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Auteur : Foucault, Michel

Présentation de la fiche

Coteb022_f0043

SourceBoite_022-1-chem | Noces spirituelles [rayé : Chair (Antiquité) Virginité]

LangueFrançais

TypePhotocopie

RelationNumérisation d'un manuscrit original consultable à la BnF, département des Manuscrits, cote NAF 28730

Références éditoriales

Éditeuréquipe FFL (projet ANR *Fiches de lecture de Michel Foucault*) ; projet EMAN (Thalim, CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne nouvelle).

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be reconciled with the positive statements on marriage and time in Hom. Opif. ? We might, of course, allow for a development in Gregory's ideas in this matter, and we might take into account that in a treatise on virginity marriage tends to be put in an unfavourable light. But there is something more to be said. As we have already noticed, marriage and time are for Gregory ambiguous realities, qualified both by creation and sin. In a certain sense this also applies to Death⁶⁹. Moreover, the author seems to play deliberately on the ambiguity of the word 'death': he applies to virginity a terminology which Paul used to characterize the situation of every christian who in baptism has been transferred from death to life⁷⁰. It may be reminded that Clement, in his refutation of Encratism, took advantage of this ambiguity in order to save the 'orthodoxy' of EvEg⁷¹. But it can hardly be denied that Gregory, like the author of EvEg, thought of virginity as a victory over physical death: he opposes it to marriage which he considers, again in agreement with EvEg, as the instrument of physical death. But not only he who abstains from marriage (= procreation) does not any longer give 'fuel' to death; for him also time seems to come to an end. At first sight it may seem as if in Gregory's view marriage delays the Parousia⁷², and as if, here again, he is in agreement with EvEg. But for Gregory there can be no question of hastening the moment of the Parousia and stopping the course of time. For this presupposes a *general* prohibition of marriage ("a collective suicide"), that is certainly well in line with Encratism, but not with Gregory's theology: even in De Virg. where he does not refrain from making the most of the misery of marriage, he has a chapter (8) against those who reject marriage altogether. As for Gregory virginity is chosen freely, it cannot be its purpose to bring about the end of time and history. What he means is that for whoever abstains from procreation the temporal distance (διάστημα) between himself and the end of time is taken away even because he anticipates this end and the life thereafter. Insofar as time means being separated from the goods one is yearning for, it does not exist any longer for those who have already received them (ἤδη δέδεκται). On the other hand, even for those who lead an angelic life on earth, the Parousia remains something to be expected (ἀναμένει λοιπόν; cf. also 9,2; 18, 3 and 23, 7). Though the idea of realized eschatology by means of virginity is strongly emphasized, the eschatological tension has not disappeared. In fact, the view of marriage and time as developed in De Virg. is not much different from the one presented in Hom. Opif. 22, at the end of which the author concludes that the only thing man can do to prepare for the Parousia is to anticipate the future grace by his good behaviour.

To sum up, marriage and time are ambiguous realities; though affected by sin, they also serve a positive purpose; as after the fall creation has to be brought to its completion by the alternative way of marriage (and time), the procreation of mankind cannot be given up collectively—as was advocated by the Encratites. The moment of the Parousia (the end of time) cannot be hastened by universally practised virginity, but for the *individual* virgin time becomes virtually non-existent because of his victory over death, and his anticipation of the life of the world to come. If the Encratism of EvEg can be characterized as extreme eschatologism and, therefore, implies a complete rejection of time, we may see Gregory's theology of time as a profound answer to the problem raised in EvEg and, indeed, underlying much of old christian ascetism.

Of all the theologians we have been studying, Gregory certainly gives the most tho-

69. See J. DANIELOU, *Le IV^e siècle, Grégoire de Nysse et son milieu*, Paris (Inst. Cath., ad modum manuscripti), p. 98-100, and DE BOER, *o.c.* p. 219-220. Marriage, death and *πάθη* are the coats of skin with which God clothed man after the fall (*Gen.* 3, 21), as a sign of divine compassion. Death is a good thing because with it the possibility is given, that the body, affected by sin, is restored

to its original integrity by the resurrection. See e.g. *Or. Cat.* 8, PG 45, 33.

70. The same method was applied by Basil of Ancyra, *De Virg.* 52 (PG 30, 773).

71. Above, p. 220.

72. So AUBINEAU, *o.c.* p. 441, n. 5: "Le mariage... retarderait l'heure de la Parousie".



