

OBSERVATIONS ON THE ASCETIC DOCTRINE OF THE *SHEPHERD OF HERMAS*¹

INTRODUCTION

The *Shepherd of Hermas* is “one of the most enigmatic writings to have come down to us from Christian antiquity”; it “bristles with problems, both literary and theological”.² From a doctrinal point of view, it is puzzling that this text never scandalized Hermas’ contemporaries or later Orthodoxy.³

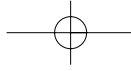
In what follows, I shall argue that subsequent generations – and perhaps especially the monastics who continued to copy the *Shepherd* – had much reason to be sympathetic to the ascetic theology of this work, particularly the *Shepherd’s* theory of prayer, the marked presence of the angel, and the connection between temple liturgy, interior liturgy, and the liturgy of heavens. I shall discuss the interaction between the believer, on the one hand, and the divine presence, conveyed by the angel, on the other, as illustrated by Hermas’ views on prayer and, more generally, the ascetic life.

Nadia Ibrahim-Fredrikson has already noted several striking similarities between certain elements in the *Shepherd*, the Qumran writ-

1. I will be using the Greek text provided by the latest critical edition M. LEUTZSCH, *Papiasfragmente. Hirt des Hermas* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1998). For a detailed presentation of its merits in comparison to the older editions of Joly and Whittaker, see G. LUSINI, “Nouvelles recherches sur le texte du Pasteur d’Hermas”, *Apocrypha* 12 (2001) 79-97. The English translation is taken from C. OSIEK, *Shepherd of Hermas* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress 1999). References to the text of the *Shepherd* follow the old three-number system of citation, which allows the reader to know whether the quoted passage belongs to the visions, mandates or similitudes.

2. L. BARNARD, “The Shepherd of Hermas in Recent Study”, *Heythrop Theological Journal* 9 (1968) 29; W. COLEBORNE, “A Linguistic Approach to the Problem of Structure and Composition of the Shepherd of Hermas”, *Colloquium* 3 (1969) 133.

3. For a list of mostly positive references to the Shepherd, ranging from the second century to late middle ages, see A. VON HARNACK, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* I/1 (1893; Hinrichs: Leipzig 1958) 51-58, and Brox, *Der Hirt* 55-71. According to Osiek (*Shepherd Commentary* 180a), “[i]f the Christology is what most interpreters say it is... it is strange that this immensely popular document of the early church was never condemned for Christological heresy”. Similarly, Brox (*Der Hirt*, 328): “Wie H. solche Äusserungen in Rom publizieren konnte... bleibt ein Geheimnis”.



ings, and the fourth-century Syriac writer Aphrahat: a certain dualism, the language of possession, defilement, and suffocation, the metaphor of “mixing honey and wormwood”.⁴ In what follows, I take a different approach: rather than focus on some or other isolated image or term in the *Shepherd*, I will attempt to find in this work an articulated ascetic theory that coheres well with later developments. As will become apparent, the *Shepherd* is an eminent witness to the Jewish roots of Christian mysticism.⁵ Using and reworking the imagery of Temple sacrifice and angelic liturgy current in Second Temple Judaism, this text, which Daniélou deemed “the summary of Jewish Christian moral and ascetical theology”,⁶ anticipates developments that will come to full bloom in later Christian ascetic and monastic traditions.

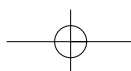
In submitting to the current scholarly consensus, I assume that the *Shepherd of Hermas* is a unitary text from the early decades of the second century.⁷

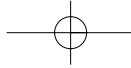
4. N. I. FREDRIKSON, “L’Esprit saint et les esprits mauvais dans le *Pasteur* d’Hermas: Sources et Prolongements”, *VC* 55 (2001) 262-280.

5. In order to make sense of a text as enigmatic and disputed in scholarship as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, scholars have proposed various cultural frameworks. Erik Peterson (“Beiträge zur Interpretation der Visionen im *Pastor Hermae*”, in *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* [Rome/ Freiburg/ Vienna: Herder 1959] 254-70), J. Schwartz (“Survivances littéraires païennes dans le ‘Pasteur’ d’Hermas”, *RB* 72 [1965] 240-47), and J. Reiling (*Hermas and Christian Prophecy: A Study in the Eleventh Mandate* [Suppl. NT 37; Leiden: Brill 1973]) have argued that Hermas is heavily indebted to the Hellenistic “revelatory apparatus” and to Hellenistic theories of mantic inspiration. The same framework is operative in the footnotes of Joly’s critical edition (HERMAS, *Le Pasteur. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* [SC 53; Paris: Cerf 1958]). Pierre Audet (“Affinités littéraires et doctrinales du Manuel de Discipline”, *RB* 60 [1953] 41-82) and Jean Daniélou (*The Theology of Jewish Christianity* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1964] 39; *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* [Baltimore, Md.: Helicon] 125-27) have pointed to a possible link between the *Shepherd* and the Essene movement. Fredrikson (“L’Esprit saint”), Wilson (*Five Problems in the Interpretation of the Shepherd of Hermas: Authorship, Genre, Canonicity, Apocalyptic, and the Absence of the Name “Jesus Christ”* [Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: Mellen 1995]), and Bogdan G. Bucur (“The Son of God and the Angelomorphic Holy Spirit: A Rereading of the *Shepherd’s* Christology”, *ZNW*, 98 [2007] 1-23) exemplify today’s prevalent interest in the Jewish background of the *Shepherd*.

6. DANIÉLOU, *Jewish Christianity*, 37.

7. Robert Joly seems to have provided a decisive refutation of the most compelling thesis of multiple authorship. See Stanislas GIET, *Hermas et les Pasteurs: les trois auteurs du Pasteur d’Hermas* (Paris: PUF 1963), and, in response, JOLY, “Hermas et le Pasteur”, *VC* 21 (1967) 201-218; “Le milieu complexe du Pasteur d’Hermas”, *ANRW* 27.1, 524-551. The thesis of multiple authorship, epitomized in Coleborne’s proposal to distinguish seven sections of the work, and six authors, all writing before the end of the first century (“The Shepherd of Hermas: A Case for Multiple Authorship and Some Implications”, *SP* 10.1 = *TU* 107 [1970] 65-70) has been discarded today in favor of more attentive consideration of the *Shepherd’s* stylistic peculiarities. One of the recent commentators, Norbert Brox concludes: “Nach der Studie von Coleborne möchte man grundsätzlich davon abraten, die literarischen Probleme des PH weiterhin durch die Annahme mehrfacher Verfasserschaft lösen zu wollen... Unterscheidend besser lässt sich der problematische Zustand des Buches durch die ungewöhnliche Schriftstellerpersönlichkeit des H. erklären” (BROX, *Der Hirt des Hermas* [KAV 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1991] 32-33). Most recently, Osiek (*Shepherd Commentary*, 13a; 15b) has argued convincingly that “this loose structure is best explained as the result of underlying oral patterns present in the original use of the text: as a basis for oral proclamation... One consequence of this process of interaction between written text and oral proclamation is that after the author’s first draft, there never was an original text, because the text went through many changes in the hand of its author as he and perhaps his assistants





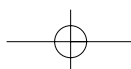
1. THE *SHEPHERD* ON “PLACE”, “LITURGY” AND “WORKING THE EARTH OF THE HEART”

For the *Shepherd*, the ascetic life of the Christian is intimately linked to the phenomena of divine inhabitation and angelic intercession. The Holy Spirit inhabits the human (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τὸ ἐν σοὶ κατοικοῦν, Mand 10.2.5), and, as Fredrikson has aptly noted, “Hermas’ pneumatology is inscribed in a dynamic of the Spirit’s indwelling – or departure from – the habitation he occupies”.⁸ The Holy Spirit not only inhabits the human, but can also intercede against a sinner: Hermas is instructed to drive out sadness, lest the holy spirit intercede to God and depart: μήποτε ἐντεύξῃται τῷ Θεῷ καὶ ἀποστῆ ἀπὸ σοῦ (Mand 10.41.5). It is reasonable to assume that, under normal circumstances, he would be interceding *on behalf* of the virtuous Christian. Indeed, the *Shepherd* does refer to the spirit interceding on one’s behalf, and warns that the intercessor is easily grieved and driven away by sadness, λύπη (Mand 10.1.3, 10.2.1). In other words, prayer is not capable of reaching the heavenly altar when one is overcome by sadness (Mand 10.3.2). The Pauline views on the intercession of the Holy Spirit offer an interesting parallel to such statements.⁹ Yet, one should not overlook the fundamental text of Isa 63:9-10: “In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, He fought against them”.

or colleagues added more and more material as it developed in the interpretative process in which he and others were engaged on the basis of the text”. This new approach to the text has immediate implications for the problem of dating. While the scholarly consensus seems to have settled around the year 140, with a tendency towards the earlier part of the second century (OSIEK, *Shepherd Commentary* 2, n. 13; for a survey of opinions, see BROX, *Der Hirt* 22-25), Osiek concludes on “an expanded duration of time beginning perhaps from the very last years of the first century, but stretching through most of the first half of the second century” (OSIEK, *Shepherd Commentary* 20b). Leutzsch (*Einleitung*, 137) proposes the interval 90-130. A late first-century date of 80-100 is hypothesized by J. CHRISTIAN WILSON, *Toward a Reassessment of the Shepherd of Hermas: Its Date and Pneumatology* (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: Mellen 1993) 60. However, this proposal stands on shaky ground, since the considerations on which it is based are themselves debated issues: the early development of monarchical episcopate in Rome, the *Shepherd*’s relationship to Hebrews (and, implicitly, the dating of Hebrews), the possible echoes of persecutions in the text.

8. FREDRIKSON, “L’Esprit saint”, 273.

9. Hermas comes close to the Pauline statement about the Holy Spirit interceding “for us, with sighs too deep for words” for the saints, according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26; the same verb is used as in Mand 10.41.5, ἐντυγχάνω). According to Hermas, one is not to grieve or “oppress” the indwelling spirit: λυπεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα, Mand 10.2.2; μὴ θλίβε τὸ πνεῦμα, Mand 10.2.5. Cf. μὴ λυπεῖτε τὸ πνεῦμα (Eph 4:30); τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε (1 Thess 5:19).



Another passage relevant for the *Shepherd's* views on prayer is Sim 8.2.5. Here, Michael tells the “shepherd” left in charge of receiving and inspecting the branches brought by the believers (i.e., their good deeds), that he, Michael, will personally verify every soul again, at the altar (ἐγὼ αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον δοκιμάσω). The text seems to deploy the traditional imagery of angels carrying the prayer of the humans up to the heavenly altar.¹⁰

Yet, the offering on the heavenly altar is mirrored by an interior phenomenon: Mand 5.1.2 describes the proper mission of the indwelling spirit as an act of worship, a “liturgy”: λειτουργήσῃ τῷ Θεῷ ἐν ἰλαρότητι. For Hermas, the religious acts of individual asceticism – for instance, fasting, as I will show below – are a “liturgy”, emulating the angelic worship before the divine throne. This is the sense in which the verb λειτουργέω is used elsewhere in the *Shepherd* (e.g., Sim 7.6, Sim 9.27.3, Sim 5.3.8).¹¹

The *Shepherd's* theory of prayer and prophecy appears to be based on the logic of Biblical sacrificial rites: only pure and blameless sacrifices can be admitted at the altar. Two issues are of concern with regard to the indwelling spirit: absolute *purity*, since the spirit cannot endure defilement by evil passions;¹² and adequate *space*, since the spirit does not suffer constraint.¹³ This “spatial language” is dependent on the understanding of spiritual indwelling as “liturgy” (Mand 5.1.2).¹⁴ The human “vessel” inhabited by the spirit (Mand 5.1.2) is a “place”: if the place is pure, the spirit is able to engage in intercessory worship. A precise rendering of the *Shepherd's* views would be to say that moral purity creates a pure place, whereas moral defilement causes the spirit to be “constrained” (στενοχωρεῖται, Mand 5.1.3), hinders his presence by a certain “hardness” (σκληρότης, in Mand 5.2.6). The angelic spirit cannot perform its “liturgy” in the absence of a pure place, μὴ ἔχον τὸν τόπον καθαρὸν; μὴ ἔχον τόπον λειτουργήσαι τῷ κυριῷ

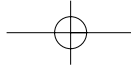
10. For a long list of relevant texts and detailed discussion, see L. STUCKENBRUCK, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (WUNT 70; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1994), 173-180.

11. In the LXX, λειτουργέω translates the Hebrew *sharet* and *'abodah* (“to serve”, “to work” in a cultic setting, or, more generally, to perform an assigned duty). It occurs for instance in passages dealing with temple service (Exod 30:22; Num 18:6, 1; Chron 9:13). In the NT uses the word family of λειτουργέω is used both for temple worship (Luke 1:23; Heb 9:21; 10:11) and for the ascetic and mystical life of individuals (Acts 13:2), although it may also designate the general idea of service, assistance, help (e.g., Rom. 15:7; Heb 1:14). For a detailed history of usage, see S. AYSE TUZLAK, “Service and Performance: ‘Leitourgia’ and the Study of Early Christian Ritual” (unpublished PhD dissertation; Syracuse University, 2001), 1-49.

12. Mand 10.2.6 mentions λύπη. An expanded list occurs in Mand 5.2.4.

13. Mand 10.2.6 (τὸ γὰρ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ... ταύτην λύπην οὐχ ὑποφέρει οὐδὲ στενοχωρίαν) and Mand 5.1.2 (ὁ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον... ἐν εὐρυχώρῳ κατοικοῦν).

14. OSIEK, *Shepherd Commentary* 142b.



καθώς βούλεται (Mand 5.1.3). Reading this statement in conjunction with those above on the prayer rendered powerless by the indulgence in evil passions, such as sadness (Mand 10.3.2-3) makes it obvious that moral purity and adequate space are not two distinct requirements, but rather different expressions of the same reality. Indeed, these two requirements are indeed taken together in Mand 5.1.2, 5.2.5. For the *Shepherd*, then, moral purity is the adequate “place” of worship.

The requirement of a pure “place” does not apply only for the individual and the “interior liturgy”, but also for the public ministry of the prophet. According to Mand 11, there exists a pneumatological mirroring between the prophet (whether “true” or “false”) and his audience: authentic prophecy occurs through a pure and righteous person, at the inspiration of the angel of the prophetic spirit, in a congregation of righteous people; false prophecy is uttered by a morally defiled person, at the inspiration of the earthly spirit, before people that lack undivided faith. There is no way in which these two sets of elements may interfere: the true prophet shuns the congregation of δῖψυχοι,¹⁵ just as the false prophet shuns the congregation of righteous people, lest he be discovered and spiritually incapacitated by the prayer of the righteous congregation (Mand 11.13).¹⁶ This is why, according to Reiling, “the prophet needs the action of the church in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit. His inspiration is congregationally determined”; it is only the “spiritual climate” of the congregation that enables the spiritual phenomenon of prophecy.¹⁷ In short, the prophet is to the congregation what the inspiring agent is to him: a conveyer of authoritative divine messages. Conversely, the community is for the prophet what the latter is for the angel: a “place” in which divine worship is made possible.¹⁸

The theme of prayer as interiorized temple sacrifice is well established in the Cappadocians, who inherit it from Origen.¹⁹ And it is

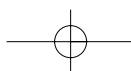
15. For the history and meaning of the term, see O. J. F. SEITZ, “Antecedents and Signification of the Term *Dipsychos*”, JBL 66 (1947) 211-219; O. J. F. SEITZ, “Afterthoughts on the Term *Dipsychos*”, NTS 4 (1957-58) 327-334; J. AMSTUTZ, *HAPLOTÉS: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Studie zum jüdisch-christlichen Griechisch* (Bonn: Hanstein 1968).

16. Cf. ORIGEN, *On Prayer* 20: “For in place of the... twofold company of saintly men and blessed angels there may, on the other hand, be a twofold association of impious men and evil angels. Of such a congregation it might be said alike by holy angels and by pious men: I sat not down with the council of vanity, and with transgressors I will not enter in; I hated the church of evildoers and with the impious I will not sit down”.

17. REILING, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy*, 163; OPITZ, *Ursprünge* 114.

18. Just as the prophet is filled by the angel of the prophetic spirit (Mand 11.9), the false prophet is filled by the spirit of the devil (Mand 11.3).

19. E.g., GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On Virginity* 24. See Th. HERNANS, *Origène: Théologie sacrificielle du sacerdoce des chrétiens* (Théologie historique 88; Paris: Beauchesne, 1996) esp. 102-192.



quite likely that the *Shepherd's* intriguing statements about the “narrow” and “hard” recesses of the heart were received also by the mediation of Origen. Indeed, Origen speaks of the narrow spaces (*angustiae*) in the hearts of sinners, where only the devil can crawl like a serpent. Due to the serpent’s icy presence, the soul becomes “rigid”, shrinks together, and is driven into narrowness (*infelix anima... serpentine frigore rigens attrahitur et coartatur atque in omnes angustias cogitur*). Conversely, the good soul is enlarged and spread out (*dilatatur atque diffunditur*) like the heavens, and becomes a palace of Wisdom.²⁰ Early Syriac tradition also uses the image: according to Aphrahat, “the Evil One puts his guards at the doors of [the man’s] thought, and his mind is disturbed by a multitude of seductions... His heart is like a solid rock... the evil one comforts him and fills his heart”.²¹

The title of this section mentions “working the earth of the heart”. This is, of course, a deliberate allusion to Columba Stewart’s book on the Messalian controversy.²² Indeed, I believe that this famous pseudo-Macarian phrase expresses something already foreshadowed in the *Shepherd's* Fifth Similitude.²³ The text speaks about a faithful slave who is commanded to root out the weeds that “are suffocating” the vine, and to provide the vine with props.²⁴ Interpreted in a Christological key, “rooting out weeds” refers to the Son of God purifying his people by His Passion, and providing angels to sustain each of the be-

20. ORIGEN, *Comm. in Rom* 2.6.6.

21. APHRAHAT, *Dem* 14:43. For a more detailed treatment of this topic, see S. K. SKOYLES JARKINS, “Aphrahat the Persian Sage and the Temple of God: A Study of Early Syriac Theological Anthropology” (PhD dissertation, Marquette University, 2005) 174-184. The work is forthcoming at Gorgias Press.

22. STEWART, “*Working the Earth of the Heart: The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431* (Oxford: Clarendon 1991).

23. For the exegesis of the Fifth Similitude, I rely mostly on Philippe Henne: “À propos de la christologie du Pasteur d’Hermas. La cohérence des niveaux d’explication dans la Cinquième Similitude”, *RSPT* 72 (1988) 569-78; “La polysémie allégorique dans le Pasteur d’Hermas”, *ETL* 65 (1989) 131-35; “La véritable christologie de la Cinquième Similitude du Pasteur d’Hermas”, *RSPT* 74 (1990) 182-204.

24. The action is termed *χαρακώω*, “providing the vine with poles (*χάρακες*)”. The usual translation is “to pale around, to palisade with pales or pointed stakes”. The Greek also has the meaning of “to prop with a pole or stake”. Dibelius (*Hirt*, 562), Brox (*Der Hirt*, 316), and Osiek (*Shepherd Commentary* 171a) note the two meanings, and the biblical precedent (Isa 5:2, LXX: *φραγμός* for “enclosure”, and *χαρακῆν* for “staking with a pole”), but use the first one in translation. Henne (*Christologie*, 192; “La véritable christologie”, 190-91) notes that the definitions of *χάραξ* as “vine-prop” is consistent with the role of angels as portrayed in the explanation of Sim 5 and throughout the entire text of the *Shepherd*. Indeed, the *χάρακες* are explained as *οἱ ἄγιοι ἄγγελοι... τοῦ κυρίου οἱ συνκρατοῦντες τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ* (Sim 5.5.3). In the same line of thought, the *Shepherd* undertakes to prove the sovereignty of the Son of God by showing that He is the one who appointed angels to watch over each individual, *ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς τοῦ συντηρεῖν ἐκάστους* (Sim 5.6.2). This idea is conveyed by the expression *ὁ κείμενος ἐπ’ αὐτῷ / πρὸς αὐτόν*, noted above as describing the relation between “the angel of the prophetic spirit” and the prophet (Mand 11.9). Reiling (*Hermas and Christian Prophecy*, 106) concludes, after a review of several passages in which *κείσθαι ἐπί* occurs, that “on the basis of this circumstantial evidence, rather than on strictly semantic grounds, we may conclude that the angel of the prophetic spirit is in charge of and responsible for the prophet and is his steady companion”.

lievers (Sim 5.5.2-3; 5.6.1-3). The text remains, however, a parable about the correct way of fasting, and the shepherd's explanations are mostly about the ascetic life: fasting from food, almsgiving, acquiring purity of heart, perhaps celibacy.²⁵

Fast to God this way: do no evil thing in the course of your life, but serve the Lord with a pure heart. Keep His commandments, proceed according to his regulations, and let no evil desire arise in your heart. Trust in God, that if you do all this, fear God, and refrain from every evil deed, you will live to God. If you do these things, you will perform a great fast that is acceptable to God (Sim 5. 1.4-5).

So this is the way you will keep this fast that you are about to do. First of all, keep from every evil utterance and evil desire, and purify your heart from all the silliness of this world... on the day you fast, taste nothing but bread and water, calculate the price of the food you were going to eat, and give it to the widow or orphan or needy person... If you complete the fast this way, as I commanded you, your sacrifice will be acceptable to God, and this fast will be recorded for you; and the service so done is beautiful, full of joy, and pleasing to the Lord (Sim 5.3.5-8).

Keep this flesh of yours pure and undefiled, so that the Spirit that dwells in it may witness to it... If you defile your flesh, you will defile the Holy Spirit (Sim 5.7.1-2).

Toiling in the garden to “root out the weeds” functions here a metaphor for the ascetic labors. The garden, which could be used as a symbol of the entire world, in the Christological explanation (Sim 5.5.2), here stands for the interior world: the heart. Twice in Sim 5.2.4 the *Shepherd* describes the weeds as “choking” the garden. In Mand 5.1.3, the very same verb, *πνίγω*, describes the evil spirit's “choking” of the Holy Spirit by means of worldly cares. The Biblical usage of *πνίγω* is also significant: as Fredrikson points out, it occurs in 1 Sam 16:14 and Mat 5:18, in cases of demonic possession.²⁶ It appears, then, that Sim 5 offers a symbolic depiction of the commandment to acquire purity of heart, in order to enable the angelic spirit to celebrate his “liturgy”.

“Liturgy” first designates the set of good deeds that exceed the ba-

25. When Sim 5.3.3 speaks of “doing good beyond the commandment” it does so without specifying the respective “services” (τὰς λειτουργίας ταύτας). It is interesting that the same possibility of “doing good beyond the commandment” and the same reward, namely “gaining for oneself more abundant glory”, is also discussed in Mand 4.4.2. In this latter text, however, the reference is unambiguously to the celibate life. Remarrying after the death of one's spouse is not sinful, nevertheless “by remaining single, that one acquires greater status and great honor before the Lord... So preserve chastity and reverence, and you will live to God”.

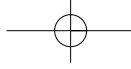
26. Fredrikson, “L'Esprit saint”, 273. In the parable of the sower *πνίγω* is used to describe the way in which the disciple's faith commitment is overtaken by worldly cares (Mark 4:7.19; Matt 13:7.22; Luke 8:7.14).

sic commandments. It reappears in Sim 5.3.8, where the theme of the interiorized temple sacrifice becomes clearer: “If you complete the fasting this way, as I commanded you, your sacrifice (ἡ θυσία σου) will be acceptable to God, and this fast will be recorded for you, and the service (ἡ λειτουργία) so done is beautiful, full of joy and pleasing to the Lord” (Sim 5.3.8). The well-pleasing “liturgy” is described here, more concretely, as a sacrifice (θυσία) that reaches up to God and will be recorded (ἔγγραφος) – presumably “inscribed” on the heavenly tablets above. Consequently, the allegorical interpretation of the work in the garden fits perfectly Hermas’ theory of prayer as interior liturgy performed by the angelic spirit in the “place” of the human heart.

To sum up, the *Shepherd* has a definite penchant for language suggestive of divine indwelling and is quite insistent on the use of “place”. This is most likely not an accidental usage, since “place” is a term of paramount importance for Jewish and Christian mysticism:

“Place”, *atra*, is a *terminus technicus*... The Aramaic *atra*, like the Greek *topos*, renders the word, *maqom*, of the Hebrew Bible. The first and primary – verging on technical – meaning of *maqom* is the locus of divine manifestation, such as, for example, Bethel in Genesis 28:11 and 16-19, or the burning bush of Exodus 3:5, or verses such as Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, etc., which speak of the “chosen *maqom*” where God will make His Name to dwell. With the latter we arrive at the association of “the place” with Zion, that is, the Temple in Jerusalem, a linkage which is especially frequent in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 24:3), and exceedingly frequent in Jeremiah, where the expression *hammaqom hazzeh*, “this place”, occurs over thirty times as in, for example, Jer 17:12... If anything, this identification of “place” with the Temple is accentuated in the Septuagint’s use of the equivalent Greek word, *topos*. Thus, in Exodus 24:10, we find the insertion of the phrase, “the place where stood”, into the Hebrew, “they saw the God of Israel”. In the Septuagint version, the elders thus “saw the place”, with *topos* serving as, effectively, a stand-in for God himself. While it may have been intended originally to soften the stark anthropomorphism of the Hebrew, this Septuagint variation would have a very important history in Greek ascetico-mystical literature, especially in the late fourth-century Desert Father, Evagrius Ponticus, ...and continuing thereafter in such writers as, for example, Dionysius Areopagites... In Rabbinic parlance therefore, *haMaqom* designates God in much the same way as do *haKavod* (the Glory), *haSem* (the Name), *haŠekinah* (the Presence), *haQadoš* (the Holy One), etc.²⁷

27. GOLITZIN, “The Place of the Presence of God: Aphrahat of Persia’s Portrait of the Christian Holy Man”, in ΣΥΝΑΞΙΣ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΙΑΣ: *Studies in Honor of Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonos Petras, Mount Athos* (Athens: Indiktos, 2003) 407-408. For the Biblical usage of “place”, Golitzin refers the reader to the articles by J. Gamberoni (*mqm*) and H. Köster (*topos*) in *TDOT* and *TDNT*. On the relevance of “place” language for Ps.-Dionysius, see GOLITZIN, “Revisiting the ‘Sudden’: Epistle III in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*”, *StPatr* 37 (2001) 482-491. For Evagrius, see STEWART, “Imageless Prayer and the



I think there is now proof enough to conclude that the *Shepherd of Hermas* also uses “place” in a quasi-technical way. The interaction between the angel and the prophet, who, for the *Shepherd*, is the holy man *par excellence*,²⁸ occurs in the “place” of visions,²⁹ in the interior “place” of the interior liturgy (Mand 5.1.3), as well as in the prophetic ministry to the congregation, where the congregation itself constitutes, as it were, the “place”. In the case of saintly persons, the *Shepherd* can also claim that “their place is *already* with the angels”.³⁰ I will return to this last element in the third section of this essay.

2. THE ANGELIC SPIRIT AND THE ASCETIC RESHAPING OF THE CHRISTIAN

The use of the term “flesh” in the Fifth Similitude seems to be undergoing a semantic shift from the notion of “flesh” as designating the entire person, to “flesh” as only one *part* of the human self. In Sim 5.6.4b-5.6.7, the *Shepherd* mentions “flesh” independently (ἡ σάρξ ἑνῆ in Sim 5.6.5, 6, 7; πᾶσα σάρξ in Sim 5.6.7), with verbs suggesting personhood (“to serve”, “to conduct oneself”, “to labor”, “to be rewarded”). This use of “flesh” ceases after the explicit announcement in Sim 5.6.8 (“thus you now have the explanation of this parable”). In the following section (Sim 5.7), σάρξ always appears determined by a possessive pronoun (τὴν σαρκὰ σου, five times), and Hermas uses “flesh” for “self” in one section, and “flesh” as body, in the next.³¹

This semantic evolution of the term “flesh” has an important bearing on the use of “spirit”, which also acquires a new sense. There is no doubt that in Sim 5.6.4b-5.6.7 “spirit” refers to a spiritual entity, a

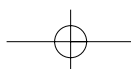
Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus”, *J ECS* 9.2 (2001) 173-204. For discussion of the Jewish exegetical and mystical resonances of the phrase “place of God”, see N. SÉD, “La shekinta et ses amis araméens”, *CO r* 20 (Geneva: 1988) 233-247.

28. See Mand 10-11, where Hermas deals with the true and false prophet, perfectly matches Mand 5, where the *Shepherd* has in mind the Christian in general.

29. Vis 1.1.3; 2.1.1; 3.1.3-5; 4.1.2; Sim 8.4.1; 9.5.6; 9.10.3. Note that the opening vision of Sim 5 occurs on a mountain.

30. ἦδη ὁ τοπος αὐτῶν μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων ἐστίν (Sim 9.27.3).

31. Curiously, A. Hilhorst (*Sémitismes et Latinismes dans le Pasteur D'Hermas* [*Graecitas Christianorum Primaeva*, Fasciculus Quintus; Nijmegen: Dekker & Van De Vegt 1976]) seems to have overlooked this obvious Semitism. He only mentions the commonplace that “in biblical language ψυχή and σάρξ do not only stand for ‘soul’ and ‘body,’ but may also designate the human as a whole” (138). Cirillo (“Christologie pneumatique”, 27-29), followed by Brox (*Der Hirt*, 326), notes the “anthropologie d’origine juive”, in which “flesh” designated the whole of human being. To prove this point both authors point to Mand 3.1 and Mand 10.2.5-6, where the parallelism “spirit dwelling in the flesh”/ “spirit dwelling in you” supports the identification of “flesh” with “self”. Neither author seem aware of a switch from this use of flesh to a different one. For the contrary, see OSIEK, *Shepherd Commentary* 180, n. 39; 182.



presence that dwells in the believer, labors together with the believer and may become his companion (Sim 5.6.6). The situation is slightly more ambiguous in Sim 5.7. On the one hand, the spirit can “bear witness” to the believer, a view that recalls Hermas’ understanding of the angelic intercession on behalf of the believer. On the other hand, the insistence on the interconnectedness between “flesh” and “spirit” with respect to purity or impurity (Sim 5.7.4: “They are together, and one cannot be defiled without the other. So keep both pure, and you will live in God”; cf. 1 Cor. 6:16-20) is quite ambiguous, because “spirit” here could be either the heavenly “holy spirit”, or part of the human self, or both.³²

Yet what exactly is relation between the “holy spirit” that is the Son of God, the angelic “spirits”, and the spirit of the believer, with respect to divine indwelling? The *Shepherd* is somewhat ambiguous on this matter as well. Aside from the well-known use of πνεῦμα / *spiritus* for the Son (Sim 9.1.1-2; Sim 5.5.2), the *Shepherd* also uses the word to designate angelic beings. In Mand 11.9, the *Shepherd* seems to use from “spirit” and “angel” interchangeably.³³ The phenomenon is particularly noticeable in Mand 5 and 6.³⁴ The use of πνεῦμα language to designate angelic beings does not surprise. Far from being a Christian invention, much less a peculiarity of the *Shepherd*’s, this phenomenon is present in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX and various authors of the Alexandrian diaspora, and at Qumran.³⁵ In Isa 63:9-10 (referred to above) the Angel of the Lord is referred to as “holy spirit”. In the New Testament, it is usually *evil* angels that are referred to as (impure)

32. This ambiguity recurs in no less a second-century authority than Irenaeus. In *Adv. Haer* 5:6:1, while interpreting 1 Thess. 5:23, Irenaeus talks about the human person as consisting of three elements: body (*caro*, σῶμα) made of dust by God, but capable of partaking of incorruptibility; soul (*anima*, ψυχή) called to open itself to the Spirit; and the Spirit (*Spiritus*, πνεῦμα) who communicates the incorruptible life in God to the soul and, through the soul, to the body. Critics agree that Irenaeus does not envisage a third human element, beside body and soul. “Spirit” is, throughout the entire fragment, the Spirit of God. When Irenaeus refers to the Holy Spirit as to one of the three elements mentioned in Thes. 5:23, “a very precise theological instinct dictates to him the words to suggest the intimate relation between the Spirit of God and His creature and, at the same time, to safeguard God’s absolute transcendence” (SC 152: IRÉNÉE DE LYON, *Contre les hérésies*, livre V, tome 1 [Notes justificatives] 229).

33. “When the man who has the divine spirit comes into an assembly of righteous men... then, the angel of the prophetic spirit who is upon him (ὁ κείμενος ἐπ’ αὐτῷ) fills the man and he, filled by that holy spirit, speaks... as the Lord wills”.

34. Compare “the spirit of righteousness” in Mand 5.2.7, and “the angel of righteousness” in several verses of Mand 6.2; “delicate” (τρυφερός), “meek”/ “meekness” (πραός / πραότης), and “tranquil”/ “tranquility” (ἡσύχιος / ἡσυχία) are used of both the angel (Mand 6.2.3) and the “spirit” (Mand 5.2.6); humans are attended by two spirits (Mand 5.1.4), or angels (Mand 6.2.1); they must depart from the opposite spirit or angel (Mand 6.2.7; Mand 5.2; Mand 11.17); the criterion for distinguishing the influence of the good angel or spirit from that of the evil one is the experience and subsequent conduct of the indwelt person (Mand 5.2.1-3; Mand 6.2.3-4).

35. J. LEVISON, “The Angelic Spirit in Early Judaism”, *SBLSP* 34 (1995) 464-493; *The Spirit in First Century Judaism* (AGJU 29; Leiden; New York; Cologne: Brill 1997); A. E. SEKKI, *The Meaning of Ruach at Qumran* (SBLDS 110; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars 1989) 145-171.

“spirits”, but one also finds references to angelic beings in general.³⁶ In the Book of Revelation, πνεῦμα is used twice for angelic beings, namely evil ones (Rev 16:13-14; 18:2). But as the parallel between Rev 14:13 and Rev 19:9 reveals, πνεῦμα can also indicate a good angel.³⁷ For the *Shepherd*, the Son of God is, technically, also a “holy spirit”: the highest “holy spirit”, to whom all other “(holy) spirits” are subordinated. I have argued this idea at length elsewhere.³⁸

Hermas’ favorite ways of expressing the effect of divine indwelling are “clothing” (Sim 9. 13.5: one has to be *clothed* with the holy spirits/powers/virtues of the Son of God in order to enter the Kingdom), “renewal” (Vis 3.16.9), “purification” (Vis 3.16.11 and Vis 3.17.8), “rejuvenation” (Vis 3.21.2), and “strengthening” (Vis 3.20.3). These expressions mark a transition from past spiritual weakness to present strength (see the use “then” and “now” in HVis 3.12.3 and HSim 9.1.2), and correspond to the repeated exhortation to “be a man” that Hermas receives from the angel (ἀνδρίζομαι, used in Vis 1.4.3; Vis 3.16.4; Vis 3.20.2). The problem is that Hermas will ascribe this indwelling to “the angel”, “the spirit” or “the Lord” without the slightest indication of perceiving any overlap or contradiction.³⁹ As Halvor Moxnes observed, “the function of the angel... is to such a degree identical with God’s own that the process in Sim V:4.3 f can be described without him”.⁴⁰

36. Aside from the designation of *evil* angels as (impure) “spirits”, the equivalence of “spirit” and “angel” is implicit in Heb 1:14 (angels are “ministering spirits”), Heb 12:9 (“Father of spirits”), and Acts 8:26.29.39, where the text seems to alternate between “angel of the Lord”, “spirit” and, “spirit of the Lord”.

37. Rev 14:13: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: *Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord!*’ Yes, says the Spirit (the initial locutor, the voice), ‘they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’”; Rev 19:9: “And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: *Blessed are those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!*’ And said he (the initial locutor, the angel) to me, ‘These are true words of God!’” From a form-critical perspective, both passages are examples of the so-called promise-to-the-victor, a type of statement that occurs fairly often in the Book of Revelation. In both passages, an initial declaration is repeated and confirmed by the same heavenly locutor. The difference consists only in the fact that we read “spirit” in Rev 14:13, and, respectively, “angel” in Rev 19:9. Yet, in light of the structural similarities in structure and content, and given the interchangeability of the terms “angel” and “spirit” in early Jewish and Christian texts, I believe that the case under discussion is another example of pneu=ma language in the service of angelology.

38. BUCUR, «The Son of God and the Angelomorphic Holy Spirit», *ZNW* 98 (2007) 1-23.

39. The theme of the spirit dwelling in the faithful recurs again and again in Sim 5. At one point, however, the angel offers the following ideal portrait of the believer: “Ὁς ἂν δοῦλος ἦν, φησίν, τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχη τὸν κύριον αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ (Sim 5.4.3). Mand 3.28.1 speaks about the truth-loving spirit that God made to dwell in the believer (τὸ πνεῦμα, ὃ ὁ θεὸς κατόκισεν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ ταύτῃ); in a way, it is the Lord Himself who dwells in the believer (ὁ κύριος ὃ ἐν σοὶ κατοικῶν). Then, in Mand 5.33.1, it is τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τὸ κατοικῶν ἐν σοί. In Vis 3.22.3, the strengthening in faith and rejuvenation of the spirit come from the Lord. However, this “strengthening” seems to be carried out by the Lord through the agency of the angels: in Sim 5.1.3 and 5.6.2, the angels are appointed by the Son of God to watch (συντηρεῖν) and hold fast (συκρατεῖν) each individual.

40. H. MOXNES, “God and His Angel in the Shepherd of Hermas”, *Studia Theologica* 28 (1974) 54; 54, n. 41; 55. For instance, in Sim 7, “Hermas’ family has sinned against the angel, but it is God who can give forgiveness. The angel has handed Hermas over to be punished, but it is God who has decided to show him the reason for it... We seem to be nearer to the OT understanding of the ‘malak Yahweh’ more than to any specific angelic figure in later development of angelology”.

In fact, the seeming contradiction is resolved if we consider the *Shepherd's* hierarchical view of the heavenly world: Father, Son (as supreme "spirit") and "spirits"/ angels. The Son works in the believers through his angels/ spirits: the Lord "strengthens" the believer either directly (Vis 1.3.2; Vis 3.12.3; Sim 7.4), or through the angels (Sim 6.1.2; Mand 12.6.4).

3. THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS AND THE IDEAL OF THE ANGELIKOS BIOS

What is the ultimate purpose of Christ's dwelling in the believer by means of his angels/ spirits? Hermas' point of reference for the ascetic ideal is, of course, the life of angels. The eschatological reward is described successively as "being numbered with us [the angels]" (Sim 9.24.4), or "being granted entry/ passage (πάροδος) with the angels" (Sim 9.25.2; Vis 2.6.7). All these descriptions are given the same theological explanation: these people have pursued the ascetic struggle against evil passions, and have received or been clothed with the "spirit".

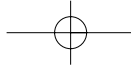
Thus, the goal of the believer is to become an angel. But the cooperation between the believer and the spirit may also point to a supra-angelic ideal. The fact that being "coheir of the son" in Sim 5 is, logically, a status superior to that of the counselors suggests (although Hermas never says it explicitly) that the exalted Christian will be placed *above* the angels, even above the first-created angels!⁴¹

"Being numbered with the angels" is likely to have been read metaphorically in post-Nicene Christianity. In the monastic tradition, the holy man, even when described as "angel in the body", remains nevertheless a human being; and the condition of sanctified humanity in heavens, although described in angelomorphic terms,⁴² remains nevertheless *human*.

It is less clear, however, that a pre-Nicene reading of the *Shepherd*, would have necessarily tread the same path. This can be illustrated by appealing to a writer whose fondness of the *Shepherd* is very well-known: Clement of Alexandria.

41. This is an eschatological view not uncommon in the second century: 2 Baruch (51:12): "And the excellence of the righteous will be greater than that of the angels"; Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer* 5:36:3): after the *parousia*, humankind will "contain the Word, and ascend to Him, passing beyond the angels (*supergradiens angelos*)"; Asc. Isa 9: 42 mentions first the adoration of the just, and only afterwards that of the angels. All references are drawn from Y. DE ANDIA, *Homo Vivens: Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes 1986) 327-28.

42. I am using the term "angelomorphic" according to the following definition: "Though it has been used in different ways by various scholars, without clear definition, we propose its use wherever there are signs that an individual or community possesses specifically angelic characteristics or status, though for whom identity cannot be reduce to that of an angel" (C. H.T. FLETCHER-LOUIS, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* [WUNT 2/94; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1997], 14-15).



Clement of Alexandria is – especially in the *Excerpts from Theodotus*, the *Prophetic Eclogues*, and the *Adumbrationes*⁴³ – one of our most eminent witnesses of secret traditions ascribed to the apostles and circulating during the first three centuries of the common era.⁴⁴ On the basis of such traditions stemming from the revered “elders”, Clement of Alexandria furnishes a detailed description of the hierarchical structure of the spiritual universe.⁴⁵

This celestial “hierarchy” – if the anachronism is acceptable – features, in descending order, the Face, the seven first created angels, the archangels, finally the angels.⁴⁶ The orienting principle (ἀρχή) of the hierarchy is the “Face of God”, which, for Clement, is the Son (*Excerpta* 10:6; 12:1). The first level of celestial entities contemplating the Face are the seven πρωτόκτιστοι, celestial beings “first created” (*Excerpta* 10; *Eclogae* 57:1). Leaving aside the OT and pseudepigraphical traditions about the highest angelic company,⁴⁷ among the Christian texts available to Clement, Revelation mentions seven spirits / angels before the divine throne (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; 8:2), and the *Shepherd of Hermas* knows of a group of seven consisting of the six “first created ones” (πρώτοι κτισθέντες) who accompany the Son of God as their seventh (Vis 3:4:1; Sim 5:5:3).

These *protoclists* fulfill multiple functions: in relation to Christ,

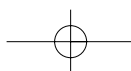
43. On the *Hypotyposes* and their place in the Clementinian corpus, see P. NAUTIN, “La fin des Stromates et les Hypotyposes de Clément d’Alexandrie”, *VigChr* 30 (1976), 268-302. For a survey of other theories pertaining to the origin and function of *Excerpta* and the *Eclogae*, see 270-282.

44. “Le contenu de cette tradition secrète concerne les secrets du monde céleste, qui étaient déjà dans le judaïsme l’objet d’un savoir réservé. Cette tradition secrète n’est donc à aucun degré relative à l’essence du message apostolique, qui est le Christ mort et ressuscité. Mais elle correspond à une explicitation de ce mystère dans sa relation avec le monde céleste. Les Apôtres pensaient que cette explicitation ne relevait pas de l’enseignement commun, mais d’une initiation plus poussée, de caractère oral” (DANIÉLOU, “Les traditions secrètes des Apôtres”, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 31 [1962] 214). See also G. G. STROUMSA, “Paradosis: Esoteric Traditions in Early Christianity”, in *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden/ New York / Cologne: Brill 1996), 42-43.

45. See Ch. OEYEN, *Eine frühchristliche Engelpneumatologie bei Klemens von Alexandrien* (Bern, 1966); B. G. BUCUR, “The Other Clement of Alexandria: Cosmic Hierarchy and Interiorized Apocalypticism”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006) 251-268. The fact that Clement’s strictly hierarchical universe goes back to earlier tradition has been demonstrated by older research: P. COLLOMP, “Une source de Clément d’Alexandrie et des Homélie Pseudo - Clémentines”, *Revue de philologie et littérature et d’histoire anciennes* 37 (1913) 19-46; W. BOUSSET, *Jüdisch-christlicher Schulbetrieb in Alexandria und Rom: Literarische untersuchungen zu Philo und Clemens von Alexandria, Justin und Irenäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1915); OEYEN, *Engelpneumatologie*.

46. The term “hierarchy” has been coined centuries later by the anonymous author of the Pseudo-Areopagitic Corpus. I have taken the liberty to use it for Clement’s description of the celestial realm, because the fundamental operating principles of the Clementinian and Dionysian universes are surprisingly similar. This fact has been noted in passing by Alexander Golitzin (*Et Introibo Ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* [Analekta Vlatadon 59; Thessalonica: 1994], 265), but has not yet received adequate treatment.

47. Cf. Ezekiel 8:2-3; Tob 12:15; 1 Enoch 20; Jub 2:2.18; 15:27; 31:14; T. Levi 3:5; 4:2; T. Judah 25:2; 1 QH 6:13; 2 En 19:1; PrJos.



they present the prayers ascending from below (*Excerpta* 27:2); on the other hand, they function as “high priests” with regard to the archangels, just as the archangels are “high priests” to the angels, and so forth (*Excerpta* 27:2). In their unceasing contemplation of the Face of God, they represent the model (προκέντημα) of perfected souls (*Excerpta* 10:6; 11:1).⁴⁸

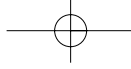
The *Shepherd* envisions, as we have seen, an eschatological collegiality between the perfected believer and the highest angels. According to the *Eclogae Propheticae*, too, the believers’ horizon is one of angelification. Fortunately, Clement is not shy of providing details: at the end of each millennial cycle, the believers are translated into the rank of angels, while their instructors, formerly angels, become archangels, and move “upwards” to replace their own instructors, who are in turn promoted to a higher level. Thus, all degrees of the hierarchy move one step higher every one thousand years. And this movement reflects a real (“ontological”) transformation: humans truly *become* angels, and will function as the angelic guides and teachers of humans (*Eclogae* 56:5; 57).

The *Shepherd*’s statement about the angelic (or supra-angelic) ideal of the Christian, or Clement’s understanding of the perfected human being as “living as an angel (ισάγγελος) on earth, but already luminous, and resplendent like the sun” (*Strom* 7:10:57), are not unrelated to the later notion of the ascetic *bios angelikos*. We cannot assume that the “metaphorical” interpretation of an expression in the *Shepherd* such as “being numbered with the angels” would have been the only interpretation possible. Certain groups of early Christians might have entertained a more “ontological” notion of “angelification”, similar perhaps to the one exhibited by Clement’s *Eclogae* and *Excerpta*.

CONCLUSIONS: THE *SHEPHERD* AND EARLY CHRISTIAN ASCETIC LITERATURE

The connection between temple liturgy, interior liturgy and the heavenly liturgy before the divine throne places the *Shepherd* at an earlier stage of the three-church theory witnessed in the Syriac *Liber*

48. It is quite clear that Clement’s references to *protoclists* reflect ancient angelological speculations characteristic of Second Temple Judaism. However, it should be noted that Clement subjects this material to the spiritualizing interpretation and the Logos-theology inherited from Philo. The *protoclists* are both “angelic powers” and “powers of the Logos” that mark the passing of divine unity into multiplicity, and, conversely, the reassembly of cosmic multiplicity into the unity of the Godhead (see *Strom.* 4:25:156). Clement’s project is one of internalizing the traditional apocalyptic imagery. See BUCUR, «The Other Clement of Alexandria: Cosmic Hierarchy and Internalized Apocalypticism», noted above.



Graduum. According to this fifth century work, the Christian is gradually shaped in the external church, so that he may discover the inner church of the heart, where “the body is... a hidden temple and the heart a hidden altar for ministry in the spirit”. Persevering in the interior liturgy, he will be further shaped to the point that “the heavenly church and the spiritual altar will be revealed”. The holy man will “find himself in their heavenly counterparts... and entering in, even while... still in this visible church”, he will realize that “one and the same Spirit ministers in all three [churches]”.⁴⁹

Syriac writers customarily speak of the fire of the Holy Spirit descending to consume the interior sacrifice of prayer.⁵⁰ The connection between the themes of prayer as Temple offering, the requirement of purity, and the angelic inspection, is normative for Aphrahat, a writer considered “totally traditional in all that he says”. Consider the following passage: “You who pray should remember that you are making an offering before God: let not Gabriel who presents the prayers be ashamed by an offering that has a blemish... In such a case, ...Gabriel, who presents prayers, does not want to take it from earth because, on inspection, he has found a blemish in your offering... he will say to you: ‘I will not bring your unclean offering before the sacred throne’”.⁵¹ Here, Gabriel fulfils the duties that Hermas assigns to Michael.

Finally, the similarity of vocabulary between the *Shepherd* and texts involved in the later Messalian controversy is quite notable. Brox’s survey of passages describing the relation between humans and God, angels, or evil spirits using οἰκεῖν, *habitare*, and related terms⁵² bear striking resemblance to the lists entitled “Vocabulary of Indwelling” and “Vocabulary of Filling” in Columba Stewart’s study of the Messalian controversy.⁵³

If the *Shepherd of Hermas* were a Syriac document, to be taken together with the *Odes of Solomon* or Tatian, the observations above would be perfectly fitting. But there are no Syriac manuscripts of the

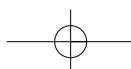
49. *The Book of Steps, Discourse 12*, in S. BROCK, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition* (Kerala, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute 1989), 45-53.

50. In this respect, see S. BROCK, “Fire from Heaven: From Abel’s Sacrifice to the Eucharist. A Theme in Syrian Christianity”, *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993) 229-243; “The Priesthood of the Baptized: Some Syriac Perspectives”, *Sobornost* 9 (1987), 14-22, esp. 18-19.

51. APHRAHAT, *Demonstration* 4:13 (tr. S. BROCK, in *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications 1987] 17-18, 19). The characterization of Aphrahat occurs in R. MURRAY, “Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature”, in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus* (Chicago, Ill.: The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago 1977), 110.

52. BROX, *Der Hirt*, 549-551. Brox distinguishes between proper “dwelling in” (applicable to God), and “dwelling with” or “dwelling in the house of” (applicable to good and evil spirits/ angels).

53. STEWART, *Working the Earth of the Heart*, 294-303.



Shepherd, and no references to this work among Syriac writers.⁵⁴ Barring the case of a massive and silent incorporation of elements from the *Shepherd* into early Syriac literature (perhaps by someone like Tatian) – for which, however, there is no proof –, we must consider the idea of a massive Palestinian-Syriac cluster of ascetic vocabulary and imagery, passed on by the earliest Christian missionaries to communities in Syria and Alexandria.⁵⁵

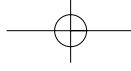
This, of course, is “to say something in order not to remain altogether silent”. The *Shepherd* must remain a puzzle. But we can now return with some profit to the question raised in the beginning of this paper: why did a text such as the *Shepherd*, “bristl[ing] with problems, both literary and theological”, fare so well in early Christianity? The usual “solution” that early Christians were willing to overlook the problematic theology of the *Shepherd* because they were mainly interested in it as a moral exhortation, does not stand scrutiny. Aside from the obviously anachronistic assumption that early Christians would have been far more interested in questions of ethics than of doctrine, this solution does not account for the fact that the only harsh critique of the text is concerned precisely with the *Shepherd's* moral stance. Moreover it is noteworthy that the critic himself, Tertullian, adopts or shares some of the characteristic elements of Hermas' Pneumatology.⁵⁶

The preceding pages have shown that the *Shepherd* anticipates important elements of later Christian ascetic theory, such as prayer as an interior sacrifice, the link between the offering on the heavenly altar and the altar of the heart. It seems therefore more likely that subsequent generations – and perhaps especially the monastics who continued to copy the *Shepherd* – had good reasons to be deeply sympathetic to the ascetic theology of this work, particularly the *Shepherd's* theory

54. LEUTZSCH, *Einleitung*, 120-121. According to Sebastian Brock, among the Greek pre-Nicene Greek writings available in Syriac translations, “while Ignatius, Clement of Rome and Hippolytus are quite well represented, *Hermas*, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen are conspicuous by their absence”, Brock, *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions Between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity* (Brookfield: Ashgate Variorum, 1999) III: 37; Emphasis mine.

55. A fresh and compelling view has been proposed recently by A. DE CONICK, *Recovering The Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of The Gospel And Its Growth* (LNTS 286; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005) 236-241. Classic scholarship on this issue includes G. KRETSCHMAR, “Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese”, *ZTK* 64 (1961) 27-67; P. NAGEL, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (TU 95; Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1966); R. MURRAY, “An Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church”, *NTS* 21 (1974) 59-80; “The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism”, in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of E. G. Rupp* (London: SCM 1975) 65-77.

56. See K. ADAM, “Die Lehre von dem hg Geiste bei Hermas und Tertullian”, *Theologische Quartalschrift* 88 (1906) 36-61; J. E. MORGAN-WYNNE, “The ‘delicacy’ of the Spirit in the Shepherd of Hermas and in Tertullian”, *SP* 21 (1989) 154-157.



of prayer, the marked presence of the angel, the ideal of the *isaggelia*, and the connection between temple liturgy, interior liturgy and the liturgy of heavens.

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