

# 14.04.27, Schwartz, Paideia and Cult

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Schwartz, Daniel L.. *Paideia and Cult: Christian Initiation in Theodore of Mopsuestia Hellenic Studies Series, 57*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. Pp. xii, 182. ISBN: 978-0-674-06703-5.

## Reviewed by:

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Christian initiation in Late Antique Antioch is the focus of *Paideia and Cult*, a stimulating study of a catechetical curriculum of sixteen homilies written by Theodore of Mopsuestia in the early 390s. Daniel Schwartz justifies this textual choice not so much on the grounds that Theodore was later condemned, which is not the focus of the book, or because these are the only catechetical sermons remaining for this period; rather, for him, these homilies "offer the only catechetical curriculum that has been preserved in the form in which it was designed and delivered" (5).

Through astute contextualization and analysis, Schwartz shows how Theodore designed a well-rounded Christian education (paideia) meant to initiate new Christian citizens. While issues of conversion and Christianization of the Roman Empire are clearly at stake, Schwartz is quick to acknowledge the limits of his study. Experiences of baptism were varied and subjective. The book neither aims at establishing the nature and the extent of these catechumens' conversion on a personal level, nor does it purport to tell us how many converted or listened to these sermons. More prominent, instead, are the pedagogical concerns of a pastor and the acknowledgment that his approach to and explanations about the catechumens' expected experiences of conversion were not only meaningful to the priest, but also to the Christian community surrounding him. As rites of initiation, catechism and baptismal liturgy were considered effective in transforming catechumens into full members of the Christian community, physically, mentally and spiritually. Conversion is here studied through the lens of defining what is meant by being in or out of the community.

Theodore's sermons embodied communal, intellectual, and ritualistic components, essential to the creation of a new Christian identity. The need for a sponsor throughout baptismal preparation aimed at developing ties with the Christian community; Theodore's simple explanation of Christian doctrines shaped the future Christian's basic doctrinal formation; finally, his description of the liturgy outlined the essential place of ritual within the community. As an initiation, these sermons made use of rhetorical and pedagogical strategies that are reminiscent of the author's rhetorical education and consistent with late antique pedagogy. Ultimately, they contributed to the elaboration of a "meaningful Christian paideia" (146). After a presentation of Theodore's life and education, and of late antique catechesis more generally, the book analyses these three components of Christian catechesis: community, creed and cult.

Chapter 1 is devoted to Theodore's life, education and ministry. Theodore's own education of mind and body, at the school of the rhetorician Libanius then at the asketeria of Diodore of Tarsus, contributes to our understanding of Theodore's approach to pastoral duties. For instance, his attention to the context of the Scriptures, the so-called Antiochene historical approach, should be understood in the backdrop of his literary education. The specific context of fourth-century Antioch with the still fresh debates over Arianism also helps understanding his theology and, more particularly the prominent place received by Christological and Trinitarian questions in his writings. While such theological issues are not the main focus of Schwartz's book, they did influence Theodore's explanations of the creed and, notably, his concern to present a Christ concomitantly fully

human and fully divine, which was, in his mind, the only understanding that ensured the salvation of his parishioners (humanity was only redeemable if Christ was also fully human).

Chapter 2 is devoted to catechesis and rites of initiation in Late Antiquity. The claim to secrecy of Christian rites and doctrines is reminiscent of other mystery cults. The extent to which such secrecy was maintained is more difficult to ascertain, however, considering the number of pagan testimonies about Christian cult. Regardless, the language of secrecy was present and aimed at provoking an emotional response from the catechumens. In the words of Theodore, the rites were meant to be "awe-inspiring" (62), a term also found in the works of John Chrysostom. Catechesis and baptism were truly intended to be rites of passage into a new community.

The next three chapters focus on the three main aspects of initiation: community, doctrine and the enactment of such a doctrine into ritual. Chapter 3 focuses on the community of Christian citizens into which the catechumens prepared their entry. The prominence of the Christian community and its hierarchy in the region of Antioch at the time should not be neglected. As such, catechesis also involved an explanation about the structure of Christian clergy for its new members. The catechumens would be confronted to a range of people whose ranks and tasks they should be able to identify and understand--becoming a Christian was not just being initiated into a new set of beliefs, but also into a new social network (91). Baptismal sponsors were essential and acted as legal guarantors, scrutinising the catechumens and providing them assistance during their initiation and the baptismal ceremony.

While sponsors introduced the catechumens into the community, the sermons presented them with the intellectual and ritualistic components of their conversion. Of the sixteen sermons, ten are devoted to the creed, one to the Lord's Prayer and five to the liturgy; among these five, three are devoted to baptism and two to the Eucharist. Chapter 4 explores the explanations devoted to and the language used to present the creed. Theodore's approach to the creed was methodical, but his main concern was to integrate the catechumens within the community rather than forming theologians. Rhetorical and pedagogical strategies lead Schwartz's analysis of these doctrinal sermons. Theodore's pedagogical concerns are visible in the recurrent use of terms related to teaching and progressive learning. The use of a simple terminology mattered more than the technicalities of a complex theology. Regular (and somewhat tiresome) repetitions of the main ideas aided to commit the creed to memory--the ultimate aim of the doctrinal aspect of catechesis. The Christian doctrine was true precisely because it was so necessarily simple. The catechumens needed not to understand the intricacies of theological debates--after all, many of them were not part of the intellectual elite. Rather they had to be convinced that they were indeed part of a community that held a true understanding of God.

Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the last sermons, which describe the catechumens' future experience of the baptismal and Eucharistic liturgies. Theodore presents these rituals as the enactments of theological concepts, as well as a means to seal the Christian community. Theodore's classical training and his pedagogical concerns are visible once again in his use of the ekphrasis, which portrayed these rites vividly. Liturgy was meant to be awe-inspiring and Theodore's explanations aimed at inviting the catechumen to imagine how these rites ultimately reproduced the heavenly reality. The catechumens were full participants in such a liturgical drama: as in a courtroom where, as supplicants to God, catechumens were redeemed from their obedience to the Devil, the words, postures, actions and dress of all the participants were meaningful in each moment.

*Paideia and Cultis* is an engaging book written in an effective and seamless prose. Schwartz's approach to Theodore of Mopsuestia's rhetoric and pedagogy is refreshing. While scholars' concern for Theodore's posthumous condemnation in the context of the Nestorian controversy is of course warranted, such a focus on his later reception overlooks the fact that Theodore was also a pastoral leader, whose work was generally well received by his contemporaries. Yet, precisely because Theodore's Greek works were destroyed after his condemnation in the sixth century, the sermons studied have been preserved in their Syriac translation only. Concerns may be raised regarding the claim that this curriculum is indeed "preserved in the form in which it was designed and delivered" (5). This claim is, in fact, the only quibble I may have with Schwartz's approach, particularly since his arguments rely heavily on terminological and semantic analysis. A few words about the translation and its quality would have been helpful, even though one may (or should) probably assume the translator's faithfulness to the original, to allow for any analysis of Theodore's ideas in a fourth-century context, rather than in that of their later reception. To my view, ultimately, Schwartz's observations remain solid.

The book offers a clear and concise introduction to Christian initiation in its classical (Roman) context, but also to the functioning of an early Christian community, that of Antioch in the late fourth century. More generally, the book provides new insights to the Late Antique Christian Church, and an original approach to the process of Christianization and conversion of the Roman Empire through the lens of pedagogy, rather than that of laws, institutions or demography. Students and scholars alike will reap benefits from this book: the former for the clear introduction it provides to broader issues pertaining to the early Christian Church; the latter for the new lights it sheds on Theodore of Mopsuestia himself, and the role of the Christian community at large in the Christianization of the Roman Empire.

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Paideia and Cult explores the role of Christian education and worship in the complex process of conversion and Christianization. It analyzes the Catechetical Homilies of Theodore of Mopsuestia as a curriculum designed to train those seeking initiation into the Christian mysteries. Although Theodore gave considerable attention to teaching creedal theology, he sought to go b Paideia and Cult explores the role of Christian education and worship in the complex process of conversion and Christianization. It analyzes the Catechetical Homilies of Theodore of Mopsuestia as a curriculum designed to tra D.L. Schwartz Paideia and Cult. Cult and Context: The Paranoid Ethos in Melanesia. Theodore Schwartz - 1973 - Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology 1 (2):153-174. La Musique Grecque. H. J. W. T., Théodore Reinach & Theodore Reinach - 1926 - Journal of Hellenic Studies 46:268. E. Amann - 1934 - Revue des Sciences Religieuses 14 (1):161-190. Analytics. Added to PP index 2015-09-04. Total views 15 ( #625,181 of 2,349,163 ). Recent downloads (6 months) 1 ( #511,414 of 2,349,163 ). "[Paideia] is intended for the general reader, and it is probably God's gift to educators, because it conveys to the reader, in a clear and attractive form, covering the ground comprehensively, a conception of the central point of view in Hellenic society and culture."--Edmund Wilson, New Yorker. "The most illuminating work I have ever read on Greece."--Edith Hamilton, The New York Times Book Review.