

VICTORINUS OF PETTAU AS
THE AUTHOR OF THE CANON MURATORI

To Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J.

The authorship of the Muratorian Fragment is a mystery that has been all but abandoned by contemporary scholarship. First discovered by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in the Ambrosian Library at Milan in a manuscript acquired from Columban's monastery at Bobbio, the Fragment was published in 1740 as a specimen of the miserable Latin of medieval scribes in Italy.¹ The Fragment begins and ends abruptly in incomplete sentences, and the orthography of the main text is notoriously defective. And yet, according to traditional scholarship, the eighty-five surviving lines of enigmatic script comprise the earliest list of the books of the New Testament canon. Muratori conjectured that the Fragment had originally been composed in Greek by Gaius of Rome, and though subsequent scholarship initially retained the hypothesis that the present text of the Fragment represents a Latin translation, the nomination of Gaius as the Fragmentist was soon dismissed as indefensible.² J. B. Lightfoot argued that Hippolytus had authored the

¹ The Latin text of the Muratorian Fragment is reproduced in an appendix at the end of this article. All quotations of the Fragment will be drawn from the Latin edition by Hans Lietzmann (*Das Muratorische Fragment und die monarchianischen Prologe zu den Evangelien* [Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber, 1902; repr., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1933], 5–11) and the English translation by Bruce Metzger (*The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987], 305–7). See also L. A. Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicae Medii Aevi*, vol. 3 (Mediolani: Ex Typographia Societatis Palatinae, 1740; repr., Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1965), 853–56. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles secured a photographic reproduction of the Fragment and published it in his analytical commentary (*Canon Muratorianus: The Earliest Catalogue of the Books of the New Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867]). For other transcriptions of the text, see Brooke Foss Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1855; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 521–38; Adolf von Harnack, „Das Muratorische Fragment,“ *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 3 (1878): 595–99; and E. S. Buchanan, „The Codex Muratorianus,“ *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (1907): 537–45.

² In 1873, Friedrich Hermann Hesse argued for a Latin original of the Fragment (*Das Muratorische Fragment* [Giessen: J. Ricker], 25–39). This conclusion was adopted by scholars such as C. P. Caspari (*Ungedruckte, unbeachtete und wenig beachtete Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel* [Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1875; repr., 1964], 3:410), George Salmon (“Muratorian Fragment,” in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, ed. William Smith and Henry Wace

Fragment, reasoning that whereas Gaius rejected Revelation, Hippolytus and the Fragmentist both accepted the Johannine Apocalypse.³ However, this hypothesis was all but demolished by the criticisms of Adolf von Harnack, who drew attention to the fact that Hippolytus received Hebrews while the Fragmentist passed over it in silence.⁴ Despite centuries of research, no consensus has been achieved concerning the identity of the anonymous author.⁵ The present author contends that the Fragment can be attributed directly to the third-century bishop Victorinus of Pettau. The argument outlined below is bipartite. First, Victorinus documents more parallels to the Muratorian Fragment than any

[London: John Murray, 1877], 3:1000–1), and Adolf von Harnack (*Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897; repr., 1958], 1.2:646–47). Although modern scholars are usually reluctant to attempt to determine the original language of the Muratorian Fragment, Arnold Ehrhardt also advocates a Latin original (“The Gospels in the Muratorian Fragment,” in *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964], 11).

³ Lightfoot confesses: “I am ready to accept the Hippolytean authorship. To this view I am predisposed by the fact that there was no one else in Rome at this time, so far as we know, competent to produce it” (“The Muratorian Fragment,” *The Academy* 36 [September 21, 1889]: 188). The theory that Hippolytus composed the Fragment attracted the support of T. H. Robinson (“The Authorship of the Muratorian Canon,” *The Expositor* 1 [7th series, 1906]: 481–95) and Theodor Zahn („Hippolytus, der Verfasser des Muratorischen Kanons,” *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 33 [1922]: 417–36).

⁴ After outlining a number of problems with this theory, Harnack concluded that the Fragment represented an official ecclesiastical instrument issued either by Bishop Victor of Rome or perhaps Zephyrinus („Über den Verfasser und den literarischen Charakter des Muratorischen Fragments,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums* 24 [1925]: 15–16). M. J. Lagrange attempted to defend the Hippolytean theory of authorship against Harnack by claiming that the copyist had inadvertently omitted a line, for not only is Hebrews left unmentioned, but James and 2 Peter as well: «Nous concluons plus nettement que leur absence du Canon doit s’expliquer plutôt par une lacune dans le copie que par une intention de l’auteur. Si au contraire on se refuse à aucune correction dans le Canon, il faudra conclure avec Harnack qu’il n’est pas l’oeuvre d’Hippolyte» («Le Canon d’Hippolyte et le Fragment de Muratori,» *Revue biblique* 42 [1933]: 186).

⁵ Nominations that won an inconsequential following include Papias (Simon Maria de Magistris, *Daniel secundum Septuaginta ex Tetraplis Origenis* [Rome: Typis Propagandae Fidei, 1772], 467), Hegesippus (Christian Bunsen, *Analecta Ante-Nicaena*, vol. 1 [London: Longman, 1854; repr., Aalen: Scientia, 1968], 125), Polycrates of Ephesus (Gottfried Kühn, *Das muratorische Fragment über die Bücher des neuen Testaments* [Zürich: S. Höhr, 1892], 33), Clement of Alexandria (John Chapman, «L’auteur du Canon Muratorien,» *Revue Bénédictine* 21 [1904]: 263), Melito of Sardis (Vernon Bartlet, “Melito the Author of the Muratorian Canon,” *The Expositor* 2 [7th series, 1906]: 214), and Rhodon (C. Erbes, „Die Zeit des Muratorischen Fragments,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 35 [1914]: 360). Heinrich W. J. Thiersch submitted that the Fragment was perhaps a forgery crafted by Muratori himself (*Versuch zur Herstellung des historischen Standpuncts für die Kritik der neutestamentlichen Schriften* [Erlangen: Heyder, 1845], 385).

other ancient author. Second, several of the otherwise inexplicable oddities of the Fragment are rendered intelligible by a Victorinan theory of authorship.

Even before we examine the specific arguments, a Victorinan theory of authorship would be attractive for several reasons. For one, it could account for the curious amalgam of amateurish Latin and Greek idiom embedded in the Fragment. In *De Viris Illustribus*, Jerome introduces our author as follows: “Victorinus, bishop of Poetovio, did not know Latin as well as he did Greek; as a result, his works, which are excellent in content, seem inferior in composition.”⁶ Victorinus’s poor Latin style but rich spiritual insight is the unrelenting theme of Jerome’s comments.⁷ Experts continue to endorse Jerome’s evaluation, and against those who would say otherwise, R. P. C. Hanson deemed Victorinus’s Latin “not execrable.”⁸ In as far as the copious errors found within the Fragment are probably not entirely the fault of the copyist but at least partially attributable to the primary author, one would conclude that the Fragment was penned by a notably poor Latinist.⁹ In addition, as J. B. Lightfoot among others observed, aside from a few lines that betray the creativity of a Latin author, the text submits to the restrictions

⁶ *De Vir. Ill.*, 74.1 (*On Illustrious Men*, trans. Thomas P. Halton, FathCh 100 [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999], 105).

⁷ Jerome again avers: “Victorinus, although he has the glory of a martyr’s crown, yet cannot express what he knows” (*Ep.*, 58.10 [NPNF second series, 6:122]; see also *ibid.*, 70.5). Jerome writes to Paula and Eustochium: “I have arranged to send you shortly the Commentaries of Hilary, that master of eloquence, and of the blessed martyr Victorinus, on the Gospel of Matthew. Their style is different, but the grace of the Spirit which wrought in them is one” (*Pf. Hom. Orig. in Luc.* [NPNF second series, 6:496]).

⁸ “The Rule of Faith of Victorinus and of Patrick,” in *Latin Script and Letters A.D. 400–900* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 27. In this context, Hanson notes that Victorinus’s Latin is actually superior to Saint Patrick’s. F. F. Bruce attests: “Jerome’s witness to his imperfect knowledge of Latin is decidedly justified by his writings that remain. While his meaning is usually quite plain, his grammatical constructions are the reverse. In many places they conform to no known rule of Latin syntax, classical or post-classical” (“The Earliest Latin Commentary on the Apocalypse,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 10 [1938]: 353–54).

⁹ See Joseph Verheyden, “The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute,” in *The Biblical Canons* (Louvain: University Press, 2003), 489.

of translation into Greek with surprisingly little resistance.¹⁰ Although this incidence could be interpreted as evidence that the Fragment represents a modestly amended translation of a Greek original, a more straightforward alternative would be to assign the text directly to a bilingual author.

Another reason why Victorinus should be considered a candidate author of the Fragment is the fact that, as we shall see, the ancient writers who most clearly appear to have been dependent on the Fragment are also those who are most explicitly familiar with the works of Victorinus, namely Chromatius of Aquileia, Isidore of Seville, and especially Jerome. Although Victorinus offers the single most parallels to the Fragment, Jerome offers the second most, and perhaps Jerome's extensive knowledge of Victorinus's commentaries is significant in deciphering an explanation for this correlation.¹¹ The above constellation of authors who both admit their indebtedness to the works of Victorinus and also evidence a dependence upon the Fragment certainly does

¹⁰ Lightfoot declared that the Fragment read "much more naturally" in Greek than in Latin ("The Muratorian Fragment," 187). He then stated: "The whole cast and connexion of the sentences are Greek" (*The Apostolic Fathers*, [London: Macmillan, 1889], 1.2:408). Christian Bunsen (*Analecta ante-Nicaena* [London: Longman, 1854; repr., Aalen: Scientia, 1968], 1:142), P. A. Böttlicher („Versuch einer Herstellung des *Canon Muratorianus*," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 10 [1854]: 127), and A. Hilgenfeld (*Historisch-kritisch Einleitung in das Neue Testament* [Leipzig: Fues, 1875], 97) all affirmed the affinity of the Fragment's Latin with Greek grammar and published Greek versions of the hypothetical original text.

¹¹ Jerome was more than acquainted with Victorinus's *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, the only one of the eleven treatises enumerated in *De Vir. Ill.*, 74.2, that has survived to the present. At the request of a certain Anatolius, who found Victorinus's millenarianism disturbing, Jerome produced a grammatically and theologically amended edition of the commentary in 398 A.D. (Martine Dulaey, «Jérôme, Victorin de Poetovio et le millénarisme,» in *Jérôme entre l'occident et l'orient* [Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1988], 95). The *Recensio Hieronymi* eventually replaced the *Editio Victorini* as the version in circulation, and it was not until the twentieth century that Johannes Haussleiter finally recovered the unrevised edition from a fifteenth-century manuscript in the Vatican Library. In 1916, Haussleiter published both editions of the commentary along with *De Fabrica Mundi*, a tractate unmentioned by any ancient author but unanimously ascribed to Victorinus since it was first published in 1688 (*Victorini Episcopi Petauionensis Opera*, ed. Johannes Haussleiter, CSEL 49 [Vindobonae: F. Tempsky, 1916], xxvii–xxx). Besides the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* and *De Fabrica Mundi*, a few fragments are also accepted as from the authentic writings of Victorinus, including *De Decem Virginibus* and the *Fragment Chronologique* (André Wilmart, "Un anonyme ancien *De X Virginibus*," *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétiennes* 1 [1911], 35–38; SC 423:20–23).

not necessitate the conclusion that Victorinus was the anonymous Fragmentist, but such a coincidence nevertheless merits further consideration. We shall now survey the parallels between Victorinus's *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* and the Muratorian Fragment.

I. The Johannine Legend and the Rule of Faith

The Fragmentist documents an enigmatic account concerning the composition of the Gospel of John, after which he cites the *regula fidei* in order to establish that the essential doctrine of the Fourth Gospel is in alignment with the synoptic tradition:

(9) The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. (10) To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], (11) he said, 'Fast with me from today for three days, and what (12) will be revealed to each one (13) let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed (14) to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, (15–16) that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various (17) elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, (18) nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, [19] since by the one sovereign Spirit all things (20) have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the (21) nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, (22) concerning life with his disciples, (23) and concerning his twofold coming; (24) the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, (25) the second glorious in royal power, (26) which is still in the future.¹²

The story that John had been compelled by his associates to write the Fourth Gospel is recorded by several other ancient authors: Clement of Alexandria, Victorinus, and Jerome.¹³ The report of the first of these three authors has survived only as quoted by Eusebius: "Last of all, aware that the physical facts had been recorded in the Gospels, encouraged by his pupils and irresistibly moved by the Spirit, John wrote a spiritual

¹² *Mur. Frag.*, 9–26 (Metzger, 306).

¹³ Adolf von Harnack proposed that the Johannine legend most probably entered into circulation through Papias („Über den Verfasser und den literarischen Charakter des Muratorischen Fragments," 9). In light of the tradition that Papias had been John's amanuensis, this theory appears quite probable (see especially *Frag. in Pap.*, 19, 20 [*The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer {London: Macmillan, 1891; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984}, 535]). After a reappraisal of the evidence, Ehrhard reconfirmed Harnack's conclusion ("The Gospels in the Muratorian Fragment," 18).

Gospel.”¹⁴ Although this account certainly evokes the story repeated in the Fragment, it is yet unique in several respects. For example, whereas Clement recounts that John’s “pupils” [γῶρῖμων] urged him to publish his Gospel, the Fragmentist recounts that John’s “fellow disciples and bishops” [*condiscipuli et episcopi*] compelled him to document his testimony.¹⁵ Arnold Ehrhardt and Martine Dulaey both conclude that Clement’s account is independent from the other sources, although each for different reasons.¹⁶ On the other hand, Victorinus and Jerome appear to offer authentic parallels to the Johannine legend as presented in the Fragment, the first of whom attests:

Indeed, when Valentinus and Cerinthus and Ebion and others of the school of Satan were scattered throughout the world, the bishops from the neighboring cities assembled and compelled him to write down his testimony in the Lord.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Hist. Eccl.*, 6.14.7 (*The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965], 254–55). Eusebius perhaps alludes to the Johannine legend when he writes of the disciples: “Yet of them all Matthew and John alone have left us memoirs of the Lord’s doings, and there is a firm tradition that they took to writing of necessity” (ibid., 3.24.5 [Williamson, 132]; see also ibid., 3.24.11). Charles E. Hill argues persuasively that Eusebius in fact derives this paragraph (3.24.5–13) from Papias (“What Papias Said about John [and Luke]: A ‘New’ Papian Fragment,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 [1998]: 611–13). In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that the Fragmentist should feature Andrew in his recounting of the Johannine legend, for Papias lists Andrew as the first of those from whom he had acquired his tradition (*Hist. Eccl.*, 3.39.4).

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.14.7 (Williamson, 255; *Die Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Eduard Schwartz [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908], 235); *Mur. Frag.*, 10 (Lietzmann, 5). In alignment with the Fragment, Victorinus mentions only “bishops” [episcopi] (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 11.1 [Haussleiter, 96]), and Jerome once speaks of “bishops” only (*De Vir. Ill.*, 9.1 [Halton, 19]) and in another context refers to both “bishops” and “brothers” (*Pf. Comm. in Matt.* [NPNF second series, 6:495]).

¹⁶ The former contends: “Clement maintains that it was St. John who was ‘taken up in the Spirit of God,’ whereas the Muratorian Fragment has it that St. Andrew was granted the vision that all the surviving disciples of the Lord should pool their analects. This difference, however, is perhaps not altogether conclusive because the record in the Muratorian Fragment is defective. Nevertheless, it makes it clear that the two stories are not identical, but two separate branches of an established tradition” (“The Gospels in the Muratorian Fragment,” 20). The latter deduces: «Selon le Pannonien, l’Évangile fut composé pour être un instrument dans la lutte antihérétique, idée qu’il a tient d’Irénée. Cette tradition est différente de celle des *Hypotyposes* (vulgarisée par Eusèbe), où Clément affirmait que l’Évangile de Jean aurait été rédigé dans le but de compléter les Synoptiques» (*Victorin de Poetovio: premier exégète latin* [Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1993], 1:73).

¹⁷ *Comm. in Apoc.*, 11.1 (Haussleiter, 94–96). All translations of Victorinus’s *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* are mine. Like the Fragmentist, Victorinus is inclined to comment on the circumstances of the composition of the Johannine literature, elsewhere recounting the story of the genesis of Revelation (ibid., 10.3).

In the fourth century, Jerome reaffirmed:

John, the apostle whom Jesus loved the most, the son of Zebedee . . . most recently of all, at the request of the bishops of Asia, wrote a Gospel against Cerinthus and other heretics.¹⁸

Jerome again writes concerning John:

When he was in Asia, at the time when the seeds of heresy were springing up (I refer to Cerinthus, Ebion, and the rest who say that Christ has not come in the flesh, whom he in his own epistle calls Antichrists, and whom the Apostle Paul frequently assails), he was urged by almost all the bishops of Asia then living, and by deputations from many Churches, to write more profoundly concerning the divinity of the Saviour. . . . Ecclesiastical history relates that, when he was urged by the brethren to write, he replied that he would do so if a general fast were proclaimed and all would offer up prayer to God; and when the fast was over, the narrative goes on to say, being filled with revelation, he burst into the heaven-sent Preface: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'¹⁹

In each of the above passages, Jerome acknowledges two separate streams of tradition concerning the composition of the Gospel of John.²⁰ In alignment with Victorinus, he avers that John aimed his work against heretics in general and Cerinthus in particular.²¹ At the same time, he also adopts the theory passed on by Clement that John wrote the Fourth Gospel in order to perfect the testimony of the Synoptics.²² Jerome's account shares traits with each of the other three sources and appears to be a compendium of these specific texts. Therefore, although the Johannine legend is recorded by three authors

¹⁸ *De Vir. Ill.*, 9.1 (Halton, 19).

¹⁹ *Pf. Comm. in Matt.* (NPNF second series, 6:495). From Tregelles's perspective, Jerome's citation of the Johannine legend was sufficient evidence to demonstrate that he had read the Fragment, for Jerome and the Fragmentist alone comment on the fast preceding the revelation of the Johannine prologue (*Canon Muratorianus*, 35, 53).

²⁰ In the discussion that follows the first of these paragraphs, Jerome addresses the sources of the tradition in sequence, introducing the second source with the words: "But there is said to be yet another reason for this work. . . ." (*De Vir. Ill.*, 9.2 [Halton, 19]).

²¹ It is possible that Victorinus patterned his account after a paragraph from Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, 3.11.1). Irenaeus there states that the apostle John published his Gospel in order to correct Cerinthus and then recites the rule of faith and the Johannine prologue.

²² Although Jerome furnishes details that are not found in Eusebius's synopsis of Clement's account, his appeal to *ecclesiastica historia* is no doubt a citation of Eusebius's classic text. Thus, one may be assured that Jerome counted Clement among his sources.

besides the Fragmentist, we may conclude that the testimony of Victorinus stands closer to the Fragment than either the accounts of Clement or Jerome, for Clement follows another storyline than the one preserved in the Fragment, and we may be confident that Jerome acquired his tradition principally from Victorinus, whose commentary he republished.

This incidence alone should be sufficient to arouse suspicion. However, the parallel between the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* and the Muratorian Fragment becomes exponentially more significant as one observes that both authors cite the rule of faith immediately after the Johannine legend.²³ In the context of his commentary, Victorinus situates the tradition of the composition of the Fourth Gospel in a paragraph in which he delivers an exegesis of Rev 11:1, the verse in which John is instructed to measure the temple with a reed. Following his account of the Johannine legend, Victorinus announces that the reed represents the rule of faith:

And the ‘measure’ of the faith is the command of our Lord to confess the almighty Father, as we have learned, and his Son our Lord Jesus Christ, begotten spiritually by the Father before the beginning of the age, who was made a man and, after he had defeated death, was received with a body into the heavens by the Father. He is the holy Lord and the assurance of immortality, who was preached by the prophets, who was attested by the Law, who is the hand of God and the Word of the almighty Father and the founder of the circle of the whole world. This is the reed and measure of the faith, that no one should worship before the holy altar except those who confess the Lord and his Christ.²⁴

²³ Since the Fragment has been the subject of such painstaking study, it is surprising to discover that the presence of the *regula fidei* in lines 19–26 has received almost no scholarly attention until quite recently. Ehrhardt notes that the Fragmentist’s rule of faith appears in neither F. J. Badcock’s *History of the Creeds* nor in J. N. D. Kelly’s *Early Christian Creeds*, and one could add Philip Schaff’s *Creeds of Christendom* to this list as well (“The Gospels in the Muratorian Fragment,” 25). Nevertheless, the presence of the rule of faith in this context did not escape the notice of Adolf von Harnack (*The Origin of the New Testament*, trans. J. R. Wilkinson [New York: Macmillan, 1925], 19), nor of Geoffrey Wainwright (“The New Testament as Canon,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 [1975]: 556). Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J., considers this instance of the rule of faith to be crucial in constructing a revised history of the formation of the New Testament canon (*The Bible, The Church, and Authority: The History of the Christian Bible in History and Theology* [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995], 40–41; see also *ibid.*, 100).

²⁴ *Comm. in Apoc.*, 11.1 (Haussleiter, 96).

Victorinus and the Fragmentist both juxtapose the *regula fidei* and the Johannine legend, but their versions of the rule of faith are structurally dissimilar, for whereas Victorinus's formulation is binitarian, the Fragmentist's is kerygmatic and narrative.²⁵ Nevertheless, scattered throughout his commentary, Victorinus documents several specimens of the rule of faith that compare favorably with the Fragmentist's informal creedal synopsis.²⁶ There is therefore no reason to suppose that Victorinus could not have expressed the *regula fidei* as formulated by the Fragmentist.

Intriguingly, although the rule of faith in the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* does not precisely parallel the one found in the Muratorian Fragment, it is remarkably similar to Saint Patrick's rendition.²⁷ In a pioneering analysis of the interrelationship of the rules of faith presented in the *Recensio Hieronymi*, the *Editio Victorini*, and the *Confessiones* of Patrick, J. E. L. Oulton declared: "It is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid the conclusion that the general contents of P[atrick's creed] are based on those of V[ictorinus's] as revised by J[erome]."²⁸ After considerable deliberation, R. P. C. Hanson

²⁵ In the *Recensio Hieronymi*, the rule of faith is trinitarian in structure.

²⁶ In his discussion of Rev 1:16, in which context John describes the face of Jesus as the sun, Victorinus writes: "And the glory of the sun is less than the glory of the Lord, but on account of the fact that the sun rises and sets and rises again, just as the Lord was born and suffered and rose again, so the Scripture compares his face to the glory of the sun" (ibid., 1.3 [Haussleiter, 20]). In his exegesis concerning the new song of Rev 5:9, Victorinus writes: "It is new for the Son of God to become a man, new indeed for this one to be delivered to death by men, new to rise again on the third day, new to ascend with a body into heaven, new to give men forgiveness of sins, new for men to be sealed with the Holy Spirit, new for the Son of God to receive a priesthood of supplication and to await a kingdom of boundless promise" (ibid., 5.3 [Haussleiter, 66]; see also ibid., 1.2, 3.1).

²⁷ Ferdinand Kattenbusch credits A. Hahn as the first to observe this parallel (*Das Apostolische Symbol* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1894; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962], 1:212).

²⁸ *The Credal Statements of St. Patrick* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 15. Against Oulton's theory, Ludwig Bieler argued that Patrick received his rule of faith through an intermediary source rather than directly from Victorinus's commentary ("The 'Creeds' of St. Victorinus and St. Patrick," *Theological Studies* 9 [1948]: 124). Against both scholars, R. P. C. Hanson concluded that, although it could not be denied that Patrick's rule represented "an adaptation" of Victorinus's rule, neither could it be affirmed that Patrick's usage was unique, for by the fifth century Victorinus's *regula fidei* had been

arrived upon the same conclusion and averred: “Even though Patrick does not exactly reproduce Victorinus’ rule of faith . . . the use of the archaic and unusual, though accurate, term *mensura fidei* precisely in the sense in which Victorinus used it, make[s] it difficult, in my opinion, to avoid the conclusion that Patrick had read Victorinus’ *Commentary on the Apocalypse*.”²⁹ Patrick’s adaptation of Victorinus’s rule of faith demonstrates that Victorinus’s writings circulated broadly in antiquity and were read even as far north as Ireland. In light of this fact, we may recall that the manuscript in which Muratori discovered the Fragment had been acquired from Columban’s monastery at Bobbio, an incidence that led Brook Foss Westcott to posit that it was probably of Irish origin.³⁰ It would therefore not be surprising to find that a fragment from one of Victorinus’s works had been assimilated into the manuscript containing the Muratorian Fragment.

In addition to the Johannine legend, Victorinus provides a couple of other parallels to the paragraph culled from lines 9–26 of the Fragment, as reproduced above at the beginning of this section. First, Victorinus and the Fragmentist each subscribe to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ and express their faith in a comparable fashion. In his argument for a second-century dating of the Fragment, Everett Ferguson draws attention to the syntactical form of the sentence concerning the return of the Lord and affirms: “the two advents, the first in humility and the second in royal power, is a feature

incorporated into the catechetical instruction of the British Church (“The Rule of Faith of Victorinus and of Patrick,” 36; see also idem., *Saint Patrick: His Origins and Career* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], 173).

²⁹ “Patrick and the *Mensura Fidei*,” in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 10 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970), 111.

³⁰ *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*, 522.

of the second century.”³¹ Ferguson is certainly correct on this point, for Justin Martyr especially—although to an extent Tertullian and Irenaeus as well—articulates this dogma in a manner that shares much affinity with the formula adopted by the Fragmentist. However, the text that Adolf von Harnack and Theodor Zahn isolate as the most significant parallel to the tradition of the Muratorian Fragment is extracted from Victorinus’s *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*:³²

Fragment: de gemino eius adventu, primo in humilitate despectus, quod fuit, secundo in potestate regali praeclaro, quod futurum est³³

Victorinus: qui primo in suscepto homine uenit occultus, post paululum in maiestate et gloria ueniet ad iudicandum manifestus³⁴

Second, Victorinus and the Fragmentist employ a common sentence structure and vocabulary in their attestations to the unity of the four Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, and further, each appears to have been inspired primarily by Irenaeus. Victorinus is clearly dependent upon Irenaeus’s discussion of the fourfold Gospel canon, for he reproduces Irenaeus’s argument precisely in his own defense of the unique authority of

³¹ “Canon Muratori: Date and Provenance,” in *Studia Patristica*, 17.2 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 681. Ferguson then offers the following as examples: Justin, *Dial.*, 32–33, 52, 110–11; Tertullian, *Apol.*, 21; *Adv. Iud.*, 14. To this list, Philippe Henne adds: Justin, *Dial.*, 14, 40, 49; *1 Apol.*, 52; Tertullian, *Contr. Marc.*, 3.7, 4.35; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 4.33.1 («La datation du Canon de Muratori,» *Revue Biblique* 100 [1993]: 66).

³² Harnack, „Über den Verfasser und den literarischen Charakter des Muratorischen Fragments,“ 4; Zahn, „Hippolytus, der Verfasser des Muratorischen Kanons,“ 424–25.

³³ “And concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future. . . .” (*Mur. Frag.*, 23–26 [Metzger, 306; Lietzmann, 5]).

³⁴ “He who first came secretly in the humanity he had undertaken will after a little while come openly in majesty and glory in order to judge all things” (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.1 [Hausleiter, 18]). Dulaey contends that Victorinus’s formula is probably patterned after the writings of Tertullian’s ardent disciple Cyprian (*Victorin de Poetovio*, 304; see Cyprian, *Idol.*, 12; *De Bon. Patient.*, 23). Contrariwise, as Zahn theorized, it may also be that Victorinus received his tradition from Justin through Hippolytus, since Hippolytus closely echoes Justin in his affirmation of the two advents (*Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* [Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1888; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1975], 2:44; see Hippolytus, *Antichrist.*, 44).

the apostolic Gospels.³⁵ In an article supporting the research of Ferguson, Philippe Henne argues persuasively that the Fragmentist appeals to the rule of faith in order to defend the orthodoxy of the Fourth Gospel, an appeal that reveals his indebtedness to Irenaeus.³⁶

The Fragmentist therefore exhibits the same reasoning process that one would anticipate that Victorinus would also employ in constructing a case for the canonicity of the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, pure speculation is rendered unnecessary, for the statements of Victorinus and the author of the Muratorian Fragment concerning the four Gospels and the Pauline Epistles are ostensibly parallel:

Fragment: nihil tamen differt credentium fidei, cum uno ac principali spiritu declarata sint in omnibus omnia³⁷

Victorinus: hae ergo praedicationes quamuis quattuor sint, una tamen praedicatio est, quia de uno ore processit³⁸

³⁵ In his famous proclamation of the fourfold Gospel canon, Irenaeus correlates the four Evangelists and the four living creatures of Ezk 1:10 (*Adv. Haer.*, 3.11.8). Victorinus essentially duplicates this passage in his own discussion of Rev 4:7 (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 4.3–4; see also *ibid.*, 4.7; *De Fab. Mund.*, 3). The structure of these texts is identical, and both authors cycle through the four Gospels three times: first assigning each of the Evangelists to one of the animals, second observing that the opening verse of each Gospel evokes the imagery of its assigned creature, and third arguing that the sequence of events of Jesus' earthly ministry corresponds to the order in which the Scripture lists the four living creatures. In addition, whereas later authors assigned the Evangelists to various creatures, Irenaeus and Victorinus each associate John with the lion, Matthew with the man, Luke with the calf, and Mark with the eagle. Jerome reengineered Victorinus's symbol scheme in his edition of the commentary and assigned John to the eagle and Mark to the lion (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 4.3–4 [RH]; see also Jerome *Adv. Iovin.*, 1.26). Augustine was aware of both symbol schemes and recommended the one propagated by Jerome over and against the one first introduced by Irenaeus and adopted by Victorinus (see Augustine, *De Cons. Evan.*, 1.6.9; *ibid.*, 4.10.1; *In Ioh. Evan. Tract.*, 36.5).

³⁶ Henne avers: «Le récit légendaire de la rédaction du quatrième Évangile a donc pour principale fonction de montrer que cet Évangile fut inspiré par une révélation. . . . L'auteur du fragment ne voulait pas simplement rapporter une belle histoire. Il voulait défendre la canonicité de l'Évangile de Jean. Or celle-ci fut particulièrement combattue en Occident au IIe et IIIe siècle» («La datation du Canon de Muratori,» 66–68).

³⁷ “Nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all [the Gospels]” (*Mur. Frag.*, 18–20 [Metzger, 306]). This sentence also resembles a quote from Irenaeus that no doubt inspired Victorinus: “[He] has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit” [*dedit nobis quadriforme Euangelium quod uno Spiritu continetur*] (*Adv. Haer.*, 3.11.8 [ANF 1:428; SC 211:162]).

³⁸ “Therefore, though these proclamations are four in number, nevertheless the message is one, because it proceeded from one mouth” (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 4.4 [Haussleiter, 54]).

Fragment: Iohannes enim in apocalypsi licet septem ecclesiis scribat, tamen omnibus dicit³⁹

Victorinus: sed quia quod uni dicit, omnibus dicit; nihil enim differet⁴⁰

II. The Seven Churches and the Pauline Epistles

The Fragmentist acknowledges a seven-church canon of Pauline Epistles and likens this collection to the seven Johannine letters documented in the opening chapters of the Apocalypse:

As for the Epistles of (40–1) Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent. (42) First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms; (43) next, to the Galatians, against circumcision; (44–6) then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme). It is necessary (47) for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed (48) apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor (49–50) John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians (51) first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, (52) to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, (53) to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans (54–5) seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, (56–7) yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the (58) Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, (59–60) nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred (62–3) in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline.⁴¹

³⁹ “For John also in the Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches nevertheless speaks to all” (*Mur. Frag.*, 57–59 [Metzger, 307; Lietzmann, 9]).

⁴⁰ “But because what he says to one, he says to all. Indeed, it makes no difference at all” (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.7 [Haussleiter, 28]). Victorinus pens this partial sentence in reference to the seven epistles of Paul, which he compares to the seven Johannine Epistles.

⁴¹ *Mur. Frag.*, 40–63 (Metzger, 306–7). It has long perplexed scholars why the author of the Fragment would discuss the specific themes of three of the Pauline Epistles—i.e., Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans—before listing all seven letters in a different sequence only a few lines later. It may be noted that the themes of these three epistles correspond to the themes of the first three Johannine Epistles, at least as explicated by Victorinus in his commentary. The Fragmentist states that Paul first confronted the sectarian teachings of the Corinthians (*ibid.*, 42), and Victorinus declares that John exhorted the church to avert the doctrines of the Nicolaitans in his first epistle (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 2.1). The Fragmentist then avers that Paul directed the Epistle to the Galatians against the Judaizers (*Mur. Frag.*, 43), and Victorinus attests that the second Johannine Epistle is focused on overcoming the opposition of the Jews (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 2.2). The Fragmentist lastly asserts that Romans, the third Pauline Epistle, presents the structure of the Scriptures (*Mur. Frag.*, 44–46). The third Johannine Epistle twice refers to the “double-edged sword” of Christ, and Victorinus repeatedly affirms that the dual blades of this sword stand for the bipartite configuration of the Bible as Old and New Testaments (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.4).

It is noteworthy that the Fragmentist conceives of the Pauline Epistles as seven in number, for the fourth-century authors customarily speak of a collection of fourteen missives, reserving the sacred number seven for the Catholic Epistles.⁴² In fact, besides the Fragmentist, only four ancient authors apply the number seven to the collection of Pauline Epistles: Hippolytus of Rome, Cyprian of Carthage, and again Victorinus and Jerome. Hippolytus's statement is lost, but the twelfth-century scholar from Syria, Dionysius bar Salibi, records: "Hippolytus says that in writing to seven Churches, he [the Apostle John] writes just as Paul wrote thirteen letters, but wrote them to seven Churches. That to the Hebrews he does not judge to be Paul's, but perhaps Clement's."⁴³ Because Hippolytus's testimony is preserved only as a paraphrase in Syriac—and one adapted almost a millennium after the primary text was written in Greek—it is far from clear which aspects of the above sentence may be attributed to Hippolytus.⁴⁴ If, for example, Hippolytus had mentioned Hebrews in the original passage or spoken of the Pauline Epistles as thirteen in number, as does Dionysius, then the resemblance of this statement to the Fragment would be significantly diminished. And yet, because Victorinus acquired a great deal of his exegesis from Hippolytus, it is entirely possible that this observation

⁴² Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3.3.5; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.*, 4.36, 10.18, 17.20, 17.34; Athanasius, *Ep. Fest.*, 39.5; Apostolic Canons, *Can. Ap.*, 85; Synod of Laodicea, *Can.*, 60; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carm. Dogm.*, 12.31; Rufinus, *Comm. in Symb. Apost.*, 37; Jerome, *Ep.*, 53.9; Augustine, *De Doct. Christ.*, 2.29; Gelasius, *Decr. De Lib.*; Junilius, *Inst. Regul. Dev. Leg.*; John of Damascus, *Expos. Fid.*, 4.17. Upholding a fourteen-document collection of the Pauline Epistles, Amphilochius avers that Paul wrote two times seven letters: Παῦλον σοφῶς γράψαντα ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἐπιστολάς δις ἑπτὰ (*Iamb. Ad Sel.*, 300–1 [Amphilochii Iconiensis *Iambi Ad Seleucum*, ed. Eberhard Oberg {Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969}, 38]).

⁴³ T. H. Robinson, "The Authorship of the Muratorian Canon," 488.

⁴⁴ Following this citation, Robinson notes: "It is obvious, however, that Bar Salibi is not quoting exactly, and, unfortunately, we have no means of testing his other quotations from Hippolytus, unless Epiphanius be allowed to represent Hippolytus more closely. But we can compare his references to Eusebius with that author's Syriac text, and the result we reach is the certainty that Bar Salibi's quotations are not necessarily verbal" (*ibid.*, 489).

proved inspirational for Victorinus, especially since it is found in Hippolytus's own commentary on the Apocalypse.

Cyprian also retains the tradition of a seven-church canon of Pauline Epistles, but although his comments exhibit an affinity to some of the phrases used by Victorinus, they do not rival Victorinus's parallel to the Fragment. In a paragraph in which he cites several instances of the number seven in Scripture, Cyprian avers: "Paul wrote to seven churches; and the Apocalypse sets forth seven churches, that the number seven may be preserved."⁴⁵ This sentence is remarkably akin to a line that later appeared in Victorinus's commentary: "First indeed, in order that he [the Apostle Paul] might preserve that very number, he addressed seven of the churches and no more."⁴⁶ Based on this parallel and others, Dulaey considers it virtually certain that Victorinus was familiar with Cyprian's *Ad Quirinum* and *Ad Fortunatum*.⁴⁷ Victorinus develops the tradition beyond Cyprian, however, for he not only affirms that the Johannine and Pauline Epistles were each addressed to seven churches, but he enumerates the seven congregations, just as the Fragmentist does. In addition, it is not insignificant that Victorinus and the Fragmentist each affirm that Paul addressed the churches "by name" [*nominatim*].⁴⁸ In his explanation of the seven stars of John's vision, Victorinus writes:

And he called each of the *seven churches* expressly by name and wrote an epistle to each, not because they were the only churches around nor because they were the most important, but

⁴⁵ "Paulus septem Ecclesiis scripsit, et Apocalypsis Ecclesias septem ponit, ut servetur septenarius numerus" (*Ad Quir.*, 20 [ANF 5:513; PL 4:716D–17A]). In the midst of a panegyric for the seven martyrs of the book of Maccabees, Cyprian also writes: "And the Apostle Paul, who refers to this lawful and certain number, writes to the seven churches" (*Ad Fort.*, 11 [ANF 5:503]).

⁴⁶ "primum quidem, ut serualet [ipse] et ipsum, septem ecclesiarum non excessit numerum" (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.7 [Haussleiter, 28]).

⁴⁷ *Victorin de Poetovio*, 1:303.

⁴⁸ Victorinus, *Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.7 (Haussleiter, 26); *Mur. Frag.*, 49 (Lietzmann, 7).

because what he says to one, he says to all. Indeed, it makes no difference at all whether someone addresses a detachment of only a few soldiers or whether he addresses all directly, for through the detachment he speaks to the entire army. Accordingly, whether in Asia or whether throughout the whole world, Paul instructed all seven churches, and the seven named churches are the one catholic church. First indeed, in order that he might preserve that very number, he addressed seven of the churches and no more, but wrote to the Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians. Afterwards, he wrote to individuals, so as not to exceed the number of seven churches.⁴⁹

Finally, it should be noted that neither Victorinus nor the Fragmentist mention the Epistle to the Hebrews, and this omission has mystified many scholars. Perhaps it was specifically this lacuna that prompted Jerome to discuss the authorship of Hebrews at length in his own list of the Pauline Epistles:

He wrote nine epistles to seven churches: to the Romans, one; to the Corinthians, two; to the Galatians, one; to the Ephesians, one; to the Philippians, one; to the Colossians, one; to the Thessalonians, two; and besides, these to his disciples: to Timothy, two; to Titus, one; to Philemon, one. The epistle which is called the Epistle to the Hebrews is not considered to belong to him, on account of its difference from the others in style and language, but it is reckoned either, according to Tertullian, to be the work of Barnabas, or, according to others, to be by Luke the evangelist or by Clement afterwards bishop of the church at Rome, who, they say, arranged and adorned the ideas of Paul in his own language, though, to be sure, since Paul was writing to Hebrews and was in disrepute among them, he may have omitted his name from the salutation on this account. He being a Hebrew wrote Hebrew, that is, his own tongue and most fluently, while the things which were eloquently written in Hebrew were more eloquently turned into Greek, and this is the reason why it seems to differ from the other epistles of Paul. Some read also a letter to the Laodiceans, but it is rejected by everyone.⁵⁰

It is rather surprising that Jerome would correlate the number seven with the Pauline corpus, for elsewhere he acknowledges a fourteen-letter collection of the Pauline Epistles, along with the other authors of the period.⁵¹ It should therefore be noted that the above passage can be read without undue effort as an adaptation of the tradition in the

⁴⁹ *Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.7 (Haussleiter, 26–28). Among the surviving manuscripts of the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, four distinct sequences of the Pauline Epistles have been discovered, one of which does in fact correspond to the order preserved in the Muratorian Fragment (Haussleiter, 29).

⁵⁰ *De Vir. Ill.*, 5.9–11 (Halton, 13–14). Jerome reaffirms: “The apostle Paul writes to seven churches (for the eighth epistle—that to the Hebrews—is not generally counted in with the others)” (*Ep.*, 53 [NPNF, second series, 6:101]). In a manner very similar to Victorinus, Jerome declares that the church is one spiritually though seven in number (see Victorinus, *Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.7; Jerome, *Adv. Jov.*, 2.19).

⁵¹ *De Vir. Ill.*, 59.2 (see also Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 6.20.3).

Muratorian Fragment. Whereas the Fragmentist and Victorinus both strain to assign all of the Pauline Epistles a place in their seven-fold framework, Jerome dispels any confusion by declaring that Paul wrote nine epistles but addressed them to seven churches. Further, despite the fact that Jerome was frequently given to hyperbole, his concluding remark that everyone rejected the Epistle to the Laodiceans was entirely accurate. It is quite odd that he would even mention this ancient piece of Marcionite propaganda, unless this paragraph was indeed patterned after the Muratorian Fragment, for at an earlier date, the Fragmentist refuted the Epistle to the Laodiceans as a serious threat.⁵²

III. Victorinus of Pettau as the Author of the Canon Muratori

The analysis thus far has demonstrated that Victorinus documented more parallels to the Muratorian Fragment than any other ancient author. Parallels such as these persuaded scholars of a century ago that Victorinus was acquainted with the Fragment. The research of Adolf von Harnack, George Salmon, John Chapman, G. Morin (Dom), M. J. Lagrange, as well as the modern scholar Martine Dulaey, all confirms the presence of a definite literary relationship between Victorinus's commentary and the Fragment.⁵³

⁵² See *Mur. Frag.*, 63–65. According to Karl Pink, who reproduces all of the ancient references to the Epistle to the Laodiceans in his definitive article on the subject, Victorinus would have been aware of Hippolytus's early tradition concerning this heretical document („Die Pseudo-Paulinischen Briefe II,“ *Biblia* 6 [1925], 185).

⁵³ Harnack writes: „Aus diesem Tatbestand muß notwendig gefolgert werden, daß Viktorin entweder das Muratorische Fragment selbst benutzt oder eine gemeinsame Quelle mit ihm hat. . . . Man darf daher mit einer erheblichen Wahrscheinlichkeit behaupten, daß Viktorin das Muratorische Fragment selbst und als lateinisches Schriftstück benutzt und paraphrasiert hat“ („Über den Verfasser und den literarischen Charakter des Muratorischen Fragments,“ 11–12; see also Salmon, „Muratorian Fragment,“ 3:1003). John Chapman argued that Victorinus and the Fragmentist were both dependent on Clement of Alexandria: «Je dis seulement ici qu'il me paraît certain que Victorin ne cite pas le fragment, mais directement la source utilisée par l'auteur du fragment» («L'auteur du Canon Muratorien,» 263). In response to Chapman, G. Morin (Dom) suggested that perhaps the common source was not Clement of Alexandria but the Epitomes of Theodotus («Notes sur Victorin de Pettau,» *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 [1906]: 458). However, M. J. Lagrange contended that Victorinus was directly dependent upon the

However, because the above scholars each considered a second-century date for the Fragment to be firmly established, they uniformly assumed that Victorinus borrowed from a more ancient, now lost source. The evidence that Victorinus was familiar with the Fragment is significant, for it persuasively recommends the conclusion that the Fragment circulated before the close of the third century and therefore cannot have been written as late as the fourth century, as Albert C. Sundberg proposed in his renowned article, “Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List.”⁵⁴ Pierre Vallin, S.J., exposes this discrepancy in a concise appendix following an essay on the formation of the New Testament canon:

Un élément de réflexion que Sundberg n’a pas examiné complètement tient aux points de contact qui existent entre le fragment et l’oeuvre de Victorin de Pettau. . . . Une solution simple serait d’attribuer à Victorin la rédaction de l’original lui-même du *Muratorianum*. . . . Cela ne peut évidemment constituer davantage qu’une hypothèse. Elle semble pourtant être cohérente.⁵⁵

The present author embraces the conclusion of previous scholarship that the parallels between Victorinus’s *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* and the Muratorian Fragment establish the presence of a definite literary relationship. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper, it would be inadequate merely to explore such parallels, for the

Fragment: «Il n’est pas douteux que Victorin dépende du Canon. Il est peu probable que tous deux dépendent d’une source commune, car un Canon seul avait intérêt à traiter en même temps des épîtres de Paul aux Églises et à des particuliers» («Le Canon d’Hippolyte et le Fragment de Muratori,» 183). Dulaey collaborates with Harnack and Lagrange when she avers: «Victorin connaît Tertullien, Minucius Felix, Novatien et le Canon de Muratori, même si, exégèse oblige, il est plus familier d’Irénee, Hippolyte et Origène» (*Victorin de Poetovio*, 1:36).

⁵⁴ *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 1–41. For more scholarship advocating a fourth-century dating of the Fragment, see also idem., “Towards a Revised History of the New Testament Canon,” in *Studia Evangelica*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968): 452–61; Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); idem., “More on Redating the Muratorian Fragment,” in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 19 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1989): 359–65. For an in-depth review of the current debate, see Verheyden, “The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute,” 487–556.

⁵⁵ «La formation de la Bible chrétienne,» in *Le canon des Écritures: études historiques, exégétiques et systématiques* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 235–36.

evidence of literary commonality cannot prove authorship. It would always remain possible that the author of the primary text had simply assimilated the secondary text into his own work. In the final section of this article, we shall survey some of the perplexing features of the Fragment and attempt to decipher each from the perspective of a Victorinan theory of authorship. The Fragment continues to be a mysterious document, but that many of its most severe aberrancies can be rendered intelligible when read as from the pen of Victorinus represents the concluding evidence that Victorinus was not only acquainted with the Fragment but indeed was its author.

A. *The Fraternity of Pius and Hermas*

The Fragmentist asserts that Hermas, the author of the *Shepherd*, was in fact the brother of Pius, the bishop of Rome:

(73) But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* (74) very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, (75) while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair (76) of the church of the city of Rome.⁵⁶

This legend appears in an extremely limited context in ancient Christian literature, but it represents a tradition with which Victorinus was almost certainly familiar. The sole reference to this tradition that possibly antedates the fourth century—and therefore could have served as a source for either the Fragmentist or Victorinus—is found in the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*.⁵⁷ The anonymous but notably mediocre Latinist of the orthodox

⁵⁶ *Mur. Frag.*, 73–76 (Metzger, 307). Hahneman points out the inherent improbability of this tradition, for Pius occupied the episcopal see of Rome and Hermas was a slave; the name *Pius* is derived from Latin, *Hermas* from Greek (*The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, 52).

⁵⁷ The only other specimen of this tradition is preserved in the *Liberian Catalogue* (see L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis* [Paris, 1886; repr., 1955], 1:5). The author lists the bishops of Rome from Peter to Liberius, and thus the final redaction of this document was assuredly published after the beginning of the reign of Pope Liberius in ca. 352 A.D.

poem records:

post hunc deinde Pius, Hermas cui germine frater,
angelicus pastor cui tradita verba locutus.⁵⁸

Scholarship has long recognized that Victorinus was exceptionally familiar with the traditions preserved in the *Carmen*. In her 1936 dissertation at the Universität Würzburg, Marta Müller documented over twenty verbal and thematic parallels between the *Carmen* and the *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*.⁵⁹ Parallels such as these are so plentiful and rich that Johannes Haussleiter even once proposed that Victorinus be identified as the author of the *Carmen*.⁶⁰ Regardless of the precise relationship of these treatises, however, it is not improbable that the legend of the fraternity of Pius and Hermas was known to the authors of both compositions.⁶¹

⁵⁸ “Then after him [Pope Hyginus] came Pius, whose physical brother was Hermas, the angelic shepherd, who spoke the words that were handed down to him” (*Carm. adv. Marc.*, 3.294–95 [Karla Pollmann, *Das Carmen adversus Marcionitas: Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar* {Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1991}, 102]). The last bishop of Rome listed in this context is Anicetus, whose pontificate commenced in ca. 155 A.D. It is entirely possible that this composition dates to a relatively early period, especially since the theme of the *Carmen* is the second-century heresy Marcionism.

⁵⁹ *Untersuchungen zum Carmen adversus Marcionitas* (Ochsenfurt am Main: Fritz und Rappert, 1936), 38–56. Although Dulaey maintains that the author of the *Carmen* had been influenced by Victorinus, rather than the reverse, she nevertheless acknowledges: «La thèse traditionnelle était alors que Victorin dépendait du poète» (*Victorin de Poetovio*, 2:22).

⁶⁰ “Die Kommentare des Victorinus, Tichonius und Hieronymus zur Apokalypse,” *Zeitschrift für kirchliche Wissenschaft und kirchliches Leben* 7 (1886): 254–56; see also idem., “Victorinus von Pettau” in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 20 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908), 618. It is also noteworthy that the Muratorian Fragment and the *Carmen* contain a number of parallels. Stating the reason why he disallows epistles tainted with the heresy of Marcion to be read in the church, the Fragmentist declares: “it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey” [fel enim cum melle misceri non congruit] (*Mur. Frag.*, 67–68 [Metzger, 307; Lietzmann, 9]). In his invective against Marcion, the author of the *Carmen* accuses: “he carries about poison mixed with honey for the wretched” [circumfert miseris mixtum cum melle venenum] (*Carm. adv. Marc.*, 1.86 [Pollmann, 60]). This citation from the *Carmen* parallels the tradition found in the Fragment significantly more precisely than anything offered by other ancient authors (see also Ireneus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.17.4; Tertullian, *De Anim.*, 3; Origen, *Hom. in Jos.*, 7.4; *Shepherd*, Mandate 5.1.5). It is possible that this quotation from the Fragment is an allusion to Rev 10:10, in which context John records that the little book given to him by the angel tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth but turned sour in his stomach. Victorinus does in fact interpret the “little books” mentioned in the Apocalypse as books of the Bible (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 5.1; see also *ibid.*, 10.1).

⁶¹ According to Theodor Mommsen, this legend can be traced back to Hippolytus (*Über den Chronographen vom Jahre 354: Mit einem Anhang über die Quellen der Chronik des Hieronymus*

But there are several reasons to conclude that Victorinus was in fact also the author of the *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*, the evidence of literary parallels aside. Firstly, two centos extracted from the *Carmen* were discovered in the nineteenth century in a manuscript dating from the ninth or tenth century, and both were attributed to an otherwise unidentified author by the name of Victorinus.⁶² Secondly, Isidore of Seville attests that a certain Bishop Victorinus penned a couple of poems against the heretics, one against the Manichaeans and another against the Marcionites.⁶³ The only bishop to appear in the pages of Isidore's massive literary corpus by the name of Victorinus is Victorinus of Pettua. In addition, Isidore specifically acknowledges Victorinus as one of the exegetes upon whom he most depended, along with Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine.⁶⁴ For the purposes of this article, it is of quintessential importance to note that Isidore incorporates material from Victorinus's *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* into his own discussion of the New Testament canon in the *Libros Veteris ac Novi Testamenti Prooemia*. Regarding the unity of the four Gospels, these authors affirm:

Victorinus: [haec] ergo praedicationes quamvis quattuor sint, una tamen praedicationis est, quia de uno

[Leipzig: Weidmann, 1850], 594–98, 637–44). If this hypothesis is correct, then it becomes very difficult to deny that Victorinus was most probably aware of this tradition.

⁶² Pollmann, *Carmen adversus Marcionitas*, 13. Angelo Mai published the first cento in 1833 (“Victorini de Nativitate, Vita, Passione et Resurrectione Domini Carmen,” in *Auctores Classici*, vol. 5 [Rome], 382–86), and August Oxé published the second in 1894 (“Versus Victorini de Lege Domini Nostri Iesu Christi: Ein undierter Cento aus dem Carmen adversus Marcionitas [Krefeld: Kramer und Baum]).

⁶³ *De Vir. Ill.*, 8 (PL 83:1088A). Scholars agree that Isidore's comment refers to the *Carmen*, although traditional scholarship is reluctant to conclude that the Victorinus cited in this passage is indeed Victorinus of Pettau. Radbodus Willems proposed that Isidore was perhaps speaking about the poet *Victorius* (not *Victorinus*) whom Sidonius Apollinaris praises (*Tertulliani Opera*, CCSL 2 [Tvrnholti: Typographi Brepolis Editores Pontificii, 1954], 1420). However, this theory is problematic since Sidonius extols the beauty of the poet's language, calling *Victorius* “doctissimus” and his verses “potentissime,” but the style of the *Carmen* is commonly acknowledged to be quite poor and far beneath an acclaimed poet (*Ep.*, 5.21 [PL 58:550C]).

⁶⁴ *Quaest. in Vet. Test. in Gen.*, pf. 5 (PL 83:209A).

ore processit⁶⁵

Isidore: Evangeliorum praedicatio, quamvis quadrifaria sit, una est tamen, quia ex uno eodemque ore Divinitatis processit⁶⁶

It is indeed curious that it would occur to Isidore to quote Victorinus as an authority on the New Testament canon, unless of course Victorinus was known to Isidore as the author of the Muratorian Fragment. The hypothesis that can best accommodate the above data is simply that Victorinus was the anonymous author of the Canon Muratori.

B. A Closed Canon of the Old Testament and the New Testament as composed during the Apostolic Age

The author of the Fragment writes concerning the *Shepherd* of Hermas:

(77) And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but (78) it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among (79) the prophets, whose number is complete, or among (80) the apostles, for it is after [their] time.⁶⁷

The Fragmentist presents two reasons for disqualifying the *Shepherd* from canonical status: the exact count of the Old Testament books or “prophets” is already fixed, and the

⁶⁵ “Therefore, though these proclamations are four in number, nevertheless the message is one, because it proceeded from one mouth” (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 4.4 [Haussleiter, 54; see also *ibid.*, 6.1]).

⁶⁶ “The proclamation of the Gospels, though it is fourfold, nevertheless it is one, because it proceeded from one and the same divine mouth” (*In Lib. Vet. Ac Nov. Test. Prooemia*, 86 [PL 83:175A]). Isidore’s remarks on the seven Pauline Epistles also parallel those of Victorinus, who writes: “First indeed, in order that he [the Apostle Paul] might preserve that very number, he addressed seven of the churches and no more” [primum quidem, ut seruaret {ipse} et ipsum, septem ecclesiarum non excessit numerum] (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.7 [Haussleiter, 28]). In turn, Isidore states: “The Apostle Paul drew up fourteen epistles of his preaching, but he addressed them to seven churches on account of the figure of the sevenfold church, preserving rather and not exceeding this symbolic number, in accord with the sevenfold power of the Holy Spirit” [Paulus apostolus quatuordecim Epistolis praedicationis suae perstrinxit. Ex quibus aliquas propter typum septiformis Ecclesiae septem scripsit Ecclesiis, conservans potius nec excedens numerum sacramenti propter septiformem sancti Spiritus efficaciam] (*In Lib. Vet. Ac Nov. Test. Prooemia*, 92 [PL 83:176B]). Other parallels demonstrating Isidore’s dependence on Victorinus in his discussion of the New Testament canon could be adduced. For example, both authors compare the four Gospels to the four rivers of paradise, and both assign each of the Evangelists to one of the four living creatures according to the same theological reasoning. In his brief comments on the Apocalypse, Isidore refers to the “viginti quatuor seniors” and the “quatuor animalia” that stand in the presence of God, phrases that are prominent in Victorinus’s *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*.

⁶⁷ *Mur. Frag.*, 77–80 (Metzger, 307).

New Testament books or “apostles” were all composed during the apostolic age. We shall consider each reason separately. First, the comment that the number of the prophets is complete—a statement that is at present rather perplexing to scholars—is in perfect accord with Victorinus’s notion that the Old Testament books can be no more or fewer than twenty four:⁶⁸ “And moreover there are twenty four books of the Old Testament which are received (as we discovered in the epitomes of Theodore), just as there are also twenty four patriarchs and apostles, as we said.”⁶⁹ Victorinus argues that the sanctity of this number is confirmed in the Apocalypse: “*The twenty four elders had twenty four tribunals*. They are the books of the prophets and the law referring to the testimonies of judgment. They are indeed the twenty four fathers: twelve apostles and twelve patriarchs.”⁷⁰ From the perspective of one who subscribed to Victorinus’s theory of the divine significance of the exact count of the books of the prophets, it would be self-evident that the *Shepherd* could not be added into the canon of the Old Testament.

Second, the Fragmentist avers that the *Shepherd* cannot be read among the New Testament books because it appeared after the time of the apostles. In the analysis of Albert C. Sundberg, the phrase “very recently, in our times” [*nuperrime temporibus nostris*] should not be interpreted as an affirmation that the *Shepherd* was written during the lifetime of the Fragmentist, but rather that it was published subsequent to the period

⁶⁸ Metzger speculates: “Perhaps the Fragmentist means that there are three major Prophets and twelve minor prophets” (*The Canon of the New Testament*, 307).

⁶⁹ *Comm. in Apoc.*, 4.5 (Haussleiter, 56).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.3 (Haussleiter, 50); see also *ibid.*, 5.3, 12.1; *De Fab. Mund.*, 10. Victorinus’s argument for the number of the books of the Old Testament is reminiscent of Irenaeus’s defense of the fourfold Gospel.

of apostolic direction of the church:⁷¹ “That is to say, the term ‘nuperrime’ does not necessarily fix the time-comparison with the lifetime of the author of the list, but may relate the time-comparison of the writing of the *Shepherd* of Hermas to the previously listed apostolic books.”⁷² If one reads the text in alignment with this theory, one arrives upon the conclusion that the author of the Muratorian Fragment endorsed a defined concept of the apostolic age and further believed that the canonical documents of the New Testament were all delivered during this era. It is therefore of consequence to find that Victorinus comprehended salvation history as divided into three stages: the prophetic period of the Old Testament, the apostolic age of the New Testament, and the current epoch of the church. In his comments on the angel who forbade John to write down all that he had witnessed, Victorinus provides the reader the opportunity to peer into his theology of the stages of revelation:

The Spirit of sevenfold power foretold all future events through the prophets, and by the voice of John, the Spirit delivered its testimony into the world. But because he said that he would write all that the thunders declared—i.e., whatever had been prophesied obscurely in the Old Testament—he was forbidden to write anything down and permitted only to ask about the revelation. Because he was an apostle, it was not fitting for the grace of a subsequent period to be granted in the first. . . . For the apostles overcame disbelief by displays of power, signs, wonders and miraculous deeds. After the apostles, the consolation of the interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures has now been given to the same churches that the apostles established in the faith.⁷³

Victorinus then addresses several passages in which Paul prescribes the continuing practice of the charismatic gift of prophecy in the church, although this would appear to contradict the theory that no new prophecy, and thus no new Scripture, could be conferred after the death of the apostles. While the prophets of pre-apostolic times foretold events that had never been announced, Victorinus elucidates, the prophets of

⁷¹ *Mur. Frag.*, 74 (Metzger, 307; Lietzmann, 9).

⁷² “Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List,” 9.

⁷³ *Comm. in Apoc.*, 10.2 (Hausleiter, 90); see also *ibid.*, 6.1.

post-apostolic times are “interpreting prophets” who merely expound what has already been delivered.⁷⁴ Victorinus and the Fragmentist therefore share the presupposition that the canonical books of the New Testament were all composed before the close of the apostolic age.

C. The Catholic Church and the Book of Wisdom

The Fragmentist refers to the church with the substantival adjective *catholica* and uniquely attributes the book of Wisdom to the friends of Solomon:

(68) Moreover, the Epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom, (70) written by the friends of Solomon in his honour.⁷⁵

First, it should be noted in passing that the substantival use of the adjective *catholica* is an extremely uncommon construction in earliest Latin Christian literature. Nevertheless, Victorinus also once uses the adjective *catholica* substantivally in his *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, and thus he represents one of the most ancient authors whose knowledge of this construction is attested.⁷⁶

Second, the author of the Fragment states that the apocryphal book of Wisdom was written by the friends of Solomon, an ascription that is not repeated anywhere among ancient sources. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles hypothesized that this bewildering comment about the friends of Solomon resulted from the failure of the supposed Latin translator to

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.2.

⁷⁵ *Mur. Frag.*, 68–70 (Metzger, 307).

⁷⁶ Victorinus writes: “Paul instructed all seven churches, and the seven named churches are the one catholic church” [catholica] (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 1.7 [Haussleiter, 28]). Like the Fragmentist, Victorinus more frequently uses this adjective attributively (*Comm. in Apoc.*, 4.5, 12.4). Tertullian also once uses this adjective substantivally, and thus this occurrence is not absolutely unprecedented (*Praesc.*, 30.2).

correctly render the Greek words *ὀπὸ Φίλωνος* [by Philo].⁷⁷ Tregelles then concluded, rather ingeniously, that Jerome's rejection of the Solomonic authorship of the book of Wisdom and ascription of the work to Philo stemmed from his acquaintance with the Greek original of the Muratorian Fragment. This theory is admittedly intriguing, although it is certainly not unproblematic. In contradiction to Tregelles's theory, Cassiodore appears to believe that Jerome was the first to claim that the book of Wisdom was written by another author than Solomon.⁷⁸ Despite an extensive knowledge of Greek literature, the erudite Epiphanius notes no controversy over the authorship of the book of Wisdom, and he catalogues it as Solomon's in his own draft of the New Testament canon.⁷⁹

But there is another theory concerning this perplexing allegation, and one that deserves further consideration. Christian Charles Josias Bunsen once argued that the Fragmentist's reference to the friends of Solomon could be a slight misquotation of the Septuagint translation of Proverbs 25:1, in which verse it is recorded that the friends [οἱ φίλοι] of Hezekiah transcribed Solomon's proverbs.⁸⁰ Because Proverbs 25:1 concerns the

⁷⁷ *Canon Muratorianus*, 53. Theodor Zahn also viewed this theory favorably (*Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, 2:101).

⁷⁸ *Instit.*, 1.5.5. Tregelles confesses: "After many years' study of the earlier Fathers, and much investigation of the subject of the canon of the Old and New Testaments, and the reception of the Apocrypha, I cannot find this authorship of the book of Wisdom mentioned by any writer anterior to Jerome" (*Canon Muratorianus*, 53). Augustine affirms that the book of Wisdom was traditionally attributed to Solomon on account of its style (*De Doct. Christ.*, 2.8.13; *De Civ. Dei.*, 17.20; see also *Retract.*, 2.30.2). The arguments regarding the book's authorship were therefore rhetorical rather than textual, at least as far as Jerome's contemporary and correspondent Augustine was concerned.

⁷⁹ *Pan.*, 76.5 (PG 42:560D–61A). Origen seems to question the Solomonic theory of authorship (*Contr. Cels.*, 5.29), although he customarily quotes the book of Wisdom as Solomon's. Origen explains that his doubt concerning the book's authority derived from the fact that the author employs a philosophical term not used elsewhere in Scripture (*De Princ.*, 4.4.6). His reserve regarding the Solomonic authorship of the book was therefore purely philological and did not stem from an awareness of a tradition ascribing it to Philo.

⁸⁰ *Hippolytus and His Age* (London: Longman, 1852), 2.137–38. William Horbury defends this theory against Tregelle's suggestion ("The Wisdom of Solomon in the Muratorian Fragment," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 [1994]: 150).

book of Proverbs and the Fragmentist's statement is respecting the book of Wisdom, however, this hypothesis never achieved broad acceptance. And yet, it is quite possible that Victorinus presumed that Proverbs 25:1 referred not only to the book of Proverbs but in fact to the entire Solomonic corpus. For in a fragment excerpted from his commentary on the Song of Songs, Hippolytus asserts that this verse applies to all of Solomon's writings, including Proverbs, the book of Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.⁸¹ Hippolytus alone among ancient Christian authors commented on Proverbs 25:1, and his idiosyncratic interpretation of this verse is a plausible explanation for the Fragmentist's error in attributing the book of Wisdom to the friends of Solomon. As an avid reader of the exegetical writings of Hippolytus in general and as the author of commentaries on Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs in particular, Victorinus remains the most promising candidate author of the Canon Muratori.⁸²

D. The Acceptance of the Apocalypse of Peter

We shall now turn to review the presence of the Apocalypse of Peter in the Muratorian Fragment. This incidence constitutes one of the simplest but most compelling arguments for a Victorinan theory of authorship:

(71) We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, (72) though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church.

It is significant that the Fragmentist accepted the Petrine Apocalypse, for this is unique

⁸¹ The Solomonic corpus, which supposedly was comprised of an astronomical number of songs and proverbs, was edited down to its current dimensions during the days of Hezekiah, Hippolytus explains: "Out of these [works of Solomon], then, the wise friend of Hezekiah took those portions which bore upon the edification of the Church" [**Error! Main Document Only.** Ἐξ αὐτῶν οὖν τούτων οἱ φίλοι Ἐζεκίου σοφοὶ ὑπάρχοντες ἐξελέξαντο τὰ πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας] (*Frag. in Cant.* [ANF 5:176; PG 10:629A]).

⁸² See Jerome, *De. Vir. Ill.*, 74.2.

among ancient lists of the books of the New Testament canon. Eusebius specifically rejects the Apocalypse of Peter in *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.25.1–7, but aside from this passage, the Apocalypse of Peter appears in no other canon list except the Fragment.⁸³ The Fragmentist’s provisional acceptance of the Apocalypse of Peter was one of the reasons why Adolph von Harnack dismissed the Hippolytean theory of authorship.⁸⁴ Theodor Zahn considered it unimaginable that a document with a Roman provenance could contain such a reference: “Even the mention and still more the recognition of an Apocalypse of Peter in the West is inconceivable in the light of the fact that not a single quotation from the oldest western writers can be adduced to show their knowledge of it.”⁸⁵ In order to preserve the integrity of a Hippolytean theory of authorship, Zahn was therefore forced to argue that the Fragment was simply corrupt at this point.

However, a textual emendation need not be assumed, for the eccentric Bishop Victorinus did in fact receive the Apocalypse of Peter as Scripture. In 1911, André Wilmart published an exegetical fragment on the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Wilmart concluded that the piece was from the pen of Victorinus, and subsequent scholarship has confirmed his analysis. It is thus of utmost importance to note that Victorinus quotes the Petrine Apocalypse as authoritative and applies the formula *scriptum est*. In his depiction of the throne of God, Victorinus writes: “there is a river of fire that separates the impious

⁸³ Eusebius reaffirms his rejection of the Apocalypse of Peter in *Hist. Eccl.*, 6.14.1, although this passage is not considered to be a canon list.

⁸⁴ “Ganz deutlich ist, daß für Hippolyt die Johannes-Apokalypse die einzigliche Apokalypse ist“ („Über den Verfasser und den literarischen Charakter des Muratorischen Fragments,“ 14).

⁸⁵ “Muratorian, Canon,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1951), 8:55.

from the Kingdom of God, as it is written in Daniel and Peter—in his Apocalypse.”⁸⁶

Concerning this citation, Wilmart exulted: “Or, ce témoignage exprès du fragment en faveur de l’Apocalypse de Pierre est extrêmement précieux, j’oserai dire même inouï.”⁸⁷

The phenomenal rarity of authors who accepted the Apocalypse of Peter speaks all the more forcefully for a Victorinan theory of authorship.

D. The Name “Cataphrygians” for the Montanists

The theological orientation of the Fragmentist is notably anti-Montanist and anti-Marcionite, and Victorinus also opposed these particular groups. Against the former, Victorinus denounced those who followed after the “new prophecies” [*nouas prophetias*], and he also differentiated spurious prophecy from “catholic prophecy” [*catholica prophetia*].⁸⁸ Against the latter, he censured those who claimed that the author of the Old Testament was not the same as that of the New.⁸⁹

If it be granted that the *Adversus Haereses* ascribed to Victorinus by Jerome can be identified as the document traditionally attributed to Pseudo-Tertullian, then a new set of circumstantial evidence confirms Victorinus as the author of the Fragment.⁹⁰ This is admittedly a controversial concession, but it nonetheless represents a theory that has been maintained by such authorities as Adolf von Harnack, Eduard Schwartz, and Johannes

⁸⁶ “flumen igneum est quo impii regno Dei arcebuntur, ut apud Danielum et apud Petrum—in Apocalypsi eius—scriptum est” (*De X Virg.*, 58–60 [Wilmart, “Un anonyme ancien *De X Virginiibus*,” 37]).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁸ *Comm. in Apoc.*, 2.4, 10.2 (Haussleiter, 38, 92).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.1.

⁹⁰ Jerome *De Vir. Ill.*, 74.2.

Quasten.⁹¹ The modern scholar K. H. Schwarte accepts this attribution as a matter of fact in his article in the eminent *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*.⁹² If the *Adversus Haereses* commonly associated with Pseudo-Tertullian is indeed identified as the work of Victorinus, then a number of parallels between this treatise and the Muratorian Fragment present themselves as evidence for a Victorinian theory of authorship. For example, as the Fragmentist states that the church rejects the writings of Valentinus, so the author of *Adversus Haereses* accuses Valentinus of introducing many falsehoods and adding to the received collection of Scripture.⁹³ The author of *Adversus Haereses* also proves to be surprisingly sophisticated in his analysis of the heretical canon of Cerdo, the forerunner of Marcion: “The Gospel of Luke alone, and that not entire, does he receive. Of the Apostle Paul he takes neither all the epistles, nor in their integrity. The Acts of the Apostles and the Apocalypse he rejects as false.”⁹⁴ The Fragment ends with the assertion that Basilides was the Asian founder of the “Cataphrygians.”⁹⁵ In this light, it is

⁹¹ Harnack avers: “Das unter den Werken des Tertullian stehende, den Präskriptionen angehängte und durch einen am Anfang zugefügten Satz mit ihnen künstlich verbundene Büchlein mit demselben Titel . . . ist vielleicht, ja wahrscheinlich eben das Werk des Victorin” (*Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897; repr., 1958], 2.2.430; see also idem., “Geschichte der marcionitischen Kirchen,” *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 19 [1875], 113–20; Quasten, *Patrology* [Westminster: The Newman Press, 1951], 2:412). The identification of Pseudo-Tertullian’s *Adversus Haereses* as Victorinus’s was first proposed by Franciscus Öhler (*Tertulliani quae supersunt opera* [Leipzig, 1851], 2.749–65).

⁹² “Victorinus of Pettau,” in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, trans. Matthew O’Connell (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 596.

⁹³ Pseudo-Tertullian, *Adv. Haer.*, 4. The author then reveals his own canon consciousness when he writes concerning Valentinus: “Of the Law and the prophets some parts he approves, some he disapproves; that is, he disapproves all in reprobating some. A Gospel of his own he likewise has, beside these of ours” (ibid. [ANF 3:652]).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 6 (ANF 3:653). Speaking in reference to Apelles, the disciple of Marcion, this author continues: “He uses, too, one only apostle; but that is Marcion’s, that is, a mutilated one” (ibid. [ANF 3:653]).

⁹⁵ *Mur. Frag.*, 85 (Metzger, 307).

noteworthy that the uncommon Latin name “Cataphrygians” for the Montanists appears for the first time on record in Pseudo-Tertullian’s *Adversus Haereses*:⁹⁶

Other heretics swell the list who are called Cataphrygians [qui dicuntur secundum Phrygas], but their teaching is not uniform. . . . The common blasphemy lies in their saying that the Holy Spirit was in the apostles indeed, the Paraclete was not; and in their saying that the Paraclete has spoken in Montanus more things than Christ brought forward into (the compass of) the Gospel.⁹⁷

It would therefore seem that Victorinus and the Fragmentist each refer to the Montanists with the afore-unattested alias “Cathaphrygians.” Further, both authors evidence an unprecedented preoccupation with the canon of the New Testament.

IV. Conclusion

Perhaps no other non-sacred text in all of ancient Christian literature has received such intense scrutiny as the Muratorian Fragment. The most notable parallels between Victorinus’s commentary and the Fragment were commonly discussed in the theological journals and monographs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, because these scholars presupposed a second-century dating for the Fragment, they unanimously concluded that Victorinus acquired his traditions from Hippolytus or from another hypothetical source. In current research, the second-century dating for the Fragment is seriously questioned, and a third-century theory of authorship could be proposed as a viable alternative. In this context, Victorinus of Pettau quickly rises as the most probable author of the Fragment. Not only does Victorinus offer an abundance of parallels, but a Victorinan theory of authorship would seem to account for several of the Fragmentist’s otherwise nonplusing remarks.

⁹⁶ Ferguson, “Canon Muratori: Date and Provenance,” 681.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 (ANF 3:654 [PL 2:90B]).

But at least one important question remains unanswered: if Victorinus was the anonymous author of the Canon Muratori, then why is it mentioned neither by his contemporaries nor by his successors? The present author is convinced that several ancient sources do in fact refer to the Muratorian Fragment, for it was known in antiquity as the prologue to Victorinus's *Commentarius in Matthaëum*. Jerome does not list this commentary along with Victorinus's other popular works in *De Illustribus Viris*, 74.2, but he acknowledges it in the preface to his translation of Origen's *Homiliae in Lucam*.⁹⁸ Origen discusses the four orthodox Gospels in the preface to his work on Matthew, and as Victorinus emulated Origen's exegesis, so he very well may have patterned the preface to his commentary on Matthew after Origen's.⁹⁹ We may recall that Jerome's account of the Johannine legend reflects the influence of the Muratorian Fragment. It is therefore fascinating to discover that Jerome presents this legend in the preamble to his commentary on Matthew, and he specifically informs the reader that he reviewed Victorinus's *Commentarius in Matthaëum* in preparation for writing this work. Still more persuasively, Joseph Lemarié notes that Chromatius of Aquileia directly copies out multiple lines from the Fragment in the prologue to his own commentary on Matthew.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Cassiodorus also acknowledges Victorinus's *Commentarius in Matthaëum*, and he considered it a classic work of Latin exegesis (*Inst.*, 1.7.1). At the close of his discussion on the New Testament canon, Cassiodorus comments that he had often cited Victorinus above (*ibid.*, 1.9.2), when he had actually specifically mentioned Victorinus only twice. We may thus suspect that Cassiodorus relied on Victorinus in drafting his New Testament canon list.

⁹⁹ Eusebius introduces Origen's discussion as follows: "When defending the canon of the Church, he testifies that he knows four gospels only" (*Hist. Eccl.*, 6.25.3 [Williamson, 265]). The only New Testament canon that antedates Victorinus is an informal list provided by Origen (*Hom. in Jos.*, 7.1). According to Johannes Haussleiter, Victorinus evidences a familiarity with precisely this series of sermons (see Victorinus, *Comm. in Apoc.*, 14/17.2; Origen, *Hom. in Jos.*, 9.10).

¹⁰⁰ «Saint Chromace d'Aquilée témoin du Canon de Muratori,» *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 24 (1978): 101. The Fragmentist writes: "(3) Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, (4–5) when Paul had taken him with him as one zealous for the law, (6) composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not (7) seen the Lord in the flesh" [Lucas iste medicus,

Lemarié affirmed that Chromatius of Aquileia probably depended upon Victorinus's commentary on Matthew, and this conclusion is corroborated by Dulaey.¹⁰¹ All these independent rays of evidence converge to recommend the thesis that the ancients knew the Canon Muratori as the prologue to Victorinus's *Commentarius in Matthaem*.¹⁰² It is not at all improbable that a fragment from Victorinus's lost commentary on Matthew should find its way to L. A. Muratori. Martine Dulaey affirms that a remnant from Victorinus's *Commentarius in Matthaem* known as the *Fragment Chronologique* was in fact discovered in another ninth-century manuscript from the monastery at Bobbio. This manuscript too journeyed to the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and in 1713, this fragment

post ascensum Christi cum eum Paulus quasi ut iuris studiosum secum adsumpsisset, nomine suo ex opinione conscripsit, dominum tamen nec ipse vidit in carne] (*Mur. Frag.*, 3–7 [Metzger 305–6; Liezmann, 4–5]). Lemarié notes that Chromatius is clearly indebted to the Fragment: “Luke also had not seen the Lord in the flesh, but because he was very well informed in the law, inasmuch as he was a companion of the Apostle Paul in everything that he did, and one instructed in the grace of God, he accurately set forth the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel bearing his name” [Lucas quoque *Dominum in carne non uidit*, sed quia *eruditissimus legis* erat, quippe qui *comes Pauli* apostoli in omnibus fuit, instructus gratia Dei, ipse apostolorum Acta diligenter exposuit et euangelium *nomine suo conscripsit*] (*Prolog. Tract. in Math.*, 2. [*Chromatii Aquileiensis Opera*, ed. R. Étaix and J. Lemarié, CCSL 9A, [Tvrnholti: Typographi Brepolis Editores Pontificii, 1974], 185]). Again the Fragmentist avers: “And so, though various (17) elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, (18) nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things (20) have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the (21) nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, (22) concerning life with his disciples, (23) and concerning his twofold coming” [Et ideo, licet varia singulis evangeliorum libri principia doceantur, nihil tamen differt credentium fidei, cum uno ac principali spiritu declarata sint in omnibus omnia: de nativitate, de passione, de resurrectione, de conversatione cum discipulis suis ac de gemino eius adventu] (*Mur. Frag.*, 16–23 [Metzger, 306; Liezmann, 5]). Chromatius then adds in his commentary: “Therefore, the authority of these four Gospels is firm and unchangeable, since they drew up all things by the one sovereign [Spirit]. And though from a certain point of view various elements may be taught, nevertheless they differ in no sentiment among themselves, because the sense of the faith is one and the same in all concerning the incarnation of the Lord, concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, and also concerning his twofold coming” [Horum igitur quattuor euangelistarum firma et indemutabilis auctoritas est, quia *uno principali* omnia conscripserunt, quorum *licet* certa ratione *uaria principia doceantur*, in nullo tamen sibi dissentiant, quia unus omnium idemque *fidei* sensus est de incarnatione Domini, de *natiuitate*, de *passione*, de *resurrectione*, de *gemnio* quoque *eius aduentu*] (*Prolog. Tract. in Math.*, 3 [CCSL 9A:186]).

¹⁰¹ Lemarié, «Saint Chromace d'Aquilee témoin du Canon de Muratori,» 102; Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio*, 1:64.

¹⁰² Accordingly, the Muratorian Fragment can be dated to ca. 258 A.D.

was published by none other than the tireless Italian librarian, L. A. Muratori.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Muratori, *Anecdota, Quae Ex Ambrosianae Bibliothecae Codicibus*, vol. 3 (Patavii: Joannem Manfrè: 1713), 207–8; Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio*, 37.

V. Appendix: The Latin Text of the Canon Muratori¹⁰⁴

(1) . . . quibus tamen interfuit, et ita posuit. (2) Tertium evangelii librum secundum *Lucam*. (3) Lucas iste medicus, post ascensum Christi (4) cum eum Paulus quasi ut iuris¹⁰⁵ studiosum (5) secum adsumpsisset, nomine suo (6) ex opinione conscripsit, dominum tamen nec ipse (7) vidit in carne, et ideo prout assequi potuit (8) ita et a nativitate Iohannis incipit dicere. (9) Quartum evangeliorum *Iohannis* ex discipulis. (10) Cohortantibus condiscipulis et episcopis suis (11) dixit »conieiunate mihi hodie triduo, et quid (12) cuique fuerit revelatum, alterutrum (13) nobis enarremus«. Eadem nocte (14) revelatum Andreae ex apostolis, ut (15) recognoscentibus cunctis Iohannes suo nomine (16) cuncta describeret. Et ideo, licet varia (17) singulis evangeliorum libris principia (18) doceantur, nihil tamen differt (19) credentium fidei, cum uno ac principali spiritu (20) declarata sint in omnibus omnia: de (21) nativitate, de passione, de resurrectione, (22) de conversatione cum discipulis suis (23) ac de gemino eius adventu, (24) primo in humilitate despectus, quod (25) fuit, secundo in potestate regali (26) praeclaro, quod futurum est. Quid ergo (27) mirum, si Iohannes tam constanter (28) singula etiam in epistulis suis profert (29) dicens in semetipsum »quae vidimus oculis (30) nostris et auribus audivimus et manus (31) nostrae palpaverunt, haec scripsimus vobis«. (32) Sic enim non solum visorem se et auditorem, (33) sed et scriptorem omnium mirabilium domini per (34) ordinem profitetur. *Acta* autem omnium apostolorum (35) sub uno libro scripta sunt. Lucas »optimo (36) Theophilo« comprehendit, quae sub praesentia eius singula (37) gerebantur, sicuti et semota passione Petri (38) evidenter declarat, sed et profectione Pauli ab (39) urbe ad Spaniam proficiscentis. *Epistulae* autem (40) *Pauli*, quae a quo loco vel qua ex causa directae (41) sint, volentibus intellegere ipsae declarant: [42] primum omnium Corinthiis schismatae haereses (43) interdicens, deinceps Galatis circumcisionem, (44) Romanis autem ordinem scripturarum sed et (45) principium earum esse Christum intimans (46) prolixius scripsit. De quibus singulis (47) necesse est a nobis disputari, cum ipse beatus (48) apostolus Paulus sequens prodecessoris sui (49) Iohannis ordinem non nisi nominatim septem (50) ecclesiis scribat ordine tali: ad Corinthios (51) prima, ad Ephesios secunda, ad Philippenses (52) tertia, ad Colossenses quarta, ad Galatas (53) quinta, ad Thessalonicenses sexta, ad Romanos (54) septima. Verum Corinthiis et (55) Thessalonicensibus licet pro correptione iteretur, una (56) tamen per omnem orbem terrae ecclesia (57) diffusa esse dinoscitur. Et Iohannes enim in (58) apocalypsi licet septem ecclesiis scribat, (59) tamen omnibus dicit. Verum ad Philemonem unam (60) et ad Titum unam et ad Timotheum duas pro (61) affectu et dilectione, in honorem tamen ecclesiae (62) catholicae in ordinationem ecclesiasticae (63) disciplinae sanctificatae sunt. Fertur etiam ad (64) *Laodicenses*, alia ad *Alexandrinios*, Pauli (65) nomine finctae ad haeresem Marcionis et alia (66) plura, quae in catholicam ecclesiam recipi non (67) potest: fel enim cum melle misceri non (68) congruit. *Epistula* sane *Iudae* et superscripti (69) *Iohannis* duae in catholica habentur et (70) *Sapientia* ab amicis Salomonis in honorem ipsius (71) scripta. *Apocalypses* etiam *Iohannis* et (72) *Petri* tantum recipimus, quam quidam ex (73) nostris legi in ecclesia nolunt. *Pastorem* vero (74) nuperrime temporibus nostris in urbe (75) Roma Hermas conscripsit sedente (76) cathedra urbis Romae ecclesiae Pio episcopo fratre (77) eius: et ideo legi eum quidem oportet, se (78) publicare vero in ecclesia populo neque inter (79) prophetas completo numero neque inter (80) apostolos in fine temporum potest. (81) *Arsinoi* autem seu *Valentini* vel *Mi[l]tiadis* (82) nihil in totum recipimus, qui etiam novum (83) Psalmorum librum Marcioni (84) conscripserunt una cum Basilide Asiano, (85) Cataphrygum constitutore. . . .

¹⁰⁴ Hans Lietzmann, *Das Muratorische Fragment und die monarchianischen Prologe zu den Evangelien* (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber, 1902; repr., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1933), 4–11.

¹⁰⁵ Lietzmann believed the words “ut iuris” to be a corruption and emended the text to read “litteris.” However, in light of the testimony of Chromatius of Aquileia, it appears that the original phrase is to be preferred.