

THE CHURCH HISTORIANS (I):
SOCRATES, SOZOMENUS, AND THEODORETUS*

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I *Introduction*

The reign of Theodosius II (408–450) was an age of cultural ascendancy. The classical tradition was still vibrant, but Christian influence showed its mark, too. Poetry blossomed, continuing older motives and forms but also dealing with Christian themes; the Codex Theodosianus was drawn up, assembling the tradition of imperial legislation.

Classicising historiography found a worthy continuator in Olympiodorus; ecclesiastical historiography was as productive as never before. No less than four Church historians are known from this age: Philostorgius, Socrates, Sozomenus, and Theodoretus. The works by three of them are completely or nearly completely preserved, Philostorgius' work can be reconstructed from numerous fragments in its main outlines.¹ Apart from these a so-called Christian history was written by Philippus of Side, which was certainly more directly related to the Church histories than to pagan historiography.

There are many striking resemblances between the Church histories of Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus: all three of them claim to continue Eusebius' Church history; all three of them are built around the reigns of Roman emperors; and their judgements on individual emperors are all very similar. For Cassiodorus (Epiphanius) and Theodorus Anagnostes those similarities were so evident that they wrote Church histories, which assembled passages from those three authors, so-called *historiae tripartitae*. Therefore, the label "synoptical Church historians" has been adopted in the language of modern

* Many thanks to John Drinkwater for his help.

¹ This Herculean task has been achieved by J. Bidez and F. Winkelmann (Berlin, 1981).

research to describe the work of Socrates, Sozomenus, and Theodoretus. More recent studies have, however, highlighted the differences between them,² which will also be underlined in this contribution. Therefore the term “synoptical”, which is sometimes useful, is written in inverted commas here.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to how the cluster of Church histories in the reign of Theodosius II is to be explained. The phenomenon seems to be a symptom of the consolidation of Christian faith in Roman state and society. On the other hand, the necessity of defending the orthodox interpretation of history against heretical concepts, which retained a certain allure for many, was without doubt widely felt.³

One thing is clear: paganism is not the main target of the polemics of these historians. Although they like to write triumphalist accounts of the destruction of pagan sanctuaries, the victory over the pagans is generally taken for granted. The main enemy is heterodoxy, especially homeanism, and all those confessions that are labelled as Arian in the Athanasian tradition. This observation makes the Church history of Philostorgius, not to be dealt with here, the more valuable, because he was an adherent of Eunomius, and thus, in the eyes of his “colleagues”, an Arian. In any case, the Church histories of the Theodosian age give a colourful impression of the plurality of theological and political (not only in terms of Church policy) concepts of this age.⁴

II *The Authors*

1. *Lives*

A. *Socrates*

Socrates is known only from his own writings.⁵ He was a native of Constantinople, where he grew up and wrote his Church history.

² H. Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Großen zu Theodosius II. Das christliche Kaisertum bei den Kirchenhistorikern Socrates, Sozomenus und Theodoret* (Hypomnemata 110), Göttingen, 1996; T. Urbainczyk, “Observations on the Differences between the Church Histories of Socrates and Sozomenus”, *Historia* 46 (1997), 355–373; id., *Socrates of Constantinople. Historian of Church and State* (Ann Arbor, 1997).

³ See Marasco in this volume.

⁴ All translations are based on the respective NPNF-volumes.

⁵ For his life see Leppin, *op. cit.*, 10ff.; see T. Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople*,

His date of birth lay in the period 380–390. He was educated by pagan *grammatici*⁶ and probably received a rhetorical training. His humble style cannot be put forward in evidence against this supposition, because it corresponded to certain ideals of Christian literature.⁷ He was certainly to some extent familiar with concepts of classical culture, but it is not certain whether this reached farther than he made explicit in his work. Socrates must have died after 439.

His exact social position remains unclear. The traditional surname “Scholasticus”, which would point to a position as a jurist, is certainly late, probably given to him in analogy to Evagrius Scholasticus, who was indeed an advocate. Several points tell against the idea that he was a jurist. There is no sign of any legal training in his work. The personal contacts he names have no political or administrative functions. He certainly had no links to court society.⁸ Since he felt competent to give theological judgements and knew many bishops personally, most likely he held some position in the Church.

Also controversial is his theological stance. Although there is no doubt that he adhered to the orthodox theology in terms of the canons of the Council of Nicaea (325), it remains unclear whether he was a member of the dominant orthodox Church or of the Novatian sect which, for example, in respect of penitence, accepted more rigorous standards⁹ and which holds a surprisingly prominent position in Socrates’ Church history. Since Henri de Valois (17th century) there had been a consensus that Socrates did not belong to the Novatians. This was founded on the interpretation of 5.19.10, where he intimates a position critical to a particular reform in ecclesiastical institutions, which made the main Church more similar to the Novatian. Recently, Wallraff has been able to show that this interpretation is not cogent and has even gone so far as to declare that Socrates was a Novatian,¹⁰ convincing most of his reviewers.¹¹

13ff.; M. Wallraff, *Der Kirchenhistoriker Sokrates. Untersuchungen zu Geschichtsdarstellung, Methode und Person* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 68) (Göttingen, 1997), 209ff.

⁶ Socrat., *HE* 5.16.9.

⁷ Socrat., *HE* 6. pr. 2–5; 7.27.5.

⁸ Cf. Socrat., *HE* 7.22.1, where he rejects the idea that he wants to become known at the court by his work.

⁹ M. Wallraff, “Geschichte des Novatianismus seit dem vierten Jahrhundert im Osten”, *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 1 (1997), 251–279.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.* 1997, 235ff.

¹¹ For example St. Rebenich, *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 4 (2000), 392–395, 394;

I still hold to the minority position that Socrates did not belong to the Novatians. My main reason is that the alleged Novatian did not write a history of the Novatian Church (although he was well informed on it), but of the main Church, numbering the Novatians among the “others”.¹² Why should a Novatian have written the history of another Church? The work of Philostorgius shows that an alternative narrative of Church history was feasible.

This problem is conspicuous in the treatment of the Council of Nicaea. Socrates gives a lengthy account of this assembly,¹³ although he knows (and tells his readers) that in the eyes of the Novatians the Council was unnecessary, because it did nothing but confirm the ancient dogmas.¹⁴ In my opinion, the lengthiness of the account would be inexplicable in a Novatian source.

Even Socrates’ integrative attitude towards heresies and his wish to unite as many Christian groups as possible is no sign of a specifically Novatian position. This corresponds to pragmatic positions which were widely held, especially in Constantinople, whereas the tendency to underline differences and to fight aggressively against deviant theologians is typical for certain ecclesiastical groups. The latter are well represented in the literary tradition and are therefore easily overestimated. More important than these details is that Socrates, no matter whether he was a Novatian or not, was by necessity dogmatically and politically committed to the Nicaean Church, because the Novatians were not persecuted in the Theodosian age but accepted as orthodox in the literal sense.

Socrates says that he was encouraged to write his Church history by one Theodorus, a *holy man of God*.¹⁵ The identification of this man, who probably was a monk or a cleric, is impossible. If Socrates refers to someone like him, it seems plausible that he reckoned to have among his readers members of Church milieux. On the other hand, he thinks it necessary to explain several theological items and words, which suggests that he hopes to win also a readership outside such circles. All his work shows that he is emotionally near to the bishops of Constantinople, whereas the flaws of holders of rivalling Episcopal

but see J. Ulrich, s.v. Sokrates, *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, ed. S. Döpp and W. Geerlings (Freiburg, 1998), 562f.

¹² Socrat., *HE* 5.20.1.

¹³ Socrat., *HE* 1.7–13.

¹⁴ Socrat., *HE* 1.10.1–4.

¹⁵ Socrat., *HE* 2.1.6; 6, pr. 1; 7.48.7.

sees, such as those of Alexandria or Rome, are often highlighted.

Socrates' writing of his Church history did not go smoothly. At the beginning of the second book he informs his readers that he had had to draw up a second version of his work, because he had relied on Rufinus too heavily before;¹⁶ he had detected that this historian had made serious chronological errors regarding Constantine the Great. This revision extended at least until the sixth book, where it is obvious that a chapter of the former version has been preserved.¹⁷

For the date of the composition of his Church history as we have it, we possess a reliable *terminus post quem*, namely 439.¹⁸ The *terminus ante quem* is the death of Theodosius II on 28 July 450, because the text supposes the emperor to be alive. Besides, Sozomenus and probably Theodoretus, who also wrote during the lifetime of Theodosius, used Socrates' work. Most scholars maintain a date shortly after 439; I myself have proposed a date closer to the mid-440s, for the reason that sharp polemic against Cyrillus, bishop of Alexandria, in an author who wants to promote peace in the Church seems to be more conceivable after the bishop's death in 444.¹⁹ But this suggestion is certainly not cogent and has not won acceptance as yet.²⁰

B. *Sozomenus*

The second "synoptical" Church historian, Sozomenus [or Salamanes Hermeias Sozomenos, to give him his full Greek name], is not otherwise known,²¹ but his work gives various clues to his life.²² He was born into a Christian family from Bethleea near Gaza about 380. His grandfather had been converted to the Christian faith and the family had suffered from persecution under Julian. Sozomenus himself came to Constantinople in 425/6 at the earliest; there he worked as a lawyer. When he wrote his Church history he had already been

¹⁶ Socrat., *HE* 2.1.1–4.

¹⁷ Socrat., *HE* 6.11.9–20.

¹⁸ Socrat., *HE* 7.48.8.

¹⁹ Socrat., *HE* 7.7.2–5; 7.13–15; 7.34.

²⁰ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 274ff.; cf. Wallraff's criticism (*op. cit. Der Kirchenhistoriker Sokrates*, 210f.).

²¹ The identification with the homonymous *domesticus* of the pretorian prefect in *Oriens* about 435/6 (proposed in *PLRE* II 1023f.) is speculative.

²² For his life, see B. Grillet, "Introduction", in *Sozomène, Histoire ecclésiastique. Livres I–II*, SCh 306 (Paris 1983), 9–58; Hansen, *op. cit. Sokrates*, LXIVff.; Leppin, *op. cit.*, 13ff.

baptized. The historian seems to have undertaken voyages as far as Rome. He died probably not long after 446.

His Church history was not completed and breaks off in the ninth book. It is based on Socrates,²³ but is written in a significantly more rhetorical style. In his dedication and at the beginning of the ninth book Sozomenus ably uses the technique of panegyric.²⁴ This major difference between Sozomenus and Socrates should not lead to the conclusion that their educational levels were different, because both authors made a conscious decision to write in the style which they thought suitable for Church historiography. The Church history is not the only work which Sozomenus wrote. He mentions a completely lost Epitome dealing with the period from the Ascension to the death of Licinius.²⁵

His intended public consists of well-educated people who enjoyed literary style and disliked studying long canons or theological letters. Many of his potential readers were obviously in need of fundamental information about Christian religion. As he is the most polemical against paganism among the Church historians, he seems to have expected to find some pagans or paganizers in his readership. On the other hand, he considers readers who would like to live as monks.²⁶

Sozomenus was in all probability near to members of the imperial court, especially Pulcheria, Theodosius' sister, whose qualities and influence on her brother are praised at the beginning of Book Nine.²⁷ She had been a dominant figure during the first years of Theodosius' reign, but in the 440s her relationship with her brother was strained, because she favoured a considerably more aggressive policy against those groups which were to become regarded as monophysites.

The date of composition of Sozomenus' work²⁸ depends on the dating of that of Socrates, which varies between 439 and 446. It is evident that Sozomenus used, revised and complemented that work.

²³ That Socrates was prior is proved by the general impression that Sozomenus often elaborated on Socrates and by a detail: in *HE* 1.10 Socrates declares that he personally had received information from a witness. The notice is repeated by Sozomenus (*HE* 1.22) without any clear hint as to the source.

²⁴ Sozomen., *HE* 9.1.

²⁵ Sozomen., *HE* 1.1.12.

²⁶ Sozomen., *HE*, Ded. 18.

²⁷ Sozomen., *HE* 9.1–3.

²⁸ See C. Roueché, "Theodosius II, the Cities, and the Date of the Church History of Sozomenus", *Journ. Theol. Stud.* 37 (1986), 130–132; Leppin, *op. cit.*, 279ff.

The *terminus ante quem* is again Theodosius' death, and probably also that of Pulcheria's sister, Marina, on 3 August 449, because Sozomenus mentions the sisters without alluding to any bereavement. As he presupposes peace in Church,²⁹ a date before 448, when the controversies revived, seems plausible.

C. *Theodoretus*

Theodoretus was a prominent figure in Church politics during the reign of Theodosius II.³⁰ Born into a well-off family in Antioch about 393, he was early dedicated to a life in the service of Christ by his mother and maintained close contacts with the monks in the region of Antioch. Although he was deeply imbued with Christian teachings, he received a traditional intellectual education. At an early age he became a monk; in 423 he was consecrated Bishop of the small town of Cyrrus. Being ambitious, he nevertheless spent a lot of time in Antioch and became a leading contestant in the christological debates between Antiochenes and Alexandrians, which first culminated in the Council of Ephesus in 431. In this synod he participated personally, also meeting Theodosius II, whose behaviour disappointed him. After the failure of the council a formula of union was proposed to which Theodoretus gave his assent reluctantly, although he had contributed to it intellectually. Years of relative peace followed, yet in 444/5 the Bishop was involved in a regional dispute and felt that the imperial government discriminated against him.³¹ In the course of the so-called Robbers' Synod of 449 he was deposed and afterwards duly exiled, to be rehabilitated and reinstated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. He returned to Cyrrus, where he died during the period 460/466.

Theodoretus was a prolific author, who wrote works in several genres,³² mainly in order to defend his theology and politics. As he was a radical exponent of Antiochene, dyophysite theology, the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553 condemned several of his works.

²⁹ Sozomen., *HE* 9.1.9.

³⁰ For his life, see H.G. Opitz, "Theodoretos", *RE* V A 2 (1934), 1791–1801; Y. Azéma, "Théodoret de Cyr", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 15 (1991), 418–435; Leppin, *op. cit.*, 15ff.; cf. also now T. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The bishop and the holy man* (Ann Arbor, 2002) (n.v.).

³¹ H. Leppin, "Zum kirchenpolitischen Kontext von Theodorets Mönchsgeschichte", *Klio* 78 (1996), 212–230.

³² See *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* 6200–6288.

Nevertheless, he had his Nicene orientation in common with Socrates and Sozomenus, even if his sympathies with Nestorius were evident.

Theodoretus is the only one of the three who is not connected to Constantinople. In several passages of his Church history his Syriac perspective is tangible. The public he writes for is decidedly orthodox and he believes it to be willing to read long dogmatic texts. There is no indication of any pagan sympathies in his intended readership.

The date of his Church history is controversial.³³ Previously, it seemed to be established that Theodoretus wrote it during the years of his exile, but this has been questioned with strong (if not completely compelling) reasons. Again, the death of Theodosius II is the *terminus ante quem*; the latest safely datable event mentioned in the Church history is the translation of John Chrysostom's relics to Constantinople in 438. However, as Theodoretus alludes to his *Historia religiosa*, which is now generally dated at 444, he must have finished his history after this. His visible interest in emperors who have been misled by evil, heretical advisers may be understood as a reaction to his own experiences since 448, which would suggest a return to the traditional date. In any case, Theodoretus wrote his Church history after having been discriminated against by imperial decisions, which he must have interpreted as wrong and dangerous to the true faith.

2. Sources

All Church historians are authors who compose and formulate their works consciously, following clear principles; none of them simply reproduces his sources. All the same, the foundations of their knowledge and judgement are their sources. Many of them can be ascertained. Nevertheless, studies of special problems may still produce new ideas about them.³⁴

³³ See G.F. Chesnut, "The Date of Composition of Theodoret's Church History", *Vet. Christ.* 35 (1981), 245–252; B. Croke, "Dating Theodoret's Church History and Commentaries of the Psalms", *Byzantion* 54 (1984), 59–74; Leppin, *op. cit.*, 281f.

³⁴ See, e.g. recently T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius. Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. and London), 1993; P. van Nuffelen, "La tête de l'histoire acéphale", *Klio* 84 (2002), 125–140.

A. *Socrates*³⁵

There were two elder Church histories which covered the time from Constantine to Theodosius I and which could provide an outline for Socrates' work, that of Gelasius of Caesarea and that of Rufinus of Aquileia.³⁶ Socrates had used Rufinus extensively in the first version of his work and apparently even consulted the Greek translation by Paeianus.³⁷ After having read through Athanasius, he became more critical, but arguably he still consulted him. Gelasius of Caesarea, an earlier continuator of Eusebius, who was also used by Rufinus, is never named by Socrates, but is widely regarded as fundamental to his work because of correspondences between his text and that of the so-called Gelasius of Cyzicus, who, in numerous passages of his Church history, almost certainly followed his alleged namesake from Caesarea. This thesis is well argued, but necessarily based on various assumptions, which are debatable (although they are not debated currently, as far as I can see).

A number of theological writings are detectable among Socrates' sources. Most important are Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*, Athanasius' writings, the collection of synodal acts composed by Sabinus of Heracleia (an adherent of the Macedonian confession), and lists of bishops.

Socrates does not avoid secular sources such as Eutropius' *Breviarium ab urbe condita* or a Latin chronicle of Constantinople, which is naturally very important for chronological questions. Even pagans such as Libanius and Julian are cited, and in two cases he refers to epic poems, which are known only by name.³⁸ There is no sign of any knowledge of legal sources.

Exceptionally important for Socrates is the oral tradition, which he obtains from personal contacts. Among these is the Novatian priest Auxanon, who even remembered details regarding the Council

³⁵ F. Geppert, *Quellen des Kirchenhistorikers Sokrates Scholasticus* (Leipzig, 1898; repr. Aalen, 1972); Hansen, *op. cit. Sokrates*, XLIIIff.; Wallraff, *op. cit. Der Kirchenhistoriker Sokrates*, 185ff.

³⁶ See for the background F. Winkelmann, "Zur naheusebischen christlichen Historiographie des 4. Jahrhunderts", in G. Makris and C. Scholz (eds.), ΠΟΛΥΠΛΕΥΡΟΣ ΝΟΥΣ *Miscellanea für Peter Schreiner zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* (Byz. Archiv 19) (Munich and Leipzig, 2000), 404–414.

³⁷ P. Périchon, "Eutrope ou Paeianus? L'historien Socrate se referait-il à une source latine ou grecque?", *REG* 81 (1968), 378–384.

³⁸ Socrat., *HE* 3.21.14 (Callistus); 6.6.36 (Eusebius Scholasticus with his Ganais).

of Nicaea. It is understandable that most of the personal witnesses are cited for events near to Socrates' own lifetime.

B. *Sozomenus*³⁹

Sozomenus' (nowhere mentioned)⁴⁰ main source is Socrates, but his independence should not be undervalued. He did much more than rework Socrates stylistically. Several sources used by Socrates were again consulted by Sozomenus. This holds true, e.g. for Rufinus, Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*, and Athanasius. Moreover, he produces more documentary sources, which he probably took over from the collections, particularly (again) that of Sabinus of Heraclea. Otherwise, he relies on several monastic histories, for example Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*. In the ninth book, which is not completely preserved, Sozomenus made extensive use of the secular historian Olympiodorus. This explains the remarkable prominence of detailed secular events in these passages. Presumably, he also integrated material from Syriac sources. Very important for Sozomenus and for the problem of his reliability is the fact that he was well versed in legal texts.⁴¹ In many passages he integrates laws in his account in a very independent (that is often wrong!) way.⁴² But his mistakes involve mainly the contextualisation of the texts and not their content, which he understands well.

C. *Theodoretus*⁴³

Theodoretus may have known Socrates and (less probably) Sozomenus.⁴⁴ As long as all the possible common sources, such as Gelasius of Caesarea, are poorly known, certainty cannot be reached on this question. Doubtlessly he used Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*. There are good reasons to suppose that Theodorus of Mopsuestia's works on heresies served him well. Theodoretus may have used local sources for many details regarding martyrs and bishops. Moreover, his own

³⁹ G. Schoo, *Die Quellen des Kirchenhistorikers Sozomenos* (Berlin, 1911; repr. Aalen, 1973); Hansen, *op. cit.* *Sozomenus*, XLIVff.; 528ff.

⁴⁰ In *HE* 1.1.13 Sozomenus even suggests that *HE* had no predecessor at all.

⁴¹ Sozomen., *HE* 1.1.13.

⁴² J. Harries, *Sozomenus and Eusebius: The Lawyer as Church Historian in the Fifth Century*, in C. Holdsworth and T.P. Wiseman (eds.), *The Inheritance of Historiography 350–900* (Exeter, 1986), 45–52.

⁴³ Parmentier, *op. cit.* LXXIIIff.

⁴⁴ Hansen, *op. cit.* *Sokrates*, XXVf. argues that Theodoretus used Socrates; cf. id., *Theodoret*, 434ff., where he also affirms that Theodoretus used Sozomenus.

experiences, which he had partially recorded in his *Historia religiosa*, went into his Church history, as well as information which he received from personal conversations or letters. Beyond that, numerous documents are inserted into Theodoretus' Church history which probably stem from the usual collections, but probably also from the Antiochene archives.

Although the Church historians had many sources in common and at least to some extent knew each other, there are remarkable differences in their selection and use of sources. This is highly influenced by their respective ideas on Church history and Church politics.

III *Character of the Works*

The term "synoptical" Church historians is based on superficial observation. Whoever reads those works carefully will come across many differences which cannot be explained by the use of divergent sources, but must be ascribed to differences in their respective *Weltanschauungen*. I will first illustrate the differences by three examples; then I shall proceed to examine them systematically.

A. *Differences between the "synoptical" Church historians. Some examples*

The Council of Nicaea of 325⁴⁵ was fundamental to the Church history of the fourth century, because in the 350s Athanasius was to make the *homoousios* propounded by this council the main point of reference for assessing Christian orthodoxy. Therefore the council merited extensive treatment in every Church history which covered those years, and this treatment was bound to be of major importance for the treatment of all councils that followed. In the perspective of the Church historians, who lived in a time when a number of councils were held under imperial influence, the role of the emperor must have been paramount. The right to convoke and to steer councils could be a key power of rulers in late antiquity, the extent of which was still in dispute.

Socrates, Sozomenus and Theoderet all regard Constantine's convocation of the council as a laudable act, which was unavoidable

⁴⁵ See Leppin, *op. cit.*, 53ff.

since the main contestants themselves had not been able to find a common solution.⁴⁶ Socrates⁴⁷ is closest to Eusebius,⁴⁸ whom he cites word for word at length. The emperor arrives when the bishops are fully assembled, demonstrating his deep respect for them. He sits down only after having been invited to do so. Then he delivers a speech, in which he makes an appeal for unity. Afterwards the discussion—a passage which is taken over directly from Eusebius—shows the emperor as a patient moderator who directs the bishops to unity by listening to their words and giving or refusing his assent. Thus, the emperor appears to be a competent judge in theological affairs. The creed is not formulated by him, but it can materialize only with his help. After the council the emperor does his best to make the decisions work, by exiling Arius and his friends and by communicating the decrees to his subjects.

Sozomenus ascribes a seemingly stronger position to the emperor:⁴⁹ after their first debates the bishops are convoked in the imperial palace. After the emperor has taken his seat on the throne, the bishops are allowed to sit down on their benches; it is their turn to show respect. Yet, interestingly, the emperor's role during the debates is less prominent than in Socrates. While the bishops are discussing, a consensus emerges which is accepted by the emperor as god-given. After the council he puts the decrees into action, as he did according to Socrates. It is also significant that Sozomenus is the only author to take over the following element from Eusebius' account: the invitation of the bishops to Constantine's vicennalia,⁵⁰ which connects the ecclesiastical event with a political one.

Finally, Theodoretus.⁵¹ His emperor is full of respect (*aidós*) for the bishops; he looks up to them like a child who loves his parents. He asks whether he might participate and takes one of the seats, not a special throne. Bishops and emperor sit down at the same time. The ruler gives a speech at the beginning, but is silent during the debates themselves. After the bishops have taken their decisions, the emperor does whatever is necessary to implement them.

These extremely diverse accounts of the same event, which are

⁴⁶ Socrat., *HE* 1.7; Sozomen., *HE* 1.16–17.1; Theodoret., *HE* 1.7.1.

⁴⁷ Socrat., *HE* 1.8.

⁴⁸ Eus., *V. Const.* 3.5–14.

⁴⁹ Cf. esp. Sozomenus. *HE* 1.19f.

⁵⁰ Sozomen., *HE* 1.21.4f.

⁵¹ Theodoret., *HE* 1.7–10.

based on only slightly different sources, show how free the Church historians feel in their treatment of the tradition. In the end, the “facts” they give depend on their view of the ideal emperor or the ideal council.

The second example relates to the emperor Jovian, who reigned only a few months. Since he was regarded in the Nicene tradition as an orthodox emperor, his early death, which under normal circumstances would have been interpreted as a sign of God’s wrath, required an explanation. Socrates simply refers to a natural cause: constipation.⁵² Sozomenus, who does not conceal that Jovian was considered gluttonous, is not sure whether his death was brought about by his excessive meals or by poisonous vapours in his chamber.⁵³

Completely different is Theodoretus. Jovian dies after having received the last rites (perhaps even baptism), and he does not die from a luxurious life, but because he was too good for this world.

After distinguishing the beginning of his reign by edicts of this (*sc.* orthodox) kind, Jovian set out from Antioch for the Bosphorus; but at Dadastanae, a village lying on the confines of Bithynia and Galatia, he died. He set out on his journey from this world with the grandest and fairest support and stay, but all who had experienced the clemency of his sway were left behind in pain. So, me-thinks, the Supreme Ruler, to convict us of our iniquity, both shews us good things and again deprives us of them; so by the former means He teaches us how easily He can give us what He will; by the latter He convicts us of our unworthiness of it, and points us to the better life.⁵⁴

As so often, Theodoretus shows a remarkable inclination to impute a deeper theological understanding to an incident which is regarded by others as the result of a bad life or contingent circumstances.

Thirdly, a military event, the battle of Frigidus in 394. Theodosius was victorious against the allegedly pagan usurper Eugenius, but at the cost of heavy losses, because on the first day of the battle his Goths, who had to get through a defile, were decimated. It is clear that all three Church historians give the same general judgement. The Christian emperor won against an enemy flawed by his pagan sympathies; his losses are not seen as being serious.

But seemingly superficial differences demonstrate the divergent

⁵² Socrat., *HE* 3.26.5.

⁵³ Sozomen., *HE* 6.6.1.

⁵⁴ Theodoret., *HE* 4.5.

attitudes of the authors. Socrates⁵⁵ ignores the fact that the battle lasted over two days, but he is aware that there were two phases of fighting. In the first, the Romans among Theodosius' soldiers were a match for the Romans in the ranks of Eugenius; only the barbarians were driven back. Perceiving the critical situation, Theodosius threw himself on the ground and began to pray. This brought about a complete change. Bacurius put the enemies to flight; at the same time a miracle came about. A strong storm blew the missiles, which Eugenius' men had thrown, back towards them. Thus Theodosius' prayer won the battle. Socrate combines a military explanation with a miraculous one.

Sozomenus goes into greater detail.⁵⁶ Theodosius, while in the Alps, is encircled by Eugenius' troops. He suffers serious losses in the vanguard while already under attack from the rear. Realising the hopelessness of his position, the emperor throws himself on the ground and begins a tearful prayer. He gets an immediate result. The leaders of the troops who surround him offer to change sides, if they are granted sufficient recognition. The emperor does not find paper and pen, but takes a tablet on which to write down which military offices they will earn—the fact that what they did was an act of treason is nowhere reflected. Then the battle in the vanguard is decided by the miraculous storm. To this is adjoined a Constantinopolitan anecdote. At the time of the battle a demon appears in the Church of John Baptist at the Hebdomon, which had been built by Theodosius, slandering John but confessing his own defeat.

In Theodoretus the story of the battle appears in an extremely stylised form.⁵⁷ Against all the odds the emperor, trusting in God and in God alone, is triumphant over the pagan usurper. He even dismisses his barbarian allies before the combat. His prayer does not take place in a crisis, but during the night before the battle a dream announces the victory to him and to a soldier. Although the foe surpasses Theodosius' troops in number many times over, Theodosius is victorious because (and only because) of a miracle, which makes the enemy soldiers change sides.

It is evident again that Socrates is the most sober and most pragmatic among the Church historians, whereas Theodoretus is most

⁵⁵ Socrat., *HE* 5.25.11–14.

⁵⁶ Sozomen., *HE* 7.24.3–9.

⁵⁷ Theodoret., *HE* 5.24.3–17.

consistent in respect of theological aspects and Sozomenus' approach lies between those of his colleagues, since he has an intimate knowledge of political affairs but is also very impressed by the religious facets of historical events. Theodoretus' aspiration towards theological consistency has grave consequences for his reliability as a historical source. He has no qualms about stylising or, to put it bluntly, of falsifying history. For example, contrary to the chronological order, he makes the rebellion of Antioch (387)⁵⁸ happen after the act of penitence in Milan (389/90)⁵⁹ in order to show how far Ambrose's influence went. He was, according to Theodoretus, even (indirectly) responsible for the act of clemency towards the Antiochenes. Even though modern historians are frustrated by Theodoretus' untrustworthiness, one should not forget that he fulfilled what he considered as his principal task, that is to give his readers an idea of God's involvement in history, which is from a religious viewpoint obviously much more important than any circumstantial detail.

B. *God and the course of history*

The Church histories should not be considered as theological works, but they certainly have a theological dimension since their authors have to write the history of the true faith and its exponents. All three are convinced Nicenes. Although it is not their task to argue the theological correctness of Nicene dogmas, they have to illustrate the victory of the faithful in history.

This victory is difficult to show in turbulent times. Eusebius' optimism regarding the victory of true Christianity and the establishment of a Christian Empire had been found wanting by the wars between Christian confessions and by manifest failures of Rome in the course of the secular wars during the fourth century, which could not all be ascribed to the mistakes of the pagan Julian and the heretic Valens.

Yet from a Christian perspective victories of another kind were possible, namely the triumphs of individual holy men over their enemies, be they pagans or heretics, as well as miracles and acts of martyrdom.⁶⁰ Therefore, the three Church histories are full of events

⁵⁸ Theodoret., *HE* 5.20.

⁵⁹ Theodoret., *HE* 5.18.

⁶⁰ See for the miracles L. Cracco Ruggini, "The Ecclesiastical Histories and the Pagan Historiography: Providence and Miracles", *Athenaeum* 55 (1977), 107–126.

which illustrate and reinforce the power of holy men and women. Sozomenus and Theodoretus, in particular, lay great stress on the importance of monks. This is perfectly in keeping with Theodoretus, but also suits the more metropolitan Sozomenus. The fascination for holy men is by no means an apolitical attitude; rather it corresponded to the development of political culture in the fifth century. Holy men became more important, and Sozomenus's probable protectress Pulcheria, who strove for an image of chastity if not holiness, was among their most influential patrons. In this sense, Sozomenus grasped the political situation better than the more down-to-earth Socrates.

Another aspect is more intricate. Eusebius' optimism had only in part been motivated theologically; his praise of the felicity under the reigning emperor was also the manifestation of a long-standing panegyric tradition. This tradition is palpable in Socrates and Sozomenus. Both of them heap praise on the ruling emperor Theodosius II, and neither apparently sees a contradiction between the glorification of their own time and their Christian view of secular times and of the End of Days, when Jesus Christ will return.

Sozomenus sticks firmly to the tradition of the panegyric, although he enriches it with some Christian overtones. Not only Theodosius, to whom the *Dedicatio* is given, is praised in panegyric words, but also Pulcheria, his sister, at the beginning of the ninth book. Here, the Christian slant is much more evident, but the passage remains within the panegyric tradition.

Socrates seems to be more independent in the two chapters which praise Theodosius. He begins by denying the idea that he is going to write a panegyric, which is the surest sign that he will be doing exactly this.⁶¹ However, his panegyric is more imbued with Christian concepts than Sozomenus's. Theodosius appears as the incarnation of Christian life.⁶² A kind of second panegyric is found in 7.42. In this chapter Theodosius' clemency is extolled and regarded as the decisive reason for Roman victories.

The last chapter of the whole work seems to be in keeping with this line of thinking. After having mentioned that Thalassius, a praetorian prefect designate, had been made Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, Socrates carries on rather surprisingly:

⁶¹ Socrat., *HE* 7.21.10.

⁶² Socrat., *HE* 7.22.1–19.

In such a flourishing condition were the affairs of the Church at this time. But we shall here close our history, praying that the Churches everywhere, with the cities and provinces, may live in peace; for as long as peace continues, those who desire to write histories will find no materials for their purpose. And we ourselves, O holy man of God, Theodore, should have been unable to accomplish in seven books the task we undertook at your request, had the lovers of seditions chosen to be quiet.⁶³

What will the contemporary readers have taken this remark to mean? They knew about the manifold dangers which menaced peace. They knew about the endless series of theological quarrels. Did Socrates mean to be ironic in this passage?

Plainly different from both his “colleagues” is Theodoretus. His work lacks panegyric passages, flattering politicians of his own age. He is, on the other hand, tactful enough not to point up weaknesses in Theodosius’ reign (and being a victim of the emperor’s politics he could have said a lot about this), but he writes at length on the contemporary persecution of Christians in Persia. To this digression he adds a significant reflection.

Innumerable other similar deeds of violence were committed by these impious men, but we must not be astonished that the Lord of all endures their savagery and impiety, for indeed before the reign of Constantine the Great all the Roman emperors wreaked their wrath on the friends of the truth, and Diocletian, on the day of the Saviour’s passion, destroyed the Churches throughout the Roman Empire, but after nine years had gone by they rose again in bloom and beauty many times larger and more splendid than before, and he and his iniquity perished.

These wars and the victory of the Church had been predicted by the Lord, and the event teaches us that war brings us more blessing than peace. Peace makes us delicate, easy and cowardly. War whets our courage and makes us despise this present world as passing away. But these are observations which we have often made in other writings.⁶⁴

The ideal, peaceful state of affairs, which has been reached according to the panegyric passages in Socrates and Sozomenus, is not desirable according to Theodoretus. Again, his theological consistency is evident. The purpose of history is not to aggrandize the Roman Empire, but to teach people how to live pious lives.

⁶³ Socrat., *HE* 7.48.6f.

⁶⁴ Theodoret., *HE* 5.39.24–26.

Historical causation is a thorny issue for the Church historians, because they always have to consider God's might and human behaviour at the same time. Unsurprisingly, there are several levels of historical explanation in their works, the relation of which is nowhere elucidated. On the one hand, God is obviously the master of whatever happens and providence is ultimately responsible for everything. God's will is steering history by means of the Holy Spirit. One example of this are the proceedings of the Council of Nicaea. Bishops and perhaps the emperor decide on the decrees of this council, and the decision-making process is described in detail, but in the end its decisions are regarded as the work of the Holy Spirit, who creates the consensus. God's force is opposed by the Devil, who is ultimately responsible for all the problems of Christianity, in particular the existence of heretics.⁶⁵

On the other hand, all historical texts of antiquity have to concentrate on the doing of individuals. They can act well or badly. Staying with the Council of Nicaea, the participants—bishops, monks and the emperor—struggle for the right doctrine and fight heretics. In the end they express the will of the Holy Spirit, whereas the heretics, people like Arius, are driven by the Devil. In their account of the battle of Frigidus, Socrates and Sozomenus combine the heroism or treason of military leaders with the miracle of the storm, which is prompted by Theodosius' praying. This manner of explanation results in a double causality: history is God-worked and man-worked at the same time. Therefore, although the Church histories tell the story of God's influence on history, they can simultaneously create extremely personalised narratives.

This seeming inconsistency regarding historical causality in the Church histories should be seen in the context of a theological issue: the problem of free will. This problem obviously was not of central importance to Eastern theologians. Apparently, the double causality of the will of God and the will of man was generally accepted. The Church historians never bother to discuss these subtleties.

In one passage Socrates exhibits an element of what may be considered as a kind of philosophy of history: the convergence between

⁶⁵ For the nuanced position towards hereticism, see P. Allen, "The Use of Heretics and Heresies in the Greek Church Historians: Studies in Socrates and Theodoret", in G. Clarke (ed.), *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity* (Rushcutters Bay, 1990), 265–289.

incidents in the history of the Empire and the Church. He defines as one of his historiographical aims that

it might be made apparent, that whenever the affairs of the State were disturbed, those of the Church, as if by some vital sympathy, became disordered also. Indeed whoever shall attentively examine the subject will find, that the mischiefs of the State, and the troubles of the Church have been inseparably connected; for he will perceive that they have either arisen together, or immediately succeeded one another. Sometimes the affairs of the Church come first in order; then commotions in the State follow, and sometimes the reverse, so that I cannot believe this invariable interchange is merely fortuitous, but am persuaded that it proceeds from our iniquities; and that these evils are inflicted upon us as merited chastisements, if indeed as the apostle truly says, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after."⁶⁶

The English word sympathy corresponds to the Greek *sympátheia*. This concept has a Stoic background, but its usage by Socrates is not very deeply considered.⁶⁷ It aims simply at giving a concise expression to a banal observation and cannot support the thesis that Socrates' historical thinking has been influenced by pagan philosophy. He himself *de facto* gives up the concept of *sympátheia*, when he refers to sin as the real cause of trouble. This idea is obviously Christian in character. But again, it is evident that a Church historian is able to treat historical causality on two levels: abstract and personalised.

There is another kind of "sympathy" between developments in different fields. Natural catastrophes, such as floods, earthquakes, plagues of locusts, even military defeats are expressions or better expressed results of "bad" government in the sense of dogmatically deviant government. On the other hand, "good" government is accompanied by the flourishing of affairs in every regard. However, even in this respect, developments are in the end man-made, since human sin or human piety leads to certain developments in nature, as Sozomenus confirms.

⁶⁶ Socrat., *HE* 5 pr. 2–5. The biblical citation is 1. Tim. 5.24.

⁶⁷ See Leppin, *op. cit.*, 208ff.; mine is a minority position: cf. G.F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomenus, Theodoret, and Evagrius* (Paris, 1977), 194ff.; Urbainczyk, *op. cit.*, 86ff.; Wallraff, *op. cit.*, 283ff.; J. Szidat, "Friede in Kirche und Staat: Zum politischen Ideal des Kirchenhistorikers Sokrates", in B. Bäbler and H.-G. Nesselrath (eds.), *Die Welt des Sokrates von Konstantinopel: Studien zu Politik, Religion und Kultur im späten 4. und frühen 5. Jh. n. Chr. zu Ehren von Christoph Schäublin* (Munich and Leipzig, 2001), 1–14.

About this period the dissensions by which the Church was agitated were followed, as is frequently the case, by disturbances and commotions in the state. The Huns crossed the Ister and devastated Thrace. The robbers in Isauria gathered in great numbers and ravaged cities and villages as far as Caria and Phoenicia.⁶⁸

Therefore an apparent paradox emerges. Those historians who care most for God and God's intervention in history are the most prone to emphasize human responsibility, even in those cases where God intervenes with all His might, because the idea of fate is irrelevant to them, even if they use the word *týche* in some contexts where it is more or less a way of speaking. This personalised view of history is also a kind of theodicy. If history would be purely the work of God, the Church would have fared better, but human beings are fallible and the Devil is always involved in their affairs.

C. *Politics*

All the Church historians, not just Theodoretus, are forced to tell a rather depressing story. Christianity became the religion of the Roman emperors, but peace did not follow, not even peace within the Church, still less in politics. And turmoil in the Church is in their eyes indissolubly connected with turmoil in the secular world. Although called "Church" histories, all three works offer multifarious, often very detailed information about politics and therefore their accounts are also political in character. Socrates not unexpectedly is the only one to reflect on this problem:

Before we begin the fifth book of our history, we must beg those who may peruse this treatise, not to censure us too hastily because having set out to write a Church history we still intermingle with ecclesiastical matters, such an account of the wars which took place during the period under consideration, as could be duly authenticated. For this we have done for several reasons: first, in order to lay before our readers an exact statement of facts; but secondly, in order that the minds of the readers might not become satiated with the repetition of the contentious disputes of bishops, and their insidious designs against one another; but more especially that it might be made apparent, that whenever the affairs of the state were disturbed, those of the Church, as if by some vital sympathy, became disordered also.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Sozomen., *HE* 8.25.1.

⁶⁹ Socrat., *HE* 5, pr. 1–3.

Socrates gives three reasons for including political affairs in his Church history, the second of which seems to be somewhat ironic, as the bishops' quarrels are labelled boring. However, the first reason is pragmatic and convincing. The chronological frame of emperors was still more solid than that of the various (and often-contested) episcopal sees. The third one, which has been cited already, is part of Socrates' concept of history as already discussed.

Although they do not make it explicit, Sozomenus and Theodoretus must have had similar reasons for including political affairs in their Church histories. Nevertheless Socrates' apology demonstrates that there existed different, less political concepts of Church history at this time. Unfortunately, it is impossible to identify the circles in which such ideas circulated.

The political ideas of the "synoptical" Church historians can, to a certain degree, be distilled from their works. The legitimacy of those emperors who managed to gain power and to become generally acknowledged within the Empire, is never doubted. In this regard, there is no discrepancy between Christian and pagan authors. Although piety is applied as the paramount criterion for the evaluation of emperors, impiety, heretical belief or paganism do not invalidate an emperor's claim to political legitimacy, with just one exception. Theodoretus calls Julian the Apostate *tyrannos*, that is usurper, several times.⁷⁰ However, even he sets out nowhere explicitly to contest Julian's legitimacy. Thus, the legitimist standpoint of the Church historians is clear.

The general evaluation of the emperors is the same among the three authors. There is a clear distinction between "good" and "bad" emperors,⁷¹ which apparently had been established before the Church historians began writing, probably in the work of Gelasius of Caesarea. This evaluation obviously depends on each emperor's religious affiliation. Nicene (or seemingly Nicene) emperors are "good", the other ones "bad". The "good" emperors support the Church and individual Nicenes in every regard, for example by building churches; the "bad" ones fight against the adherents of true religion.

However, there are two discourses concerning the qualities of "good" and "bad" emperor in Sozomenus and, to a lesser extent,

⁷⁰ See, e.g. Theodoret. *HE* 3.11.1; 3.16.6; 3.28.3; 4.1.3.

⁷¹ For details, see Leppin, *op. cit.*, 40ff.

in Socrates: a Christian one and a traditional one.⁷² The latter one should not be labelled “pagan”, for the reason that, even if it were indebted to concepts evolved in the pagan tradition, it presented itself as religiously neutral in order to be acceptable to the whole multireligious elite of the empire, in the same way as the panegyric texts.

The most important quality of the “good” emperor in the Christian sense is his piety. He acts mercifully; his reign is filled with successes, even with military successes. All the other qualities depend on this, which does not make him a perfect man. Even a “good” emperor can be caught by a fit of rage and behave badly, but he will heed the reproaches of the holy man. One virtue which was very popular with Western authors is lacking in the Church histories: *humilitas/tapeinótes*. Here, this quality is connected only with women.⁷³ The “bad” emperor is a heretic or, still worse, a pagan, who will act upon the council of evil people and who will not be likely to be revoked to a pious behaviour. He easily becomes angry and punishes his enemies cruelly. Misfortune will shape his reign.

The traditional discourse on the “good” emperor, as derived from the panegyric tradition, is developed by Sozomenus in the panegyric passages.⁷⁴ Here nothing unusual is to be found. The emperor possesses every Platonic virtue. *Philanthropía*, which had become the fundamental imperial virtue both in pagan and in Christian discourses during the fourth century, is also ascribed to the emperors in the Church histories.⁷⁵

The judgements about individual emperors are easily summarised. Constantine, Jovian, Theodosius I and his sons⁷⁶ are regarded as orthodox and, therefore, “good”; Constantius and Valens as heretical and therefore “bad”; Julian is detested as a pagan and is therefore necessarily the “worst” emperor. However, the model is not entirely simple: Constantine cannot be regarded as a perfect emperor, because he made several mistakes, beginning with the banishment of Athanasius. Even Theodosius is not blameless. On the other hand, Constantius is pictured as a less “bad” emperor than Valens. His

⁷² Cf. Leppin, *op. cit.*, 160ff.

⁷³ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 164f.

⁷⁴ Sozomen., *HE, Ded.* and 9.1.6–8.

⁷⁵ Sozomen., *HE, Ded.* 3; 9.

⁷⁶ The evaluation of Theodosius’ sons is a special case, because those emperors were contemporaries of the Church historians.

personal belief, for example, is considered sincere, and his efforts to propagate Christianity outside the Roman Empire are appreciated. Even the detestation of Julian varies in intensity.

Although the three Church historians are in agreement as to their general evaluation of the emperors, there remain many differences in detail, as has been shown in the case of Jovian. Whereas Socrates and Sozomenus, as loyal citizens from the capital Constantinople, follow the panegyric tradition and praise Theodosius II, Theodoretus makes Jovian the ideal emperor, underlining that such an emperor should not live too long.

Those rulers whose influence was less felt in the East allow the authors still more freedom in evaluating their work. Thus, the Western, without doubt “good” emperor, Valentinian I is praised by the tolerant Church historians Socrates and Sozomenus for his tolerance (a quality which, indeed, he showed), whereas the rigorously orthodox Theodoretus paints him as a decidedly orthodox monarch.⁷⁷ Another example is Gallus, whom most ancient sources, pagan as well as Christian, judge a despotic emperor. This tradition has had a deep influence on Socrates and Sozomenus, whereas for Theodoretus Gallus is above all Julian’s Christian antagonist and therefore a “good” emperor.⁷⁸

A fundamental difference between the authors lies in their respective attitudes towards the priestly function of the emperors.⁷⁹ Socrates suggests that the emperor Theodosius II is also a true, that is to say mild, priest⁸⁰ and he shows him acting in this capacity on several occasions.⁸¹ This position can be expected in an author with strong secular interests, who does not wholly recognise the unique dignity of clerics as people who were distinguished by consecration.

Sozomenus is fundamentally different. He distinguishes sharply between emperor and priest, whose honour has to be respected at least in holy places.⁸² The emperor should restrain himself from intervening in Church affairs, in the manner of Valentinian I, an exemplary emperor.⁸³

⁷⁷ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 91ff.

⁷⁸ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 84f.

⁷⁹ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 194ff.

⁸⁰ Socrat., *HE* 7.42.1.

⁸¹ Socrat., *HE* 7.22.16–18; 7.23.11f.

⁸² Sozomen., *HE* 2.34.5f.

⁸³ Sozomen., *HE* 6.7.2.

Theodoretus emphasizes the distinction still more. The true priest possesses a special charisma, which has to be respected by the emperor. Again Valentinian I is depicted as an exemplary ruler. When he is asked by a synod to decide on the successor of Auxentius on the episcopal throne of Milan, Theodoretus makes him say: "The responsibility is too great for us. You who have been dignified with divine grace, and have received illumination from above, will make a better choice".⁸⁴

It is symptomatic of their respective positions that Socrates does not mention Theodosius' act of penitence in front of Ambrose at Milan, although he must have known about this incident, whereas Sozomenus and Theodoretus go into it.⁸⁵ Theodoretus' conclusion is characteristic: "So both the archbishop and the emperor showed a mighty shining light of virtue. Both to me are admirable; the former for his brave words, the latter for his docility; the archbishop for the warmth of his zeal, and the prince for the purity of his faith".⁸⁶

These divergent attitudes to the emperor's priestly role explain the differences in the accounts of the Council of Nicaea. If the emperor is the holder of certain priestly qualities, as Socrates contends, he should intervene in the debates. If, on the other hand, the emperor has to respect the wisdom of the bishops, as in Theodoretus, he has to keep silent and to implement what the bishops decide. Finally, Sozomenus, who is near to the court and sees the ceremonial importance of the demonstration of respect towards the emperor, nevertheless feels that decisions on dogma should be as free as possible from imperial intervention.

There is a consensus among all three authors on the general role of priests in political affairs. Priests are responsible for the well being of Christians and for the health of the True Faith. In this function they have to act as the emperor's counsellors. They enjoy the right to criticise the ruler and even feel that they are obliged to do so, because he, as a human being, is fallible. This duty is defined by the word *parrhesía*, frankness.⁸⁷ That attitude had been the property of philosophers, now it is transferred to clerics and monks. It is con-

⁸⁴ Theodoret., *HE* 4.7.1. As Valentinian I is an exemplary emperor this (without doubt unhistorical) utterance of his can be taken as if it were an authorial comment by Theodoretus.

⁸⁵ Sozomen., *HE* 7.25.1–7; Theodoret., *HE* 5.17–5.18.23.

⁸⁶ Theodoret., *HE* 5.18.23.

⁸⁷ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 189ff.

ceivable that Theodoretus is the most inclined of the three to extol this function of the priest. For him Ambrose becomes the embodiment of the true priest, but he also gives other examples which demonstrate that the frank conduct of priests can silence even dangerous enemies.⁸⁸

In contrast to secular historians such as Ammianus, the Church historians have no interest in problems of taxation or administration. In Socrates alone are there detectable some elements of the senatorial perspective, when he highlights the pains endured by members of this order.⁸⁹ But these notices are of only marginal importance, because in his view the main problem of the Empire lies in religious division.

Military occurrences are not mentioned in their own right, but as symptoms of the moral quality of individual emperors. The defeat at Adrianople, for instance, proves that God hates Valens,⁹⁰ whereas the victory at the river Frigidus confirms that God protects Theodosius. Therefore, the choice of military events is selective, particularly in Theodoretus. The distinction between civil wars and external wars is not sharp in any of those authors. A triumph over a usurper is no less valuable than a victory against foreign enemies.

All the Church historians are loyal subjects of the Roman Empire, but their perspective is, with few exceptions, limited to the East. They have only a faint knowledge of Western geography. Typically, Socrates shifts the Frigidus, which is in the Julian Alps, to Gaul.⁹¹ Therefore the sack of Rome 410, which impressed Latin authors such as Augustine and Jerome so intensely, is of minor importance to the Greek Church historians. Theodoretus does not even deem it worth mentioning. Socrates⁹² and Sozomenus⁹³ do mention it, albeit from different perspectives. Socrates places his account of the sack of Rome between two chapters which refer to acts of violence by Bishops of Rome against Novatians. Thus he constructs a synchronism which, in his mode of thinking, also gives a reason for the events of 410 in the sense that the Bishops of Rome are responsible for

⁸⁸ Theodoret., *HE* 2.27.21; 2.32.5; 5.32.5–8.

⁸⁹ See, e.g. Socrat., *HE* 2.32.1; 6.6.9–11; 7.10.4.

⁹⁰ Socrat., *HE* 4.33; Sozomen., *HE* 6.37; Theodoret., *HE* 4.36.2–37, cf. 5.1.1.

⁹¹ Socrat., *HE* 5.25.10.

⁹² Socrat., *HE* 7.10.

⁹³ Sozomen., *HE* 9.8.

the sack of Rome, not the secular powers; this is without doubt a manifestation of Socrates' adherence to the court.

Sozomenus obviously wants to deal with pagan interpretations of the calamity. He shows that not even those pagans who tried to do it so were able to avert the catastrophe and that certain Christian sites and individuals were duly respected by the Christian Goths. In general, all the past sins of the Romans (i.e. the pagan Romans) are responsible for their final defeat—which is a remarkably distant way of judging Roman history. Besides, even for him, whose account is relatively detailed, the sack of Rome is no more than “a purely local problem”.⁹⁴

The Church historians do not discuss the circumstance that the frontiers of Christendom are not identical with the frontiers of the Roman Empire; nevertheless they do not take the identity for granted. Although they do not treat events in Persia or among the barbarians systematically,⁹⁵ they give heed to those of them which are important for the history of Christendom, and Sozomenus even justifies this by claiming that it is necessary to preserve the memory of the non-Roman heroes.⁹⁶ Therefore, the conversion of foreign nations is important,⁹⁷ but equally so is the suffering of Christian martyrs under Persians⁹⁸ or Goths.⁹⁹

Their relative openness towards peoples beyond the imperial frontier does not make the Church historians cosmopolitans. There is no doubt that they are loyal subjects of the Roman Empire—that they want the Romans to be victorious against other nations. The Roman tradition is still very much alive.

All Church historians pay attention to the politics of their times. Socrates attaches unusual importance to the interests of secular politi-

⁹⁴ Chesnut, *op. cit.*, 198.

⁹⁵ See also for this distinction F. Winkelmann, “Die Bewertung der Barbaren in den Werken der oströmischen Kirchenhistoriker”, in E.K. Chrysos and A. Schwarcz (eds.), *Das Reich und die Barbaren* (Veröff. Inst. öst. Geschichtsforschung 29) (Vienna and Cologne, 1989), 221–235.

⁹⁶ Sozomen., *HE* 1.1.18f.

⁹⁷ See, e.g. Socrat., *HE* 1.19f.; Sozomen., *HE* 2.7; 2.24; Theodoret., *HE* 1.23–1.24.12; cf. B. Bäbler, “Der Blick über die Reichsgrenzen: Sokrates und die Bekehrung Georgiens”, in B. Bäbler and H.-G. Nesselrath (eds.), *Die Welt des Sokrates von Konstantinopel. Studien zu Politik, Religion und Kultur im späten 4. und frühen 5. Jh. n. Chr. zu Ehren von Christoph Schäublin* (Munich and Leipzig, 2001), 159–181.

⁹⁸ See, e.g. Sozomen., *HE* 2.9–14; Theodoret., *HE* 5.39.

⁹⁹ See, e.g. Sozomen., *HE* 6.37.12–14.

cians.¹⁰⁰ His main concern is the unity of the Empire, which is indissolubly connected with the unity of the Church, which is in turn often disturbed by disputatious bishops. This does not mean religious indifference, but certainly a lack of concern with dogmatic questions. Obviously in Socrates' eyes, religion should work as a tool to unify society, in a way that *polis*-religion had been doing for centuries.

Therefore, Socrates is fond of tales which show all Christians united, as for example at the burial of the Novatian bishop Paul: "At his own funeral he united, in a certain sense, all the different sects into one Church. For all parties attended his body to the tomb, chanting psalms together, inasmuch as even during his lifetime by his rectitude he was in universal esteem by all".¹⁰¹ Another event narrated by Socrates has a definite political accent and illustrates the correspondence of the Christian and of the political body:

This event (*sc.* the miraculous victory over the usurper John in 425) afforded that most devout emperor an opportunity of giving a fresh demonstration of his piety towards God. For the news of the usurper's being destroyed, having arrived while he was engaged at the exhibition of the sports of the Hippodrome, he immediately said to the people: "Come now, if you please, let us leave these diversions, and proceed to the Church to offer thanksgivings to God, whose hand has overthrown the usurper." Thus did he address them; and the spectacles were immediately forsaken and neglected, the people all passing out of the circus singing praises together with him, as with one heart and one voice. And arriving at the Church, the whole city again became one congregation; and once in the Church they passed the remainder of the day in these devotional exercises.¹⁰²

Because of his secular interests and his seeming devotion to Theodosius, Socrates has been interpreted virtually as a secular historian. For G. Zecchini he is a "storico ufficiale di fatto, e non di nome".¹⁰³ This position ignores Socrates' personal aloofness from the court. Moreover, certain deeds which were important for Theodosius II are completely ignored by Socrates, as for example the codification of the law. T. Urbainczyk calls Socrates a "historian of Church and

¹⁰⁰ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 227ff.

¹⁰¹ Socrat., *HE* 7.46.2f.

¹⁰² Socrat., *HE* 7.23.11f.

¹⁰³ G. Zecchini, "S. Ambrogio e le origini del motivo della vittoria incruenta", *RSCI* 38 (1984), 391-404.

state".¹⁰⁴ Even this position seems to be too far reaching. The Church is always in the centre of Socrates' work; he is a historian of state only insofar as the fate of the state is indissolubly intertwined with the fate of the Church. If a decision between the interests of Church and state is necessary, Socrates prefers the former. It is remarkable that in the last chapter of his work he speaks approvingly of the fact that Thalassius, the praetorian prefect designate, has been ordained Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia.¹⁰⁵

In Sozomenus¹⁰⁶ one thing is clear: he is a devotee of Pulcheria. As he is writing in the 440s, this means that he finds himself at a certain distance from imperial policy. He avoids praising Theodosius II as a kind of priest and, as he knew Socrates, this avoidance must be meaningful. His main concern seems to be personal holiness, which was the quality a powerless woman such as Pulcheria might exploit to establish a position at court. Conceivably, he shows significantly less sensitivity towards the needs of senators than Socrates.

Theodoretus, the provincial bishop (probably) in exile, has no secular concerns.¹⁰⁷ His main interest is to protect the independence of the Church from political pressure and to show that the priest has to be regarded higher than the king. A bishop who does not attach importance to the distinction between emperor and priest is not worth his title.¹⁰⁸ And as suffering is necessary for human beings, the aim of winning peace and prosperity does not appeal to him.

Although their positions towards imperial politics are by no means identical, none of the three Church historians can be used as a source for the official position of the Theodosian establishment. They show rather the diversity of political and ecclesiastical positions within orthodoxy. There was no clear development towards what is later on perceived as Byzantine Caesaropapism. The intellectual and political situation was open.

¹⁰⁴ In the title of *op. cit.*; cf. Wallraff's rather harsh polemic against this position (*op. cit.*, 20).

¹⁰⁵ Socrat., *HE* 7.48.2–5.

¹⁰⁶ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 244ff.

¹⁰⁷ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 253ff.

¹⁰⁸ Theodoret., *HE* 5.18.24.

IV *The “synoptical” Church histories and the genre of Church history*

It is evident that the Church histories combine traditional and Christian elements. However, the Church historians do not justify their manner of writing history at length. Socrates is the most original in this regard.¹⁰⁹ Very important is the beginning of Book Five already cited. In this passage Socrates justifies the inclusion of seemingly secular matters by developing his theory of *sympátheia*. The second main area of Socrates’ theoretical musings is his remarks on his simple style, to which he alludes several times¹¹⁰ and most extensively in the proem to Book Six.¹¹¹ He regards his style, which is indeed clear but not refined, as an expression of Christian simplicity.

Theodoretus makes some general remarks in the first lines of his work.¹¹² He declares that he wants to preserve the memory of splendid deeds and of useful teachings. The reference to the teachings seems to be specific to the genre of Church history. It makes clear that Theodoretus does not set out to prove the true dogmas by history, but only to record them.

Sozomenus offers a long digression on his writing of history in the first chapter of his first book. He begins rather surprisingly with a sharp polemic against the Jews whose disbelief he thinks incurable. He compares them to the pagans who have been convinced by the words, and still more, by the deeds of Christian missionaries. These victories are as praiseworthy as the battle of Marathon. Church history is thus, very traditionally, justified by the importance of the theme. Then Sozomenus proceeds to explain his treatment of laws, documents and heretical writings. As regards the quarrelling of the bishops, which had already concerned Socrates, Sozomenus wants to hand it down to posterity because of his love for the truth and in order to show that the true dogma is triumphant in the end. Finally, he explains why he also includes events which happened

¹⁰⁹ M. Mazza, “Sulla teoria della storiografia cristiana: Osservazioni su proemi degli storici ecclesiastici”, in S. Calderone (ed.), *La storiografia ecclesiastica nella tarda antichità. Atti del convegno tenuto in Erice, 3–8 XII 1978* (Messina, 1980), 335–389; id., “Lo storico, la fede ed il principe. Sulla teoria della storiografia ecclesiastica in Socrate e Sozomeno”, in id., *Le maschere del potere. Cultura e politica nella Tarda Antichità* (Naples, 1986), 255–318; I. Krivushin, “Socrates Scholasticus’ Church History: Themes, Ideas, Heroes”, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 23 (1996), 95–107.

¹¹⁰ Socrat., *HE* 1.1.3; 3.1.3.

¹¹¹ Socrat., *HE* 6 pr. 2–5.

¹¹² Theodoret., *HE* 1.1.

among the Persians and the barbarians. This is a very full, if rather loose, exposition.

Somewhat different is the address to Theodosius II which inaugurates the whole work. This passage is chiefly devoted to a panegyric on the emperor. Sozomenus, having underlined the importance of literary patronage for the good ruler, beseeches the emperor to give him rewards similar to those that other writers had received from their sovereigns, and he names several pagan authors (including Homer, Plato or Theopompus), as if his writing were normal literature within a system of patronage. We shall return to this mixture of Christian and pagan perspectives typical of Sozomenus.

Historians of antiquity were likely to claim that they were telling the truth and nothing but the truth. This is also done by Socrates in a short polemic against Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*.¹¹³ His claim seems to be honest, since he indeed rewrote his history after reading Athanasius, although his new thinking tarnished the image of Constantine, the first Christian emperor.¹¹⁴ Less convincing to modern eyes is Socrates' assertion that he is not writing in eulogising words on Theodosius II in order to win the emperor's favour, but only because he wants to say what is true.¹¹⁵ This seems to be contradicted by the panegyric overtones of his text. But idealisation of the reigning emperor is acceptable within the contemporary discourse. Panegyrists do not shrink from underlining the truthfulness of their utterances, even though the public were fully aware of their constraints. It would therefore be unhistorical to condemn Socrates as a hypocrite.

Theodoretus makes no specific claim concerning his truthfulness and, typically enough, he is the most inclined to introduce stylisation into his work, as is evident in his narrative of Jovian's death or of the battle of Frigidus.

The Church historians do not directly consider their relationship to the genre of Church history, but some ideas are implicit in their writings. Church history was a new genre of prose literature in late antiquity, created by Eusebius.¹¹⁶ It differed from secular history in two regards. There were no speeches and there were many docu-

¹¹³ Socrat., *HE* 1.1.2f.

¹¹⁴ Socrat., *HE* 2.1.

¹¹⁵ Socrat., *HE* 7.21.10–22.1.

¹¹⁶ See Winkelmann in this volume.

ments, which were reproduced *verbatim*. Thus, for a reader who is used to classicising prose, Eusebius sometimes creates the impression of having produced no more than a rough draft. This impression of roughness is not that surprising, if one remembers that Church History is not an exact translation of the Greek *ekklesiastikè historia*. A more precise rendering would be “history regarding Church matters”. This concept could include many things; and the resulting work need not be a well-structured history in the classicising sense. Even mere collections of material could be termed ecclesiastical histories.¹¹⁷

The so-called synoptical Church historians depart in several ways from the Eusebian concept. Nevertheless the core theme remains the Church. Their idea of Church is, however, difficult to reconstruct.¹¹⁸ One thing is clear. The Church is not an institution, which comprises only priests, bishops and synods, but includes also holy men and women, and necessarily the Christian or anti-Christian emperors who influenced the Church. As Socrates puts it:

We have continually included the emperors in these historical details; because from the time they began to profess the Christian religion, the affairs of the Church have depended on them, so that even the greatest Synods have been, and still are convened by their appointment. Finally, we have particularly noticed the Arian heresy, because it has so greatly disquieted the Churches. Let these remarks be considered sufficient in the way of preface: we shall now proceed with our history.¹¹⁹

There existed another notion concerning the writing of the history of the Christian religion, the concept of *christianikè historia*, “history regarding Christian matters”. The only known writer in this genre is Philippus of Side.¹²⁰ He was a deacon in Constantinople and had contacts with John Chrysostom. Having been ordained as a priest, he tried to become bishop three times: 426 against Sisinnius, 428 against Nestorius, 431 against Maximinus. His work is severely criticised by Socrates.¹²¹ Although both, Socrates as well as Philippus,

¹¹⁷ Van Nuffelen *op. cit.*, 128.

¹¹⁸ See, as a good attempt for Socrates, Wallraff, *op. cit.*, 29ff.

¹¹⁹ Socrat., *HE* 5 pr. 9f.

¹²⁰ E. Honigmann, “Philippus of Side and his ‘Christian History’”, *id.*, *Patristic Studies* (Studi e testi 173) (Vatican City, 1953), 82–91; W. Portmann, “Philippus von Side”, *Biogr.-bibliogr. Kirchenlexikon* 7 (1994), 510–512.

¹²¹ Socrat., *HE* 7.27; Phot., *Bibl.* 35.

were Nicenes, they held opposing views in respect of Bishop Proclus of Constantinople (434–446), of whom Socrates thinks highly, whereas Philippus was opposed to him. It may be that Socrates began writing Church history in order to combat Philippus' Christian history.

The character of Philippus' work can be reconstructed only tentatively. The defeated rival of Proclus obviously intended to defend his position. His style was according to the hardly objective Socrates "Asiatic", that is to say pompous. Anyway, the work, numbering 36 books each of several volumes, must have been extremely large. It included many polymathic digressions (as in the case of Philostorgius) and was chronologically inconsistent. Much remains unclear, particularly how Philippus handled Church history proper, but it is certain that this Christian history was very different from the known Church histories.

Eusebius' first successor was Gelasius of Caesarea, whose work is again difficult to reconstruct,¹²² but of which we know enough to be sure that Gelasius considered himself to be a continuator of Eusebius. This is also the case with Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus. They are explicit followers of Eusebius,¹²³ and they stay within the general framework of his kind of writing. There are no long speeches and there are many documents quoted word for word.¹²⁴ Socrates and Theodoretus even include digressions of a theological character.¹²⁵ The reliability of the documents is high. For example, neither Socrates nor Theodoretus mention in their authorial comments on the Council of Nicaea that it was Constantine who introduced the concept of *homoousios* into the debates, but both of them quote Eusebius' letter affirming this, despite the fact that this does not suit their respective interpretations of Nicaea.¹²⁶

On the other hand, all three of them are influenced by secular historiography, albeit to different degrees. They evidently take over certain stylistic features from classicising authors¹²⁷—for example a

¹²² See F. Winkelmann, *Untersuchungen zur Kirchengeschichte des Gelasios von Caesarea* (Berlin, 1966).

¹²³ Socrat., *HE* 1.1.1; Sozomen., *HE* 1.1.12s.; Theodoret., *HE* 1.1.4.

¹²⁴ An extremely strange element is a dialogue between Constantius and Pope Liberius included in Theodoretus (*HE* 2.16.1–26), which the Church historian probably regarded as a kind of document.

¹²⁵ E.g. Socrat., *HE* 5.30–80; 6.13; Theodoret., *HE* 4.5.2; 5.39.24–26.

¹²⁶ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 57.

¹²⁷ T. Hidber, "Eine Geschichte von Aufruhr und Streit: Sokrates' Kirchengeschichte

narrative, which is more consistent than Eusebius's. They also accept the reigns of emperors as the main partitions of history, and they are akin to senatorial historians insofar as they distinguish between "good" and "bad" emperors.

Socrates seems to set himself against secular historiography, especially historiography written in an elevated style, as is illustrated by his defence of his own deliberately simple style. In several passages he also shows an aversion to the abuse of pagan education.¹²⁸ Acumen, which relies on dialectic, particularly of the Aristotelian kind, is one reason for the emergence of heresy.¹²⁹ The basis for polemics like this is his solid knowledge of classical culture.¹³⁰

This does, of course, not mean that Socrates is completely free from pagan influence. He had been educated by pagans, and his Church history contains not only much secular material—which he is able to defend—but is also, which is more important, built around secular dates: emperors, consuls and even Olympic games are fundamental to his chronology. He lives in a context which is deeply imbued with pagan culture, and he cannot conceal this.

Theodoretus deeply abhors every form of paganism, but his writing style is elegant. Indeed all his five books are distinguished by an artful composition:¹³¹ the central chapters have special significance and are carefully linked to other books. The importance of these chapters is evident in the following observations: the central chapter of Book One (17) documents a letter in which Constantine calls

und die Tradition der Zeitgeschichtsschreibung", in Bähler and Nesselrath (eds.), *Die Welt des Sokrates von Konstantinopel*, *op. cit.*, 44–59.

¹²⁸ See, e.g. Socrat., *HE* 2.35.6; 7.6.3f.; 7.22.8. Wallraff, *op. cit.*, 83ff. makes too much of Socrates' formation by pagan education. His style shows that *HE* has less regard for pagan culture than the Cappadocians (*contra* Wallraff, *op. cit.*, 89f., n. 299)—which does not mean complete disregard.

¹²⁹ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 173.

¹³⁰ Cf., with other accents, H.-G. Nesselrath, "Die Christen und die heidnische Bildung: Das Beispiel des Sokrates Scholastikos (hist. eccl. 3,16)", in J. Dummer and M. Vielberg (eds.), *Leitbilder der Spätantike: Eliten und Leitbilder. Altertumswiss. Koll. I* (Stuttgart, 1999), 79–100, 97ff. for allusions to classical authors; see also C. Eucken, "Philosophie und Dialektik in der Kirchengeschichte des Sokrates", in B. Bähler and H.-G. Nesselrath (eds.), *Die Welt des Sokrates von Konstantinopel. Studien zu Politik, Religion und Kultur im späten 4. und frühen 5. Jh. n. Chr. zu Ehren von Christoph Schäublin* (Munich and Leipzig, 2001), 96–110 (with some misunderstandings); T. Gelzer, "Zum Hintergrund der hohen Schätzung der paganen Bildung bei Sokrates von Konstantinopel", in Bähler and Nesselrath (eds.), *Die Welt des Sokrates von Konstantinopel*, *op. cit.*, 111–124.

¹³¹ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 287ff.

for the erection of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The central chapter of Book Five (21) contains Theodosius' I (non-existent) order to destroy all pagan temples. In Books Two and Four heretical emperors dominate: Constantius II and Valens. In the central chapters they are shown clashing with courageous bishops.¹³² In this Theodoretus shows himself to be a willing pupil of the rhetorical schools.

Sozomenus is by far the most influenced by secular historiography, as has already been shown by the panegyric dedication and by the panegyric beginning of Book Nine. His panegyrics are much more technical than Socrates's. Sozomenus informs his readers that he will paraphrase many documents,¹³³ which is also in keeping with the tradition of classicising historiography. Moreover, he unmistakably alludes to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in the beginnings of his work.¹³⁴ His books are almost as artfully composed as Theodoretus's.¹³⁵

He also makes explicit criticism of certain pagan interpretations, such as the allegation that Constantine converted to Christianity because no other religion was able to condone his sins.¹³⁶ In addition, he declares that pagans tried to avert Alaric's sack of Rome, but to no avail.¹³⁷ His work was obviously the most palatable to educated readers used to classicising historiography.

Eusebius defined as one of his main themes the fate of the Jews. This does not make much impact on the Church historians.¹³⁸ They mention the Jews in the context of Julian's failed plan to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, but their principal aim is thereby to illustrate God's wrath against Julian.¹³⁹ Socrates has a noteworthy concentration of anti-Jewish tales in Book Seven.¹⁴⁰ Sozomenus begins his first book with a reflection on the Jewish stubbornness in refusing to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah; afterwards the theme recurs rarely, even though it is more prominent than in Socrates. Theodoretus

¹³² Theodoret., *HE* 2.16; 4.19.

¹³³ Sozomen., *HE* 1.1.14.

¹³⁴ Sozomen., *HE* 1.1.1 with Xen., *Cyr.* 1.1.1.

¹³⁵ Leppin, *op. cit.*, 183ff.

¹³⁶ Sozomen., *HE* 1.5.

¹³⁷ Sozomen., *HE* 9.6s.

¹³⁸ See Urbainczyk (1997a), 364ff.

¹³⁹ Socrat., *HE* 3.20; Sozomen., *HE* 5.22; Theodoret., *HE* 3.20.

¹⁴⁰ Socrat., *HE* 7.4; 7.16; 7.17; 7.38.

makes several anti-Jewish comments,¹⁴¹ but the Jews are not very important to him. The topic seems to have lost its importance in Church historiography.

To conclude, it is evident that all three Church historians treated here consider themselves to be true followers of Eusebius, and rightly so. Nevertheless, a plain tendency to the convergence of Church history and pagan history is palpable in all of them, particularly in Sozomenus. This will be taken to its fullest extent by later authors such as Theophylactus Simocatta (7th century). But even in this case our main point remains valid: For all that they have in common, the three so-called “synoptical” Church historians are individual authors with divergent views, whose works illustrate the intellectual richness of the Theodosian age.

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