

THEODORET'S COMMENTARY ON PAUL

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Resumen

Sacando tiempo entre sus obligaciones pastorales y su dedicación teológica en la década anterior al concilio de Calcedonia, Teodoreto pasó de ocuparse de los Salmos a comentar las cartas de Pablo. Aunque en la manera de abordar el texto no es más crítico que sus predecesores antioquenos, que cita con frecuencia, sabe apreciar con agudeza el pensamiento del Apóstol sobre la relación de la Ley con la fe y la gracia.

Summary

Finding time amidst his pastoral duties and his theological concerns in the decade before the council of Chalcedon, Theodoret moved from a work on the Psalms to commentary on the letters of Paul. Though he is no more critical in his approach to the text than his Antiochene predecessors, whom he frequently cites, he demonstrates a fine appreciation of the apostle's thought on the relationship of the Law to faith and grace.

Theodoret had been bishop of Cyrus for over two decades when he undertook his only foray into New Testament commentary with a work on the fourteen letters of Paul. Fourteen, because inclusive of Hebrews, which in his text sits before the Pastorals and provides him with much grist to his theological mill.¹ The evidence suggests he wrote this Com-

¹ Theodoret is aware that there were those in antiquity who questioned the Pauline authorship of Hebrews – Origen for one, though the bishop chooses to blame his bêtes noires, the Arians (PG 82.673). But he follows the attribution of the letter to Paul that had been traditional at least since Cyril of Jerusalem a century before. We shall see he is not given to entertaining critical ideas on such matters.

mentary (it is the work of a desk theologian, not a preacher — a distinction he observes scrupulously) in the theologically turbulent years before his deposition in 449 by the Robber Synod of Ephesus, his rapid reinstatement, and agitation for a council that was held in Chalcedon in 451. In a letter written to Eusebius of Ancyra, dated December 448,² he claimed to have commented on "all the prophets, the psalter and the apostle," and in another to Pope Leo, dated in 449, he speaks of commentaries composed on "both the apostolic (i.e., New Testament) and the prophetic (Old Testament) oracles." His Psalms Commentary, which opens with mention of his previous exegetical works, was composed between 441 and 448,³ and internal evidence also suggests he had not then written the work on the Pauline letters.⁴ This busy bishop of a see responsible for 800 parishes ("little backwater" though it has been called)⁵ was thus not letting contemporary theological turmoil absorb him completely.

We might think it strange that Theodoret never ventured to comment on any of the Gospels were it not for the egregious examples of evangelical commentary current at the time from the pulpit of fellow Antiochene John Chrysostom. Theodoret admits in his preface to the Commentary on Paul that even in this work he is exposing himself to charges of "presumption and overconfidence for having the effrontery to undertake the commentary on the apostle in the wake of this person and that, the world's luminaries."⁶ But as in the conclusion to his Psalms Commen-

² By the editor of his letters, Y. Azéma, *Théodoret de Cyr. Correspondance* II (SC 98; Paris, Cerf, 1964) 202; it is Letter 82 in that vol. The words to Pope Leo occur in Letter 13 of Vol. III (SC 111; 1965) 64.

³ That preface to the Psalms Commentary does not mention a work on Paul. For evidence of dating, see the Introduction to my forthcoming translation of that work in the Fathers of the Church series (Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press).

⁴ At 2 Cor 4:13 Paul quotes Ps 1 16:10 (LXX — Paul's text — 115:1); in commenting on this quotation Theodoret quotes also Ps 116.8-9 (LXX 114:8-9), whereas in his Psalms Commentary at these places he does not refer to Paul's citation, frequent though scriptural documentation is in that work — unlikely if he had already done his Pauline Commentary.

⁵ By F. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1983) 267.

⁶ PG 82.36. With no modern critical edition of Theodoret's Commentary available, we rely on the nineteenth century reprint found in J. P. Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* 82 of the eighteenth century edition by J. L. Schulze, based on the first edition of all

tary he was confident he had brought to study of "the Spirit's hidden mysteries" not only the best of his predecessors' work but also his own insights,⁷ so in commenting on Paul he believed "it is not out of place for us, too, like some kind of mosquito, to buzz about the apostolic meadows along with those famous bees."⁸ The luminaries and famous bees he had in mind are (unlike the Psalms Commentary, where he could access also Alexandrian exegesis through Eusebius of Caesarea) the giants of Antioch, most frequently Severian of Gabbala and especially Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom. Scores of times in his work he cites (always anonymously) these alternative interpretations,⁹ not consistently to agree with them but always with respect; the length he goes to in disallowing their consensus about the composition of Ephesians, for example, betrays his regard for them.¹⁰

So the bishop of Cyrus betook himself to a formidable work of commentary¹¹ on a New Testament figure for whom he, like Chrysostom, felt a high degree of personal admiration and empathy in a period when he was much occupied with theological debate, and that climate predictably leaves its mark on his manner of commentary. The marvellous hymn at Phil 2:6-11, for example, he turns into an arsenal against all possible trinitarian and Christological heresies, citing a whole rogues' gallery – Sabellius, Photinus, Marcellus of Ancyra, Paul of Samosata, Arius, Eunomius, Marcion, Valentinus, Mani – before concluding, "Of these matters, however, we have treated at length in other works," including

Theodoret's works by Jacob Sirmondi in the early seventeenth century. Schulze cannot explain the lacuna found in the text of Gal, 2:6b-14 the verses affected.

⁷ PG 80.1997.

⁸ Concise though Theodoret insists on being, he is always concerned to bring out the force of Paul's figurative expressions (like the boxer beating the air in 1 Cor 9:26), and often develops his own to reinforce Paul's point. The lyrical language of the Psalms, too, loses nothing at his hands.

⁹ Jean-Noël Guinot has traced forty six such references in his authoritative work, *L'Exégèse de Théodoret de Cyr* (Théologie historique 100; Paris, Beauchesne, 1995) 644-666, to which could be added a forty seventh, on Col 2:16.

¹⁰ PG 82.505.

¹¹ In (my) translation the work runs to about two hundred and thirty thousand words, despite Theodoret's asserting in the preface, "My particular concern is for conciseness: I am aware that brevity encourages even those prone to easy ways to do some reading" (PG 82.37). He made the same claim of his equally lengthy Commentary on the Psalms.

perhaps the *Eranistes*, which Guinot dates at 447. Scrupulous though he is not to stray into the preserve of a golden-mouthed preacher, with the moralising and *makrologia* it involves, he is less meticulous about interpreting Paul within the circumstances and theological currents of the mid-first century. He has a theological agenda of his own, which is never far below the surface; and he can present Paul as commentator on ecclesiastical and theological developments of later times, as he does in opening his commentary on Romans:

(Paul) was aware that Jews were excessively attached to the Law, while those infected with the teachings of Marcion and Valentinus, and of course Manichees, criticised it severely. So just as some excellent general, surrounded on all sides by enemies, repels one lot after another and sets up the trophy, so the divine apostle demolished both the columns of the heretics and the force of the Jews through divine grace.¹²

I. AN UNCRITICAL COMMENTATOR

With no congregation to impress, and with his constant accent on conciseness, Theodoret aims to conduct his Commentary as a purely cognitive exercise for the benefit of his readers — "to demonstrate the profundity of the apostle's wisdom and strip away the veils from the writing so as to offer those willing to partake of it the due benefit," as he claims at the opening of the preface, aware perhaps of his subject's reputation for obscurity from as early as 2 Peter 3:15-16. His readership, "those prone to easy ways" who require concise commentary, would seem to be lay people living in the world;¹³ the adequacy of his spiritual guidance we shall examine below. He is considerate of their need to find their way through these documents from an earlier age of the Church, and

¹² PG 82.45.

¹³ Did they include women? The text would suggest otherwise. Though he could not be classed "an incorrigible sexist," as J. N. D. Kelly says of Chrysostom in his biography *Golden Mouth* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1995) 51, and takes the references to Genesis 1-3 in Rom and 1 Cor in a less anti-feminist way, and though he chides his society for sexual inequality in comment on 1 Cor 7:34, he addresses his readers at times in a way that presumes no woman is reading the text, as on Rom 13:9; Phil 4:15-16; Heb 9:10; 11:31.

guides them through Paul's thought with helpful overviews of a letter's development, as at the opening of shorter letters and several times within the longer letters. His concerns with the material do not exactly reflect those of today's commentators on Paul like Rudolf Bultmann, C. K. Barrett, Matthew Black, F. F. Bruce, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor and John A. T. Robinson, nor do his skills parallel theirs. He shows none of our contemporary interest in sociological matters like the composition of the Roman church; it is rare for him to relate our knowledge of Paul's background to the contents of the letters, as he does in commenting on the Corinthian community's response to the apostle's directive on punishing the wrongdoer (2 Cor 2:6-7), "Tentmaker though the writer was, he was capable of such an effect owing to the power within him." He is principally interested in doctrinal matters, showing markedly less enthusiasm for the parenetic sections of the letters, and rarely if ever having recourse to moralising. We might like to have heard more from him on topics of interest to today's commentators, like Paul's life, conversion and commissioning, the purpose of the letters in general, their authenticity, their use in the churches of his day; his preface treats only of the order of composition of the letters.

This is also the place to admit that "uncritical" can be applied to Theodoret in his approach to the biblical text as much as to any other of the Fathers, and to concede that "commentary" rather than "exegesis" is what he is capable of and aims at. Among his exegetical shortcomings, lack of a knowledge of Hebrew is not such a limitation as it proved to be in his work on the Psalms, emerging only a few times in his approach to this Greek text;¹⁴ and with Syriac as his native tongue¹⁵ he is in a position to comment fully on *Abba* at Rom 8:15 and *Maran atha* at 1 Cor

¹⁴ He fails to appreciate Paul's play upon the similarity in form of the Hebrew words for "Jew" (*Yehudi*) and the hiphil form of the verb "praise" (*yadah*) in Rom 2:28-29; on "the Israel of God" in Gal 6:16 he confuses the etymology of Jacob's cognomen with that of Peniel in the same incident in Gen 32:28-30; he thinks he sees Adam (*'adam*) in the red (*'adamah*) heifer of Num 19:2 referred to in Heb 13:11; with Paul he cannot match the quibble raised by modern commentators as to the true significance of the name Abraham in the citation of Gen 17:5 at Rom 4:17 or the identity of the nations mentioned there.

¹⁵ So P. Canivet, *Histoire d'une entreprise apologétique au Ve siècle* (Paris, Bloud & Gay, 1957) 26-27, a view confirmed by his access to the Peshitta Bible in commenting on the Psalms.

16.22, where he disabuses Chrysostom of the idea that the word is Hebrew, not Aramaic. The text of the letters he is commenting on is (generally if not consistently)¹⁶ that revision of Greek manuscripts we know as the Koine text; attributed by Jerome to the scholar of Antioch, Lucian,¹⁷; an attribution now thought suspect,¹⁸ it spread widely with the spread of bishops from Antioch, being known also as Byzantine, and it is due to its preservation in the works of Chrysostom and Theodoret that scholars are now appreciating its antiquity.

We would also find him uncritical in his acceptance of details of the letters now under question. Beyond the issue of the authorship of Hebrews ("Blessed Paul wrote fourteen letters," he simply says in the preface, though crossing swords with opponents of this view on theological grounds when he begins commentary on it), he entertains no suggestion of a distinction between proto-Pauline and deutero-Pauline letters. He does not enter into a discussion of the various forms of authorship, even when there is reference to employment of a scribe at the end of Rom, Gal, Col, 2 Thess. He uses evidence from the letters and from Acts indiscriminately on matters such as the chronology and order of the letters (though he is flexible enough to observe, "I believe the order in which they occur in the Bible is not of [Paul's] doing," as he had been similarly flexible on order and titles of Psalms).

¹⁶ Theodoret can cite the Koine text of a letter, and then comment on the alternative reading, e.g., Heb 10:34.

¹⁷ So K. Aland, B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1989) 51-71. Lucian had been given credit also for the form of the Septuagint found in Antioch and represented in the Old Testament commentaries of Chrysostom and Theodoret (also on the word of Jerome, likewise under review).

¹⁸ Cf. B. Aland / K. Wachtel, "The Greek miniscule manuscripts of the New Testament," in B. D. Ehrman / M. W. Holmes (edd.), *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1995) 45: "We can no longer maintain without reservation the view that was still upheld by the present author (B. Aland) in *The Text of the Near Testament*, 64-66, that the koine text is to be attributed to a recension produced by Lucian... One simply cannot determine if and to what extent Lucian was involved in producing a recension of the New Testament."

II. APPRECIATION OF PAUL

Yet a reader of the Commentary feels Theodoret has a deep understanding of Paul and his message, and often we are led to regret that most modern commentators had not gone to the trouble to check with their ancient predecessors. When Paul says in 1 Cor 4:13, for example, "We have become the world's garbage (*περικαθάρματα*)," C. K. Barrett comes up with the unlikely notion of "scapegoats,"¹⁹ which makes one wish he had read Theodoret's comment in the fifth century, "We are no different, he is saying, from what is thrown out in households as superfluous — vegetables, scraps and the like; in similar fashion we are reputed by most people to be worthless." More generally, we sense in Theodoret a sureness of touch in commenting on Paul's thought. He reveals a fine understanding of the relationship developed in Rom and Gal between the Law, grace and faith, eschewing from the outset any interest in a narrow "pangs of conscience" interpretation and instead setting the composer's thinking in the wider context of the Incarnation. When he comes to chapters 9 to 11 of Rom, he realises that he has reached "the heart of Romans," and with one of his sweeping summaries of the material that are of great help to a reader, he unerringly situates the chapters in the letter's developing theology:

The divine apostle explicitly demonstrated that the Incarnation of our God and Savior was necessary and was a source of ineffable goods to the believers. In fact, he proved Jews to be liable to heavier accusation because of the giving of the Law, and all the others to be transgressors of the law of nature. Exposing the threat of punishment, he explained the gifts of the evangelical grace, and gave a glimpse of the salvation coming under faith. Lest the Jews complain, supposing the Law to be under attack, and lest heretics hostile to the Old Testament take occasion from making of the comparison for calumny against the Law, he was obliged to bring out the usefulness of the Law and commend it with great eulogy. Since, however, the Jews in turn put forward the patriarch Abraham and the promises made

¹⁹ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, Black, 1968). F. F. Bruce, by contrast, in his *1&2 Thessalonians* (Word Biblical Commentary 45; Waco, Word Books, 1982), frequently checks with the Fathers' views, though not Theodoret's. Hence the importance of making these patristic commentaries readily accessible in English, or at least a modern language.

him by God, and attempted to show the apostles' preaching to be at variance with these, he was obliged to give attention to these arguments; with great wisdom he demolished them, employing opportunely both scriptural testimonies and ancient examples, and clearly showing the real meaning of the divine promises.²⁰

He grasps the full sense of key Pauline terms like *οἰκονομία* and *μυστήριον*. With typical Eastern optimism he understands Paul's true accent on healing in the movement from Fall to restoration in Rom 5:12-14: "Just as that first being by sinning fell under the norm of death, and the whole race followed the first parent, so Christ the Lord by fulfilling the utmost righteousness destroyed the power of death, and being the first to rise from the dead he led the whole human race back to life." His vision of the *ἀνακεφαλαιώσις* of all things in Christ in Eph 1:10 is magnificent, and is one we associate rather with Irenaeus (in its Latin version *recapitulatio*) and Maximus Confessor. In company with all the Greek Fathers before John Damascene he rightly takes ἐφ' ᾧ in Rom 5:12 not with Adam as antecedent but in the sense "because," commenting, "In other words, it is not because of the sin of the first parent but because of their own that each person is liable to the norm of death." He refuses to accept a notion of predestination that would later be based on Rom 8:30. He will conscientiously wrestle with items in a *crux interpretum* like Rom 1:3 or the phrase "from faith to faith" (Rom 1:7), where he acknowledges the traditional but inadequate explanation before offering an improvement. He appreciates the irony in texts like 1 Cor 4:8, and is concerned that readers of Gal are sensitive to Paul's unusually irate tone there.

In a commentator so closely in tune with the thinking of his *beau ideal*, it is all the more obvious when he is uncomfortable with it and cannot accept its implications for positions held at Antioch, such as the balance between the gratuity of divine grace and the role played by human effort in the process of salvation. This had been a key issue both for Chrysostom and Theodoret in their commentary on the Psalms,²¹ and is so again here, as we shall see; particularly in the heart of Romans, where the mystery of divine election is being canvassed, the commentator perversely

²⁰ PG 82.148.

²¹ See R. C. Hill, "A pelagian commentator on the Psalms?": *Irish Theological Quarterly* 63 (1998) 263-271 (on Chrysostom's Commentary).

resists the writer's acceptance of gift ahead of personal zeal, *προθυμία*. In another area, where the status of the Son is in question, Theodoret refuses to accept at face value the recurring phrase "God and Father of the Lord Jesus," insisting we make a break and apply the former term only to ourselves lest some element of subordinationism enter our thinking; so he rewrites the phrase at Rom 15:5, explaining, "He called God our God, and Father of the Lord Jesus: the God of us all is his Father." ²²

It goes against the grain for an Antiochene commentator like Theodoret to cavil at scriptural statement. He has deep respect for "the divine apostle" (rarely presuming to refer to him as "Paul") and for "the divine Gospels." The Old Testament authors are all inspired, *προφήται*, and their works "holy Scriptures;" against heretics like Marcion, Valentinus and the Manichees it is to be maintained that "the old Scripture is divine,... inspired by God." Old Testament texts that he or Paul cites are interpreted in the manner of his school, where in fidelity to the principles of Diodore of Tarsus the literal sense was preferred to the allegorical, ²³ and where typology was acceptable only with the encouragement of Scripture itself. When Paul in Rom 3:25 speaks of Christ as the true mercy seat, Theodoret beautifully develops this typological picture of Christ in its Old Testament setting in a way that delivers a resounding negative to Matthew Black's tentative question as to whether "expiation" is an adequate notion for *ἱλαστήριον* in Paul's thinking at this point ²⁴ — a further example of the rich resource that patristic commentary is for modern scholars prepared to read it. He further relishes Paul's encouragement at 1 Cor 10:1-4 to take in typological fashion (and even sacramental, as is his wont) the Exodus narratives of Moses feeding the people in the wilderness and giving them to drink; and he frequently acknowledges the use of typology by the author of Hebrews. ²⁵

²² Cf. his comments on 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3,17; Heb 2:11.

²³ Cf. C. Schäublin, "Diodor von Tarsus": *TRE* 8.756. If *theoria* was the characteristically Antiochene hermeneutic, in this work we find the term only in connection with the discernment of sacramental realities (on Heb 8:4-5); cf. A. Vaccari, "La θεωρία nella scuola esegetica di Antiochia": *Biblica* 1 (1920) 3-36, with whose thesis — that for the Antiochenes "l'allegoria esclude di sua natura il senso letterale" — Theodoret would not concur, at least as far as his treatment of the Hagar and Sarah story at Gal 4:22-26 goes.

²⁴ M. Black, *Romans* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, ²1989) 60.

²⁵ Lover of the Scriptures though he is, Theodoret can be in error in recalling

Along with upholding the Old Testament against Christian heretics, Theodoret repeatedly asserts the value of the Mosaic Law, at least to the Jews of old; of the Judaism of his time (a term he does not employ, even with Paul's encouragement in Gal) he knows little.²⁶ In commentary on Colossians, which he sees directed against Judaizers, again and again he denies that the Law is in Paul's sights — just obsolete adoption of it. He does not take a cue from Paul's devastating disparagement of the Old covenant in 2 Cor 3-4, or Gal 3, nor does he elaborate on Paul's diatribe in 1 Thess 2:15-16. He seems to see Jewish Christians bringing a rich background to the faith: when Paul speaks of the churches of Macedonia and Achaia contributing to the welfare of the church in Jerusalem, he glowingly sketches that background, from the patriarchs to Jesus to the apostles, before saying it is only right that the Gentile churches, who were given a share in that rich background, "should give a share in the less" (Rom 15:26-27). He even speaks, on Eph 5:27, of the Church existing before Christ's coming, though in "her former servile condition," which is now stripped away by Christ's death.²⁷ If he is not so expansive or so mordant as Chrysostom in polemic against the Jews of his day, even in commentary on Paul, yet he does bring out here (as on the Psalms) the evidently conventional attribution of current Jewish misfortunes to the crucifixion, finding encouragement for this in statements like 1 Cor 2:8: he agrees the awful offence was pardonable, but the Jews did not repent, even when confronted with the apostolic miracles; "they persisted in their infidelity and so he consigned them to the siege."

III. THEODORET'S THEOLOGICAL AGENDA

It is not the relative status of the Law or the deficiencies of contemporary Judaism, however, that are at the focus of Theodoret's everpresent theological agenda as he works through the fourteen letters. The person

details of loci he cites, and less than textually precise in quoting verses.

²⁶ He does not know extrabiblical Jewish literature, like *Jubilees*, that would have helped commentary on Col; he is unaware of errors about Jewish ritual by the author of Heb; he knows of the Mishnah — at least the meaning of the word — but disallows its value (1 Tim 1:4).

²⁷ Cf. his comment on Timothy's Jewish-Christian mother Eunice (2 Tim 1:5).

of Christ, the Trinity and the ὁμοούσιον of the Spirit are at centre stage; we feel the commentator is working in a theological climate in which continuing problems like Arian and Pneumatomachian positions were still to be disposed of, and newer monophysite doctrines were yet to be dealt with in a Chalcedonian council in the near future. Those concerns surface at times even despite the drift of the text; when Paul is treating of the false worship by impious pagans in developing his important diptych in the opening chapter of Romans, Theodoret cannot resist what he considers a more urgent issue closer to home: "Whereas they ought to have worshipped the true God, they offered reverence due to God to a creature. They also are liable to these accusations who call the only-begotten Son of God a creature while adoring him as God ...," and off he goes on this tangent.²⁸ The subordinationism of "those who hold the position of Arius and Eunomius" is a constant worry to him, the phrase occurring, a score of times, relevant to Paul's theme or not.²⁹ As we have seen, he will rewrite Paul if he feels the apostle's phrase is unhelpful, as he does the term, "the Son of his love," in Col 1:13. His theological justification of his Koine reading of Gal 4:4 as "born of a woman" (γεννώμενον) is that it avoids any idea of sending of the divinity. As we noted, all major trinitarian and Christological heresies of the previous two or three centuries come in for mention and rejection with the hymn at Phil 2:6-11, which he finds an apologetic compendium. He also uses the hymn at Col 1:15-20 against Arian subordinationism. Docetism is also a concern for a commentator who always has in mind the *oikonomia* of the Incarnation as the backdrop to textual statement on Jesus; at 1 Thess 4:14 he sees Paul speaking in consoling fashion of "those who have fallen asleep" but insisting bluntly that "Jesus died."

There are signs the Commentary was composed during the years of the monophysite controversy preceding the council of Chalcedon,³⁰ Theodo-

²⁸ Rom 1:25; cf. 11:36; 1 Cor 11:3; 2 Cor 4:6; 13:4; Gal 1:1,15-16; Eph 5:2; Phil 4:7; 2 Thess 1:1-2.

²⁹ Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 1:24; 3:9,23; 8:6; 15:25,27-28; Phil 2:6; 1 Thess 4:2; 2 Thess 2:16. He is aware of texts called into service by the Arians, such as John 17:3 (in comment on 1 Thess 1:9).

³⁰ The terminology of the Chalcedonian formula occurs at times, e.g., on Eph 5:32. It is odd that an article by Camillus Hay entitled "Antiochene exegesis and Christology," *Australian Biblical Review* 12 (1964) 10-23, would make no mention of Theodoret, confining itself to commentaries on John's Gospel by Theodore and Chrysostom.

ret being keen to labour the distinction in natures in Jesus (as he is in Commentary on the Psalms in the same decade). Paul gains his commendation for doing likewise at the beginning of Romans with the phrase in 1:3, "of David's line according to the flesh;" Theodoret comments, "In mentioning David's line the divine apostle of necessity added 'according to the flesh' to teach us clearly how on the one hand he is God's Son and on the other he is styled David's."³¹ Insistence on the distinction has earned him suspicion of underplaying the hypostatic union (no phrase of his, of course).³² Certainly there are passages in the Commentary where he shows reluctance to concede the *communicatio idiomatum*.³³ On 1 Cor 2:8, "If they had realised it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," Theodoret comments, "Now, he called the crucified one 'Lord of glory,' not to associate the passion with the divinity, but to show the degree of lawlessness of the sinners." 1 Thess 1:10 prompts him to comment, "It is as a human being that he suffered, and as a human being that he rose."³⁴ His reading of Heb 2:10 leads him to say, "The nature assumed is source of our salvation: rising from the dead, it procured resurrection for us all."

To a greater degree than the Paul of the letters, Theodoret is concerned to stress with his readers the equality of status of the persons of the Trinity (and by the time of this Commentary at any rate there is nothing

³¹ Cf. Eph 1.19-22; Heb 1. Such efforts at achieving a balance have helped earn his thinking the term "symmetrical" from K. McNamara, "Theodoret of Cyrus and the unity of person in Christ": *Irish Theological Quarterly* 22 (1955) 326, McNamara attributing the term to Alois Grillmeier. If meant pejoratively by McNamara, "symmetrical" can also be taken as a fair statement of Theodoret's balanced and disciplined approach.

³² Cf. M. Mandac, "L'union Christologique dans les oeuvres de Théodoret antérieures au Concile d'Ephèse": *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 47 (1971) 96: "Il est vrai qu'il ne sut pas exprimer avec toute la clarté désirable ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'union hypostatique et ses conséquences, mais qui connaît la longue histoire de ce dogma ne lui en fera pas grief." J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco, CA, Harper & Row, 1978) 325, is prepared to concede he does not sacrifice one dogma for the other: "His guiding principles, we should note, were the completeness and distinction of the natures (cf. ἡ λαβούσα and ληφθεῖσα φύσις), and their union in one person."

³³ Cf. A. Viciano, "Theodoret von Kyros als Interpret des Apostels Paulus": *Theologie und Glaube* 80 (1990) 288: "Er hebt die *unio hypostatica* nicht genügend hervor. Das gilt auch für die *communicatio idiomatum*."

³⁴ Cf. Rom 5:10; Gal 1:1; Heb 1:2; 7:25-26.

Nestorian in his use of *πρόσωπα*, as emerges from his comments on the trinitarian blessing that closes 2 Cor). Without encouragement from the text, he maintains that when Paul at the opening of the letters claims to have been "set apart for God's Gospel," it was "Father, Son and Holy Spirit who set him apart," finding scriptural support for each so as to bring out the necessary equality. Eph closes with a blessing from Father and Christ, but Theodoret insists it is also from the Spirit. The community's gifts, ministries and activities may be diverse, he concedes at 1 Cor 12:4-6 and may be said by Paul to be imparted by the Spirit, but "they are supplied by the all-holy Spirit, by the Lord, and by the God and Father... He did not claim, as some of the foolish heretics supposed, that some are activated by the Spirit, others by the God of all." It is a question in particular of defending the *homoousion* of the Spirit ("the Spirit that proceeds from the Father,"³⁵ of course – not also from the Son); and with Athanasius and the Cappadocians he comes out in several places against the subordinationism of Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, the later Arians and the Pneumatomachians (without citing them).³⁶

Many of these theological issues, as we have noted, arise as much from Theodoret's concerns at the time as from his text. But the nature of the material and the commentator's episcopal ministry both exercise an influence as well. A reader of his Psalms Commentary perceives here a relative lack of admonition – predictable in view of the less figurative character of the letters – against infringing divine transcendence by misinterpreting anthropomorphisms (a typical Antiochene concern, of course: Chrysostom would have gone on to speak of the divine *συγκατάβασις* involved – but it is not a term found in Theodoret's vocabulary here). It is rarely he has to remind the reader as he does on Rom 1:18, "By 'God's wrath' he refers to retribution not because God punishes in a passion, but to instil fear into the opponents by mention of his name." As a bishop he naturally responds to the sacramental, and particularly baptismal, dimension to Paul's thinking, especially on the process of justification. In fact, he will find this dimension even where the composer did not intend it, occasionally even projecting on to Paul an understanding of the immersion ritual of baptism that was probably not liturgical practice

³⁵ His comment on Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 2:12; Heb 9:8,14.

³⁶ Cf. Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 3:17; 2 Cor 3:17.

in the first century; for instance, he embroiders Paul's reference to the sacrament in Rom 6:4 thus:

The sacrament of baptism itself taught you to shun sin. Baptism, in fact, represents a type of the Lord's death and in it you have had a share with Christ in both the death and the resurrection.³⁷

That difficult phrase "from faith to faith" in Rom 1:17, on which Theodoret cites first the traditional but "certainly inadequate" interpretation (in Fitzmyer's view also),³⁸ is then taken sacramentally, belief in Christ leading through baptism to belief in further verities such as resurrection of the dead. Many a time the process of justification is seen by the commentator to involve participation in the sacraments.³⁹

The Commentary thus provides useful data for historians of sacramental practice and theology. In Theodoret's church, initiation into the community was one single rite, performed at the moment of baptism (of adults, presumably): on 1 Cor 12:13 he comments, "We were all renewed by one Spirit, we all enjoyed the same gift in baptism, we all alike received forgiveness of sins, we all participated in the eucharist."⁴⁰ The context here is the treatment of the charismata; on v. 7 of that chapter, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit," his comment reveals a theology and practice different from western thinking on a sacrament of confirmation: "He said, not 'the gift,' but 'the manifestation:' the grace even today is given to those thought worthy of all-holy baptism, but not in obvious fashion" (unlike the working of the charismata in the Corinthian community). As there is no separate moment of confirmation in his church, nor it seems is there a separate rite of reconciliation: forgiveness comes with baptism, and he warns his readers of its unicity: "Do not, therefore, look forward to any other forgiveness through baptism."⁴¹

³⁷ PG 82.105. In commentary on Col 3:9-14, the ritual of baptism, in which neophytes don the baptismal robe, is much on the bishop's mind.

³⁸ J. A. Fitzmyer, "Romans": *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1990) 834: "Certainly inadequate is the interpretation of Tertullian and Origen, 'from faith in the law to faith in the Gospel.'"

³⁹ Cf. Rom 4:25; 5:1-2; 8:30; 11:26-27; 13:14; 2 Cor 3:9; 5:17; Gal 2:19; Heb 3:14.

⁴⁰ Cf. Gal 6.15. He also speaks of catechising as a preparatory stage to initiation (Eph).

⁴¹ Rom 6:9-10; cf. 4:25; Col 1:14. Likewise mention of sealing with the Holy

Yet he can condemn Novatian rigorism in denying the possibility of pardon of sin after baptism, as he does at the close of comment on 2 Cor 12⁴² (Novatian already having come in for censure for ruling out second marriages).⁴³ Treating of the eucharist in 1 Cor 11, he presents the sacrament in a paschal theology, and reminds his readers that their term for it is not quite Paul's: "By 'the Lord's Supper' (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) he refers to the Lord's sacrament (δεσποτικὸν μυστήριον)" – μυστήρια being his term for sacraments generally.

In this context, too, with the prominence given to baptism, it is interesting to see the bishop maintaining his principle (expressed also in the Psalms Commentary) that clerics have no monopoly on spiritual goods. When, in taking issue with the parties in Corinth that traced their origin back to the minister of baptism, Paul claims he was sent by Christ to preach and not baptize, this desk commentator modestly concedes the priority of the former role:

Preaching is more important than baptizing: baptizing is easy for those thought worthy of priesthood, whereas preaching is proper to a few, who have received this gift from a divine source.⁴⁴

Theodoret evinces a sound grasp and endorsement, we noticed of Paul's thought on the relationship of Law, grace and faith. When Paul comes to treat of faith in Rom 3:28, "We therefore hold that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law," with the aid of Antiochene precision he avoids the later error of Hilary, Ambrosiaster and then Luther in inserting "only" after faith, and seconds the warning of James not to exclude all works from the process of justification, commenting, "The law he is referring to is the Mosaic Law; yet he said not, We hold a Jew is justified by faith, but 'a person,' a name referring generally to human nature." He is likewise clear on Paul's distinguishing the Law from the natural law; in v. 20 of that chapter he helpfully distinguishes the natural law, its expression in the Decalogue, and temporary prescriptions

Spirit in Eph 4:30 evokes no comment on a sacrament of confirmation, as it might in the West.

⁴² Also Gal 4:19; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-27; 12:17.

⁴³ At the close of comment on 1 Cor 7; cf. 1 Tim 3:2.; 5:14.

⁴⁴ 1 Cor 1:1.7 (PG 82.233).

for the Jews by way of cultic practices.⁴⁵ He joins the ranks of commentators ancient and modern in wrestling with that puzzling phrase in Rom 12:3, "Each according to the measure of the faith God has assigned," and gives a plausible interpretation.

IV. LAW, FAITH, GRACE, FREE WILL

It is such dogmatic sections of the letters that appeal to Theodoret; on the parenetic sections he is even more concise, yet he cannot avoid taking moral positions. In fact, he emerges as a shrewd observer of contemporary (sexual) mores; when Paul in 1 Cor 7:3-4 proposes an equality of esteem between husbands and wives, the bishop observes,

Human laws, you know, tell women to be continent, and punish those breaking the law, whereas of husbands they do not require the same continence: men, being makers of the law, were not concerned for equality, instead granting themselves licence.⁴⁶

Moralising, we noted, he regards as beyond his purpose; he does not fulminate against sin in the manner of a preacher, and just as he avoided going into details when commenting on David's sin in Ps 51, so he does not expatiate on sexual excesses when Paul touches on the subject in Rom 1:26-27. We saw that when he came to that key text in Rom 5:12 on the Fall and the consequence of death for all, he was anxious to insist that it is individual sin that brings us under the norm of death. He would give no encouragement to pelagians with his acceptance of the Fall, and yet with typical eastern accent on healing rather than wound he can present it almost as a *felix* culpa:

From the beginning the creator arranged our condition this way and foreseeing Adam's transgression he prepared in advance a remedy suited to the wound.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cf. Gal 2:16; 3:21; Eph 2:15; 6:3; Heb 7:18-20; 9:9-10; 1 Tim 1:11.

⁴⁶ PG 82.272. Today's social workers and criminologists would agree with the bishop's analysis of the effects of indolence and unemployment in commentary on Eph 4:28, "Let thieves be thieves no more," where he sees theft as a symptom of idleness.

⁴⁷ 2 Cor 5:5 (PG 82.408).

We are probably right to claim, therefore, that Gustave Bardy, when highlighting Theodoret's deficiencies as a spiritual director, is wide of the mark in tracing his ambivalent position on grace and free will to a problem with original sin (though, predictably, the term does not occur in his text).⁴⁸ We saw him, rather, wrestling with Paul's insistence on the gratuity of divine grace because, on the basis of Antioch's incarnational theology generally, it seemed to impugn the role of free will and human effort in the process of salvation — as it would thus undercut that school's Christology, soteriology and approach to (the literal sense of) Scripture. It is quite logical of him, accordingly, to resist a notion of predestination limiting free will that developed in later interpretation of Rom 8:30, "Those whom he predestined he also called;" capitalising on his imaginative gifts, he warms to Paul's theme as he sees it:

It was not the foreknowledge that made them like that — rather, God from afar foresaw the future as God. In other words, if I were to see a bucking horse champing at the bit and in no way tolerating the rider, and say he was riding for a fall, and then things turned out according to my word, it would not be I who brought the horse down; rather, I put into words what was bound to happen, relying on the horse's lack of control as a sign. The God of all from a distance knew everything as God; he did not apply pressure to such-and-such a one to practise virtue, nor to another to commit evil. After all, had he forced them in each case, it would not be right for him to celebrate and award the former and sentence the other to punishment.⁴⁹

We bear a considerable degree of responsibility for our own salvation, he is saying; in the divine economy human effort counts for much: "Faith is not sufficient for salvation," as he says by way of paraphrase of 2 Cor 5:9 — our response to our divine benefactor is also required.⁵⁰ It was by not responding that the Jews lost God's favour through their own free

⁴⁸ G. Bardy. "Théodoret", in *DTC* 15, 323: "On voit sans peine les insuffisances et les lacunes de cette doctrine (of original sin). Lorsqu'il s'agit de la grâce et de sa nécessité, Théodoret n'est pas moins incomplet."

⁴⁹ PG 82.141.

⁵⁰ Cf. Heb 4:2; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:9. When Eph 2:8 says unambiguously, "By grace you are saved through faith,... not from works," Theodoret concurs, but sees faith as our response to the gift, and after baptism the practice of virtue, so maintaining the balance; and on 4:8 it is our faith that elicits divine grace.

will (*gnome, proairesis*): such is his diagnosis of biblical history in chs 9-11, "the heart of Romans." Not that there is no role for divine grace: the Commentary insists on it; but in his desire to maintain that "symmetrical" balance the commentator can come out with statements that seem at least ambivalent and would give heart to the pelagians – for example, "Grace comes to the assistance of those who contribute the proper enthusiasm (*προθυμία*)."⁵¹ At other times the balance, though still unhappily expressed, is more deliberate, as in commentary on Rom 12:1-12:

The Spirit is quenched in the case of those unworthy of grace: they do not keep the eye of the mind clear, and so do not receive that ray... The one who is fervent in spirit serves the Lord with enthusiasm, looks forward to the enjoyment of the good things hoped for and proves superior to the onset of trials, pitting endurance against their assaults and calling unceasingly on divine grace for assistance.⁵²

Our effort and enthusiasm make us "worthy of grace," and yet we depend on and pray for "divine grace for assistance:" a balance, if teetering somewhat. He is more secure in comment on Phil 1:29-30: "Free will (*γνώμη*) of itself, devoid of grace, can achieve no good work: there is need of both, our enthusiasm and divine assistance. In other words, the grace of the Spirit is not sufficient for those lacking enthusiasm nor in turn is enthusiasm which is devoid of it capable of amassing the riches of virtue."⁵³

Predictably, in Theodoret we find no suggestion of impairment of human nature; he retains his eastern optimism on its goodness, and would not want his readers to think Paul is of a different mind in passages like Rom 6:13: "He presented the body not as evil but as a creation of a good God; it is capable when guided by the soul in a fit and proper manner, of worshipping God." He would have no truck with modern commentators

⁵¹ 1 Cor 7:7. As with Chrysostom, *προθυμία/ραθυμία* are binomials (to adopt the terminology of F. Asensio) basic to the spiritual life in Theodoret's thinking. See my "A pelagian commentator on the Psalms?"

⁵² PG 82.189.

⁵³ PG 82.568. But in the next chapter, 2:13, he rephrases Paul, finding him too evenhanded. Cf. 2 Thess 5:3: "We need both, good intention and cooperation from on high." Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 373, defends both Theodore and Theodoret against charges of pelagian theology, admitting only "an intensified emphasis on individualism."

like Bultmann who constantly find in the text a gnostic background to Paul's thinking. He takes issue with heretics who want to see a dualistic antithesis of body and spirit in the letters, especially in passages contrasting two principles of action, like Rom 8:13:

Here, of course, the divine apostle saw the blasphemy of Marcion, Valentinus and Mani, and proposes the teaching with great precision, saying not, You put to death the body, but 'the actions of the body,' that is, the mindset of the flesh, the impulses of the passions; after all, you have the Spirit's cooperating grace.⁵⁴

He insists in comment on Gal 5 that Paul's antithesis of flesh and spirit is to do with attitude, φρόνημα, γνώμη, no criticism of the body being involved.

Theodoret tells his readers (probably lay people in the world, we concluded) that there is no need to cut themselves off from the world; he paraphrases 1 Cor 5:10 to mean, "I impose no difficult requirement on you; I am not bidding you be completely cut off from those not of the faith, this being tantamount to dispatching you to some other world."⁵⁵ He is concerned lest the dictum (if not of Paul, of the Corinthians themselves) in 2 Cor 5:6, "While at home in the body, we are away from the Lord," be taken amiss, and he insists, "He does not say, We are at a distance from the Lord in still being joined to the mortal body; rather, We do not see him here and now with the eyes of the body, whereas we shall see and be in his company." Bodily existence is no obstacle to union with the Lord. He rejects as "obvious servitude and abolition of the dignity given to us" the rigorous asceticism of deviants in the Colossian church.

V. ASCETICISM WITHOUT MYSTICISM

It is sound, balanced, practical advice to his readers for living their spiritual life, even if he does not go into further detail than Paul himself; this he would see more appropriate to a preacher. Theodoret would probably have been content with Louis Bouyer's summary — an "asceti-

⁵⁴ PG 82.133.

⁵⁵ But that other-worldly maxim in Heb 13:14 leads him (as it has led many another preacher) to an unhelpful comment for lay people, "Let us despise things of this life."

cism without mysticism" ⁵⁶ - of; Antioch's reaction against an impractical Alexandrian mysticism. As is true also of the Commentary on the Psalms, in this work Theodoret does not aspire to the role of spiritual director; when Paul at 1 Thess 5:17 urges his listeners to "pray without ceasing," Theodoret passes on with a mere one-liner. He realises that his readers, who as lay people are not in the habit of reading much and are "prone to easy ways" in that regard, are not bent on ascending Mount Carmel. Generally, they are married people; he is aware Paul had contemporary misunderstandings about marriage to confront, and he himself wants to uphold the institution against later heretics assailing it. The occasion comes, of course, with the reply to queries on the subject of virginity and marriage from Corinth at 7:32-37 of the first letter. Taking a lead from Paul, Theodoret first concedes the double function of virginity, pragmatic and eschatological: "The person practising virginity has a soul free of idle and pointless concerns, and reproduces the future life as far as possible;" he adds the fact that his work on this topic (not known to us) goes into greater depth. He then relates the two ways of life without detriment to marriage: "He brought out the good in one case and the better in the other, and stopped the mouths of the heretics who malign marriage," citing in particular Novatian's condemnation of second marriages. In the light of his general defense of life in this world and the compatibility of body and spirit in the Christian life, this brief endorsement would have encouraged his readers, as it did Paul's community.

One reason I personally had in making this "Commentary on the fourteen letters of St. Paul" available in English translation was that, in the view of its eighteenth century editor J. L. Schulze, it is a work "quo nil melius tota antiquitas habet post Chrysostomum," ⁵⁷ and thus deserves to be better known. Theodoret would have been gratified to think that this late work of his, completed at a busy stage of his episcopate when currents of theological controversy were swirling about (and soon to engulf) him, could be compared to that of one of "the world's luminaries," and he but a mosquito buzzing about the apostolic meadows in the company of "those famous bees," and incurring criticism for his effrontery. As the work of a desk theologian, with conciseness his principal criterion, his

⁵⁶ *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (London, Burns & Oates, 1963) 444.

⁵⁷ PG 82.1.

Commentary cannot easily be compared to Chrysostom's voluminous pulpit homilies on "the world's teacher," *beau idéal* of both men. There are, of course, similar accents in both works traceable to the theological and hermeneutical convictions of their school of Antioch: an attachment to (if uncritical acceptance of) the literal sense of the text, an esteem for ἀκριβεια, that virtue of precision found both in the text and hopefully also in the commentator, an accent on the humanity of Jesus in Christological debate, a preference for the ascetical (in the sense of practical) against the mystical (in the sense of experiential) in spiritual direction, a struggle to maintain a balance in identifying the respective roles of divine grace and human effort in the process of salvation. Both commentators also do us a service in preserving readings of the Koine text, as they can be faulted both for exegetical shortcomings and for limitations as spiritual gurus. In Theodoret himself, however, we can admire the distinctive balance and flexibility in his approach to his subject, which earns him the epithet "modéré" from Bardy, for whom he is for later ages "le noyau ou le terme de comparaison indispensable."⁵⁸ To the extent that he succeeded in his modest aim of "demonstrating the profundity of the apostle's wisdom and stripping away the veils from the writing," he deserves to be known by modern commentators on Paul.

⁵⁸ "Interprétation chez les pères," in *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément IV* (Paris, Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1949) 582.