

The Pattern and the Image in Gregory of Nyssa's Interpretation of the Jewish Tabernacle

Philo of Alexandria

On the Life of Moses

(II,74) It was determined, therefore, to fashion a tabernacle, a work of the highest sanctity, the construction of which was set forth to Moses on the mount by divine pronouncements. He saw with the soul's eye the immaterial forms of the material objects about to be made, and these forms had to be reproduced in copies perceived by the senses, taken from the original draught, so to speak, and from patterns conceived in the mind.¹

σκηνην οὖν, ἔργον ἱερώτατον, δημιουργεῖν ἔδοξεν, ἧς τὴν κατασκευὴν θεσφάτοις λογίοις ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους Μωϋσῆς ἀνεδιδάσκετο, τῶν μελλόντων ἀποτελεῖσθαι σωμάτων ἀσωμάτων ἰδέας τῇ ψυχῇ θεωρῶν, πρὸς ἃς ἔδει καθάπερ ἀπ' ἀρχετύπου γραφῆς καὶ νοητῶν παραδειγμάτων αἰσθητὰ μιμήματα ἀπεικονισθῆναι.

Questions and Answers on Exodus

(52) What is the meaning of the words "Thou shalt make, according to all that I shall show thee on the mountain, the patterns of the tent and the vessels"? That every sense-perceptible likeness has (as) its origin an intelligible pattern in nature (Scripture) has declared in many other passages as well as in the present one. Excellently, moreover, has it presented (as) the teacher of incorporeal and archetypal things not one who is begotten and created but the unbegotten and uncreated God. For it was indeed proper and fitting to reveal to an intelligent man the forms of intelligible things and the measures of all things in accordance with which the word was made. (Extant only in Armenian.)

On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses

(16) [When God] had decided to construct this visible cosmos, he first marked out the intelligible cosmos, so that he could use it as a incorporeal and most god-like paradigm and so produce the corporeal cosmos, a younger likeness of an older model, which would contain as many sense-perceptible kinds as there were intelligible kinds in that other one.² (...)

(24) If you would wish to use a formulation that has been stripped down to essentials, you might say that the intelligible cosmos is nothing else than the Logos of God as he is actually engaged in making the cosmos.³

βουληθεῖς τὸν ὄρατὸν κόσμον τουτονὶ δημιουργῆσαι, προεξετύπου τὸν νοητὸν, ἵνα, χρώμενος ἀσωμάτῳ καὶ θεοειδεστάτῳ παραδείγματι, τὸν σωματικὸν ἀπεργάσῃται, πρεσβυτέρου νεώτερον ἀπεικόνισμα, τσαῦτα περιέξοντα αἰσθητὰ γένη ὅσαπερ ἐν ἐκείνῳ νοητά. (...)

εἰ δέ τις ἐθελήσειε γυμνοτέροις χρήσασθαι τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, οὐδὲν ἂν ἕτερον εἶποι τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἢ θεοῦ λόγον ἤδη κοσμοποιούντος·

¹ English translation F. H. Colson, *LCL* 289.

² Philo, *Opif.* 16.

³ Cf. Philo, *Opif.* 24. English translation D. T. Runia.

Clement of Alexandria

Stromateis

(V,6,38,6–7) And as the Lord is above the whole world, yea, above the world of thought (ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοητοῦ), so the name engraven on the plate has been regarded to signify, above all rule and authority; and it was inscribed with reference both to the written commandments and the manifestation to sense. And it is the name of God that is expressed; since, as the Son sees the goodness of the Father, God the Saviour works, being called the first principle of all things, which was imaged forth (ἀπεικόνισται) from the invisible God first, and before the ages, and which fashioned (τετύπωκεν) all things which came into being after itself.⁴

ὥσπερ δὲ ὁ κύριος ὑπεράνω τοῦ κόσμου παντός, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοητοῦ, οὕτως καὶ τὸ ἐν τῷ πετάλῳ ἔγγραπτον ὄνομα «ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας» εἶναι ἠξιώται, ἔγγραπτον δὲ διὰ τε τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐγγράφους διὰ τε τὴν αἰσθητὴν παρουσίαν. ὄνομα δὲ εἴρηται θεοῦ. ἐπεὶ, ὡς βλέπει τοῦ πατρὸς τὴν ἀγαθότητα, ὁ υἱὸς ἐνεργεῖ, θεὸς σωτὴρ κεκλημένος, ἢ τῶν ὄλων ἀρχή, ἣτις ἀπεικόνισται μὲν ἐκ «τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου» πρώτη καὶ πρὸ αἰώνων, τετύπωκεν δὲ τὰ μεθ' ἑαυτὴν ἅπαντα γενόμενα.

Gregory of Nyssa

Life of Moses

(II,174) This tabernacle would be ‘Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God,’⁵ who in his own nature was not made with hands, yet capable of being made when it became necessary for this tabernacle (τὴν σκηνὴν ταύτην) to be erected among us.⁶ Thus, the same tabernacle is in a way both unfashioned and fashioned, uncreated in preexistence but created in having received this material composition.⁷

αὕτη δ' ἂν εἴη Χριστός, ἢ θεοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεοῦ σοφία, ἢ ἀχειροποίητος οὓσα κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν φύσιν δέχεται τὸ κατασκευασθῆναι, ὅταν ἐν ἡμῖν δέη τὴν σκηνὴν ταύτην παγῆναι, ὥστε τὴν αὐτὴν τρόπον τινὰ καὶ ἀκατάσκευον καὶ κατασκευασμένην εἶναι, τῷ μὲν προϋπάρχειν ἄκτιστον, τῷ δὲ κατὰ τὴν ὑλικὴν ταύτην σύστασιν κτιστὴν γενομένην.

(II,177) The power which encompasses the universe, in which ‘lives the fullness of divinity’,⁸ the common protector of all, who encompasses everything within himself, is rightly called ‘tabernacle’.⁹

Ἡ γὰρ περιεκτικὴ τῶν ὄντων δύναμις ἐν ἧ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος, ἢ κοινὴ τοῦ παντός σκέπη, ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ πᾶν περιέχων, σκηνὴ κυρίως κατονομάζεται.

(II,179) We can gain clarity about the figures pertaining to the tabernacle from the very words of the Apostle. For he says somewhere with reference to the Only Begotten, whom we have perceived in place of the tabernacle, that ‘in him were created all things, everything visible and everything invisible, Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignities, Powers,’¹⁰ or forces. Then the pillars gleaming with silver and gold, the bearing poles and rings, and those cherubim who hide the ark with their wings, and all the other things which are contained in the description of the tabernacle’s construction – all of these things, if one should turn his view to things above, are

⁴ English translation W. Wilson.

⁵ Cf. *1 Cor* 1:24.

⁶ Cf. *John* 1:14.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *De vit. Moys.* II,174. (All quotations from Gregory of Nyssa’s *The Life of Moses* are taken from the translation of A. J. Malherbe and E. Ferguson.)

⁸ *Col* 2:9.

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De vit. Moys.* II,177.

¹⁰ Cf. *Col* 1:16.

the heavenly powers which are contemplated in the tabernacle and which support the universe in accord with the divine will.

γένοιτο δ' ἂν ἡμῖν δι' αὐτῶν τοῦ ἀποστόλου τῶν λόγων ἢ τῶν τῆς σκηνῆς αἰνιγμάτων σαφήνεια. φησὶ γάρ που περὶ τοῦ μονογενοῦς, ὄν ἀντὶ τῆς σκηνῆς νενοήκαμεν, ὅτι Ἐν αὐτῷ ἔκτισται τὰ πάντα, τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε ἐξουσίαι εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε δυνάμεις. οὐκοῦν στῦλοι ἀργυρολαμπεῖς καὶ χρυσήλατοι καὶ ἀναφορεῖς καὶ δακτύλιοι καὶ τὰ χερουβὶμ ἐκεῖνα, τὰ ταῖς πτέρυξι τὴν κιβωτὸν ἐπικρύπτοντα, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ὅσα ἢ τῆς σκηνοπηγίας ὑπογραφή περιέχει, εἰ μὲν τις πρὸς τὰ ἄνω βλέποι, αἱ ὑπερκόσμοι δυνάμεις εἰσὶν, αἱ ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ θεωρούμεναι, αἱ κατὰ θεῖαν βούλησιν τὸ πᾶν ὑπερείδουσαι.

Homilies on the Song of Songs, 13

(GNO VI,380f) For since Christ is in one respect creature and in another respect uncreated. (...) '[U]ncreated' we call the Word who was in the beginning and is always with God and is God the Logos, the One through whom everything came to be and apart from whom none of the things that have come to be exists;¹¹ but 'created' we call the One who became flesh and tabernacled among us (ἐν ἡμῖν σκηνώσαντα),¹² whose glory shining forth in his incarnate state reveals that God has been 'manifested in the flesh',¹³ the Only Begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father.¹⁴ (...) Now that of him which is uncreated and before the ages and eternal is by nature completely incapable of being grasped and unutterable, while what is manifested for us through the flesh can to a degree come into our knowledge; and for this reason our teacher focuses on the latter and in that regard speaks as much as her hearers are capable of taking in.¹⁵

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὸ μὲν κτιστόν ἐστι τὸ δὲ ἄκτιστον (...) ἄκτιστον λέγομεν τὸν ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντα λόγον καὶ αἰεὶ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὄντα καὶ θεὸν ὄντα λόγον, τὸν δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο καὶ οὗ χωρὶς τῶν γεγονότων ἔστιν οὐδέν, κτιστόν δὲ τὸν σάρκα γενόμενον καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν σκηνώσαντα, οὗ καὶ σαρκωθέντος ἡ ἐμφαινομένη δόξα δηλοῖ, ὅτι Θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, θεὸς δὲ πάντως ὁ μονογενής, ὁ ἐν τοῖς κόλποις ὢν τοῦ πατρὸς. (...) ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν τὸ μὲν ἄκτιστον αὐτοῦ καὶ προαιώνιον καὶ αἰδῖον ἄληπτον μένει καθ' ὅλου πάση φύσει καὶ ἀνεκφώνητον, τὸ δὲ διὰ σαρκὸς ἡμῖν φανερωθὲν δύναται ποσῶς καὶ εἰς γνῶσιν ἐλθεῖν, τούτου χάριν πρὸς ταῦτα ἡ διδάσκαλος βλέπει καὶ περὶ τούτων ποιεῖται τὸν λόγον ὅσα δύναται γενέσθαι χωρητὰ τοῖς ἀκούουσιν.

(GNO VI,383) Anyone who focuses attention on the church is in fact looking at Christ – Christ building himself up and augmenting himself by the addition of people who are being saved.¹⁶

ὁ πρὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν βλέπων πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸν ἀντικρυς βλέπει τὸν ἑαυτὸν διὰ τῆς προσθήκης τῶν σφωζομένων οἰκοδομοῦντα καὶ μεγαλύνοντα.

(GNO VI,386) She treats of the church as the one body of the Bridegroom, and by referring to each individual member, she indicates, in her account of his beauty, some one of his attributes and in this way, starting from the particular characteristics she has examined, sums up the beauty of the body as a whole.¹⁷

πᾶσαν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἐν σῶμα τοῦ νυμφίου ποιήσασα ἴδιόν τι νόημα δι' ἐκάστου τῶν μελῶν ἐν τῇ ὑπογραφῇ τοῦ κάλλους ἐνδείκνυται, δι' ὧν ὅλον ἐκ τῶν κατὰ μέρος θεωρουμένων τὸ τοῦ σώματος κάλλος συναπαρτίζεται.

¹¹ Cf. *John* 1:1–3.

¹² Cf. *John* 1:14.

¹³ *1 Tim* 3:16; cf. *John* 1:14; *1 John* 1:1f.

¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cant. cant.* 13 (GNO VI,381; translation R. A. Norris). Cf. *John* 1:18.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cant. cant.* 13 (GNO VI,381).

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cant. cant.* 13 (GNO VI,383).

¹⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cant. cant.* 13 (GNO VI,386).