CHAPTER THREE

THE VEIL

At the western end of the *hekal* was the great curtain, the veil which concealed the cherub throne. Neither 1 Kings nor Ezekiel mentions it even though Exodus and the Chronicler describe it in detail. It became the means of expressing many beliefs about the limits of human experience. The veil itself, simply as a piece of needlework, must have been something of a masterpiece, and it is not surprising that it was carried off as loot along with gold and bronze treasures whenever the temple was sacked. Inseparable from the veil were the vestments of the high priest, elaborately woven and embroidered in almost the same way as the veil. Veil and vestments were complementary imagery; the veil symbolized all that stood between human perception and the vision of God, and the vestments symbolized the clothing of the divine in that same material world which also concealed it. Thus the veil and the priestly vestments provided the first Christians with ready imagery to convey what they meant by the incarnation. The linen robes worn by the high priest in the sanctuary were also the dress of the angels, those who had left the life of this world and lived in the immediate presence of God. They became the white clothing of the newly baptized.

As with the garden of Eden, all these pictures must be allowed to function *as pictures*, mellowed perhaps and faded so that the detail is no longer clear. What the pictures conveyed was, and still is, more vivid than any number of words. It is only by following the imagery to and fro that the full extent of its influence can be seen and appreciated.

Between Heaven and Earth

Jesus these eyes have never seen
That radiant form of thine;
The veil of sense hangs dark between
Thy blessed face and mine.
R. Palmer

The *hekal* represented the earth and the *debir* the heavens; between them was the veil which separated the holy place from the most holy (Exod. 26.33). The veil represented the boundary between the visible world and the invisible, between time and eternity. Actions performed within the veil were not of this world but were part of the heavenly liturgy. Those who passed through the veil were the mediators, divine and human, who functioned in both worlds bringing the prayers and penitence of the people to God and the blessing and presence of God to his people. All this was expressed by means of intricate symbolism. As with everything else about the temple, it has to be reconstructed from the surviving fragments, which means that there are many gaps in our knowledge. In this Chapter I shall assemble such parts of the picture as remain, from which it will be seen that the veil seems to have been the earliest expression of the idea of incarnation, the presence of God on earth in a material form. This passed directly into Christian usage: 'Therefore, brethren, . . . we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh' (Heb. 10.19—20). At the moment of his death the flesh and the veil were both torn and the way was opened into the heavens, into the presence of God (Mark 15.38). 'We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens' (Heb. 4.14). The symbolism passed into early liturgy:

> We thank thee, O Lord our God, that thou hast given us boldness for the entrance of thy holy places, which thou hast renewed to us as a new and living way through the veil of the flesh of thy Christ. We therefore, being counted worthy to enter into the place of the tabernacle of thy glory, and to be within the veil, and to behold the Holy of Holies, cast ourselves down before thy goodness.
> (Liturgy of James)

The History of the Veil

Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy, there is none beside thee,
Perfect in power, and love, and purity.

R. Heber

There is no description of the temple veil in the account of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6–8, but it is mentioned in the corresponding passage in 2 Chron.: 'And he made the veil of blue and purple and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and worked cherubim on it' (2 Chron. 3.14). Nothing is said of its significance. The curtain of the desert tabernacle is similarly described: 'And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen; in skilled work [*hoseb* work] shall it be made, with cherubim' (Exod. 26.31; cf. Exod 36.35). Again, nothing is said of its meaning. There was some debate after the temple had been destroyed about whether there had been a curtain at all in the first temple. The Mishnah says that on the Day of Atonement the high priest had to walk between the two curtains until he reached the ark. But, says the commentary on this passage: 'To what are we referring here? If it be the first sanctuary, was there then a curtain? Again, if it is to the second, was there then an ark?' (b. *Yoma* 52b). From this it can be seen that there was a tradition of two curtains in the second temple, and they were said to have hung one cubit apart, so that a narrow walkway existed between them: 'The outer curtain was looped up on the south side and the inner one on the north side. He went along between them until he reached the north side; when he reached the north side he turned round to the south and went on with the curtain on his left hand until he reached the ark' (Mishnah, *Yoma* 5.1). There must have been several of these great temple curtains; such a piece of fabric would have been very valuable. 'The veil was one handbreadth thick and was woven on a loom having seventy-two rods, and over each rod were twenty-four threads. Its length was forty cubits and its breadth twenty cubits; it was made by eighty-two young girls and they used to make two in every year' (Mishnah, *Shekalim* 8.5). If the veil contacted any uncleanness, it had to be washed; this must have been quite an undertaking. Two hundred square metres of wool

and linen fabric would have been very heavy when wet. We are told that it required three hundred priests to immerse it.

> If the veil of the temple contracted uncleanness from a derived uncleanness, it may be immersed within the temple court and forthwith brought in again; but if from a primary uncleanness, it must be immersed outside and spread out on the Rampart since it must await sunset to be wholly clean. If it is new it must be spread out on the roof of the portico that the people may see how fine is the craftsmanship thereof. (Mishnah, *Shekalim* 8.4)

Both Antiochus and Titus took a temple veil among their spoils. In 169 BC Antiochus Epiphanes came against Jerusalem 'with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also . . . the curtain' (1 Macc. 1.21–2). This veil may have ended its days in the temple of Zeus; Antiochus rededicated the Jerusalem temple to Olympian Zeus (2 Macc. 6.2), and in the second century AD Pausanias described thus a curtain offered in the great temple of Zeus at Olympia: 'In Olympia there is a woollen curtain, adorned with Assyrian weaving and Phoenician purple, which was dedicated by Antiochus' (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, V. 12.2). There is no proof that this was the Jerusalem curtain, but the possibility is tempting. Similarly, in AD 70 Titus took the curtain of the temple among his spoils together with a great quantity of blue and purple wools. He ordered that the curtain be kept in his palace in Rome (Josephus, *War* VII.162), where a second-century Rabbi saw it. He also saw on it the bloodstains from the Day of Atonement sprinklings: 'Said R. Eleazar b. R. Yose, "I myself saw it in Rome and there were drops of blood on it. And he told me, 'These are the drops of blood from the Day of Atonement'"' (Tosefta, *Kippurim* 2.16). Of its ultimate fate nothing more is known.

The Symbolism of the Veil

O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.

R. Grant

More important for our purposes is what the veil was thought to represent. There is no direct reference to this in the Old Testament, although there are places where the idea seems to be presupposed. The Second Isaiah described the place of God as a tent and a curtain, but the Lord's tent was really the heavens, and there was a curtain before him which concealed him.

> It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
> and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
> who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
> and spreads them like a tent to dwell in. (Isa. 40.22)

The tent of the Lord, his tabernacle, was in reality high above the earth, with the heavens stretched out as its curtain. There is nothing here to link the idea specifically to the sanctuary, but other texts do suggest that this was imagery associated with the form of the sanctuary. Psalm 104 describes the Lord's tent and his palace established over the waters, his chariot of clouds and his host of heavenly messengers, creatures of flame and fire. These are the heavenly temple and were depicted in the furnishings of the sanctuary. The tabernacle must have been intended by: 'Thou . . . who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent' (Ps. 104.2). The equally dramatic poem in 2 Sam. 22 (which is the same as Ps. 18) described the Lord riding upon his cherub, enveloped in a canopy of clouds (2 Sam. 22.12). In these three texts are the roots of several later ideas associated with the curtain, but whether the texts represented the ideas in an earlier form, or whether they were the basis of a later speculation about the curtain, we cannot know. Later tradition certainly *did* associate the tabernacle curtain with the high place from which the Lord (or his prophet) could look down and see the earth; the curtain was decorated with patterns to represent the heavens, according to one source, and the idea of the enveloping clouds was probably depicted by the cherubim even on the curtains of the desert tabernacle.

In the first century AD Josephus knew that the veil represented the created world:

> Before these [doors] hung a veil of equal length, of Babylonian tapestry, with embroidery and fine linen, of scarlet also and purple, wrought with marvellous skill. Nor was this mixture of materials without its mystic meaning: it typified the universe. For the scarlet seemed emblematical of fire, the fine linen of the earth, the blue of the air and the purple of the sea; the comparison in two cases being suggested by their colour and in that of the fine linen and the purple by their origin as the one is produced by the earth and the other by the sea. On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens, the signs of the Zodiac excepted. (*War*, V. 212–13)

This is the description of the outer curtain; he says that the inner veil was the same. What is not known is the origin of this symbolism; was it a recent addition to temple lore, or was it ancient? His description of the veil of the desert tabernacle is similar: 'The tabernacle was covered with curtains woven of fine linen, in which the hues of purple and blue and crimson were blended . . . This curtain was of great beauty, being decked with every manner of flower that earth produces, and interwoven with all other designs that could lend to its adornment, save only the forms of living creatures' (*Antiquities*, III.124, 126). The tapestries woven of four materials denote the natural elements: 'Thus the fine linen appears to typify the earth, because from it springs up the flax, and the purple the sea, since it is incarnadined with the blood of fish; the air must be indicated by the blue and the crimson will be the symbol of fire' (*Antiquities*, III.183). The whole tabernacle represented the universe in its different aspects: 'In fact, every one of these objects is intended to recall and represent the universe' (*Antiquities*, III.180).

Philo also mentions this symbolism: 'The highest, and in the truest sense the holy, temple of God is, as we must believe, the whole universe, having for its sanctuary the most sacred part of all existence, even heaven, for its votive ornaments the stars, for its priests the angels' (*Special Laws*, I.66). Elsewhere he says that the weaving of the curtain represents the created world:

> What is spoken about is the workmanship of the materials woven together, which are four in number and are symbols of the four elements, earth, water, air and fire, of which sublunary things are made, while the celestial sphere [is made] of a special substance, of the very most excellent things which have been brought together . . . And so he thought it right that the divine temple of the Creator of all things should be woven of such and so many things as the world was made of, [being] the universal temple which [existed] before the holy temple. (*Questions on Exodus*, II.85)

(This glorious Babylonian tapestry appears in less flattering light in Revelation 17, where it is the garb of the great harlot. The second temple was held by many to be an impure place, not least because of its corrupt priesthood. The first Christians were savagely persecuted in Jerusalem and they took for themselves the ancient descriptions of Jerusalem as the great harlot to be punished by the Lord (e.g. Ezekiel 23, the tale of Oholibah the great harlot, or Isa. 57. 7ff., the new temple as the bed of the great harlot). Like all prophecies, this one in Rev.17 was re-used and applied to the city of Rome, but in origin it was almost certainly against Jerusalem. The woman was 'arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls' (Rev. 17.4); she was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. 17.6) and she was enthroned upon many waters which represented the nations of the earth (Rev. 17.15), just as they had done in the older descriptions of the Lord triumphing over his enemies, and just as they did in the almost contemporary vision of the man from the sea (4 Ezra 13.5) where the threatening deeps of the old creation story have become the nations threatening the people of God. All the details of Rev. 17 are elaborately interpreted, a sure sign that this is a traditional piece being re-used.)

Philo says a great deal about the role of the veil which separated earth from heaven in that it separated *hekal* from *debir*; 'For in the universe, heaven is a palace of the highest sanctity, and earth is the outer region, estimable indeed in itself, but when it comes into comparison with ether, as far inferior to it as darkness is to light and night to day and corruption to incorruption and mortal man to God' (*Life of Moses*, II.194). It separated the changing from the unchanging: 'It indicates the changeable parts of the world, which are sublunary, and undergo changes of direction, and the heavenly region which is without transient events and is unchanging' (*Questions on Exodus*, II.91).

The furnishings of the *hekal* such as the table and the *menorah* represented the heavenly world in the world of the senses: 'And they are placed outside the veil because the things in the inner recess are invisible and intelligible, whereas those which are external are visible and sense perceptible' (*Questions on Exodus*, II.95). The lamp was made of gold because this was a symbol of the purest substance, heaven (*Questions on Exodus*, II.73).

Clement of Alexandria drew upon the colour symbolism when explaining the mystic meaning of the tabernacle: 'And the covering and the veil were variegated with blue and purple and scarlet and linen. And so it was suggested that the nature of the elements contained the revelation of God. For purple is from water, linen from the earth; blue, being dark, is like the air, as scarlet is like fire' (*Stromata*, V.6). The curtain also appeared in the writings of the Jewish mystics. In the Hebrew Book of Enoch (3 Enoch) Metatron revealed to R. Ishmael the secrets of the great curtain spread before the Holy One. Since this writing was the account of a heavenly ascent, the curtain was described from the other side, so to speak; this was what the curtain looked like for those who saw it from the heavens. The picture is that of Isaiah, where the Lord sits and sees the inhabitants of the earth like grasshoppers. The Hebrew Book of Enoch is a late text, perhaps from the fifth century AD, but it serves to show the continuing influence of temple mythology. The veil divided this world from the beyond; Philo used it in the material sense, and showed how the veil was the boundary between the visible and the invisible creations; the writer of 3 Enoch used it in the temporal sense and showed how the veil represented all history simultaneously in the world beyond time. All the components of history could be seen on the veil just as all the elements of the created world could be seen. This view of history from beyond is important for understanding prophetic and apocalyptic texts (in reality, the same thing). Their view of the future was the view from eternity, a glimpse of the reality underlying time. John, for example, saw what was 'beyond' as well as 'after' his own time of persecution (Rev. 4.1). He was taken up and placed before the heavenly throne.

The High Priest

Thou within the veil hast entered,
Robed in flesh, our great high priest.

W. Chatterton Dix

The only person who passed through the veil was the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The texts which describe his vestments show that these were made in exactly the same way as the temple curtain and that they also represented the creation. Their

construction is described in Exod. 28: the high priest had a robe of blue with a trimming of blue, purple and scarlet pomegranates around the hem, interspersed with gold bells; over this he wore the ephod of blue, purple, scarlet and fine linen interwoven with gold, clasped at the shoulder with two engraved onyx stones. Over this again was the breastplate, set with twelve precious stones to represent the twelve tribes. On his head he wore a linen turban surrounded by a plate of gold on which was engraved 'Holy to the Lord'.

The symbolism is explained by both Josephus and Philo. Josephus says:

> The high Priest's tunic likewise signifies the earth, being of linen, and its blue the arch of heaven, while it recalls the lightnings by the pomegranates, the thunder by the sound of the bells. His upper garment too denotes universal nature, which it pleased God to make of four elements; being further interwoven with gold in token, I imagine, of the all-pervading sunlight. (*Antiquities*, III.184)

Philo says the vestments are very complicated:

> In this it would seem to be a likeness and copy of the universe. This is clearly shown by the design. In the first place it is a circular garment of dark blue colour throughout, a tunic with a full-length skirt, thus symbolising the air, because the air is both naturally black and in a sense a full-length robe stretching from the sublunar region above to the lowest recesses of the earth. Secondly, on this is set a piece of woven work in the shape of a breastplate which symbolises heaven. For on the shoulder points are two emerald stones, a kind of substance which is exceedingly valuable. There is one of these on each side and both are circular, representing the hemispheres, one of which is above and one under the earth. Then on the breast are twelve precious stones of different colours, arranged in four rows of three each, set in this form in the model of the zodiac. (*Special Laws*, I.84—7)
>
> Such is the form in which the sacred vesture was designed, a copy of the universe, a piece of work of marvellous beauty to the eye and the mind . . . For it expresses the wish first that the High Priests should have in evidence upon him an image of the All . . . The High Priest of the Jews makes prayers and gives thanks not only on behalf of the whole human race but also for the parts of nature, earth, water, air, fire. (*Special Laws*, I.96—7)

The Wisdom of Solomon says simply: 'For upon his long robe the whole world was depicted, and the glories of the fathers were engraved on the four rows of stones, and thy majesty on the diadem upon his head' (Wisd. 18.24). The priest offered incense on the incense altar outside the veil, and once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest took incense into the *debir*. The four spices of the incense, like the robe, symbolized the worship of the creation:

> Now these four, of which the incense is composed, are, I hold, a symbol of the four elements out of which the whole world was brought to its completion.
> . . . so that while in outward speech it is the compound formed by the perfumer's art which is burned as incense, in fact it is the whole world, wrought by divine wisdom, which is offered and consumed morning and evening in the sacrificial fire. (*Who is the Heir?* 197, 199)

The high priest dressed to represent the universe when he functioned in the *hekal*, the earth, but when he passed through the veil into the holy of holies, into heaven, he wore linen garments (Lev. 16.4). Leviticus does not say why he had to wear a different garment, but it almost certainly signified a different role. It is unlikely that the vestments of the *hekal* were highly symbolic and those of the *debir* not. In the *debir* he no longer represented the created world, but was deemed one of the heavenly entourage. The white linen garment was the dress of the angels, given to favoured human beings upon their ascent to heaven. Frequently in both the Old Testament and the later apocalypses, the 'men in white' were the angels, often the archangels. Thus Ezekiel saw a man clothed in linen (Ezek. 9.2), when judgement was brought upon Jerusalem. Daniel saw a man clothed in linen, who was clearly angelic as his face was shining and his limbs gleamed like bronze (Dan. 10.5). Enoch saw white men coming from heaven (1 Enoch 87.2); they were archangels bringing the judgement. Enoch later saw the seven white men executing judgement on the fallen angels (1 Enoch

90.21—2). Enoch himself was dressed in a glorious robe when Michael brought him before the throne of the Lord: 'And the Lord said to Michael, "Go and extract Enoch from his earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my glory." And so Michael did just as the Lord had said to him. He anointed me and he clothed me . . . And I looked at myself and I had become like one of his glorious ones' (2 Enoch 22.8, 10). Enoch the man had become Enoch the angel; he was not only robed but also anointed, the sign of a king or a high priest. John saw the elders in white before the throne (Rev. 4.4) and a multitude in white robes (Rev. 7.9). In the Ascension of Isaiah, the prophet was taken up through the seven heavens; throughout this text angelic status is described in terms of the robe. The companion angel told Isaiah: 'You will receive the robe which you will see . . . and then you will be equal to the angels who are in the seventh heaven' (Asc. Isa. 8.14—15). 'The holy Isaiah is permitted to come up here, for his robe is here' (Asc. Isa. 9.2). When he reached the seventh heaven, Isaiah saw the heavenly host; 'And there I saw Enoch and all who [were] with him, stripped of their robes of the flesh; and I saw them in their robes of above, and they were like the angels who stand there in great glory' (Asc. Isa. 9.8—9). Thus Isaiah and the ancient worthies had been transformed from men into angels; they had received their robes. Philo hints at this belief that the linen robe symbolizes the heavenly state when he says that the high priest wears a white robe in the sanctuary: '. . . when he enters the shrine to offer incense, because its fine linen is not, like wool, the product of *creatures subject to death*' (*Special Laws*, I.84). There is one curious incident in the Old Testament which may refer to this custom of robing the high priest for the sanctuary. When Zechariah had a vision of the high priest, he saw him standing before the Lord with Satan at his right hand to accuse him (Zech. 3.3). The high priest was then stripped of his filthy garments and robed in clean garments at the command of the Lord. After rerobing he was told that he had the 'right of access among those who are standing here' (Zech. 3.7). Since the whole vision was set in the heavenly court, this must refer to access to the angelic places, once he had received his robe and sworn to walk in the ways of the Lord.

Philo's Logos

Almighty Son, Incarnate Word,
Our Prophet, Priest, Redeemer, Lord.

E. Cooper

In order to understand the role of the high priest we have to find what was intended by these different vestments, but unfortunately there is no extant text which deals directly with the meaning of the high priesthood. All that remains are the many descriptions of the robes and the rituals. Philo, however, has left us his own characteristic interpretation of the high priest's role, and this is the nearest we can get to any contemporary understanding. Throughout his writings, Philo was transforming Jewish beliefs into something comprehensible to his educated Greek contemporaries in Alexandria. *But he was transforming, not inventing*. He himself remained a leading figure in the Jewish community, and this would not have happened had he been an arch-heretic. He must have been transforming contemporary Jewish belief. The question then is: *What* was he transforming for his contemporaries? He was using temple symbolism, but instead of talking about the heavenly and the earthly temple, he talked about the universe and the individual, each man in some way a temple of God. In order to recover the first-century understanding of high priesthood, we have to extract from his writings the temple symbolism with which he began.

Philo talks of a heavenly high priest who had an earthly counterpart, which is quite consistent with what is known elsewhere of the temple. His heavenly high priest was called the Logos, the Word, of God. What is surprising is that this heavenly high priest figure was described as a *second God* who was the intermediary between the Most High God and his world. Man was made in the image of this second God, 'For nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of the Most High One and Father of the Universe, but only in that of the *second God who is his Logos*' (*Questions on Genesis*, II.62). This second God was the high priest of the universe, 'For there are, as is evident, two temples of God: one of them this universe in which there is also as high priest his Firstborn, the Divine Logos, and the other the

rational soul, whose priest is the real man' (*On Dreams*, I.215). Here we have the idea of a heavenly high priest who was the Firstborn of God, a second God. Presumably this was part of Philo's own belief about the high priest, which means that the high priest in the temple must have depicted in some way the role of this second God. What he says about the cosmic significance of the Logos must have been the original significance of the high priest and whatever he represented.

Since the true high priest was a heavenly figure, he originally passed through the veil not *to* but *from* the presence of God. As he passed through the veil so he took form from it and thus became visible, robed in the four elements of the created order: 'Now the garments that the supreme Logos of him that IS puts on as raiment are the world, for he arrays himself in earth and air and water and fire and all that comes forth from these' (*On Flight*, 110). The high priest, he says, is the outward, visible image who: 'offers prayers and sacrifices handed down from our fathers to whom it has been committed to wear the aforesaid tunic which is a copy and replica of the whole heaven, the intention being that the universe may join with man in the holy rites and men with the universe' (*On Dreams*, I.215). The high priest was thus the second God in his earthly manifestation, who passed back into the presence of God as the mediator. Philo gives other passing allusions to the high priest's role; he says he was 'appointed judge and mediator' (*Questions on Exodus*, II.13). When he went through the veil he divested himself of the multicoloured garb of the material world and put on the glorious robe of the angels, of which he was the chief. 'To his Logos, his archangel, the Father of all has given the special prerogative to stand on the border and separate the creature from the creator. This same Logos both pleads with the immortal as suppliant for afflicted mortality and acts as ambassador of the ruler to the subject' (*Who is the Heir?*, 205). This Logos was a royal figure, 'he who is at once high priest and king' (*On Flight*, 118). He took human form, 'God's Man, the Logos of the Eternal' (*On the Confusion of Tongues*, 41). Finally, Philo describes the Logos as the agent of God on earth: 'This hallowed flock he leads in accordance with right and law, setting over it his True Logos and Firstborn Son who shall take upon him its government like some viceroy of a great king; for it is said in a certain place: Behold I AM, I send my angel before thy face to guard thee in

the way' (*On Agriculture*, 51). The Logos, the high priest, was the angel of the Lord who bore the name of the Lord on his forehead, just as did the chosen who survived the judgement (Ezek. 9.4; Rev. 7.3; 14.1) to enter the presence of God. Philo says that the high priest wore on his turban a golden band, not inscribed 'Holy to the Lord' as we read in Exod. 28.36, but simply with the four letters of the sacred name, 'four incisions showing the name which only those whose ears and tongues are purified may hear or speak in the holy place and no other person nor in any other place at all. That name has four letters' (*Life of Moses*, II.114). In other words, the high priest bore the name Yahweh. The Letter of Aristeas says this too: 'On his head he wore a tiara, as it is called, and upon this in the middle of his forehead an inimitable turban, the royal diadem full of glory with the name of God inscribed in sacred letters on a plate of gold' (Aristeas 98).

All these descriptions of the Logos high priest are reminiscent of the old royal titles; Philo's high priest seems to have inherited the ancient role of the anointed king, and the Logos can best be explained as the memory of the heavenly ideal on which the monarchy was based. The Logos archangel was the patron angel of Israel who walked in the garden of Eden and had his shrine in the heavenly temple. In Philo's writings, however, we discover another aspect; he was made visible when he passed through the veil into the temple. The veil was the means of revelation. This is not wholly unexpected; Amos had seen the Lord standing by the altar (Amos 9.1); Malachi prophesied that the angel of the covenant would appear in the temple (Mal. 3.1); Zechariah saw the angel of the Lord standing by the incense altar in the temple, i.e. in front of the veil (Luke 1.11). What Philo says in no way contradicts what other writings imply. The information he adds is that the high priest 'was' in some way the great archangelic mediator. The Dead Sea Scrolls often mention priests as angels; this is not explained, simply assumed. Thus in the blessing of the sons of Zadok, the priests, we find: 'May you be as an Angel of the Presence in the Abode of Holiness to the glory of the God of [Hosts] . . . May you attend upon the service in the Temple of the Kingdom and decree destiny in company with the Angels of the Presence' (1 QSb IV). The *Songs for the Sabbath Sacrifice* also describe angelic priests: 'to be for him the priests of [the inner Temple in his royal sanctuary], ministers of the Presence

in his glorious innermost Temple chamber' (4Q 400); 'the sovereign Princes of the [wonderful] priest[hood] . . . the seven priest[hoods] in the wonderful sanctuary for seven councils of holiness' (4Q 403).

The texts are all too fragmented for any certain conclusions to be drawn, but what remains is consistent with Philo's picture. No Qumran text describes his heavenly high priest, but if the priests 'were' the angels of the sanctuary, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the chief priest should have been the chief angel, exactly as Philo says, and this chief angel took a visible form when he passed through the temple veil and arrayed himself in the elements of the material world.

Some Gnostic Texts

The veil represented the division between the material and spiritual worlds, between the visible and the invisible, and in this respect it *concealed* the divine. But it also *revealed* the divine in that the veil was the robe of the heavenly high priest when he passed into the visible world. All these ideas were used in the early Christian centuries both by those whom history remembers as Christians and those whom it has labelled heretics. Of the heretics, the most important for our purposes were the Gnostics who developed a highly sophisticated form of Christianity which survived for many centuries and reappeared in the twelfth century in southern France with the Cathars. Nobody can be certain of the origin of the Gnostics, but the imagery used in many of their texts suggests that there was at the very least a Jewish grandmother in the family, with whom they had had a violent disagreement. Their use of Jewish themes went hand in hand with a determination to show that the Jewish God was evil. This accounts for some of the more peculiar twists in their writings. Gnosticism was a great threat to Christianity in its earliest years, and it was some time before the two systems really became distinct. Irenaeus, who wrote towards the end of the second century in southern France, left a systematic condemnation of their teachings and it is from his accounts that we gain a great deal of our information about them.

A library of gnostic books was found in December 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Of the texts found there, two clearly use the ancient temple themes. These gnostic texts are thought to date

from the third century AD, and they are obviously related to each other. The nature of this relationship need not concern us here; what is important is the way they both employ the old temple themes albeit in their own characteristic way. The Gnostics held that the creator God of the Old Testament was a second deity, and that there was a higher divine being. This is exactly what is implied in the writings of Philo, namely that there was a Most High God and then a second divinity, his Firstborn, his Word, the deity who was made visible in the world below the temple veil. Where the Gnostics differed from Philo is that they said the creator God was evil, and this belief of theirs explains some of the alterations they made to the traditions. As with Philo, we have in these gnostic texts an interpretation of an underlying tradition, or rather, a scheme which uses elements from the older pattern. In so far as we are dependent upon so little to reconstruct the 'original' scheme of temple belief, it is not easy to say what is a new construction using the old materials, and what is actually a development of earlier ideas. Here I shall simply pick out familiar motifs.

The first of these texts, *The Nature of the Archons* (CG. II.4), demonstrates the reality of the great angelic rulers of the universe by giving an esoteric interpretation of the first six chapters of Genesis. Norea, the daughter of Eve, encountered the Great Angel, a being clothed in white whose appearance was like fine gold (CG. II.4/93). This Great Angel was one of the four Light-Givers who stood in the presence of the Great Invisible Spirit. (We recognize here the four archangels.) He assured her that the Rulers would have no power over her, and that they would one day be bound. He then told her of the upper world: 'Within limitless realms dwells Incorruptibility. Sophia (Wisdom) . . . wanted to create something alone without her consort, and her product was a celestial thing' (CG. II.4/94). (We recognize here the creative power of Wisdom and the belief in a world beyond matter and time.) The angel then explained the creative process: 'A veil exists between the world above and the realms that are below; and a shadow came into being beneath the veil; and that shadow became matter; and that shadow was projected apart. And what she had created became a product in the Matter, like an aborted foetus.' (Here there is the divine being passing through the veil and taking material form). Philo had called the Logos the Shadow: 'God's shadow is his Logos, which he made use of like

an instrument and so made the world' (*Allegorical Interpretation*, III.96). This divine being looked around him and declared that he was the only God. He was androgynous and created for himself seven androgynous offspring. (Here we recognize the creator of Genesis who made male and female in his own image [Gen. 1.27]. There were also the seven archangels and the seven eyes of the Lord who were upon the earth as his agents. Finally, there was the hostility to Judaism which characterizes the gnostic writings; the God of the Old Testament is here depicted as arrogant, claiming to be unique. Whatever the interpretation, the underlying tradition is immediately obvious; the God of the Old Testament was as bad as any of the fallen angels who were condemned for their pride.) The divine being who took material form and became arrogant was named Sabaoth. He later repented of his arrogance and was installed by Wisdom as ruler of the seventh heaven which was 'below the veil between above and below' (CG. II.4/95): 'And he is called the God of the Forces, Sabaoth, since he is up above the Forces of Chaos, for Wisdom established him' (CG. II.4/96). (Here we recognize the ancient enthronement of the Lord over the waters of chaos. The enthronement of the arrogant Sabaoth is only possible because he repented; this is the gnostic element in the account, in order to bring their peculiar views about the God of the Old Testament back into line with the tradition of Sabaoth as the ruler.) Finally this Sabaoth 'made himself a huge four-faced chariot of cherubim and infinitely many angels to act as ministers, and also harps and lyres' (CG. II.4/96). The source of this is unmistakable; Sabaoth was the Lord of Hosts (*Yahweh Sabaoth* in Hebrew) and the whole episode must have been the gnostic version of the temple myth of the creation, with the added refinement that they wished to depict the creator God of the Old Testament as essentially evil. According to the tradition underlying this account, *it was the Lord himself who passed through the veil to take material form* and create the world. Perhaps this is why the high priest wore on his head the sacred name Yahweh; he represented the Lord. Had he inherited the role of the ancient king, as seems likely, this would be consistent with the idea that the king had been the visible manifestation of the Lord, the patron deity of Israel.

The second of these texts is an untitled work usually known as *On the Origin of the World* (CG. II.5). It also deals with primeval

times and says that Chaos was the original Shadow, the Darkness. After the immortals had been created Sophia (Wisdom) wished to create something from the light, that is from the upper world, the world above the shadow: 'Immediately her wish appeared as a heavenly likeness, which possessed an incomprehensible greatness, which is in the middle between the immortals and those who came into being after them, like what is above, which is *a veil which separates men and those belonging to the sphere above*' (CG. II.5/98). The upper world, called the aeon of truth, was a place of immeasurable light and therefore had no shadow, i.e. no matter, within it. The shadow then realized that it was not the greatest power (cf. Sabaoth recognizing a higher power), and Wisdom realized what horrors resulted from a creation which existed without her: 'Then she turned to it and [breathed] into its face in the abyss [which is] beneath all the heavens' (CG.II. 5/99). (This is the creation story of Genesis, but the Spirit on the face of the waters is named Wisdom as so often happens in the intertestamental texts.) She then gave the power of the upper world of light to the ruler of chaos: 'Now when Faith–Wisdom desired [to cause] the one who had no spirit to receive the pattern of a likeness and rule over the matter and all its powers, a ruler first appeared out of the waters, lion-like in appearance, androgynous and having great authority within himself, but not knowing whence he came into being' (CG. II.5/100). This creature organized matter and created the heaven for himself and the earth for his footstool. He then created seven androgynous beings (the seven eyes of the Lord, the seven archangels), and created for each of them a glorious heavenly place with a chariot throne and angelic servants. (This is the picture of the heavens implied in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, where there are the seven angelic Princes with their sanctuaries.) In this version of the story it is the Father of the seven sons who becomes arrogant and is condemned, but the tale then continues with the familiar repentance of Sabaoth, one of the seven sons, who is then endowed with great light by Faith –Wisdom and given power over Chaos. The earlier description of the father God and this one of his son Sabaoth seem to be variants of the same belief, namely that one essentially evil being was endowed by Faith–Wisdom with light which enabled him to rule Chaos/matter. Sabaoth is taken up to the seventh heaven by Faith–Wisdom and then makes for himself, 'a great throne on a

four-faced chariot called cherubim . . . And seven archangels stand before him' (CG. II.5/105). Sabaoth thus sits in the seventh heaven as the creator, the one who rules over Chaos; he is the second God. He had been a part of the world of matter/chaos, elevated to heaven by the power of Wisdom.

A third Nag Hammadi text, *A Valentinian Exposition*, is too fragmented to be read with any certainty, but it seems to introduce a concept known elsewhere in gnostic texts, that of the Limit, Horos, which divided the material world from the upper world: 'And Limit [is the separator of the All] . . . completely ineffable to the All, and he is the confirmation and [the] hypostasis of the all, the silent [veil], the [true] High Priest [the one who has] the authority to enter the holy of holies revealing the glory of the aeons' (CG XI.2/25–6).

Another gnostic writer who used temple themes was Theodotus, a Valentinian Gnostic who was teaching towards the end of the second century. Clement of Alexandria made a collection of quotations from his teaching, possibly as the basis for a book; these survive as the *Excerpts from Theodotus*. It is not always possible to tell which sections were from Theodotus and which were Clement's comments, but this need not concern us overmuch. What is important is the temple imagery used and what it reveals of the role of the veil in the temple cult:

> The priest on entering within the second veil removed the plate at the altar of incense,* and entered himself in silence with the Name engraved upon his heart, indicating the laying aside of the body which has become pure like the golden plate and bright through purification . . .
> Now he discards this body, the plate which had become light, within the second veil, that is, in the rational sphere the second complete veil of the universe, at the altar of incense, that is, with the angels who are the ministers of the prayers carried aloft. Now the souls, stripped by the power of him who has knowledge, as if it had become a body of the power, passes into the spiritual realm and becomes now truly rational and high priestly. (*Excerpt* 27)

Beneath the gnostic peculiarities we see the more ancient belief

* Nothing is known of this custom from other sources.

that passing through the veil was passing into heaven, and that this dangerous journey could only be made by the high priest.

A second extract uses *TOPOS*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *MAQOM*, one of the many circumlocutions for the Divine Name. It means 'the place'.

> A river goes from under the throne of [Topos] and flows into the void of the creation which is Gehenna, and it is never filled, though the fire flows from the beginning of the creation. And [Topos] itself is fiery. Therefore, he says, it has a veil in order that things may not be destroyed by the sight of it. And only the archangel enters it, and to typify this, the high priest every year enters the holy of holies. From thence Jesus was called and sat down with Topos. (*Excerpt* 38)

Here we see the angelic role of the high priest who enters on the Day of Atonement into the presence of the fiery throne.

Clement also records that these Gnostics knew of a Limit (*Horos*) which separated the upper world from the lower. It is clear, even from their highly stylized use of the idea, that this too originated with the temple veil. The soul of the Gnostic goes to meet its heavenly counterpart, its angel bridegroom: 'then they enter the bridal chamber within Horos and attain to the vision of the Father' (*Excerpt* 64). When Jesus came into the world he 'went forth outside Horos' (*Excerpt* 35), and the cross became 'a symbol of Horos in the Pleroma, for it divides the faithful from the unfaithful just as the latter separates the world from the Pleroma' (*Excerpt* 42).

There were angels baptized for their gnostic believers, 'in order that we too . . . may not be held back and prevented by Horos and the Cross from entering into the Pleroma' (*Excerpt* 22). When Jesus said 'I am the door' (John 10.7) he meant: 'up to the Horos where I am, you will come, you who belong to the superior seed' (*Excerpt* 26).

These gnostic writings, for all their apparent confusion, allow the older beliefs to show through. The setting for all the drama of creation and redemption is the temple with its angels and its two worlds, the upper world of the light, the Pleroma, and the lower material world. The second God is the one who has a place in both worlds; *The Nature of the Archons* says he came through the veil and became matter, *The Origin of the World* seems to emphasize rather his origin in matter and elevation by Wisdom.

Either way, this creator God was a divine being who could have a material form and who passed through the veil separating the world of light and incorruptibility from the world of darkness and matter. He was enthroned in the seventh heaven, on the cherub throne of the temple sanctuary. The *Excerpts* on the other hand, emphasize the high-priestly role rather than that of the creator. The roots of all three are beyond doubt in the temple.

The Early Christian Writings

> Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
> Hail the incarnate Deity!
>
> C. Wesley

The veil of the temple was used by Christians from the beginning to describe the incarnation. Further, they used not only the veil but also the robe of the high priest, which symbolized the second divine being robed in the material world of the veil. The first Christians knew the intimate connection between the two. The earliest reference to the veil is in Hebrews where the curtain is the flesh of Jesus, and Jesus the High Priest takes his own blood through the veil into the sanctuary (Heb. 10.19—21). The Gospels record that the veil was torn in two at the moment of Jesus' death, a graphic illustration of the identity of flesh and veil (Matt. 27.51; Mark 15.38; Luke 23.45).

Melito of Sardis, who wrote about AD 170—80, composed a homily on the Pascha. Pascha has no exact English equivalent; it can mean either the Passover or the Christian Holy Week and Easter which replaced it but kept many of its themes. Speaking of the moment when the temple veil was torn at the crucifixion, Melito said: 'For when the people did not tremble, the earth quaked; when the people were not terrified, the heavens were terrified; when the people did not tear their clothes, the angel tore his; when the people did not lament, the Lord thundered out of heaven and the Highest gave voice' (*On the Pascha*, 98). The veil of the temple is the robe of the angel. Melito says *the* angel as though his hearers would have known which angel was meant. It must have been the angel who was present in the temple. In a fragment of his work which has survived only in a Georgian translation, he also described the crucifixion: 'Stars withheld their light, the sun was darkened, and angels horrified quit the temple, and seraphim cried out with their noise, [the veil] was torn, and shadows filled all the earth' (*New Fragment* II, 101—6). This is similar to the account in Josephus of the angels leaving when the temple was about to fall to the Romans (see Chapter 1), and a different version of the tradition is in a Christian addition to the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: 'And the veil of the temple shall be rent, and the Spirit of God shall pass on to the Gentiles as fire poured forth' (Test. Benjamin 9.4).

Clement of Alexandria, who wrote at the end of the second century, knew that the robe and the veil depicted the incarnation. This, he said, was particularly for the benefit of those people who could not cope with the world beyond that of the five senses: 'But the knowledge of God is a thing inaccessible to the ears and like organs of this kind of people. Hence the Son is said to be the Father's face, being the revealer of the Father's character in the five senses by clothing himself with flesh. . . Now the high priest's robe is the symbol of the world of sense.' Only those who bore the sacred name were able to pass through the veil and enter the sanctuary. Every item of the high priest's vestment represented some aspect of Jesus' ministry; the three hundred and sixty bells on the robe were the days of the acceptable year of the Lord, the golden mitre was the sign of princely rule, the breastplate by which oracles were given signified the Word as prophet and judge, and so forth. 'And they say that the robe prophesied the ministry in the flesh, by which he was seen in closer relation to the world. So the high priest, putting off his consecrated robe . . . washes himself and puts on the other tunic, a holy of holies one, so to speak, which is to accompany him into the adytum.' This linen robe is 'the bright array of glory' and the one who wears it 'is now replenished with insatiable contemplation face to face'. 'But in one way, as I think, the Lord puts off and puts on by descending into the region of sense; and in another, he who through Him has believed puts off and puts on, as the apostle intimated, the consecrated stole' (all these are from *Stromata*, V.6). Justin knew a different tradition; he said that there were twelve bells which represented 'the twelve Apostles who were dependent on the Power of Christ the everlasting Priest' (*Trypho*, 42). When Irenaeus described the incarnation in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, he used language which must have come from this setting:

> So he united man with God and brought about a communion of God and man, we being unable in any other wise to have a part in incorruptibility, had it not been for his coming to us. For incorruptibility, while invisible and imperceptible, would not help us; so he became visible, that we might be taken into full communication with incorruptibility. (*Proof*, 31)

He also spoke of the shadow: 'and shadow means His body, for as a shadow is made by a body, so too Christ's body is made by His Spirit' (*Proof*, 71). He elaborated the shadow image in several ways, but the fact that the shadow of the Spirit becomes the visible body shows that he was using the traditional description of the second God coming through the veil.

St Ephrem the Syrian, who wrote in the middle of the fourth century, used the veil and the robe to describe the incarnation:

> The firstborn was clothed in the body;
> it was the veil of his glory.
> The immortal Bridegroom
> will shine forth in this robe.
> The guests in their robe
> will be like that robe of his;
> [their] bodies, their garments will shine. (*Nisibene Hymns* 43. tr. Murray in *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 76)

In one of his *Hymns on the Nativity* he wrote: 'Blessed is He Who made our Body a tabernacle for His unseen Nature . . . Blessed be He Who dwelt in the womb and wrought therein a perfect Temple, that He might dwell in it, a Throne that he might be in it, a garment that He might be arrayed in it' (*Hymn* 11). In his *Hymns on Paradise* he spoke of the veil differently (see Chapter 2). He compared the sin of Adam and the sin of King Uzziah, who took the incense and went into the temple, despite the protests of the priests (2 Chron. 26.16—21) and was punished with leprosy. Ephrem compared the veil which should not have been penetrated by Uzziah with the tree whose fruit should not have been tasted by Adam. Both veil and tree separated what was above from what was below (*Hymn* 3.14). It is easy to see why he said this: the fruit of the tree gave man knowledge so that he became like one of the *elohim* (Gen. 3.22), and the vision beyond the veil also transformed the beholder, but in each case there was death for anyone who did this unlawfully. Ephrem

must have known that the holy of holies was the place of transforming vision, which rendered the human divine, or he could not have made the comparison.

The *Book of James* was first mentioned by Origen in the early third century and must record very early material about the infancy of Jesus. One of its stories tells how Mary had been a temple weaver; the mother of the holy child was weaving a new temple veil as she carried him in her womb.

> Now there was a council of the priests and they said: Let us make a veil for the temple of the Lord . . . And they brought [seven virgins] into the temple of the Lord and the priest said: Cast me lots, which of you shall weave the gold and the undefiled [the white] and the fine linen and the silk and the hyacinthine and the scarlet and the true purple. And the lot of the scarlet and the true purple fell unto Mary and she took them and went unto her house. (Book of James X)

As she was working, Gabriel came and told her she was to have the holy child. She continued her work and then brought the purple and scarlet wool back to priests in the temple.

The veil of the temple is thus a means of revelation as well as of concealment. The divine becomes visible when it is veiled in the material world. In the earliest biblical texts this is implicit: 'And let them make a sanctuary *that I may be seen among them*' (Exod. 25.8, translated from the Greek version). It was this Greek version which inspired Origen's understanding of the tabernacle: 'God wishes, therefore, that we make a sanctuary for him. For he promises that if we make a sanctuary for him, *he can be seen by us*' (*Homily on Exodus*, IX).

Beyond the Veil

> . . . till before my Father's throne,
> I shall know as I am known.
> J. E. Leeson

Beyond the veil was the world outside time and thus the sanctuary was the place for visions from eternity and of eternity. What was eternal was concealed; the Hebrew words for 'eternity' and 'conceal' come from the same root *'lm*. Sometimes these were visions of judgement, sometimes they were panoramic

views of history. Sanctuary visions in later texts often describe how the seer looked down from a high place and saw the whole creation, both in time and space, simultaneously before him.

The clearest example of this tradition is in the Hebrew Book of Enoch, a late text, but one which undoubtedly incorporates many old ideas. R. Ishmael had been taken up through the heavens by the great angel Metatron, who had formerly been the seer Enoch. He recorded his experience, one of which was seeing the heavenly veil: 'R. Ishmael said: Metatron said to me: Come and I will show you the curtain of the Omnipresent One which is spread before the Holy One, blessed be He, and on which are printed all the generations of the world and all their deeds, whether done or to be done, till the last generation' (3 Enoch 45.1). There follows a long description of Israel's history from earliest times until the days of the Messiah yet to come. 'All the rest of the leaders of every generation and every deed of every generation both of Israel and of the gentiles, whether done or to be done in the time to come, to all generations, till the end of time, were all printed on the curtain of the Omnipresent One' (3 Enoch 45.6). The veil filtered out all the limitations of time and space and gave a view of the creation from the divine throne. Those who passed beyond the veil passed beyond the limitations imposed by what it represented. Having described Jesus as the true High Priest who veiled himself in flesh and then passed back through the heavens, the writer to the Hebrews could conclude that Jesus was a part of the world beyond the veil: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb. 13.8). Many of the prophetic visions in the Old Testament may have had such a setting; the prophets claimed a special insight into the ways of God: 'Surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets?' (Amos 3.7).

The earliest certain reference to a panoramic view of history from the height of the sanctuary is in 1 Enoch. Three of the archangels grasped Enoch by the hand, 'and took me from the generations of the earth, lifted me up into a high place, and showed me a high tower above the earth and all the hills were small. One of them said to me, "Stay here until you see everything that will happen"' (1 Enoch 87.3—4). *The tower* was a common description of the sanctuary. The oldest reference to the tower as a place of vision is in Habakkuk:

I will take my stand to watch,
and station myself on the tower,
and look forth to see what he will say to me,
  and what I will answer concerning my complaint.
And the Lord answered me
'Write the vision;
  make it plain upon tablets,
  so that he may run who reads it.
For still the vision awaits its time;
  it hastens to the end – it will not lie.
If it seem slow, wait for it;
  it will surely come, it will not delay.' (Hab. 2.1—3)

For the Psalmist the tower was the sanctuary, even though there is no question of a vision in this text:

Lead thou me to the rock that is higher than I;
for thou art my refuge,
  a strong tower against the enemy.
Let me dwell in thy tent forever!
  Oh to be safe under the shelter of thy wings! (Ps. 61.2—3)

In 1 Enoch, the returning exiles built a high tower and offered bread on the table before the tower (1 Enoch 89.73). This bread must have been the shewbread which was set out in the *hekal* before the sanctuary. In the Assumption of Moses we read: 'the God of heaven will make the court of his tabernacle and the tower of his sanctuary' (Ass. Mos. 2.4). Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard (Isa. 5.1—7) said that the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts was the house of Israel; an interpretation attributed to R. Yosi in the early second century AD adds, 'And he built a tower in the midst of it . . . this is the sanctuary' (Tosefta, *Sukkah*, 3.15). In Hermas the Church is described as a great tower, but the imagery has obviously been taken over from the earlier temple. The tower is built of people, the living stones of 1 Peter 2.5, built upon water (*Parable* 3.ii.4) and also built over a great rock (*Parable* 9.iii.1). A glorious man, whom we have been told was the Son of God, is the Lord of the tower (*Parable* 9.vii.1), and also the rock on which it is built (*Parable* 9.xii.1). None could enter the tower, also called the kingdom of God, unless he had received the name of the Son of God (*Parable* 9.xii.8). This tower is the sanctuary of the temple, with the great

rock beneath it, the primeval waters around it, and the name of the Lord upon all who could enter.

It was from this tower that Enoch had his vision; he was caught up by archangels and saw the whole history of Israel as an animal fable, from the time of the garden of Eden until the time of the Last Judgement. Jesus' visions during his temptations are very similar in form; 'And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth in a moment of time . . . And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple' (Luke 4.5, 9). There is a similar panoramic vision in the Apocalypse of Abraham. At the time of his covenant sacrifice (Gen. 15) Abraham was taken by the angel Iaoel up to the divine throne where he saw the heavenly beings and heard their song. The Eternal Mighty One spoke to him:

> Look now beneath your feet at the firmament and understand the creation that was depicted of old on this expanse, and the creatures which are in it and the age prepared after it. And I looked beneath the firmament at my feet and I saw the likeness of heaven and the things that were therein. And [I saw] there the earth and its fruit and its moving things, and its things that had souls . . . And I saw there the sea and its islands and its cattle and its fish and Leviathan and his realm and his bed and his lairs. (Apoc. Abraham 21.1—5)

Abraham too saw all of Israel's history until the time of the Messiah.

The visions in the Apocalypse of Baruch were given in the sanctuary. When Baruch was questioned about the disaster which had befallen Jerusalem he said: 'Far be it from me to forsake you or to withdraw from you, but I will only go unto the Holy of Holies to inquire of the Mighty One concerning you and concerning Zion, if in some respect I should receive more illumination' (2 Bar. 34). Later he described the final state of the blessed:

> For they shall behold the world which is now invisible to them, And they shall behold the time which is now hidden from them: And time shall no longer age them. For in the heights of that world shall they dwell, And they shall be made like unto the angels, And be made equal to the stars . . .
> For there shall be spread before them the extents of Paradise, and there shall be shown to them the beauty of the majesty of the living creatures which are beneath the throne. (2 Bar. 51.8—10)

Moses had been shown all secrets when he was in the presence of God:

> For he showed him many admonitions together with the principles of the Law and the consummation of the times . . . and likewise the pattern of Zion and its measures, in the pattern of which the sanctuary of the present time was to be made. But then he also showed to him the measures of the fire, also the depths of the abyss, and the weight of the winds and the number of the drops of rain . . . And the height of the air and the greatness of Paradise and the consummation of the ages and the beginning of the day of judgement. (2 Bar. 59.4, 5, 8)

The Babylonian Talmud shows that the angels were believed to bring revelations through the curtain, often of a less momentous nature: Gabriel brought advice about the poll tax (b. *Yoma* 77a), and Satan revealed a secret to Abraham 'Thus have I heard from behind the curtain' (b. *Sanhedrin* 89b). The story was told of a man scolded by his wife who went out and spent the night in a cemetery. He heard two spirits talking to each other:

> Said one to her companion: My dear, come and let us wander about the world and let us hear from behind the curtain what suffering is coming upon the world. Said her companion to her: I am not able, because I am buried in matting of reeds. But do you go and whatever you hear, tell me. So the other went and wandered about and returned. Said her companion to her: My dear, what have you heard from behind the curtain? She replied: I heard that whoever sows after the first rainfall will have his crops smitten by hail. (b. *Berakoth* 18b)

The man listening in the cemetery was able to profit from this information! Elsewhere the curtain became simply the name for the first of the seven heavens; *Wilon*, the name of the first heaven, was a name for the curtain derived from the Latin *velum* (b. *Hagigah* 12b).

The veil was the means both of concealing and revealing the divine. It represented the material world and thus it concealed, but it clothed the divine and thus made it visible. 'Coming forth' from the presence of God, one who both reveals and is revealed, is one of the great themes of the Fourth Gospel (John 3.13; 6.38; 8.23). The Ascension of Isaiah expressed the idea more vividly if more crudely: 'The Lord will indeed descend into the world in the last days [he] who is to be called Christ after he has descended and become like you in form and they will think that he is flesh and man' (Asc. Isa. 9.13). The Epistle to the Hebrews spoke of one who was both sent out, 'the apostle', and passed back through the veil, 'the high priest' (Heb. 3.1). All these expressed the basic idea of passing from the invisible to the visible, from the *debir* and what it represented into the *hekal* and this world. The *debir* was the timeless place, the place of myths, the principles upon which the creation was built and by which it was to be understood. By a new actualization of these myths, a new beginning was made and a new creative process was begun. It is this aspect of the veil which underlies Irenaeus' mysterious 'recapitulation', the explanation of the work of Christ which develops the ideas of Eph. 1.9—10: 'For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' God restored the divine plan for mankind, said Irenaeus, which had been marred by the fall of Adam. His entire work from the beginning was restored in his Son, who lived as Adam but did not fall as Adam had done. By becoming again the first man, the whole human race was renewed and restored. This is the mythological view of history; all which we experience only in time exists outside time and eternity. Those in eternity grasp all history in a moment ('all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time', Luke 4.5). 'When he became incarnate and was made man, he recapitulated in himself the long history of man, summing up and giving us salvation in order that we might receive again in Christ Jesus what we had lost in Adam, that is, the image and likeness of God' (*Against Heresies*, III.18.1). By this gathering up, this recapitulation, Christ renewed everything, thus linking recreation and revelation, Eden and the One who walked in Eden.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THRONE

Beyond the veil there was the holy of holies, the most sacred part of the temple. In Solomon's time it had housed the cherub throne; in the descriptions of the desert tabernacle this became the mercy seat, the place of the presence of the Lord, which was at the very heart of the cult. By New Testament times the holy place had been stripped by enemy action and it was empty. The rituals were practised 'as though' the throne was there. St Paul built upon this when he spoke of Jesus as the new 'mercy seat' (Rom. 3.25). The word translated 'expiation' in the RSV is the same as that translated 'mercy seat' in Lev. 16.14. The poignancy of this is not apparent if the temple setting is lost. St Paul was saying that the heart of the cult had been restored.

The throne of God in the holy of holies, which represented the highest heaven, passed into all Christian imagery of the last judgement. The angels around the throne were the basis of the earliest expressions of the Trinity, and, most crucial of all, the man figure on the throne, originally a memory of the ancient kings, was thought to have prefigured the incarnation, the presence of the Lord with his people in human form. It is the throne and its associations which proved the most fertile source of inspiration for the expression of early Christian thought.

The Presence of the Lord

Let all mortal flesh keep silence
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.
Liturgy of St James, tr. G. Moultrie