

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

THE  
CHURCHMAN

MARCH, 1894.

ART. I.—HERMAS AND THE FOUR GOSPELS.

WHEN a writer likens the Four Gospels to the four elements of the world, he gives us to understand that in the Church of his day, and as he knew it, they had already won for themselves an exclusive and canonical position. It is, therefore, of no little importance for the history of the Canon of the New Testament to trace this comparison as nearly as may be to its source. It is found in Origen; and in "The Witness of Hermas to the Four Gospels" (1892) I have endeavoured to show that it is contained in an enigmatical form in the "Shepherd" of Hermas, a work of about the middle of the second century.

The case is stated as below by Dr. Sanday in the "Bampton Lectures" for 1893: "The 'Shepherd' is from first to last an allegory, the details of which are significant, though the writer himself only partially explains them; so that when the Church, afterwards identified with the Son of God, under the figure of an aged woman who becomes young, is represented as sitting upon a bench or stool planted firmly upon four feet, there is certainly a resemblance to a place in Irenæus where the Church Catholic spread throughout the four quarters of the earth is said to be stayed upon four pillars, which are the Four Gospels, corresponding also to the four cherubim over whom is seated the Word. And when it is further said that the stool has four feet and stands strongly because the world also is held together by four elements (*διὰ τεσσάρων στοιχείων κρατεῖται*), we are reminded that *Origen compares the Four Gospels to the elements of the faith of the Church, of which elements the whole world consists.* Now we know that Irenæus treats the 'Shepherd' of Hermas as Scripture, and that Origen treats it almost as Scripture, quoting from it repeatedly, and mentioning the fact that some did so regard it. When, therefore, the question is asked whether the two later writers are wholly independent

of the earlier, or the coincidence between them is purely accidental, though I admit that the case is not so clear as to convince a gainsayer, I confess that to me there seems to be a real probability that they are not independent, and that Hermas gave the hint which Irenæus and Origen have followed. But if so, then Hermas knew the fourfold Gospel, and even in his day the Canonical Four were detached from the rest."

See also the statement by Dr. Resch in his "Paralleltexte."

Some reviewers of the "Witness of Hermas" are satisfied with the argument of the book, some dissatisfied, and some in doubt about it. Without mentioning the names of those who have found fault with it, I propose to show how the first draft of the argument may be improved and their objections met. The objectors, so far as I have observed, were not acquainted with Origen's comparison of the Four Gospels to the Elements of the World. In this important particular Dr. Resch and Dr. Sanday have the advantage of them. The passage of Origen was not known to me when I wrote the "Witness of Hermas," and it seemed to me when I met with it to be a striking illustration and a verification of the thesis of the book. It is in the prologue to his commentary on St. John's Gospel, on the first verse of which he quotes the "Shepherd" by name.

The train of reasoning by which I was led to the conclusion that Hermas hinted at the Four Gospels, namely, under the figure of the *four feet* of the Church's seat, which he compares to the *four elements* of the world, was as follows:

"I was not thinking of any moot-point in the history of the Canon, but only of the relation of the 'Teaching of the Twelve Apostles' to the 'Shepherd' of Hermas. I was writing an article on this for the *Journal of Philology*, and had satisfied myself that Hermas not only used, but used up the 'Teaching'; so that anything very striking in that manual had only to be looked for in the 'Shepherd,' and there it would in due course be found in one disguise or other. Coming near to the end of the comparison of the two writings, I was considering the words in the last chapter but one of the 'Teaching,' 'And your prayers and your alms and all that ye do, so do as ye have it in the Gospel of our Lord,' when it occurred to me that there ought to be some trace of the word 'Gospel' in Hermas. I set to work to read through the 'Shepherd' for the purpose of finding in it a disguised trace of the word *εὐαγγέλιον*, *Gospel*. I came to *Vis.* iii. 13, 2, and found *ἀγγελία ἀγαθή*, *good tidings*, which was evidently the thing sought. Then at once it seemed clear to me, in the light of sayings of Irenæus which will be quoted below, that under the figure of the bench standing firmly on four feet, in the imme-

diate context, Hermas refers to the Four Gospels, comparing them to the four elements of the world."

It is easy to dispose of this argument by saying that it makes everything depend upon the supposed reference to the Gospel as *good tidings*, and that this is not proven, and consequently the further reference to the Four Gospels falls to the ground. But in reality nothing depends upon the expression upon which everything seems at first sight to have been staked. I was, indeed, first led to connect the Gospel with the *bench* in the way above mentioned; but if the link "good tidings" were missing, its place could easily be supplied.

The author's partial explanation of the figure of the bench must be read in connection with the entire picture of which the bench is a detail. The explanation is given at the end of *Vis.* iii. ; but for the whole vision and its interpretation, and therefore for the right understanding of the bench as part of it, we must go back to the beginning.

In *Vis.* iii. 1, *sq.*, we read: "Then she came with six young men, the same whom I had seen before, and . . . she raiseth me by the hand, and leadeth me to the bench, and saith to the young men, *Go and build* . . . . Then she again took me by the hand, and raiseth me, and seateth me on the bench at the left hand, while she herself sat at the right. And lifting up a certain bright rod, she saith to me, Seest thou a great thing? I say to her, Lady, I see nothing. She saith to me, Look thou; dost thou not see in front of thee *a great tower* being builded upon the waters, of bright four-square stones? Now, the tower was being builded four-square by the six young men. . . . The tower (she said) which thou seest building is myself, *the Church*. . . . But the six young men that build, who are they, lady? These (she says) are the holy angels of God that were created first of all, unto whom the Lord delivered all His *creation*, to increase and to build it, and to be masters of all creation. By their hands, therefore, the building of the tower will be accomplished." See Mr. Harmer's text and translation of the "Shepherd" in Lightfoot and Harmer's "Apostolic Fathers."

The building of the tower, which is the Church, is the outcome of the preaching of the Gospel; and of its component stones it may be said, in words quoted from the Gospel in *Vis.* iii. 7, *These are they that heard the word*. The Church personified commands the six angelic "masters of all creation" to go and build—that is, to rear the universal Church by preaching the Gospel; and she gives the word of command standing by the bench; and she shows Hermas the vision of the Church "being builded upon the waters" of baptism, as the earth was "founded upon the floods," while she sits,

waving her "rod of power," upon the bench, with Hermas beside her on the left hand.

The bench is thus intimately associated with the preaching of the Word of God. By a customary symbolism a throne, chair, or other seat connotes authority to rule, judge, or teach; and the source of the Church's power to "edify" and teach is the Divine revelation of "the everlasting Gospel," which the bench should in some sense accordingly represent.

Thus far we have touched upon no disputed point in the history of the Canon. The Gospel known to Hermas may have been single or multiple, documentary or oral; and the Church's seat may have had four feet, or only three, or none at all.

C. TAYLOR.



#### ART. II.—THE ORIGIN OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

PROFESSOR GARDNER'S pamphlet on this subject<sup>1</sup> is very attractive. The tone is modest and conciliatory; the scholarship is of the highest; the difficulties have been carefully considered and the objections anticipated. With much of what he writes, all who have studied the subject will agree—nay, more, they will be grateful for the illustrations which his special knowledge gives; and yet from his main conclusions we feel bound to dissent.

Some persons will retort that all criticism tends in the same direction, and that our only safety lies in the strict conservatism of the late Dean Burgon, who laid down the rule that if a single word in the Bible fall short of being in the fullest sense the Word of God, the whole of our Christianity must be abandoned. Being unwilling to leave any excuses for such counsels of despair, we proceed to examine these new proposals.

Dr. Gardner offers us the choice of two positions. One, to which he apparently inclines, makes the scene of breaking bread, which the Synoptists unite in placing at the Last Supper in or about the year 29, to be antedated by almost a quarter of a century. Our Lord did not say while He was upon earth, "*This is My Body*," but St. Paul in a trance at Corinth in the year 53 heard Him say the words in heaven. More timid or cautious readers are offered an alternative, according to which Christ broke bread and gave it to His disciples upon earth, but nothing further was done. No sacra-

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan and Co., London, 1893.