

**Agnès Lorrain, *Le Commentaire de Théodoret de Cyr sur l'Épître aux Romains. Études philologiques et historiques, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 179, Boston-Berlin, Walter de Gruyter 2018, 392 p., ISBN: 978311053788**

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Any new edition of ancient text or patristic commentary on biblical books attracts the attention of a philologist, historian, or theologian. The tradition of editing a patristic text, well preserved especially in Western Europe for several centuries, will reveal texts of great interest to Eastern Church and Orthodox theologians as well. In the volume discussed here we meet an influential author, both prolific and profound for his time: Theodoret, Bishop of Cyr, from whom we have exegetical, historical and dogmatic writings of great value for the whole Christian tradition. But the Christological disputes in which he was involved, especially his opposition to Cyril of Alexandria, perhaps the most influential character of the fifth century, made Theodoret's work partly lost, or less frequented by posterity in the area dominated by the Byzantine and Latin culture. Moreover, his exegetical writings were neglected throughout the medieval period, when the interest of readers and church authorities were mainly focused on dogmatic, historical or spiritual works. Theodoret was an exegete of Antiochian tradition, who fought the allegorical method and the intervention of the interpreters' opinions during the exegetic endeavor. It is precisely for the reasons stated here that our author has become one of the most interesting for contemporaneity.

From Theodoret we have the only complete commentary on Romans preserved in Greek, its original language, written between 433 and 448. The first commentary we have on Romans, written by Origen, was preserved only in Latin translation and scattered Greek fragments. The commentary of Theodor of Mopsuestia it is also very fragmentary, while from John Chrysostom we have a collection of homilies, and not a linear, continuous commentary of the text of the Pauline epistles. Agnès Lorrain is the author of a consistent doctoral thesis, which contains the critical edition of the Theodoret's commentary on Romans with a dense and useful philological study for those interested in the comment of the Syrian author.<sup>1</sup> But the volume published here contains only the thorough study, not the critical edition of the commentary itself, as one hasty reader of the title might expect. Therefore, this

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<sup>1</sup> Théodoret de Cyr, *Interpretatio in Epistulam ad Romanos, Édition, traduction et commentaire*, Sous la direction de M. Olivier Munnich, Professeur des universités, Paris, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2015.

volume is published in the prestigious *Texte und Untersuchungen* (TU) series, founded by Adolf von Harnack in 1882, which has been accompanying for over a century the *Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* (GCS) series, in which the editions of text are printed. The author promises the appearance of the critical edition of Theodoret's commentary on Romans not only in the GCS, with all the necessary critical apparatus, but also a version intended for the wider public, easier to use, with a French translation, in the well-known *Sources Chrétiennes* series, in the near future. This rhythm cannot be better: before having the text and the critical edition, A. Lorrain introduces us to the literary, historical and theological universe of her author, through a study made up of five parts. The first two are related to the lexical and semantic environment of the ancient author. The importance that A. Lorrain gives to this thorough investigation is observed first of all from the space she dedicates to this concern: out of the more than 300 pages of the volume, one third are dedicated to the language of Theodoret of Cyr. Let us not forget that A. Lorrain wrote a doctoral thesis, not in the field of theology, but in philology („études grecques"). The benefit for theologians is indeed immense. Drawing on topics such as virtue and godliness, passions, and grace the author of the volume analyses in detail how Theodoret builds his speech and she makes accurate statistics of occurrences of key terms and emphasizes the specificity of the ancient author in comparison with his predecessors, the originality of his writing, but also the common heritage (p. 23-26). Although quite technical, the second chapter includes a thorough screening of the words inherited from previous authors, such as John Chrysostom (p. 33ff). A. Lorrain puts us ahead of Theodoret's own concepts (p. 45ff) and inventory the formulas by which the author expresses an aspect of the doctrine (p. 62ff). Without going into detail, I must admit that A. Lorrain provides us with an instrument but also an extremely valuable method for accurately studying patristic texts. She manages to provide for each expression – and we are talking about at least seventy expressions – revelatory information for further research on Theodoret's work. For example, we find from this analysis that the expression *μυστική εὐχή* appears only three times in the works known to us during the first five centuries: once in Gregory of Nyssa, once in John Chrysostom and once in Theodoret's works (p. 35). On the other hand, the expression *ἄφατος φιλανθρωπία* appears a hundred times in John Chrysostom and ten times in Theodoret. Expressions such as *ὅρος τοῦ θανάτου* demonstrate the author's relationship with the Antiochian theological universe, which was not departed until the last moment, despite his exceptional Hellenistic instruction. Such a survey highlights and certifies that the main sources of inspiration for Theodoret were John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria (p. 91), despite the distance our author takes to both, both in language as well as ideas.

The following three chapters are dedicated to the content of the bishop's commentary on the Pauline epistle to the Romans. An entire chapter is dedicated to the prologue of the commentary; one deals with the relationship between Theodoret and his main source, John Chrysostom, and the last chapter – and perhaps the most interesting – gives us an insight into the controversial elements that make their presence felt in the commentary text. Of all these, I would like to underline only a few aspects here, pursuing my research interests. From the chapter dedicated to the relationship with the work of John Chrysostom it is especially worth mentioning here the subject of anti-Judaism of the two patristic authors and the comparison that A. Lorrain undertakes in this regard. From the chapter dedicated to the controversial aspects, I was interested here to follow Theodoret's controversy with Judaism and Marcionism, due to the limited space we have in this review.

Pertaining to Theodoret's relationship with John Chrysostom regarding anti-Judaism, A. Lorrain demonstrates once again the actuality and necessity of her approach. She discovers that, unlike the young and fierce Antiochian preacher, who struggled as a shepherd of souls with both Judaizing Christians and the Jewish community in Antioch, the bishop of Cyr did not show a direct confrontation with these groups of believers. They are rather the enemies of the Apostle Paul, whereas the enemies of Theodoret's faith were mainly followers of Marcion. This is probably the reason for his considerable distance from John Chrysostom's view on Judaism, in the interpretation of the epistle to the Romans. It is known that Theodoret gained to the Christian Catholic faith several villages and more than a thousand people from his diocese. Because of the confrontation with the heretics (Marcionites), it was easier, or it was necessary, to discover the intrinsic value of the Old Testament Law and the characters that shape the history of salvation, described in the Scriptures that Marcion himself wished to have disappeared from the Christian life. A. Lorrain does not wish to excuse Theodoret's anti-Judaism. But she notices the significant differences between Theodoret and other authors, which are worth mentioning here. She first divides the information and expressions specific to an anti-Jewish attitude into two categories: one is the baggage of traditional expressions, encountered by the previous authors, including John Chrysostom, and the other is the one that contains particular expressions and ideas of our author.

Traditional reproaches are those found in the works of the majority of the patristic authors. A. Lorrain carefully records them and remembers here the relevant and most frequently encountered: lawless (*παράνομια*), hardening of the heart (*σκληροκαρδία*), foolishness (*μανία*), pride (*μέγα φρονεῖν*) etc (p. 229). It is relevant to notice here that all these reproaches are

present in the hymnographic texts of the Byzantine rite in use to this day in the Orthodox churches. The exact identification and analysis of Theodoret's anti-Jewish language can help those interested in tracing a trajectory of this set of patristic reproaches, which are the basis of the late liturgical ones, but inspired by the great previous patristic works. A. Lorrain stresses on several occasions that Theodoret employs several anti-Jewish expressions that has already become traditional in his days but is not directly involved or emotionally invested in a vigorous fight of Judaism as part of his pastoral ministry. He even sets aside some excessively harsh expressions from John Chrysostom (p. 232, 234) and tries to discover the genuine message of the Pauline text. For Theodoret it is important that the Apostle Paul puts Jews and pagans on the same level: he stresses several times in his exegesis that God does not prefer some and despises others, or does not save some, to the detriment of others, but He will put them all under the same obedience and they all offered the same chances of salvation. Of course, in Theodoret salvation means faith in Jesus as Messiah. He does not claim salvation apart from Christ, as some modern interpreters of the epistle claim, under the theory of the so-called 'Sonderweg'. Theodoret knows how to see and appreciate the depth of the apostolic thinking regarding the fate of Israel and is more interested in the apostle's praise than in the accusations against the Jews (p. 236). In addition, Theodoret does not hesitate to display a clear apology for the Law. He argues that the Mosaic Law is an integral part of God's benevolent plan for the whole world and recognizes that the Jews actually believed in Jesus as the Messiah, as some were even the first to spread the Gospel to the world (p. 240). The culmination of Romans 11, where the salvation of *all Israel* is affirmed, is understood by Theodoret as the moment of penance and general conversion, in which the Prophet Elijah will play a decisive role. "The entire Israel" means for Theodoret "all the faithful", and repentance will then cause the resurrection of the dead (p. 241). However, the exegesis of Theodoret on Romans cannot be considered an anti-Jewish exegesis, says A. Lorrain (p. 244). And it is not an anti-Jewish one, just because it is an anti-Marcionite one. This pastoral situation of the bishop of Cyr somehow "saves" him from the trap of a vitriolic anti-Judaism, present for example in John Chrysostom's work.

A. Lorrain's contribution may be interesting for audiences within Eastern Europe and especially within Romania, as a translation of this commentary made by Ilarion M. Argatu from the venerable Migne edition has just been published.<sup>2</sup> The translation was published in a new and appreciated

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<sup>2</sup> Feriçitul Teodoret al Cirului, *Tălcuire la Epistola către Romani*. Translation, introduction and notes by Ilarion M. Argatu, Iași, Doxologia 2020.

series in Romania, which gives access to new patristic works, not previously translated into Romanian. But the translators and the author of the introductory study<sup>3</sup> did not access the previous publications of A. Lorrain or the volume discussed here and published already two years prior. That, for sure, would have helped translators much more. The same is true of the Romanian translation of Theodoret's commentary on the other Pauline epistles, already published in 2015 at the Doxologia Publishing House.<sup>4</sup>

Another reason for a better dissemination in Eastern Europe pertains to the fact that Lorrain is quoting and critically discussing a well-known Romanian author, Prof. Vasile Mihoc, whom she criticizes. The article in question authored by Mihoc<sup>5</sup> concerns the relationship between St. Paul and the Jews in Romans 9-11 in the vision of St. John Chrysostom, of which she says that Mihoc "highly relativizes the anti-Judaism of John Chrysostom from his homilies in Romans 9-11, which to us seems questionable" (p. 156, n. 40). But, understandably, this challenge would have deserved more space than just a brief reference in a footnote. The broader argument can be derived only from the reading of the whole work. Here it seems to me essential to remember that at key moments of the interpretation of the epistle, Theodoret distances himself from the interpretation of his master, from which he is otherwise massively inspired, and appeals to the solutions of other authors, or to his own (p. 258). Undoubtedly Theodoret is more interested in a rather intellectual audience than the former patriarch of Constantinople. Theodoret pays attention to the historical details, to the logical structure of Pauline's argument, but also to the psychology of the apostle (p. 315).

All these aspects make the volume offered by Agnès Lorrain a valuable and exemplary tool for knowing the work of the exegete Theodoret of Cyr and his commentary on Romans in particular. Consequently, interested parties should look forward to her forthcoming critical edition and their translation in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series.

<sup>3</sup> Ilarion M. Argatu, „Studiu introductiv: Tâlcuire la Epistola către Romani – martor al teologiei Fericitului Teodoret”, in: Fericitul Teodoret al Cirului, *Tâlcuire la Epistola către Romani*, p. 7-18.

<sup>4</sup> Fericitul Teodoret al Cirului, *Tâlcuire la Epistolele Sfântului Apostol Pavel*, vol. I, translated by Iulia Cărare and Mircea Ștefan. Introduction by Constantin Crețu, Iași, Doxologia 2015. See also the introduction to the previous volume with Theodoret's commentaries on Pauline epistles, where the author doesn't seem to be aware of A. Lorrain's publications: Dr. Constantin Crețu, „Fericitul Teodoret al Cirului, tâlcuitor al epistolelor pauline. Studiu introductiv”, in: Fericitul Teodoret al Cirului, *Tâlcuire la Epistolele Sfântului Apostol Pavel*, p. 9-24.

<sup>5</sup> Vasile Mihoc, “Paul and the Jews according to John Chrysostom's Commentary on Romans 9-11”, in: D. Patte & V. Mihoc (eds.), *Greek Patristic and Eastern Orthodox Interpretations of Romans*, London-New Delhi-New York-Sydney, 2013, p. 63-82.