CHAPTER TWO

THE HAGAR AND SARAH MOTIF

Str. I 28-32

1.1 Introductory remarks

The setting for the main themes

An important problem that Clement confronts in the first book of the Stromateis is to define the role that philosophy and Greek culture can play in faith. In the introductory paragraphs, he touches on the occasion that gave rise to his work, the difference between written and unwritten traditions and reminiscences of his own teachers. In paragraph 15 he then turns his attention to the main problem. He promises that he will make use of what is best in philosophy and other preparatory culture. In dealing with their role throughout this and the succeeding books, he evokes two pervasive images to illuminate the issue. First, there is the image of growth; watered with the thoughts of the Greeks, the earth will receive the spiritual seed cast upon it and cause that seed to grow. Clement compares his work to that of the farmers who direct this process.\(^1\) In another passage, he compares preparatory culture and philosophy to showers; the rain falls everywhere, on good land and bad, and the resulting growth is correspondingly rich or meager; both weeds and grain spring up. Connected with this imagery, which illustrates Clement’s idea of the role of philosophy, is the parable of the sower; there is only one sower, but through different ages his various seeds can bring forth a wide variety of plants.\(^2\)

The second image in which Clement encapsulates his theme is that of concealment. The Stromateis will, says Clement, contain the truth mingled with philosophy or rather, covered over and hidden by it, as is the edible part of the nut in the shell.\(^3\) It is appropriate that the seeds of truth are kept only for the farmers of faith. Clement continues that he is not oblivious to the cackling of people, who in their ignorance are frightened by every noise and who say that one must occupy oneself with

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\(^1\) Str. I 17,4.
\(^2\) Str. I 37,1ff.
\(^3\) Str. I 18,1.
what is most necessary and indispensable for faith. They think that philosophy was introduced into life by the force of evil to ruin people. In this polemical setting, Clement tries to refute the arguments of his adversaries by saying that one cannot declare that something is useless or evil by nature without a basic knowledge of it. Philosophy is not put forward for its own sake but because it leads people to reflection and prepares them for comprehending the truth.4

Principal themes of the passage

This passage, which covers chapter 5 of the first book, describes in greater detail how philosophy functions as preparation for faith. In the construction of the passage, three components can be distinguished:5 the theme, as described in Clement’s own words, quotations from Proverbs, and quotations and reminiscences of Philo’s De Congressu. The quotations from Proverbs are largely concentrated in a first group, the material from Philo in a second area. He precedes, separates and concludes these two groups of borrowings with exposition, adaptation and commentary in his own words.

Clement’s theme

At the very beginning of chapter 5, the theme is announced; “‘Thus before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for justification, and now it becomes useful for piety, being a kind of preparatory training for those who reap the fruit of faith through proof by argument.’”6 Shortly thereafter, he presents the following formulation: “‘For just as the law brought up the Hebrews, so this (philosophy) brought up the Greek world to Christ. Philosophy, therefore, is a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ.’”7

Between the quotations from Proverbs and from Philo, we read “‘When Scripture says ‘Be not much with a strange woman’, it admonishes us, indeed, to use but not to linger and spend time with secular culture. For things that are bestowed at seasonable times on each generation for its advantage are a preliminary training for the word of the Lord.’” As a clear termination8 of the passages from Philo, the theme

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4 Str. I 20,3; 80,5; 99,1; cf. Camelot, Idées, p. 51.
6 Str. I 28,1.
7 Str. I 28,3; cf. II 37,2.