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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The criteria for canonicity which led to the inclusion of the Book of Revelation in the New Testament call into question the exclusion of other apocryphal apocalypses and revelatory treatises. Biblical apocrypha is defined as texts that were at one time a part of the biblical canon but no longer are, or texts that were never a part of the biblical canon at all but are widely known and valued. Examples of writings that collectively make up the apocrypha are gospels, gnostic texts, acts, epistles, apocalypses, fragments, lost works, and other miscellaneous texts."

Rest 496

Works in Progress





Vincent J. Marino

New Testament Biblical Apocrypha and the Exclusion of Apocalypses from the Canon

The criteria for canonicity which led to the inclusion of the Book of Revelation in the New Testament call into question the exclusion of other apocryphal apocalypses and revelatory treatises. Biblical apocrypha is defined as texts that were at one time a part of the biblical canon but no longer are, or texts that were never a part of the biblical canon at all but are widely known and valued. Examples of writings that collectively make up the apocrypha are gospels, gnostic texts, acts, epistles, apocalypses, fragments, lost works, and other miscellaneous texts.

Perhaps the most controversial and discussed texts of the apocrypha are the apocalypses. The apocalypses discuss the “end times” of the world and portray what will happen when the world is ending and how people will be judged for their lives on earth and invited to live in heaven or be sent to hell. Several of these apocalyptic writings derive pseudonymously from some of the twelve apostles of Jesus, including Peter, Paul, James, and Thomas. Others derive

from other distinct sources, including the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, Apocalypse of Stephen, and the *Shepherd* of Hermas. These stories are of much interest to people, as all people of faith wish to live their lives in such a way that their ultimate destiny may be secured. For me personally, this topic is of especially high interest as I have always had a sense of wonder and a thirst for knowledge about what will happen to the human race in end times. If it were possible to know the “truth” about the end times and what will happen to humanity, one would be hard pressed to find a person who had little to no interest about it. In addition, the canon is of such high importance to be a part of, as it is what is considered authority and what is to be believed and passed down to subsequent generations as truth.

All of the apocalyptic texts were excluded from the current canon with the exception of the Book of Revelation. For this reason, there is speculation that this text must contain something that the others lack, or vice versa. Each text was written during a distinct period of time and had specific origins, influences, and authors. There may be several reasons why the Book of Revelation rose above the rest of the apocalypse theories and was included in the canon. Comparison of each of the apocalypses will allow for a better understanding of the criteria that ultimately led to the exclusion of every apocalyptic book except the Book of Revelation, and its ultimate inclusion into the biblical canon. This paper seeks to compare apocalypses in order to arrive at a better understanding of the exclusion of every apocalypse except the Book of Revelation. The implications this has for the legitimacy of the criteria used to include the Book of Revelation will also be examined. After all, who or what is deemed legitimate enough to have authority over what is included into the biblical canon and what is not?

Chapter 1: Inclusionary Criteria for the Book of Revelation into the Canon

The Book of Revelation is believed to have been written around the end of the first century at some point around 96 A.D⁶. It was not included in previous canons for several speculated reasons which will be discussed, but is included in the current canon. There is speculation surrounding the true author of this text, and that may partially be attributed to its initial speculation to be excluded from the biblical canon. The book's authorship was initially credited to John the Apostle, as in Revelation the author refers to himself only as "John⁴." The first early Christian writer to reference John the Apostle as author of Revelation was Justin Martyr in the second century. In his text *Dialogue with Trypho*, he states that:

"And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place. Just as our Lord also said, 'They shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal to the angels, the children of the God of the resurrection.'"

Thus, that is the earliest cited reference to John the Apostle being the author of Revelation that is known. However, several other early Christian writers instead reference a few alternative authors; with some concluding John of Patmos and others believing that John the Elder is the author. It is also possible that these two Johns are the same person, as was believed by the earliest Christian scholars.

John of Patmos, also called John the Revelator, John the Divine and John the Theologian, is believed by some modern scholars to have written Revelation. Whether it is truly known who this exact "John" is or not, it is known that the Revelation from God came to him while he was in exile on the island of Patmos, located near Greece. John was purportedly exiled from the Roman Empire by Emperor Domitian as a result of anti-Christian persecution. This derives from early on in the first chapter of Revelation, as he states "I John, your brother and partaker with you in tribulation and kingdom and patience *which are* in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for

the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev 1.9)¹.” Although this “John” was present on the island of Patmos, there is evidence still that argues it is not John the Apostle. Many scholars argued that these two “John” characters were indeed the same person, but other early Christian texts present writings that suggest otherwise. Writings from Dionysius of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea note differences in language and theological methodology between Revelation and the Gospel of John. For example, Bart Ehrman states⁵:

“In any event, it can be stated without reservation that whoever wrote the Gospel (Fourth Gospel) did not also write this book. For one thing, the theological emphases are quite distinct. In the Gospel of John there is virtually no concern for the coming end of the age (contrast the Synoptics, with their proclamation of the imminent arrival of the Son of man); in the book of Revelation the end is nearly the entire concern. Even more importantly, as recognized even by linguists in early Christianity, the writing styles of these two books are completely different. Detailed studies have shown that the author of Revelation was principally literate in a Semitic language, probably Aramaic, and knew Greek as a second language.”

This citation discounts the possibility that John the Apostle could have written Revelation due to fundamental style differences. In modern critical scholarship, it is now widely rejected that John the Apostle was actually the author of that book¹⁰. It must not be discounted, however, that authors of that time used pseudonyms to write for fear of being prosecuted⁷. This does not prove that John of Patmos was the author due to the fact that Eusebius’ writings have roots in earlier texts that connect to John the Presbyter.

John the Elder, also known as John the Presbyter and John the Divine, is another possible author for the Book of Revelation*. After Dionysius of Alexandria declared that John the Apostle was indeed not the author, the name of John the Presbyter appears in fragments written by Papias of Hierapolis and Irenaeus of Lyons⁹. Eusebius, in fact, quotes the works of Papias in his argument against John the Apostle having authored Revelation. One of Papias’ fragments, *History of the Church*, is quoted by Eusebius:

“It is worthwhile observing here that the name John is twice enumerated by him. The first one he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles, clearly meaning the evangelist; but the other John he mentions after an interval, and places him among others outside of the number of the apostles, putting

Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him a presbyter. This shows that the statement of those is true, who say that there were two persons in Asia that bore the same name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which, even to the present day, is called John's. It is important to notice this. For it is probable that it was the second, if one is not willing to admit that it was the first that saw the Revelation, which is ascribed by name to John.”

*Gospel authorship is generally attributed to John the Apostle, also referred to as John the beloved disciple of Jesus. He was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and his brother was James the Apostle. The phrase “the Disciple whom Jesus loved” appears only in the Gospel of John and not in any other New Testament accounts of Jesus. John 21:24 claims that the Gospel of John is based on the written testimony of this disciple.

These pieces of evidence do provide framework for a possible author, but cannot definitively place the pen in the hands of someone who is agreed upon by all. There are still too many speculations that can cause any of these ideas to be untrue.

There is no significant evidence that can disprove that John of Patmos and John the Elder was not indeed the same person. There is evidence, as previously stated, that distinguishes John the Elder from John the Apostle. There are several controversies surrounding Eusebius’ identification which remind us that a large part of this work is inevitably left up to interpretation. For example, it is argued that Eusebius’ interpretation may have derived from his opposition to the Book of Revelation and by distinguishing between two Johns he could discount the work and provide fuel for having it excluded from the canon¹⁰. Also, Eusebius is quoted as saying, “Papias was not himself a hearer and eye-witness of the holy apostles” which is contradicted in his writing of the *Chronicle* in which he exclusively calls John the Apostle the “teacher of Papias.” Nonetheless, it was probably included in the canon due to the fact that early scholars “believed the author was, in fact, Jesus’ earthly disciple.¹⁹”

The author of Revelation is very important to this topic, because one of the major inclusionary criteria for the canon here can be identified as the author.

*Polycarp of Smyrna appears to have been a direct associate of John the Apostle. His orthodoxy is widely accepted in many groups, and is believed to have been the one who compiled, edited, and published the New Testament. This is an important connection because whoever

authored Revelation mentions that a book will be written and sent to seven churches, one of which is in Smyrna. Thus Polycarp's writings are of great interest.

It can be assumed that one of the most important criterions, if not the most important overall, has to be the source of the text. Without legitimate citation and authorship, surely the Christian church cannot teach such writings or use them as their doctrine. In this case, however, there is not distinct evidence that can automatically select out one author. It would make the most sense, in the eyes of the church, if John the Apostle were the author. That would mean the Revelation received did truly come directly from God, as the apostles had the most direct and intimate contact with him*. Without proof, authorship cannot be one of the inclusionary or exclusionary criteria that allowed Revelation into the canon or that kept other apocalyptic texts out. Therefore, another or a collection of other criteria must be more important than authorship if Revelation is still to be superior to other apocalyptic texts and be included in the canon.

Although the authorship of Revelation is disputed, and it can seemingly be discounted that authorship was not an important criteria in establishing the canon, the history of how the twenty-seven books came to be accepted may perhaps shed some light on what was truly important. The New Testament was arguably written in light of the Old Testament scripture, as Paul seems to re-interpret them in the light of God's new revelation in Jesus⁴. There is an argument by David Meade that states, "previous revelation was actualized to meet the needs of a new generation.^b" That idea seemed to have been adopted by the early church, as it allowed reinterpretation of the prophecies of the Jewish Scripture towards something that applied to Jesus and the apostolic revelation of those times. This allowed for inspiration amongst not only those who were apostles and eye-witnesses, but other writers as well. The collection of the words of

Jesus and the apostles parallel with the Jewish Scriptures eventually took shape as the authoritative stance similar to the scriptural tradition of the Jews.

By the end of the first century, Christians had a core of scripture that was more or less firm across all boundaries of the church¹⁷. It was evident that each local church or area held that same core, but with some slight variations on included texts within the fluid edges of the earliest form of a “canon.” All of these collections contained, without much dispute, all writings of Paul while the varying texts often included writings such as the *Didache*, the *Shepard of Hermas*, and *I Clement*.

It was not until the middle of the second century when the first real challenge was presented addressing the ambiguity of the loosely held “canon” by a man named Marcion. Marcion was excommunicated by the Roman church for heresy on grounds of his own brand of Christianity that was becoming a threat to the church. His idea was based on rejection of Christian Scripture portraying Jesus as a fulfillment of the Jewish covenant. His theological ideas caused him to become one of the first Christians to vouch for a specific list of books that could provide guidelines for worship that were more specific. Although his proposed canon of books was very small and did not hold value to the church, it sparked a movement within the church to come to the defense of the other books that were excluded from Marcion’s canon¹⁵.

What can be drawn from this historical event is that the church did not wish to narrow its views, and accepted diversity and plurality of the scripture that is ultimately represented in its theology. In some ways, more of a definition of a true God was presented as a result of this challenge. The narrow beliefs presented by Marcion allowed the church to reflect upon previous areas of the scripture that did not allow room for growth. However, the next challenge presented to the newly formed idea of the canon caused the church to swiftly close the door upon continued

spiritual revelation. This event even reached so far as to eventually have some books excluded from the canon because they were believed to be “forged in Paul’s name to further the heresy of Marcion.”

A group of Christians claiming to follow a man named Montanus claimed to be a new religion of the Holy Spirit and celebrated “ecstatic outbursts that it regarded as the only true form of Christianity.” Thus, any “divine inspiration” received would be considered scripture and would open the canon to a perhaps endless outpouring of inspiration. The church was then therefore forced to assess what inspiration was legitimate as the self-proclaimed prophets of Montanism were challenging the notion of inspiration. The response of the church was to argue that the canon of scripture should be limited only to books that had apostolic and eye-witness authority¹⁵. This decision by the church would prove to be one of monumental magnitude as it set the boundaries for an important standard of criteria for canonicity. A special type of inspiration was needed, and the Montanist movement caused the church to mark the end of what it would allow in terms of plurality and diversity in its ideologies.

The fourth century saw the first official list of twenty seven books to become the canon for Christian Scripture. The list was published in the middle of the century and was proposed by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria¹⁵. The list of books that he created are the books that are included in the canon today, but in a slightly different order. It must be noted that it was not simply published without dispute, as at least three synods were held to debate the ratification of the list around the turn of the fifth century. There are several reasons to why it is believed that this canon was able to gain approval, including support of some important theologians of the time.

The first reason was that there was an acceptance of a similar list of books by the Western church, as argued by Jerome. Jerome argued for the acceptance of famously disputed books, such as Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, and Revelation¹⁵. It is also said that Jerome's translation of the Bible mirrored that of Athanasius', drawing even more of a parallel between the theology of the two scholars. A second reason was that the proposed canon was also considerably further supported by Augustine, another of the Western church's leading scholars on three separate occasions over the course of twenty years in Hippo, Carthage, and Carthage again at a later date during the third and fourth centuries¹⁴. The fact that this proposed canon warranted significant support from the scholars mentioned means that the ideologies must have been nearly identical. Thus, this indicates that at the synods within the discussions held about the canon being formed there must also have been some opposition to including Revelation.

One last challenge to the New Testament canon came in the sixteenth century from Martin Luther and the reformers. Luther, like Marcion, wished to change the canon to reflect his own theological beliefs*. His efforts convinced the Lutheran church to maintain a more open approach to the canon, and this included refraining from having lists of books as parts of confessional statements¹⁵. Other reformers, however, continued to support the twenty seven books chosen originally as authoritative. Also, the statement of the Council of Trent in 1546 provided an additional authority over the sacred nature of the Bible, including the New Testament canon.

*It is important to denote between canons of the Jewish scriptures. Palestinian scripture had to be written in Palestine, and Luther embraced only this canon. Catholic and orthodox churches embraced the Alexandrian canon. This is acute at the time of the reformation as there is a difference in canons of the Old Testament.

Several important pieces of information can be taken from this trace through history of the formation of the New Testament canon. First, the challenges that were presented to the church caused an emphasis to be placed on authority rather than inspiration. This is key to the argument of criteria of canonicity because it caused a narrowing of the books that would be considered acceptable to be included in the canon. The movements of reformation appealed to the limits of what was considered to be acceptable inspiration by the Christian church. It was also an appeal to the theology and doctrine of the apostolic and eye-witness tradition, as no book that did not meet that specification was not to be accepted into the canon. Also of importance to this argument is the fact that when the canon was being proposed, there had to be significant backing for certain disputed books, which included Revelation. This still reaffirms that this process of selecting a canon was not so cut and dry, and that there must be certain other special characteristics or tradition of the book that allowed it to gain entrance into the canon. Especially with the eye-witness and apostolic tradition and the uncertainty surrounding the inspiration and authorship of Revelation, a certain “overriding factor” must be present about the writing. The criteria of eye-witness tradition and apostolic authority can therefore be discounted as exclusionary criteria as the inspiration of Revelation is unknown. There may be some further information that can be assessed by looking at canons that almost became accepted and how they came to be.

Two proposed canons in particular gained much popularity during their time and had considerable support. The Muratorian Canon, also known as the Muratorian Fragment and the list of Eusebius of Caesarea are considered by many to have laid the foundation for the New Testament that came to be accepted³. The Muratorian Fragment is an interesting piece of text that consists of eighty-five lines of an assortment of books. The collection of books was indeed

considered to be authoritative by the church, and it consisted of four separate categories. The fragment was composed originally in Greek and is believed to have been written at some point towards the end of the second century because the author, who remains anonymous, refers to Pius I.

The first category contained books that were universally accepted by the church such as the Gospels, the Book of Acts, letters to Paul, letters of John, *Wisdom of Solomon*, and the Apocalypse of John³. This categorization is somewhat contradictory to the information presented in the previous paragraph. When the present canon was being disputed, there was speculation over Revelation and whether it should be included or not. However, the Muratorian Fragment is perceived to have been written at the turn of the second century. The current canon was not accepted until the fourth century, insinuating that there may have been a historical event that challenged the authority of Revelation³. It is entirely possible that the Montanist movement may have had something to do with this, as it was one of the major limiting factors that caused the transition of stressing authority over inspiration. For that reason, the early church scholars may have recognized the lack of clarity in Revelation's authorship and for the first time caused speculation as to whether the book should be included in the canon or not. Still, something must be identified that caused acceptance into the canon without much speculation in the fourth century.

*Books that were excluded from the Protestant canon exclude things supported in the Catholic canon of Old Testament such as the Book of Wisdom, Tobit, and the Maccabees. These dealt with things such as prayers for the dead, Purgatory, and intercessions of angels and saints. The Protestants accept the Catholic New Testament, but have adapted the Jewish Old Testament.

The second category contains one disputed book, the *Apocalypse of Peter* which was and still is argued by some to be valid enough to gain inclusion in the canon³. A full examination on

the exclusionary criteria for this book will appear later in this paper, but a general trend can be noted. There always seems to be speculation around apocalyptic writings, and they either barely make it into the canon or are only just excluded. The content of the apocalyptic writings may lie on the blurred edge of what is acceptable for canon and what is not. The *Apocalypse of Peter* is the second most accepted apocalyptic theory after Revelation, and extensive analyses of this text as well as apocalypses of the other apostles are warranted due to the purported requirements of the biblical canon which include eye-witness and apostolic authority⁴. The third category contained books that were not acceptable for public reading and worship, but were deemed acceptable for private reading. The most noteworthy book in that collection is the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Lastly, the fourth category lists books that should be rejected altogether by the church.

Bart Ehrman outlines four criteria for canonicity based on the analysis of the Muratorian Fragment. These proposed criteria are favorably outlined by the works considered in the first category of the Muratorian Fragment, and define what qualifies a scripture to be included³. The first criterion is the writing being ancient. Throughout time, proto-orthodox authors have maintained the importance of a text being composed near the time of Jesus. This does not mean ancient in terms of how the word is truly received, but ancient in the sense pertaining to the origin of the religion in Jesus' time. Therefore, any books to be considered worthy of inclusion must have been written close to his day to be considered authoritative. Again as mentioned above, a stress of authority was placed over inspiration, so these criteria mainly focus on areas that justify authority. It was for this reason that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was not included, as at the time of the decision of the final canon the work was considered to be too recent and therefore not as sacred.

The second criteria is defined as being apostolic, meaning it was written by an apostle or at the very least by one of their companions³. One might question why so much importance is placed on the apostolic writings and why they are so significant. First off, the words of the apostles are considered to carry the most authority because the apostles were the closest companions of Jesus, and much of what he said directly to them is believed to be in the words of the apostles. Second, the tradition of actual *words* of the apostles was always the way that teachings were passed around. However, the apostles could not be present in all churches across the ever-expanding empire. Therefore, the words of the apostles came to be written down by their own hand. Much controversy arose over this, as mentioned above with pseudonyms⁶. Early writers recognized that apostolic texts contained the most authority and carried the highest purity, and would sometimes forge writing under one of the apostle's names. The most classic example of this is forgery of some of Paul's writings by Marcionites to try and put a spin on the theology and Christology proposed by Paul³. This criterion is clearly the main one that troubles the Apocalypse of John repeatedly. Since it was not and is still not known which "John" wrote the text, it was widely rejected by Eastern proto-orthodox scholars through the first four centuries. However, another criterion may have allowed it to surpass this seemingly strict requirement.

*The Epistle of Barnabas is believed to have been excluded from the canon due to a pseudonymously-written issue. It is now ascribed to an unknown early Christian teacher, as Eusebius rejected the work as being written by Barnabas.

The third criterion is that the text must be Catholic³. This means that the books had to have widespread use among the "established" churches and were therefore considered universal. Any text that did not have widespread popularity was therefore excluded, such as the Apocalypse of Peter. The author appeared to favor the book, but he also noted that it was not accepted for reading in the church in the proto-orthodox community. It was for this reason that some of the

shorter epistles, such as 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, and Jude were not originally included. However, those works were later determined to be apostolic and were thus included in the canon.

The fourth and most “important” criterion as deemed by Ehrman is the text being orthodox³. This is deemed the most important criterion because it deals with a book’s theological character which ultimately mattered the most to proto-orthodox Christians. The other three criteria can be almost viewed as symbionts to this one in several different aspects. For example, if a book was not orthodox, then it was not apostolic or ancient, or even Catholic for that matter. This can be seen in Serapion’s evaluation of the Gospel of Peter. He knew that Peter did not write it because it contained a seemingly docetic Christology, and to him Peter would obviously have not written something like that. Although this may not be the way that current scholars solve issues of authorship today, it was a significant deciding factor among the proto-orthodox. It was by this criterion that the Marcionite forgeries of Paul were found.

Another proposed canon came from Eusebius of Caesarea in the early fourth century in the form of his *Ecclesiastical History*³. It addressed the same issue of the books to be included as canon for the Christian church. Eusebius counted “the votes of his witnesses” in order to gauge the support of each book⁵. His first category was the books that were believed to be universally accepted. This list included the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, Pauline epistles, 1 Peter, and 1 John. Again, and exclusively this time, he noted question as to whether the Apocalypse of John should be included in the category¹³. He eventually chose to include it in that category as well as those he concluded were to be rejected. This is an interesting ideology, as it seems as though he was reluctant to include it in his category of books that were universally accepted.

The second category was similar to the second category of the Muratorian Fragment in the sense that it listed books that were more disputed, but still familiar to the church. This

category included James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John. The last category contained books that were to be rejected due to significant doubt about their apostolic authorship and character, and included the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Didache*, and *Acts of Paul*. This exclusion is rightly so based on the established criteria of eye-witness and apostolic character set by the church in the current canon at the end of the fourth century¹³. There is much support for the notion that the current canon may have used much of this list as well as the Muratorian Canon as templates.

There was considerable disagreement in the work by Eusebius over whether Revelation was to be included in the canon or not. There were many different types of debates, including if Revelation's teaching was to be taken seriously and if it was written by John the Apostle or not¹⁴. The actual substance of the debates related to the doctrine of the scripture, and whether a "potentially crass millenarian view" could be accepted³. It is noted in his work that these issues were not quickly dissolved, however, as he presents the work as his attempt to "summarize the New Testament."

Much of the presented evidence thus far has shown that the Book of Revelation received scrutiny under nearly every circumstance when its inclusion in the canon was proposed. The focus of the paper will now shift to criteria of several documents that granted their exclusion from the canon. This includes the works listed in the introduction to the paper, and will delve into the differences they share or may even have in common with the Book of Revelation. Again, the main question here focuses on the major differences that set Revelation apart from all the rest of the apocalypses. The inclusionary criteria were already outlined, so now each work will be held to those standards and scrutinized under the same lens.

Chapter 2: Exclusionary Criteria

Perhaps the best place to establish exclusionary criteria for books that did not make it into the present canon is with the *Apocalypse of Peter*, as it is recognized by many leading authorities as the second most accepted apocalypse behind Revelation. This book can be seen in both the Muratorian Fragment as well as the list of books proposed by Eusebius of Caesarea as narrowly missing widespread use in the church as material to be preached. For these reasons, it is possible that this text may meet one or a few of the inclusionary criteria outlined in the first chapter of this study. Therefore, only partial qualification as outlined by the inclusionary criteria can be defined as an exclusionary criterion, since Revelation met all four of criteria outlined by Ehrman. As we take a closer look at the origins and influences of this text, it may be possible to define more concrete exclusionary criteria as outlined by the inclusionary criteria.

There are three different apocalypses which all claim to be written by Peter, the disciple of Jesus. The one discussed here was discovered in the tomb of a Christian monk in 1887 along with the Gospel of Peter. This is the most recognized and authoritative version of the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the Ethiopic translation appears to be the most accurate portrayal of the text⁴. The text can be dated back to the second century, and as stated above was believed to have come directly from the pen of Peter himself. The text was definitely well versed in early Christianity, and some churches even used the text as a part of the New Testament Scriptures. We once again traverse the lines of the Muratorian Fragment for reference, as it states “the Apocalypses also of John and Peter only do we receive, which some among us would not have read in church.” As the earliest known source of a proposed canon, the Muratorian Fragment carries a significant amount of weight and influence in regards to the matter⁶. This means that the criterion indirectly

outlined in the fragment itself surely set a benchmark of what was to be included. Why, then, was the *Apocalypse of Peter* mentioned on the same level as the Book of Revelation or the “Apocalypse of John” as it is referred to? It should be noted that there is significant difference in the stories, as Revelation portrays the end of an age and how the world will come to an end, and the *Apocalypse of Peter* determines the fates of all those who have died. It offers the first notions of heaven and hell, many of which we believe them to actually be similar to. The apocalypse also depicts graphic punishments and grim pictures within its lines. An examination into the influence of the Muratorian Fragment and the other proposed canons may provide some insight as to why the *Apocalypse of Peter* had authority in the days of early Christianity.

The Muratorian Fragment dates back to the second century, as mentioned above, which is along the lines of when some of the apostolic texts were being accepted as authoritative³. There is some evidence that suggests the Muratorian Fragment contains influence from Alexandria. This evidence comes directly from the fragment’s inclusion of the *Apocalypse of Peter* into the canon, due to the fact that this apocalypse falls into the genre of Clementine literature. It is believed that Clementine literature was popular in Alexandria during the early centuries, due to Clement himself who authored several important teachings and lived in Alexandria¹⁵.

Clement of Alexandria was heavily influenced by Hellenistic overtones, more so than any of the other Christian thinkers of his time¹². Names such as Plato and the Stoics were familiar to the mind of Clement, and his major works showed these influences. A scholar of Clement at the Catechetical School of Alexandria by the name of Origen was born in 185 and was regarded as a prodigy early on in his childhood. It was noted by Eusebius that he was appointed to be the head of the famous school in Alexandria as a teenager, and would go on to become the leading spokesperson for proto-orthodoxy in his day¹⁸. The importance here is that Origen proposed his

own canon of New Testament Scriptures. He makes references to the canon, and the references can show how the canon was beginning to become defined in Alexandria in the early third century¹¹. There is something truly interesting to note here; and that is the fact that Origen disputes the inclusion of Revelation into the canon. He says,

“And why do we need to speak of the one who reclined on Jesus’ breast, John, who left behind one Gospel, while admitting that he could produce so many that the world would not be able to contain them [John 21:25]? He also wrote the Apocalypse, after being ordered to be silent and not to write what was spoken by the voices of the seven thunders (Rev10.3-4). He also left behind an epistle of a very few lines, and possibly a second and third. For not everyone agrees that these are genuine. But taken together, both do not contain a hundred lines.”

There must have been a point of disconnect between the time that the Muratorian Canon was proposed and when this was proposed. There also must be an underlying difference of influence, which is again puzzling as the Muratorian Canon appears to have the Clementine influence with the inclusion of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which was taught to Origen. All of this knowledge and influence circles around Alexandria, which was the authority of proto-orthodoxy during the time of canon development. This theory is further backed by the canon proposed by Eusebius of Caesarea.

Eusebius of Caesarea, known as “Father of Church History,” is believed to have been born around 260 and was a Roman historian of Greek descent. He lived during the time of Roman Emperor Constantine, and purportedly had support from him. He also identifies Pope Dionysus of Alexandria as a contemporary¹⁴. Thus, the influence of Alexandrian proto-orthodoxy was present during his time. In fact, the main source of dogmatic inspiration of Eusebius was indeed none other than Origen of Alexandria. Here, we will take a detour to summarize Athanasius of Alexandria to lead into the crossing of paths between him and Eusebius.

Athanasius of Alexandria proposed the canon that eventually came to be accepted as the current canon. His proposed list of twenty-seven books also had influence of Clementine literature in Alexandria, but did not include the *Apocalypse of Peter* in his list or as a recommended text otherwise, unlike the *Shepherd of Hermas* which he declared may be read³. Eusebius included the *Apocalypse of Peter* as a book that is “false” or pseudonymously written. Therefore, it is agreed upon by two of the most important early Christian scholars that this text was not to be included in the canon⁸. The two scholars were both present at a meeting in Constantinople, of which Athanasius and Eusebius were both bishops of their respective areas. This conveys heavy influence that these two proposed canons from these scholars carries, and therefore the *Apocalypse of Peter* not being included in either one serves as an exclusionary criterion in itself. This is puzzling based on the influence of the work, but nonetheless an immensely important discovery was probably the ultimate reason that it was excluded from the canon.

As previously stated, writing under a pseudonym was not uncommon in the times when scripture was being written, due to fear of being condemned for heresy and exiled⁶. This brings difficulty to deciding which scripture belongs in the canon due to the fact that hundreds of false works were produced, and scholars had to decipher which ones were truly written by their claimed authors and which were falsely claimed. This clearly violates one of the major inclusionary criteria for being accepted into the canon, which is being from apostolic descent³. This was inherently too much of a deficit for the early councils to overlook, and rightfully so as the true author is not known and therefore cannot be entrusted with being a part of the New Testament scriptures. Thus, an exclusionary criterion can be established pertaining to

pseudonymous composition. However, I will later discuss theories of pseudonymity and the credibility that they may have.

The next work that will be examined and narrowly missed acceptance into the canon is the *Shepherd* of Hermas. This text was fairly popular in early Christian churches, and was still accepted as able to be read in church by the anonymous author of the Muratorian Canon⁴. The text is a very unique and interesting one, and is a different type of apocalypse that still fits under the classical definition. An “apocalypse” is defined as a disclosure or revelation¹³. Although is not a revelation about the end of an age like most of the other apocalypses, it is nonetheless a revelation that brings ethics into the spotlight. It is revelatory in the sense that it contains five visions, twelve mandates, and ten similitudes (parables). The work was composed by Hermas, who was a former slave and evidence suggests that he was the brother of Pius I, the bishop of Rome.

“But Hermas wrote The Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the 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, [12] or among the Apostles, for it is after their time.” –Muratorian Fragment

Since the substance of the paper appears to be in line with Christian doctrine, a few deciding factors probably kept this book out of the canon. The first, and perhaps the most accurate, is that it was not ancient as denoted by the quote above. Clearly, since the text is dated to approximately the middle of the second century. This date is considered to be too far after the time of the apostles, and thus was the main exclusionary point that perhaps kept the *Shepherd* out of the canon. This, however, raises the question of what is considered to be too late or too far removed from the time of the apostles? Since Revelation was written towards the end of the first century, and this text is hesitantly dated to the middle of the second century, we can derive that there is a

narrow window. One piece of evidence, however, places the dating at least “one hundred and fifty years after the Christ child” due to how Jesus is spoken of. He is mentioned as the “Son of God” and never as “Christ” or “Jesus.” The “Son of God” title is more of an Egyptian and Persian deist concept¹⁸. Although this was never spoken of explicitly, the determination of valuable substance should be drawn from the shortest amount of time possible after the apostles to ensure credibility.

The second factor that could have played a role of this text not getting into the canon was that it was not very well received amongst a few popular early scholars, such as Clement of Alexandria¹⁵. His well-known influence in the era could very well have prevented the text from becoming widely used by all churches, allowing it to meet at least one of the criteria for inclusion². Also, an additional argument may be made that this document contained adoptionism. Bogdan G. Bucur notes how widely accepted the text was among “orthodox” Christians, but was never criticized for portraying a style of adoptionistic Christology^a. The culmination of these factors may very well have solidified the exclusion of the *Shepherd* of Hermas from the New Testament canon.

The *Apocalypse of Paul* was another apocalypse that did not gain entrance into the canon. This is a third century document, and the original version has been lost⁴. It has been reconstructed from later translations, but the original is believed to have been written in Greek. This apocalypse, similarly to the *Apocalypse of Peter*, presents a detailed vision of heaven and hell purportedly experienced by Paul the Apostle. The text can be viewed closely as almost a sort of expansion or rearrangement of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, but with a few differences². It is an extension in the sense that it frames the reasons for the visits to heaven and hell as Paul being a witness to the death and judgement of wicked and righteous men. However, it played a major

role in shaping early Christian morals as it portrayed many details about the afterlife and how people came to believe it.

The origins of this book are quite interesting as it appears to use the *Apocalypse of Peter* as a source⁵. Also, the book itself was not written by Paul, but by a pseudonymous author. Paul himself is not believed to have written the book as in it, there is a quote that reads that the content of the book includes things that “could not be uttered.” Thus, the reason here for a pseudonymous author may be viewed as more credible than other cases as someone was merely communicating what was observed by Paul. It is also interesting to note the amount of parallel between this text and the one by Peter. It may be entirely possible that Peter had communicated his experiences to Paul, and that Paul later had his own experience. However, there is no evidence that can disprove Peter and Paul having their own unique experiences. This in turn would provide more truth to the message contained in both of the texts, as nearly the same experience was had by two Apostles. We then have to ask if this was the case, then how could the early Christians ignore the content and label the books as apocrypha and not canonical?

This leads to a challenge of pseudonymous work being an exclusionary criterion. The reasoning of the church is that unless the author is of apostolic origin, then the text cannot be trusted as it may portray different views, be altered, or even heretical. This is not bad reasoning, as they only wish to ensure the most authentic content will be included in the canon, but what about the special circumstances such as the one listed above? Both apocalypses from Peter and Paul were written pseudonymously, but the possible reasoning behind may just reveal a weak point in the reasoning for excluding these books from the canon. If both Peter and Paul were instructed to or could not bring themselves to utter what they saw, and kept some type of record of it, what is to say that the authors who copied it or completely wrote it out were wrong? We

may never know that the source was true, but for that reason I believe that the texts should not receive as little credibility as they are granted.

Yet another apocryphal apocalypse to be discussed is that of Thomas. This apocalypse is of importance to this discussion because it is similar to Revelation, but is written in a more straightforward manner with less mysticism⁴. Therefore, since it is similar to the book of Revelation and the apparent author is known and not pseudonymous, why is this text not included as canonical? According to Milton Gatch, the text was “most likely accepted as canonical in certain parts of Western Christendom in the ninth and tenth centuries.”⁵ Although this is not true across the spectrum of Christianity, there is something to be said for a certain part accepting this text as canonical.

The only possibility that comes to the forefront when considering the exclusion of this text from the canon is the recentness of which it was written. Though an exact date cannot be placed on an original composition, and the earliest hypothesized date only dates back to the eighth century¹⁸. Many different interpretations and translations of the seemingly mysterious and unnamed “text” at the time may also have clouded the reputation of this book as well. Therefore, we can assume that it is out of the reach of being “ancient” as designated by the inclusionary criteria.

*The fifteen signs of doomsday stem from the Apocalypse of Thomas and are found in many post-millennial manuscripts in Latin and in the vernacular. These signs had influence in medieval Western literature and shaped the minds of people for how the world would come to an end.

All of these texts discussed in this chapter are unique in their own right. Although some draw some strong parallels to each other or even to other canonical texts, none of them were able to prevail over the texts that are currently included. This is true for several reasons mentioned,

including pseudonymous composition, date written, and influence of early Christian scholars. These criteria were ultimately outlined by the inclusionary criteria from the first chapter of this discussion, yet there may be some weak spots in the exclusionary criteria and therefore ultimately the inclusionary criteria.

What I believe is the strongest argument against the inclusionary criteria is the pseudonymous authorship of certain texts. Even though certain texts such as the apocalypses of Peter and Paul were not written by the apostles themselves, they should not be excluded only on the fact that they were not penned by the Apostles. Something being written down in a matter to be communicated solely for the fact that the original experience could not be uttered classifies credibility. However, the church disagrees as there is too much to sort through to prove that these texts were written pseudonymously for the right reasons. For that reason until solid evidence can be presented that would otherwise prove the credibility of the authorship, the inclusionary criteria will not be overridden.

The inclusionary criteria established are entirely thorough and consistent, except for Revelation in which the real reason for its inclusion remains unknown. The inclusionary criteria outlined and the exclusionary criteria can explain the inclusion and exclusion of every book except for Revelation. Perhaps the author of Revelation will never truly be known, but for now the message and other criterion met by the book outweigh the competitors and have allowed it to stay in the canon. It is possible that it may be time for a re-evaluation of these inclusionary criteria by the church, and perhaps even a re-evaluation of the canon to allow new books in and old books to be removed. In conclusion, the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria as defined by the Christian church and exemplified by the current list of New Testament books are consistent within every book except the Book of Revelation in which the true author is not know

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