

“Second Repentance” in the Early Church: The Influence of *The Shepherd of Hermas*

‘Indeed, all the saints who have sinned up to this day will be forgiven, if they repent with all their heart and drive away double-mindedness from their heart.’ *The Shepherd of Hermas* Vision II, 6.4 ¹

The forgiveness of sins and the necessity of living a holy life have always been crucial parts of the Christian message. *The Shepherd of Hermas* acts as a “window” allowing the modern historian to look inside the Church “building” to hear and to feel the anxiety of early believers on these issues. *The Shepherd* gives witness to a tension in the second century church over the issue of “second repentance,” that a “lapsed” believer could be readmitted into the Church fellowship through penance. In the first instance, a lapsed person was someone who had apostacized in the face of persecution, but as we shall see, the debate in the Church quickly became a much broader discussion. *The Shepherd* is the earliest post-canonical discussion of “second repentance.” The reader witnesses the struggle of Hermas,² and hears his thoughts on these burning issues. Telfer, in agreement with most scholars, says that *The Shepherd* “rapidly extended its influence among the Mediterranean churches”.³ This paper will show that *The Shepherd* played a key role in the discussion of “second repentance” in the early Church. First, the importance of *The Shepherd* in the second century will be established, then an overview of the “second repentance” material in *The Shepherd* will be given, and lastly, the influence *The Shepherd* had on two important early fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, will be discussed. We will look at each of these topics after a brief introduction.

The Church, founded in a time of great spiritual expectancy within the Jewish community, existed in an emotionally charged environment. Jesus had come as the promised OT Messiah and, after his ascension, two angels had announced to the disciples that He would “come back” as He promised (Acts 1.11; Luke 21.27). This expectancy of the soon coming Christ overshadowed the NT Church and provided fertile soil for a crisis ethic, what Telfer calls “an interim ethic,” of spiritual perfection;

¹ All references to *The Shepherd of Hermas* are from the Lightfoot, Harmer, and Holmes (LHH hereafter) edition, THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS. I have used their new chapter numbering system. See the bibliography for details of all citations.

² See Reiling, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy*, p.20-26 for an overview of authorship. Chadwick (JTS, Vol. 8, p.276-78) using Zahn’s work, shows that the author was most probably not the brother of Pius as attested by the Muratorian author. Reiling argues against multiple authorship, but for a composite work spanning some 20 years. Lane Fox, Robin, *Pagans and Christians* (1986) dates *The Shepherd* early, “in the 90s” (p.381) and argues against a composite work.

³ Telfer, *The Forgiveness of Sins* (London 1959), p.37

This heroic ethic of the primitive Christians, based upon the thought that the time for which it endures will be short, and a time of crisis, has been named an interim ethic. Under this interim ethic the lapse of a Christian is surrounded with all the tragic associations of treason and cowardice in war.⁴

During times of crisis people are able to focus more readily on goals beyond their immediate sight – to live beyond themselves. Telfer maintains that this “multitude of believers who live without sinning”⁵ was possible because of this crisis period. However, Gentiles coming into the Church brought some unexpected tensions: this waiting time for the eschatological end would be much longer, and the lowering of moral standards seemed unavoidable.⁶

Where the eschatological vision birthed this crisis period, the intermittent persecutions extended it. In most of the second century documents we find this same “interim ethic” now motivated by the drive to be faithful in the face of death.⁷ Leaders in the Church began to face the fact that many had failed to remain faithful, many had lapsed in their faith. With increasing numbers of lapsed believers seeking readmission to the Eucharist table, the Church had to develop some guidelines for penance. Tertullian gives a graphic picture of what penance typically looked like, at least in North Africa;

...when you lead the penitent adulterer into church to beg the intercession of the brethren, place him on his knees in their midst, covered with sackcloth and ashes, in an attitude of humiliation and fear, in the presence of the widows, in the presence of the priests, moving all to tears, kissing the footprints of all, embracing the knees of all. *On Purity* 13⁸

This type of penance was not uncommon, but was typically reserved for more serious sins.⁹ *On Purity* is Tertullian’s Montanist response to a Catholic edict to allow penance for adulterers.¹⁰ We will come back to Tertullian and this tract later.

What is the evidence that *The Shepherd* enjoyed any serious attention at all during the latter second and early third centuries? The first mention of *The Shepherd* comes from Irenaeus (cir. 175) with what some have considered to be a strong reference; he quotes *Mandate* I, 26.1

⁴ Ibid., p.21.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p.23.

⁷ 1 *Clement* 7.1,2; The Letters of Ignatius *Eph* 10.2-11.1; *Polycarp* 3.3; *Barnabas* 4.1; and many others.

⁸ All citations of Tertullian come from *Tertullian Treatises on Penance*, translated by Le Saint, 1959.

⁹ Lane Fox (*Pagans*, p.337) indicates a rigorist position was held from the start; “After baptism, Christians had only one last chance of forgiveness...all Christians were granted the second chance; then the second chance was extended to deadly sins, to adultery and to lapsing...during persecution.” G.H. Joyce (JTS, Vol. XLII, p.18-42) shows that during this early period private penance “was accorded by the Church to penitent sinners, and no one of them [references made in early documents to forgiveness] hints that there were sins which the Church could not, or would not, remit.” (p.24)

¹⁰ Le Saint, p.42.

with the introduction, “Well saith the Scripture.”¹¹ Next would be the references made by Tertullian: he refers to *The Shepherd* in his tract, *On the Prayer*, and again in his Montanist tract *On Purity*.¹² The writer of the Muratorian fragment (cir. 180) disputes the authority of *The Shepherd*, but Chadwick maintains that this was probably done as an anti-Montanist move.¹³ Clement of Alexandria quoted *The Shepherd* several times in his work *Stromateis*¹⁴ (cir. 200-202) and “the quotations are always explicitly identified as words of the revealers to Hermas.”¹⁵ A close look at these quotations shows that Clement viewed *The Shepherd* to be inspired Scripture. We also know that Athanasius and Origen accepted *The Shepherd* as Scripture, as well as Didymus the Blind.¹⁶ The Codex Sinaiticus, from the fourth century, includes *The Shepherd* along with *The Epistle of Barnabas*.¹⁷ “As revelations given by the spirit these [apocryphal] writings claimed the highest authority for themselves without much ado...the *Shepherd of Hermas*...insisted on being heard, and wide circles in the church granted [that] request.”¹⁸ This evidence seems to indicate that *The Shepherd* enjoyed a wide audience and status during the latter second and early third centuries. The message of this document as it relates to apostasy and “second repentance” needs to be explored next.

Repentance is the overall theme of *The Shepherd* with “second repentance” for lapsed believers being a dominate part of that theme. The references to apostasy, repentance, and forgiveness are too numerous to list.¹⁹ The following text can be used to summarize the thought of the entire document,

‘I have heard from certain teachers that there is no other repentance beyond that which occurred when we descended into the water and received forgiveness of our previous sins.’ He said to me, ‘You have heard correctly, for so it is. For the one who has received forgiveness of sins ought never to sin again, but to live in purity....For those who have just now believed, or those who are going to believe do not have repentance for

¹¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.20.2. Reiling (p.170n.) holds that Irenaeus is not ascribing inspired status to *The Shepherd*, but he is in the minority. When you consider the text being quoted and the theological significance which it foreshadows (that being *creatio ex nihilo*) it gives even greater weight to the probability that Irenaeus was holding it as inspired.

¹² Tertullian’s reference in *On the Prayer* (ch 16) is not a strong one, in fact he is not even sure of the exact name of the work [*The Shepherd*], but it is a positive reference. The references in *On Purity* (ch. 10 and ch. 20) are derisive, but show that *The Shepherd* had a ready audience. We will discuss this later.

¹³ Chadwick, JTS, p.277. Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, also shows indications for this, p.264n.

¹⁴ References from Clement come from *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Vol. 1 (1867), Vol. 2 (1869). *Strom.* I,xvii, p.408; I, xxix, p.469,70; II, ix, p.27,28; II, xii, p.34,35; VI, vi, p.330,31; VI, vi, p.332.

¹⁵ Reiling, p.170. Reiling goes on, “this means that he does not consider Hermas as a prophet but assigns authority to the book as a divine revelation because of the divine revealers.” But then says, “This does not, however, mean that Clement considered the Shepherd to be canonical.” (footnote, p.170)

¹⁶ LHH, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p.189.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lietzmann, A HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH, Vol. II, p.102.

¹⁹ A sample: 4.2; 6.4ff, especially 6.8; 7.4; 13.5; 14.5ff; 23.5; ch 29; 30.2; ch 31; 72.4; 103.6; ch 105; 114.3.

sins, but they do have forgiveness of their previous sins. So, for those who were called before these days the Lord has established repentance....But the Lord, however, who is exceedingly merciful, had mercy on his creation and established this opportunity for repentance...But I am warning you,' he said, 'if, after this great and holy call, anyone is tempted by the devil and sins, he has one opportunity for repentance. But if he sins repeatedly and repents, it is of no use for such a person, for he will scarcely live.'
Mandate 4 31.1-6

It is apparent from this text that the issue of "second repentance" was being debated. The problem with this text is that it does not specify that the sin is apostasy, yet the subject of those who "have denied their Lord" appears over and over again throughout the document, usually with the door of repentance left open;

After you have made known to them all these words, which the Master ordered me to reveal to you, then all the sins which they have previously committed will be forgiven them. Indeed, all the saints who have sinned up to this day will be forgiven, if they repent with all their heart....Blessed are those of you who patiently endure the coming great tribulation and who will not deny their life. For the Lord has sworn by his Son that those who have denied their Lord have been rejected from their life, that is, those who now are about to deny him in the coming days. But to those who formerly denied him mercy has been granted because of his great mercy. 6.4,7-8

The heavenly revealer usually shows that there is a possibility of repentance and forgiveness for apostasy. But the warning in *Mandate 4* gives no parameters to "second repentance" sins: *The Shepherd* applies this same concept to other issues.

Probably the biggest issue after apostasy was adultery; *The Shepherd* gives the same warning of only one more chance to those who were guilty of adultery. The warning quoted above comes from the major section dealing with adultery, *Mandate 4*. In this section Hermas asks numerous questions about unfaithfulness and is given the following responses:

But if the husband knows about her sin and the wife does not repent, but persists in her immorality...
...if, after the wife is divorced, she repents and wants to return to her own husband...
...the one who has sinned and repented must be taken back. But not repeatedly: for there is only one repentance for God's servants.²⁰

It must be noted that the possibility of repentance is taken for granted here, but the "only one" chance provision is maintained. *The Shepherd* opened the door of "second repentance" for those who had committed serious sins like adultery.

Hermas is not only concerned with apostasy and adultery, but with a range of lesser sins; indeed, we see in *The Shepherd* the division of sins into greater and lesser classifications. Throughout the *The Shepherd* Hermas is distressed about his own sin. The document opens with Hermas being accused (by the Elderly Woman messenger) of sin and reveals his distress

²⁰ All three quotations come from Ch. 29, *Mandate 4*, p.217.

over this accusation.²¹ At several points in the document, when a heavenly messenger appears, or describes sinfulness and the need of repentance, Hermas has a personal time of distress and penance.²² This reflects the second century fixation with perfection, but also shows the strain of this position with the realization that Christians do sin. For this generation the evidence of salvation “was understood to depend not upon a favorable balance in the ‘book of life’ but upon a clean page.”²³ How does this struggle with general sins relate to our discussion on “second repentance?” We have seen that the assurances of a “second repentance” are not clearly reserved for serious sins leaving the impression that “a clean page” is necessary. In this larger discussion of sin and forgiveness, *The Shepherd* introduces the idea of two different classifications of sins;

Adultery and fornication, lawless drunkenness, wicked luxury, many kinds of food and the extravagance of wealth and boasting and snobbery and arrogance, and lying and slander and hypocrisy, malice and all blasphemy. These actions are the most wicked of all in the life of men...Listen also, therefore, to the things that follow them...theft, lying, robbery, perjury, greed, lust, deceit, vanity, pretentiousness, and whatever else is like these.

38.3-5

This division is not entirely clear, but this is one of the earliest classifications of sins. We will see how important the classification of sins becomes in this discussion of “second repentance.”

We have seen evidence that *The Shepherd* was held in high regard in the first two centuries. We have seen the overarching theme of repentance in *The Shepherd*. Now we will look at evidence which points to the influence *The Shepherd* had on the discussion of “second repentance.” That evidence is found in two early fathers of this period: Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian.

We have already shown that Clement frequently quoted from, or alluded to, *The Shepherd* as an authentic prophetic source. As we look more closely at a few of these texts, we see that Clement follows *The Shepherd* quite closely on this issue of “second repentance.” Clement concludes a chapter on “Twofold Faith” with the following quote;

²¹ Kenneth Clark in his article *The Sins of Hermas*, SUPPLEMENTS TO NOVUM TESTAMENTUM, Vol. 54, p.30-47 shows that the sins of Hermas are “difficult [to discern] because his own report is often inconsistent and confusing (p.33)...[the document] does not succeed in any attempt at a clear explanation of these sins, or of their sure consequences. The general principle...is clear, but the definition of that principle remains vague and inconsistent.” (p.46)

²² As a sample: 9.5-9; 25.1-4; 28.3; 30.3; 46.4- 47.1; 60.3; 61.1.

²³ Clark, p.32. Although this observation by Clark seems to be true, 39.1 seems to indicate that there was a realization that Christians will need forgiveness from time to time; “ ‘How can I ask for something from God and receive it, when I have sinned so often against him?’ Do not reason in this way, but turn to the Lord with all your heart...” (p.226)

The same [*The Shepherd*] also says 'that repentance is high intelligence. For he that repents of what he did, no longer does or says as he did. But by torturing himself for his sins, he benefits his soul. *Strom* II.12

Clement's reference is from *Mandate 4*, a section of strong warning against adultery which also contains one of the clearest pronouncements of "second repentance" in *The Shepherd*. Clement's next chapter is titled, "On First and Second Repentance" and is his most thorough discussion on this issue. Here is the opening of this chapter,

He, then, who has received the forgiveness of sins ought to sin no more. For, in addition to the first and only repentance from sins (this is from the previous sins in the first and heathen life—I mean that in ignorance), there is forthwith proposed to those who have been called, the repentance which cleanses the seat of the soul from transgressions, that faith may be established. *Strom* II.13

This rather obtuse statement, opening the chapter with a quote from *The Shepherd*, is followed by yet another quote from *The Shepherd*²⁴ which helps to make his meaning clear,

And the Lord, knowing the heart, and foreknowing the future, foresaw both the fickleness of man and the craft and subtlety of the devil from the first...Accordingly, being very merciful, He has vouchsafed, in the case of those who, though in faith, fall into any transgression, a *second* repentance; so that should any one be tempted after his calling, overcome by force and fraud, he may receive still a repentance. *Strom*.II.13 (emphasis added)

Clement adds the word "second" here, showing the influence of *The Shepherd*. But then he goes back to his original rigorist line by quoting Hebrews 10:26,27.²⁵ So we see in Clement, just as in *The Shepherd*, there is some ambiguity as to how this "second repentance" applies. The second chance seems to apply to all sin, yet there is the same call to "sin no more." What about the classification of sins into major and lesser ones? Clement has this same idea, but rather than listing particular acts or attitudes, he states that there are sins of thought, word, and deed.²⁶ He references 1 John 5.16,17 (*Strom* II.15), but he is not altogether clear as to what constitutes a "sin unto death" and what would be a "sin not unto death." There are other areas where Clement seems to follow the lead of *The Shepherd*,²⁷ but for our purposes this will suffice.

²⁴ The first quote is 31.2, p.218 and the second is, 31.4-5, p.219, both from *Mandate 4*.

²⁵ "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

²⁶ He covers sins of thought in *Strom* II.14, p.38, and word and deed in Book II.15, p.41. He had already discussed voluntary and involuntary actions as "sin, mistake, crime" (II.15, p.38).

²⁷ Telfer (p.45-47) shows how Clement's view of wealth in *Who is the Rich Man being Saved?* is very similar with that of *The Shepherd*. Even in *Stromateis* this can be seen—compare, "It is sin, for example, to live luxuriously and licentiously"(II.15, p.38) with *Shep* 38.3; 45.1; 50.10. On sins of ignorance (VI.6, p.332), Clement is very similar to *Shep* 60.3. On the sins of a believer being worse than someone who is ignorant (II.13, p.36), see *Shep* 95.2.

For our final piece of evidence to show the important influence *The Shepherd* had on the discussion of “second repentance,” we need to take a closer look at Tertullian. Two of his tracts are important in this discussion, *On Penitence* (written prior to 207 while he was clearly orthodox), and *On Purity* (written 217-222 after his defection to the Montanists).²⁸ *On Penitence* seems to be an address given to catechumens in preparation for baptism. Like *The Shepherd* and Clement, Tertullian initially sounds like he is taking a rigorist stance against sin;

A point I now insist upon is this, that the penance which has been revealed to us by the grace of God, which is required of us and which brings us back to favor with the Lord, must never, once we have known and embraced it, be violated thereafter by a return to sin. *On Penitence* 5

We are not baptized so that we may cease committing sin but because we have ceased, since we are already clean of heart...for he has feared to continue sinning, lest he should not deserve to receive [baptism]....Grant, Lord Christ, that Thy servants may...know nothing of repentance nor have any need of it [after baptism]. *On Penitence* 6-7

But he then goes into great detail to show there is a place for repentance, even after baptism (ch 7). He gives biblical texts to prove God’s mercy (ch 8), and finally gives the proper approach to the penitent (ch 9). He introduces this section with this statement which immediately follows the text quoted above;

I am reluctant to make mention here of a second hope, one which is indeed the very last, for fear that in treating of a resource which yet remains in penitence, I may seem to indicate that there is still time left for sin. God grant that no one come to such a conclusion... *On Penitence* 7

Just as *The Shepherd* (“For the one who has received forgiveness of sins ought never to sin again...” 31.2, *Mandate 4*) and Clement (a quotation of *The Shepherd* 31.2 in *Strom* II.13), Tertullian illustrates the tension which existed in the early fathers; Christians should not continue in sin, but there is forgiveness even after baptism. Tertullian outlines the process of penance after baptism (*On Penitence* ch. 9-12), even using the proper Greek name, *exomologesis*.

In the early third century (cir. 217-222) Callistus, bishop of Rome, produced a decree which authorized bishops to allow absolution for penitent adulterers.²⁹ Tertullian responded with his tract, *On Purity*.³⁰ Although this is a virulently written tract against the Church, it sheds light on many issues surrounding the debate of “second repentance.”³¹ Again, like *The Shepherd*

²⁸ Le Saint gives a brief overview of the dating problems, p.12 and p.47-52.

²⁹ Le Saint, p.48. He briefly discusses the problems of authorship of this edict.

³⁰ It appears that he defected to the Montanists in 217AD. (Le Saint, p.52)

³¹ Le Saint's comments on Tertullian after his defection to Montanism are worth reading, “All of his Montanist tracts are characterized by a warped and exaggerated asceticism; in all of them Tertullian's indignation is impressive, even when his position is impossible and his arguments absurd....From beginning to end he is the true fanatic; he is impatient of all opposition; his mind is closed to every viewpoint but his own...He draws on a bewilderingly large number of texts from both the Old and the New

and Clement, Tertullian concedes two types of sin: “We agree that the cases where penance is required are sins. These we divide according to two issues: some will be remissible, others irremissible.”(ch 2) Like *The Shepherd* (and unlike Clement)³² Tertullian’s listing of sins is a bit obscure.³³ After introducing the concept in chapter 2, he attempts, with great detail, to justify this position (ch. 3-19) before giving the reader his listing of sins;

It is a fact that there are some sins which beset us every day and to which we all are tempted. For who will not, as it may chance, fall into unrighteous anger and continue this even beyond sundown, or even strike another or, out of easy habit, curse another, or swear rashly, or violate his pledged faith, or tell a lie through shame or the compulsion of circumstances? In the management of affairs, in the performance of duties, in commercial transactions, while eating, looking, listening — how often we are tempted! So much so that if there were no pardon in such cases, no one would be saved. For these sins, then, pardon is granted through Christ who intercedes with the Father. But there are also sins quite different from these, graver and deadly, which cannot be pardoned: murder, idolatry, injustice, apostasy, blasphemy; yes, and also adultery and fornication and any other violation of the temple of God. For these Christ will not intercede with the Father a second time. *On Purity 19*

This text is Tertullian’s explanation of 1 John 5.16,17, followed by this comment;

Thus an explanation of the apparent contradiction in John will be found in the fact that he is making a distinction between classes of sins when he asserts, in one place, that the sons of God *do* sin and, in another, that they *do not*. (Italics in Le Saint’s text)

From the two tracts we have examined, it seems clear that Tertullian’s position on “second repentance” has only changed with respect to the *mortal* sins of adultery and fornication,³⁴

And so you are now left with no choice but this: either to deny that fornication and adultery are mortal sins, or else to admit that they are irremissible and that we are not even permitted to make supplication for them. *On Purity 22*

Tertullian is in the midst of a battle with the Church as to whether “sinners,” those who have committed *mortal* sin (in particular, adultery), should be allowed to do penance and be restored to fellowship. Tertullian maintains that even if a person commits a mortal sin they should do penance; God might forgive them in the end — but the Church should not allow them to partake in communion.³⁵ Quoting a great number of biblical texts supporting mercy, Tertullian first

Testament to establish this thesis, revealing throughout the whole treatise a familiarity with the Bible which is truly amazing. One hardly knows which is the more remarkable—his readiness in quoting Scripture or his genius for distorting it.”

³² Clement’s focus was not upon the exact sin, but upon the issue of choice, whether the person knowingly, voluntarily commits the “crime,” of sin, *Strom* II.15.

³³ Le Saint discusses this “lack of precision,” p.46,47. Tertullian’s discussion on divisions of sins (*On Penitence* 3, p.17-20) sounds much like that of Clement.

³⁴ There is evidence and debate as to whether he allows *exomologesis* to apostates and murderers in chapter 22. See the comments of Le Saint, p.51. I cannot remember if Le Saint mentions this point, but I do believe that Tertullian is the first Latin father to use the terms *mortal* and *venial* sins.

³⁵ Ch. 3, p.60 and ch. 18, p.109.

gives a scathing review of those who "bandy about, unmanning rather than strengthening discipline, flattering God and pandering to themselves. We are able to adduce, in rebuttal, just as much contrary testimony, which shows forth the threat of God's severity..."(*On Purity* 2); he then continues by citing scriptures which illustrate God's judgment. He then admits scripture speaks of both sides saying that he must stop his discussion because he is beginning "to pull alternately in opposite directions on a rope of contention."

Tertullian was most critical of the idea that an adulterer could receive absolution while it might be withheld from the one "whom savagery has overcome after he has struggled with torments in the agony of martyrdom. It would, in fact, be unworthy of God and of His mercy...that those who have fallen in the heat of lust should more easily reenter the Church than those who have fallen in the heat of battle." (ch 22)

Thus far we have shown similarities between *The Shepherd* and Tertullian. The most obvious evidence that *The Shepherd* had some influence on Tertullian (and in the discussion of "second repentance") comes from the way he opposed it. In two places Tertullian refers to *The Shepherd*, both only briefly and both in a negative tone;

For if any wavering of the flesh, any distraction of spirit, any wandering glance, causes you to lose your equilibrium—remember God is good! It is to His own and not to the heathen that He opens His arms. A second penance will receive you and, after you have been an adulterer, you will again be a Christian. Thus would you speak to me, Oh kindest of God's exegetes. And I would assent, if the book of the Shepherd which alone is favorable to adulterers deserved to be included within the sacred canon, and if it had not been judged apocryphal and false by all the councils of the churches, even your own! It is adulterous itself and therefore favors its associates. *On Purity* 10

And surely the epistle of Barnabas has found wider acceptance among the churches than has that apocryphal *Shepherd* of adulterers. *On Purity* 20³⁶

The fact that Tertullian even bothers to mention *The Shepherd* shows its importance in this debate. His references seem to indicate that *The Shepherd* had been used to defend "second repentance" for adulterers. Tertullian is obviously in disagreement with *The Shepherd* on this point, but he admits that his position had changed; in light of *On Penitence* it would seem that he was in agreement with *The Shepherd* prior to his defection to the Montanists.

To review the evidence we have seen on the influence of *The Shepherd* with respect to the discussion of sin, forgiveness, and "second repentance," we will employ a simple chart,³⁷

³⁶ The "epistle of Barnabas" cited by Tertullian is actually *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 6.1, 4-8.

³⁷ As has been noted, there is ambiguity in all three documents on these issues.

<i>The Shepherd</i>	Clement <i>Stromateis</i>	Tertullian	
		<i>On Penitence</i>	<i>On Purity</i>
The acknowledgment of “second repentance”	Yes	Yes	Yes
“Second repentance” seems to apply to all sins	Yes	Yes	No
Takes a rigorist position that after “second repentance” there should be no more sin	Yes	Rigorist after initial baptism	Yes
That God forgives sin done in ignorance	Yes	----	Yes ³⁸
The classification of sins into serious and lesser sins	Yes	Yes	Yes
There is a sin of thought	Yes	----	Yes

Conclusion:

It is clear that *The Shepherd of Hermas* held a significant place in the second and early third centuries with respect to the issues of sin, forgiveness, and “second repentance.” As with other major issues, the Church had to grapple not only with practical application of “truth” in the lives of believers, but also with obscure biblical texts. In the end, judgments had to be made and tradition was established, but getting to that place was not easy. In 251 AD, under Cyprian of Carthage, this issue took on the added significance of who could offer penance and forgiveness to the 'lapsed.' The authority of the bishop was again being questioned and Cyprian's document, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, established the rule of the church followed from that time forward – authority rested with the bishops.

The Shepherd of Hermas eventually faded into the background of appendices and monastic shelves, but its influence continued through Clement, Tertullian and those who read and followed these two second century fathers.

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³⁸ Tertullian (ch.18) seems to cite the same text which Clement uses (VI.6, p.332) from *The Shepherd* (60.3, p.246). Clark (p.35n) cites this text as coming from *The Preaching of Peter*.

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