THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS (Con.)

Hymn: 372 "Father, Hear Thy Children's Call"
Prayer: II Clement XX.5

THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

A specimen of Christian prophet—a second century apocalypse. Perhaps one of the last examples of this famous genre of Jewish and Christian literature. Hermas believed he was inspired. The book consists of a series of revelations made to Hermas by the Church in the form of a woman, first old, and afterwards younger, and by the angel of repentance in the form of a shepherd. The Shepherd dictates most of the book. The title of the book comes from the role of the Shepherd.

The book was written about 140 A.D. in a time of peace when the church was growing lax. The church had passed through a period of persecution. Some think part of the book may have been written as early as the time of Clement, Bishop of Rome (c. 90-99 A.D.) since in Vision II.iv.3 Hermas was told to send a copy of the book to Clement who would send it to cities abroad. The book was held in very high regard in Christian antiquity. Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen considered him an inspired prophet and included this work among the books of Holy Scripture. In Origen's time and probably still in Eusebius' time in some places it was still read publicly as a book of Scripture. Eusebius (H.E. III.xxv.4) lists it as one of the disputed books that were not genuine. The Muratorian Canon (c. 180 A.D. from Italy) declares: "But the Shepherd was written very recently in our time by Hermas, in the city of Rome, when his brother, Bishop Pius, was sitting in the Chair or the Church of Rome. therefore it ought also to be read; but it cannot be publicly read in the Church to the people, either among the Prophets, since their number is complete, or among the Apostles, to the end of time..."

In Codex Sinaiticus (4th century) it was one of the New Testament books.

Hermas tells us (Vision I) that the one who brought him up sold him as a slave to a Roman lady named Rhoda. Hermas became a freedman and lived in the city of Rome but was a kind of farmer-preacher, working his farm on the highway from Rome to Cumae. On his farm he had a quiet place for prayer and meditation where he received some of his visions. In the church he had again become acquainted with Rhoda and loved her as a sister. Hermas was a very pious, steadfast, earnest and conscientious man. His wife talked too much and did not bridle her tongue. Their children had apostatized during the persecution, had betrayed their own parents, and led a disorderly life.

THEME: Repentance
MAIN PROBLEM: Sin after baptism
KEY IDEA: One forgiveness after baptism

FORM OF THE BOOK:
Five visions: Stress the necessity for repentance
Twelve Commandments of Mandares: Explain the life required from the penitent
Ten Parables or Similitudes: The doctrine of repentance and how it works
Hermes

KEY OR SEED IDEAS IN HERMAS:

1. God created the world out of nothing (ex nihilo), Mand. I.1; Vis. I.1.6
2. Does not clearly distinguish Son and Holy Spirit. Son is older than creation and the counsellor in creation. Sim. IX.12.2. Holy Spirit existed before creation and is a Son of God, Sim. V.vi.5; IX.xii.2
3. Does not clearly distinguish the Holy Spirit and the Angels: seven spirits, seven angels, seven maiden who are seven virtues. Angel Michael and Holy Spirit not clearly distinguished. Sometimes angels were first things God created. Good and bad angels: bad angels hanker after women and delicacies.
4. The Church the first of all God's creatures. The world was made for the Church. The Church is the tower that is being built near the water. Vis. I.i.6; II.iv.6; I.iii.4 Vis. III.
5. Adoptionism: body of Jesus adopted to share in glory of Son. Sim. V.
6. Baptism: by a special dispensation one repentance after baptism. Baptism is in the name of the Lord. One goes into baptism in a state of death and comes out in a state of life. Baptism is a seal that may be broken by sin and repaired by repentance. Vis. II and III. Mand. IV. Sim. IX.
7. Penitent must torture his soul. Almsgiving is the most effective form of penitence. Time of repentance is now. Time of repentance will end when the Church (the tower) is completed. Vis. II; Mand. IV; Sim. V and VI.
8. Purgatory: a time of punishment for luxury and sin. One hour of luxury brings an hour of punishment that will seem like thirty days. Sevenfold punishment. A single day can bring a year of torture. Sim. VII.
9. Double Standard: can do more than is required and this brings extra merit and reward.
10. Marriage: Brother-sister marriage. Cannot live with one who commits adultery. Cannot divorce one who commits adultery for this closes door to repentance. When they repent must take them back. If mate dies, it is not a sin to remarry, but it is better to remain single.
11. Organization of the Church: overseers, presbyters, deacons. Does not clearly distinguish overseers and presbyters. Some think Clement implies bishop and Grapte deaconess. Some presbyters had been proud and negligent and some deacons had taken church funds.
12. Doublemindedness the great sin.
13. True fasting.
14. Live in simplicity with no luxuries.

Hermas gives us one of our most vivid pictures of the life of an early church—the church in Rome near the middle of the second century.