Introduction: Theodoret and the Fifth Century

Earth and sea are freed from their ancient ignorance; the error of idols is no longer to be seen; the darkness of ignorance has been dispersed, and the light of knowledge fills with its rays the whole inhabited world. Greeks, Romans, and Barbarians recognize the divinity of the crucified and venerate the sign of the cross. The Trinity is worshipped in place of a multitude of false gods.[1]

Therapeutikê 6.87

Theodoret chose to describe his times in terms that expressed more his aspirations than contemporary reality. However, the defining features of fifth-century society under the Byzantine Empire were transition and transformation. While the bulk of this book will focus on specific topics, the stage needs to be set with the discussion of a range of contextual issues: the state of Christianity at the time, the state of paganism, and the issues surrounding Hellenic culture's most exalted good, *paideia*, and its relationship with late Roman elites.

By Theodoret's time Christianity had made considerable headway toward social and intellectual acceptance. In the process of negotiating its position with regard to the imperial administrative apparatus, the church had developed its own administrative structures. A series of imperial edicts starting with Constantine and continuing with Theodosius had progressively—at least in theory—banned animal sacrifices, religious festivals, and divination.[2] The liturgical calendar was filled with commemorations of the saints. Sunday was being celebrated as the day of the Lord.[3] The structures of conciliar Christianity had been developed. Art and iconography were developing.[4] Asceticism had spread in all levels of the society. Monastic communities and ascetics had multiplied in the East during the fourth century.

1 Translations of Theodoret's *Therapeutikê* are from a draft translation by Thomas Halton, often with my own adaptations.

2 For the full dossier, see Trombley 1993–1994(I):1–97.

3 Rordorf 1962.

4 Elsner 1998.

As a result of these developments, the late antique landscape was dotted with monasteries, particularly in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. Literary works advertising the pious lives of Christian ascetics were circulating throughout the empire.[5] The spread of the cult of the martyrs led to the erection and multiplication of *martyria* and such forms of piety as pilgrimage.[6] Ambitious and elaborate building programs were transforming the outlook of the Holy Land and the new capital of the empire, Constantinople.

But if Christianity had evolved by Theodoret's time so had Greek pagan beliefs.[7] Contrary to a deep-seated tendency to view paganism as moribund, there remained considerable vitality in the religious traditions of Hellenism, but also in other forms of Semitic paganism.

Neoplatonism

As a result of symbiosis, confrontation, and competition with Christians, pagan intellectuals such as Sallustius, Iamblichus, and Proclus attempted to synthesize strands of different traditions and thus create a systematic theology that brought together Platonic, Stoic, Pythagorean, Orphic, and Chaldean elements.[8] This combination of religion and philosophy became known as Neoplatonism.

Neoplatonists invested Platonic texts and their exegesis with sacral awe.[9] Plotinus, the founding figure of Neoplatonism, provided the first synthesis toward the elaboration of Platonic doctrine in the third century.[10] It was left to his disciple Porphyry to make available these teachings, which he did in an edition entitled the *Enneads*. A consummate logician himself, Porphyry sought among other things to protect, by means of allegory, the most venerable texts of Hellenism, Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*,[11] while attacking Christians in one of the most formidable anti-Christian treatises of late antiquity.[12]

5 On asceticism and the developments that took place, see Brown 1998:601–634 and Rousseau 1998:745–780.

6 Caseau 1999:21–59; Bitton-Ashkelony 2005; Elsner and Rutherford 2005.

7 Leppin 2004:59–81; Caseau 2011:111–134. By using the term paganism I am aware of the fact that the term lumps into one category an array of practices and beliefs of various religious systems. I am not assuming, however, a unitary category or understanding of paganism. Despite its pejorative connotations the term has recognizability and is still useful if employed with an awareness of its shortcomings. See the most recent discussion by North 2005:125–143 and Van Nuffelen 2011:89–109; for a defense of the term, see Cameron 2011:14–32. For arguments for the use of the term 'polytheism' instead, see Fowden 2005:521–522.

8 Saffrey 1992:35–50.

9 Hadot 1987:13–34.

10 Edwards 2006.

11 Buffière 1956:392–558; Brisson 2004.

12 Morlet 2011b; Levieils 2007.

Among intellectuals Platonic texts formed the basis of study and, in combination with a collection of oracles (the Chaldean Oracles, supposedly from Julian, the second-century theurgist), breathed new life into old and venerable traditions. As early as the third century AD, Sallustius' *On the Nature of Gods*, a compendium of pagan belief,[13] sought to present a unitary understanding of Hellenic paganism. Iamblichus, a contemporary of Sallustius, attempted to synthesize different religious traditions in his *On the Mysteries*, a "summa of polytheist belief."[14] On a broader level, however, more than conscious of Christianity but deprived of its civic outlook and function, paganism receded into a state of mind.[15]And yet in the fifth century, there remained considerable vitality in the religious traditions of Hellenism, both in its rural and its philosophical form, but also in other forms of paganism (e.g. Semitic).

All this systematizing of late pagan philosophical and religious thought "produced a doctrine and an identity and it is their [pagan] response that justifies the use of the word 'pagan-ism'."[16] This did not result in a coherent or consistent attitude toward the Christians or in an organized oppositional front against Christianity, as scholars have until very recently posited.[17] Instead, reactions to Christianity ranged from covert polemical allusions to *damnatio* by exclusion from narratives. These attitudes went hand in hand with debates and

[13] Sallustius *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, ed. Nock 1926. Melsbach 2007.

[14] Fowden 1999:82–106 at 86.

[15] Fowden 1998: "there were long-term resistances offered by educated elites concerned with the preservation of something less tangible, a tradition of thought and personal conduct as well as of cult" (555). Caseau 2004:105–144, esp. 137: "The issue of pagan *temples* and of pagan *practices* should not be confused." On the destruction of temples, see Hahn 2011, Lavan 2011:15–65. and Saradi 2011:263–309.

[16] North 2005:137. North continues by rightly observing that "[t]he conception of the history of pagan-ism . . . is that the crucial factor is not some internal change or transformation, still less an evolution according to some pre-determined process, but rather the necessary effects of confrontation and co-existence with the new types of religious groups, Jewish, Christian, and others, with which pagans in all the cities of the empire had to deal from the first century onwards. The effect was to create a self-consciousness about their own position and a need to define and justify themselves, which had simply not existed before, when there were no alternative systems against which they had to measure themselves. It is in this context that they themselves have to produce a doctrine and an identity, and it is their response that justifies the use of the word 'pagan-ism'. It is not necessary for this view that there should have been much, if any, violent conflict between pagans and others; what we have to believe is that there was a steady drift of pagans away from their traditional attachments and a great deal of peaceful co-existence and discussion; but that the survival of pagan practice depended on their success in retaining numbers, generation by generation. It remains, of course, a serious question why pagans did so drift away from traditional attachments." See also Van Nuffelen 2011:89–109.

[17] Some examples of these approaches are De Labriolle 1934, Momigliano 1963, and recently Siniossoglou 2008 and Schäfer 2008. For a critique of the "conflict" model, see Lizzi Testa 2009 and Brown 2009:277–285. Cameron 2011 has delivered the *coup de grâce*.

disagreements between Neoplatonists themselves about the role of ritual and religious practice in their conception of Neoplatonism.[18]

Challenges . . .

Challenges to Christianity in the fifth century were not new. In the third century Porphyry had written a devastating critique of Christianity, of which only fragments survive.[19] Eusebius, Apollinaris, Macarius Magnes, Philostorgius, Philip of Side, Methodius, and Jerome had all sought to refute it, and two emperors, Constantine and Theodosius II, had even commissioned its destruction. [20] Then, an emperor—Julian, no less—wrote a damaging treatise entitled *Against the Galileans*,[21] which attacked the fundamental tenets of Christianity. Written by a lapsed Christian[22] with a thorough knowledge of the Bible and of Greek philosophy, the work caused great alarm to many Christians. Alongside his overt polemic against the Christians, and building on Iamblichus' reworking of different religious traditions, Julian sought to define Hellenism more narrowly, emphasizing the religious character of the classical literature and placing a hitherto unprecedented emphasis on the religious affiliation of those who were to profit from it.[23]

By Theodoret's time the continued resonance of Porphyry's and Julian's anti-Christian polemic had trickled down to broader circles of intellectuals, providing philosophically inclined pagans with ready arguments against Christianity. Writing in the 420s, Cyril of Alexandria justifies his decision to refute Julian's *Against the Galileans* by referring to pagans who, "when they meet Christians, they upbraid them with the taunt that 'none of our teachers is capable of rebutting or refuting his works'."[24] Macarius of Magnesia's apology *Monogenes* (*Apokritikos*), from the late fourth (or early fifth) century, reinforces this fact.[25] In the same period the church historian Philostorgios reputedly wrote

18 Saffrey 2008:489–511.

19 The nature and extent of the work have been the subject of prolonged and intense debate among scholars. Its very existence as an independent work has been doubted by Beatrice 1994:221–235, but forcefully argued by Goulet 2004:61–109. For several attempts to reconstruct the work by collecting (and discussing) the fragments, see Berchman 2005, Ramos Jurado et al. 2006, and Muscolino 2009. For a recent discussion of the nature of the work, see Edwards 2007a:111–126 and Morlet 2011b:11–49.

20 Sarefield 2006:287–296; Herrin 2008:205–222.

21 *Against the Galileans*, ed. Masaracchia 1990.

22 Bouffartigue 2007:25–38.

23 On this see Chapter Five. See also Elm 2003:493–515.

24 Wilken 2000:70–84, esp. 81.

25 *Macarios de Magnésie. Monogénès*, ed. Goulet 2003.

a treatise against Julian. Philip of Side too wrote a treatise against Julian, though it is now lost. Thus Theodoret, like many other contemporary Christian authors, was still contending with aggressive pagan criticism that echoed the polemics of Porphyry and Julian, whose impact reverberated long after their deaths.

Similar challenges to Christianity are registered in other fifth-century sources, confirming Christian concerns and offering us insights into the tensions that existed in Theodoret's time. These include, not only Ps.-Justin's *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos* and the correspondence of Isidore of Peluse[26] and Nilus of Ancyra, but also the *Life of Severus* by Zacharias of Mytilênê.[27] The corpus of Isidore's and Nilus' letters reveals an array of *scholastikoi*, grammarians, imperial officials, sophists, and soldiers raising issues similar to the ones with which Theodoret is dealing: the appeal of Christianity to the uneducated masses, skepticism and repugnance toward the cult of the relics, and the role of divine providence, among others.[28] The fact that the names of these correspondents are known to us, then, is enough to maintain that their existence need not be argued simply from silence.

How much distance Christianity had still to travel in the fifth century can also be seen in the world of education, as vividly conjured in the *Life of Severus* by Zacharias of Mytilênê from the 480s.[29] His account offers glimpses of students in Alexandria and Beirut, eagerly devoted to Hellenic paganism.[30] It has been called a "vigorous agitated academic world that was cut off neither from the provinces

[26] Isidore *Lettres*, ed. Evieux 1997. Isidore, in a letter to Olympiodorus, conjures up pagan reactions thus: "θαυμάζω, ὅπως οὐ μόνον οἱ παιδεύσεως ἄμοιροι τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐπαγγελόμενοι, καὶ οἱ ἐπὶ εὐγλωττίᾳ ἐναβρυνόμενοι, ἐπὶ διαλεκτικῇ τε αὐχοῦντες, καὶ συλλογισμοῖς ἐπερειδόμενοι, καὶ τὰς μὲν ἐναντιώσεις τῶν λογισμῶν ὁρῶντες, τὰς δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων μὴ καθορῶντες, οὐκ αἰσθάνονται, δι'ὧν τὸ κήρυγμα τὸ θεῖον κατατοξεύουσι, διὰ τούτων μᾶλλον ἑαυτοὺς καταισχύνοντες. Φέρει γάρ τινα φιλοτιμίαν τοῖς κεκρατημένοις, ἡ τῶν κεκρατηκότων ὑπεροχή, Αὐτοὶ δὲ φάσκουσι νεκρὸν τὸν Ἰησοῦν, ἵνα νεκροῦ ἀποφανθῇ τῶν παρ'αὐτοῖς θεῶν ὁ δῆμος ἀδρανέστερος. Κωμῳδοῦσι τὸν σταυρὸν, ἵνα κωμῳδηθῶσι σφοδρότερον, ἀτίμως πεπορθημένοι καὶ νενικημένοι σταυρῷ. Σκώπτουσι τὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων ἀμαθίαν, ἵνα λαμπρότερον οἱ θρυλλούμενοι παρ'αὐτῶν στηλιτευθῶσι σοφοί, ἰδιωτῶν ἀνδρῶν διδασκαλία ἡττηθέντες. Τὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ προσκυνούμενον χλευάζουσι τάφον, ἵν' οἱ παρ'αὐτοῖς περιφανεῖς ναοί, γέλωτα ὀφλείωσι μείζονα, χλευαζομένῳ παραχωρήσαντες τάφῳ. Παντὸς ἐπιλαμβάνονται ὡς εὐτελοῦς τοῦ κηρύγματος, ἵνα τὰ παρ'αὐτοῖς περιφανῆ πλέον ὀφθῇ καταγελαστότερα, τῇ τῶν εὐτελῶν ὑποκύψαντα φύσει" (Ep. 27, PG 78:1080). See also the study by Evieux 1995.

[27] Zacharias of Mytilênê *Life of Severus*, ed. Kugener 1907; rev. edition, Turnhout 1971:207–264. The Greek text has been lost but is preserved in Syriac and has been translated into French and, partially, into English by Young 1990:312–328. For a full more recent translation, see now Zacharias Bishop of Mytilênê *The Life of Severus*, ed. Ambjörn 2008.

[28] For the caution with which Nilus' correspondence (still not available in a critical edition) should be approached, see Cameron 1976:181–196.

[29] Probably retouched by Zacharias in Constantinople in the years between 510 and 520 according to Watts 2005:437–464, esp. 439.

[30] Discussed by Chuvin 1991:108–117, Trombley 1993–1994(II):1–51, Hall 2004:192–217, and Watts 2005:437–464.

from which its members originated, nor from the major cities that received them."[31] In the midst of such a climate of religious antagonism and debate, Zacharias' protagonist Severus is presented in his preparation for becoming a Christian as feeling the lure of pagan literature. He is therefore counseled "to set the orations of Basil and Gregory, the illustrious bishops, in opposition to the orations of Libanius the Sophist, by whom, with the ancient rhetoricians, he was dazzled."[32] While the reader is left with no doubt as to who finally wins Severus' heart, his biographer later mentions that Severus "still needed to read even more of the orations of the rhetoricians and philosophers, because the pagans even now excessively consider themselves superior and glorify themselves in these studies, and they should be freely debated from these writings."[33] Describing the readings of Christian students on Sundays, Zacharias writes:

> [They] began with the treatises that different ecclesiastical authors have written against the pagans. After this we read the *Hexaemeron* of Basil, then various of his works and letters, after that the treatise addressed to Amphilochius refuting Eunomius, and finally the *Address to Young Men* in which he informs them how to profit from the writings of Hellenic authors.[34]

This is a priceless glimpse into the reading habits of Christian students. Their search for refutations of paganism went hand in hand with the search for a way in which they could still profit from their reading of the classical authors while also pursuing instruction in their faith. The list of authors whose refutations were consulted includes Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom. Theodoret's *Therapeutikê*, conspicuously absent from the list, was almost certainly read, though, as Trombley notes, it was likely not mentioned due to Theodoret's role in the continuing Christological controversies. Zacharias, however, included materials from the *Therapeutikê* in his anti-pagan dialogue *Ammonius*, in which he refuted pagan arguments against the eternity of the world.[35]

[31] Chuvin 1991:105; Nesselrath 2006:179–192; Poggi 1986:57–71; Watts 2010:123–154 For the activities of sophists, grammarians, and teachers and a prosopography, see Szabat 2007:177–345. For a more skeptical approach to the claims of these texts and an emphasis on the caution with which these accounts must be read, see now Chuvin 2004:15–31.

[32] Zacharias of Mytilênê *Life of Severus* 317.

[33] Zacharias of Mytilênê *Life of Severus* 319.

[34] Trombley 1993–1994(II):32.

[35] See the section on Theodoret's reception, Zacharias *Ammonius*, ed. Minniti Colonna 1973:112n34.

The *Life of Severus* offers us another scene of Christians debating with pagans as an illustration of the need for contemporary Christians to respond to pagan eagerness for debate:

> After reading many treatises of the church fathers who had opposed the Hellenes, [Stephen] received grace from God to defeat them utterly in his debates with them . . . He refuted the sophistic objections made by the Hellenes against Christians. Then he retorted against the offenses of the pagans to Paralios: the infamous mysteries of their gods, the dream-oracles of polytheism, the obscure and embarrassed responses of these gods, their ignorance of the future, and other frauds of those same daimones. Stephen persuaded Paralios to submit his doubts to Horapollon, Heraiskos, Asklepiodotos, Ammonius, Isidore, and the other philosophers close to them, giving just weight to what each side [of the controversy] said. Paralios engaged in conversations with the pagans many days thereafter. He found their responses weak and without foundation.[36]

Not only do these glimpses corroborate the urgency of Theodoret's task, but they also complement our picture of the range of issues that were debated in the fifth century, casting into sharper relief at least part of his intended audience as well as the use to which texts such as the *Therapeutikê* might have been put. The latter is an issue to which we will return.[37]

Thus the confidence that the empire had finally become Christian went hand in hand with the uncertainty of how Christian late Roman society had become. For "a post-pagan world was not, by any means, necessarily a Christian world."[38] Attachment to paganism remained strong precisely in the areas that Theodoret was most concerned with, in the circles of intellectuals, grammarians, and students, but also in rural settings.[39]

Although Theodoret is perhaps deliberately vague about the precise identity of those whose reactions he describes, conjuring up imagined opponents allows him to engage his audience on various fronts. His real targets, however, may have lain closer to him. In the aftermath of Constantine's conversion, the large number of converts who became Christian were motivated by different factors. It is estimated that during the fourth century, "an age of spectacular mass-baptisms . . . a thousand persons might be initiated every year at Easter in

[36] Passage in Trombley 1993–1994(II):5.
[37] This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.
[38] Brown 2003:46.
[39] Lizzi Testa 2010:77–113.

any large city."[40] This growth exerted pressure on the church and affected the process of Christianization in many ways, as Harold Drake articulates:

> The combination of a constant infusion of converts—who necessarily brought with them a wide range of experiences and preconceptions about everything from the proper ordering of society to the role of divinity in human affairs—and the small number during this same period who were able to discern and articulate the unique demands of the Christian message shows us a movement that was exceptionally fragile, as well as one that necessarily had to engage in constant dialogue, both with other Christians and with the larger world from which new Christians came.[41]

Alongside those who genuinely believed in the superior spiritual value of Christianity, some acted from expediency, and religious coercion undeniably played its role.[42] The renowned rhetor Libanius in an address to the emperor Theodosius sums up this latter problem in the fourth century thus:

> But if they tell you that others have been converted by these [coercive] acts and are now of the same religious opinion as themselves, do not let it elude you that they are speaking of *seeming converts*, and of factual ones. For they put off nothing of their [belief], but only *say* they have. This is not to say that they honor one set of cults instead of others, but that the [Christian authorities] have been fooled. For they go with the crowds through the other places where they go for the sake of appearances, but when they assume the mien of men praying, they either call upon no one or else the gods, it not being proper to call upon them from such a place, but they do it all the same.[43]

As for those who truly espoused Christianity, the question of "how much of the old life could be carried into the new" loomed large with an inescapable urgency;[44] for "we must beware of supposing that what it meant to be a

[40] Brown 1998a:617.

[41] Drake 2005:4. Fowden 1998 writes: "in communities but recently thrown into disarray by attacks on their sanctuaries, and in individuals too, conversion might be a purely external conformity, an either more or less self-conscious cryptopolytheism from which stress easily provoked return to old, well-tried gods" (557). On the problem of apostasy from Christianity, see now Schöllgen 2004:58–80.

[42] On coercion and conflict, see Brown 1998a:632–664 and Gaddis 2005.

[43] Libanius *Orations* 30.28, trans. A. F. Norman. For a discussion of the context, see Trombley 1993–1994(II):134–204.

[44] Markus 1990:32.

Christian was a matter of unanimity within the community as a whole."[45] Contrary to the previous understanding of conversion as a dramatic one-time event, recent scholarship has emphasized the complexity of this transition and the slow transformation that followed from the act.[46] These considerations raise questions about the nature and terms of conversion as well as the quality of the converts' instruction in the Christian faith.[47] Conversion to Christianity left many with a host of questions in need of answers. Thus Christianity came to be challenged not only externally by impenitent pagans but also internally by searching new Christians.

Erôtapokriseis: Ps.-Justin's *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*

Nowhere is this searching more apparent than in a collection of inquiries that were posed to an anonymous Christian teacher probably during the fifth century,[48] Ps.-Justin's *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*[49] (hereafter *QRO*). The *QRO* provides a particularly useful demonstration of the topics that came up for discussion and debate as well as the challenges that both Christian authors such as Theodoret and, on a broader level, fifth-century Christianity in general faced. This collection of 161 inquiries from an Antiochene perspective establishes a world full of tensions with a directness not easily discernible in other sources.

By following the seemingly random compilation of the *QRO*, we can trace the preoccupations of a society still debating a number of unresolved contemporary problems.[50] The *QRO* highlights focal points in these debates, revealing a fluidity in the beliefs held by Christians at the time while underscoring the challenges

[45] Scourfield 2007:4; Sandwell 2010:523–542. For a questioning of the pagan vs. Christian divide and a nuanced model of assessing pagan and Christian investment in religion, see Cameron 2011:175–177.

[46] For a nuanced discussion, see Brown 2004:103–117. For a recent reappraisal of conversion, see Mills and Grafton 2003.

[47] Soler 2010:281–291.

[48] While the issue of its dating is not settled yet and while, as a compilation, the *QRO* may contain materials from both an earlier and a later period, what is not in doubt is that the central core of the collection is from the fifth century.

[49] On the authorship, see Harnack 1901:33–44; Funk 1907(III):323–350. Recently, Riedweg 1998:848–873, esp. 868–869. For the purposes of this study I use the edition of Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1895, reprinted 1976, Leipzig. All translations of the *QRO* are my own.

[50] Dagron 1981: "Le ps.-Justin des Quaestiones ad orthodoxos, qui est peut-être Théodoret de Cyr lui même, en toute cas l'un des ses contemporaines; Il nous place, comme les vies du Ve siècle, au carrefour de deux mondes, entre un paganisme qui n' est plus un rival, mais une composante culturelle encore mal assimilée, et une fois nouvelle qui explore un autre coprus de textes et a découvert la voie parallèle d' une histoire vétérotestamentaire" (144).

that this fluidity posed to the formation of a Christian identity.[51] Because the range of issues the *QRO* is meant to address overlaps so markedly not only with Theodoret's concerns but also with those of many Christian apologists of the time, it is particularly relevant for assessing the state of Christianization in the fifth century and beyond.[52]

Seen in this light, Theodoret and the anonymous author of the *QRO* are attempting to respond to the pressing concerns of contemporary late antique society. The literature of *erôtapokriseis* to which the *QRO* belongs began growing significantly in the fifth century not only as a response to debates but also as a way to address the deeply-felt need that converts had for instruction.[53] For, contrary to the tendency to see catechesis as restricted only to the preparation for admission to the liturgical life of the church, we must regard religious instruction as a longer process, one encompassing all aspects of the life of the Christian.

Other challenges facing Theodoret were the internal divisions of Christianity and Judaism. Theological divisions, to which Theodoret devotes considerable attention in his *Ecclesiastical History*, had beset the eastern empire and Antioch in particular in John Chrysostom's time but were still causing controversy in the fifth century. The situation was further compounded by the continued vitality of Judaism in Syria, as well as in other parts of the eastern empire.[54] As the closest alternative to Christianity, Judaism continued to be a challenging presence capable of attracting Christians. A generation earlier, Chrysostom had gone to great lengths to divert his congregation in Antioch from Jewish practices.[55] Debate and polemic against Judaism continued to inform Theodoret's work in varying degrees, most predominantly with respect to his exegesis.[56] At the same time, the lingering problem of heretics and Manichaeans[57] and the menacing presence of Persia—with its sporadic persecution of Christians toward the end of the reign of Yazdgard I (399–421)—contributed to a climate of worrisome uncertainty.[58]

[51] On the problem and challenge, see Piepenbrink 2005 and Sandwell 2007; Gemeinhardt 2008:453–476.

[52] See for further details Papadoyannakis 2008:115–127.

[53] Papadoyannakis 2006:91–105.

[54] Millar 2004:1–24, esp. 15–16.

[55] Wilken 1983; Soler 2006; Sandwell 2007.

[56] On this, see Guinot 1997:153–178; McCollough 1984 and 1989(II):157–174.

[57] See Ep. 81, ed. Azema, where Theodoret refers to eight villages of Marcionites, one village of Eunomians, and one village of Arians. Also Hutter 2002:287–294. For Marcionites, see Tardieu 1997–1998:596–605.

[58] See Chapter Five. See also Dignas 2007:223–255.

Hellenism = Paganism?

As further analysis will demonstrate,[59] Theodoret's *therapeutic* approach is based on a model deeply rooted in the traditions of Greek medicine and philosophy. According to this model, to have the wrong religious beliefs is tantamount to a failure of cognition, which must be remedied by means of discourse. Nevertheless, the rejection of Hellenic religion did not imply a wholesale rejection of Hellenic culture. Recent scholarship has shown how Hellenism had been variously defined, and it remained a fluid concept even among its non-Christian adherents.[60] As such, 'Hellenism' designated, among other things, attachment to pagan beliefs/ancient ideas about religious practice, ritual, and even good command of classical Greek language and literature.[61] It conjured up an entire culture of enormous sophistication. The multivalence of the term 'Hellenism' rendered it inherently ambiguous and therefore subject to competing conceptualizations. The line between its religious and non-religious elements was very hard to negotiate. Not only was the 'pagan' element of Hellenism not uniformly defined or understood, it was also often left to the eye of the Christian beholder to determine its content and contours. Different Christian authors chose to draw the line at different points.[62]

If Theodoret inveighs against this religious aspect of Hellenism (viz. paganism) in his work, he nevertheless considered other aspects too important to be rejected. By exploiting what common ground existed (as well as what ground *could be seen* to exist) between Hellenic literary culture and philosophy and Christianity, he sought to redefine the way his readers related to a corpus of classical texts and ideas. To accomplish this—and to help his readers across what was made to look like a firm divide—Theodoret incorporated a broad array of Greek texts in a manner integral to his apologetics. In the same vein he elucidated the title of the work *Therapeutikê of Hellenic Maladies* by adding: "Proof-recognition (*epignôsis*) of the Gospel from Greek philosophy." These strategies reiterate an idea found in earlier apologists that paganism may have been based on misguided thinking. In the process of refuting this thinking, apologists could

[59] See Chapter Three.

[60] Whitmarsh 2001: "Greek cultural identity, at least in the highly energized world of elite literary production, was manipulated strategically in order to serve the interests of the speaker or the writer. Each literary articulation of Greekness, then, needs to be interpreted in context, in the light of the aims and ambitions of the actor in question, and not simply taken for granted as an expression of ethnic unrest" (305). See also Konstan and Saïd 2006; Johnson 2011:165–181.

[61] Bowersock 1990; Rapp 2008:127–147. Recently, Kaldellis 2007:120–187, though there is a tendency to overstate the conflict and overlook significant points of convergence.

[62] Johnson 2006:55–93; Kahlos 2007:1–112; McLynn 2009:572–587; Cameron 2007:21–46; Bagnall 2008:23–41.

highlight intimations of Christian truth, which helped to confirm the correctness of their theology. Theodoret's entire apologetic enterprise, then, could be regarded by readers, not only as a refutation of paganism, but as both a justification and a guideline for the Christian use of classical texts.

Theodoret's time saw the culmination of Christianity's grappling with Hellenism, which was embedded in a wider and longer running pattern of opposition to and integration of Hellenism, along with Christianity, into the Roman elite culture. The challenge for Theodoret was to continue the tradition, established by Clement of Alexandria, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa, of harmonizing scripture and Hellenic philosophy and culture.[63] Christians were contending with a host of challenges: the accommodation of the emperor in the narrative of Christianization, the accounting for and defense of the cult of martyrs that played an increasingly important role, the assimilation of asceticism into the new reality of the Christian Empire, the justification of Christianity's success. These challenges called out for a sustained engagement with Hellenism, and Greek *paideia* provided a precious resource.

There were other areas too, where the appeal of Hellenic paganism found expression, particularly biography and historiography. Biography ensured that models of pagan piety remained highly visible and that the bearers of the true Hellenic *paideia* were properly praised. Biographies of the time abounded in miracles, signs, and oracles and such practices as fasting, sexual abstinence, miraculous healing, and divinatory practices,[64] but also in covert polemic against Christianity.[65] In line with predecessors Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus*, *Life of Pythagoras*) and Iamblichus (*Life of Pythagoras*), Eunapius, composing portraits of holy men in the later fourth century, advertised the spiritual values of a community threatened by the rise of Christianity;[66] Marinus (*Life of Proclus*) in the fifth century and Damascius (*Life of Isidore*) in the sixth century continued this tradition. Philosophers were presented as accomplished religious figures who, having progressed in a graded system of virtues through their discipline and piety, had achieved a divine status. The underlying values of these philosophers were oriented toward a union with God. Collectively, the real heroes of these biographies were Hellenic education and religion. Despite the bleak view these authors took of the fate of the ideals they propounded, their texts also carried a very potent message: divine power still abides in the people who choose to adhere to the time-honored religious traditions of Hellenism and to the ideals that it fosters. At the same time, the histories of Eunapius and Zosimus (the

63 Breitenbach 2003.
64 See Goulet 1981:161–208 and 1998:217–265; Edwards 2000.
65 Clerc 1994:294–313; Saffrey 1975:553–563 and 1992b:421–431.
66 Penella 1990.

former only partially preserved in the latter) were motivated by the view that the abandonment of time-honored religious practices and traditions would bring about the decline of the Empire.[67]

Hellenism and Christianity

Even a cursory look into Theodoret's writings suffices to show that his engagement with Hellenism—understood as both a set of religious traditions and cultural and literary expressions—lasted throughout his life. Seen as a set of religious traditions, Hellenism was incompatible with Christianity, and Theodoret argued vigorously against it. But as a set of literary and cultural expressions Hellenism was not only a defining component of the world he described; it was essential to its survival. Writing almost two generations after Julian's attempt to define Hellenism more narrowly, Theodoret was aware of the fact that, to a significant degree in the East, Greek literature and culture had a crucial part to play in the continuing development of the eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) in particular. Greek literary culture was an index of Roman identity.[68]

The focus, then, on the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity—both terms appear in the sources of the period, often as conventional opposites[69]—raises many issues for Theodoret, at once a bishop faced with the task of Christianizing late Roman society and a Hellenized Syrian staking his claim to full participation in that society to Greco-Roman identity.[70] Philip Rousseau has summed up well the challenge facing bishops like Theodoret:

> Christianization was not a matter merely of defeating 'paganism': it meant implanting more securely the system of belief that the population had already in theory embraced—converting the converted. Nor could a bishop rest content with the force of law or secular authority no matter how friendly he might be with those who wielded it. He was faced with more than criminal intransigence and had to deploy other traditional forms of role and status—those of the orator, the scholar, the man of virtue—in order to bring to bear in this new cause the established techniques of instruction and persuasion.[71]

[67] Leven 1988:177–197; Green 1974. For the historiography of this period, see Winkelmann 1998:123–159. But see recently the critique and qualifications offered by Cameron 2011:644–654, 668–678.

[68] See Millar 2006.

[69] See *QRO* Q. 16, Q. 34, Q. 55, Q. 86.

[70] See Chapter Five. Millar 2007:105–125.

[71] Rousseau 2008:36–37.

The complex interplay between these two traditions in the work of Theodoret was inevitable given his family background, education, his vocation. Theodoret realized, as did many a classically educated bishop, that he could neither fully concede the elite's belief in *paideia* as the locus of highest worth nor entirely shake free of it.

Admittedly, many of the above challenges were not new. Tensions went back to Clement of Alexandria and were addressed by Origen, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom, among others.[72] However, the issue had by no means lost its immediacy and relevance in Theodoret's time. In fact, as Christians sought to envisage a Christian future, the question of how to deal with Hellenic *paideia* remained all the more pressing; for the cultivated audience of the time, Christian and non-Christian alike, did not simply require the refutation of pagan criticisms. Rather, they sought a view of where and how Christianity fitted with the literary culture they had been brought up to admire.[73] Accordingly, Christian authors themselves had to continue to worry about how to accomplish such a synthesis. How was the relationship between Christianity and Hellenism to be defined? What were the implications for Christian identity and for *paideia*?

Paideia and the Formation of Elites

Following the efforts of numerous Christian authors in the preceding generations, the fourth and fifth centuries saw Christianity consolidating its position

[72] Sandnes 2007:124–195.

[73] Julian summed up this supreme confidence in the intrinsic value of Greek *paideia* by taunting Christians thus: "But you yourselves know, it seems to me, the very different effect of your writings as compared with ours; and that from studying yours no man could attain to excellence or even to ordinary goodness, whereas from studying ours everyone would become better than before, even though he were altogether without natural fitness. But when a person is well endowed, and moreover receives the education of our literature, he becomes actually a gift of the gods to humankind, either by kindling the light of knowledge, or by founding some kind of political constitution, or by routing numbers of his country's foes, or even by traveling far over the earth and far by the sea, and thus proving himself a person of heroic mold. Now this would be a clear proof: choose out children from among you all and train and educate them in your scriptures, and if when they come to manhood they prove they have nobler qualities than slaves, then you may believe that I am talking nonsense and am suffering from spleen. Yet you are so misguided and foolish that you regard those chronicles of yours as divinely inspired, though by their help no man could ever become wiser or braver or better than he was before; while, on the other hand, writings by whose aid men can acquire courage, wisdom and justice, these you ascribe to Satan and to those who serve Satan!" (*Against the Galileans* fr. 55, trans. Wright LCL). While Julian's attitude cannot be taken as representative of all those classically educated non-Christians, it certainly had considerable resonance among the literati and highlighted the challenge that Christians had to be prepared to meet on the role of classical education in a Christian empire.

as a pervasive element in Roman elite culture. This period was thus crucial for the formation and maintenance of Christian elites.[74] Theodoret's focus on the formation of a Christian *paideia* bears directly upon this process, as Christian elites sought to maintain and redefine their place within late Roman society and its traditions.[75] Classical *paideia* was tied to social esteem, and it conferred status on its holders. In the absence of a Christian educational system, young men had to acquire an education through the study of Homer and other pagan authors. This meant that they had to immerse themselves in pagan literary and religious values, as Robert Kaster explains:

> If in theory the man of traditional education could be presumed to be the '*right sort*', in practice the presumption provided entry into the networks of personal relationships and patronage by which local and imperial governments were managed and through which the rewards were distributed. The man thus prized and rewarded for his culture was a figure of continuity in the empire from its beginning until its end, whatever changes the life and structure of the empire experienced. In the wake of such changes it was a function of the traditional education to continue its old job of sorting out and identifying the elite, of providing reassurance that nothing basic had shifted, that the right, honorable men were still conspicuously present and in control. Tenacious in its maintenance of a familiar order, this culture of language and texts continued to perform its job as long as the structures of the imperial government remained standing in the Latin west, and still longer in the Greek east.[76]

Thus Hellenism, bound up with *paideia* as it was, became essential. The capacity of Greek literature to induce a sense of cultural (and religious) identity made it a field of contestation *par excellence*. Furthermore, increasing bureaucratization made education, and hence the study of classical authors, a highly desirable path for advancement. As Christianity had not yet developed its own curriculum and relied instead on the traditional educational system, Christian authors were concerned with the fact that the study of the classics involved encountering literature steeped in Hellenic religious ideas and beliefs.[77] Their challenge was to affect the way with which the elites related to this corpus of texts and ideas

[74] See the contributions in Rapp and Salzman 2000; also Salzman 2002.

[75] Cameron 2004:91–107.

[76] Kaster 1999:421–423, at 423. On *paideia* and education in late antiquity, see Watts 2006.

[77] Sandnes 2009; on the varying ways in which Christians dealt with Greek myths, see recent contributions in Von Haehling 2005.

while at the same time precluding adherence to the 'pagan' religious element of classical *paideia*.[78] Brown sums up the problem thus:

> Culture was not a surrogate for religion. For many the classical literature and art and the sense of history and language were central to culture, inherited from the deep past of Rome, *were*, in effect, the religion. It was a religion in which all members of the ruling class could share. It spoke with a heavier voice and elicited a thrill of numinous awe that often resonated more deeply and more widely among its devotees than did the novel tingle of sectarian loyalties.[79]

On a broader level, reverence for the classical *paideia* went hand in hand with the need to create a more polished Christian literature intended to cater to the literati.[80] Theodoret's time was one of literary vigor, actively supported by the patronage of Theodosius II, which led to the writing of hagiography as well as the recasting of Biblical narratives in classisizing poetry.[81] The confidence that this move was meant to convey should not be underestimated: to Christian and non-Christian eyes, it was important that Christianity be seen as able to present its protagonists on the "brightly-lit stage of Late Roman opinion."[82] Because they would be recognizable to readers schooled in Greek rhetoric, Christian Syrian ascetics would begin to enter the literary mainstream and become known throughout the empire. Without excluding other potential motives behind the writing of the *Religious History*, this one has received the least attention.[83]

Theodoret was not alone in deliberately fusing classical literary ideals with Christian ones. The obvious parallel that comes to mind from this same period is Eudocia. As consort of emperor Theodosius II, Eudocia was heavily invested in promoting a Christian Hellenism that sought to integrate Hellenic and Christian literary ideals. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Theodoret's texts, among others, were precisely what Eudocia was reading.[84]

As the evidence suggests, the Christianization of the empire during Theodoret's time was still very much in progress. In the context of continuous fluidity, there remained a continual need for new syntheses and responses. As

78 McLynn 2009:585 argues similarly.
79 Brown 2011:69.
80 Bevegni 2006:389–405.
81 On this literary phenomenon, see Whitby 2007:195–231, Nesselrath 2005–2006:43–53, Johnson 2006, and Nazzaro 1998:69–106.
82 Brown 1998:656.
83 *Pace* Leppin 1996b:212–230.
84 Cameron 1982:217–289 at 280.

the rest of this study will illustrate, the methods Theodoret uses to articulate his apologetic enterprise have yet to be fully understood in light of the above considerations. While an exhaustive study is too large in scope to address here, the subsequent chapters will highlight cumulatively the following interlocking key themes.

Chapter One surveys the notion of *therapeia* and its role in the apology. Drawing on a number of texts it will show how medical/philosophical notions are employed in the refutation of pagan polemic and how Greco-Roman theories of the role of the emotions provide a framework for persuading Theodoret's readers.

Chapter Two considers the polemic against the conceptualization of Greek gods and other intermediaries (angels, heroes, daemons) and how Theodoret replaces them with angels. A major part of Theodoret's polemical intent is to cast pagan Gods and intermediaries into the category of demons. The role of demons in divination and sacrifice requires Theodoret to engage both aspects of Greek religion.

Chapter Three focuses on the cult of martyrs. It examines the criticisms underlying Theodoret's defense of the cult and how this is played against the background of the hero cult.

Chapter Four examines the presentation of Christianity as a practical universal philosophy. It shows how Greek philosophy is used to articulate a contrast between Christianity and paganism. This contrast also informs the opposition of local versus universal and that of Greek philosophers and the true philosophers, the Christian ascetics.

Finally, Chapter Five is a study of Theodoret's rhetoric, style, and argumentation and their integral role in the articulation of his apologetic program. Particular attention is given to the literary form of *dialexis* and its significance for the format of the *Therapeutikê*. In light of the surrounding literary activity, this chapter also advances a new suggestion for the intended role of the work.

The following analyses will enable us to see Theodoret as a creative apologist—not just adding a new inflection to old themes but creating his own unique perspective—by closely examining the polemical literary context that shaped his views and the emergence of ideas born from his experience contending with pagan criticism.