

THEODORET (c. 393-458)

The writer of exegetical and historical works. A native of Antioch, he was born into a pious [Christian](#) family of great wealth and received his education in a monastic school. After the death of his parents while he was in his twenties, he decided to distribute his inherited wealth to the poor and the needy, and then retire to the Monastery of Nicerte (c. 416). There he devoted all his time to prayers and intensive study of [church](#) history and the sacred traditions of the church. Ultimately Theodoret's fame for chastity, piety, and saintly life spread widely in the region of Antioch and, against his will, he was forced by the congregation to be consecrated as bishop of Cyrrhus in Syria in 423. He conducted the affairs of his ecclesiastical office with great sagacity, and he was firm in fighting paganism and all manner of heresy as he saw it.

Gradually Theodoret became involved in the Christological conflicts between the two giants of the church, NESTORIUS, [archbishop](#) of Constantinople, and Pope CYRIL I of Alexandria. His close friendship with and admiration for Nestorius swung him to the side of the [patriarch of Constantinople](#) and placed him against Cyril, who accused him of confusion of the orthodox Christology with APOLLINARIANISM and the maintenance of the duality of Christ's nature.

The THEOTOKOS was accepted by Theodoret only as a figurative term. The rising tide of polemics over these conceptions led to the convening by Emperor Theodosius of the [First Council](#) of EPHESUS in 431. As chairman of the council, Cyril opened the meeting of the council before the arrival of the Syrian delegation, which included Theodoret. The council accepted the formula of Cyril and deposed and anathematized Nestorius. When the Syrian bishops under the leadership of Theodoret arrived, they held a rival council, which in turn excommunicated Cyril and confirmed Nestorius.

The polemical disputes between Alexandria and Constantinople kept

flaring up until Theodosius II decided to summon another council, also at Ephesus, in 449. Cyril had died, and his successor, DIOSCORUS I, came to the council with a firm commitment to uphold the principle of MONOPHYSITISM that EUTYCHES professed at Constantinople. The council reversed the decisions made at Constantinople and reinstated Eutyches before the arrival of the [Roman](#) delegation with Pope Leo's "Tome," which was not read at the meeting. Dioscorus accused Theodoret of making [Christ](#) two sons, and had Theodoret deposed and anathematized. Ephesus II was dubbed by the rival party "Robber Council" or Latrocinium, a term used by Leo in his "Tome."

The succession of Marcian and Pulcheria, following the death of Theodosius II, imposed a new policy hostile to Alexandria and Dioscorus, whom they summoned to another council at CHALCEDON in 451. The decisions of the Latrocinium were reversed; Theodoret was confirmed, and Dioscorus was anathematized, deposed, and exiled to [Gangra](#) in Paphlagonia. The Copts never recognized Chalcedon as an ecumenical council, and to this day repudiate its decisions as heretical.

Theodoret spent his remaining years peacefully completing his literary works, which may be [roughly](#) divided into four categories. First are his exegetical works, which rank among the best on record. They include a vast number of treatises dealing with Old Testament books such as Psalms and the Song of Songs, the Octateuch, Kings, Chronicles, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets. On the New Testament, Theodoret left commentaries on the fourteen epistles of Saint Paul, including that to the Hebrews, that are considered among the best specimens of religious writings.

Second, the works of controversial character that appear to have occupied his latter years deal with his conflicts with Cyril I and Dioscorus I over the problem of monophysitism. In them he discussed heresies in general in five books composed at the request of Sporacius, an imperial commissioner present at Chalcedon.

Third, his theological works include his *Graecarum affectionum curatio*, a fine work of [Christian](#) apologetics, in which he compiled statements of the pagan philosophers in twelve discourses, with the Christian answers in elegant style and forceful expression.

The fourth category includes his historical works. The first is his *Ecclesiastical History*, which was intended to be a continuation of the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius and covers the period from the rise of ARIANISM to the death of THEODORUS OF MOPSUESTIA in 429. In this work, he supplements the works of SOCRATES and SOZOMEN while correcting some of their errors. He uses original documents, but one must be cautious of his chronology. The second, *Religious History*, is a [biographical](#) treatise on thirty hermits and ascetics of his day, in which he displays his personal knowledge of or [acquaintance](#) with these persons.

To the above categories may be added Theodoret's accumulation of letters written to contemporary personalities on the outstanding theological problems of his time, as well as his sermons and orations.

The works of Theodoret that are lost number at least ten, with the following titles traceable: (1) Pentalogus, on the Incarnation, written against Cyril I; (2) *Opus mysticum*; (3) *De theologia et incarnatione*, consisting of three dialogues against the Macedonians and Apollinarians, wrongly attributed to Saint Athanasius; (4) *Opus adversus Marcionem*; (5) *Opus adversus Judaeos*; (6) *Responsiones ad quasita majorum Chrysostomi*; (7) "Allocations Against Cyril" at Chalcedon; (8) "Fragments Against Sabellius"; (9-10) two sermons, one at Antioch and the other on JOHN CHRYSOSTOM.

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