IV

THE EPISCOPACY AND DIOCESE OF ST. METHODIUS

a. Testimony of ecclesiastic sources

Despite a continuing interest in Moravian and Methodian studies little progress, if any, has been made with regard to some basic issues of Moravia’s ecclesiastical history. There is still a diversity of scholarly opinion as to the very nature of Methodius’s episcopal dignity, as well as to the location – or even the existence – of his episcopal see. Methodius has been considered by various scholars in turn to have been a bishop “at large” without a permanent residence, a missionary bishop, a land-bishop (chorepiscopus), or, finally, a titular bishop of Sirmium on the river Sava who was active mainly in Prince Sventopolk’s domain (believed to be north of the Danube) with a see either in Nitra, Velehrad, or elsewhere. Thus, on the one hand, we have differences of opinion on the nature of Methodius’s episcopal dignity and, on the other, a general scholarly agreement that he had the function of archbishop of Moravia. The persistence of conflicting interpretations of the episcopal dignity of Methodius and the acceptance of the notion that he was archbishop of Moravia, a title for which there is no evidence in the sources, warrant a re-examination of the Methodian problem in an attempt to eliminate some of the contradictions.

Both the episcopal dignity and the archiepiscopal function of Methodius are adequately defined in contemporary papal letters as well as in hagiographic writings of later origin. For instance, in a letter from Pope John VIII to Adalvin, archbishop of Salzburg, Methodius is referred to as “frater” of the Pope. The term “frater” is employed in papal

1 The letters of Pope John VIII are available in several collections, e.g. *Monumenta Germaniae historica, Epp.*, vol. VII. Excerpts relevant for the study of Moravian and Methodian problems are included in *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses: Fontes* (Zagreb, 1960); *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. I and *Magnae Moraviae fontes historici*, vol. III, ed. Lubomir Havlik.
usage only in respect to bishops - the sacerdotal dignity of the pope is also only that of a bishop. Another letter by the same pope to Sventopolk shows that Methodius was ordained in Rome, during the pontificate of Pope Hadrian II, as archbishop to Sventopolk.²

Since the earliest recorded synodal decisions, a fully ordained bishop has been the leader of a community of believers in an urban settlement. The ordination of a bishop consists today, as it did in the ninth century, of a mystical marriage ceremony between the bishop-elect and the church to which he is assigned. As early as 451, Canon 6 of the Council of Chalcedon (Fourth General Council) decreed that “no one is to be promoted to the priesthood or diaconate or to any other ecclesiastical order, unless the one to be promoted is specially affiliated with a church of a city or that of a village, or a martyry or a monastery. In regard to those who have been ordained absolutely [that is, without a titulus], the holy council decided that such ordination is invalid, and that they can function nowhere, to the disgrace of the one who ordained them.”³

Clerics or bishops who abandoned their church or were ordained without a titulus were considered clerici vagi or acephali and were subject to disciplinary censure. The Synod of Arles (314) formulated the rule that “ubi quisque ordinatur, ibi permaneat.” Similarly, Canon 15 of the First Council of Nicaea (First General Council, 325) and Canon 20 of the Council of Chalcedon (451) remind clerics that they should not pass from one church to another. In the ninth century the popes and some of the provincial synods were concerned with vagrant bishops and clerics. Consequently Methodius, ordained by Hadrian II, must have been fully intitulatus, that is, ordained to a cathedral church from the income of which he received his subsistence and at which he had to establish his residence. He was obviously not an episcopus vagus, but neither was he a titular bishop (of a defunct see), as is frequently assumed – this institution came into existence only in the wake of Muslim conquests and especially after the collapse of the Crusades.

The diocese of Methodius is frequently mentioned in contemporary ninth-century documents because of a legal dispute between the papacy and the archbishop of Salzburg over jurisdictional authority in parts of former Pannonia. In the late eight century large areas of Pannonia

² “Ne mireris, quia diximus te agente sedem a fratre nostro Methodio recipiendam, quia profecto dignum est, ut tu, qui fuisti eius auctor deiectionis, sis officii commissi causa receptiosis”; MGH, Epp. VII, No. 20. “Methodius vester archiepiscopus ab antecessore nostro, Adriano sibi papa, ordinatus vobisque directus”; ibid, No. 200.

³ The canonical decisions are quoted from Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils, ed., trans., and with commentary, by H.K. Schroeder (St. Louis and London, 1937).