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LEARNING FROM ALLEGORICAL IMAGES IN THE *BOOK OF VISIONS* OF *THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS*

ALDO TAGLIABUE

The Shepherd of Hermas is an early Christian text, probably written in the second century C.E.,[1] that recounts a series of divine revelations given to the freed slave and Christian believer Hermas inviting him and other Church believers to experience μετάνοια, an "inner change" (Grundeken 2015a.10).[2] The book receives its title from the principal mediator of the revelations, an angel of repentance who comes to Hermas in the guise of a shepherd. As many scholars point out, this text was very popular in the early Christian era, as can be seen from its closeness to the Canon,[3] its wide attestation in both non-scriptural manuscripts of the time before Constantine[4] and the

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1 For a recent survey of the most controversial issues around this text, including the date, see Grundeken and Verheyden 2012.23–25 and Grundeken 2015a.2–23.

2 I translate the word μετάνοια as "inner change." It is a term very often found in the *Shepherd*. In doing so, I follow Grundeken 2015b.139: "We may conclude that *metanoia* in Hermas means a believer's personal transformation: it is a change of attitude, behaviour, feeling, heart, soul and mind, aiming at moral renewal by regretting one's old self and starting a new life." Unlike Osiek 1999, I decided not to translate μετάνοια with "conversion," as this term suggests movement from a pagan to a Christian faith—a movement which is not part of the agenda of the *Shepherd*, since, as I will suggest below, this text was meant to be read by Christians.

3 Although the Muratorian Fragment rejects the *Shepherd* as a canonical text, Ireneus around 180 C.E. considers it a part of Scripture (Leutzsch 1998.122–24 and Cecconi and Tornau 2014.4; for more, see below).

4 See Choat and Yuen-Collingridge 2010.191: the *Shepherd* "is by far the best-attested Christian work except those eventually established as canonical."

Oxyrhynchus papyri,[5] and its many translations during the first centuries of the Christian era into Latin, Ethiopian, Coptic, Georgian, and Pahlavi (Cecconi and Tornau 2014.6–7). The complete text of the *Shepherd* contains five visions and two other sections dedicated to commandments and parables, but the first four visions originally constituted an independent section, the so-called *Book of Visions* (hereafter *BV*).[6] My paper focuses on this first part of the *Shepherd* and aims to reassess its literary status.

Since the study of Martin Dibelius in 1923, many theologians and New Testament scholars have analysed the *Shepherd* and reached a consensus about its theological content, genre, and function. To begin with, the *Shepherd* is believed to convey a double theological message, as it both offers a portrayal of the Church (Pernveden 1966) and calls its members to μετάνοια (Grundeken 2015b). Secondly, this text belongs to the category of apocalyptic literature, as it contains many features typical of this genre, namely, visions, intermediaries, heavenly books, and references to eschatological events.[7] The *Shepherd* is thus considered to be part of a larger pool constituted by the many Jewish and early Christian texts written in the imperial era such as *1 Enoch*, *4 Ezra*, *Revelation,* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* (for a full list, see Carey 2014.218). Finally, the *Shepherd* was in all likelihood meant to address Christian believers[8] and have an educative effect on them that among New Testament scholars is usually called paraenetic.[9] This argument was first suggested by the Muratorian Fragment,

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5 Among the extant papyri preserving extra-canonical writings, "the most popular . . . was the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which is attested some ten times between the second and fourth centuries" (Blumell 2012.167).

6 As summarised by Humphrey 1995.126–29, both internal and external factors lead to this conclusion. The change of mediator in Vision 5 (from the Lady Church to the Shepherd), the heading ἀποκάλυψις used in the Codex Sinaiticus for Vision 5 against ὅρασις used for Visions 1–4 (for a recent study of this codex, see Batovici 2015.153), and the absence of the name Hermas from Vision 5 onwards are among the reasons which suggest a discontinuity between the *BV* and what follows. In addition, the section from Vision 5 to the end is only found in the Michigan Codex and in the Sahidic version of the text.

7 Towards the end of the 20th century, the key role of exhortation (Osiek 1999.11) and the limited number of eschatological references (Moreschini 1995.244–45) in the *Shepherd* were considered objections to this generic affiliation. In more recent times, however, since the apocalyptic genre has been enlarged to include exhortation in response to a contemporary crisis (Collins 2014b.6–8), that the *Shepherd* belongs to this category of literature seems no longer to be in dispute (see Schröter 2015.180: "The *Shepherd of Hermas* . . . also belongs to the apocalypses of early Christianity").

8 Scholars also argue for a possible Jewish readership, but as recently discussed by Grundeken 2015a.24–52 (with references), none of their arguments are convincing.

9 As shown by Starr 2013, paraenesis, originally a Greek term meaning "advice," is often used by New Testament scholars as an "umbrella term for any kind of instruction, moral or

which in about 170 C.E. "recommends the *Shepherd* for private edification" (Cecconi and Tornau 2014.4), and by the many citations of the *Shepherd* among the Church Fathers (see again Cecconi and Tornau 2014.4). Eusebius (third–fourth century C.E.) even reports that the *Shepherd* was a text "indispensable" to Christians and especially "to those in need of elementary instruction" (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.3).[10] Each of these three features—the call to μετάνοια, its apocalyptic genre, and its paraenetic function—applies not only to the *Shepherd* as a whole but also specifically to the *BV.* This is documented by the four visions which appear in this section of the text and by some passages which are paraenetic in a more specific sense as they consist of "concise and benevolent injunctions" (Starr and Engberg-Pedersen 2004.4)[11] inviting members of the Church to undergo an inner change.

However, the scholarly assessment of the literary quality of the *Shepherd* is often negative and unsatisfactory. Some theologians have criticised the cohesion of this text. To mention two examples, in her influential commentary, Carolyn Osiek defines the structure of the *Shepherd* as "loose" (1999.13), and A. Hilhorst points out inconsistencies while commenting upon the beginning of the *Shepherd* (see Hilhorst 1988). Three partial exceptions to this negative criticism are Humphrey's, Young's, and Lipsett's studies, which combine theological and literary observations in order to discuss Hermas's μετάνοια as a key element of the *Shepherd* (Humphrey 1995.119–49, Young 1994, and Lipsett 2011.19–53). Moreover, scholars have so far failed to situate the *Shepherd* in the broader literary context of the imperial era.

My paper identifies in the *BV* an unnoticed literary technique through which the paraenetic call to μετάνοια is specifically addressed, that is, a consistent use of images that demand allegorical responses. Since these images introduce Hermas to a new understanding of the Church*,* the theme of μετάνοια in the *BV* turns out to have a profound foundation, and the two theological focuses of the *Shepherd* are thereby united. In the second part of the paper, I will shift my focus to the reader's response, arguing

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otherwise." For a focused discussion of early Christian paraenesis, see Starr and Engberg-Pedersen 2004.

10 See also Athanasius's *Festal Letter* 39 (367 C.E.). According to Bovon 2012.127, the *Shepherd* could be numbered among those early Christian texts which were neither canonical nor apocryphal and "were considered profitable or useful."

11 See the full definition given at a conference held in Oslo in 2001: "Paraenesis is (a) concise, benevolent injunction that reminds of moral practices to be pursued or avoided, expresses or implies a shared worldview, and does not anticipate disagreement" (Starr and Engberg-Pedersen 2004.4).

that the early Church believers dealing with this text might also have learnt from these images, but possibly at a different pace and depth than Hermas.

Overall, this study of the *BV*, which addresses both theologians and classicists, will contribute to a literary reassessment of this text. With this reassessment, not only will cohesion and literary quality be imputed to the *BV*, but new light will be shed on the position of the *Shepherd* within the broader literary context of the imperial era.

SECTION 1: ALLEGORICAL IMAGES
IN THE APOCALYPTIC GENRE

To begin, I must briefly discuss the use of images in apocalyptic literature and its relation to ekphrasis. As recently argued by C. A. Newsom, the apocalyptic genre portrays the divine by means of an "epiphanic rhetoric" (2014.206) that mostly consists of vivid images in visions that demand an allegorical interpretation.[12]

This "epiphanic rhetoric" is already visible in the earliest extant apocalyptic text, the biblical *Book of Daniel* (2 cen. B.C.), in which the prophet tells us about his vision of God as he was standing by the river Tigris: "I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl . . ." (10.5–6).[13] A key element of this epiphanic rhetoric is the puzzlement of the receiver about the revelation and his subsequent request to a mediator for an allegorical interpretation,[14] as we see in the "The man from the sea vision" in *4 Ezra* (1 cen. C.E.):[15]

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12 Vividness is another key feature of Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic texts; for a recent comprehensive study, see Neumann 2015, with a survey of the bibliography on this topic at 92–98. On the apocalyptic demand for an allegorical interpretation, see Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles 2009.832: "Apocalyptic literature is saturated with symbolic, figurative, and metaphorical language. Symbols and other figures constitute the common stock of apocalyptic writing."

13 The English translations of this passage and of all the Biblical passages quoted in this paper are taken from *ESV* 2010. For the translation of *4 Ezra*, see Metzger 1983, and for *1 Enoch*, Laurence 1883. The Greek text and translation of the *BV* are from Ehrman 2003, except where noted. For the translation of Philostratus the Elder's *Imagines*, see Fairbanks 1931.

14 See, e.g., Aune 2006.59 and Newsom 2014.210: "Frequently, the seer is baffled and disturbed by what he sees or hears and requires the assistance of someone even higher in the hierarchy of knowledge, usually an interpreting angel." See also Whitaker 2015b.88–92, who identifies "interpretive puzzles" in some passages of *Revelation*.

15 The example of *4 Ezra* is particularly relevant, as this text shares specific elements with the *BV*: see Osiek 1999.68. The most evident link is the transformation of a woman into a city, for which cf. *4 Ezra* 10.25–27 and *BV* 11.3.

> And I looked, and behold, this wind made something
> like the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the
> sea . . . Then in great fear I awoke; I besought the Most
> High, and said: "From the beginning you have shown
> your servant these wonders . . . now show me also the
> interpretation of this dream" (13.3, 13–15, with some
> adaptations).

Within this process of revelation, the receiver's curiosity plays a
key role, as we see in the following passage from *1 Enoch* (2 B.C.–1 C.E.),
where the angel Michael speaks to Enoch: "'Enoch, why do you inquire
respecting the odour of this tree? Why are you inquisitive to know it?' Then
I, Enoch, replied to him and said: 'Concerning everything I am desirous
of instruction, but particularly concerning this tree!'" (24.5–7).

Usually the code of these allegorical interpretations "is . . . not
too difficult to decipher" (Newsom 2014.210), as the images contain a
limited number of symbols. In *4 Ezra*, the description quoted above of
the "man from the sea" recalls the Son of Man who appears in *Daniel* 7
(see Reynolds 2008.50–51), a figure "whom the tradition, both Jewish and
Christian, understood to be a messianic figure" (Henze 2011.270). In light
of this background, it was easy for readers to grasp the meaning of the
"man from the sea" in *4 Ezra*, which is then revealed by an angel: "This
is the interpretation of the vision: as for your seeing a man come up from
the heart of the sea, this is he whom the Most High has been keeping for
many ages, who will himself deliver his creation" (13.25–26). As a result
of this simplicity, in apocalyptic visions, "the reader often understands
even before the angelic explanation" (Newsom 2014.210). In my analysis
of the *BV*, I will focus on images which have features similar to those
listed above.

In recent decades, New Testament scholars, starting from the
plausible assumption that in the imperial era, Greek *paideia* was shared
by both pagans and Christians (see Henning 2014.48–50, relying on Mar-
rou 1982, Morgan 1998, and Rousselle 2001), have begun to study images
in apocalyptic texts written in this period and reading them as instances
of ekphrasis—*Revelation* is a case in point of this new trend.[16] Ekphrasis

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16 See Royalty 1997, Huber 2013, Henning 2014, Weissenrieder 2015, and Whitaker 2015a
and 2015b: each of these scholars offers a new interpretation of the use of images in *Rev-
elation* by drawing on the reflections on ekphrasis available in Greek textbooks written in
the imperial era (the so-called *Progymnasmata*).

is the literary device used by Greek and Latin writers (beginning with the Iliadic shield of Achilles) that, during the imperial era, was incorporated into the rhetorical tradition and defined as λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον ("a descriptive speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes," Theon *Prog.* 118.7–8).[17] My paper engages with this trend within New Testament scholarship by suggesting some differences between apocalyptic images and ekphraseis, while pointing out a new similarity focused on the allegorical process of interpretation.

SECTION 2: LEARNING FROM ALLEGORICAL IMAGES IN THE *BOOK OF VISIONS:* HERMAS

The *BV* begins with Hermas's autobiographical account of his relationship with Rhoda, his owner when he was a slave and his future wife. After many years, Hermas has the chance to observe Rhoda while she bathes in the Tiber (1.2), and he reacts to this episode by expressing his wish to marry her (1.2). Immediately afterwards, however, a spirit leads him to heaven where he receives the first of a series of visions. The manuscript tradition numbers them as four, but each of them actually comprises a series of revelations, which I summarise as follows:

> 1) Vision 1 (1.4–4.3): Rhoda and the Lady Church
> a) revelation of Rhoda, who is in heaven, accusing Hermas of lusting after her (1.6–8);
> b) revelation of the Lady Church, confirming Hermas's sin, promising the Lord's mercy, and inviting him to call his household to μετάνοια (2.2–3.4) and to become a man (4.3).
> 2) Vision 2 (5.1–8.3): the Lady Church and an angel
> a) revelation of the Lady Church, again inviting him to call his household to μετάνοια and confirming the promise of divine salvation (5.3–7.4);
> b) revelation of an angel asking Hermas about the identity of the Lady Church (8.1);

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17 The bibliography on this topic is huge. Essential studies are Bartsch 1989, Goldhill and Osborne 1994, Elsner 1996 and 2002, Webb 2009, and Squire 2009. I will return to ekphrasis in my Conclusion below.

c) revelation of the Lady Church asking Hermas to write books so as to spread her divine message to different members of the Church (8.2–3).

3) Vision 3 (9.1–21.4): the Lady Church, the Church Tower, and an angel

a) revelation of the Lady Church foretelling her future appearance to Hermas (9.2);

b) revelation of the Lady Church in a field, in which she introduces Hermas to the description and interpretation of the Church Tower (9.6–15.6);

c) revelation of the seven personifications of virtues surrounding the Church Tower (16.1–8);

d) revelation of an angel giving Hermas explanations about the different appearances of the Lady Church (18.7–21.4).

4) Vision 4 (22.1–24.7): the beast and the Lady Church

a) revelation of the sea monster; Hermas survives the encounter with the help of God and faith (22.5–22.10);

b) revelation of the Lady Church, introducing Hermas to the interpretation of the sea monster (23.1–24.7).

Throughout this series of revelations, the *BV* describes Hermas's process of μετάνοια, which B. D. Lipsett rightly identifies as the most important element of the *Shepherd*. The nature, timing, and method of this change, however, need further discussion. In Young's and Lipsett's view (Young 1994.240–47 and Lipsett 2011.19–23, 31–36), Hermas's inner change occurs in two stages: his initial acknowledgment of the sin of lustfulness for the bathing Rhoda, and then his transformation later in the text into a brave leader able to invite his own household and Christian community to μετάνοια (3.1–3.4). More precisely, Lipsett argues that the second stage of Hermas's inner change takes place by means of "self-scrutiny" (Lipsett 2011.30) in response to the exhortations he receives from Rhoda, the Lady Church, and different angels through different media: oral, written, and visual (see also Humphrey 1995.139–44).

While Lipsett's point about Hermas's initial acknowledgment of sin is certainly right, I argue that the second stage of his inner change can be better described by focusing on a key formal element of the *BV*: the inclusion in the revelations of a series of allegorical images. Such an

element—often neglected by scholars[18]—is an important literary device proper to this text that expands the focus of Hermas's learning beyond self-scrutiny. My thesis is that through images, Hermas learns about the Church by identifying himself with her and being established as a member, and this form of learning develops progressively throughout the *BV*.

In this section of the *Shepherd,* Hermas sees the Lady Church, the Tower Church, seven virtues, and a terrible beast. Each of these subjects is introduced with a description which contains simple symbolic elements, and the text places a special emphasis on Hermas's reception of these images, a process that consists of the following three elements: attention drawn to the image, the allegorical interpretation of it with the help of an interpreter, and the paraenetic use of the same allegory.

The sequence of allegorical and then paraenetic use of images recalls the key role of allegory and paraenesis in early Christian exegeses of the Bible written between the third and fifth centuries C.E. (see Young 1997.189–92 and 248). Origen, for example, gives an allegorical reading of the gospel story of the Canaanite Woman as a portrait of the human soul and then adds the following comment: "And we must surely believe that each of us, when he sins, finds himself in the territory of Tyre and Sidon" (Orig. *Comm. Matt.* 11.16.43–44). With this "we," as argued by Nancy Klancher, we see "a move from allegory and exegesis to moral exhortation" (2013.56).[19] According to Young (1997.235–40), in early Christianity, this interpretive approach was not only proper to commentaries on the Bible, it was also found in Christian apocryphal and hagiographical narratives such as the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (contemporary with the *Shepherd*). Such narratives, although they often focus on non-biblical characters, still "portray the ideals believed to be enshrined in the Bible" (Young 1997.235) with the help of allegory and paraenesis. In addition, in early Christianity, the basic moral teaching of scripture soon became part of the standard

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18 The only exceptions are brief mentions by Downey 1959, Fitzgerald and White 1983, Aune 2003, and Maier 2015.158.

19 Paraenesis plays an important role also in Jesus's "Parable of the Sower" (see Blomkvist 2011.853). As noted by Collins 1999.457–62, allegorical interpretation and paraenesis appear also in two ancient pagan texts, Prodicus's *On Heracles* (5th century B.C.), reproduced in Xenophon's *Memorabilia,* and the *Tabula Cebetis* (1st or early 2nd century C.E.). However, unlike in the *BV* and in early Christian exegesis, in these two texts, paraenesis is introduced before the allegorical interpretation (see Xen. *Mem.* 22.1.23 and *Tab. Ceb.* 3.1). On similarities between the *Tabula Cebetis* and the *Shepherd*, see the Conclusion of this paper.

educative process, as Origen argues in his *Contra Celsum* (*C. Cels.* 6.1–3ff., Young 1997.242–43).

In light of this framework, I consider it appropriate to relate the allegorical and paraenetic use of images in the *BV* to the contemporary Christian approach to exegesis and narrative. In Vision 4, a further precise link will emerge, as there the figure of Hermas is characterised as an *exemplum* and the beast which he has defeated as a τύπος . . . θλίψεως τῆς μελλούσης τῆς μεγάλης ("the symbol of the great affliction that is coming," 23.5; my trans.). In early Christianity, "scripture . . . could also function as the provider of moral examples for imitation" (1997.227), and this possibility also occurs in early Christian non-biblical narratives.[20] More precisely, within these exemplary narratives, the word τύπος is often used to characterise mimetic signs . . . that have a prophetic reference (adaptation from Young 1997.232), as does the beast of the *BV*.[21] As a result, this text indeed exploits the exegetical approach typical of early Christianity.

First Image: The Lady Church

The Lady Church is first introduced in the *BV* in chapter 2, when Hermas narrates (2.2): βλέπω κατέναντί μου . . . καὶ ἦλθεν γυνὴ πρεσβῦτις ἐν ἱματισμῷ λαμπροτάτῳ, ἔχουσα βιβλίον εἰς τὰς χεῖρας, καὶ ἐκάθισεν μόνη, "I saw across from me . . . And an elderly woman came, dressed in radiant clothes and holding a book in her hands. She sat down, alone." This character then reappears in each of the four visions. She is described in a very similar way in Visions 2 (5.3) and 4 (23.1), while in Vision 3, her portrait is briefer and more attention is given to a couch she is sitting on (9.4–7). In technical terms, the Lady Church is a special kind of allegory, namely a personification.[22]

a) Attention: Hermas's attention is especially drawn to the Lady Church at the beginning of Vision 3, in which the same character, by predicting a future appearance (9.2), makes the protagonist impatient about his imminent encounter with her: ἐγενόμην οὖν, ἀδελφοί, εἰς τὸν ἀγρόν, καὶ συνεψήφισα τὰς ὥρας ("And so, brothers, I went into the field and

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20 See again the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* with Young's interpretation (1997.236–37).

21 See Young 1997.232 for a discussion of this mimetic understanding of typology against the modern definition of it focused on historicity, for which see Daniélou 1958.140.

22 On personification as "a central component of allegorical procedures," see Copeland and Struck 2010.6.

counted the hours," 9.4). As the Lady reveals herself, her appearance fol-
lows the epiphanic rhetoric typical of the apocalyptic genre; Hermas experi-
ences wonder and fear when he sees the couch the Lady is sitting on (9.5).

b) Allegorical interpretation: Hermas is invited to interpret allegori-
cally the Lady Church by an angel appearing at the end of Vision 2 (8.1):

> Τὴν πρεσβυτέραν, παρ᾽ ἧς ἔλαβες τὸ βιβλίδιον, *τίνα*
> *δοκεῖς εἶναι; ἐγώ φημι· Τὴν Σίβυλλαν.* Πλανᾶσαι,
> φησίν, οὐκ ἔστιν. Τίς οὖν ἐστιν; φημί. Ἡ ἐκκλησία,
> φησίν. εἶπον αὐτῷ· Διατί οὖν πρεσβυτέρα; Ὅτι, φησίν,
> πάντων πρώτη ἐκτίσθη·

> "The elderly woman from whom you received the little
> book—*who do you think she is?*" "*The Sibyl*"—I replied.
> "You are wrong," he said; "it is not she." "Who then is
> it?" I asked. "The church," he said. I said to him: "Why
> then is she elderly?" "Because," he said, "she was created
> first, before anything else."

In this passage, Hermas's interpretation of the image of the Lady
Church develops via a dialogue with a mediator that some scholars define
as *erotapokrisis* (a question and answer dialogue).[23] Within this dialogue,
Hermas gives a wrong interpretation of the Lady Church, the acknowledg-
ment of which constitutes the first element of his μετάνοια focused on the
understanding of the Church.

Hermas's mention of the Sibyl deserves special attention: the
initial formula "the elderly woman from whom you received the little
book" recalls the image of the Lady Church at the beginning of Vision
2. Since, however, there Hermas had spoken of τὴν πρεσβυτέραν ἣν καὶ
πέρυσιν ἑωράκειν ("the elderly woman I had seen the year before," 5.3), it
is legitimate to consider Hermas's interpretation as also recalling the first
description of this character (which I quote in full): βλέπω κατέναντί μου
καθέδραν λευκὴν ἐξ ἐρίων χιονίνων γεγονυῖαν μεγάλην· καὶ ἦλθεν γυνὴ
πρεσβῦτις ἐν ἱματισμῷ λαμπροτάτῳ ἔχουσα βιβλίον εἰς τὰς χεῖρας, καὶ

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23 See Fitzgerald and White 1983.13–34, who give a useful survey of the appearance of this
    kind of dialogue in ancient literature, including Jewish literature (Philo's *Quaestiones et
    Solutiones*) and revelation literature (apocalyptic texts and Hermetic oracles). See also
    Volgers and Zamagni 2004.

ἐκάθισεν μόνη . . . , "I saw across from me a large white chair, made of wool, white as snow. And an elderly woman came, dressed in radiant clothes and holding a book in her hands. She sat down, alone . . ." (2.2). A close analysis of this passage suggests that Hermas's answer "the Sibyl" is an understandable mistake: the portrait of the Lady does not immediately recall the Church but rather resembles the prophetess' usual description.

As noted by Leslie Baynes, some details of this portrait relate to the image of God in apocalyptic literature: "the white chair of the *Shepherd* . . . closely recalls the white throne of Rev 20:11" (2012.173),[24] and the mention of "snow-white wool" is also a marker of the divine, as it appears in Daniel's description of God in chapter 9.[25] Even more, radiant clothes are a reminder of the Gospels' description of the clothes of the transfigured Jesus that are στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν ("radiant, intensely white," *Mark* 9.3). In light of these thematic similarities, the Lady of the *BV* seems to recall a divine figure with the ability to prophesy. However, the appearance of a woman as the revelatory figure does not fit into this framework and is an innovative aspect of the *BV*.[26] Furthermore, her allegorical interpretation is made more difficult by the fact that the female personification of the Church was not widely known in the second century c.e. The Church is compared to a wife in the *Letter to the Ephesians* (5.23), in *Revelation* 19.7–8, and to a woman in the *Second Epistle of Clement* (14.2),[27] but it is uncertain whether the writer of *Shepherd* could have read any of these texts.[28] As a result, Hermas cannot be blamed for his lack of recognition of the Church.

What is more, his specific choice of the Sibyl is fully understandable. In ancient Greek myth after the fourth century b.c. (see Heraclides Ponticus frag. 130 Wehrli), many prophetesses are attested with the name of Sibyl and their old age is proverbial.[29] Moreover, as noted by Osiek, a "seated position" and "holding a book" also relate to their traditional portrait (1999.58). Although the extant iconography of the Sibyl is scanty in

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24 On a reading of this white throne as an ekphrasis, see Whitaker 2015b.81–88.

25 For white colour as a "Signatur des Himmlischen," see Brox 1991.86. For another use of white-like-wool in an apocalyptic text, see also *1 Enoch* 46.1.

26 See Baynes 2012.180, speaking of "a radical disjunction with tradition." See also Osiek 1999.16, who mentions *4 Ezra* as a similar but not identical parallel.

27 On the female personification of the Church, see Applegate 2004.94–96.

28 The *Second Epistle of Clement*, in particular, dated to 130–60 c.e., might have been written after the *BV*.

29 See Henriksén 2009.129, quoting, among other passages, Virgil's description of the Sybil as *longaeva sacerdos* (*Aen.* 6.321 and 628).

the imperial era, these characters are often portrayed as individual proph-
etesses seated on a rock or throne (see *LIMC* 7, nos. 17, 19, and 21 and
Caltabiano 1994.757), and three Roman objects portray a Sibyl with a scroll
in her hands (*LIMC* 7, nos. 23–25), an iconography meant to recall the
so-called Sibylline Books, which were consulted by the Romans since the
time of King Tarquinius (see Orlin 2002.76–115) and were likely known
by the author of the *BV*, given that he probably hailed from Rome.[30] There-
fore, Hermas might have been well acquainted with the iconography of
the Sibyls and could, indeed, think of one of them when he saw the image
of the Lady Church.

In light of this framework, the angel's mention of the Church can
be taken as a real correction of Hermas's belief, one which leads to the
protagonist's first discovery about the Church.

c) Paraenetic use of the allegory: towards the end of Vision 3, the
image of the Lady Church receives further discussion, as both her descrip-
tion and allegorical interpretation are enriched with the notion of rejuvena-
tion, which in early Christian theology refers to the rebirth produced by
faith and baptism (Ladner 1960.51). Then the allegory of the Lady Church
assumes a paraenetic function, which is made especially effective by means
of the identification of Hermas with the Church.

In chapter 18, Hermas again gives a comprehensive description of
the Lady's three forms (18.3–5). In her first appearance, the Lady Church
was λίαν πρεσβυτέρα καὶ ἐν καθέδρᾳ καθημένη ("a very elderly woman,
seated on a chair," 18.3), in the second, τὴν μὲν ὄψιν νεωτέραν εἶχεν . . .
καὶ ἑστηκυῖά μοι ἐλάλει ("She had a younger face . . . and she spoke to
me while standing," 18.4), and in the third, ὅλη νεωτέρα . . . ἱλαρὰ δὲ
εἰς τέλος ἦν ("She was very young . . . and completely cheerful," 18.5).
This summary is very important because it adds new details to the earlier

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30 This is suggested by the Muratorian Fragment and Origen; see Grundeken 2015a.9–11.
   Parke 1988.155, Lightfoot 2007, and Rüpke 2004 identify Hermas's Sibyl with the Cumaean
   one, but their argument is based on a suggestive conjecture by Dindorf 1856 at 1.3 of
   εἰς Κούμας, "to Cumae." However, as acknowledged by Ehrman 2003.175 in his textual
   apparatus, this conjecture is controversial, since the unanimous manuscript tradition pres-
   ents εἰς κώμας ("to the countryside"). Rüpke also argues for a specific literary reference
   in the *BV* to the Virgilian and Ovidian Sibyls. The Lady Church's exhortation to Hermas,
   ἀνδρίζου ("be a man," 4.3), her use of a staff in the description of the tower, and the fre-
   quent mentions of her old age are taken by Rüpke as references to either Virgil's *Aeneid*
   (Book 6) or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 14). Although this hypothesis is intriguing, the
   listed parallels are too general. In addition, the woman's staff in *BV* occurs in Vision 3
   rather than in Vision 1, so after the only reference to the Sibyl in the text.

descriptions of the Lady Church and introduces the apparently new topic of her progressive rejuvenation.

After Hermas's summary, an angel gives an allegorical interpretation of this phenomenon (19–21), which begins (19.2):

τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ ὁράσει διατί πρεσβυτέρα ὤφθη σοι καὶ ἐπὶ καθέδραν καθημένη; ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα ὑμῶν πρεσβύτερον καὶ ἤδη μεμαραμμένον καὶ μὴ ἔχον δύναμιν ἀπὸ τῶν μαλακιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ διψυχιῶν.

In the first vision, why did she appear to you as an elderly woman seated on a chair? Because your spirit is elderly and already fading away, having no vigour because you are feeble and of two minds.

The angel makes Hermas realize that the old age of the Lady Church stands for the lack of spirituality of its members.[31] In the following chapter, the angel discusses the second and younger portrait of the Lady and, in order to explain it, he tells the story of a weak man who suddenly receives an inheritance and whose spirit becomes rejuvenated (21.2–3). At the end of this story, the angel again relates the Church's age to the spirituality of its members: οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ἀκούσαντες τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν, ἣν ὑμῖν ὁ κύριος ἀπεκάλυψεν, ὅτι ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς καὶ ἀνενεώσατο τὰ πνεύματα ὑμῶν, "You are like this as well, when you hear what the Lord has revealed to you. For he showed you compassion and rejuvenated your spirits" (20.2–3). These words suggest an identification between Hermas and the image of the Lady Church as the latter's changes are attributed to Hermas.

At its very end, then, this allegory reveals its paraenetic function, as the angel, after commenting upon the Lady's and the Church members' last stage of rejuvenation, says: οἱ οὖν μετανοήσαντες *ὁλοτελῶς νέοι ἔσονται* καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι, οἱ ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας μετανοήσαντες, "And so, those who *fully* repent *will become young* and firmly established—those who have repented from their whole heart" (21.4, my trans.). Thus Hermas is invited to change and become like the third image of the Lady. As shown by ἔσονται, this identification is presented as a future event, one

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31 See Section 3 for a discussion of second-person plural verbas and their impact on readers.

which, as I will explore below, also relates to the paraenesis inscribed in the allegory of the Tower.

Second Image: The Tower

The Tower is the image that receives the greatest attention in the *BV*: it occupies a large section of the longest vision of this text, Vision 3. My analysis will show that with the Tower, the *BV*'s use of images acquires a marked interpretive and allegorical focus, one which points to Hermas's increased knowledge of the Church.

The Tower is first introduced to Hermas by the Lady Church with the following words: Σύ, ἰδοὺ οὐχ ὁρᾷς κατέναντί σου πύργον μέγαν οἰκοδομούμενον ἐπὶ ὑδάτων λίθοις τετραγώνοις λαμπροῖς; "Look, do you not see a great tower being built upon the water across from you, with bright, squared stones?" (10.4). In the following paragraphs, the text mentions other features of the Tower, namely, its square form (10.5), its builders (10.5), and a second and third round of stones (10.6–7). On the other hand, additional stones, some drawn from a dry land and others having precise features such as cracks and fractures, lie around the Tower, but are not useful for the construction of the building (10.7–8).

Overall, the details of this description of the Tower are limited in number and symbolic, and seem to anticipate its allegorical interpretation as the Church. In the context of ancient construction techniques, the squareness of the stones[32] suggests integrity and stability, two essential features of the Church (cf. Wilson and Ryken Taylor 2015 s.v. "cornerstone"). In addition, the perfect match of the stones anticipates the theme of the unity of the Church, and the damaged stones are proleptic of the detachment from the Church of some of her members.

a) Attention: Hermas's attention is drawn to the Tower by the Lady Church, who implicitly refers to this building by telling six angels ὑπάγετε καὶ οἰκοδομεῖτε ("Go and build!" 9.7) well before revealing its nature as a tower (10.4). Then she attracts Hermas's attention to the tower by placing him on the couch and waving a bright rod (10.4).

b) Allegorical interpretation: the allegorical interpretation of the Tower covers six chapters in which every single element of this building

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32 Although this feature is explicitly mentioned only at the beginning of the description (10.4), the fact that later some stones are rejected because they are rounded (10.8 and 14.6) suggests that every accepted stone might be square.

is explained. The text starts with the identity of the Tower as the Church (11.3), and then moves to the foundation of the Tower over the water and the angelic identity of its builders (12.1–2). Chapter 13 is dedicated to the stones contributing to the construction of the Tower, while chapters 14 and 15 focus on stones that are not useful, before an entire chapter dedicated to the seven female personifications of virtues located around the Tower (16). It is clear that the allegorical interpretation of the Tower exceeds in length the description of this building. This process is explicitly defined by the Lady Church as τὴν ἐξήγησιν τοῦ πύργου ("the interpretation of the tower," 15.4),[33] and her interpretation takes the form of a dialogue stimulated by Hermas's question (11.1):

> Δείξασά μοι ταῦτα ἤθελεν ἀποτρέχειν. λέγω αὐτῇ· Κυρία, τί μοι ὄφελος ταῦτα ἑωρακότι καὶ μὴ γινώσκοντι τί ἐστιν τὰ πράγματα; ἀποκριθεῖσά μοι λέγει· Πανοῦργος εἶ, ἄνθρωπε, θέλων γινώσκειν τὰ περὶ τὸν πύργον.

> When she had shown me these things, she wanted to hurry away. I said to her: "Lady, what good is it for me to see these things if I do not know what they mean?" She answered: "You, fellow, are a crafty one, *wanting to know* about the tower."

This portrait of Hermas as an active and curious inquirer, which is confirmed in other sections of this allegorical explanation,[34] contrasts with Hermas's previous passivity in the interpretation of the Lady Church and thus points to a transformation (μετάνοια) in the protagonist's attitude toward learning.

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33 This phrase strategically occurs at the end of the Lady's explanation, while at its very beginning, another technical term appears, παραβολή, for which see Danker 2001, s.v.: "π. is for Hermas an enigmatic presentation that is sometimes seen in a vision, sometimes expressed in words, but in any case is in need of detailed interpretation."

34 See the other six references to Hermas's desire for knowledge (θέλειν γιγνώσκειν) at 12.3, 13.3, 14.1, 15.3, 16.6, 19.4; for occurrences of the curiosity theme, see 11.2, 14.5, 16.9, and 24.1. Scholars comment on the Lady Church's criticism of curiosity, and Brox rightly interprets it both as a way to enhance the "Dramatisierungs-Effekt" typical of the dialogic form of the *BV* (Brox 1987.175) and as a reference to the early Christian discussion of curiosity (Brox 1987.186–87 and Leigh 2013.151–58), which asserts that the human desire to know is (and must be) mediated and limited by divine revelation.

A second and more important aspect of Hermas's μετάνοια con-
cerns his progress in knowledge of the Church through his interpretation
of the Tower. To begin with, as with the Lady, the identification between
the Tower and the Church was unlikely to be evident to Hermas, and his
request for an explanation is justified. As argued by Osiek, "The Church
as building has a previous history, as does the tower as symbol of strength
and duration" (1999.64),[35] but the identification between the Church and
precisely this kind of building is an innovation of the *BV*.[36] As a result,
Hermas's realization of the allegorical meaning of the Tower can be taken
as a significant increase in his knowledge.

Moreover, in Vision 3, in contrast to Visions 1 and 2, Hermas's
knowledge of the Church increases, as through the Tower he is given a
full picture of the composition of the Church.

c) Paraenetic use of the allegory: The allegory of the Tower reveals
its relevance to Hermas's life when the Lady Church interprets the white
rounded stones (14.5) and addresses Hermas (14.7):

ἀπὸ σεαυτοῦ πρῶτον γνῶθι· ὅτε ἐπλούτεις ἄχρηστος ἦς,
νῦν δὲ εὔχρηστος εἶ καὶ ὠφέλιμος τῇ ζωῇ. εὔχρηστοι
γίνεσθε τῷ θεῷ· καὶ γὰρ σὺ αὐτὸς χρᾶσαι ἐκ τῶν
αὐτῶν λίθων.

You should know this above all from your own case.
When you were wealthy, you were of no use, but now
you are useful and helpful in life. *All of you should be
useful to God*. For you yourself are also being taken from
the same stones.

With the emphasized phrase, "the paraenetic function of the allegory
becomes evident" (Blomkvist 2011.857), and Hermas is invited to acknowl-
edge his status as a member of the Church.

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35 The former element is a recurrent topic in the New Testament, as we see in *1 Cor* 3.9–10,
    in Jesus's definition of Saint Peter as "the rock" upon which "I will build my church" (*Matt.*
    16.18), and in the identification of the Church as a "spiritual house" in which the faithful "are
    being built up as a spiritual house" (*1 Peter* 2.5). Conversely, the use of a tower as a symbol
    of strength is both an intuitive association and one occurring in the Hebrew texts, as we see
    in the "Animal Apocalypse" within *1 Enoch*, in which a high tower stands for the sanctuary
    to which Enoch is taken (87.3–4). See also *Cant*. 4.4, 7.5, *1Qsb* 5.23–24, and *1QH* 7.8.
36 See Blomkvist 2011.858, who also mentions and dismisses Staats's theory that the tower
    of the *BV* might refer to the Tower of Babel (see Staats 1986.102).

This paraenetic function of the allegory of the Tower is expanded when, at the end of the presentation of the seven personified virtues,[37] the Lady Church exclaims: ὃς ἂν οὖν δουλεύσῃ ταύταις καὶ ἰσχύσῃ κρατῆσαι τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν, ἐν τῷ πύργῳ ἕξει τὴν κατοίκησιν μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ θεοῦ, "Whoever serves as their slave and is able to adhere to their deeds will have a place to reside in the tower, along with the saints of God" (16.8). In light of the previous identification of Hermas with a stone, the protagonist is here given a place in the Tower, but the verb tense of ἕξει and the mention of the saints present this event as a future one—an interpretation which is supported by Hermas's subsequent questions about the coming of the end (16.9). As a result, here, as in the conclusion of the allegory of the Lady Church, the impact of the Tower upon Hermas is established as a process that still needs to be completed.

Third Image: The Beast

The beast is the third image in the *BV* from which Hermas learns (22.6.10):

> καὶ ἰδοὺ βλέπω θηρίον μέγιστον ὡσεὶ κῆτός τι, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἀκρίδες πύριναι ἐξεπορεύοντο. ἦν δὲ τὸ θηρίον τῷ μήκει ὡσεὶ ποδῶν ρʹ, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν εἶχεν ὡσεὶ κεράμου . . . εἶχεν δὲ τὸ θηρίον ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς χρώματα τέσσερα· μέλαν, εἶτα πυροειδὲς καὶ αἱματῶδες, εἶτα χρυσοῦν, εἶτα λευκόν.

> And suddenly I saw an enormous wild beast, something like a sea monster, with fiery locusts spewing from its mouth. The beast was nearly a hundred feet long, and its head looked like a ceramic jar . . . And the beast had four colours on its head: black, fire- and blood-red, gold, and white.

With regard to this image, the text describes a threefold process of interpretation. Unlike the previous cases, however, the allegorical and paraenetic levels are preceded by the narrative of Hermas's fight and victory over the beast—an account which presents the protagonist as an *exemplum* to be followed by its readers, as I will discuss in Section 3.

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37 See Blomkvist 2011.858, arguing that here "the paraenetic motive is highlighted."

a) Attention: Hermas's attention is drawn to the beast by the fact that its arrival is foreshadowed at the very beginning of the vision (22.1) but is then delayed by the appearance of a cloud of dust (22.5).

b) Allegorical interpretation: Hermas's allegorical process of interpretation of the beast resembles those of both the Lady and the Tower Church, thus representing their ideal conclusion: it shares with the former the exploitation of motifs typical of the apocalyptic tradition and, with the latter, the development of an exegesis in a long dialogue between the Lady Church and a curious Hermas.[38]

First, the Lady Church offers the allegorical interpretation of Hermas's victory over the beast (23.5; my trans.): τὸ θηρίον τοῦτο τύπος ἐστὶν θλίψεως τῆς μελλούσης τῆς μεγάλης· "This wild beast is a symbol of the great affliction that is coming." This explanation points to the apocalyptic focus of this image, as θλῖψις likely refers to "an impending persecution which Hermas understands as part of a larger eschatological event" (Bauckham 1974.32).[39] Then, in chapter 24, the Lady Church gives an allegorical explanation of the four colours of the beast's head. As summarised by Osiek (1999.93–96), the allegorical use of both beast and colours has Biblical precedents: the beast recalls Daniel's four monsters (*Daniel* 7)[40] and the dragon of *Revelation* at 12.1–17, while the allegorical and symbolic use of colours is firmly attested in both the apocalyptic genre[41] and the Bible.[42]

c) Paraenetic function of the allegory: When the Lady gives the allegorical explanation of the beast's colours, she relates gold to the motif of the just, tested and refined in fire, and then she says (24.4):

> ὥσπερ τὸ χρυσίον ἀποβάλλει τὴν σκωρίαν αὐτοῦ, οὕτω
> καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀποβαλεῖτε πᾶσαν λύπην καὶ στενοχωρίαν,
> καὶ καθαρισθήσεσθε καὶ χρήσιμοι ἔσεσθε εἰς τὴν
> οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ πύργου.

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38 See 24.1 for an overt reference to Hermas's curiosity and 22.1 for the appearance of the exegetical term τύπος, "symbol" (Danker 2001; my trans.).

39 This interpretation is reinforced by an analysis of the other occurrences of θλῖψις in the *BV* (see Osiek 1999.95), which, with the exception of 6.7, refer to the same generic persecution without placing it in the future. See 7.1, 7.4, 10.1, and 14.5.

40 For more on monsters in the Old Testament as a whole, see Ryken and Wilhoit 1998, s.v. "monster," esp. 1901, and see also *Isaiah* 27.1, referring to a monster of the sea.

41 See Osiek 1999.93: "The symbolic use of colors in apocalyptic literature is traditional, especially black, red, and white, with a variant fourth color," as shown by *Zech.* 1.8, 6.1–6, and *Rev.* 6.1–8.

42 See Ryken and Wilhoit 1998, s.v. "color," and Calaway 1998.219–20.

> "For just as gold casts off its dross, so also you will cast
> off every grief and tribulation, and be cleansed and made
> useful for the building of the tower."

With these words, the Lady Church uses the image of the beast to support Hermas's establishment as a part of the Tower and therefore as a member of the Church. In this way, the exhortation at the end of the allegories of both the Lady Church and of the seven virtues is here recalled and reinforced.

After Hermas has overcome the beast, the protagonist sees an even younger version of the Lady Church, κεκοσμημένη ὡς ἐκ νυμφῶνος ἐκπορευομένη ("clothed as if coming from a bridal chamber," 23.1),[43] and says: ἔγνων ἐγὼ ἐκ τῶν προτέρων ὁραμάτων ὅτι ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐστίν, καὶ ἱλαρώτερος ἐγενόμην, "*From my earlier visions I knew* that she was the church, and I became *rather cheerful*" (23.2). Hermas's immediate recognition of the Lady is the result of the progress in understanding he made through his earlier visions. We find a final confirmation of the fact that at the end of the *BV* Hermas's ability to learn through images has increased.

SECTION 3: LEARNING FROM ALLEGORICAL IMAGES IN THE *BOOK OF VISIONS*: THE EARLY CHRISTIAN READERS

As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the *Shepherd of Hermas* was very popular among early Christian believers. This interpretation is supported by many internal references in the *BV* to ἀδελφοί, contemporary Christians,[44] as well as by the following comment by the Lady Church on her heavenly book: ὅταν οὖν ἀποτελέσω τὰ ῥήματα πάντα, διὰ σοῦ γνωρισθήσεται τοῖς ἐκλεκτοῖς πᾶσιν, "Then when I complete all the words, they will be made known through you to all those who are chosen" (8.2). Since in the apocalyptic genre heavenly books are used to give authority to the text (Carey 2014.227), and as Peter von Möllendorff argues in his study of *Revelation* (2015.160), they work as mise-en-abymes of that text, the passage above presents the members of the Church—"the chosen"—as the intended audience of the *BV*. This Church (summarised in Grundeken 2015a.1), consists in the *BV* of four different levels: the house

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43 On this portrait of the Lady Church as a bride, see the analysis by Osiek 1999.93.
44 Cf. *BV* 8.1, 9.1, 9.4, 18.3, 22.1, 22.5, and 22.8.

Church (1.1.9), the Church in Rome (2.4.3), communities in other cities (2.4.3), and the Church as a whole.[45] It must also be noted that, although this does not necessarily imply that non-Christians were not reading the *Shepherd*, "Hermas does not seem to address non-believers" (Grundenken 2015a.1 n. 4). As a result, my study of the impact of allegorical images on the readers of the *BV* addresses the most likely audience: early Christian believers.

　　In any narrative text, characters can play privileged roles as mirrors of the readers' experiences.[46] Is this role fulfilled by Hermas in the *BV*? A positive answer can be given with the help of the distinction in first-person narratives between the "experiencing" and "narrating I" of Leo Spitzer (1928.447–49) for events that have already taken place (as is the case in the *BV*).[47] I. J. F. de Jong then adopted this distinction for her study of messenger speeches in Greek tragedy. In de Jong's words, an "experiencing I" is one who "narrates the events exactly as he experienced and understood them at the time they took place" (de Jong 1991.1), and, as a result, readers are invited to "see the events exactly as he saw them, hence to share his experience of growing understanding" (de Jong 1991.38). Conversely, a "narrating I" is one who "can tell how he focalizes an event now" (de Jong 1991.31) and thus "makes use of his *ex eventu* knowledge" (de Jong 1991.1). As a consequence, readers are prevented from sharing the narrator's original experience. De Jong provides a list of features which are proper to a narration spoken by an "experiencing I": a restriction of place, of access to the other characters' thoughts, and, most importantly, of understanding. This last restriction is usually marked by vagueness in the narration, a chronological arrangement of the events that lacks overt prolepses, an absence of references to the present of the narrator, and the use of the historic present (my summary from de Jong 1991.1–62).

　　Strikingly, the first-person narration by Hermas in the *BV* contains each of these qualities with the exception of the last. Hermas gives us information only about the places he visits, and he does not describe any of

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45 This fourth level is more clearly addressed later in the text (*Sim*. 9.18.2) but it is already hinted at in the *BV*, where Hermas is invited to think of the community of the saints (1.9, 16.8). On the coexistence of different levels in the *BV*'s church, see also Young 1994.242.

46 See Grethlein 2010.318: "A consistent focalization of a plot through a character and the absence of narratorial prolepses align the experience of a reader with that of the character."

47 For a definition of first-person narrative, see de Jong 1991.2: "a narrative told by a narrator who is himself a participant in the events he is narrating."

the inner thoughts of the different women he encounters during his visions but only what he sees and hears from them. In addition, the language of the visions lacks precise spatial and temporal markers: a certain degree of vagueness surrounds every arrival of a new character, and Hermas gives no overt anticipation of events as he narrates them. The only exceptions are the very beginnings of Visions 3 and 4, in which we read: Ὅρασις γ΄. ἣν εἶδον, ἀδελφοί, τοιαύτη ("Vision Three. What I saw, brothers, was this," 9.1), while in the latter: Ὅρασις δ΄. ἣν εἶδον, ἀδελφοί, μετὰ ἡμέρας εἴκοσι τῆς προτέρας ὁράσεως τῆς γενομένης, εἰς τύπον τῆς θλίψεως τῆς ἐπερχομένης ("Vision Four. This is what I saw, brothers, twenty days after the earlier vision, as a symbol of the coming affliction," 22.1; my trans.). In both cases, however, although the quoted phrases come from the "now" of the narrator and anticipate the content of the vision, their effect on readers is limited. Immediately afterwards, "the messenger goes back in time" (de Jong 1991.34), as we see, for example, in Vision 4: ὑπῆγον εἰς ἀγρὸν τῇ ὁδῷ τῇ Καμπανῇ ("I was going into the country on the Via Campania," 22.2),[48] where Hermas once more adopts the stance of a "narrating I." As a result, the way in which Hermas the narrator tells the story mostly stimulates readers to follow and be involved in his experience.

This conclusion is suggested by frequent references in the text to Hermas's curiosity and desire for knowledge, which I have already commented on in Section 2 and which reinforce his role as a mirror for the reader's experience. Here I mention two passages that are strategically placed at the beginnings of Vision 3 and of the allegory of the personified virtues. Before the Lady appears in Vision 3, she attracts Hermas's attention with these words: Ἐπεὶ οὕτως ἐνδεὴς εἶ καὶ σπουδαῖος εἰς τὸ γνῶναι πάντα ("Since you are so needy and eager to know everything," 9.2). In this way, readers are also invited to be curious. Then after the Lady Church mentions the possibility of seeing something else, namely the women surrounding the tower, Hermas defines himself as κατεπίθυμος ὢν τοῦ θεάσασθαι ("being so eager to observe") and as περιχαρὴς . . . τοῦ ἰδεῖν ("excited by the prospect," 16.1)—attitudes that readers are inspired to follow. As with other passages like these, readers are invited to participate in Hermas's curiosity at both a visual and intellectual level: Hermas is indeed a trigger of the readers' responses.

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48 In the case of Vision 4, although the anticipation is more precise, it still does not reveal the identity of the affliction and so it increases the readers' suspense and participation in the events.

Even more, this invitation is reinforced when the text addresses its readers through second-person plural verbs—a phenomenon that we have already encountered in Section 2.[49] Strikingly, these second-person plural verbs are used in each of the passages that introduce a paraenetic reading of the allegories of the Church, Tower, and beast. As a result, readers are clearly invited to learn from images exactly as Hermas does. At the same time, since the symbolic material of these images is simple, and, in some passages, Hermas's process of understanding is portrayed as unsuccessful (in the case of the Sibyl) or slow (in the case of the Lady Church's rejuvenation), it is not unlikely that some readers could complete this process before he does or reach a more profound level of interpretation.

Readers Anticipating Hermas's Interpretation

Now I will discuss two cases in which readers—or at least some of them—might anticipate Hermas in arriving at an allegorical interpretation. The first case concerns the identity of the Lady Church. As we know, Rhoda is introduced in a bath scene set in the Tiber River and then appears in heaven and rebukes Hermas. This shift of context generates surprise, as is shown by Hermas's comment: βλέψας δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν λέγω αὐτῇ· κυρία, τί σὺ ὧδε ποιεῖς; "I looked at her and said: '*Lady, what are you doing here?*'" (1.5).[50] As a result, when in chapter 2 another woman, the Lady Church, appears, readers are likely to be surprised by her and then wonder who she is. At this point, some of them, on the basis of their theological knowledge, might identify her with the Church even before reading the dialogue between the angel and Hermas.

Readers might also anticipate the discovery of the Lady Church's rejuvenation, a feature that Hermas only mentions explicitly at the end of Vision 3,[51] by comparing the successive descriptions of the Lady. The

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49   See 6.7, 11.5, 14.7 (Tower), 17.1, 18.9, Lady (19–21), and beast (24.4.6) for other passages in which this shift from second-person singular to plural takes place.

50   Hermas's surprise is reinforced by his next reaction to Rhoda: οὐ πάντοτέ σε ὡς θεὰν ἡγησάμην; ("Have I not always thought of you as a goddess?" 1.7). Scholars find this reference to a goddess "strikingly unChristian" (Dibelius 1923.434); see Rüpke 2004.296 and Grundeken 2015a.95–96, who argue for an echo here of the apotheosis of Roman emperors in Roman literature. This hypothesis is suggestive but difficult to prove.

51   Here I go against the scholarly consensus: see Osiek 1999.84: "The theme of rejuvenation is introduced for the first time here [in Vision 3]" See also Dibelius 1923.477, who expresses the same idea and even discusses the possibility of an interpolation.

Lady's portrait in Vision 2 is very brief; at its conclusion, it is stated that the woman is περιπατοῦσαν καὶ ἀναγινώσκουσαν βιβλαρίδιον ("walking and reading a little book," 5.3). This mention of movement suggests that the "second" Lady might have more strength than the "first" one and, therefore, be younger.[52]

In Vision 3, then, another step towards rejuvenation is implied by other elements of the image (9.6–7):

> ἡ δὲ ἦλθεν μετὰ νεανίσκων ἕξ, οὓς καὶ πρότερον ἑωράκειν, καὶ ἐπεστάθη μοι καὶ κατηκροᾶτο προσευχομένου καὶ ἐξομολογουμένου τῷ κυρίῳ τὰς ἁμαρτίας μου. καὶ ἁψαμένη μου λέγει . . . καὶ ἐξεγείρει με τῆς χειρὸς καὶ ἄγει με πρὸς τὸ συμψέλιον.

> And she came with six young men, whom I had seen before, and she stood beside me and listened closely while I prayed and confessed my sins to the Lord. She touched me and said . . . She raised me by the hand and led me to the couch.

Here the Lady Church is no longer defined as old, and since this characteristic was always mentioned previously, I take this omission to be deliberate. And she is more active than in the earlier two visions; she touches Hermas and raises him up. Thus the three descriptions of the Lady Church in the visions already point to the rejuvenation that Hermas discusses at the end of Vision 3. The late discussion of this topic by Hermas (18.3–5) would then point to something that some readers might have already picked up on.

Readers' Interpretation of Hermas as an *Exemplum*

In a final speculative note, readers might get not only a quicker but also an even more profound understanding of the images of the *BV* than the one

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52 Between Visions 1 and 2 there is also a change in the definition of the woman, from γυνὴ πρεσβῦτις to τὴν πρεσβυτέραν. However, I do not take this as significant, since in early Christian texts, ἡ πρεσβυτέρα, when used as a substantive, simply means "old person" (Lampe 1968 s.v. πρεσβύτερος II).

the text attributes to Hermas. In Vision 4, Hermas's account of his encounter with the beast not only proves his new understanding of the Church, it also portrays him as an *exemplum* to be followed.

Hermas's fight and victory over the beast point up his bravery and his process of learning from God: ἐνδυσάμενος οὖν, ἀδελφοί, τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου καὶ μνησθεὶς ὧν ἐδίδαξέν με μεγαλείων, θαρσήσας εἰς τὸ θηρίον ἐμαυτὸν ἔδωκα, "And so, putting on the faith of the Lord, brothers, and *remembering the great things he had taught me, I courageously* gave myself over to the beast" (22.8). Then the Lady Church praises Hermas's action: Καλῶς ἐξέφυγες . . . ὅτι τὴν μέριμνάν σου ἐπὶ τὸν θεὸν ἐπέριψας καὶ τὴν καρδίαν σου ἤνοιξας πρὸς τὸν κύριον . . . μεγάλην θλῖψιν ἐκπέφευγας διὰ τὴν πίστιν σου, "*You escaped well . . .* because you cast your anxiety upon God and opened your heart to the Lord . . . You have escaped a great affliction because of your faith" (23.4). After this, the Lady addresses Christian believers and invites them to take the same attitude as Hermas in order to overcome the coming affliction: ἐὰν οὖν προετοιμάσησθε καὶ μετανοήσητε ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας ὑμῶν πρὸς τὸν κύριον, δυνήσεσθε ἐκφυγεῖν αὐτήν, "If then all of you prepare and repent before the Lord from your whole heart, you will be able to escape it" (23.5). With these statements, the Lady Church presents Hermas as a model for readers and, more precisely, as an *exemplum* of faith and μετάνοια.

Both these features closely recall the first two of the seven female personifications of virtues, the only ones that are fully described (16.3–4):

> ἡ μὲν πρώτη αὐτῶν, ἡ κρατοῦσα τὰς χεῖρας, Πίστις καλεῖται· διὰ ταύτης σῴζονται οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ. ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα, ἡ περιεζωσμένη καὶ *ἀνδριζομένη*, Ἐγκράτεια καλεῖται·

> The first of them, the one clasping her hands, is called Faith. Those who are chosen by God are saved through her. And the other one, the one wearing a belt and *acting like a man*, is called Self-Restraint.

Attentive readers might notice that the Hermas of Vision 4 seems to re-enact these two virtues, and this interpretation can be reinforced with two further considerations. First, the expression (22.8) ἐνδυσάμενος . . . τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου suggests that Hermas is physically embracing this virtue, since the verb ἐνδύομαι means "to clothe oneself in." Second,

Hermas's re-enactment of Self-Restraint is reinforced by the Lady Church's earlier definition of the protagonist as ὁ ἐγκρατής, "the self-controlled" (2.4). Relying upon this definition, which is unique in the text, and on the fact that Hermas's brave behaviour in Vision 4 fits the participle ἀνδριζομένη, I would suggest that readers might even identify the protagonist with the personification of Self-Restraint. By doing so, the readers' perception of Hermas as an *exemplum* in Vision 4 would be confirmed, and their acquisition of a profound lesson from images further enhanced, since they would see Hermas as a special kind of image, namely, a personification of Faith and Self-Restraint.

With Hermas's final act of bravery, attentive readers could also re-read the whole of his inner change from a gender perspective, taking it as a movement from female to male images. After Rhoda's brief appearance in heaven and the repetitive encounters with the Lady Church, Hermas deals with the Tower, an intuitively masculine symbol, and, then with his brave victory over the beast. This movement seems to reflect a shift in the view of the Church from a rejuvenated woman to a strong and stable building able to win over enemies. Since, as noted by Young, this shift takes place with the help of the female figures,[53] it can be understood as a harmonious progression rather than as a contrast between genders.

CONCLUSION

The *Book of Visions* within the *Shepherd of Hermas* makes systematic use of allegorical images and discusses the protagonist's interpretation of them. Such a process highlights a key feature of Hermas's μετάνοια, which goes beyond the self-restraint and manliness usually identified by scholars and consists of his learning about the Church. It is through encountering and interpreting the images of the Lady Church, the Tower, and the beast that Hermas is progressively led to identify himself with the Church and to become one of its members. Through a series of structural and rhetorical devices, the text invites readers, too, to participate in this learning process. Therefore, the *BV* can be reassessed as a text that has a deliberately literary quality. Furthermore, this study offers a new and comprehensive explanation of the theology of the *Shepherd*, as it points

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53 See Young 1994.252: "For . . . Hermas to rise to full manhood his female models become his female assistants."

to a connection between Hermas's μετάνοια and the Church, the most prominent image in the text.

I would like to relate this analysis of images within the *BV* to the on-going debate about ekphrasis in order to situate this text within the broader context of the literature written in the imperial era. In Section 1, I offer the traditional definition of ekphrasis and I mention that theologians and New Testament scholars have recently used this notion as a way to interpret the vivid images characteristic of apocalyptic literature and, especially, of *Revelation*. On the other hand, classicists working on ekphrasis have so far ignored apocalyptic images and do not include the *BV* in their studies. Who is right: the theologians or the classicists? I argue that the truth lies in the middle: apocalyptic images share features with ekphraseis but cannot be identified with them.

On the one hand, the *BV*'s focus on an allegorical interpretation of images has something in common with ekphrasis. The use of descriptive passages "to draw in the audience and ask of them an effort at interpretation" (Bartsch 1989.15) is represented in the ekphrastic tradition of the imperial era in the works of Lucian (especially the *Prolaliae*), the *Tabula Cebetis*, the two *Imagines* of the Philostrati, and Callistratus's *Ekphraseis*. In these texts, as in the *BV*, dialogues guide internal audiences to a dynamic understanding of the descriptions, as we see in Philostratus the Elder's *Imagines*, where the main narrator engages a young pupil with instructions and questions such as σὺ δέ μοι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην βλέπε ("Look at Aphrodite, please!" 1.6.7) and τί οὖν αἱ Μοῦσαι δεῦρο; ("Why are the Muses here?" 2.8.6). More precisely, in some texts such as Lucian's *Heracles* and in the *Tabula Cebetis,* the readers' interpretation is directed to an "allegorical" (Bartsch 1989.22, 23) meaning of the given descriptions as well as to "what could be immediately visible" (17). The same allegorical "drive" is characteristic of the *BV*. Finally, within this ekphrastic tradition, it happens that "the accompanying viewer or viewers this author invents are usually at a loss as to what the painting means until an interpretation is supplied from some other character or source" (Bartsch 1989.15). And when the delayed interpretation is given, as we see in the case of Lucian's *Heracles*,[54] we cannot be sure "whether the interpreter enlightens . . . individuals who are at complete loss, or whether he confirms the guesses of those more

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54 See Luc. *Heracles* 4, where an interpreter appears and tries to explain τῆς γραφῆς τὸ αἴνιγμα ("the riddle of the picture").

clever" (Bartsch 1989.27). A very similar process—combining allegorical interpretation with mistake, delay, and mediation by an interpreter—has emerged in our analysis of the *BV*. In the light of this framework, the use of images in this text displays interesting similarities with the ekphrastic tradition of the imperial era.

On the other hand, in contrast with the images of the *BV*, ekphrasis is a more complex and sophisticated literary device. To oversimplify, ekphrasis can be said to have a distinctive mimetic nature. Through ekphrasis, readers are invited to immerse themselves in the described image. We can see this effect in the section on hunters from Philostratus's *Imagines* (3 cen. C.E.),[55] a famous collection of ekphraseis of works of art (1.28.1–2):

> Do not rush past us, ye hunters, nor urge on your steeds till we can track down what your purpose is and what the game is you are hunting. For you claim to be pursuing a "fierce wild boar," and I see the devastation wrought by the creature—it has burrowed under the olive trees, cut down the vines, and has left neither fig tree nor apple tree or apple branch . . . I see the creature, its mane bristling, its eyes flashing fire . . . How I have been deceived! I was deluded by the painting into thinking that the figures were not painted but were real beings, moving and loving.

In Jaś Elsner's authoritative analysis, *Imagines* 1.28 features two significant elements typical of ekphrasis: a mimetic agenda and a self-reflective acknowledgment of the impossibility of its full achievement. The former element is suggested by the abundance of realistic details rendering the boar's devastation and by Philostratus's commands at the very beginning, which are "enacting the image it describes—we, the viewers, are also hunters 'tracking down' our prey" (Elsner 1995.34). With these devices, readers are carried into the image (1995.34, slightly rephrased). Yet the same rhetoric also produces the opposite effect, because alerting the reader that he is dealing with a text describing an image[56] breaks the illusion that he is

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55 See Elsner 1995.28–39. The bibliography on this text is vast; for recent studies collecting earlier bibliography, see Baumann 2011 and Bachmann 2015.

56 See, e.g., Platt 2011.174: "Ekphrasis, in fact, both strives to make present that which is other and, at the same time, through its technical language diverts the readers' attention to its own facture, thus undermining their experience of the conveyed object."

part of that image and makes full mimesis impossible.[57] This reflection on the artificial nature of mimesis is a second distinctive feature of ekphrasis.

In consideration of this example, the allegorical images of the *BV* cannot be defined as ekphraseis. As I showed in Section 2, the main focus of these images is allegorical interpretation and an increase in the understanding of the Church, and there are neither an emphasis on vividness nor any mimetic and self-reflective agendas.[58] Hermas's identification with the Lady Church is no exception, since it takes place in a context of moral allegory and paraenesis. To sum up, the allegorical images of the *BV* share features with ekphrastic discourse but also are clearly different.

I hope that this paper will encourage more classicists to include in their discussions of ekphrasis a comparison with the images of the *BV*. Moreover, since, as I have shown in Section 1, the *BV*'s focus on allegory, its limited provision of descriptive details, and its process of interpretation of images are no innovations of this text but features typical of the apocalyptic genre, I would encourage classicists to include the whole of this genre in their study of ekphrasis.

I also hope that my study will start a dialogue with New Testament scholars, inviting them to reconsider their ekphrastic interpretation of images in the apocalyptic genre, and especially in *Revelation*. Although it is certainly true that a text like the *BV* is simpler in its use of images than *Revelation*,[59] the images within the latter text—with their focus on sight, the emotional engagement of readers, and a great number of details[60]—

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57 See Newby 2009.323, arguing that one "key feature" of Philostratus's "approach to art [in the *Imagines*] is a continual movement between absorption in the world of the image and a detailed intellectual viewing which seeks to constrain the power of the visual through subjection to textual or verbal explanations."

58 With this antinaturalistic agenda, the images of the *BV* might anticipate the Christian late antique take on ekphrasis, as argued by Goldhill 2012.98: "Christian ecphrasis can echo Hellenistic language and the gestures of the Hellenistic viewer, but cannot be the same, because the act of viewing has developed a new moral and intellectual positioning." See also Elsner 1995.88, arguing for the Christian "transformation in viewing away from naturalist expectations towards the symbolism inherent in mystic contemplation." The *Tabula Cebetis* (contemporary to the *BV*) is believed by scholars to share this antinaturalistic agenda (Fitzgerald and White 1983.18), but this assumption is criticised by Grethlein and Squire 2014, who uncover the mimetic and aesthetic agenda of the *Tabula*. If they are right, the *BV* might be the only imperial work which anticipates the Christian late antique take on ekphrasis.

59 See Whitaker 2015b.71, commenting on the "increase in density of apocalyptic imagery" in *Rev*. 1.9–20 and defining the language of this text as "highly vivid and clear" (62).

60 Each of these elements is part of Whitaker's careful analysis of the *Revelation*'s three descriptions of the divine (1.9–20, 4.1–11, and 5.1–14) as ekphraseis (2015b). On the other

seem to both recall some aspects of ekphraseis and yet lack their sophisticated mimetic agenda.

Due to its images, then, the *BV* deserved more attention in the context of Greek literature written in the first centuries of the imperial era. Many years ago, E. R. Curtius was probably right when he defined the *Shepherd of Hermas* as "the most important document of early Christian vision literature" (1963.103).[61]

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