in the *Shepherd* a direct transitive property between all elements of Hermas's soteriological scheme, it begins to become obvious that Hermas prioritizes moral and ethical advance above all else, such that one's salvation is strongly moored to ethics, virtues, and personal usefulness (εὔχρηστος), rather than any passive acceptance of Christ's accomplishment on a cross or by any other methods.

An even stronger hint that Hermas's insistence on moral or ethical advance should be interpreted in contrast to soteriologies centered on the actions of Christ appears in the recapitulation of the tower metaphor in Parable 9. As previously indicated, it is in the Parables that a character approximating Jesus Christ, always referred to as the Son of God and never by name, materially appears in the *Shepherd*. But even here, the shepherd describes the Son of God, amidst a quite polyvocal portrayal of his apparent parabolic equivalence to a slave, his import at the creation of the world, and his role to inspect the

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[217] Herm. Vis. 4.3.4 (24.4).

[218] Herm. Vis. 3.8.8 (16.8); trans. mine.

tower, as the tower's door through which people can reach the Lord or enter the kingdom of God.[219] Taking on the name of the Son of God, and thus being known as a Christian, is an indispensable step for one's faithful progress, but neither is this specifically, nor is one's assent to crucial events in the past, on the cross or otherwise, tied exclusively to his or her salvation. Instead, the *Shepherd* assigns significance to being "called by the name of the Son of God," adjures its audience not to deny or be ashamed at the name, and even affords a special place to those who suffer for the name.[220] But these do not guarantee one's place in the tower, one's eternal salvation.[221] Instead, the same focus on a moral or ethical advance is ported over from the metaphor of the tower in the Visions, and to enter the kingdom of God, one must *also* bear the names of the women, this time twelve in number and described variously as virgins or spirits, whose qualities previously supported the tower but now are the powers of the Son of God.[222] Referring to the first groups of stones that Hermas saw fitted into the tower—from prophets and deacons to apostles and teachers—the shepherd explains why they earned their place in the tower:

> "For these [people]," he said, "bore these spirits at the first, and they did not withdraw from one another at all, neither the spirits from the people nor the people from the spirits, but the spirits abided with them until their sleep

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[219] Herm. Sim. 9.12.4-6 (89.4-6).

[220] Herm. Sim. 9.17.4 (94.4); Sim. 9.21.3 (98.3); Sim. 9.28.2 (105.2).

[221] And thus Hermas stops shy of ascribing a salvific quality to "the name" itself, as appears to be the case in a book approximately contemporaneous with the *Shepherd*, the canonical Acts of the Apostles. See especially Acts 3:6, where Richard Pervo, 100, remarks that "the Name works *ex opere operato*" to effect Peter's healing of the man described as lame from birth. While Luke and Hermas share some interest in "the name" and characteristically locate a "Name Theology" in the sphere of salvation (cf. Acts 2:21, 2:38, 3:16, 4:7, 4:12), Hermas would doubtlessly be uncomfortable with the extent to which Luke imagines the name itself conferring salvation, absent the individual's commitment toward virtue. Yet, their shared interest in the subject indicates that the church's thinkers grappled in the late first and early second century for a proper understanding of the limits that could be ascribed "the name."

[222] Herm. Sim. 9.15.2 (92.2).

arrived. And if they had not had these spirits with them, then they would not have become useful (εὔχρηστοι) for the building of this tower."[223]

This remarkable final sentence, which has all the marks of an archetypal second-class condition in Koine Greek, asserts that the apostles and prophets and so on all retained the twelve virtues throughout their lives, but had they somehow tripped up and lost these qualities—which the shepherd knows to be untrue—even they would not have been useful for the tower. Their status as the apostles called by the Son of God would not have saved even them, and furthermore, the Son of God himself bore the names and qualities of the twelve virgins.[224] Hermas's salvation by usefulness thus applies not just to his audience and the Church during his heyday, but even to the Son of God and his apostles.

If my reading of these issues—the prevalence of salvation as the problem needing solved in the *Shepherd*, the ethical requirements that Hermas insists on by means of revelation, and the subversive wordplay that supersedes Christ with a call to personal usefulness—is truer to his intentions than has traditionally been recognized, several implications are in order. First, it is unconscionable that the *Shepherd* could have flourished in spite of these elements had they universally been deemed non-starters. If only Christocentric soteriologies that viewed the crucifixion-resurrection as the decisive intervention of God heralding salvation at the *eschaton* were permitted within a growing and chaotic Christian laboratory, Hermas's book would have immediately been found wanting and possibly squelched forever. Instead, early Christianity cannot be reduced to a belief in the event, and Christ must not be allowed to stand unquestioned as simply the

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[223] Herm. Sim. 9.15.6 (92.6); trans. mine.

[224] Herm. Sim. 9.13.3 (90.3).

cosmic, pre-existent, and all-powerful savior, but must also be recognized in some circles as an exemplary servant of God, as can be gathered from, for example, the Philippians Christ-hymn and the *Didache*,[225] where Jesus is known simply as a servant (παιδός) like David. Secondly, Hermas is decidedly a radical. Not only does he disregard Jesus as the relevant agent of salvation, but he finds ways to not include Jesus Christ in his book at all, by referring to the "Name" or simply the position of "Son of God." Where this has previously been suggested as overly reverential or as a persecution-avoidance tactic, it now seems that the growing importance of Christ had become, in some sense, anathema to Hermas's construction of the church and of salvation. I have suggested that Hermas responds to a prior soteriological centrality on Christ that failed to produce the expected moral and ethical ascension within the Church and that failed to account for the sins that a person inevitably commits because of his or her own faulty nature. Something else was required for Hermas—not to look toward Christ but to achieve usefulness in one's own life. Third, though many metaphors and images exist in early Christianity to describe the church as a body, or in familial language, salvation is often depicted in individualistic terms: the restoration of a relationship between the human and God, a situation made possible now only because of Christ. Hermas dissents, portraying salvation as the fantasy-image of a tower building from a foundation of the apostles. Hermas knows and recognizes no locus of Christian authority, whether a body of texts or any particular rule or canon of faith beyond his insistence on a singular creator God. God's son is difficult for Hermas to place in this scheme. But prophecy and revelation are well and truly alive, and Hermas understands that the Church has a role to play in the formation of the

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[225] See, for example, *Did.* 9.2 and Phil. 2:7-9.

individual; at a time when the Church is not an edifice but a body of the faithful, he fashions it into a cosmic, ultimate unity, not in the language of one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:5), but though one's moral and ethical progress. And while enshrinement into this cosmic Church can only come through the "door" of the Son of God, without also living a virtuous life, one's induction is impossible. Salvation can only be achieved through individual attention to virtues (Trust/Faith and her Daughters), keeping the commandments of God, taking on the Name, and remaining steadfast.

The *Shepherd* of Hermas may be missing what for many is an essential Christian element—that is, Jesus as Savior—but it replaces the necessity for this with new "Chrestian" elements, ranging from its imperative to become useful for the tower to a set of twelve enumerated commandments. This moral advance, as with the way that the *Shepherd* spells out the imperative necessities of the Christian life, must have appealed to some people not only in the earliest centuries of the church, but through the sixth century, after which the Greek manuscript history eventually trickles to a halt—preserved thereafter only thanks to the cloistered but virtue-eager environment of the monastery.[226] Strange though it may seem to us now, Hermas found a market for his ideas that, though not especially rich theologically, inspired a subset of early Christians to imagine their eternal salvation in the Church tower and live a useful life meriting inclusion with the saints. Though known to scholars for centuries and sometimes earning their disgust,[227]

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[226] The continued copying of the text in Latin translations owes to different factors, including (perhaps) the relative unfamiliarity with the *Shepherd*'s contents in the West during the Middle Ages.

[227] See, for example, the introductory notes to the *Shepherd* in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series, where the translators admit disappointment, repugnance, and distaste for the book. *ANF* 2:3.

the *Shepherd* speaks volumes about the diversity of thought in the early decades of the church and the strange brews conjured up by its laboratory.

5.   Conclusion

This chapter began by examining the function of "apocalyptic" in the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Without placing judgment on Hermas's claim to special revelation, we observed that "apocalyptic," beyond merely supplying prominent themes for Hermas to plumb in his own way, serves as the primary method of storytelling in the Visions. In other words, Hermas is a dreamer, seer, or prophet, and his book is propelled forward by various apparitions, unlocking new insights that range from the bad news that Hermas has sinned to the positively visionary: the Church as a soteriological rampart incorporating the stones of those worthy to "live to God." We then progressed through the lengthy text of the *Shepherd*, highlighting its crucial elements and proposing an overarching unity for Hermas's book in its frequent attention to salvation. For Hermas, salvation hinges on personal moral ascension and ethical improvement, a strikingly persistent assertion that abides through an initial fantasy-image of the tower to a set of twelve Christian commandments and back to the tower again, where in spite of new elements and augmentations, Hermas stops shy of changing his mind. The Son of God is now present and assigned various roles, but for Hermas, the agent of salvation is never Christ but the individual, who must attend to the virtuously named spirits who support the tower.

The chapter then turned from the text of the *Shepherd* to the context into which it was received by church fathers and anonymous others. Irenaeus clearly approved of the

text, and though his determination that it be called γραφὴ has previously been explained

away with undue confidence that the book was not actually scripture for him, such

rulings are premature and force the terms of later ecclesiastical battles upon the different

needs of at least a century earlier. Irenaeus may not have approved of the entirety of the

Shepherd, but he certainly found the shepherd's Commandment 1, which spelled out a

doctrine of God and creation in a succinct manner, advantageous to his counter-heretical

causes. Shortly after Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria would speak of the *Shepherd* of

Hermas most glowingly, recognizing the revelatory authority behind the book as

authentic and knowing the text well enough to quote it accurately even while freestyling

about the relationship of Greek philosophy to Christianity, the true philosophy. Back in

the Christian West, Tertullian begins to demonstrate some cracks in the reception of the

Shepherd; while at first he shows concern to limit Hermas's work as a practical guide in

every circumstance, this also paradoxically suggests that the *Shepherd* had somehow

achieved such a following. Tertullian later turns decidedly against the *Shepherd*,

contrasting the book's allowance of repentance for adulterers with Jesus Christ, the real

shepherd, who in his eyes permits no such reprieve. The North African's rejection of the

book may owe to other unspoken matters, but his expressed extreme rigorism was a

matter of internal debate within the Church, and was by no means settled by Tertullian.

Coupled with his abundant, ever-present bombast and Montanist sensibilities, it is

difficult to accept Tertullian as a typical interpreter of the *Shepherd*. Returning to Egypt,

Origen continues a line of Eastern approval of the text, even if he must self-muzzle, to an

extent, once settling in Palestine. Finally, one of the greatest indications of the

significance of the *Shepherd* in the second and third centuries comes not from a writer of text at all, but from the walls of the Catacomb of San Gennaro, where a plainly heterotopian fresco of the tower signals the aspirations of those entombed underground to be inducted with the saints into the church. The fresco indicates that the *Shepherd* was received and interpreted at face value, even if the church elite had other concerns and axes to grind in these earliest centuries.

Finally, I constructed a novel case for viewing the *Shepherd* of Hermas as a book not of repentance, but of salvation. This breaks from at least the last century of erudite scholarship on the book, from Martin Dibelius to Bart Ehrman. Unsettlingly, the *Shepherd* actively dissents from an otherwise near-unanimous ecclesiastical agreement that Christ has in some way inaugurated the availability of salvation, instead insisting on attention to moral commandments and ethical concerns. But beyond simply ignoring the way in which other soteriologies prioritize Christ or the crucifixion-resurrection event in their passive schemes, Hermas takes the surprising step of subversively appropriating the name of Christ and superseding it with a shorthand imperative: "Become εὔχρηστοι to God." The command is sustained even through the appearance of the Son of God in the *Shepherd*, and strongly suggests that salvation must be achieved by the individual, in spite of narratives circulating about historical events in Roman Palestine in previous decades. I suggested, furthermore, that this catalogue of Christian action and self-empowering soteriology must have appealed to some in the early church, even if the church fathers who mention the text have evidently enveloped Hermas's work within their own Christocentric macro-narratives.

As we continue into the fourth century, the story of the Hermas's book becomes muddled further. In some quarters, the *Shepherd* was a rising star and perhaps essential to the Christian life, continuing to be read both privately and in church gatherings, and in some cases use for orthopractical proofs. But further fault lines would begin to appear. At the same time, the manuscript history blossoms, and the *Shepherd*, just at the time that delineating a canon of scripture becomes a plausible idea, sticks out as a contested text.

CHAPTER THREE

The Contested Usefulness of the *Shepherd* in the Third and Fourth Centuries

1.   Introduction

As this investigation transitions past the midway point of the third century, the portrait of mostly high esteem enjoyed by the *Shepherd* of Hermas begins to face harsher judgments. Whereas the book once found fertile soil in the laboratory of the second century, rockier ground would now appear. And yet, in the period of c. 250-400 CE, Hermas's book would never come under universal reprobation, such that by the end of the fourth century it could be categorized or adjudged in different ways by luminaries ranging from Cyril of Jerusalem to Jerome and Rufinus to Didymus the Blind, on a scale ranging from forbidding even private reading of apocryphal books like the *Shepherd*, to classifying it within a second order of ecclesiastical but not covenantal books, to continuing to welcome Hermas's text among canonical scriptures that, interpreted together, lead the faithful to the fullness of divine revelation.

This chapter proceeds first by resuming the reception history paused in the previous chapter after Origen and the catacomb fresco from Naples. Two additional witnesses from the third century attest to how the *Shepherd* was used variously for the justification of thought and practice or, for the first time since Tertullian, demarcated from other New Testament texts in an early construal of Christian scriptures. We then

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enter the fourth century, where Eusebius and Athanasius supply their own lists of the New Testament, each ultimately excluding a book that maintained usefulness for many of their contemporaries. The study then turns to a consideration of the manuscript history for the *Shepherd* from the second to the sixth centuries as preserved by the arid Egyptian climate, without which the foregoing patristic reception of Hermas's text might be regarded a trifling aberration. Yet, the abundant manuscript copies recovered for the *Shepherd*, leading especially to the book's inclusion in Codex Sinaiticus, offer another compelling clue toward the persistence and popularity of Hermas's book that should not be so easily discounted by an appeal to the New Testament canon that prevailed. After confronting the various arguments tendered to construe the *Shepherd*'s placement within Codex Sinaiticus either in an "appendix" or as a secondary, noncanonical book, I conclude instead that the community underlying the Codex intended to enshrine the *Shepherd* in their particular biblical canon that, though it need not have been designed as a protest against the canonical designs of Athanasius, attests to the obdurate diversity of Christianity in fourth-century Egypt.

2.   Reception History for the *Shepherd*, Continued (c. 250–400 CE)

Before this investigation takes a concerted turn to the East, where the *Shepherd* proved most persistent and whence the first list comprising the eventual New Testament was produced in 367 CE, we must attend to the last meaningful output of the Christian West, where Hermas's revelations were first recorded. One such item has cast a long shadow over the dating and general scholastic attitude toward the *Shepherd* and has, until

quite recently, been discussed in terms of very broad geography rather than its authorship, which the present author believes can be convincingly placed. But prior to delving into the *Muratorianum*, it is worth addressing the contents of a unique but neglected sermon from Rome or North Africa that was thought at one time to have been one of the earliest Latin Christian documents preserved by the Church.

The Anonymous Sermon De Aleatoribus

Compared to most of the literary evidence related to the *Shepherd* of Hermas, this treatise *On Dice-players* has over the years received limited scholarly attention; only recently, for example, has an authentic *editio princeps* been published.[1] The treatise betrays a sermonic or homiletic quality, and is delivered from an apparent position of authority, as its writer claims both the "leadership of the apostolate" (*apostolatus ducatum*) and "the chair in the place of the Lord" (*vicarium Domini sedem*), tied perhaps to Peter, who seems to be the referent behind "the origin of the authentic apostolate, upon which Christ has founded his church" (*super quem Christus fundavit ecclesiam*).[2] Adolf von Harnack, writing about the sermon in 1888, believed it could be dated as early as Victor of Rome (c. 189-199 CE), and claimed that it contained the first extant reference to

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[1] Chiara Nucci, ed., *Pseudo Cipriano: Il Gioco dei Dadi: Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2006).

[2] *Aleat.* 1; Latin text taken from Nucci, 76. The only complete English translation of this sermon that I have found is that of Scott T. Carroll, "An Early Church Sermon Against Gambling (CPL 60)," *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8.2 (Summer 1991): 83-95. My English translation takes Carroll's as a starting point but often diverges in minor ways, having consulted Nucci's Latin, in word order and punctuation. Carroll is also imprecise in many places about the scriptural referents underlying the translated text of *De Aleatoribus*.

Mt. 16:18-19 in order to establish the authority and primacy of the Roman episcopacy.[3]

His case, in brief, observed the frequency of an African Latin dialect and Old Latin translations of books of the New Testament; as Scott T. Carroll has more recently explained, the homily features "the corrupt low Latin of Roman Africa and is in grammatical disarray, with frequent confusion of genders, voices, cases, and tenses."[4] Harnack searched from there for Africans with connections to the early Roman episcopacy, and, after lengthy deliberations, regarded Victor the best candidate given his rigorist tendencies and other known facts about him. While Jean Daniélou still considered this early dating and connection to Victor credible in the posthumous publication of the final volume of his history of early Christian doctrine,[5] the *editio princeps* of Chiara Nucci has resoundingly doubted the ascription to Victor, even while retaining the great probability that it was authored by a bishop.[6] Following other scholars who have pointed to relationships in style, vocabulary, and especially the rigorism within the writings of Cyprian (d. 258 CE), Nucci dates *De Aleatoribus* most probably to the second half of the third century, though she does not rule out the possibility that it may extend into the early fourth century.[7] However, the later this sermon is dated, the more surprising its inclusion

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[3] Adolf Harnack, *Der Pseudocyprianische Tractat De Aleatoribus: Die Älteste Lateinische Christliche Schrift, Ein Werk Des Römischen Bischofs Victor I (Saec. II)*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur 5.1 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1888), 73-77, 93; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951001472795w;view=1up;seq=9.

[4] Carroll, 83.

[5] Jean Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, vol. 3 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, trans. David Smith and John Austin Baker (London: The Westminster Press, 1977), 93-98.

[6] Nucci, 19-21.

[7] Ibid., 20-21. Indeed, *De Aleatoribus* would eventually be transmitted with Cyprian's works and attributed to the martyred Carthaginian bishop, though it is not listed in the earliest catalogues of his

of the *Shepherd* of Hermas and the *Didache* among uncontested scriptural authorities becomes.

The sermon itself is a blistering attack against gambling and the game of dice in particular, a place "where there is no truth, but only the gaming-table of lies" (*Aleat.* 11), which its author considers economically ruinous to members of the community.[8] On numerous occasions the homilist contrasts the Christian faith with the unspoken deity who reigns over games of chance, but the devil *also* has a seat at the gaming-table (*Aleat.* 5), watching over them to snatch away their fortunes. Participants in the games are thus no better off than pagans and are even disallowed from claiming the name of "Christian": "O dice-player who claims to be a Christian, whoever you are, you are not a Christian, because you participate in the sins of the world. You cannot be the friend of Christ when you are a friend of his enemy" (*Aleat.* 8).[9] While it appears difficult to establish the proper setting for the delivery of this sermon or to uncover who exactly might be implicated in the gambling scandal, Nucci notes that there are no intimations that the problem was limited to just a few Christians; instead, among the transgressors targeted by the homilist was "un nutrito gruppo di fedeli che . . . comprendesse addirittura coloro ai quali era stato affidato il ministero episcopale."[10] The essential truth of this becomes clearer when examining the logic of the sermon's opening arguments, and particularly the

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writings from the mid-fourth century. See Carroll, 84-85. I have nothing new to add about the date of the anonymous sermon, and am content to follow the consensus placing it somewhere in the second half of the third century.

[8] *ubi nulla veritas, sed mendaciorum mandra*; trans. mine.

[9] Trans. per Carroll, 93.

[10] Nucci, 28.

way that the major reference to the *Shepherd* of Hermas is utilized. An extended

quotation is merited to grasp the context in which this appears:

> We are warned by the doctrine of salvation lest by our unrestrained pardoning of sinners we should suffer an equal torment with them.
>
> We are called "the salt of the earth" so that from us the whole brotherhood might be salted with heavenly wisdom. For where it says, "But if the salt loses its savor, it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trampled on by men," here we are afraid and we should fear that, while feeling secure in the church because of the priestly authority that the Lord has bestowed upon us, we could be revealed (*repperiamur*) to be non-functioning by negligence (*neglegentiae*) in the case of the indolent brothers, or worse yet that we grant them spurious communion, and thereby provoke the indignation of the Lord from our actions. And we do not fulfill the duty that we are honored to receive from God. Indeed, the divine scripture (*scriptura divina*) says, "Woe to the shepherds! If the shepherds are themselves revealed (*reperti*) to be negligent (*neglegentes*), how will they respond to the Lord before their sheep? What shall they say? That they were vexed by the sheep? They will not be believed—it is an incredible claim that any shepherd could be afflicted by his sheep; all the more will they be punished because of their lie" (*Aleat.* 1-2).[11]

Beginning with "*Vae erit pastoribus*" through the end of this quotation, the homilist, who

combats a problem of gambling and unchecked sin in his community, cites the "divine

scripture" of the *Shepherd* of Hermas,[12] although he clearly anticipates it nearly from the

point at which he turns from Jesus's saying about good-for-nothing salt (Mt 5:13) to issue

a warning to his fellow shepherds who also oversee flocks. This can be demonstrated

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[11] As noted above, owing to the difficult nature of the homilist's Latin, my translation begins from Carroll, 88, with several adaptations and an eye toward Nucci's Italian translation, which adheres much more closely to the breathless rigidity of the source material. Carroll's translation attempts to present the admittedly thorny Latin by modern conventional English, but in so doing often misses the thrust of the argument and key terminology as well.

[12] Herm. Sim. 9.31.5-6 (108.5-6). Hermas may be riffing on Ezekiel 34, which scholars sometimes cite as the "divine scripture" that the homilist has in mind, but this quotation is undoubtedly from the *Shepherd* and nowhere else. Importantly, the quotation from *De Aleatoribus* reflects, with minor variations, the use of the Latin Vulgata translation of the *Shepherd*, and acts as a *terminus ante quem* for that translation. Christian Tornau and Paolo Cecconi, eds., *The* Shepherd *of Hermas in Latin: Critical Edition of the Oldest Translation* Vulgata (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 10.

most acutely by the linguistic connection of negligence, the second example above of

which our author inserts into the quotation of the *Shepherd* instead of *dissipati*

("scattered"), the reading attested by the Latin Vulgata translation. However, the general

sense of the passage and the rigorist attitude of the homilist finds its justification and

culmination in the *Shepherd*, in spite of the brief detour about salt: with something as

important as salvation at stake, he wishes to convey, *we bishops should not be allowing*

the tail to wag the dog. It is in this same vein that the homilist eventually calls for an end

to leniency for the gamblers who use the same hand to roll the dice as they also lift up in

prayer to the Lord—even to the point of denying them the Eucharist (*Aleat.* 4).

Interrogating the scriptural collection of the author behind the short sermon may

be the wrong inquiry to make, yet we can observe that he traverses over a diverse range

of Old Testament, New Testament, intertestamental texts, the *Shepherd* of Hermas,

possibly the *Didache* and a number of unknown Jewish or Jewish-Christian

apocryphons.[13] But beyond the one explicit citation of the *Shepherd* as "divine scripture,"

Harnack was the first to recognize deeper resonances of Hermas's book in the

argumentation of our homilist, including possible allusions to all three sections of the

Shepherd.[14] Harnack even claimed that the sermon is more dependent upon the *Shepherd*

than any other scripture, and concluded his study with the following:

> Diese Zusammenstellung lehrt, dass unser Verfasser im Hirten lebt und webt.
> Sobald er sein specielles Thema verlässt, für dessen Behandlung er aus dem

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[13] See the fuller discussion in Daniélou, 94-97.

[14] Aside from the quotation of Herm. Sim. 9.31.5-6 (108.5-6), Harnack finds 10 other reminiscences of the *Shepherd* in the sermon, including an adaptation of the claim of Mand. 4.1.9 (29.9)— *tu particeps eris peccatis eius*—in *Aleat.* 4, where the homilist borrows the shepherd's insistence that one shares in the sins of a habitual sinner from which one does not disassociate oneself. For the full accounting of similarities, see Harnack, 126-8.

> Hirten direct nichts gewinnen konnte, treten die Reminiscenzen an den Hirten deutlich hervor. An ihm hat er sich gebildet.[15]

Nucci regards the homily a *unicum* in the history of Christianity precisely for this fact: here for the first time in the Judeo-Christian tradition is gambling opposed,[16] and a case had to be constructed from a wide tapestry of scriptures given that cleromancy is essentially a biblically approved practice (e.g., Acts 1:24-26). The *Shepherd* proved especially valuable for the homilist, since he could draw from it both a spirit of collective responsibility and the authority to upbraid his fellow "shepherds" for their dereliction of duty. Whether the preacher was "formed" by the *Shepherd* must remain a matter of conjecture, but still, Daniélou could only concur with Harnack, noting that the sermon displays the same concern for post-conversion lapses into a life of sin as does the *Shepherd*, even if he sometimes finds that more proximal texts were also available from which the homilist could have sourced his resonances that nevertheless bear some relationship to Hermas's text.[17] Regardless, that we do not know, and possibly cannot ever know, the precise date or identity of the author of *De Aleatoribus* is no slight against its relevance for the investigation at hand. Instead, by this point in the third century, we can recognize that it attests to the crescendo of early Christian witnesses that the *Shepherd* was highly valued as Scripture by most of the thought-leaders of the East and

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[15] Harnack, 128.

[16] "Nessun testo scritturistico forniva una base su cui predicare contro l'invalso e quanto mai riprovevole gioco d'azzardo." Nucci, 12.

[17] "The characteristic feature of the treatise is its rigorism. It lays down as a matter of principle that the Christian cannot be allowed, after baptism, to lapse into sins such as idolatry or fornication, and pastors are warned against the danger of offering such sinners too easily a reconciliation. . . . The author of the *Shepherd* had exactly the same attitude, so that it is hardly surprising that our author should have quoted from the *Shepherd*." Daniélou, 98.

West alike who found occasion to speak about it, utilizing it variously to affirm doctrines, to justify rigorist reproof of impropriety, to illustrate expectations of eternal salvation, and, in the case of Origen, even as allegorical material. In nearly every case, starting with Irenaeus and persisting to this point in the third century, the *Shepherd* could stand alongside the gospels, Paul, and other clearly scriptural texts to elucidate the full revelation of God to the church. In this light, the invective of such a character as Tertullian must be deemed an exception, rather than the rule, to the otherwise positive reception of the text,[18] and his allegation that every church council found the book apocryphal must be regarded a lie in service of his extreme idiosyncratic agenda. Thanks to *De Aleatoribus*, we can see that rigorism was no determinant of one's attitude toward the *Shepherd*. Tertullian would eventually find a like-minded soul in Victorinus of Poetovio, possibly the first writer of the church to leave behind an inventory of included and excluded books of the New Testament. But his contribution has not always been recognized or contextualized appropriately by scholars of early Christianity.

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[18] Scholars sometimes claim that Tertullian's caustic determination about the *Shepherd*, often coupled with the testimony of the Muratorian Fragment—always deemed a second-century witness—meant that Hermas's book was regarded, in the main, as non-canonical. Not only does this unwarrantedly antedate the concept of a closed scriptural canon (or at the very least, a settled judgment with respect to this particular book) to the second or third century, but it also ignores the general trend of patristic evidence in the service of an evangelically convenient conclusion toward the *Shepherd*'s extracanonicity. Eckhard Schnabel, for example, can insist that Eusebius's fourth-century disfavor toward the *Shepherd* replicates "a situation that pertained since Tertullian" more than 100 years prior. Eckhard J. Schnabel, "The Muratorian Fragment: The State of Research," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57.2 (2014): 242; see also Charles E. Hill, "'The Writing Which Says …' *The Shepherd* of Hermas in the Writings of Irenaeus," *Studia Patristica LXV: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 128, 138.

The extant literary corpus of Victorinus, bishop of Poetovio in modern-day Slovenia until his martyrdom in perhaps 303 or 304 CE, pales in comparison even to his output known to Jerome. In *Vir. ill.* 74, Jerome could list ten works, most of which were commentaries on books of the Old Testament, "and numerous others"—in addition to the fact that though he wrote in Latin, Victorinus had a much better grasp of Greek.[19] Most famous for writing the first commentary on the book of Revelation, Victorinus also authored a short treatise *On the Creation of the World* and a miniature, 14-line fragment chronicling important dates in the life of Christ, including his birth, baptism, and death. But the significance of this fragment, literally known as the "Chronological Fragment," owes to the provenance of its ninth-century manuscript, which wound up at the Ambrosian Library of Milan after being transferred from the Colomban monastery at Bobbio.[20] Thus far, nothing would suggest the relevance of Victorinus to the study of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, for nowhere in his acknowledged works does he cite or make reference to the book. But as has recently been argued, the Chronological Fragment would not be the only artifact of Victorinus to wind up in the archives of the Ambrosian Library from Bobbio.

Eighty-five additional lines followed that the same 100-kilometer path from Bobbio to Milan, and would be published in 1740 by Ludovico Antonio Muratori chiefly

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[19] Victorinus is often cited as the first exegete of biblical books in Latin. Thomas P. Halton, trans., *Saint Jerome: On Illustrious Men*, vol. 100 of *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 105-6.

[20] Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio: Sur L'Apocalypse et Autres Écrits*, vol. 423 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 20-1.

as an example of barbaric Latin and careless scribal habits. However, it was soon recognized that the fragment contained something far more valuable: though its beginning and ending were missing-in-action, this document featured a discussion of or introduction to the books of the New Testament—one that purported, on a surface reading of the text, to be remarkably early. Such a judgment hinged on the fragment's testimony about the *Shepherd* of Hermas, which, though not entirely decisive in and of itself, makes bold claims about the authorship and status of the book. The relevant portion of these lines reads as follows:

pastorem vero *nuperrime temporibus nostris in urbe* **75** *roma herma conscripsit sedente cathe* *tra urbis romae aeclesiae pio ēps fratre* *eius et ideo legi eum quidē oportet se pu* *plicare vero in eclesia populo neque inter* *profetas conpletum numero neqe inter* **80** *apostolos in fine temporum potest*[21]	But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the prophets, whose number is complete, or among the apostles, for it is after [their] time.[22]

A surface reading of these lines produces the impression of an author quite proximal to Hermas and Pius (d. c.155 CE), one who possesses special information about their relationship and who holds to a distinct concept that all texts written by the apostles date to an earlier time. Not coincidentally, scholars from the 18th to the 20th centuries queued up to offer dates ranging from 170–220 for this Muratorian Fragment,[23] and its likely origin in Rome, where traditions about Hermas and Pius would have been most prevalent,

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[21] Latin text per Hans Lietzmann, *Das Muratorische Fragment und die monarchianischen Prologe zu den Evangelien*, Kleine Texte für theologische Vorlesungen und Übungen 1 (Bonn: Marcus und Weber's Verlag, 1902), 8-10; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=chi.103135237;view=1up;seq=12.

[22] Translation per Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 307.

[23] This history is covered adequately in Schnabel, 239-40.

was never seriously doubted.[24] In short, scholars were quite credulous that this anonymous, incomplete, and poorly transcribed fragment hidden away for some 1,400 years was telling the truth and, that as a witness to the *status quaestionis* of the second century, it could speak into the darkness that surrounds the formation of the canon of the New Testament. This credulous consensus was therefore ripe for the picking.

While this may not be the place for a full recounting of the tedious history of scholarship on the Muratorian Fragment, inasmuch as the reception of the *Shepherd* of Hermas is intertwined with it—and becomes unraveled when the supposed second-century canon list is understood as another Italian fragment from the pen of Victorinus of Poetovio—some attention must be devoted to last half-century of interpretation of these 85 lines. Albert Sundberg first presented a challenge to the null hypothesis of a second-century Muratorian Fragment in the mid-1960s; his full argument was published in 1973.[25] Offering a new interpretation of the vexing *vero nuperrime temporibus nostris* from the Fragmentist's discussion of the *Shepherd*, Sundberg regarded this not as a statement of absolute chronology but rather relative epochs of activity, suggesting that its author held to a typological separation of distinct periods that need not behave according to the denotation of the words themselves. From there, Sundberg was able to contest other aspects of the Fragment that seemingly confirmed its second-century dating, including the presence of named heresies and heretics that belonged to an earlier time, in service of his ultimate assertion that the Fragment should be viewed as a fourth-century

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[24] Joseph Verheyden, "The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Debate," in *The Biblical Canons*, ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. De Jonge (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 492.

[25] Albert C. Sundberg, "Canon Muratori: A Fourth Century List," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 1-41.

Eastern creation. Sundberg persuaded some scholars, but not all, and his new interpretation spawned the inevitable restatements of the prior null hypothesis.[26] Sundberg's argument was later taken up at greater length by Geoffrey Hahneman in numerous venues, the most recent and succinct of which appeared as a chapter in an edited volume entitled *The Canon Debate*.[27] Among the numerous rationales developed here were: (1) the data offered about Hermas himself, whose name is Greek and whose autobiographical breadcrumbs suggest that he followed a foundling-to-freedman path detaching him from authentic familial ties, do not correspond to what can be gleaned from the *Shepherd*; (2) the Muratorian Fragment incorrectly projects the later Roman monoepiscopacy, which was not achieved until perhaps the early third century, back into the middle of the second, and at any rate flies in the face of the *Shepherd*'s own testimony about bishops, elders, and τοῖς προηγουμένοις τῆς ἐκκλεσίας in the plural with no discernable hierarchy[28]; and (3) devising a list of New Testament books is without parallel in the second century and therefore too exceptional to uphold without a reliable origin story, but would instead be commonplace for the fourth century, when, beginning with Eusebius, numerous such lists were drawn up.[29] Hahneman's case was answered at impressive length and depth in 2003 by Joseph Verheyden, who fundamentally pined for

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[26] See, for example, Everett Ferguson, "Canon Muratori: Date and Provenance," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 677-83.

[27] Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, "The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 405-15; see also the monograph featuring his full argument, in Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

[28] Herm. Vis. 2.2.6 (6.6).

[29] For a full defense of these positions and further reasons, see Hahneman, in *The Canon Debate*, 408-12.

the long-accepted positions of the Fragment's second-century date and Western provenance.[30] Verheyden ended his chapter wishing by *fiat* that the Sundberg-Hahneman position "be put to rest not for a thousand years, but for eternity,"[31] but in reality their competing interpretations each had irresolvable difficulties and so left scholarship divided over the placement of the Muratorian Fragment.

Into this unbridgeable chasm, Jonathan Armstrong offered a third position in 2008, attempting to attribute the Muratorian Fragment not nebulously to an expansive locale and century on the basis of generalized regional and temporal similarities, but to the pen of a known patristic author. Building off the labors of Sundberg and Hahneman, who introduced doubt about the Fragment's null hypothesis, Armstrong asserted that the numerous oddities of the Fragment could be explained by ascribing it to none other than Victorinus of Poetovio.[32] Victorinus's name had often appeared in much earlier discussions of the Muratorian Fragment, but given that scholars had universally assigned it a second-century date, the traditions attested by Victorinus were deemed to have come from the Fragment itself or from a hypothetical source predating both of them.[33] So convincing is Armstrong's overall hypothesis that the present author follows it nearly without reservation, but paradoxically, it has barely received a hearing among scholars, such that, for example, Eckhard Schnabel's 2014 review article purporting to cover the

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[30] Verheyden, 487-556; see especially pp. 497-530, where Verheyden—mostly even-handedly—takes up the various arguments of Sundberg and Hahneman and offers his rebuttals.

[31] Ibid., 556.

[32] Jonathan J. Armstrong, "Victorinus of Pettau as the Author of the Canon Muratori," *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008): 1-34.

[33] Ibid., 18.

"state of research" on the Muratorian Fragment could pass over it with nary a mention.[34]

It is therefore constructive to cover some of the arguments that especially commend

Armstrong's solution about the Fragment, which he regards not as a detached canon list

but as a portion of the introduction to Victorinus's lost *Commentarius in Matthaeum*,

datable with surprising confidence to c.258 CE.[35] Though not mentioned in Jerome's

aforementioned truncated list of the writings of Victorinus, this commentary was

otherwise known to Jerome and possibly also Chromatius of Aquileia (d. 407) and

Cassiodorus (d. 585) as well.[36]

As Armstrong successfully argues, the enumerated books and argumentation

observable in the Matthaean introduction, which I will continue to refer to as the

Muratorian Fragment, bear more relationships to the idiosyncrasies of Victorinus than

any other ancient author. On the level of individual books, among these are the absence

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[34] Instead, though Schnabel recognizes that the Muratorian Fragment "is not a canon list" and more probably existed at one time as an introduction to the New Testament (so Metzger) or, *in situ* at Bobbio as a "kind of monastic handbook on the Bible," his article rehearses old information about canon formation *ad nauseam*, especially to militate against Hahneman, endorsing many evangelical canards, such as a four-gospel canon which was supposedly established in the early second century, along the way. Schnabel, 231-64; esp. 238-9 and 244-53.

[35] Armstrong, 32 n.102. Since he offers no particular evidence for this dating, his earlier claim that "the Fragment circulated before the close of the third century" (18) is a preferable principle from which to guide our chronology. But even this deserves to be interrogated somewhat, for the authorities who betray knowledge of the Fragment are few and far between, and flourished in the late fourth, fifth, and even sixth centuries. It may be, therefore, that Victorinus's *Commentary on Matthew* was not widely known or traveled in antiquity, coming only to Jerome's attention by virtue of his similar ethnicity with Victorinus and to Chromatius and Cassiodorus thanks to their own proximities to Pannonia. "Circulation," then, may be the incorrect terminology for Victorinus's *Commentary on Matthew* and its introduction, for it may have been used merely for the catechumens of Poetovio and scholars with some connection to Victorinus's provincial home. This hypothesis would further explain the limited influence of the so-called Canon Muratori and its eventual discovery in northern Italy.

[36] Specifically, Jerome cites Victorinus's *Commentarius in Matthaeum* in his Latin translation of Origen's *Homiliae in Lucam*. See Armstrong, 30-1.

of Hebrews in Victorinus's account of Pauline letters,[37] but more significantly, his

expressed approval of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, a book which a paucity of patristic

authors, especially from the West, was willing to endorse.[38] Second, the narrative

traditions found within the Fragment about Paul's epistolary practice and John's

inspiration to write his gospel, both of which are found in a minority of ancient writers,

track especially well with statements of Victorinus in his *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*.

For example, both the Fragment and Victorinus transmit a legend that the apostle John

was cajoled to write his gospel by his disciples and associates,[39] and moreover that he

only agreed to do so either after a revelation received while fasting or as a response to the

various heretics that challenged the Lord's divinity or humanity. Whereas Clement of

Alexandria, Eusebius, and Jerome also know elements of this lore, Armstrong

demonstrates that "the testimony of Victorinus stands closer to the Fragment" than the

remaining accounts—an observation virtually sealed by the fact that both Victorinus and

the Fragmentist immediately follow the legend with a statement about the rule or measure

of faith.[40] Similarly rare but attested both by the Fragmentist and Victorinus is the

assertion that Paul wrote to seven churches,[41] a precedent also attested by John in

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[37] *Comm. in Apoc.* 1.7; see Armstrong, 15-17.

[38] Once again, the evidence comes from a fragment that has been reliably attributed to Victorinus. See Armstrong, 28.

[39] *Comm. in Apoc.* 11.1; see also lines 9-16 of the Fragment in Metzger, 306.

[40] Armstrong, 8-9.

[41] *Comm. in Apoc.* 1.7; see also lines 46-61 of the Fragment in Metzger, 306-7.

Rev. 2–3.[42] In so doing, both apostles address not just the recipient churches, but, it is said, the entire church. As with the Johannine legend, the Pauline seven-church tradition is mentioned by a scarce few ancient authors, including Jerome, Cyprian, and Hippolytus, though the last of these is preserved only in a paraphrastic Syriac translation from the 12th century. Cyprian may be the originator of this tradition, but again, Victorinus and the Fragmentist maintain linguistic parallels indicating their particular closeness of thought, and both omit Hebrews.[43] On grounds like these, Armstrong has already stated a sufficient circumstantial case for Victorinan authorship of the Fragment.

However, Armstrong's solution becomes all the more solidified when it is recognized that Victorinus also adhered to strict concepts of a fixed canon of the Old Testament and the periodization of historical time—as expressed in the lines of the Fragment pertaining to the *Shepherd*. In his understanding, Victorinus writes from the era of the church, whereas previous epochs were defined by the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New. Nothing innovative may now be conceived given the closing of this apostolic period, but the era of the church has been graced with the "consolation of the interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures," so that the church may understand what has been written in the preceding periods.[44] Similarly, Armstrong is correct to observe that Victorinus regards the Old Testament canon as fixed; though he nowhere lists the books he includes by name, Victorinus cites the "epitomes of

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[42] Victorinus believes, of course, that the Apocalypse was written by the same John of Zebedee who later authored the Fourth Gospel. Though Paul wrote to seven churches first—John's literary activity did not begin until after the death of Domitian—he can still refer to John as Paul's apostolic predecessor. *Comm. in Apoc.* 10.3-11.1.

[43] Armstrong, 14-16.

[44] *Comm. in Apoc.* 10.2; trans. per Armstrong, 24.

Theodore" as having supplied the correct record of twenty-four books.[45] Moreover, given

that Victorinus also disallows the *Shepherd* from a place among the New Testament, it

becomes quite likely that he considered the New Testament canon closed as well. Though

unrecognized or at least unstated by Armstrong, it seems that this is precisely the case,

for in the same context where Victorinus casually equates the twenty-four books of the

Old Testament with the total number of wings distributed among the four creatures of

Rev. 4:8, he then adds:

> Just as an animal cannot fly unless it has wings, neither can the preaching of
> the New Testament support faith, unless it possesses[46] the witness foretold in
> the Old Testament, through which it is elevated from the earth and flies. For
> whenever something said in the past is found to have happened later, it always
> produces undoubting faith (*Comm. in Apoc.* 4.5).[47]

Crucially, Victorinus also regards the eyes of these creatures as the preaching of the New

Testament, and argues that only the Catholic church—not the Jews, who have wings but

no "life," and also not the heretics, who disregard the "prophetic testimony" and thus

have no wings—possesses the correct combination of eyes and wings to elevate from the

earth, "as though a living animal." In short, Victorinus implies rather strongly that the

Old Testament and the New Testament carry equal weight for the testimony of the

church, and it is only a small step from there to typologically require that the New

Testament *also* feature twenty-four books.

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[45] *Comm. in Apoc.* 4.5; Armstrong, 23.

[46] The translation offered here by Weinrich, "is seen to correspond to," seems an undue stretching of the verb *habeat*, but advantageously it makes clearer the thrust of Victorinus's argument. William C. Weinrich, *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, Ancient Christian Texts Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 8.

[47] Trans. mine, from the Latin text in Dulaey, SC 423:70.

We might wish that Victorinus had stated this explicitly, but enough can be

gleaned circumstantially from his discussion to commend such a conclusion. For

example, shortly after equating the twenty-four elders seated on twenty-four thrones with

the twenty-four books of the Old Testament (Rev. 4:4),[48] he cites Mt. 19:27-28, where

Christ declares that the twelve apostles will also assume twelve thrones from which to

judge the twelve tribes. Victorinus then connects this to Gen. 49:16, implying that the

twelve apostles will be joined by the twelve patriarchs, a combination he also teases

when first commenting on the twenty-four thrones.[49] Moreover, the preaching of the New

Testament is imbued with the "foreknowledge of the Spirit" (*spiritualem providentiam*),[50]

permitting the New Testament to fulfill everything "previously foretold" (*antea*

praedicata) in the Old by the same Spirit.[51] In this light, it is surely not insignificant that

the Muratorian Fragment, assuming the existence of Matthew and Mark on the missing

lines,[52] enumerates exactly twenty-four books for the New Testament. Thus, Victorinus's

New Testament collection, the first ever devised in a closed and exclusive fashion,

seemingly included the following twenty-four books:

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[48] *Comm. in Apoc.* 4.3. Victorinus also notes here that the 24 elders signify the 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles.

[49] *Comm. in Apoc.* 4.5.

[50] My translation here of *spiritualem providentiam* follows that of Dulaey: "la prescience de l'Ésprit." *Comm. in Apoc.* 4.5; Dulaey, SC 423:70-1.

[51] Victorinus's Latin here also comes from *Comm. in Apoc.* 4.5. See also *Comm. in Apoc.* 10.2, where he claims that "the Spirit of sevenfold power foretold all future events through the prophets."

[52] As most scholars do; see Verheyden, 513 n.136.

(Gos. Matthew)	Colossians	1 Timothy
(Gos. Mark)	Galatians	2 Timothy
Gos. Luke	1 Thessalonians	Jude
Gos. John	Romans	1 John
Acts of the Apostles	2 Corinthians	2 John
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians	Wisdom of Solomon
Ephesians	Philemon	Apoc. John
Philippians	Titus	*Apoc. Peter*

This accords well with Martine Dulaey's observation that Revelation for Victorinus

"n'est donc pas pour l'essentiel une prophétie des fins dernières, mais une révélation

parfaite du sens de l'Écriture."[53] Though he also interpreted from Revelation a

millenarian eschatology that later proved scandalous to Jerome and his contemporaries,

Victorinus sifted from the book a sense of completion and finality that applied equally to

future events and the two-halved collection of scriptures. Given the recognized

similarities between Victorinus's *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* and the Fragment, the

likelihood appears high that he also transposed the idea of a closed canon from the former

to the latter, framing the New Testament as a worthy mirror of the Old.

With the Victorinan authorship of the Fragment established, it becomes possible

to probe deeper into the veracity of the claims that Victorinus makes about the *Shepherd*

of Hermas. First of all, he possibly knows Pius's name from Irenaeus, on whom he often

depends for exegetical material and from whom he might have developed his pronounced

millenarian tendencies.[54] In *Haer.* 3.3.3, Irenaeus supplies a list of the bishops of Rome,

the "greatest and most ancient Church,"[55] to contend that the doctrines of the worldwide

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[53] Dulaey, SC 423:29-30.

[54] Ibid., 36; 39.

[55] *Haer.* 3.3.2; trans. per Dominic J. Unger and Irenaeus M. C. Steenberg, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 3*, vol. 64 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: Newman Press, 2012), 32.

church were secure by proper apostolic succession that forbade the innovations of heretics—and here Pius is counted as the ninth bishop from the time of the apostles. Why might Victorinus have selected Pius? This is difficult to say; it may be that he merely wished to distance Hermas as far as he could, within reason, from the apostolic era.[56] This becomes more likely if we can presume that Victorinus knows anything about the contents of the *Shepherd* and regards the Clement contemporaneous with Hermas as the Roman bishop third in line from the apostles.[57] Also from Irenaeus, Victorinus would have then been forced to contend with the fact that Clement

> both saw the blessed apostles themselves and conferred with them, and still had the preaching of the apostles ringing in his ears and their tradition before his eyes. In this he was not alone, for there were many others still left at that time who had been taught by the apostles (*Haer.* 3.3.3).[58]

It would obviously have undermined Victorinus's contention that Hermas could not be placed among apostolic times if it was not unusual for the peers of Clement to have known and learned under the apostles themselves. A competing claim was therefore desirable. It may also be possible that, as Hahneman has suggested,[59] the Fragmentist was aware of the tradition Origen cites naming the Hermas whom Paul greets in Rom. 16:14 as the author of the *Shepherd*. This likelihood increases under a Victorinan theory of the

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[56] The only other information that Victorinus could have gleaned from Irenaeus about Pius is a brief mention in *Haer.* 3.4.3 that under Pius the heretics Valentinus and Marcion "flourished" in Rome.

[57] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3).

[58] Trans. per Unger and Steenberg, 32-3. Note that this statement about Clement's apostolic contemporaries comes from the very same place as Irenaeus's placement of Pius in the Roman apostolic succession list.

[59] Hahneman, in *The Canon Debate*, 409.

Fragment's authorship, for Origen, in spite of only preceding Victorinus by a matter of a few decades, was another authority upon whom our bishop of Poetovio relied heavily.[60] Furthermore, if Victorinus truly regarded the number of books of the apostles—thus, the New Testament—complete, and if he could expect some agreement on this point from his contemporaries, then the argument about the late and insufficiently apostolic authorship of the *Shepherd* would be unnecessary. Instead, all of Victorinus's stated qualms about the *Shepherd* break down on a deeper analysis. Though he seems to have personally entertained the idea of a closed collection of the New Testament in the second half of the third century, he was apparently the first to adopt such rigidity with respect to the scriptural canon. Moreover, Hermas bore no relationship to the later Latin-named bishop Pius,[61] but instead committed the *Shepherd* to text much earlier, still apparently in the "apostolic" age.[62] Finally, Victorinus's assertion that the book not be read in church belies and exposes the need even to craft such an injunction; from later patristic authors such as Eusebius and Jerome we find admissions that the *Shepherd*, indeed, was read aloud in churches, and Victorinus, when combined with the probability that the sermon *De Aleatoribus* also affirms this practice, likely attests in the same direction.

If these points and the Victorinan authorship of the Fragment are accepted, then it also becomes plausible that, contra Verheyden,[63] Victorinus found something about the

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[60] Dulaey, SC 423:36.

[61] Hahneman, in *The Canon Debate*, 409-12.

[62] Verheyden, 508, 512, concedes that the tradition cited by the Fragmentist about Hermas is incorrect, though he also counts it plausible that the Fragmentist could have been incorrect in the second century.

[63] "He [the Fragmentist] obviously has no problem with the content of the [*Shepherd*], since he permits it to be read in private." Verheyden, 507. This is perhaps too naïve an assumption, for as Harry

Shepherd—possibly its innovative tendencies—canonically objectionable. Otherwise, the

need to devote so much space to the *Shepherd*, when in other cases books can be waved

away whole cloth, is rather surprising.[64] Surely it is not insignificant that, when

interpreting 1 Cor. 14:29—precisely where Paul speaks about prophecies and revelations

that might be received by members of the Corinthian church—Victorinus clarifies that

Paul "was not speaking of catholic prophecy of some unheard of and unknown kind but

of that prophecy that has been foretold. They weigh what is said to ensure that the

interpretation conforms with the witness of the sayings of the prophets."[65] John of

Zebedee, as disciple and apostle of Christ, is exempt from this stipulation, which permits

only prophets that interpret prior Scripture. Hermas was perhaps too innovative and

unbeholden to Scripture for Victorinus, who strongly preferred revelations rooted in Old

Testament prophecy or those (pseudonymously or homonymously) linked to actual

apostles. For Victorinus, the *Shepherd* simply did not measure up to the witness of the

other Scriptures, to such an extent that he selected the Wisdom of Solomon over the

Shepherd of Hermas to round out his New Testament with a felicitous twenty-four

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Gamble has persuasively argued, attempts to control the reading of apocryphal books must be interpreted in light of their persistent currency. Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 236. Perhaps, furthermore, Victorinus did not feel he had the ability to restrict private reading in the first place, or better yet, he may have adhered to a distinction explicitly stated later by Rufinus, that though books like the *Shepherd* could be read, they could not be used to craft the church's doctrine.

[64] Assuming that the first line of the Fragment rounds out a discussion about Matthew or Mark, rather than belonging to the narrative about Luke, Victorinus devotes more lines (7+) to the *Shepherd* of Hermas than any other individual book extant on the Fragment other than the Gospel of John, and given his *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, Victorinus discernably retained a particular fondness for the character or idea of this John.

[65] *Comm. in Apoc.* 10.2; trans. per Weinrich, 13.

books.[66] Thus, instead of anything pertaining to the authorship of the *Shepherd* or the actual identity of Hermas, the so-called Muratorian Fragment only informs us that the book was annoyingly persistent in the second half of the third century, was rather on the precipice of the New Testament even perhaps in Pannonia, and necessitated the construction of specious and idiosyncratic arguments against the book. Victorinus's testimony, though decidedly negative toward Hermas's text, backhandedly accords with what can otherwise be gleaned from the reception of the *Shepherd* preceding it—the book was popular and often counted unproblematically among the Scriptures. Only in Victorinus and those who would independently emulate his task in the following century would the cracks foreshadowing its eventual downfall begin to appear.

Eusebius of Caesarea

Prior to Armstrong's recognition of the Victorinan authorship of the Muratorian Fragment, Eusebius received warranted consideration for the novelty of his watershed classification of the "encovenanted" (ἐνδιαθήκων, *Hist. eccl.* 3.3.3) books of the New Testament (τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης, 3.25.1). Eusebius appears to have acted entirely independently of Victorinus, for nowhere does he name or cite the Pannonian bishop or betray definitive awareness of the traditions unique to the Fragment. However, I concur with Gregory Robbins that Eusebius, quite like Victorinus, attempted to mirror a closed

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[66] See the discussions about the *Wisdom* of Solomon in Armstrong, 25-27, and Verheyden, 541-5. As Verheyden and Schnabel, 242, have both noted, the existence of the *Wisdom* of Solomon in the Muratorian Fragment presents roadblocks for any definitive theory about its provenance. Here we can only note that it must not have been among the twenty-four books of the Old Testament in the epitomes of Theodore, but that Victorinus found it so valuable as to outweigh his insistence that the New Testament be composed entirely in the apostolic age. It also demonstrates the lengths to which he was willing to stretch himself to disallow the *Shepherd* of Hermas from the New Testament, given that the *Wisdom* of Solomon apparently received an exemption from his otherwise rigid chronological criteria.

twenty-*two* book collection of Old Testament scriptures with twenty-*two* "universally"

acknowledged books of the New Testament.[67] Neither would enumerate the exact books

eventually canonized, but Eusebius (unlike Victorinus) would at least be responsible for

ushering the debate to the center of the church's consciousness, such that his efforts are

subsequently replicated many times in the course of the fourth century.[68] As regards the

Shepherd, Sundberg and Hahneman considered Eusebius the turning-point in the

reception of Hermas's book,[69] and Robbins similarly noted that in Eusebius, "a certain

ambivalence about the Shepherd, tending toward positive acceptance" now faced the

harsh reality of categorical judgment.[70] The only reason Eusebius ever offers in the

monumental *Ecclesiastical History* to explain its placement outside of the

"encovenanted" scriptures is that "some" (τινων)—almost certainly including Eusebius

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[67] Gregory Allen Robbins, "PERI TŌN ENDIATHĒKŌN GRAPHŌN: Eusebius and the Formation of the Christian Bible" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986), 141-7. In so doing, Eusebius follows Josephus, a fellow historian, who enumerates the Hebrew Scriptures as "two and twenty" in *Ag. Ap.* 1.37-42. Eusebius knows, of course, that Hebrews and Revelation are not "universally" acknowledged and therefore more ἀντιλεγόμενα than ὁμολογούμενα, but in the final reckoning, it is Eusebius's personal opinion to admit these two books that counts. Much like Victorinus, Eusebius's idiosyncratic and quite academic determinations did not receive wide acceptance, for others in the church wished to retain books that he attempted to exclude. Particularly curious is the degree to which Rufinus, when translating the *Ecclesiastical History* into Latin, amends Eusebius's more controversial statements about certain books in order to make him appear more aligned with fifth-century attitudes; see Robbins, "PERI TŌN," 124-7.

[68] Robbins, "PERI TŌN," 217-53; see also Hahneman, in *The Canon Debate*, 413-5. Whether Eusebius ever entertained an idea of closure of the New Testament collection, even privately (as Robbins has previously posited), is possible, if uncertain. Robbins has more recently suggested that Eusebius was content to submit his views of the Christian "classics" for discussion by the church at large and thereby refrained from making such a determination on his own authority. That is, Eusebius's list at *Hist. eccl.* 3.25 "articulate[d] principles of order," and from there he bequeathed his interest in list-making to other "[w]riters in the fourth century . . . [who] must continue the discussion Eusebius initiated." Gregory Allen Robbins, "'Number Determinate is Kept Concealed' (Dante, *Paradiso* XXIX 135): Eusebius and the Transformation of the List (Hist. eccl. III 25)," in *Studia Patristica* 66, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 184, 186. If so, Eusebius exercised remarkable restraint where he had seemingly made his own conclusions about most of the books up for debate, including the *Shepherd* and Revelation.

[69] Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, 70.

[70] Robbins, "PERI TŌN," 26-7.

himself—rejected the theory of unspoken parties (Eusebius employs an impersonal φασιν) that it was authored by the Hermas greeted by Paul in the salutations of Romans (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.6). It thus becomes necessary to probe briefly into Eusebius's designs for the contours of the New Testament catalogue,[71] the categories that he utilizes, and the criteria or criterion guiding his determinations. From this I observe, furthermore, that Eusebius pays the *Shepherd* very limited heed while overexerting himself with respect to the book of Revelation, such that the *Ecclesiastical History* offers a telling tale of two apocalypses, one of which Eusebius is discernably eager to retain, and the other for which he has very little time. At best, Eusebius neglects Hermas's book; at worst, he is flippant, dismissive, or even disingenuous toward the *Shepherd*, unwilling to locate it appropriately according to the most basic sense of his own classification scheme.

Book 3 is paramount to the discussion of Christian scriptures in the *Ecclesiastical History*. Concomitant with Eusebius's established method, this book follows a ping-pong procedure of referring to relevant events in the history of the Roman empire and pausing to locate the development of Christianity within that chronology. Thus, Book 3 starts from the Jewish War and the departure of Peter and Paul and concludes late in the reign of Trajan, when Eusebius can admire the emperor for a policy of restraint toward the persecution of Christians. As Eusebius rounds out his discussion of Peter and Paul, he finds occasion to sift through the texts that they left behind, of which he only accepts 1 Peter and the fourteen letters of Paul (including Hebrews). After noting that he does not

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[71] Given that he employs the term κανὼν otherwise, I intentionally avoid the term "canon" for Eusebius in the context of scriptural collections. See Gregory Allen Robbins, "Eusebius' Lexicon of 'Canonicity,'" in *Studia Patristica XXV: Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1991*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 134-41.

receive the *Acts of Paul* as conveying authentic traditions about the apostle to the

Gentiles, Eusebius curiously devotes the most extended ministration toward the *Shepherd*

as he will deign to do in the entire work:

> ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ὁ αὐτὸς ἀπόστολος ἐν ταῖς ἐπὶ τέλει προσρήσεσιν τῆς πρὸς Ῥωμαίους μνήμην πεποίηται μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ Ἑρμᾶ, οὗ φασιν ὑπάρχειν τὸ τοῦ Ποιμένος βιβλίον, ἰστέον ὡς καὶ τοῦτο πρὸς μέν τινων ἀντιλέλεκται, δι᾽ οὓς οὐκ ἂν ἐν ὁμολογουμένοις τεθείη, ὑφ᾽ ἑτέρων δὲ ἀναγκαιότατον οἷς μάλιστα δεῖ στοιχειώσεως εἰσαγωγικῆς, κέκριται· ὅθεν ἤδη καὶ ἐν ἐκκλησίαις ἴσμεν αὐτὸ δεδημοσιευμένον, καὶ τῶν παλαιτάτων δὲ συγγραφέων κεχρημένους τινὰς αὐτῷ κατείληφα (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.6).

> But since the same apostle, in the concluding addresses of Romans, made mention, among others, also of Hermas, of whom they say laid down the Book of the *Shepherd*, one must know that this is also contested by some, on account of whom it should not be placed in the acknowledged (books), but by others it has been judged most indispensable, especially to whom there is need of elementary instruction—for which reason even now we have known it being used in the public service in churches, and I have found some among the most ancient authors who employed it.[72]

Had we not already seen that it was none other than Origen, one of Eusebius's primary

influences, who advanced the particular theory about Hermas that he regards as

ἀντιλέλεκται, it would be difficult to apprehend whose opinion he opposed here. For the

time being, however, it is enough to observe not that the Palestinian bishop rejects the

authorship of the *Shepherd* by someone named Hermas, but specifically that he disallows

the particular Hermas known to Paul from having written the book (Rom. 16:14).

Otherwise it would be quite curious indeed for Eusebius to have disrupted his Peter-and-

Paul pattern, which continues after the conclusion of the above quote by naming their

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[72] Trans. mine, from the text of Kirsopp Lake, trans. and ed., *Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History, Volume I: Books 1-5*, vol. 153 of LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 192-4.

known associates, to digress upon the authorship of the *Shepherd*.[73] But since "some"

have contested the theory put forth by unspoken others, the book thus cannot be

described as commonly attributed to that Hermas who would link the *Shepherd* to a

quantifiable apostolic authority. Given his "even now" (ἤδη καὶ) and the admission that

some of the oldest patristic writers cited the *Shepherd*, we can also discern elements of

Eusebius's surprise and dismissiveness toward the book beginning to manifest

themselves.

Substantially later in Book 3, Eusebius comes to speak about the apostle John and

follows with a discussion of his writings. This turns naturally into the list of Christian

scriptures for which four categories are adduced: books that are **(1)** acknowledged

[ὁμολογούμενα], **(2)** contested [ἀντιλεγόμενα], **(3)** illegitimate [οἱ νόθοι], and **(4)** the

formations of heretical men [αἱρετικῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀναπλάσματα]. The middle two

categories may well be borrowed from commonplace usage in Greco-Roman literary

circles with which Eusebius was familiar, as ἀντιλεγόμενα similarly arises in Plutarch's

discussion of the output of one of the adopted sons of Isocrates (*Vit. X orat.* 2.839c), and

νόθοι, which appears frequently in the literature to designate illegitimate children,

nevertheless finds paralleled usage for forged books by the same Porphyry whose

Adversus Christianos Eusebius countered in various treatises (*Plot.* 16). Combined with

the wide swath of terms Eusebius uses to designate legitimate apostolic writings before

settling on ὁμολογούμενα,[74] it quickly becomes apparent that the bishop of Caesarea

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[73] Eusebius's brief but informative discussion of the *Shepherd* here thus anticipates both the sections that immediately follow it and the full catalogue of 3.25.1-7, where the *Shepherd* is ruled illegitimate (ἐν τοῖς νόθοις).

[74] Robbins, "Eusebius' Lexicon of 'Canonicity,'" 135 n.2.

Maritima concerns himself with delineating a catalogue according to the predominant criterion of genuine authorship.[75] As we will see with the *Shepherd*, it is a criterion that likely extends beyond orthonymity alone to also rule out cases of misattributed authorship. Nevertheless, Eusebius definitively reckons twenty-one books in the acknowledged category, and also adds one provisionally: the Revelation of John, εἴ γε φανείη. He takes the extraordinary tactic of also placing Revelation in the third category of illegitimate books, a tension he promises to resolve at the appropriate time with a full discussion of the opinions for and against its authenticity. Also ἐν τοῖς νόθοις, alongside the *Acts of Paul*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the Teachings of the Apostles (i.e., the *Didache*) is "the writing which is called the *Shepherd*," but before returning to consider this severe verdict, it will be instructive to observe the lengths to which Eusebius is willing to exert himself to rescue a book that, however disputed, he has already deemed valuable.

Beginning in Book 3 of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius appears to be building two acceptable cases through which to regard Revelation as a category 1 book. The first of these follows Irenaeus, Victorinus, and others who know the tradition of the long life of John the apostle. According to this chronology, John was exiled to the island of Patmos under Domitian, allowed to return after that emperor's assassination, and lived into the reign of Trajan before dying in Ephesus. Lest this seem unbelievable, Eusebius marshals the testimony of "two witnesses, and these ought to be trustworthy, for they

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[75] Thus Robbins, "PERI TŌN," 144: "Once it is recognized that Eusebius' concern is forgery we have an important clue for understanding the list as a whole. Central to his determination of whether or not certain writings in this list are to be accorded 'covenantal' (ἐνδιαθήκος) status is the issue of authentic authorship."

represent the orthodoxy of the church, no less persons than Irenaeus and Clement of

Alexandria" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.23.2).[76] On the other hand, Eusebius decides in another

direction toward the end of Book 3, as when he pauses from quoting the second-century

father Papias to elucidate the implications of one of his statements. Papias recounts

inquiring of presbyters what things had been said by a number of named apostles,

including John, as well as *another* John, a presbyter. Eusebius then reckons:

> This confirms the truth of the story of those who have said that there were two
> of the same name in Asia, and that there are two tombs at Ephesus both still
> called John's. This calls for attention: for it is probable that the second (unless
> anyone prefer the former) saw the revelation which passes under the name of
> John (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.5-6).[77]

Difficult as it may be to fathom that both traditions known to Eusebius could co-exist,

and that two separate Johns were both exiled to Patmos and thus eligible to receive a

revelation of Jesus Christ, Robert M. Grant has ingeniously mined the *Ecclesiastical

History* to discern that Eusebius believed both of them at different points in his life and

scholarship.[78] His opinion about the authorship of Revelation therefore underwent a

transformation from the initial edition of the 290s CE to the finished product datable to

nearly a generation later, passing from initial acceptance to rejection to acceptance

again.[79] Whereas Eusebius initially held to the genuine authorship of the apostle John, he

eventually favored the measured and critically enlightened judgment of Dionysius of

Alexandria (d. 265), who concluded that the book, though mysterious and problematic,

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[76] Translation per Lake, 241-3.

[77] Ibid., 293.

[78] Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 126-36.

[79] Thus the two categories where we find Revelation in *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1-4 reflect two positions that Eusebius has, on a rather first-hand basis, considered reasonable.

was written by someone named John—just not the evangelist and apostle, and also not John Mark (*Hist. eccl.* 7.25.1-27).[80] Prior to laying out Dionysius's decisive verdict that he had come to endorse by the 320s, Eusebius exclusively cites church fathers who accepted the book as written by John the apostle: Justin Martyr (*Hist. eccl.* 4.18.8), Irenaeus (5.8.5-7), Clement of Alexandria (3.23.6), and Origen (6.25.10). Curiously, there are no dissenters. Though Eusebius had previously vowed to record the opinion of those who disfavored the book as pseudepigraphal, thereby casting the authorship of Revelation into doubt and thrusting the book into the νόθοι (3.24.18), by the conclusion there is no one to be found who regards it as illegitimate—only two parties that accept this apocalypse as written by someone named John who had authentic apostolic *bona fides*.

The foregoing case of the Book of Revelation has been laid out in detail as a worthy comparison to Eusebius's treatment of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, an apocalyptic book to which the church historian devotes substantially less attention. As we already observed with Origen, who found the *Shepherd* useful, he was forced to temper his approbation of the book after moving to Palestine, where no traditions associated with the *Shepherd* are attested before him. In contrast, Eusebius has no particular skin in the game; in spite of a voracious appetite for words of a Christian type, he apparently has never availed himself of the opportunity to read the book. Two of his three references to the *Shepherd* have already been laid out above, and the third has been cited in the previous chapter of this dissertation, as Eusebius admits that Irenaeus "not only knew, but

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[80] Notably, in the lengthy portion of a Dionysian treatise quoted by Eusebius, the Alexandrian bishop also commends the same legend of two tombs belonging to Johns in Ephesus that Eusebius parrots in 3.39.5-6. *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.12.

also accepted (ἀποδέχεται) the writing (γραφήν) of the Shepherd" (*Hist. eccl.* 5.8.7).[81]

Here Eusebius certainly nods that *he* does not receive the *Shepherd*, and possibly also

winks that he does not *know* it either.[82] Either way, the quotation of Irenaeus comes in

partial fulfillment of *Hist. eccl.* 3.3.3, where Eusebius vowed to divulge "which of the

orthodox writers in each period used any of the doubtful books."[83] Leaving aside the

Western witnesses approving of the *Shepherd*, where, one wonders, is Origen's testimony

about the book, or Clement of Alexandria's—he whom, along with Irenaeus, Eusebius

was all too eager to cite earlier as reflecting "the orthodoxy of the church" (*Hist. eccl.*

3.23.2)? Eusebius has already admitted that some of the most ancient authors—in the

plural—were accepting of the *Shepherd*, but perhaps he stops himself after Irenaeus lest

he be required to answer for its routinely positive reception and to defend his own

negative judgment against the book. Indeed, locating the *Shepherd* among οἱ νόθοι, in

category 3, is already difficult to accept, for this is traditionally suggestive that either he

or the weight of Christian witnesses regarded the book a counterfeit[84]—that is, written by

someone else in the name of its putative author, Hermas. But perhaps an alternative

explanation for his handling of the *Shepherd* within the scriptural catalogue will obtain.

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[81] Translation mine, from the Greek text of Lake, 457. Eusebius follows with a quotation of *Haer.* 4.20.2, preserving twenty words of Irenaeus in Greek (fourteen of which are his use of the *Shepherd*; Herm. Mand. 1.1 [26.1]). See also Chapter 2 of this dissertation above, pp. 58–9, esp. 59 n.109.

[82] But see Andrew Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 67 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 209 and 233, who, without offering persuasive evidence, regards it likely that Eusebius both "possessed" and "must have known the text of" the *Shepherd*.

[83] Translation per Lake, 193.

[84] This would seem to be ruled out, given that the only named patristic author who occasions to reference the *Shepherd* is Irenaeus, who "received" the book. Though Eusebius certainly knows and quotes from Tertullian, whether or not he knows of Tertullian's eventual disapproval of the *Shepherd* must remain a mystery. Even so, Tertullian never labeled the *Shepherd* a forgery—merely "apocryphal and false"!

As Robbins and others have argued, ἀντιλεγόμενα and οἱ νόθοι are two linguistic expressions for the same category in Eusebius's own reckoning; both collect books that Eusebius personally believes to be illegitimate, but the former category constitutes a subdivision necessitated because many in the church use, and regard genuine, the five catholic epistles that Eusebius would omit as counterfeits.[85] If Eusebius were being completely intellectually honest, perhaps the *Shepherd* would also belong to the ἀντιλεγόμενα as well,[86] but it is also possible that the Palestinian disapproval of Hermas's book so tainted its reception for him as to prevent any alternative judgment. Perhaps, however, forgery and pseudepigraphy are not the best lenses through which to view the macro-category of ἀντιλεγόμενα-νόθοι, at least in the case of the *Shepherd* and possibly also extending to the *Acts of Paul* and others. In the absence of further information from Eusebius, our attention should return to his first reference to the book, in the context of authentic Pauline writings. There, problematically, the *Shepherd* is demonstrated as spurious because "some" (τινων) reject the attribution of the book to the Hermas greeted by Paul, and with this in dispute, the book lacks an apostolic origin-story. The twenty-two books of the ὁμολογούμενα can all claim such legitimating origin-stories, being either orthonymous (13 of Paul, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation) or attributed to an apostle (Matthew, John, and Hebrews) or an apostle's associate (Mark, Luke, and Acts).

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[85] Robbins, "PERI TŌN," 138-41; 242. The five general epistles Eusebius locates among the ἀντιλεγόμενα, and therefore omits from his collection of accepted scriptures, are James, 2 Peter, Jude, and 2 and 3 John, which elsewhere Robbins has described, to Eusebian eyes, as "orthodox Christian writings which are also *counterfeits*." Robbins, "Eusebius' Lexicon of 'Canonicity,'" 134; emphasis his.

[86] To draw a parallel with another book that Eusebius does not personally accept: just as with the *Shepherd*, which he has already admitted "has been judged most indispensable" by "others" (ἑτέρων, *Hist. eccl.* 3.3.6), 2 Peter similarly "has appeared useful to many, and has been studied with other scriptures" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.1). On the surface, at least, there would seem to be little rationale to apply differing designations to the *Shepherd* and 2 Peter.

Disconnected from any Pauline authentication, the *Shepherd* lacked a critical apostolic relationship, and Eusebius was too disturbed by the dubious backstory he found in Origen to consider the book on its own terms. Herein lies the illegitimacy of the *Shepherd*, in spite of its approval by unnamed individuals in Eusebius's own day and by otherwise orthodox luminaries of the patristic past: detached from a known apostle, Eusebius is unable to vouch for the genuine Christian-ness of the book's contents. Eusebius thus cares not exclusively about genuine *authorship*; he instead displays an overriding interest in *apostolic legitimacy*. Stated another way, authentic Christian scriptures cannot have been produced on the authority of a nobody.

Methodologically, Eusebius leaves historians perplexed. He can be maddeningly brief, shrouding his true intentions behind unrestrained verbosity and a guise of thorough coverage. Within this tale of two apocalypses, variants of the same *modus operandi* manifest themselves: Eusebius has chosen to exchange blows with straw men, and when the time comes for the long-awaited title bouts, his opponents have turned largely absent, already swept away by the winds. Thus, we never hear directly from anyone who would disapprove of Revelation and omit it from the catalogue of scriptures,[87] and whereas Eusebius promises to consider the authors approving of the contested books, they too are largely evaded in the case of the *Shepherd*, a somehow demeritorious book with grievances that are never fully aired. Eusebius may have personally prevailed in the ensuing contests, but they were never fair fights from the outset. In the final reckoning, Eusebius's own opinions about the catalogue of scripture have won the day.

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[87] We only hear of such complaints obliquely in the lengthy quote of Dionysius (*Eccl. hist.* 7.25.2). As Grant, 132-4, has explained, Gaius of Rome has been cleverly omitted from the *Ecclesiastical History*.

Eusebius's contemporary and theological opponent Athanasius of Alexandria (c.298–373), a truculent character virtually synonymous with the Council of Nicaea and its elucidations of Christ, often appears in discussions related to the canon of scripture, for good reason. The long-serving archbishop would be the first figure in the history of Christianity to record a closed list matching the current twenty-seven book New Testament canon, but it was a development forged deep into a pressurized career largely spent embroiled in theological and political controversies. Though he held his see for the better part of forty-six years, seventeen of these were served in exile,[88] and the entire duration of his episcopacy was spent entangled in a prolonged schism that ignited under his predecessor Alexander. Originally a theological disagreement between Alexander and a Libyan presbyter named Arius, the argument over the creaturely status of the Son would eventuate in excommunications, creedal maneuvering, aggressive politicking of foreign bishops, the intervention of several emperors, a decades-inconclusive Council of Nicaea and numerous lesser synods, competing criminal accusations and innumerable unpleasantries, engulfing the whole of the Eastern church in the discord. Athanasius's five separate expulsions from Alexandria all owe to his life's struggle against so-called Arianism and the bishop's trenchant disposition, and his entire literary output must be consciously filtered through an awareness of this "heresy" that so threatened his understanding of salvation. This dissertation will examine the role of the immortal Athanasius at greater length in a later chapter; for now, our principal interest must be the several references to the *Shepherd* of Hermas visible within his writings. Treating

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[88] Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius*, Early Church Fathers Series (London: Routledge, 2004), 33.

Athanasius's opinions about contested books separate from his heresiological orientation is, perhaps, a bifurcation that cannot be supported, except as a concession for the sake of brevity, for all five places where Athanasius has cause to refer explicitly to the *Shepherd* contain contra-Arian apologetics or an underlying polemical purpose. Nevertheless, the foundation for a full analysis must first be laid; only by sifting through Athanasius's literary corpus diachronically can we begin to comprehend the evolution of the bishop's unique perspective on the *Shepherd* of Hermas.

Athanasius's first treatise has been difficult to date conclusively, but it can most likely be placed sometime between his ascension to the episcopacy in 328 and his first exile, which began in 335.[89] Though addressed to one Macarius and countering Greeks like Plato and indistinct parties of Jews, *On the Incarnation* is suffused with the characteristic Athanasian assertion that the Word of God is and must be fully divine in order to effect salvation for humankind. But he begins rather at the historical starting point, defending the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which he views as necessary lest God be found a mere artisan (τεχνίτης; *Inc.* 2.4). Contending against enemies who doubt God's creative abilities, Athanasius conjures scriptural evidence:

> Ταῦτα μὲν οὗτοι μυθολογοῦσιν. Ἡ δὲ ἔνθεος διδασκαλία καὶ ἡ κατὰ Χριστὸν πίστις τὴν μὲν τούτων ματαιολογίαν ὡς ἀθεότητα διαβάλλει. Οὔτε γὰρ αὐτομάτως, διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀπρονόητα εἶναι, οὔτε ἐκ προϋποκειμένης ὕλης, διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀσθενῆ εἶναι τὸν Θεόν· ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων καὶ μηδαμῇ μηδαμῶς ὑπάρχοντα τὰ ὅλα εἰς τὸ εἶναι πεποιηκέναι τὸν Θεὸν διὰ τοῦ Λόγου οἶδεν, ᾗ φησὶ διὰ μὲν Μωϋσέως· « Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν »· διὰ δὲ τῆς ὠφελιμωτάτης βίβλου τοῦ Ποιμένος· « Πρῶτον πάντων πίστευσον, ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ Θεός, ὁ τὰ πάντα κτίσας καὶ καταρτίσας, καὶ ποιήσας ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι. » (*Inc.* 3.1).

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[89] Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 12.

Thus do these [Greeks and Jews] fabulate. But god-inspired teaching and the faith according to Christ discredits their empty chatter as atheism. For it [that teaching and that faith] recognizes that neither spontaneously, given that it was not without premeditation, nor from pre-existent matter, since God was not weak, did God cause everything to be initiated through the Word from non-existence and complete nothingness; which, just as he said through Moses, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," so also through the most useful book of the *Shepherd*: "First of all believe that God is one, who created all things and set them in order, and made out of what did not exist what is."[90]

Athanasius continues with a quotation of Hebrews 11:3, adding a Pauline stamp of approval to his argument. But as Bart D. Ehrman has also observed, the μὲν . . . δὲ construction connecting Genesis and the *Shepherd* to the word of God shows exceptionally high praise for Hermas's book,[91] which Athanasius can even embellish with the rare superlative ὠφελιμωτάτης.[92] In this early period, therefore, Athanasius greets the *Shepherd* with praise rather on par with the other Alexandrians examined in the previous chapter, Clement and Origen. It is even possible that Athanasius developed an idiosyncratic refrain for his preaching and theologizing linking Moses, Paul, and the *Shepherd* in an unexpected fashion, for in a second positive reference toward the Hermas's book, he again cites the ever-popular Commandment 1 and encourages his

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[90] Trans. mine, from the text of Charles Kannengieser, trans. and ed., *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Sur L'Incarnation du Verbe*, vol. 199 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 268. Athanasius's quotation of the *Shepherd* is only missing a final τὰ πάντα that would complete the sense of Herm. Mand. 1.1 (26.1); he has otherwise perfectly quoted from the Greek of the *Shepherd*.

[91] Bart D. Ehrman, "The New Testament Canon of Didymus the Blind," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37.1 (1983): 18-19.

[92] No literary connection need be imagined here, but curiously, the root adjective ὠφέλιμος also appears in the *Shepherd* at Herm. Vis. 3.6.7 (14.7), when Hermas, in his poverty, is also described as εὔχρηστος. The superlative ὠφελιμωτάτης has very limited antecedents in Christian writers before Athanasius, but also appears in Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 1.9.86) and Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.29.7), where the church historian denotes *Against the Greeks* as the "most useful" of Tatian's συγγράμματα.

readership not to be offended at the testimony of the *Shepherd* (*Ep. fest.* 11.4).[93] Within

this Festal Letter of 339 CE, the *Shepherd* occupies a crucial place in the argument;

following the example of Moses, one must have both a correct knowledge of God and the

laws and precepts that will please him.[94] The *Shepherd*'s exemplary theological maxim

and Paul's life of virtue therefore offer a compelling parallel to Deuteronomy 5-6, where

the Shema (Dt 6:4-5) follows shortly after the Decalogue (Dt 5:6-21).[95] Tantalizingly

enough, Athanasius possibly invokes the remainder of the Commandments in the

Shepherd by such a correlation with the Decalogue, but whether this was intentional must

remain a mystery, for here he seems to consider the *Shepherd* a book that contains a

proper theology of God's creation, and hence content primarily for belief, rather than

praxis. Either way, the Festal Letter of 339 is all the more interesting given that

Athanasius likely writes it on the verge of being ousted for the second time from his

episcopacy, dispatched this time to Rome for what would become a seven-year absence.

He thus offers resolute reminders to his loyal following in Egypt and the nearby

provinces, "exhort[ing] his flock to persevere in confessing the unqualified divinity of the

Son" while also emulating biblical heroes starting with Paul.[96] Quite likely, considering

his personal uncertainty that would lie ahead in the West, Athanasius also writes a note-

[93] *Quod si quis testimonio Pastoris non offenditur, melius ei erit si ante omnia discat, quae ille scripto tradidit: «In primis crede unum esse Deum, qui creavit disposuitque res omnes…»*; PG 26:1406.

[94] James D. Ernest only finds the link between Hermas and Moses to be operative; thus, the divine teaching speaks "both through Moses and through Hermas." James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria*, vol. 2 of *The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2004), 81.

[95] Athanasius oddly stresses an incorrect sequence of events when he claims that Moses first delivered knowledge of God through the Shema, and then imparted the commandments of God. If written quickly and under duress, without requisite time to consult the text of Deuteronomy, the error might be excusable.

[96] Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 17.

to-self to persist in the face of persecution by the Ariomaniacs, "who now have gone out from the Church, where opposing Christ, they have dug a pit of unbelief into which they have been trampled, and, proceeding in impiety, they pervert the faith of the simple, blaspheming the Son of God, whom they declare to be a creature" (*Ep. fest.* 11.10).[97]

Importantly, though Athanasius has already been demonstrably exercised by a struggle against opponents whom he is all too keen to doctrinally anchor to Arius (d. 341), there is at this early juncture no hint that the *Shepherd* of Hermas has in any way been tarnished for Athanasius by the conflict. It is a text that can stand unproblematically alongside Paul as a Christian witness to correct doctrine, and beyond this, features valid inspiration by the same God who also spoke through Moses. But the *Shepherd*'s favor in Athanasian thought would not last forever, and would suffer from the prolonged conflict against all who regarded the Son of God in any way a created being. In the 340s, for example, Athanasius starts to expound on the oneness of God in a fashion meant to exclude aberrant interpretations of the statement.[98] "For God is one and only and first, but this is not said in abrogation of the Son. May it never be—for he is in that very one, and first, and only" (*C. Ar.* 3.6).[99] The next time Athanasius finds cause to mention the *Shepherd* of Hermas, it comes in precisely such a context, for he has apparently found that his opponents are exploiting the shepherd's Commandment 1 to support counter-Nicene doctrines. "Let them declare to us from which Scriptures they have learned,"

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[97] Trans. mine, from the Latin text in PG 26:1409.

[98] Dating per Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 70.

[99] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:333.

Athanasius sneers in his *Defense of the Nicene Definition* of 357-9 CE,[100] begging to find

scriptural validation for the characteristic Arian slogans (*Decr.* 18.1).[101] He then marshals

one such text that his opponents apparently do use:

> ἐν δὲ τῷ Ποιμένι γέγραπται, ἐπειδὴ καὶ τοῦτο καίτοι μὴ ὂν ἐκ τοῦ κανόνος προφέρουσι· « πρῶτον πάντων πίστευσον, ὅτι εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός, ὁ τὰ πάντα κρίσας καὶ καταρτίσας καὶ ποιήσας ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ πάντα. » ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο πάλιν οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν υἱόν ἐστι· περὶ γὰρ τῶν πάντων λέγει τῶν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ γενομένων, ὧν καὶ ἄλλος ἐστὶν αὐτος. οὐ γὰρ οἷον τε τὸν δημιουργοῦντα τοῖς ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ γενομένοις συγκαταριθμεῖν, εἰ μὴ καὶ τὸν ἀρχιτέκτονα τοῖς ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ γενομένοις οἰκοδομήμασι τὸν αὐτὸν ἄν τις παραφρονῶν λέγοι. (*Decr.* 18.3)

> And in the *Shepherd* it is written—since they also cite this, though not being from the canon—"First of all believe that God is one, who created all things and set them in order, and made out of what did not exist everything that is." But even this again is not at all (relevant) towards the Son, for it speaks concerning everything that came into being through him, from whom he is excluded. For it is improper to reckon the fabricator among what came into being through him, unless one declares senselessly (that) even the very mastercraftsman (is reckoned) among the buildings that came into being through him.[102]

The sense of this is plain: at some point, opponents of Athanasius began to use a section

of the *Shepherd* that he previously cherished to argue a theological point with which they

knew he disagreed. Athanasius must have been furious; under his watch, the *Shepherd*

became a battleground text, and was now "sfruttabile dagli eretici."[103] Central to

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[100] Dating per Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 176. This treatise was therefore written in Athanasius's third exile, which began in 356 and lasted for six years.

[101] This is interestingly a riposte also used by the opponents of Nicaea, who found *homoousios* problematic given that it was nowhere to be found in Scripture.

[102] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in Hans-Georg Opitz, ed., *Athanasius Werke*, *Band II, Teil 1: Die „Apologien", Leiferung 1: De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 1,5 - 40,24 (Reprint, 2012; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1935), 15.

[103] Antonio Carlini, "Tradizione Testuale e Prescrizioni Canoniche: Erma, Sesto, Origene," *Orpheus* 7.1 (1986): 45.

Athanasius's response is that the phrases devised by the Arian party of "Eusebius and his fellows,"[104] ranging from the famous "there was once when he was not" to "out of nothing" (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων) and several others, have no legitimate scriptural basis. His tactic with regard to the *Shepherd*, where one such phrase (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) is *nearly* found,[105] thus becomes three-fold. First, in spite of his prior praise for the *Shepherd* precisely at this point of its text, Athanasius suddenly concludes that this book is not "from the

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[104] Thus the common old translation of οἱ περὶ Εὐσέβιον, "those around Eusebius." It is often hard to discern who Athanasius has in mind, for he frequently opposes Eusebius of Nicomedia *and* Eusebius of Caesarea, both of whom he regularly links with Arius and the Ariomaniacs. But in both *De decretis* and the *Epistula ad Afros episcopos*, Athanasius explicitly names Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), for whom he withheld special reprobation given the latter's supposed flip-flopping behavior. The Caesarean bishop arrived at Nicaea in 325 provisionally excommunicated by the quite recent Council of Antioch, read a generic statement (perhaps the creed in use at Caesarea), of which Constantine quickly approved, assented to the Nicene formulation, and swiftly sent a letter back to his church explaining under what terms he agreed to the *homoousian* and other difficult statements. To Athanasian eyes, Eusebius's letter severely undermined the new Creed. See J. Stevenson and W.H.C. Frend, eds., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 390-4; Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 205, 213-5. Given that both Eusebii were at this point deceased, Athanasius here avails himself of the opportunity to relitigate old grievances in his characteristic polemic style; as with Arius himself, it is preferable to understand that Athanasius harbors a long memory of prior transgressions, beginning with his first exile in 335, and uses the "Arians" and "Eusebians" as typological heretics and political enemies. See David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 169-244. More plausibly, Athanasius's *later* opponents began to use the *Shepherd* in ways he found offensive, ushering his judgment that the book was "not from the canon."

[105] Though it would make a worthy investigation, why Hermas would be interested in this point of a primarily philosophical inquiry in the late first century has not been adequately studied. Interestingly, however, Hermas's ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος finds perfect parallels in Xenophanes, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, and more proximal to Hermas, in Philo (e.g., *Decal.* 23) and Plutarch (*Quaest. plat.* 4.1003a). It seems to be the earlier and more prominent linguistic form of a debate over the existence of matter that still animated Christians into the fourth century. Christopher Stead, "The Word 'From Nothing' for Reinhard Hübner," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49.2 (Oct. 1998): 671-3. As noted above—see p. 60 n.112—Frances Young doubts that Hermas had interfaced with Hellenistic philosophy, and so the ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος was less a case of philosophical interest than an environmental influence from deuterocanonical texts. Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 29. Osiek, Hermeneia, 103, also dismisses Hermas's statement as "a familiar Hellenistic Jewish creedal formula," even while simultaneously crediting Hermas for "the earliest Christian use of an idea drawn from Hellenistic philosophy that was soon to appear frequently among Christians" in another part of the very same verse (Herm. Mand. 1.1 [26.1])! Thus, we should not so easily disregard the possibility that Hermas also draws from his familiarity with philosophy for the ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος statement about the creation of all things, especially when it figures mightily in Athanasius's turn from approving the *Shepherd* as a "most useful book" after his Eusebian opponents included the Son as one of the κτίσμα made ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος.

canon"—an authoritative declaration that his opponents cannot make doctrinally viable claims from this text, since it is not reckoned among Scripture. They likely would not have agreed with Athanasius on this point. However, his newfound edict notwithstanding, Athanasius secondarily argues that their interpretation of the shepherd's Commandment 1 is flawed, using an elaborate construction metaphor about a builder and his creations. Third, Athanasius turns from the "irreligious" claims of the Arians to his account of the method followed by the crafters of the Nicene definition, which was to enshrine "the acknowledged phrases of the scriptures" into a timeless creed for the worldwide church (τὰς δὲ τῶν γραφῶν ὁμολογουμένας[106] φωνὰς; *Decr.* 19.1). Though reminiscent in some ways of Tertullian's prior virulent determination against the *Shepherd*, Athanasius's explanation of the orthodox sense of Commandment 1, coupled with favorable reference to the Mandates earlier in the same treatise,[107] together suggest that he was inclined to retain valuable elements in the book while disallowing his opponents from using it to substantiate their slogans or craft statements of doctrinal belief. In spite of any such retention, however, his statement in *De decretis* must be regarded as a watershed moment in the patristic reception of the *Shepherd*.[108] For in spite of having its detractors

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[106] This stands perhaps as a curious borrowing from the scriptural categories of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.2), whom Athanasius was otherwise predisposed to reject on account of his actions surrounding Nicaea. Given that *homoousias* or a discussion of Christ's *ousia* is nowhere to be found in Scripture, it is also an incredible claim, stretching the evidence to a point that would have been unbearable (and perhaps laughable) to Athanasius's opponents.

[107] At *Decr.* 4.3, Athanasius critiques διψυχία as indicative of heresy, and equally cites James 1:8 and Herm. Mand. 9.9-11 (39.9-11). The *Shepherd*, he approvingly notes, refers to double-mindedness of as the offspring of the devil.

[108] Athanasius makes a very similar statement to *Decr.* 18.3 in a *Letter to the Bishops of Africa* of 367-9 CE, where again he recounts the history of the Arian controversy and the development of the Nicene Creed. Once again, Athanasius claims that "those around Eusebius . . . used to reckon" (οἱ περὶ Εὐσέβιον . . . ἐλογίζοντο) the words of the *Shepherd* at Commandment 1.1, believing that this text

elsewhere, Hermas's book had otherwise been highly esteemed in Alexandria, the episcopal seat of the text's most fertile soil. In this controversial bishop of the fourth century, however, can the first *Egyptian* strike against the *Shepherd* be found, and it has roots in Athanasius's lifelong struggle against "Arianism."

In the following decade, after returning in February 366 from his fifth and final exile, Athanasius continued to battle nagging problems of competing loci of authority.[109] Though his constant survival in the face of opposition from political authorities and doctrinal challenges alike "transformed [him] from a proud prelate with a dubious reputation into an elder statesman renowned for his heroic defense of Nicene orthodoxy,"[110] Athanasius would find no tranquility from the heresies and irregularities that swirled about the Egyptian church in the form of aberrant doctrines, alternate charismatic teachers, popular monasticism, and the like. His Festal Letters from the final seven years of his episcopacy continue to attest to incongruities necessitating his attention, which he characteristically ascribes to the un-Christian beliefs of Arians, Melitians, Jews, heretics, and disharmonious teachers who do not recognize the same truths as he; thus, "even in his declining years, Athanasius still had to work at

substantiated their doctrinal position for the creaturely status of the Son. In response, "the bishops, beholding their craftiness, and the cunning of their impiety, expressed more plainly the sense of the words 'from God,' by writing that 'of the essence of God' (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ) is the Son, so that the creatures, since they do not exist of themselves without a cause, but have a beginning of their existence, may be spoken of as 'from God,' but the Son alone is properly of the essence of the Father" (*Ep. Afr.* 5). Trans. mine, from the Greek text of PG 26:1037.

[109] David Brakke expertly lays out Athanasius's long battle with what he terms "academic Christianity," which operated on a different mode of authority than the bishop and treasured a more extensive and charismatic search for truth within an expansive set of scriptures. See David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth 'Festal Letter,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 87.4 (Oct. 1994): 395-419 (esp. 398-410).

[110] Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 152.

establishing an Egyptian church with the unity and uniformity that he desired."[111] In this context, militating against anyone who would lead the flock astray by using apocryphal or unscriptural books, Athanasius used his Festal Letter for 367 CE—ostensibly circulated to set the date each year for Easter and the fasts and observances surrounding it, but long employed as an occasion to weigh in on other matters—"to set out in order the canonized (κανονιζόμενα), handed-down, and believed-to-be-divine books."[112] After producing a list of books of the Old and New Testaments that more or less corresponds to the modern Protestant canon of Scripture,[113] Athanasius stipulated a third category of seven books that, though not devised by heretics for the corruption of Christians, yet are not to be counted among the canon. Athanasius explains:

> Ἀλλ᾽ἕνεκά γε πλείονος ἀκριβείας προστίθημι δὴ τοῦτο γράφων ἀναγκαίως, ὡς ὅτι ἔστι καὶ ἕτερα βιβλία τούτων ἔξωθεν, οὐ κανονιζόμενα μὲν, τετυπωμένα δὲ παρὰ τῶν Πατέρων ἀναγινώσκεσθαι τοῖς ἄρτι προσερχομένοις καὶ βουλομένοις κατηχεῖσθαι τὸν τῆς εὐσεβείας λόγον· (*Ep. fest.* 39.20).

> But for the sake of greater precision, I continue now with this, writing of necessity, given that there are also other books besides these, at once not canonized, yet having been impressed by the Fathers to be read for the benefit of those just starting out and wishing to be instructed by the word of piety.[114]

Athanasius thus devises a canon with firm boundaries, excluding the *Shepherd* of Hermas as well as the *Didache*, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith,

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[111] Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict," 398.

[112] *Ep. fest.* 39.16; trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:1433-36.

[113] Most significantly, Athanasius's Old Testament list excludes Esther, but he also counts Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah as properly belonging to Jeremiah, whereas these are today placed among the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books. And as Ernest, 341, notes, Daniel for Athanasius likely included the book's Greek additions Susanna and Bel and the Dragon. Most significantly, Athanasius's New Testament corresponds precisely to modern Christian canons, though his ordering of texts differs in several ways, such as placing the catholic epistles after Acts of the Apostles and before the Pauline corpus.

[114] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:1437.

and Tobit. That he does not even attempt to catalogue the heretical or apocryphal writings to be completely anathematized belies his concern to encircle the Old and New Testaments with precise limits from only the most proximal texts, relegating these seven books to catechetical use only for the instruction of proselytes. Athanasius need not explain himself any further or offer rationales for the individual books; it is evident enough for him that these are not to be marshaled for Christian doctrine, as they are not among the πηγαὶ τοῦ σωτηρίου supplying the church with its proper διδασκαλεῖον or teaching-house (*Ep. fest.* 39.19), therefore supplanting the "speculative and original thought of the schoolroom" with a restricted and episcopally sanctioned canon.[115]

The foregoing constitutes the vital context through which the *Shepherd*'s placement in the monumental Festal Letter of 367 CE must be read. When he deemed it useful in contra-Arian polemics and Nicene apologetics for setting out a proper doctrine of creation, Athanasius was keen to uphold the *Shepherd*, even to the point of regarding it a "most useful book." Here the fourth-century bishop at first embraces the *Shepherd* in a typical Alexandrian fashion. But the book's utility for Athanasius was virtually extinguished when the very verse of Hermas's text that he most often championed became more useful for the cause of his complex matrix of theological opponents than it was for him, possibly enabling an interpretation that subordinated the Son of God to the status of a created being. The so-called Arians, Eusebians, or *homoiousians*, had they chosen to plumb the *Shepherd* for additional supporting material, could have found

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[115] Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict," 399.

plenty; whether they did so must remain probable but unknowable.[116] However, at such a crossroads, it was more prudent for Athanasius to jettison the book from canon than to retain it in an interpreted fashion. The *Shepherd* was now *scriptura non grata*—unwelcome, for this fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, anyway, both in the church's lectionary and the doctrinal lexicon of the Christian faith. The church-at-large would eventually concur with Athanasius, owing to the tremendous hagiographical clout that accompanied him in the search for orthodox stalwarts of old, not to mention the good fortune involved in Jerome's enactment of the Athanasian New Testament. But the testimony of others in the fourth century suggests that the *Shepherd* was still imbued with varying degrees of prestige.

Other Fourth-Century Authorities in Brief

However decisive Athanasius may appear in his determinations about the *Shepherd* of Hermas from 357-369 CE, Ehrman has rightly concluded that these were not statements describing the well-accepted limits of canon, but rather the promulgation of a "prescriptive" catalogue. Yet no one outside of his Egyptian sphere of authority was particularly obliged to follow the prescription.[117] Even in Alexandria itself, Didymus the

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[116] In light, however, of Richard Hanson's framing of the "Arian controversy" as an *exegetical* crisis, it seems probable that interpreters on both sides would have availed themselves of any scriptural proofs in their favor. Though Athanasius's characterization of "those around Eusebius" rallying around the *Shepherd* may not be historically accurate, it is likely that the *Shepherd* occupied a significant unspoken place in the controversy that was lamentably not preserved by our documentary records. See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), esp. 824-849.

[117] Athanasius did not *immediately* become the lionized figure he is to systematic theologians today, who often rejoice in his staunch orthodoxy in the face of exile. Roger E. Olson, *Counterfeit Christianity: The Persistence of Errors in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 18.

Blind (d. 398)—Athanasius's own appointee to lead the city's long-standing catechetical school—maintained a more expansive sense of canon than did his bishop, at least including the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the *Didache*, and *1 Clement* beyond the Athanasian catalogue.[118] The evidence for the *Shepherd* is perhaps clearer than the rest of these contested books, for on five occasions in his Toura commentaries on Job, Zechariah, and Ecclesiastes does Didymus refer to passages from Hermas either to authenticate his interpretations of the Old Testament, parallel the testimony of the *Shepherd* with another unquestionably scriptural text, or otherwise demonstrate his approval of the book.[119] In one of the clearest signs that Didymus considers the *Shepherd* to be "canonical," he inventories the examples within Scripture referring to women either as vices or virtues, and here Hermas's book is counted alongside Revelation, 1 Corinthians, Proverbs, Psalms, 2 Kings, and others. The appropriate conclusion from the evidence of Didymus's hidden commentaries is that Athanasius's restrictions on the canon faced an uphill battle to acceptance even in his own city with officials of his church—let alone *beyond* Egypt. Indeed, other evidence from the fourth and early fifth centuries, both from the East and the West, indicates no unanimous agreement about how the *Shepherd* may be utilized, even if all seem to concur about its secondary status. Whereas Athanasius accepted that Hermas's book was to be retained for catechetical instruction, Cyril of Jerusalem, teaching in a region where we have seen that the

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[118] Ehrman thus concluded that the notion of any fixed canon during Athanasius's episcopacy must be "a fantasy." Ehrman, "The New Testament Canon of Didymus the Blind," 18-19; 2.

[119] Ibid., 11-13. Didymus equally refers to the *Shepherd* as a book of repentance (τῆς μετανοίας) and a book of catechism (τῆς κατηχήσεως) and alludes to or quotes passages ranging from Vis. 3.2.7 (10.7) and Mand. 2.2 (27.2) to Sim. 9.15.1-3 (92.1-3) and 9.19.1 (96.1). Much like Clement and Origen before him, Didymus knows a complete text of the *Shepherd* of Hermas and treasures it highly.

Shepherd had no history of positive reception, instructed *his* catechumens that "whatever books are not read in churches, these read not even by thyself, as thou hast heard me say" (*Lect.* 4.36).[120] Meanwhile, Jerome failed to list the *Shepherd* among the books of his canon (*Epist.* 53.9), and within his so-called "helmeted preface" to books of the Hebrew Scriptures that he translated into Latin (393 CE), he counted the *Shepherd* "not in the canon" but among the apocrypha, along with 1-2 Maccabees, Judith, Tobit, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon (*Pro. Gal.*).[121] Yet, while not considering Hermas's book canonical, Jerome can yet repeat the tradition, plausibly from Origen's writings directly, that the author of the *Shepherd* was known to and greeted by Paul (Rom. 16:14). Given that Jerome was well acquainted with, and frequently appealed to, the traditions espoused in the Muratorian Fragment/*Commentarius in Matthaeum*, this must be interpreted as a profound rejection of Victorinus's alternative backstory for the authorship of the *Shepherd*.[122] Jerome also knows the book to be read in the churches of Greece, a statement about which he chooses not to look askance. "In truth it is a useful book (*utilis liber*)," Jerome continues regarding the *Shepherd*, "and many of the ancient writers made use of its *testimonia*, but among Latins it is nearly unknown" (*Vir. ill.* 10).[123] Jerome's

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[120] *NPNF²* 7:28. Augustine, similarly, only allowed the reading of non-canonical texts after one has "been built up in the belief of the truth" (*Doct. chr.* 2.12); *NPNF¹* 2:538.

[121] This "helmeted preface" to the Old Testament comes at the end of Jerome's *Preface to the Books of Samuel and Kings*; *NPNF²* 6:490. Dating per Edmon L. Gallagher, "Jerome's *Prologus Galeatus* and the OT Canon of North Africa," in *Latin Writers*, vol. 69 of *Studia Patristica*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 99.

[122] Jerome regards Victorinus as a one of the *columnae ecclesiae*, likely retaining an affinity for the Pannonian exegete, whom he can also describe as "our Victorinus," given their similar ethnic origin. Weinrich, xix-xx; see also Armstrong, 3-8 (esp. 3 n.7), 30-31.

[123] Trans. mine, from the Latin text in Ernest Cushing Richardson, *Hieronymous liber de viris inlustribus – Gennadius liber de viris inlustribus*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur 14.1, ed. Oscar von Gebhardt and Adolf Harnack (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche

contemporary Rufinus similarly reckons the *Shepherd* into a contingent class of "other books which our fathers call not 'canonical' but 'ecclesiastical,'" permitting them to be read in churches, but "not appealed to for the confirmation of doctrine" (*Symb.* 38).[124] An omnidirectional matrix of opinions about the *Shepherd* can thus be found contemporaneous with and after Athanasius, ranging from canonical approval (Didymus) to admonitions that it not be read (Cyril), but Jerome, Rufinus, and Eusebius are all aware that the book has been read in church and essentially approve of the practice.

Still, the climate of Christianity has demonstrably evolved from the laboratory of the second century to the doctrinally constrictive vice of the fourth. Whereas we concluded the last chapter at a point of high receptivity to the *Shepherd*, much of the evidence dateable after 250 CE trends in the opposite direction. Some, like Didymus and the anonymous homilist of the early Latin sermon *On Dice-players*, remained unabashedly favorable toward Hermas's book, but Victorinus and Eusebius—possibly the first two patristic writers to advocate, independently, for closed collections of the New Testament—each locate the *Shepherd* outside of their catalogues, for somewhat different but overlapping reasons. Eusebius only notes that doubts have accumulated about the *Shepherd*'s apostolic legitimacy, while Victorinus regarded the *Shepherd* as written in the age of the church, after the apostolic era, and too incongruous with ancient prophecy to find a home in either of the testaments. These rationales, which must be excavated from a prevaricative and laconic fog, likely shroud deeper unspoken reservations with the book,

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Buchhandlung, 1896), 14; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.ah219y;view=1up;seq=94. Scholars are often keen to point out that Jerome's statement about Latin ignorance of the *Shepherd* must be false. For a further discussion of Jerome's testimony about the *Shepherd*, see below, pp. 387–8, esp. 388 n.127.

[124] *NPNF²* 3:558.

about which, barring remarkable discoveries of new data, will have to lie fallow. More concretely, the long and checkered episcopal career of Athanasius affords us the opportunity to peer into the great metamorphosis that his impression of the book underwent, when the *Shepherd* was transformed from a "most useful book" to a canonical *scriptura non grata* by his life's struggle against numerous opponents whose theologies cheapened the divinity of Christ. Via Athanasius, we can nearly approach a more solid reason than has traditionally been given for the *Shepherd*'s extracanonicity, but his *fiat* declaration took some time to attain and would eventually be bolstered by more reprobative edicts than he would offer in the fourth century, like the *Decretum Gelasianum* that anathematized Hermas's book and many others.[125]

As scholars of the biblical canon have routinely recognized, the fourth century ushered in a newfound age of canonical list-making.[126] Eusebius likely deserves some credit for this trend that would culminate in the Athanasian catalogue, but one intriguing list from the fourth century deserves special mention here. For within the sixth-century

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[125] Neither the date nor the exact impact of this decree, which has been understood since the seventh century as emanating from the reformist Pope Gelasius (492-6), has won universal scholarly acceptance. Tornau and Cecconi, 5, tolerate a date of 382, but most scholars place the final version of the decree in the early sixth century—perhaps based on the canons of a Western council during the last years of the papacy of Damasus (366-84). The last section of the decree, which contains the prescription against the "apocryphal" *Shepherd* as a book of heretics and schismatics, belongs to the sixth century and was likely penned by a Gallican cleric reflecting Roman positions. Berthold Altaner, *Patrology*, 2nd ed., trans. Hilda C. Graef (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961), 552-3; E. Peretto, "Decretum Gelasianum" in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/ivpacaac/decretum_gelasianum/0?institutionId=1676. Dan Batovici, however, has noted that such a declaration did not prevent the *Shepherd* from continuing to be transmitted in its two Latin translations, celebrated in Western academic circles, and significantly, quoted by the esteemed orthodox Pope Gregory the Great in his *Gospel Homilies*. Dan Batovici, "Dating, Split-Transmission Theory and the Latin Reception of the Shepherd," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 60 (2017): 83 n.4.

[126] Robbins, "PERI TŌN," 217-45; Hahneman, in *The Biblical Canon*, 412-15; Verheyden, 531 n.215.

manuscript of Paul's letters known as Codex Claromontanus appears a Latin stichometry, titled *Versus Scribturarum* [*sic*] *Sanctarum*, which "a été établie indépendamment du corpus paulinien repris par le Codex [bilingue]," and thus bears little relationship to the surrounding manuscript.[127] The Latin listing of scriptural books features numerous oddities and omissions, in that it **[1]** skips Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Hebrews, all of which appear in the Codex, perhaps by parablepsis; **[2]** lists 1 and 2 Peter as letters *of Paul* "Ad Petrum"; and **[3]** counts *Barnabas*, the *Shepherd*, the *Acts of Paul*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter* among apparent scriptural texts within its New Testament catalogue. These four works are obelized in the left-hand margin corresponding to their lines, but their presence in such a list denoting the Lines of the Holy Scriptures is yet another notch in the *Shepherd*'s favor. Though earlier scholars could insinuate that the copyist of this stichometric list in the sixth century[128]—perhaps working from a third- or fourth-century original—added these obeli to strike the offending books out of the canon, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's high-quality, full-color digitization of Claromontanus reveals that these marks are qualitatively different than other horizontal strokes appearing in the letters of the stichometry, and thus likely the work of a different hand.[129] Combined with the recognition that Paul's first letter "Ad Petrum" *also* bears an obelus, this later hand was likely a general corrector of the manuscript rectifying scribal

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[127] Philippe Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," *Revue Thomiste* 90.1 (1990): 92. Henne is among those who regard this list as a product of third-century Egypt that eventually found its way into the later sixth-century manuscript.

[128] Gregory Allen Robbins, "Codex Claromontanus," in Vol. 1 of *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1072–3; Verheyden, 508.

[129] Bibliothèque Nationale de France, "Grec 107: 0601-0700," last accessed June 1, 2019, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84683111/f870.image. Aside from their thicker and more consistent strokes, the ink used to obelize items in this list also appears darker than the ink used in the stichometry.

mistakes of all kinds. If the original copyist had the canon consciousness often imagined

of this list, then this too is a vital hint that expansive catalogues of scriptures, sometimes

including the *Shepherd* of Hermas, proliferated throughout the fourth century.[130] At the

very least, such a stichometry relates that the *Shepherd* was still being copied by scribes,

and that paying customers wanted to ensure their copies of its 4,000 lines were complete.

Given the testimony that this list implies about the *Shepherd*'s continued popularity and

esteem in the fourth century, it also follows that the vibrant manuscript history for the

text itself could enrich our understanding of the text's reception in early Christianity.

Thus, we now turn to the Egyptian soil that has so preserved a direct record of discarded

history.

3.　Rising from the *Afsh*: The *Shepherd*'s Bountiful Egyptian Manuscript History

More than a century and a half of archaeological finds from sites alongside the

banks of the Nile has produced an observable trend from the second century onward: a

steady increase in the volume of texts recovered, terminating only when these Egyptian

sites fall out of Christian disuse in the seventh century. By contrast, the *Shepherd* of

Hermas paints a different picture. As already stated in the introduction to this

dissertation, archaeologists have recovered more manuscript copies for the *Shepherd*

dated prior to about 325 CE (11) than every canonical book of the Christian Bible except

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[130] Even when the concern is not "canon" but rather keeping a record of books in one's library, the *Shepherd* is well represented. See, for example, the catalogue perhaps of a church or a monastery's holdings preserved as P. Ash Inv. 3, recording the *Shepherd*'s presence on a *parchment* manuscript alongside biblical commentaries of Origen, various books of the Old Testament, Acts of the Apostles, and a Μέγα Βιβλίον containing the four gospels. Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 149; C. H. Roberts, "Two Oxford Papyri," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 37 (1938): 184-8.

the Psalms (16-18) and the gospels according to Matthew (12) and John (11-15).[131] And

while the *Shepherd* continues to be attested until the sixth century, finds featuring

Hermas's text noticeably begin to fizzle in the fifth and sixth centuries, such that Roger

Bagnall can concede that its chronological distribution from Egypt "is entirely different

from that of Christian books in general," telling a unique history that generally coincides

with the book's fortunes in the foregoing examination of its patristic reception.[132] It is no

wonder, then, that Antonio Carlini has described the loss of the *Shepherd* as a

characteristic case of the "effetti di interventi esterni sulla tradizione testuale," and thus

the victim of authoritative prescriptions that restrained an otherwise vibrant history.[133]

But before episcopal interference with the *Shepherd* could completely take root, the

volume and distribution of its manuscripts shape their own underground story of

reception, popularity, and unity that bypasses the necessity for official pronouncements

of the text's value. This section therefore answers Larry Hurtado's call for biblical

scholars to become acquainted with the manuscript recoveries that so improve our grasp

of Christian origins and takes it a step further, bringing together for the first time all

current evidence for the Greek manuscripts of the *Shepherd* through the sixth century.

Indeed, the sheer magnitude of independent attestations of the value of Hermas's book

before and during the fourth century, when the final stages of canon formation

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[131] Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 20-23; 28; 32-33. Uncertainty about the number of manuscripts for the Psalms and the book of John emanate from the use of Hebrew letters for the Tetragrammaton in two of the former, which may indicate their Jewish provenance, and an inability to determine if separate pages belonged to distinct or the same manuscripts in the latter.

[132] Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 41.

[133] Carlini, "Tradizione Testuale e Prescrizioni Canoniche," 42.

commenced, warrants increased attention to the weight and influence of the *Shepherd* in the field of Christian Origins.

We would be remiss, however, if we did not first take stock of the warnings of papyrologists and paleographers about the pitfalls of their trade. Using the notes and public statements of the chief archaeologists from Oxyrhynchus, a site especially abounding in ancient papyri and supplying eleven fragments of the *Shepherd*, Brent Nongbri recently described how the layers of *afsh* that preserved papyrus manuscripts intact depended on their placement within mounds a certain elevation from the surface to protect the precious finds from moisture.[134] It is an anecdote that first forces a sense of caution when considering the relevance of manuscript finds from Egypt, for at every step of bringing the papyri from the *afsh* to public awareness, degrees of both random chance and human judgment factor into the manuscriptural calculus. From deposition[135] to preservation to discovery and finally to editorial choice,[136] papyrology is beset by bottlenecking factors that transform the matrix of manuscripts now at the forefront of

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[134] Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 221.

[135] While our data from Egypt often comes from scrap heaps, Nongbri's brusque notice that "we are dealing with trash" fails to provide important context about *why* the manuscripts have ended up in the garbage (230). Otherwise, one could easily hypothesize that the *Shepherd* was discarded more often than other manuscripts simply because its owners, after a time, deemed it less valuable to them than other Christian writings—but then one would have to account for the tremendous numbers of canonical scriptures also in the city dump! Fortunately, AnneMarie Luijendijk, working from a garbological perspective, suggests two possible alternatives: **(1)** the tendency for some manuscripts to be shorn into many pieces may serve symbolically as a "desacralizing" of scriptures that had become physically damaged in some way, and **(2)** an owner may have commissioned a cleaner or better copy of the text that was eventually thrown out, leaving little reason for retaining the exemplar. AnneMarie Luijendijk, "Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 64 (2010): 230-1; 249.

[136] Nongbri, 230. On this final matter of editorial choice, Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 25, has noted that only roughly one percent of the perhaps 500,000 manuscripts from the pre-Constantinian period has yet been published.

scholarly attention less into a pure representative sample of the record that was into, at

perhaps every step of the process, a random cross-section of fortune divided by scholarly

decisions. Furthermore, Nongbri heavily asterisks the ability of paleography to produce

reliable dates alone, and advocates for organizational collectors of manuscripts to open

their libraries up for more reliable methods, including radiocarbon dating and ink

analysis, to provide greater input.[137] All of these caveats deserve the time of day, but

particularly important for these manuscripts of the *Shepherd* is their provenance from

Egypt, where the evidence of patristic reception is most favorable. Hurtado acknowledges

this difficulty, but reasons, "We will assume here that, however the texts came to be

discarded, the Christian manuscripts found in the Oxyrhynchus rubbish mounds and other

places in Egypt may broadly reflect Christian use of these texts, at least in these parts of

Egypt."[138] However, the extrapolability of Egyptian manuscript data for the *Shepherd*

should not be assumed; the present author remains keenly aware that we are dealing here,

primarily, with an *Egyptian* story of reception. Heeding these various warnings, it yet

behooves scholars to account for the extant data, a task charted in Figs. 3.1 and 3.2.

In spite of the limitations of paleography, both Bagnall and Nongbri concur that

following the collective wisdom of scholarship as represented in the open-access Leuven

Database of Ancient Books (LDAB), rather than any individual idiosyncratic re-

formulation, remains our best chance of making sense of the extant data.[139] Arranged in

such a manner, the chronological distribution suggests that the *Shepherd* was most

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[137] Nongbri, 56-72.

[138] Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 25.

[139] Bagnall, 72; Nongbri, 243.

Fig. 3.1: Extant Greek Manuscripts of the Shepherd of Hermas Through the Sixth Century CE[140]

#	LDAB	Identifier	Location	Date	Present Contents		Access	Physical Details
1	1095	P.Oxy. 3528	Oxford	150-225	97.3-4	Sim. 9.20.3-4	P.Oxy Online	papyrus codex
2	1094	P.Iand. 1.4	Geißen	150-250	43.19-21, 44.1-3	Mand. 11.19-21, Mand. 12.1-3	Wayment, The Text of NT; Apocrypha, 106-7; 315-6.	papyrus codex
3	10575	P.Oxy. 4706	Oxford	170-250	Sixteen single-sided fragments		P.Oxy Online	papyrus roll
4	10574	P.Oxy. 4705	Oxford	200-250	1.8-9	Vis. 1.1.8-9	P.Oxy Online	papyrus opisthograph
5	10576	P.Oxy. 4707	Oxford	200-299	63.6-65.2, 65.5-66.2	Sim. 6.3.6-6.5.2, Sim. 6.5.5-7.2	P.Oxy Online	papyrus codex
6	1096	P.Mich. 130 / 44	Ann Arbor	200-299	27.6-28.1	Mand. 2.6-3.1	UM Adv. Papyrological IS	papyrus opisthograph
7	1099	P.Oxy. 1828	Oxford	200-299	61.1-12	Sim. 6.1.1-12	P.Oxy Online	parch. codex; amulet
8	1098	P.Oxy 3527	Oxford	200-299	70.1-71.2	Sim. 8.4.1-8.5.2	P.Oxy Online	papyrus codex
9	1101	P.Oxy 404	Oxford	200-399	113.2-4	Sim. 10.3.2-4	Hathi Trust	papyrus codex
10	1100	P.Berl. 5513	Berlin	200-399	51.7-10, 53.2-5	Sim. 2.7-10, Sim. 4.2-5	Berliner Papyrusdatenbank	papyrus roll
11	1097	P.Mich. 129 / 917	Ann Arbor	250-299	51.8-18.2	Sim. 2.8-9.4.2	UM Adv. Papyrological IS	papyrus codex
12	1103	P.Oxy. 1783	Glasgow	250-350	39.2-5	Mand. 9.2-5	University of Glasgow	parch. codex; amulet
13	1104	P.Oxy 1599	London	300-399	72.4-74.3	Sim. 8.6.4-8.8.3	Hathi Trust	papyrus codex
14	1105	P.Oxy. 3526	Oxford	300-399	51.4-10	Sim. 2.4-10	P.Oxy Online	papyrus codex
		P.Oxy. 1172	London		34.3-35.2	Mand. 5.2.3-6.1.2	Hathi Trust	
15	1108	P.Hamburg 24	Hamburg	300-499	53.6-7, 54.1-5	Sim. 4.6-7, 5.1-5	Hathi Trust	parchment codex
16	1109	P.Prag. 1.1	Prague	300-499	60.3-4, 61.2-4, 38.9-12	Sim. 5.7.3-4, 6.1.2-4, Mand. 8.9-12	AfP 62 (2016), 20-36	papyrus codex
17	3478	Codex Sinaiticus	London, Sinai, Leipzig, and St. Petersburg	325-375	1.1-31.6, 65.5-68.5, 91.4-95.5	Vis. 1.1-Mand. 4.3.6, Sim. 6.5.5-8.2.5, Sim. 9.14.4-9.18.5	Codex Sinaiticus Online	parchment codex; pandect Bible
18	1102	P.Berl. 13272	Berlin	350-399	54.5-55.2, 55.4-6	Sim. 5.1.2-5.2.2, Sim. 5.2.4-6	Berliner Papyrusdatenbank	parchment codex
19	1106	P.Bodmer 38	Geneva	350-450	1.1-21.4	Vis. 1.1-3.13.4	Bodmer Lab	papyrus codex
20	1110	P.Berl. 5104	Berlin	400-499	32.4	Mand. 4.4.4, 5.1.2-4	Berliner Papyrusdatenbank	papyrus codex
21	1111	P.Harris 1.128	Birmingham	400-499	7, 5.5	Vis. 5.5, 7	JTS 48 (1947), 204-205	papyrus codex
22	1112	P.Amh. Gr. 190 / 197	New York	450-550	Seven double-sided fragments		The Morgan Library	papyrus codex
23	1113	P.Berl. 21259	Berlin	500-599	14.4, 14.6	Vis. 3.4, 3.6	Berliner Papyrusdatenbank	papyrus codex
24	1115	P.Berl. 6789	Berlin	500-599	67.1-12	Sim. 8.1.1-12	Berliner Papyrusdatenbank	papyrus codex

Fig. 3.2: Contents of the Two Piecemeal Shepherd *Manuscripts from Fig. 3.1*

MS #3: P.Oxy. 4706		MS #22: P.Amh. Gr. 190/197	
12.3	Vis. 3.4.3	2.2-4	Vis. 1.2.2-4
14.6	Vis. 3.6.6	2.4–3.1	Vis. 1.2.4–1.3.1
17.6-7	Vis. 3.9.6-7	20.3	Vis. 3.12.3
21.3–22.1	Vis. 3.13.3–4.1.1	21.3-4	Vis. 3.13.3-4
22.6-8	Vis. 4.1.6-8	44.1	Mand. 12.1.1
22.8-9	Vis. 4.1.8-9	44.3	Mand 12.1.3
27.4-5	Mand. 2.4-5	79.1-2	Sim. 9.2.1-2
29.1	Mand. 4.1.1	79.4-5	Sim. 9.2.4-5
31.6	Mand. 4.3.6	89.2-3	Sim. 9.12.2-3
32.3-4	Mand. 4.4.3-4	89.5	Sim 9.12.5
33.6-7	Mand. 5.1.6-7	94.1	Sim. 9.17.1
35.2-5	Mand. 6.1.2-5	94.3-4	Sim. 9.17.3-4
37.5–38.1	Mand. 7.5–8.1	107.1-2	Sim. 9.30.1-2
38.6	Mand. 8.6	107.3-4	Sim. 9.30.3-4
39.7-8	Mand. 9.7-8	*Plus a few small, unplaceable fragments*	
40.1-2	Mand. 10.1.1-2		
Plus 10 additional unplaceable fragments			

frequently copied in Egypt the third and fourth centuries; only five of the 24 manuscripts are definitively dated after the fourth century, while the first 11 appear to belong paleographically to the second and third centuries. The manuscript history for the *Shepherd* therefore largely aligns with what can be discerned about its Alexandrian reception in Clement, Origen, and Athanasius's early decades, bolstering a sense of its popularity and utility in early Christian formation. Moreover, the *Shepherd* found its way to nearly every textual technology attested in Christian usage: codices of both papyrus and parchment, miniatures "intended to be worn as amulets or for handy reading,"

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[140] This table [Fig 3.1] is inspired by the appendix in Hurtado, *Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 224-5, where the first 11 manuscripts here also appear. Present order in Fig 3.1 determined by paleographic dates as assigned in the Leuven Database of Ancient Books. Dates, Locations, and Physical Details are also reproduced as given for each manuscript in LDAB, but the exact contents of each book are cobbled together from a number of sources, primarily from Lincoln H. Blummell and Thomas E. Wayment, eds., *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2015); Kurt Aland and Hans-Udo Rosenbaum, eds., *Repertorium der Griechischen Christlichen Papyri, Vol. II: Kirchenväter Papyri* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995); and Thomas Wayment, *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha (100–400 CE)* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013). The Leuven Database of Ancient Books is available and searchable online at https://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/.

opisthographs, and fresh, single-sided scrolls.[141] So valuable was the *Shepherd* to its early

celebrants that it was copied wherever it could fit, for personal or communal use.

As impressive as the extant haul of early Greek papyri attesting to the *Shepherd*

is, one can easily miss the fragmentary nature of these recoveries. For one, non-

specialists in the *Shepherd* often do not recognize the immense length of the book, and

the traditional method of citing excerpts of the text offers no help in this regard.

Sometimes, scholars unfamiliar with the textual divisions in the *Shepherd* cite it as if

these divisions simply do not exist.[142] Specialists, for their part, have not made it easy to

understand the contents of the *Shepherd* in recovered manuscripts; for some fragments

listed above, one must track down rare foreign-language publications to determine their

precise textual dimensions. Even if one manages to find the appropriate papyrological

sources, none uses the more recent, continuous citation system for the *Shepherd* as

recommended in the current edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style*.[143] Fig. 3.1 attempts to

remedy this situation and present the true extent of the extant fragments.[144]

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[141] Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 2; Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 236; Bagnall, 42, insists that this technological blossoming and particularly the use of new rolls for the copying of the *Shepherd* is unparalleled even for canonical scriptures. This evidence, however, has been turned against Hermas's book, as when Charles Hill can claim, on nothing more than the general observation that Christians came to prefer codices to rolls, "that at least the scribes of these particular mss did not consider the book to be Scriptural." Hill, "'The Writing Which Says,'" 128 n.2. Such reasoning must be considered specious, especially in light of the recent realization that the preference for the codex is more properly a *Roman* trend rather than a specifically Christian phenomenon speaking into the scripture/not-scripture debate. Instead, as Bagnall, 81, can quip about a related issue where again the choice of the codex over the scroll is under scrutiny, "Would such an argument be used if anything other than Christianity"—and in this case specifically, the need to find early attestations in the direction of later canonical decisions—"was at stake?"

[142] For example, see Carroll, 88 n.23, 90 n.33.

[143] Society of Biblical Literature, *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 133; 331-2.

[144] This nexus of physical details and contents permits a variety of interesting observations. For example, P.Mich. 130 (MS #6) is properly a "register of landed property," onto the verso of which, against

No early Greek manuscript is as complete as Codex Sinaiticus, which contains

only about 30 percent of the overall text of the *Shepherd*.[145] Only two come close:

P.Mich. 129 (MS #11) contains slightly more than a quarter of the text, while P.Bodmer

38 (MS #16) preserves just under one-fifth of the book. Beyond these, only two other

manuscripts include an entire chapter of the *Shepherd*, and eleven encompass just six

verses or fewer. Though their existence attests to the early popularity of the *Shepherd*,

these fragments, on the whole, are not particularly helpful in the reconstruction of the

book's earliest text. Instead, the general tendency for manuscripts to preserve only

portions of one of the three sections led scholarship down a perilous path whereby

various partition theories of authorship or distribution were concocted, and buttressed

from various internal textual data from the *Shepherd*, to imagine anywhere from two to

five or six authors.[146] P.Mich. 129, for example, is a papyrus codex only of the Parables,

and a later text like P.Bodmer 38 contained just portions of the Visions in a "Codex of

Visions" cobbled together from many authors. In another example, P.Oxy. 3527 (MS #8)

the papyrus grains, has been scribbled Herm. Mand. 2.6–3.1 (27.6–28.1)—containing the shepherd's commandment to give freely to all, irrespective of judgments of their need, in order to "live to God." Bagnall, 45. P.Oxy. 1783 (MS #12) is an amulet featuring Mand. 9.2-5 (39.2-5), where the shepherd encourages people to request God's supplication without doubt or double-mindedness: "But turn to the Lord with all your heart and ask of him unhesitatingly, and you will know his extraordinary compassion, because he will never abandon you but will fulfill your soul's request." Trans. per Holmes, 533. In such a light, one begins to appreciate how the *Shepherd* might have fulfilled individuals' needs to keep moral and theological reminders close at hand or close at heart.

[145] Until 1975, the only known portion of the *Shepherd* in Codex Sinaiticus included Vision 1.1 to Mandate 4.3.4 (1.1–31.4). The rest of the text, some 83 chapters, was presumed lost until maintenance operations undertaken by the monks at St. Catherine's Monastery recovered portions of the Similitudes as well. The *Shepherd* is now thought to have been complete in Sinaiticus, but its perilous position at the bookend of the codex meant that its leaves, like those of Genesis, were most susceptible to wear, tear, and eventual loss. Holy Monastery and Archdiocese of Sinai, *The New Finds of Sinai* (Athens: Ministry of Culture – Mount Sinai Foundation, 1999), 32; 10-11.

[146] Osiek, Hermeneia, 8-10, recounts the history of scholarly thought in this regard.

features pagination that may indicate its codex likely started somewhere in the Commandments.[147] However, other finds from P.Oxy. 4706 (MS #3) to Codex Sinaiticus have attested to an intact text especially at the points where it was once thought most divisible, such that Carolyn Osiek properly regards the *Shepherd*'s "initial unity that was later broken by circulation of separate sections independently."[148] Given the immense length of the *Shepherd*, its partitioning was perhaps inevitable based on the cost of materials and scribal copying, the existence of textual divisions that could speak to individual Christians in different ways, and, from an archaeological perspective, the general piecemeal nature of manuscript recoveries.

Aside from the occasional preference for parchment as a writing medium over papyrus, a decision that Bagnall has demonstrated to be "luxurious,"[149] little about the manuscripts themselves—setting aside Codex Sinaiticus for the time being—would differentiate this collection of the *Shepherd* from other Christian writings of the same time period. Some are more or less professional productions with consistent handwriting and pretensions toward formality, while others were produced more quickly, in less distinguished and sometimes careless or even "severe" hands, without strict marginal or gutteral uniformity.[150] The situation compellingly parallels the general spectrum in quality for all Christian scriptures, which, depending on the price an individual or congregation was willing to pay, could vary in formality from a cursive documentary

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[147] Wayment, *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha*, 158-9.

[148] Osiek, Hermeneia, 8; see also Bagnall, 47-8.

[149] Bagnall, 79.

[150] Wayment, *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha*, 81-169.

hand to the positively calligraphic.[151] Moreover, for the most part, the typical range of

nomina sacra forms is employed in manuscripts of the *Shepherd*, with one significant

exception: while the extant manuscripts from Fig. 3.1 only include two where the word

"son" (YÏOC) has been preserved, at no point in Codex Sinaiticus is this abbreviated in a

way that would christen a text that otherwise fails to feature Jesus Christ by name.[152] On

twelve occasions, YÏOC appears with a plene spelling, including once where YÏOY

breaks a line and the *nomen sacrum* might have come in handy.[153] P.Mich. 129, the other

manuscript of the *Shepherd* to include the word "son" in its extant portions, employs a

rare three-letter *nomen sacrum* on two occasions where Jesus or the "Son of God" are the

intended referent, while also attesting the plene spelling for the "profane" son of Parable

5.[154] The likelihood is high that the scribe of P.Mich. 129 (or its *Vorlage*) has applied this

abbreviation on an *in scribendo* basis and that, given the complete absence of shortened

"sons" in Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Athous Gregoriou 96, or the Latin Vulgata manuscript

tradition, no consensus for standardization of this *nomen sacrum* had developed by the

time of production or its earliest transmission from Rome, reflecting on its subsequent

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[151] Bagnall, 57.

[152] At Herm. Vis. 2.2.8 (6.8) in Codex Sinaiticus, the scribe mistakenly wrote the (accusative) *nomina sacra* form for Christ ($\overline{XN}$) rather than Lord ($\overline{KN}$). Though amended by a later scribal corrector, Codex Sinaiticus, at least at one time, *was* a christened text. See also Osiek, Hermeneia, 56.

[153] This can be found precisely at Herm. Vis. 2.2.8 (6.8), on quire 93, folio 2r, column 3, lines 30-31. See Fig. 5.1, p. 284 below.

[154] Herm. Sim. 5.1-7 (54-60) includes the parable where the shepherd describes the vineyard tended by a slave during his master's absence; see above, pp. 50–1. The three-letter *nomen sacrum* in P.Mich. 129 appears both as $\overline{YIN}$ and $\overline{YIC}$; though also attested in other Christian manuscripts, this would not prevail as the preferred scribal form.

scribal duplication.[155] This permitted a situation where individual scribes could choose to so encode Jesus into the text, but barring future discoveries, it will be impossible to know whether others followed the lead of the scribe underlying P.Mich. 129.

The Shepherd *in Codex Sinaiticus*

While curiosities like these certainly merit our attention, the undisputed crown jewel of the *Shepherd*'s manuscript history must be its inclusion in the magisterial Codex Sinaiticus. Unfortunately, the meaning of its presence in one of the earliest pandect Bibles has proven difficult to assess and has generated no scholarly consensus. No paratextual indicators exist, for example, to explain the inclusion of the *Shepherd* in the codex, and neither do we know anything consequential about the specific conditions under which the manuscript was conceived and produced. Its precise provenance eludes us, though paleographically the text dates probably to the mid-fourth century. Scholars are therefore left to answer questions of canon or scriptural status from the extant manuscript itself. Materially speaking, much of the data immediately concerning the text of the *Shepherd* is evident and agreed upon. Following the twenty-seven books comprising the modern New Testament, on the third leaf (folio 2r) of quire 91, the same scribe who has just concluded the Book of Revelation continues on a new column with the *Epistle of Barnabas*. In spite of the scribe's best efforts to squeeze the entirety of *Barnabas* onto the remainder of quire 91, a quire of one bifolio (two leaves, four pages)

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[155] I have discussed these issues in much greater detail in an unpublished paper and regional Society of Biblical Literature presentation (March 2017). Rob Heaton, "The Son, All Spelled Out: A Consideration of the Unchristened Text of the *Shepherd* of Hermas," (unpublished seminar paper, March 2016).

was required to inscribe the complete text,[156] after which a new standard quire of four

bifolios commences the *Shepherd* of Hermas. A different scribe copied the *Shepherd*, the

same who had at least copied the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament, following

the codex's usual practice of allowing a book started by a different scribe to begin on a

fresh quire—likely permitting them to work independently and simultaneously.[157] Until

1975, only 12 complete leaves and half of another folio containing the *Shepherd* were

known to have survived, with the extant portions of the manuscript terminating in the

middle of Commandment 4. The New Finds of Sinai from 1975, only published earlier

this decade, included portions of the outer bifolio of quire 95, featuring two

discontinuous sections of the Parables.[158] Prior suspicions that the *Shepherd* was

originally complete in Codex Sinaiticus[159] were therefore essentially confirmed, and now

David Parker presumes the entire text to have filled 3.5 quires, terminating on the eighth

page of quire 96.[160] Whether this was the final quire of the codex or even a standard quire

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[156] Dirk Jongkind, *Scribal Habits of Codex Sinaiticus*, vol. 5 of *Texts and Studies*, Third Series (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 50.

[157] Dan Batovici, "The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus," *Biblica* 97.4 (2016): 600. There are thus no grounds for claiming that this practical arrangement "could indicate hesitation on the part of the copyist" about the canonicity of the *Shepherd*, as Verheyden, 508, attempts to insinuate.

[158] Archbishop Damianos of Sinai, "The Shepherd of Hermas and Its Inclusion in Codex Sinaiticus: Almost Scripture," trans. George S. M. Foskolos, in *Codex Sinaiticus: New Perspectives on the Ancient Biblical Manuscript*, ed. Scot McKendrick, David Parker, Amy Myshrall, and Cillian O'Hogan (London: The British Library / Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 163.

[159] H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London: British Museum, 1938), 17.

[160] David Parker, "The Transcription and Reconstruction of Codex Sinaiticus," in McKendrick, Parker, Myshrall, and O'Hogan, eds., 290.

of four bifolios cannot be ascertained on the present evidence, but it must at least be

reckoned plausible that the codex included further texts beyond that of Hermas.[161]

Unfortunately, in spite of the renewed interest in Codex Sinaiticus coinciding with

its unprecedented digitization and online preservation, official publications of the codex's

archival institutions, at least, have tended to downplay the significance of the inclusion of

the *Shepherd* of Hermas in Sinaiticus.[162] Parker thus follows a method of referring to the

second half of Sinaiticus as containing the New Testament "and two other early Christian

writings," leaning on Athanasius's Festal Letter of 367 to describe how it features the 27

canonical books as well as two others considered "inspired" and worthy of being read.[163]

In the more recent academic-oriented volume of the British Library, part of the

responsibility for discussing the inclusion of the *Shepherd* was granted to the current

Archbishop of Sinai, Damianos. Unfortunately, he also leaned strongly on current

judgments of the book and the New Testament canon, regarding the *Shepherd* not only as

"almost Scripture" and non-canonical, but also lamenting even its modern designation

among the Apostolic Fathers:

> Orthodox theology and concepts consider such a characterization of these
> texts to be rather unfortunate. Of course, in dealing with ancient writers this
> does not automatically make of them Fathers, who were the only ones that

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[161] As Parker notes, "One might even speculate that the manuscript lost a similar number of leaves at each end, so that around sixteen leaves are lost at the end, allowing room for one or more further texts." Parker, "The Transcription," 293 n.10. Even if quire 96 was just a standard quire with eight pages remaining after the *Shepherd* ended, this may have been enough space to include a text like the *Didache*.

[162] Parker can even write the following, in an admittedly more lay-level monograph, evincing a certain first-hand unfamiliarity with the *Shepherd*: "Probably written in the middle of the second century, it is an apocalyptic work in the vein of Revelation, dealing with important issues of the day." D. C. Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of the World's Oldest Bible* (London: The British Library / Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 31.

[163] Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus*, 29-31.

expressed the clear conscience of the Church and who consequently were recognized by her as bearers of the pure tradition (amongst whom may be counted such Apostolic Fathers as Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Irenaeus and Dionysius of Corinth); therefore, one ought not to include Hermas the author and some others with them.[164]

It should not need to be stated that measuring the fourth-century value of the *Shepherd* against 20th century conceptions of Orthodox theology is methodologically deficient,[165] but in a similar vein, it is perplexing that Parker would use the Athanasian canon as a guideline for the contents of Sinaiticus. Its relevance is not established, but rather assumed. Yet, not only does Sinaiticus contain six of the seven books that Athanasius could describe as "not canonized"—with no way to rule out that the *Didache* may have followed the *Shepherd* of Hermas on the 96th quire, thereby rounding out the septet—but it also assuredly includes at least three other books he did not count as κανονιζόμενα, the *Epistle of Barnabas* plus 1 and 4 Maccabees. Furthermore, the Athanasian ordering of texts is broken in both the Old and the New Testaments, and it stands in need of rumination that Athanasius's list did not become a "table of contents," of sorts, for the New Testament until the 11th century at the very earliest.[166] When it is furthermore recognized that Athanasius handed down not an established or "descriptive" canon but one that he rather intended to implement for political and ecclesiological purposes so as

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[164] Archbishop Damianos of Sinai, in McKendrick, Parker, Myshrall, and O'Hogan, eds., 168; 161.

[165] Granted, of course, that "Apostolic Fathers" is an academic designation originating in the 17th century, that the Archbishop so chose to militate against the non-confessional categories of texts in use today is indicative of his overriding theological and apologetic orientation. See David Lincicum, "The Paratextual Invention of the Term 'Apostolic Fathers,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 66.1 (April 2015): 139-48.

[166] Daryl D. Schmidt, "The Greek New Testament as a Codex," in McDonald and Sanders, eds., 478.

to preclude forms of authority not limited to the texts he recognized,[167] it becomes

particularly attractive that the contents of Codex Sinaiticus must be approached on their

own terms—perhaps even conceived as a material disputation against the claims of the

hierarch—rather than on any terms prescribed by Athanasius perhaps even after the

codex was completed. Instead, the fourth-century codex demands contextualization

within the wider scope of its own divided ecclesiastical climate, rather than assuming

Athanasius spoke for all parties of his day. Given the existence of a figure like Didymus,

who adhered to a wider conception of canon—including both *Barnabas* and the

Shepherd—than did his episcopal counterpart, and a whole range of theological

opponents of both a monastic, academic, and "Arian" bent whom Athanasius alleges to

appeal to a wider scope of textual authorities, very little about Athanasius's list of 367 CE

appears relevant to the present inquiry about the limits of canon and the status of the

Shepherd in Codex Sinaiticus. It also reveals a key assumption among many scholars that

the pandect Bible must have been an *essentially orthodox and ecclesiastical instrument*

birthed by those who fully acknowledged episcopal authority. Instead, David Brakke

reminds us that we must take stock of the "several forms of Christianity in existence at

this time" in Alexandria,[168] with an Athanasian episcopate fending off political, doctrinal,

and monastic challengers who did not always recognize the hierarch's sole authority.

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[167] Here I lean again on David Brakke: "Athanasius's Festal Letter, far from being the decisive climax, was merely a signal moment in an ongoing process of Christian self-definition." As noted above, Brakke regards the Athanasian catalogue as "a certain kind of canon . . . meant to replace the authority of human teachers and their doctrinal speculations with an unchanging record of what was taught by Christ." Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict," 419; 398-9.

[168] David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 112.

A more sober handling of the data has recently been undertaken by Dan Batovici, who weighed the inclusion of *Barnabas* and the *Shepherd* in Codex Sinaiticus and that of *1* and *2 Clement* in Codex Alexandrinus simultaneously against both the material evidence of the manuscripts and the patristic reception of these texts. Crucially, Batovici can line up two sets of heavyweight scholars who work from countervailing assumptions about these apostolic fathers that appear in the major biblical codices of the fourth and fifth century: for the present purposes, those who view Sinaiticus as evidence that its copyists and collaborators saw the *Shepherd* of Hermas as canonical and/or scriptural (C. Tuckett, B. Ehrman, J. K. Elliott, and Tischendorf), and those who regard the *Shepherd* as part of an "appendix" of texts that are not canonical, but merely useful to be read (J. B. Lightfoot, C. H. Turner, Milne and Skeat, B. Metzger, and N. Brox).[169] Recognizing that neither of these sides generally advocate for their positions, but rather simply assert them as gospel, Batovici attempted to offer evidence for his thesis that the apostolic fathers are more likely to feature in the codices as "recommended, secondary books" than they are to be considered canonical.[170] At some points, he seems to equivocate between the two options, for textually speaking, the *Shepherd* and other books in question are copied with the same attention to detail, and are paratextually embellished in similar manners, so as to provide no reason to differentiate them from the surrounding scriptures. He therefore deems using a term like "appendix" to separate the apostolic fathers from the canonical biblical texts inappropriate, and yet regards it significant that each codex places the disputed texts "toward the end of the codex . . . not grouped with the books of the same

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[169] Batovici, "The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus," 583-4.

[170] Ibid., 588-9.

genre."[171] However, it is not evident how these two concepts are meaningfully distinguishable, for both designate the texts as *adjacent* to some preconceived notion of an accepted New Testament—even if Batovici avoids any such diminutive descriptor. Regardless, like Parker, Batovici also brings the canon lists of Athanasius and the Muratorian Fragment into the conversation and suggests that Codices Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus have found a physical method to imitate "the tripartite lists that organise and describe Christian literature all throughout Late Antiquity," making the pandects compliant with the expectations of a readership presumed to be familiar with the patristic catalogues of Old Testament, New Testament, and the intermediate class of sub-canonical texts.[172] Consequently, Batovici can avow with regard to the apostolic fathers:

> They are to be read, and thus a hypothetical pandect codex containing, after the New Testament, the *Shepherd* and the *Didache* would have been congruent with Athanasius' account, just as one with the *Shepherd* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* after the New Testament would have been a way of putting into practice what the Muratorian Fragment seems to prescribe.[173]

An observation of this sort might be merited if the deuterocanonical Old Testament texts of Athanasius's Festal Letter were not integrated within the Old Testament of Sinaiticus. As it stands, however, it begs explanation why books proximal to the New Testament

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[171] Batovici, "The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus," 602; 588. As regards the *Shepherd* specifically, Batovici has offered similar sentiments about the congruity of Hermas's text in Sinaiticus with the codex's other biblical books, and especially to those copied by the same Scribe B, in other recent publications. For example, he finds that *Barnabas* and the *Shepherd* were both corrected with the same scruples as other books within Sinaiticus over the centuries, and has also acknowledged elsewhere that the *Shepherd* is "presented as part of this Greek biblical codex." Dan Batovici, "Textual Revisions of the *Shepherd of Hermas* in Codex Sinaiticus," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 18.3 (Dec. 2014): 467-8; Dan Batovici, "The Appearance of Hermas's Text in Codex Sinaiticus," in McKendrick, Parker, Myshrall, and O'Hogan, eds., 158. His more recent argument detailed above seems, to a degree, to repudiate these earlier observations.

[172] Batovici, "The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus," 604.

[173] Ibid., 592.

must be treated in an appendicular fashion, but those of the Old can be incorporated where generic similarities are identified.

Batovici's better argument, therefore, relates to the observation that the *Shepherd* is not categorized with Revelation in Sinaiticus, and neither is *Barnabas* with the other epistles. However, here too problems appear. The placement of the Book of Acts between the Pauline and catholic epistles signifies that there is no *single* body of letters in Sinaiticus, and therefore the codex does not emulate this particular feature of the Athanasian list—where the catholic epistles appear *before* those of Paul. Organization by genre is thus not a strict concern of Sinaiticus in the first place. Moreover, while church fathers sometimes recognized the *Shepherd* as an apocalyptic or revelatory text, none whose testimonies survive did so in the fourth century, when Didymus, for example, can instead refer to it both as a book of catechesis and repentance. Similarly, the fourth- or fifth-century manuscript P.Bodmer 38 grouped the apocalyptic material into a so-called Codex of Visions, suggesting that perhaps readers of the *Shepherd* considered it thematically distinct from Revelation by this period. It would be improper, then, to expect the ancients to classify the texts in the same way modern scholarship does. Furthermore, Batovici even recognizes that plausible reasons exist for the ordering of New Testament books in the realm of physical book production, relating possibly to the availability of exemplars or the ordering of texts within them.[174] Even more likely than this is that the present order, in spite of the universal observation that no expense was spared in the production of Sinaiticus, was yet determined by economical concerns to make the fullest possible use of standard quires by calculated stichometric pre-planning. As Dirk Jongkind

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[174] Batovici, "The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus," 603.

has explained, the remainder of Revelation and *Barnabas* should have fit perfectly on a standard quire, but for whatever reason, one bifolio was removed from the quire *in scribendo*—requiring an intercalary quire of exactly one bifolio to complete *Barnabas*.[175] This, combined with Parker's reconstruction of the lost Old Testament text of the pandect, gives every impression that Codex Sinaiticus was intricately planned on a stichometric, scribal, and technological level.[176] Thus, Batovici's rationales for continuing to consider *Barnabas* and the *Shepherd* appendicular—even if he superficially eschews the term—are mitigated on a deeper examination of the implications of his suggestion that they retained a secondary status. The preferable interpretation of the evidence is one Batovici himself expressed as recently as 2015: aside from the placement after what, after many centuries, is recognizable as the New Testament canon, "[t]here is simply no formal marker to allow us to consider the *Shepherd* (and *Barnabas* with it) as an appendix to a biblical manuscript."[177]

If the reasons to consider the *Shepherd* a "secondary" book in Sinaiticus have melted away, we must face the alternative hypothesis that it achieved and retained such favor as to merit inclusion with the rest of the Christian scriptures and was thus welcome among *this particular* biblical canon. Too often the material fact that, at the tremendous expenses of time, resources, animal life, parchment preparation, scribal labor, and book fabrication, a singular tome was conceptualized, organized, and produced to contain a limited set of Christian books to be read together is overlooked or downplayed. However,

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[175] Jongkind, 49-50.

[176] Parker, "The Transcription and Reconstruction of Codex Sinaiticus," 285-92.

[177] Batovici, "The Appearance of Hermas's Text in Codex Sinaiticus," 158.

in a period when "nothing like it had been produced before and very little like it was produced afterward,"[178] the absence of any clear demarcating devices and the deficiency of arguments intended to defend a sacrosanct 27-book New Testament, combined with a recognition of the fluidity and variety of scriptural collections in the mid-fourth century, should return us to a default hypothesis that the books placed between two enormous covers were truly intended to be used as the authoritative measure for the individuals and/or the community that sponsored it. As Harry Gamble writes,

> Codex Sinaiticus seems to have aimed at bringing together the scripturally authoritative literature of the church in a single book, thus to create for the first time a one-volume 'Christian Bible'. . . . There could scarcely be a more effective bibliographic means to signal the special status of this literature or to symbolize its unity than to transcribe all of it in a single massive codex. Just as the special status of some early Christian literature appears to have prompted the Christian use of the codex in the first place, so the continuing development of the technology of book production finally permitted the Scriptures of Christianity to be represented as a transcriptional unity.[179]

The bold unity of such a production compels us to acknowledge that the limits of the New Testament in Codex Sinaiticus are neither to be determined with 16-plus centuries of hindsight, nor by smashing together the political and ecclesiological complexities to conceive of fourth-century Christianity as a harmonious and orthodox whole. Furthermore, we must resist imagining invisible boundaries where they do not exist, but rather consider the books stitched together in the second half of its encovenanted scriptures as a New Testament particular to Codex Sinaiticus. Why might *Barnabas* and the *Shepherd* have been considered essential members of this New Testament? Again, we

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[178] Harry Gamble, "Codex Sinaiticus in Its Fourth Century Setting," in McKendrick, Parker, Myshrall, and O'Hogan, eds., 3.

[179] Ibid., 5-6.

know hopelessly little about the circumstances of its production, its commissioning, or its earliest use. Milne and Skeat argued at one time convincingly for its Caesarean provenance,[180] but the foregoing consideration of the *Shepherd*'s popularity in Egypt and disfavor in Palestine especially militates for the alternative Egyptian origin, far away from whence Eusebius's measured insistence on a collection restricted possibly to 44 books could have held any sway. Furthermore, at 730 or 740 leaves[181] of an individual size never before attempted,[182] requiring the hides of large calves and sheep,[183] Sinaiticus was profoundly immobile, inconvenient for use at a lectern or public reading,[184] and therefore probably would not have originated in a context far from its eventual destination after the sixth century at St. Catherine's Monastery,[185] where few would have known about the codex and fewer would have used it. Gamble has suggested that the codex must have been commissioned privately for either individual use or as "a patronal gift to a church or monastic community," an appraisal that stands as our best estimate of

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[180] Milne and Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors*, 66-69. They also acknowledged that good reasons exist to consider Egypt as its place of origin (see 67 n.1), but were particularly married to the theory of Caesarean origin because they were swayed by the romantic idea that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus related in some manner to the Constantinian order of scriptures preserved by Eusebius in the *Vita Constantini*.

[181] Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus*, 1, maintains the larger estimate, while the lower belongs to Gavin Moorhead, Sara Mazzarino, Flavio Marzo, and Barry Knight, "A Physical Perspective of Codex Sinaiticus: An Overview from British Library Folios," in McKendrick, Parker, Myshrall, and O'Hogan, eds., 221. If an animal could only be used for a single bifolio, somewhere in the neighborhood of 365-370 were required to cultivate the skins necessary for Codex Sinaiticus; perhaps more should be assumed given the great likelihood of skins rejected due to blemishes and human error—at either the tanning and preparation stage or the inscription phase of production.

[182] Gamble, "Codex Sinaiticus in Its Fourth Century Setting," 4.

[183] Moorhead, Mazzarino, Marzo, and Knight, 221-2.

[184] Gamble, "Codex Sinaiticus in Its Fourth Century Setting," 13.

[185] Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus*, 3, estimates that the Codex must have arrived at the Justinian monastery by the year 1000 at the latest, and probably significantly earlier.

its origin. Difficult as it may be to answer these nagging questions conclusively, we are

left with the codex itself, created at a time when canon formation was nearing its final

stages and book technology had advanced to such a point to make the single-volume

Bible a possibility. Given that we have no evidence to construe Sinaiticus as an official,

ecclesiastical undertaking,[186] we similarly should not frivolously assume that it must have

been an orthodox instrument aligned with any known canon or scriptural catalogue.

4.   Conclusion

The present chapter has covered a significant and necessary expanse, starting

from a careful reevaluation of the *Shepherd*'s reception from approximately 250-400 CE.

Most significantly, this dissertation is apparently the first contribution interested in the

Shepherd of Hermas to follow and apply Armstrong's convincing argument that the

Muratorian Fragment, a questionable piece of evidence that has long monopolized both

canonical studies and interpretation of the *Shepherd*, was written by Victorinus of

Poetovio in the second half of the third century, rather than the prevailing options of a

second-century Western or a fourth-century Eastern Fragment. With a location both

temporally and geographically in the middle of these prior estimations, Victorinus retains

his place at the forefront of an exclusionary canonical impulse, but his impacts upon the

ultimate shape of the canon and the reception of the *Shepherd* of Hermas were tepid at

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[186] For many of the same reasons as Gamble, I reject the old hypothesis, as argued by Milne and Skeat, that Codex Sinaiticus relates in any way to Constantine's order of fifty copies of the Divine Scriptures from Eusebius. Gamble, "Codex Sinaiticus in Its Fourth Century Setting," 7–11; see also the definitive word on Constantine's order in Gregory Allen Robbins, "'Fifty Copies of the Sacred Writings' (*VC* 4.36): Entire Bibles or Gospel Books?" in *Studia Patristica XIX*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 91–8.

best. Combined with the plentiful manuscript history for the *Shepherd* and its inclusion in the canon of the Codex Sinaiticus, patristic attitudes toward Hermas's book during this period—in spite of occasional idiosyncratic rejections—indicate that the popular text often enjoyed scriptural status and was likely on a canonical trajectory.

For its part, Codex Sinaiticus need not have been conceived as a conscious rejection of Athanasius's canonical wishes. Yet, since it is most often dated to within the limits of his episcopacy, its expansive set of scriptures again epitomizes the stubborn diversity of canon lists and the pervasive mélange of Christianities from this period of tense theological, political, ascetical, and ecclesiological struggles.[187] Emblematic of this religious pluriformity and the lack of checks with which to control its extent is the continuing popularity of the *Shepherd* of Hermas in Egypt. Hermas's book would live on outside Codex Sinaiticus, both within and without Egypt, in hushed elite and monastic circles. Yet within its covers we find, perhaps, the apogee of its curious early Christian reception and the culmination of nearly two centuries of Egyptian favor bestowed upon the *Shepherd*, when the humble but contested book could be inscribed within this particular canon and subsequently accepted as scripture in the cenobitic shadows for centuries. We may not know the names or identities of the creators of Codex Sinaiticus, but their reception of the *Shepherd* stands as yet another notch in its curious favor within early Christianity, even signaling this countervalent text's greatest achievement—one with which surprised and sometimes hostile modern scholars are still struggling to reckon. Beyond the manuscript recoveries, the *Shepherd* inspired contrasting opinions in the third and fourth centuries, ranging from rejection to reception as "divine scripture,"

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[187] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 266–72.

leaving us with a dichotomy worthy of being explored to determine how its persistent

favor eventually gave way to unquestioned extracanonicity. Knowing both its patristic

reception and consternation, as well as the underlying currents of both academic

celebration and unlettered acceptance of Hermas's visions, the shepherd's elaborations,

and their related imagery, we must plumb beyond reflexive defenses of the boundaries

established by the modern New Testament. In the following chapter, therefore, we further

interrogate the meaning of scripture and canon and examine the rationales scholars have

offered to explain the *Shepherd*'s eventual placement outside of the New Testament.

Passing the Test? The *Shepherd*, Canonical "Criteria," and Reasons for Exclusion

1. The "Criteria" for Canonicity: Testing the *Shepherd*

Having weighed and re-evaluated the substantial evidence for the appeal, initial

positive reception, and eventual disapproval of the *Shepherd* of Hermas through the first

four centuries, it is now appropriate to return our focus to the ultimate question that this

dissertation seeks to answer—to account for the text's extracanonicity. In spite of the

foregoing handling of data about the *Shepherd* in the early church, solutions to this

inquiry all depend very much on one's construal of the process of canonization.

Many decades and even centuries into discussion on the formation of the

Christian canon, scholars have reached no unanimous conclusions about this process that

Lee Martin McDonald can variously describe as "inexact," "largely unconscious," and

"highly complex."[1] This section therefore proceeds by offering definitions for scripture

and canon that will remain operative for the remainder of this project. After making some

additional preliminary claims about solutions to the problem that I find unsatisfying, I

proceed by testing the *Shepherd* of Hermas against the prevalent criteria for canonicity

that scholars have divined from the irregular writings of patristic authors surveyed in the

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[1] Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 418.

previous chapters and advanced, if often in a qualified fashion, to explain the church's

canonical process. In order to analyze the extracanonicity of the *Shepherd*, this chapter

utilizes the three criteria identified by Bruce Metzger in 1987: (1) theologically orthodox

content, (2) apostolic authorship, and (3) traditional and widespread use "by the Church

at large,"[2] plus another added more recently by McDonald largely on the witness of the

Muratorian Fragment about the *Shepherd*: (4) antiquity.[3] Though "not invoked with great

rigor or consistency" by the earliest Christian authors,[4] these criteria, which are

admittedly descriptive rather than prescriptive, have persisted as the logic through which

scholars engaged in canon studies have construed the formation of the New Testament.

However, to my knowledge, the criteria have never been put to a prescriptive test, and

have especially not been employed in any attempt to reason out the extracanonical status

of a book on the margins. As a result of this criterial inquest, however, we are left at an

impasse. In nearly every place where a patristic author critiques the *Shepherd* in a manner

aligned with a criterion, we find another church father with a contradictory opinion,

essentially accepting the *Shepherd* on the basis of that same criterion. In spite of

occasional complaints about Hermas's book, a route toward canonization was just as

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[2] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 251-4. Though Metzger couches these criteria in somewhat different terms—for example, referring to orthodoxy as "conformity to what was called the 'rule of faith'"—I do not believe I have taken too much academic license in my refashioning of the vocabulary.

[3] Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Antiquity*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 412-4. McDonald's ch. 14, "The Criteria Question," in this volume largely parallels his contribution to *The Canon Debate*; where common material appears in these two chapters, I have made every attempt to cite its occurrence in this monograph. McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon," 431, concedes that the criterion of antiquity bleeds over substantially with the first two used by Metzger, but it remains significant particularly in light of its apparent origin from the Muratorian Fragment's perspective on the *Shepherd*.

[4] Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Meaning and Making* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 67. At the very least, the use of such well-trodden criteria has the advantage of limiting canonical conjecture within the bounds of factors observed by generations of scholars.

available for the *Shepherd* as other contested texts, such as Hebrews or Revelation or some of the disputed general epistles, had the relevant authorities not deemed it objectionable. As the use of these criteria is accompanied by no apparent guidelines or a measure by which such disagreements may be resolved, I suggest that criterial logic be abandoned, the criteria be downgraded from the lofty status and unmerited implications of an open-ended juridical process that attends them, and furthermore that the canonical process be described by different means or methods. Finally, this chapter concludes by covering the answers and observations offered for the extracanonicity of the *Shepherd* within the last few decades of scholarship, paving the way for Part 2 of the dissertation that will attempt to provide a fuller answer to the question.

Defining Matters: What is Scripture? What is Canon?

While prior to this point, we have allowed the crucial terms of scripture and canon to remain somewhat undefined, it now becomes vital that they attain their technical meanings valid among the subdiscipline of canon studies. Though it will be of no real surprise to the reader here, "scripture" and "canon" are transliterations from the historical languages of Christianity, from Latin and Greek respectively. They are not transliterated because no appropriate translation exists for these terms in English, but because the transliterated words bear the weight of special religious signification. "Scripture" therefore denotes "texts that are revered as especially sacred and authoritative,"[5] that is, writings that rise above the ordinary within a community to the status of holy and

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[5] William A. Graham, "Scripture," in vol. 13 of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 133.

operative upon its belief and/or praxis.[6] Popularly or colloquially, this definition may

adequately convey the sense in which "canon" often gets used,[7] but for our purposes, we

must recognize the two academic definitions of canon effective in scriptural discourse

that have become known as canon 1 and canon 2. Canon 1 constitutes an earlier usage of

the word κανών, as when Irenaeus can, for example, elucidate the "rule of faith" or the

"rule of truth,"[8] by which he attempts to offer what Eugene Ulrich describes as "the

authoritative principles and guiding spirit which govern belief and practice."[9] In the case

of Irenaeus's five examples of such canons, the measure of faith or truth can constitute

well attested interpretations of scripture, the contents of the prologue of the Gospel of

John, the words of God, the pure doctrine received at one's baptism, and the church's

kerygma about God, which then spurs the believer to trust, fear, and obedience. But these

various measures, which arise in a pre-creedal milieu that yet attempted to essentialize

the Christian faith, are obviously not the end goal of the present project. Instead, we must

look to identify where the *Shepherd* struck out among the delimitation of canon 2. Again,

Ulrich's description is most instructive: "The canon of scripture . . . is the definitive,

closed list of the books that constitute the authentic contents of scripture. It should not be

confused either with the stages in the canonical process or with simply books that are

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[6] John Barton has outlined five factors characteristic of early Christian scriptures, laid out succinctly by McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 402-4: liturgical use, holiness (i.e., non-triviality), internal consistency, a multiplicity of meaning, and the presence of the *nomina sacra*. These factors will not be plumbed or pressed to any great length in the ensuing discussion, but it is appropriate to be aware of their existence in modern scholarship.

[7] One might think of a fictional cinematic universe like that of Star Wars, and contentions in fandom about whether an anecdote, deleted scene, or extended-universe novel is "canonical."

[8] *Haer.* 1.9.4; 2.27.1; 3.11.1; 4.35.4 ("rule of truth"); *Dem.* 3 ("rule of faith").

[9] Eugene Ulrich, "The Notion and Definition of Canon," in McDonald and Sanders, 28.

canonical, because books can be, and were, canonical (in the sense of canon 1) long before there was a canon of scripture."[10] Thus, the canon that we will explore henceforth is not one merely of inclusion, as when we might recognize that the gospels functioned from an early period as scriptural or authoritative, but also, crucially, *exclusion*. Yet, conscious attentiveness to the closed, enumerated list of books does not prohibit, and perhaps even implores, our interest in the various books that appeared to be on a scriptural and canonical trajectory toward inclusion within canon 2. In fact, with canon so construed as the closed list of books, the "marginal" or even "fringe" texts that sat on the fence of the canon, ultimately to be included like Revelation, Hebrews, or the latter of the catholic epistles, or excluded like the *Shepherd* and others, have the potential to tell us far more about the operative mechanics of the canonical process than the gospels or major letters of Paul ever could. As a result, such an investigation may force a great rethink about how the canonical process is conveyed and portrayed.[11]

Under a definition of canon as an exclusive and communally accepted list, certain depictions of the canonical process deserve to be stricken out from consideration altogether. Chief among these are explanations that diminish the church's agency to delimit the books of the canon, that would instead prefer to see God as the ultimate authority behind the church's decision-making. At times, evangelical scholars even push

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[10] Ulrich, "The Notion and Definition of Canon," 34.

[11] As Ulrich also contends at the conclusion of his long chapter defining canon, it becomes necessary to move beyond the more banal matter of a consensus understanding of canon to properly account for the canonical process that is "much more important, interesting, and ripe for analysis." Ulrich, "The Notion and Definition of Canon," 33. In this respect, it may become instructive to differentiate between the "final canon" of the New Testament as received by most Christian traditions, and canons—that is, closed and exclusionary lists—operative for Christians at particular times and places along the great march to achieving a singular final canon, both of which merit some claim to the spirit of canon 2.

a Barthian view that "the canon imposed itself upon the church," for example, while

apparently not viewing this as contradictory to a process of exclusive selection.[12] Most

recently, however, Michael J. Kruger has advocated for the validity of an "ontological

definition" of canon, whereby "books do not *become* canonical—they are canonical

because they are the books God has given as a permanent guide for his church."[13] While

Kruger seems to be operating in this instance on the canon 1 gradation of "canonical," it

is not difficult to understand how these assumptions might color one's view of the

canonical process and ultimate delimitation of the canon. Under such suppositions, no

wiggle room exists for the church to conclude for or against a given book; it only allows

that the church must recognize the canonical authority inherent to a book, or reject a book

already lacking such a quality. As Kruger adds, the ontological perspective of canon

requires that "the 'canon' is always the books God intended as a permanent foundation

for his church; no more and no less. In this sense, the canon is 'closed' as soon as the last

book is given by God."[14] As much as Kruger attempts to disassociate his ontological

definition from a pre-critical view that the canon was divinely ordained by God from on

high and delivered intact for the benefit of humankind,[15] acceptance of the innate

ontology of canonical books rules out *a priori* that there may have been other books

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[12] Eckhard J. Schnabel, "The Muratorian Fragment: The State of Research," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57.2 (2014): 258 n.183, 261.

[13] Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 40; emphasis his. Kruger also regards this "ontological" definition of canon as complementary to other definitions of canon, including the exclusive and functional dimensions; in his characterization, this ontological quality is lacking from an oversized emphasis on the historical-critical process by which most scholars attempt to understand the closing of the Christian canon.

[14] Kruger, 40 n.53.

[15] Ibid., 46.

under consideration for inclusion by Christian communities. It similarly enforces a

handling of the evidence of, for example, Codex Sinaiticus, the stichometric list found in

Codex Claromontanus, and the church fathers otherwise favorable toward the *Shepherd*

so as not to allow that the text could have, for them, been ontologically or functionally

canonical.[16] Similarly, scholars who entertain these views tend to antedate the final stages

of the canonical process well before the fourth century. Eckhard Schnabel, for example,

overestimates the value of the Muratorian Fragment, explains away the omission of

would-be canonical books by calling them "an oversight or . . . the result of the

fragmentary character of the Fragment," and breathtakingly imagines that the "process of

delimitation" of texts had concluded by the end of the second century.[17] The Muratorian

Fragment, properly attributed to Victorinus, is more accurately regarded as the very

beginning stage of that exclusionary step in the shaping of the canon, as the first concrete

indication of an impulse toward closure of the collection. By the foregoing presentation

of the *Shepherd*'s reception history,[18] such assumptions as these from Kruger and

Schnabel cannot be permitted or regarded as incumbent upon the canonical process.

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[16] Furthermore, "ontological" reasoning is lacking from the church fathers whose occasional writings give us insight on the canonical process. Irenaeus notes that the four-gospel collection is fitting not because of their ontology but on account of quadripartite phenomena in the natural world (*Haer.* 3.11.7-8), while Athanasius attributes his canonical determinations to "the Fathers" (*Ep. fest.* 39.20). Others, like Victorinus and Eusebius, appear more numerologically motivated, even when describing the bounds of canon by other terms.

[17] Schnabel, 258.

[18] Kruger, of course, must also handle the *Shepherd* in a manner that classically overemphasizes the evidence of Tertullian, the Muratorian Fragment, and other critiques of the book, with very little interest in countervailing approbation of Hermas's text in other authors. He seems willing to grant that some viewed the *Shepherd* as scripture, and even that Hermas was consciously attempting to write scripture, but that in no way made the book a candidate for the New Testament canon, given that it was a book disputed by some segments in the church. Kruger does not deal adequately with why Victorinus, Eusebius, and Athanasius must each labor to portray the *Shepherd* of Hermas outside of their New Testament collections if it was classically understood as extracanonical. See Kruger, 36-7, 66, 98, 122 n.16, 154, 157 n.11.

The Shepherd *and the Criteria of Canonicity: A Prescriptive Test-Case*

A far more persistent method of depicting the canonical process has, in the last generations of scholarship, centered around various sets of criteria built from the writings of patristic authors themselves. All scholars concur that we have no proper ancient accounting for the full canonical process; as Gamble quips, it must be excavated "on the basis of sparse and fragmentary evidence and with a measure of conjecture."[19] Yet, Gamble (1985), Metzger (1987), and McDonald (1988, 1995, 2007) have continued to postulate the development of canon along criterial logic, such that Metzger can imagine "test[s] that [were] applied to a given book to determine whether it deserved to belong in the New Testament."[20] Similarly, McDonald affirms that it is "generally acknowledged that the church used several criteria in order to determine the contents of the NT."[21] In spite of concessions that these criterial processes were not uniform in every locale and never strictly applied in a conscious or recorded fashion,[22] all seem to imagine *active* procedures of adjudicating eligible Christian books by at least some of their criteria. The enumerated criteria vary from scholar to scholar, but their evolution from Gamble to McDonald reveals an apparent consensus on the three major criteria advocated by

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[19] Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 23.

[20] Metzger, 253.

[21] McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 405.

[22] So Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 71: "It should be clear that the principles of canonicity adduced in the ancient church were numerous, diverse, and broadly defined, that their application was not systematic or thoroughly consistent, and that they were used in a variety of combinations." So Metzger, 254: "[W]e find much variation in the manner in which the criteria were applied. Certainly they were not appealed to in any mechanical fashion. There were different opinions as to which criterion should be allowed chief weight." And so McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 405: "No surviving evidence, however, suggests that all churches used the same criteria in selecting their sacred collections. Likewise, no evidence suggests that each separate criterion weighed equally with others in deliberations about canon. In fact, the variety of Scripture canons from the fourth to the sixth centuries suggests otherwise."

Metzger: apostolicity, orthodox content, and use by the church-at-large. A fourth criterion

defended by McDonald, antiquity, takes as its basis the Muratorian Fragment's critique of

the *Shepherd* of Hermas, and so is also relevant for the task at hand. That task may be

described as follows: if the criteria of canonicity are valuable for understanding the

canonical process of selecting texts, then they should provide insight about why a

marginal text like the *Shepherd* was ultimately excluded. Using the reception history for

Hermas's book that covers parts of chapters 2 and 3 above (pp. 56–85 and 115–165), the

following analysis plumbs the perceptions of ancient writers to determine if the criteria

favored by scholars retain any prescriptive utility, that is, whether they were genuinely

operative in the early church, as the use of "criteria" terminology and the supposition of

an active canonical process both imply.

A. Apostolicity/Apostolic Authorship

The first criterion advocated by Gamble, Metzger, and McDonald for the

acceptance of a book as canonical relates to the identity and status of its reputed author.

In a situation of manifold writings inspiring pockets of early Christians, those books that

were believed to be penned by apostles—either persons who were commissioned by

Jesus himself or who otherwise could make a legitimate claim to apostolicity or the

apostolic era—as well as those books that were believed to have been written by an

apostle's immediate companions, were naturally preferred. In the eyes of the church

fathers, at least, the *Shepherd* was indisputably written by one Hermas of Rome, but

given that no degree of specificity about his actual identity or credentials was provided by Hermas himself, this would have to be supplied by tradition.

Two such reports are attested by the mid-third century; whether they are inventions of Origen and Victorinus cannot ultimately be known. Origen claimed in his *Commentary on Romans* (c. 244) that the author of the *Shepherd* was the Hermas greeted by Paul (Rom. 16:14). Though Hahneman appropriately notes that this tradition "cannot be traced" before Origen,[23] it seems unlikely that the work flourished and attracted such great interest, in an era when such attributions had already become significant authorizing factors for the gospels, without anyone previously making the connection. It could owe to the speculation of Clement of Alexandria, with Origen trusting his mentor enough to record the connection as factual. Regardless, Origen's claim would have rooted the *Shepherd* in the apostolic era and, through the apparent blessing of Paul, given Hermas's output a stamp of apostolicity. It was believable enough for Jerome; in *On Illustrious Men*, his catalog of important figures in the church up to his own day, the eccentric scholar and theologian lists Hermas after eight supposed authors of New Testament books and Barnabas, thereby locating him exceptionally early.

However, this was not the only Hermas surmised by the ancients as the source of the book. The so-called Muratorian Fragment, which I follow Armstrong in attributing to Victorinus in the second half of the third century, regarded Hermas as the brother of Pius. Two other Western sources—the *Carmen adversus Marcionem* and the Liberian Catalogue, repeat this tradition, which seems designed to dispute the apostolicity of the

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[23] Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 52.

author of the *Shepherd*—that is, to cast it as far away from the episcopacy of Clement as was feasible. That Victorinus knew of and explicitly repudiated the tradition from Origen, as Hahneman suggests,[24] is not required by the evidence; Victorinus clearly knew of Origen's literary output, but his restatement of Hermas's identity only need have opposed a general view that the *Shepherd* was an early text, perhaps written contemporaneous with Clement. The sense in which he uses "apostles," as a parallel to the "prophets" and thus as a code-word for New Testament books, does not require that Victorinus challenged an actual prior claim to Hermas's apostolic legitimacy, even though his tactic of placing Hermas in the mid-second century effectively countermands the apparently earlier assumption of Hermas's apostolicity. Eusebius, on the other hand, certainly knows the tradition of an apostolic-era Hermas and regards it suspect. It is on this basis that Eusebius rejects the *Shepherd*, which for him lacks the apostolic legitimacy that required of encovenanted books.

No one seems to have known or remembered the actual identity of the individual who wrote the *Shepherd*. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian alike were comfortable just calling this person Hermas, as does the *Shepherd* itself, but in Clement's case, apostolicity may have been the default assumption toward books of which he otherwise approved. Furthermore, the authorship of a given text seems to have arisen as a secondary concern or question. While particularly significant to Eusebius, who was likely among the "some" disputing Origen's connection of Hermas to Paul, authorship was no universal obsession in the period of canon formation. An appropriate analogy to Clement's acceptance of the *Shepherd* without recourse to an explicit defense of its

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[24] Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, 52-3; 60.

authorship may be the Eastern opposition to Revelation and Western objections to

Hebrews, where in both cases Gamble finds that "the basic considerations were doctrinal

and hermeneutical, and the question of authorship was ancillary to these."[25] Osiek

observes similarly that while the Muratorian Fragment forthrightly assails the authorship

of the *Shepherd*, this merely covers its unspoken theological misgivings with Hermas's

book.[26] I have furthermore suggested that Victorinus was deterred by Hermas's prophetic

innovations, given that his book did not conform to a view of Christian prophets as

interpreters, rather than inventors of new, unheard traditions. In this void of certainty

about exact motives, two major possibilities survived for the identity of Hermas. One

route toward apostolic authorship, the claim offered by Origen and repeated by Jerome,[27]

was available to the patristic shapers of the canon if they chose to accept the *Shepherd* on

some other basis. Looking back on the books that eventually constituted the New

Testament, little more than such verisimilitude was necessary.

B. Antiquity

Inasmuch as the antiquity of a book also involves the material details of its

production, this criterion is invariably connected to authorship and proximity to the age

of the apostles. Yet, McDonald asserts the validity of an independent criterion on a basis

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[25] Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 52.

[26] Carolyn Osiek, *Rich and Poor in the* Shepherd of Hermas: *An Exegetical-Social Investigation* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983), 12; Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 6.

[27] Interestingly, both of these same authors famously vacillated on the ultimate authorship of the book of Hebrews, with Origen giving up and saying only God knew the author's identity, and Jerome claiming that the ultimate author of the letter did not matter, since he was clearly a man of the church (*Hist. eccl.* 6.25.11-14; *Ep.* 129).

beyond the general principle that the ancients preferred the old to the new. "The early

Christians believed that the books and writings that gave them their best access to the

story of Jesus, and thus defined their identity and mission, were those that came from the

apostolic era."[28] McDonald thus subtly prioritizes certain thematic content that canonical

scriptures should include, offering a sort of criterion within the criterion that poses a

problem for the *Shepherd*, for as Jörg Rüpke has noted, Hermas's book was perhaps the

first Christian writing that is "neither an epistolary treatise nor a biography of Jesus or a

collection of his sayings."[29] Regardless, the *Shepherd* persevered as a text legitimately on

the precipice of canonicity, and its supposed insufficient age seems to have been a

problem for Victorinus, who explicitly dismissed the book on account of its "very recent"

production by Hermas after the time of the apostles. However, as we have deduced,

Victorinus relies heavily on a periodization of time that was not universally operative

among his contemporaries, and at any rate he transmits an authorial situation that does

not match the scant internal data from the *Shepherd*.[30] Origen, by virtue of identifying the

author of the *Shepherd* as the Hermas of Romans 16:14, inadvertently places the book

well back into the apostolic era, and if his attribution were true, the *Shepherd* could

become possibly one of the *earliest* Christian books. This, however, is not a claim

corroborated by verifiable evidence. Instead, antiquity can be maintained as no more than

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[28] McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 413.

[29] Jörg Rüpke, "Fighting for Differences: Forms and Limits of Religious Individuality in the 'Shepherd of Hermas,'" in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 319-20.

[30] Joseph Verheyden, "The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Debate," in *The Biblical Canons*, ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. De Jonge (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 512; Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, 52.

a largely unstated and obvious criterion for canonicity, *sans* any firm boundary given the questionably antiquity of the Pastorals and the later general epistles.[31] Furthermore, instead of functioning for Victorinus as a legitimate criterion by which documents were judged, his claim about the recent composition of the *Shepherd* may simply have been the most facile method of authoritatively disallowing its public reading alongside the other books of the New Testament. Victorinus's idiosyncratic critique of the *Shepherd*'s age, we must observe, made no discernible impact upon his fellow patristic interpreters, leaving largely intact a default assumption of adequate age—at least in relative proximity to the production of other Christian scriptures—for the communities and individuals who cherished the *Shepherd*.

C. Use by the Church-at-Large

A second criterion agreed upon by the trio of Gamble, Metzger, and McDonald centers around the widespread or catholic use of a book by the church, for sensibly, those books that Christians were accustomed to hearing in worship, catechism, and teaching were in a strong position to eventuate their inclusion in the canon. On the basis of plentiful manuscript recoveries, translation into seven languages or dialects,[32] and the foregoing patristic testimony, this principle would seem like a slam-dunk in the favor of

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[31] McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 413.

[32] As previously noted in the introduction, the *Shepherd* was translated into two Latin editions, the earlier Vulgata and the later Palatine, as well as Ethiopic, Akhmimic and Sahidic Coptic, Middle Persian, Georgian, and perhaps Arabic as well. The Arabic translation is postulated, rather than evidenced in ancient manuscripts, as the source underlying the Georgian translation. For greater biographical details on the translations and relevant secondary scholarship, see Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, "The Egyptian *Hermas*: The *Shepherd* in Egypt before Constantine," in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 193-4; Osiek, Hermeneia, 2-3. See also above, p. 8 n.26.

the *Shepherd*'s case for canonicity. While some of the church fathers are indisputably more effusive in their favor toward Hermas's book, each of these copies, translations, and discussions of the text may be taken as admissions or silent attestations of the *Shepherd*'s currency. Even in the case of those who found reason to reject the *Shepherd*—Tertullian, Victorinus, Eusebius, and Athanasius, in his later years—their reprobations of the book remain as breadcrumbs tracing back to a vexing persistence or utility that attended it, necessitating their argumentation against the *Shepherd* in the first place. With the exception of Tertullian, these authors all simultaneously imagine or concede the paracanonical utility of Hermas's text, which Gamble has appropriately interpreted as an official concession toward standing Christian practice apparently beyond the control of the hierarchical church.[33] Of course, a far simpler and more compelling case for the *Shepherd*'s widespread use comes from the various other sources of evidence. Our surprisingly abundant Greek manuscript copies may all emanate from the Egyptian climate most conducive to their preservation, but wherever else the *Shepherd* is discussed among the church fathers—in Gaul by Irenaeus, in North Africa by Tertullian, in the Italian settings of *De Aleatoribus* and the fresco of the San Gennaro catacombs, and in Poetovio by Victorinus—we must assume that the conscious interest in dissemination internal to the text was reflected by the local existence of manuscripts copied for omnidirectional distribution.[34] Jerome's awareness that the *Shepherd* was read aloud in the churches of Greece, and similar admissions by Eusebius and Rufinus that lack

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[33] Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 236.

[34] As the woman Church herself encouraged Hermas; Herm. Vis. 2.4.2-3 (8.2-3).

locational qualifiers, complement the geographical and utilitarian data suggesting a very wide berth for Hermas's book, tempered only by occasional patristic disputation or caustic judgments that, with the benefit of 16 centuries of hindsight, appear more determinative than they actually were at the time.

However, the evidence cannot and should not be construed to imagine that the *Shepherd* maintained universal favor. The best interpretation of Origen's trepidation about using the *Shepherd* for support of his doctrinal musings after relocating to Palestine remains that no tradition of positive reception took root among Christian churches there.[35] The same could likely be the case for other locales where gaps exist in the attested data. Furthermore, Jerome claims that the *Shepherd* was virtually unknown in his day among Latins; however this statement is to be interpreted, it suggests at minimum that the value of the *Shepherd* may have waned over time in some places. The irregular qualifier sometimes appended to this criterion of widespread use, that an eligible text maintain *continuous* favor and be adaptable to new circumstances, may therefore pose problems for a book like the *Shepherd*.[36] And yet, greater specificity about how a criterion of widespread use might have actually been utilized only muddies the waters further. Metzger notes that in the hands of Jerome, both principles of antiquated and ongoing usage of texts were marshaled in different ways to justify the canonicity of Hebrews and Revelation, books with uncertain authors or questionable content.[37] Thus, a

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[35] Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, 66. Hahneman rightly notes that this need not entail an active rejection of the *Shepherd*, but rather "only that it was not received."

[36] McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 416.

[37] Metzger, 253.

claim of historical use may well have sufficed as the saving grace for books with a similar history of disputed favor as that of the *Shepherd*.

In the end, it seems that widespread use is another imperfect criterion weighed with no consistent basis for including or excluding Christian books. As Gamble and McDonald both concede, the *Shepherd* and several other books, from the *Didache* to *1 Clement* and more, can claim far deeper and greater historical use in the church than could some retained by their reputed authorship, such as 2 Peter, Jude, 2-3 John, and even Philemon.[38] Such an observation almost begs the hypothetical question that, if the established use of the *Shepherd* was not enough for it to achieve canonical inclusion, whether Hermas was simply too honest by using his own name. Might a pseudonymous claim or brazen apostolic declaration have ushered the *Shepherd* into the canon, or would his book still have run into problems due to the nature of its theological content?

D. Orthodoxy

In a critical period for the final stages of the canonical process, the second half of the fourth century, bishops and theologians of the church perceived themselves to be under tremendous threats. The Council of Nicaea had met and settled upon a creed counting Jesus, the Son, as co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father, but the votes of the bishops present at Nicaea in favor of this definition would not immediately translate into its worldwide acceptance. Athanasius could not shake the threat posed in his backyard by "Arianism," which challenged the doctrine of the Son and named Jesus as one of the created beings, and the so-called "Eusebians," who simultaneously threatened the Nicene

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[38] Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 71; McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 415.

formulation of Jesus and Athanasius's episcopate by aligning with "Arians." Other

threats to Athanasius's authority included a Melitian hierarchy laying claim to the

authentic orthodox church of Alexandria, independent, academic strands of Christian

philosophers, and a growing Egyptian movement away from the cities and into the desert,

forming the first anchoritic and cenobitic communities that resisted episcopal oversight.[39]

Furthermore, contemporaneous with these challenges, the production of systematic

heresiographies and other writings of a heresiological nature abounded.[40] In short, this

was a vital time for the definition of orthodoxy, by which is meant not little minutiae like

details of narrative events, which were always seen to contradict in certain ways, but the

important points. As McDonald notes—again, perhaps insisting on a particular thematic

criterion not warranted by every scripture under consideration—to be counted as

orthodox, the church had to believe that a work "reliably conveyed the essential message

of and about Jesus the Christ."[41] Not only did the *Shepherd* fail to support the Nicene

definition of Jesus, but as previously noted, it also neglects to mention Jesus Christ at all.

But even this was not enough to weaken Athanasius's early and typically Alexandrian

appreciation of the *Shepherd*, which he regarded a "most useful book" perfectly at home

alongside Moses and Paul at conveying authentic Christian principles. It was not until

Athanasius found that some of his many opponents—the Eusebians or Arians—were

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[39] David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3-4.

[40] As just one example: Shortly after Athanasius's death, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis on Cyprus, published the *Panarion*, where he described in gory detail 80 heretical sects that threatened orthodox Christianity like various ferocious beasts. His work still stands as the longest and most vitriolic heresiography in Christian history.

[41] McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 411.

interpreting the shepherd's Commandment 1 to argue for the creaturely status of the Son when he finally claimed the *Shepherd* to be outside of the canon. Roughly a decade later, in the famous Festal Letter of 367, Athanasius would explicitly enumerate the *Shepherd* as one of seven books "not canonized" by the "Fathers."

But Athanasius's determination against the *Shepherd* cannot strictly be characterized as a failure of the book itself to meet some standard of orthodoxy. Certainly, Tertullian's beef with the book was rooted in a dispute over the *Shepherd*'s perceived laxity with respect to adulterers, but neither Athanasius nor anyone else known to history shared in Tertullian's precise complaint against this doctrine of second repentance found in the shepherd's Commandment 4. And in spite of the reading I have offered above portraying Hermas's book as a subversive, praxis-oriented text inclined to convince its readers that salvation must be earned by a life of virtue, as soon as a few generations after its production, it was received in a surprisingly "orthodox" fashion. Irenaeus, for example, could imagine that Commandment 1 upheld nascent Trinitarian doctrine, and Clement of Alexandria affirmed the authentic prophetic quality of Hermas's revelations. Meanwhile, Origen allegorized from Hermas's visions to demonstrate an understanding of different levels of spiritual advance among believers, and an anonymous homilist appealed to the *Shepherd* to convince his audience to take action against the problem of gambling within Christian communities. Another intriguing piece of evidence is perhaps most disposed to convey this harmonizing principle: P.Oxy I.5, one of the first items unearthed and presented from Oxyrhynchus, contains a brief quote from Commandment 11 and then explains that the "prophetic spirit" spoken of by the shepherd

"is the body of the flesh of Jesus Christ that became intermingled with humanity through Mary."[42] This commentary's orthodox tendency should perhaps reflect upon Athanasius's similar early approbation of the *Shepherd*, for as John Barton convincingly explains, where a text has already been ascribed a certain value, even a "canonical" value (in the sense of canon 1), one tends to read and interpret it canonically. Put most simply, "what we read is in some measure the result of what we expect to read."[43] This value was shaken enough for Athanasius by the existence of an alternative, "heretical" interpretation of Commandment 1, aligning the *Shepherd* with doctrines he attributed to Arianism, that the book could be comfortably jettisoned from the canon and reduced to a catechetical plane.[44] The *Shepherd* was not itself inherently heretical, but it suffered exploitation by Athanasius's heretical opponents in a veritable cauldron of theological civil war, and would become a lamentable casualty of that war. Once again, we thus encounter another criterion that seems to be adequately formulated from patristic evidence and at home in

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[42] This fragment, which in 1898 was not linked with the *Shepherd* by Grenfell and Hunt, was then surmised as part of a "Christian homily or treatise on the spirit of prophecy." Though it dates to perhaps the late third or early fourth century, I have not included it in the earlier listing of Greek papyri for the *Shepherd* given that it is not simply a textual witness to Hermas's book itself, but since it rather comments on the text. The translation of the anonymous commentary is mine, and the quoted material from the *Shepherd* comes from Herm. Mand. 11.9-10 (43.9-10). See Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhnchus Papyri, Part I* (London: University of Oxford, 1898), 8-9; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31822028306702;view=1up;seq=30.

[43] John Barton, "Canon and Content," in *When Texts Are Canonized*, ed. Timothy H. Lim with Kengo Akiyama, Brown Judaic Studies 359 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2017), 89.

[44] As David Brakke explains, the placement of the *Shepherd* outside of the New Testament canon had side benefits for Athanasius. Rather than simply excising a book that permitted a creaturely construal of the Son of God that Athanasius connected to Arians and the Eusebians, he also sought to subvert the status that academic Christianity enjoyed by "replac[ing] the authority of human teachers and their doctrinal speculations with an unchanging record of what was taught by Christ, the sole teacher," whose instructions could be mediated only through the bishop. Athanasius, therefore, was targeting not only specific writings with his *fiat* proclamations of orthodoxy, but also the wider phenomena of religious individuation and democratization popular among those of a more scholarly, speculative bent. David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth 'Festal Letter,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 87.4 (Oct. 1994): 398-399.

the secondary literature, but which, when put to the test, contains very little explanatory value to account for a given text's exclusion. Though modern scholarship can easily look into a book like the *Shepherd* and find it theologically inconsistent and insufficient, if the ancients arrived at similar conclusions, their critiques were tabled and perhaps channeled into alternative characterizations of its deficiency. Meanwhile, where the *Shepherd* was long enjoyed, its readers apparently considered it an orthodox book.

Well intentioned though the devising of such canonical criteria may be, this brief investigation into the applicability of the criteria—though manifestly and consciously using them for a prescriptive purpose for which they were never intended—yet exposes their basic inadequacy. Scholars have been imprecise or incorrect to presume an active process of canonical delimitation on criterial logic, and have been even further off base when claiming that the criteria "came to be generally adopted during the course of the second century and were never modified thereafter."[45] The criteria, for example, leave it genuinely unclear where exactly the *Shepherd* has run afoul. Certainly, their perusal in this method highlights the *Shepherd*'s contested status in the early church, but the criteria are not necessary to unearth such obvious facts. No particular formula could determine whether the *Shepherd* was simply too frequently disputed as to attain canonical status. Those who oppose the text sometimes state their reasons, but nothing seems particularly decisive: they often grasp at whatever explanation may damage the *Shepherd*'s currency in their individual spheres of influence. In short, this test-case exposes a dead-end problem with the canonical criteria: of what use are they if they cannot bring clarity to the very phenomenon they purport to elucidate in a specific example?

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[45] Metzger, 254.

The Problematic Criteria and the Ecclesiastical-Political Dimension of Canon

Aside from the tangible difficulties of applying the criteria for canonicity in the case of a particular book, insisting on the validity of the criteria poses a number of general theoretical problems for an accounting of the canonical process that distract from, and take the place of, a more forensic understanding of the church's circuitous route to its current New Testament. This brief section attempts to explore and enumerate those problems before suggesting an alternative understanding of the canonical selection process that can guide the remainder of this dissertation's investigation into the extracanonicty of the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Among the problems are several difficulties in accepting the patristic evidence, the indistinct relative value of each criterion, the connotations or implications that a word like "criteria" impose upon the canonical process, and whether the criteria are posited for the inclusion or exclusion of texts.

The first general problem with the criteria for canonicity stems from the many caveats that Gamble, Metzger, and McDonald have already acknowledged. Though built from the occasional statements of the church fathers whose writings give us insight into the formation of the New Testament canon, the criteria are not systematic or even utilized in tandem in a singular patristic author. But most importantly, the criteria force scholars to accept, even to some discounted degree, the stated reasons from patristic authors for including or excluding a specific book. As Carolyn Osiek notes of the Muratorian Fragment, "The real reason for the rejection of Hermas in the list may be less the reasons stated than objections to its theological content."[46] Victorinus outwardly disallows the *Shepherd* from being read alongside the prophets because he accepts a closed twenty-four

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[46] Osiek, Hermeneia, 6.

book canon of the Old Testament, and also shuts out the book from a collection of "the apostles" because he frames the book as written "after their time." Yet he apparently welcomes the Wisdom of Solomon into the collection of "the apostles," which suggests a wrinkle in his own classification of texts. Furthermore, I have argued that if Victorinus is aware of the subject matter of the *Shepherd* and Hermas's claim to special revelation—and his willingness that the book be read in private suggests that he knew enough about the book to approve it for circumscribed private readings—he might have taken issue not with a particular construction of its authorial situation, but with the content of Hermas's prophecy, which offered no obvious connective tissue to the Old Testament that he regarded the bedrock and exemplar for New Testament scriptures. In this plausible construal of Victorinus's thought, fleshed out from his statements in the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, locating the *Shepherd* later in the second century may be nothing more than a superficial mask for his estimation of the text's doctrinal flaws. A parallel to Victorinus's handling of the *Shepherd* may be found in Eusebius as well, for difficulties attending the reputed author of Revelation did not deter Eusebius from committing significant ink to a defense of what he ultimately regarded a book orthonymously written by a Christian named John. In contrast, no such gymnastics were performed for the *Shepherd*; Eusebius merely allowed a disputation about its author to stand as the only reason condemning the book to the νοθοί, perhaps implying that if Eusebius was at all aware of the content of the *Shepherd*, it may have similarly rubbed him the wrong way. Such evasiveness is even entirely comprehensible, for rather than delving into thorny complaints about the *Shepherd*'s equivocality in comparison to other Christian traditions,

thereby granting Hermas's book a measure of credibility as a canonical contender, it was far simpler to dismiss the text on a technicality—even, in Victorinus's case, one possibly of his own creation. So to some degree, using the criteria requires scholars to suspend disbelief and take the church fathers at their word, even when they may have had tenable pretexts for roundabout or reticent dismissiveness.

Second, the multiple criteria are held aloft by scholars with no way to adjudicate among them or to know what the decisive factor might have been in the actual practice of canon formation. In spite of depicting the criteria as effectual upon the development of the canon, no formula can explain the selection of texts. Would a book be excluded simply for flouting too many of the criteria at the same time, and if so, what is the threshold for how many criteria must be transgressed? Or would the violation of one master criterion have spelled doom for a book? In the absence of a proper method for scrutinizing the criteria, such discussions inevitably devolve into varying estimations of the weightiest criterion, or the one most operative for inclusion or exclusion. Gamble, for instance, argues that "[w]hat counted the most was whether the church, in whole or large part, was accustomed to hearing the document read in the service of worship."[47] Ehrman, whose Doktorvater was Metzger, baldly concludes otherwise: "The most important criterion for proto-orthodox Christians deciding on the canon had to do with a book's theological character. To some extent, in fact, the other criteria were handmaidens to this one."[48] McDonald seems unable to arbitrate between these two options, expressing in the

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[47] Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 216.

[48] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scriptures and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 243.

same paragraph that the texts ultimately welcomed into the canon were those that best transmitted "the earliest Christian proclamation," and thus demanding that its content have an orthodox theological character, while also claiming that "the key to understanding the preservation and canonization of the books that make up our current NT is probably usage."[49] Other scholars can be inordinately swayed by individual pieces of the canonical puzzle, as when Schnabel privileges a book's "derivation from the prophets and the apostles" as one of the two "fundamental criteria for canonicity" due to its explicit citation in the Muratorian Fragment.[50] The end result of these contrasting emphases is only confusion, to the degree that interpreters trying to make sense of the criteria and describe a consensus among their scholarly wielders are left wanting. In different hands, each criterion can have been the most important of the three or four. In this way, scholars advocating the criteria inadvertently deteriorate their potency.

Related to these problems with the criteria of canonicity, a third observation, warranted by the manner in which the patristic authors exercise them, suggests that the criteria are properly principles for the *inclusion* of texts, and thus for identifying eligible *scriptural* texts, rather than canonical ones. For example, when Jerome defends Hebrews and Revelation given that they are "constantly read in the churches,"[51] this understandably conveys its own value, but it is unclear whether this constitutes a criterion that can be flipped to merit the exclusion of books not being read. This becomes

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[49] McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 421.

[50] Schnabel, 262. The second criterion that Schnabel prioritizes, public reading, also comes with backing from the Muratorian Fragment's discussion of the *Shepherd*.

[51] *Ep.* 129; see Metzger, 253.

particularly problematic for the current generation of scholarship, which has defined

canon in terms of the exclusive list of books comprised in the church's Bible, and yet

carries over criteria of inclusion to adjudicate its contents. It is not enough to say that the

texts left out failed to meet some standard of inclusion, and were simply apostolic but not

apostolic enough, or read aloud in liturgies but not read frequently enough, for again it

begs the question to explicate the measure by which a given text has fallen short and been

excluded. The criteria may be capable of informing us why a random writing that might

be found in a compendium of ancient papyri from the age of canonical texts—that is,

from before 175 CE[52]—was not included in the biblical canon, but they say very little

definitively about contested texts that had both celebrants and detractors. Timothy Lim

has very recently offered a similar appraisal of criterial logic in the development of the

Hebrew Scriptures as a canon. Though the criteria long championed among Judaic

scholars understandably differ from those bearing on the study of Christian origins, Lim

offers compelling clarity that applies equally to the New Testament canon:

> I suggest that the books of the canon were not selected according to a set of
> criteria. One cannot explain by a set of standards or norms why one book is
> chosen over another book. I avoid the terminology of "criteria" and its
> connotation of an external standard. The canonical process was multifaceted
> and complex, both in the way that each community formulated its own
> understanding of authoritative scriptures and in the rationale implied in the
> selection.[53]

The specific solutions that Lim offers tend to deviate from relevance for the New

Testament canon, given their rootedness in the historical narrative of ancient Israel.

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[52] As R. W. Moberly explains, this was the *terminus ante quem* for Hal Taussig's recent project, *A New New Testament*. R. W. Moberly, "Canon and Religious Truth," in Lim and Akiyama, 114.

[53] Timothy H. Lim, "An Indicative Definition of the Canon," in Lim and Akiyama, 1.

However, he also articulates general principles that may be useful for the construction of a wider theory of canonicity, a task that is not necessitated here.[54] For now, it is sufficient to observe that a long scholarly tradition of constructing canonical processes by criterial logic has come under critique for its inability to speak specifically about the selection of canonical texts. Fresh alternatives might be well served to postulate the development of canon on other grounds.

Finally, the troublesome consistency with which scholars have continued to imagine canonical formation along criterial logic has artificially reified the criteria as valid and has tended to distract fellow interpreters from more fruitful lines of inquiry. Undoubtedly, we must assume that the church underwent some canonical process of including and weeding out texts, but the former likely transpired in a largely unconscious fashion, through a method of more or less silent assent to received precedent, and the latter may have occurred only on the irregular occasion that textual boundaries came in need of policing, a matter that would have been handled preferably under shrouded circumstances. Perhaps this problem of scholarly depiction can be traced back to the language used for the canonical process: active verbs, including but not limited to "canonize," are suggestive of action—action undertaken in some traceable fashion by the

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[54] Lim argues, for example, that "the search for criteria should give way to a different way of thinking, an indicative logic that is nonessentialist." Rather than assuming that the canon exalts a distinct set of texts with unique attributes, he suggests that "family resemblances" likely exist between texts that were included in the canon and others that were not. Functionally, Lim points to the persistent communal approval of smaller sets of texts that satisfied needs of internal belonging and maintenance, while also noting how external forces also acted on the in-group, which in response emphasized its distinctiveness in new ways. Importantly, Lim marshals Josephus's depiction of the Hebrew Scriptures in *Against Apion* as evidence for the canon in the first century CE, but when Josephus attempts to distinguish the twenty-two approved texts from extrabiblical ones on a spectrum of trustworthiness, "the sense in which they are less trustworthy is not explained." The upshot here is that canon may not always be explicable by reason, and instead leans heavily on communal decisions undertaken without needing to be defended. Lim, 24; 17.

leaders of the church. Certainly, Athanasius attempts to authenticate his New Testament

list as "canonized" (κανονιζόμενα) and depict the seven enumerated books, including the

Shepherd, as "not canonized" (οὐ κανονιζόμενα), but he appeals back to an uncertain

authority in an attempt to lend credibility to his schematization of the books.[55] And yet,

concrete actions rising to the level of "canonize" simply cannot be found.[56] While it is

manifestly obvious that we have a New Testament canon that developed by means of

some internal process, it is less obvious that it was actively "canonized" in a manner

effective for the whole church. Moreover, the linguistics of "criteria" are attended by

unearned implications of an open-ended, impartial, and unbiased juridical process—as if

the church hierarchy applied them coolly and even-handedly to a giant list of contending

texts, perhaps in an open forum with authentic debate, discussion, and voting. While no

one argues for this as the historical actuality, the modern connotations of a word like

"criteria" can never be too far from the mind of a student or reader encountering the

criterial logic as it has been routinely expressed. Just as "canonize" may unduly stretch

the evidence, so too might "criteria" be preferably avoided absent a better restatement of

their subjectivity and occasionality. Perhaps they may be downgraded from "criteria" to

"factors" sometimes voiced by the church fathers to justify their intermittent decision-

making, rather than insinuating their timeless existence as constituent elements of an

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[55] So Gallagher and Meade: "Athanasius's failure to cite any documentation suggests that he was not basing himself on a catalogue previously set down in writing." Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 127.

[56] Though canonical collections are sometimes attached to councils or synods, such as Laodicea and Carthage in the fourth century, these have an uncertain value: not only are their collections incomplete, but the degree to which they can be construed as bearing upon the wider church is very slim indeed. McDonald, "Appendix D: Lists and Catalogs of New Testament Collections," in McDonald and Sanders, 595. The sixteenth century Council of Trent certainly lies beyond the scope of consideration here.

objective and conscious exercise. Described in these terms, the caveats about inconsistent applications of the criteria will ring less hollow, and the presumption of a canonical process that no scholar can adequately describe will take a backseat to a more sober handling of the evidence.

Furthermore, we might again stress the final canon, that "definitive, closed list of the books that constitute the authentic contents of scripture,"[57] not as the result of organic development, divine selection, or a providential imposition upon the church by fortune, but as stemming from an authoritarian impulse to define and codify. Canon is at first a matter of power and authority to restrict, and secondarily a function of the strength of a harmonious coalition. As Johann Semler recognized in the 18th century, the canon was a "consensus agreement between bishops,"[58] and that consensus could be freely joined, even by non-episcopal elites, where concord was privileged, or perhaps disputed, directly or indirectly, where different preferences were in order. To choose but one example, Codex Sinaiticus maintained a scriptural collection different from that of Athanasius in the fourth century, but the final canon was more aligned with Athanasius on the strength of his celebration in the halls of episcopal power.[59] This, then, is the depiction of the canon operative on the remainder of this dissertation: beyond the closed, exclusive list of books alone, canon should be regarded as an ecclesiastical and political instrument,

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[57] Ulrich, "The Notion and Definition of Canon," 34.

[58] Schnabel, 255. Schnabel's article, which outwardly professes to present the "state of research" on the Muratorian Fragment, yet adequately covers the pre-criterial history of canon in primarily German scholarship, stretching from Semler and Baur to Zahn and Harnack, and finally through von Campenhausen and Markschies.

[59] Bart D. Ehrman, "The New Testament Canon of Didymus the Blind," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37.1 (1983): 19.

constructed by human agency over a complex process of development, restricting the books to be used for theological argumentation and the construction of doctrine and praxis. The final canon was never voted upon or agreed upon by all, but instead was ratified historically by a sort of episcopal "gentleman's handshake," and the wider church largely participated in the consensus unconsciously, thanks to the weight of standing tradition. Scriptural books from the early centuries of Christianity, ranging from the surest gospel to the *Shepherd* of Hermas, may only be described as on a canonical trajectory by virtue of the aforementioned factors and their patristic reception. But significantly, the factors cannot tell us *why* a book on such a trajectory was ultimately excluded—alternative explanatory methods must be traced, as best as possible, by evidence that conforms to an understanding of canon as an ecclesiastical power move.

2.   Why Not the *Shepherd*? Previous Observations on the Canonical Question

One matter remains before this dissertation may proceed, for if we are attempting to elucidate a reason or reasons why the *Shepherd* was omitted from the final New Testament canon, it is reasonable to take a closer look at prior scholarly observations related to the question. Some attention has been paid to the issue in the last generation or so of scholarship, not yet at the monograph or dissertation level, but in book chapters and journal articles, and not necessarily asking the exact, direct question but touching on both the *Shepherd* and the canon, as to warrant a brief literature review. This analysis benefits tremendously from a recent survey article by Batovici, wherein he observes that scholarship interested in the *Shepherd* of Hermas—whether from angles related more to

patristic reception, papyrology, or canonical studies—all tends to "oscillate between a maximal and a minimal approach" to the questions of canonicity and scripture. Scholars, he notes, often emphasize one side of the multivalent evidence, sometimes with specious argumentation, to fit an interpretation of the *Shepherd* as exceptionally well received on the one hand or only questionably scriptural on the other.[60] Conservative scholarship prefers the testimony, for example, of Tertullian, the Muratorian Fragment, Eusebius, and Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter, and often deploys these negative judgments against the *Shepherd* as a means to decipher what otherwise seems like evidence for its positive reception in early Christianity. Moreover, a similar move favoring instances of the *Shepherd*'s curious positive reception trends toward the opposite pole of stressing its "canonical standing in the first four centuries, even if only locally, or temporarily."[61] Batovici himself prefers to recognize that though Hermas's book was probably considered scriptural in certain places and times, evidence to establish its status as canonical is thin and should point scholars toward a more fruitful study of Christian texts occupying this "secondary space."[62] This postulation of "secondary space" constitutes a sustained theme in Batovici's various articles on the *Shepherd*, from the question of canon to the interpretation of its placement in Codex Sinaiticus. Moreover, it fits his framing of this review article, where he expresses an interest in the biblical "fringes" and finds that a survey of such scholarship on the *Shepherd* may lead us to a better

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[60] Dan Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon: A Review Article," *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 34.1 (2017): 104. Given that this brief literature review does not cover every scrap of scholarly attention to the *Shepherd* in the last generation, but has attempted to address the most relevant pieces, I highly recommend Batovici's article as further background material and context.

[61] Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 104.

[62] Ibid., 105.

understanding of similar authoritative, but non-canonical, Christian scriptures.[63] Though Batovici's review adequately covers the *status quaestionis*, he offers no new proposals all the while issuing warnings worthy of consideration. The opinions he surveys cover the gamut: for some, the *Shepherd* was a popular text, and even where it was opposed, this attests to its authority, whereas for others, the New Testament was an exclusionary body of more stable texts not likely to have welcomed the plainly catechetical *Shepherd*. Most prominently, however, Batovici characterizes the *Shepherd* as rightfully prominent among the books that straddled the fence of early Christian scriptural appreciation, thereby strengthening its location in the canonical margins and demanding further research into the question at hand.

It might be said that Antonio Carlini kicked off the recent wave of scholarship into the *Shepherd*'s extracanonical fate, though such interest has been admittedly sporadic and disconnected since 1986. Each of the scholars surveyed here approached questions of the *Shepherd* and the canon from their unique perspectives, sometimes not precisely attempting to offer an answer for its extracanonicity but instead examining the relevant issues and data, with an intention to spur additional research. As Carlini, a textual specialist and orthographer, worked in a period that saw the publication of several new manuscript recoveries for the *Shepherd*, he was particularly drawn to understanding how such a book that appeared into the fourth century to be a "candidata alla canonizzazione" was thereafter reduced to the sidelines of the canon and, eventually,

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[63] Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 89.

virtually expunged in its native language.[64] Carlini pairs a review of the papyri and other manuscripts for the *Shepherd* with an abbreviated reception history, where he displays less interest in the canonical implications of the negative judgments from Tertullian, the Muratorian Fragment, and Eusebius than might be expected. In each case, Carlini argues that their opinions had no significant effect on the expansive textual tradition for the *Shepherd*, and the latter two concede the value of reading the text. He can therefore claim as follows: "Fino alla metà del sec. IV in Oriente e in Occidente il *Pastore* non ha incontrato veri ostacoli di ordine censorio nel suo cammino tradizionale."[65] Its inclusion in Codex Sinaiticus is thus perfectly explicable from a lengthy tradition of Egyptian use of the text. Only when he arrives at the testimony of Athanasius does Carlini find that a restriction against the *Shepherd* could have plausibly intervened on the textual proliferation that had continued apace especially since the third century. He notes:

> Il *Pastore* dalla testimonianza di Atanasio appare potenzialmente pericoloso perché sfruttabile dagli eretici. La *Sinossi pseudoatanasiana* omette sia la *Didachè* che il *Pastore*, dandoci una ragione per credere che l'esclusione di queste opere dalle liste scritturali sia avvenuta in epoca non molto lontana dalla morte di Atanasio.[66]

Without recourse to Athanasius's famous 39th Festal Letter, Carlini thus lays out a plausible case that the Alexandrian bishop may have been a critical figure in the disruption of the *Shepherd* of Hermas's canonical trajectory. The *Decretum Gelasianum*'s prescription against the *Shepherd* as an apocryphal book then stands as an

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[64] Antonio Carlini, "Tradizione Testuale e Prescrizioni Canoniche: Erma, Sesto, Origene," *Orpheus* 7.1 (1986): 42.

[65] Ibid., 44.

[66] Ibid., 45.

even more final and decisive blow against its favor, for here there would be no secondary approbation of the *Shepherd* "come testo utile all'edificazione spirituale"[67]—it would henceforth only be useful for schismatics and heretics. Though Carlini pays some attention to the Latin survival of the *Shepherd*, he suggests that its disuse or sparse use was indicative of a "sort of Karst phenomenon" of underground growth from the dissolved remains of previous overt appreciation that, though it may have precipitated a lively manuscript history in Latin texts, had little effect on the shape of the canon.[68] That ship had already sailed by the fifth century, when the formative authorities of the Latin church agreed more or less to the canonical boundaries that left Hermas and his *Shepherd* on the sidelines.[69]

Four years later, in 1990, Philippe Henne pursued a more exhaustive reception history of the *Shepherd* that yet suffered from the pitfalls of the credulous acceptance of the Muratorian Fragment. Following many decades of credulous scholarship, Henne placed the Fragment near the end of the second century, and he could therefore portray the Western fortunes of Hermas's book as sunken by a tendentious cooperative effort of the Fragment and Tertullian, one which had a quite generalizable negative impact on the *Shepherd* in its backyard. So Henne can aver,

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[67] Carlini, "Tradizione Testuale e Prescrizioni Canoniche," 47.

[68] Ibid.; I have taken the liberty here to translate Carlini's "una sorta di fenomeno carsico."

[69] See, for example, how Prosper repudiates Cassian for using the *Shepherd* of Hermas, as well as Augustine's admission to Jerome that he has "learned to respect and honour only those books of the Scriptures now referred to as canonical." Augustine, *Ep.* 82; translation per Carolinne White, *The Correspondence (394-419) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo*, Studies in Bible and Early Christianity 23 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 146.

Les chrétiens n'étaient cependant pas dupes de cette confusion hâtive.[70] La plupart d'entre eux avaient entendu parler d'Hermas et de son frère Pie. Ils savaient que ce long traité de pénitence n'était pas comme les autres livres liturgiques composés par les prophètes ou les apôtres.[71]

The testimony of the Muratorian Fragment thus becomes not the argument of its author, but of its environment—extending, apparently, to one half of the Christian world in the early church—where it was regularly received as a text foreign to those read officially in worship ceremonies. Henne is particularly fond of conceptualizing the *Shepherd* as finding a home in "les petits groupes," family settings, or for catechetical instruction only, and paints with an unnecessarily broad brush when he claims that "le *Pasteur* quitte l'église pour se réfugier dans les foyers."[72] The Eastern, Greek-speaking fortune of the *Shepherd* receives its own historical telling, where Henne emphasizes an abrupt fall for the book after Athanasius ruled it outside his canon: but for Didymus the Blind, the favor enjoyed by Hermas's book in Greek audiences "sombre alors brusquement dans la nuit de l'oubli."[73] Its survival, he notes, comes completely in translation to Latin, Ethiopic, Coptic, and so on, relegating the *Shepherd* to vernacular languages and fitting his understanding of Hermas's text as instructive in the home or moral life rather than the church and its theological life. Back in the West, Henne characterizes the brief revival and long but stunted afterlife of the *Shepherd* as part of a tendency to rediscover Greek theology—in this context, he lumps together the testimonies of figures ranging from

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[70] Henne refers here to the prior favor and public reading of the *Shepherd* in worship ceremonies and liturgical assemblies, which otherwise conferred a measure of clout on the book.

[71] Philippe Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," *Revue Thomiste* 90.1 (1990): 89.

[72] Ibid., 89; 100.

[73] Ibid., 95.

Jerome to John Cassian to Bede, and also references the later Palatine Latin translation

and its persistence in Western manuscripts. Henne's general impression about the

Shepherd suggests that its history is less one of exclusion from the canon, but of settling

in a more or less rightful place as a moral, but non-scriptural and certainly non-canonical,

"manuel de vie chrétienne."[74] Henne does, however, maintain a sense that the *Shepherd*

was weighed down and perhaps abandoned due to its deficient theological character, at

least in comparison with more meaningful texts. Perhaps with Athanasius in mind, he

concluded, "On imagine la méfiance des autorités à l'égard d'un apocryphe que le succès

avait porté au cœur du Canon. Il valait mieux que cette œuvre disparût de peur qu'elle ne

détournât les chrétiens des vraies Écritures."[75] With conceptions like the "heart of the

Canon" and "true Scriptures," Henne relegates the *Shepherd* to the scriptural periphery,

and, much like McDonald, makes silent demands of the content of Christian writ that

belie the ability of ancient Christians to harmonize texts that they otherwise consider

valuable.

In contrast with these more forensic and deductive investigations of the

Shepherd's favor and disfavor in the early centuries, J. Christian Wilson was comparably

more willing to consider alternative reasoning for the *Shepherd*'s extracanonicity. In one

chapter of his polyvalent study of issues related to the *Shepherd*, Wilson pondered its

exclusion and settled on a three-strike scheme. For him, Hermas's book was plagued at

first by issues of questionable apostolicity and "overall theological ineptitude," for which

he cites the conflicting Christologies extant in the Parables and the shepherd's allowance

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[74] Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," 89.

[75] Ibid., 100.

of postbaptismal repentance, a tension that he contends could not have coexisted in the

same canon with Hebrews 6:1-6.[76] For his third strike, Wilson fully gravitated toward

inductive reasoning and claimed that the *Shepherd* could not have stood in the canon

because of its tremendous length in comparison with the more valuable theological founts

of the gospels and epistles.

> It seems altogether probable to me that the third and fourth century fathers,
> when they looked at the emerging New Testament canon as a whole, would
> strongly wonder whether a book of as questionable theological value as the
> Shepherd of Hermas would deserve the amount of space in a New Testament
> manuscript that its sheer length would require.[77]

Only the first of these strikes leans on the testimony of a piece of evidence stated by the

church fathers, and it comes from the Muratorian Fragment that Wilson is otherwise quite

ready to approach with suspicion over its evidentiary value.[78] Moreover, the supposed

third strike, which Wilson later reiterates as determinative for the *Shepherd*'s

extracanonicity,[79] locates the decisive reason in the realm of book production, when in

fact pandect Bibles were exceptionally rare in antiquity and, as he admits, one of them

did include the *Shepherd*. Wilson follows his three strikes with a curious and disjointed

reception history, with odd statements like an insistence that "after Tertullian the

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[76] J. Christian Wilson, *Five Problems in the Interpretation of the Shepherd of Hermas: Authorship,
Genre, Canonicity, Apocalyptic, and the Absence of the Name 'Jesus Christ'* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen
Biblical Press, 1995), 54. This proposal retains some potential validity and should not be dismissed outright,
but Wilson does not undertake an in-depth analysis in order to show why, for example, this scriptural
contradiction could not stand canonically while others could. Future research could elaborate on the instinct
to compare the two books on this point, including how the competing perspectives of Hebrews and the
Shepherd of Hermas toward instances of apostasy might relate to later disagreements from rigorists,
Melitians, or other groups insisting on strict terms for lapsed Christians during times of persecution.

[77] Wilson, 55.

[78] Ibid., 10-13; 63 n.26.

[79] Ibid., 70.

Shepherd of Hermas virtually disappears from the canon in the West."[80] Such an assertion presumes that canon, apparently in a canon-2 sense, existed as an idea in the early third century, and discounts other evidence pointing at the *Shepherd*'s continued scriptural status in the West, from the sermon *De Aleatoribus* to the San Gennaro fresco.[81] Perhaps Wilson privileges Tertullian's judgment because he considers his testimony indicative of the initiation of a third and final stage of his canonical schematization, a shift from earlier inclusiveness to rejection of books.[82] Though Wilson's ultimate conclusion has been met with appropriate skepticism and critique,[83] he deserves credit for approaching the question with an openness to alternative explanations not entirely reliant on the traditional criteria and for attempting to account for the *Shepherd*'s exclusion in light of the paucity of patristic evidence on which to formulate solid hypotheses.

Carolyn Osiek dedicated a comparatively smaller introductory subsection of her excellent *Hermeneia* commentary on the *Shepherd* (1999) to its reception and canonicity. Unlike others, Osiek emphasizes the brief, occasional mentions of the *Shepherd* among

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[80] Wilson, 65.

[81] See also the brief catalog of Western users after Tertullian, in Osiek, Hermeneia, 4.

[82] Curiously, however, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, the latter of whom he considers the bastion of canonical inclusivity, wrote at perhaps the same time. Wilson does not reckon with this chronological aspect of his canonical scheme, and placing Irenaeus after Clement and Tertullian after Origen seem like thoroughly ham-fisted choices meant to fit a predetermined order of events. In this light, Wilson's approach to canon is (without citing anyone in particular) to postulate three stages, one of inclusivity, another of transition from inclusivity to exclusivity, when canonical criteria emerge, and a final stage of exclusivity. For Wilson, these are roughly chronological, and yet the placement of Tertullian in the third stage violates even the vague outlines that he has devised. Wilson's analysis is beset with further problems, as when he concludes by claiming that the exclusion of the *Shepherd* from the canon was "a good choice." Wilson, 55-6; 72.

[83] See David Ian Baker, "*The Shepherd of Hermas*: A Socio-Rhetorical and Statistical-Linguistic Study of Authorship and Community Concerns," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, Cardiff, 2006), 17.

lesser-known authors of the church to indicate its generally scriptural, but sometimes

contested, status in a manner that augments the usual varying testimonies of Clement,

Tertullian, Origen, and others.[84] Early Christians with rigorist tendencies, she notes,

could sometimes find agreement with Hermas and the *Shepherd*, or they could reject the

book for not being rigorist enough. Yet, "there is no doubt that at some times and places,

Hermas was considered both scripture, that is, inspired, and canonical, part of the rule of

faith sanctioned for liturgical use."[85] In spite of this early positive appraisal of the

Shepherd, Osiek finds that later Christians steadily trended toward "canonical rejection,"

even though a place was eventually carved out for the book in private circles. She offers

no concrete reasons why the book may have fallen out of favor, and failed to bridge the

divide between canon 1 and canon 2, observing only that Eastern sources dry up after the

seventh century, and Western citations of the book survive thereafter only in elite circles.

Though she references the distinct condemnation of the *Decretum Gelasianum* in the

sixth century, its effectiveness on the reception of the *Shepherd*, which scribes yet

continued to reproduce in the Middle Ages, has been difficult to determine. No reasons

are therefore postulated for the ultimate canonical disfavor that Hermas's book acquired;

she simply remarks that the *Shepherd* was most appreciated in Egypt, and that

consternation with unspecified theological issues could lie behind, for example, the

Muratorian Fragment's dismissal of the *Shepherd* from its canon. Unlike Henne and

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[84] Osiek, Hermeneia, 4-5. Among the lesser-known sources for the *Shepherd*'s reception are Hippolytus, Commodian, and the Nag Hammadi Coptic *Apocalypse of Peter*.

[85] Osiek, Hermeneia, 5. Here she follows a canon 1 definition of canon.

others, Osiek maintains no presumption that the *Shepherd* had longstanding value in solely moral or catechetical circles.

Moving into the present century, papyrologists Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge sought to understand the factors contributing to the *Shepherd*'s popularity in the early church, especially as revealed by its Egyptian papyri. Along the way, they assert categorically that to pursue why the *Shepherd* was ultimately extracanonical, or whether it achieved canonical standing for any Christians at all, is to ask "the wrong question," for it "cannot withstand methodological scrutiny, as the concept of canonicity is debatable and elastic."[86] Not only can we not follow this path, but they even seem to doubt that the *Shepherd* was ever considered scripture by early Christians at all, as they are only willing to concede that its most favored patristic sources cited Hermas "*as if* he had the authority of scripture."[87] If the question of canonicity were truly unwarranted, then it behooves explanation how, for Victorinus, Eusebius, and Athanasius, the *Shepherd* always appears precisely at the canonical boundary. Furthermore, their survey of patristic reception passes over the instances where Irenaeus probably and the sermon *De Aleatoribus* certainly grant the *Shepherd* scriptural status, opting instead to portray Hermas's text as a curiously popular writing that somehow attached itself to Christian books. In spite of casting shade on the question of canonicity, Choat and Yuen-Collingridge yet seem determined to weigh in on the matter, as when they offer that "the evidence strongly suggests [Hermas] was not" regarded as canonical.[88] As Batovici has also noticed, such

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[86] Choat and Yuen-Collingridge, "The Egyptian *Hermas*," 191.

[87] Ibid., 192; emphasis theirs.

[88] Ibid., 197.

statements stick out as inappropriate and even "questionable," as the authors present no real reason for their determination and have apparently eschewed any attempt at methodological rigor for a more indulgent injection of opinion.[89] Despite this suspect logic, their article and the question they investigate does maintain relevance for the *Shepherd*'s ultimate status. While they consider data from the manuscripts themselves, their format, and the text's ascetic content—that the *Shepherd* meaningfully survived at any degree of completion in its original language, it must be recognized, is thanks to the monastic stewardship of Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Athous—Choat and Yuen-Collingridge conclude that the book was always intended only for catechesis and little more. "The high rate of survival of the Shepherd is in part likely due to its prominent place within the catechetical system at a time, (the third and fourth century) at which the Christian community in Egypt was undergoing rapid expansion."[90] To some extent, the catechetical function of the *Shepherd* stimulated an interest in manuscript production for personal use as well, but the institutional role in catechesis "best explains its dramatic attestation in early Christian world [*sic*] . . . as Hermas has the mysteries of the world explained to him, so they were explained to the catechumens."[91] To be sure, Athanasius deals with the *Shepherd* and other texts he regards as "not canonized" in this fashion, and Eusebius stresses the value of Hermas's book for Christians in need of "elementary instruction," but Choat and Yuen-Collingridge's attempt to read this situation back into

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[89] Thus Batovici notes, "from the data presented in their paper one could easily argue that at least for some Christians *Hermas* was most likely 'canonical,' by simply moving the emphasis on the Patristic authors who are said to have used it 'as if he had the authority of scripture.'" Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 93-4.

[90] Choat and Yuen-Collingridge, 202; parenthetical insertion in original.

[91] Ibid., 203.

Tertullian or to portray it as the universal understanding for the book seems unwarranted. In reality, we have no solid hints toward an assignment for the *Shepherd* solely in a catechetical sphere until the fourth century, and it may be just as likely that this scheme was the episcopal compromise contrived for a book that proved obnoxiously popular in spite of their elite misgivings. In such a light, the question of canonicity remains valid and can easily assimilate a reformulated version of their proposal about the abundant papyri in the Egyptian *afsh*.[92] For the authors do not attempt to explain why catechetical use or status would prohibit inclusion in the New Testament; it must be assumed that canonical texts like Matthew were *also* catechetical, and therefore these supposed categories cannot be universally construed as mutually exclusive, to the probable chagrin of Athanasius. In fact, such a proposal might even lead back to the evidence for Didymus's exegetical practices, where the *Shepherd* of Hermas is certainly scripturally interpreted on par with other canonical Christian texts,[93] and possibly would have featured in a canon drawn up by the Alexandrian catechetical headmaster, had he been so inclined.

A more curious method by which the status of the *Shepherd* of Hermas has recently been called into question comes from the subdiscipline of text criticism and the

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[92] Batovici, while expressing his intrigue at their suggestion that the *Shepherd* was "an enhanced catechetical text," presciently recognizes that Choat and Yuen-Collingridge's proposal "points more to a *how* rather than *why*" as to the question of the *Shepherd*'s popularity. Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 93 n.18.

[93] Here I lean on Bart Ehrman's classic article about Didymus's canon of scripture (see pp. 125-6 above), though I also accept Batovici's critique that Ehrman more precisely provides evidence for the canon 1 attitudes of Didymus. Ehrman himself admits, however, that Didymus's Toura commentaries do not replace a fully exclusive canon 2, and therefore we cannot exhaustively determine the boundaries of Didymus's canon. See Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 92-3; Ehrman, "The New Testament Canon of Didymus the Blind," 2-6.

reactionary scholarship that Bart Ehrman has engendered from conservative circles. In a

contribution chiefly interested to refute assertions of instability and scribal corruption to

the text of the New Testament, K. Martin Heide introduced the *Shepherd* into his

argument as a comparative text by which to illustrate the higher degree of textual

reliability found among canonical books. As regards the *Shepherd*, Heide's method

compared some of the larger extant papyri and Codex Sinaiticus against the fifteenth-

century Codex Athous and found that for Hermas's book, "the average text lability of 14

percent is … almost twice as large as that of the New Testament," by which he means

selected portions of the New Testament that avoid more problematic passages like

Romans 15-16.[94] In spite of his earlier caution that his calculation of textual stability

"merely states how much has changed during an extended period of time, not when, how,

and for what reasons,"[95] Heide pivots from his demonstrations of comparative stability to

fashion conclusions with canonical implications:

> According to some church fathers, the *Shepherd of Hermas* had a quasi-
> canonical position. Despite its high popularity at the time, it was not copied as
> precisely as the New Testament writings. . . . Although the *Shepherd of
> Hermas* in the Codex Sinaiticus was linked to some degree to the canonical
> writings (which surely increased its esteem), it cannot, thus, be concluded that
> the *Shepherd of Hermas* had scriptural authority equal to other writings of the
> New Testament. A further point worth mentioning is that the earliest
> manuscripts of the *Shepherd of Hermas* from the second century (P.Michigan
> 130; P.Oxy 4706) were written on scrolls and not bound in the form of the
> codex, as is the case with the earliest known New Testament manuscripts.
> Theological discourses and excerpts were also written on scrolls; the Codex

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[94] K. Martin Heide, "Assessing the Stability of the Transmitted Texts of the New Testament and
the *Shepherd of Hermas*," in *The Reliability of the New Testament: Bart D. Ehrman and Daniel B. Wallace
in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 146.

[95] Ibid., 134.

style, however, was the prevalent technique of writing among canonically relevant manuscripts.[96]

Heide makes several interpretive missteps within this paragraph. First, though his investigation of the *Shepherd* starts from well-trodden observations[97] that its text frequently suffered scribal improvements to its low Koine diction,[98] he yet frames them as impinging upon its status. Thus, not only was the *Shepherd* merely "linked to some degree" to canonical books, and not esteemed on its own basis, but its textual instability also reckoned it among a secondary class of sub-New Testamental books. As with Wilson above, Heide grasps onto a textual rationale for the exclusion of the *Shepherd* with no substance in patristic writings and which, given that it relies on the late Byzantine Codex Athous for the calculation that supports its "instability," could not have possibly risen to the attention of the ecclesiastical decision-makers of the fourth century. Furthermore, Heide is mistaken to use the general preference recognized among early Christians for the codex as a definitive marker of the canon. Though other conservative scholars sometimes join him and cite this as an obelus against the *Shepherd*'s status,[99] Batovici has rightly pointed out that not only does the *Shepherd* also appear overwhelmingly in codex format among its manuscript recoveries, but this also cannot become a generalized canonical

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[96] Heide, "Assessing the Stability of the Transmitted Texts," 147-8.

[97] For example, see James S. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: Social Order and Hierarchy in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 22.

[98] Heide, "Assessing the Stability of the Transmitted Texts," 151-2. As Heide readily admits, the textual alterations to the *Shepherd* are, by and large, decorative or linguistically motivated and do not "change the general meaning of its text."

[99] Charles E. Hill, "'The Writing Which Says …' *The Shepherd* of Hermas in the Writings of Irenaeus," *Studia Patristica LXV: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 128 n.2.

principle without inadvertently affecting one's judgment about some New Testament texts as well.[100] On the whole, Heide's is a dubious portrait of the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Though he concedes that the emendations to the text rarely changed its meaning to a substantial degree, he yet speculates that its noncanonical or apocryphal rank may have opened it to wanton scribal revision.[101] Heide's study is not wholly without value, in that it contributes quantitative support to long-standing scholarly observations of an imperfectly preserved *Shepherd*, but these would be better served if they instigated alternative directions for research, such as what effects its post-Sinaiticus extracanonicity may have had on the text's instable preservation or whether the same observation can be replicated in the book's better-attested Latin Vulgata translation.

Finally and most recently, David Nielsen dedicated a short chapter of an edited volume to the *Shepherd*'s importance in the early church, and particularly to what its reception might tell us about the timing of the New Testament canon's formation. As Batovici noted, Nielsen advances no particularly new interpretation of the *Shepherd* itself or factors weighing on its patristic reception, and leans heavily on the presentation of Osiek's *Hermeneia* volume. To an extent, Nielsen offers a "bird's eye survey" on the value of the *Shepherd* in early Christianity,[102] but to his credit, Nielsen takes seriously the problems that the reception of Hermas's text poses to any conception that the canon was complete or finalized in the second century. In spite of his mostly reasoned handling of

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[100] Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 95.

[101] Heide, "Assessing the Stability of the Transmitted Texts," 152. As he elsewhere adds in a bout of circular logic, the *Shepherd* was only copied "capriciously" because no robust scribal tradition was built up around the accurate preservation of the text.

[102] Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 103 n.75.

the evidence—for example, he observes that the *Shepherd* was functionally authoritative or scriptural for many in the early centuries, that its favor ranks it above some of the lesser letters ultimately included in the canon, and that church fathers often critiqued Hermas "out of personal theological agendas and not necessarily from an inherent flaw in the text"—Nielsen yet accepts the criterial logic for canonicity and finds that the *Shepherd* was predominantly aligned with the criteria.[103] However, though he considers it a "worthy study," Nielsen does not attempt to solve the puzzle of the *Shepherd*'s extracanonicity; instead, for him, the excluded book indicates that the New Testament meaningfully took shape "in the fourth, not the second, century."[104] Among the various interpretations of patristic data that lead Nielsen to this conclusion are his sense that the Muratorian Fragment's testimony about the *Shepherd* contains more fiction than fact; here he leans heavily on Hahneman and Sundberg, while apparently remaining unaware of Armstrong's Victorinan hypothesis. Nevertheless, in Nielsen's view, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, though now canonically marginal, should be excavated from its obscurity and explored more rigorously in order to home in on the factors that produced the final boundaries of the canon. Though itself relegated to the historical sidelines, the *Shepherd*'s rejection belies an outsized relevance for deducing the untold story of the New Testament canon.

When taking stock of the last generation or so of scholarship with direct bearing on the *Shepherd* and the biblical canon, a few trends emerge. As with relevant

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[103] David Nielsen, "The Place of the *Shepherd of Hermas* in the Canon Debate," in *"Non-canonical" Religious Texts in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James H. Charlesworth (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 163; 165-6.

[104] Nielsen, 166; 175.

scholarship on the reception of the *Shepherd* in the early church, certain canards prevail by which the book's value can be dismissed or doubted, ranging from an overestimation of the Muratorian Fragment's importance to attempts to draw canonical conclusions from the physical format and scribal reproduction of the text. With few exceptions, the criteria for canonicity and criterial logic are upheld as a valid implement by which the canon can be gauged.[105] Even when an author, such as Wilson, offers a reason for the *Shepherd*'s extracanonicity outside of the traditional criteria, his argumentation is buttressed by criterial logic, perhaps as a failsafe in the event that a consensus does not emerge on his more speculative grounds. Choat and Yuen-Collingridge say nothing at all about the criteria, and yet they reformulate the popular use of the *Shepherd* from a book considered scriptural and on an apparent canonical trajectory to one that was always merely catechetical; its popularity is thus deceptive for the criterial task. Aside from them and Heide, however, there remains a general observation that Hermas's book enjoyed scriptural favor, perhaps not universally but in certain times and places, and especially in Egypt. Most would also concur that the *Shepherd* was perhaps on a canonical trajectory, or at least a candidate for inclusion in the canon, given its status from the second to the fourth centuries, affirming the need for further study given that no ultimate reason for its exclusion has yet obtained.

Not all of these authors show a probative interest in the criteria for canonicity, and certainly none find the pursuit of an "ontolofical" understanding of canon fruitful. Yet,

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[105] Batovici, "The *Shepherd of Hermas* in Recent Scholarship on the Canon," 102, appears to be the lone dissenter in this survey, though he limits his critique to the criterion of traditional use and another that, though postulated earlier, has largely fallen by the wayside: the belief that a text was "inspired." Batovici does not appear to turn against the canonical criteria completely, though neither does he advocate for them as a way forward.

with the exception of Carlini, inasmuch as they locate Hermas's text in a secondary, catechetical space or discern reasons why the *Shepherd* did not intrinsically match up with the canon that prevailed, they tend to participate in the pursuit of a teleological construction of the canon.[106] This teleological construction allows that no other end was possible for a book like the *Shepherd* of Hermas and largely ignores the episcopal and ecclesiastical-political context of the shaping of the canon. For its part, the closing of the canon becomes an inevitable development in the history of Christianity, and the books included within were those that fit a certain mold, theological standard, or some benchmark of usage within the church. However, instead of mirroring reality as some perfect reflection of the spectrum of scriptures celebrated within early Christianity, the Athanasian canon and its survival as the church's New Testament bears the marks of a constrictive ecclesiastical grip on the sure sources for living an authentic Christian life. That the scholars surveyed here, bar Carlini and a few relevant lines from Henne and Wilson, place no particular emphasis on Athanasius or the evolution of the hierarchical fourth-century church is remarkable: in Athanasius we have a clear case where the bishop shifted from positive appreciation to clear exclusion, and many recognize his importance for canonical studies even without resorting to an uncritical portrayal of the impact of his 39th Festal Letter. Though Batovici has suggested that research into the Christian appreciation of books of a clear secondary and non-canonical value might be a fertile ground for new insights, one must first establish how a book so clearly on the precipice

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[106] While not looking at the *Shepherd* specifically, Brakke has similarly observed the overwhelming scholarly preference for a canonical τέλος; see David Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Tradition in Antiquity*, ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and David Brakke (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2012), 265-6.

came to be regarded as secondary. Athanasius and the restrictive fourth-century church therefore endure as worthy subjects for this project. Moreover, given that Wilson can observe that the *Shepherd* was excluded from the canon for "no reason at all," at least in explicit terms tendered by the church fathers, it remains safe to say that no consensus on this question has yet emerged.[107] At the very least, none of these chapter- or article-length studies tell the full story of how a book so apparently useful and revered in the second, third, and fourth centuries could abruptly become *scriptura non grata* to the institutional church. The outstanding question merits deeper contextualization from the needs of a fourth-century hierarchy which, under newfound imperial favor, sharply diverged from that of the more permissive, organic, and diverse church of the centuries prior.

3. Conclusion

While this chapter originated from an impulse to test the *Shepherd* of Hermas according to the criteria of canonicity for some clues about its exclusion from the canon, the criteria themselves have been found wanting. Not only can the patristic data for the *Shepherd* speak equivocally, both for and against this text's alignment with each criterion, but the criteria are imbued with no consistent use or formulaic standard in early Christianity, rendering them functionally useless for the selection of contested books. Moreover, for several reasons, criterial logic is also theoretically unhelpful and even distracting, for it implies the presence of a juridical process by which the agents of the church forensically determined the contents of canon. Scholars know better than to

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[107] Wilson, 70.

suggest this to have been the case, and yet the criteria have mostly lived on unchallenged in New Testament scholarship.

Given that the criteria should be abandoned or perhaps reformulated as factors of inclusion, eligibility, or for setting scriptural texts on a canonical trajectory, we have offered an ecclesiastical-political definition of canon focusing on its value an episcopal instrument of consensus-formation. Only by approaching the canon in new ways will we be capable of reaching fresh insights about disputed books on the precipice of canonicity. But as the ultimate question this dissertation asks has not been completely ignored over the last generation of scholarship, this chapter concluded with a brief literary analysis stretching from Antonio Carlini (1986) to Dan Batovici (2017). As a result of this review and survey, the vital need for the present project has been reinforced, for no solid or agreed-upon rationale has prevailed to explain the *Shepherd*'s exclusion. All the while, both Batovici and David Nielsen have affirmed the need for new proposals. With Carlini, we concur that the manuscript history for Hermas's book, at least in Egypt, placed it comfortably among scripture and necessitated external prescriptions against its intrinsic value, but this must have been precipitated by causes that should be identifiable in the complex lived reality of the church. Perhaps we can find a better answer than has previously been offered to the valid question about the *Shepherd*'s extracanonicity by linking the church's turn to canonical limitation in the fourth century with other constrictive trends bearing on the hierarchical institution, by finding within the paucity of patristic evidence scraps pointing toward effective exclusionary justifications or techniques, and by regarding the *Shepherd* as a primary example of the output of the

Christian laboratory of the second century that could no longer be tolerated in the more

discriminatory environment of the pressurized fourth century.

PART II — FALL OF THE *SHEPHERD*: CANON AND ITS DISCONTENTS

CHAPTER FIVE

Constrictive Trends Forging Fourth-Century Christianity

1.   Introduction: The Episcopal Turn Toward a Closed Scriptural Canon

Though much work remains to be done, scholars writing on the history of the

New Testament canon have made certain strides over recent decades, generally

deemphasizing the impact of the Muratorian Fragment, questioning the significance of

the comparatively academic Eusebius, and amending our grasp of the timeline of canon's

closure, such that now the common sense explanation states that the final stages of the

canonical process—the definitive exclusion of books with a sense of finality or

consensus—were only initiated in the fourth century. The closing of the canon most

traceable in the fourth century undoubtedly signified the ratification of prior scriptural

micro-collections, such as the four gospels, that became the ecclesiastical norm at some

earlier point. But crucially, only with the notion of the closed canon in the fourth

century—a move initiated and authorized by episcopal *fiat*—do the decision-makers of

the church act simultaneously to enshrine long-recognized books and to demarcate the

tricky fringes of the scriptural collection, those bluffs where the *Shepherd* lived.

In spite of acknowledging the fourth century as the period when the canon

became a possibility, scholars have yet generally pursued this study as though the canon

appeared in a vacuum, decontextualized from the particular tensions and conflicts that

formed the backdrop of fourth century Christianity. This disinterest in theological

developments and disagreements, perhaps, lies behind Lee Martin McDonald's

preference that the canon have been a "largely unconscious process" guided by a distinct

set of intrinsic criteria, and Michael Kruger's pursuit of canon with an ontological

dimension prizing "the authoritative books that God gave his corporate church."[1] Based

on studies of these types, one gets the impression that the canon *could have* come into

focus at any point in time on such grounds, but did so beginning in the fourth century

rather by accident, if not by providence. Though they sometimes recognize that the

primary evidence for canon formation comes nearly exclusively from bishops and

sometimes from synods or councils, rarely has it been pursued why bishops or councils

would elect to weigh in on canon in the fourth century in the first place. However, David

Brakke, in over two decades of studies focused on Athanasius and fourth-century

Christianity in Egypt, has remained keenly and consistently aware of the overtly political

and counter-heretical context for the Egyptian's delineation of the canon. Thus he writes:

> Although most scholars remain focused on the lists of books, the greater
> importance of the [39th Festal L]etter is that it reveals the role of canon
> formation in supporting one form of Christian piety and authority and
> undermining others. Different scriptural practices accompany different modes
> of authority and spirituality, and we should not take the bounded canon of

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[1] Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 418; Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 40.

episcopal orthodoxy as either the inevitable *telos* of early Christian history or the only way that Christians construed and used sacred writings.[2]

Within his 2010 article on Athanasius's key Festal Letter delineating a scriptural canon, Brakke offers for the consumption of English-speaking audiences his translation of the complete extant text—both its Greek and Coptic fragments.[3] Perhaps as a corollary to the observation that scholarship generally eschews the ecclesiastical-political dimension of canon for teleological depictions, the substantially lesser and more fragmentary Greek text found in the *Patrologia Graeca* series features Athanasius's list and only limited hints of the context into which the bishop interjected with his declaration of canon. It has thus been possible, if not even preferable, to receive Athanasius's testimony on the authorized collection of scripture entirely divorced from its native *raison d'être*.[4] The Coptic, meanwhile, unfurls a much lengthier diatribe against, among others, (1) figures in the bishop's midst who assumed the position of teacher, (2) Melitians who, Athanasius alleges, celebrate the contents of apocryphal books forged in the names of biblical heroes, (3) Arians, Jews, and various other opponents of episcopal orthodoxy, and (4) a mini-catalogue of the classical heretics who misunderstood, and are plainly refuted by appeal

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[2] David Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter: Heresy, Apocrypha, and the Canon," *Harvard Theological Review* 103.1 (2010): 56.

[3] Brakke previously performed the same service in his revised dissertation, but the *HTR* article's significance comes from the availability of a new Coptic fragment of the letter that sharpens Athanasius's heresiological interests. See David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 326-32.

[4] As James D. Ernest notes, the actual substance of the Festal Letter, as revealed by its Coptic fragments, means that "we no longer have any excuse for isolating the list of books from the letter as a whole." However, while he rightly perceives the Athanasian intention to exclude books from his canon, Ernest perhaps takes the argument too far when he claims that the enumeration of Old and New Testaments "is almost incidental to the negative statement banning any use of the apocrypha." Instead, Athanasius consciously sets a boundary delineating both. James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria*, vol. 2 of *The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2004), 337.

to, the authentic scriptures. Brakke presses his observations about Athanasius's crucial letter and its historical backdrop into a differentiation of social functions served by alternative scriptural practices—that of an academic Christianity privileging study and open inquiry under the mantle of a gifted interpreter, that of revelatory movements heralding the connection of the community to beatified martyrs, and that of worship-centric praxis offering allegiance to the clerical hierarchy.[5] Without disputing the validity of this construct, I remain more invested in Brakke's depiction of the Athanasian canon as a constrictive device subverting certain existing Christian practices and enshrining the bishop, that is, the proper apostolic heir, as the sole interpretive conduit for the scriptures. As he says elsewhere, Athanasius sought to install "a certain kind of canon" so as to rule out *both* the problematic books and their competing hermeneutical structures imbuing them with life for the Christian faithful.[6] For when canon is viewed as an episcopal tool of constriction, it falls perfectly in line with other such rhetorical developments designed to limit the acceptable range of Christian piety in the fourth century. It can then be more readily understood how a book like the *Shepherd*, so widely appreciated in a different environment with its own native needs and concerns, fell by the wayside in the crucible of the fourth century's struggle for political power, theological definition, and a doctrinal basis for Christian unity.

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[5] David Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Tradition in Antiquity*, ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and David Brakke (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2012), 271-8.

[6] David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth 'Festal Letter,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 87.4 (Oct. 1994): 398.

This chapter lays the groundwork for the vital context for the episcopal canon by tracing four trends in the early church that, though they were all inaugurated much earlier in Christian history, coalesce in the fourth century and culminate in a constrictive environment that could no longer suffer the coexistence either of alternative scriptural collections or specific books that, like the *Shepherd*, offered no support to the episcopal agenda. The four constrictive trends, ranging from the rhetoric of heresiology to the importance of Christology, and from the distrust of revelatory or visionary experiences to the struggle for hierarchical ecclesial organization, are not intended as an exhaustive list of factors forging fourth-century episcopal Christianity. However, they are submitted as examples of the much-needed context for this period during which canon was recognized as not only a possibility, but as a political and ecclesiastical exigency. As part of the discussion of each of these four trends, I highlight how the *Shepherd* measured up against them, either intrinsically by an appeal to the contents of Hermas's text, or extrinsically, with consideration toward how the early church received the book. More than any other Christian writing, perhaps with the exception of the *Didache*, the *Shepherd* sticks out as an artifact representing an earlier epoch of Christian development, that laboratory characterized by organic, and even chaotic, doctrinal and practical growth, given that it manifestly lent little to validate the causes and positions championed by the fourth-century episcopal elite. Following a discussion about the four constrictive trends up to and within the fourth century, a subsequent sister-chapter turns to inspect the episcopacy of Athanasius of Alexandria more closely, demonstrating that each of the four trends under consideration here find plentiful attestation in his writings and goals, both

generally in his lifelong hostility against Arianism, the Melitian hierarchy, monastic

independence, and other groups or causes he fashioned as schismatic or heretical, but also

specifically within the rhetoric of his 39th Festal Letter. That letter's declaration of a

scriptural canon may find parallels elsewhere in bishops antedating Athanasius, but

neither Victorinus nor Eusebius enjoyed the regional political network, the episcopal

clout spreading into the West, or a ready-made hagiographical tradition to celebrate their

contributions to orthodoxy. Only in Athanasius, and not his predecessors, does it become

readily apparent that the scriptural canon's time had arrived, both pragmatically, as the

worldwide church sought consensus, and heresiologically, as a tool meant to stamp out

beliefs deemed deficient.

In this fashion, the Athanasian canon, interpreted along Brakkian lines, most

luridly displays the political implications of delineating a scriptural collection. Though

some variance persists in the Old Testament canon into the fifth century, and even

Revelation[7] and Hebrews[8] can be omitted here and there, that the modern New Testament

matches Athanasius's in name and number testifies to his formative influence, which

would filter into the Latin church through the work of Jerome. Finally, though J.

Christian Wilson remains correct that a latter-day history of the canon extending beyond

the Roman period has yet to be adequately written,[9] the work initiated here would not be

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[7] Omitted, for example, by Gregory of Nazianzus and the first Carthaginian synod of 397; see Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Antiquity*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 445-51.

[8] Omitted possibly by Pope Innocent I, Cassiodorus, and the stichometry of Codex Claromontanus; see McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 445-51.

[9] J. Christian Wilson, *Five Problems in the Interpretation of the Shepherd of Hermas: Authorship, Genre, Canonicity, Apocalyptic, and the Absence of the Name 'Jesus Christ'* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), 56 n.16.

complete without a look at how Athanasius's determination about the *Shepherd* became

irrevocably etched into the annals of history. We therefore sketch the pathways to the

Athanasian canon's success both in the Eastern church with the most immediate ties to

the Alexandrian bishop, and in the West, where the Bible would be soon read for

centuries in Latin under the canonical designs of Jerome and his successors,[10] each who

followed Athanasius's lead in the contours of the New Testament and its discontents.

First, however, we begin of necessity with a context for the canon in the crucible of the

fourth-century proto-orthodox church.

2. Four Constrictive Trends Paralleling the Declaration of a Canon

A. Heresiology

Just after his accession to Augustus of the whole Roman Empire in 324,

Constantine intervened epigraphically in the dispute brewing in Egypt between

Alexander, the Alexandrian bishop, and Arius, a Libyan presbyter teaching in the

Egyptian church. As preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine's hagiographer,

Constantine viewed their disagreement as much ado about nothing, a case of mutual fault

for Alexander to have inquired and Arius to have so flippantly answered him concerning

a minor theological issue. Rather, in Constantine's understanding, their "quarrel did not

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[10] It remains common for quick-hit analyses, especially as might be found in encyclopedia articles, to subordinate Jerome's canonical musings to a Council of Rome chaired by Pope Damasus in 382. For example, see Charles Arnold-Baker, "Damasus, St. (303-384)," in *The Companion to British History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001). However, though we know well that this council took place and that Jerome himself was likely among the attendees, evidence for any canon list emanating from it is quite weak, relying on a minority of manuscripts that begin only in the ninth century for what otherwise appears to be a sixth-century decree. Though now rather dated, the arguments of H. H. Howorth against this supposed Damasine canon list are still quite strong; see H. H. Howorth, "The Decretal of Damasus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 14.55 (April 1913): 321-37. For further discussion, see pp. 384–5 below.

arise over the chief point of the precepts in the Law," and thus he enjoined Alexander and

Arius to behave as philosophers do, agreeing to disagree on the peripheral details so long

as they find unity in the "basic principle" (*Vit. Const.* 2.70-71.2).[11] Constantine frames

his attempt at mediation in terms of his recent unification of the Empire; thus, the discord

lain bare by congregational squabble over a "very silly question, whatever it actually is"

causes the emperor palpable, if melodramatic, distress (*Vit. Const.* 71.6).[12] Constantine's

appeal toward peaceful Christian coexistence on this matter would find no resolution

during his lifetime, and the spark of discord at Alexandria would eventually spread

beyond Egypt to engulf the whole empire in a veritable conflagration for the better part of

the century. Though Timothy Barnes absolves Constantine of the accusation that he

"failed to appreciate what was at stake" in the disagreement between Alexander and

Arius, or that he neglected to detect the latter's "heresy,"[13] this letter is a sure sign that

Constantine possessed little effective understanding about the centrality of correct

doctrine, or *orthodoxy*, within elites practicing the religion he had empowered, or the

ongoing currency of its polemical discursive method when matters of right and wrong

belief were deemed at stake: the worldview of heresiology. So prevalent, in fact, was

heresiology among early Christianity that its impact on Christian development can hardly

be overstated. As Winrich Löhr aptly acknowledges, "heresiology became part and parcel

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[11] Translation per Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 118.

[12] Translation per Cameron and Hall, 118-9.

[13] Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 213.

of the theological memory of Christianity,"[14] and its tactics would be repurposed in every century to performatively defeat the heretics of old and especially to meet new challenges with the winning strategies of the giants of prior orthodox vintage. Athanasius himself demonstrates how an appeal to Revelation proved heresiologically potent against his political and ecclesiastical opponents,[15] but even later, other rhetorical battles could be waged on the plane of heresy and orthodox, whether the proper methods of monastic tonsure and of determining the date of Easter (so Bede), the "heresy" of Islam (so John of Damascus and later Martin Luther), or liberal theology (so Karl Barth).

Scholarly recognition of heresiology and its effects is a relatively recent phenomenon and has only benefited from the post-Bauerian re-imagination of the relative emergence of "orthodoxy" and "heresy." No longer, however, do scholars conceptualize this problem as a search for what sort of doctrinal system appeared temporally first, for the bulk of attention has now shifted to these labels as discursive creations, ones always belonging to the orthodox self-fashioner.[16] Averil Cameron has thus changed gears from an earlier emphasis in her career on Byzantine heresiological writings in an attempt to "understand the mirage of 'orthodoxy,'" the forging of which she depicts as a "violent" and reductive enterprise that eliminates real diversity to delineate a very limited and ever-

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[14] Winrich Löhr, "Modelling Second-Century Christian Theology: Christian Theology as *Philosophia*," in *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 167.

[15] Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, & Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 135, 143, 165.

[16] As Le Boulluec put it in his classic study on the early Christian wielding of "heresy," "si la norme crée l'erreur, l'acte qui decide de l'erreur crée aussi la norme." Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque IIe-IIIe siécles, Tome II: Clément d'Alexandrie et Origène* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985), 554.

shifting truth.[17] Meanwhile, a definition for heresiology itself has been difficult to pin down, with prior scholars using the label for the genre of writings typified by Irenaeus's *Adversus haereses* or similar offerings by Tertullian, Hippolytus, and later Christians following in their collective footsteps. More fruitfully, Robert Royalty has broadened heresiology into a "discourse that negotiates difference within religious communities by seeking ideological hegemony."[18] That discourse can take many forms and appear across numerous genres, and is accompanied by a range of characteristics limiting in-group membership by belief in the right ideas, supplying a doxography and often a genealogy of incorrect ones, and imbuing the in-group with a rigid us-versus-them mentality. Heresiology forms a polemical "rhetoric of difference and exclusion"[19] and is often practiced from a position of relative political privilege, permitting the wielder to locate himself centrally within a limited range of orthodoxy.

Though I welcome the definitional shift from genre to rhetoric, I submit that the centrality of heresiology to centuries of Christians expressing the boundaries of correct belief necessitates an even wider expansion of the term. Heresiology cannot be limited to its verbal expression, but extends to a *worldview* of religious truth and falsehood that constricts the former, demonizes the latter, and disallows others from claiming a particular identity, representing a toxic ecclesiology ill-equipped to tolerate doctrinal variance. Moreover, given the immense popularity of the genre of heresiological

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[17] Averil Cameron, "The Violence of Orthodoxy," in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, vol. 119 of *TSAJ*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 114.

[18] Robert M. Royalty, Jr., *The Origin of Heresy: A History of Discourse in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 26-7.

[19] Ibid., 3-4.

doxography, the term *heresiography* should be reserved for those classical systematic explorations of heretical sects. Heresiography encompasses a "totalizing" genre that characterizes the beliefs and practices of named others and organizes the data and people of the world epistemologically along an in-out binary of saved and damned, often exploring or inventing their origins from other known heresies and caricaturing them as beasts or diseases.[20] Heresiology and the weaponized technical construal of heresy as diabolical variance form the bedrock for authoritarian, episcopal Christianity from the late-second century onward, but with the prospect of imperial power in the fourth century, hostilities that were previously lobbed more or less as rhetorical grenades now enjoyed the real potential for enforcement. In the case of church hierarchy, this would usually be enacted by exile, but at least for the classic heresies like Marcionism, Constantine revoked their rights to assemble and further outlawed them with the threat of asset confiscation and repatriation to the catholic church (*Vit. Const.* 3.63-66).

Tracing the inception of heresiology as a Christian rhetoric of difference is no easy task, and the historian must make some inferences about where the story begins. Royalty sees proto-heresiological discourses already in the letters of Paul and the Gospels, not to mention documents found at Qumran, and thus heresiology is simply a continuation of prejudices evident in the scriptures that Christians had begun to cherish by the second century.[21] Löhr and Rebecca Lyman, following Le Boulluec, view heresiology as an adaptation of the genre of philosophical doxography by elite Christians

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[20] The language of "totalizing discourse" originates from Averil Cameron, though my initiation to it comes from Jeremy Schott, "Heresiology as Universal History in Epiphanius's *Panarion*," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 10.3 (2006): 563.

[21] As he contends, "the ideology of heresy precedes the technical use of the term." Royalty, 9.

of the mid-second century who were familiar with these discourses, including Justin

Martyr and Hegesippus.[22] Justin in particular seems to have been comfortable fashioning

Christianity as the true philosophy, though such a construal could not withstand the

hierarchical church's tensions with pagan philosophy, and thus heresiography was

harnessed by figures like Irenaeus who located the truth claims of Christianity in the

authentic succession of the local bishop from the apostles.[23] Meanwhile, the present

author has previously made the case that early Christian heresiographers, like Tertullian,

took certain cues from early Roman anti-Christian rhetoric, refracting binaries like *religio*

and *superstitio* into a weaponized discourse simultaneously aimed at pagans,

philosophers, and heretics.[24] It is likely, however, that these various influences combined

to reinforce the discourse of heresiology into the powerhouse it became, and we should

not simply select one of the options—which may be collapsed into the scriptural, the

philosophical, and the cultural—as the singular launching point for Christian heresiology.

Though the systematic heresiographies, starting with the first extant example from

Irenaeus now simply known as *Against the Heresies*, and the vituperative apex of the

genre, Epiphanius's fourth-century *Panarion*, may stand as the most potent specimens of

this discourse, heresiology can be readily identified in doctrinal treatises far and wide,

ranging from Tertullian's musings about church practice to Origen's lengthy response to

the pagan Celsus and even to Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, where the heretics figure

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[22] Rebecca Lyman, "2002 NAPS Presidential Address: Hellenism and Heresy," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11.2 (Summer 2003): 215-6.

[23] Löhr, 156-7.

[24] Rob Heaton, "Christian Heresiology in Context: *Religio*, *Superstitio*, and Roman Rhetoric of Difference" (paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, November 22, 2015).

prominently even in the preface to the Palestinian bishop's work.[25] Manifestly, heresiology was integral to the shape and narrative of Christian history: one true doctrine assailed by many enemies and false options, often inspired by Satan, as far back as Simon Magus, heresy's alleged patient zero.[26]

Importantly for the present study, heresiology also constituted the logic by which Christians responded to new doctrinal threats. Progressing from its second-century beginnings, this "discourse of religious exclusivity" by the fourth century formed a staple of Christian rhetoric, such that very early on, the dispute in Egypt between Arius and Alexander would be fought on the logic of truth and falsehood. In spite of the Constantinian suggestion that the parties could come together on the substantial common ground that they shared,[27] Alexander was keen to depict Arius as following in the footsteps of arch-heretics, as when he wrote a letter to sympathetic bishops before the Council of Nicaea warning them of false doctrines that are spreading:

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[25] Among other top-level items that his history endeavors to cover, Eusebius promises to record "the names, number and the ages of those who, driven by love of novelty to the extremity of error, have announced themselves as sources of knowledge (falsely so-called) while ravaging Christ's flock mercilessly, like ferocious wolves" (*Hist. eccl.* 1.1.2). Translation per Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2007), 21. See also Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 33-44 and esp. 84-96.

[26] Perhaps taking clues from Justin's lost heresiography, the *Syntagma*, Irenaeus fashions Simon Magus (of Acts 8) as the person "from whom all heresies got their start" (*Haer.* 1.22.2), an assertion agreed upon by both Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.13) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 21). Though Epiphanius contends that heresies in the Christian era emanate from the earlier "mother heresies" of Barbarism, Scythianism, Hellenism, Judaism, and Samaritanism, he yet grants the pride of place to Simon Magus, whose followers constituted "the first sect (αἵρεσις) to arise in the time between Christ and ourselves" (*Pan.* 21.1.1).

[27] The heresiological portrait of Arius as heresiarch has largely obfuscated the reality that all parties in the fourth century shared more theological points in common than they sparred over. Therefore, it is important to recognize that all were Trinitarians (with Arius himself subscribing to a doctrine of three *hypostaseis* in the divine Godhead), all maintained a conception of *creatio ex nihilo*, and all shared a "common christological confession" where the Lordship of Christ, and indeed, both his existence before the creation of the world and his power to effect human salvation, were central to the faith. See Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 36-7.

> For you are God-taught and not uninformed that the teaching rising in insurrection against the pious of the church just now is that of Ebion and Artemas and the Antiochene zeal of Paul of Samosata, who by council and judgment was publicly renounced by bishops of the church.[28]

Indubitably, such a pastiche of known heretics makes little rational sense—"Ebion" was not a real person, but an anthropomorphized retroversion from the so-called Ἐβιωναῖοι or Ebionites on the mistaken, but heresiologically potent, belief that heresies arise from deviant individuals. Furthermore, Arius's own statements repudiate the possibility that he could have agreed with any kernel of a shared Ebionite-Samosatene belief that Jesus was a "mere man," born of the normal human conjugation of Mary and Joseph.[29] Instead, Alexander applies one of the classic heresiological tactics to the "conspiracy" that Arius and others have launched against the church, rhetorically anchoring Arius to other known heretics by means of a genealogical lineage of error. Accepting Arius, he thereby implies, would be akin to welcoming both "Ebion" and the excommunicated Paul of Samosata to the catholic church as orthodox members. Arius, meanwhile, made conscious overtures to distance himself from several named "uncatechized men of heresy" (ἀνθρώπων αἱρετικῶν ἀκατηχήτων) in his own day and those prominent heretics from the Christian

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[28] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §35; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Hans-Georg Opitz, ed., *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1: Urkunden zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streites 318-328* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1934), 35. I accept the view of David Gwynn, following Rowan Williams, that this letter dates to 321-2 CE, and therefore constitutes perhaps the earliest appeal for external support in what had previously been an internal Alexandrian dispute. See David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 63-6.

[29] So Arius: "Now us, what do we say, and understand, and what have we taught, and what do we teach? That the Son is not unbegotten, and neither partakes in any manner in the unbegotten nor is from some lower matter; but that by will and counsel he hypostatized before time and before ages, God full (of grace and truth), only-begotten, unchangeable. And before he was begotten or created or ordained or established, he was not." *Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia*, Urkunde 1 §4-5; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 2-3. This letter seems to have been written immediately after Alexander first externalized the conflict, as Arius sought support from rival eastern bishops vying for political clout; see Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 63.

past, ranging from Valentinus to Manichaeus to Sabellius.[30] Thus, all parties involved demonstrated an awareness of the doctrinal tightrope on which they treaded: one must portray oneself as orthodox and as espousing proper belief, because a failure to position one's understanding of the scriptures and the Christian faith correctly risked capitulation to the rabid snare of heresiology. Khaled Anatolios notes, for example, that four arch-heresies formed the negative boundaries held in common by all parties engaged in fourth-century disputes, and that "one welcomed any excuse for pinning these labels" of the heretics on their opponents.[31] And as we will see in the next chapter with Athanasius's posthumous interpretation of Arius's teachings, those suspected of heretical beliefs rarely are allowed to write their own stories.

Though numerous examples from second- and third-century heresiology could be marshaled to demonstrate the strategies in established use by those self-fashioned as orthodox, it seems appropriate to remain with the early framing of the fourth century ecclesiastical civil war still sometimes known as the "Arian controversy." This label, wherever possible, must be rejected as reproducing the very heresiological methods by which the eventual victors framed the conflict: as a controversy spawned and therefore known unto the ages by the heresiarch who caused it, lending his name to both incorrect doctrine and the disturbance that opposed the true Christian church.[32] For as all recent critical scholars agree, the disagreement over the generation of the only-begotten Son and

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[30] *Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia*, Urkunde 1 §3; *Letter of Arius to Alexander of Alexandria*, Urkunde 6 §3.

[31] Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 38. These four heresies rejected in common by all parties included Manichaeism, the psilanthropism of Paul of Samosata, Sabellianism, and "gnostic emanationism."

[32] This is a perspective inscribed in the earliest extant heresiography, where Simon Magus lends his name to the "Simonians" and other sects follow suit; see Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.4.

his precise relationship to the ingenerate Father goes far deeper than Arius himself, a personage who was resoundingly disclaimed by those to whom the label "Arian" was applied.[33] Lewis Ayres prefers to frame the fourth-century controversy as an "epiphenomenon of widespread existing tensions" that continue at pace once Arius has disappeared from the scene, with no recourse to the mere presbyter from Libya, except by his polemical opponents.[34] Richard Hanson and Rowan Williams suggest that the fourth-century crisis should be viewed as a matter of competing scriptural exegeses in a void of a solid and agreed-upon doctrinal method of marrying strict monotheism with the confession of Christ's divinity, for both Arius and his episcopal opponents presented themselves as biblical or scriptural theologians.[35] Compellingly, David Gwynn has shown how as early as 341, when all of the major players from the early conflict were either dead (Alexander, Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and Eusebius of Caesarea) or in exile (Athanasius), the majority of the Eastern Church could come to an agreement on a so-called 'Dedication Creed' that neither featured the inflammatory *ousia* language of Nicaea nor could be construed in any manner as "Arian."[36] What we have from the fourth century, then, may only blithely and heresiologically rendered as an "Arian controversy"; instead, scholarship remains in need of a better way to characterize the long-lasting

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[33] Thus Rowan Williams: "'Arianism' as a coherent system … is a fantasy—more exactly a fantasy based on the polemic of Nicene writers, above all Athanasius." Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 82.

[34] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15; 101.

[35] R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 874; Williams, 107-8.

[36] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 220-8.

discord of the fourth century concisely. If the title of Hanson's *magnum opus*—the search

for the Christian doctrine of God—appears too ponderous or embarrassing, it yet

maintains the primary advantage of insisting that orthodoxy was only discovered through

a lengthy and sometimes uncouth process of trial, error, politicking, accusations of

heresy, and precarious consensuses subject to re-evaluation at the passing of emperors.

Many of the persistent rhetorical elements of that ill-tempered search for

orthodoxy in the fourth century are already present in the early 320s, when Alexander

undertook an aggressive letter-writing campaign to cultivate support from like-minded

bishops and form a unified front against the spreading "conspiracy" headed by Arius

(*Pan.* 69.4.3). In addition to the obfuscatory triangulation of Arius's doctrines along a

plot of known heretics—the genealogy of false beliefs—Alexander employs several other

classical heresiological tactics intended to accentuate the distorted character of those

doctrines. **First**, heretics are rarely allowed to speak for themselves. Few heresiologists

appeal to the words and even fewer to the elaborations of their subjects, and instead serve

as prosecutor while feasting on a paucity of the alleged heretic's most incendiary

remarks. In Alexander's *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, for example,

Arius's thinking is reduced to a handful of slogans that he may well have crafted, even to

the tunes of popular working-class songs, in order to introduce his theology to the

masses.[37] And yet, even though Alexander must know that such brief statements as "there

was when the Son of God was not" and "God made all things from non-existence"[38]

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[37] Stephen J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 53.

[38] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §10-11; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 21.

would not represent a full accounting of Arius's reasoning, he proceeds with a lengthy

one-sided rebuttal against his opponent hyper-focused on the theological problems caused

by the slogans. Alexander both restricts Arius's speech and indicts him *in abstentia*. This

courtroom language of accusation and prosecution, furthermore, is not merely

metaphorical on my part, for Arius and his co-conspirators stand charged with various

crimes against both vulnerable women and Christ, of fomenting plots against the bishop

and his supporters, and prominently of both "drunkenly slandering" (ἐμπαροινοῦντες)

and "altogether destroying" (συναναιροῦντες) the Scriptures. **<u>Second</u>**, Alexander and

others participating in the discourse do not direct their heresiology toward the accused,

but rather as an open letter intended to convince the church at large, and especially those

who Alexander believes might be sympathetic to his cause, of the validity of the heretical

label for Arius. Alexander's two circulated letters pre-Nicaea explicitly warn against

accepting Arius in any manner and of entertaining either his epigraphic outreach or any

appeals on his behalf, and furthermore intimate that the best remedy might be an

episcopal show of unity against the heresy now threatening to rend the church.[39]

     <u>Third</u>, earlier doctrinal struggles stimulated the advent of a self-serving logic that

guaranteed the orthodoxy of the bishop by the principle of proper apostolic succession.

As conceived or at least presented by Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.3.3), and used to great effect by

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[39] In addition to the *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica* already quoted several times, a shorter *Encyclical Letter* (Opitz, Urkunde 4b) is also relevant to the study of Alexander's early framing of the controversy. Though often assumed to be the earlier of the two, I again accept that the Williams-Gwynn hypothesis that this letter, which could have even been written by Athanasius on Alexander's behalf, represents a later awareness (or allegation) that Eusebius of Nicomedia is now in league with Arius against the Alexandrian episcopate. If this letter is to be dated to 324 or early 325, it would seem to hint deliciously that Eusebius—in addition to whatever he might have believed doctrinally—could have used his newfound proximity to Constantine and a burgeoning alliance with Arius to undermine the regional authority enjoyed by Alexandria. See Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 63-9.

virtually all episcopal heresiologists thereafter, the ability to trace one's office

genealogically back to the apostles was a crucial tool in the arsenal against newly arising

heresies. The bishop could therefore depict the alleged heretic of having no authentic

roots in the history of Christian doctrine—the heretic becomes an inventor, rather than a

participant in a long tradition. Arius and his fellow deviants, on the other hand, rebel

against both the "divinity of the Son of God" and the authority of the bishop, as when

Alexander himself can uniquely insist that "we ourselves believe just as the apostolic

church thought."[40] Alexander's elaboration that follows includes various items not on the

church's radar in the first century, such as the Father's status as unbegotten (ἀγέννητον),

immutable (ἄτρεπτον), and unchangeable (ἀναλλοίωτον) as well as the meaning of the

Son's begotten-ness, exposing the function of this tactic not to authenticate the antiquity

of this or that doctrine but to authorize the hierarch as the guarantor of a doctrinal

lineage. Yet, by the time of his later *Encyclical Letter* (c. 324), Alexander could no

longer rely on the principle of apostolic succession alone against these heretics, for

Eusebius of Nicomedia had apparently allied himself with Arius. This Eusebius posed a

political and ecclesiastical threat to Alexander given that he assumed the episcopacy in a

church near Constantine in Asia Minor, and thus Alexander would need to supplement

his critique of the apostates with gossip and insinuations that Eusebius was acting out of

covetous ambition in league with the heretics.[41] Finally, **<u>fourth</u>**, a tried-and-true

heresiological tactic sealed the demonic origin of false doctrine by declaring the opponent

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[40] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §41 and §46; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 26.

[41] *Encyclical Letter of Alexander to All Bishops*, Urkunde 4b §4-5; 11.

under the inspiration of Satan, the devil, or some other widely acknowledged insufficient biblical source of doctrine. Over two letters, Alexander impressively insists that the devil was at work in Arius, causing him to reject "all piety,"[42] that Arius blasphemes the Son of God and therefore oversteps the behavior even of demons,[43] that Arius follows in the footsteps of Judas and should be viewed as one of the "men of lawlessness" and the "forerunner of the Antichrist,"[44] and finally that Arius is responsible for rending Christ's garment that not even the Roman soldiers would dare destroy, for fear of acting contrary to the scriptures (Jn 19:23-25).[45] As a result of this rhetorical bombast and classic heresiological methodology, Alexander can finally declare Arius and his companions anathematized heretics (ἀναθεματισθέντες αἱρεσιῶται), convinced that his framing of the situation would suffice for the bishops to whom he appealed for support. Only by accident does Alexander ever admit the true cause for the conflict between himself and Arius: the latter follows a scriptural hermeneutic that emphasizes the lower humanly moments in Christ's life, which Alexander construes as an eschewal of passages demonstrating "his eternal divinity and his indescribable glory beside the Father."[46] It is worth wondering alongside Hanson whether such heresiological toxicity was merited by what was apparently a matter of competing exegetical tendencies that had long coexisted

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[42] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §1; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 19.

[43] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §43.

[44] *Encyclical Letter of Alexander to All Bishops*, Urkunde 4b §3; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 6-7.

[45] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §5.

[46] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §4; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 20. Alexander makes a similar statement later in the same letter, §37.

in the Alexandrian church.[47] And yet, the parties involved could not agree to disagree, for the sake of unity, as Constantine would urge them.

Since the second century, when leaders of the church sought to rhetorically limit the influence of the laboratory of Christian doctrines, heresiology had served as the method by which orthodox boundaries were established. So successful were the quasi-philosophical doxographies of Justin and Hegesippus that Irenaeus popularized the genre of heresiography for wider consumption by the church, at first against the "knowledge falsely so-called" of Gnostic Valentinians and then against others who threatened the core elements of the church's burgeoning, but inconsistent, rules of faith and truth. Subsequent generations of Christian writers took up the pen to continue the "violence" against alleged heretics, such that as the third century wore on, the likes of Sabellius and Paul of Samosata were cast to the sidelines with prior heresiarchs, ranging from Marcion to "Ebion" to Valentinus. All who fashioned themselves orthodox accepted heresiology as the unspoken lens through which Christianity viewed both past and present as a matter of absolute truth assailed by many imitators whose doctrines needed constriction from the church. But important challenges lay ahead, and in the fourth century, the animating logic of heresy would once again be wielded by episcopal authors. As Hanson writes of the challenge posed by Arius,

> The limits of orthodoxy at the beginning of the fourth century, though more definite than they had been a century earlier, were still loose and unclear. The subject brought to the fore by Arius was one upon which no consensus had yet been reached among the Church's teachers.[48]

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[47] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 145.

[48] Ibid.

In this void of a universally recognized orthodoxy, the church responded to perceived threats with its established, ruthless discourse intending not to foster consensus through debate and collective learning, but to exclude and demarcate by the accumulated wisdom and rationale of heresiology.

The *Shepherd* and Heresiology

Heresiology rightfully deserves its place of primacy in any elaboration of constrictive trends impacting the fourth-century church. Though it is somewhat more difficult to trace such developments in the late first or early second century, when the *Shepherd* of Hermas appeared, we can take a page out of the method of Royalty, who sought any "rhetoric of exclusion, examination of difference, and polemics against other Christians" in the texts that would later comprise the New Testament.[49] That task would theoretically be just as viable for the *Shepherd*, which was often reckoned among the scriptures and, we have argued, straddled the precipice of canon given the trajectory of its reception in early Christianity. However, the disagreements reflected in the epigraphic records most often revolve around matters of belief, whether the correct interpretation of the scriptures or a proper accounting of the meaning of Jesus Christ's life and death. These conflicts may also manifest themselves in the expression of determinative eschatological judgments against one's enemies, but such judgments are usually intricately connected to the rejection of Christian doctrine. In his classic study of heresy and early Christian heresiology, Le Boulluec notes, "Le choix du mot *hairesis* et du mode

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[49] Royalty, 25. As Royalty, ix, furthermore observes, the New Testament is already full of rhetoric against other Christians—indicating that doctrinal disputes began early.

de désignation qui lui est associé a des conséquences décisives pour la formation et l'histoire de l'hérésiologie. Il a pour premier effet de rendre prépondérant l'élément doctrinal des conflits."[50] As we have previously observed, in spite of the outsized frequency with which the shepherd's Commandment 1 is approvingly cited by writers from Irenaeus to Origen and even Athanasius early in his career, the *Shepherd* cannot be construed predominantly as a text conveying Christian doctrines. Instead, within this book of practical salvation, Hermas and his shepherd sometimes employ rhetorics of difference within the taxonomies of believers who either will live to God or who are wasting their chance at being saved. Importantly, however, the *Shepherd*, in using labels like "apostates" or the ἄχρηστοι, does not call out specific, named false doctrines. Such language primarily serves a cautionary or admonishing function designed to lead its readers and hearers to repentance.

For example, one of the *Shepherd*'s taxonomies of Christians parabolically compares "all those called by the name of the Lord" to branches of a giant willow tree. Similar to the Parable of the Talents, the angel who gave the sticks to the Christians eventually requested them back for an examination of their stewardship. Even though the shoots had been severed from the tree, many of them remained green and alive, while others have withered to various stages of lifelessness. This uncomplicated parable eventuated into a detailed explanation of the deadest of the branches:

> These whose shoots were found dry and consumed by moths are the apostates and traitors of the church, who blasphemed the Lord by their sins and even felt ashamed of the name of the Lord by whom they were called. These, therefore, utterly perished to God, forever. And you see that not one of them repented, even though they heard the words that you spoke to them as I

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[50] Le Boulluec, 551.

commanded of you. From people such as this, life has departed. And those who delivered the dry and uneaten shoots are very close to them. For they were hypocrites, introducing other teachings and perverting the servants of God, especially those who had sinned, not permitting them to repent, but misleading them with moronic teachings (ταῖς διδαχαῖς ταῖς μωραῖς).[51]

Crucially, though the shepherd suggests some degree of finality for the first group of people who have εἰς τέλος ἀπώλοντο τῷ θεῷ, the identities of those so damned are never revealed, and the shepherd does not perseverate on their fate. Instead, his explanation quickly pivots to the importance of repentance for the second group advancing alternate teachings; he even holds open the possibility that they may ascend (ἀνέβησαν) to the tower in spite of their previous aberrant behavior.[52] This stands as yet another indication that Hermas reckons salvation, or living to God, as the end goal of his dissertation, making the prior pronouncement less a heresiological malediction than a disciplinary exhortation of the gravity of denying or blaspheming the Lord.

Other rhetorics of difference or exclusion in the *Shepherd* fail to meet the standard of heresiological discourse for varying reasons. Harry Maier, for example, calls attention to the unique scene found in the shepherd's 11th commandment, where a false prophet (ψευδοπροφήτης) and "fortune-teller" or "diviner" (μάντιν) appears. Though the mandate given here to Hermas concerns the need to test prophets to determine the origin of their messages, Maier imagines a situation of "neighbourhood competition amongst religious experts" directly involving or even implicating Hermas himself.[53] Hermas,

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[51] Herm. Sim. 8.6.4-5 (72.4-5); trans. mine.

[52] Herm. Sim. 8.6.6 (72.6).

[53] Harry O. Maier, "Romans Watching Romans: Christ Religion in Close Urban Quarters and Neighbourhood Transformations," *Religion in the Roman Empire* (*forthcoming*, 2020).

though critical of the diviner's "empty answers" and equally of any medium-seeker's perverse senselessness, was equally trading in visionary experiences and wished to be reckoned an authority in matters pertaining to the future. In the course of the mandate, the shepherd instructs that the false prophet must be distinguished from true ones by the source of its insights: if it speaks of "earthly" (ἐπιγείῳ) and "empty" (κενῷ) matters, its spirit is powerless and originates from the devil. By contrast, the true prophet speaks from obligation at the instigation of God, not from want of money or fame, but because he possesses "the divine spirit from above."[54] In this episode, Hermas certainly tests a developing binary of truth and falsehood recognizable to later heresiology, but he deploys this accusatory rhetoric against apparently non-Christian religious rivals. Hermas's competition in this instance comes not from inside what must have been a small Roman Christian bubble but the wider pagan context of the congested city, where many options presented themselves to the seeker of a divine word. Hermas's prescription most immediately forbids "those who are strong in the faith of the Lord" from associating with diabolically motivated fortune-tellers,[55] but in the process he testifies to a sharpening of rhetoric that in just a few short decades following him would be marshaled for intra-Christian polemics by figures like Justin Martyr.

One additional brief episode is perhaps indicative of the limits of the *Shepherd*'s kinder and comparatively underdeveloped heresiological rhetoric. After imploring Hermas to straighten up his family, the woman Church delivers a new instruction to Hermas rather out of nowhere: "But you will say to Maximus: 'Behold, tribulation is

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[54] Herm. Mand. 11.8 (43.8).

[55] Herm. Mand. 11.4 (43.4).

coming; if it seems good to you, disown again.' 'The Lord is near to those who return to him,' as it is written in (the book of) Eldad and Modat, who prophesied in the wilderness to the people."[56] Readers have not heard of Maximus before now, and he disappears from the book as quickly as he was introduced. Yet, what appears at first to be an abrasive word of imprecation for Maximus turns rather immediately to a comforting message intended to encourage his repentance, for *metanoia* remains a possibility even despite his companion's prior record of denying the Lord. This same hope of repentance for the purpose of salvation almost always accompanies and tempers the few instances of the *Shepherd*'s polemic, to the limited degree that it exists, against other Christians who behave objectionably.

Manifestly, the *Shepherd* of Hermas was not animated by any systematic doctrinal specificity, and he was largely uninterested in intra-Christian doctrinal polemics. Neither the concept of heresy nor the word αἵρεσις itself appears in his lengthy text, and concomitantly, Hermas has no theological axe to grind against other named Christians. What limited rhetorics of difference appear in the *Shepherd* come as warnings not to apostatize or to deny belonging to the Lord, as these and other actions will not lead one to salvation. If heresiology is "integral to how people 'speak Christian' and thus to Christian identity,"[57] as Royalty has asserted, the *Shepherd* only displays the slightest hints that Hermas's early Christianity required polemical anathemas against one's enemies. Hermas undoubtedly toys with the sort of linguistic disapproval that could be weaponized against

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[56] Herm. Vis. 2.3.4 (7.4); trans. mine. Given the lack of Greek punctuation, it is impossible to determine how much of the verse was intended to be delivered in reprobation to Maximus; here I follow the collective interpretation of Holmes, Ehrman, and Osiek in translation.

[57] Royalty, 4-5.

doctrinal deviants—he entertains, for example, the existence of some undefined "moronic teachings" and maintains that the Christian community abiding in truth must remain separate from false prophets. In some cases he appears to disallow the possibility of reconciliation to the church for apostates. Notably, these cases are all detached from named individuals, and each appears more strongly indicative of heteropraxy than heterodoxy, such as cases where one-time Christians have apostatized. However, Hermas's disapproval most often functions as a word of warning to his own audience, either to encourage their repentance or to caution them against falling into such intolerable and unthinkable categories among his taxonomies of Christian comportment. Though Royalty refers here to the *Didache*, his judgment would equally fit the *Shepherd*: both texts, through their shared adaptation of the Two Ways discourse and other methods, employ "various Christian traditions to describe difference in practice without heresiological rhetoric."[58] Hermas's book, then, would have offered very few resources to the leaders of the fourth-century church who were so exercised by a need to combat heretical doctrines. Alexander and Athanasius could not, therefore, mine the *Shepherd* as a source to buttress their polemics. It was simply a different sort of scripture, one lacking both precedent and ample parallels among other Christian texts. Borne of the laboratory of early Christianity, when other soteriologies were undoubtedly rife in its environs, the *Shepherd* was uninterested even in contending directly against alternatives to its model of individual ascension by virtue. This failure to align itself with the heresiological needs of the later church, however, is no fault of the Hermas's, and neither can it be regarded as

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[58] Royalty, 115.

individually decisive for the text's ultimate extracanonicity. The *Shepherd* would be found more clearly lacking in other areas that spurred the church's canonical constriction.

B. Christology

If heresiology inculcated within Christian elites both an influential worldview of narrowly defined truth beset by countless falsehoods and surefire tactics for epigraphic rebuke of doctrinal variance, some attention must also be paid to the subjects and topics that the proto-orthodox heresiologists were most characteristically animated to defend. While the Christian rhetoric of difference could eventually be wielded against a wide range of opponents, from "heresies" in the classical sense to pagans, pre-Christian philosophy, and more, heresiological doxography was applied at first to rapid doctrinal growth under poorly regulated intra-Christian disagreements. From these early disputes, Irenaeus and Tertullian marshalled their summaries of the fledgling religion's essential beliefs under the "rule of truth" or "rule of faith," a concept with a history reaching back perhaps into the baptismal ceremony as a concise method of recalling the faith conferred upon one God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit.[59] Irenaeus can also devise the faith received or confirmed at baptism into three articles (κεφάλαια):

> And this is the order of our faith, the foundation of [the] edifice and the support of [our] conduct: God, the Father, uncreated, uncontainable, invisible, one God, the Creator of all: this is the first article of our faith. And the second article: the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was revealed by the prophets according to the character of their prophecy and according to the nature of the economies of the Father, by whom all things were made, and who, in the last times, to recapitulate all things, became a man

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[59] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.9.4; 1.10.1. As Bokedal notes, Tertullian and Clement conceive of Christ as the originator of the rule, whereas Irenaeus attributes it instead to apostolic tradition. Tomas Bokedal, "The Rule of Faith: Tracing Its Origins," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7.2 (2013): 237-8.

amongst men visible and palpable, in order to abolish death, to demonstrate life, and to effect communion between God and man. And the third article: the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs learnt the things of God and the righteous were led in the path of righteousness, and who, in the last times, was poured out in a new fashion upon the human race renewing man, throughout the world, to God (*Dem.* 6).[60]

Irenaeus's tripartite statement both prefigures the later development of creeds and stands as a mature construction simultaneously developed from diverse scriptural sources and from a lexicon intended to rule out Gnosticism and Docetism. It will come as little surprise that as the heresiologists were motivated to write against such challengers of its core beliefs, these refinements wormed their way into nascent creeds; God's creative activity, the Son's origin from God and especially as revealed incarnate in human flesh, and Christ's power to effect salvation for humanity all become stressed in this manner. Viewed retrospectively from the creeds of the fourth and fifth century, Frances Young has deemed the Christian development of statements of orthodoxy as "a process of finer and finer definition to the extent that the precise make-up of the Trinitarian God" was the church's end product,[61] and so it would appear that a comprehensive doctrine of God, or theology, was persistently on the radar of the heresiologists. Yet, the three *hypostases* in the Christian Godhead were not evenly contested in the pre-Constantinian period. Although the New Prophets prized their assertion to speak in the Spirit and Montanus may have himself assumed the mantle of Paraclete, claims upsetting the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by and large only arise later in the fourth century, whereas supposedly aberrant doctrines of the Creator or Father God are most at-home in the second century,

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[60] Translation per John Behr, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 43-4.

[61] Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 100.

when heresiologists opposed Marcion and the Gnostics. Instead, from the second to the fourth centuries, doctrinal competition for a proper understanding of the origin and work of Christ, and especially his relationship to the singularly unbegotten Father God, becomes increasingly heated. Preceding Nicaea, Christians disagreed most stringently about "how to read the christological narrative presented by Scripture,"[62] a difficulty not simply of harmonizing and interpreting texts but of describing the nature of the created order and relating it to established liturgical confessions, the real world that did not yet match those totalized assertions of truth and Lordship, and the belief in salvation enabled by the actions of Christ.

Increasingly constrictive Christological doctrines were the result of numerous heresies during this period that, to the proto-orthodox mind, flouted some element of the full narrative laid out in the scriptures. Marcionites, though their signature claim displaced the God of the Old Testament from Christian worship, discounted Christ's "presence" and prophetical foretelling in that prior testament. The Ebionites totally ignored the Johannine origin for Christ "in the beginning" and "before Abraham," if they were even aware that this higher Christological story existed, and postulated that Jesus was born of the natural human conjugation of Joseph and Mary. Paul of Samosata was motivated to preserve both "the Oneness of God and the humanity of Jesus Christ" and apparently understood the Johannine *Logos* as a power or an aspect of God that dwelt superabundantly in the human Jesus.[63] In perhaps an opposite direction on the

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[62] Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 41.

[63] T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 114.

Christological spectrum, Docetists regarded a Christ who was not in any way human and only appeared to suffer, while Sabellius collapsed Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into different modes with which the divine interacted with creation. And finally, these nameable "heresies" predating the fourth century do not even begin to touch on the widespread subordinationist tendencies manifest among otherwise "orthodox" thinkers active especially during the early part of this period. Though Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian are normally welcomed as mainstream fathers of the church, they utilized conceptions of the Son's relationship to the Father that, if expressed in the fourth century, would have either seen them anathematized or forced them to quickly change course.[64] Quite clearly, conceptions of Christ vying for the banner of orthodoxy underwent simultaneous definition and challenge before Constantine on nearly every point of doctrine. Was Jesus human, God, or some combination of both, and how? Did Christ possess full awareness of his purpose, or was he blindly at the whim of a divine will to which he had little or no access? At what point did the Son of God become generated, and was the *Logos* an innate part of his being? How was one to reconcile the origin stories of Johannine incarnation theology and the virginal conception of Mary as found in Matthew and Luke? The expansive variety of different answers to these questions and many others made Christological interpretation in the early church awash with options,

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[64] As just one example, witness Tertullian's blush-inducing "Arianism" that even cites John 14:28 in the same way as the opponents of Athanasius: "For the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole, as He Himself acknowledges: 'My Father is greater than I.' In the Psalm His inferiority is described as being 'a little lower than the angels.' Thus the Father is distinct from the Son, being greater than the Son, inasmuch as He who begets is one, and He who is begotten is another" (*Prax.* 9). *ANF* 3:603-4. Even the editors of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series recognize this tension, and yet work to excuse Tertullian for using "expressions which in aftertimes, when controversy had introduced greater precision of language, were studiously avoided by the orthodox." *ANF* 3:604 n.1.

and particularly in the second century, the outcome of the diversity would have been anything but obvious to observers.

The subject of the church's Christological refinement from the second to the fourth centuries surely merits a dissertation-length study of its own, and yet space here demands brevity. To condense the worthy macro-topic into a digestible format, we assume that the role of heresiological squabbles concerning Christologically insufficient doctrines is well understood and accepted. We need not belabor the point that patristic authors responded with reprobation to heresies they deemed aberrant to the church's understanding of Christ. The more interesting development beginning in the second century was the increasing importance of the Gospel of John, and especially its Prologue, to proto-orthodox conceptions of Christ. As Pollard's durable study argued,

> Without in any way diminishing the importance of other biblical writings in the development of the church's doctrine, is it St John's Gospel—and the First Epistle of St John—that brings into sharpest focus the problems which created doctrinal controversy in the early church and which indeed still perplexes the church today.[65]

Specifically, Pollard identified two paradoxes that vexed the church as it struggled to crystallize and universalize its Christological beliefs: that of "distinction-within-unity," or the need to simultaneously affirm the close relationship between Father and Son while yet differentiating between the two *hypostases*, and the second paradox of Christ's synchronous humanity and divinity.[66] The church's near-unanimous use of the Gospel of John from the second century onward forced it to reckon with these paradoxes, perhaps driving it on a course that could only culminate in the preference for a high Christology

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[65] Pollard, 3.

[66] Ibid., 15.

and the inclination to filter all other Christological material in the scriptures through a Johannine lens.[67] It is in John's Gospel where we read the clearest indications that Christ, as the *Logos* or "Word" through which God created the natural order, pre-existed creation and was incarnated in the last days, "being God in human form."[68] Beliefs such as these made explicit in the first 18 verses of John, and which the fathers of the church supported by interpretation of that gospel and imported into their perception of other Scriptures, would hold an outsized sway on doctrinal development in the succeeding centuries. To demonstrate the rising significance of Christological elements of a Johannine flavor, this section proceeds by surveying signposts for the church's theology diachronically, first from Ignatius and Justin to Irenaeus, second from the prominent writers of the third century, and finally, from Alexander.

Beyond the acknowledged use of Mark by the other synoptic evangelists, discovering concrete evidence for the definitive importance of *written* gospels is somewhat dicey even as late as Justin in the mid-second century. Earlier, in the second decade of the second century, the Antiochene bishop Ignatius wrote desperate letters trying to rally the support of other Christians while *en route* to Rome for his certain martyrdom. Ignatius unveiled a Christology rooted primarily in the events of Jesus's synoptic life (*Mag.* 11, *Eph.* 18.2) and very keenly stresses the significance of his real

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[67] For now, I wish to set aside the narrower definition of Christology, which sometimes centers on how or why Jesus of Nazareth became or qualified to become the Messiah/Christ, and to interrogate a more comprehensive "doctrine of Christ, which typically includes a discussion of his personal identity as both divine and human, and his work of atonement that brings salvation." Not all elements recognizable or essential to modern systematic theology will be present among writers of the pre-Constantinian period, but this is an appropriate reminder that Christology encompasses somewhat more than merely the logic that merited Jesus's identity as the Christ. Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 579.

[68] David L. Bartlett, *Christology in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2017), 132.

birth, real crucifixion, and real resurrection, likely as responses to docetic views that

plagued his episcopacy (*Trall.* 9.1-2). In terms of written gospels, he displays the most

affinities with Matthew, but Helmut Koester and William Schoedel are likely correct that

Ignatius knows and works from oral tradition, rather than a final written format.[69]

However, Ignatius extends beyond the Matthaean bounds alone and uses expressions, if

incipiently, that indicate a familiarity with Johannine traditions. He regularly calls Jesus

"our God" and expresses the mystery of Christ's salvific work in a series of dualities:

"There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn (γεννητὸς καὶ

ἀγέννητος), God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to

suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord" (*Eph.* 7.2).[70] In another place,

Ignatius can refer to the Son as God's "Word (λόγος) that came forth from silence"

(*Magn.* 8.2), and while neither of these requires a written Gospel of John, it seems clear

that Ignatius has welcomed in some Johannine concepts to help him make sense of God's

humanity in the person of Christ. As regards the Ignatian *Logos*, much interpretive work

is left to be done after the Antiochene, for charges have been raised that his nontechnical

use of the term, especially as paired with Silence (σιγῆς), indicates that he may have

picked it from Gnostic or Valentinian tendencies.[71] Instead, Schoedel's solution is

preferable: Ignatius need not be doing anything more than refracting his awareness that

Christ had become identified with the *Logos*, therefore supplementing the simple

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[69] William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 9.

[70] Translation per Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 189.

[71] See the discussion in both Pollard, 28-30, and Schoedel, 120.

meaning of "speech," and not yet "Divine Reason," with the preceding silence of creation.[72] Either way, this singular use of *Logos* for Christ portends its low significance for Ignatius. Although he may know of Johannine concepts, his faith is not constructed from this Gospel, and "his christology is a Son-christology, not a Logos-christology."[73] By contrast, Justin arrives to Christianity, the "true philosophy," from a philosopher's background, where the concept of the *Logos* was germinated before its incorporation into Hellenistic Judaism and John's Gospel. Though Justin also characteristically refrains from quoting the gospels, which he knows as the "memoirs" of the apostles (*Dial.* 50), he yet exhibits an early incarnational Christology indebted to the Johannine Prologue. According to Justin, the Reason, or *Logos*, though always existing in the world, "himself took shape and became man (ἀνθρώπου γενομένου), and was called Jesus Christ" (*Apol.* 1.5).[74] Justin's intention here is less of a systematic expression of doctrine and more to demonstrate how Christ-as-*Logos* corresponds to reason or logic as a Greco-Roman mind might have recognized it, but he takes further steps later in his *Apology* to signal the essential role carved out for the *Logos* in the world. In a sign that Justin was motivated to find the *Logos* active throughout scriptural or salvation history, he equates *Logos* with the spirit of prophecy that caused Isaiah to record that the virgin would conceive (Is 7:14). All of the prophets are similarly inspired by the movement of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ (*Apol.* 1.33), and so too did the *Logos* appear to Moses in the burning bush (*Apol.* 1.63), but beyond this, all who lived at any point in history μετὰ λόγου, like Socrates and

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[72] Schoedel, 121.

[73] Pollard, 31.

[74] Trans. mine, from *PG* 6:336.

Heraclitus, also testify to Christ's existence that antedates his actual birth from Mary (*Apol.* 1.46). Even if Justin does not explicitly quote from the Prologue of John's Gospel, he is indisputably familiar with its claim that "the Word was God" (Jn 1:1), and he presses this further than Ignatius to offer a synchronized macro-narrative that includes both origins of Christ before creation and through his human birth by Mary.

Though a five-book heresiography comprises much of the extant material from the bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus is a figure of indisputable significance to any summary of patristic knowledge or early Christian theology. His preserved work has even been lauded for its "first relatively complete picture of 'early catholicism' that has come down to us," but sight should not be lost of the fact that Irenaeus transmits his elements in the direction of a coherent theology via a controlling purpose of refuting heresies.[75] This context forms the exigency from which Irenaeus makes nearly all of his most famous claims. For example, certain heretics get carried away with their deviant doctrines because they use only one gospel without taking heed of the rest, from Ebionites reliant on Matthew alone to the Valentinians who cherish John (*Haer.* 3.11.7). Their heresies are rightly answered for Irenaeus by the church's standard of all four gospels in tandem—no more and no less will he tolerate. Moreover, Irenaeus devises a *raison d'être* for the composition of the Gospel of John precisely in this counter-heretical context. In his reckoning, John observed the specious interpretations of Cerinthus and the Nicolaitans, each who harbor Gnostic tendencies displacing creation from the Father God and suggesting that Jesus was

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[75] Denis Minns, "Truth and Tradition: Irenaeus," in *Origins to Constantine*, Vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 263.

not inherently "Christ" but received this mantle at some indeterminate point in his life.

Irenaeus asserts that John wished to set the record straight:

> The Lord's disciple, therefore, wished to put an end to all such tenets, and to make firm the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one God almighty, who through His Word made all things, both the visible and the invisible. He indicated, too, that through the very Word through which God fashioned the creation, He bestowed in turn salvation on the people who are in this creation. That is how he began with the doctrine according to the Gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…* (*Haer.* 3.11.1).[76]

Elsewhere when Irenaeus unfurls a rule of faith or truth, he characteristically includes Johannine elements, but here he attributes the development of that rule to the apostle and evangelist John. As he continues to plumb the Johannine Prologue for its useful heresiological components, he even supposes that incarnation theology forms a litmus test against the heretics, for none of them will allow that the *Logos* was made flesh without some qualification that robs the incarnate Word of its power (*Haer.* 3.11.3). Though Irenaeus rejects the philosophical underpinnings of the *Logos*, he yet recognizes its potential to concisely transmit correct doctrine harmonized from the four gospels: the Word permits Christ's presence and agency at creation, while yet explaining the recent appearance of Jesus in history for the salvation of humankind (*Haer.* 3.16.7, 3.18.1). Jesus's birth from Mary in Matthew and Luke has not lost its significance, but rather has been subsumed under the operative macro-narrative provided by the Johannine Prologue, for Christ, as the Word, was always with humanity:

> Consequently, every objection of those who say, "If therefore Christ was born, then He did not exist before," is rejected. For we have shown that the Son of God did not begin to exist then, having been always with the Father; but when

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[76] Trans. per Dominic J. Unger and Irenaeus M. C. Steenberg, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 3*, vol. 64 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: Newman Press, 2012), 52.

> He became incarnate and was made man, He recapitulated in Himself the long unfolding of humankind, granting salvation by way of compendium, that in Christ Jesus we might receive what we had lost in Adam, namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God (*Haer.* 3.18.1).[77]

In Irenaeus, therefore, we note the tremendous achievement of Johannine theology. Whereas Ignatius displays only a passing familiarity with the idea of the *Logos* and other concepts from John, in just a few generations Irenaeus has fully absorbed Johannine logic and makes its Prologue the centerpiece through which all Christian claims cohere intelligibly. Justin represents perhaps an intermediary stage between these two poles of second-century development, but only in Irenaeus does Justin's fondness for the *Logos* become wrested from its philosophical husk and pressed into service of an unabashedly scriptural framework that differentiates an orthodox Christianity from speculative heresies. Irenaeus, himself an émigré from Asia Minor where traditions about John were most concentrated, traced his own theological heritage through Polycarp and back to John, and from there it is of little surprise that he imbued elite Western bishops with a "strong Johannine flavour."[78] Thanks to the popularity of his heresiography, which turned up in Egypt before the end of the second century, Irenaeus's construction of a theological macro-narrative was also exported to the Christian East.

Pollard has ably shown how Irenaeus's focal interest in Johannine theology was taken up in the third century, both in the Christian West and in Alexandria by figures ranging from Hippolytus and Tertullian to Clement and Origen. Their primary targets were "monarchians" of various stripes, requiring the fathers of the church to meet a

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[77] Pollard, 87-8.

[78] Ibid., 48.

challenge "of defining more clearly the divinity of Christ and his place in the godhead."[79]

Meanwhile, others influenced strongly by the writings of Irenaeus exhibited an overriding

interest in John, whom they presumed to have written both a gospel and the book of

Revelation. For example, Victorinus was best known in antiquity for his primitive

millenarian exegesis of Revelation, but his Muratorian Fragment also reserves more lines

to the place of John's Gospel in the order of the scriptural collection than it devotes for

any other book of his New Testament. Victorinus especially echoes the legend that John

was encouraged by the other apostles to write his Gospel, a story that appears in two

different forms in the Muratorian Fragment (lines 10–16) and his Commentary (*Comm. in

Apoc.* 11.1). In the second of these, Martine Dulaey observes the presence of two factors

that seal Victorinus's dependence upon Irenaeus: John's purpose to refute the heretics,

and a subsequent statement of the rule of faith borne out within John's writings.[80]

Elsewhere in his fragmentary extant corpus, Victorinus is content to simply portray Jesus,

as the Word, as the "author of all creation," after which he furnishes the first several

verses of John (*De Fab.* 7).[81] In Victorinan thought, irrespective of the actual subject at

hand, John is the indispensable apostle of Christ, and the writings of the beloved disciple

continue to play a notable role in other authors from the third century, suggesting that his

Gospel has achieved a newfound, widespread importance for the elucidation of

orthodoxy. Pollard summarizes the phenomenon thusly:

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[79] Pollard, 51.

[80] Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio: Premier exégète latin* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 1:73.

[81] Trans. mine, from the Latin text in Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio: Sur L'Apocalypse et Autres Écrits*, vol. 423 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 144.

Hippolytus against Noetus, Tertullian against Praxeas, Novatian against the unnamed proponent of a humanistic Christology (*psilanthropism*)—all three delivered their most telling blows by exegesis of St John. Clement and Origen, too, find in the Fourth Gospel support for their view of distinctions within the godhead.[82]

John has not entirely usurped the use of the other gospels, but as observed with Irenaeus, the Johannine Prologue supplies a theological superstructure that casts a shadow over nearly all patristic exegesis in the third century.

In particular, these Alexandrian exegetes of the third century light flames that adumbrate into the controversies of the fourth century, blending scriptural exegesis with the necessity to explain in more sophisticated, philosophical terms the precise relationship of Father and Son, including the degree to which the Son shares in the Father's will. The *Logos* was front and center; J. Rebecca Lyman asserts that "the importance of the Logos paradigm in Origen's Christology can hardly be overstressed."[83] The *Logos* permits creatures to access the Creator God through the Son in prayer, acting as an intermediary to the Father reflective entirely of his special status as the firstborn of all creation. Origen's Christology also introduces new tensions and a vocabulary that ripens into a source of conflict after his death: the Son could paradoxically exist as both God and a creature, if an eternally generated one; Christ was incarnated by the marrying of his pre-existent soul with the *Logos*; and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all shared to some degree an essence (οὐσία) or nature, though the Father

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[82] Pollard, 52.

[83] J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 39.

retained a distinctive place among the Trinity thanks to his unbegotten status.[84] These are

but minor examples reflecting Origen's extreme intellectualism and theological creativity

that caused significant trouble both in his own lifetime, as when Dionysius excused him

from the Alexandrian catechetical school, and beyond it, when the tensions his

speculative work enacted erupted fully into yet another theological civil war. The

indispensability of John's Gospel to Origen, Victorinus, and other significant theologians

of the third century cannot be denied, but crucially, Christology is also being constructed

on logical or philosophical terms that have burst the bonds of Scripture alone.

Thus, at the outset of the fourth century, three prevalent Christological strands

persisted in the Eastern Church, each relying on an interpretation of John's Gospel as

well as external or supplementary influences. Pollard broadly refers to these three strands

as Antiochene, Alexandrian, and neo-Alexandrian, and holds that the latter of the three,

represented by Alexander and Athanasius, would cannibalize the other two by the end of

the century.[85] Without rehearsing too much of the fourth-century conflict here, it

behooves us to cover the degree to which the neo-Alexandrian tradition expressed its

Christological rebukes in the accoutrements of the Johannine Prologue. As we have

already demonstrated, Alexander's two major letters from the 320s set a distinctly

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[84] Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology*, 69-72. As she poignantly notes, "The Son is divine through being first-born, eternally begotten from God, and participates directly in the Father. He is of a derivative, but unquestionable divinity. . . . In his acts of love the Son reveals the divine essence, for he is the 'image of the invisible God'. Yet, by his very activity in incarnation and death, the Son is of a different substance from the Father."

[85] Pollard, 117. Reality is likely somewhat more complex than this simple outline of three dominant traditions, which relies on Arius's enigmatic "co-Lucianists" comment to portray him as most influenced by the Antiochene tradition. It would perhaps be preferable to locate Arius somewhere between the Antiochene and Alexandrian strands, for Arius does reflect *some* of Origen's theology and Christology, even if he vehemently rejects the *homoousian*. For Pollard, the best representative of the older Alexandrian tradition is Eusebius of Caesarea, who benefitted from Origen's work in Palestine.

heresiological course for the controversy—it would be decided on the combatants'

conviction that one truth would prevail, and others would be relegated to history as

heretics. When Alexander was not deploying his most virulent tactics, however, most

often he appealed to the Gospel of John as the self-evident scriptural elixir warding off

Arius's farcical beliefs. The latter of Alexander's letters pillories Arius's theology, or a

caricature thereof, before setting out the thoroughly Johannine terms by which it may be

repelled:

> τίς γὰρ ἤκουσε πώποτε τοιαῦτα; ἤ τίς νῦν ἀκούων οὐ ξενίζεται καὶ τὰς ἀκοὰς βύει ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ τὸν ῥύπον τούτων τῶν ῥημάτων ψαῦσαι τῆς ἀκοῆς; τίς ἀκούων Ἰωάννου λέγοντος, « ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος », οὐ καταγινώσκει τούτων λεγόντων, ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, ἤ τίς ἀκούων ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ « μονογενὴς υἱός », καὶ « δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο πάντα », οὐ μισήσει τούτους φθεγγομένους, ὅτι εἷς ἐστιν τῶν ποιημάτων; πώς γὰρ δύναται εἷς εἶναι τῶν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ γενομένων, ἤ πῶς μονογενὴς ὁ τοῖς πᾶσι κατ᾽ ἐκείνους συναριθμούμενος;

> For who has ever heard such things? Or who, now hearing them, is not bewildered and corks his ears in order to prevent himself from the effect of hearing the filth of these words? Who, hearing John saying, "In the beginning was the Word," does not convict these ones who say, "There was once when he was not," or who, hearing in the Gospel "only-begotten Son," and "through him all things were made," will not hate these ones braying that he [the Son] is one of the things made? For how can he be one of the things made "through him(self)," or how can he who is reckoned among all those things be "only-begotten"?[86]

Given this letter's intention to rally support before the expected ecumenical council from

like-minded Eastern bishops, Alexander should be heard here as modeling both the proof-

texts that contravene Arius's characteristic doctrines and Christological elements that he

holds dear. But even earlier, when Alexander's audience is merely one bishop who may

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[86] *Encyclical Letter of Alexander to All Bishops*, Urkunde 4b §12; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 8-9.

be close to Constantine's ear, Alexander puts forth the Johannine Prologue as the grounds

from which the church's Christology must be constructed:

> περὶ μὲν οὖν ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ οὔτε ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων γεγένηται, οὔτε ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, αὐτάρκης ἐπαίδευσεν Ἰωάννης ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς γράφων οὕτως περὶ αὐτοῦ· « ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός, ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρός ». προνοούμενος γὰρ ὁ θεῖος δεικνύναι διδάσκαλος ἀλλήλων ἀχώριστα πράγματα δύο, τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν, ὄντα αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς κόλποις τοῦ πατρὸς ὠνόμασεν. ἀλλὰ γὰρ καὶ ὅτι τοῖς ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων γενομένοις ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ οὐ συναριθμεῖται, πάντα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ γεγονέναι φησὶν ὁ αὐτὸς Ἰωάννης. τὴν γὰρ ἰδιότροπον αὐτοῦ ὑπόστασιν ἐδήλωσεν εἰπών· « ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος… ».

> John the Evangelist taught sufficiently, therefore, that the Son of God came into being neither from non-existence, nor was there once when he was not, writing thusly concerning him, "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father." For with foresight, the divine teacher, to make known that the two, the Father and the Son, are inseparable from one another, placed him in the bosom of the father. But, not reckoning the Word of God among the things that came into being from non-existence, the same John also says that all things were made through him. For he [John] indicates his [the Word's] distinctive *hypostasis*, saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…"[87]

From the Prologue to the Gospel of John, Alexander makes fruitful use of verses 1, 3, and

18, and he occasionally appeals to other places in John—3:16, 5:23, 10:30, and 14:6—to

buttress his scriptural censure of Arius's views. By contrast, though these two letters

make regular use of prophetic books of the Old Testament and the letters of Paul, they

only occasionally appeal to Matthew, and never to the other Gospels. For Alexander, the

crucial Christological material conveying the church's Trinitarian doctrine is

overwhelmingly to be found in John, the Prologue of which becomes "naturally the great

resort of the pro-Nicenes."[88] As we have suggested here, the elite navigation of

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[87] *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium/Thessalonica*, Urkunde 14 §1; trans. mine, from the Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 15-16.

[88] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 835.

Christological doctrine by material distinct to John reflects a lengthy escalation of the Fourth Gospel's import since the second century, when Justin and Irenaeus first pounced on John and claimed the *Logos* as a defining framework through which to understand the totality of Christian theology. In the third century, John serves fruitfully both as the indispensable apostle of Christ and as the resource for combatting new-arising psilanthropist heresies or Christologies that appeal all too frequently to the synoptic human-born Son of God. In the fourth century, John supplies the most ammunition for Alexander and his successors against other Christological ideas that, whether Samosatene or properly Trinitarian, disturb the essential unity of Father and Son. Each generation, while trying to conceive of the origin, intention, work, and nature of Christ, struggled to produce doctrinal refinements that would outlast their lifetimes, but as time passed, most agreed that the Gospel of John, and especially its Prologue, was in some way determinative for the orthodoxy of the church. Considering how entrenched this development was in the minds of elite Christians by the fourth century, how are we then to view the comparatively underdeveloped Christological material from the *Shepherd* of Hermas?

The *Shepherd* and Christology

In the midst of a fourth-century ecclesiastical climate and a dominant neo-Alexandrian interpretive tradition that pursued its Christological doctrine by the determinative theology of the Johannine Prologue, the *Shepherd* yet flourished despite lacking the name of Jesus or the title Christ. Though the *Shepherd* speaks variably about

the Son of God—with the word υἱός appearing in the Visions once and 45 times in the Parables—a unified Christology does not obtain from these polyvocal elements. Carolyn Osiek comments thusly: "It is clear to the reader that speculative or systematic christology is not the author's goal. All attempts to reconstruct a systematic christology in *Hermas* falter."[89] However, wielders of scripture engaged in fourth-century polemics were less interested in recovering a systematic portrayal than they were in finding resources that supported their cause. Hanson refers to this textual approach as an "atomic" tendency, "as if each verse or set of verses was capable of giving direct information about Christian doctrine."[90] Moreover, we should not underestimate the capacity for Christians who were fostered in a book like the *Shepherd* to read it "canonically," such that irrespective of its actual ambiguity, where it did not actively oppose one's beliefs, it could be understood to uphold them. This forms the probable impulse behind the curious appearance of Christ in the text of Codex Sinaiticus at Vision 2.2.8, where a scribe substituted the *nomen sacrum* for "Christ" for that of "Lord":
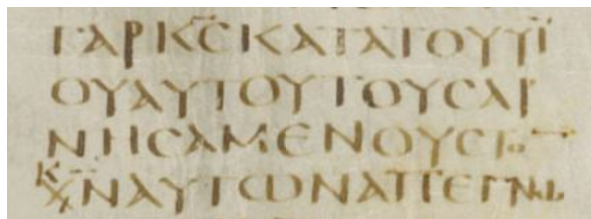
Fig. 5.1: The first four full lines of Herm. Vis. 2.2.8 (6.8) in Codex Sinaiticus, at Q93 F2r C3. See esp. the first letters of the fourth line here, corrected from $\overline{XN}$ to $\overline{KN}$.[91]

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[89] Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 36.

[90] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 848-9.

[91] This image capture comes from the Web publication of the Codex Sinaiticus, accessible on the Codex Sinaiticus Project website at http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx.

Thus, until a corrector fixed the text in the 12th century, this most famous manuscript of the *Shepherd* of Hermas read, "For the Lord has sworn by his Son that those who have denied their *Christ* have been rejected from their life, that is, those who are now about to deny him in the coming days."[92] That this reading is manifestly incorrect is less relevant than its actual reception in Christian circles, for it hints strongly that where the text appropriately reads as Son or Lord, those cherishing the book could hear "Christ" and "understand[] this as a reference to Jesus."[93] Modern interpreters rightly perceive a hesitancy from Hermas to delve into the significance of Christ, but wherever the text speaks of the Son, the Name, the Master (ὁ δεσπότης) of the Tower, or even just the Lord (ὁ κύριος), certain Christians reasonably discerned information about Jesus that accorded with their beliefs nurtured from other sources, whether scriptural or traditional.

Unfortunately, we have desperately little substantive access to the reception of the *Shepherd* from Christians who admired it after Origen, and virtually none that elucidates key points in the text which might disclose their comprehension of its conformity, or lack thereof, to an established Christological portrait. While the above line suggests that the Lord and the Son worked together in a complementary relationship for soteriological winnowing, it offers nothing about a shared nature or essence, the precise origin of the Son, creation, or any of the components of a Christology excavated from the Johannine Prologue. Instead, we must imaginatively approach other potential Christological material from the *Shepherd* in order to hypothesize how it might have been received in the fourth century. The three paragraphs that follow delve respectively into three sections

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[92] Herm. Vis. 2.2.8 (6.8); trans. mine, from the transcribed text of Codex Sinaiticus.

[93] Osiek, Hermeneia, 56 n.14.

of the *Shepherd* where interpretive decisions would have portended a positive or negative Christological association with the text. Building from prior discussions about the *Shepherd*'s contents, we now turn to Commandment 1, Parable 5, and Parable 9.

As we pursued our patristic reception history for the *Shepherd* above, we saw that the first commandment of the shepherd to Hermas was far and away the most quoted section by the church fathers. Irenaeus approved of its statement about the one God who created all things from nothing but was himself uncontained, as did Origen and even Athanasius in his early days, when he regarded the *Shepherd* a "most useful book." Of this group, Irenaeus produced commentary most indicative of a Trinitarian understanding of the commandment, his quotation of which flows immediately from an interpretation of Genesis 1:26, a hortatory injunction where the Father God creates along with his Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit. Whatever the authorial intention of Hermas, for Irenaeus, the *Shepherd*'s statement that "God is one" reflects the entirety of the divine Trinity within the creative unit. Athanasius undoubtedly concurred, for throughout his career he vehemently defended the Son's participation in creation, as was affirmed for him by John 1:3 and Proverbs 8:22, among other scriptures. However, Athanasius alleged that some Christians—the Eusebians whom he understood to be allied with "Arians"— regarded the Son not among the "God is one" statement of Commandment 1 but among the "all things" created from non-existence. The result was an objectionable tension, for in spite of a perfectly acceptable orthodox understanding of the commandment dating back to Irenaeus, this central cosmogonical and Christological statement of the *Shepherd* was now irreversibly open to interpretation. While we do not possess an account of

anyone who interpreted Commandment 1 in this fashion, and neither do we even know

their names, it must be reckoned probable that Athanasius relays this information

accurately, and not simply to dethrone the *Shepherd* as collateral damage. In the fourth

century, though Athanasius himself was apoplectic about any insinuation that the Son

was a κτίσμα, others had significantly fewer qualms about calling the Son a "perfect

creature." Arius himself, in his carefully worded statement of faith penned for Alexander,

selected an expression that afforded the Son primacy among the creations of the Father:

the υἱὸν μονογενῆ was the κτίσμα τοῦ θεοῦ τέλειον, ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ὡς ἓν τῶν κτισμάτων.[94] So

while we have no indication that Arius himself appealed to the *Shepherd* of Hermas, it

would not have been an impossible or unheard-of position for one of the doctrinal

combatants in the fourth century to locate the Son among the created order, and from

there to have availed himself of the *Shepherd*'s Commandment 1 as an explicit scriptural

foundation for such a belief. In truth, however, the shepherd's first commandment offers

no obvious Christological material for either side of the controversy; the Son is not

explicitly a subject of whatever precise doctrinal claim Hermas intended to advance here.

Instead, interpreters of this verse since the second century mapped their own

preconceived notions of Christian orthodoxy onto the mandate, which itself was

sufficiently plastic to accommodate a variety of later needs.

By contrast, Parable 5 begins to make positive statements about the Son of God,

but its positions would have almost certainly been regarded untenable to every side of the

fourth-century Christological debates. In fact, no ancient author comments on this parable

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[94] *Letter of Arius to Alexander*, Urkunde 6 §2; Greek text in Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Band III, Teil 1*, 12.

that, though it purports to reframe the practice of fasting in a manner that God truly appreciates, elaborates further on the slave who tended exceptionally to his master's vineyard. Through his extraordinary work, the slave is promoted to a co-heir with the master's son—but the roles are allegorized unexpectedly to reveal the slave as the Son of God and the master's son as the Holy Spirit.[95] In spite of some confusing components and textual critical issues, this adoptionistic or perhaps exaltationist Christology found no meaningful support in the fourth century, irrespective of Alexander's attempts to slander Arius with the weight of accusations that his doctrine was taken from "Ebion" and Paul of Samosata. Instead, all sides avoided this brand of "low" or primitive Christology, for it did not match the philosophical sophistry of Johannine *Logos* theology, and neither was it simple to reconcile with the recognized synoptic story of Jesus's virginal conception and birth, anointment with the Holy Spirit, and sacrificial death.

If Athanasius's opponents truly did appeal to the *Shepherd* of Hermas for support of their Christological doctrine, as he alleges, they would have found more plentiful support in the lengthy ninth Parable. Recapitulating the third Vision, where Hermas is first shown the salvific tower under construction, the shepherd here reveals to Hermas a more elaborate vision of the tower. The imagery is embellished with new details: twelve mountains from which people of the earth, and thus stones possibly comprising the tower, come, a set of twelve "wild" women who seduce people away from the virtuous behaviors, and the newfound abounding presence of the Son of God, who fulfills various roles never mentioned before in the *Shepherd*. Aside from being equivalent to "the holy

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[95] For further detail about this parable, refer above to pp. 50–1.

spirit" who spoke to Hermas earlier in the form of the woman Church,[96] the Son of God

will at some point return to the tower to test it and either declare it completed or order

more construction.[97] The shepherd continues to explain that the twelve virgins who

support the tower, with glorious names such as Faith, Truth, Love, and Harmony, are

each "powers" of the Son of God.[98] In order to enter the kingdom of God, one must bear

both the name of the Son of God and his powers.[99] Most Christologically potent,

however, are the implications borne out by Hermas's elaborate tour of the tower, where

he takes special notice of its foundation and gate:

> Though that rock was old, an entrance had been struck out of it; but the carving of the entrance appeared as if quite recent to me. And the entrance outshone the sun, such that I was amazed at the brilliance of the entrance.[100]

Eventually, Hermas seizes upon an opportunity to quiz the shepherd about the rock

foundation for the tower and its newer, glorious entrance:

> "First of all, sir," I said, "explain this to me: Who is the rock and the entrance?" "This rock," he said, "and the entrance are the Son of God." "How, sir," I said, "is the rock old, but the entrance new?" "Listen," he said, "and understand, you fool! The Son of God was generated before (προγενέστερος) all his creation, such that he was a counselor (σύμβουλον) to the Father for his creation. For this reason, the rock is old." "But why, sir," I said, "is the entrance new?" "Because," he said, "in the last days of the consummation was he made manifest; for this reason, the entrance is new, so that those who are going to be saved might enter the kingdom of God through it."[101]

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[96] Herm. Sim. 9.1.1 (78.1).

[97] Herm. Sim. 9.5.2 (82.2); 9.6.4-5 (83.4-5).

[98] Herm. Sim. 9.13.2 (90.2); 9.15.2 (92.2).

[99] Herm. Sim. 9.12.4 (89.4); 9.12.8 (89.8); 9.13.2 (90.2).

[100] Herm. Sim. 9.2.2 (79.2); trans. mine.

[101] Herm. Sim. 9.12.1-3 (89.1-3); trans. mine.

The *Shepherd* never exceeds these Christological heights, and though the book affirms that the "name of the Son of God sustains (βαστάζει)" the entire world,[102] these flirtations with cosmogony are almost immediately subordinated to Hermas's more crucial aretological designs for the tower.[103] As we have argued previously, this recapitulation of the tower strongly commends the hypothesis that Hermas was compelled, perhaps through feedback from his immediate audience, to syncretize his powerful earlier vision with other elements of Christian confession with which both performer and audience had since become familiar. Before this ninth Parable, Hermas has previously devoted no attention to the kingdom of God, but now he retrofits the tower to include both the Son of God and kingdom-language, all the while retaining his insistence that one's ascendance in virtue certifies that one has become useful (εὔχρηστοι) for the tower—and thus has achieved a place within the kingdom. The relative ages of the foundational rock and the entrance to the tower, and the Son of God's polysemous metaphorical equivalence with both parts, suggest the influence of a Johannine *Logos* Christological framework that could both explain the recent appearance of the Son while also affording him primeval origins. Crucially, however, the *Shepherd* engineers a similar scheme without ever declaring that through the Son all things were created (cf. Jn 1:3), for only the Holy Spirit is "preexistent" and has "created all creation."[104] The Son, on the other hand, can only be described by a comparative term (προγενέστερος) that indicates first-born status, and is

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[102] Herm. Sim. 9.14.5 (91.5).

[103] Herm. Sim. 9.15.2 (92.2); cf. 9.13.3-4 (90.3-4).

[104] So Herm. Sim. 5.6.5 (59.5), which speaks of τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τὸ προόν, τὸ κτίσαν πάσαν τὴν κτίσιν.

thus wholly open to "Arian" construals that the Son could be a κτίσμα, or that there was a time when the Son did not exist. In spite of Hermas's demonstrable openness to a reevaluation of his parables after encountering other tradents of early Christian theology, he never quite supplies Christological resources for a cosmogony or soteriology that Alexander or Athanasius would have found acceptable in the controversies of the fourth century.

Scholars who investigate the contents of the *Shepherd* of Hermas customarily observe its inconsistent, confusing, or low Christology, and Osiek speaks for many when she puzzles over the fact that "this immensely popular document of the early church was never condemned for christological heresy."[105] Again, we have no access to how the *Shepherd* was interpreted at its most surprising Christological points, such as the fifth Parable. And although Athanasius, like his Alexandrian predecessors who received the *Shepherd* most favorably, almost certainly had at his disposal the complete text of Hermas's book,[106] his quotations from the *Shepherd* only barely surpass the first Commandment. For whatever reason, this renowned controversialist saw no reason to plumb beyond a commandment about God and creation that he accepted until he found it interpreted in a fashion that violated his sensibilities. Yet, Athanasius's abrupt notice that the *Shepherd* could be pressed into service of a lower Christology hints at the alluring possibility that the ninth Parable was used for the same purpose, and simultaneously at the probable episcopal embarrassment over the contents of Hermas's book among those

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[105] Osiek, Hermeneia, 179-80.

[106] Philippe Henne, "Athanase avait-il une version complète du *Pasteur* d'Hermas?" *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 66.1 (1992): 75-6.

guided by such fertile Christological material as the Johannine Prologue. Where

Athanasius could have responded with a scorched-earth missive, he instead opted for

tactful dismissiveness—for the Alexandrian bishop, the *Shepherd* could be at first

sidelined from the canon and secondarily relegated into a category of books fit to be read,

but not for the delineation of doctrine. Deeming the book merely catechetical, Athanasius

set it apart from the "canonized" scriptures that contained the "springs of salvation." In a

fourth century dominated by the pursuit for proper Christological doctrine, Athanasius's

declaration serves as a functional disapproval, if not an outright condemnation, of the

Shepherd's portrayal of the Son's relationship to the Father.

C. Attitudes Toward Prophecy, Revelations, and Visionary Experiences

Whatever Christological commitments or confessions attended the earliest

recoverable Christianity, its initial adherents maintained a belief in God's benevolent

contact with humanity—not merely through the appearance of the Son of God, but also

by the mediation of revelations. The earliest New Testament writer claims to have

received his own commission "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" and not from any

human evangelistic effort (Gal 1:12), and later he also delivered the thinly veiled skeleton

of his own "visions and revelations of the Lord" to reassert his own primacy over the

super-apostles that vexed the Corinthian church (2 Cor 12:1ff.). This same Paul also

expected that revelations and prophesying were conventional components of early

Christian worship, and only insisted that they must take place in an orderly fashion

(1 Cor 14:30-32). Paul's revelations are usurped, at least popularly, by a later writer who

claimed the receipt of the definitive "revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rv 1:1), and though this John was likely opposed to elements of Pauline Christianity,[107] their competing revelations became lumped together canonically as part of the same essential macro-narrative.

Outside of canonical scripture, prophecy, revelations, and visions become a mainstay of post-apostolic Christianity. The *Didache* knows the offices of apostle, teacher, and prophet, and contains a series of instructions about how the community should relate to a prophet (*Did.* 11.3-12), as well as an invitation to present them with offerings (*Did.* 13.3-6). Money can be given to a prophet, so long as the individual does not unbecomingly ask for it, and the book also makes attempts to distinguish the true prophet from false ones. The *Shepherd* of Hermas slots chronologically, although not geographically, in with the *Didache*, and though more will be said below, we have previously contended that the *Shepherd* was a book propelled by its author's claims to special revelations and visions. Furthermore, when we arrive to the first Christian treatise writers of the second century whose names and biographies we can recite, we discover more of the same, signifying a certain ubiquity for the existence of visions and prophecy in early Christianity. In Justin Martyr's mid-second century *Dialogue with Trypho*, this Christian philosopher lambasts an imagined Jew and celebrates the Christian appropriation of what had heretofore been a Jewish phenomenon of prophecy:

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[107] Elaine Pagels, *Revelations*, 54-5. Martinus de Boer suggests that John took Gal. 1:12 and deliberately transformed it into the opening words of his book, effectively supplanting and problematizing Paul's authority. Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, ed. Bernard J. McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 2003), 173.

> For even up to now, prophetic gifts (προφητικὰ χαρίσματα) are among us, and you should observe that (whereas) from long ago they were among your race, they have been transferred to us (*Dial.* 82.1).[108]

Justin clearly signals that prophetic gifts are still alive among Christians, and moreover he asserts that the transfer from Jews to Christians was carried out on the prophetic authority of Isaiah and Joel, such that now the spiritual gifts have rightfully become the sole domain of those who believe in Christ (*Dial.* 87.5-6). Later in the second century, Irenaeus concurs with the general picture that Justin presents, and though his purpose is not a disputation against Jews but rather the exposé of various aberrant Christians, he yet expounds how "upon whomever God sends his grace from above, they are the ones who possess the God-given prophetic power and then speak where and when God wills" (*Haer.* 1.13.4).[109] One cannot simply claim to possess prophetic gifts, nor can he or she expect to receive them from magicians or fortune-tellers—instead, God dispenses prophetic *charismata* however he chooses. Irenaeus similarly rebukes those who deny that charismatic gifts are and have been part and parcel of the church's history, for he argues that to deny the existence of men and women in the church who speak in the Spirit, one commits the grave sin of blasphemy against the Spirit (*Haer.* 3.11.9; cf. Mt 12:31-32). Irenaeus refrains here from naming names or spilling sects, but he claims to know of people who refuse the work of the Spirit in the church. By association, he argues that they also reject the Apostle Paul and the Gospel, thereby condemning their poor belief. And not long after Irenaeus, Tertullian similarly vouched for the liveliness of

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[108] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in Philippe Bobichon, *Justin Martyr: Dialogue avec Tryphon: Édition critique*, Paradosis 47 (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003), 1:410.

[109] Trans. per Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies, Book 1*, vol. 55 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: The Newman Press, 1992), 57.

spiritual gifts, visions, and prophecies in the church; he even claimed that they

authenticated his proto-orthodox church against innovations introduced by Marcion, for

whom no prophetic gifts had been reported and whose Christian experience was

comparatively invalid (*Marc.* 5.8).[110]

This vibrant prophetic spirit would not last forever. But before pondering the

decline of the prophetic gifts and divine revelations present in the early church, it

behooves us to attend to the phenomena under investigation. Rarely do Christian authors

attempt to define the terms that they use, or explain what exactly is meant by "revelation"

or "prophecy," but one important exception comes from Origen. Commenting on 1 Cor.

14:6, Origen tries to explain what Paul means by his various methods of communicating

with the Corinthians:

> Προφητεία is the knowledge indicated by a word of the unseen, the
> knowledge of the composition of the world and the activity of the elements
> and the times. Διδαχὴ is the didactic word delivered to the many. Ἀποκάλυψίς
> is whenever the mind departs earthly matters and puts off all fleshly action by
> the power of God; what transpires from this has come by means of revelation
> (*Fr. 1 Cor.* 4.55).[111]

Origen does not offer perfect definitions, for his understanding of prophecy does not

seem to account for the ecstatic experience, and neither does he connote here the element

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[110] "Let Marcion then exhibit, as gifts of his god, some prophets, such as have not spoken by human sense, but with the Spirit of God, such as have both predicted things to come, and have made manifest the secrets of the heart; let him produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer—only let it be by the Spirit, in an ecstasy, that is, in a rapture, whenever an interpretation of tongues has occurred to him; let him show to me also, that any woman of boastful tongue in his community has ever prophesied from amongst those specially holy sisters of his. Now all these signs (of spiritual gifts) are forthcoming from my side without difficulty, and they agree, too, with the rules, and the dispensations, and the instructions of the Creator; therefore without doubt the Christ, and the Spirit, and the apostle, belong severally to my God." *ANF* 3:446-7.

[111] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in Claude Jenkins, "Origen on I Corinthians. IV," *JTS* 10 (Oct. 1908): 36; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924061512327;view=1up;seq=52.

of prediction or prognostication that becomes pronounced especially in polemics against false prophets. His consideration of revelation similarly overstates, perhaps, the denial of the *sarx* as a prerequisite for receiving apocalyptic visions. At any rate, these definitions cannot be deemed universal for the church, or applied to Paul or Hermas or any other visionary—they are instead elements of Origen's peculiar understanding. By contrast, Laura Nasrallah takes a preferable approach: whether we are considering prophecy, revelations, visions, oracles, or dreams, in antiquity these "were understood to be part of the same basic phenomenon—the communication of the divine with the human."[112] It may be better to state what these modes of atypical knowledge are not. They are not rationally perceived by the human senses, not logically deduced or calculated, and not subject to independent verification, such that in an open playing field, the auditors of a prophet or visionary must simply take her at her word. With that said, we can discern functional differences between these activities from a composite portrait of their use across multiple early Christian authors and writings. Thus, in spite of occasional testimonies that prophets, like apostles, may be itinerant, for the most part "prophecy is a church-centered ministry through which the Lord speaks to the church what he has to say when he wants it said."[113] The content that God wishes to convey must be delivered to the prophet, and this is where our other terms under consideration find their place. Because "prophet" is a recognizable office or role in early Christian texts and the others are not, the content of the divine becomes transmitted to the prophet by means of visions,

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[112] Laura Salah Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*, Harvard Theological Studies 52 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.

[113] J. Reiling, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy: A Study of the Eleventh Mandate*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 37 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 13.

dreams, revelations, or oracles.[114] These modes of transmission may not be perfectly

interchangeable, but for the purposes of this investigation, "prophecy" will subsume the

other terms by which the divine imparts otherwise imperceptible messages to the prophet

and his community.

By the fourth century, the apparent consensus in early Christianity affirming

active prophetic gifts would suffer and dry up, and though it may be reductive to pin this

transformation on any one source, inevitably the writings of the proto-orthodoxy preserve

the remnants of a struggle against certain heretics. Beginning perhaps in the 160s or 170s

CE, Montanus and his followers in Asia Minor transgressed certain prophetic boundaries

by claiming to speak for Christ, enthused with the spirit of the Paraclete—or so their

ecclesiastical opponents alleged. Our surviving evidence for the actual content of their

prophecies is scant and aimed, of course, at offering only the most damning presentation

of these "Montanists" or "Phrygians," the most common appellations by which the

church would remember them. However, the self-proclaimed "New Prophecy" movement

of Montanus, Maximilla, and Priscilla was eschatologically motivated, foretelling of an

imminent end of the world.[115] Montanus apparently believed that the New Jerusalem

would descend at a particular place near Pepouza in Phrygia that has only recently been

discovered.[116] Opponents of these New Prophets also accused them of false prophecy, of

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[114] Reiling appears to be trending in this same direction when he claims that "[p]rophecy rests . . . on revelation." Reiling, 16.

[115] Antti Marjanen, "Montanism: Egalitarian Ecstatic 'New Prophecy,'" in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics,"* ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 76 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 205.

[116] William Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones: An Imaginative History of Montanists and Other Early Christians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 17-8, 20 n.21; William Tabbernee, "Portals of

over-exuberance and unintelligibility while prophesying, of introducing new scriptures

and eschatological novelties, and of committing unspecified doctrinal offenses against the

Trinitarian belief of the church.[117] But perhaps the most offensive and heresiologically

touted component of the New Prophecy was their claim to special revelations not

recorded otherwise in the scriptures. A heresiography from the third century, now

attributed to Pseudo-Tertullian, remembers them concisely: "[Cataphrygians] say the

Holy Spirit was in the apostles, but not the Paraclete; the Paraclete said more things to

Montanus than Christ set forth in the gospel—not only more, but better and greater"

(*Haer.* 7.2).[118] Not only did the New Prophets differentiate between the Holy Spirit and

the Paraclete, an oddity of John's Gospel that had regularly been harmonized with the

synoptic Holy Spirit by interpreters of the church, but Montanus and his followers

claimed for themselves a direct line to the Paraclete that precluded any verification by the

scriptures or by Christ, effectively superseding apostolic conventions and hierarchical

institutions which were themselves only in their infancy in the second century. William

Tabbernee characterizes the challenge posed by the New Prophecy as a struggle for

authority and for the limits of prophecy:

> Early Montanism, therefore, may tentatively be defined as an innovative
> prophetic movement intent on bringing Christianity into line with what it
> believed to be the ultimate revelation of the Spirit through the New Prophets.
> To the 'catholics,' however, Montanism was a destructive pseudo-prophetic

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the Montanist New Jerusalem: The Discovery of Pepouza and Tymion," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11.1 (2003): 92-3.

[117] William Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 87-124.

[118] Trans. per Robert M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 92.

movement intent on introducing novelties into the church on the basis of the heretical utterances of the dupes of an evil spirit.[119]

Though largely forgotten today, this New Prophecy movement was a greater challenge to the church than is commonly recognized. In the late second and early third century, bishop Victor of Rome initially acknowledged their "prophetic gifts" and Tertullian was similarly caught under the sway of the New Prophets, apparently attracted by their rigorist tendencies.[120] The New Prophets found adherents not just in Phrygia, but in the major cities and centers of the church as well, prompting a severe response from institutional actors intent on protecting both the church's doctrine and their own positions of leadership within its nascent hierarchy.

Though the origins and revelatory content of the New Prophecy remains a fascinating puzzle, more interesting for the present purposes is how the proto-orthodox response to "Montanists" or "Phrygians" served to derail the sense that prophecy was still alive within the church. As Tabbernee has observed, early institutional clergy, who "saw themselves as shepherds of the flock and guardians of orthodoxy," recognized a threat to their power and the orderliness of faith, and were among the first vocal opponents of the New Prophecy.[121] Along heresiological lines, they employed restrictive tactics intended to exclude Montanists from the mainstream of the church, but as a by-product came the tendency to constrict altogether the possibility of prophecy, visions, and revelations in the church, and to replace this mode of authentication with institutional and hierarchical

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[119] Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*, 124.

[120] Marjanen, 193.

[121] Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*, 41-2.

authority. One of the sources for early Montanism that Eusebius preserves in his church history comes from a debate between Proclus and Gaius, and the latter asserts the apostolic succession as transmitting the authentic tradition of the church over against any claims to special prophecy. Whereas the New Prophets lack a solid history, Gaius "can point out the trophies of the Apostles, for if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way you will find the trophies of those who founded this Church" (*Hist. eccl.* 2.25.7).[122] Not only were these Phrygians depicted as motivated by an evil spirit that introduced novel ideas to the institutional church, but another early source extant in the *Panarion* of Epiphanius also contended that prophetic gifts have ceased within the church—an extraordinary claim in the early third century[123] that effectively contravenes a consensus vouched by Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. As indicated by Nasrallah, this source believes that *grace* (χάρις) well and truly thrives within the church, but that gifts of prophecy (τῶν προφητικῶν χαρισμάτων) are time-limited to some point in the apostolic past, for the church now relies only on those prophecies that "'have been tested through the holy apostles in the holy church.'"[124] Such an unexpected argument seems entirely constructed to rule out the New Prophecy and "set a temporal limit on prophetic gifts,"[125] but it would have wide-ranging consequences. First, it signaled that the apostolic era had

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[122] Trans. per Kirsopp Lake, *Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History, Volume I: Books 1-5*, vol. 153 of LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 183. Eusebius makes it clear that Gaius refers to Peter and Paul as the "trophies" (τὰ τρόπαια) of the church, which he also identifies as their "sacred relics" (τὰ ἱερὰ σκηνώματα).

[123] Tabbernee dates this anonymous treatise, attributed by Epiphanius to the "anti-Phrygian," to the second decade of the third century. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*, 52.

[124] Nasrallah, 173-4.

[125] Ibid., 173.

concluded, and that the church now moved forward in a new era. Second, it closed off

what had previously thrived as a source for God's communication with the church, and

designated that the source of proper authority was found in the institution as preserved

through apostolic succession. And third, this conclusion led to the construction, within

the same author's treatise, of two additional stipulations for authentic prophecy designed

to countermand any surviving Montanists: in addition to ceasing at the end of the

apostolic era and no longer being necessary for the church, prophecies were now to be

delivered within churches, rather than outside of them, and to authenticate the prophet,

they must also come true.[126] On all of these points, the anti-Phrygian source believed that

the New Prophecy, an off-shoot heresy with its own congregations that had mistakenly

predicted the end times, had failed to meet his newly minted standards for true prophecy.

This same sense that prophecy only took place in the apostolic past is perhaps one

of the sources for Victorinus's strong periodization of time, which itself finds expression

in his restrictions on the Christian prophets that Paul referenced in 1 Corinthians 14.

Recall that in his commentary on Revelation, Victorinus interjects to announce that any

Christian prophets are limited by prophecies recorded in the Old Testament:

> When, however, [Paul] said, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the
> others weigh what is said," he was not speaking of catholic prophecy of some
> unheard of and unknown kind but of that prophecy that has been foretold.
> They weigh what is said to ensure that the interpretation conforms with the
> witness of the sayings of the prophets (*Comm. in. Apoc.* 10.2).[127]

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[126] Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, 134-5.

[127] Trans. per William C. Weinrich, *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, Ancient Christian Texts Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 13.

As an apostle, John the Revelator was exempt from this stipulation, but others were bound by it, and the restriction here is strong enough to effectively neuter prophecy, since only the interpretation of prior prophecies present either in the Old Testament or the Christian apostles now was permitted. Not incidentally, Victorinus's Muratorian Fragment was one of the first writings of the church to dispute the authority of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, and the first to name it outside of an enumerated New Testament collection, precisely because, as he argued, it could not be included "either among the prophets, whose number is complete, or among the apostles, for it is after [their] time."[128] Operating in the second half of the third century, Victorinus worked to reconcile the post-Montanist cutoff of Christian prophecy with the awareness that, in Paul and John, an earlier generation actively received revelations, and his result was a temporal limit after the lives of the apostles. Other claims to special prophetic or revealed knowledge were deemed dubious, and quite conveniently, Victorinus located Hermas undoubtedly outside the apostolic window. Reiling thus appropriately explains in his investigation of Hermas and Christian prophecy that "the Montanist crisis jeopardized the ministry of those who bore the title 'prophet', to the extent that in the 3rd century A.D. the prophets, either Old Testament or Christian, are seen as belonging to the past."[129] Not only would this move jeopardize the office of the prophet, but it would later threaten Hermas's book fostered within the laboratory of early Christianity under the strange authentication of dreams, visions, and the revelations of an unknown shepherd. In this context, Victorinus signals

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[128] Trans. per Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 307.

[129] Reiling, 175.

an important point of contact between the decline of prophecy and the rise of the institutional church, one that increasingly found its sources for authority not in the uncontrollable tongue of the prophet, but in the traditions traceable back to the apostles and the limited set of books produced under their auspices.

The *Shepherd* and Prophecy, Revelations, and Visionary Experiences

At the same time as Christian influencers of the third century and beyond, especially in response to the challenge posed by the New Prophecy revival movement, were turning against claims to special revelation, the *Shepherd* of Hermas persisted as a Christian scripture brought to life by this very authenticating method. As described in the second chapter above, Hermas's visions flow from his matter-of-fact assertions of revelatory experiences, sometimes occurring in dreams and at other times apparently in the course of his routine, waking life. These visions are frequently instigated by women who appear to Hermas as the personified Church, but Hermas simultaneously knows the presence of angels who help him interpret the difficult or perplexing content of his visions. And where his revelations cease, Hermas becomes visited by the shepherd, also called the angel of repentance, who delivers twelve Commandments and ten Parables. This shepherd mandates Hermas to write down everything he sees and hears for the benefit of his audiences, whether proximal or abroad. In short, Hermas was himself an apparent nobody in the Roman church and went entirely unremembered to history, yet he flourished at a time when structures of authority in Christian communities had not yet taken root universally, and when revelations could plausibly be received by anyone in the

congregation (cf. 1 Cor 14:30). Decades earlier, Paul could enjoin his Corinthian converts

to "eagerly desire to prophesy" (ζηλοῦτε τὸ προφητεύειν), and though Hermas likely

knows not this particular imperative (1 Cor 14:39), the same spirit pervades his own

Christian experience. Feeling the spark of prophecy, Hermas devised a complex and

episodic "apocalyptic" narrative, not consistently concerned with eschatology but rather

the revealing of divine truths, all in service of his central message of salvation.

Specifically, Hermas implored his audiences to reform and repent so as to prepare

themselves for their eternal citizenship in the far-off city, and so that they could become

the very stones that edify the tower of the church that was soon to be completed at the

Master's arrival.

For many within the church's early decades and centuries, Hermas's authorizing

apparitions, and his claim to visions and revelations, were together perfectly acceptable

and even reconcilable with an emerging Johannine-Pauline charter narrative that would

guide the development of Christian doctrine. Clement of Alexandria, for example,

affirmed the authenticity of Hermas's divine revelations, adjudging furthermore that

Christ and the shepherd spoke in harmony. Later Alexandrians like Origen and even

Athanasius similarly approved of the *Shepherd* for its meritorious content, and the former

eagerly allegorized from Hermas's book to understand different levels of spiritual

progress among third-century Christians. However, the *Shepherd*'s favor would not last

forever, and the scant hints preserved in patristic writings suggest that its prophetic

novelty could have been partially to blame. Interpreting 1 Corinthians 14, where Paul

acknowledges the existence of Christian prophets and encourages their orderly

comportment in worship, the third-century bishop Victorinus restricts prophets from introducing innovations into the faith that properly spans two testaments; instead, they were meant to merely reinterpret old oracles for the new context brought about by the incarnation of Christ. Moreover, Harry Maier and J. Reiling, though more than a generation apart, have each recognized that Hermas likely faced opposition or competition in his own Roman Italian setting that forced him to self-authenticate his own prophetic status against the all-too-proximal existence of pagan fortune-tellers. Though hoping to be received as a prophet, Hermas was "engaging in his own form of fortune telling under the guise of an apocalypse that purports to be a divinely given message."[130] In order to distinguish himself from the ψευδοπροφήτης and stipulate measures by which to sift the true prophet from false ones, the shepherd's eleventh Commandment becomes an apology for Hermas's own position within his church and the wider Christian experience.[131] In particular, Hermas claims "the power of the divine spirit" for his own activities, while denigrating the emptiness of evil spirits characterized by the vain, self-important, money-seeking lifestyle of the false prophet or fortune-teller.[132]

The *Shepherd*'s general early recognition as scripture and its apparent canonical trajectory was not enough to see the book welcomed among the scriptural collections of Victorinus or Eusebius, or into the final canon of Athanasius and Jerome. Each had their own reasons, and these reasons are perhaps only partially recoverable to us today. But as

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[130] Maier, "Romans Watching Romans."

[131] Reiling, 48-57.

[132] Jonathan Hill, "The Self-Giving Power of God: Dunamis in Early Christianity," in *Divine Powers in Late Antiquity*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 155.

we will discover below, Athanasius too was affected by the general ecclesiastical turn against prophetic, revelatory, or visionary authentication. As this earlier form of authority was eventually relegated to the dustbin of Christian history, we turn now to consider the institution that arose to take its place as the guardian of the faithful. To some extent, the bishop would take the place of the spirit, circumscribing the emerging hierarchy with an apostolic sanction and proceeding from there on a path of scriptural harmonization. This fourth constrictive trend consists of the struggle for an ecclesial and political organization that would serve the needs of the institutional, imperial church.

D. Ecclesiastical Organization

As scholars of early Christianity, we often take for granted the ecclesiastical leadership that emerged and asserted itself from the second century onward, with success that obtained asynchronously. But it perhaps bears conscious acknowledgment that the organization of cities and sometimes regions under the oversight of a singular bishop can claim no precedent in the story of Jesus and his initial apostles, and only emerged through anthropological struggle well after the earliest evangelism. In spite of the "early Christian tradition [that] unanimously puts Peter, toward the end of his life, in Rome,"[133] curiously, no reliable evidence survives for his actual activity in Rome beyond his possible martyrdom there (cf. *1 Clem.* 5.4). His foundation of either the church at Rome or the office of bishop must also be regarded as later dubious attempts to claim apostolic origin. Instead, the earliest recoverable form of authority from the texts of the New Testament

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[133] Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 60.

privileges the apostles of Jesus, starting with the Twelve and proceeding from there to figures who either claim the title or are attributed as such, like Paul and James, the brother of Jesus. Paul attests the authenticity of the Twelve and their superior chronological claim to apostolicity (1 Cor 15:5), though he is careful to insist that his authority and legitimacy comes not from them, but from his genuine revelation from the risen Jesus himself (Gal 2:12; 1 Cor 9:1-2). Other itinerants like Apollos, Barnabas, and the companions of Paul achieved a measure of authority, though it is unclear if all were considered apostles (cf. Acts 14:14; 1 Thess. 2:7). Regardless, from this sprang a number of traveling evangelists and missionaries wishing to be known as teachers, apostles, and prophets (*Did.* 11-13).[134] Meanwhile, the house-church social setting of much of early Christian gatherings, persisting through the second century, fostered an organic form of leadership: wealthy homeowners or *patresfamilias* with spaces sufficient to accommodate the believing community naturally achieved some clout and may have been bestowed with honorific titles, possibly including "overseer" or "elder."[135] If multiple house-churches are posited at Philippi, the early appearance of bishops (ἐπίσκοποι) in the plural may commend this conclusion (Phil. 1:1), but there is no reason to assume either that such governance took root everywhere at the same pace or that Paul himself instituted the title or role.

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[134] Apparently, some itinerant prophets or apostles occasionally chose to settle down among communities of believers, even if for a season; *Did.* 12.2-5 issues some guidelines by which a church community could decide to accept or reject these visitors.

[135] Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991), 4.

Bishops feature again in the New Testament in the deutero-Pauline Pastoral

epistles 1 Timothy and Titus, where the pseudonymous author of these letters uses the

persona of Paul to argue for some hierarchical criteria incumbent upon bishops. These

letters attest a Christianity that has surpassed imminent eschatological expectation and

now is settling down for the long haul, anchoring an institutional governance in place

within static church communities. In both letters, but especially in the lengthier list of

criteria from 1 Timothy, the standards that qualify a man as a bishop include proficiency

in the household (1 Tim. 3:1ff.); the letter addressed to Titus conceives of the bishop as

the οἰκονόμον of God, and further stipulates that the individual must be "hospitable"

(φιλόξενον) as well (Tit 1:7-8). With great aplomb, Harry Maier connects the Pastorals'

episcopal criteria to the linguistic register of wealthy householders and elite ideals of

good citizenship,[136] and thus it becomes likely that 1 Timothy and Titus work to enshrine

a situation that had arisen organically, but now with the authority of Christianity's

prominent letter-writing apostle, thereby sanctioning a comparatively newer form of

authority with the pen of an older one. Yet, while whether the author of these letters

conceives of a singular bishop in Christian communities cannot be certain, only shortly

thereafter in the 110s CE will Ignatius of Antioch make the first argument for the absolute

authority of the bishop. In fact, for Ignatius, the authentic practice of Christianity was

indistinguishable from the presence and approval of the bishop: believers should "regard

the bishop as the Lord himself," and do nothing without the approval of the bishop (Ign.

Eph. 6.1; *Smyrn.* 8.1-2).[137] In his letter addressed to Polycarp, Ignatius forcefully warns

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[136] Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry*, 44-6.

[137] Translation per Holmes, 187.

the Smyrnaean bishop to be on guard against troublemakers and false teachers that could

jeopardize Polycarp's oversight of the church, but he also sets out the self-serving divine

justification for the authority of the bishop: the overseer is himself overseen

(ἐπισκοπημένῳ) by the Father God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and has earned the right to

serve as the church's foremost representative (Ign. *Pol.* Sal.). Ignatius was a remarkably

early proponent of the monarchical episcopacy, and Schoedel links the Antiochene's

argumentation with a "blow to his self-esteem" as bishop that forced him to reevaluate

the poorly defined authority of the bishop and argue stringently, to any community that

would listen, for absolute episcopal authority so as to ward off Docetists and other false

teachers.[138] Again, while we have no reason to posit a uniform and organized

development for institutional Christianity, by the end of the second or beginning of the

third century, we can observe ecclesiastical organization turning increasingly episcopal.

When Irenaeus advocates for the apostolic authenticity of his orthodox church by

presenting a succession that can be traced back to Peter and Paul at Rome (*Haer.* 3.3.3),

his argument rests on the ability to name each bishop, thereby guaranteeing the

preservation of correct doctrine by means of an unbroken chain of authority.[139] More

importantly, Tertullian, who himself was not the bishop of Carthage and in fact

vehemently disagreed with his hierarch on matters of rigorism and discipline, attests the

normalization of church offices in a three-tiered system of bishop, presbyters, and

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[138] Schoedel, 13; 22.

[139] Contra Grant, who bewilderingly asserts that "Irenaeus makes no use of Ignatius' doctrine of the episcopate." Perhaps he intends that Irenaeus makes no explicit appeal to the words of Ignatius, for Irenaeus himself subscribes to the importance of the *monoepiscopos*. Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), 29.

deacons. In spite of disagreements, Tertullian never questions the propriety of having a singular bishop to oversee the church, and instead opines that the office "provides continuity for the life of the church, particularly for the faithful transmission of apostolic teaching."[140] Thus did the office of the episcopacy, as we commonly understand it, develop substantially in the second century, supplanting charismatic and itinerant forms of authority that existed in the earliest decades of Christianity. By the early third century, the bishop was, in most places, the undisputed guarantor of authentic belief and doctrine.

By contrast, the Alexandrian bishop at this same time labored to supplant the earlier and greater authority enjoyed by academic Christians in Egypt. More than any of the other constrictive trends explored here, the primacy of the episcopal ecclesiastical governance faced uniquely pronounced challenges in Alexandria. In the process, it becomes clear that the story of the declaration of the church's scriptural canon, or "rule of scripture," will be inexorably intertwined with Egyptian history and the struggle for a locus of Christian authority in Alexandria. Most explorations of the origins of Alexandrian Christianity begin with the comparatively late claim that the church was founded by the evangelist Mark and the skeleton of an episcopal succession list that Eusebius reconstructs over the course of four different books of his *Ecclesiastical History*.[141] Unfortunately, Eusebius can find only miniscule and formulaic notations of the names and terms of Mark's ten immediate successors in Alexandria, such that Walter

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[140] David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 169.

[141] S. Davis, 14-5. As he notes, the Markan origins for Alexandrian Christianity do not appear in writing before Clement, and in the disputed *Letter to Theodore* at that. S. Davis, 8. Whether or not this letter can be authentically attributed to Clement, however, Eusebius cites Clement as the primary source of his information about Mark's presence in Alexandria; see *Hist. eccl.* 2.15-16.

Bauer famously derided this information as "almost less than nothing" and "a mere echo and a puff of smoke."[142] More fruitfully, Brakke has described Alexandrian Christianity in the second century as primarily a story of "teachers and their competing independent 'schools,'"[143] placing the development of early Christian spirituality in Egypt much closer to that in Rome than anything approximating the burgeoning episcopal institution of Ignatius. For example, measured against the meager information Eusebius knows about Alexandrian bishops from the second century, he is comparatively well informed about the city's academic traditions, even conceding that Pantaenus, the mentor and teacher of Clement—rather than any bishop—"had charge of the life of the faithful in Alexandria, for from ancient custom a school of sacred learning existed among them" (*Hist. eccl.* 5.10.1).[144] By contrast, the monoespicopacy in Alexandria was a late-arriving institution, and Demetrius (c.189–231 CE), the first bishop whose thoughts and deeds can be ascertained, was famously hostile to the independent scholastic traditions.

To Demetrius and his hierarchy, in addition to granting too much authority to the teacher, Christian scholasticism tolerated an uncomfortable range of theological diversity and unduly privileged the spiritual progress achieved by one's academic attainment.[145] Demetrius tried to restrict schools and teachers by consolidating them into one institution under his oversight, but Origen's *On First Principles*, produced in the 220s as a "theological handbook," substantially hastened the divide between episcopal institution

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[142] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. by the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 45.

[143] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 59.

[144] Translation per Lake, 463.

[145] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 60.

and the catechetical maestro, even to the point that Demetrius excused Origen from

Alexandria and its school, encouraging him to stay in Caesarea.[146] But Demetrius's

action, rather than decisively signaling the episcopal superiority over scholasticism, was

indicative of the tension between these modes of authority that continued into the fourth

century, when the presbyter Arius emerged from his clerical abode and reopened old

fissures between academic Christianity and the hierarch of Alexandria. In short, Christian

origins in Alexandria traditionally favored charismatic teachers who interpreted a wide

range of scriptures from a combination of philosophy, especially Stoicism, and the

church's accumulated exegesis. It was aligned less toward the singular bishop than the

superiority of gifted interpreters, each who staked their own claims to apostolic

legitimacy.[147] The Egyptian receptivity toward the *Shepherd* of Hermas may well be

connected to this openness to learning, theological speculation, and alternative modes of

authority to the hierarchical *fiat*, but either way, the long-lasting survival of an

independent spirit underpinning variant Christianities and spurning the singular bishop

remained most prominent in Alexandria and throughout Egypt.

The *Shepherd* and Ecclesiology

For its part, the *Shepherd* officially advocates no particular system of

ecclesiastical organization. Instead, it simply attests and accepts what institutional

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[146] Demetrius and his supporting clergy apparently ejected Origen around 231, a fate that he accepted given Caesarea's comparative openness to his learning. See John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 36; 70; 212. See also S. Davis, 25-7, for deeper context to the expulsion of Origen from Alexandria.

[147] S. Davis, 20. Without the particular emphasis on the bishop, Clement and Origen both appealed to the preservation of apostolic teaching that existed in the church of their day.

authority already exists in its late first century or early second century milieu. Hermas, for example, recognizes the position occupied by Clement in the Roman church, and follows the woman Church's instruction to filter his book through Clement to the cities abroad.[148] But this Clement, even though his identification with the author of *1 Clement* is quite probable, was not a singular bishop as later remembered by Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.3.3), but rather something akin to a church secretary, in charge of corresponding with Christians outside of Rome.[149] Moreover, his position was not a powerless one, but Clement knows nothing of the monoepiscopacy that was slow to develop in Rome, not appearing until perhaps Victor in the final decade of the second century or his successor Zephyrinus.[150] Beyond Clement, Hermas acknowledges a variety of leaders in the early church not by name, but by their titles or roles. The tower most fittingly incorporates the early leaders who are depicted as always speaking in one voice (συμφωνήσαντες): the apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons form the whitest and squarest set of stones sitting at the base of the church tower.[151] On numerous occasions, Hermas mentions the

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[148] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3).

[149] Osiek, Hermeneia, 59.

[150] Though a date for the Roman monoepiscopacy remains an academic hot potato, many scholars locate it in the era of Victor (c.189-199), a bishop who observed Irenaeus's control over Lugdunum and made overtures toward tightening his grip over doctrines (e.g., the church's official stance toward the New Prophecy) and practices (e.g., the date of Easter) spanning the loosely controlled Roman system of house churches. Still, it was not until Zephyrinus (c.199-217) until the New Prophecy "was official condemned in Rome," even though Victor had previously become convinced that Montanists' prophetic *charismata* were suspicious. Because of the paucity of sources, it is unlikely that a conclusive answer will ever be forthcoming for the precise appearance of the Roman monoepiscopacy, but we can certainly be satisfied that this did not materialize earlier in the time of Clement. See Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, 55 n.1; Marjanen, 193.

[151] Herm. Vis. 3.5.1 (13.1). In a possible echo of Paul, the woman Church tells Hermas of this quartet of leaders that οἱ μὲν κεκοιμημένοι, οἱ δὲ ἔτι ὄντες (cf. 1 Th 4:13-17, where those who have fallen asleep are also paired with the living for a salvific purpose). At the recapitulation of the tower in Parable 9, the apostles and teachers again receive their placement early in the construction of the tower, but this time

presbyters of the church in passing, admitting that they rightfully enjoy privileges such as priority seating.[152] The woman Church speaks to Hermas about the "elders presiding" (τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τῶν προϊσταμένων) over the church.[153] Hermas is twice adjured to direct his message to the leaders (τοῖς προηγουμένοις) of the church, an admonition embellished once with the modifier πρωτοκαθεδρίταις: Hermas must speak, therefore, to the first-seaters among the church,[154] possibly with the economic aspects of his message in plain view to these wealth-holders.[155] All in all, church governance in the *Shepherd* of Hermas is comprised of an unstructured hodge-podge much more proximal to the organic, charismatic leadership of the earlier texts of the New Testament than it is to the advocacy for clearly defined roles of the deutero-Pauline Pastoral epistles, Ignatius's pleading for episcopal dominion, or the impression of a mostly settled trend toward monoepiscopacy evident in the late second century. The ἐπίσκοποι do reappear much later in the *Shepherd*, but only in the context of hospitality for the needy and widows, again recalling not the institution of the monoepiscopacy that had yet to assert itself but a small network of house-church patrons who could provide shelter for travelers and the poor when such a need arose in the church.[156] Maier helpfully connects this praise for overseers who use their material resources for the service of the church with Hermas's

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they appear apart from the bishops and deacons atop a set of "righteous men" and prophets who form the foundation of the tower. See Herm. Sim. 9.4.3 (81.3); 9.15.4 (92.4).

[152] Herm. Vis. 3.1.8 (9.8).

[153] Herm. Vis. 2.4.3 (8.3).

[154] Herm. Vis. 2.2.6 (6.6); 3.9.7 (17.7).

[155] Herm. Vis. 3.6.5-7 (14.5-7); Sim. 2.1-10 (51.1-10).

[156] Herm. Sim. 9.27.2 (104.2).

persistent "ethic of love patriarchalism" that becomes most pronounced in the Parables, where Hermas envisions a symbiotic relationship between the rich and the poor in the church.[157] But this episode typifies Hermas's muted interest in leadership roles in the church: as he does not occupy any such role, rather than championing any form of ecclesiastical organization, he simply acknowledges that which already prevails and desires that all would use their position to edify the church, rather than to permit stagnation, sin, or virtue-less lifestyles.

3.   Conclusion

The four constrictive trends outlined in this chapter each display an evolution perceptible from the writings of the second century, when the laboratory of early Christianity allowed many permutations of faith, to the fourth century, when a less permissive environment prevailed and sought bases for religious unity under the pressures of imperial administration. We intended not to postulate any degree of linear development across the centuries, but rather to call out the important signposts indicative of the direction toward which elite Christians trended by the fourth century. Because of his long career and involvement in many of the controversies of the fourth century, Athanasius becomes an ideal spokesperson for the four constrictive trends, even if he had not penned the first canon list in the church's history. However, this dissertation turns now to Athanasius's manipulation of the four constrictive trends to understand just how, more than criterial logic or any set of standards adjudicating the internal metadata of

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[157] Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry*, 61; 63.

scriptural texts, these defining forces crystallized in the episcopacy of Athanasius to result in his declaration of a canon that would exclude the *Shepherd*.

CHAPTER SIX

Athanasius of Alexandria and the Four Constrictive Trends:

A Novel "Rule of Scripture" and Hermas's *Scriptura Non Grata*

1.   Introduction

From the preceding review of patristic reception, it becomes clear that

Athanasius, while he may not have immediately resolved the canon of the New

Testament with the writing of his Festal Letter of 367, played a significant and influential

role in the exclusion of the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Though the *Shepherd* surely did not

maintain its favor everywhere, in Egypt, where it was most celebrated, Athanasius used

his clout and political connections to authoritatively construe Hermas's book outside the

canon. But given that others within his same Egyptian milieu demonstrably favored the

Shepherd, even to the degree that it was included within Codex Sinaiticus sometime

during his episcopacy, there is no reason to presume that Athanasius's opinion about the

Shepherd's relegation within a group of catechetical books was universally accepted or

even could have mustered a plurality among Egyptian Christians. Instead, from

Athanasius we merely have the expression of an elite and authoritarian judgment that

doubtlessly paralleled his intention to constrict the acceptable range of Christianity not

only to particular beliefs and scriptures, but also to forms of life, authority, and ecclesial

organization. This chapter examines how Athanasius mirrored, shaped, and deployed the

four constrictive trends explored above to formulate an imperial Christianity in his

image—for the "ideal Athanasian Church was an episcopal church" comprised of "bishops in communion with Athanasius"[1]—and to politically and rhetorically enact his vision in an environment of opposing viewpoints. To unpack how he engineered the four constrictive trends, each of the four sections below considers both the bishop's general attunement to and interest in the trends first as attested in the various treatises and polemical writings throughout his career, and secondarily, directly from his 39th Festal Letter, demonstrating the relationship between each trend and Athanasius's declaration of a particular kind of episcopal scriptural canon. But first, we must set the stage for Athanasius, supplementing our earlier portrait of his career with a more thorough narrative of his life, aims, and characteristic beliefs.

Athanasius inherited many of the problems of doctrine and practice that would define his career from his mentor Alexander, for whom he served as secretary and accompanied to the Council of Nicaea in 325. Though not a significant figure at this first ecumenical council, Athanasius would become synonymous with its creed when later, in the 350s and 360s in such treatises as his *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, or *De decretis*, he contrived it as the only acceptable standard of orthodoxy for the church to combat its various opponents. At that point, Nicaea was no longer at the forefront of anyone's minds; instead, a group of bishops gathering at Seleucia in 359, roughly when Athanasius wrote *De decretis*, invoked the 341 Council of Antioch and its "Dedication Creed" as the theological standard for the church.[2] Well before these events, however,

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[1] David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 200.

[2] David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 225.

Athanasius ascended to the Alexandrian episcopacy under dubious circumstances in June 328—perhaps, as Brakke has suggested, he was elected in secret by a selective cadre of favorable bishops, ignoring Melitian dissenters in Alexandria.[3] Athanasius immediately upheld his predecessor's staunch refusal to readmit Arius to communion, carrying forward a trenchant posture toward what he, like Alexander, viewed as a weakening of Christ's full divinity. Not only did the pair of Alexandrian bishops view Arius as factually and scripturally incorrect, but, most significantly, his error wreaked havoc on their basic doctrine of salvation, which Athanasius understood as a matter of deification: Christ "became man (ἐνηνθρώπησεν) in order that we ourselves might be made God (θεοποιηθῶμεν)" (*Inc.* 54.3).[4] Moreover, the Melitian line of clergy persisted through Alexander's episcopacy from their origins in the Diocletianic persecutions of the early years of the fourth century, when Melitius of Lycopolis installed bishops in the absence of the Alexandrian bishop Peter. Finally, onlookers from the Eastern part of the Empire, and especially its more prominent bishops, were interested to curtail Athanasius's outsized secular responsibilities, ranging from treasury to the management of food supplies, as delegated by Constantine, that crossed over into imperial administration.[5] Without even appealing to the pesky problems of Christian life on the ground level, such

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[3] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 7-8.

[4] The quote comes from Athanasius's earliest treatise, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, which has been difficult to surely date but can be safely placed before 335. *Theopoēsis* persists, furthermore, as a characteristic Athanasian depiction of salvation at least into the 340s, appearing also at *C. Ar.* 1.39.1. Trans. mine, from the Greek text of Archibald Robertson, *St. Athanasius: On the Incarnation, The Greek Text Edited for the Use of Students*, 2nd ed. (London: David Nutt, 1893), 82; http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/N12481625.pdf.

[5] Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 178-9. As Barnes emphasizes, Athanasius as bishop enjoyed "a very real political power which enabled a man who knew how to exploit it to defy the emperor who in theory ruled the Roman Empire."

as the largely orthodox but troublesome virgin women, the men who opted for a detached

ascetic experience in the refuge of the desert over city living, and the sustained

independence of charismatic Egyptian teachers needing no authentication from the

Alexandrian bishop, Brakke appropriately observes the gamut of political difficulties that

rendered Athanasius's entire reign tenuous:

> [A]s he began his episcopate, Athanasius faced a host of enemies: the
> Melitians, who may have elected their own bishop of Alexandria and whose
> alternative hierarchy continued to thrive throughout Egypt; those Christians in
> Alexandria who considered Arius' views within the limits of acceptable
> theological diversity and were dismayed by Alexander's (and now
> Athanasius') authoritarian response to philosophical disagreement; and
> numerous bishops of the Eastern Church, who were sympathetic to Arius's
> brand of theology and eager to limit the influence of the Alexandrian bishop
> on the international scene.[6]

Constantine's deep desire for Christian unity was thus hampered by the existence of

divisions of virtually all kinds. Matters of doctrine easily elided into factionalized

politics, and bishops like Athanasius were not immune to strongman tactics to resolve

such disputes. Athanasius himself maintained his position "by the systematic use of

violence and intimidation," which frequently served as a source for trumped-up

accusations against him.[7] Even so, Athanasius's range of opponents in Egypt and abroad

collaborated to see him deposed and exiled on five occasions, sometimes evading more

serious punishments than exile only by hiding from imperial authorities. Through it all,

Athanasius achieved a sort of immortality, and as time wore on it became no wonder that

he, never losing sight of the goal to consolidate and universalize Christianity under the

authority of the imperially empowered bishop, reduced his struggle to himself as the

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[6] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 8.

[7] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 32-3.

manifestation of truth and an imitator of the saints against the many false prophets and

false Christs that the Lord testified would arise (*Ep. Aeg. Lib.* 1). So while Athanasius is

but one prominent figure from the fourth century in a veritable mélange of different

opinions, his ultimate success and variety of writings vaults him to a position of

spokesperson for the four constrictive trends impacting the fourth-century imperial

church. In this one synecdochic bishop, we find not only ample evidence for the

constrictive forces of heresiology, Christology, ecclesiology, and the limits of

apocalypticism, but also the first authoritative declaration of a New Testament *canon* that

excludes the *Shepherd* of Hermas. These phenomena are surely no coincidence, and it

behooves us to observe the evidence for Athanasius's constriction and his construction of

the boundaries of acceptable Christian life, doctrine, and authority.

2.   Athanasius and Heresiology

In spite of tremendous scholarly interest in the writings of Athanasius, the

Alexandrian bishop is not normally thought of as a chief heresiologist, possibly because

of the flourishing of prolific heresiographers contemporaneous with him in the fourth

century. Indeed, in his recent study viewing heresiology as Christian ethnography, Todd

Berzon pays very little attention to Athanasius, preferring to investigate those

heresiographies containing strata of competing heresies most conducive to a systematized

ethnographic analysis.[8] Epiphanius, for example, represents a milestone in the genre of

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[8] This inattention to Athanasius is no failure of Berzon's, whose inquiry is motivated in another direction. Instead, he attends to how the macro-enterprise of heresiology wrote people into or out of existence, formed an *episteme* of its own, and "produced a culture and discourse of Christian knowledge." His important work complements my more pressing interest in the application of heresiological tactics in

heresiological doxography; his *Panarion*, often regarded as the apex of heresiography and dated to c. 375, just years after the death of Athanasius, recast the entire history of the world into the many opponents of truth combatting "Christ's sole bride, the church," which "has always been but was revealed in the course of time, through Christ's incarnation, in the midst of these sects."[9] By contrast, though Athanasius may very well have held to such a totalized view of world and salvation history, he was too mired in active doctrinal disagreements, political and episcopal challenges, and the real threats of exile to produce a tome such as that of Epiphanius. Instead, Athanasius appropriated heresiological tactics characteristic to the genre, internalized from a lengthy counter-heretical heritage, and deployed them liberally against his opponents, ranging from "Arians" to "Eusebians" to "Melitians" and others, in order to rhetorically depict them as deviants and enemies of truth. Athanasius was especially keen to collapse them all into the category of Arianism—not just casting the latter groups as schismatics but, wherever possible, as equal partakers in a "godless heresy" (*Ep. Aeg. Lib.* 22). The degree to which these labels and the framing of the orthodox victors have stuck into the twenty-first century, with detection and rejection of the Athanasian paradigm becoming mainstream only in the last generations of scholarship, demonstrates the tremendous rhetorical success of the Alexandrian bishop and the power of institutional history memorializing him. As with Epiphanius, the legacy of heresiology meant that the lens of heresy was the

the midst of polemics, where Athanasius glitters as an underrated specimen for his rhetorical shaping of the "Arian controversy" that engulfed virtually all of his enemies. Todd S. Berzon, *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 16.

[9] *Pan. Proem.* I.1.3; trans. per Frank Williams, *The* Panarion *of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book I (Sects 1-46)*, vol. 63 of *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3.

prism through which Athanasius viewed his world; he would wield it masterfully to shape the church's remembrance of the events of his own life.

Previously, we discussed Alexander's early framing of the controversy between himself and Arius purely on heresiological grounds. Alexander also appropriated the tactics from heresiological doxographies in an attempt to portray Arius and his companions as outside of the acceptable spectrum of Christian beliefs. Though Alexander was only partially or temporarily successful in his elaborate construction—Arius, while excommunicated at Nicaea, was permitted to offer his own creed and achieved reinstatement from Constantine, if never the Alexandrian hierarchs—Athanasius would follow Alexander beat by beat, similarly depicting the doctrinal dispute between Arius and the Alexandrian episcopacy as a matter of truth and falsehood, of orthodoxy and heresy. Athanasius would not immediately invoke the Eusebians, a group of opposing bishops in league with Eusebius of Nicomedia, as collaborators with Arius until he needed to scapegoat their alliance as the impetus behind his first exile to Gaul, which began in 335.[10] Yet, nearly any of his writings after this period, excluding only the early Festal Letters and *De Incarnatione*, can be marshaled to demonstrate Athanasius's tendency to wield the sword of heresiology against his opponents unsparingly. Somehow, Athanasius could construe an ascetic dispute about the length of time monks should sleep per night into a matter of heresy and orthodoxy, even to the point of nonsensically invoking Arius as a forefather of such errors where he certainly had no actual involvement.[11] But as telling as such minor incidents may be for the sway of the

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[10] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 82.

[11] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 97-8.

heresiological worldview on Athanasius, we would be remiss to inspect anything other than the bishop's elaborate characterization of the Arians as the next in a long line of heretics ready to devastate the true faith of the church with their impious errors. For as Gwynn recognizes, "Athanasius constructs a vision of the fourth-century Church dominated by a single 'Arian Controversy', an ongoing conflict polarized between the 'Arianism' of his opponents and the 'orthodoxy' which he himself claims to represent."[12] The primacy of this career-long fight for orthodoxy against "Arianism" and its later relationship to the canonical exclusion of the *Shepherd* of Hermas necessitates a look at how Athanasius utilized heresiological tactics in his portrayal of his life's struggle, particularly as characterized during his second exile, when the outcome of the Alexandrian's plight was by no means certain and the church's orthodoxy, at least with respect to Nicaea, was many decades from being settled.

In what Ayres has called "the first full appearance of the fourth century's consummate act of heresiology,"[13] Athanasius's three genuine *Orations Against the Arians* feature his most concentrated adaptation of heresiography to paradigmatically interpret Arian doctrines and to transmit the heresy of "Arianism" for the consumption of the wider church. Written most likely in the first half of the 340s,[14] his *Orations* reveal

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[12] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 169.

[13] Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 117. Ayres's statement may be debatable given the influence curried by Epiphanius's *Panarion* later in the century, but there can be no doubt that Athanasius wielded heresiology as a weapon to win an ongoing dispute, whereas the accomplishment of Epiphanius constituted a more encyclopedic achievement by which he framed all of human history in terms of heresy and orthodoxy.

[14] Earlier interpreters placed the *Orations* in the late 350s, but more recent scholarship has resoundingly rejected that judgment as groundless, given, among other reasons, their lack of *homoousian* language and Athanasius's later characteristic insistence on Nicaea as the standard of orthodoxy for the

multiple goals. Like Alexander, Athanasius cannot escape the fact that his opponents make use of the Christian Scriptures, even if he fervently disallows them from claiming the title "Christian." Much of the *Orations* features lengthy exegeses of thorny passages of Scripture that are especially susceptible to an "Arian" interpretation, from Proverbs 8:22 to Acts 2:36 to John 14:28. Simultaneously, Athanasius writes to counter "prominent contemporary 'heretics,'" like Asterius and Eusebius of Nicomedia, both of whom were plausibly still alive when at least the first of the *Orations* was initiated.[15] However, these ongoing political opponents that Athanasius begrudges for his exiles to the West are perceptibly deprioritized by his introduction to the work, where the bishop frames the appearance of "Arianism" in a long history of heresies that have threatened the church:

> Αἱ μὲν αἱρέσεις, ὅσαι τῆς ἀληθείας ἀπέστησαν, ἐπινοήσασαι μανίαν ἑαυταῖς φανεραὶ τυγχάνουσι, καὶ τούτων ἡ ἀσέβεια πάλαι πᾶσιν ἔκδηλος γέγονε. . . . ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἡ μία τῶν αἱρέσεων ἡ ἐσχάτη καὶ νῦν ἐξελθοῦσα πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου ἡ Ἀρειανὴ καλουμένη δόλιος οὖσα καὶ πανοῦργος βλέπουσα τὰς πρεσβυτέρας ἑαυτῆς ἀδελφὰς ἄλλας αἱρέσεις ἐκ φανεροῦ στηλιτευθείσας ὑποκρίνεται περιβαλλομένη τὰς τῶν γραφῶν λέξεις ὡς ὁ πατὴρ αὐτῆς ὁ διάβολος καὶ βιάζεται πάλιν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν παράδεισον τῆς ἐκκλησίας . . . ἀναγκαῖον ἡγησάμην προτραπεὶς παρ᾽ ὑμῶν διελεῖν τὴν « πρύξιν τοῦ θώρακος » τῆς μιαρᾶς αἱρέσεως ταύτης καὶ δεῖξαι τὴν δυσωδίαν τῆς ἀφροσύνης αὐτης (*C. Ar.* 1.1.1-4).

> The heresies, as many as have deserted the truth, have all occasioned to invent madness for themselves, and their impiety long ago became evident to all. . . . But since then, one of the heresies, the last, and which now has come forth as the forerunner of the Antichrist—so-called the "Arian" (heresy)—being crafty and appearing knavish like her elder sisters the other heresies, although manifestly proscribed, pretended to enshroud herself in the sayings of the scriptures like her father the devil, and is again imposing herself into the

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church. See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 419; Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 21-6.

[15] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 24-5.

church's paradise . . . of necessity I have been led, impelled by you all, to dismantle the "corrugation of (her) breastplate" [cf. Job 41:5 LXX] and to make known the foul stench of her folly.[16]

Athanasius thus opens his influential monologue not by relaying a historically reliable version of the disagreement that arose at first between Arius and Alexander. Instead, he supplies the vital context for "Arianism" in the procession of heresies deviating from the truth of the church, a cavalcade for which the Arians serve as the apogee and the forerunner of the Antichrist.[17] Athanasius's polemical and heresiological depiction, which formulates the Arians as offspring of the devil, sells a polarized version of events to readers who had already accepted this binary presentation or for whom the construction familiar from a long heresiological heritage would have plausibly resonated. Though we know nothing further about the explicit impetus Athanasius took for penning these orations, Gwynn is probably correct to imagine that the best defense of Athanasius's own position was the most potent offense, or a sustained attack upon his variety of opponents in a framework pitting their heresy against his own true Christian faith.[18]

A deeper look at the rhetorical strategies used by Athanasius in the introduction to the *First Oration* will serve to demonstrate his reliance on heresiological tactics

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[16] Translation mine, from the Greek text in Karin Metzler, Dirk U. Hansen, and Kyriakos Savvidis, eds., *Athanasius Werke, Teil 1, Band I: Die Dogmatischen Schriften, Leiferung 2: Orationes I et II contra Arianos* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 109–10.

[17] This same label, πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, appears (in accusative case) in Alexander's *Encyclical Letter* of 324, which may well have been written on his behalf by Athanasius; see pp. 257–60 above. Heresiologically, the phrase *praecursor(es) antichristi* dates back at least to Tertullian (*Marc.* 5.16) and Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.13.1); though it may sound scriptural, the only appearance of πρόδρομος in the New Testament comes at Heb. 6:20, where Christ is himself called the forerunner of God's promises.

[18] And thus, the exiled Alexandrian bishop wrote the *Orations* with "a dual audience and a dual purpose, to reinforce Athanasius' position among his own supporters and to persuade others to uphold his presentation both of himself and of his opponents." Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 26.

sharpened through centuries of the church's fight against supposedly insufficient beliefs. First, Athanasius pointedly claims that to admit Arius and his like-minded followers to communion with the church would be to regard even Jesus's scriptural opponents Christians, from the high-priest Caiaphas to the crowd that demanded Barabbas to Judas himself—for Arians perpetrate evil against the Lord in the same way as did men like these (*C. Ar.* 1.2.1). From this general allegation that Arians, by slandering his divinity, therefore oppose Christ, Athanasius then ruminates over the label "Arians." Like Marcionites, Valentinians, Manicheans, and other major heresies commonly recognized by the church, the "Arians," he alleges, celebrate their founder by taking the name of the heresiarch, so leaving behind the church and its properly sourced teachings. In Athanasius's presentation, this factoid is ascribed special value, as if self-evidently damning the heretics. Left unsaid, however, is the heresiological origin of this practice, as when Justin Martyr can otherwise admit that such identifiers are pinned on heretics ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν, that is, by the orthodox party writing in opposition to Marcion or any named others (*Dial.* 35). So controlling was the patristic understanding of the relationship between heresiarch and the appellation given to their followers that Tertullian and Hippolytus, or perhaps a lost heresiography they utilized, retrospectively invented the existence of "Hebion" or "Ebion," the supposed founder of the Ebionites. Yet, appropriating this trope for polemical effect, Athanasius suggests that the key moment when Arius ceased to be Christian and initiated his own sect came when Alexander excommunicated him; he was thereafter severed from the name by which orthodox believers are known. Impressively, Athanasius spins this tactic into an adaptation of traditional episcopal claims to apostolic

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succession so as to justify the competing appellations enjoyed by orthodox Christians and the various heresies:

> κἂν γὰρ διδασκάλων διαδόχους ἔχωμεν καὶ « ἀκροαταὶ » τούτων γινώμεθα, ἀλλά γε τὰ Χριστοῦ παρ᾽ αὐτῶν διδασκόμενοι, Χριστιανοὶ οὐδὲν ἧττον ἐσμὲν καὶ καλούμεθα. εἰ δέ γε τοῖς αἱρετικοῖς ἀκολουθοῦντες, κἂν μυρίους διαδόχους ἔχωσιν, ἀλλὰ πάντως τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ τὴν αἵρεσιν ἐφευρόντος φέρουσιν (*C. Ar.* 1.3.3-4).

> For although we have successions of teachers and we become their "hearers" [Rom. 2:13], because we are taught the things of Christ by them, we both are, and no less, are called Christians. But as for those following the heretics, while they have countless successors, at any rate they bear the name of the one who devised the heresy.[19]

Not only does this rule out those Athanasius labels as "Arians," but the same principle sinks the Melitians, who are saddled with the name of their "founder" by virtue of their inappropriate ancestry apart from the authentic orthodoxy party of Alexandria, the Petrine church. If we return to the four markers of heresiology attested by Alexander and already with a long history in heresiological discourse, Athanasius clearly deploys two of them in this introduction to the *First Oration*: the cautionary orientation toward the wider church, his real intended audience, and the use of proper apostolic succession to adjudge the heretics out-of-bounds. Moreover, Athanasius wields another rhetorically potent, but historically dubious strategy when he derives significance from the names ascribed by orthodox writers to the heretics, feigning that such designations are self-chosen by the deviants themselves.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Athanasius also exploits the other two main heresiological tactics of his predecessor Alexander in the remainder of his introduction to the *First Oration*. Recall that Alexander only permitted Arius and his followers to speak

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[19] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in Metzler, Hansen, and Savvidis, 112.

in short slogans and pithy theological declarations—all statements that Alexander could control, frame as farcical, and rebut with his own orthodox interpretations of the scriptures. Athanasius adheres essentially to the same method, conveying many of the identical Arian slogans and inclinations as did Alexander, including one that will become especially interesting for its possible linguistic relationship to Commandment 1 of the *Shepherd* of Hermas.[20] For now, it will suffice to recognize that Athanasius restricts the heretics' speech in much the same ways as Alexander, but that he does supply seven lines here from the *Thalia* of Arius, a method he will repeat later in his career in a treatise *On the Synods of Ariminium and Seleucia*.[21] The extracts in the *First Oration*, however, contain no particular doctrinal statements of Arius and instead serve to convict him of boastfulness with his own words, as when Arius claims to have been "God-taught" and to have acquired "wisdom and knowledge" in the process (*C. Ar.* 1.5.1). Arius clearly self-locates within the Alexandrian tradition of academic Christianity that Athanasius so loathed.[22] Any statements or slogans that Athanasius transmits hereafter in the *First Oration* are detached from their context and rhythmic verse; given that they descend into near-Gnostic speculations about the order and various partakers in creation, it becomes nearly impossible to extricate authentic sayings of Arius from their Athanasian husks.

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[20] In one tantalizing case, for example, the language that Athanasius quotes and apparently attribute to Arius linguistically parallels the shepherd's first mandate, which Athanasius has previously approved in an orthodox manner. At this point in the 340s, Athanasius has not left any extant, explicit judgment against the *Shepherd*, or an indication that his opponents are interpreting the book in ways that would abrogate his Christology. However, if there exists any relationship to the apparent slogan of Arius to the *Shepherd* of Hermas at *C. Ar.* 1.5.3, here we may find the seeds of Athanasius's suspicion about the book's value for the church's "founts of salvation." We will attend to this slogan and other possibilities that "Arians" made use of the *Shepherd* for the construction of their theology below.

[21] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 42-3, dates this treatise to October 359.

[22] David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth 'Festal Letter,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 87.4 (Oct. 1994): 404.

Moreover, Athanasius, by presenting these sayings piled up in a confusing train wreck, intends to portray Arius's doctrines as senseless and mindless. Surely it is relevant that just before he offers the meager fragments of Arius's *Thalia*, Athanasius dials up the callous rhetoric in order to furnish for his readers a generally uncharitable depiction of Arius. Arius's supporters are thus no longer "Arians" but Ἀρειομανῖται, or "Ario-maniacs," and twice Athanasius insists that Arius himself is "not manly" (μὴ ἀνδρῶδες) and his *Thalia* are "effeminate" (θηλυκὸν) both in their tune and *ethos*. Similarly, as Athanasius would have it, Arius's inventions have no relationship whatsoever to the church's long tradition of interpretation, inspired commentary, and worship, but are perfectly at home at the pub or tavern, where a scene of drunken revelry produces "wretched phrases of impiety" worthy only of ridicule (*C. Ar.* 1.4.1–5.1). And finally, when Athanasius apparently conveys doctrinal content from Arius and his followers, he reacts in a characteristically apoplectic fashion to certain concepts that he cannot theologically bear. Throughout his career, Athanasius harbored a special annoyance with any portrayal of Christ as a "creature" (κτίσμα) or "thing made" (ποίημα), and both of these labels occupy his attention in the introduction to the *First Oration* and its lengthy refutation of "Arian" doctrines. Here too, Athanasius continues his practice of restricting the heretics' speech; they are not allowed to unfurl their own understanding of Christ-as-κτίσμα, as *the* perfect and pre-existent creature, but instead Athanasius devotes significant attention to repudiate a creaturely Christ given that it causes manifold problems to his beliefs about salvation.[23] Recognizing that Athanasius reserves special

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[23] As Athanasius repeats in the *First Oration*, emulating a similar line from the earlier *De Incarnatione*: "Therefore he, being man, did not later become God, but being God, later became man, in order that we might be made god (θεοποιήσῃ)." *C. Ar.* 1.39.1.

offense for the term κτίσμα, Gwynn lucidly explains that "the implications of this position that Athanasius develops at great length in his polemic again derive almost exclusively from the imposition of his own theological principles."[24] Because he understands κτίσμα in a certain way, Athanasius stretches the evidence to suppose that his opponents believed "that the son was created in time . . . and was not the creative Word of the Father."[25] From what we can otherwise gather about the spectrum of Athanasius's opponents, however, the Alexandrian bishop concocts these implications purely from his idiosyncratic and polemical devices so as to undermine and render them quite obviously in contravention of the church's acceptable doctrines. When Athanasius asserts that the "Arians" or "Eusebians" deny Christ, or have become known as Χριστομάχος, or are the forerunners of the Antichrist (*C. Ar.* 1.7.4), behind these weighty allegations are simply complaints that their conception of Christ countermands his own and neuters his soteriology of *theopoesis*.

Though the *First Oration* opens with a nod to the diabolical inspiration of Arius, and its introduction contains several scattered references to anterior heresies from which Arians take pieces of their doctrines, only with the coda to his introduction does Athanasius most clearly express the true origin of Arianism. In so doing, he culminates the prologue to his *Frist Oration Against the Arians* with a flourish and seals it with the fourth of his predecessor Alexander's heresiological tactics deployed against them. Characteristically, this passage begins with Athanasius denying Arius and his followers any scriptural authority for their beliefs; in his mind, they ignore the plain words of the

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[24] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 233.

[25] Ibid., 234.

Gospel, where God declares, for example, Christ his "Son" (Mt 3:17; Lk 3:22) and not a "creature" as do the Arians:

> οὐδὲ ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν ἔχουσι τὰς προφάσεις. ἐδείχθη γὰρ πολλάκις, δειχθήσεται δὲ καὶ νῦν ὡς ἀλλότρια ταῦτα τῶν θείων λογίων. οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ λείπει λοιπὸν εἰπεῖν, ὅτι παρὰ τοῦ διαβόλου λαβόντες ἐμάνησαν· τούτων γὰρ ἐκεῖνος μόνος ἐστὶ σπορεύς, φέρε, πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀντιστῶμεν· πρὸς ἐκεῖνον γάρ ἐστιν « ἡμιν » διὰ τούτων « ἡ πάλη », ἵνα τοῦ κυρίου βοηθοῦντος κἀκείνου συνήθως πίπτοντος τοῖς ἐλέγχοις αἰσχυνθῶσιν οὗτοι βλέποντες ἀποροῦντα τὸν ἐπισπείραντα τὴν αἵρεσιν αὐτοῖς καὶ μάθωσι κἂν ὀψέ ποτε ὅτι Ἀρειανοὶ ὄντες οὐκ εἰσὶ Χριστιανοί (*C. Ar.* 1.10.6-7).

> And they do not possess any mandates from the scriptures, for it has been shown many times, but it will be shown even now how these things are foreign from the divine oracles. Accordingly, since it remains only to say that from the devil have they been driven to madness—for that one alone is the sower of these opinions—let us endure to stand against him. For with that one (the devil) is "our struggle" [Eph. 6:12] via these (Arians), in order that, with the Lord aiding us, when that one (the devil) falls in customary disgrace by our arguments, these (Arians), seeing the sower of their heresy at an utter loss, they might learn, at last, finally, that *being Arians, they are not Christians*.[26]

The clearly constrictive nature of Athanasius's heresiology is lain bare by this final clause: his opponents are simply not Christian, at least not in the fashion that he deems acceptable. Though his extensive depiction of his doctrinal foes bears all the high marks of centuries of heresiology that preceded him, ranging from the restriction of heretical speech to a focus on the orthodox church's authentic apostolic succession, at its most basic level, the Christian rhetoric of difference that at once caricatures and constructs the heretics for historical remembrance is interested to disapprove of theological deviants and enshrine the author's own orthodoxy. That Athanasius, as Exhibit A of many of fourth-century Christianity's most lamentable attributes, participates in heresiology should come as little surprise, but without inspecting his writings at this granular level and considering

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[26] Trans. mine, emphasis mine, from the Greek text in Metzler, Hansen, and Savvidis, 120.

the unpredictable fortunes for his then-exiled episcopacy—not to mention the uncertain

outcome of Christian orthodoxy in the post-Constantinian Empire—we might not have

appreciated the active role Athanasius played in erecting the artifice of "Arianism" by

which his life and struggle has been so long comprehended. As we have seen, this *First*

Oration stands as a polemical milestone both in the early decades of Athanasius's long

career and in the context of all heresiology, but it is also worth observing the more

pointed effects of the bishop's heresiological orientation as he wrote the all-important

Festal Letter for 367. There, as will be observed, the declaration of canon interweaves

with the exigency presented by the still-prevalent, and malevolent, heresies.

Heresiology in the Festal Letter of 367

Transitioning from the early career of Athanasius to his later years, the 39th Festal

Letter of 367 accords strongly with the constrictive trends evident in the fourth-century

church. The letter not only transmits a list of books Athanasius considers scripture, but he

frames his declaration of this biblical canon with two complementary logics that may be

broadly termed the heresiological and the authoritarian. Athanasius intends both to

contravene heretics whose scriptural practices he finds dubious and to establish a sure

base for the church's authority: the church's first "rule of scripture" containing only those

books he considers part of the κανών, a term that has previously signified other "canons"

for the church that he novelly marshals for this endeavor. Athanasius is convinced that

heretics not only use apocryphal books, but also invent them to give fabricated sayings

the impression of veracity and antiquity (*Ep. fest.* 39.21–23). It should come as little

surprise that the heretics at the forefront of the bishop's mind are none other than the

Arians and Melitians, "les ennemis irréductibles de l'évêque," two groups that

Athanasius continues to flog in his later years.[27] Heresies such as theirs license

Athanasius to insist that the Holy Scriptures are perfect and lack nothing from which to

teach the faithful, but first he cannot resist the opportunity to again typologize his

opponents as scriptural adversaries, who, like the Jews, reject teachings of the Lord:

> For the Jews gather together like Pontius Pilate, and the Arians and the
> Melitians like Herod, not to celebrate the [Easter] feast, but to blaspheme the
> Lord, saying, "What is truth?" and "Take him away! Crucify him! Release to
> us Barabbas!" For it is just like the request for Barrabas [*sic*] to say that the
> Son of God is a creature and that there was a time when he was not. As for
> them, it is no surprise that they have remained dead in their unbelief by being
> bound by their evil thoughts, just as the Egyptians were bound by their own
> axles (*Ep. fest.* 39.14).[28]

Remarkably, this quote epitomizing the counter-heretical orientation of the 39th Festal

Letter sits just outside of the extant Greek text of the letter; it is shortly followed by his

communiqué on the canonized books that has all too often been prized or even totemized

absent the native context of its expression. Still, Athanasius proceeds to claim that

Christians can properly celebrate Easter because they possess the scriptures containing

everything necessary for salvation—only then, after some literary *topoi* intended to

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[27] Eric Junod, "D'Eusèbe de Césarée à Athanase d'Alexandrie en passant par Cyrille de Jérusalem: De la construction savante du Nouveau Testament à la clôture ecclésiastique du canon," in *Le canon du Nouveau Testament: Regards nouveaux sur l'histoire de sa formation*, vol. 54 of *Le Monde de la Bible*, ed. Gabrielle Aragione, Eric Junod, and Enrico Norelli (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2005), 188.

[28] Unless otherwise footnoted, all quotations of Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter that follow are from the translation of David Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter: Heresy, Apocrypha, and the Canon," *Harvard Theological Review* 103.1 (2010): 57-66. Divisions in the letter by paragraph all relate to the combined Coptic-Greek edition, as also reflected in Brakke's article, even where I have supplied my own translations from the extant Greek fragments.

excuse his "audacity" (τῆς ἐμαυτοῦ τόλμης)[29] and to attribute his declaration of an

episcopal canon not to his own inventiveness but, via the aorist tense, to some tradition

from the indeterminate past, does Athanasius unfurl his "canonized (κανονιζόμενα),

handed-down, and believed-to-be-divine books" (*Ep. fest.* 39.16).[30] Though the *Shepherd*

is not found in Athanasius's construal of the apocrypha—a set of books that he refuses to

name—but rather in the category of seven books appointed to be read by catechumens

(*Ep. fest.* 39.20), Hermas's book is yet restricted from impinging on the essential

doctrines of the church, given that it does not contain the "founts of salvation" as do the

books Athanasius describes as "canonized."

Another strong clue that the worldview of heresiology, which as we have seen

was quite pervasive in Athanasius's career, motivated the Alexandrian bishop to set

stricter limits than ever before to the scriptural canon has only recently become clear with

the discovery of additional Coptic fragments of his letter. Newly translated by Brakke,

these fragments contain a mini-catalogue of heretics whose doctrines are plainly refuted

by the "spiritual Scriptures," which are completely sufficient for the doctrinal and salvific

needs of authentic Christians (*Ep. fest.* 39.23). The impious positions of Manicheans,

Marcionites, Phrygians (Montanists), and "the Arians and their parasites, the Melitians,"

[29] Both Junod, 190-2, and Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter," 55, call attention to this admission that Athanasius was acting audaciously by setting out a list of the "canonized" scriptures. For Junod, the bishop's audacity relates to his production of a "plus restrictif" canon than even he had previously used in his own scriptural practice, while Brakke suggests that the audacious move was the scriptural in-out binary that transformed books previously deemed "disputed" or "contested," in the hands of a more scholastic Christian like Eusebius, to an extracanonical status, even if they could still be read by catechumens. I am more inclined to accept Brakke's understanding of Athanasius's audacity; in Athanasius, for the first time, do we find hard limits to a scriptural collection under a term (κανών) that previously delineated other "rules" of faith and truth for the church. It seems that Athanasius was consciously making a new decree about the books that "measured up" by conveying the elements for salvation, and thus he admitted his audacity at devising the church's first "rule of scripture."

[30] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:1435-36.

are thus all contradicted by an orthodox understanding of the texts comprising his New Testament (*Ep. fest.* 39.24–26). In each case, Athanasius supplies only proof-texts without lending any credence to the doctrines he opposes or explaining whence they emanate; no significant argumentation is necessary, because for him, the heretics are plainly defeated by divine sayings most often coming from the Gospel of John.

Given that Athanasius's canon-defining Festal Letter was promulgated on heresiological grounds, one may fairly wonder how the *Shepherd* of Hermas factored in to his decision-making. Hermas's book was one of seven named immediately outside of the Old and New Testaments in the category of books "impressed by the Fathers to be read," and was thus more proximal to the "spiritual Scriptures" than were the apocrypha (*Ep. fest.* 39.20).[31] As a member of this septet, Athanasius apparently reserved for the *Shepherd* a propaedeutic quality,[32] perhaps regarding it useful to instill piety among catechumens while teaching them "how to hate sin and to abandon idolatry" (*Ep. fest.* 39.28). These functions are imagined for the entirety of the category, however, and Athanasius says nothing here about the *Shepherd* of Hermas independently. For the bishop's individual attention to the *Shepherd*, it becomes necessary to think back nearly a decade before the Festal Letter of 367, when while in exile within Egypt he wrote his major defense of the Nicene Council and accused the Eusebians, whom he equates with the Arians, of citing the shepherd's Commandment 1 to support their doctrine of a creaturely Son. While Athanasius offered an orthodox interpretation of the *Shepherd*

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[31] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:1437. "Spiritual Scriptures" comes from the translation of Brakke describing the limited Old and New Testaments together at *Ep. fest.* 39.23.

[32] Junod, 194.

reckoning the Son not among the "things created" but rather with the creative God, he

simultaneously took the opportunity to inveigh against a heretical use of Christian

scriptures to, for the first time, pronounce the book as "not . . . from the canon" (μὴ ὂν ἐκ

τοῦ κανόνος).[33] By 367, Athanasius may very well consider the sidelining of the

Shepherd a war waged and a battle won; he need not elaborate on Hermas's text or any

other extracanonical book specifically. And yet, his earlier determination concerning the

Shepherd suggests that just like the decree about the precise contents and contours of the

canon, the *Shepherd* itself was excluded on a counter-heretical basis. The ambiguity that

the *Shepherd* permitted about the status of the Son could not stand in the same canon as

the "spiritual Scriptures," especially when he discovered it pressed in a heretical direction

by his opponents. We might wish that Athanasius had spent more time defending his

position and thereby engaged in a deeper exegesis of the *Shepherd*, for given that he

considers his Old and New Testaments the combined "springs of salvation," is it possible

that he objected to the soteriology or some other theological content he found in the

Shepherd? As we have argued, Hermas and his shepherd put forward an entirely different

picture of salvation not as *theopoesis* but as ascension in virtue to a place of permanent

enshrinement in the tower. That Athanasius might have opposed the *Shepherd* for its

underdeveloped portrait of salvation can be at this time no more than an untestable

hypothesis.[34] Yet, what little he does offer about his thought processes in the 350s and

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[33] *Decr.* 18.3; for the full translation of the passage and greater context, see pp. 152–6 above.

[34] In light of the argument from the first half of this dissertation that the *Shepherd* achieved such popularity in the early church as a book of practical salvation, it becomes particularly attractive to speculate that Athanasius may have also opposed it for similar reasons. For if Athanasius had read the *Shepherd* in such a manner, it certainly would have flouted his own sensibilities toward a soteriology of *theopoesis*. Similarly, Gregg and Groh argued a generation ago that "Arianism" was driven by a "positive soteriology"

360s suggests that the *Shepherd*, like the scriptural canon as a whole, was arbitrated on heresiological grounds.

In what might perhaps stand as an apt parallel to Athanasius's rejection of the *Shepherd* of Hermas for these reasons, Elaine Pagels has argued convincingly that the same bishop only came to accept Revelation as canonical thanks to its utility to assist in fighting his lifelong theological disputes, particularly when wielded to defame so-called heretics. Revelation was only shakily received in the East, and particularly after the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as at first a permissible faith and then as its official religion, the obvious metonymy of Babylon as Rome desperately required reformulation, and the millenarianism of prior centuries also needed replacing if Revelation was to retain what status it previously enjoyed among segments of colonially and imperially dominated Christians. But Athanasius, never one to turn down a biting accusation or to refrain from anchoring his own enemies to scriptural antagonists, alleged that the

characterized by a creaturely Christ who stood for them as a faithful example of an "obedient servant" to God. Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism—A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 12, 25. While not dismissing the possibility that Athanasius knew and rejected the *Shepherd* for such a reason—after all, he also instrumentalizes the purpose of the "divine Scriptures for salvation" (*Ep. fest.* 39.15)—two primary hurdles necessitate interpretive conservatism at this point. **First**, we have no access to Athanasius's reading of the *Shepherd* beyond his meager comments at Mand. 1.1, and what he does offer bears mainly on Christology, rather than soteriology. Granted, they are normally intricately connected in Athanasian thought, but it seems just as plausible that he would have been able to spin the difficult elements of Hermas's tower, and possibly even his diminished role for the Son of God, into an orthodox understanding of these passages. **Second**, in spite of Gregg and Groh's arguments, some significant doubt remains that salvation served as the impetus for "Arian" thought. See, for example, Christopher Stead, "Arius in Modern Research," in *Doctrinal Diversity: Varieties of Early Christianity*, Recent Studies in Early Christianity Series, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 136. Certainly, Athanasius signals that Arianism was soteriologically intolerable, but this need not have been from elements of active Arian assent—he only need have been offended that his construal of Arianism nullified his own theological position, on which see again Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 233. Moreover, even if salvation were the linchpin motivating Arians, we have no certainty that they appealed to the *Shepherd* on this point. Given that Athanasius contends against the *Shepherd* exclusively in the context of contra-Arian polemics, this too might be a crucial point in need of addressing. Future research might find a route around these hurdles, such as by demonstrating wider Egyptian unrest around competing soteriologies, but at present we must remain limited to extrapolating from the context of the 39th Festal Letter.

Melitians and Arians came together with their various errors to symbolically mirror the cup of Babylon (*Ep. Aeg. Lib.* 22), where wrath and fornications and iniquities were all mixed into a toxic brew endangering the servants of the Lord (Rev 14:8; 18:6). As Pagels notes, in the course of fighting for his see and sparring with the heretics, particularly during his spells of expulsion from Alexandria, "Athanasius increasingly interpreted the *whore* of Babylon, who drinks human blood, no longer as *Rome* but rather as *heresy personified*."[35] During those times when Constantine's sons supported causes Athanasius construed as "Arian" in inclination, his reframing of Revelation as a counter-heretical book made sense of his prolonged exiles via the scriptures and was rhetorically powerful. Its heresiological muscle served, furthermore, to inculcate the Apocalypse within the bishop's canon; when reinstated to his episcopacy, Athanasius would continue to reserve this as an inactive but apotropaic tool in his scriptural arsenal. The *Shepherd* of Hermas, meanwhile, supplied Athanasius with very few resources for the polemical prosecution of heretics. The book's general disinterest in waging doctrinal wars or making extensive declarative statements of belief meant it was not often useful for his heresiological purposes. Athanasius surprisingly does use the *Shepherd* in one instance to portray Arians and Eusebians as double-minded and therefore the "offspring of the devil," in an allusion to the shepherd's Commandment 9. This even appears, surprisingly, in the same treatise where he first decrees the *Shepherd* outside of the canon, but this isolated case

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[35] Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, & Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 143; emphases hers.

seemingly relies more on the appearance of διψυχία in James, which triggers

Athanasius's later reference to the *Shepherd* (*Decr*. 4.3).[36]

Ultimately, however, Hermas's book is audaciously evicted from the scriptural

canon of the Alexandrian patriarch, a decision that must have been controversial in an

environment that concomitantly produced plentiful manuscript copies of the text and also

enshrined it in the pandect Bible of the Codex Sinaiticus. Perhaps Athanasius's earlier

exiles in the West enabled him to see that the *Shepherd* did not universally enjoy the

status it was afforded in Egypt. Regardless, the abundant manuscript recoveries for the

Shepherd strongly suggest that others in Egypt were either ignorant of the bishop's

decision or were manifestly willing "(à) déborde(r) les bornes du canon d'Athanase,"

both in the case of the *Shepherd* and other books he designated for reading only.[37] They

were, perhaps, not as heresiologically driven as was the bishop, whose career was

demonstrably consumed by struggles against "heretics." But combined with Athanasius's

key statements about how the *Shepherd* of Hermas was used by his opponents, we have a

strong clue that the heresiological tempest of the fourth century strongly influenced

Athanasius's imposition of a canon and the *Shepherd*'s exclusion from the New

Testament canon.

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[36] Athanasius alludes here to elements from Herm. Mand. 9.9-11 (39.9-11) and demonstrates a curious familiarity with the *Shepherd* not otherwise signaled by his literary corpus. He does, however, misquote the *Shepherd*, transmitting ἔγκονόν ἐστι διαβόλου instead of the text's actual ἡ διψυχία θυγάτηρ ἐστὶ τοῦ διαβόλου, perhaps because his intention is not fidelity to the *Shepherd* itself rather than to using the sense of the text to berate his opponents.

[37] Junod, 194.

3. Athanasius and Christology

In the previous chapter, we pursued the rising importance in Christology from the second century to the fourth, where the Prologue to the Gospel of John ascends from nearly unknown to a figure like Ignatius to a key component of the scriptural macro-narrative just a few generations later, as observed in the *Adversus haereses* and other extant writings of Irenaeus. From there, John continues to guide Christian interpretation, whether the memory of the disciple himself for Victorinus, the counter-heretical potential of his Gospel, or its theological orientation that neatly unites Christ's advent with the origin of the world. Origen eventually signals the full theological-philosophical potential of the *Logos*, which was comparatively only teased by his predecessors. Once we arrive in fourth-century Alexandria, Athanasius forms another benchmark for the ascendancy of John and the centrality of *Logos* theology, a tendency that he emulated from Alexander. In fact, the Johannine concept of the *Logos* serves as the linchpin of Athanasius's thought, accounting for the signposts of salvation history from creation to incarnation to resurrection to the expectation of deification. To first establish the indispensability of Athanasius's Christology and give it flesh, we investigate here his earliest treatises, the apologetic duo of *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, wherein the young Alexandrian bishop molds a "consistent account of the Christian faith,"[38] or what otherwise might be understood as the theological platform he established before his episcopacy was consumed by combatting heretical and political opponents. Pollard has appropriately remarked that this two-part work is "in fact an expansion of the [Johannine] Prologue in the form of a spiritual history of mankind or of God's saving purpose throughout the ages

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[38] Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 31.

culminating in his self-revelation in the Christ-event."[39] And as the traditional title of *De Incarnatione* might suggest, Athanasius works at length to reinforce the corporeality of the *Logos*—that concept by which he made intelligible the humanity of God—with a full philosophical, historical, and soteriological significance, so as to elevate the incarnation into the theological-linguistic register of his day. In short, for Athanasius, the incarnation restores a broken relationship between God and creation, for humanity rejected God and became willfully corruptible (*C. Gent.* 9.1-2; *Inc.* 5.1-2). Thus, the Word/Reason of God, which created humanity with God, appropriately deigned to become man, die a sacrificial death for all sins, and return to humanity the promise of immortality that it once enjoyed at Eden, when Adam could live freely and carelessly, constantly contemplating God (*C. Gent.* 2.4; 47.4). For Athanasius, the actions of the *Logos* summarily constitute the logic of the divine plan.

Athanasius makes fruitful use of the *Logos* throughout both halves of this dual treatise, which he presents at their outset as an attempt to demonstrate that the belief in the Savior has logical merit, so that "no one may regard the teaching of our doctrine (λόγου) as worthless, or suppose faith in Christ to be irrational (ἄλογον)" (*C. Gent.* 1.3).[40] While Athanasius will not unveil Christ as the Word of God until the following chapter (*C. Gent.* 2.2), the abundant wordplay signals that the *Logos* serves as the primary content of his argument. Khaled Anatolios properly discerns that the work should be viewed as apologetic in nature, but rather than an *apologia crucis*, it is better understood

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[39] T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 133-4.

[40] Trans. per Robert W. Thomson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 3.

as an elaborate *apologia logou*, for Athanasius seeks to persuade his imagined reader

both that Christ is the *Logos* and that the claims of Christianity are logical.[41] The story

begins with a wayward humanity, such that the Greeks, Egyptians, and every other nation

rejected the true God in favor of imagined deities that do not actually exist

(*C. Gent.* 23.5). But before Athanasius comes to explain the redemptive acts of the

incarnated Word, he argues that the goodness and orderliness of creation demonstrates

the activity of the God underlying it:

> For if the movement of creation was meaningless (ἄλογος) and the universe
> was carried about haphazardly, one could well disbelieve our statements. But
> if it was created with reason (λόγῳ), wisdom, and understanding and has been
> arranged with complete order, then he who governs and ordered it can be none
> other than the Word (Λόγον) of God (*C. Gent.* 40.3).[42]

Creation, therefore, reveals the logical work of God and the *Logos* through whom it was

made. Athanasius is careful to differentiate the Christian *Logos* from the Stoic

σπερματικὸς λόγος or from the plain spoken word, for he refers instead to "the living and

acting God, the very Word (αὐτολόγον) of the good God of the universe, who . . . is

rather the sole and individual Word of the good Father" (*C. Gent.* 40.4).[43] With little

surprise, Athanasius seals his argumentation with John 1:1 as he defends his view that all

things cohere under the *Logos* of God, and the *Logos* enables the created order to

function properly (*C. Gent.* 42.2).

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[41] Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 28. Though Athanasius appeals to the cross and especially follows its Pauline presentation as a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks/Gentiles (*Inc.* 33.1-2; cf. 1 Cor. 1:23), this does not constitute an especially sustained theme until the second half of *De Incarnatione*, and is conspicuously absent from *Contra Gentes*.

[42] Trans. per Thomson, 111.

[43] Ibid.

If *Contra Gentes* contains a "pre-Christian" history for the *Logos*, the second half of Athanasius's treatise dives almost immediately into Christ's incarnation. But Athanasius nevertheless rewinds the story to Eden and the creation of mankind, and in so doing, he finds occasion to quote approvingly from the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Shortly thereafter, Athanasius explains why the origin of humanity is relevant to the inquiry about the incarnated *Logos*: the *Logos*, for him, is God's redemption of an insubordinate creation. "For we were the cause of his incarnation, and for our salvation he had compassion to the extent of being born and revealed in a body" (*Inc.* 4.3).[44] Athanasius's rationale knows nothing of the "fall" or "original sin," the elucidation of which would only arrive after his death. Instead, he explains God's choice to reconnect with humanity as a sort of redemptive Plan B. God could not lie, and therefore his restriction delivered to Adam in Paradise about the fruit of the trees was necessarily upheld (Gn 2:16-17). Taking special significance from the Hebrew intensifying idiom that survived into the Septuagint as θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖσθε—appearing occasionally in the KJV as "die the death"—Athanasius interpreted this as a sure sign that God promised Adam would "not merely … die, but … remain in the corruption of death" (*Inc.* 3.5).[45] God, being good and just, naturally needed to render his initial sentence of death, but chose to reconnect with humanity by coming in the flesh. For this task, the creative *Logos* was once again well disposed:

> [W]ho was needed for such grace and recalling except the Word of God, who also in the beginning had created the universe from nothing? For it was his task both to bring what was corruptible back again to incorruption, and to save

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[44] Trans. per Thomson, 143.

[45] Ibid.

what was above all fitting (εὔλογον) for the Father. For since he is the Word of the Father and above everyone, consequently he alone was both able to recreate the universe and be worthy to suffer for all and to be an advocate on behalf of all before the Father (*Inc.* 7.4-5).[46]

Later in the treatise, Athanasius argues for the necessity of Christ's death on the cross and other matters in defense of Christian doctrine, such as the virginal conception and birth, but he makes his most central points early on: humanity is proven corrupt not only by the evidence from the gods and idols of all nations, but from the very story of Adam, and only the Lord and Savior, as the fully divine *Logos*, could choose to restore humanity back to incorruptibility (*Inc.* 20.1). For this task it was necessary that the Son of God take on a human body and performatively "die the death" that was promised to humanity, so that they could again attain the promise of immortality. As Anatolios keenly observes of *De Incarnatione*, "Christology and a certain presentation of redemption that is centered around the incarnation of the Logos play the central rôle in the conception and argument of [Athanasius's] work."[47] His Christology in this, his earliest treatise, requires the *Logos* to bridge the chasm between the uncreated Godhead and the created order, for it was only by the Word's incarnation and subsequent actions in a mortal body that salvation could be offered and humanity achieve a return to incorruptibility.

Christology in the Festal Letter of 367

As we turn from the evidence from Athanasius's earlier corpus to the 39th Festal Letter, we find interwoven with his other constrictive arguments a penchant for signaling

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[46] Trans. per Thomson, 151.

[47] Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 67.

the implications of his dominant interest in Christology. While distinguishing the received, divine, and spiritual Scriptures from the apocrypha, one prevalent theme of the letter concerns the bishop's portrayal of the canonical subject matter of these authentic books: they offer to Christians all of the necessary components for salvation. "We have the divine Scriptures for salvation," Athanasius declares, "which are sufficient to instruct us perfectly. When we read them carefully with a good conscience, we will be 'like the tree that grows upon places of flowing water, which brings forth its fruit in its season and whose leaves do not wither'" (*Ep. fest.* 39.15).[48] Given that he protests against inaccurate depictions of the Son of God, it is of little surprise that Athanasius's canon of scriptures contains, above all else, the resources for correct Trinitarian and Christological doctrine. For this reason, he paraphrases approvingly from Jesus's lengthy answer to "the Jews" who challenged his authority to heal a paralytic on the Sabbath: "Search the scriptures, because it is they that testify about me" (*Ep. fest.* 39.19).[49] Later, after critiquing the contents of apocryphal books, Athanasius offers a set of condensed doctrinal proof-texts guiding his reading of scripture:

> Therefore, if we seek the faith, it is possible for us to discover it through (the Scriptures), so that we might believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If (we seek after) the subject of his humanity, John cries out, "The Word became flesh and lived among us." And on the subject of the resurrection, the Lord put the Sadducees to shame, saying, "Have you not read what is said to you by God, who says, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (*Ep. fest.* 39.24).

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[48] Athanasius quotes here from Psalm 1, which offered him a simple binary between the disposition of the righteous and the wicked that perfectly serves his heresiological orientation.

[49] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:1437. The reference from which Athanasius paraphrases here appears in John 5:39, and possibly forms an interpretive tendency that was long in the tooth: in his earliest treatise, *Contra Gentes*, Athanasius similarly insists that every God-breathed Scripture (πᾶσα θεόπνευστος γραφὴ) confirms the equivalence or origin of the Word with the Father (*C. Gent.* 45.2).

The "living" and the "dead" comprise one largely unrecognized motif in the letter, standing respectively for proper Christians who will be saved and the heretics who will not. Regardless, more interestingly, Athanasius reveals his own debt to the Johannine charter story in that he locates a proper understanding of Christ's humanity not in some synoptic tale about his birth or vulnerable moments characteristic of human emotion, but in the concept of incarnation found only in the Prologue of John. Faith, moreover, is condensable for Athanasius in holding correct doctrine about the Godhead, and once more, Athanasius comes to depict the Arians and Melitians as baldly repudiated by the first verse of John, which inoculates against their impious slogans.

Yet, although we can see that Christology remains crucial to the thought of Athanasius, it is appropriate to observe here that the genre of the Festal Letter does not lend itself to copious elaboration on the finer points of doctrine. The Festal Letter of 367 contains brief statements reflective of Athanasius's more developed treatises, even those penned decades earlier, and his short quotations of John and other occasional nods to the texts of his authentic New Testament stand rather as the tip of an interpretive Christological iceberg. Instead, he can assume that many of the readers already allied to him theologically and politically were aware of his central Trinitarian tenets. In Athanasius's most pervasive message that he conveys with the letter, he progresses beyond the Christological battleground to argue that only Christ should enjoy the title of "Teacher," and that the content of Christ's teaching, to which all purporting to instruct new disciples must now be beholden, must come only from the authentic Scriptures that Athanasius has now outlined. Though we will return to this subject below when

considering the bases for Athanasian authority and ecclesiology in the church, for now it is significant to observe how the bishop portrays Christ's identity as the church's sole teacher. He writes, "But our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—being the Word of the Father and having not been instructed by anyone—rightly he alone is the Teacher, so that the Jews were astonished when they heard him and said, 'How does he know the Scriptures without having been taught?'" (*Ep. fest.* 39.13). Whereas human teachers, charismatics, and academics all originate as disciples and later become teachers, Jesus was uniquely recognized for his didactic abilities that the scribes and Pharisees of his day could not attribute to scholastic achievement. Athanasius recognizes, as did church tradition preceding him, that the source of his knowledge was none other than his origin from God; the Johannine Prologue, again, referred to him as the *Logos* or Reason of the Father, a philosophical designation that served Athanasius's purposes here perfectly. As the *Logos* constitutes the Athanasian logic and an essential narrative that guides all other scriptural interpretation, it also forms a measuring stick unto itself: where other scriptures do not conform or especially where they can be interpreted to militate against his *Logos* Christology, Athanasius was willing to cut his losses. However edifying he regarded the *Shepherd* some three decades earlier, Athanasius would now have reckoned it narratively and theologically deficient, given that its most sustained deliberation about the Son of God could not approach his Christological exigency: the incarnation of God's preexistent *Logos* for the restoration and salvation of humankind.

Therefore, we find in the 39th Festal Letter two constrictive influences paralleling the first-ever declaration of a scriptural canon. First, Athanasius participated in the deeply

inculcated worldview that pitted the received truth of the church as orthodoxy and deprecated all deviations thereof as heresies unwelcome within Christian piety. This worldview furnished influencers of the church with a popular and persistent rhetorical method and an array of polemical discursive tactics for ongoing use against any new doctrinal challenges. And second, the subject matter most often inciting Athanasius's heresiology involved his unyielding Christological beliefs which, if violated in any way—whether through insinuation that Christ was a creature or via any perceived failure to track the Johannine framework of the *Logos* that clarified Christ's concomitant divinity and humanity—triggered a characteristically caustic response. These two Athanasian tendencies, stipulating both a reason for attack and the method by which he pursued it, are both on display in the 39th Festal Letter that novelly and audaciously designates, for the first time, a rule of scripture. In all cases, the Alexandrian bishop flexes his earned influence and constrictive muscles to shape the future of orthodox Christianity. Vitally, however, on top of incorrect doctrines enabled by apocryphal and non-salvific scriptures, Athanasius also needed to deal with alternative sources of authority in Christian churches.

4. Athanasius and Revelatory Experiences

Visionary or revelatory experiences do not figure very frequently in the writings of Athanasius, especially as compared to his Alexandrian predecessors Clement and Origen. The few extant places where he describes visions or prophetic episodes suggest that the bishop maintained a certain ambivalence toward them, or rather that he tolerated

them only when they supported either his ascetic or heresiological proclivities.

Otherwise, special revelation was not a source of authority to be trusted. On the one hand,

Athanasius necessarily affirms the authenticity of visions in the Old Testament: the

prophetic heroes of the biblical past were indeed the recipients of divine revelations, or

they could sometimes see genuine visions while dreaming, but Athanasius insists that

these spiritual gifts were experienced while the prophets performed extreme ascetic

programs. However, he says desperately little about the ongoing viability of revelations

and visions: while Brakke understands that Athanasius believes the prophets "merely

actualized a potentiality in every human soul,"[50] Athanasius also holds forth the idea,

early in his career, that prophecies and visions have ceased given that Christ has come in

the flesh. Inasmuch as this becomes stated in the context of anti-Jewish polemic, it may

not be extrapolable to the entirety of Christian experience, and certainly Athanasius later

permits that monastics who have ascended the ascetic heights may also receive divine

visions as a powerful by-product of their supremacy over the body. Even then,

Athanasius expresses restrictions on the publication of visions—visions can be the

domain of the devil, but even if not, they should only be shared if they edify the

community.[51] In other places, especially when making reference to the major heresies of

the Christian past, Athanasius treated with contempt any claims to special revelatory

dispensation, for the Holy Spirit was not the domain of a privileged few, but had become

available to all Christians. In the following pages, we flesh out this multivalent story as

chronologically as possible through the career of Athanasius, proposing that the bishop

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[50] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 250.

[51] Ibid., 252.

maintained a skeptical view toward the currency of visionary experiences that was only

occasionally obviated by the limited realities of the prophets of Old Testament scripture

and monastic prowess that Athanasius plausibly experienced first-hand during his tours

and exiles within Egypt. Athanasius otherwise distrusted visions and revelations, and

though he never volunteers reasons so transparently or explicitly, we can rightfully

postulate that the bishop was cautious to inoculate against the potential for an

uncontrollable alternative source of authority garnered by the recipients of revelations,

visions, or prophecies. This episcopal defense mechanism was curated after the challenge

of the New Prophets and other novel heresies that instigated a hierarchical response

clamping down on the freedom of the spirit within the catholic church.

Of necessity, Athanasius recognized the scriptural narratives concerning uniquely

gifted prophets, for which the quartet of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel received

revelations of various types from the Lord.[52] This initial, Biblicist step along

Athanasius's circuitous sensibilities concerning visions does not merely repeat the stories

as he finds them, however, for Athanasius surpasses the plain narratives of scripture and

insists that Moses, Elijah, and Daniel earned their visions by asceticism. The young

bishop writes in his first Festal Letter, for 329:

> That great man Moses, when fasting, conversed with God, and received the
> law. The great and holy Elijah, when fasting, was thought worthy of divine
> visions, and at last was taken up like Him who ascended into heaven. And
> Daniel, when fasting, although a very young man, was entrusted with the
> mystery, and he alone understood the secret things of the king, and was
> thought worthy of divine visions. . . . And, generally, each one of the saints
> has been thought worthy of similar transcendent nourishment (*Ep. fest.* 1.6).[53]

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[52] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 250.

[53] *NPNF² 4:508.*

Early on, therefore, Athanasius qualifies the scriptural narrative about prophetic gifts and revelations: Moses, Elijah, and Daniel do not merely receive visions because they were members of God's chosen people, or because they were elected as prophets, but their visions were granted by God as rewards for their characteristic ascetic practice. Moses, specifically, is imagined in the same letter as having fasted for forty days, during which he was sustained by divine words. No scriptural referents substantiate Athanasius's claims for Moses or Elijah—though Daniel fasts and prays (Dn 9:3)—and yet Athanasius transforms the charismatic gift of prophecy or revelation from a matter of the Lord's election to a measure of their ascetic practice. Visions are strongly tied to fasting, rather than one's status as a prophet. These same prophetic heroes achieve a level of "watchfulness of the soul" that permits them to receive visions during their bodily sleep, and so Athanasius accounts both for waking visions and revelations that come while dreaming (*Mor. et val.* 6).[54] Meanwhile, still early in his career, Athanasius musters a series of apologetic arguments rebuffing Jewish denials about Christ. In *De Incarnatione*, one such argument concerns his sense that prophecy and visionary experiences delivered to Jews have ceased, as has their prophetic office and their hold on Jerusalem.

> For when did the prophet or vision cease from Israel, except now that the holy of holies, Christ, has come? For a sign and a great proof of the coming of God the Word is this: no longer does Jerusalem stand, nor does a prophet arise, nor is vision revealed to them—and rightly so. For when he who was announced has come, what need is there of those who announce; when the truth is at hand, what need is there of the shadow? . . . Therefore, since the holy of holies

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[54] Trans. per Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 312. Brakke notes elsewhere that this fragmentary treatise, *On Sickness and Health*, cannot be dated within Athanasius's career on the current extant evidence. David Brakke, "The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana," *Orientalia* 63.2 (1994): 32.

is at hand, rightly have vision and prophecy been sealed, and the kingdom of Jerusalem has ceased (*Inc.* 40.1-2).[55]

Given that Athanasius delivers this judgment about the conclusion of prophecy in contra-Jewish polemic, it is of ambiguous value. The Alexandrian likely only intends that prophecy and revelations have ceased *to the Jews*; given that Christians uniquely recognize and worship God's Word, visionary gifts may have passed on to Christian emulators of the biblical past. Interestingly, Athanasius refrains from making this argument. Though he claims the God of Abraham for the Christians, he stops short of wresting gifts of prophecy and visions as did Justin two centuries earlier, and only reiterates that they have ceased (*Inc.* 40.6-7). While Brakke imagines that Athanasius opens visionary experiences more widely to anyone who possesses a "rational soul," or ψυκὴ λογική (*C. Gent.* 31.5),[56] it must be held in tension that Athanasius could imagine no further purpose for the dissemination of visions about God or the Godhead, for the Logos has come in the flesh and the Holy Spirit is now available to all.

Whereas these earlier treatments of visions permit an uncertainty about Athanasius's views, later he must contend with a setting where such visions were among the experiences practiced and even celebrated within the cloistered communes of monastics. During a period of exile spent in hiding among the monastics, Athanasius, just years after the famed Antony's death in 356, occasions to write the *Life of Antony*. The resulting work was a compendium of some potentially authentic episodes and the pet causes of Athanasius himself: the bishop possibly only met Antony once or twice,

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[55] Trans. per Thomson, 231-3.

[56] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 250.

spending minimal time around him, and was not a principal candidate to write a proper biography.[57] Instead, Athanasius's hagiography blends a number of his characteristic purposes: Athanasius sought to portray this leading monastic as subordinate and non-threatening to the authority of the Alexandrian bishop, to stake a claim for Antony's doctrinal support of himself, rather than Arius or any other faction, and to model an ideal Christian existence, such that Antony is the "ideal Athanasian human being" and the paragon of Christian life.[58] This understanding of the *Life of Antony* follows all of the central tenets advanced by Brakke: Athanasius possessed little firsthand knowledge of Antony, and most significantly, he harbored little interest in the historical Antony. Instead, Athanasius cleverly sensed and seized the opportunity presented by Antony's ascetic fame: if Athanasius could control the narrative and write the story, Antony could become an unwitting conduit for Athanasius's political and ecclesiastical designs in Egypt. Thus Antony sounds suspiciously like Athanasius at many points, whether upholding a view of the sufficiency of Scripture or the purpose of earthly life to achieve incorruptibility and eternal life (*Vit. Ant.* 16). In a series of chapters of the *Life*, Antony sounds like he is delivering a condensed version of the Athanasian theological platform from *Contra Gentes–De Incarnatione* described above (*Vit. Ant.* 74-80). Thus does Antony direct a monologue caustically against "Greeks," stressing the incarnation of the Word of God for the salvation of humankind as the divine plan superior to all of his opponents' "irrational" (ἀλόγων) deities and beliefs. These imagined opponents can only respond with "senseless" (ἀλογίαν) words, for they are resoundingly defeated by

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[57] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 204-5.

[58] Ibid., 242; 262.

Antony's unschooled but inspired knowledge.[59] Finally, Antony's objections to Arian

doctrine all follow from the argumentation of Athanasius, reflecting the bishop's

characteristic annoyance that Arians would dare to reckon the Son and Word of God a

κτίσμα (*Vit. Ant.* 69).

More significantly, however, the *Life of Antony* transmits Athanasius's most

extensive remarks about visionary experiences. As Brakke observes, Antony's ascetic

rigor earned him visions quite like those conferred upon the biblical prophets, but Antony

typically attributes them to God, who alone enables the reception of visions.[60] Athanasius

puts words in Antony's mouth meant to discourage readers from seeking visions: thus,

any decision to become a monk and undertake ascetic duties should not be

> "for the purpose of gaining foreknowledge . . . but rather in order that we may
> please God in the way we lead our lives. . . . For I believe that when a soul is
> pure in every way and in its natural state, it is able, having become
> clearsighted, to see more and farther than the demons, since it was the Lord
> who revealed things to it" (*Vit. Ant.* 34).[61]

Interestingly, this admonition of Antony's appears deeper in a context of prophetic

powers that originate from demons; Antony claims, for example, that demons seek to

earn the trust of the faithful by conveying prophecies that come true, after which the

demons can then control and progressively lead their human hosts astray (*Vit. Ant.* 31).

Astoundingly, Antony imagines these demons as embodied. As exceptionally fast

travelers, the demons acquire their information not through possessing any special insight

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[59] The Greek of Athanasius here, recalling the bishop's λόγος wordplay from *Contra Gentes–De Incarnatione*, comes from PG 26:949.

[60] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 251.

[61] Translation per Robert C. Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 57.

about what is transpiring elsewhere, but by first seeing, for example, the departure of a person, and then outpacing them to their destination to foretell their arrival. But what the demons can sometimes precipitate through trickery, Antony himself achieves on several occasions reproduced by Athanasius. In one example, Antony hunkered in a cave and was able to see the travel of two men who had run out of water. In the midst of fetching help for the men, Antony additionally experienced a vision of one of the men dying, a matter that Athanasius assures the reader was of no discredit to Antony. "For surely the judgment of death was not from Antony, but from God, who both passed judgment on the one, and sent the vision concerning the other" (*Vit. Ant.* 59).[62] From these episodes, one must observe the extreme ambivalence of Athanasius toward visionary experiences. He cannot deny their currency among ascetics; having spent ample time among them while exiled, Athanasius would have been familiar with cenobitic narratives of visions. Instead, he urges caution and problematizes the prophetic mode of authority, for just as they can be experienced by the monastic whose ascetic prowess purifies his soul, so too are visions and prognostications often the domain of the devil. Additionally, visions carry a certain tenuity, as the prophetically empowered monk does not become an all-powerful seer, but remains reliant on the will of the Lord to reveal the contents of visions as he, and only he, chooses. A final stipulation arrives as Athanasius depicts Antony's decorous reserve, for the visionary should not be a babbler or a gossip, spreading the contents of visions freely and liberally. Speaking of the matters revealed to Antony, Athanasius stresses:

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[62] Trans. per Gregg, 75.

These things he did not report voluntarily, for he had spent much time in prayer and marveled at them privately, but when those with him inquired and pressed him, he was compelled to speak, being incapable, as a father, of concealing things from the children. On the contrary, he supposed his conscience to be pure, and that the accounts were to their advantage, since they would learn that the discipline yields good fruit, and that the visions frequently take place as an assuagement of the trials (*Vit. Ant.* 66).[63]

The recipient of revelations should avoid outright pride or braggadocio, but share his visions as a testament to his ascetic advance and the favor of the Lord, so that others may be inspired to imitate the monk in the pursuit of a life of Christian perfection. In other cases agreeable to Athanasius's polemical orientation toward Arians, a more unfettered proclamation of one's visions is permissible (*Vit. Ant.* 69; 82), but generally the monastic must exercise a certain prophetic etiquette, reflecting Athanasian caution toward visionary experiences. As visions are both demonic and divine, and synchronously a reward for ascetic mastery yet not to be sought as an end unto themselves, "The *Life* is simultaneously an endorsement and a warning about monastic visions."[64] Given his prior reserve about visions, Athanasius, writing the hagiography for Antony, labored to strike a delicate compromise, on the one hand promoting visions that would accord with his doctrinal and practical designs, while on the other hand restricting revelations that might harm the monastic community or impair the authority of the bishop.

One final excerpt written in 359, shortly after the *Life of Antony*, continues the lifelong trend of Athanasian skepticism toward revelatory experiences and visions. Responding to the publication of an anti-*homoousian* creed from earlier in that same year, Athanasius attempted to rally support among like-minded bishops, ultimately as a means

[63] Trans. per Gregg, 80.

[64] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 252.

of reasserting the primacy of Nicaea. Thus, *De Synodis* addresses the synods that took

place in Selucia and Arminium with the blessing of Constantius, an emperor who

persistently favored Athanasius's opponents and "strenuously sought to apprehend" the

hidden Alexandrian hierarch after he evaded arrest by imperial authorities in 356.[65]

Athanasius once again sharpened his heresiological pen and wrote to delegitimize the

drafting of yet another contra-Nicene creed, a passage worth quoting at length in order to

comprehend its full thrust against both the emperor and heresies, old and new:

> Τὸ μὲν οὖν τολμηρὸν τῆς προαιρέσεως ἐλέγχει τὴν ἀμαθίαν αὐτῶν· τὸ δὲ καινὸν ἐπινόημα τῆς γραφῆς ἴσον ἐστὶ τῆς Ἀρειανῆς αἱρέσεως. Οὕτω γὰρ γράψαντες ἔδειξαν, πότε μὲν ἤρξαντο πιστεύειν αὐτοί· ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ νῦν βούλονται τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν καταγγέλλεσθαι. Καὶ ὥσπερ, κατὰ τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴν Λουκᾶν, « ἐτέθη δόγμα » περὶ τῆς ἀπογραφῆς, καὶ τοῦτο τὸ δόγμα πρότερον μὲν οὐκ ἦν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων ἤρξατο, ἐν αἷς καὶ ἐτέθη παρὰ τοῦ γράψαντος· οὕτω καὶ οὗτοι γράψαντες, « Ἐξετέθη νῦν ἡ πίστις, » ἔδειξαν, ὅτι νεώτερόν ἐστι τὸ τῆς αἱρέσεως αὐτῶν φρόνημα, καὶ οὐκ ἦν πρότερον. Εἰ δὲ προστιθέασι, « τῆς καθολικῆς, » ἔλαθον ἑαυτοὺς πεσόντες εἰς τὴν παράνοιαν τῶν ἀπὸ Φρυγίας· ὥστε καὶ αὐτοὺς κατ᾽ ἐκείνους εἰπεῖν· *Ἡμῖν πρῶτον ἀπεκαλύφθη, καὶ ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν ἡ πίστις ἄρχεται τῶν Χριστιανῶν*. Καὶ ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνοι Μαξιμίλλαν καὶ Μοντανόν, οὕτως οὗτοι ἀντὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ Κωνστάντιον δεσπότην ἐπιγράφονται. Εἰ δὲ κατ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς νῦν ὑπατείας ἀρχὴν ἡ πίστις ἔχει, τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ Πατέρες καὶ οἱ μακάριοι μάρτυρες; τί δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ ποιήσουσι τοὺς παρ᾽ αὐτῶν κατηχηθέντας, καῖ πρὸ τῆς ὑπατείας ταύτης κοιμηθέντας; Πῶς αὐτοὺς ἐγείρουσιν, ἵνα ἃ μὲν ἔδοξαν δεδιδαχέναι τούτους, ἀπαλείψωσιν, ἃ δὲ νῦν ὡς ἐφευρόντες ἔγραψαν, ἐπισπείρωσιν αὐτοῖς; (*Syn.* 4.1–4).

> Whereas the audacity of the deliberate heresy proves their stupidity, the novelty of their writing equals the Arian heresy. For in this way they explained whence they began to believe, and from now on they wish to proclaim *their* faith. And just as, according to the evangelist Luke, "a decree was put forth" concerning the registration,[66] and this very decree was not established previously, but began from those days during which it was put forth by its registrar—in this way these ones, having written "The Faith is now

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[65] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 121.

[66] Athanasius cleverly changes the verb of Luke 2:1 from ἐξῆλθεν to ἐτέθη so as to match the wording of the "Dated Creed" that he lambasts (ἐξετέθη).

published," showed that the design of their heresy is new, and was not established previously. But since they also add the adjective "*catholic*,"[67] they hurl themselves down unwittingly into the paranoia of the Phrygians, so as to say alongside them, "To us was it revealed *first*," and "from us the faith of the Christians begins." And just as those attribute origins for themselves by Maximilla and Montanus, in the same way these, instead of by Christ, do so with Constantius, "Master." But if, according to them, the faith has its beginning from the present consulate, what will the Fathers and the blessed martyrs do? And what will they do for their very catechumens, who fell asleep before the consulate? How will they rouse them, so that they might annul that which they seem to have taught them, and now sow among them that which they, as if having newly discovered, have instituted?[68]

Though Athanasius directs his biting polemic against the dual councils and especially the so-called "Dated Creed" of May 22, 359, which was produced at Sirmium under the auspices of Constantius,[69] this lengthy excerpt yet reveals another window into the Alexandrian bishop's appraisal of claims to special revelation. Athanasius alleges no genetic link, doctrinal or otherwise, between the bishops present at Sirmium and the Montanists, and yet he perceives a similar innovative spirit between them that would dispense with his particular orthodoxy, which he characteristically equates with authentic Christianity.[70] Athanasius regards the New Prophecy and its founders as participants in παράνοιαν, and flatly rejects their novelties as antithetical to the catholic faith set up by Christ and spread throughout the world by his apostles and their successors. In the

[67] In the same treatise, Athanasius supplies the text of the creed, the opening line of which actually reads Ἐξετέθη ἡ πίστις ἡ καθολικὴ; PG 26:692. My translation follows this reality rather than the strict Greek of Athanasius's polemic, which takes a few liberties in the interest of emphasis.

[68] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:685-8.

[69] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 134. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 363-4, provides a translation of this creed, which claims that the Son was begotten "before all comprehensible substance (οὐσίας)." Naturally, Athanasius was opposed to such claims and pounced on other objectionable elements of the creed, including the rather modern historical attunement by which it ventures to date itself.

[70] Though we have learned so above, it bears repeating that "it had long been Athanasius' strategy to associate his own cause with the defense of true faith." Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 110.

process, Athanasius stakes a claim for the hierarchy and antiquity of the church as a

proper repellent of individuating challenges to its traditions, whether those that publish a

presumptuously "Dated Creed" or circumvent episcopal authority by claims to visions or

revelations. Moreover, this reference to the New Prophets again indicates that Athanasius

looked askance upon claims to special revelation, but significantly, it also implies that his

suspicions were in some way connected to the locus of authority for the church. Though

his relevant writings on the matter are few and far between, the paucity of evidence yet

paints a consistent portrait: Athanasius maintained a deep skepticism toward visions,

revelations, and prophecies, a sentiment only occasionally mitigated by the strength of

Athanasian-aligned asceticism. Though visionary prophets were certainly active in the

biblical past, their presence in the Christian era had no certain source; visions could either

be inspired by demons or the Lord, and the latter only arose in limited circumstances of

exceptional monastic toil. We may conjecture, then, that Athanasius's distrust of

revelations reflected on his approach to books that advanced visionary experience as an

authenticating device, for if visions were not welcome in the general polity of the church,

they were also dubious members of the church's scriptural collection.

Revelatory Experiences in the Festal Letter of 367

In spite of the underacknowledged intrigue that saw the prophetic, revelatory

movement of early Christianity transformed into a project of scriptural harmonization and

hierarchical organization, Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter transmits very little of his

occasional opposition to individual visions or prophecies. However, the Festal Letter of

367 yet contains one explicit element that tracks his prior statements and another critique of apocryphal books that, while perhaps not immediately relevant to Athanasius's approach to revelatory experiences, yet alludes to earlier critiques of the New Prophets and other heretics by influential proto-orthodox figures. Just as proto-orthodox Christians responding to Montanists often decried the novelties that they introduced into Christian doctrine—and so too did Athanasius participate in this line of critique—the Festal Letter accuses the authors of apocryphal books of devising their own innovations, those "evil teachings that they have clearly created" (*Ep. fest.* 39.23). The referents of Athanasius's invective—he also calls the contents of apocryphal books "myths" put forth by "empty and polluted voices" (*Ep. fest.* 39.22)—here are not readily identifiable, but Athanasius clearly asserts that heretics fabricate sayings of the biblical patriarchs and try to pass them off as ancient. Yet, as he also rules out the possibility that Moses and Isaiah could have transmitted books not within the church's canon, it must at least be plausible that these books contained special visions, revelations, or prophecies, and that their contents were objectionable to the Alexandrian hierarch. Whether Athanasius more overtly disdains the forgery of such apocrypha, or their genre or prophetic *topoi*, must remain an open question, but his opposition to novelty certainly reflects a career-spanning inclination to safeguard what he viewed as the authentic orthodox faith.

More explicitly, in the midst of arguing that his approved scriptures contain all that is necessary for the faith of the church and for human salvation, Athanasius contends that the scriptures rule out all of the flagship heresies that arose in prior centuries. For example, Marcion is repelled by several verses in the New Testament where Paul and

John suggest that Christ upholds the Old Testament. In the course of this argumentation, Athanasius adds: "In addition, it is the holy Scriptures that exposed the people in Phrygia as heretics when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples and they gave it to the Christians" (*Ep. fest.* 39.25). Underlying this sentence's brevity are hints that can be supplemented by the relevant snippets of Athanasius's *De synodis*, and which also appear in earlier polemics against the Montanists that Athanasius has certainly internalized. The final independent clause's pronouns should be read as "They, the disciples, gave it, the Holy Spirit, to the Christians," belying a characteristic heresiological understanding that the Montanists or Phrygians, as deviants, are not Christians. Furthermore, they received no special dispensation of the Holy Spirit that was actually spread first among Christ's disciples (Jn 20:22) and then among all others in their company (Acts 2:4). Montanists are thus repudiated by the scriptures, which affords their claims to prophetic or spiritual experience no warrant. It is a perspective that concords well with the portion of *De synodis* examined above, where the Spirit was disbursed not simply to one inventive council, but to all Christians from old, invalidating special assertions of pneumatic authorization. In their attempt to hoard the Spirit, the Phrygians reveal that they speak emptily and have not read the scriptures appropriately, for Athanasius poses as if he regards Acts as democratizing the Holy Spirit among all Christians. In reality, Athanasius wishes to assert and preserve his own interpretive privilege, which permits him to, among other feats, declare the church's rule of scripture. And though his Festal Letter refuses to go into the details about each book left on the sidelines of the "spiritual Scriptures," it must be reckoned plausible that, aside from the *Shepherd*'s insufficient Christology,

Athanasius found the visionary Hermas and his shepherd a lackluster source of authority possibly authenticating or enabling other claims to special revelation unearned by a long life of painstaking monastic virtue. Toward such claims Athanasius, following an episcopal tradition that was shaken by challenges like that of the New Prophecy, was habitually icy. Instead, he reserved the gifts of prophecy and visions in the catholic church to only the most capable and worthy imitators of the biblical heroes.

5.   Athanasius and Alexandrian Ecclesiology

While the existence of a polyvalent and uncoordinated matrix of leaders in a scriptural text such as the *Shepherd* may not have been enough to irreparably tarnish it in the eyes of most Christians, Athanasius of Alexandria was not like most Christians. For Athanasius, the primary measure of one's authentic Christianity consisted of one's support or repudiation of the Athanasian episcopate, and in the latter camp he lumped together all of the "heretics" in his Egyptian environment, starting with the Arians, Melitians, and Eusebians. As Barnes reminds us, whereas Athanasius the bishop may prominently feature for us as a crucial figure in church history, he also must be remembered as a political official completely at home in the Roman Empire, maneuvering through a complex mix of emperors, external bishops, church leaders with opposing viewpoints, and independent monks with uncanny political flair.[71] Having outlasted seventeen combined years of exile to lead the Alexandrian church for four decades, all the while seeing off doctrinal and political challenges and other claims to his office, Athanasius truly earned the immortality of his name, even if, to survive, he

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[71] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 176-9.

spearheaded "an ecclesiastical mafia" with the finesse of "a modern gangster" and "possessed a power independent of the emperor which he built up and perpetuated by violence."[72] Where one's primary in-group criterion was not an honest accounting of the theological tradents edifying the church in its early centuries but rather loyalty, it becomes easier to see how a text that acknowledged the presence of many different human leaders—with the role for bishops highly circumscribed to hospitality and the authority of revelations and prophetic visions privileged over institutional office—might have been dismissible from the scriptural collection. Meanwhile, other texts of questionable orthonymity were welcomed into the Athanasian canon because they, bearing names such as Peter and John, espoused a view from the leadership of the church and reflected arguments against heretics.

Although the oversight of a singular metropolitan or regional bishop and his associated deacons, priests, and other clergy had long prevailed as the standard form of church governance within proto-orthodox Christianity, Athanasius inherited schismatic headaches that would plague his episcopacy from his predecessor Alexander. Some of these dilemmas reflected far back into the history of Egyptian and Alexandrian Christianity, while others were of a more recent vintage. Specifically, Athanasius faced both the longstanding tradition of academic Christianity that resisted oversight and more recent problems ranging from an alternative Melitian hierarchy to splinter groups like female virgins and monastic men that portended different modes of Christian piety prevalent among a fragmented, liberated, and dissentient population. Meanwhile, "it was

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[72] Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 230.

Athanasius' goal to bring order to this confusion by consolidating all Egyptian Christians around the hierarchical organization of bishops and priests that he headed."[73] Without forgetting the good fortune of well-timed deaths of his opponents and disfavored emperors, or some of the lamentable coercive and heresiological tactics Athanasius deployed in the process, it is a testament to his political and ecclesiastical acumen that he managed to mostly steer the fractious Alexandrian church toward unity by the end of his lifetime. As Brakke explains, Athanasius used different methods for each of these groups. For the ascetics, he intended to slowly bring monastic institutions and virgin women, both of whom retreated from the responsibilities and pressures of an ordinary life in the pursuit of Christian perfection, under the influence of his hierarchy by inserting himself into their affairs, cajoling them toward his particular orthodoxy, and forming strategic alliances. However, stronger tactics were necessary against the Melitians and Arians: here, Athanasius sought to subdue and subjugate by any means necessary.[74] This section proceeds with a glimpse into Athanasius's approach to asceticism, especially as it reached its zenith in the *Life of Antony*, followed by his more abrasive response to his Melitian opponents.

Ascetic tendencies called for a more genteel approach than did the outwardly insubordinate heretics. For Athanasius, even if he silently bemoaned the decision to detach oneself from the life of the church and from ordinary Christians, respected their pursuit of virtue and perfection in a way he never could with the Melitians, Arians, and Eusebians. However, some cross-pollination of his life's struggles was inevitable, and

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[73] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 4.

[74] Ibid., 4-5.

Athanasius found himself dictating Christological doctrine to virgin women who were drawn to the academic study of scriptures in the classroom setting in surprising numbers. While he could not chaperone the women through all of their daily affairs, he could plant a seed in their minds about the limits of doctrinal speculation and thereby dissuade them from following rogue teachers. Athanasius thus conceived these celibate women as metaphorical brides of Christ, enlisting them to safeguard Christ's honor through the precise theological content that Athanasius himself taught against Arian heretics. Posturing to them in the voice of Alexander, whom he conveniently recalled speaking authoritatively to virgins on occasion, Athanasius wrote:

> "But watch out, O my daughters: let no one lie and speak against your bridegroom in your presence, envying your noble and holy union and the thinking about him that you have, desiring to separate you from his love. . . . beware of those who are coming to you lest anyone, desiring to destroy your heart, speak against your bridegroom, lying and saying, 'The Word of God is created, and he came into being from things that do not exist, and before he was begotten he was not'" (*Ep. virg.* [Copt.] 42).[75]

The result is a transparent reflection of Athanasian Christological and anti-Arian teachings, in spite of the bishop's attempt to detach himself from his words and roleplay as Alexander. Aside from the doctrinal content, Athanasius frequently concentrates on the figure of Mary as the proper embodiment of the women's aspirations for the Christian life. Not only did Mary maintain her virginity through her life, earning her eternal praises, but she also kept her mind attuned to divine matters rather than the gossip of the streets. "And she did not acquire eagerness to look out the window," Athanasius averred, but "rather to look at the Scriptures" (*Ep. virg.* [Copt.] 13).[76] Simultaneously, he sought

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[75] Trans. per Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 287-8.

[76] Ibid., 277. The context suggests the possible influence here of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

to domesticate and sterilize the virgin women, supplementing their unconventional lifestyle with duties at the home for their metaphorical husband, all the while restricting their intellectual capacities and preventing them from learning anything that might lead them away from the Athanasian Christ. Brakke observes how

> the virgins' fidelity to their husband the Word required a private life devoted to the cultivation of true thought, not a public life involving conversation with men. The setting for the virginal life, in Athanasius' view, should not be the Christian school, but the community of women affiliated with the episcopal party.[77]

Enlisting the virgin women was an important early step in his attempt to stem the tide of Arian doctrine,[78] but Athanasius replicated the same tactic for monastic men not by devising the rites of marriage, but by modeling how the ideal monk could enact the bishop's doctrinal and heresiological proclivities. Just as he assumed the persona of Alexander to converse with the virgin women, Athanasius would eventually marshal Antony to curry favor with the monks.

Inasmuch as the historical Antony is recoverable from his sayings and letters transmitted independently of Athanasius, he does not match the episcopally expedient figure that Athanasius depicted in the *Life*. First, Athanasius portrays Antony's withdrawal from the bustle of life as part of the program of ascension to heaven by renunciation from the world, attunement to the Word of God, and the exercise of virtue that follows from the perfection of the soul. "The *Life of Antony* translates this complex vision into the story of a single person, the monk Antony, whose career functions as a

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[77] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 58.

[78] Athanasius wrote this letter to virgin women early in his career, likely before 339. Brakke, "The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana," 24.

pattern for the successful Christian life."[79] Athanasius achieved a wide readership with

his hagiographical portrait of Antony, both among ascetics and ordinary Christians, such

that both literally and figuratively, he wrote the book on Antony. But his Antony is a

constructed character, onto whom Athanasius could transfer his designs for the

relationship between monasticism and the hierarchical institution of the church. Antony

thus reflects Athanasius's biases uncannily: he refuses hospitality to Arians, Melitians,

and people of suspicious theological beliefs, supports the Athanasian episcopate and the

bishop's "authority on ascetic matters," and militates against Arians and other heretics

whenever he became aware of people who held false doctrines.[80] Athanasius summarizes

these proclivities of Antony in between his fabrication of specific episodes:

> In things having to do with belief, he was truly wonderful and orthodox.
> Perceiving their wickedness and apostasy from the outset, he never held
> communion with the Melitian schismatics. And neither toward the
> Manichaeans nor toward any other heresies did he profess friendship, except
> to the extent of urging the change to right belief, for he held and taught that
> friendship and association with them led to injury and destruction of the soul.
> So in the same way he abhorred the heresy of the Arians, and he ordered
> everyone neither to go near them nor to share their erroneous belief. Once
> when some of the Ariomaniacs came to him, sounding them out and learning
> that they were impious, he chased them from the mountain, saying that their
> doctrines were worse than serpents' poison (*Vit. Ant.* 68).[81]

Essentially, in addition to serving as the monastic exemplar for imitation *par excellence*

and the perfect representation of the soul's advance in a human body, Athanasius

contends that Antony was the ideal reflection of the Athanasian platform for Christianity.

This allegiance becomes sealed when Athanasius proceeds to narrate the end of Antony's

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[79] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 217.

[80] Ibid., 134-5; 109.

[81] Trans. per Gregg, 81-2.

life. Not only does Antony reiterate the bishop's pet biases against the Melitians and Arians, but he advocates for a life and faith grounded in the Scriptures—itself another common Athanasian saying, even if he had not yet dictated his list of the canon by this point in the late 350s (*Vit. Ant.* 89). When Antony senses himself near death, he retreats from the mass of brothers and summons only his most trusted monks, adjuring them to bury him in the ground in a secret place, thereby preventing his body from becoming a shrine useful to Melitians or any other Christians drawn to relics of the saints. Furthermore, Antony symbolically bequeaths his few possessions to Athanasius and Serapion,[82] leaving behind no legitimate monastic successor to trouble the episcopate but instead signifying his eternal fidelity to the church of Athanasius (*Vit. Ant.* 91).[83] Portraying Egyptian monasticism as subservient to the Athanasian institution was a crucial step toward quelling the independent and uncontrollable spirit of an alternative order of the church—one that, as late as John Cassian in the fifth century, continued to appeal to an insular set of traditions and sayings of the Desert Fathers foreign to the hierarchical church that imbued the monastic Christian life with depth and meaning.[84]

We have thus far covered two challenges to Athanasius's oversight from problematic segments of the Egyptian church, but whatever headaches were caused Athanasius by monastic men and virginal women, they did not exist in a state of open hostility and competition for control of the institutional church. As we have seen several

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[82] Brakke notes that Serapion was "one of Athanasius' most important allies in the Egyptian Church," perhaps lending his assistance to Athanasius with the *Life of Antony*. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 246-7.

[83] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 247.

[84] Josh Schachterle, "Exercising Obedience: John Cassian and the Creation of Monastic Subjectivity," (Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 2019).

times over, the group of Christians that Athanasius depicts as Arians evolved to pose a threat his power, such that during one period of his exile from the Alexandrian episcopacy, Constantius appointed the "Arian" George of Cappadocia as bishop of Alexandria in 356.[85] Athanasius was convinced that the Arians and Eusebians were conspiring to wrest the episcopacy from him and install a rival bishop more amenable to their beliefs, and George's appointment demonstrated the truth of this politicking. Meanwhile, another group, dubbed by Athanasius as the Melitians—but who undoubtedly saw themselves as both authentic Christians and "the true continuation of the pre-Constantinian church of the martyrs"—persisted in Alexandria and competed not just for clerical appointments, but for power, influence, and control of the episcopate.[86] The contest with Melitians was yet another splintering of Christians unique to Egypt, dating back to the first years of the fourth century when Peter of Alexandria fled the city under threat of persecution. Though Peter attempted to maintain control of ecclesiastical affairs from seclusion, Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis in the Nile Delta region, inserted himself into the Alexandrian church primarily to ordain new priests and act in Peter's absence. By the time that open persecution ceased in Egypt, the Melitian clergy adopted a rigorous attitude toward Christians who renounced or made sacrifice to the emperor, and thus the schism between the Petrine hierarchy and Melitian Christians touched on matters both of official legitimacy and church practice toward lapsed believers.[87] Decades later,

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[85] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 270; Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 159; Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 325-6.

[86] Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict," 411.

[87] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 5.

the Council of Nicaea officially recognized the Petrine succession of bishops then in the hands of Alexander, but it did not squelch the Melitian hierarchy altogether, and thus a shadow institution would accompany Athanasius's bishopric as long as he lived, seeking power wherever possible, and not foreswearing physical violence, intimidation, and accusations of high crimes before the emperor, such as eventuated in Athanasius's expulsion to Gaul after the 335 Council of Tyre.[88] The appointment of Athanasius as bishop, in fact, may have only been possible due to the restriction and denial of Melitian voting rights, and there is some evidence that the Melitians maintained allegiance to a rival bishop in the first seven years of Athanasius's episcopacy.[89] But as Athanasius's reign over Alexandria dragged on from years to decades, with the hierarch constantly outlasting threats from emperors and investigatory councils, the Melitians would increasingly ally themselves with Athanasius's other sworn enemies, the Arians and Eusebians. In fact, Athanasius commonly portrays Melitian clergy as crisis actors in a larger drama for the orthodox faith of the church. In his view, Melitians such as John Arcaph accused Athanasius of repeated acts of violence against them not because this was true, but so that the episcopal throne of Alexandria may be vacated and the Arian heresy could take hold in the absence of godly doctrine (*Apol. sec.* 17).[90] In spite of his allegations, Athanasius's continued attention paid toward the Melitians in the *Life of*

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[88] These charges included the supposed murder of Arsenius, the breaking of Macarius's chalice (both being Melitian clergy), and finally, perhaps decisively, the allegation that Athanasius had threatened to withhold the shipment of grains from Egypt to Constantine. Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 69-76.

[89] Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 230.

[90] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 77-8. In fact, papyrus finds from the 330s invalidate Athanasius's fainthearted claims to absolute innocence. Instead, concurrent with the same Council of Tyre that ultimately exiled him, the bishop was implicated in schemes to beat and detain Melitian clergy, preventing them from attending the council. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 32-3.

Antony and the Festal Letter of 367 testifies to their persistence and longevity: in fact, the fifth-century church historian Socrates spoke of the Melitians as a schismatic sect still active in Egyptian ecclesiastical affairs during his lifetime (*Hist. eccl.* 1.9).

Meanwhile, Athanasius long harbored distrust for the academic study of scriptures under the leadership of a charismatic teacher, a curriculum most synonymous in Alexandria with Origen in the third century. By the fourth century, the study of scriptures in this context had been disassociated with one particular gifted interpreter, but instead has persisted as prominent method by which Christians exercised and realized their faith, rivaled in Alexandria by at least two other modes of Christian piety: hierarchical, bishop-centric worship and the martyr cult that continued to prize revelations, the shrines of the saints, and apocryphal books.[91] That is, the independent exegesis of texts and study of doctrines, often with an openness to philosophy and a wide collection of scriptures, comprised the praxis of the Christian life for many in Alexandria, even to the point that it was "Alexandria's most traditional form of Christian piety."[92] The existence of the bishop played a quite minor role for Christians motivated in this direction. Arius would locate himself in this tradition of teachers, wisdom, and open inquiry, while Athanasius naturally opposed the supposed excesses of the schoolhouse. The age-old tensions of ecclesiastical organization and authority were truly still alive

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[91] Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict," 396. Given that Brakke's expression of these forms of piety arrives in the context of the 39th Festal Letter, he limits himself to these two alternatives to the independent teacher and their circles of students/disciples. A more comprehensive accounting of all Christian pieties active in fourth-century Egypt would certainly include monasticism and their ascetic behaviors, but by 367, Athanasius could count many monks as allies, even if their pious praxis differed substantially from ordinary Christians loyal to the Alexandrian episcopate.

[92] Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter," 52.

throughout the episcopacy of Athanasius, and worse, they become complexified by the comparatively recent fissures of independent ascetics and Melitians.

In the late 360s, with Athanasius having returned to Alexandria from his final period of exile and hiding, his problems had not evaporated, but his alliances and perseverance had earned him some ecclesiastical latitude. The aged bishop would use it to make one of his bolder episcopal decrees, lashing out at the prevalence of human teachers in the churches under his control. In fact, in spite of the thematic and schismatic complexity so far uncovered in the present analysis of traditions resistant to episcopal control in Alexandria, the one consistent theme pervading Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter from the beginning to the end of its extant text concerns his desire to identify a reliably constricted basis for teaching within the church. That is, he seeks to unfurl both the content of the church's teaching and its context, or the parameters and limits of instruction. Athanasius does not provide an ecclesiological flowchart, liturgical syllabus, or otherwise dictate how exactly the Alexandrian catechetical school must proceed. Instead, he operates at a more abstract level of thinking, for he faces off in the Festal Letter of 367, as he has for decades, against two groups strongly resistant to his control. On the one hand, Alexandria's scholastic institution was no longer headed by such elitists as Clement or Origen, yet its tradition of academic Christianity still boasted a strong independent streak and an interest in gifted teachers who interpreted notoriously wide sets of scriptures—his own appointment to the catechetical school, Didymus the Blind,

among them. When Arius claimed in his *Thalia* to follow in a succession of wise men, Athanasius predictably balked at his temerity to pose as a teacher while advancing such false doctrines.[93] Meanwhile, Melitian Christians, the other prominent group in Alexandria, continued to buck the hierarchical church recognized by the Constantinian emperors and celebrated their connection to the martyrs of Christ, especially those who suffered during the Diocletianic persecutions of the early fourth century.[94] Melitians may have even treasured their own scriptural texts, proudly referring to them as "apocryphal."

This laxity of authority and scriptural practices finally necessitated a response from a bishop who sensed the opportunity to spend what political and ecclesiastical capital he had managed to garner. Brakke explains the totality of Athanasius's solution:

> In contrast to these [groups], Athanasius offered an episcopally oriented piety, which valued adherence to the clergy and its sacraments and found revealed truth not through study under a learned teacher, nor through revelations at martyr shrines, but through a stable canon of Scriptures, interpreted by the official catholic church.[95]

As his primary tactic, Athanasius called into dispute all claims to the title of "teacher" existing in the church; he declared stringently that only Jesus Christ could be the "true Teacher," quoting Matthew 23:8-10 in the process (*Ep. fest.* 39.9-11). Athanasius must also explain away those places within Scripture where Paul or James acknowledge the existence of teachers and where (deutero-)Paul appears to claim the mantle of "teacher"—wherever this appears, Athanasius deduces that one may be called teacher if

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[93] Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict," 404; 406.

[94] Ibid., 411. Elsewhere, Brakke helpfully problematizes Athanasius's simplistic method linking the Melitians with an incipient martyrdom cult, noting that the bishop "tried to make the Melitian Church a scapegoat for practices widespread in the Egyptian churches." Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 101.

[95] Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter," 51-2.

he has received an authentic commission from the Lord and if he teaches only the words of Christ. In this context, Athanasius finally articulates his list of the "canonized" books, adding: "In these books alone the teaching of piety is proclaimed. Let no one add to or subtract from them" (*Ep. fest.* 39.19). The remainder of the Festal Letter proceeds with Athanasius's new stipulations about the church's Teacher and its curriculum never too far from view, but he ensures to hit the high notes as the letter concludes. Not only does he remind his readership that teachers in the church must "teach from the words of Scripture" (*Ep. fest.* 39.28), but Athanasius issues a preemptive defense of his own authority in a fashion that signals how the church relates to its singular teacher, Christ the Word. Athanasius's crescendo reads:

> I have not written these things as if I were teaching, for I have not attained such a rank. Rather, because I heard that the heretics, especially the wretched Melitians, were boasting about the books that they call "apocryphal," thus I have informed you of everything that I heard from my father, as if I were with you and you with me in a single house, that is, "the church of God, the pillar and strength of truth" (*Ep. fest.* 39.32).

In one masterful stroke, Athanasius asserts an episcopal privilege earned via apostolic succession—"my father" being an appeal to Alexander, who was never far from Athanasius's mind, theologically or politically. His decree was thus linked to the logic that long justified the actions of the church's overseers. Simultaneously Athanasius disclaims the title of teacher while asserting an overarching authority to chart the course for the church, delivering for it both a scriptural canon intended to usurp the influence of human teachers[96] and a tropical faux-humility that shrouded the actual audacity of his power-play.

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[96] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 67.

Brakke has long held that Athanasius's turbulent career was spent trying to wrestle the independent spirit of Alexandrian Christianity into one orthodox institution, "one hierarchical and episcopal in structure, uniform in theology, and inclusive of ascetic and ordinary Christians."[97] Declared in the last years of his life, the bishop's canon serves as the bookend of two long processes, one in motion since the development and spread of Christianity within an ungoverned doctrinal laboratory, and the other as the unexpected outcome of a long struggle for boundaries in Egyptian Christianity. In the latter case, while the biblical canon would have seemed an obvious matter in need of defining for us looking retrospectively today, and indeed there exist precedents for a closed and exclusive scriptural collection dating back nearly a century before Athanasius in Victorinus of Poetovio, Athanaisus spent most of his career consumed by rhetorical and exegetical competition for orthodox doctrine. The *Shepherd* of Hermas, perhaps, occupies a prominent place in his evolution away from doctrinal argumentation, for in *De decretis* of the late 350s Athanasius expresses for the first time how his opponents have applied a book he previously favored to substantiate a Christological belief that he could not stand. Whatever the precise development of Athanasius's thought, when he finally introduces a set of "canonized (κανονιζόμενα), handed-down, and believed-to-be-divine books" in 367, Athanasius frames the matter of a scriptural collection in an entirely new way (*Ep. fest.* 39.16).[98] Where Victorinus apparently formulated a New Testament introduction with a comparatively minor platform of readership and Eusebius wrote from the perspective of a Christian academic, apparently attempting to sort out the authenticity

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[97] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 271.

[98] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:1435-36.

or apostolic legitimacy of each of the scriptures, Athanasius produced a different list altogether, one imbued with senses of authority and imposition lacking in previous attempts to delineate scriptural collections.[99] Athanasius ordained the first-ever *canon*, or "rule of scripture," with the emphases that only his enumerated books were to be the source of Christian teaching, and furthermore that they contained everything necessary for human salvation.

Beyond the list of books that Athanasius welcomes into his canon, the wider rhetoric of Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter reveals how the Alexandrian bishop served as a perfect spokesperson for the four constrictive trends investigated here. Athanasius was heresiologically and Christologically animated to defend his doctrine of the salvific Word of God against all who cheapened the church's teaching, while at the same time arguing for an ecclesiastical organization subservient to the bishop and his affiliated clergy, who alone safeguarded authentic Christian doctrine as true apostolic heirs. Not only did Athanasius's institution exclude Melitians, but it also extinguished the authority enjoyed by independent charismatic teachers and academics who promulgated doctrines odious to Athanasius. Just as these themes appear in the Festal Letter for 367, they also find wide attestation throughout the career of Athanasius, suggesting that their confluence in his canon list was no coincidence or fluke, but instead represented the authentic tensions that

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[99] Ernest observes that Athanasius breezes over any controversy surrounding books like Hebrews, Revelation, and the lesser catholic epistles. Instead, "the most noteworthy feature of the [Athanasian] list as a whole, and probably a factor in its later influence, is that Athanasius does not leave room for any disagreement with his list. This apodictic tone distinguishes his list more sharply from Eusebius's observations"—to which we may also add Victorinus, who, though he also poses authoritatively, yet allows some ambiguity given that he knew of certain Christians who would not allow the Apocalypse of Peter to be read in the churches. Neither of these predecessors of Athanasius dictated their opinions so firmly, instead permitting some open threads not resolved in their times. James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria*, vol. 2 of *The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2004), 342.

crystallized his declaration of the church's first "rule of scripture." But the mere statement of such a list did not necessarily equate to its immediate acceptance, as the abortive impacts of Victorinus and Eusebius indicate. In spite of his notoriety in the affairs of the fourth century, Athanasius was but a singular figure, and canonical acceptance required the buy-in of bishops not simply in the Christian East, but also in the Latin-speaking West, where Athanasius was in the mid-fourth century known only to a handful. Therefore, with special attention to the fate of the *Shepherd* of Hermas and an eye toward its reception and manuscript history pursued in the previous chapters, this final section sketches out in rough terms how the New Testament of Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter became the New Testament of the worldwide church.

6.   After-Effects of the Athanasian Canon and the Loss of the *Shepherd* of Hermas

If the evidence for the first decisive declaration of the boundaries of the scriptural canon points to Athanasius, we should expect to find some evidence that its contents were signal-boosted by factions, authors, or fellow bishops and influential Christians who were either directly loyal to the Alexandrian hierarch or indirectly supportive of the catholic organization that he claimed to represent. In the final substantive section of this dissertation, we explore how Athanasius's canonical list and its associated Festal Letter influenced the church in the decades after 367, not simply in Egypt and the Christian East but also in the Latin-speaking world. A full accounting of canonical developments across all centuries and in all places cannot be pursued here, and in fact there remains much work to be done on the history of the canon after the Roman and Byzantine periods in

order to understand more completely how the worldwide church settled on a 27-book New Testament. However, because the primary interest of this dissertation concerns the extracanonicity of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, it suffices to examine the decades and centuries immediately following Athanasius's canon list for evidence of the bishop's decisive impact. In the following paragraphs, we examine the theological successors of Athanasius for indications that his canon list was determinative for either the church's New Testament generally, or the exclusion of the *Shepherd* of Hermas specifically, in order to solidify the case that Athanasius and the four constrictive trends detailed above, rather than any combination of canonical criteria, condemned the *Shepherd* from the canon of the church's New Testament. Starting in the East and then turning West, we have found ample evidence of Athanasius's successors supporting and applying his canon, and in the case of more expansive Syriac and Armenian canons, even these gradually conformed to the Athanasian boundaries. From these lines of argumentation, I then respond as conclusively as possible to the ultimate question this dissertation seeks to understand, offering a novel understanding for the loss of the *Shepherd* of Hermas from the New Testament canon of the Christian church.

In the *immediate* aftermath of Athanasius's Festal Letter for 367, little appreciable impact for his canon list can be discerned. In Egypt, either no other authoritative body responded with an alternative list or raised direct objections that filtered down to subsequent history, or if they did, any such counter-declaration was not preserved. Given, however, that Athanasius attacks his Melitian and academic opponents precisely for scriptural excesses such as the celebration of apocryphal books, and given that only a

decade earlier Athanasius attacked the "Eusebians" for their non-sanctioned use of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, we must assume that alternative and expansive scriptural practices prevailed in Egypt concurrent with the bishop's declaration of his canon. Even Didymus, Athanasius's appointment to the catechetical school, freely pulled from the *Shepherd* of Hermas, *Barnabas*, the *Didache*, and *1 Clement* in his scriptural commentaries,[100] suggesting that Athanasius was metaphorically on an island of his own in his surrounding Egyptian scriptural environment. If, as I have argued in an earlier chapter, Codex Sinaiticus attests not the execution of the Athanasian canon in pandect format (so Batovici) but the preservation of an alternative canon altogether, it too challenges the degree to which the bishop's canon can be presumed to have enjoyed any consensus beyond his most loyal supporters. Moreover, a cursory glance at the lists of scriptural collections produced outside of Egypt among his contemporaries Epiphanius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem, and the synodal canon of Laodicea each reveals at least minor differences among them ranging from the omission of Hebrews, 2 Peter, or Revelation to the inclusion, in Epiphanius, of the Wisdom books of Solomon and Sirach.[101] Thus, it appears that the canon list of Athanasius experienced a delay of *at least* one generation before its adoption, whether inside or outside of Egypt.

But some evidence exists contemporaneous with the production of the Festal Letter of 367 that, as we might expect, it was transmitted to monasteries allied with

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[100] Bart D. Ehrman, "The New Testament Canon of Didymus the Blind," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37.1 (1983): 18.

[101] Lee Martin McDonald, "Appendix D: Lists and Catalogs of New Testament Collections," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 592-5.

Athanasius. Moreover, his particular emphases about the exigency for producing a restricted scriptural canon were immediately conveyed to the Pachomian monks by Theodore, one of the Abbas with whom Athanasius managed to forge a crucial alliance.[102] From a Coptic fragment of cenobitic acts, Louis-Theophile Lefort translated the relevant section into French. Just as Athanasius utilized the metaphors of flowing water and the "springs of salvation" to describe correct teaching and the canonical books, so too did Theodore rejoice that Athanasius "détermine les sources d'eau de vie," adding how "il importe beaucoup que nous y buvions pour être bien portants en la grâce de Dieu."[103] Theodore appears to extend Athanasius's metaphor, also referring to apocryphal books as false waters and springs replete with bitterness, all before reiterating that the brothers should neither read the verboten books of "ces hérétiques impurs, athées et vraiment impies," nor encourage others to indulge in unspecified apocryphal books.[104] Theodore both respects Athanasius as an authoritative hierarch on such matters, and receives the particular message Athanasius delivers loud and clear: the bishop, as a valid successor of the most holy apostles, has written his Festal Letter "en dressant le canon des livres des saintes écritures et celui de leur nombre."[105] While Theodore apparently does not perseverate on any particular book or even the category of non-canonical but catechetical books, this piece of evidence strikingly preserves an example of the precise

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[102] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 124.

[103] Louis-Theophile Lefort, "Théodore de Tabennese et la Lettre Pascale de St-Athanase sur le Canon de la Bible," *Le Muséon* 29 (1910): 213; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101073499947;view=1up;seq=209.

[104] Ibid., 214.

[105] Ibid., 212.

reception Athanasius would have expected among his allies: total trust in the hierarch and repetition of his message, so as to advance his restricted canon of scripture and the reasons for which he distributed it.[106] Secondarily, another Coptic source transcribing not a record of monastic minutes but listing the "Canons of Athanasius" demonstrates an interest in the distinction the archbishop made between canonical and apocryphal books. The editors hold that the Canons must not have been produced after 500 CE, but were probably closer to the life of Athanasius than not.[107] In a section only fragmentarily preserved in Coptic but extant in a more complete eleventh-century Arabic translation, the Athanasian Canons issue a series of requirements on the clergy. Among them, "the reader shall read nought but from the catholic word, lest the people mock at the lying words of the writings that have been set aside, which be not of God's inspiration but of the world."[108] Perhaps in an extension of Athanasius's own authority to preserve the readership of only approved books, a later section again charges the bishop with the power to watch over readers and cantors so that they read nothing other than the "common, catholic books."[109] From these two sources it is evident that an institutional memory built up around Athanasius's contribution to the church's scriptural canon.[110]

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[106] Perhaps only by chance, this 39th Festal Letter is the only one "for which we have explicit testimony of its reception, when the letter was read out and then posted in Pachomian monasteries." David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 156.

[107] Wilhelm Riedel and W. E. Crum, *The Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria: The Arabic and Coptic Versions* (Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1904), xiii-xiv; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044079406062;view=1up;seq=13.

[108] Ibid., 23. The editors suggest that the emendation of a single Arabic letter could transform "catholic" into "canonical," but they do not press inordinately for this, recognizing that the transmitted reading accords well with the 39th Festal Letter of Athanasius already. Reidel and Crum, xv.

[109] Ibid., 28.

This observation seemingly finds confirmation in the Syriac Index to the collection of the bishop's Festal Letters, which both prioritized the dates for Easter and Lenten celebrations and summarized the other main details contained therein. For the letter of 367, the Syriac Index concludes with a brief notice that Athanasius "écrivit, fixant le canon concernant les livres divins."[111] In spite of the brevity and nonchalance of this notice, it joins other Eastern traditions supporting the remembrance of the bishop's determinative writings about the church's scriptures. Furthermore, Syriac authors attest canons from the second to the seventh centuries with similar variety to the Greek-speaking fathers. Though their canons were slow to come around, they eventually did replace the *Diatesseron* with the four gospels, omit 3 Corinthians, and add the four minor catholic epistles of 2-3 John, Jude, and 2 Peter.[112] Still, Revelation was apparently not translated into Syriac until the seventh century, and the Pastoral letters only entered the

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[110] Curiously, the echoes of Athanasius's canonical designs are absent from the hagiographical tradition that attempted to narrate his life. Standard episodes and isolated thoughts attributed to Athanasius attest that he used, read, and venerated scripture, including one place where he attributes the authorship of the Scriptures to the Holy Spirit, but there exists nothing to embellish the situation underlying the writing of the Festal Letter for 367. Iconography for Athanasius frequently depicts him with a jewel-encrusted book, but this too may be a standard element unconnected to his canon list. Elizabeth S. Bolman, ed., *Monastic Visions: Wall Paintings in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 94; Tito Orlandi, *Testi Copti: Encomio di Atanasio; Vita di Atanasio* (Milano: Instituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1968), 133.

[111] Annik Martin and Micheline Albert, eds., *Histoire « Acéphale » et Index Syriaque des Lettres Festales d'Athanase d'Alexandrie*, vol. 317 of *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 270-1. I can find no estimation of the date of this Syriac Index to Athanasius's Festal Letter collection, though Alberto Camplani has established that the author of the Index, like Sozomen in the fifth century, had access to the archives of the Alexandrian church and clearly identified with the Orthodox Alexandrian party that so cherished Athanasius's contributions to Egyptian Christianity. The Index does appear in a manuscript from the 8th century now housed in the British Library. Like many of the para-Athanasian writings, it was likely composed more proximally to the bishop's lifetime than not, as part of the hagiographical tradition that remembered him fondly. Alberto Camplani, *Atanasio di Alessandria: Lettere Festali e Anonimo: Indice delle Lettere Festali* (Milan: Paoline, 2003), 99-108.

[112] Franz Mali, "Le Canon du Nouveau Testament chez les Auteurs Syriaques," in Aragione, Junod, and Norelli, 281.

scriptural collection in the fifth century.[113] Interestingly, the memory that Athanasius

acted decisively to "fix" the canon persisted simultaneously with a gradual Syriac

progression to the church's canonical mean. Coptic works remembering Athanasius's

import also preserved the same memory, and it is not coincidental that after the sixth

century we lose track of the *Shepherd* of Hermas in Egypt, whether in Coptic or Greek.

Athanasius may not have made an immediate restrictive impact on the variety of

Christian books being used during his lifetime, but his New Testament would eventually

prevail upon the major Eastern churches, forcing the *Shepherd* into monastic seclusion.

Paradoxically, Athanasius's more immediate success was felt in the canon of the

Christian West, which had long transitioned to Latin for its scripture reading and

worship. But its scriptures consisted of early and often-problematic translations into Old

Latin, and around 383 CE, the Roman bishop Damasus commissioned Jerome to produce

a revision of the Latin New Testament from Greek originals for his edition that would

become known as the Vulgate.[114] From this knowledge it often follows that Damasus also

dictated to Jerome the specific books he wished to have included in the New Testament,

and furthermore that a Roman council of 382, at which Jerome was himself present,

produced such a New Testament canon.[115] However, though we know well that this

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[113] Mali, 274, 281. See also the possible late-fourth-century Syriac canon list, excluding Revelation and the four lesser catholic epistles, in Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 236-43.

[114] Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 50-2. Williams depicts a close friendship and professional relationship between Jerome and Damasus, but avers that the esteemed bishop of Rome only served as "the initial impetus" behind Jerome's work of translation.

[115] For one recent example to subordinate Jerome's canonical musings to a Council of Rome chaired by Pope Damasus in 382—and at that, by means of a declaration of fact completely lacking in

council took place and that Jerome himself was likely among the attendees, evidence for any canon list emanating from it is quite weak, relying on a minority of manuscripts for the *Decretum Gelasianum*, a possible sixth-century papal decree, that begin only in the ninth century to cite Damasus as its instigator. H. H. Howorth militates convincingly against this supposed Damasine canon list, arguing that neither Jerome nor other scholars of the Latin church preserved any memory of this particular conciliar act of 382, and in fact church historians instead recall the fifth-century Pope Innocent as prominently producing a New Testament canon for the Latin church. In spite of their age, Howorth's statements with regard to Jerome are worth quoting at length:

> As little can we understand why a council summoned at Rome in 382 should have gone out of its way to formulate a list of canonical books, and, if it had done so, that such a fact should not have been mentioned by Jerome or the Church historians and writers who wrote between the fourth and the ninth century. . . . It is also strange and almost incredible that if Jerome, who was very probably present at the Council and was certainly at Rome, had ever heard of such a pronouncement he should nowhere have mentioned it, or that it should not have greatly qualified his own statements on the Bible Canon, for he posed as a most orthodox person and was especially devoted to the papal chair, but, on the other hand, should have so pertinaciously pressed the claims of another Canon altogether.[116]

Instead of Damasus dictating the contents of the New Testament to Jerome, it appears that Jerome was free to make these decisions for himself from his own scholarly acumen or other environmental influences. And while we cannot know the exact books of the New Testament that Jerome revised in the 380s, after his permanent move to Bethlehem later in the decade, Jerome's correspondence reveals that his understanding of the canon

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evidence—see Charles Arnold-Baker, "Damasus, St. (303-384)," in *The Companion to British History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001).

[116] H. H. Howorth, "The Decretal of Damasus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 14.55 (April 1913): 327.

substantially matches that of none other than Athanasius, whose Festal Letters Jerome knew, read, and reflected when he pondered the boundaries of the Old Testament, New Testament, and a third category of books that included the *Shepherd* of Hermas.[117] For example, at a time when New Testament canon lists continue to show variance, Jerome's New Testament matches that of Athanasius's Festal Letter for 367, even if Jerome provides a different order and cites the Pauline seven-church tradition that he received from Victorinus (*Ep.* 53.9). Moreover, Jerome's Old Testament also tracks that of Athanasius with only minor exceptions: Jerome includes Esther, which Athanasius had earlier placed in the category of books for catechesis, and is silent about Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah (*Ep.* 53.8).[118] These similarities further commend a genetic link between Athanasius and Jerome on the subject of the canon, from whom came a New Testament list followed by numerous Western authorities.[119] Jerome only offered slight tweaks to the books of the Old Testament, perhaps from his first-hand experience with Jewish scriptural practices that Athanasius only knew through bookish learning.

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[117] Otherwise, it would be quite unexpected for Jerome to include the Festal Letters of Athanasius in his stunted list of the Alexandrian bishop's writings at *Vir. ill.* 87, when Athanasius certainly produced many more doctrinal works of interest to Jerome. While Jerome nowhere individually quotes the Festal Letter of 367, his various works over the years enumerating the biblical canon so closely mirror Athanasius's canon as not to be a coincidence. See Edmon L. Gallagher, "The Old Testament 'Apocrypha' in Jerome's Canonical Theory," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20.2 (Summer 2012): 230 n.64.

[118] This letter dates to 394; Jerome's inclusion of Esther likely reflects his keener awareness of the scriptural practices of Jews, such as those from whom he learned Hebrew. While Jerome also says nothing of Lamentations in the letter, his "Helmeted Preface" to the books of the Old Testament included at the beginning of his translations of the books of Samuel and Kings (*Pro. Gal.*, 393 CE) indicate that he counted Jeremiah-Lamentations as one book. Thus, Jerome provides perhaps the earliest statement of the two testaments as received by modern Protestant churches, just years before the turn of the fifth century.

[119] As explained by Gallagher and Meade, 216-35, the Latin Christian New Testament lists of Rufinus, Augustine, Pope Innocent, and the *Breviarium Hipponense* all conform to the catalogue of Athanasius and Jerome.

Nevertheless, more significant to this study is Jerome's perfect reflection of the Athanasian 27-book New Testament, and furthermore, his adoption of an intermediary category of books that "are not in the canon," cushioning the divide between canon and apocrypha (*Pro. Gal.*).[120] Even for some contemporaries of Jerome, like Augustine, there only exist books that are canonical and those that are not received by all of the churches: a simple binary of in and out that suggests no interest in books that were close to the boundary, or already deemed noncanonical (*Doct. chr.* 2.12; *Ep.* 82). By contrast, Jerome preserves both this intermediate category and many of the same books, following a similar ordering, that Athanasius had earlier permitted "to be read for the benefit of those just starting out and wishing to be instructed by the word of piety" (*Ep. fest.* 39.20).[121] Jerome's sometime-friend, sometime-sparring partner Rufinus of Aquileia also attests an enumerated list that appears derivative of Jerome, as reproduced below in Fig. 6.1. Jerome offers few comments on this list of books not in the canon: whatever is not included in the two testaments "should be consigned to the apocrypha." Edmon Gallagher understands that Jerome regards this category of books apocryphal, mixing profitable material and flaws—*aurum in luto*—that make the former difficult to sift. Still, Jerome's intentions for this term may not be quite as vitriolic as its Athanasian meaning.[122] In fact, though Jerome also calls Judith and Tobit "apocryphal," in his translations of these books he "combine[s] the ideas of exclusion from the canon and inclusion in ecclesiastical

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[120] Trans. per Edmon L. Gallagher, "Jerome's *Prologus Galeatus* and the OT Canon of North Africa," in *Latin Writers*, vol. 69 of *Studia Patristica*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 99.

[121] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in PG 26:1437.

[122] See the discussion about Jerome and *apocrypha* in Gallagher, "The Old Testament 'Apocrypha,'" 223-33, esp. 231.

Fig. 6.1: *The Intermediate Class of Sub-Canonical Books in 4th–5th c. Church Fathers*

Athanasius[123]	**Jerome**[124]	**Rufinus**[125]
Wis. Solomon	Wis. Solomon	Wis. Solomon
Wis. Sirach	Wis. Sirach	Wis. Sirach
Esther		
Judith	Judith	Tobit
Tobit	Tobit	Judith
Didache		1-2 Maccabees
The *Shepherd*	The *Shepherd*	The *Shepherd*
	1-2 Maccabees	"The Two Ways"
		Judgment of Peter

usage," apparently commending the books for reading in a cautious fashion.[126] Likewise, Jerome refers to the *Shepherd* as a *utilis liber* (*Vir. ill.* 10),[127] and although he also knows the Visions well enough to appeal to them in his *Commentary on Hosea*, he takes a palpably selective posture toward Hermas's book.[128] Either way, this is precisely the

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[123] *Ep. fest.* 39.20, **367 CE**; Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter*," 61.

[124] *Pro. Gal.*, **393 CE**; *NPNF²* 6:490.

[125] *Symb.* 38, **ca. 400-402 CE**; *NPNF²* 3:558.

[126] Gallagher, "The Old Testament 'Apocrypha,'" 226.

[127] We could only wish that Jerome had offered more of his knowledge about the *Shepherd* of Hermas. For example, his suggestion that the book was unknown to Latins, though empirically incorrect, may yet be anecdotally well-grounded. Jerome's statement that "among Latins it [the *Shepherd*] is nearly unknown" is normally understood as meaning simply that Latin Christianity was unaware of the book; see Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 6-7. However, largely unacknowledged in this discussion is that Jerome makes similar statements about other apocryphal books, including a blanket statement in his preface to Chronicles that *apocrifa nescit Ecclesia*; Gallagher, "The Old Testament 'Apocrypha,'" 225-7. Out of many possible solutions to this apparent riddle, it must at least be reckoned possible that Jerome to some degree conflates "knowing" a book with using it either as scripture or as possessing the semblance of canonical authority. Specifically for the *Shepherd* of Hermas, then, Jerome could be attesting to the surprising use he has encountered of the book in the East, for which its liturgical reading in Greek churches stands as but one example, in comparison to his anecdotal knowledge that the same did not take place to such a pronounced degree in the Christian West. Jerome is doubtlessly aware of Victorinus's perspective on the *Shepherd*, which he may be pressing into service among his depiction of the book as "nearly unknown" to Latins.

[128] Jerome's chief interest in the passage is the church that appears to Hermas both as an old white-haired woman and young marriageable maiden. Philippe Henne, *L'Unité du Pasteur d'Hermas: Tradition et Redaction*, vol. 31 of *Cahiers de la Revue Biblique* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1992), 43.

perspective of Rufinus, who may not know Athanasius's Festal Letter directly yet locates

the *Shepherd* among "other books which our fathers call not 'canonical' but

'ecclesiastical' . . . all of which they would have read in the churches, but not appealed to

for the confirmation of doctrine" (*Symb.* 38).[129] Rufinus also differentiated this category

of ecclesiastical books from the apocrypha, perhaps signaling a continued development of

the church's thought in the fifth century. Yet, after Rufinus the intermediate category

disappears, and in spite of the reproduction of Hermas's book in Latin manuscripts or

occasional favorable references to it by authors such as John Cassian or Bede,[130]

thereafter the discussion of the *Shepherd* in the context of the scriptural canon ceases.

The common irruptive thread in this survey of the hardening of the scriptural

canon and the disappearance of the *Shepherd* is Athanasius. Jerome knows his Festal

Letters as a collection just decades after Athanasius's death and amplifies a modified

version of the Alexandrian bishop's three-tiered system, which was then either a

carryover from earlier academic appraisals of Christian scripture[131] or a concession to

ongoing usage that the Alexandrian bishop could not entirely suppress. Either way,

Rufinus explains the purpose of the books in the intermediate category in a way much

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[129] *NPNF²* 3:558. Rufinus plausibly takes this description, too, from Jerome's language about the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach; see Gallagher and Meade, 212.

[130] Bede knows the *Shepherd* of Hermas primarily through John Cassian's *Conferences*, which inspired the notice at *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum* 12.15, and the *Liber Potificalis*, whence come Bede's statements about *Annum Mundi* 4113 in *De temporum ratione*; limited evidence exists that Bede read the *Shepherd* independently of these sources. Following *Liber Potificalis* 11.2-3, Bede was particularly drawn to the false reminiscence that an angel appeared to Hermas and declared that Easter should be celebrated on a Sunday. See Lawrence T. Martin, *The Venerable Bede: Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 113; Faith Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, vol. 29 of *Translated Texts for Historians* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 202; Raymond Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs* (Liber Pontificalis)*: The Ancient Biographies of First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, vol. 6 of *Translated Texts for Historians* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 5.

[131] Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter*," 55.

closer to that of Athanasius, but this middle textual ground would not last forever. In the East, open usage of the *Shepherd* practically evaporates after the contemporaries of Athanasius, such as Didymus; after that, though we still find evidence for its copying or inclusion in stichometric lists and library catalogues, the only undisputed use in the East comes in plagiarized and hushed terms.[132] Thereafter in the East, the *Shepherd* found refuge not in the institutional church but in the cloistered environment of the monastery, where its message about virtue could still be profitably received. Codex Athous and Codex Sinaiticus crucially preserved the text of the *Shepherd* in its original language, and the continued corrections of Sinaiticus down the centuries attest that other exemplar copies must have existed after the seventh century, from which the monks at St. Catherine's revised the pandect's leaves. The *Shepherd* also survived in the West as an elite curiosity, sometimes being transmitted in the same manuscripts as canonical books,[133] but generally it proved more acceptable to monastics than it did to the catholic, episcopal church, which largely forgot about Hermas's book until critical scholarship and manuscript finds revived it in the 19th century.

These considerations, taken holistically, commend the thesis that Athanasius played the critical role in disallowing the *Shepherd* of Hermas from a place in the church's canon. While others may have had their suspicions about this book, in Athanasius we discover a transition from high praise of the *Shepherd* to clear exclusion over an objectionable interpretation of the Son's relationship to the father. Furthermore,

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[132] "Pseudo-Athanasius in the fifth or sixth century, and Antiochus of Mar Saba in Palestine in the seventh, could plagiarize [the *Shepherd*] repeatedly without feeling the need to acknowledge sources, perhaps indicating a serious decline in use." Osiek, Hermeneia, 6.

[133] Osiek, Hermeneia, 7.

Athanasius produced a list marking the *Shepherd* outside the boundaries of the canon,

and his catalogue proved both influential and replicable for the church beyond his

Egyptian milieu. Athanasius's "rule of scripture," the church's first, pressed previous

uses of the term κανών into a new and audacious, but ultimately conventional, meaning

denoting the standard of texts circumscribed to transmit doctrine necessary for human

salvation.[134] Partially by the good fortune of his long and ultimately celebrated

episcopacy, partially by the extension of a hagiographical tradition for non-martyred

Christian saints that he himself spawned,[135] partially because his celebrated Nicene

homoousian prevailed as the Christological standard of the church, and partially by

Jerome's serendipitous application of his canon list, Athanasius succeeded in eventually

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[134] As Gallagher and Meade, 127-8, note, Athanasius employs the word κανών for the first time in Christian history in a technical, categorical sense, precisely in the context of the *Shepherd*'s exclusion from that canon.

[135] Though the *Life of Cyprian* appeared a century earlier than Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, this latter work was indisputably the most influential early example of Christian hagiography, perhaps because it ushered in a new era of Christian biography displaced from the ideal of martyrdom. Athanasius too would benefit from this tradition to which he gave birth; the bishop would, shortly after his death, be the subject of a Coptic *Encomium*, a Coptic *Life* that "depicts him as the founding figure of Egyptian orthodoxy," and a lengthy entry in the Arabic *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. These hagiographic remembrances all exist in addition to the other "acts" of Athanasius preserved in his Canons and annotated editions of his letters and treatises. In short, the fourth-century bishop of Alexandria was very quickly lionized, as he instilled an everlasting textual component to the proper ascetic practice: rather than asceticism as a Christian practice unto itself, monks were taught to enshrine ascetic practice into writing, enabling the monks' ongoing memory. So celebrated was Athanasius, in fact, that his contemporary Gregory of Nazianzus showered him with a eulogizing *Oration* just years after his death, turning the bishop into the physical embodiment of virtue (*Or.* 21.1), tremendously exaggerating his participation at the Council of Nicaea (*Or.* 21.14), lauding his steadfast perseverance through the great theological conflicts of the fourth century, especially against the "Arians" (*Or.* 21.35), and generally transforming Athanasius into a figure unrecognizable to modern critical scholars. From hagiographical sources such as these, the super-orthodox portrait of Athanasius was constructed, and scholarship now in the twenty-first century is still scrambling to recover a properly historical understanding of the bishop and his effects upon the direction of Christianity. Andrew Louth, "Hagiography," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 358; Arietta Papaconstantinou, "Hagiography in Coptic," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography: Volume 1: People and Places*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 327; Derek Krueger, "Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice in the Early Christian East," *The Journal of Religion* 79.2 (April 1999): 226-7.

determining the books of the New Testament for the church. His canon did not triumph by the application of canonical criteria, and it was not consecrated by the votes of an ecumenical council anywhere near his lifetime, but was ordained over time by a grand episcopal "gentlemen's handshake," a glacial process of largely unconscious assent to a scriptural standard authoritatively declared long ago. As the decades and centuries wore on, the church forgot both the circumstances that forged its canon and the books it left behind. But in this process, Athanasius and his aligned church fathers *also* effectively excluded the *Shepherd* of Hermas from the canon, preventing it from impacting the doctrines of Christianity for at least 15 centuries.

In some ways, however, Athanasius merely serves as the spokesperson for a demonstrably evolved, elite, episcopal, and philosophical Christianity that had long outgrown its more experimental past. Athanasius was certainly not the only lettered Christian to deride the *Shepherd* and its alternative Christianity, as Prosper of Aquitaine attests in his spat with John Cassian. Victorinus and Eusebius, both in the context of the scriptural collection under early development, also speak to this reality, even if neither of them imparted a decisive voice on the confines of the New Testament. Instead, in Athanasius, we find married for the first time the conditions for the assertion of an amenable episcopal canon and the combination of polemical orientation and authoritative clout that transformed one definitive and translocal New Testament into a novel possibility.[136] Not surprisingly, the Athanasian canon reflected all of the bishop's

[136] And thus, Constantine's preference for a unified religion would eventually be realized scripturally, in spite of observations sometimes prevailing that, as per Gallagher and Meade, 2, there existed an "absence of a hierarchy able to impose that unity." As I have attempted to argue in the foregoing, perhaps the main error here is an assumption of the canon's universal *imposition*. Instead, a preferable

particular biases and designs for Christianity, which he imagined as a monolithic institution loyal to the hierarch that received its doctrine solely from episcopal interpretation of scripture. Consequently, this Brakkian mode of Christian piety was also forged by four predominant constrictive trends under observable evolution from the second century, but which are especially pronounced in the written corpus of Athanasius generally and his climactic 39th Festal Letter specifically, so as to depict the canon as yet another constrictive force producing a particular Christianity after the fourth century. These four trends—heresiology, Christology, distrust over prophetic authority, and episcopal ecclesiology—combined to constrain the religion to an episcopally tolerable subset of beliefs and practices. It furthermore produced an artificial canon of 27 books, from which the *Shepherd* was ultimately deemed an incompatible source for the church's doctrine.

While we have outlined the constrictive trends driving Athanasius's declaration of a canon in 367, and these remain operative forces effecting the loss of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the acceptance of Athanasius's canon must be explained in ecclesiastical-political terms. It will no longer suffice to either throw all early Christian testimony about the *Shepherd* into a blender along with the criteria for canonicity, and neither does it satisfy reason to privilege Victorinus's Muratorian Fragment or Tertullian's scathing remarks without regarding their contexts or questionable impacts upon the ongoing currency of Hermas's book. Instead, attention must now be rerouted to the gradual consensus that formed around the Athanasian canon, especially as amplified by Jerome,

model for understanding the delineation of the church's canon seeks the hints of silent episcopal agreement to a rule of scripture already declared or settled. An inclination toward imposition only tells half of the story of the Athanasian canon's ultimate success, one completed by the episcopal interest in consensus.

thereby setting a standard that slowly ossified until no objectors to it could be found. Over time, the church participated in an often unwitting acquiescence to this episcopal canon, solidifying a "rule of scripture" that had no room for the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Athanasius's exclusion of the *Shepherd* won the day given his personal influence broadly in the church that was reflected most acutely in the East through a fortuitous hagiographical tradition beginning in the years just after his death. In the aftermath, the *Shepherd* would survive in the cloistered environment of the monastery and within elite circles, but perhaps in reproduction of longstanding prejudices against the book, centuries of Christians would adopt a dim view on its value in comparison with the Athanasian New Testament, such that it has been difficult for many to fathom that Hermas's book would have ever motivated Christian spirituality or praxis.

7.   Conclusion

Previously, this investigation built a case for the extracanonicity of the *Shepherd* of Hermas leading away from the so-called canonical criteria of Gamble, Metzger, and McDonald. Instead, from a reevaluation of the book's reception in early Christianity, we deduced that the few outspoken detractors of the *Shepherd* before the fourth century had little appreciable impact on its continued popularity that was most pronounced in the manuscript recoveries from Egypt. But the *Shepherd*'s early popularity and even essentiality to certain strands of second- and third-century Christianity was not enough to carry it through to canonical acceptance. Books needed to be constantly affirmed as central to the Christian life. Though some cracks appear in the late third and early fourth

century, as when Victorinus and Eusebius locate the *Shepherd* outside of their scriptural collections, this does very little to temper its acceptability in Egypt, where the book was demonstrably popular. Even Athanasius shows unmitigated appreciation for the *Shepherd* in his early years, making him at this point a characteristic Alexandrian reader of the book. Outside of Egypt, for large swaths of the Christian world of the third and fourth centuries, we unfortunately encounter a paucity of data about the *Shepherd*'s reception. Still, we know that a bishop in the environs of Rome and a community entombed in Naples were animated by elements of Hermas's book, from the shepherd's call to collective responsibility to the salvific imagery of the church as a tower into which the virtuous are enshrined. Other named figures from the Christian West either approved of the *Shepherd* on dogmatic grounds, like Irenaeus, or hyperbolically disputed against it for seemingly idiosyncratic reasons, as in the peculiar rigorism of Tertullian or the prophetic criteria and periodization of time evinced by Victorinus. The degree to which these testimonies affected the reception of the *Shepherd* in the West is difficult to conclusively judge, for their specific rationales do not appear generalizable even if their decisions against the text's value may have been evinced by others within their milieu.

Back in the East, it is not until Eusebius in the fourth century when we first encounter open disapproval of the *Shepherd*; though Origen becomes aware of Christians who do not receive the book as scripture after transferring to Palestine, both he and Clement of Alexandria acclaim Hermas's book widely. Each quotes from or alludes to the *Shepherd* over 15 times in their written corpuses, forming allegorical content and even placing the shepherd's words in parallel with those of Jesus. Manuscript recoveries

from Egypt solidify the favor that the *Shepherd* enjoyed in the East, from the sixteen fragmentary copies dated paleographically to the fourth century or earlier to other papyri that either quote from Hermas's book or list it within a library's collection. The most significant of these manuscripts is, of course, the Codex Sinaiticus, where the *Shepherd* rounds out the pandect Bible as the terminal book of its particular New Testament. Even if I have argued that we have no reason to regard the codex as an orthodox or ecclesiastically sanctioned artifact, Sinaiticus yet demonstrates the currency the *Shepherd* continued to enjoy in perhaps the mid-fourth century. Furthermore, when each of Tertullian, Victorinus, Eusebius, and Athanasius writes to oppose the *Shepherd* and depict it as outside of their New Testament collections, they backhandedly corroborate its value as a text that has attained scriptural status by at least segments of their contemporaries, whether by the widely acknowledged practice of being read aloud in public worship or through attempts to attribute its author as a companion of Paul. To this evidence for its celebrated use can also be added the later testimony of Jerome, who is personally appraised of Greek churches where the book is still read, and Rufinus, who explicitly approves of the practice, so long as the *Shepherd* is not appealed to for the formation or substantiation of doctrine. This stipulation, however, only appears to have formed in the fourth century; starting with Irenaeus in the second century, other Christian writers apparently had no qualms about citing the *Shepherd* in support of their doctrinal claims. In short, the *Shepherd* of Hermas was regularly viewed as scripture into the fourth century, on an apparent canonical trajectory into the fourth century and therefore a bona fide candidate for inclusion in the church's New Testament.

From these presuppositions, the present chapter and its preceding sister-chapter have constructed an elaborate case for the contributions of four constrictive trends impacting fourth century Christianity on the declaration of Athanasius's canon. No longer should the settled canon be divorced from the exigencies that forged it. Resolving to read his Festal Letter of 367 beyond its superficial list of scriptures that Athanasius deemed necessary for salvation, this investigation was indebted to Brakke's work on the career of the Alexandrian bishop, but pushed beyond it to contextualize his novel declaration of the canon. First, we demonstrated the evolution of Christian thinking from the second century to the fourth in four areas. From the mid-second century onward, heresiology became the dominant worldview among elite bishops and thought-leaders of the church, such that the genre of heresiography could be weaponized against doctrinal deviants. Simultaneously, its logic of truth and falsehood was deeply internalized for deployment against innumerable others. Second, at the same time, the church came to view the Johannine Prologue as the indispensable guide for the harmonization of the Christian metanarrative, and its conception of the *Logos* dominates all Christology from Irenaeus onward. These two trends hardened the boundaries of the church's doctrine, and they were supplemented by constrictive trends centering around the sources of authority for the church. Third, in spite of a vibrant and permissive inclination toward visions, revelations, and prophetic experiences in early Christianity, the excesses of the New Prophecy movement inspired a change of attitude among writers of the church, such that they developed a perspective of prophecy taking place only in the past, or otherwise being so restricted as to render new prophecies largely impossible. Finally, the

centralization of authority espoused by Athanasius meant that all forms of Christian living, from virginal women and ascetic men to the instruction of ordinary believers, must take place under the benevolent patriarchal oversight of the bishop, following his approved doctrines and celebrating only his limited scriptural canon. These four trends should not be regarded as an exhaustive accounting of every factor pressurizing and animating fourth-century Christianity generally or Athanasius's declaration of a canon specifically, but they are especially prominent given that they each demonstrate evolution from the second-century laboratory to the fourth-century imperial institution. Additionally, each of the four trends relates to the *Shepherd* of Hermas in some prominent and observable fashion, each finds constrictive attestation in the corpus of Athanasius, and finally, they each contribute in Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter to his all-important and novel declaration of the "rule of scripture." In all cases, moreover, the *Shepherd* offered no support for the Athanasian platform of Christian unity, and it was constricted out of the church's canon for largely unspoken reasons such as these, which rendered it incompatible to episcopal Christianity in the fourth century. While Athanasius's earlier treatise supporting the Nicene definition of Christ had excluded the *Shepherd* on grounds that it was useful for a "heretical" understanding of the Son of God as a creature, these four constrictive trends motivating fourth-century Christians enable an understanding that the exclusion of Hermas's book from the canon was intertwined with the heated polemics for the sort of Christianity that would prevail under imperial benefaction. From questions of proper Christian authority to particular doctrines that

Hermas's book did or did not properly support, Athanasius left the *Shepherd* on the sidelines of authentic Christianity alongside his political and ecclesiastical opponents.

A landmark declaration that it was, however, Athanasius's canon did not immediately become gospel for the church. For one, some Christians resistant to the bishop's control continued for decades and even centuries to celebrate Hermas's *scriptura non grata*, and beyond the use of excluded books, Athanasius's Festal Letter was itself nothing more than a regional decree around which only institutions loyal to the bishop rallied. Didymus the Blind, Athanasius's own hand-picked leader of the Alexandrian catechetical school, utilized the *Shepherd* of Hermas for doctrinal arguments more frequently than would have pleased his bishop. In spite of the existence of some earlier precedents for outlining scriptural collections, their impact paled in comparison to Athanasius's imposition of his canon. We know, for example, that Athanasius's letter reverberated immediately in the monastic institution loyal to his episcopacy, and the preservation of Athanasius's letters—along with a Syriac summary acknowledging that Athanasius wrote to fix the canon—suggests he was received as an authority on the authorized scriptures. After Athanasius in the fourth century, we can observe bountiful list-making in both halves of the Christian world. Though not all such lists feature the exact 27 books he identified as the church's New Testament, crucially, Jerome and Rufinus both attest Athanasius's same canon *and* place the *Shepherd* of Hermas in a third category, replicating Athanasius's preservation of books that are improper for the construction of doctrine. As list-making continued in the fifth and sixth centuries, and occasional regional councils weighed in, the New Testament canon gradually trended

toward the list produced in 367 under constrictive pressures from heretics and schismatics, leaving the *Shepherd* of Hermas decisively out of the church's New Testament. Occasional echoes of the book's prior favor could still be found in Codex Sinaiticus and the stichometric list inserted into Codex Claromontanus, and indeed monastics would continue to minister to Hermas's book, but these echoes were reduced to a mere whisper as the hierarchical church increasingly assented to the canon of Athanasius and Jerome and preserved only scattered memories of its lost *Shepherd*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: Eight Primary Contributions of the Foregoing Study

In the late fourth century, as Origen's theology was being posthumously scrutinized for its conformity to orthodoxy, Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea preserved extracts of his inoffensive writings in Greek for the benefit of the church.[1] Out of their admiration for Origen's beautiful thoughts, they produced the *Philocalia*, including one portion of his *Commentary on Hosea* where the catechetical headmaster spins grammatical difficulties of the Septuagint text (Hos 12:5 LXX) into an expression of Christian unity in prayer and worship. Origen concluded his argument with the following reference to the *Shepherd* of Hermas:

> ὅταν δὲ καὶ ἀλλήλων μέλη εἶναι λέγωνται οἱ ἅγιοι, τί ἄλλο εἰ μὴ ἓν σῶμά εἰσι; καὶ ἐν τῷ Ποιμένι δὲ τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ πύργου, διὰ πολλῶν μὲν λίθων οἰκοδομουμένην, ἐξ ἑνὸς δὲ λίθου φαινομένην εἶναι τὴν οἰκοδομὴν, τί ἄλλο ἢ τὴν ἐκ πολλῶν συμφωνίαν καὶ ἑνότητα σημαίνει ἡ γραφή; (*Philoc.* 8.4-5).

> And further, whenever the saints are said to be members of one another, what else can they be except one body? Also in the *Shepherd*, concerning the construction of the tower—a building constructed from many stones yet appearing as one stone[2]—what else can the scripture mean except the harmony and unity of the many?[3]

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[1] John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 31; 163.

[2] Herm. Vis. 3.2.6 (10.6).

For all of the tower's symbolic centrality to the *Shepherd*, this extract exists as one of only a small handful of patristic allusions to Hermas's tower. Origen intends, of course, to interpret the tower as a reflection of concord in the one Christian church amalgamated from many individuals. But in the process, he also signals, perhaps, how the *Shepherd* could be welcomed into a united, synoptic vision of the church's diverse scripture—in this case, interpreting and buttressing the words of Paul (Rom 12:5)—before a constrictive environment prevailed and expunged the book from influencing the great Christocentric and salvific macro-narrative of Christianity. While he attests the reception of the *Shepherd* at its apex in the third century, after transferring to Palestine, Origen himself became aware of Christians who, for largely unspoken reasons, never appealed to the book. It would gradually decline from there: Victorinus (d. 303) and Eusebius (d. 339), both with well shrouded rationales and perhaps ulterior motives, located the *Shepherd* outside of their scriptural collections. Though they both probably entertained ideas of a closed New Testament fitting their idiosyncratic designs, neither of their collections rose to the level of *canon*, a term that had different meanings until Athanasius (d. 373) appropriated it to outline his "rule of scripture" just a handful of years before his death. In the following centuries, the acceptance of the Athanasian New Testament among orthodox bishops sealed the conclusive downfall of the *Shepherd*, robbing the church-at-large of a book that had so inspired the Christian life before Constantine. From there, the *Shepherd* would survive in hushed elite Western circles and persist in the East

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[3] Trans. mine, from the Greek text in J. Armitage Robinson, *The Philocalia of Origen: The Text Revised with a Critical Introduction and Indices* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1893), 54; https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015026079080;view=1up;seq=112.

only thanks to monastic institutions that both copied its text and reproduced its concerns[4]; the church's New Testament, meanwhile, could itself no longer tolerate this alternative Christian tradent. In the paragraphs and pages that follow, we recap the main observations of the foregoing investigation with a particular focus on the novel contributions this study has made toward early Christian reception of the *Shepherd* of Hermas and the eventual triumph of the Athanasian canon that decisively excluded the book from Christian scripture.

First, this study began with a fresh evaluation of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, discerning it not primarily as a text of repentance, as most scholars have appraised it over the last century, but rather as a book of practical salvation. Living 'to God' and being saved occupy Hermas from the first aggrieved rhetorical questions he utters after an apparition confronts him with his unconscious sins. Similarly, this theme persists through the Visions and Commandments and also inspires the parables of the tower, which Hermas and his shepherd erect as an image of salvation. Repentance still features frequently throughout the book, but it serves as a general prescription for Hermas's

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[4] As one example of a shared field of interests between monasticism and the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the opening episode of the alphabetical version of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*AP*)—known in English as the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and which dates to the end of the fifth century—features the venerated monk Antony despairing over his idle thoughts and *accidie*. In his weakness, he asks the Lord the very same question as does Hermas (Vis. 1.2.1 [2.1]): "How can I be saved?" God's response, too, suggests the influence of the *Shepherd*, for Antony then sees the apparition of an angel performing manual labor, praying, and then returning to his work, all before the angel deigns to instruct him to do likewise in order to be saved. While not a perfect carbon copy of a singular episode from the *Shepherd*, enough resemblances exist here to imply the influence of Hermas's popular book—and especially the determinative salvific quality ascribed to praxis—as to encourage further exploration of signature ascetic volumes for other echoes that would not survive long in a hierarchical church so transfixed by orthodoxy. Translation and text per Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, Cistercian Studies Series, rev. ed. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 1-2. For dating of the *AP* collection, see John Wortley, ed. and trans., *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers: A Select Edition and Complete English Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2. Special thanks are owed to my colleague Josh Schachterle for introducing this particular episode to me.

audience given its necessity for salvation: many Christians, he deduces, must change their minds and recommit to the Christian life if they are to ascend in virtue and achieve enshrinement in the tower with the saints and holy ones of God.

Second, we proceeded to the patristic and early Christian reception of the *Shepherd*. Starting with Irenaeus in the late second century, the church placed a high value on Hermas's book, though Irenaeus offers no comment on its predominant interest in salvation. Instead, while affirming the book as scripture, Irenaeus sifts from the shepherd's first Commandment a doctrine of creation that accords with Genesis and several other ultimately canonized books. The *Shepherd*'s one God who created all things was particularly incisive against Gnostics who pursued more expansive origins of the created order, and Irenaeus used the shepherd's mandate widely in order to concisely portray his belief about the Trinitarian God's participation in creation. After Irenaeus, a number of other nameable Christians appeal favorably to the *Shepherd*—among them, the Alexandrians Clement, Origen, Didymus, and even Athanasius who, early in his episcopal career, called it a "most useful book." But more significantly, I highlighted the catacomb fresco of San Gennaro and the anonymous homily *De Aleatoribus* to portray the *Shepherd* as widely favored in the early church beyond the visible stratum of elite literate Christians whose writings often dominate such reception histories. The Neapolitan fresco, in fact, offers a unique glimpse into the possible straightforward acceptance of the primary message we have sifted from the *Shepherd*: its depiction of the tower under construction from the petrified remains of the εὔχρηστοι, situated in an early

Christian funerary context, likely intimates that the decedents entombed therein aspired to earn their places in the tower.

Third, we similarly re-evaluated the negative appraisals of the *Shepherd*, starting with Tertullian in the early third century. His quarrel with the *Shepherd*'s supposed laxity for adulterers indicates not a generalizable rigorist attitude toward the book, as *De Aleatoribus* confirms, but rather his own particular infatuation with sexual sins, and there is no ascertainable evidence that councils in his day had inveighed against the *Shepherd*'s scriptural or canonical status. Moreover, this study accepted Jonathan Armstrong's argument that the Muratorian Fragment was written by Victorinus of Poetovio and, by appealing to his *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, extended Armstrong's analysis to deduce that Victorinus opposed the *Shepherd* given its prophetic novelties. Though Victorinus ruled the *Shepherd* outside of his enumerated, 24-book New Testament, his impact on the *Shepherd*'s favor in early Christianity is difficult to gauge, for his opinion and works did not travel well beyond the Latin West until Jerome. Eusebius was unaware of Victorinus's writings, and yet the church historian also maintained a skeptical posture toward the *Shepherd* for a slightly different reason: he disputed the association, tendered before him by Origen, between Hermas and Paul, and lacking Pauline authentication, the *Shepherd* was devoid of apostolic legitimacy even if others had regarded it an important book for Christian catechesis. But Eusebius expressed a quite academic view of Christian scripture that omitted some of the catholic epistles from the collection because he viewed them, too, as probable forgeries. Victorinus and Eusebius attest an elite turn against the *Shepherd*, plausibly for reasons beyond those that they express; however, neither can be

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regarded as the irruptive influence responsible for the eventual exclusion of the *Shepherd* from Christian Bibles. Instead, it was Athanasius who, after five periods of exile and hiding from his Alexandrian episcopacy, struggled mightily against nagging problems of disunity, which he portrayed as the fault of heretics, schismatics, and autonomous Christians prizing their alternative traditions. Against this backdrop and his lifelong opposition to "Arians," "Melitians," and "Eusebians," Athanasius dictated the boundaries of his New Testament that relegated the *Shepherd* of Hermas to an intermediate category of catechetical books not intended to reflect on the church's doctrine of salvation, but rather simply to offer a glimpse of piety to new Christians who must be led away from idolatry.

Fourth, Athanasius's declaration of the New Testament *canon*, a term borrowed from prior Christian authors which he novelly appropriates for his "rule of scripture" that excluded the *Shepherd*, becomes infinitely more understandable when we account for the breathtaking manuscript history of this text from Egypt. Not only did I produce a chart tabulating the 24 manuscript copies of the *Shepherd* through the sixth century, but I also detailed some of their more remarkable features. Significantly, 11 *Shepherd* manuscripts belong on paleographical grounds to the pre-Constantinian church, and perhaps 19 copies in total were produced before the end of the fourth century. However, the inclusion of the *Shepherd* in the pandect Bible of Codex Sinaiticus merited the most sustained discussion, for it permits us to compare the scribal treatment of Hermas's text against the undisputed canonical books. Against recent scholarly arguments for the *Shepherd* and Barnabas as members of a scriptural appendix to the New Testament, or Codex Sinaiticus

exemplifying the execution of an intermediate class of books into manuscript form, I

argued that the community, financiers, and scribes that produced the *Shepherd* considered

it a part of their canon. Unfortunately, we know too little about these people to determine

their precise beliefs, but that they preserved expansive Old and New Testaments at a time

when the episcopal institution turned constrictive suggests that we have no reason to

presume Codex Sinaiticus to be an orthodox ecclesiastical instrument. Instead, with no

paratextual clues to divine any boundary between the *Shepherd* and foregoing books,

Athanasius's intermediate category of catechetical-but-not-canonical texts should be

allowed no bearing on Codex Sinaiticus. Instead, the codex, at tremendous financial cost,

ensconced the *Shepherd* and several other ultimately extracanonical books between its

two covers, a marvelous technological achievement that novelly invited its readers and

community to read the books synoptically and canonically. Until some valid reason be

found to distinguish the *Shepherd* and other texts that, with the hindsight of over 16

centuries, now appear heterotopian in comparison to the church's canonical record, we

must accept the default hypothesis that the books of Codex Sinaiticus comprised a

particular scriptural canon fully conforming to the acknowledged canon 2 standards of

exclusion and fixity. Such an alternative canon, containing at least six of the seven books

that Athanasius deemed merely catechetical,[5] and three that he did not even bother to

name and may have found apocryphal,[6] offer insight into the expansive scriptural

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[5] These six include Esther, Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, and the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Furthermore, it cannot be regarded impossible that Codex Sinaiticus also included the seventh catechetical book of Athanasius, the *Didache*, but we have no solid evidence of this.

[6] Among these are 1 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and the *Epistle of Barnabas*.

environment of fourth-century Egypt that necessitated the bishop's constrictive intervention.

Fifth, in order to answer the topical questions of this investigation, we probed beyond the voluminous data for the early Christian reception of the *Shepherd* and turned to a consideration of the church's scriptural and canonical processes. Though scholars have sometimes proffered reasons for the *Shepherd*'s exclusion outside of the realm of canonical criteria, those criteria of apostolicity, antiquity, orthodoxy, and widespread use by the church still frequently control any discussion of the formation of the New Testament. However, using the early reception of the *Shepherd* as a test-case demonstrates the functional weakness of these criteria, for they are attended by no method of adjudicating between examples where the data appear ambivalent. One criterion allowed only books that were written by apostles or companions of those apostles, and perhaps this gave rise to Origen's understanding that the Hermas greeted by Paul in the salutations to Romans wrote the *Shepherd*. Eusebius doubted this backstory, and therefore it is often supposed that the *Shepherd* struck out on apostolic authorship, but given that Jerome also attests the same authorship explanation as did Origen, this story surely survived in the fourth century, when the *Shepherd* was excluded from the canon. Here, then, is one of several impasses that render the canonical criteria impotent. Instead, the criteria require reconceptualization as *scriptural factors*, since they portend not the exclusion of texts that canon necessitates but the identification of genuine Christian scripture, even if permitting interpreters some latitude to determine what, for example, constituted "apostolicity." In the absence of canonical criteria that controlled

the formation of the New Testament in a democratic or juridical process, I have instead depicted the canon as an authoritative imposition of church power that was then located in its prominent bishops, who naturally sought a consensus on scriptural boundaries. This ecclesiastical-political canon would largely be endorsed by the church over a gradual, unconscious process of acceptance and adjustment to the church's standard, or "rule of scripture," by means of a grand episcopal "gentlemen's handshake."

Sixth, Athanasius's importance to the New Testament canon has long been known, but when he declared the books of the New Testament in his Festal Letter for 367, his decree was more than just a list of books. Regrettably, the church preserved his list and little else from this Festal Letter in its original Greek, and scholars have all too infrequently read the letter apart from its vital context. Significantly more of the letter is extant in Coptic, permitting a view of the circumstances that motivated Athanasius to issue his "rule of scripture." Thanks to the translation of this letter and the career-spanning labors of David Brakke on the Alexandrian episcopacy of Athanasius, much of the groundwork permitting the last leg of my investigation has been initiated. For example, Brakke understands that Athanasius, in addition to declaring a canon, also promoted a model of Christian piety indebted to the exegetical and doctrinal authority of the bishop. Meanwhile, he holds that other forms of Christian piety also existed concurrent with the Athanasian model, and that these other pieties maintained alternate scriptural practices. While I concur with this argument, I also regard the limits of Athanasius's canon a worthy inquiry, for his own writings attest that he previously

approved of the *Shepherd* of Hermas without qualification, only for him to later vitiate

this popular book and leave it on the canonical sidelines.

Seventh, Athanasius's imposition of a canon among the Egyptian catholic

institution allied to his leadership begs a more detailed explanation than from the data of

the 39th Festal Letter alone. The canon, I submit, was only embryonically in the making

until the time of Athanasius, who perfectly encapsulated the constrictive institution of the

fourth century that was so foreign to the doctrinal laboratory of early Christianity. I have

identified four constrictive trends operative within the Festal Letter for 367, and also

found these to be widely attested within Athanasius's voluminous written corpus as

environmental influences impelling his construal of Christianity. These four constrictive

trends included:

(1) The worldview of ***heresiology*** that implanted an in-group/out-group mentality of truth vs. many heresies,

(2) the rising importance of a Johannine ***Christological macro-narrative***,

(3) the growth of an elite aversion to ***prophecy, visions, and revelatory experiences*** as proper sources of authority in the church, and

(4) a struggle for uncontested ***ecclesiastical authority*** under the episcopal institution.

These trends all can be observed in development beginning from the earliest textual

layers of Christianity. Furthermore, owing to the breadth of the *Shepherd*, its text can be

appraised against the constrictive trends to discern the modes of Christian piety that

might have appreciated Hermas's book. This analysis concluded that the *Shepherd*

offered no resources for Athanasius's doctrinal and authoritative brand of Christianity,

one dedicated to a pre-existent and fully divine Savior consubstantial with the Father

God. These four constrictive trends then produced a constrictive instrument: the church's

first scriptural canon, or "rule of scripture." In the process, though Athanasius had years

earlier ruled the *Shepherd* of Hermas outside of the canon because his theological

opponents had used it to support their understanding of Christ as a created being, here the

Shepherd was constricted from the New Testament because it impeded the Athanasian

doctrinal and authoritative platform for Christian piety.

Finally, our story would be incomplete without some consideration of the effects

of the Athanasian canon. In the East, we have evidence from the *Life of Pachomius* that

Abba Theodore read the Festal Letter of 367 aloud to his monks, mirroring Athanasius's

key points, plus other indications that from the fourth to the sixth centuries,

reminiscences of Athanasius's acts included notices about his declaration of canonical

boundaries for catholic scripture. Beyond these specific resonances of his canon, the

Egyptian Coptic church, broadly speaking, remembered Athanasius fondly as an

inaugurator of orthodoxy; over the centuries, churches using languages other than Greek

in the East would gradually add to his clout by bringing their canons in line with that of

Athanasius. As for the Latin West, their canon was given boundaries not by Damasus in

Rome but rather via Jerome, who knew and applied the Festal Letter of 367 in his labors

of translation. Throughout his prefaces to translated biblical books, Jerome capped the

Old Testament with only slight variations to the Athanasian canon but mirrored the

Alexandrian's New Testament exactly, even to the point of reproducing an

intermediate category of enumerated books that explicitly excluded the *Shepherd* of

Hermas from the canon. And though additional research may elaborate how, where, and

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when the church increasingly acceded to the canon of Athanasius and Jerome, after Rufinus the *Shepherd* meaningfully disappears from the context of the scriptural canon or the New Testament, only surviving to us today thanks to the hospitality of monastics and the curiosity of elite Latin-speaking Christians.

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The New Testament canon that the church received from Athanasius, Jerome, and their episcopal and papal inheritors—and crucially, the canon that all Western Christians find in their Bibles today—was no divinely appointed instrument.[7] Instead, that canon prevailed as a constricted subset of wider early Christian texts selected by human design, and was forged out of heated conflicts between Christians who disagreed on theological points that no longer animate the church beyond an infinitesimal elite of scholars and systematic theologians. And though the church portrays its Bible as the complete foundation for the Christian faith, it is unfortunate to find that the *Shepherd* of Hermas, an eccentric but remarkably popular text motivating Christians into the fourth century, which was included in perhaps the earliest pandect Bible and which Athanasius could earlier regard as a "most useful book," became *scriptura non grata* under questionable conditions and by the authoritative decree of this distasteful episcopal figure.

From here, some might suppose that I have pursued this subject with reformist intentions, that is, out of a desire to see the New Testament canon reassessed and the *Shepherd* of Hermas welcomed into the collection. However, such an interest never

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[7] Bob Funk avers that bishops were "so exercised about heresy—read: their own authority and power—that they narrowed the spectrum [of texts, tradition, and interpretation] too much both laterally and vertically." I concur and share his critique of the canon that was handed down to the Christian present. Robert W. Funk, "The Once and Future New Testament," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 545.

motivated the present inquiry, which has been limited to understanding why the *Shepherd*

was excluded in light of its popularity in the pre-Constantinian church. In spite of my

fascination with Hermas and the elements of his book that appear antithetical to church

doctrine, I have no aspirations to interject for a revision of the New Testament or biblical

canon that the church considers closed. Should the church at large, or individual

denominations, determine that a rationale exists to amend its canon, scholars have already

produced compendia of supplementary texts and hypothetical guidelines that could

commence the process.[8] Instead, I would only observe here that books with dubious

authorship claims or later misattributions dominate the current New Testament, and

compared with some of the minor catholic epistles and deutero-Pauline letters, the

Shepherd would have much to offer believers from an early and alternative strand of

Christian thought. Hermas's book might complicate the unique theological claims of

Christianity, but it would simultaneously ignite healthy tensions over the nature of

authority in the religion, the meaning of Christ's life and death, and competing

conceptions of salvation. The revival of the *Shepherd*, furthermore, would perhaps signal

an interest in the wider spectrum of texts that motivated early Christians, and could arrive

as a breath of fresh air to notional believers and cultural Christians alike who recognize

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[8] For example, see Hal Taussig, ed., *A New New Testament: A Bible for the 21st Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013); Funk, 552-7. Funk, 557, probably entertains a more viable idea—rather than a different New Testament, the church or an associated denomination could ordain "an entire library of early Christian texts" for regular consumption by the church and "the renewed vitality of Christian scriptures in the third millennium." Furthermore, canon could more fruitfully be determined by a diverse pool of Christians in some democratic method, rather than remaining the restricted domain of an exclusive leadership dictating a collection for the church to merely accept. Either way, any new canon of the New Testament would need to distinguish some criteria for the search. Would only those texts with direct claims to apostolic authorship be considered, and furthermore, to what extent would this search be guided by historical critical scholarship? Alternatively, would a temporal limit before the end of the second century establish a pool of viable texts? Considerations such as these would require thankless deliberation and need to establish its comfort level with modern scholarship, thereby reopening old divides and debates between institutional spirituality and the academy.

that in the modern age of religiously pluralist society, scientific advancements to explain

evermore of the known universe, and biblical criticism that reframes scripture from Holy

Writ to human persuasion, "there is little of the orthodox story that remains tenable."[9]

Yet, for a number of reasons, a reevaluation of the contents of the New Testament along

these lines is unlikely to occur. As congregations age and churches continue to lose

ground to the "nones"—that is, American millennials and others who, in a trend partially

attributable to the knowledge sprawl of the Internet, now claim no religion[10]—trenchant

believers will likely continue to bunker in with their comfortable beliefs and Bibles,

rather than perform any groundbreaking open-ended measures of introspection.

Instead, the *Shepherd* must first clear a more proximal hurdle: the curious

scholarly resistance to, and discomfort with, this text. In the Introduction to this

dissertation, I identified a handful of recent studies, treatises, and edited volumes with

scopes neatly circumscribed to feature Hermas and the *Shepherd*, but which either ignore

the book altogether or mention it faintly in ways that indicate very low familiarity with its

contents. Recall, for example, the edited volume on *Christianity in the Second Century*

that, though it professed to plumb deeper than the common narrative of "hierarchies and

institutions," instead only mentioned the *Shepherd* twice.[11] To this could be added the

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[9] Funk, 548.

[10] The 2018 General Social Survey (GSS) survey recently revealed that the number of Americans claiming "no religion" has now reached 23.1 percent; when Christians are split by broad denomination (e.g., Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Black Protestant), the "nones," for the first time, now claim a plurality of American society. In comparison, as recently as 1994, under 10 percent of Americans surveyed claimed "no religion." The GSS data matches the ascent of the "nones" in Pew's ongoing research on American religious composition. Ryan Burge, Twitter post, March 19, 2019 (7:48 p.m.), accessed March 29, 2019, https://twitter.com/ryanburge/status/1108183399364263936.

[11] James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu, eds., *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 4-5.

recent revised dissertation of Katherine Shaner exploring the phenomenon of enslaved

persons in early Christian communities, which privileges archaeological evidence to the

avoidance of the one early Christian text containing an authorial claim to manumission.[12]

As outlined in the mini-literature review above, some attention has been paid to the

Shepherd in the context of the New Testament canon, but it is often pursued from a

perspective doubtful of its value in early Christianity. Moreover, a recent monograph on

Egyptian manuscript finds, interested in problematizing scriptural status and canonical

claims—even to the point of propounding that "there isn't really any such thing as 'a

New Testament papyrus'"[13]—passes over the *Shepherd* in practical silence. Beyond

these, in a number of recent books collectively lauding the uniqueness of the Christian

confession, Larry Hurtado has settled on its facets of belief and a "distinctive religious

identity . . . [that] involved claims about the unique significance of Jesus in particular."[14]

These, of course, minimize the existence of alternate perspectives on Christology in the

early church and ignore the *Shepherd*, a text that only becomes interested in Jesus—or

the "Son of God"—at a late juncture.[15] But beyond these scholars who traverse into

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[12] Katherine A. Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[13] Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 19; 279.

[14] Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 102. See also Larry W. Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016); and Larry W. Hurtado, *Honoring the Son: Jesus in Earliest Christian Devotional Practice* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

[15] Moreover, Hurtado "seems to assume the existence of a single group of earliest Christians who all experienced the same kind of risen Jesus and power of God." Yung Suk Kim, review of Larry Hurtado, *Honoring the Son: Jesus in Earliest Christian Devotional Practice*, *Review of Biblical Literature* (2019), 3; https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/12421_13845.pdf.

topics of early Christianity with immediate relevance to Hermas, some who intentionally

work on the *Shepherd* yet continue to offer dismissive appraisals of the book, whether

concluding that it was rightfully excluded from the canon[16] or even asserting that

Hermas's book should be evicted from the sub-canonical academic collection of the

Apostolic Fathers.[17] These examples resemble the open contempt that earlier scholars

reserved for the *Shepherd*, which perhaps underlies its continued avoidance as a text

reflective of a strand of early Christianity before the spread of a particular Christology or

soteriology. In pursuit of a more comprehensive depiction of Christian Origins and the

actual theological diversity under the umbrella of the Jesus movement, we in the academy

should be above the restraining influence of confessional dissonance. Lately, if the

curious avoidance of Hermas and the *Shepherd* gives any indication, this text can still be

popularized for broader investigation and interest.

As I hope this study has suggested, the *Shepherd* still contains much fertile

ground and a remarkable amount of scholastically uncharted territory as to warrant

continued research on the text, especially as related to points of contact between its

genesis and Judaism,[18] the matrix of early Christianities,[19] Roman or pagan religion,[20]

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[16] J. Christian Wilson, *Five Problems in the Interpretation of the Shepherd of Hermas: Authorship, Genre, Canonicity, Apocalyptic, and the Absence of the Name 'Jesus Christ'* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), 72.

[17] Archbishop Damianos of Sinai, "The Shepherd of Hermas and Its Inclusion in Codex Sinaiticus: Almost Scripture," trans. George S. M. Foskolos, in *Codex Sinaiticus: New Perspectives on the Ancient Biblical Manuscript*, ed. Scot McKendrick, David Parker, Amy Myshrall, and Cillian O'Hogan (London: The British Library / Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 168.

[18] For example, beyond the generalized interest in the *Shepherd*'s Two Ways material and over-eager comparisons with the traditions of Qumran, how might Hermas's book be explained as the output of an early Jewish(-Christian) church at Rome? If such an investigation bears fruit, where does it fit in the matrix of Second Temple Judaism of Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and so on? What are the apocalyptic exemplar texts that motivate Hermas, and do they include the Book of Revelation?

and late antique philosophy.[21] Moreover, the celebration of the *Shepherd* merits further

attention, especially as a text that inspired asceticism and reproduction in the

monastery,[22] and there remain certain threads of the book's extracanonicity that deserve

continued research.[23] The time has come to devote our focus to Hermas's book among

the polyvalent responses to and constructions of the Christian story, and to attempt to

locate the *Shepherd* within the shrouded complexity of early Christian development. If

this dissertation contributes to a reexamination of the *Shepherd* or renewed interest in the

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[19] Such questions might include: What are the full implications of an early Christian text like the *Shepherd* that shows no overt interest or deference to other tradents of the religion, from Pauline thought to Christology and the late-coming gospels that gave for believers a sense of Jesus's biography? Was a Jesus-less Christianity actually viable, and why was that appealing to some? How does Hermas fit into the phenomenon of Christian prophecy, and what was his relationship to other house-churches in Rome? What does the persistence of this book suggest about early Christianity's exegetical enterprise?

[20] While the appearance of the woman Church to Hermas seems overtly Christian, the similar manifestation of the shepherd as the author's guide offers intriguing parallels in Roman religions, where gods like Apollo and Hermes sometimes appear as shepherds. What more can be said about the provenance of Hermas's shepherd, and given Hermas's existence at Rome, to what extent does his shepherd represent an attempt at syncretism between Jewish Christianity and Roman religions? In the popular portrayal of Judaism and Christianity as a "parting of the ways," could Hermas's *Shepherd* be instead depicted as an attempt to unite the various Ways—including not just Judaism and Christianity, but Roman religious sensibilities and popular philosophy as well?

[21] Hermas's learned indifference about wealth or fame, and his abundant interest to ascend in virtue, is suggestive of Stoicism and remains perhaps the most fertile untrodden ground for research on the *Shepherd*. What other indications exist in the text to suggest his philosophical background, and what can be made from them? Given, furthermore, that Hermas's book may very well have been sunk from the Christian canon over a "heretical" exegesis of the phrase ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος (see above, pp. 152–6, esp. 154 n.105), what evidence might exist for this point entering the *Shepherd* via pagan philosophy?

[22] Monastic institutions in Egypt and Greece, for example, are singularly responsible for the survival of the *Shepherd* in its original language in anything approaching its entirety. How was the book used or esteemed in the monastery down the centuries, and in what respects could it be said to inspire, presage, or influence monastic thought and praxis, either in the rise of cenobitic communities or their later development? Might ascetics have been particularly drawn to Hermas's portrayal of salvation as a matter of praxis or ascension in virtue, a concept that became anathema to the institutional church?

[23] For example, research should also continue on the settled canons of scripture, including the eventual accession to the New Testament of Athanasius and Jerome, and the disappearance of the *Shepherd* from the intermediate (and eventually deuterocanonical) category of sub-canonical texts. To what extent, furthermore, can the ecclesiastical-political imposition of the canon pursued here, and secured by an episcopal "gentlemen's handshake," be applied to describe the canonical process in its entirety?

book, then it will have been a successful endeavor. For within academia, the *Shepherd* still faces curious obstacles to its recognition as a text genuinely indicative of a lost but quite ancient tradent in Christian history, and beyond this, students in New Testament courses might be interested to learn about the ecclesiastical-political imposition and subsequent episcopal consensus that decisively excluded such books as the *Shepherd*.[24] And though the ship has long since sailed for its inclusion among the church's New Testament, perhaps Western Christians whose institutions continue to downplay scandals of commission (sexual abuse and implication with unsavory politics) and omission (historic levels of economic inequality and crippling poverty) could stand to benefit from Hermas's messages about virtues, repentance, the renunciation of wealth in the church, and sharing resources. Even if one regards the *Shepherd* a lacking Christian book in comparison to the canonical New Testament, many would agree that the *Shepherd*'s neglect in the field of Christian Origins remains perhaps the most lamentable facet of its exclusion from the canon in the crucible of the fourth century. But this constrictive trend can yet be turned around, should we regard it favorable to reconsider what new insights the *Shepherd* of Hermas might reveal about the diversity and development of Christianity in the first, second, third, and fourth centuries. By asking the right questions of Hermas's book, and pursuing fresh lines of inquiry with new methods, we might excavate from this institutional *scriptura non grata* the potential of its popular alternative course toward

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[24] Beyond this alone, the *Shepherd* and other disfavored texts might feature more regularly alongside the canonical scriptures, even in introductory-level courses, to convey properly the diversity of early Christianity. These non-canonical Christian sources could also include the *Didache*, *1 Clement*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Judas*, and others among the texts recovered from Nag Hammadi, but even among these worthy candidates, by virtue of its early Christian popularity as depicted in the foregoing dissertation, the *Shepherd* of Hermas rightly deserves eminent status alongside the canonical New Testament.

which the Christian faith may have trended in a less authoritative, creedal, and

Christocentric environment.

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