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virginité (παρθενία) that is the wings of the soul: here the christian 'virtue' of virginité (or continence) has taken the place of the platonic Eros. By these wings the soul is lifted up from the corruption of the body (τὴν φθορὰν τῶν σωμάτων 8, 1) to the supra-mundane regions of this life, to the meadows of incorruptibility (8, 2). There are Justice itself, and Love itself, and Truth and Prudence. This is regained Paradise, for there we find the trees of Continence, of Love and Understanding; those who pluck their fruits will not waste away and die, but will grow into immortality and divinity (εἰς ἀθανασία καὶ θεϊότητα 8, 3). In 1, 1 Methodius, using the same metaphoric language borrowed from Plato's Phaedrus, says that "we should imagine virginité as walking on earth with her head touching the heavens". Those who practise it "guide aloft the chariot of their soul... until, leaping easily over the world with the lightning speed of thought, they stand upon the very vault of heaven and gaze directly upon Incorruptibility itself... » Musurillo thinks that "Methodius is referring to the practice of ascetism in this life with the possible connotation of mystical experience"⁴¹. This seems to imply some sort of actual partaking in incorruptibility by the practice of virginité. On the other hand, Methodius leaves no doubt that, as long as they dwell in the body, the virgins have only images (or faint copies, 8, 3) of things divine, which they are longing to enter, "picturing them in their imagination from afar" (8, 2)⁴². It is only after their souls have left the world, that the virgins enter the Kingdom of heaven, the meadows of incorruptibility. Methodius here combines (neo-)platonic worldview and christian eschatology. That the latter is not abandoned is also clear from the fact that Methodius reaffirms the traditional link between Continence and the resurrection of the flesh (esp. in Log. 9): the ἀγγελία also makes the flesh buoyant (ἀνωφερῆ) and raises it up (8, 4), and immortalizes our bodies (ἡ ἀθανατοποιὸς τῶν σωμάτων ἡμῶν ἀγγελία 10, 6). Methodius' eschatology remains predominantly future-directed⁴³.

As we have just seen, the meadows of incorruptibility are regained Paradise (8, 3). On the day of the resurrection Paradise is no longer bereft of men (Thecla's hymn 22). Paradise is the realm where man lived, and will live, incorruptible (4, 2); he was cast far out, as being no longer capable of being governed by incorruptibility (10, 3); after the fall, the waters of corruption poured forth in a flood-tide (4, 2); none of the other three legislations was able to bring man back to incorruptibility, but only the law of the Gospel, i.e. that most excellent auxiliary that is ἀγγελία (10, 3; 4, 2). — It is worth noting that Methodius sees no relation whatsoever between the exile from Paradise as the state of incorruptibility and the beginning of marriage as necessitated by death. This seems to confirm our view that incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) in the Symposium means something more than the absence of physical death⁴⁴.

To conclude, the main interest of the Symposium for our purpose lies in the close relation which Methodius establishes between chastity (and virginité) on the one hand and incorruptibility and resurrection on the other. But both incorruptibility (resurrection) and the angelic life are predominantly spoken of as future realities; apart from the ambiguous passages on the ascent of the soul, there are no traces of the realized eschatology which is so characteristic of the form of Encratism attacked by Clement of Alexandria. Furthermore, the relation between virginité (chastity) and incorruptibility is not contrasted with the opposite relation between marriage and death. Concerning Methodius' attitude

41. o.c. p. 188, n. 4.

42. Cf. MUSURILLO, o.c. p. 221, n. 15: "This phrase perhaps tends to cast doubt on the view that the ascent of the soul, as described by Methodius, was a truly mystical experience".

43. This is overlooked by P. NAGEL, o.c. p. 60, when he writes: "Wenn Jungfräulichkeit und Fasten bereits den

Zustand des Menschen im Paradiese repräsentieren, so ist eine endzeitliche Paradieserwartung, besonders anschaulich bei Methodios, eigentlich überflüssig". Paradise is for Methodius a future reality (4, 2; Thecla's Hymn 22).

44. It also explains why he uses ἀφθαρσία more frequently than ἀθανασία; see n. 36.

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