CHAPTER THREE

MIDRASHIC METHOD, PATTERNS AND TERMINOLOGY

Approach

The two preceding chapters have pointed out several midrashic features which are common to parts of Philo, John and the Palestinian midrash: the systematic paraphrase of words from Old Testament quotations and fragments from haggadic traditions, and the use of a widespread homiletic pattern.

This chapter will show in detail the way midrashic method, patterns and terminology are employed in such homilies. In undertaking this task it is necessary to draw a distinction between the history of tradition in terms of content, on the one hand, and of form criticism, on the other hand. The exegetical paraphrase makes such a distinction necessary, since it fuses together words and fragments from different traditions into traditional forms and patterns. This method of exegetical paraphrase, then, leads to a dynamic process of new combinations within the framework of tradition.

Ignoring, therefore, the question of content as much as possible, concentration will be directed to a discussion of the characteristics of form. As basis for the analysis the homily in John 6, 31-58 will be used. There are two reasons for this choice: First, this section has been the object of very thorough stylistic and linguistic analysis by several scholars. Second, it lends itself very well to a comparison both with the Palestinian midrash and Philo, since it has close parallels with the midrash; but at the same time it was written in Greek, as were the works of Philo.

Although John 6, 31-58 is chosen as a basis for the investigation, the approach employed will also throw light upon the question as to whether Philo uses midrashic method, patterns and terminology or not. Scholars have differed very much on this question. One group has maintained that Philo uses rabbinic methods and patterns of interpretation, although Greek philosophy did make a deep impact upon the content. This group includes scholars like Frankel,
Siegfried, Treitel and R. M. Grant. On the other hand, there are those who analyse Philo from the viewpoint of Greek exegetical method and style. According to them Philo’s allegorical method has Greek roots and is strongly influenced by the style of diatribe. Proponents of this theory include Heinisch, Stählin, Heinemann, Pepin, Stein, Daniélou, Wendland and Thyen.

These two different points of view should not, however, be considered as mutually exclusive. Some of the scholars mentioned above have adopted intermediary positions. For instance Siegfried and Grant find in Philo influences from the Stoic method of allegorical interpretation as well as the rabbinic one. And even I. Heinemann observes that Philo’s methods of exegesis and the rabbinic coincide at certain points. Finally, Stein relates Philo’s allegory to the haggadah.

This contrast is also weakened by some studies which demonstrate close points of agreements between the Greek and rabbinic style and method of exegesis. Therefore, it is possible to analyse Greek