

## II. HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

# THEODORET OF CYRUS ON MESSALIANISM

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper aims to review the positions of Theodoret of Cyrus on Messalianism. After a brief presentation on Messalianism and of the position taken against it by some Church Fathers and synods, the author formulates the hypothesis that Theodoret, while taking a position on Messalianism, was careful not to harm the reputation of Antioch, as this theological centre could be perceived in Alexandria as a fief of Messalianism in the East. In *Historia religiosa* Theodoret carefully avoids any association of his ascetic heroes with Messalianism. The report on Messianism in *Historia ecclesiastica* also carefully disconnects Antioch from Messalianism and declared that Syria was cleared up of their influence.

**Keywords:** Theodoret of Cyrus; Messalianism; Antioch; Historia Religiosa; Historia ecclesiastica; Theodoret on Messalianism

## I. Introduction

The interest in Messalianism has been raised in the previous century, when the collection of fifty *Spiritual Homilies*, traditionally ascribed to Macarius the Egyptian, also surnamed “The Elder” or “the Great” (around 300 – shortly before 390) a few generations after his death. It was proved as originating in fact in Syria (sometime between 390 and 431) and being produced in Messalian circles<sup>1</sup>. As Andrew Louth formulated, “the ascription of these homilies to Macarius was a device to keep them circulating among the orthodox”<sup>2</sup>. In fact,

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<sup>1</sup> For a short and clear report on the process of discovering the real origins of the *Spiritual Homilies*, see J. Quasten, *Patrology: Vol. III, The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Spectrum Publishers, 1962), 163-164. For a report on the contesters of this theory, see *ibidem*, Quasten, *Patrology*, 164-165.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 111.

their author was, most probably, a Messalian named Symeon of Mesopotamia<sup>3</sup>. The interest for Messalianism has also grown because they were perceived by some scholars as being comparable with previous Montanism<sup>4</sup> or as predecessors of modern Pentecostalism<sup>5</sup> or Evangelicalism<sup>6</sup>.

In this study, I intend to review the way in which Theodoret of Cyrus presents Messalianism in his writings. One may expect that Theodoret, who originated in Syria and was a prolific author, wrote about this heretic-ascetic movement which appeared in the region of his origin. There are indeed several records on Messalianism in his writings. However, this research will try to go beyond a simple record and analysis of anti-Messalian statements of Theodoret. When reviewing his statements on Messalianism in his *Historia religiosa*, I will refer to his complex attitude on Messalianism by revisiting previous scholarship on this particular matter. Also Theodoret's report on Messalianism in *Historia ecclesiastica* serves the same purpose of disconnecting Antioch as a theological-spiritual centre from any connection or association with Messalianism.

Before reviewing the way in which Theodoret perceived Messalianism, I will introduce two other chapters: a propaedeutic one on Messalianism and a register of patristic references against it. The scope of the first chapter is to simply introduce the potential readers into the doctrine and spirituality of Messalianism. The second chapter, which is far from being exhaustive, is aimed to show the reactions of different Church Fathers, as well as of synods, to Messalianism. It highlights the fact that Messalianism as a heretic-ascetic movement was refuted both by the Orthodox Church, as well as by other churches. Especially the reports on the way how Antiochian theologians previous to Theodoret reacted to Messalianism play an important role for the argumentative construct of this paper. Out of these brief presentations, these questions emerge: Did Theodoret, as an Antiochian theologian, have a special interest in refuting Messalianism? Was his refutation particularly biased by his own context?

## II. What is Messalianism?

Messalianism was a monastic movement which appeared in Mesopotamia and developed further in Syria during the last part of the fourth century C.E. Their name comes from the Syriac word "msallyane" which means "the praying ones".

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<sup>3</sup> H. Dörries, *Symeon of Mesopotamien. Die Überlieferung der messalianischen Makarius-Schriften*, Texte und Untersuchungen, 55:1 (Leipzig, 1941).

<sup>4</sup> Reinhart Staats, "Messalianer", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 22, (1993): 607. However, unless in Montanism, Messalianism did not teach the imminent apocalyptic end of the world.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 112.

<sup>6</sup> See Henri Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila* (Oxford, 1976), 179.

It is the participle of the word which means “prayer”. Their Greek name “euchites” has the same meaning and comes from the word “euche”, which means “prayer”. Both the Syriac and the Greek names are an allusion of the emphasis on prayer which is typical for the spirituality of this movement. They named themselves “pneumatikoi” i.e. “spirituals”<sup>7</sup>, but also “beggars” and “the poor” (cf. Mathews 5:3: “poor in spirit”)<sup>8</sup>. Their message could be summarized as the following: “the only thing that matters is prayer. Fasting, asceticism (even morality), Baptism, the Eucharist, and the institution of the Church – all this is beside the point”<sup>9</sup>. It seems also that they did not have a lot of respect for philosophy and for scholastic work; a concrete attitude regarding labour was missing and they did not want to be bound to any place on earth, therefore they walked from one place to another, living out of alms. Their prayer did not follow a clear liturgical order. According to some later records, they also deny the role of the saints and refuted the worship of icons<sup>10</sup>.

### III. Church Fathers and synods against Messalianism

There are several patristic records and synodical decisions against Messalianism. Each of them described and rejected one or another aspect or aspects of their teachings, spirituality and/or discipline.

Ephraim the Syrian (306-373) mentions the Messalians in his *Hymnes on the heresies* written in Edessa between 363 and 373<sup>11</sup>. This is one of the first historical records on Messalianism.

There is an ascetical treatise entitled *On Sickness and Health* attributed to St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296-298 - 373) in which heretics who demand uninterrupted divine service and therefore do not tolerate any sleep, are refuted. Possibly this writing meant the messalians<sup>12</sup>.

Some authors noticed “a Messalian atmosphere” in some of the questions and a “restraint in the answers” in the first redaction of the *Small Asketikon* of St. Basil the Great (330-379), which goes back to 358/359<sup>13</sup>. There is also a “Messalian influence noticeable” in the first chapter of the *Great Asketikon* by the same author<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Antoine Guillaumont, “Messaliens”, *DP*, tome X, (Paris, 1980), 1074.

<sup>8</sup> Staats, “Messalianer”, 607.

<sup>9</sup> Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 112.

<sup>10</sup> Staats, “Messalianer”, 607.

<sup>11</sup> *Hymnes sur les hérésies* 22, 4, CSCO 169 (E. Beck, 1957), 79.

<sup>12</sup> Quasten, *Patrology. Vol. III*, 49 affirms that “style and content do not offer anything which would contradict” the attribution of this treatise to St. Athanasius.

<sup>13</sup> Quasten, *Patrology. Vol. III*, 212.

<sup>14</sup> Quasten, *Patrology. Vol. III*, 213.

Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) in *De virginitate* criticized their ethics sharply, as they were living in communities both of women and men in which they were considering their dreams as revelations<sup>15</sup>.

Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) wrote in around 380 about some old monks who came from the eastern borders of the Empire, i.e. from the region of Antioch as Abrahamic fathers asking the flock in Constantinople to take part in dubious actions.<sup>16</sup> A year later, the same Gregory defended the deity of the Holy Spirit in the synod of Constantinople, mentioned some monks coming from the East who seemed to confirm his pneumatology<sup>17</sup>.

The first synodical condemnation of the Messalians took place in Side, Pamphylia (390) in a synod attended by 25 bishops and presided by Amphilochius of Iconium (339-394). Flavian of Antioch (381-404) was informed about the decisions taken against Messalians by a synodical letter. The main accusations on Messalians presented in this synod, based on different testimonies, but also on their writings were the following: since the fall of Adam, each human being is possessed by a demon; Baptism is clearly played down, as it does not cleanse the demon and the roots of the sin remain; only prayer is efficient in expelling the demon from the human soul and in making space for the Holy Spirit<sup>18</sup>.

Flavian of Antioch himself held a synod against the Messalians, around 400. Their leader, Adelphos, was interrogated and condemned as a heretic. After the synod, Flavian held correspondence with the bishops from Osroene, Upper Mesopotamia, on the matter of Messalians. It seems that he burned Messalian monasteries and sent Messalian monks into exile. In a letter to an Armenian bishop, he complains about the protection he provided to these heretics<sup>19</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom (350-407) who was a priest in Antioch from 386 to 397, acknowledged the presence of Messalians in his native city. There are modern theologians stating that the critic of Chrysostom on “the men of today ... (who) do not shudder when they measure themselves with such a great man as this”

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<sup>15</sup> Gh. Ny., *De virg* 23. See also the English translation: St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginitate*, NPNF 205, 582-583: “From this number, too, come the Dreamers, who put more faith in the illusions of their dreams than in the Gospel teaching, and phantasies <revelations.> Why, we have known ascetics of this class who have persisted in their fasting even unto death, as if <with such sacrifices God were well pleased, and, again, others who rush off into the extreme diametrically opposite, practicing celibacy in name only and leading a life in no way different from the secular; for they not only indulge in the pleasures of the table, but are openly known to have a woman in their houses; and they call such a friendship a brotherly affection, as if, forsooth, they could veil their own thought, which is inclined to evil, under a sacred term. It is owing to them that this pure and holy profession of virginity is <blasphemed amongst the Gentiles>”.

<sup>16</sup> See Greg. Nyss., *Oratio XXXIII*.

<sup>17</sup> See Greg. Nyss., *Opera IX*, 337ff.

<sup>18</sup> Staats, “Messalianer”, 607.

<sup>19</sup> Photius, *Bibl.*, cod LII, ed. Henry I, 38, 43-45.

(i.e. St. Paul)<sup>20</sup> has in mind the Messalians. This critique was formulated around 386-388, when Flavian was the bishop of the city. In one of his sermons, Chrysostom warned his listeners on a certain visionary who affirms that he has seen the pure nature of God which remains unseen even to the Cherubim<sup>21</sup>. This critique might be also directed against the Messalians. These evidences prove that Messalianism was an issue in Antioch when St. John Chrysostom was a priest there<sup>22</sup>.

Mark the Hermit, a disciple of St. John Chrysostom wrote *About the Law of the Spirit* in which he attacked the Messalians. The same character has another piece entitled *On Those who suppose Justification* in which he refuted the Messalian identification of grace with mystical experience. *On the Baptism* has the same character, as it deals with the effects of the sacrament of Baptism<sup>23</sup>.

Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310-320 - 403) in his work *Panarion*<sup>24</sup> signalled their presence in Antioch around 376-377. They are described as vagabonds who renounced any possession; they were begging on the streets, as they were refusing any work and any discipline, a part of prayer. Epiphanius mentions that they originated in Mesopotamia.

In 415, St. Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376-444) called a synod against the Messalians, which means that they were present in Alexandria in his time. Also, Hieronymus (c.347-420) who travelled in the East around the same time, met them and compared them with Pelagians<sup>25</sup>. His comparison with a similar heresy present in the West indicates that the Messalians were unknown there.

Nilus of Ancyra (around 430), who was an archimandrite in a monastery near Ancyra, made an "implicit refutation" of the Messalians in his writing *On Voluntary Poverty*, ch. 21 who rejected poverty on the pretext that it made perpetual prayer impossible<sup>26</sup>.

The Council of Ephesus, 431, took a radical decision on Messalianism, more in the spirit of Cyril of Alexandria than in the spirit of previous synodal decisions against Messalianism. The Council of Ephesus decided that a Messalian bishop has no right to repentance. Therefore, in care a bishop was proved as

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<sup>20</sup> J. Chrysostom, *Treatise on the Priesthood*, IV. 6.

<sup>21</sup> J. Chrysostom, *Hom. In illud, Vidi dominum* 2, 2 PG 56, 109.

<sup>22</sup> For further details see Hieromonk Vasile Birzu, *Reverberation of Messalian Controversy in the Life and Work of St. John Chrysostom*, in *Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, Ierarh, Teolog, Filantrop* (Sibiu: Andreana, 2008), 367-395.

<sup>23</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*. Vol. III, 164.

<sup>24</sup> *Panarion haer. 80, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte 37*, ed. K. Holl (Leipzig 1933), 484-496.

<sup>25</sup> *In dial. Adv. Pelagianos*, Prol. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*. Vol. III, 164.

being a member of this heresy, he automatically lost his office<sup>27</sup>. *Codex Theodosianus* (428), following the synodical decision of Ephesus, ranked Messalianism as one of the most dangerous heresies<sup>28</sup>.

Diadochos of Photiki (c. 400 – c.486) wrote around 468 a piece called *One Hundred Chapters on Spiritual Perfection* in which he refuted the Messalian belief that after the fall of Adam, every human being has a demon which was not expelled through Baptism, but it can be expelled only by ceaseless prayer. He also refutes the messalian idea of cohabitation between grace and sin in the human soul. The presence of the grace and the deliverance of the sin through baptism does not mean that there is no further battle with sin<sup>29</sup>.

John of Damascus (c. 675/676 - 749) considered that the enthusiasm of the Messalians, expressed as they were being filled and fulfilled by the Holy Spirit as suspicious<sup>30</sup>.

Messalianism was condemned also outside of the byzantine Orthodoxy. An Armenian synod gathered in 447 in Shahapivan condemning the Messalians as those who used to have too much influence on women and children. Also, the Nestorian Church took, after 550, several synodical decisions against the Messalians<sup>31</sup>.

#### IV. Theodoret of Cyrus on Messalianism

The records of Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393 – c. 458) on Messalianism are considered as one of the most important ones, together with those of Ephraem the Syrian, Epiphanius of Salamis, Cyril of Alexandria and John of Damascus<sup>32</sup>. They are perceived as some of the most important informers on the early history of this movement<sup>33</sup>.

Why is Theodoret interested in Messalianism? One may simply respond that Theodoret wrote about Messalianism as many other Church Fathers and theologians of his time have done. Even more, it is natural to find records on Messalianism in his writings, as a theologian of his calibre was interested in all sorts of dynamics within Christianity during his time. I think that there is evidence to affirm that for Theodoret, as an Antiochian theologian, the issue of

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<sup>27</sup> ACO I,1,7, NR. 80; Mansi IV, 541-544.

<sup>28</sup> Cod. Th. XVI,5,65.

<sup>29</sup> Staats, "Messalianer", 609.

<sup>30</sup> *Haer. 80*, PG 94; I, 728-737.

<sup>31</sup> Staats, "Messalianer", 611.

<sup>32</sup> Staats, "Messalianer", 609.

<sup>33</sup> Guillaumont, "Messaliens", 1074.

Messalianism was particularly delicate. This fact really influenced his attitude regarding Messalianism and the way he described this heresy in his writings.

What could make the issue of Messalianism delicate for Theodoret? One could find the answer in the previous chapters of this study. Even if the origins of Messalianism were in Mesopotamia, it rapidly first spread in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire and settled in Antioch which was the most important centre of the East. Everyone who knows the history of Antioch well knows that other heresies were also born in the vicinity of Antioch, making particular efforts to settle in the city. This was an important step for the success of further missionary efforts to spread their ideas in the Roman Empire. The particular efforts done in Antioch and in its vicinity – either solitary (see the references on Flavian of Antioch, St. John Chrysostom and Mark the Hermit) or collectively (synods held in Side and Antioch) – to know better and then to condemn Messalianism<sup>34</sup> is, in my opinion, evidence that the presence of Messalians in Antioch was already an issue before Theodoret wrote his works. Every responsible churchman who knew the dimension of Antiochian monasticism and its influence in the Church could be nothing else but concerned about the spread of such a strange movement among monks and nuns.

The positions of Theodoret of Cyrus on Messalianism which are dated later, were influenced by some particular developments in the Church. I refer to the growing rivalry between Alexandria and Antioch as theological-spiritual centres. Theodoret lived and wrote in a period when this rivalry reached its highest points. Messalianism reached Alexandria quite early (see the references on St. Athanasius of Alexandria) and became a real problem in the time of St. Cyril of Alexandria. Given the delicate relationship between Antioch and Alexandria, one may speculate that St. Cyril has had enough reasons to perceive Messalianism as a heresy coming from Antioch. The extreme decision taken against it in the Synod of Ephesus (431), under the presidency of St. Cyril could be attributed to his volcanic character, but also to the fact that Messalianism originated in the East where Nestorius and his heresy also came from.

As the greatest theologian of the Antiochian school of his time and its *port Drapeau*, Theodoret aimed to condemn Messalianism, but at the same time he wanted to make sure that the fact that Antioch was one of the first centres in the Roman Empire, does not harm the reputation of the city as a theological centre. Especially after the Nestorian controversy and the synod of Ephesus, Theodoret was interested in avoiding the development of the idea that Antioch is a place which produces heresies. And the connections between Messalianism and Antioch could only provide arguments of this kind to the rivals of Antioch.

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<sup>34</sup> Reinhart Staats describes Messslianism as a monastic movement which was later condemned as a heresy. Staats, "Messalianer", 611.

#### ***IV.1. Historia religiosa***

*History of the Monks* or *Historia religiosa* is chronologically the first historical writing of Theodoret. Its date of composition is about 444<sup>35</sup>. It is in fact a description of 28 men and 3 women ascetics. All figures presented are ascetics living in Syria and in the region and many of them, even from the diocese of Cyrus, where Theodoret was a bishop. The central figure of *Historia religiosa* is Simeon Stylites. In my opinion, the main purpose of *Historia religiosa* was to prove that Antioch, as an ecclesial centre, developed a monasticism which was in no way lower than the Alexandrian monasticism<sup>36</sup>. Messalianism definitely did not serve this purpose.

I used as a starting point for this subchapter an article published in 1961 in French on *Théodoret et Messalianisme*<sup>37</sup>. It focuses almost exclusively on the way in which *Historia religiosa* relates with Messalianism. R. P. Pierre Carnivet started from the idea that Theodoret was not keen to present any deviation of the Syrian monasticism. However, Carvinet affirms:

„Toutefois, il n'est pas impossible de deviner sous les propos de Théodoret des réticentes ou de discrètes suggestions qui sont autant d'efforts pour corriger des déviations alors courantes dans le monachisme”<sup>38</sup>.

He suggests that Theodoret was aware of the deviations of Messalianism already before becoming a bishop, when he spent his life as a monk in the monastery of Nicerte, near Apamea (before 423). The role of Theodoret is compared with the one played by Gregory of Nyssa who condemned Messalianism with the purpose of renewing the monastic life in Asia Minor<sup>39</sup>. Theodoret played the same role in Syria, however he did not condemn Messalianism openly in *Historia religiosa*, because the goal of this writing was exactly to present Syrian monasticism as being a model for the entire Christian world. Carvinet suggested that in order to get the real attitude of Theodoret on Messalianism, we need to focus more on what is not within the contents of *Historia religiosa* than on what is. His main arguments for this hidden condemnation of Messalianism in *Historia religiosa* are:

1. *The way in which Theodoret presents the visions of his heroes.* We also learned about the role that visions play in Messalianism. Unlike Diadochos of Photiki, who is mentioned above, Theodoret did not make any differences between good visions which obviously come from God and bad visions which come from the demons.

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<sup>35</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*. Vol. III, 550.

<sup>36</sup> I work on a separate study where I intend to present in details the evidences which support this hypothesis.

<sup>37</sup> R. P. Pierre Carnivet S.J., “Théodoret et le Messalianisme”, *Revue Mabillon* (1961): 27-34.

<sup>38</sup> Carnivet S.J., “Théodoret et le Messalianisme”, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Carnivet S.J., “Théodoret et le Messalianisme”, 26

Also in case of Symeon Stylithos who is the central figure of *Historia religiosa*, Theodoret pays the right attention to visions. While the Syriac *vita* of Symeon is full of reports about his miracles and visions, Theodoret is more careful in presenting Symeon's visions. Carvinet concludes that:

„Cette difference essentielle entre la *Vie Syriaque* et la notice de Théodoret n'est pas accidentelle. Théodoret a pu être soucieux de ne rien rapporter qui ne lui parût contrôlé, mais il a sans doute voulu éviter d'accorder trop d'importance à ces révélations qui survenaient dans les sanges et où les Messaliens avaient tendance à chercher la règle de leur conduite, croyant entendre par là l'Esprit-Saint”<sup>40</sup>.

2. *Theodoret's attitude regarding handwork.* Theodoret puts emphasis on prayer, but he also suggests that every ascetic should live out of their own work. The Messalians despised hand working and preferred to live out of alms. This is clear from the way he presents the lifestyle of Theodosius of Rhodes, one of the monastic figures he presented in *Historia religiosa*:

„...n'est-il pas surprenant que Théodoret ait pris la peine, tout en ménageant les uns et les autres, de présenter le manière de vivre des moines de Théodose de Rhôsos, qui faisaient de la vannerie et des voiles et écoulaient eux-mêmes leur marchandise, avec un appui de preuves qu'il ne donne pas à ceux qui conçoivent différemment la pauvreté”<sup>41</sup>.

3. *Theodoret does not speak about significant Messalians* like Alexander Acemetrus who lived in the area of Mesopotamia for twenty years before moving to Constantinople. On the contrary, Theodoret makes serious efforts to prove that some of his ascetic heroes were defenders of Orthodoxy against heresies as well as against Pagans and Jews<sup>42</sup>.

#### **IV.2. *Historia ecclesiastica***

*Historia ecclesiastica* is the main historical writing of Theodoret. It explicitly intends to continue the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius of Caesarea, extending the presentation of the events from 323 to 428. It has a strong anti-heretical character and it was written in 449-450 when Theodoret was in exile in Apamea. This is his record on Messalianism:

<sup>40</sup> Canivert S.J., “Théodoret at le Messalianisme”, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Canivert S.J., “Théodoret at le Messalianisme”, 32.

<sup>42</sup> See Daniel Buda, *Rolul monahilor în formarea spirituală a credincioșilor potrivit lucrării Historia religiosa (H. r.) a lui Teodoret al Cyruului* în Vasile Stanciu, *Misiunea parohiei și mănăstirii într-o lume în continuă schimbare. Lucrările simpozionului internațional de Teologie, Istorie, Muzicologie și Artă, 3-4 nov. 2015, vol. I*, ed. Cristian Sonea (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Renașterea, 2016), 415-432, especially ch. II.6.

“At this time also arose the heresy of the Messaliani. Those who translate their names into Greek call them Euchitae.

They also have another designation which arose naturally from their mode of action. From their coming under the influence of a certain demon which they supposed to be the advent of the Holy Ghost, they are called enthusiasts.

Men who have become infected with this plague to its full extent shun manual labour as iniquitous; and, giving themselves over to sloth, call the imaginations of their dreams prophesying. Of this heresy Dadoes, Sabbas, Adelphius, Hermas, and Simeones were leaders, and others besides, who did not hold aloof from the communion of the Church, alleging that neither good nor harm came of the divine food of which Christ our Master said ‘Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood shall live for ever’.

In their endeavour to hide their unsoundness they shamelessly deny it even after conviction, and abjure men whose opinions are in harmony with their own secret sentiments.

Under these circumstances Letoius, who was at the head of the church of Melitene, a man full of divine zeal, saw that many monasteries, or, shall I say, brigands’ caves, had drunk deep of this disease. He therefore burnt them, and drove out the wolves from the flock.

In like manner the illustrious Amphilochius to whom was committed the charge of the metropolis of the Lycaonians and who ruled all the people, no sooner had learnt that this pestilence had invaded his diocese than he made it depart from his borders and freed from its infection the flock he fed.

Flavianus, also, the far famed high-priest of the Antiochenes, on learning that these men were living at Edessa and attacking with their peculiar poison all with whom they come in contact, sent a company of monks, brought them to Antioch, and in the following manner convicted them in their denial of their heresy. Their accusers, he said, were calumniating them, and the witnesses giving false evidence; and Adelphius, who was a very old man, he accosted with expressions of kindness, and ordered to take a seat at his side. Then he said ‘We, O venerable sir, who have lived to an advanced age, have a more accurate knowledge of human nature, and of the tricks of the demons who oppose us, and have learnt by experience the character of the gift of grace. But these younger men have no clear knowledge of these matters, and cannot brook to listen to spiritual teaching. Wherefore tell me in what sense you say that the opposing spirit retreats, and the grace of the Holy Ghost supervenes’. The old man was won over by these words and gave vent to all his secret venom, for he said that no benefit accrues to the recipients of Holy Baptism, and that it is only by earnest prayer that the indwelling demon is driven out, for that every one born into the world derives from his first father slavery to the demons just as he does his nature; but that when these are driven away, then come the Holy Ghost giving sensible and visible signs of His presence, at once freeing the body from the impulse

of the passions and wholly ridding the soul of its inclination to the worse; with the result that there is no more need for fasting that restrains the body, nor of teaching or training that bridles it and instructs it how to walk aright. And not only is the recipient of this gift liberated from the wanton motions of the body, but also clearly foresees things to come, and with the eyes beholds the Holy Trinity.

In this way the divine Flavianus dug into the foul fountain-head and succeeded in laying bare its streams. Then he thus addressed the wretched old man. 'O thou that hast grown old in evil days, thy own mouth convicts thee, not I, and thou art testified against by thy own lips'. After their unsoundness had been thus exposed they were expelled from Syria, and withdrew to Pamphylia, which they filled with their pestilential doctrine"<sup>43</sup>.

The long report of Theodoret in *Historia ecclesiastica* about the Messalians could be summarized as the following:

- Names used to designate the Messalians;
- Nomination of the Messalian leaders;
- Their belief and behaviour;
- Measures taken against them in Metilene by Letoius and in Lycaonia by Amphilochius;
- Report on the actions taken by Flavian of Antioch: interrogation of Adelphius; further details about their way to deal with things and about their doctrine.

It is clear that Theodoret wrote this report on Messalians, using the Antiochian tradition he is familiar with. Perhaps he even had access to the acts of the synod of Flavian against the Messalians, as he was active in Antioch and in the area of Antioch for many years. The list of the Messalian leaders mentioned by Theodoret is completed with other names by Photius<sup>44</sup> and other later authors. Adelphius is also mentioned as by Philoxen of Mabbog as the founder of the heresy of Messalianism<sup>45</sup>. For the purpose of this article, it is enough to concentrate on the passages which reflect the actions taken by Flavian. Beforehand, Theodoret underlines that Messalianism "was living in Edessa" and because they were "attacking with their peculiar poison all with whom they come in contact." Given the situation, Flavian of Antioch "has sent a company of monks, (and) brought them to Antioch." It seems that Theodoret

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<sup>43</sup> Theodoret, *H.E.*, 4, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Photius mentions also a Messalian leader called Sabbas and having the surname "the Castrate" and a certain Eusebius of Edesa. Photius, *Bibliothèque*, codex 52, t.1, ed. R. Henry (Paris, 1959), 36-40.

<sup>45</sup> Philoxène de Mabboug, *Lettre à Patrice d'Edesse 108-111*, PO 30, fast 5, ed. R. Lavenant (Paris, 1963), 850-855.

intends to suggest that Messalianism, even if it was condemned in a synod in Antioch, was not a challenge present in Antiochian, but in Edessa. Or we know from the testimonies of St. John Chrysostom and other Antiochians that the Messalinas were present in Antioch.

At the end of his report, Theodoret concludes that they “were expelled from Syria, and withdrew to Pamphylia, which they filled with their pestilential doctrine”. It means that he however admits that the Messalians were present in Syria, but not in Antioch. And most important is the fact that Messalianism “withdrew to Pamphylia”. So, Syria remained a province free of “their pestilential doctrine”.

I think that this is enough evidence to allow us to conclude that the report of Theodoret on Messalians from *Historia Ecclesiastica* is also a part of the same effort, made however in a different manner than in *Historia religiosa*, to keep the reputation of Antioch untouched by Messalianism.

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