

The Shepherd of Hermas



The Good Shepherd: Vault Painting from the Catacomb of Priscilla
Image courtesy of the *International Catacomb Society*

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Who was Hermas?

The Shepherd of Hermas is an early second century Christian work composed, probably over a period of time by one author called Hermas¹. Whatever we know about him is gleaned from his work. He was a Christian freedman who previously had been bought as a slave by a Roman Christian lady of some social standing and subsequently set free. As a freedman he made a reasonable living with his own business (not without some shady dealings), married, and, by the time of this work's composition, had adult children. The latter apparently apostaticized during an earlier persecution but finally returned to the faith. Hermas wrote in rather simplistic Greek and in a somewhat homespun style, indicating eastern provenance and only a modest level of education. It is quite possible that he was of Jewish background, but the evidence concerning this is inconclusive. He is, in any case, considered one of the Apostolic Fathers of the Church. Yet Hermas was neither a scion of the upper class nor an intellectual, but an ordinary man with few social pretensions.

When was *The Shepherd of Hermas* Written?

Where and when did Hermas compose this work? He certainly lived in central Italy, possibly Rome. The local geographical references he gives bear this out.² When exactly Hermas lived is more difficult to pin down. Carolyn Osiek points out that there are three data by which one may try to fix his era: the Hermas of Romans 16:14, the reference in the *Shepherd* to Clement (presumably Clement of Rome),³ and the *Muratorian Fragment*.⁴ The problem is that they cannot all be correct. Origen associated the Hermas of the *Shepherd* with the Hermas of Romans 16:14. If this were true it would be unlikely that he lived beyond the end of the first century. Clement of Rome is generally understood to have been active in his see toward the end of the second century. So far, nothing is inconsistent as long as one assumes that Hermas composed this work when very old. But the *Muratorian Fragment* is the only work which claims to be contemporary with the *Shepherd* and it attributes the *Shepherd* to a Hermas who was the brother of Pius I, who presided as bishop in Rome no earlier than 140-155. Hence not all three references can be correct.⁵

The *Muratorian Fragment* seems to be the most credible witness. Origen, a mid-second century theologian was hardly contemporary either with Hermas or the milieu of the *Shepherd*. He did consider this work to be canonical so he would be interested in assigning it an early date, and certainly he had the handy reference to an Hermas in Romans 16:14. Although hardly impossible, there is no solid proof for this beyond Origen's assertion. The reference to Clement in Vis. II.4.3 is shakier than might at first appear. The Clement who was to forward the revealed text to cities abroad need only have been a clerk rather than a bishop. Hermas refers to Clement together with a certain woman, Grapte, who was to educate the local women and orphans using the revealed text. To refer to a bishop and a local educator in

¹This is a debatable point, but the contemporary majority opinion is that the *Shepherd* had one author, although the work was composed not all at once. For a brief overview of this issue, see Carolyn Osiek, "Introduction," *The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 8-10.

²The Tibur, see "The Shepherd of Hermas," *The Apostolic Fathers* (trans. Joseph M.-F. Marique, S.J., Ph.D.; Fathers of the Church 1; New York: Christian Heritage, 1948) Vision I.1.2 (235), Cumae, idem., Vis. I.1.3, Vis. II.1.1. the Via Campana, idem., Vis. IV.1.2, etc.

³*Shepherd* Vis. II.4.3.

⁴The *Muratorian Fragment* is the oldest known list of New Testament books, dated to approximately 170. Discovered by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in a manuscript in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, it was published by him in 1740.

⁵ See Carolyn Osiek, "Introduction" 18-20.

one breath seems a little unlikely, although not impossible. Even if Clement, Bishop of Rome was intended, Hermas need not have been contemporary with the bishop. It is a feature of apocalyptic literature, a genre to which this work belongs, to cite heroes and sages of earlier ages to enhance the authority of a given text. Since the *Shepherd* claims to present divinely revealed messages, such an authoritative witness would be useful. The *Muratorian Fragment* held the *Shepherd* to be useful for instruction but advised against its public recitation in worship due to its recent provenance. Whoever composed the *Fragment* claims to be contemporary with the Hermas in question. It is difficult to ascertain what motive the author of the *Fragment* might have had to make such a statement unless it were true. Furthermore, many references in the *Shepherd* refer to the pause in the building of the Tower which signifies the delay in Christ's coming.⁶ This would have been a far more pressing issue in the mid-second century than in St. Paul's or St. Clement's time. Hermas' reference to heresies and heretics would also make greater sense if made in the mid-second century.⁷ Therefore the *Shepherd of Hermas* was most likely written by the brother of Pius I in the mid-second century.

Why did Hermas write the *Shepherd*?

In discussing why Hermas wrote the *Shepherd*, it is revealing to consider what kind of work it is. The *Shepherd of Hermas* is an apocalyptic work which makes one final call to repentance for all believers before a final affliction or persecution takes place.⁸ Although a piece of apocalyptic literature, it is not a proper apocalypse since,⁹ although the setting is the final days, the focus is on the current call to repentance and not on the narration of the eschaton.¹⁰ It certainly has many of the characteristics of an apocalypse, such as being revelatory literature mediating a divine message to a human recipient through otherworldly beings. It uses symbolism extensively, the meaning of which Hermas consistently extracts from his heavenly revealers, often receiving rebukes for impudence alternately with commendations for pursuing knowledge with pure motives.¹¹ Yet, unlike *Revelation*, *Daniel*, and the mini-apocalypses of Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21, it does not discuss the end of the current age directly. This is, in the opinion of this study, an essential aspect of an apocalypse without which a work may be apocalyptic, but not an apocalypse proper.¹² Hermas composed the *Shepherd* to send forth a

⁶*Shepherd* Vis. III.5.5, Sim. IX.14.2, Sim X.4.4, etc.

⁷*Shepherd* Man. XI.1-21, Sim. VIII.5-6, Sim. IX.19.2, Sim. IX.22.1-4. Hermas does not discuss the theological nature of the notions of the heretics. One doubts he would have understood them anyway. Yet due to the focus on moral repentance in his work, Hermas describes the spiritual maladies and attitudes by which these heretics are afflicted.

⁸The Greek term used is *thlipsis* (θλίψις), meaning pressure, oppression, affliction, tribulation, and sometimes translated as persecution.

⁹The Greek term is *apocalypsis* (ἀποκάλυψις), meaning revelation.

¹⁰The Greek word, *eschaton* (ἔσχατον), the substantive of *eschatos* (ἔσχατος), means the uttermost, the last, the greatest extremity. In a Christian context it refers to the end of the age. *Eschatology* is therefore the Christian study of the last things.

¹¹Concerning the first revelations about the Tower, see *Shepherd* Vis. III.3.1 - III.7.6; concerning the Beast which represents the coming persecution, *Shepherd* Vis. IV.1.1-IV.3.7; concerning the Twelve Mountains and a new vision about the Tower and the interruption of its construction, *Shepherd* Sim. IX.1.1 - IX.31.6; concerning the Willow Tree, *Shepherd* Sim VIII.1.1 - VIII.11.5, and so forth.

¹²*Semeia 14* provides several useful studies of the apocalypse as a literary genre. Its definition of an apocalypse is as follows. "Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. The *Shepherd of Hermas* is understood here as an apocalypse with cosmic and/or political eschatology without employing historical review or an otherworldly journey. It is considered an apocalypse since it has an apocalyptic eschatology and is a revelation mediated by otherworldly beings. See John. J Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia 14* (Missoula, MT: Univ. Montana, 1979) 9, 14. Also Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypse," in idem., 74-75. This is an helpful definition and it fits well

final call to repentance to all before of the completion of the Church and the end of the current age.¹³ The call to repentance was to all, but his emphasis was on the repentance of believers before the eschaton.

This work has two historical settings: the historical setting as understood by modern readers, and the setting as understood by Hermas himself. The historical setting as we understand it is central Italy in the mid-second century in a Church pondering the seeming tardiness of Christ's coming, in which the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon are still under development, in which prophets are still active, and which struggles with division, lapsed and lukewarm Christians, and heresy. Hermas' understanding of his setting was, however, that his time was the final pause in the completion of the Church before the end of the age. This pause was granted by God's mercy to allow one last chance of salvation for all and was near its end, hence the urgency of its tone. The time for salvation was short. The final affliction or persecution was fast approaching.¹⁴

The Structure of the *Shepherd of Hermas*

Now that it is relatively clear by whom, why, and when the *Shepherd* was written, it is fitting to discuss its structure since this is one of the work's most unusual aspects. As mentioned previously it is an apocalyptic work but not an apocalypse proper since in it one finds no narration of the eschaton. It is questionable what need the Church would have had for yet another apocalypse since *Daniel*, the mini--apocalypses of Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21, and probably the *Revelation* were apocalypses already accepted by the Church and in common use by the mid-second century. Not that there were no other Christian apocalypses available, but none reached the level of use and official acceptance as the works above, or even, for a while, the *Shepherd*. Being a man of the Church, Hermas perhaps sensed no need for another apocalypse but presupposed the ones previously mentioned. Yet that does not mean that he did not have an apocalyptic mentality or that the *Shepherd* was not an apocalyptic work.

The *Shepherd* had many characteristics of an apocalypse, especially since it contains a transcendent message of salvation mediated by otherworldly beings to the human recipient, Hermas, both via visions and a divine book handed over for reproduction and transmission to the Church. The first part of the *Shepherd* consists of four visions granted to Hermas in which admonitions toward repentance, a vision about a tower which signifies the Church, and specific admonitions to the rich and to Church leaders are given through an elderly appearing woman who signifies the Church. It is this woman who gives Hermas a book to copy and hand over to Clement and Grapte for transmission.¹⁵ The admonition to repentance, which is the central message of the Visions, as well as the subsequent Mandates and Similitudes, has an eschatological context. This call to repentance issues forth in the latter days not long before the forthcoming persecution, the completion of the Tower, and end of the current age.¹⁶ Christians have

with the meaning of the term, *apocalypsis*. Yet it seems odd that a narration of the eschaton itself would be unnecessary for an apocalypse. Using such a definition, any work with enough revelatory features becomes an apocalypse. But the narration of the *eschaton* should be more than a mere feature of an apocalypse, rather its highlight, since that is what normally comes to mind when thinking about this kind of work. Furthermore, requiring an apocalypse to entail a narration of the end allows one to distinguish apocalyptic literature from an apocalypse proper, a useful distinction.

¹³*Shepherd* Vis. III.5.5, Vis. III.9.5, Sim. VIII.11.1-5, Sim. IX.14.2, Sim X.4.4, etc

¹⁴*Shepherd* Vis. II.2.4-8, Vis. IV.2.1-6. Interestingly enough, Vis. IV.2.1-6 presents the final tribulation as avoidable. If believers repented in a timely fashion and trusted God wholeheartedly, they could escape these final woes.

¹⁵For the Four Visions, see *Shepherd* Vis. I.1.1 - IV.3.7; concerning the heavenly book and the identity of the woman, Vis. II.1.1-3; II.4.1-3; concerning repentance, Vis. I.3.1 - I.4.1; and concerning the rich and Church leaders, Vis. II.2.6, III.9.1-10

¹⁶*Shepherd* Vis. I.3.1-4, II.2.1-8, II.3.3-4, IV.4.1.1 - IV.3.7. Hermas later elucidates that the building of the Tower, which

been granted one more chance for sincere and wholehearted repentance after baptism *now*. Repentance is open for pagans until the end of the age which, however, is not far off.¹⁷ This first part of the *Shepherd* is a complete literary entity unto itself and probably represents the earliest edition of the *Shepherd*.

After the four visions comes a fifth vision. This fifth vision, however, is not a simple continuation of the previous visions. It is instead a transition to the following two sections: the Twelve Mandates and Ten Similitudes.¹⁸ These two sections expand significantly the content of the Visions. They also introduce many new revelatory characters, but especially the Angel of Repentance or Shepherd under whose spiritual guidance Hermas is placed.¹⁹ It is after this angelic being that the *Shepherd of Hermas* derives its name. The elderly women of the Visions never appears again. But many new characters do appear, e.g., the Angel of Pleasure and Deceit, the Avenging Angel, the Twelve Virgins, and the Twelve Black-clad Women.²⁰ Whether the Mandates and Similitudes can be considered as one or two sections is debatable. Indeed, the literary structure of the *Shepherd* is rather amorphous. But this is a commonplace feature of apocalyptic literature. The very additive nature of apocalyptic literature wherein one vision follows another tends toward very loose structures. To decide whether Hermas felt the need for more hortatory elaboration, simply had subsequent visions, or both, is hard to decide. As long as one recognizes the apparent literary seams of this work, determining the exact structure of this apocalyptic work is neither necessary nor very rewarding. The essential point to keep in mind is the main purpose of the work, to call both believers and non-believers to sincere repentance before the approaching end of the age. Divine revelations as media would certainly enhance the authoritative claim of the call, provided one accepted the authority of the messenger, Hermas.

About the Role of Hermas

Hermas is the human recipient of heavenly messages which issue a last call to repentance. It is his task to relate this message to the proper Church authorities for transmission. Hermas, for example, is to make multiple copies of the book which he received. One was to be given to Clement for its transmission to other cities. Another was to be given to a certain Grapte, who was to educate the women and orphans with it. In Rome, Hermas and the local presbyters were to read this work publicly.²¹ Hermas is later commissioned by the Angel of Repentance to proclaim repentance to everyone since the merciful Lord has sent the angel to grant repentance to all.²² Hermas is to "acquit himself manfully of this office" by telling everyone the wonders of God. Those who follow the teaching of the revelations will live and be happy in this life whereas those who reject it will not live and will be unhappy in this life. Temporal and eternal bliss or damnation depend upon the reception of these messages, and Hermas is their official emissary.²³ Hermas recognizes the public role of prophets in the Church and apparently sees himself as a divinely commissioned prophet of repentance for the latter days.²⁴ This commission is mediated

represents the completion of the Church, has been paused providing an extended opportunity for repentance. This would give a plausible rationale for the delay of the Lord's coming. See *Shepherd* Vis. III.5.5, but especially Sim. IX.14.2, Sim. X.4.4, etc

¹⁷*Shepherd* Vis. II.2.1-8.

¹⁸Vision 5, *Shepherd* Vis. V.1.1-7. The Twelve Mandates, *Shepherd* Man. I.1 - XII.6.5. The Ten Similitudes, *Shepherd* Sim. I.1-X.4.5.

¹⁹*Shepherd* Vis. V.1-7.

²⁰*Shepherd* Sim. VI.1.1 - VI.2.6, VI.3.1 - VII.1-7, IX.2.1 - IX-4.8, IX.9.1-7, IX.11.1-9, IX.13.1 - IX-15.6.

²¹*Shepherd* Vis. II.4.2-3.

²²*Shepherd* Sim. VIII.1.1.

²³*Shepherd* Sim. X.4.1, also Sim X.2.4.

²⁴*Shepherd* Man. XI.1-21.

through the Angel of Repentance of the Mandates and Similitudes, the elderly woman of the Visions, and a glorious young man who explains the symbolism of the elderly women to Hermas.²⁵

Fine, but how would Hermas' hearers verify the truthfulness of his claims, seeing that his divine commission would be related to them only by his own testimony while that very testimony is what is in question? How does one escape this logical circle? As believers were to follow the Holy Apostle Paul as he followed Christ,²⁶ they were to follow Hermas based on how his message bore fruit in his life. Hence the *Shepherd* relates how the divine messages transformed Hermas' and his family's lives. The differing appearances of the woman in the Visions who represented the Church corresponded to the spiritual growth engendered in Hermas by his adherence to her messages.²⁷ Hermas and his hearers will live if they repent and obey the mandates given by the Angel of Repentance.²⁸ The handing over of Hermas and his family to the Avenging Angel for chastisement and their presumed subsequent correction gives public testimony to the efficacy of Hermas' message and the authority of Hermas' office.²⁹ Not only must Hermas' life be in order, but his family must be well-ordered as well.³⁰ The dignity of the Angel of Repentance is affirmed whose testimony about Hermas and his sincere reception of the divine messages is positive.³¹ Hermas and his household are entrusted to the care of the Twelve Virgins of the Similitudes, who represent spiritual graces, signifying the ongoing presence of divine grace in both Hermas and his family's lives.³² The efficacy of Hermas' message, as seen through its transformation of his and his family's lives, is the heavenly certification of Hermas' prophetic ministry. Furthermore, Hermas was a man of the Church and his prophetic message was to be spread by the Church. Clement is to pass it on to other cities. Grapte would use the text to educate women and orphans, while Hermas himself was to proclaim his revelations publicly together with the presbyterate.³³ The very locus of the prophet's activity is a key facet in the *Shepherd* of discerning between true and false prophets. The true prophet is humble and bears good spiritual fruit in his life. He also speaks only when God gives the utterance and *in the context of the divine assembly*. Not so for false prophets, who are self-indulgent, speak only privately, in accordance with the lusts of his hearers, and are struck dumb in the gathering of the godly.³⁴ Hermas' intends his prophetic authority to be certified by the Church. He is not a lone wolf.

The Reception of the *Shepherd of Hermas*

The reception of Hermas' authority and message was quite positive, especially in the early Christian centuries. Knowledge of the writing spread very quickly, at first appreciated and later rejected by Tertullian in Carthage, acknowledged by Irenaeus in Lyon, Clement and Origen in Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine, and so forth. Irenaeus of Lyon, Clement and Origen of Alexandria even recognized the *Shepherd* as an authoritative text of Holy Writ. Tertullian in his later Montanist years rejected the *Shepherd*, especially due to its views favoring marital reconciliation after divorce. Toward the end of the third century and beyond, the position expressed by the *Muratorian Fragment* seems to have prevailed, namely that the work is useful spiritually but that it should not be read publicly in the

²⁵*Shepherd* Vis. II.2.1-8, II.4.1-3, V.1-7, Sim. X.4.1.

²⁶I Corinthians 11.1

²⁷*Shepherd* Vis. III.10.1-III.13.4.

²⁸*Shepherd* Man. XII.6.4-5.

²⁹*Shepherd* Sim. VII.1-7.

³⁰This reminds one of St. Paul's discussion of bishops and their families. See I Timothy 3:1-6 and Titus 1:4-9.

³¹*Shepherd* Sim. X.2.1-4.

³²*Shepherd* Sim. X.3.1-4.

³³*Shepherd* Vis. II.4.2-3.

³⁴*Shepherd* Man. XI.1-21.

Church. Athanasius, Eusebius and Jerome find the *Shepherd* to be helpful reading. Dydimus the Blind quoted it in the fourth century. Jerome reports that the *Shepherd* was still read publicly in some Greek churches. It continued to be very popular in Egypt into the sixth century and Antiochus of Mar Saba in Palestine used it frequently in the seventh century. In the Christian East, the manuscript trail cools off after this. In the Christian West the popularity of the *Shepherd* may have begun to decline in the mid-sixth century due to its condemnation by the *Pseudo-Gelasian Decree*,³⁵ but its usage seems never to have disappeared entirely in the Christian West.³⁶

The *Shepherd* may be loosely structured, but its content is rich. Hence it elaborates many themes, making it impossible to cover all of them adequately in a short study. This study will therefore select a few major themes for analysis. The first significant theme to be discussed is repentance.

The Eschatological Context of Repentance

In the sections of the *Shepherd* which survive in Greek, the word which Hermas uses for repentance is *metanoia* (μετάνοια), which means repentance, but also afterthought, or a change of mind upon reflection. In the sections which survive in Latin, the term *pœnitentia* is used, which means repentance or regret. The Greek term is the one used by Hermas himself, which also has a more cognitive connotation than the more seemingly emotive *pœnitentia*. In either case, the essential meaning is clear. Repentance is a considered, deliberate, and heartfelt act by which one turns away from sin. Yet there is more to Hermas' notion of repentance than can be gleaned from the words used. One way toward a fuller grasp of his concept of repentance is to analyze Hermas' understanding of the term's context.

The time for repentance is *now*. While this is a common Christian topos, the immediacy of Hermas' call is unusually strong. As he understands it, this call to repentance is a final one, effective for all people but especially directed toward the Church. A final tribulation is to come, adding a compelling note to Hermas' call.³⁷ The Third Vision and Similitude Nine narrate the construction of a tower which represents the completion of the Church. Sinners are given a chance to repent now, before the Tower's completion. Once the Tower is completed, however, the current age will end and no room will be left in the Tower for anyone else.³⁸ For example, Hermas admonished the rich not to overindulge in God's creatures, i.e., avoid gluttony, luxury, etc. While the rich make themselves ill through overindulgence, the poor suffer from insufficient food. Failure to share therefore harms all. The rich are thus to keep their eyes on the coming judgment and repent *now* before the completion of the Tower, at which point no opportunity will remain to do good.³⁹ Believers are to live in peace and leave behind all quarrelsomeness now.

*So, mend your way while the tower is still in the building. The Lord has His dwelling among the peace-lovers. The Lord prizes peace and He is far from the quarrelsome and from those who are given up to wickedness.*⁴⁰

³⁵This is an early-sixth century list of Scriptural texts as they appeared in the Vulgate, probably composed in early sixth-century Italy, deriving its name from Gelasius, Pope of Rome (492-496).

³⁶Carolyn Osiek provides a good brief overview of the reception of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. See Osiek, "Introduction" 407.

³⁷*Shepherd* Vis. II.2.4-8. The term used is *thlipsis*, see note 8.

³⁸*Shepherd* Vis. III.5.5.

³⁹*Shepherd* Vis. IV.9.2-6.

⁴⁰*Shepherd* Sim. IX.32.1-2.

One must not procrastinate but perform works of charity now lest the Tower be completed and the opportunity for salvation lost. In fact, the pause in the Tower's construction is provided for humanity's sake, offering an extension to the period of salvation.⁴¹ Greater timeliness in repentance brings even greater honor among the inhabitants of the Tower. Tardiness in repentance might cause one to dwell within the walls of the Tower, i.e., as stones too weak to support the building and thus used in a less honorable way. Yet at least they have repented and live. Those who never repent will *die the death*.⁴²

If one repents in a timely fashion, he is saved and will be fit into the Tower. If one delays, but finally repents, he will be saved, although situated in a less honorable place in the Tower. Those who finally reject the Lord will perish outside the Tower. Is there any salvation outside the Tower? One would think not, but Hermas hints at the possibility. In Vision Three, Hermas asks if the stones, i.e., believers, could repent, who were expelled from the Tower since they could not fit in it. The answer is affirmative, they can repent. They will be granted another less honorable place after they have been chastised and fulfilled a period of punishment for their sins.⁴³ This single reference is obscure, but it reminds one of Ephrem of Nisibis' later concept of the foothills of Paradise, the very outer slopes of the Mountain of Paradise wherein penitents would dwell; a place of lesser honor but nonetheless of salvation.⁴⁴ Those who have heard the Word but are on the fringes of the Church apparently have some hope of salvation after enduring a period of chastisement.

The call to repentance is now. The final days of woe approach. The Church nears its completion. The door to salvation is open, but not for much longer. In this context lies the force of Hermas' call to repentance. Mercifully, God has delayed the completion of the Church to lengthen the period allowed for repentance. Given such graciousness, delay is costly, leading to either less honor or even damnation. But is also worth noting what else the delay in the construction of the Tower accomplishes; it allays the scandal of the Lord not having yet come. The mini-apocalypses of the Synoptic Gospels indicated that the end would come within a generation.⁴⁵ John 21:22-23 reflects the belief of some that the end would come within the lifetime of the Apostle John. Yet decades had passed since John's demise and not quite a century since the era of the Synoptics. Why had not the Lord already come? He has tarried, providing a gracious delay to increase the opportunity for man's salvation.

Repentance after Baptism?

Is repentance possible after baptism? To the modern Christian such a question would seem odd since it is assumed that one may repent as often as necessary. The early Church did not assume this, hence the then common practice of delaying baptism until the approach of death. The early Church took Holy Writ very seriously, hence the question whether repentance after baptism was possible. Consider the following Scriptural passages.

⁴¹ *Shepherd* Sim. X.4.3-4.

⁴² *Shepherd*. Sim. VIII.7.3 (θανάτω ἀποθανοῦνται).

⁴³ *Shepherd* Vis. III.7.5-6. Hermas speaks of fulfilling *the days of their sins* (τὰς ἡμέρας τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν). This reminds one of the concept of purgatory. But since it is not specified whether this period of chastisement is in this world or the next, it is hard to know what exactly is meant. As it is, it is hardly a proof text for the notion of purgatory.

⁴⁴ Ephrem of Nisibis, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (trans. Sebastian Brock; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990) 79, 88 (Hymns 1:4 and 2:10).

⁴⁵ See Luke 31:32, Matthew 24:34, and Mark 13:30.

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And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned (Hebrews 6:5-8).

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:26-31).

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 1:6-2:2).

And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not (1 John 5:15-18).

Such passages reveal the perplexity of the early Church regarding repentance after baptism. The passages from Hebrews seem to exclude such a possibility whereas those from 1 John seem to allow for it, excepting the unnamed sin unto death. Hermas' initial understanding is that there is one repentance, one baptism, and one remission of sins available to all. He even queries the Angel of Repentance concerning this issue.

And I said to him, "I should like to continue my questions." "Speak on," said he. And I said, "I heard, sir, some teachers maintain that there is no other repentance than that which takes place, when we descended into the water and received remission of our former sins." He said to me, "That was sound doctrine which you heard; for that is really the case. For he who has received remission of his sins ought not to sin any more, but to live in purity. Since, however, you inquire diligently into all things, I will point this also out to you, not as giving occasion for error to those who are to believe, or have lately believed, in the Lord. For those who have now believed, and those who are to believe, have not repentance for their sins; but they have remission of their

previous sins. For to those who have been called before these days, the Lord has set repentance. For the Lord, knowing the heart, and foreknowing all things, knew the weakness of men and the manifold wiles of the devil, that he would inflict some evil on the servants of God, and would act wickedly towards them. The Lord, therefore, being merciful, has had mercy on the work of His hand, and has set repentance for them; and He has entrusted to me power over this repentance. And therefore I say to you, that if any one is tempted by the devil, and sins after that great and holy calling in which the Lord has called His people to everlasting life, he has opportunity to repent but once. But if he should sin frequently after this, and then repent, to such a man his repentance will be of no avail; for with difficulty will he live." And I said, "Sir, I feel that life has come back to me in listening attentively to these commandments; for I know that I shall be saved, if in future I sin no more." And he said, "You will be saved, you and all who keep these commandments."⁴⁶

So the Angel of Repentance affirms the teaching which Hermas had received, that there is only one repentance and baptism available to all. Afterward the believer is to avoid sin and live in purity.⁴⁷ Yet the Lord knows our weakness and in His mercy allows one additional occasion for repentance after baptism for those who fall.⁴⁸ The Angel of Repentance himself is the one assigned the administration of this additional repentance.

So far things seem clear, although quite rigorous. Repentance is available for sinners and pagans until the end. After the current final call, repentance for the just is at an end.⁴⁹ But what happens if the believer sins yet again? Frequent alternations between sinning and repentance apparently render such occasions of repentance void. Yet where those who do not repent die,⁵⁰ those who repent often might live, albeit with difficulty.⁵¹ Those who never repent will perish. Those who repent and continue in purity will live. Those who repented previously but fall under severe temptation will live if they avail themselves of the current calling to repentance and henceforth live purely. Although severely discouraged, repenting often might still save, if only barely. This last point is left rather vague, however. Yet whenever possible, Hermas leans heavily on the side of repentance and salvation.

Hermas' tendency to stress the possibility and efficacy of repentance is very clear in Similitude Eight, the Parable of the Willow Tree.⁵² The Willow Tree represents the law of God and those who seek its shelter are the ones called by the name of the Lord. A tall angel lops off branches from the Willow, handing one to each believer. Each is to tend to his branch and return it to the same angel for inspection, i.e., each believer is evaluated according to how he kept the divine law. Those with green branches (the holy and just), or green with buds (confessors), or green with buds and fruits (martyrs) are admitted to the Tower immediately. The rest have faulty branches (those who failed to keep the law). These hand their branches over to the angel of repentance who would attend to them, attempting to revive them to the degree possible. Subsequently a second inspection, representing evaluation after the current call to

⁴⁶*Shepherd* Man. IV.3.1-7. Unless otherwise stated, this and all subsequent quotations will use the Roberts-Donaldson translation, taken from *Shepherd of Hermas* (<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd.html>, 2001).

⁴⁷See also *Shepherd* Sim. VI.1.4.

⁴⁸See also *Shepherd* Sim. IX.26.3-6.

⁴⁹See *Shepherd* Vis.II.2.5. This reflects Hermas' earlier opinion concerning repentance found in the Visions. The discussion in Mandate Four (cited above in note 46) came later and indicates some development in Hermas' thought, i.e., what happens in case of multiple acts of repentance.

⁵⁰*Shepherd* Vis. III.7.6; Sim. VIII.7.3; Sim. IX.26.8, etc.

⁵¹*for he will live with difficulty* (δυσκόλως γὰρ ζήσεται), *Shepherd* Man. IV.3.6. Concerning the double-minded man being saved with difficulty see, *Shepherd* Man. IX.6. See also *Shepherd* Sim. IX.23.3.

⁵²*Shepherd* Sim. VIII.1.1 - 11.4.

repentance, would take place. The believer's fate depended on how his branch prospered. Without going into detail over the states and fates of every willow branch, it is important to note that the Angel of Repentance was optimistic since he affirmed the Willow to be tenacious of life.⁵³ Hence his efforts to revive them met with considerable success. Hermas therefore believed in the innate tendency of believers toward life.

Hermas therefore leans toward the possibility of repentance whenever he can. He is convinced of the Lord's mercy which makes the current call for repentance possible. Yet he also believes in the efficacy of divine teaching since the branches of the Willow cling to life. He affirms as well the power, authority, and dignity of the Angel of Repentance i.e., of the one who administers repentance.⁵⁴ Hermas therefore believes in the tendency of believers toward life due to the efficacy of the Church's ministrations, and in the efficacy of repentance due to its majesty and power.

Perhaps such motivations underlie the admonition of the woman, in Vision One, that Hermas not give up on his fallen, apparently apostate children. Hermas is to encourage and strengthen his household and not relent. As a smith masters his metal by constant hammering, so too must the righteous overcome evil by daily sermons. Hermas is not to slacken in his efforts but admonish his children, in the confidence that if they repent wholeheartedly, their names will be written in the books of life with the saints.⁵⁵ Given such hopefulness, one must never give up on the possibility of repentance for others.

Another essential point to understand is the importance of *sincerity*. If one repents thoroughly and wholeheartedly, he will be rejuvenated and firmly established.⁵⁶ Even those who previously denied the Lord may repent and be saved due to the Lord's mercy. But anyone currently planning to deny the Lord in a forthcoming persecution has already rejected his own life.⁵⁷ The Lord is merciful, but for repentance to be efficacious it must be *sincere*. The sinner must truly want to set aside the sin in question. If the sinner *plans intentionally* to commit that very sin again, there is no forgiveness since there is no real repentance. For Hermas, multiple acts of repentance betray a lack of both sincerity and true repentance. This psychological insight is vital to Hermas' understanding of repentance. The sincere repenter does not want to sin again. Hermas therefore tries to balance the ever present mercy of the Lord with the requirements of Christian holiness together with the subtleties of the psychology of repentance. Hermas, and many other early Christians, also thought it possible to live the rest of one's days in purity since they also believed that the Lord's coming was nigh, i.e., they had not long to endure.

Perhaps a good place to end this discussion of repentance in the *Shepherd* is with the following call to repentance at the conclusion of Similitude Eight, the Parable of the Willow.

And after he had finished the explanations of all the branches, he said to me, "Go and tell them to every one, that they may repent, and they shall live unto God. Because the Lord, having had

⁵³*Shepherd* Sim. VIII.2.1-9.

⁵⁴*Shepherd* Sim. X.1.1-3.

⁵⁵*Shepherd* Vis. I.3.1-2.

⁵⁶*Shepherd* Vis. III.13.4.

⁵⁷*Shepherd* Vis. II.2.7-8. Can the lapsed be saved? Hermas is ambiguous on this point. The text just cited affirms the possibility. Hermas seems to have refined his thought on this issue over time since the later Sim. IX.26.3-7 qualifies this position. Those who denied the Lord previously, but not from the heart, may yet repent and live. For those who meant the denial from the heart, the issue remains uncertain. Nonetheless, whoever currently plans to deny the Lord will not be saved. Elsewhere, apostates who denied the Lord, are traitors to the Church, and who have blasphemed are lost to God. *Shepherd* Sim. VIII.6.4.

compassion on all men, has sent me to give repentance, although some are not worthy of it on account of their works; but the Lord, being long-suffering, desires those who were called by His Son to be saved." I said to him, "Sir, I hope that all who have heard them will repent; for I am persuaded that each one, on coming to a knowledge of his own works, and fearing the Lord, will repent." He answered me, and said, "All who with their whole heart shall purify themselves from their wickedness before enumerated, and shall add no more to their sins, will receive healing from the Lord for their former transgressions, if they do not hesitate at these commandments; and they will live unto God. But do you walk in my commandments, and live." Having shown me these things, and spoken all these words, he said to me, "And the rest I will show you after a few days."⁵⁸

Double-mindedness is to be Avoided

Given Hermas emphasis upon sincere repentance and a pure life, it would be consistent that he address other ethical issues as well. Hermas does indeed do so, and double-mindedness is one of his chief concerns. The noun for double-mindedness is *dipsychia* (διψυχία), and the adjectival form often used by Hermas is *dipsychos* (διψυχος), meaning double-minded. These terms are derived from the noun *psyche* (ψυχή), which means breath (especially as a sign of life), life, soul, heart, mind, and reason, and the verb *psychô* (ψύχω), to breathe, cool or refresh. *Psyche* is the seat of the will, desires and passions, as well as the mind. Hermas never gives his own proper definition of double-mindedness. But his understanding of it becomes clear in Mandate Nine, where he discusses the issue.

He saith to me; "Remove from thyself a doubtful mind and doubt not at all whether to ask of God, saying within thyself, "How can I ask thing of the Lord and receive it, seeing that I have committed so many sins against Him?" Reason not thus, but turn to the Lord with thy whole heart, and ask of Him nothing wavering, and thou shalt know His exceeding compassion, that He will surely not abandon thee, but will fulfill the petition of thy soul. For God is not as men who bear a grudge, but Himself is without malice and hath compassion on His creatures. Do thou therefore cleanse thy heart from all the vanities of this life, and from the things mentioned before; and ask of the Lord, and thou shalt receive all things, and shalt lack nothing of all thy petitions, if thou ask of the Lord nothing wavering. But if thou waver in thy heart, thou shalt surely receive none of thy petitions. For they that waver towards God, these are the doubtful-minded, and they never obtain any of their petitions. But they that are complete in the faith make all their petitions trusting in the Lord, and they receive, because they ask without wavering, nothing doubting; for every doubtful-minded man, if he repent not, shall hardly be saved. Cleanse therefore thy heart from doubtful-mindedness, and put on faith, for it is strong, and trust God that thou wilt receive all thy petitions which thou askest; and if after asking anything of the Lord, thou receive thy petition somewhat tardily, be not of doubtful mind because thou didst not receive the petition of thy soul at once. For assuredly it is by reason of some temptation or some transgression, of which thou art ignorant, that thou receivest thy petition so tardily. Do thou therefore cease not to make thy soul's petition, and thou shalt receive it. But if thou grow weary, and doubt as thou askest, blame thyself and not Him that giveth unto thee. See to this doubtful-mindedness; for it is evil and senseless, and uprooteth many from the faith, yea, even very faithful and strong men. For indeed this doubtful-mindedness is a daughter of the

⁵⁸Shepherd Sim. VIII.11.1-5.

*devil, and worketh great wickedness against the servants of God. Therefore despise doubtful-mindedness and gain the mastery over it in everything, clothing thyself with faith which is strong and powerful. For faith promiseth all things, accomplisheth all things; but doubtful-mindedness, as having no confidence in itself, fails in all the works which it doeth. Thou seest then," saith he, "that faith is from above from the Lord, and hath great power; but doubtful-mindedness is an earthly spirit from the devil, and hath no power. Do thou therefore serve that faith which hath power, and hold aloof from the doubtful-mindedness which hath no power; and thou shalt live unto God; yea, and all those shall live unto God who are so minded."*⁵⁹

Double-mindedness, therefore is associated with doubt, an imperfect faith, and a lack of wholeheartedness. Double-mindedness, naturally, is to be avoided. Double-mindedness in prayer destroys the efficacy of one's prayers since, on the one hand it requests something in prayer but, on the other hand, it doubts the likelihood of its fulfillment. It is essentially having two opposing minds regarding the faith. It is the daughter of the devil, an earthly spirit, and wreaks havoc upon believers. The double-minded believer cannot accomplish his spiritual goals. Double-mindedness is a severe spiritual malady, but not all hope is lost for the double-minded since they are not said to be damned, but *will be saved with difficulty*.⁶⁰ Repentance is certainly possible for the double-minded and deflects the woes described above.⁶¹

One should disrobe oneself of doubt and double-mindedness and clothe oneself with faith. Faith is strong and powerful. It allows for the fulfillment of one's requests in prayer. Faith promises and delivers all. Faith perfects all things. Faith is powerful whereas doubt and double-mindedness are feeble. One should therefore serve faith which comes from God and is mighty. Furthermore, believers who are not double-minded receive the full efficacy of the final offer of repentance which Hermas announces.⁶² To abide in *simplicity* brings great spiritual honor and rewards.⁶³ Simplicity is not complex, consisting of many things but is of a single essence. Therefore, instead of being double-minded, rendering one's faith largely ineffective, one should abide in faith and single-minded simplicity, which bring honor, perfection and life.

About True Fasts and Stations

The *Shepherd* addresses fasting and the keeping of stations in Similitude Five, sections one through three.⁶⁴ In section one, the Angel of Repentance encounters Hermas, who is seated on a mountain, fasting and keeping a station. The angel asks why Hermas is there at such a time and the reply is that he is fasting as he is accustomed. The angel then admonishes Hermas that the latter does not know how to fast to the Lord and that Hermas' current fast is not a true fast at all. God does not wish for this sort of vain fast, being vain since it accomplishes nothing for justice. The angel declares to Hermas what a complete and acceptable fast to the Lord is. True fasting consists of avoiding any wicked deed and serving the Lord with a pure heart. By refusing evil desires admittance to his heart, following God's commandments, having faith in God and fearing Him, Hermas will live unto God and thereby perform a fast great

⁵⁹*Shepherd* Man. IX.1-11. Bolded highlights are mine. Here J. B. Lightfoot's translation is used, taken from *Shepherd of Hermas* (<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd-lightfoot.html>, 2001).

⁶⁰δυσκόλως σωθήσεται. *Shepherd* Man. IX.6.

⁶¹*Shepherd* Man. IX.6; Sim. VIII.7.1-2.

⁶²*Shepherd* Vis. III.2.2.

⁶³The Greek term used is *aplotes* (ἀπλότης), meaning simplicity, plainness, frankness. See *Shepherd* Vis. III.1.9.

⁶⁴*Shepherd* Sim. V.1.1-5 - 3.1-9.

and acceptable before God.⁶⁵ The angel then relates a parable concerning fasting.

"Hear the similitude which I am about to narrate to you relative to fasting. A certain man had a field and many slaves, and he planted a certain part of the field with a vineyard, and selecting a faithful and beloved and much valued slave, he called him to him, and said, 'Take this vineyard which I have planted, and stake it until I come, and do nothing else to the vineyard; and attend to this order of mine, and you shall receive your freedom from me.' And the master of the slave departed to a foreign country. And when he was gone, the slave took and staked the vineyard; and when he had finished the staking of the vines, he saw that the vineyard was full of weeds. He then reflected, saying, 'I have kept this order of my master: I will dig up the rest of this vineyard, and it will be more beautiful when dug up; and being free of weeds, it will yield more fruit, not being choked by them.' He took, therefore, and dug up the vineyard, and rooted out all the weeds that were in it. And that vineyard became very beautiful and fruitful, Having no weeds to choke it. And after a certain time the master of the slave and of the field returned, and entered into the vineyard. And seeing that the vines were suitably supported on stakes, and the ground, moreover, dug up, and all the weeds rooted out, and the vines fruitful, he was greatly pleased with the work of his slave. And calling his beloved son who was his heir, and his friends who were his councilors, he told them what orders he had given his slave, and what he had found performed. And they rejoiced along with the slave at the testimony which his master bore to him. And he said to them, 'I promised this slave freedom if he obeyed the command which I gave him; and he has kept my command, and done besides a good work to the vineyard, and has pleased me exceedingly. In return, therefore, for the work which he has done, I wish to make him co-heir with my son, because, having good thoughts, he did not neglect them, but carried them out.' With this resolution of the master his son and friends were well pleased, viz., that the slave should be co-heir with the son. After a few days the master made a feast, and sent to his slave many dishes from his table. And the slave receiving the dishes that were sent him from his master, took of them what was sufficient for himself, and distributed the rest among his fellow-slaves. And his fellow-slaves rejoiced to receive the dishes, and began to pray for him, that he might find still greater favour with his master for having so treated them. His master heard all these things that were done, and was again greatly pleased with his conduct. And the master again calling; together his friends and his son, reported to them the slave's proceeding with regard to the dishes which he had sent him. And they were still more satisfied that the slave should become co-heir with his son."⁶⁶

Hermas, however, does not understand the parable and requests an explanation. The angel explains that if one keeps God's commandments he will be well-pleasing to God and will also be inscribed among those who keep His commandments, i.e., he will live. But if one performs additional good while maintaining the commandments, he will receive greater glory and be held in much higher esteem by God. Therefore if Hermas keeps the true fast, which consists of keeping God's commandments zealously, he will perform a fast beautiful before God. To keep the fast Hermas intended to keep, he must abstain from evil words and desires and cleanse his heart of all worldly vanities⁶⁷

Yet there is more. After completing what is prescribed on the day of fasting, Hermas should only taste bread and water. Then he should calculate the money saved by such fasting and give it to a widow, an orphan, or to someone in need. This will humble the soul of the giver. The giver's humility will then fill

⁶⁵Shepherd Sim. V.1.1-5.

⁶⁶Shepherd Sim. V.2.1-11.

⁶⁷Shepherd Sim. V.3.1-6

the soul of the recipient so that he may pray for the giver. This true fast thereby benefits both giver and recipient. It is a service which is beautiful, joyous, and acceptable in the sight of the Lord.⁶⁸

To those accustomed to the fasting practices of the Church, such admonitions are familiar. Fasting from food and drink alone can make one dour, bitter, and spiritually worthless. Fasting is also not only a negative thing, but has positive aspects as well. One must indeed fast regarding food and drink, but it is even more valuable to fast from evil words, gossip, corrupt desires, and backbiting. Such is the negative aspect of fasting, i.e., the things to be avoided. The positive aspect of fasting is not only to keep God's commandments, but to excel in what is good, i.e., doing good beyond what is merely necessary. Fasting also has an obligatory connection with acts of mercy, especially generosity towards the poor. Such fasting benefits saint and sinner alike. Such advice is commonplace in Patristic and eremitic literature. But it is worth noting how fully developed it had already become by the mid-second century. It is also difficult to find this notion expressed as forcefully elsewhere as here in the *Shepherd*.

Chastity, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

In Mandate Four, the *Shepherd* addresses marital issues.⁶⁹ Chastity is to be preserved by avoiding all thoughts of adultery, fornication, or similar sins. To have such impure thoughts and desires is a great sin for the believer since where holiness dwells no such thoughts should exist. Anyone who actually commits such deeds inflicts death upon himself. If one remembers one's wife, however, one can avoid sinning in this regard.⁷⁰

Hermas then asks the Angel of Repentance whether a man should stay with a wife who professes the faith but is found in adultery. If the man is ignorant of such sin and stays with his wife, there is no sin. But should he uncover it and she does not repent but continues in her sin, he should divorce her lest he be a partaker in her sin, presumably by condoning it. Hermas then asks what such an unfortunate husband should do. The answer is that he should divorce her but remain single since to remarry in these circumstances constitutes adultery. Hermas continues his questions. What if the wife should repent and desire to return to her husband? The angel replies that the husband commits a great sin if he does *not* take her back. *One ought to take back the repentant sinner*, albeit not often since there is only one repentance for God's servants. This is the prime reason the husband should not remarry, *to provide the sinning spouse an opportunity to repent*.⁷¹

Adultery encompasses more than sexual sin, lapsing back into paganism is adultery as well and should be treated the same way.⁷² To continue with the lapsed spouse is to partake in the spouse's sin. Although the discussion so far addresses what to do in case the wife falls, the angel specifically states that these rules apply to both husband and wife. These rules do not provide an opportunity for sin. An opportunity for genuine repentance should be provided, yet the sinner should sin no more. For this reason the non-offending spouse should remain unmarried.⁷³

⁶⁸*Shepherd* Sim. V.3.7-9.

⁶⁹*Shepherd* Man. IV.1.1-11; 4.1-4.

⁷⁰*Shepherd* Man. IV.1.1-3.

⁷¹*Shepherd* Man. IV.1.4-8.

⁷²This reminds one of the bridegroom imagery of Mark 2:19-20, Matthew 9:15, Luke 5:34-35, John 3:28-30, and Revelation 18:23. One suspects Hermas of elaborating this theme to the effect that infidelity to Christ becomes spiritual adultery, meriting the same treatment as carnal adultery.

⁷³*Shepherd* Man. IV.8-11.

Later Hermas asks if it is a sin to remarry should one's spouse die. The angel answers that to remarry upon the death of one's spouse is no sin. But in the sight of the Lord, to remain unmarried brings greater honor and glory. In any case, one should live for God in purity and modesty. There is remission for former offenses if one keeps the commandments of the Angel of Repentance, implying that there is none for those who currently determine in their hearts to sin.⁷⁴

It is interesting to compare these admonitions with the New Testament, especially the Gospels wherein Jesus addresses issues of marriage and divorce. Mark 10:1-12 forbids remarriage as adultery, apparently under any circumstances. 1 Timothy 5:9-12, when discussing which widows should be eligible for the Church dole, seems to forbid the remarriage of widows. Hermas is more permissive than this since he at least permits remarriage after the death of one's spouse. Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-12 allow for divorce in case of adultery, but advocate utter chastity for those who are capable of it. Hermas is simultaneously stricter and more lenient here. He is stricter since his visions forbid remarriage in case of adultery; more lenient in that for Hermas chastity is not utter sexual abstinence, but encompasses marital fidelity. Sex is perfectly fine within the bonds of marriage and does not defile one's chastity.⁷⁵ Hermas does not advocate sexual abstinence. After all, the main weapon for preserving chastity is to keep one's wife in mind. Regarding remarriage after the decease of the spouse, it is hard to know if he is stricter than the admonitions of the Gospels since they do not really address this issue.⁷⁶ Hermas' equation of apostasy with adultery is unknown in the New Testament.

What should one make of all this? Many of the admonitions of the *Shepherd* may not be very practicable, but it is worth analyzing the principles underlying them. Sexual abstinence is *not* a goal, being neither mentioned nor implied in the *Shepherd*, since preserving marital fidelity preserves the bond of chastity. When Hermas advises against remarriage in case of sexual sin, he does not advocate sexual abstinence, *rather the provision of an occasion for repentance*. Yet such sins are not to be condoned since the spouse *must* divorce the unfaithful partner lest one be a partaker in the partner's sin. The importance of sincerity in repentance is clear since multiple acts of repentance are forsworn. In allowing remarriage after the death of one's spouse, a certain realism seems to emerge. Repentance, forbearance without condoning sin, an aversion to denial of the faith, and a certain realism regarding chastity flavors the admonitions of the *Shepherd* regarding to marital issues.

Whom Should One Fear?

As a Christian, whom should one fear? Proper Christian fear is discussed in Mandates Seven and Twelve in the *Shepherd*.⁷⁷ The Angel of Repentance advises that if one fears the Lord and keeps His commandments, he will be powerful and his actions will be incomparable since by fearing the Lord he will do all things well. To be saved, this is a desirable form of fear. The devil, on the other hand, one should not fear at all since in him is no power. Fear is an emotion appropriately reserved for an awesome and powerful being, such as the Lord, whereas an entity without power is despised by all. One does well to fear the devil's deeds, i.e., fear committing them, since they are wicked. But if one fears the Lord, he

⁷⁴*Shepherd* Man. IV.4.1-4.

⁷⁵This differs from later eremitical literature which typically equates chastity with total abstinence from sexual relations.

⁷⁶Mark 12:18-27, Matthew 22:23-33, and Luke 20:27-40 address the trick question of the Sadducees concerning one's marital status after the resurrection of the dead and therefore argue neither for nor against remarriage.

⁷⁷*Shepherd* Man. VII.1-5; XII.5.1 - 6.5.

will not commit them.⁷⁸

Fear is therefore twofold. If one would perform the good, fear the Lord and one will do it. If one would avoid the performance of evil, fear the Lord and one will not do it. The angel admonishes that if one would live, he must fear God and keep His commandments. Hermas then asks why the angel said that to live one must both fear God and keep His commandments. The answer is straightforward. All creatures fear the Lord, but not all keep His commandments.⁷⁹ Only those who do both will live to God.⁸⁰

Apparently failing to understand the power of the fear of the Lord, Hermas questions later in Mandate Twelve whether one can keep these commandments. Hermas surmises that one might wish to do so but the devil lords it over man, making such obedience practically impossible. The Angel of Repentance rejects this adamantly. The devil will strive against the believer who keeps God's commandments but cannot overcome the believer who trusts God wholeheartedly. When such a believer resists the devil, the latter retreats. Perhaps it is best to let the *Shepherd* speak for itself.

I say to him, "Sir, listen to me for a moment." "Say what you wish," says he. "Man, sir," say I, "is eager to keep the commandments of God, and there is no one who does not ask of the Lord that strength may be given him for these commandments, and that he may be subject to them; but the devil is hard, and holds sway over them." "He cannot," says he, "hold sway over the servants of God, who with all their heart place their hopes in Him. The devil can wrestle against these, overthrow them he cannot. If, then, ye resist him, he will be conquered, and flee in disgrace from you. As many, therefore," says he, "as are empty, fear the devil, as possessing power. When a man has filled very suitable jars with good wine, and a few among those jars are left empty, then he comes to the jars, and does not look at the full jars, for he knows that they are full; but he looks at the empty, being afraid lest they have become sour. For empty jars quickly become sour, and the goodness of the wine is gone. So also the devil goes to all the servants of God to try them. As many, then, as are full in the faith, resist him strongly, and he withdraws from them, having no way by which he might enter them. He goes, then, to the empty, and finding a way of entrance, into them, he produces in them whatever he wishes, and they become his servants."⁸¹

The Angel of Repentance goes on to encourage Hermas and all believers not to fear the devil since this very angel is with all who repent wholeheartedly in order to bolster them in the faith. Those who despair of life due to their sins and those who have weighed down their lives by adding to their sins should trust in God. If they should repent with their whole hearts, sin no more for the rest of their days, and serve God according to His will, God will heal them of their former sins and grant them power to have dominion over the devil's works. Fear not the devil since he is as feeble as a dead man's sinews, i.e., he has no power whatsoever. Everyone who fears the Lord and keeps His commandments will live to God.⁸²

The ethical tone which arises from Hermas' concept is vigorous, but also *positive and dynamic*. Being a Christian is not merely avoiding a laundry list of sins, but a positive thing. Only one fear is required, the fear of the Lord. Possessing this, the believer will have the power to keep the commandments. His faith will be nurtured by repentance and made fast. In such a manner the believer will overcome evil works, obey the commands of God, and thereby live. Christianity is a faith of positive assurance and power by

⁷⁸Shepherd Man. VII.1-3.

⁷⁹This reminds one of James 2:19, *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

⁸⁰Shepherd Man. VII.4-5.

⁸¹Shepherd Man. XII.5.1-4.

⁸²Shepherd Man. XII.6.1-5.

which one overcomes evil. By God's grace, sincere repentance, and wholehearted faith one can keep God's commandments and live. Christianity is the pursuit of life, not a cringing avoidance of sin and death.

The *Shepherd* addresses many more ethical and spiritual themes. Unfortunately, the scope of this study prevents covering them all. Since a selection must be made, the final theme to be analyzed will be the ecclesiology of the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

Issues concerning the Ecclesiology of the *Shepherd*

The *Shepherd* reflects a churchly environment and Hermas is a man of the Church. As a result, Hermas knows the offices of the Church. Scattered throughout the work are references to various Church offices of which he names the following: apostles, bishops, presbyters, teachers, deacons, as well as prophets.⁸³ This reflects a period in the early Church late enough for the standard ecclesiastical offices to be developing but still early enough for the prophetic ministry yet to be active. Such a picture fits the mid-second century rather well.

Given the length of this work, references to official ecclesiastical offices are not particularly numerous. These offices do not seem very central to Hermas understanding of the Church, being recognized but not emphasized. Some references are rather flattering. The Apostles and teachers who brought the Gospel to the whole world and who live in purity, justice and truth are represented by the Eighth Mountain in Similitude Nine are certainly lauded as are the hospitable bishops represented by the Tenth Mountain in the same similitude.⁸⁴ The Apostles, bishops, teachers and deacons who administer their offices with purity and sanctity, represented as square white stones which fit into the Tower (of Vision Three), are certainly approved as well.⁸⁵ Not all references are so flattering. Deacons who administer their office wickedly, depriving widows and orphans of their due are represented as spotted stones from Mountain Nine in Similitude Nine.⁸⁶ If they continue in their present ways they will perish. But should they repent and fulfill their office honorably, they can live. In Vision Three the leaders of the Church in the first seats are admonished not to be as poisoners, carrying poison in their hearts instead of the boxes which murderers use. Their hearts are said to be hardened and unwilling to be cleansed. They sin by living in dissention with each other and in being unwilling to mix their wisdom with clean hearts whereby the Lord could have mercy on them. They also cannot correct others if they themselves go uncorrected. They are to cease from dissention and live in mutual peace so that they may receive a good accounting before the Lord. The offices themselves therefore are clearly recognized by Hermas and are far from disparaged, but they are not central to his reasoning. What matters to him is the character of their occupants and their fulfillment of their God-given responsibilities.

Hermas stresses the function of prophets more than any of the other offices. This is clear in his discussion of the discernment of true from false prophets in Mandate Eleven.⁸⁷ As discussed previously, the office receives special attention since Hermas probably understands himself to be a prophet and feels the

⁸³*Shepherd* Vis. II.4.2-3; III.5.1; 9.7-10; Man. XI:1-21; Sim. IX.25.1-2; 26.2; 27:1-3. Hermas refers to both presbyters and bishops in the *Shepherd*, but he does not clearly distinguish between their respective offices. Although it must be said that Hermas does not describe the functions of these offices in detail, one has little evidence for the emergence of the monarchical episcopacy in the *Shepherd*.

⁸⁴*Shepherd* Sim. IX:25.1-2; 27:1-3..

⁸⁵*Shepherd* Vis. III.5.1.

⁸⁶*Shepherd* Sim. IX.26.2.

⁸⁷*Shepherd* Man. XI.1-21.

need to establish his prophetic authority before his audience.⁸⁸ Yet even here he stresses the character of the person and how the ministry is executed. Although hardly absent from Hermas' mind, ecclesiastical structure is not central to his notion of the Church.

The three appearances of the women revelator in Visions One, Two and Three demonstrate more of his understanding of the Church.⁸⁹ Here the heavenly woman is the spiritual being who transmits revelations and their interpretations to Hermas. In the Second Vision, Hermas learns from another heavenly revelator, a beautiful young man, that the woman in question is the Church.⁹⁰ One gleans from this that, for Hermas, the Church is the locus for revelation. As true prophets operate only within the bounds of the Church so also true revelations emerge only within the Church. In Vision Two, the woman is said to be elderly since she was created before all things and for her was the world created. Thus not only is the Church the locus of true revelation, but also the first fruits of creation.

Hermas later notes the changing appearance of the woman in the first visions. In the first vision, she was old, clad in a brilliant garment, and seated in a chair. In the second vision she looked younger, but her flesh and hair still appeared quite old. In the third vision, she was young and beautiful, although her hair looked old, and in the end she was joyful and seated on a couch.⁹¹ Hermas wished to know the significance of these varying appearances and after a single day's fast a heavenly young man appeared to him, explaining the woman's changing appearance.

Her appearance did not reflect the character of the Church, rather the effect upon Hermas of the revelations mediated by the Church. She appeared elderly in the first vision since Hermas' spirit was old and ailing due to his softness and double-mindedness. She sat in a chair since a chair is for the weak and initially Hermas was spiritually quite weak.⁹² In the second appearance where she appeared younger, but with old skin and hair, she reflected the renewed spirit of Hermas upon the receipt of the heavenly revelations. As an old man is rejuvenated upon news of receiving an inheritance, so Hermas was rejuvenated by hearing the divine messages. Correspondingly, Hermas set aside his weakness and put on strength.⁹³ In the third vision the woman appeared young (although with old hair), beautiful, joyous and seated on a couch, corresponding to how the messages which Hermas received displaced from his mind his previous spiritual illness and bad tidings. By the receipt of all these blessings was he was rejuvenated. The couch shows the security of the woman's position, revealing how the thorough repenter will be both rejuvenated and firmly established.⁹⁴ The message of salvation, which comes only through the Church, is the source of renewed life and a firm establishment in God's mercy. The Church is therefore the source of truth, grace and renewed life. The Church is the home of salvation.

The Revelations concerning the Church

One finds the most thorough discussion of the Church in two sections of the *Shepherd*, the building of the Tower in the Third Vision, and in the visions of the Twelve Mountains and Tower in Similitude

⁸⁸See pages 4-5 above.

⁸⁹*Shepherd* Vis. I.1.1-4.1; II.1.1-4.3; III.1.1-9.10.

⁹⁰*Shepherd* Vis. II.4.2.

⁹¹*Shepherd* Vis. III.10.1-10.

⁹²*Shepherd* Vis. III.11.1-4.

⁹³*Shepherd* Vis. III.12.1-3.

⁹⁴*Shepherd* Vis. III.13.1-4.

Nine.⁹⁵ Since the Four Visions probably correspond roughly to the earliest version of this work, they would tend to reflect an earlier stage in Hermas' thought. The later Mandates and Similitudes would thus reflect later and more fully developed versions of his thought. Since there is a very probably time gap between the sections above as well as a maturation of thought, it is best to address the visions concerning the Church in each section separately, beginning with the earliest.

In Vision Three, Hermas receives revelations concerning the construction of an eschatological tower.⁹⁶ These are much less extensive than those in Similitude Nine and represent an earlier stage of development of Hermas' understanding of the Church. Here the woman revelator shows Hermas a tower being built on the waters out of brilliant square stones. The six young men who accompanied her were building the Tower in the shape of a square. Other innumerable men were hauling stones to the Tower out of the depths of the sea and from the land and were handing them over to the six young builders for use in the its construction. All stones were placed in the Tower as they were, fitting together so snugly that the lines of contact disappeared. Hence the Tower appeared to be built of one stone. Of the stones taken from dry land, some were accepted for use in the Tower whereas others were broken up and cast far away from the Tower. Yet more stones were lying about the Tower unused, some being chipped, some being white, round and unable to fit into the Tower. Some stones lay at a great distance, coming to the road but not staying on it, rolling instead into the waste lands. Others fell into fire and thus were burnt while yet others fell near the water but were unable to roll into it.⁹⁷

The significance of the Tower becomes apparent in the woman's explanation of the vision to Hermas. The woman, who herself represents the Church, identifies the Tower with herself. Hence the Tower is the Church.⁹⁸ The Church is built upon the waters since believers' lives are saved by baptism. The Church is also built on the foundations of the Word of the Name and is held together by the Lord's invisible power.⁹⁹ The significance of the stones fitting together as one is readily apparent, although not specifically stated, i.e., that the Church is one and undivided although composed of many members.¹⁰⁰ The six builders are the first angels created by God to whom God has entrusted all creation. By them also is the Church perfected. The haulers are angels of lesser dignity who aid in the Tower's completion.¹⁰¹ Hence the Church is built by heavenly means under eternal guidance. The stones represent different classes of believers: the white, square stones representing Apostles, bishops, teachers and deacons who carry out their functions in purity and sanctity; the stones from the sea, martyrs; the stones from dry land going into the Tower without further trimming, the holy and just who keep God's commandments; those set inside the Tower, the young in faith and faithful in whom are found some sin and are therefore reminded by the angels to do good; and those near the Tower but yet unused, those who can be used in the building in case they repent.¹⁰² The women goes on to discuss the meaning of the other discarded stones which represent rejected believers who have fallen into various degrees of serious sin.¹⁰³ These can repent but will not be fit into the Tower, rather into some less honorable place after a period of chastisement. These still can be saved but just barely.¹⁰⁴ Finally, the Church is supported by seven women who represent spiritual qualities, respectively Faith, Continenence, Simplicity, Knowledge,

⁹⁵*Shepherd* Vis. III.1.1-9.10; Sim. IX.1.1-33.3.

⁹⁶*Shepherd* Vis. III.1.1-9.10.

⁹⁷*Shepherd* Vis. III.2.1-9.

⁹⁸*Shepherd* Vis. III.3.3.

⁹⁹*Shepherd* Vis. III.3.5.

¹⁰⁰*Shepherd* Vis. III.2.6.

¹⁰¹*Shepherd* Vis. III.4.1-2.

¹⁰²*Shepherd* Vis. III.5.1-5.

¹⁰³*Shepherd* Vis. III.6.1-7.6.

¹⁰⁴*Shepherd* Vis. III.7.5-6.

Innocence, Reverence and Love. Whoever masters their works and serves them will find a place in the Tower along with God's saints.¹⁰⁵ The Lord has not yet come since the Tower is not yet completed, but its completion will be the end of the age. The Tower will be completed shortly since it is being built rapidly, leaving the present as the only opportunity for repentance.¹⁰⁶

In this vision, The Church is founded and maintained by the power of God through angelic agency. Believers are saved through baptism and the quality of their lives determines their place in the Tower and even whether they are admitted at all. The Church is also an eschatological entity at whose completion the end of the age comes. Ecclesiastical officials, represented by the brilliant square stones, are clearly honored by an apparently exalted place in the Tower. But more important to Hermas is the character of the inhabitants, i.e., the sanctity of their lives. This applies not only to Church officialdom, but to all believers. Due to his eschatological understanding of the Church and the corresponding immediacy of the call to repentance, Hermas views the Church as the congregation of the holy, i.e., of repentant sinners made holy by God's grace. Such is Hermas' notion of the Church in Vision Three.

In Similitude Nine, Hermas has another vision concerning the Tower. This time, however, his spiritual shepherd, the Angel of Repentance, is the revelator and this vision is much more detailed and extensive. In this similitude, Hermas is taken off in a vision to Arcadia and placed on top of a breast shaped mountain. Here he beholds a vast plain, twelve mountains of differing characters and colors, and again the construction of a great tower. This tower was built upon an old huge four-square rock rising out of the plain. On top of this was a brilliant new gate. Upon this gate the Tower was built. Six tall men and enumerable others were engaged in erecting this edifice. Twelve cheerful linen-clad virgins were to bring all stones used for the Tower's construction through the gate and to the builders. In this way the stones would be made white. The builders themselves were not to haul any stones since only by the virgins bearing the stones through the gate were they whitened. Out of the abyss came ten uncut brilliant square stones which covered the whole rock and became the Tower's foundation. Then another story was built from twenty-five stones from the abyss, another from thirty-five stones, and yet another from forty stones; four stories in all. After this many multi-colored stones were hauled from the Twelve Mountains. These stones too required transport by the virgins through the gate to accomplish their whitening. The construction process was then interrupted and the unfinished tower inspected by its Master to ensure its construction according to His specifications. During the inspection He tested the stones by striking them with his staff. Those which proved faulty under the blows were to be removed and set just outside the Tower. Any new stones for the Tower were to be taken from the nearly plain where many brilliant, white stones, both square and round, lay. The Master of the Tower then commissioned the Angel of Repentance to trim and salvage any of the stones rejected during the inspection. The usable ones would be restored to the Tower while the stones now twice-rejected would be carried back to their original mountains by twelve black-clad beautiful, but savage women. Upon the Tower's completion, the site was cleansed and the holes left by the stones were filled with lime. The Tower was thus complete.¹⁰⁷

The significance of these things lies in their interpretation. The Angel of Repentance informs Hermas that the Rock and the Gate represent the Son of God. The rock is ancient but the gate is new corresponding to how the Son of God was born before all creation and thus the Father's councillor regarding creation but was only manifest in the latter days. All stones must proceed through the Gate since nobody enters The Kingdom of God except through the Name of His Son. The Master is also the Son of God

¹⁰⁵*Shepherd* Vis. III.8.1-8.

¹⁰⁶*Shepherd* Vis. III.8.9-10, also III.9.5-6.

¹⁰⁷*Shepherd* Sim. IX.1.1-10.7.

and the six noble men are his angelic attendants who never approach the Father except in the company of the Son.¹⁰⁸

The Tower is the Church and the Twelve Virgins are twelve spiritual graces: Faith, Continen- ce, Forti- tude, Long-suffering, Simplicity, Innocence, Purity, Cheerfulness, Truth, Understanding, Concord, and Love. As the stones are whitened only by the hands of the Twelve Virgins, so too must one bear these names, i.e., possess these qualities, together with the name of the Son of God, if one would enter the Kingdom of God. Without these qualities the name of the Son of God is borne in vain. Those who reject these qualities are removed by the black-clad women called: Unbelief, Incontinence, Disobedience, De- ceit, Grief, Wickedness, Licentiousness, Irascibility, Lying, Foolishness, Slander, and Hatred. The twice-rejected stones may yet repent and for that reason the Tower's construction was interrupted. Yet they must hasten lest others take their place, leaving no room for them.¹⁰⁹

The ten foundational blocks represent the first generation of saints (prediluvian saints?), the twenty-five are the second generation of just men (post-diluvian saints?), the thirty-five are God's prophets and min- isters, and the forty are the Apostles and teachers who proclaimed the Son of God.¹¹⁰ The Twelve Mountains from which the other stones are drawn are the nations of the earth to whom the Apostles pro- claimed the Son of God and their colors correspond to varying mentalities and understandings. From each mountain come believers of differing attitudes and moral qualities. All these multi-colored stones become one color, white, since all nations, receiving the Son of God and adopting the characteristics of the Virgins, are called by one name, that of the Son of God. Upon receiving the seal they have one un- derstanding and one mind, their faith and love making them one.¹¹¹ The square white stones from the field lay at the foot of Mountain Twelve which represents the innocent. These found use since the Mas- ter felt sure they would not change their character. The brilliant round stones represent rich believers who must be trimmed of much stone, i.e., of much of their wealth, in order to fit into the Tower. Some of their wealth would be left them facilitating the exercise of charity. The filled-in plain represents the forgetfulness of the Lord regarding the sins of those who repent thoroughly and continue in a pure dispo- sition. Their sins no longer show at all.¹¹²

This vision clearly demonstrates an evolution in Hermas' thought. The Tower is still the Church. The stones represent differing types of believers. But whereas in the first vision of the Tower the Lord did not come since the Tower was not completed, in the second vision of the Tower a deliberate pause is in- troduced which explains explicitly why the Lord had not yet come, providing theological groundwork for his final call of repentance after baptism, i.e., in the refitting of the rejected stones. In both visions the rejected stones could repent. In Vision Three they would dwell in a less honorable place than the Tower, and only after purgation. But in the Similitude Nine they could be fully restored to the Tower. Over time his confidence in the efficacy of repentance increased.

In both visions the Church is portrayed as one, but only in the second vision is it made explicit, i.e., through the theological explanation thereof, i.e., salvation by one Lord, and the experience of one faith,

¹⁰⁸*Shepherd* Sim. IX.12.1-8.

¹⁰⁹*Shepherd* Sim. IX.13.1-15.3.

¹¹⁰*Shepherd* Sim. IX.15.4-6.

¹¹¹*Shepherd* Sim. IX.17.1-5. The *Shepherd* devotes much space to describing the specific characteristics of each type of be- liever represented by each mountain. The scope of this study does not allow for describing them all. See *Shepherd* Sim. IX.19.1-29.4.

¹¹²*Shepherd* Sim. IX.30.1-31.6; 33.1-3.

one mind, and one understanding and love.¹¹³ In Similitude Nine the Church is founded upon an ancient Christ manifested only in the latter days, together with the appropriate spiritual graces. This demonstrates greater theological and moralistic elaboration than Vision Three wherein which the Tower was erected upon the waters of baptism. The Church is comprised of the just from all nations and all ages who by repentance and steadfastness in the Lord have had their sins effaced forever. In both cases, however, the Church is an eschatological entity whose completion draws the current age to a close.

As time went on, Hermas' thought grew more elaborate, perhaps pondering questions unanswered by the earlier vision. Hermas' confidence in the efficacy of repentance increased over time. He seems also either to have discarded or left undeveloped an earlier notion of a lesser place of salvation outside the Church proper. By the end of the work, the Church is the sole place of salvation.

Hermas' moralistic conception remains undiminished throughout the *Shepherd*, however. Although he recognizes the offices of the Church as exercised in his day. They are clearly of secondary importance to him. Even his own prophetic office seems important to him only insofar as it establishes his personal prophetic authority before his audience. Once established, Hermas' stressed the call to repentance and the correspondingly moralistic vision of the Church. For him, the Church was the assembly of the holy, i.e., of sincerely repentant sinners who abide in God's faith by God's grace and power. Considering that this work served as a universal call to repentance, it is hardly surprising that his conception of the Church would be moralistic. Considering the eschatological context of the *Shepherd*, the emphasis of character over office makes sense. If one truly believed the Lord's advent to be near, even at the door, repentance and spirituality would be stressed more than the mere holding of a Church office. For the one who administers well the office entrusted to him by God, however, great awards and honors wait.

Conclusion

To the modern reader, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is as eccentric to read as is the Book of Revelation. The modern reader is simply not accustomed to Jewish or Christian apocalyptic literature. The *Shepherd* at first glance has a strong rigorist flavor to it, perhaps intimidating many readers interested in spiritual matters. Such rigorism reflects, however, a very imminent eschatology which accentuates the need for such strenuousness, especially since it need not be pursued for so very long. Yet if one examines the spiritual values underlying this rigorism, such as repentance, forbearance, hospitality, generosity to the poor, the efficacy of God's grace and power, Hermas' spiritual optimism, and so forth, one finds values of more enduring appeal.

But this work does reflect its era, namely that of Rome under the Antonines. It presupposes a minority-based, socially marginal Church awaiting the imminent arrival of its Lord. It represents the view also a Roman freedman, socially an ordinary fellow of his age. This is unusual in the patristic tradition wherein most writers are professional theologians, very educated people, and quite often bishops. A bishop could hardly have written the *Shepherd*. The *Shepherd* was timely for its age, but such timeliness entails a certain datedness. One feels the Antonine era in this work strongly, hence perhaps its very high evaluation among early Roman Christians. But with Christianity prevailing throughout the Roman and Byzantine world in the ensuing centuries, this datedness probably accounts for its decline in popularity. It is a

¹¹³This reminds one of Ephesians 4:4-6: *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Adult Patristic Study - The Shepherd of Hermas

fascinating historical piece, and with analysis it yields remarkable spiritual insights. But its form is a hard shell to crack. The sweetmeat inside is worth the effort, however.

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