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**Osiek, Carolyn Koester, Helmut, ed.**

***The Shepherd of Hermas***

Hermeneia

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Osiek's translation and commentary on the Shepherd of Hermas for the Hermeneia series is the first in English since Snyder's (*The Shepherd of Hermas* [Camden: Nelson, 1969]). Osiek prefers the critical text of Molly Whittaker (p. 3) and, while following the traditional divisions (Visions, Mandates, Similitudes) in her translation, she also includes in brackets Whittaker's consecutive numbering system.

In this introduction and commentary, Osiek, Professor of New Testament at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, thoroughly updates pertinent bibliography, summarizes important research and offers her own critique of selected significant proposals. In short, this is a fine reliable commentary. Of course, any commentary reflects the interests of the commentator, and Osiek's particular professional interests do bring to this commentary some unique observations. Osiek has long been interested in the oral nature of early Christian literature (see bibliography, p. 268). She believes the uneven structure and language of Shepherd reflects the affect of oral presentations over a long period of time (pp. 13-16). She sees at least three characteristics: 1) She attributes incongruencies of the text to the additive and repetitive habits of the church rhetor. 2) In her translation Osiek shows, by means of [pl,], when the rhetor turns to address the listening congregation. This occurs often, but particularly at the end of a mandate (e.g., Mand. 4:10). 3) Osiek uses a more folksy translation in order to demonstrate the oral nature of a popular work.

Osiek's work on the family in early Christianity (with David Balch, *Families in the New Testament: Households and House Churches* [Louisville: WJK, 1997]), reflects a longtime interest in gender and gender relationships. In the translation of Hermas she indicates gender when there may be some question (e.g., the congregation is addressed as "brothers and sisters" for *adelphoi* [Vis. 4.1.5]). In the commentary she makes us more

aware that popular early Christian literature has women and families play a very significant role in the life of the church. Hermas' revelator was a woman (Vis. 2.1.3). A woman, Grapte, was responsible for writing down part of the revelation and was to use it in teaching widows and orphans (Vis. 2.4.3 [p. 59]).

A third concern involves the biblical tradition of God's preference for the poor (see bibliography, p. 268). In her discussion of the famous elm and vine parable (Sim. 2), Osiek doubts it refers to a symbiotic relationship between rich and poor, but more likely that, according to Hermas, God made some Christians wealthy in order specifically to support the poor of the Roman churches. They either contributed to a common fund and/or acted as traditional patrons for some special poor (pp. 163-164).

Among key issues in Hermas the following are of special interest: *metanoia*, *dipsuchia*, and *ketos*. *Metanoia* may well be the major theme of Hermas. Some early contemporaries of Hermas condemned him for moral laxity because he allowed *metanoia* after baptism (pp. 4-5; 28-30; 114-115). Later some church leaders saw in Hermas' teaching on *metanoia* a positive rationale for post-baptismal penitence. Osiek essentially rejects these conflictive readings. She sees Hermas' teaching on *metanoia* as his awareness that the ethic of the faith community is developing. Sin is not permitted for the baptized, but actually sin is inevitable. So *metanoia* is a constant reality for the congregation (p. 115). As a result Osiek consistently translates *metanoia* as "conversion," rather than "repentance."

While the theme of Hermas might be *metanoia*, theologically speaking Hermas could be placed with such Two Way writings as The Didache, Barnabas and perhaps the Letter of James. The human problem in a Two Way system is *dipsuchia*, or uncertainty about nature of the Two Ways. While Osiek translates *dipsuchia* as doublemindedness, she argues that *dipsuchia* in Hermas refers more to doubt about one's relationship with God (Mand. 9 [pp. 1231-134]).

Despite the importance of *metanoia* and *dipsuchia* (the root occurs 55 times), Osiek still believes Hermas should be classified as an apocalypse rather than a didache. To be sure, Hermas does receive an *apokalupsis* from an otherworldly source. And Hermas does exhibit most of the literary marks of the apocalyptic genre (pp. 10-12). Those of us who doubt that Hermas is an apocalypse argue that a genuine apocalypse emerges from a political crisis. Without a crisis the writing is simply a literary imitation (p. 12). For example, one of the marks of an apocalypse is the *therion* in Vision 4. The woman church explains the dragon (*ketos*) as a mark of the great tribulation to come (4.3.6 [pp. 94-95]). But there is no tribulation in the offing, as Osiek realizes. Among Osiek's many interests is early Christian art (pp. 7-8). The most popular piece of early Christian art was the sea monster (*ketos*) of the Jonah narrative. Contemporary with the *ketos* of Hermas, this popular dragon of early Christian art did not signify persecution but cultural conflict.

While Osiek does not utilize this popular connection, finally she would modify her stance on the genre issue and call Hermas an apocalyptic paraenesis (p. 11).

Taking Hermas as a popular declamation solves some problems and raises others. Did the faith community actually gather for daylong meetings in order to listen to a lengthy narration like Hermas (note Acts 20:7-9)? Why doesn't other early Christian literature reflect the extensive role of women in the life of the congregation? Why is the *kerygma* missing from this popular document as well as from other popular materials like art and inscriptions? Osiek has dealt helpfully with difficult questions in Hermas and stimulates us to discover more about the context in which it was written. Consequently, it is invaluable to have this translation and commentary from a scholar whose research interest lies in the nature of early popular Christianity.