From "Most Edifying Book" to *Scriptura Non Grata*:
Canon, Religious Constrictiveness, and the Loss of the *Shepherd* of Hermas in Early Christianity

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I.   Introduction, Question, and Thesis

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. Cassian had written in his *Conferences*, "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 people—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 mankind, he reasoned, this denied the necessity of God's grace and wreaked havoc on the doctrine of original sin. With proof-texts and reasoned arguments of his own, Prosper countered Cassian at significant length. But regarding Hermas, a different tactic was in order. Here Prosper found it sufficient to deride that "unauthoritative testimony (*nullius auctoritatis testimonium*) inserted into his discussions from the book of the Shepherd" (*Liber Contra Collatorem* 13.6).[3]

Prosper's determination about the *Shepherd* would have come as a major surprise to many Christians of the previous three centuries. Written in Rome sometime in the first half of the 2nd century, the *Shepherd* quickly spread into both halves of the Christian world. It attempts, by

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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).

[3] 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.

means of revelations to its main character and author, Hermas,[4] to present the kind of paraenesis or moral instruction otherwise absent from Christian scriptures at the time, to the degree that Philippe Henne dubbed the work "le manuel de vie chrétienne."[5] Irenaeus (in Gaul)[6] and Clement of Alexandria[7] 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 according to Matthew (12) and John (11-15).[8] While this could be a mere fluke, 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.[9] So valuable was the *Shepherd* to these early readers that it was copied wherever it could fit, for personal or communal use. Before the end of the second century, the book existed in a complete Latin translation, and it would be translated at least six times further before the Greek manuscript history disappears after the sixth century.[10] Its scenes were part of early Christian material

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[4] Beyond his name and the scant autobiographical details he offers—he is married, has children, was formerly a slave, and now owns or runs a business—Hermas is otherwise unknown to history. At some point, he became identified with the Hermas whom Paul greets in Romans 16:14. Modern scholarship generally doubts this association, though Origen and Jerome advocated for it.

[5] Or, "the manual of Christian life." Philippe Henne, "Canonicité du «Pasteur» d'Hermas," *Revue Thomiste* 90.1 (1990): 89.

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

[7] 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.

[8] Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 27.

[9] Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 2; Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univeristy Press, 2009), 42. Bagnall insists that this technological blossoming is unparalleled even for canonical scriptures.

[10] The other extant translations for the *Shepherd* during this period include Ethiopic, Akhmimic and Sahidic Coptic, Middle Georgian, Persian, and a second Latin translation known as the Palatine (as distinguished from the early, 2nd century Latin translation known as the Vulgata). Osiek, Hermeneia, 2-3. The *Shepherd* only exists in

culture, as in the magnificent third-century fresco depicting Hermas's vision of the Church as a tower under construction, preserved in the catacombs of San Gennaro, Italy.[11] Finally, in the middle of the fourth century, the *Shepherd* was reproduced as the terminal book of perhaps the first pandect Bible, the Codex Sinaiticus—making the *Shepherd* the exclamation point of the earliest bound New Testament.[12]

In fact, the *Shepherd* was so well favored into the 4th century that Athanasius, the young bishop of Alexandria, approved of it as a "most edifying book" shortly after the Council of Nicea in 325 CE (*Inc.* 3.1). His opinion would soon sour. For despite the many implicit appraisals of the *Shepherd*'s authority over the previous two centuries, Athanasius ruled it outside of the New Testament in his famous list of approved books, 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 needless to say, Hermas's "most edifying" work can be found in no Bible today. This prompts the question: what accounts for the loss of the *Shepherd* in early Christianity?

Despite previous attempts to solve the puzzle, this remains an unsettled problem.[13] Answers have generally been sought from the writings of the church fathers, most prominently a

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complete form in Latin and Ethiopic. Christian Tornau and Paolo Cecconi, eds., *The* Shepherd *of Hermas in Latin: Critical Edition of the Oldest Translation* Vulgata (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 2-3.

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

[12] For a recent discussion of the meaning of the *Shepherd*'s inclusion in Sinaiticus, see Dan Batovici, "The Apostolic Fathers in Codex Sinaiticus and Coxed Alexandrinus," *Biblica* 97.4 (2016): 581–605. 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. 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 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), 134–141 [esp. 139].

[13] 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*.

generation ago by Henne and Antonio Carlini. Problematically, the patristics saw little need to explain themselves in any degree of detail. As J. Christian Wilson quips, the most frequent reason given for the exclusion of the *Shepherd* is "no reason at all."[14] Given the air of decisive finality that authors like Prosper and Jerome could project by the 5th century, answers must be excavated from the constrictive environment of imperial Christianity in the 4th century. 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).[15] This explicit evidence only tells part of the story, however. I contend that Athanasius's connection of the *Shepherd* to heresy 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 to the second century that Winrich Löhr and others have recently deemed the age of the "laboratory,"[16] was being stamped out in favor of an authoritative Christocentric faith. Thus, I argue that **while on the one hand, the *Shepherd* of Hermas was explicitly excluded from the Christian canon by its novel association with Arianism, it was, on the other, opposed by proxy in the battle for the sort of Christianity that would prevail under the religion's newfound imperial blessing.**

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[14] 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), 70.

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

[16] 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.

II. The *Shepherd* of Hermas, Described

In his recent popular book, *The Lost Way*, Stephen Patterson illustrates how attention to ultimately disfavored texts can impact our understanding of the complexity 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*.[17] 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*.[18] 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, inasmuch as it figures in the themes of the *Shepherd*, is possible not because of the recent actions of God in Jesus Christ, but through participation in the Church and remaining steadfast—free of double-mindedness—to the very end. The *Shepherd* is the cumulative revelation to Hermas explaining how to accomplish this goal, supplemented with much motivational material and encouragement.

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

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[17] 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.

[18] 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.

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 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."[19] *Metanoia* of this variety, which Carolyn Osiek appropriately regards as "conversion,"[20] may be fairly counted as the primary message of the *Shepherd*, though by saturation, the message tends to dilute.

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."[21] This titular figure remains with Hermas to the end of the book, delivering Commandments and Parables and ordering that these frequent demonstrative interpretations[22] of symbols unveiled before Hermas, like the preceding Visions, be written down.[23] 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,

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[19] Herm. Vis. 2.2.4 (6.4). The translation used here and throughout 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.

[20] Osiek, Hermeneia, 29–30.

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

[22] 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.

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

from stating what Hermas is to believe about God's creation,[24] to an admonition not to remarry

after divorce,[25] to more metaphysical concerns like the angels of righteousness and wickedness

that inhabit each person. Various metaphors and images accrue and serve as instructional

material: two cities,[26] 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."[27] 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.[28] 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.[29] Later

still comes a statement that sounds rather in accordance with orthodox Christology: "The Son of

God is far older than all [God's] creation, with the result that he was the Father's counselor in his

creation."[30] 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

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[24] 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).

[25] 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.

[26] 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]).

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

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

[29] 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]).

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

and undergoing development in the "laboratory" of early Christianity. Hermas dabbles in Christologies that could be variously described as adoptionistic, "exaltationist,"[31] angelomorphic, or pre-existent. Revelation about practical concerns was more pressing, and on these matters the *Shepherd* offers little equivocation. More than two centuries removed from its development, it was perhaps this concerted ministration toward paraenesis, combined with a perceived theological ineptitude, that would relegate the *Shepherd* as merely catechetical[32] in the minds of the fourth century episcopal elite.

III.   Significance of the Project

Discussions of factors involved in the extracanonicity of the *Shepherd* have primarily been relegated to book chapters or journal articles, and I have found little concerted attention paid to the question since the mid-1990s. For example, Carlini notes that the *Shepherd* and others were suppressed from Christian scripture by means of authoritative intervention on the textual tradition.[33] Henne performs 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.[34] Its exclusion from the canon factors only briefly in Henne's article. Notably, both of these authors wrote in foreign languages and their work made little domestic impact. Carolyn Osiek, in a three-page section on "Reception and Canonicity" of her magnificent Hermeneia volume on the *Shepherd*, cites both Carlini and Henne but offers no concrete reason for its rejection beyond unspecified "objections

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[31] 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.

[32] This observation is similarly offered by Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, who follow it to explain the *Shepherd*'s bountiful manuscript history. Choat and 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.

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

[34] Henne, 81–100.

to its theological content."[35] 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.[36] 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 6th century Codex Claromontanus, provides appropriate context.[37] 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.[38] However, given the contributions of canon studies and the absence of such reasoning in antiquity, Wilson's line of argumentation is puzzling.[39] 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 measuring its history against the commonly cited criteria for canonicity,[40] but also by reviewing evidence from manuscript recoveries for the *Shepherd*, and

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

[36] Wilson, 54–55, 70.

[37] 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, 6th century, or sometime later than this.

[38] BnF Gallica, "Grec 107: 0601-0700," Bibliothèque nationale de France, 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).

[39] Notably, Wilson ignores 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.

[40] The strict definition of such criteria is a modern, retrospective scholarly phenomenon, albeit based upon the 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;

by pursuing a thorough contextualization of major constrictive trends affecting fourth century Christianity, when the canon was essentially settled. Among those influences I will cover are **(1)** the proliferation of heresiology—itself a burgeoning field—**(2)** the rising importance of Christology, **(3)** attitudes toward apocalyptic literature, and **(4)** the conflict between authoritarian (centrally organized) and libertine (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. Given that one could make the case that the *Shepherd* largely passes the criteria of apostolicity, antiquity, use by the Church-at-large, and orthodoxy, I may propose a re-evaluation or re-ordering of the criteria, or suggest that they be demoted from the lofty status of "criteria," which imprecisely suggests the ancient pursuit of an open-ended, juridicial process, to something more akin to "factors." Secondarily, though studies have been conducted on borderline, but accepted, books like Hebrews and Revelation, my investigation of the *Shepherd* may require that the factors involved in 4th century canonical determinations be broadened. As a robust case-study on a rejected book, it will be the first of its kind.

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 Graeco-Roman World have almost entirely avoided the evidence of the

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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.

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 of immortality to all, the essentials of the Pauline gospel, and the promise of a new "translocal and transethnic" religious identity.[41] 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."[42] In contrast to this tendency to play down or sidestep the *Shepherd* as a text indicative of a prevalent strand within early Christianity, I contend 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.[43] Inasmuch as I intend to draw attention to the contexts for the genesis and disappearance of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, this dissertation will also make inroads toward comprehension of this unique, popular, early Christian text more broadly within the guild.

IV.   Scope and Methodology

While other noteworthy and useful books from Christianity's early centuries also failed to reach canonical status, this study evaluates the *Shepherd* alone. No other early Christian book ultimately excluded from the New Testament achieved the popularity of the *Shepherd*, and thus I

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

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

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

contend that Hermas's work was the one most on the precipice of canonicity. The trends I explore from the 4th 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 4th 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 5th century considered the *Shepherd* excluded, how the 6th-century Gelasian Decree regarded the *Shepherd* as apocryphal and anathematized it,[44] and how the book lived on in hushed circles despite these declarations. Furthermore, I must recognize and examine the 2nd- and 3rd-century origins of the major constrictive influences on 4th century Christianity.

The dissertation features two distinct sections calling for different methodologies. First, I explore the "rise" of the *Shepherd* over the course of two chapters. In a chapter labeled "Text and Context," I will thoroughly overview of the relevant contents of the *Shepherd*, before examining the factors that caused the book to flourish. This chapter will include a reception history of the *Shepherd* through the end of the third century, traversing from Irenaeus to Origen diachronically to highlight their evaluations of the book. The following chapter will primarily assess the *Shepherd* against the commonly cited criteria for canonicity, especially as explained by Bruce Metzger and Lee Martin McDonald. Using the framework of the four criteria, I will delve further into patristic reception from the fourth century, and will also examine necessary elements such as the Muratorian Fragment. Under the criterion of orthodoxy, this same chapter will investigate the manuscript history for the *Shepherd*, and thus will employ the tools of textual criticism and paleography. These chapters seek to convey the popularity of the book in early Christianity, and to demonstrate that a route toward canonicity—at least on par with books that would be

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[44] "Decretum Gelasianum," The Latin Library, http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/decretum.html.

canonized—was available to the decision-makers of the fourth century should they have deemed the book otherwise acceptable.

Following this illustration of the *Shepherd*'s "rise" comes four chapters contextualizing its "fall" and exclusion from the canon, a story requiring a careful, nuanced historical-critical approach. In three chapters, I will set the stage with four trends on the rise since the second century that played an irruptive role in the *Shepherd*'s fate. I will approach (1) **heresiology** and (2) **Christology** together in the same chapter, demonstrating how the increased specificity of language used to describe the role of Jesus was always intertwined with a heresiological mindset. Next come individual chapters on (3) **apocalyptic** and (4) **ecclesial organization**, which culminate in the rise of an imperially empowered, bishop-centric Church with the authority to enforce a version of the religion heavy on distinctive beliefs. This section culminates with a look into Athanasius of Alexandria as the embodiment of these four constrictive influences on 4th century Christianity. By shining a light onto the facts of Athanasius's episcopacy and the theological wars he waged, I will locate the exclusion of the *Shepherd* in a heresy-obsessed environment of increased religious authority. I will furthermore demonstrate how Athanasius viewed the *Shepherd* exploitable by Arianism, all the while opposing its undercurrents of a more primitive and uncontrollable Christian faith.

V. Chapter Outline

A tentative chapter breakdown for this project can be outlined as follows:

Ch. 1: Introduction: Seeking the Lost *Shepherd* (~20 pages)

Beginning perhaps with the same hook of the mini-dispute over the *Shepherd* between John Cassian and Prosper of Aquitaine that serves as the lead-in to this proposal, this chapter introduces readers to Hermas's book, the problem of its early popularity contrasted against its eventual extracanonicity, and the method by which I will approach a solution. This introductory section prominently features my thesis and culminates with a chapter outline.

PART I—Rise of the *Shepherd*: The Book and Its Earliest Readers

The dissertation proper begins with a section focusing on the preserved evidence from early Christianity for the Shepherd. *This includes both statements about the book from the church fathers and findings from its considerable manuscript recoveries.*

Ch. 2: The *Shepherd* of Hermas: Text and Context (~35 pages)

What factors contributed to the creation of a text like the *Shepherd*, and why was it popular in pre-Constantinian Christianity? This chapter features a detailed description of the *Shepherd* of Hermas, including an overview of its significant contents for my analysis and its developmental setting. Following a reception history covering the major Christian writers from Irenaeus to Origen, I supply further evidence for its popularity: manuscripts recovered, translations, the San Gennaro fresco, and more. The chapter concludes with several possible reasons for the flourishing of the *Shepherd*, including how the book met needs not fulfilled elsewhere, portended differing priorities and foci among 2nd and 3rd century Christians, and suggested different possibilities for the direction of Christianity.

Ch. 3: Passing the Test? The *Shepherd* and the Fourth Century Criteria for Canonicity (~40p.)

Scholars have identified several criteria relevant for deciding whether a given book would be canonized. Bruce Metzger advocated three: *apostolicity*, *use by the Church-at-large*, and *orthodoxy*. To these, Lee Martin McDonald added *antiquity*. This chapter uses the criteria commonly cited in recent scholarship to determine how the *Shepherd* measured up: not as modern scholarship might rule, but according to the variegated testimonies from the second-to-fourth centuries. In addition to weighing patristic statements and the Muratorian Fragment, this chapter investigates the manuscript tradition for the *Shepherd* for any hints that might differentiate its treatment from canonical books. In this chapter, I examine the reception of the *Shepherd* into the fourth century, and also consider other factors proposed to have doomed the *Shepherd*, from the absence of Jesus's name to its length. Ultimately, I suggest that though the *Shepherd* had its detractors prior to Athanasius—Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Eusebius, and the anonymous author (Victorinus?) behind the Muratorian Fragment—a route toward canonization was just as available for the *Shepherd* as other contested texts.

PART II—Fall of the *Shepherd*: Constrictive Trends Impacting 4th Century Christianity

This second major section contextualizes the exclusion of the Shepherd *from the Christian canon by describing other developments in the religion in the 4th century. So as not to lose sight of the* Shepherd, *each of these chapters concludes with a prominent discussion of how*

the Shepherd *fit in—or, more appropriately, could not fit in with the changing tide of imperial Christianity.*

Ch. 4: Heresiology and Christology: Rising Tides Since the Second Century (~40 pages)

Many, but not all, of the major so-called heresies of early Christianity were opposed for their Christological deficiencies. In other words, the proto-orthodox fathers of the Church regarded the Docetists, Ebionites, Arians and others insufficient in their understanding of Jesus, and these groups play a major role in the annals of heresiology. Heresiology and Christology are thus twin phenomena, arising concurrently and generally accompanying one another. I argue that the increased focus on correctly identifying the person of Christ and the reliance on heresiography to castigate theological opponents created a constrictive environment in which doctrinal deviance could not survive. Caught up in this *maelstrom* were versions of Christianity previously thought acceptable. This chapter will demonstrate how the heresiological mindset and the specificity of Christological language contributed to a shrinking of the diversity that had attended early Christianity. Furthermore, in contrast to the developing orthodox Christology, the *Shepherd* offered a confusing amalgam of indifference, occasional statements in line with the Nicene definition of Christ, and parables in outright conflict with Trinitarian theology.

Ch. 5: Accepting Apocalyptic: What Revelatory Material Matters? (~30 pages)

Though the *Shepherd* is sometimes denied a place among apocalyptic books in modern scholarship, I will make a brief case for considering it thoroughly apocalyptic, suggesting that the genre and the word ἀποκαλύπτω itself always connoted wider meaning than scholars generally allow. Furthermore, in Clement of Alexandria, the *Shepherd* had at least one prominent church father who accepted Hermas's visions as genuinely prophetic and derived from "divine power." However, Christian apocalyptic literature, beset by frequent pseudepigraphy and lacking an authoritative arbiter of its revealed truths, faced no easy road to wide acceptance; even the canonical Revelation won its place among the accepted books only in the 4th century. This chapter examines arguments against Revelation and other apocalyptic literature, followed by Eusebius and Athanasius's rationales for accepting Revelation. It concludes by locating the *Shepherd* within this matrix of opinions. The breadth of apocalyptic required the church fathers to be selective, and the *Shepherd* was deemed dispensable.

Ch. 6: Constantine's Christianity and the Alternatives (~35 pages)

Whatever the true constitution of his "conversion," Constantine changed history when he reversed the Diocletianic persecutions and made Christianity the official imperial religion. His insistence on unity, initially aimed at cooling divisions between Arius and his proto-orthodox opponents, lent imperial support and a degree of enforceability to the trends described in the previous two chapters. Empowered by his rule were existing structures of authority, such as the bishops summoned to Nicea in 325 CE, but enclaves of Christians resistant to centralized governance had existed for centuries. For Hermas, the church did not require a bishop's presence or blessing, but was best described apocalyptically and parabolically as a tower, an old woman, a willow tree, or the mountains from which its members come.[45] A similar organizational tension continued into the 4th century, when monks eschewed the oversight of the official Church. Unsurprisingly, the forms of academic, philosophical, and underground Christianity outside of the Church's immediate control seem to have held the *Shepherd* in the highest regard. But with Constantinian Unity also came the possibility of an exclusive, concurred-upon canon.

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[45] Osiek, Hermeneia, 37.

Constantine and the dynasty of Christian emperors that followed him permitted the once-and-for-all centralization of Christianity, and this chapter will describe how the de-centralized Christianity of the *Shepherd* was left behind in the process.

Ch. 7: *Scriptura Non Grata*: Athanasius, Arianism, and the Loss of the *Shepherd* (~40 pages)

The story of the *Shepherd* becoming an unwelcome Christian book culminates in Athanasius of Alexandria, the embattled but emboldened bishop responsible for our first canon list featuring the New Testament as we know it (367 CE). In particular, he manipulated the trends described in the previous three chapters, in many ways eternally shaping Christianity. Athanasius, a young attendee at Constantine's Council of Nicea, staunchly defended the Nicene construction of Christ, employing as his primary weapon the scourge of heresy. The fight against Arianism consumed his entire life. He liberally accused his opponents, from Eusebius of Caesarea to Eusebius of Nicomedia and various monks, of following Arius. Though exiled five times from his episcopacy, the immortal Athanasius eventually secured imperial favor over his opponents and emerged as something of a hero for his defense of "proper" Christian faith. He further centralized the church in Egypt, laying the groundwork for incorporating heretofore noncompliant monastics under the control of the bishop with, for example, his dubious biography of Antony, a hero to many monks. Finally, Athanasius approved of the apocalyptic of John of Patmos given that Revelation was useful to denigrate his "heretic" opponents.[46] Caught on the other side of this functional proxy war was the apocalyptic, and indeed, the Christianity of the *Shepherd*, which Athanasius finally, authoritatively, deemed more useful to those "heretics" than to church leadership.

PART III—The Aftermath of Canonical Decision-Making

Ch. 8: Conclusion: Finding the Lost *Shepherd* (~10 pages)

The final chapter ties together the most significant evidence supporting the dissertation's thesis, reinforcing the relevance of my four constrictive trends (detailed in Part II) on the idea of an exclusive canon of Scripture. I then will describe the place of the *Shepherd* in early Christianity, and furthermore, suggest that continued research on the *Shepherd* and other marginalized texts may be a route to new insights about early Christianity.

Ch. 9: Epilogue: The Afterlife of the *Shepherd* (~10 pages)

Regardless of 4th century decisions and concerns, the *Shepherd* would, to some extent, live on. John Cassian carried it with him, at least figuratively, to his new home in Gaul. New Greek copies would continue to be made into the 6th century, after which time they disappear. Several translations also survive, and the Latin West attests to at least a dozen copies, many of which are complete. The 15th century Codex Athous supplies most of the text of the *Shepherd* in its original language. Despite these ongoing investments in the *Shepherd*'s survival throughout the centuries, a not insignificant proportion of scholars continue to see fit to agree with its exclusion from the canon. I want to explore this phenomenon—the "soft rejection" of antiquity and that which persists today—and, with Stephen Patterson, also propose that the *Shepherd* and

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[46] Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, & Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 140ff.

other disfavored texts[47] be taught more regularly alongside the canonical scriptures, even in introductory-level classes, to properly convey the diversity of early Christianity.

VI.   Bibliographic Method

Chapters 2 and 3 above will be developed from term papers written during my doctoral coursework, and therefore bring with them an "inherited" set of research articles, monographs, reference work entries, and manuscripts. This last category, for example, includes some 30 Greek and Latin manuscripts that I have gathered over many hours of research and carefully catalogued for continued study.

However, I have not relied on this previous research alone. Using the Compass search tool at http://library.du.edu, I have searched widely within the Penrose Collection maintained by the University of Denver and the Taylor Library holdings at the Iliff School of Theology. This feature also permits tailored searches of many of the University of Denver's electronic databases. I have cast an initial wide net using keyword searches. Examples of my keyword searches include *shepherd of hermas* (with and without quotation marks), *hermas* alone, and both of these terms combined with other keywords significant for my dissertation using appropriate Boolean operators: *christology*, *christolog**, *apocalyp**, *arius*, *arianism*, *heresy*, *heresio**, *heretic**, *canon**, *bible*, *biblical*, *scriptur**, and *christian**. From these searches, I have paid attention to common catalog subject headings and clicked through to their listings. Some examples of these have included "Hermas, 2nd cent. Shepherd," "Hermas, active 2nd century. Shepherd," and simply, "Shepherd of Hermas." Furthermore, I have substituted the English title of the *Shepherd* for the French *Pasteur (d'Hermas)* and the Latin *Pastoris*.[48] For the mostly standalone chapters in Part II of my proposed Chapter Outline, I used the list of secondary search terms sans

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[47] These may include the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and others among the texts recovered from Nag Hammadi.
[48] The Greek title, Ποιμὴν, is harder to search for in English; "Poimen" yields some correct hits, but no results I had not previously encountered.

shepherd of hermas and added further terms, including *constantin**, *athanasius*, *imperial*, *roman (empire)*, *nicea*, *nicaea*, *nicene*, *revelation*, *ecclesia**, and *ecclesiolog**. I have utilized author searches for several of the scholars most pertinent to my project, including those whose CVs have been dominated by the *Shepherd* of Hermas, and those who have written extensively about 4th century Christianity. Finally, I have repeated many of my searches in specific databases: ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT), Academic Search Complete, Prospector, Google Scholar, Worldcat, and, on the Iliff side, ATLAReligion and New Testament Abstracts.

Additionally, I have made fruitful use of bibliographies and citations I have found in other works, major and minor. I have received many of these, including articles published in French and Italian, via InterLibrary Loan, through which I have also accessed articles catalogued by ATLAReligion but not appearing in Full Text (esp. *Journal of Theological Studies*). Several important monographs and edited volumes have only been available via Prospector and InterLibrary Loan. Other library services I have utilized and will continue to utilize include the [Religious Studies LibGuides](#) and Joint Ph.D. Program Reference Library Liaison Peggy Keeran.

Finally, my connections on Academia.edu have been another vital avenue to emerging textual and canonical research on the *Shepherd*. Here, certain authors have freely posted publication-quality versions of their research, alerting me in a very timely fashion to new edited volumes and journal articles.

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VIII.   Electronic Papyrus/Manuscript Repositories

The following manuscript repositories have proven useful in my prior textual critical work on the *Shepherd* of Hermas. In most cases, direct links to early manuscripts of the *Shepherd* are supplied.

Berliner Papyrusdatenbank. "P. 13272: Hermas, Pastor, Similitudines V 1, 5–2, 2; V 2, 4–2, 6." [P.Berl. 13272]. Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. http://ww2.smb.museum/berlpap/index.php/03657/.

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To be found: Codex Athous Gregoriou 96 (Complete/HQ/Legible Version)