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Bracht, K 1999 – *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung: Zur Anthropologie des Methodius von Olympus* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 2.)

Tübingen: JCB Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Pages: 438. Price: Unknown

Reviewer: Prof H F Stander

The Church Father Methodius of Olympus was bishop of Lycia in the last half of the third century. He probably died as martyr in 311/12. He lived during the period of peace which lasted about forty years and which preceded the last great persecution. Apart from Eusebius, Methodius is the only church writer of the Eastern Church whose writings have been preserved for us and who stems from this period of time. His writings therefore give us valuable insight into the exegetical practices, theology and piety of the pre-Nicene Christians in Asia Minor.

In almost all his writings Methodius addresses issues concerning the place of man and woman before God. A very important aspect that we frequently encounter in his works, is the question of human perfection. However, Methodius never gives us a systematic exposition of his theology. But in this book Bracht attempts to formulate Methodius' anthropology that underlies all his writings. Bracht presents Methodius as an independent theologian who has to be understood against the philosophical and theological background of his times. In this respect Bracht's work must be distinguished from previous studies on Methodius. In the past scholars usually focused on the relationship between the theology of Origen and Methodius, or they compared the dialogues of Methodius with those of Plato. In the latter case, Plato becomes the yardstick by which Methodius is being measured.

Unfortunately only one work (*The Banquet*) of Methodius has been preserved for us in Greek. Only fragments from five other writings have survived. Fortunately we have a very reliable Slavonic translation of the entire *Corpus Methodianum*. This Slavonic translation forms the basis of Bracht's study.

In Part I of Bracht's work, she explains how Methodius uses the term τέλειος ("perfect"). Part II is the crux of the study. In this section she deals with the anthropology of Methodius of Olympus in the light of his ideas of perfection. According to Bracht, Methodius distinguishes between an absolute and an indirect perfection. Absolute perfection can be ascribed to God only, because God is perfect because of Himself (τέλειος δι' ἑαυτόν). Man, however, is perfect only in an indirect sense, since his perfection is derived from God's perfection (τέλειος διὰ θεόν).

Bracht argues that Methodius' anthropology is based on two ideas. Firstly, Methodius regards mankind as being "between" (μεταξύ). Man is neither perishable, nor imperishable; he is neither good, nor bad. When one looks at mankind from a perspective of sin, man is sinful. On the other hand, because of God's perfection, man is also perfect, though only in an indirect sense. Secondly, Methodius argues that man has the freedom to choose between good and bad (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον). This results in man's good or bad actions. Both these aspects are essential for a proper understanding of Methodius anthropology.

Methodius distinguishes four phases in the history of humanity, which are also discernible in every person: (i) man's original position before God; in this state man is an image of God, and therefore also immortal. (ii) the loss of man's perfection because of the fall of man. (iii) the recapturing of man's

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perfection that is introduced by Jesus, that is by baptism. In baptism Christ is born in man, that is the baptismal candidate is filled with the Logos. (iv) the consummation of human perfection in the *Eschaton*.

Methodius also addresses the question concerning the origin of evil (πόθεν τὰ κακά;). He ascribes it to man's freedom to choose (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον). Methodius therefore believes that man alone is responsible for the evil.

Bracht shows in her study to what extent Methodius has modified Stoic theories, and how he also rejected the Platonic view of man, which was very much anthropocentric. Bracht describes Methodius's anthropology as theocentric, since man is always depicted as being in relationship with God. Man can attain perfection only through God (διὰ θεόν).

After discussing the theological-historical aspects of Methodius's anthropology in Part II of her book, Bracht proceeds to discuss the church-historical aspects in Part III. She reminds the reader that Methodius's anthropology originated in a concrete historical situation. In a sense this section deals with the "Sitz im Leben" of Methodius's anthropology.

There are several appendices to the study that are not really related to the main theme. Yet, these annexures give us valuable information that is not readily found in other literature. In one of these appendices, Bracht for example gives us an overview of the construction and contents of all Methodius's writings. She also gives us a full list of all available primary and secondary works on Methodius. Moreover, she gives us a list of all Biblical references in her book, as well as references to Christian and non-Christian authors of the ancient world. There is also a list of Greek and Slavonic words that are found in this work.

Bracht must be congratulated with her book. She is a master of her subject, and the book is a good example of great scholarship. It was an honour for me to read the book and write this review.
