

A Spiritual Director from Antioch

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Abstract: Along with the Gospels, the Psalter was a staple of spiritual formation for Christians in the early centuries of the Church. Hence, many psalm Commentaries were composed, often taking pride of place in an author's literary output. Theodoret of Cyr likewise, though a busy pastor in a time of theological turmoil, composed such a work to help people understand this favourite book as they sang it. Drawing on his predecessors from Antioch and Alexandria, and betraying current trends in Christology, scriptural interpretation and ascetical practice, he offered with typical conciseness "some benefit in concentrated form" that today we might find at variance with our expectations of a spiritual director.

OF MOST OF THE GREAT COMMENTATORS on the Scriptures in the centuries after their compilation in the Christian Bible whom we know as Fathers of the Church, it could safely be said that they composed and in some cases orally delivered their work for the benefit of a public for whom they had pastoral responsibility.¹ They were not composing for their own edification, nor were they thinking of circulation of their material within a narrow circle of specialists, as might be true of authors of some biblical commentaries today; disparaging comments by some Fathers about such specialists – *philomatheis* for Greek Fathers – betray their wider concern, as well as offering an apologia for a personal impatience with detail in some cases. So when these pastors come to comment on the great biblical classics, like the Psalter or the Gospels, for the spiritual betterment of their listeners and readers, theirs is not primarily an academic exercise; had it been so, we might have faulted their equipment for the task: commentary only, and not strictly exegesis, is what many of them were capable of, particularly in respect of a work from the Hebrew Bible.

And yet, of course, it was to the Psalter that so many of the Fathers turned for the benefit of those to whom they spoke and wrote. Marie-

1. This feature alone would not be responsible for our lack of works composed by women in that period. Attempts to assemble an array of Mothers of the Church have pointed to women, sometimes with a degree of *cura pastoralis* in types of religious community, whom we know from correspondence from men like Jerome (their own letters having perished). Failure to document the claim to such status arises from a wider factor; as Elizabeth A. Clark puts it, "The often repeated assertion that the coming of Christianity benefited women in general is not borne out in our evidence of the period" (*Women in the Early Church* [Message of the Fathers of the Church 13; Wilmington: Glazier, 1983] 156).

Josèphe Rondeau has examined scores of commentaries on the Psalms from the third to the fifth centuries,² not all preserved in their entirety or in direct manuscript tradition, but some of great dimensions, happily extant without need of recourse to the catenae for determining their provenance. Obviously not every Father was of the same mind as Jerome, who, on learning from Augustine that he was thinking of composing such a commentary on the Psalter, wrote back in 404 to challenge him on the prudence of his decision. Listing six Greek and three Latin extant commentators, he demanded of Augustine: if those commentaries were clear, would not the task be superfluous; if obscure, would it not be presumptuous.³ Happily, Augustine passed through the horns of the dilemma.

THE PSALTER IN ANTIOCH

In the East also, Fathers in Alexandria like Origen (not the first, but taking pride of place in Jerome's list) turned their hand to a commentary on the Psalter, not always without that sincerest form of flattery of their predecessors – imitation and dependence to such an extent that independent commentary is rare: one should not expect to find in the commentary bearing the name of Athanasius, for example, the independent work of that great churchman. Commentaries composed in the school of Antioch in that period may be less abundant; but the school's distinctive theology and (as we shall see) Protestant spirituality vis-à-vis Alexandria ensured a degree of authenticity, and in some cases these works come to us in direct manuscript tradition. Diodore of Tarsus,⁴ his pupils Theodore of Mopsuestia⁵ and John Chrysostom,⁶ and Theodoret of Cyr⁷ have all left us with a commentary on the Psalms, the latter two in direct tradition, perhaps only Theodoret's complete (the jury is still out on Chrysostom's intention to treat of only the fifty eight psalms in the extant collection), Diodore's alone available in critical edition and not all in modern language translation,⁸ but together constituting an impressive corpus of Antiochene biblical commentary and illustrating their school's accents in spiritual direction. All four men were occupied as bishops for much of their life, caught up in theological

2. Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les Commentaires Patristiques du Psautier (IIIe-Ve siècles)*, 2 vols (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 219, 220; Roma: Pont.Inst.Stud.Or., 1982, 1985).

3. *Ep* 112,20 (PL 22,929).

4. J. M. Olivier (ed), *Commentarii in Psalmos I-L*, (CCG 6; Turnhout: Brepols, 1980).

5. *Le Commentaire de Théodore de Mopsueste sur les Psaumes (I-LXXX)* (Studi e Testi 93; Roma: Vatican Press, 1939).

6. *PG* 55,39-498.

7. *PG* 80,857-1997.

8. See my *St John Chrysostom. Commentary on the Psalms*, 2 vols (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), and forthcoming translation of Theodoret's Commentary in the Fathers of the Church series (FOTC 101; Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

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debate in this conciliar period, and in some cases fighting for survival against persecution and malice; but at least for Theodore and (to judge from textual signs of youthful inexperience)⁹ possibly also for Chrysostom, work on the Psalter was by deliberate choice the first fruits of their “exegetical” output, while Theodoret opens his commentary with an apology that pressure of affairs forced him to turn to other biblical books ahead of the Psalter:

It would have been a pleasure for me to do a commentary on the inspired composition of the mighty David in preference to all other divine sayings... But we were prevented from putting this desire into effect by those who made demands on us for commentaries on the other divine Scriptures.¹⁰

When Theodoret penned those words (we know from internal evidence in the Commentary and his letters that it was between 441 and 448), he had for two decades been bishop of Cyr, a city some days walk from Antioch – perhaps a “little backwater”, in the words of Frances Young, but with responsibility for some 800 parishes.¹¹ In a letter of December 448 written to Eusebius of Ancyra, he says he has written commentaries on “all the prophets, the psalter and the apostle”¹² – no mean feat for a busy bishop also involved in civic and social improvements to Cyr and caught up as well in contemporary theological developments (his *Eranistes* against the monophysites is also from the 440s) that would culminate the following year in his deposition at the Robber Synod of Ephesus, then reinstatement and finally vindication at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, a gathering for which he must take much credit. So this conscientious churchman must have felt it a binding duty to “do a commentary on this piece of inspired composition first of all” or in fact at any stage of his active episcopacy. Yet he was able to complete the work of commentary that even with characteristic conciseness – “we shall make every effort to avoid a superfluity of words”, he promises in the preface – runs to close on three hundred thousand words in translation.

Bishop Theodoret is aware that the Psalter – hardly in preference to the Gospels, though strangely he did not follow another strong patristic

9. See my article, “Chrysostom’s Commentary on the Psalms: homilies or tracts?” in P. Allen et al (eds), *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church* (Brisbane: Australian Catholic University, 1998) 301-17.

10. *PG* 80, 857-860.

11. F. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 267.

12. Letter 82, Y. Azéma (ed), *Théodoret de Cyr. Correspondance* (SC 98; Paris: Du Cerf, 1964) 202. The *terminus a quo* is set by a comment on Ps 18.12-14 (in the Hebrew numbering – more convenient than Theodoret’s Septuagint text), where he refers to invasions of Huns in 434 and Persians in 441 (*PG* 80,978). (For the Psalter text Theodoret is using, see Introduction #3 to my forthcoming translation.)

tradition to leave a commentary on them – looms large in the spiritual lives of his flock.

Our experience is that most people make little or no reference to the other divine Scriptures, whereas from the spiritual harmonies of the divinely-inspired David many people make frequent quotations, whether at home, in public places or while travelling, gain serenity for themselves from the harmony of the poetry, and through this enjoyment obtain spiritual benefit.¹³

It is not quite clear, however, just whose “spiritual benefit” he had specifically in mind in writing the commentary. (It is a desk commentary, unlike the evidently – though not indubitably – oral character of Chrysostom’s work.)¹⁴ The above statement from the preface would suggest he has his lay congregations in mind; but a few lines previously he had narrowed the focus to the more devout and then even further to religious:

Students of religion, whether city dwellers or in the country, all alike have been zealous in applying themselves to this work in particular. Not the least of these are those who embrace religious life; they have it on their lips by night and in the middle of the day, to sing the praise of the God of all and to allay their bodily passions.¹⁵

Theodoret had had first-hand acquaintance with monastic life in nearby Apamea earlier in his life, and he would join that community for a brief period again on deposition shortly after completing this Commentary. He shows high regard for “those who embrace the angelic life;... acting as ambassadors for human beings, they make divine reconciliation their business” (on Psalm 72:3), and knows well that “the choir of the saints always rises at night for praying and celebrating the God of all” (on Psalm 119:55). He also speaks with esteem of his fellow clergy: in comment on Psalm 45:12, “The wealthy members of his people will entreat your countenance,” which he applies first to Christ, he then adds, “The priestly order also acts like the Church’s countenance in being invested with greater spiritual dignity.” Yet in noting that Psalm 115 makes special mention of Aaron and priesthood, he remarks that superior to him in the psalmist’s view are “those who fear the Lord”. On the other hand, he can make some quite dismissive remarks about

13. From the preface (PG 80,860); the work is hardly known beyond it.

14. See my article, “Chrysostom’s Commentary on the Psalms”, for evidence for the conclusion that Chrysostom is delivering his work to a group (of men) in a *didaskaleion*, or classroom (not in a church within a eucharistic liturgy).

15. PG 80,857. Was Theodoret writing for women as well as men? Though he takes issue with the exclusivity of the Psalter’s opening verse, “Blessed the man who did not walk in the counsel of the ungodly”, his own practice soon belies that caveat.

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life in the world which would not be of much help to the bulk of his flock destined to spend their life there: on Psalm 73:18-20 he comments, "He was right to compare (the Babylonians') prosperity to a dream; the unreality of the present life is no different from a dream, after all."

THEODORET'S READERS AND HIS AIM

If the precise readership Theodoret has in mind is unclear, the improvement he is aiming at achieving in them is clearer. The preface and brief conclusion to the Commentary indicate that failure by their users to understand the Psalms is the deficiency he hopes to remedy, and that his primary role is that of teacher. His purpose in doing a Commentary, he says, is "that they might sing its melodies and at the same time recognise the sense of the words they sing". It is a cognitive deficiency he hopes to overcome, as Chrysostom likewise had been concerned that "those singing (the Psalter) daily and uttering the words by mouth do not enquire about the force of the ideas underlying the words".¹⁶ The failure to understand the verses of the Psalms may have been realised in people from all those states of life, just as Bishop Theodoret himself is not at all above reproach when it comes to biblical lore in general. His recall of scriptural texts is often loose, if not downright faulty: on Psalm 5 he has Jesus in place of the Baptist quoting Isaiah from Luke 3, on Psalm 16 he has Peter in place of Paul addressing the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, on Psalm 87 he confuses the Rahab of Isa 30:7 with that of Jos 2; on Psalm 106 he cites "Elijah the Tishbite" when he means Isaiah of Jerusalem; and so on with a dozen other psalms.

There are therefore good reasons for Theodoret's impatience with the *philomatheis* beyond what Gustave Bardy calls "défiance à l'égard des explications contournées",¹⁷ and there is something of a paradox in his estimate of his readers' biblical literacy: we find an element of castigation in his opening to commentary on Psalm 3 regarding David's flight from Absalom – "This story, of course, is known to the more studious, but for the benefit of lazier people I shall summarise it" – and yet he can still flatter his readers on that Psalm 110, used as a theological proof-text even in the New Testament, with the ability to appreciate intense trinitarian and Christological argument.

Whoever it was, then, that Theodoret saw receiving "some benefit in concentrated form" from his work (as he put it in the preface), he felt confident as he reached the close that he had produced "a fit and proper commentary" by both relaying the best thinking of his predecessors and also making his own individual contribution.

16. Commenting on Ps 141 (PG 55,427).

17. "Théodore", *DTC* 15 (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1946) 312.

If we have not in some cases arrived at the Spirit's hidden mysteries, do not be too hard on us: what we succeeded in finding we proposed to everyone without stint, and what we learnt from the Holy Spirit we were anxious to offer to posterity.¹⁸

To plumb "the Spirit's hidden mysteries" he had gone to the trouble of assembling on his desk not only the works of his Antiochene predecessors, but also the best Alexandrian tradition via the Commentary of Eusebius of Caesarea, through which he could tap into Origen's thinking. He thus had choices to make in the overall style of commentary he would provide for the readers who depended on him. We need not discuss here the hermeneutical decisions he had to make, as he outlines in the preface:

Now, let no one think any the less of our efforts for the reason that others have produced a commentary on (the Psalter) before ours. I mean, I have encountered various such commentaries: some I found taking refuge in allegories with considerable relish, while others would adapt the inspired composition to history of a certain type to such an extent that the commentary represents a case for Jews rather than the household of the faith.¹⁹

The excesses of allegorism, represented by Origen or Apollinaris of Laodicea, and of historicism, represented by his fellow Antiochene Theodore, he would like to avoid; on over two score occasions he cites these predecessors anonymously,²⁰ and elsewhere an unaccustomed expansiveness betrays a passing dependence on Eusebius. What is of relevance here is rather the choices he had to make by way of the spiritual direction he should offer his readers in responding to the psalmist's text.

ASCETICISM WITHOUT MYSTICISM

Bishop Theodoret did not cast himself in the role of a guru leading his readers through the dark night of the soul; though he was capable of engaging with the figurative language of the Psalter's lyric poetry and could plumb for them the sense of a "God who trusts hearts and entrails" (Psalm 7:9) and the bird imagery of Psalm 102:6-7, he is reluctant to get beyond the historical or Christological or eschatological sense he gives a psalm to apply it with any intimacy to the lives of his

18. PG 80,1997.

19. PG 80,860. D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch. A study of early Christian thought in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 39, properly credits Theodoret with a "moderate historicism". For further detail on his hermeneutical approach in the Commentary, see Introduction #5 to my translation.

20. See Jean-Noël Guinot, *L'Exégèse de Théodoret de Cyr* (Théologie Historique 100; Paris: Beauchesne, 1995) 684-713, who endeavours to identify the views cited.

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flock. This is not an idiosyncrasy of his: he is but illustrating the general protest of Antioch against what it perceived to be an unhealthy mysticism in Alexandrian spirituality, where “a fervent piety unsatisfied by mere moralism fell by the nature of things into a deceptive ‘asceticism’,” in the words of Louis Bouyer.²¹ In Bouyer’s reading, “in the school of Origen, the tendency is to find Christian dogma under its most metaphysical aspects, or Christian spirituality under its most mystical aspects (that is, what is connected with the life of Christ in us)”. Antiochene monasticism in this period, of which Theodoret was a product, reacted against this approach, moving “from mysticism towards a rather moralistic asceticism”, settling for an “asceticism without mysticism” – something Bouyer finds in Chrysostom specifically,²² though the Antiochene revolt affected theology and dogma as well, while of immediate relevance for us is the fact that “it was the whole orientation of spirituality that was involved”.

To be sure, “mystical” is not a word that characterises Theodoret’s commentary on “the spiritual harmonies of the divinely-inspired David”. On the other hand, neither is Bouyer’s “moralistic” close to the mark: Theodoret (unlike Chrysostom) never moralises, even when commenting on David’s sin in that classic penitential Psalm 51, where the sin goes unspecified, though throughout the Commentary “the sin” is frequently referred to as a watershed in his career. Perhaps fewer than a dozen times does the bishop move from the historical or eschatological application he is giving to a psalm to tease out its significance for his readers’ lives; they are left to bridge the gap themselves. Only at the very end of full commentary on those 176 verses of Psalm 119 on the Law of God does the commentator invite the readers to find in them some fruit for themselves:

Now, after making our commentary on the psalm in summary fashion, we urge the readers not to be satisfied with what is written, nor consider that this applies only to the inspired author. Instead, let each one draw fitting benefit from the writings, and ensure that the remedy wards off one’s own passions.²³

Antioch would encourage no closer *rapprochement*, and this desk theologian (with his own innate delicacy as well)²⁴ did not feel he could presume a relationship proper to a preacher and his congregation.

21. Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates, 1963) 436-49.

22. For the extent to which this is true of Chrysostom’s *Commentary on the Psalms*, see Introduction #9 to my translation and my article, “The Spirituality of Chrysostom’s *Commentary on the Psalms*”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997) 569-79.

23. PG 80,1873.

24. This feature of Theodoret’s personality perhaps accounts for his unwillingness to examine David’s adultery in any detail. It emerges also in his handling of the term for “belching”, *exereugomai*, at its rare occurrences in his LXX text, whereas Chrysostom had

Far from leading his readers on the ascent of Mount Carmel, then, Theodoret is content to portray their life with God in terms of traditional metaphors, like the patient under the hand of physician or surgeon, or the seafarer at the mercy of the navigator. He has a list of vices and virtues that appears at times in a form suggesting repeated use:

Now, what is the summit of good things? "Seek peace and go after it": the peaceable person entertains peace towards everyone, not purloining the neighbour's property furtively, not committing homicide, not undermining marriages, not speaking evil, not doing evil, doing favours, showing respect, sharing, lending support, sharing dangers and struggles – such is unalloyed love and genuine friendship.²⁵

We might like to see the bishop give frequent instruction on the art of prayer (he does so briefly in commentary on Psalm 4:1) if we did not recall Chrysostom's mechanical efforts at such instruction, which came out like a set of rules or a medical prescription.²⁶

BALANCING HUMAN AND DIVINE

Spiritual directors in Antioch, by contrast with their Alexandrian counterparts whom Bouyer sees withering on the vine, clearly believed in keeping one's feet on the ground in the process of spiritual development. This approach, of course, was all of a piece with their approach to Christology, to soteriology, to the Scriptures: human nature, not grace alone, had an undeniable role to play. With monophysite ideas in the air, shortly to be dealt with at Chalcedon, the Theodoret of the *Eranistes* frequently finds occasion in the Psalms to bring out the distinction in Jesus ("the form of a slave" from the *Philippians* being a frequent term for him) between the divine and the human, accentuating the latter at times, as in Psalm 55, which he takes to refer to the Passion:

It was necessary, you see, for the nature which underwent the Passion to be revealed, and the extraordinary longsuffering which the loving God had for our race; he underwent suffering in the flesh, wishing also in this to be involved in our salvation.²⁷

made great capital of it in *Ps* 45:1 to develop a theology of divine inspiration of the biblical authors. See my article, "Psalm 45: a *locus classicus* for patristic thinking on biblical inspiration", *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993) 95-100.

25. On *Ps* 34.14 (*PG* 80,1105-1108).

26. See "The spirituality of Chrysostom's *Commentary on the Psalms*", 571-72. It was interesting to hear the reservations regarding Alexandrian "mysticism" on the part of Bishop Rowan Williams, speaking at the Sydney conference on Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church, January 1999. Few, however, upheld the Antiochene alternative (the present writer excepted).

27. *PG* 80,1272.

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Jousts with Arius and Apollinaris, on the one hand, and Cyril, on the other, lie as an *arrière-scène* to commentary on some psalms in which he finds a Christological sense. He is generally careful to respect the thinking and even the terminology of credal statements, and we find elements of the later Chalcedonian definition appearing in his text. Perhaps out of regard for Nestorius, he (or at least the shorter form of the text of the Commentary)²⁸ avoids the term *Theotokos*, and though he will speak of “the holy Virgin”, Mary does not figure prominently; yet “he is no Nestorian”.²⁹ Concomitantly, this Antiochene commentator approaches the Scriptures with similarly balanced appreciation of the divine and the human in textual expression. Sensitive of the need to respect divine transcendence in understanding anthropomorphic phrases in psalm verses, Theodoret enunciates the principle of *synkatabasis* with an adequacy equal to Chrysostom’s. Of Psalm 119:135 he remarks: “The divine is incorporeal, simple and without composition. Sacred Scripture, however, speaks about the divine in a rather corporeal and concrete fashion, adjusting its language to human nature.”³⁰ Behind both positions, Christological and biblical, lies Antioch’s profound acceptance of the principle of incarnation, *ejnānqrwvphsiß*.

This principle undergirds Antiochene spiritual direction as well, and accounts for Theodoret’s insistence on the role of human effort as well as divine grace in the process of salvation – an insistence that to some in former times bore a whiff of pelagianism, and which J. N. D. Kelly has to explain rather as “an intensified emphasis on individualism”³¹ but which seems more adequately accounted for by Antioch’s incarnational thinking. Just as sound Antiochene Christology has to be unmistakably dyophysite, and biblical exegesis has to admit a dual authorial influence, so the process of salvation and spiritual growth is the beneficiary of

28. As mentioned above, we have no modern critical edition of the Commentary, the text available being that of J. L. Schulze in the eighteenth century that was reprinted in Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca* a century later. It survives in two forms, long and short, the latter better attested to by more ancient witnesses, yet the long form being in existence since the sixth century. My reading suggests Rondeau (*Les Commentaires Patristiques*, I, 135) is right to give preference to the short form, there being clear signs the long form is derivative while having its own theological agenda.

29. Bardy, “Théodoret”, 324. M. Mandac, “L’union Christologique dans les oeuvres de Théodoret antérieures au Concile d’Ephèse”, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 47 (1971) 64-96, surveys Theodoret’s statements (though only from doctrinal works) before concluding his Christology is “correcte tout en étant incomplète”. K. McNamara, “Theodoret of Cyrus and the unity of person in Christ”, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 22 (1955) 326, employs the term “symmetrical” he gets from Alois Grillmeier for Theodoret’s Christology; if it means “balanced”, it is true of the Psalms Commentary – unlike the “fundamentally dualistic” of Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 274.

30. PG 80,1864. See my article, “On looking again at *synkatabasis*”, *Prudentia* 13 (1981) 3-11.

31. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 373. For Chrysostom’s liability to such a charge, see my article, “A pelagian commentator on the Psalms?”, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 63 (1998) 263-71.

divine and human activity. For Theodoret the Fall is real, as are the effects of that primal sin ("original" not being a term in the mouth of the Greeks); pelagians could not find comfort in this work as they might in some of Chrysostom's. Yet while eastern optimism is not allowed to deny the reality of a deadly cycle of sin, neither is there any concession to western pessimism about impairment of human nature; he says on that penitential Psalm 51,

Now, we learn from all this that the force of sin is not part of nature (if this were so, after all, we would be free from sin), but that nature tends to stumble when troubled by passions; yet victory lies with free will, making use of effort to lend assistance.³²

That sequence (primal sin – mortality – corruption – disordered passions – our own sins) can be broken by "free will", or our mindset (*gnomê*) and human effort. Admittedly, Theodoret could be more precise in detailing the role of grace in this cycle, as he is elsewhere: "All people, even if adorned with the works of virtue, stand in need of divine grace" (on Psalm 32:10). At other places, he tries hard to maintain a balance:

It is impossible for anyone to travel the way of virtue without his grace. He works in association with those who have this righteous intent: for the acquisition of virtue there is need of human zeal and divine assistance at one and the same time.³³

There are those, like Bardy, acquainted with this Commentary only to the extent of reading the well-known preface, who see pelagian weaknesses in Theodoret's thinking.³⁴ They might take individual passages to find the "symmetrical" balance wanting also in respect of Christology and biblical interpretation. Overall, however, this work preserves the necessary balance, given the contemporary need to resist monophysite imbalance with its implications for spiritual formation, and given also that "healthy reaction" against Alexandrian deficiencies of which Bouyer speaks.

EXPECTATIONS UNREALISED

"Feet on the ground" doubtless has its strengths as a program for spiritual direction; and as a stance in the ancient world against ascetical and theological excesses it served Antioch well. It does not, however,

32. PG 80,1244, a place where he also – correctly – takes the εἰδὼν w/l of Rom 5:12 as "because" (as he does in commenting on that letter).

33. On Ps 37:23-24 (PG 80,1132).

34. See Bardy, "Théodoret", 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."

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make for exciting listening or reading: Chrysostom's response to the Pilgrim Songs (Psalms 120-134) is as pedestrian as Theodoret's. And there are other psalms where we wish that Theodoret the commentator would allow something of the psalmist's pathos to come through, like Psalm 27, rather than simply honour his promise to "avoid a superfluity of words" and "offer some benefit in concentrated form". In our day we might also have preferred the Bishop of Cyr to have resonated with the liturgical origins and use of these cultic hymns in the manner of modern commentators, like Gunkel, Mowinckel and Weiser, for whom *Sitz im Leben* is vital, and to have spoken more of their role in Christian liturgy. We can be disappointed with him, as with almost all the Fathers commenting on the Hebrew Bible, for his lack of direct contact with the original text,³⁵ with all the shortcomings this involves through use of a LXX crib he believed to be developed "not without divine inspiration". His "moderate historicism" by way of a hermeneutical approach may also disappoint others, sound though his understanding of scriptural *koinonia* is. All the same, we can understand his obvious sense of satisfaction at the close of his Commentary with fulfilment of his aim of helping readers (primarily) and singers of the Psalter "sing its melodies and at the same time recognise the sense of the words they sing", thanks to the light he claims to have shed on it from fine exponents from Alexandria and Antioch both, including himself. There is more to the place of the Psalms in the spiritual life of Christians than this, of course; if he sensed that, he did not offer it. Like other Psalm commentators from his school, he believed that the first step in arriving at "the Spirit's hidden mysteries" is comprehension of the text;³⁶ the deeper experiences implied in the ambivalent term "mystical" are a bonus in the process of spiritual development, and can be left to the resources of individual readers.

35. P. Canivet, *Histoire d'une entreprise apologétique au Ve siècle* (Paris: Blond & Gay, 1957) 26-27, makes a good case for Theodoret being bilingual, Syriac his mother tongue, Greek his "langue de culture" (in Guinot's phrase) – hence his ability to access parts of the Hebrew Psalms text through the "Syrus" (a form of the Peshitta Bible). In the Introduction to my translation I discuss the handicap this represents and the character of the ("Lucianic") form of the LXX he is using, along with alternative Greek versions available in his copy of the Hexapla, that great thesaurus of Origen.

36. Theodoret would have found a spiritual paradox in the recitation of the breviary in Latin by St Teresa's community, who were innocent of knowledge of that language.