Lost in Revision: Gender Symbolism in *Vision* 3 and *Similitude* 9 of the *Shepherd of Hermas*

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■ Abstract

This article investigates the early development of gendered Christian symbolism by focusing on discrepancies between two sections of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Using close textual analysis and contemporary feminist theological frameworks, I identify the seemingly subtle, yet crucial and conspicuous, transformations of gender symbolism in the revision of *Vision* 3 into *Similitude* 9. These transformations include replacing the feminine Church with the Shepherd, the Tower, and the Son of God; dividing seven women (Faith and her genealogical descendants) into twelve virgins and their twelve vicious counterparts; and erasing "waters" and "the deep" from the Church's foundation, while emphasizing tall rocks and level ground. Scholars typically have considered these revisions to be products of deeper and more systematic theological reflection, or mere elaborations and expansions in a "literary unity" drawn from oral composition. I argue instead that the revisions are rooted in embedded cultural patterns that consistently exclude maternal figures and their associated imagery. This re-evaluation of the revision process in *Hermas* complements other approaches to studying women in early Christian history, supplying a critical account of the evolving conceptual and symbolic structures that supported declines in the ecclesiastical status and symbolic significance of women.

■ Keywords

Shepherd of Hermas, feminist theology, feminist theory, women, gender, early Christianity

■ Introduction

The discrepancies between two richly symbolic and closely related sections of the early Christian *Shepherd of Hermas* provide a remarkable opportunity for examining how, and at what cost, coherent systems of Christian symbolism developed. These two sections are *Vision* 3 and *Similitude* 9, both of which feature a revelatory agent who interprets an image of the Church as a Tower assembled from different types of stones.[1] *Sim* 9 is widely recognized as a later revision of *Vis* 3, and recent scholarship typically has characterized *Sim* 9 as "more or less a further elaboration of the vision of the tower in *Vis*. 3"[2] or as "the same initial idea reworked and expanded over a period of years."[3] Most studies have assumed a developmental model of theological reflection at work between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9, approaching the latter as more theologically "systematized" than the *Visions* material.[4] This attitude has persisted regardless of whether scholars considered the *Sim* 9 author to be an independent reviser of *Vis* 3 or the same author writing after years of refining his thought.[5] Developmental models that account for the discrepancies between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9 have included Hermas's spiritual growth, in which his ability to tolerate multiplicity of meaning is a sign of his spiritual maturity;[6] or the author's "additive" style, typical of oral composition, which generates "deeper" or "new" meanings.[7]

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[1] I capitalize terms that function in *Hermas* like proper names or titles—e.g., Church, Shepherd, Tower, and Son of God. Textual citations are from *Hirt des Hermas* (ed. Martin Leutzsch), in *Papiasfragmente. Hirt des Hermas* (ed. Ulrich H. J. Körtner and Martin Leutzsch; Schriften des Urchristentums 3; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998) 105–497. Translations are my own, in consultation with the translations of Carolyn Osiek (*The Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999]) and Bart D. Ehrman (*The Apostolic Fathers* [2 vols.; LCL 24–25; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003] 2:161–473).

[2] Mark Grundeken and Joseph Verheyden, "The Spirit Before the Letter: Dreams and Visions as the Legitimization of the *Shepherd of Hermas*; A Study of *Vision* 5," in *Dreams as Divine Communication in Christianity: From Hermas to Aquinas* (ed. B. J. Koet; Studies in the History and Anthropology of Religion 3; Leuven: Peeters, 2012) 23–56, at 30.

[3] Osiek, *Hermas*, 220.

[4] Carla Bausone referred specifically to the greater "sistematizzazione" of *Sim* 9 ("Aspetti dell'ecclesiologia del *Pastore* di Hermas," *StPatr* 11 [1972] 101–6, at 106).

[5] For example, in his argument for a later independent author, W. Coleborne claimed that the *Sim* 9 author had a fuller theological agenda, which aimed to "reassert adoptionism," to revise teachings on the Parousia, and to "restate the doctrine of the Church" ("The *Shepherd* of Hermas: A Case for Multiple Authorship and Some Implications," *StPatr* 10 [1970] 65–70, at 68). Luigi Cirillo hypothesized a single author, whose *Sim* 9 revision had to account for the facts that the end of the world seemed less imminent, that the Christian community had welcomed an increasing number of Gentile ("pagani") converts, and that an encounter with John's gospel revealed to Hermas the link between Christ and the Church ("Erma e il problema dell'apocalittica a Roma," *CNS* 4 [1983] 1–31, at 23).

[6] Patricia Cox Miller, "'All the Words Were Frightful': Salvation by Dreams in the Shepherd of Hermas," *VC* 42 (1988) 327–38, at 332.

[7] See Carolyn Osiek, "The Oral World of Early Christianity in Rome: The Case of Hermas," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 151–72. Quotations from Osiek, *Hermas*, 212.

These approaches reckon with discrepancies while still affirming *Hermas* as a literary unity, unified perhaps by a consistent interpretive technique rather than by consistent meanings.[8] An exuberant embrace of multiple, "deeper" meanings remains a frequent concomitant of the wider acceptance of arguments for the single authorship of *Hermas*.

By contrast, this article uses the perspective of feminist theological analysis to restore emphasis to the problematic nature of the tensions and discrepancies between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9, and to challenge their characterization as the products of deeper or more mature theological reflection and spiritual growth, or as mere elaborations and expansions that result from the text's stylistic and compositional features. Analytical methods developed by feminist theologians are especially well honed for assessing the *Sim* 9 revision's crucial and conspicuous transformations of gender symbolism and for identifying the patterns and importance in what the *Sim* 9 revision has altered and displaced. If *Sim* 9 does represent a more systematized revision of *Vis* 3, then it achieves its greater theological coherence at the expense of feminine imagery and feminine symbols of authority.

Further, this analysis unsettles the paradigm of "literary integrity" and "literary unity" that has endured in recent decades of *Hermas* scholarship, including in gendered analysis of the text.[9] The erasures and contradictions discussed below show that a semblance of "literary integrity" in *Hermas* as a whole is not achieved, but is undermined, by the discrepancies in gender symbolism that remain between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9. Because the literary reappraisal of biblical texts—in reaction to source criticism—closely parallels the literary approach taken to *Hermas* and likely provides its model, it should be noted that the discrepancies in *Hermas* differ in kind from the inconsistencies that the Bible's literary critics happily overlook in order to appreciate the narrative art of its redacted forms.[10] I argue instead that *Vis*

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[8] Philippe Henne, "La polysémie allégorique dans le *Pasteur* d'Hermas," *ETL* 65 (1989) 131–35.

[9] Steve Young, "Being a Man: The Pursuit of Manliness in *The Shepherd of Hermas*," *JECS* 2 (1994) 237–55. Young argued that the ascendency of a masculine ideal over feminine figures shaped the literary unity of *Hermas*.

[10] The trend away from source criticism is best represented by the work of Robert Alter, beginning with his *Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Some of Alter's most pithy statements on the topic, however, come from his translations and commentaries on the literary features of biblical texts. Alter acknowledges the basic insight of two centuries' worth of source criticism—that most biblical texts were produced by "an accretion of sundry traditions, shot through with disjunctions and contradictions, and accumulated in an uneven editorial process over several centuries." Nevertheless, while Alter notes minor discrepancies within the biblical texts as they exist today, he focuses his comments on the literary artistry of the redactors themselves, who assembled narrative masterpieces out of assorted materials, much like the generations of architects and masons who built medieval cathedrals, or the editorial teams who produced "the greatest Hollywood films." Alter launches his translation and commentary project with the presupposition that the redacted form of Genesis "is a coherent book, what we moderns would think of as a work of literature" (*The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* [New York: Norton, 2004] 9, 11). This preference for overlooking textual inconsistencies, rather than obsessively tracing them to independent sources and hypothesizing those sources' respective ideological investments, found favor especially with

3 does not represent simply an oral draft or early stage of thought but constitutes something more like a paper trail of the text's substantially changing ideological investments related to gender, evident in *Sim* 9.

A brief overview of the *Sim* 9 revision's effects on feminine figures from *Vis* 3 includes the following points: First, the revelatory agent in *Vis* 3 is an elder woman (or a female elder, ἡ πρεσβυτέρα, *Vis* 3.1.2), who is addressed as "Lady" (Κυρία, *Vis* 3.1.3) and identified as the Church; the revelatory agent in *Sim* 9, however, is a male Shepherd, who replaces the feminine Church as the authoritative interpreter of the text's most prominent vision. Second, seven allegorical female figures called "women" in *Vis* 3 appear in *Sim* 9 as twelve white-clad "virgins"; they also acquire counterparts in the form of twelve seductive "women" dressed in black. In *Vis* 3, the allegorical female figures are related to one another as a matrilineal chain descended from one foremother named Faith, whereas in *Sim* 9 they are assistants of the Son of God and competitors for the affections of men. Third, the Tower in *Vis* 3 is constructed on primordial waters using stones from "the deep" and from "the earth," whereas the Tower in *Sim* 9 is built on a rock even taller than the surrounding mountains that supply its building material.

These changes should be striking to readers attuned to the types of symbolism marked as highly significant in feminist analysis. What other scholars of *Hermas* have viewed as mere elaborations and expansions this article treats as coordinated shifts that eliminate feminine symbols from the Christian imaginary or that constrain these symbols to the service of increasingly patriarchal institutions. Several feminist theologians have investigated critically the development of Christian symbolism, which supplies a necessary complement to more empirical approaches for understanding declines in the status and significance of women in early Christian communities.[11] In particular, I draw on the feminist analysis of Christian symbolism advanced in the work of Tina Beattie and Catherine Keller, who deconstruct developments in Western and Christian theology, and who reclaim

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feminist biblical scholars. The foundational work of Phyllis Trible, for example, affirmed the value of reading "the text in its final form." In Trible's case, this meant adopting the methods of "literary criticism" in order to "offer sympathetic readings of abused women" in the Bible, rather than adopting the dominant historical-critical method of dissecting the text into its component parts (*Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984] 1–5). Within the field of biblical studies, literary approaches have offered a refreshing alternative to the dominant tools of source criticism, and feminist scholars have put this alternative to effective use. Scholarship on *Hermas* parallels this trend, assisted by gender-conscious readers, toward viewing the text as a literary whole despite the inconsistencies downplayed as minor. Thus, the field has not been poised to recognize the significance of the discrepancies in gender symbolism that I discuss here.

[11] Important projects that document the early participation but gradual exclusion of women from ecclesiastical leadership include Ute Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000); and *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (ed. Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

lost opportunities for cultivating symbols that are more inclusive and redemptive for women and the finite natural world.[12]

In her critiques of patriarchy in its theological and ecclesiastical forms, Beattie has adapted the psycholinguistic methods of Luce Irigaray for infiltrating and interrogating the "ever so coherent systems" of philosophers, theologians, and other architects of a symbolic and linguistic order that sacrifices and silences maternal and feminine figures.[13] But while Irigaray drew attention to "neglected myths and symbols,"[14] Beattie herself returns to earlier and underdeveloped layers of Christian thought—"discarded scraps of patristic theology that have been neglected or rejected"[15]—finding there "a more open and less repressive form of Christianity with regard to the representation of women."[16] While Beattie intentionally limits herself to sources recognized as orthodox in her own ecclesial location, confident that even these resources are sufficient to make her case, I contend that *Vis* 3 of *Hermas* provides even more persuasive evidence for an earlier and less exclusive Christian imaginary, and that the *Sim* 9 revision evinces the very clear patterns by which that material is systematized and suppressed in the name of coherence, and at the expense of feminine symbols.

Another critical resource for this article is the work of Keller, who takes as her starting point the *tehom* (the deep) of Gen 1:2, and who diagnoses a range of Christian theological traditions with forms of "tehomophobia."[17] Most basically, Keller argues that Christian theology systematically associates the deep, or "anything dark, profound, or fluid," with an often feminized and "revolting chaos, an evil to be mastered, a nothing to be ignored."[18] Keller documents the processes—Babylonian, biblical, and proto-orthodox—by which "an older creation imaginary, that of birth from the salt-waters of a goddess, must be denigrated."[19] The transition from *Vis* 3 to *Sim* 9 bears witness to precisely this process. As this article's final section shows, "the waters" and "the deep" present in *Vis* 3, associated with the feminine Church and providing the Tower with its profound foundation, are leveled and replaced in *Sim* 9 by a rock of dizzying height. A feminist perspective interprets this change not

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[12] Tina Beattie especially develops a feminist narrative of "redemption," particular to women, that includes "women's liberation from the oppressive consequences of the fall" (*God's Mother, Eve's Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation* [London: Continuum, 2002] 58).

[13] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (trans. Catherine Porter; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 150.

[14] Beattie, *God's Mother*, 23.

[15] Ibid., 6.

[16] Ibid., 64. Despite her confidence in the possibilities of early Christian sources, Beattie never naively posits "an original state of innocence" for Christian thought (ibid.). See her handling of Tertullian at 96–99.

[17] Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 7. Keller has detected tehomophobia—and a few instances of tehomophilia—in the Psalms (25–28), Irenaeus of Lyon (49–56), Augustine (65–83), and Karl Barth (84–99), among others.

[18] Ibid., 6.

[19] Ibid., 107.

simply as an elaboration of imagery but as a precedented and systematic method for phobically restricting deep waters from the Christian imaginary.

Despite notable differences in their relationships to both orthodoxy and politics, Beattie and Keller take similar approaches to deconstructing and reconfiguring symbols essential to Christian theology.[20] The deconstructive dimension of their work provides this article with a new way to interpret the stark differences between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9. Rather than regard these changes as developments, elaborations, or multiplications of meaning, this article views such changes as evidence for complicity in quite consequential shifts in the Christian imaginary that depose and diminish feminine figures of authority and significance.

■ Eliminating the Maternal Church

The most obvious index of the *Sim* 9 revision's exclusion of significant feminine symbols is the elimination of the feminine Church and the usurpation of the three dominant roles she held in the *Visions*: revealer-figure, ecclesiological symbol, and pre-created companion of God. The replacement of the feminine Church in *Vis* 3 by the Shepherd, the Tower, and the Son of God in *Sim* 9 provides context for the subtler shifts discussed in more detail in the next two sections of this article—that is, the division of the seven women into twelve virgins and their twelve vicious counterparts, and the disappearance of waters and depth from the Church's foundation. These revisions may seem minor if they are not considered in light of what is at stake for gender symbolism in the revision process. These stakes are demonstrated most clearly by the feminine Church's removal as an authoritative and significant teacher and symbol.

Examining each of the feminine Church's replacements in turn—Shepherd, Tower, and Son of God—will establish this context more firmly.[21] In *Sim* 9, the male Shepherd takes the feminine Church's place as revealer and guide, alleging his superior interpretive capacity. He claims that the Holy Spirit first spoke to Hermas "in the form of the Church" when Hermas was "weak in the flesh," but that "it is necessary" for the now-stronger Hermas "to see all things more precisely with my help" (*Sim* 9.1.1–3).[22] The Shepherd's long-winded presence occupies not only *Sim*

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[20] Beattie remains conscientiously within the boundaries of Roman Catholic orthodoxy, with the exception of her case for a maternal priesthood. Keller, on the other hand, questions the forged association of "religion" with "orthodoxy" and, with respect to the anti-Gnostic heresiological writings of Irenaeus of Lyon, argues that "Christian orthodoxy originates in a symbolic misogyny" (*Face of the Deep*, 54). Further, in notable contrast to Beattie, Keller asserts the need for symbols that affirm democratic values (ibid., 98). However, she acknowledges that her "cultural, symbolic" argument about refiguring metaphors and doctrines (such as *creatio ex nihilo*) is not causally— though it may be surprisingly—related to desired political effects such as gender equity and "less annihilation of the marginalized" (ibid., 246).

[21] I have discussed elsewhere how the feminine Church also represents forms of leadership and revelation that later centuries resisted or rejected (Lora Walsh, "Ecclesia Reconsidered: Two Premodern Encounters with the Feminine Church," *JFSR* 33 [2017] 73–91, at 82).

[22] The explicit assertion of the Shepherd's superior teaching authority relative to that of the

9 but all of the *Mandates* and *Similitudes*, genres he introduces in the fifth *Vision* and employs thereafter.[23]

Further, whereas in *Vis* 3 both the elder woman and the Tower serve as coexisting, complementary symbols of the church, *Sim* 9 reserves this symbolism for the Tower alone. In *Vis* 3, the Tower enhances the feminine Church's ability to signify ecclesiological concepts (for example, the difference between the preexistent church and the church as it elapses in historical time),[24] and the Tower remains under the feminine Church's interpretive control (signaled by the "bright rod" that she uses to direct Hermas's attention to her visual aid in *Vis* 3.2.4).[25] However, the *Sim* 9 revision does not permit the anomalous persistence of the feminine Church alongside the Tower.[26] Absent the feminine Church's personal presence, the Tower image is reduced to functioning like a "pictogram," in which the emotional dimensions of ecclesial belonging recede.[27] A relationship with an authoritative feminine being is no longer a facet of ecclesial belonging.

Finally, many scholars have noted the ascending significance of the Son of God in the more "systematized" theological framework of *Sim* 9.[28] For the purposes of

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feminine Church led Stanislas Giet to argue that *Sim* 9 once directly followed the *Visions* section (*Hermas et les Pasteurs. Les trois auteurs du Pasteur d'Hermas* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963] 104–5). Osiek has reviewed the manuscript evidence for the "uncertainty about the place of this long section in the whole" (*Hermas*, 211).

[23] Readers have long noted a shift in tone between the first four *Visions* and the long remainder of *Hermas*, which the Shepherd dominates. William Jerome Wilson observed, "At his first appearance, and at a single sitting, he [the Shepherd] delivers Vision v [*sic*] and the twelve Mandates, a mass of material greater than the first four Visions taken together." Also, "the earlier simplicity and directness are gone" ("The Career of the Prophet Hermas," *HTR* 20 [1927] 21–62, at 31, 33). Particularly in the *Mandates*, the Shepherd "gives his commandments and explanations," while the "element of dialogue" is "minimal" (J. Reiling, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy: A Study of the Eleventh Mandate* [NovTSup 37; Leiden: Brill, 1973] 161). Osiek also observed that the *Mandates* and *Similitudes* are less personal and dialogical, placing "less stress on urgency and imminence, far more on paraenesis" ("The Genre and Function of the *Shepherd of Hermas*," in *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting* [ed. Adela Yarbro Collins; Semeia 36; Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1986] 113–21, at 114).

[24] Giet, *Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 121.

[25] Edith McEwan Humphrey elucidated the potent symbolism of the feminine Church in conjunction with a building in the first four *Visions* of *Hermas* and in three similar works. She consciously limited her analysis to the *Visions* material, for "the image of the transfigured Woman-Building" and "symbol of the faithful as a whole" is not operative in later sections (*The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas* [JSPSup 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995] 19). For her treatment of *Hermas*, see 119–49.

[26] Cirillo marked the novelty of the feminine Church's persistence alongside the Tower in *Vis* 3, by contrast to 4 Ezra, in which a visionary lady departs when a city appears ("Erma e il problema," 14).

[27] Karl F. Morrison, "How to Feed on Empty Images: The Shepherd of Hermas and the Witch of Endor," *StPatr* 45 (Louvain: Peeters, 2010) 309–23, at 319. In Carl Jung's account of this shift, the Tower draws life from the feminine Church's devaluation (*Psychological Types*, vol. 6 of *Collected Works* [trans. H. G. Baynes; rev. R. F. C. Hull; Bollingen Series 20; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971] 238, paragraph 402).

[28] Graydon F. Snyder observed that in *Sim* 9 one enters the Tower not by "repentance alone"

this article, one strategy for establishing that ascendancy is most important: applying elements of the inherited wisdom tradition not to the Church, but to the Son, who assumes the feminine Church's former status as God's ancient pre-creation. Early Christians regularly equated the figure of pre-created and feminized Wisdom (as in Prov 8:22–31) with phenomena that otherwise would seem novel—namely, the Church or Christ. The strategy of identifying the Church or Christ with pre-created Wisdom could establish the ancient pedigree and prominent cosmological status of these theological innovations. The *Visions* author applies the concept of pre-created Wisdom to the feminine Church, who appears consistently as an "elder woman," and whose old age signifies her status as a pre-created being and the purpose of all creation: "She was created before everything [πάντων πρώτη ἐκτίσθη]. On account of this, she is elder. And on account of her, the world was created [διὰ ταύτην ὁ κόσμος κατηρτίσθη]" (*Vis*. 2.4.1).[29]

Other early Christians identified the figure of pre-created Wisdom not with the Church, but with Christ. Most prominently, a christological hymn embedded in the New Testament epistle to the Colossians describes Christ in terms clearly paralleled by the later *Visions* author.[30] The *Sim* 9 revision follows the tradition of the Colossians hymn, transferring the privileged, pre-created status of Wisdom away from the Church of *Vis* 3 and to the Son of God in *Sim* 9. According to the Shepherd, the ancient rock (παλαιὰ . . . ἡ πέτρα, *Sim* 9.2.2), upon which the Tower is now built, signifies the Son of God, who "was born prior to all God's creation, so as to become a counselor on creation for his Father. On account of this, the rock is ancient too" (*Sim* 9.12.2).[31] Thus, the Son of God—rather than the ancient mothers Wisdom or Church—becomes the exclusive referent for imagery of God's firstborn source of creation and the foundation of ecclesiastical community.

Hypothetically, the feminine Church and the Son of God could have shared status as coequal heirs to the wisdom tradition, whether as companion phenomena or as a single phenomenon in feminine and masculine forms. The feminine Church also

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(as in *Vis* 3) but "by means of the Son" (*The Shepherd of Hermas* [The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary 6; Camden, NJ: Nelson, 1968] 6). Another reading postulates that an eventual union with the Holy Spirit and the Son of God will erase the existence of the Church as a differentiated and autonomous entity (J. Christian Wilson, *Toward a Reassessment of the Shepherd of Hermas: Its Date and Pneumatology* [Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1993] 139).

[29] *Hermas* is "the first Christian work which conveys the concept of the pre-created Church" (David P. O'Brien, "The Cumaean Sibyl as the Revelation-bearer in the *Shepherd of Hermas*," *JECS* 5 [1997] 473–96, at 492).

[30] Christ is identified as "the firstborn of all creation" (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως), for "all things have been created through him and for him" (τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται, Col 1:15–16 NRSV). Elizabeth A. Johnson discussed how this christological hymn relies on the pattern and vocabulary of the wisdom tradition, as the author attaches descriptions and honorifics of Sophia to Christ ("Jesus the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *ETL* 61 [1985] 261–94, at 279).

[31] Giet noted how stark the discrepancy between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9 appears when one considers that the same wisdom text—Prov 8—applies first to the feminine Church and then to the rock / Son of God (*Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 161).

would have been an obvious Christianized answer to maternal goddess traditions.[32] In the developing universe of early Christian symbolism, however, the rejection of maternal goddesses and the intolerance for coexisting masculine and feminine symbols ensured that feminine symbols for the divine were either eliminated or enlisted in the service of patriarchy. What E. O. James once called "the concept of the Church as a hypostatic heavenly being, coeval with Christ and on a level with the Wisdom and the Word of God (the Logos)," did not endure.[33]

A feminist analytical framework would, without overstatement, account for the feminine Church's absence from the *Sim* 9 revision as a repetition of the most fundamental gesture in establishing a coherently patriarchal symbolic system: the commission of matricide.[34] Granted, the matricide of *Hermas* is committed primarily through omission. What is more, the only direct evidence for understanding the feminine Church in *Vis* 3 as "maternal" is a speech that she delivers, opening with the words, "Hear me, children," and followed by a description of her maternal involvement in the lives of church members: "I raised you in great simplicity, innocence, and reverence through the mercy of the Lord" (*Vis* 3.9.1).[35] But this matricide is all the more disturbing for taking the form of a nearly invisible editorial decision, and for discarding a form of maternity associated with wisdom, justice, and governance. In the speech itself, categorized variously as a homily or a prophetic oracle, the maternal Church calls her "children" to resist economic inequality and to enact ecclesiastical reform.[36] Thus, the feminine Church of the *Visions* section as a whole is not maternal in ways that evoke patriarchal fears and fantasies; there is no morphological imagery of maternity, no invocation of the inexhaustible fecundity associated with the breast or womb. Rather, the maternal Church of *Vis* 3 is an elder woman who speaks on public matters. Therefore, the matricide particular to the

[32] For the theory that "the female principle, originally personified in the Magna Mater, became the Mater Ecclesia," see E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother-Goddess* [London: Barnes & Noble, 1959] 200. Beattie has discussed the early Christian preoccupation with establishing distance from pagan fertility cults and its impact on feminine divine figures in Christianity (*God's Mother*, 62–63).

[33] James, *Mother-Goddess*, 203. A comparison of the feminine Church in *Hermas* to the Valentinian gnostic conceptions of the church as a "pre-worldly aeon" is developed in Patrice G. de Mestral, "The Heavenly Church in the Second Century: Delaying Factors in the Process of Institutionalization of the Church in the Second Century" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1966) 90.

[34] Following Irigaray, Beattie has summarized: "the symbolic murder of the mother constitutes the founding moment in the construction of Western culture" (*God's Mother*, 83).

[35] While *Hermas* does not use the term Mother Church (Μήτηρ Ἐκκλησία), Joseph C. Plumpe treated this passage as evidence for the developing concept of the church's maternity (*Mater Ecclesia: An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* [Studies in Christian Antiquity; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1943] 22).

[36] David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 310; and Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "Hermas the Prophet and Hippolytus the Preacher: The Roman Homily and Its Social Context," in *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics* (ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Pauline Allen; New History of the Sermon 1; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 33–63, especially at 38.

revisions of *Hermas* involves not a slaughter, but the silent rejection of a female figure of authority, significance, and speech.[37]

Recognizing that the *Sim* 9 revision of *Vis* 3 encodes an original matricide into the unfolding of *Hermas* confirms the potentially high stakes for the seemingly less drastic revisions of gender symbolism that I discuss in the next two sections. As the following analysis shows, the revision of the seven genealogically connected women into twelve manly virgins with twelve female rivals, and of the deep waters into impossibly tall rocks, conforms to the same pattern as the displacement of the feminine Church. All demote feminine figures and symbols.

◼ Multiplying and Dividing the Women

While the elder, maternal church disappears from *Hermas* entirely, one source of feminine imagery survives the transition from *Vis* 3 to *Sim* 9. However, this imagery undergoes significant changes in accordance with fundamental patterns, identified in feminist analysis, which damage the potential of feminine symbols to affirm identities and relationships among women. These patterns include the destruction of female genealogies and the "splitting" of feminine figures into idealized and demonized forms.

At first glance, the changes between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9 may seem like straightforward cases of "elaboration" or "additive" style. In *Vis* 3, the feminine Church introduces seven "women" (ἑπτὰ γυναῖκας) who encircle and support the Tower (*Vis* 3.8.2). These women have allegorical names—Faith, Self-Control, Simplicity, Knowledge, Innocence, Reverence, and Love—and form a line of matrilineal descent. Faith is their foremother; the rest are "daughters of one another" (Θυγατέρες ἀλλήλων, *Vis* 3.8.5). The *Sim* 9 revision increases the number of female figures to twelve and then doubles the total number of women to twenty-four by providing the twelve virtue-figures with foils, bearing names like Unbelief and Self-Indulgence.[38]

Despite this increase and doubling of feminine figures, the *Sim* 9 revisions result in a larger loss of significance for the seven women of *Vis* 3. First, the *Sim* 9 revision mentions no genealogical connection among the allegorical virtue figures, identifying them rather as "powers of the Son of God" (*Sim* 9.13.2). Furthermore, the doubling of these female figures follows the psychoanalytic model of splitting, through which a subject copes with ambivalence by dividing a category (for example, "women") into unambiguously "good" and "bad" forms.[39] In the case

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[37] As Mark Grundeken observed, after the feminine Church's departure, no women in *Hermas* have speaking roles (*Community Building in the* Shepherd of Hermas*: A Critical Study of Some Key Aspects* [VCSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2015] 105).

[38] The precise names of the virtues and vices are "not in a one-to-one correspondence" (Osiek, *Hermas*, 220).

[39] For an application of this model to medieval Marian devotion, which intensified alongside the condemnation of clerical wives, see Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Middle Ages Series; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998) 115–16.

of *Sim* 9, the twelve virtue figures are now called "virgins" (παρθένοι), who wear white linen tunics and whose bearing is both delicate and "manly" (ἀνδρείως, *Sim* 9.2.3–5). The term "women" devolves to the twelve vices (γυναῖκες δώδεκα), who are "gorgeous in appearance," and whose black garments leave their shoulders bare (*Sim* 9.9.5). Finally, Hermas's demonstration of spiritual maturity in *Sim* 9 requires him to master his desires in the presence of the linen-clad virgins, and to resist the temptations of the bare-shouldered women in black.

A closer examination of these changes demonstrates their adverse implications for feminine symbolism, for the *Sim* 9 revision entails the loss of a collective and genealogically connected feminine symbol, the polarization of seven "women" into virtuous virgins-in-white and vicious women-in-black, and the restriction of feminine figures to merely probative functions in the service of affirming Christian manhood. In what follows, I analyze these revisions in more detail and contextualize them in terms of feminist theological and psycholinguistic analysis.

To begin, *Sim* 9 not only leaves unmentioned the matrilineal relationships of the women from *Vis* 3 but correspondingly changes their means of incorporating church members into their communion. In *Vis* 3, the women involve church members in shared labor and provide them with an inheritance. When the feminine Church introduces the seven women, she describes relationships with them as fundamental to ecclesiological belonging: "The one who serves [or 'serves as a slave to,' δουλεύσῃ] these women and has the strength to carry out their works shall have a dwelling place in the Tower with God's holy ones" (*Vis* 3.8.8). Regarding Faith, the elect "are saved through her" (διὰ ταύτην σώζονται, *Vis* 3.8.3); regarding Self-Control, whoever "follows her" will find rewards in this life, believing they will "inherit" (κληρονομήσει) eternal life (*Vis* 3.8.4); regarding the other daughters, the feminine Church informs Hermas that if he accomplishes the works "of their mother" (τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῶν), he will have power to live (δύνασαι ζῆσαι, *Vis* 3.8.5). All of this language presents ecclesiological belonging and salvation itself as an inheritance acquired through serving and following these women. The women also provide the Tower image with a collective foundation, as they surround and sustain it. Therefore, *Vis* 3 furnishes readers with a collective symbol of women in genealogical relationship to one another as a foundation for ecclesiastical community and a means of integration into mature Christian life.

In *Sim* 9, however, the function of these female figures—now increased to twelve and labeled "virgins"—is to transfer people into the Son of God's (patriarchal) household. The women no longer provide an inheritance but are instead assets to be inherited through incorporation into this household as its slaves. According to the Shepherd, church members have "received the name of the Son of God" through baptism, thus aligning themselves with a new paterfamilias. They also have received "the power of these virgins" and joined "the slaves of God" (τῶν δούλων τοῦ θεοῦ, *Sim* 9.13.7). As for the female figures themselves, instead of sustaining the Tower according to God's direct command, they now take orders

from six male figures who "were commanding" (ἐκέλευον) stones to emerge and who "commanded" (ἐκέλευσαν) the young women to carry the stones through a door and give them to other men who build the Tower itself (*Sim* 9.3.3–4). These six male figures were also present in *Vis* 3, though not in any authoritative relationship with the seven women (*Vis* 3.4.1–2). It is only when the *Sim* 9 author attempts to integrate the female figures more fully into the Tower vision that they take their subordinate position.[40]

The suppression of a female genealogy and the subordination of female figures to angelic males and the Son of God's household adopts a strategy familiar from Irigaray and addressed by Beattie. In a collection of essays, Irigaray claimed that the formation of patriarchy transplants a woman into the genealogy of her husband, inhibits love between mother and daughter, and ultimately installs a "transcendent and unique God-Father" in order to collapse two genealogies (one maternal and one paternal) into a single patriarchal family line.[41] A feminist response to this patriarchal strategy would include not only affirming one's own "female family tree" but also claiming a broader range of creative production for women, who "bring many things into the world apart from children"—things such as "love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things."[42] In her theological extension of Irigaray's claims about the importance of female genealogies, Beattie argues that no single female figure—including Mary—is a sufficient symbol for women, and she states the need for "collective symbols of women's redemption and relationships to one another as mothers, daughters and sisters."[43] Beattie highlights alternative configurations of the relationship between Mary and her ancient foremother, Eve, resisting the Christian theological tendency to condemn and replace Eve with her descendent, Mary.[44]

Like Beattie's rehabilitation of Mary's relationship to Eve, Faith and her daughters in *Vis* 3 also constitute a symbol of women who are genealogically connected and who provide a path and model of Christian maturity that does not require the sacrifice of mother-daughter relationships or the replacement of mothers by triumphant daughters in pursuit of maturation. And they produce a range of contributions, for which they are named (for example, Love, and Knowledge), rather than biological offspring. Thus, these women fulfill the needs expressed by both Irigaray and Beattie for collective, genealogically connected women

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[40] Martin Dibelius considered the *Vis* 3 version of this passage a potential interpolation precisely because it is not fully integrated into the Tower vision (*Der Hirt des Hermas* [Die Apostolischen Väter 4; HNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1923] 471). Osiek also postulated that the passage is "an oral, and later literary expansion that further extends its symbolism" (*Hermas*, 77). The *Sim* 9 revision incorporates this interpolation more thoroughly.

[41] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (trans. Gillian C. Gill; New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) v.

[42] Ibid., 18–19.

[43] Beattie, *God's Mother*, 142.

[44] Ibid., 148.

who make cultural and ethical contributions beyond reproduction. Though their numbers increase in *Sim* 9, these female figures lose their capacity to signify a form of maturity that does not come at the expense of one's mother or maternal line.

These female figures also lose their capacity to signify the category of "women" for those who share that identification. As mentioned above, the "women" of *Vis* 3 are purified into the "virgins" of *Sim* 9, who have as their polar opposites the seductresses in black. Commentators have understood the introduction of female vice-figures in *Sim* 9 as evidence of Hermas's more realistic acknowledgment that the ecclesiastical community is morally flawed.[45] From a feminist perspective, however, the polarization of the seven "women" of *Vis* 3 into the twelve idealized and purified "virgins" and the twelve seductive and threatening "women" of *Sim* 9 is not the product of greater realism, but rather is an illusory substitute for building relationships with integrated and complex others, who are subjects in their own right. The female figures of *Sim* 9 no longer signify growth and maturation through relationship; rather, they symbolize either desirable ideals or demonized threats. Their distinct clothing also deploys dress rhetorically, linking *Sim* 9 to early Christian representations of dress that are "archaizing or idealized" rather than realistic or prescriptive.[46] Relatedly, the organizing scheme of whiteness and blackness also becomes more pronounced in the *Sim* 9 typology of stones comprised by the Tower.[47]

What is more, the women-in-black are associated with death: they "will put to death" (θανατώσουσιν) those handed over to them (*Sim* 9.20.4); they take away lives (ταῖς γυναιξὶ ταῖς ἀποφερομέναις τὴν ζωὴν αὐτῶν, *Sim* 9.21.4); and by them those who fail to repent in time will be ruined unto death (ὑπὸ τῶν γυναικῶν καταφθαρήσεται εἰς θάνατον, *Sim* 9.26.6). The twelve virgins, meanwhile, have a similar function to the Virgin Mary in the symbolics of patriarchy, in which Mary serves "as a good woman in opposition to all the bad women" (who are not virgins), and "who dutifully upholds the father's law, especially when it comes

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[45] Norbert Brox listed many references to a perceived distinction between the "ideal church" of *Vis* 3 and the "reality (Wirklichkeit) of the earthly, and therefore also sinful church" of *Sim* 9 (*Der Hirt des Hermas* [Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991]). Osiek challenged this broad perception, pointing out that both "ideal" and "historical, limited . . . aspects are present in both *Visions* and *Similitudes*" (*Hermas*, 212). Nevertheless, she has presented the twelve women in black as a solution to a real dilemma for Hermas: the question of how the baptized can enter the Tower and behave virtuously, yet still ultimately find themselves outside the saved community. They "go astray through the persuasion of the other group of women" (ibid., 236).

[46] *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity* (ed. Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014) 18. This edited collection assesses the wide range of how dress was represented in ancient sources.

[47] In *Vis* 3, only the idealized church leaders (*Vis* 3.5.1) and the wealthy (*Vis* 3.6.5–6) are white—and in the wealthy's case they are both white and round, and therefore useless as building material. *Sim* 9, however, relies on a stark contrast between black and white stones, and on an association of purity with whiteness. Although in practice several types of people are a mixture of whiteness and discoloration, "the desirable end product is one same, bright white color for all the stones" (Osiek, *Hermas*, 244).

to the moral condemnation of her daughter's emergent sexuality."[48] The potential impact of these twelve virgins and twelve vices on women is mitigated, however, by their primary function in *Sim* 9: to test and prove whether Hermas fulfills an early Christian ideal of manhood.

To grasp the consequential nature of the *Sim* 9 revision for women and men, it is necessary to note that the *Sim* 9 revision participates in a system of meaning-making—undermined by deconstructive criticism—in which opposing pairs (for example, "men" and "women," "white" and "black") exist not as sites of true difference but as mirror opposites in a dependent and oppressive relation to one another.[49] In accordance with this system of meaning-making, the "women" of *Vis* 3 are no longer "women" as a potential site of difference and otherness with whom to relate; rather, they become "manly virgins," who emphasize their sameness to an ideal of manliness and who reserve the category "women" for their mirror opposites. One example shows how the ideal of virginal manliness comes to characterize all of the female virtues in *Sim* 9: while only one of the seven women in *Vis* 3—Self-Control (Ἐγκράτεια)—is described as girded with a belt and acting like a man (ἀνδριζομένη, *Vis* 3.8.4), all twelve of the virgins in *Sim* 9 wear belts and stand like men (ἀνδρείως, *Sim* 9.2.4–5). These belted, manly virgins model a form of virtue and redemption that is not particular to women, but rather, that reflects the much-discussed early Christian understanding of virtue and redemption as manliness.[50]

These women also provide Hermas with an opportunity to display his own manliness and demonstrate his fitness for ecclesiastical leadership.[51] He proves his manhood by resisting the attractions of the women in black—with their loose hair, bare shoulders, and deceptive beauty—who, in contrast to the linen-clad women,

[48] Beattie, *God's Mother*, 126, 145.

[49] See ibid., 121.

[50] Beattie has discussed the presence of both "androcentric" and "gynocentric" models in patristic writings. In the androcentric model, "the good Christian woman is regarded as an honorary man," whereas in the gynocentric model, focused on the figures of Eve and Mary, women are redeemed without becoming like men (ibid., 50). An assortment of early Christian sources espousing the ideal of manliness for Christian women appears in Anne Jensen, *Frauen im frühen Christentum* (Traditio Christiana 11; Bern: Lang, 2002) 241–51. (Note that the pagination of the text differs from its table of contents.) For an extensive treatment of this ideal, see Kerstin Aspegrin, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (ed. René Kieffer; Uppsala Women's Studies: Women in Religion 4; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990). For work more specific to *Hermas*, see B. Diane Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion: Hermas, Thecla, Aseneth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 3–5, 49.

[51] Giet described the function of the women in *Vis* 3 as "symbolique," while the function of the virgins in *Sim* 9 is to test Hermas's worthiness to receive revelations (*Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 146). Discussions of *Hermas* and demonstrations of fitness for ecclesiastical leadership are found in Craig S. Wansink, "'You Will Be Restored Again to Your Office': Autobiographical Insights in *The Shepherd of Hermas*," in *Historische Wahrheit und theologische Wissenschaft. Gerd Lüdemann zum 50. Geburtstag* (ed. Alf Özen; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1996) 71–85; and Mary Rose D'Angelo, "'Knowing How to Preside over His Own Household': Imperial Masculinity and Christian Asceticism in the Pastorals, *Hermas*, and Luke-Acts," in *New Testament Masculinities* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson; SemeiaSt 45; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 265–95.

are neither virginal nor "manly." As Hermas has been warned, these women take hold of those who have "desired them," and only those who are not "deceived by these women's beauty" can remain in the Tower (*Sim* 9.13.8–9). Hermas also proves his manhood among the twelve women-in-white by exhibiting, like these manly virgins, a masterful control of his desires. The Shepherd puts Hermas to this test, leaving him for one night in the hands of the virgins, who coquettishly refuse to let him return home to sleep. They kiss him, hold him, play with him, and lead him around the Tower (*Sim* 9.11.2–5).[52] While the virgins may appear to have the upper hand in this scene, Hermas's brief stint in their captivity is primarily an occasion for him to demonstrate his own form of mastery. He spends the night in the virgins' midst, resting on their outspread garments, and remaining successfully in chaste prayer.[53]

To summarize the revised function of female figures in *Sim* 9, whether dealing with the women in black or the women in linen, Hermas's mission is not to relate to them; it is to resist them. Female virginity becomes emblematic of manly behavior, and, as the women take on subordinate roles in *Sim* 9, Hermas illustrates his own fitness for leadership of a household church.[54] Fully inhabiting their lowered positions in *Sim* 9, after the Tower passes its inspection by the Son of God, the women set to work tidying up the place: "The virgins took brooms and swept, and they took all the dirt out of the Tower and sprinkled water around, and the site of the Tower became bright and most beautiful" (*Sim* 9.10.3). As Steve Young has written of the larger arc of *Hermas* and its shift from figures like the feminine Church and the seven women in the *Visions* section to the twelve virgins of *Sim* 9, "for Hermas to rise to full manhood his female models become his female assistants."[55]

This shift from "women" to "virgins" also accounts for one small but revealing inconsistency between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9: the redescription of the feminine Church as a virgin. In the *Visions* section as a whole, the feminine Church is described consistently as an "elder woman" in the first three visions, including during her revelation about the Tower. The Shepherd is inaccurate, then, when in *Sim* 9 he announces that he will explain more thoroughly the Tower vision originally shown to Hermas "through the Church . . . by the virgin" (διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας . . . ὑπὸ παρθένου, *Sim* 9.1.2), ascribing to a virgin the vision that once (in *Vis* 3) was attributed to an elder woman. Carolyn Osiek dealt with this discrepancy by arguing that "the virgin" mentioned by the Shepherd is not the Church, but Hermas, and

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[52] Although the kissing mentioned in *Sim* 9.11.4 is not indisputably erotic (Osiek, *Hermas*, 229), the scene as a whole has much erotic potential (Brox, *Hirt*, 410). More broadly, this passage "uses . . . terms with erotic connotations in a non-erotic sense" (Grundeken, *Community*, 163–70, 175–76, quotation at 176).

[53] B. Diane Wudel has argued that this scene from *Sim* 9 proves that "innocent desire is possible" ("The Seduction of Self-Control: Hermas and the Problem of Desire," *R&T* 11 [2004] 39–49, at 46).

[54] As Young has summarized, "the virgins' concern for purity reflects Hermas's own concern to maintain clear boundaries over against the world" ("Being a Man," 252).

[55] Ibid.

therefore she translated "by the virgin" as "virginally."[56] However, transforming authoritative women into subordinate virgins is a dominant pattern of revision from *Vis* 3 to *Sim* 9. The sudden relabeling of the elder, authoritative, feminine Church as an inferior virgin is indeed a discrepancy, but one that conforms to a consistent tendency in the *Sim* 9 revision.

A detailed analysis of the transformation of the seven women in *Vis* 3 to the twelve virgins and twelve vices in *Sim* 9, contextualized by feminist and psycholinguistic frameworks, exposes the severe limitations placed on the capacity of the female figures to signify relationships among women and to represent the category of "women" as figures with whom to integrate or identify as leaders and models. The seven women of *Vis* 3 also stand out from comparison with other sources as unique in representing a matrilineal chain that requires no opposing counterparts in establishing the significance of its members.[57] In diminishing the potential of these women, it is possible that the *Sim* 9 revision came under the greater influence of classical parallels.[58]

Whatever the source of these changes, however, several related losses accrue to the women of *Vis* 3: the erasure of genealogical connections among women, the idealization of "women" into manly virgins, the introduction of these women's mirror opposites, and the restriction of women to subordinate roles in the Tower and to probative functions in determining the virtue and fitness of Hermas for ecclesiastical governance. While the documentary sources for the twelve virgins of *Sim* 9 remain elusive, their conceptual sources have been identified clearly by feminist analysts of mythological and theological tendencies that suppress and subdivide interrelated collectives of women as one strategy for their subordination in patriarchally governed households and communities.

◼ Diminishing the Deep

One additional type of revision, significant from the perspective of gender symbolism, is even less blatant than supplanting the maternal church or splitting the seven women into virtuous virgins and vicious rivals. However, this shift in imagery is, like the revisions discussed above, highly conspicuous from a feminist theological perspective. While the Tower in *Vis* 3 is built "upon waters" (ἐπὶ ὑδάτων,

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[56] Osiek, *Hermas*, 212–13.

[57] By contrast, in the Tabula of Cebes, the women form not a genealogical chain but a group of sisters with one common mother (20.3, 21.1). Their counterparts are first described as "beasts" who must be subdued (22.1–3), but later they are identified as "women whom you have called beasts" (τὰς γυναῖκας, ἅς ἔφης θηρία, 26.2). Thus, *Vis* 3 of *Hermas* is distinct in placing the women in a long line of matrilineal descent, and in not enumerating their beastly and feminine foils. *The Tabula of Cebes* (ed. John T. Fitzgerald and Michael White; Texts and Translations. Graeco-Roman Religion Series 7; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

[58] Otto Luschnat attempted to identify not specific material but "a conceptual-artistic source base" (*gedanklich-künstlerischen Quellbereich*) for the motifs present in the *Sim* 9 account of the virgins, particularly the motif of rejuvenation ("Die Jungfrauenszene in der Arkadienvision des Hermas," *ThViat* 12 [1973–1974] 53–70, at 56).

Vis 3.2.4), associated evocatively with both creation and baptism, the Tower in *Sim* 9 is built atop a giant rock (ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν τὴν μεγάλην, *Sim* 9.4.2). And while one category of stones used to assemble the Tower in *Vis* 3 comes mysteriously "out of the deep" (ἐκ τοῦ βυθοῦ, *Vis* 3.2.5), the *Sim* 9 revision conflates "the deep" with death and replaces depth imagery with literally over-the-top images of height, as well as level ground.

These revisions conform to broader Christian theological tendencies that, in the words of Keller, "systematically and symbolically sought to erase the chaos of creation."[59] Keller's own analysis of these tendencies begins with references in Gen 1:2 to the "face of the waters" and a "face of the deep," which precede God's creative activity and are made to disappear through the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. The *Sim* 9 revision similarly removes or reconfigures "waters" and "the deep," replacing them with tall rocks, tall structures, and tall men.[60]

To recognize the subtle yet insistent character of the *Sim* 9 revision, it is necessary to examine more closely the associations of waters, the deep, creation, and the feminine Church in *Vis* 3. Here, the vision of the Tower comes explicitly "through the elder woman" (διὰ τῆς πρεσβυτέρας, *Vis* 3.1.2), whose old age has just been declared to signify her pre-created status (*Vis* 2.4.1). The elder Church arrives in *Vis* 3 with six young male attendants, whom she dismisses and orders to build the Tower (*Vis* 3.1.6–7), and whom she later reveals to be prominent angels, created first and entrusted with the increase and governance of the created world (*Vis* 3.4.1). Thus, they provide both creation and the church with its construction crew. Nevertheless, these men are subsequent and subordinate to the Church herself.

The Tower that the Church shows Hermas is structurally impossible. Hermas has difficulty seeing it until the Church asks, "Do you not see across from you a large Tower being built upon waters, with squared and radiant stones?" (*Vis* 3.2.4). These plural waters recall the Church's statement in an earlier vision that God founded the earth itself upon waters (τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ ὑδάτων, *Vis* 1.3.4). However, when Hermas asks why the Tower is built on waters, the Church connects these (plural) primordial waters to (singular) baptismal water, explaining that the Tower is built on "waters" because Hermas's life has been and will be saved "through water" (διὰ ὕδατος, *Vis* 3.3.5). Both the created earth and the ecclesiastical community, therefore, have a common underlying element in water that, despite its fluidity, paradoxically undergirds rather than undermines them.

In another paradox, the growing Tower incorporates depth into its increasing height. The squared and radiant stones that rest impossibly on the waters are supplemented by other stones, some "from the deep" (ἐκ τοῦ βυθοῦ) and others "from the earth" (ἐκ τῆς γῆς, *Vis* 3.2.5). The stones from the earth vary considerably, and the Church's interpretation of their shortcomings occupies much of this vision. The stones from the deep, however, integrate seamlessly with the stones already

[59] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, xvi.
[60] *Hermas* itself may promote the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (O'Brien, "Cumaean Sibyl").

in place (*Vis* 3.2.6), and the Church identifies them as "those who have suffered on account of the Lord's name" (*Vis* 3.5.2). The Church does not elaborate on the nature of this suffering, but her description of sufferings "for the sake of the name" elsewhere suggests that these sufferings are diverse and not limited to death (*Vis* 3.2.1).[61] It is also possible that the Church in *Hermas* proposes "the deep"—suffering for the sake of the name—as an acceptable substitute for baptism, as did other early Christian writers.[62]

Speaking broadly, the imagery of *Vis* 3 relies on the paradox of a Tower that is built upon waters but assembled from stones and that increases its height by drawing from the deep. The imagery also builds equivalences between the assembling of the ecclesiastical Tower and the creation of the earth itself, for both are built upon waters and both are associated with the elder, pre-created, feminine Church and her six angelic male attendants. Paradox and resonance, waters and depth, are integral to how *Vis* 3 signifies.

By sharp contrast, images of solidity and height dominate the *Sim* 9 account of the Tower. In building the Tower on rock instead of waters, the *Sim* 9 revision consolidates its theological vision on the Son and on baptism in the Son's name as the exclusive point of entry into the Tower. The passage emphasizes repeatedly the solidity of the Tower's foundation and its distance from the ground, and height replaces depth in an almost absurd attempt for each image to top the last.

For example, whereas Hermas views the Tower while seated on a bench beside the Church in *Vis* 3, the Shepherd in *Sim* 9 leads Hermas to the peak of a breast-shaped mountain, from which he views twelve other mountains, which will furnish the Tower's stones (rather than "the earth" of *Vis* 3). The breast is quickly surmounted, however, when the Shepherd shows Hermas something even taller than any of the twelve mountains: "a giant white rock that had risen up out of the plain" (*Sim* 9.2.1). On this rock—already taller than any mountain—the *Sim* 9 equivalents of the six men from *Vis* 3 place the stones of the Tower. The first ten stones to emerge from the deep are the first layer in what becomes a four-tiered foundation (*Sim* 9.4.2–3). The men laying stones are now described as "tall" (ὑψηλοὺς, *Sim* 9.3.1), which may be an understatement, given the dimensions of their construction project! In one final escalation, another man—"a man so tall that he surpassed the Tower" (*Sim* 9.6.1)—comes to inspect the Tower. He is later identified as the Son of God (*Sim* 9.12.8).

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[61] Against Dibelius, *Hirt*, 467.

[62] The likely distinction between "the water(s)" of creation / baptism and "the deep" of suffering for the Lord's name is clear from the description and interpretation of stones that have fallen "near the waters" (ἐγγὺς ὑδάτων) but are unable to roll "into the water" (εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ). Here, the water(s) in question refer specifically to baptism (*Vis* 3.2.9, interpreted at *Vis* 3.7.3). Translations that use "the depths of the sea" for "ὁ βυθός" obscure this distinction. These passages from *Vis* 3 also belie Henne's claim that the waters of creation are always plural and the water of salvation (baptism) is always singular in *Vis* 3. However, Henne is correct in his observation that "water" is always singular in *Sim* 9 ("Polysémie," 131).

While the *Sim* 9 revision ensures that each figure surpasses the last in height, "the deep" does not disappear as a category. Instead, *Sim* 9 reconfigures the deep in ways that restrict its creative potential, using the deep to represent baptism in the Son's name, as well as the realm of death. Whereas "the deep" signified a mysterious place and potential alternative to baptism for those who suffered for the Lord's name in *Vis* 3, the Shepherd in *Sim* 9 insists repeatedly that baptism in the Son's name is the exclusive means of entry into the gated Tower (*Sim* 9.12.4). The sufferers of *Vis* 3 are now represented by the stones from the eleventh mountain (*Sim* 9.28.1–2), while "the deep" furnishes the Tower with three layers of stones from the pre-Christian past—a first generation, a second generation of "righteous men" (ἀνδρῶν δικαίων), and prophets and ministers—in addition to apostles and teachers of the Son of God (*Sim* 9.15.4). According to the Shepherd, these apostles and teachers go "into the water" (εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ) through their own physical deaths and deliver their proclamation of the Son of God to select deceased men from the pre-Christian past, so that these dead can receive God's seal, bear God's name, and rise up from the water (δι' ὕδατος ἀναβῆναι, *Sim* 9.16.2–6).[63] To present this notion of postmortem baptism for the pre-Christian righteous dead, the *Sim* 9 revision conflates "the deep" and "the water" and associates both with death.

In one further restriction of the deep, the *Sim* 9 revision contrasts depth with levelness as an ideal with its own interpretive significance.[64] When the Son of God inspects the Tower, he orders the removal of some stones, and he asks that replacements be dug from a nearby plain (*Sim* 9.6.1–7). Then, the Shepherd must fill in all of the pits or divots that these replacement stones left behind, for "it is necessary that all the area surrounding the Tower be made level (ὁμαλὰ γενέσθαι)" (*Sim* 9.10.1). When Hermas asks for an interpretation of the Tower and its stones, he neglects to ask about this last task of releveling the building site, but the Shepherd reminds him that this detail has its own meaning.[65] The Shepherd explains that the indentations left behind by the stones "were their sins, and they have been leveled so that they will not be visible" (*Sim* 9.33.3). Here, then, even the slightest trace of depth would compromise the soundness of the Tower's plot and imply the persistent presence of sin.

The fate of waters and the deep in *Sim* 9 should not surprise feminist analysts of cultural and theological patterns, nor should the clear link between these shifts in imagery and the disappearance or subordination of female figures. As presented in

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[63] Osiek has described this process as "a version of the tradition of the 'harrowing of hell'" (*Hermas*, 238). She has also noted the contrast with *Vis* 3, which includes both living and dead ministers in its first layer of stones, whereas *Sim* 9 includes only the dead (ibid., 237).

[64] Levelness also has "positive connotations" in the *Visions* (ibid., 227). However, the *Visions* section does not achieve these connotations through an explicit contrast with depth, as does *Sim* 9.

[65] Given that these verses follow what appears to be a "formal ending," they may indeed be "an afterthought" that is "typical of the aggregative structure of the text" (ibid., 257). However, these verses also create the sense of a loose end or one last detail to tidy up, appropriate for a section of text so devoted to eliminating every last trace of depth.

the introduction of this article, the Tower's refoundation on solid rock (a symbol of the Son of God) and the Tower's inconceivably tall inspector (identified as the Son of God) replace the pre-created feminine Church with the Son of God as the most ancient and highest-status figure. Moreover, the six angelic men of *Sim* 9 are "men" (ἄνδρας, *Sim* 9.3.1) rather than "young men" (νεανίσκοι, *Vis* 3.4.1), and instead of attending the elder feminine Church, they give orders to the twelve virgins. These twelve virgins are the very figures who take up their brooms dutifully and remove any vestige of unevenness after the Shepherd has patched up the holes left behind by the rocks from the plain. At the Shepherd's command, they sweep away dirt, sprinkle water to hold down the dust, and ensure that no dimension of depth will remain detectable (*Sim* 9.10.2–3).

The perspectives of Irigaray, and Beattie's Christian theological extension of them, provide some convincing larger contexts for these aspects of the *Sim* 9 revision. Beattie's summary of Irigaray's work identifies a host of relevant factors that could account for the replacement of primordial waters with solid rock, the association of the deep with death and sin, and the extreme emphasis on the height of both the fully erected Tower and the Son of God. These factors include "the concealment of maternal origins," the emergence of cultural values "based on the refusal to acknowledge our primal dependence on nature and the mother," and the processes by which "the maternal body comes to be regarded as an abyss that suggests death and annihilation . . . and is constitutive of the fear of castration."[66] The *Sim* 9 revision evinces these cultural symptoms by replacing the maternal Church and the plural waters of creation, and by overcompensating for fear of depth and death with exceedingly tall edifices, angels, and saviors.

Irigaray's own confrontation with the philosopher Nietzsche from the perspective of marine waters contains admonishments that very well could have been directed at the *Sim* 9 reviser, and that seem to encourage a return to the imagery of *Vis* 3 as more satisfying and life-giving: "Learn what was the foundation of everything you have built up. If you want to rise up once more, remember the earth you take flight from. For if she were to fail you, you would lose the very sensation of height. . . . And realize that a solid plane is never just a solid plane. That it rests on subterranean and submarine life."[67] Primordial waters, the maternal and pre-created Church, and a sense of "the deep" that is not a cipher for death or sin are precisely what the *Sim* 9 revision replaces with towering stones and structures and smooth, level terrain.

Keller, of course, has provided the most precise feminist account of the fate of the deep in Christian theological traditions, which she characterizes as "tehomophobic." Phobia, she reminds, is not simply fear but "the obsessive reiteration of fear, which cripples the ability to face the fear."[68] One iteration of this fear is present in the

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[66] Beattie, *God's Mother*, 91.

[67] Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (trans. Gillian C. Gill; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 20.

[68] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 214.

trajectory of the Christian canonical Bible itself, with its progression from the "face of the waters" and "face of the deep" that precede the creative acts of Genesis, to the vision in Revelation of a world with neither sea nor night. As Keller has put it, "A certain Christianity, unfurling towards the light, knew only dread of the dark depths."[69] The *Sim* 9 revision takes a similar trajectory, envisioning the completion of an enormously tall Tower built on rock and entirely comprising bright, white stones before the imminent end of time.

In short, because the *Sim* 9 revision particularly diminishes the creative potential of "the deep," it is unfitting to describe the theological content of *Sim* 9 as more profound.

■ Conclusion

The lack of depth in *Sim* 9, made visible through feminist theological analysis, sharply contradicts the assumptions and the attempts at systematic theological accounts that scholars have made when confronting the glaring differences between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9. Namely, analyses increasingly have approached *Sim* 9 as the product of deeper and more sustained theological reflection, or of a mind open to new meanings. Studies have assumed that *Sim* 9 is shaped by conscious reflective processes and that the author demoted the feminine Church and introduced the twelve women in black after contact with some deeper "reality." This reality is construed as either a deeper layer of significance—allegedly found in the Son of God—or as a reckoning with the persistence of vices in ecclesiastical assemblies—allegedly personified by the twelve women in black.[70]

I contend, however, that the differences in symbolism between *Vis* 3 and *Sim* 9 cannot be attributed to a fuller, conscious engagement with a "deeper" reality or revelation. Rather, the *Sim* 9 revisions result from embedded cultural patterns that erase maternal origins and that exclude maternal and feminine figures and their associated symbols from the social and spiritual maturation and integration of human subjects.

The feminist theologians whose analytical approaches have been most crucial for my evaluation of the *Sim* 9 revisions can provide accounts of the *Sim* 9 reviser's work that do not assume his deeper engagement with theological and ecclesiastical

[69] Ibid., 200.

[70] For an example of the former, consider one attempt to wrest from *Hermas* a coherent theological framework by proposing a distinction between the "symbolic" and the true identities of a revealing agent: "the 'old woman'/'church' [of the *Visions*] is only the symbolic manifestation of the revealing agent," whereas the real agent is the Holy Spirit, who also is identified as the Son of God, and who takes on angelic forms such as the Shepherd of *Sim* 9 (Bogdan G. Bucur, "The Son of God and the Angelomorphic Holy Spirit: A Rereading of the *Shepherd's* Christology," *ZNW* 98 [2007] 121–42, at 126). An example of the latter makes *Sim* 9 the product of "a Church that has had time to take stock of itself." Allegedly sobered by the intractable vices of ecclesiastical assemblies, the *Sim* 9 author has removed preexistence from the Church's qualities, given away her "lofty status as a teacher," and introduced "the twelve vicious women in black" as counterparts to the women who signified virtues in *Vis* 3 (Coleborne, "Case for Multiple Authorship," 68).

realities. Both Beattie and Keller provide brief descriptions of theological work that illuminate the *Sim* 9 revision's method, primarily by contrast to the modes of theological reflection that Beattie and Keller promote and adopt for themselves. Although the full exhibition of their theological methods and style are impossible to capture here, some of their articulations of method express most clearly the alternative paths not taken in the *Sim* 9 revision, or in Christian theology more generally, as conducted in patriarchal institutional contexts.

The framework that Beattie uses to assess early Christian writings, as well as to encourage contemporary theologians, gives an accurate description of the form of theological signification found in *Vis* 3 but rejected in *Sim* 9. She draws attention to a form of poetics manifest in early Christian sources evincing "a theological style that avoids over-systematization through the exploration of interconnected ideas."[71] Beattie associates this style with Irigaray's notion of a poetics of metonymy, which makes meaning through connections and relationships, as opposed to a poetics of metaphor, which sacrifices its referent.[72] Although Beattie does not discuss *Hermas*, *Vis* 3 appears to fulfill this ideal of metonymy, given its easy movement from one ecclesiological symbol to another—the feminine Church and the Tower—without sacrificing the first symbol and its freely associative treatment of the Church and creation, and of baptismal and primordial waters.

The *Sim* 9 revision, by contrast, at least insofar as feminine and masculine symbols are concerned, does not promote connections and relationships, but rather makes sacrifices and provides substitutes, exhibiting what Beattie, following Irigaray, would call a poetics of metaphor. The feminine Church must disappear as the Tower and the Son of God increase their dominance, and the resonant meanings of the waters at the Church's foundation are restricted as the Tower receives a new foundation in *Sim* 9—an ancient rock with a single gate signifying baptism in the Son's name. Challenging this type of trajectory, Beattie asks theologians to once again "think metonymically, in terms of contiguity and relationality," preserving a "space of mediation and exchange between all the symbols of our salvation," excluding "nobody and nothing in all creation."[73] Far from elaborating and expanding *Vis* 3, then, the *Sim* 9 revision eschews a poetics of metonymy in gendered theological symbolism in favor of exclusive and restrictive masculine metaphors and salvific figures.

Keller offers a further means of evaluating the *Sim* 9 revision as a restrictive solution to the theological concerns faced by its author. She proposes the notion of "deepening the repetition" of concepts and symbols as one solution to a particular dilemma that she and other progressive theologians face. The dilemma perceived

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[71] Beattie, *God's Mother*, 11.

[72] To paraphrase Irigaray's position, "While metaphor implies a sacrifice of meaning—the original signifier is sacrificed in the process of substitution—metonymy implies a fertile proliferation of meaning" (ibid., 33).

[73] Ibid., 153–54.

by Keller differs, of course, from the circumstances of early Christian theologians. In Keller's case, she faces a theological "double bind" of either developing progressive theological novelties that diminish their "activist potential" by losing contact with "traditional constituencies" (i.e., practicing congregations), or accepting the strictures of "accountability . . . to the church" and therefore risking "the dogmatic drag, the vortex of swirling symbols and insecure institutions." In the face of this dilemma, Keller has expressed the view that "perhaps there is nothing to do but *deepen the repetition*."[74] The particulars of Keller's dilemma are contemporary, but the dynamics would likely be familiar to people engaged in theological reflection in a range of periods and places—that is, how to relate this reflection to an ecclesiastical setting that can transform itself and its social context by embodying theological claims. The *Vis* 3 author responds to these dynamics by developing a direct relationship between the feminine Church and the visionary Hermas and by delivering a confrontational speech from the feminine Church to her constituent children, calling them to economic justice and the reformation of ecclesiastical leaders.

While the *Sim* 9 reviser returns to and repeats some *Vis* 3 topics, images, and themes, it is more apt to describe the *Sim* 9 revision as a *non*-deepening repetition of *Vis* 3 when it comes to gendered symbolism. In its repetition of feminine images from *Vis* 3, the *Sim* 9 revision does not deepen its symbols, contents, or possibilities. Rather, it impoverishes their potential to resonate, signify, and include. This type of "theological impoverishment," as Beattie has called it, often results from the "subservience" of symbols "to androcentric and patriarchal prerogatives," which indeed form the social context of the Christianities of the first two centuries.[75]

A wider lens on the fate of the feminine Church in other early Christian sources can provide further examples of repetitions that diminish rather than deepen central symbols. The pseudo-Pauline epistle to the Ephesians, for example, treats the feminine Church as a figure for wifely submission, while subordinating ecclesiological concerns to christological ones.[76] The full conscription of the maternal, feminine Church into patriarchy is most evident in the writings of Cyprian of Carthage, the third-century bishop who famously insisted that one "cannot have God as one's Father" without also having "the church for one's Mother." For

[74] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 229–30 [italics in original].

[75] Beattie has presented her work as remediating such impoverishment (*God's Mother*, 3), which is described in Nancy A. Dallavalle, "Toward a Theology That Is Catholic and Feminist: Some Basic Issues," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998) 535–53. Though Giet did not use the term "impoverishment," he also had a clear sense of the *Sim* 9 revision as weakening the potential of symbols such as the rock and the twelve virgins, and thus succumbing to a change in spirit that is "toute didactique" (wholly didactic). To Giet, the *Sim* 9 author seems more concerned with teaching than with imagery (*Hermas et les Pasteurs*, 140–41).

[76] See the pseudo-Pauline Eph 5:23–32. On that epistle's subordination of ecclesiology to Christology, and for a challenge to the common view that Ephesians evinces the theological concept of the preexistent church universal, see Christine Gerber, "Die alte Braut und Christi Leib. Zum ekklesiologischen Entwurf des Epheserbriefs," *NTS* 59 (2013) 192–221.

Cyprian, having the Church for one's mother meant accepting the authority of an apostolic lineage of bishops.[77]

The *Sim* 9 revision fits snugly into these larger contexts. When it comes to the gendered figures from *Vis* 3, the revision does not open new meanings but excludes and impoverishes them, and either prevents masculine and feminine symbols from coexisting, or subordinates the latter to the former. This article's alternative account of the *Sim* 9 revisions of gendered symbolism challenges the sense of expansion and depth assumed by other scholarship and disrupts the perception of literary and authorial "unity" that have come to dominate readings of *Hermas*. It has done so by asking whom these revisions eliminate from the scope of possibility, thus providing studies of early Christian women with a history of the conceptual and symbolic frameworks that supported their gradual decline in ecclesiastical status and exclusion from signs with crucial significance.

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[77] Cyprian's recourse to feminine imagery for the church typically addressed controversies in which the institutional integrity of the body in which he exercised episcopal leadership was at stake. These controversies included the necessity of rebaptism and the authority of rival candidates for episcopal sees in both Carthage and Rome. See Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia*, 81–108; and Karl Shuve, *The Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Identity in Early Latin Christianity* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 30.