CHAPTER FIVE

THE TEMPLE, VESTMENTS AND THE HIGH PRIEST

Str. V 32-40

1.1 Introductory remarks

Clement’s description of the temple and the vestments of the high priest stands in a long tradition, whose Old Testament background is formed mainly by Ex. 26-28. The first chapters of this passage of Exodus carefully detail the framework and covering of the tabernacle and the screens that separate its various parts. Colors and kinds of materials, and measures, sizes and quantities are specified; these numerical specifications form a striking aspect of the description. The liturgical furnishings and finally the vestments of the high priest with their elaborate and precious ornaments receive a similar detailed and colorful treatment.

Philo and Flavius Josephus seem to follow an established tradition in taking up this subject matter and giving it a symbolic development not found in Exodus. Already traditional is the use of the tabernacle and the priest’s vestments as an image for the surrounding universe with stars and planets, evoked by the gold and the variety of colors in the original biblical text. The treatments of this in Philo and Josephus, however, differ greatly. Josephus’s description of the construction is extensive while his symbolic interpretations are, in contrast with Philo, rather meager. The most important passages in Philo dealing with this material are VM II 71-135, the background text of Clement’s passage, Spec. I 66-97 and QE II 51-124. In addition, there are shorter passages like Leg. II 56; III 119; Cher. 101-106; Ebr. 87; Migr. 102f.; Her. 215f.; Congr. 117; Fug. 108ff.; Somn. I 214f.; Spec. I 296f. The Epistle to the Hebrews carries the theme into the specifically Christian realm. As in Jewish writers, the heavenly high priest and his heavenly sanctuary appear; in this case, the high priest is fully identified with Christ. In the Apostolic Fathers, in

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1 Josephus, Antiq. III 102-224; Bell. V 184-237; next to Philo and Josephus see also Sap. 18:24; Sir. 45:6-13.
2 For the literature see Herbert Braun, Handbuch zum NT 14, 1984, Exc. 17 p. 71, Jesus der himmlische Hohepriester, (Test. XII and Qumran texts are included).
3 1 Clem. 36,1; 61,3; 64,1; Ign. Phld. 9,1; Pol. 12,2; Mart. Pol. 14,3; cf. Schrenk, in TWNT III, p. 284.
Justin and in various Gnostic teachings the tradition lives on, basically nourished by the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁴

Clement stands in this line of descent and manages to incorporate material from all these radiating traditions and, at the same time, is able to make his own distinct contribution to them. He provides symbolic interpretations of the temple and the vestments both as a whole and in their different parts. The passage of Exodus lies in the background of his treatment, but he introduces another descriptive theme, namely the entrance of the high priest, whose basis is supplied by Leviticus 16.⁵ In Clement's interpretation of this liturgical action, the high priest represents Christ who becomes visible to the world by the creative power of the logos and by his coming into human being. At the same time, the high priest represents the Gnostic who moves upward to an unceasing contemplation.

Philo’s description of the temple and the vestments is propelled by a cosmological preoccupation; he develops a scheme in which the universe in its totality is ruled by God and revolves around God and his powers. The way in which God reveals himself to men like Abraham and Moses is also determined in cosmological terms. In Marguerite Harl’s formulation, "Le savoir cosmologique est le plus haut enseignement de la révélation divine."⁶ Cosmology and anthropology are extensions of each other; mankind as the most important element of creation is compared to a sanctuary. The human soul represents a second sanctuary after a first sanctuary, which is the universe; the second sanctuary is transformed into a microcosm in tune with the cosmic harmony.⁷ The purpose of God for the world as a whole and his intention for mankind are two related sides of the same principle; insight into the origins and the harmony of the cosmos may provide man knowledge of God himself.

In Clement, the emphases are different; he avails himself of cosmological models and terms but puts the accents elsewhere. Ultimately his motivation is the idea that the faithful rise up to a spiritual reality above time and space, to which Christ gives the dimension. The reverse of this rising movement is the incarnation of Christ; the ascent of man is only possible through the descent of Christ. Cosmology is pres-

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⁴ See BiPatr I, 519-524.
⁵ Lev.16:4.
⁷ Cf.Cher. 101-106; Ebr. 87; VM II 135; QE II 51.