

# “*The Voice So Dear to Me*”

## Themes From Romans in Theodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret

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SBL Romans Through History and Cultures Seminar (Boston, Nov 22, 2008)

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### Abstract

This paper examines the reception and use of the Epistle to the Romans in fourth and fifth century Antiochene tradition, focusing on the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrus. Particular attention is paid to the twin loci of Greek patristic ambivalence with the concept of predestination (especially as that finds expression in the Augustinian traditions), namely, “this body of sin” in 6:6-8 and the concept of προαίρεσις, the free choice between good and evil as an innate property of human nature.

*“As I keep hearing the Epistles of the blessed Paul read, and that twice every week, and often three or four times ... gladly do I enjoy the spiritual trumpet, and get roused and warmed with desire at recognizing the voice so dear to me (τὴν ἐμοὶ φίλην ἐπιγινώσκων φωνήν), and seem to fancy him all but present to my sight, and behold him conversing with me.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is how John Chrysostom opens the ὑπόθεσις of his homilies on the Epistle to the Romans. He was not alone; all the Antiochenes of the fourth and fifth century, including his dear friend Theodore of Mopsuestia and their student and theological heir, Theodoret of Cyrus, loved the apostle Paul deeply and spent much of their respective careers commenting, preaching, and teaching from the Pauline corpus. It was a love they seem to have inherited from their teacher, Diodore of Tarsus (d. 393) who first established the hermeneutical principles of the so-called (inaccurately) “school” of Antiochene interpretation in the middle of the fourth century in

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<sup>1</sup> John Chrysostom, “The Argument,” in *Homilies on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 335, hereafter noted as NPNF 11.

direct opposition to the “Origenists,” or as the Antiochenes called them derogatorily, the *allegorists*. The Antiochene emphasis on the *historia* permeates the writings of all three authors under consideration<sup>2</sup> and guides their gaze away from the “fanciful,” as they called the speculative, to the Scriptural, the divine οἰκονομία for the salvation of humankind as that process unfolds from the old to the new covenant, from the protoplasts to the patriarchs, Israel, and the Law, and finds its final and full expression in Christ, the Church, and grace. At the core of it all is a *ratione pietatis* centered around the person and work of Christ and, as a result, a strong focus on the problem of predestination and free will.<sup>3</sup>

## Reception

It is quite in keeping with Antiochene hermeneutical sensitivities that all three begin their respective commentaries or homilies on Romans much like modern commentators might, by extensive discussions of authorship, dating, and the place of the epistle in the chronology of Paul’s writings; and though Origen had rejected Pauline authorship of Hebrews more than two centuries before, the Antiochenes preferred to follow Cyril of Jerusalem and attribute its authorship to the apostle. On the other hand, however, neither John Chrysostom nor Theodoret hesitated to challenge the canonical order. Theodoret put it best: “While the blessed Paul wrote fourteen letters, I believe the order in which they occur in the Bible is not of his doing...The [letter] written by the most divine Paul to the Romans, for example was assigned first place, whereas it was written last of all of those dispatched from Asia, Macedonia and Achaia. In fact,” he concludes, “I believe the first to be written was First Thessalonians...”<sup>4</sup> placing Romans seventh in the sequence.

Theodoret is quite precise (*akribeia* being a chief virtue among the Antiochenes) in his ordering of the Pauline writings, going into great lengths to provide a sophisticated account of

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<sup>2</sup> J.N.D. Kelly notes that though John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrus were also part of the same exegetical tradition, “as the theorists of the movement, Diodore and Theodore were severest in applying its principles,” *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1960), p. 77. Theodoret sometimes distances himself from what he sees as an overly “Jewish emphasis” of the classical Antiochene emphasis on *historia*, preferring a more nuanced θεωρία, nonetheless his anthropology, soteriology, and interpretation of Romans and Genesis follow closely in the footsteps of his predecessors.

<sup>3</sup> See also, Peter Gorday, *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), pp. 104-107.

<sup>4</sup> *Theodoret of Cyrus, Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul*, Robert C. Hill, ed. and trans. (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), vol. 1., p. 36. For Chrysostom’s ordering, *The Argument*, NPNF 11, pp. 335-338. Of Theodore’s and Diodore’s extensive commentaries on Romans only fragments have survived, and none includes the ὑπόθεσιν. Theodore’s fragmentary comments are found in PG 66:787-876 and in Karl Staab, *Die Pauluskommentare aus der Griechischen Kirche: Aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt und herausgegeben*, in *Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 15* (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1984) where also Diodore’s surviving fragments on Romans 7-11 are found.

his conclusions based on the chronology of Acts as well as the internal witness of each letter. As such, Theodoret separates the fourteen letters into two general groupings: (a) those written from Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia, placing Romans at the end of that group (which includes, in order, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and Romans) and (b) the correspondence *from* Rome, including the Epistle to the Hebrews (that is, Galatians, Philippians, Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians, Hebrews, closing with 2 Timothy). Chrysostom gives a similar evaluation of the ordering of the epistles based on almost the same evidence from Acts and the letters themselves (though he places Galatians before Romans), but in the whole he is much less specific than Theodoret, accounting for the ordering of only ten of the fourteen letters and being more interested to draw his listeners into the epistle than the ordering of the letters.

The difference between the purposes of the two writers could not be more clear: Chrysostom is embarking on a series of thirty two homilies in which he wants to show his audience “the soul of Paul, who having as it were become winged through love, went continually round to all, abiding nowhere nor standing still,”<sup>5</sup> while Theodoret toils as a commentator, a desk theologian, whose task is “like some kind of mosquito, to buzz about the apostolic meadows ... to attempt the commentary and assemble resources from the blessed Fathers.”<sup>6</sup>

As one reads further into these works it becomes clear that the writers were quite eager and careful to address the significant themes woven throughout Romans. They were careful to talk about faith, salvation, covenants, the call of the patriarchs, the election of the Jews, the Church; yet, the theme that seems to preoccupy them most of all, and the lens through which, it seems to me, both the Eastern Fathers in general, and—for our purposes—the Antiochenes in particular see the Epistle to the Romans is first and foremost Christological. For it is not possible to tell the Christian story of salvation without touching upon the doctrine of the human being, and it is not possible to explore the doctrine of the human being without engaging the person of Christ. In fact, unlike most modern Christological formulations that are in essence extensions of our anthropologies, the Greek Fathers derived much of their anthropology from Christ rather than from Adam, and then applied it retrospectively to Adam as a type of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Chrysostom, *The Argument*, NPNF 11, p. 337.

<sup>6</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> On Theodore, for example, the recent study by Frederick G. McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2005); especially pp. 117-8 and 142. Also, McLeod's earlier work, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1999), as well as Richard A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); George Kalantzis, “Is There Room for Two? Cyril's Single Subjectivity and the Prosopic Union,” in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2008) 95-110; Joanne McWilliam Dewart, *The Theology of Grace in Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1971), among others.

As such, much of the attention revolves around the twin loci of Greek patristic ambivalence with the concept of predestination and grace, namely, mortality and sin (especially post-baptismal sin) and the concept of προαίρεσις, the free choice between good and evil as an innate property of human nature.<sup>8</sup> Nowhere is this tension more profoundly present than in the relationship between God and humans, for as Theodore puts it:

It is well known that the one who is eternal and the one whose existence has a beginning are greatly separated from each other, and the gulf found between them is unbridgeable. The one who is eternal has no limits, while the one whose existence has a beginning, his very existence is limited... It is not possible to limit and define the chasm that exists between the one who is from eternity and the one who began to exist at a time when he was not.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the Epistle to the Romans God's self and actions and humanity's nature and actions will have to be understood within this delicately balanced relationship. On this the Antiochenes will insist that even as the Apostle "drew upon himself a large measure of the Spirit's grace (τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐπεσπάσατο χάριν)" *because* he both "labored more abundantly than all the rest of [the apostles] in the word of doctrine,"<sup>10</sup> and also "yielded to the incomprehensibility of Providence,"<sup>11</sup> so it is for all of humanity: divine grace and human freedom are inextricably linked.

### **Immortality and the Fall**

Unlike Augustine and much of the Western tradition, for Theodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret, the Fall neither introduced mortality as an ontological change to the human γένος, nor removed freedom of choice, προαίρεσις, from our post-lapsarian condition. This does not mean that the Antiochenes do not take the story of the Fall seriously, but that, as Richard Norris suggests, the story of Adam is not for them the logical *starting point* of the doctrine of humanity but rather the *explicandum* that provides the hermeneutical key for the implications of that

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<sup>8</sup> It is also important to remember that all three writers came to age and wrote their respective works on Romans before the ecumenical council at Chalcedon, at a time when strict adherence to the language and nuance of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed (formulated in Constantinople in 381) forced them to draw careful distinctions between the human and divine natures of Christ.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed*, Woodbrooke Studies vol. 5, ed. and trans. Alphonse Mingana (Cambridge: Heffer, 1932), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *The Argument*, NPNF 11, p. 337, τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἐπλεονέκτησε τῷ τῆς διδασκαλίας λόγῳ· ἐπειδὴ γὰρ περισσότερον αὐτῶν ἐκοπίασε, πολλὴν καὶ τὴν τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐπεσπάσατο χάριν.

<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 2*, NPNF 11, p. 337, commenting on Rom 1:13, παραχωρεῖ τῷ τῆς προνοίας ἀκαταλήπτῳ.

doctrine and of human history, because for all three writers under consideration—and for most of the Greek East, one may add—“it is inconceivable that the divine purpose in creation should be frustrated by the sin of man.”<sup>12</sup> For how can divine providence, foreknowledge, and—by extension—divine sovereignty be so easily thwarted within the “first six hours” of creation? Here is how Theodore puts in his treatise *Against Those Who Assert That Men Sin by Nature and Not by Will*:

Whether God did not know that Adam was going to sin: this should be the response for these exceedingly wise men, that it is most insane even to consider this notion. It is obvious that [God] knew he was going to sin, and that on account of this he would, without a doubt, die. How then is it not suggestive of extreme madness to believe that first [God] made him immortal, for six hours, ... but appointed him to be mortal after the sin? Because it is certain that if [God] had wanted him to be immortal, not even the intervention of the act of sin would have changed the divine decree, for [God] did not reduce the devil from immortality to mortality, and he was the originator of all evils!<sup>13</sup>

This argument by no means surrenders the foundational theological principle that death is a punishment for sin, but on the contrary, it assumes it. What it tries to safeguard, however, is divine sovereignty: for if God had created Adam immortal, Theodore argues, he should have remained immortal even in his post-lapsarian state, forever under the punishment of death, with no possibility of redemption—just like the devil. What is at stake here is not just Adam’s ontological transformation, but God’s justice and sovereignty as well. Since in God’s justice

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<sup>12</sup> Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, p. 182. In this section on the Fall we are going to concentrate more on the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia since he is the one who wrote most clearly on the subject. Chrysostom and Theodoret do not deviate much from Theodore on the topic, but accept his conclusions as established tradition. On that, see Christopher A. Hall, “John Chrysostom,” in Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen, eds. *Reading Romans Through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), pp. 39-57 and Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus*, pp. 1-25.

<sup>13</sup> Theodore’s western contemporary Marius Mercator has supplied this fragment found in *Theodori episcopi Mopsuesteni: in epistolas B. Pauli commentarii*, H. B. Swete, ed. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1880-1882), vol. 2, pp. 332f. Also, *PL* 48.1055A. For an excellent recent study of Theodore’s anthropology and soteriology see, Eric Phillips, *Man and Salvation in Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Ph.D. diss. Catholic University of America, 2006). It ought not be surprising that Theodore had a rather incomplete and cynical understanding of his opponents’ actual views since he was getting at least some of his information about the debate from Julian of Eclanum, Augustine’s adversary and follower of Pelagius, who found refuge in Cilicia, staying with Theodore in Mopsuestia after his exile from Italy around 420. Julian and his followers from the West objected to what they perceived to be the lingering Manichaean influences on Augustine’s understanding of original sin. It may well be that it is this discussion between Augustine and Julian that compelled Theodore to insist on the natural character of mortality.

death is the appropriate punishment for Adam’s sin, and since God foreknew that he would “yield to Satan’s wiles, God created man mortal from the start, in order that after man’s defection the due penalty—death—might properly and consistently supervene.”<sup>14</sup>

Mortality is at once the consequence of sin and an aspect of humanity’s original state. The mere fact that Scripture tells us God made Adam “from the dust of the earth” should make clear to everyone that his body was mortal by nature, from the very beginning.<sup>15</sup> Adam is mortal for no other reason than that he has a body. From the moment of his creation Adam was bound to the consequences of what God had foreseen he would freely choose to do. Mortality, then is not of one kind in two modes (now as a natural condition, now as a penalty) but there are *two* distinct *genera* of mortality: the natural mortality whose origin is in the “dust of the earth,” and a different type, a penal mortality, the punishment for actual sin.<sup>16</sup> The first is the logical ground for the second and based on God’s foreknowledge of Adam’s sin, *κατά προαίρεσιν*, chosen freely.

Reading Romans 5:21 Theodore sees the reason why, at the end, God created Adam mortal: because death is not only the just punishment for sin, but also God’s provision for his *παιδεία* in virtue and sin’s ultimate expiation through the resurrection, as manifested in Christ:

This is what [Paul] means by the phrase, *just as sin exercises dominion in death*: that, because we were made mortal (*θνητοὶ γεγονότες*) we have a greater inclination toward sin. For much of our stumbling happens because of our lust for food and drink, the outside world, and intercourse with women, and most do not stand as they ought to on each of these, but are carried by excess. These things were never part of immortal nature (*ταῦτα δὲ ἀθανάτω μὲν οὐκ ἄν ποτε ἐγγένοιτο φύσει*)... But because we have been made mortal and such is our nature (*ἐπειδὴ δὲ θνητοὶ γεγόναμεν τε καὶ ἐσμὲν τὴν φύσιν*), and we suffer untold troubles from the aforementioned passions, and have received great inclination towards sinning from this, he said well that *sin exercises dominion in death*, though that was not the only thing that kept us tied to the inclination toward sin; our own sin was the very thing that forced us to be bound to her [(sin)], many times even against our judgment/wish, but God’s munificence (*φιλοτιμία*) will hold us in such manner so as to have an immovable reign over us, because having become worthy of eternal life through the resurrection we will be in true and certain righteousness and will not be able to sin.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Theodore’s commentary on Gen. 3:19b, “ὅτι γῆ εἶ και εἰς γῆν ἀπελεύση” in Marius Mercator, *Commonitorium*, PL vol. 48, 1052B-C.

<sup>16</sup> See. Phillips, *Man and Salvation*, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, p. 120-121. Chrysostom also comments on Rom. 5:21 that “For [sin] cast us out of our present life, but grace, when it came gave us not the present life, but the immortal and eternal one (*τὴν ἀθάνατον ἡμῖν ἔδωρήσατο καὶ αἰώνιον*).

John Chrysostom also comments on Rom 5:21 and contrasts the two states of being (though he is not as clear here as Theodore): “For [sin] cast us out of our present (παρούσης) life, but grace, when it came conferred upon us not the present life, but the immortal (ἀθάνατον) and eternal (αἰώνιον) one.”<sup>18</sup> By saying, “for [sin] cast us out of our *present* life,” John does not contrast the pre- with the post-lapsarian mode of being, but the life from which sin cast us out with the immortal and eternal life of the future. Chrysostom is much clearer on this point in his homilies on 1 and 2 Corinthians. In *Homily 17* he is commenting on 1 Cor. 6:14 and tells his audience that, “For even from the beginning God desired to make you immortal, but you were not willing [even though] there were enigmatic hints of immortality in how things were: the converse with God; the absence of uneasiness from life; the freedom from grief, and cares, and toils, and other things which belong to the temporary condition (τῶν ἐπικαιρίων).”<sup>19</sup>

If originally created in a state of immortality Adam and his progeny would have been condemned to a life of sin without the possibility of redemption. In their respective reading of Genesis 3, both Theodore and Chrysostom can contemplate unimaginable consequences to such existence. In *Homily 7*, on 1 Cor 2:14, Chrysostom argues that, “If, endowed with a mortal body, [the soul] expected greater things from the false promise of the Devil — (for, “*you will be*,” he said, “*like gods*” [(Gen. 3:5)]) — how far would she (ἡ ψυχή) had fallen had she received her body also, from the beginning, immortal?”<sup>20</sup> Likewise for Theodore: “If their flesh had possessed immortality, how should they not the more have supposed that through disobedience they should be gods?”<sup>21</sup> for even God says that now they have indeed “*become like one or us, knowing good and evil*” (Gen 3:22).

It seems that both Chrysostom and Theodore assert that mortality was not only the original state of our creation, but that it was even *good* for us. God created humanity mortal because “God knew that mortality is an advantage for men. For if they remain without death, they will fall everlastingly. Also, it was because it is well for such creatures if, when the body is dissolved in death, the body of sin should be done away together with it.”<sup>22</sup>

In God’s goodness and φιλανθρωπία God made us mortal so that we may be able to escape the tragedy of Eden and participate in the new life, now without end, inaugurated by Christ’s resurrection, to which we become κοινωνοί through our baptism (Rom 6:3): “Or do you not know that baptism makes us partakers of the death of Christ? And as we believe that by

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<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 10*, NPNF 11, p. 405.

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, *1 Corinthians, Homily 17.4*, adapted from NPNF 12, p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, *Homily 7.9*, adapted from NPNF 12, p. 38. Εἰ λαβοῦσα σῶμα θνητὸν, ἀπὸ ψευδοῦς ὑποσχέσεως τοῦ διαβόλου προσεδόκησε πολλῶ μείζονα: Ἔσσεθε γὰρ, φησὶν, ὡς θεοί· εἰ καὶ τοῦτο ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔλαβεν ἀθάνατον, ποῦ οὐκ ἂν ἐξέπεσε; Like Theodore, Chrysostom also thought that the soul was created immortal from the beginning, it was united to a body that had the potential for immortality; a potential never actualized until the resurrection of Christ.

<sup>21</sup> Theodore, *Commentary on Genesis*, PG 66.640C-D. Norris’s translation from *Manhood and Christ*, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, *ad loc.*

being baptized we are buried with him (in the way that is appropriate for us), we also believe that like the Lord who came into a different, new life (εις ἕτερον καινήν τινα κατέστη ζώην) having risen from the dead, [those who have been baptized] are in the same new life after baptism, being mindful to live in a manner that proves to be worthy of the life into which we believe they have been born through baptism.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Sin, death, and the Descendants of Adam**

If, then, Adam and Eve’s post-lapsarian mortality was not the result of an ontological change that took place at the moment of their lapse, and if death is the just punishment for sin, one is left to wonder about the overwhelming force of sin and death in the experience of the rest of the human race—their children.

The answer, of course, would be found in Romans 5. Theodoret is the most concise on this point: “Since Adam had sinned and death had occurred through sin, both spread to the race: *death spread to all human beings for the reason that all sinned*. In other words,” continues Theodoret, “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.”<sup>24</sup> Like all the Greek Fathers before him, Theodoret finds the etiology for our deaths in our own sin, not that of the protoplasts.

Theodore’s explanation is almost identical, commenting on 5:14: “For death is not set as the punishment of this or that kind of sin, but as the punishment of all sin ... For since all had sinned—if not with a sin of the same sort as Adam’s, then in some way, this one in his fashion, that one in another—it was necessary that death should rule over all in the same way.”<sup>25</sup>

Otherwise God’s justice could come into question. Chrysostom anticipates the objection: “What then, says one, am I to do? must I perish on his account? I reply, first, It is not on his account: for neither have you remained without sin: though it be not the same sin, at least there is some other which you have committed.”<sup>26</sup> Though he sees the objection (and as a working pastor one might even imagine he has heard it uttered numerous times) St. John does not linger on it but moves quickly to the *good news* of having been created mortal: “And again, you have not been injured by his punishment, but rather have been a gainer. For if you had been to remain altogether

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<sup>23</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 36. Hill notes here (Rom 5:12) Theodoret is well aware that Paul refers to the etiological story of the Fall in Genesis 3, and although he accepts Adam’s sin without question, he does not “see Adam as an antecedent to the pronoun” (Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 146, nt. 7).

<sup>25</sup> Comment on Romans 5:13-14, Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, p. 119. The translation is from Norris, *Manhood*, p. 181. For an excellent discussion on the hypothesis that if Adam had lived a perfectly righteous life he might have received immortality through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the same reward as the *homo assumptus*, the human nature of Christ received, as well as to the relationship of heredity and the fall, see Phillips 51-56.

<sup>26</sup> John Chrysostom, *1 Corinthians, Homily 17.4*, adapted from NPNF 12, p. 99.

mortal, perchance what is said would have had some reason in it. But now you are immortal, and if you will, thou may shine brighter than the sun itself.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom**

If the first part of the objection can be raised from our common understanding of justice (being unjust for one to pay for the sins of another), the second part may be raised from the Scriptures themselves. How is one to understand this “body of sin” as the Apostle also calls it in Rom 6 (v.6)? Or Paul’s cry in Romans 7: “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Bound to this “body of death,” the objection goes, humans are driven to sin *because* of our mortal nature; a wholly righteous life is out of the question. Here too, the objection has been anticipated: “Mortality then is not the cause of sin: accuse it not: but the wicked will (ἡ πονηρὰ προαίρεσις) is the root of all the mischief.”<sup>28</sup> By θνητότητα, mortality, Chrysostom is not referring to an abstract concept of death in general, but specifically to the question posed to him about the θνητὸν σῶμα.

Chrysostom is quite clear on the source of sin when commenting on Romans. He uses προαίρεσις and its derivatives over 40 times in his *Homilies on Romans*. His comments on four key verses suffice to illustrate his thoughts on the concept of free and deliberate choice:

- On Rom 6:12 — He does not say, let not the flesh live or act, but, ‘let not sin reign,’ for He came not to destroy our nature, but to set our free choice aright (τὴν προαίρεσιν διορθῶσαι).<sup>29</sup>
- On Rom 8:7 — For since it was no natural necessity (ἀνάγκη φύσεως) which put the gift into us, but the freedom of choice (ἐλευθερία προαιρέσεως) placed it in our hands, it rests with thee henceforward whether this shall be or the other.<sup>30</sup>
- On Rom 9:22-23 — And yet not even is it on the potter that the honor and the dishonor of the things made of the lump depends, but upon the use made by those that handle them, so here also it depends on the free choice (προαιρέσεως)... Whence then are some vessels of wrath, and some of mercy? Of their own free choice (προαιρέσεως οἰκείας).<sup>31</sup>
- On Rom 11:24 — And when you hear that he keeps speaking of ‘according to nature,’

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, *ad. loc.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 17.35 (on 1 Cor. 6:14) in NPNF 12, p. 99. Ἄλλ’ εἰ μὴ θνητὸν ἔλαβον σῶμα, φησὶν, οὐκ ἂν ἤμαρτον ... Οὐ τοίνυν ἡ θνητότης αἰτία τῆς ἁμαρτίας, μὴ κατηγόρει, ἀλλ’ ἡ πονηρὰ προαίρεσις ἐστὶν ἡ ὄψις τῶν κακῶν.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 11, NPNF 11, p. 410.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 12, NPNF 11, p. 434.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 16, NPNF 11, pp. 468-469.

and ‘contrary to nature,’ do not suppose that he means the nature that is immutable (ἀκίνητον φύσιν)... For the good things and the bad are not such as are by nature, but by opinion and deliberate choice alone (ἀλλὰ γνώμης καὶ προαιρέσεως μόνης).<sup>32</sup>

Theodore and Theodoret, too, are equally as clear on the subject as Chrysostom, though for the Mopsuestian, freedom to choose is inexorably connected with rationality, an *eligendi potestas*, “the capacity to discern among contrary things and to elect that which is greater.”<sup>33</sup> Since reason is the capacity to make moral judgments and moral choices, its perfection is twofold: on the one hand it is the capacity to distinguish between good and evil, and on the other, a voluntary conformity of action. Προαίρεσις is neither arbitrary nor unbound, but a sign of *rationibilibium omnium* manifested in practical action and virtue. That is why commenting on Rom 1: 24-26, Theodore interprets Paul’s use of active verbs to describe the current state of human affairs upon which the conclusion, διὸ παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς, is predicated to mean that: “because of this [(their behavior)] *God gave them over*, instead of forgiving them, so that each would behave in whichever manner each one wanted, not out of necessity but freely making the deliberate choice<sup>34</sup> upon which they embarked as each wanted.” Otherwise human beings would not be at all different from the ἄλογα, the irrational beings that are, and indeed cannot but be, ignorant of their own good.<sup>35</sup> Such a state is unfitting for rational creatures, made in the image of God. Theodoret picks up the argument on reason in his own commentary on Romans 9:20ff: “If you were not independent and had no free will to choose what has to be done, instead being subject to the necessity of the divine will, you would keep silent in the fashion of lifeless things, content with the arrangement. But being endowed with reason (λόγῳ τετίμησαι), you say and do what you please...”<sup>36</sup> To be free to choose is to be fully human.

In the commentary on Romans 11:15, Theodore makes this distinction even more explicit:

For irrational [creatures] everything happens according to nature (φυσικῶς). They are not able to distinguish evil from good, or to follow what seems good by the power of the will (γνώμη). Rather they continue of necessity within the bounds of nature. To them, therefore, all law is superfluous, since they can neither learn nor understand anything of that sort. But where rational [creatures] are concerned, the exact opposite is the case. For they are able to distinguish good from evil and also to choose (αἰροῦνται) what seems best by the power of the will. Further, for them the promulgation of law is altogether appropriate, since they can learn from it what is good.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 19, adapted from NPNF 11, pp. 492-493.

<sup>33</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *In Ep. ad Gal. 2:15ff.* Swete, vol. 1, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, p. 115 — οὐκ ἀναγκαστικὴν ἀλλ’ ἐλευθέραν ποιήσας τὴν προαίρεσιν.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Fragm. In Genesin. Intro.*, PG 66.633AB. Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, p. 131-132.

<sup>36</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 103

<sup>37</sup> Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, p. 156. The translation if from Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, 130.

The giving of the Law was based on this principle of reason: that, informed by that law and perfected in the exercise of choice, the rational will has the *auctoritas* (power) to determine its path, either in accordance with God’s Law or the desires of the flesh.<sup>38</sup> Freedom to choose—the means by which reason is educated into perfection—inherently implies, however, an ability to choose wrongly. For Theodore, human προαίρεσις, not divine fore-ordination and arbitrary election, is the element that distinguishes between the righteous and the unrighteous person. As in the case of David, where the divine witness declares that God has “found a man after my own heart!” (1 Sam 13:14), so is with all who are declared righteous by God. A righteous προαίρεσις will manifest itself in a σπουδὴ ἀρετῆς, a zeal for virtue that leads to a virtuous life. Those who with a righteous προαίρεσιν give themselves over to the pursuit of virtue, educated by the law of God, and choose freely to live by God’s prescriptions, could properly be called “righteous.”<sup>39</sup>

Theodoret, too, sheds much light on the discussion on divine election and predestination with his usual laconic clarity. Commenting on Romans 8:30 he insists on the principle of the righteous purpose: “[God] glorified from the beginning those whose purpose (πρόθεσιν) he foreknew... Let no one say, however, the foreknowledge is responsible for them: it was not the foreknowledge that made them like that—rather, God from afar foresaw the future as God.... The God of all from a distance knew everything as God; He did not apply pressure to such-and-such a one to practice virtue, nor to another to commit evil.”<sup>40</sup>

Of course, such was the case with Jacob and Esau (Rom 9:10-12): “God did not await the outcome of events, but instead foretold the difference between them while they were still in the womb.”<sup>41</sup> If God could declare a person’s righteousness only *a posteriori*, divine foreknowledge would be at stake; if, on the other hand God chose whom God willed in a capricious, arbitrary manner, God’s justice would be in question. Theodoret would have none of that, for Scriptures declare that since “God is righteous, as he certainly is, he gives encouragement to goodness and forbids the opposite, and he commends those who do good and punishes those who willingly embrace evil.”<sup>42</sup>

What then, why Jacob and not Esau? Why love one and hate the other? For the Greek Fathers the only answer that can possibly maintain the delicate balance between human freedom and God’s justice in such an election is that of foreseen merit: “[God] foretold [the outcome of their lives] from knowing in advance their purpose; election, far from being unjust, is in keeping

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<sup>38</sup> *In Ep. ad Gal. 2:15ff* in Swete, vol. 1, p. 28. In Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, p. 130 (also pp. 129-132 for an important discussion on Theodore’s conception of reason, its freedom and mutability).

<sup>39</sup> See also, Phillips, p. 175.

<sup>40</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101. Theodore, too, gives a similar account of the story of Esau and Jacob: God chose “knowing what sort of men they were going to be, and not waiting to decide from their ways, but distinguishing them from long ago ... Knowing the way of each man before his birth, He chose those whom He would deem to be worthy” (Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, p. 143).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

with people's purpose (τῆ προθέσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων)...So, instead of attending to nature, [God] looks for virtue alone... The divine verdict contains no injustice, he is saying [(in v. 14)]; instead it bears all the marks of justice."<sup>43</sup> Sin, therefore, is not a byproduct of our mortal nature, but of our corrupt will.<sup>44</sup> That is why God can keep human beings, each one individually and not just the *massa* of the human race, accountable for their sins: "You, then, are not constrained by natural necessities nor transgress in defiance of free will; instead you embrace evil willingly, and accept the hardship of virtue of set purpose. The sentence of the God of all is therefore right and just: he justly punishes the sinners for presuming to do this with free will."<sup>45</sup>

## Salvation

Not constrained by natural necessities, transgressing in accordance with one's free will, this must surely lead to spiritual disaster! That might have been the case if the emphasis in the Greek Fathers was solely on deliberate free choice and not on παιδεία, education of our reason, as we have seen, through the law and the commandments, into virtue. For that is the ultimate goal of all three: not to defend humanity's freedom, but on the contrary, to make that freedom, that reason, subject to the will of God—from whence grace and salvation flow. In Romans 5:21, Paul makes the extraordinary claim that where sin was multiplied, God's grace abounded all the more. God's grace and human faith, inexorably united, are the fundamental ingredients of salvation. Commenting on 5:20-21, Theodoret writes: "[Paul] teaches that, just as sin in giving birth to death reigned in mortal bodies ... so grace in according the believers the righteousness that comes through faith has a kingdom that is not of equal duration with sin but eternal and unending."<sup>46</sup>

This synergism between divine grace and human free choice is explored further by Chrysostom, especially in *Homily 8* on Romans 4. At the core of the relationship are the two poles of God's promise of justification to all and of the human ability to believe that promise freely. Abraham's life was one of faith, based on God's promise, manifested in acts of obedience. God's promise preceded Abraham's faithful response in the act of circumcision, but that very act of obedience revealed the character of the patriarch, his sincere love, the nobility of his spirit, a "lofty mind." That is why his example, argues Chrysostom, is used by Paul as he "pitches the battle for faith against works, and makes the righteous man the subject of the whole struggle."<sup>47</sup> For Abraham was not justified because of what he did on his own accord, but as the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> Theodoret argues the point consistently: in his famous *Eranistes, Dialogue I.41* he says clearly that "Ἡ ἀμαρτία οὐκ ἔστι τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ τῆς κακῆς προαιρέσεως" (Gerard H. Ettliger, ed. *Theodoret of Cyrus, Eranistes*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 69).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103, commenting on Rom 9:20-21 and again in the *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos* 24, οὐκ ἄρα οὖν ὁ θεὸς αἴτιος τοῦ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἀγαθοὺς ἢ κακοῦς, ἀλλ' ἡ προαίρεσις ἡμῶν (PG 6.1296f).

<sup>46</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 75.

<sup>47</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 8*, NPNF 11, p. 386.

outflow of his faith in God's promise, which is indeed the sign of sincere love expected of all believers: "For reflect how great a thing it is to be persuaded and have full confidence that God is able on a sudden not to free one who has lived in impiety from punishment only, but even to make him just, and to count him worthy of those immortal honors."<sup>48</sup>

This divine election is by grace, based on faith in God's promises and must lead to a life of virtue, free from sin and its enslaving power. The Greek Fathers will take Paul's admonition in Romans 6 not only as an eschatological hope of final release, but as a present reality predicated on the death and resurrection of Christ, to which the faithful are made partakers at baptism (Rom 6:1-23). "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..."<sup>49</sup> As we have already seen, this sacramental identification with Christ not only inaugurates an ontological change in the believer, from mortality to immortality, but brings with it a divine mandate to be "mindful to live in a manner that proves to be worthy of the life into which we believe they have been born through baptism."<sup>50</sup> The post-baptismal existence is to be permeated by the new law, *the law of spirit of life in Christ Jesus* (8:2), that empowers the Christian to live a wholly righteous life, freely choosing to reject sin: "This must of our own earnestness thenceforth continually be maintained, so that, although sin issue countless commands to us, we may never again obey it, but abide unmovable as a dead man does [(Rom 6:1-3)]."<sup>51</sup> Or as Theodoret puts it: "It was not nature that he referred to as the *old self*, but the wicked attitude; he said this was put to death by baptism so that the body might be unresponsive to sin...[for] who ever saw a corpse that was violating another's marriage, or bloodying its hands in murder, or committing anything else improper?"<sup>52</sup>

It would be naïve to the extreme for any preacher not to consider the reality of post-baptismal sin among one's flock. Here, too, the relationship between moral purpose, προαίρεσις, and the resurrected life will be important. Mortification of the body to sin is a choice the Christian makes at the same time as one looks forward to the resurrection, both based on an active embrace of the "vitality of Christ." Christopher Hall notes that Chrysostom here distinguishes "two mortifyings" and "two deaths": "the one is done by Christ in baptism, and the other it is our duty to effect by earnestness afterwards."<sup>53</sup> It is within this context, then, that Paul's statement in Rom 6:17, that, "*you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed*" is to be understood: just like a captive who has been rescued from "a cruel tyrant," says Chrysostom, the faithful have come

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid., ad loc.* For a discussion on the dynamics of salvation in Chrysostom, see Hall, "John Chrysostom," pp. 51-57.

<sup>49</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 75-76.

<sup>50</sup> Theodore, on Rom 6:3, in Staab, *Pauluskommentare*, p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 10*, NPNF 11, p. 405.

<sup>52</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 76 (on Rom 6:6).

<sup>53</sup> Hall, "John Chrysostom," p. 53.

willingly to God, “you were neither forced nor pressed, but you came of your own accord, with willing mind.” So that no one may boast, however, Paul added “*that form of doctrine which was delivered you,*” “that you may learn that it came not for your own willing temper only, but the whole of it of God’s grace alone...for the *obedience form the heart* shows the free will; but the *being delivered*, hints the assistance from God.”<sup>54</sup>

A sinless life is not only possible, but most desirable, and can be attained through God’s grace. This non-coercive relationship between grace and *προαίρεσις* is the foundational principle of God’s interaction with humanity. Theodoret, too, insists on the synergistic relationship between grace and human will: “We ought all to heed this teaching [(*cf.* Rom 6:11)], shun the wiles of sin and summon to our assistance Christ who has saved us: on being called he will appear and offer us his grace”<sup>55</sup> through which the faithful attain immortal life.

### **The Resurrected Life: A Note on Immortality**

As we have seen throughout this essay, immortality is not a guarantor against sin. On the contrary, as mentioned above, the devil himself is immortal and yet “he was the originator of all evils!” Immortality, therefore, cannot be the eschatological hope to which the baptized are called, and resurrection cannot simply imply a movement from the state of mortality to that of *ἀθανασία*—the Fall could happen all over again. If the synergy of grace and *προαίρεσις* are the means of human salvation whose archetypical form is found in the person of Christ, then it has to be to him that one would have to turn to find an expression of the form this salvation will take in the *eschaton*. Hints of this eschatological transformation have been scattered throughout the comments made by the Antiochenes above, but none is more clear than Theodore who, in his *Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer and the Sacraments*, writes: “It is indeed known that the One who at the beginning willed and made us mortal, is the One who is now pleased to make us *immortal*, and the One who at the beginning made us corruptible is the One who now makes us *incorruptible*. He willed at the beginning and made us passible and changeable, and at the end He will make us *impassible* and *unchangeable*.”<sup>56</sup>

These four adjectives, immortal, incorruptible, impassible, and immutable, are all used, in connection to each other—most often—in describing both the resurrected Christ and the ontological transformation anticipated by the faithful. Eric Phillips has done us a wonderful

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<sup>54</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 11*, NPNF 11, p. 412.

<sup>55</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 76-77 (on Rom 6:11). This concept of grace *ad facilius faciendum*, led Marius Mercator to accuse Theodore, in particular, and the whole Antiochene tradition as having fathered Pelagianism. Augustine, on the other hand, would insist on the prevenience of grace *ad faciendum*, rejecting any possibility of foreseen merit as a way of interpreting free will in salvation.

<sup>56</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*. Woodbrooke Studies vol. 6. Alphonse Mingana, ed. and trans. (Cambridge: Heffer, 1933), p. 59, emphasis added.

service by exploring this theme in detail.<sup>57</sup> “Immortality and incorruptibility together have primary reference to bodily well-being. The first is immunity from death, and the second is a little broader—immunity from all bodily dissolution, whether the full destruction of death or the partial destruction of injury or disease. Impassibility and immutability, on the other hand, refer to spiritual well-being. The first is freedom from passions, *i.e.* from the temptations attendant on corruptibility, and the second is freedom from those purely spiritual vices that souls can fall into without any help from bodies at all.”<sup>58</sup> These four form the framework within which salvation is to be understood, and all four are apparent in the resurrection of Christ who won them for humanity. Through their own resurrection, the baptized participate in this salvation in which mere physical immortality is secondary to the happy freedom from sin of the future age.<sup>59</sup> Immortality, incorruptibility, impassibility, immutability are the foundational premises of *θέωσις* and promise of the *eschaton*: “After the resurrection, when our bodies have become imperishable and immortal, grace will reign in them, sin then having no place; When the passions come to an end, you see, sin will have no place.”<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The epistle to the Romans lies at the heart of most of the Eastern Church’s understanding of anthropology and soteriology. The early Antiochene traditions of the fourth and fifth centuries we have examined briefly in this essay stand firm on a reading that demands an adequate (even straightforwardly coherent) account of the delicate balance of human freedom and divine providence and justice, unwilling to surrender either to what they perceived to be an unsustainable understanding of sin and the fall. For Antioch then, and Eastern Christian traditions since, any account of the relationship between God and humanity that jeopardizes—or even diminishes—the human *προαίρεσις*, also brings into question human accountability, and is, therefore, contrary to the nature and character of the God. As we have seen, their fundamental concern is not anthropological, but centers on divine sovereignty and finds its full expression in their accounts of Christology and soteriology.

Thus separated from the original, intended, created state, mortality and sin can be understood within an exclusively Christological construct that allows for ultimate restoration and freedom of all, based not on an “arbitrarily capricious” Creator who rejects *a priori* any attempt for divine accountability, but on a God who intersects human, sinful, mortal creatureliness and becomes one of us, leading us out of captivity into the divine self. That is the only reason *ἀνακεφαλαίωσις* is possible, not because we are restored to the Edemic state from which we fell (either through divine intent, in which case God would be malicious, or in spite of it, in which

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<sup>57</sup> Phillips, *Man and Salvation*, pp. 280-298.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>59</sup> Dewart, *Theology of Grace*, p. 42.

<sup>60</sup> Theodoret, *Commentary*, p. 75 (on Rom 5:21).

case God would not be sovereign) but to the *intended* θέωσις that in our freedom we rejected, then in the garden, now daily.

The epistle to the Romans offers the Antiochenes this framework of immortality, incorruptibility, impassibility, and immutability, within which the baptized, aided by God's grace, participate through the *askesis* of the Christian life in the life of Christ, anticipating the completeness of salvation from sin in the future age, when the passions come to an end and sin will have no place.

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