

Methodius, On Leprosy (2012) pp.451-456 (Excerpt)

The following excerpt was commissioned commercially from the edition by G. Bonwetsch in the GCS series. This consisted of a German rendering of the Old Slavonic text, interspersed with Greek fragments (untranslated). The translator began at the start of Bonwetsch's text, but proved unable to handle the ecclesiastical vocabulary or the Greek. The commission was terminated at the end of p.456 of Bonwetsch. What follows is the material that was successfully translated.

Roger Pearse
Ipswich, December 2011

The holy Methodius, bishop of Olympus, to Sistelius, about leprosy.

I. [1] From where, o Eubulius? Apparently not from trying to understand how divine scripture should be interpreted?

For in the early morning someone belonging to Sistelius knocked on the door and when a boy opened it, he reported that Sistelius was summoning us to him. [2] And after I arose, I immediately departed. And when we were close to the dwelling, Sistelius walked towards me, embraced me and said: Having temporarily departed from us, you robbed us of the understanding of the scripture. For as a cloud that covers the sun prevents us from seeing the sun clearly, so as well, when good instruction goes away, the soul becomes dark and the meaning eclipsed. – And I answered him: You said (reported) this well.

And after we entered the house, we sat down. [3] And Sistelius said: Now then, let us see in the scripture truth itself! With a healing herb we remove this bad leprosy, with words and with medications reducing the damage, saying: “Stand up, you, who are sleeping, and stand up from the dead, and Christ will illuminate (enlighten) you.” [4] Now then is the time, he said, to raise your voice, that is to say explaining about the leprosy that is in the law, wherein the Lord commands us to interpret much in the law allegorically, to inform the one thirsting for the gift of God of . . . an ungrudging gift.

II. [1] <Eubulius.> At the same time, do not think that I will rebuff one who wishes to receive this gift of mercy, even if I am weak in deed and word; but he, who plants the words (thoughts (?)) into the soul of each of us, will pull the bad roots out of our hearts and plant all virtues into our souls. [2] For when the nettle-like weed has dried out, then the flower of virtue blossoms. Which Christ now also compares allegorically to the “grain of mustard seed”, saying that it will bring a large stock to the <birds> of heaven. [3] For to begin with, descending to our weaknesses the divine seed of faith becomes small; once it falls into the furrows of the soul, it grows to greatness, it proceeds to the height of piety by spiritual contemplation. [4] And the Lord justifiably calls his father the planter of such a planting, for “every single plant”, he says, “which my father did not plant, will be (pulled out?)”. For understand, that he speaks not because of the plurality of souls, as some thought, but of the proper teachings and of god-fearing thoughts (words), which the industrious planter planted invisibly into our hearts, weeding out the improper plantings from our hearts, i.e., the bad thoughts and deeds. [5] For if we do not believe such, then we become the successors of the very lawless Marcion, who says that another is the good one instead of the true God, and therefore the souls of the creator of the world could not receive the promised good life, they were without the planting of the good. However, we do not want to take that into

consideration now, for it is not time for this proceeding now.

III. [1] For you are right to say, that one shouldn't hesitate and, now that the spiritual estate is being prepared by God, one should have strong fruits of wisdom, according to the words of the Apostle who says: "We are God's field." [2] For in order to keep the disease from spreading and to reveal it to everyone, we ought "to heal" through the songs of the gospel and see "if there is someone, who lacks God's mercy, whether there is an upward growing root causing damage and whether many are becoming defiled", the Apostle says, writing to the Jews.

[3] However, the law also teaches us: "And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron, saying: When a person shall have on the skin a sign of leprosy, then he should come before Aaron the priest, or one of his sons. And the priest shall examine the sore on his skin, to see if it is a sign of leprosy; and to check whether the leprosy is more than skin deep." And soon thereafter: [4] "On the seventh day, the priest is to examine him; and if he sees that the sore is unchanged and has not spread in the skin, the priest is to keep him in isolation for seven days for a second time.

(On the seventh day the priest is to examine him for the second time), and if he sees that the sore has not changed, the priest cleans him, for it is a sign; and he should wash his clothes." And soon thereafter: [5] "If any clothing is contaminated with a sign of leprosy, in a woolen or linen clothing or anything made of leather and the leprosy becomes scarlet red or green"; furthermore in the following . . .

IV.[1] . . . having said little, you reprimand. But now, O Sistelius, the truth itself, namely the law, <is> to be stated. We should now attempt to understand these insights spiritually, so that we may understand the spirit of the law and not just the word.

[2] But continuing in the proceedings he adds: "If it has spread" after the removal of the "mildew in the clothing or the leather or the attire or the weft, then the remaining mildew is leprosy, it is unclean, and he must burn the clothing or attire or the weft" etc., shown to the priest.

However, this is now the explanation for the leprosy in the law. [3] For I, myself, believe, that the prophet used these words as specific cloaks and shadows, whereby God wanted to lead us to the light of truth this way. [4] This is why, I think, the holy Paul said: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is still hidden among the lost, in whom the God of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that in them cannot shine the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of the invisible," by clearly stating, that the gospel is revealed to the believers and the "to be saved", but "veiled" to the "ones being lost" as if attached with iron clamps. [5] For one, who understands the scripture from the outside, goes forward without spiritual understanding, like someone who has seen empty walls built from stones. However, one who has fought vigorously", who has torn the spiritual veil, who, after having risen like a bird inspired by God's spirit, [has] reached the inner understanding of the scripture, which is the most holy; and arrives at the bright light, will be nourished by the lightning of true beauty. [6] For as the trees are stripped of the ornament of fruit in winter, but regain their ornaments in the spring with the sprouting of the leaves, - so I think, the words of the prophets too seem barren without meaning if taken at their word, but if interpreted with wisdom, if viewed as laden with fruit and leaves, have blossoms of a multitude of senses.

Therefore, O Sistelius, refusing to take them literally, let us carefully interpret the scriptures spiritually!

V.[1] However, we now say, as Christ instructs us:

<Greek fragment>

Thus the scripture <recounts> that Moses's sister had leprosy, because she spoke ill of her brother.

[5] However, the prophet, the holy Jeremiah, also says: “Sow not among thorns, but circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the uncircumcision of your hearts,” [Jer. 4:3-4] saying: Circumcise the evil passions, so that we deliver the [soul] unstained to God.

[6] For I think, the Lord also gave these commandments to his disciples, to walk “without a staff and without two tunics <and without shoes>.” For the evangelists have to, by

[The translation work was ended here at the foot of p.456, but Bonwetsch continues.]

Michael Chub, Preface to the recovery of the Slavic collection of the works of St. Methodius (1961) Bogoslovskie Trudy, pp.145-151.

INTRODUCTION

By the end of the third century, Christianity had spread to almost every area of the Roman Empire and had gone beyond its limits. Across these geographical boundaries, the Church had by this time among its members representatives of many different nationalities and different walks of life, and at the same time, actively improving its interior life, had successfully fought against external and internal enemies, and laid a solid foundation of theology.

Even before the Edict of Milan, the Church, in its most prominent representatives, had used every opportunity for considerable creative work for the development of various branches of theological knowledge. The widespread pagan persecutions which broke out in some areas were unable to stop this creative work of the Church, although it was a serious hindrance to normal development and often destroyed (in whole or in part) the fruits of creative labour. For obvious reasons, that part of the theological heritage of this early epoch which survives to this day, has a quite exceptional value.

Unsurpassed in its importance, the patristic literature of the fourth and fifth centuries includes the works of great ecumenical teachers, the hard work of dogmatic thought in the era of the Ecumenical Councils, the ascetic and mystical insights of the ascetics of Egypt, Sinai, Syria and Palestine -- all these build on what preceded the development. The flourishing of theological literature after the Edict of Milan can be understood and appreciated only if there are properly defined links that connect this period with the preceding one. The continuity of historical traditions in this case is extremely important.

From this perspective, the most serious attention of the researcher has been attracted to the literary heritage of Bishop St. Methodius, who was famous for the protection of academic religious traditions at the end of the third century, and at the end of the Great Persecution this culminated in his martyrdom as a confession of faith. The literary activity of St. Methodius, as can be seen, coincides with the end of the ante-Nicene period of development of theological thought, and, to some extent, can be regarded as a peculiar result of this development.

The sources preserved for the life of St. Methodius are extremely limited. Desiring to find out, if possible, at least the most important facts relating to his biography, the researcher makes the plunge into a maze of earlier contradictory statements, opinions and guesses, but the final result of these searches is very limited. Suffice it to say that so far, despite the great efforts of the experts, there is no well-established epithet, which would undeniably indicate his episcopal ministry in a particular city. It should also be noted, [146 that in the "Ecclesiastical History", Eusebius of Caesarea did not mention the name of St. Methodius. The reason for this, according to an authoritative patrology, is to be found in the marked anti-Origenism of St. Methodius: the omission of him by such an enthusiastic admirer of Origen, as Eusebius was, serves as a classic example of partisan bias. There is a well-established tradition, dating back to Leontius of Byzantium, which has long pointed to the episcopal see of St. Methodius as being in Patara in Lycia. The name of Methodius "of Patara" became famous in the Middle Ages in connection with the apocryphal "Revelation" then ascribed to him. Over time, theological science, in spite of the centuries-old association between the name of St. Methodius and Patara, and despite the certainty of his relations with Lycia in general and with Patara in particular, has had to take its search in another episcopal direction¹. The most probable at the present time is the

version according to which St. Methodius - a native of Lycia - was a bishop in the town of Philippi in Macedonia. Slavic manuscripts, which preserve to this day a large proportion of what was written by St. Methodius, many times suggest Philippi as the place of his episcopal ministry.

The most significant conclusion from all the studies and research on St. Methodius, is of the undeniable dominance in all his activities, of his interests in literary, theological and philosophical subjects. He devoted his life to them. The most reliably attested date of his martyrdom is 311 AD.

Despite the silence of Eusebius of Caesarea in his "Ecclesiastical History", we can no doubt safely say that St. Methodius during his lifetime was an authoritative theologian. In later centuries, he is repeatedly cited, not only by supporters but also by enemies. It is interesting to note that the same Eusebius, without mentioning the name of St. Methodius, made use of his works. The fate of the spiritual legacy of St. Methodius in the next century is very peculiar, for several of the works most associated with his name do not belong to him. At the same time his genuine works were gradually pushed into the background or remained in obscurity. Only relatively recently has patrology definitively established a list of works which certainly belong to St. Methodius. In this case, most of the credit belongs to the late Prof. N.G. Bonwetsch (Bonwetsch)². In Russian, there is only one translation of the works of St. Methodius made by Prof. E. Lovyagin in the last century with the publication of the Greek texts³. Even this translation, made by a specialist, included two sermons quite groundlessly attributed to St. Methodius. Meanwhile, patrological science has long known, that the extant Greek texts (repeatedly published and translated into different languages) do not exhaust the total extant works of the Bishop. Of exceptional value in this case are ancient Slavic translations of St. Methodius in manuscript collections, which have come down to us. These contain works which were carefully preserved, studied and copied by the monks in antiquity. |147

At the present time many of these collections are part of the most important manuscript collections of the libraries in our country. (Some of the Slavic manuscripts of the works of St. Methodius are known outside the Soviet Union, particularly in the Romanian Peoples Republic) These Slavic texts, outliving the author, who wrote in the late third and early years of the fourth century, date back to an ancient Slavic translation, made in Bulgaria not later than the tenth century. The texts in large part coincide with the surviving Greek texts, but along with that, quite a respectable portion of the wealth of the Slavic manuscript heritage of St. Methodius has no parallel in Greek manuscripts. In other words, in many cases, the Slavic translation is the only source of our acquaintance with the original works of the holy father. This is the value of the Slavic texts in question. To illustrate this it suffices to note that the well-known Greek text of the famous polemical work "On the Resurrection" of the Holy Methodius, which has made him famous as the most outstanding anti-Origenist, is largely completed and is controlled by the Slavic translation. At the same time, some works of St. Methodius are known exclusively in the Slavic texts⁴.

Familiarization with the content of this - Slavic - part of the literary heritage of St. Methodius so far been possible only from the publications of Professor N. G. Bonwetsch⁵. But these books, for all their exceptional academic merit, have a peculiar feature: the Greek text is given here in its own script - based on the most authoritative manuscripts - but for the Slavonic text, there is only a German translation. This translation is made very carefully, with good knowledge of the characteristics of the ancient Slavic language. However, no one will dispute the fact that, no matter how much further the modern Russian language has developed from the language of the Slavic manuscripts referred to here, the consonance of the Russian and Old Slavic languages (in the broadest sense of the expression) is significantly greater than any harmony of the German language with the language of the Slav. In any case, despite the success of the translation, this fact is of great importance. For the Russian reader to learn the content of the works of St. Methodius, preserved only in the Slavonic text, by means of the

German translation will at a minimum reduce the informative value of the studied material. Such are the considerations that led the author of these words to do work on the Slavic manuscripts of the works of St. Methodius and experience led him to undertake the translation of some parts of the foregoing Slavonic texts into the modern Russian language.

The results of this work for readers are a partial fulfillment of the wishes of Prof. E. Lovyagin made in the already mentioned book, "that all the Slavonic translations (of the works of St. Methodius) might be revised and published as a rare treasure, often supplemented with the text found in the Greek works of St. Methodius, often not known in any other language".⁶¹⁴⁸

It must be borne in mind that patrology currently has a very diverse set of materials giving the opportunity for acquaintance with a considerable part of the works written by St. Methodius. Some of his writings survived complete; for others, we can learn something on the basis of more or less extensive fragments, extracts and summaries. The Slavonic texts, which are here referred to, at least to a certain part are such extracts and are, in all probability, very slightly different from the original. (In addition to the works of St. Methodius in Slavonic translations, there are -- in the form of relatively small fragments -- extracts in ancient Syrian and Armenian translations.) Up to the present day, for the "Feast of the ten virgins," and the "On Free Will", only for the "Feast of the ten virgins," is the Greek text preserved completely in the manuscript tradition, while for the treatise "On Free Will" there is a large Greek fragment (about 1/3 of the total text) and the full text of the Slavonic translation. In addition, we can obtain the fullness of the text of the extensive treatise "On the Resurrection", reconstructed on the basis of mutually complementing Greek and Slavic manuscripts, and the Slavic texts of the small treatise "On Life and rational activity", "On distinguishing foods, and the cow referred to in the book of Leviticus, which is sprinkled with ashes by sinners", "The leprosy" ("On the lepers")⁷ and "On the leech", referred to in the book of Proverbs, and the words "The heavens declare the glory of God". From the work "On the creation" are preserved short excerpts; from the "Against Porphyry", "The Martyrs' and commentary on the book of Job there are only a few small fragments. This is the sum total of extant literary heritage of St. Methodius. (There are references works on the interpretation of the Song of Songs, the book of Habakkuk and the book of Genesis, and mentions of the names of treatises "On the witch of Endor" and "On the flesh" but these works are lost.) The favourite literary forms of St. Methodius are the dialogues and letters. These forms were formal literary devices of the era, but it is quite possible that the letters of the holy bishop were real answers to questions addressed to him.

The following publication provides a translation of the prayer of St. Methodius, which ends the essay "On the Resurrection," and four treatises: "On Life and rational activity", "On distinguishing foods", "On leprosy" and "On the leech."

The prayer of St. Methodius, known only from the Slavonic text, no doubt, belongs among the earliest Christian prayers. Its formulation and expression are extremely characteristic for evaluating the dogmatic discourse of the ante-Nicene era. That passage in the prayer which talks about victory over death, by means of the suffering and killing of a perfect, impassive and eternal one, deserves special attention. Here words and ideas already familiar to the ancient Christian Church (cf. Ignatius, "Epistle to Polycarp," 3:2, Gregory of Neocaesarea, "Message to Theopompus", 7, 8, 10) meet and mingle, and these entered the everyday life of prayer of later ages (compare, for example, in the "Succession before sleep" in the modern prayer book, Prayer Two). The whole prayer is important for judging the strength and stability of church traditions and, in particular, on how to preserve and pass on these traditions. | 149

The main idea of the treatise "On Life"⁸ is the Christian and at the same time, the philosophical (similar to Stoic morality) admonition to be content with what God has bestowed on earth, to patiently endure

temptation and to wait for the enduring blessing of the hereafter.

All three of these treatises, translations of which are given here, have as their main task to interpret in the Christian sense Jewish ritual prescriptions. Along with this, they have many moral and dogmatic elements. They deserve great attention to statements that are relevant to church history, and you can find valuable advice on methodology of penitential discipline and established liturgical practice in the early Church, and you can also hear complaints of weakness and vices which have penetrated into the church community – as far as the highest hierarchy. These passages sound like autobiographical motifs.

By attending closely to the text of these works, there can be found in them the elements of controversy, which is determined by the actual situation with which St. Methodius had to deal ⁹.

The main manuscript for the text of these works is Sbornik 11 of the XVI century, kept in the Leningrad State Public Library in the Saltykov-Shchedrin (QI 265) ¹⁰.

The main text was produced by collating the following manuscripts;

- 1) Library of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, ms. 16. 16. 2 (XVII century).
- 2) Lenin Library [=Russian State Library], from the Collection of the Moscow Theological Seminary, ms. 41 ([online](#)), previously found in the Trinity-Sergius Lavra (the beginning of the XVII century.).
- 3) [State Historical Museum, from the Synodal Assembly](#), ms. 170 (XVI century).
- 4) [Lenin Library, from the collection of the Moscow Theological Seminary, ms. 40 \(online\)](#), written for Arsenius Sukhanov (XVII century).
- 5) Lenin Library, from the collection of the Society of Russian History and Antiquities, ms. 137 (XVII century).

In addition to these manuscripts, the following were involved;

- 6) State Historical Museum, Uvarov collection, Ms. 115 (XVI century).
- 7) State Historical Museum, from the collection of the Chudovsky monastery, ms. 233 (XVI - XVII c).
- 8) State Historical Museum, from the collection of the Chudovsky monastery, ms. 205 (XVII century).
- 9) State Historical Museum, from the collection of Edinoverie monastery, ms. 12 (XVII century).
- 10) State Historical Museum, from the Autograph collection, Ms. 264 (a forgery - a rather ingenious one - from the XVI century, reproducing, apparently, word for word the text of an ancient manuscript that served as a model for this).

A comparison of the manuscripts 6-10, stored at the State Historical Museum, with the main text of the manuscript did not reveal any notable variations. The main variants, identified by collating the main manuscript, QI 265, and manuscripts 1-5, were incorporated in the translation work in accordance with the basic rules of paleography. |150

The purpose of this publication is the desire to give readers the results of the work done to create a partial Russian translation of the works of St. Methodius, within the boundaries listed above. In some cases, this translation, due to the peculiarities of the text becomes a paraphrase, out of necessity. Words and phrases are translated approximately, or else these are inserted in the text to assist communication enclosed in parentheses. In the interlinear apparatus, in order to avoid misunderstandings that may arise, in most cases the first reproduces the expression that caused the need for a note in Russian, and then provides the corresponding Slavic expression - usually as it appears in the main manuscript, and

sometimes an option from one of the other manuscripts listed above. Because this publication has repeatedly offered translations that do not coincide with the Bonwetsch edition, there was a need for special abbreviations in the apparatus - in some cases, with appropriate reference to individual expression and a German translation. The following abbreviations have been employed in the apparatus:

BO = N. G. Bonwetsch. Methodius, Leipzig, 1917. Numeral after "BO" stands for the book.

Shear. = Sreznevsky II "Materials for a dictionary of ancient language." St. Petersburg, 1893-1912.

The phrase "gap in the manuscript" notes an obvious gap in the semantic consistency of the text, detectable only when reading, because these gaps are not indicated in the manuscript; these semantic gaps are found in all the studied manuscripts, and therefore it can be argued that the loss of one or another part of the text (in most cases, no doubt, of not less than a single complete leaf) must have already occurred in the original manuscript, which was the model for all subsequent copyists.

References to Holy Scripture after a quotation were not put in by St. Methodius. They are inserted into the translation for readability; direct quotations in parentheses, and indirect quotations and reminiscences - in square brackets []. The biblical translation quoted in St. Methodius' texts in the Russian language should be, as near as possible, that in the original Slavic manuscripts, which often deviates somewhat from the normal currently accepted reading. Most of these deviations are in quotations from the Old Testament, and are caused by the very nature of things: that St. Methodius quoted from the Septuagint in the text ¹¹. Trying to quote the Bible in the Slavonic text in its present form would have led to some confusion, since in this case could not have avoided a number of sensitive deviations from generally now accepted texts ¹².

The number of biblical quotations (direct and indirect) proposed in the edition is slightly more than given by professor N.G. Bonwetsch. This is explained by the fact that, as a foreigner, in spite of a good knowledge of the Russian and Slavic languages, sometimes it was difficult for him to recognize quotations "by ear". Extra-biblical citations in this paper are not listed. The only exception to this provision are those cases where there is contact between the text of the works of St. Methodius with the literature generally known as "Agrapha" ¹³. These instances are noted in the footnotes. |151

In connection with the orations that follow, it should be noted here that Prof. N. G. Bonwetsch does not mention at all the subject of the presence of agrapha in the works of St. Methodius.

The division of the text of the works of St. Methodius into chapters and sections corresponds to the division adopted in the latest edition of Prof. N. G. Bonwetsch.

Since in this publication it was not possible to give a transcription of any kind of the Slavic text of the works of St. Methodius which was selected for translation, it seems essential to supply some photographic reproductions, which give readers an idea of the best known manuscripts, the foundation for this work.

1. As a result of these searches, the patrology of the XIX century, following the Blessed St. Jerome, acknowledged Methodius as bishop of Olympus in Lycia.

2. N. G. Bonwetsch, born in Saratov Province. A professor of evangelical theology in Dorpat (Tartu), then at Gottingen, the author of several exciting and patrological studies. He died in 1925.

3. "St. Methodius, bishop and martyr, the father of the Church of the III century. His collected works have been translated from Greek, ed. Prof Yevgraf Lovyagin, St Petersburg. 1877. " In 1905 a second edition appeared.
 4. However, for one of these treatises ("On leprosy") there are Greek fragments preserved, but their total is considerably less than the amount of Slavonic text.
 5. The first edition -- N. G. Bonwetsch. Methodius von Olympus. 1891. The second edition - N. G. Bonwetsch. Methodius. Lpz., 1917. The second of these two publications is the most complete, and it is cited for the works of St. Methodius in all later studies. For this discussion, citation is also based on this edition.
 6. E. Lovyagin, *St. Methodius, bishop and martyr, the father of the Church of the III century*. St Petersburg., 1905, pp. 22-23.
 7. The surviving Greek fragments of the treatise "On the leprosy" (very small in volume) in some places give a somewhat more detailed text than the corresponding Slavic translation. Although in terms of volume, this is only a few lines, this circumstance indicates that the Slavic translator in some cases was content to paraphrase.
 8. In the Slavic collections of the works of St. Methodius, this treatise is placed in second place (after "On Free Will"), and is usually denoted as the "second floor". The first chapters of this treatise, because of the richness of philosophical terminology, are particularly difficult to translate.
 9. When reading the treatise "On leprosy", it should be remembered that the author's intention is to write a dialogue. The names of the interlocutors are Eubulus, and Sistelios Euthymios. Eubulus is most easily recognized as Methodius himself. The work "On distinguishing foods" - a letter addressed to Frenope and Kilonii. In the treatise above-mentioned work "On Virginity" ("Feast of the ten virgins") and "On the Resurrection." Treatise "On the leech" - letter to Eustathius. "
 10. This manuscript belonged to the first F.A. Tolstoy. It is also the basis for the translation of the works of St. Methodius (referring to Slavic texts) in the publications of Prof. N. G. Bonwetsch.
 11. For an illustration, it is sufficient to give one example, the modern Russian text of the book of Proverbs 30, 15 et seq, does not even provide a key to the question in the main part of the treatise "On the leech."
 12. Compare Prof. I. Evseev. *Handwritten tradition of the Slavic Bible*, St. Petersburg., 1911.
 13. See for example. A. Resch, *Agrapha*. Leipzig, 1906. For Agraphia in the works of St. Methodius, see "J. M. P", 1954, № 6, p. 43-50. [Perhaps *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate?*]
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