CHAPTER FOUR

ANGELOMORPHIC PNEUMATOLOGY IN THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the book of Revelation witnesses to an archaic “angelomorphic” pneumatology similar to the one discerned in Clement’s Hypotyposeis. I also showed that, just as in Clement, such depictions of the Spirit occur in a larger theological articulation, namely in tandem with spirit christology, (i.e., the use of “spirit” language to designate Christ), and within a binitarian theological framework. It is now time to consider another early Christian apocalypse which enjoyed huge popularity in the early centuries, and which Clement read with evident affection and reverence: the Shepherd of Hermas. The thesis of the pages to follow is that this writing illustrates a complex interaction between the phenomenon discussed by Levison (“spirit” designating angelic/demonic beings), spirit christology, and an “angelomorphic” representation of the Holy Spirit.

The Shepherd of Hermas is by all accounts “one of the most enigmatic writings to have come down to us from Christian antiquity,” which “bristles with problems, both literary and theological.” In the words of Robert J. Hauck, “[t]here are many puzzles in this puzzling little book.” Even more puzzling, however, is the fact that this text never

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scandalized its contemporaries or later orthodoxy. Indeed, if the christology of this writing “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.” The same can be said about the Shepherd’s notion of πνεῦμα: it is significant that certain elements of the Shepherd’s pneumatology were taken over by none other than Tertullian—otherwise a harsh critic of the Shepherd.

In the pages to follow I shall discuss, first, the Shepherd’s use of πνεῦμα for angelic entities, then its use of πνεῦμα for the Son of God, and finally propose a rereading of the Fifth Similitude, the ultimate test-case for any theory on the Shepherd’s views on angels and spirits. Aside from my general indebtedness to the studies of Segal, Hurtado, Levison, Gieschen, and Fletcher-Louis, which I have acknowledged and set out earlier, my reading of the Shepherd owes very much, as I shall note at the appropriate time, to the studies of Philippe Henne. 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.

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3 For a list of mostly positive references to the Shepherd, ranging from the second century to the late middle ages, see Harnack, Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius I/1 (Hinrichs: Leipzig, 1958 [1893]), 51–58, and Norbert Brox, Der Hirt des Hermas (KAV 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1991), 55–71.

4 Osiek, Shepherd Commentary, 180a. Similarly Brox (Der Hirt, 328): “Wie H. solche Äusserungen in Rom publizieren konnte . . . bleibt ein Geheimnis.”

