Chapter Five

The Apostolic Fathers

The collection of early Christian writings conventionally known as the Apostolic fathers, the core of which is formed by the pastoral letters of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, does not represent a homogenous body of writings, but rather a group of works written between 90 and 160, i.e. in the period between the New Testament writings (but not their formation into the Canon) and those of the Apologists. There is overlap with both groups, for the Didache is at least as old as the later New Testament writings, while Quadratus and the letter to Diognetus would be better placed with the Apologists. It is a period during which Christianity spreads rapidly in the geographical sense and is developing its claim to being a universal religion separate from Judaism, but the focus of its activities is mainly inwards. Situated on the edge of Greco-Roman society, the Church is not yet ready for the confrontation with the dominant culture which the Apologists will undertake.

The relation of these writings to Philo and Hellenistic Judaism is in the main not very close, and little research has been devoted to the question. We shall confine our conspectus to brief observations on three writers.

1. Clement of Rome

In the Pastoral letter that Clement, bishop of Rome from 92 to 101, writes to the congregation of Corinth, admonishing them for their spirit of contention and exhorting them to seek harmony and concord, two passages have been brought in connection with Philo. Van Unnik, explaining with great mastery of detail the background of the term εἰρήνη βαθεία in 1 Cor. 2.2, points out a number of parallel passages in Philo, which show that the

---

1 Various editions. I have used Funk-Bihlmeyer-Schneemelcher (1956).
3 There are, for example, practically no references to Philo in the classic 5 volumes of commentary by Lightfoot, (1889–90).
4 See also chapter 7 on Alexandria, where we examine the Letter to Diognetus and some writings generally grouped under the title New Testament Apocrypha or Pseudepigrapha (to which the Letter of Barnabas should actually belong).
context of the term is Augustan political thought, in which the peace and concord of unity is contrasted with disharmony and dissension of civil strife.\textsuperscript{5} The earliest examples that Van Unnik finds are all from Judaeo-Hellenistic literature, but he sees no reason to conclude that its origin lies here.\textsuperscript{6} There is of course no question of any direct contact between Philo and Clement, only a shared background, the Judaeo-Hellenistic nature of which should, I believe, be emphasized more than Van Unnik has done (though he is looking only at a single phrase).

A second, more interesting, passage that has been brought in relation to Philo is the beautiful ‘cosmological’ chapter 20 on the elements of creation which, keeping within their ordained bounds, benefit man and beast, and so reveal God’s lovingkindness. Jaeger has drawn attention to the image of springs of water which unceasingly offer their life-giving breasts to mankind (20.11).\textsuperscript{7} He points out parallels in three Philonic passages, Opif. 38, 133, Aet. 66. The last-named passage is derived from the Peripatetic author Critolaus. Behind the convergences of the four passages, Jaeger argues, lies a tragic poetic fragment which portrayed the earth as a pregnant woman and its springs as the breasts of a feeding mother. For Philo and Clement Jaeger, using the questionable methods of Quellenforschung, postulates a common Stoic source which they both used, no doubt independently of each other.

Another aspect of this chapter may be noted, namely the strong echoes of the Mosaic creation account, and especially of the divine commands given in the works of the six days.

(a) the heavens are subordinated to the creator, day and night, sun, moon and stars fulfilling their ordered course; vv 1–3, cf. Gen. 1:3–5, 14–18;

(b) the earth brings forth its gifts, not deviating from what has been ordained; vv. 4–5, cf. Gen. 1:11–13;

(c) the sea does not exceed its bounds as its waters have been gathered together; v. 6, cf. Gen. 1:9–10 (note esp. εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς, cf. Gen. 1:9 εἰς συναγωγὴν μίαν).

(d) summarizing at the end: ‘the great craftsman (δημιουργός) and master (δεσπότης) of all things commanded (προσέτοξεν) them to be in concord and peace (ὁμονοία), benefitting (εὖργετῶν) all things’.

The mixture of Greek cosmology and Mosaic creational themes is rather reminiscent of Philo, even if composed on a much less sophisticated level. Most striking is the use of the Platonizing term ‘demiurge’, and the emphasis on divine command, also prominent in Philo’s commentary.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5} Van Unnik (1970).
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid. 277–278.
\textsuperscript{7} Jaeger (1959).
\textsuperscript{8} See my comments at Runia (1986) 108, 223.