

**John Chrysostum: His Life, Legacy and Influence**

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Within the life of the ancient church, there was a deep need for a spokesman who would represent the church and present the truth and reality of the message of Christ in a tangible manner. The era of persecution had recently concluded. Thus, there was an open door for a well-spoken evangelist. Such was the role of John Chrysostom.<sup>1</sup> His unique training and God-given ability to speak and minister in a transitory age combined with his impeccable character made him an evangelical giant in his time.

The early life of Chrysostom provides insight into the inestimable value of a godly mother. His formal education from his formational teachers demonstrates how God can take that which someone might have intended to harm the church and turn it into a tool for the advancement of His kingdom.

Chrysostom's early ministry provides insight into the intricate and difficult structure of the church in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Furthermore, his ministry was as direct and frank in approach as any ministry in church history. This directness emanates in the knifelike eloquence of his writings and his sermons. For example, his series of messages known as the *Sermons on the Statues* hastened a revival reshaping the early church.<sup>2</sup>

To set him apart further, Chrysostom insisted on the use of an systematic exegetical pattern of scriptural interpretation, as opposed to the popular allegorizing method popular in the fourth century eastern church. Thus, his strict method of biblical exegesis distinguished him from many of his

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<sup>1</sup> Chrysostom was known simply as Bishop John during his lifetime. The term χρυσόστομ (literally "gold-mouth" Cf. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, Third ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 888-889.) first appears recorded applied to him by Pope Vigiline in A.D. 553. Thus, by this unusual term, he is known in both Catholic and Protestant traditions, even further enhancing the legacy he left.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History through Revivals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 102.

contemporaries. This method of interpretation demonstrates John's utter loyalty to the Bible and his firm conviction in its inherent power. This inherent loyalty marked his ministry, both in person and in writing.<sup>3</sup>

Chrysostom was not a handsome man,<sup>4</sup> but his impeccable character and his passionate evangelistic zeal demonstrated him as man of means. Furthermore, his willingness to employ his influential role of priest and bishop, both in Antioch and later in Constantinople, was not for personal gain but rather for extending the Kingdom of God. Thus, the person and work of Chrysostom stand as an example of a life committed to Christ even in difficult days.

The writings of Chrysostom demonstrate a full complement of the result of his work. The passionate pursuit of Christ and the zealous desire to make Christ known is clear in these writings. Chrysostom also emphasized lifestyle resultant from a committed faith in Christ.

The evangelistic methods of Chrysostom show how he employed his unique heritage, training and position to their fullest advantage. The methods he employs demonstrate his earnest faith in Christ and his obvious trust in the word of Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> John Heston Willey, *Chrysostom: The Orator* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1906), 171. Willey states "He was a man of one book. His Bible was never closed. His homilies are expositions. His sermons sparkled with jewels from this mine."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. Wiley gives this description of Chrysostom: "He was short of stature, his frame slight, his cheeks hollow, his head bald. But his forehead was a great dome and his eyes like burning torches."

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LIFE OF CHRYSOSTOM

#### *Birth and Early Life*

Chrysostom was born sometime in the mid-fourth century<sup>5</sup> in the strategic city of Antioch. There can be little doubt of his family's high social placement and their apparent wealth.<sup>6</sup> His father, Secundus, was a military man of influence in the Syrian Army<sup>7</sup> marked by his title *illus*.<sup>8</sup> Although he was apparently from Latin decent, his role as a commander bestowed him a place of prominence in the welfare of Antioch was influential.

Chrysostom's mother, Anthousa, was of Greek descent. Apparently, she instructed her eldest son for the first several years of his life, probably in the Greek tongue using the Bible as her text. Chrysostom's recording demonstrates her love for Christ at least from the time of his birth. She was a young woman of less than twenty when John was born.

While Chrysostom's was a happy home, this happiness was short lived. Secundus died shortly after Chrysostom's birth

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<sup>5</sup> W. R. W. Stephens, *St. John Chrysostom: His Life and Times* (London: John Murray, 1883), 9. Stephens says "No one. . . has been able to fix the exact date and year of Chrysostom's birth." Thus, dates for the birth of Chrysostom range from 344-354. Cf. Don Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, Vol 1; Antioch (London: Sands and Co., Ltd., 1959), 3.

<sup>6</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom - Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 4. Kelley notes that such an assumption is possible because of the role of his father and the fact that his mother was not forced to remarry for financial reasons.

<sup>7</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue of Palladius*, 5. According to this, Chrysostom's "official" biography, Secundus was the "a distinguished officer on the staff of the Straelates [corps commanders] of Syria."

<sup>8</sup> An honorific title implying this man is "illustrious" because of his dedicated and noble service to the crown.

leaving an infant child and a twenty-year old widow behind.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Anthousa gave her full attention and passion to the raising of her son.<sup>10</sup> She would never remarry.<sup>11</sup>

Antioch, the home city of Chrysostom, was a city of supreme domination, both politically and religiously. It was the city known to New Testament scholars as the location where Christians were known first by that name (Acts 11:26). The "Queen of the East," "this was the city that served as the capital of the Eastern world. According to Neill, "it was a rich and prosperous city with a long tradition of learning and culture."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the people of the city considered themselves among the elite class, educated and passionate about life. This was the city where the Apostles Paul, Peter and Barnabas had preached. It was the first mission sending city and the apparent home base for those missionaries.

However, life in Antioch during this transitory time could be unstable. Since Christianity had recently been legalized (A.D. 314) and was on its way to becoming the formal state religion (A.D. 381), the tumult of control between the pagans and the Christians was palatable.<sup>13</sup> To exacerbate the dilemma further, a power struggle existed within the church between neighboring dioceses over the relationship between these dioceses. Part of this dispute was waged over the ongoing dispute regarding Arianism and a long-standing battle over the creeping influence of paganism within the church. Thus, these issues, combined with the transition of emperor leadership, provided for disharmony and trouble.

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<sup>9</sup> This according to Chrysostom himself in *De Sacerdotio* 1. Cf. Willey, 32. Cf. Don Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, Vol 2; Constantinople (London: Sands and Co., Ltd., 1960), 1.4. According to Baur, this work was in honor and in memory of his mother.

<sup>10</sup> There is some question regarding an older sister that Chrysostom may have had. If he had a sister, she apparently died early in life. Cf. Palladius, 5:18.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Neill, *Chrysostom and His Message* (New York: Association Press, n.d.), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1976), 26.

### *Education and Training*

Despite this tumultuous time, Chrysostom was educated. His mother trained him in elementary matters and, more importantly, the Bible. She was a highly unusual woman in this respect especially when one considers her personal struggles with the pressures of widowhood in a male-dominated society. She knew, however, that John needed formal training. Thus, she sought a scholar to educate him in the classics.

Usually, this classical education was founded on the principles of reading, writing and simple arithmetic. However, the heart of eastern training was grammar and syntax of the Greek language. One major requirement for students was to memorize long passages and then comment upon those passages. The canons of this memorization centered upon the four pillars of the Greek world: Homer, Euripides, Menander and Demosthenes.<sup>14</sup> However, because of Anthousa's deep faith in Christ, this was a grave matter because of pagan nature of so many educators in that day. Thus, Anthousa took special care in choosing a teacher who was at least tolerant of Christianity.

Libanius (A.D.314- 393), the sophist, was just such a man. Albeit hardly persuaded of the veracity of the Christian faith, he apparently saw no harm in it and thus allowed his students to maintain this ideology if they so chose. A famed orator, Libanius was a distinguished man who occupied the official chair of rhetoric for the city of Antioch from 354 until his death in 393.<sup>15</sup> Normally taking pagan students in their mid-teens,<sup>16</sup> he agreed to receive Chrysostom as a student. Thus, he trained Chrysostom in the areas of reason, rhetoric and logic. The fact that Chrysostom was his best student seems clear by his preference for him. This preference became explicitly clear when Libanius was near death. As his friends gathered to hear his parting words, they asked who should succeed him as instructor of rhetoric for Antioch. His reply demonstrates the faith he had in Chrysostom. "It ought to have been John if the Christians had not stole him."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kelly, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Baur, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Petit, *Les Étudiants De Libanius* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions latines, 1957), 196.

<sup>17</sup> Kelly, 8. See also Thomas Edward Ameringer, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophist on the Panegyric Sermons of St. John Chrysostom* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic

While Libanius trained Chrysostom in the classics and in academics, John's formal religious training came at the hands of the bishop of Antioch, Miletius. Despite the plethora of responsibility the bishop endured, Miletius took a keen interest in Chrysostom and spent much interest in him. Thus, after three years of instruction, the beloved bishop baptized Chrysostom on Easter Sunday, AD 368.<sup>18</sup> John's life was never the same following his baptism. He believed firmly in a definitive change after baptism. His words demonstrate this belief: "Baptism avails nothing if we lead an unworthy life afterwards." Furthermore, one of his earliest works centers on baptism and its importance.<sup>19</sup>

While Libanius taught him logic and rhetoric,<sup>20</sup> Miletius filled his soul with "great, throbbing aspirations and ideals worthy of the rhetoricians art."<sup>21</sup> While Libanius taught him the classics, Miletius taught him how to use that passion for knowledge for a worthy goal: evangelism.

The contemporaries of Chrysostom are worth noting. While he was much younger than Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, he lived in their lifetimes and apparently communicated somewhat frequently with some of them. The most significant of his contemporaries is Basil, bishop of Raphea.

Chrysostom was designated lector in the church shortly after his baptism. Although this was a humble position, it was one that allowed him the opportunity to learn from the wise bishop and allowed the time to make a careful study of the word of God.

Shortly after his appointment, however, the political climate changed. Bishop Miletius was expelled from the region. Thus, as a new bishop was needed, John and his friend Basil gained consideration for the position. Both fled to the hills

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University of America, 1921), 12. This is high praise since Libanius had also trained Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Basil.

<sup>18</sup> Palladius, V:47, 18. Cf. Willey, 42; Kelly, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Paul W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt and Johannes Quasten, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1963).

<sup>20</sup> Neill, 10. "The old pagan really had nothing much to say and said it at great length."

<sup>21</sup> Willey, 40.

for fear of forcible ordination and installation as the new bishop of Antioch.<sup>22</sup> They agreed that neither would allow themselves to be ordained without the other receiving the rites of ordination as well. Chrysostom, discreetly, had other ideas. Once they returned to Antioch, in what some have termed a deception, Chrysostom told Basil he intended to be ordained. Thus, Basil allowed himself to be ordained as well. However, Chrysostom did not intend to present himself for such. Basil, infuriated by this deception, sought a definitive elucidation from his lifelong friend. Chrysostom replied that his actions were for the greater good of the church and thus they were reconciled.<sup>23</sup>

### *Asceticism*

After Chrysostom's was baptized, his desire for a deeper cognition of the person and word of God led him to seek out a life of separation through asceticism.<sup>24</sup> While his mind seemed fixed firmly in this direction, John's mother pled with him not to abandon her for seclusion until after her death. Her passionate plea is recorded by Chrysostom. In classical motherly style, Anthousa begins by reminding Chrysostom of the challenges she endured on his behalf in raising him as a single mother. Furthermore, she reminds him that even these troubles "never persuaded me to enter on a second marriage, or to bring a stepfather into the your father's house. I put up with the storms and trials; I did not try to escape the iron-furnace of widowhood."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, she implores, "as long as I am alive, accept it as your duty to live with me. . . [until] you have committed me to the earth and laid my bones beside the bones of your father. As long as I remain among the living, stay with me in my home." Her desperate plea was effectual. He stayed with his mother for six more years. Apparently, albeit not specifically recorded by Chrysostom, she died thus allowing him to pursue his desired solitude.

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<sup>22</sup> Kelly, 27. The practice of forcible ordination was not unusual in the highly political early church.

<sup>23</sup> *De Sacerdotio* I:7

<sup>24</sup> *De Compunctione* I:6. "As I on my part formed the determination to abandon the city and seek the habitation of the monks. . . ." Thus, the idea of becoming a monk was not a rash plan of an impetuous youngster but the well-conceived plan of a well-trained scholar.

<sup>25</sup> *De Sacerdotio* I:2

According to Palladius, Chrysostom spent the next four years as a monk as a part of monastery in the solitude of the Syrian desert.<sup>26</sup> During this time, he shared space with several other monks, all practicing the ascetic way of life. While their lives were centered on contemplation of God and meditation on His word, there was a daily routine, including psalm singing and food preparation. Each day's routine, however, centered offering God the glory. Further still, a strict code of silence was enforced.

Unfortunately, this measure of asceticism and self-denial was not sufficient to satisfy Chrysostom's passion. After four years in the monastery, John departed for a cave even further in the desert. During these two years, he sought "complete escape from the world,"<sup>27</sup> spending his days engrossed in a deep and intricate study of the scripture.

No doubt, John employed the same methods of memorizing the scripture as he had employed in memorizing Homer, Euripides and the other Greek writers. Thus, he memorized large portions of the word of God. This intimacy with the scripture would serve him well during his days as a priest and bishop. Also, as a sign of his deep devoutness, he deprived himself of sleep and food for long periods, living only on water. He chose to remain upright for three months, eschewing both a seated and a prone position! However, this severe asceticism was to haunt him the rest of his life. Upon his return to Antioch (and indeed for the rest of his life), he suffered from headaches, head rushes, stomach trouble and insomnia.

Thus, after six of self-imposed banishment, Chrysostom received news of the revocation of the banishment of Miletius. Upon Miletius's return to Antioch in 378, Chrysostom returned as well, again taking up his role as lector.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Ordination as a Deacon*

After two more years as a lector, Chrysostom was ordained as deacon late in the year 380 by the hand of his mentor, Bishop Miletius. While this was not a preaching role, it was a role of intensive interaction among the catechumens and parishoners. Here, John was responsible for discipling and preparing the

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<sup>26</sup> Palladius, V:18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., V.

<sup>28</sup> Kelley, 36-37. According to Kelley, there is some dispute over the reasons for Chrysostom's return. Kelley suggests his return was not completely spiritual in nature, but was also due to his poor health.

candidates for baptism as well as assisting the new believers in the formation of faith. An eminently personal role, it would ardently aid John later in his role as bishop.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, his role as deacon demonstrated his deep love for man and his compassion for their well being as well as their souls. Much like the deacons Acts 7, Chrysostom's daily concerns dealt with the immediate physical existence of those under his charge. However, he was also ultimately responsible for their spiritual well being. This difficult balance proved to be invaluable experience in shaping the administrative principles that would color the balance of his work.

Unfortunately, Chrysostom's beloved bishop Miletius was summoned from Antioch to Constantinople early in 381 for a council. He died while en route. His death was especially hard on Chrysostom given his long-standing intimate mentor/student relationship with the bishop. This grief intensified as a power struggle ensued for control of the Antiochene bishopric since control of Antioch was equivalent to control of the Eastern church. Desiring to end the Antiochene schism, Rome desired to install a "west-friendly" bishop to heal the schism separating the eastern and western churches. Sadly, however, the eastern cardinals would have none of it. They installed Flavian to the see of Antioch, much to the consternation of the western church.

Bishop Flavian, ordained Chrysostom as priest in 386, his wisest and most-enduring move. While the people had come to know and love Chrysostom as their friend and deacon, his oratorical skills would now take center-stage. Thus, the eloquence of Chrysostom took on full form.

With rapt attention, the people of Antioch listened. They hung on his every word. Occasionally, the people would burst forth in spontaneous applause, much to the consternation of the Chrysostom.<sup>30</sup> He employed every tool in the orator's shed: caustic rebuke, gentle encouragement and stinging admonishment. Freely, John used illustrations from daily life and connected the word of God to the lives of the people. However, the skill of his speech was not the only drawing factor. The people of Antioch knew Chrysostom loved them as people, not just as faceless crowds. Thus, his acquired skill of personal investment ascertained during his days as a deacon fused with

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps some of this work is reflected in the writings of Chrysostom. John Allen Weaver, "Catechetical Themes in the Post-Baptismal Teaching of St. John Chrysostom" (Catholic University of America, 1964).

<sup>30</sup> Neill, 13.

his overwhelming skill as an orator to enable him to enjoy a ministry breadth unknown before him.

Chrysostom's sermons are among the few from the Eastern church that could still be employed today.<sup>31</sup> His populist methods allowed him to link the common people with obtuse and complicated concepts in such a way to allow them entrance into this knowledge. Thus, Chrysostom's own giftedness gave way to an undesired promotion. The happy twelve years as priest in Antioch were coming to a close.

### *Constantinople*

Upon the death of Bishop Nectarius, Constantinople needed a new bishop.<sup>32</sup> The authorities decided Chrysostom was just the man for this crucial job and sent word to Asterios to bring him to New Rome (Constantinople). Thus, in late 397, John received an urgent message from Asterios, count of the civil diocese and governor of Antioch. He was to present himself at the martyrs shrine at the gate toward Constantinople. Having arrived there, John was escorted about 45 miles north toward Constantinople by Asterios.<sup>33</sup> At the first outpost marker Asterios delivered the astounding news. By imperial directive, John had been appointed the new bishop of Constantinople. Thus, Chrysostom was abducted and taken averse to his will to serve at his new post.<sup>34</sup>

Chrysostom arrived at his new see in the capital city of Constantinople by fast chariots, fast horses and an imperial honor guard. On February 26, 398 Chrysostom was designated bishop of Constantinople.<sup>35</sup>

However, the church of Constantinople had no concept of the reforms Chrysostom had in store. Whereas Nectarius had been a *laissez-faire* type leader,<sup>36</sup> allowing his influence to be

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>32</sup> Baur 1.1.

<sup>33</sup> Kelly, 104.

<sup>34</sup> Palladius, V. Walter MacGilvray, *John of the Golden Mouth* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1871), 160. Kelley, 106, disagrees with the assessment that this promotion was not the desire of Chrysostom. Moreover, he asserts that Chrysostom saw this as a chance to broaden and deepen his ministry.

<sup>35</sup> Wiley, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Baur, 1.1. Baur notes that Nectarius was not known as a great author, orator or leader. Rather, it was his "impeccable

bought and sold, Chrysostom had no intentions of engaging in such petty brokering. He had high ideals for the clergy and for Christianity generally, beginning with the position of bishop.

For example, the *episkopeion*, the home of the bishop of Constantinople had been destroyed in 388.<sup>37</sup> While Nectarius had begun its reconstruction, he did not live to see it complete.<sup>38</sup> Nectarius had planned a palatial home decorated with expensive and exquisite decorations, such as marble walls for one room and lavish robes for ceremonial use.<sup>39</sup> Its size was immense and its splendor eminent. It was large enough to provide room not only for the bishop and his entourage of clerics, but also for their attendants and visiting bishops and dignitaries. Nonetheless, the ascetic frugality of John would not allow him to maintain such an expensive existence while those in his churches starved. Therefore, he suspended this lavish program and likely sold some of the treasures for the benefit of those within the church and the hospital.<sup>40</sup> These moves, while enormously well received by the people, were not so popular within the upper strata of society. This caused a conspiracy to remove John from his office and install a bishop more "friendly" to the "right kind" of people.

Chrysostom's reforms were not limited to material aspects of the church. He also moved against priests involved in wrongdoing, specifically Theophilus of Alexandria. Theophilus was a jealous and apparently power-hungry man. He was the bishop of Alexandria with a long-standing animosity averse to the bishopric of Constantinople generally and Chrysostom specifically. The root of this animosity lies in the determination of Council of Constantinople in 381. This council decided it comes as no surprise, then that at the Council of Constantinople of 381, it was decided that the bishop of this city would be second only to Rome herself, despite Alexandria's

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character" that commended him to the role of bishop. Interestingly, it would be his character later that is an issue of dispute. Upon taking the role of bishop of Constantinople, he employed his position as a means toward political gain, wealth and high living.

<sup>37</sup> Kelley, 111.

<sup>38</sup> Baur, 2.57.

<sup>39</sup> Stephens, 217.

<sup>40</sup> Palladius XII-XIII. Cf. Kelley, 119.

older age and history.<sup>41</sup> Thus, when Chrysostom began his reforms, Theophilus was the first to complain. He accused Chrysostom of stealing from the diocese, malfeasance and fraud. Despite the falseness of these accusations, they were later instrumental in the banishment of Chrysostom.<sup>42</sup>

Chrysostom applied the potentially unrealistic expectations on all clerics for the sake of the purity of the church. This plainspoken fashion which made him popular within the congregation made him a target to the spoiled clergy who had grown rich from their position.

Chrysostom's reforms even affected the throne itself. While he exercised church discipline when needed, he also called down the rich and arrogant for their complacency and prodded the slow of heart to decision.<sup>43</sup> His reforms went so far as to call into question the conduct of Emperor Arcadius and Queen Eudoxia. While they allowed the bishop such leeway, such a dangerous move could have been regarded as treason. Moreover, his influence extended into the political realm. He consistently called for leniency in the name of Christ, a sure irritant to the ill-tempered and mean-spirited Eudoxia. Thus, his reforms on all hands would prove to be his undoing.

#### *The Synod at the Oak and Exile*

In 403, a short five years since Chrysostom's arrival in Constantinople, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, with the permission of Queen Eudoxia, called a council of bishops together to charge Chrysostom with malfeasance, abuse and immorality.<sup>44</sup> The purpose of the convention was to remove John from his office.

This tribunal, held at an oak tree on the outskirts of Constantinople,<sup>45</sup> did not feature the guest of honor. The charges

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<sup>41</sup> Neill, 14.

<sup>42</sup> See the Synod on the Oak section below.

<sup>43</sup> Neill, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Baur, 2.257. Cf. Kelley, 220. Kelley notes the illegality of this trial. Theophilus was far from his own see and thus, according to canon 5 of the Nicene Council decision, he had no authority by which to call a trial to order, much less to impress a decision.

<sup>45</sup> Stephens, 309, notes that "trial" was held outside of the city for fear of a riot on the part of the people. Chrysostom was their beloved bishop who had stood by their side. As they would demonstrate soon, they were willing to fight to keep him.

against Chrysostom were made in his absence and were leveled on him by two deacons whom John had disciplined.<sup>46</sup> However, the most serious of these charges was that Chrysostom had used words "offensive to the Empress."<sup>47</sup> The assembled bishops found him guilty on twenty-seven counts<sup>48</sup> of these crimes and deposed him of his position. Thus, Chrysostom was arrested and exiled.<sup>49</sup> He was sent to the eastern side of the Bosphorus Sea. However, before he left, he made explicitly clear to his disciples that the work of Christ must continue, despite what should happen to him.<sup>50</sup> Again, Chrysostom's compassion and zeal for Christ overflow the circumstances he faces.

Chrysostom's exile, however, was simply too much for the people of Constantinople to bear. A rebellion was in the air, despite the parting plea of Chrysostom for peace and calm.<sup>51</sup> The people demanded the return of their beloved bishop, cognizant that these charges were fallacious and jealousy ridden. An earthquake struck the region of Constantinople at approximately this same time. The always-superstitious Queen Eudoxia was convinced that this was an omen. She pleaded with Emperor Arcadius to allow Chrysostom to return. Since, Arcadius seems to have never truly desired to banish Chrysostom in the first place, this was a welcome and easily granted the request. Thus, Arcadius lifted the banishment of Chrysostom and he was returned to his position.

However, those in the capital city who had worked hard for his banishment arose in rebellion. Specifically, Isaac, the enemy of Chrysostom who had sided with Theophilus in the Synod of the Oak, barricaded himself inside a temple. The loyal followers of John were too happy to join the troops in chastising the irascible Isaac. A bloody conflict ensued

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<sup>46</sup> Kelley, 218.

<sup>47</sup> Palladius, VIII.

<sup>48</sup> Kelley, Appendix C, has a complete listing of all charges.

<sup>49</sup> Palladius, VIII.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Chrysostom issued a command to his disciples and to the people of Constantinople to maintain continuity with the adversaries of the church and to avoid signing any decree deposing him as bishop.

<sup>51</sup> Kelley, 230.

between the troops of Arcadius and the followers of Isaac. With no surprise, the troops ultimately overran them and order was restored.<sup>52</sup>

Chrysostom's return to Constantinople was a triumphal one. In early October 403, John reentered the city to much pomp and circumstance. The people rejoiced at having him back in his pulpit and among them, and they came in droves to hear him preach. However, their joy would not be long.

Later in that same year, Queen Eudoxia had a statue of herself dedicated in front of the senate house, only a short distance from the cathedral. The dedicatory celebration was held on a Sunday and was eminently disruptive to the nearby worship service. The noise was interrupting the worship. Instead of stopping the service for a moment and request the dedication be held later, John lost his temper and complained publicly about this commotion referring to it as an "insult to the church."<sup>53</sup> Such a mistake would prove to be his last in Constantinople. Eudoxia received this as a personal attack and deliberated John's ultimate permanent exile.

#### *Final Exile*

The weak-willed Arcadius was convinced through strong-armed means to banish Chrysostom in the summer of 404.<sup>54</sup> Thus, John was carried quietly away in the dark of the night to the remote village of Cucusus in Armenia (modern Turkey), a great distance from the capital city.<sup>55</sup> His removal, unfortunately, was the catalyst for a major uprising. The senate house and the cathedral were burnt to the ground. The people were chastised by Arcadius for these treasonous acts, albeit some have presented evidence that it was John's enemies setting these fires.<sup>56</sup> Yet, the city had lost her great bishop.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kelley, 234.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>55</sup> Palladius, X.

<sup>56</sup> Kelley, 254.

<sup>57</sup> According to Palladius, X., Chrysostom was succeeded by Arsakios, the younger brother of Nectarius who had preceded John as bishop of Constantinople. Palladius records Arsakios as "dumb as a fish, inactive as a frog".

The journey to Cucusus was fraught with difficulty other than the normal hazards of long-distance travel. Several bishops made known their animosity for Chrysostom and warned him not to stay in their diocese under threat of his death. Most notable of these was Leontios, bishop of Antioch near Tarsus. Aggravated by perceived slights to him during the reign of Chrysostom, he met John and his entourage at the city's edge and threatened him immediately.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the long and difficult journey went.

Once Chrysostom arrived in Cucusus, he was not abused. During his three-year stay in Cucusus he was treated with respect and kindness. Unfortunately, the caustic and unforgiving mountain climate would prove too much for his asceticism-weakened body. The hard nights and unfamiliar food made Chrysostom's existence difficult. He was allowed to disciple regularly, however, the worst castigation of all was that he could hardly ever preach.

While Chrysostom was far from any influential position, his enemies still harbored deep animosity for him. Thus, a decree came from the throne that John move to Pithyus on the Black Sea in the summer of 407.<sup>59</sup> Pithyus stood at the farthest corner of the empire. The sick and aged bishop was forced to make the trip under the worst of conditions. No heed was given to his frail condition or to his fragile physique, thus, he was compelled to make the journey on foot. He, therefore, was exposed to blistering sun by day and the freezing mountain air by night.<sup>60</sup>

Far into the journey, Chrysostom and his entourage stopped for the night at the village of Komana. A small Christian community, they received the bishop lovingly and ministered to him during his brief overnight stay at the chapel of St. Basiliscus. The next day, Chrysostom begged the soldiers to wait until the late morning to continue the journey, sensing the nearness of his own death. Sadly, they refused and compelled John to continue the journey. After a short three miles his strength elapsed, and thus, the entourage returned to Komana. Upon their return Chrysostom requested and received a white robe

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<sup>58</sup> Kelley, 254.

<sup>59</sup> There is some question as to the author of this decree. Eudoxia died in 406 from complications of a miscarriage. However, the hatred and animosity toward John was more deeply entrenched than simply the throne. Thus, with imperial authority, the decree came forth.

<sup>60</sup> Kelley, 284.

and the Holy Communion. With the words "Glory to God for all things," he died.<sup>61</sup>

The inhumanity of Chrysostom's enemies stands in stark contrast to bishop's gentleness and patience. "While their names are generally forgotten, the name of Chrysostom lives on."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Baur, 423; Cf. Kelley, 285.

<sup>62</sup> Neill, 16.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE WRITINGS AND INFLUENCE OF CHRYSOSTOM

The breadth and extent of the writings of Chrysostom are legendary. His bibliographic list is long.<sup>63</sup> During his ministry, especially at Constantinople, his work was printed and published on a frequent and discursive manner. Furthermore, his use of the Scripture within his writings marks his great respect for the Bible and its critical role in scholarship. As an example of this commitment to the Bible, in his *Sermons on the Statues* alone Chrysostom quotes at least 400 times from the scriptures covering 45 books of the canon and 3 books of the Apocrypha.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the word of God was both authoritative and final for Chrysostom. This commitment to the word of God is demonstrated repeatedly through his works whether they be General works, practical works, theological works, sermons or polemical.

#### *General Work*

The earliest work written by Chrysostom represents the initial awkwardness of his in-process style. The essay *A King and a Monk Compared* (ca. 379) dealt with the difficult issue of social order within the world and the church.<sup>65</sup> According to Chrysostom, the perspective of the world is distorted. Despite popular opinion, it is not the emperor but the monk, committed to God and living in the light of the commands of God, who is truly rich. Furthermore, eventually, the monk is the "true king."<sup>66</sup> Using the words of Christ and the teachings of the

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<sup>63</sup> Please see Appendix Two for a wide listing of the extant writings of Chrysostom.

<sup>64</sup> Willey, 171. Cf. Robert Allen Krupp, *Saint John Chrysostom, a Scripture Index* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984).

<sup>65</sup> John Chrysostom and David G. Hunter, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk/against the Opponents of the Monastic Life : Two Treatises*, *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity* ; V. 13 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

<sup>66</sup> Kelly, 21.

Apostle Paul, Chrysostom demonstrates the veracity of the concern for the poor and their inheritance.

### *Practical Works*

On the subject of personal morality and purity comes Chrysostom's work *On Virginity*.<sup>67</sup> Born out of his own deep ascetic convictions and the widespread ascetic perspectives of the age, Chrysostom argues for celibacy and virginity on Biblical grounds. According to the words of Jesus (Matt 19:12) and the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 7:7), those who remained celibate were best able to serve and glorify God. Thus, the aim of his work is to demonstrate the high place of those who embrace this lifestyle of celibacy and live according to it. Moreover, the Lord has called a special few to the life of widowhood. This special role is to be embraced and employed as gift from God for his glory.

Furthermore, *On Virginity* was written as a polemic against the practice of monks and nuns living together in a "spiritual union." This thinly veiled immorality was a stench in Chrysostom's nostrils, especially since the blame for these unions was placed at the feet of Jesus. Therefore, this detestable practice must be stopped. Such a desire is reflected in the strong language of John to even his close friend Olympia, a wealthy widow and stalwart ally of Chrysostom.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Christianity devoid of its intimate connection with the commands of the scripture is not true and biblical Christianity and will not draw others to Christ.

Chrysostom wrote a second practical work about home and personal life. In his work *On Marriage and Family Life*,<sup>69</sup> John deals with practicality of every day of life at home. Although he never married, his work employed the epistles of Paul to describe the purpose and operation of a Christian household. His contention matches his life. A lifestyle and home

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<sup>67</sup> John Chrysostom, Sally Rieger Shore, and Elizabeth A. Clark, *On Virginity ; against Remarriage*, Studies in Women and Religion ; V. 9 (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1983).

<sup>68</sup> John Chrysostom and Olympias, *Lettres à Olympias*, Sources Chrétiennes ; No 13 (Paris,: Éditions du Cerf, 1947).

<sup>69</sup> John Chrysostom, Catharine P. Roth, and David Anderson, *On Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986).

demonstrating the truth of the words of Christianity is the most effective means of evangelism.

### *Theological or Expository Works*

Chrysostom's work *Instructions on Baptism* recently was discovered in a monastery on Mt. Athos in Greece. This work contains a series of catechumenical statements and doctrines written by Chrysostom for his parishoners in Antioch, perhaps as late as AD 390.<sup>70</sup> Reflecting his strong belief in the dramatic change brought on by baptism Chrysostom presents his instructions for those nearing baptism or recently baptized. Baptism, for Chrysostom, was not merely the act of immersion but was a lifestyle choice for a lifetime. Thus, the instruction accompanying baptism was preparation for a lifetime commitment to Christ. This should not be surprising given the dangerous climate into which Chrysostom was born.

Chrysostom also wrote several expository treatises on the gospels. Works such as *Treatise on the Gospel of Matthew*, *The Lord's Prayer*, and *Treatise on the Gospel of John* each reflect the great love for the Gospels that Chrysostom harbored. Chrysostom knew of no greater subject matter than the life and ministry of his Lord Jesus Christ.

### *Sermons*

In 387, Chrysostom wrote and preached what may be his most famous work.<sup>71</sup> In *Sermons on the Statues*, Chrysostom sought to settle the spirits of the populace after a revolt against the taxation policies of Emperor Theodosius.<sup>72</sup> Wearied by the excessive taxation of their assets, the people of Antioch began to riot. In their zeal, they struck down the statues of both

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<sup>70</sup> Harkins, 1.

<sup>71</sup> For a full treatment of these issues, please refer to Mary Albania Burns, *Saint John Chrysostom's Homilies on the Statues: A Study of Their Rhetorical Qualities and Form* (Washington, D.C.,: The Catholic university of America, 1930), Thomas M. Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of St. John Chrysostom* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967).

<sup>72</sup> McDow and Reid, 102.

the emperor and his wife. This was a move tantamount to striking the emperor himself. Thus, there was a serious price to pay for such treason. When the Emperor did retaliate with force the people recoiled under the weight of his anger. Chrysostom stood with his people. He preached messages of hope and strength found in the power of God. His preaching is founded on the word of God and power found within it, even in the most desperate of times.

The *Sermons on the Statues* are the best example of the oratory style of John. His language definitively influenced by the linguistic structure and vocabulary of the Koine Greek of the New Testament. His impassioned eloquence marks the influence of the classical orators of his training. His compassion for the people of his diocese connect these sermons to the people in an intimate manner. These sermons, strong in the polemic yet strong in their compassion, demonstrate the ability of Chrysostom to span great widths in his preaching. Thus, because of these sermons, people came to the cathedral, knowing that the loving bishop would speak to them frankly, but would speak to them in love.

A second sermonic work dealt with another difficult issue of John's day. In the *Sermons on Genesis*, John deals with those assert a problem in creation. Furthermore, John presents an introduction of the concept of a savior even in the opening days of Creation.<sup>73</sup> While not all of these have survived,<sup>74</sup> those that have survived provide an invaluable insight into the thought and theology of the early Eastern church. However, instead of presenting these concepts in a typical Antiochene academic fashion, Chrysostom sought to bring these difficult concepts into the personal lives of people, thereby connecting their lives with the Bible. This, John believed, would translate into changed hearts, minds and lives.

Chrysostom's writings on the person and work of God in *The Incomprehensible nature of God* demonstrates the depth of his understanding of God.<sup>75</sup> While he ultimately concludes that the

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<sup>73</sup> John Chrysostom and Laurence Brottier, *Sermons Sur La Genèse*, Sources Chrétiennes ; No 433 (Paris: Cerf, 1998). Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986).

<sup>74</sup> Kelly, 58. Kelley notes that only eight complete sermons have survived.

<sup>75</sup> John Chrysostom and Paul W. Harkins, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984).

human mind is not capable of fully grasping the nature of God, his systemized explanations bring the words of the scripture to life to allow hearers (or readers) entrance into at least his understanding.

### *Polemical Works*

Chrysostom wrote polemical works to attack or confront those who were teaching heresy. His most famous work, *Discourse against Judaizing Christians*, demonstrates his intimate familiarity with Judaism and, more importantly, the Old Testament.<sup>76</sup> This work attacks those who attempted to force Judaism into the church as a means to salvation. With great vigor Chrysostom wrote these sermons, denouncing those with such wicked intent. These works are so strongly written that presently some refer to this work as "anti-semitic".<sup>77</sup> While this is an understandable accusation, given the polemical and attacking tone of the writing, it is not fair to characterize it in this manner. Chrysostom compels the Jews, as well as others, to come to Christ as the fulfillment of the Mosaic law.

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<sup>76</sup> John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1979).

<sup>77</sup> This accusation appears in many places, but appears best assessed from the following site. Accessed from <http://www.chrysostom.org/jews.html> on 18 March 2002.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHRYSOSTOM'S EVANGELISTIC METHODS

Chrysostom's primary means of evangelistic centered around three canons: his weekly sermons focusing on the word of God, his lifestyle, and his writings. His meticulously prepared sermons were powerful in their content largely due to high content of scripture and the time spent in prayer and preparation. His godly lifestyle overflowed onto those within his diocese.

#### *Chrysostom as a Mission Sending Agent*

The role of Chrysostom as priest and archbishop allowed him the privilege of playing the role of a mission-sending agency. John Chrysostom had an ardent concern to extend the kingdom of God beyond its current reach. Thus, he sent missionaries to the Goths on the northern end of the empire.<sup>78</sup> Even late in life during his exilic period he dreamed of sending missionaries to the Goths and watching them raise up clergy and missionaries of their own.<sup>79</sup>

However, Chrysostom's missionary efforts to the Jews were much more heavy-handed. He sent mercenaries to destroy temples and even had wealthy individuals within the church to defray the cost while archbishop of Constantinople. He implored the Jews to come to Christ, even to the point of using public decrees and, if necessary, force.<sup>80</sup> He sought to show them the error of their theology by whatever means at his disposal. However, even in this manner, his goal was to demonstrate that Christ was the fulfillment of the law, not the negation of it. His passion, therefore, was well placed albeit enforced violently.

#### *Chrysostom's Social Evangelism*

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<sup>78</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The First Five Centuries, A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 186.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

Chrysostom was persuaded that the most effective means of evangelism was a godly lifestyle. "There would be no more heathen if we would be true Christians".<sup>81</sup> He encouraged all Christians slave owners to erect chapels on their estates and "work for the conversion of those who tilled the soil."<sup>82</sup> These radical concepts proved to be the distinctive factor in making Chrysostom the beloved priest and bishop. His willingness to live in frugality rather than lavishness demonstrated the veracity of his words.

### *Chrysostom's Pulpit Evangelism*

Chrysostom appears to have prepared meticulously for his time in the pulpit. His great sermons did not occur by accident.<sup>83</sup> Each of his sermons demonstrates a deliberateness and deep sense of thought rather than contemporaneous and coincidental speaking. Furthermore, the power of his preaching belies the time spent in prayer over his messages. While he was known as a steady and hard worker, he was also known as a man of devout prayer, constantly in touch with the Lord.

Chrysostom's messages are expository in nature, an oddity for his day and geographical location. While some of his sermons demonstrate a thematic intent,<sup>84</sup> his point-by-point development of the scripture is worthy of emulation. Also, Chrysostom allowed the word of the Lord to speak for itself. While he, above all others, was worthy of speaking for its defense, it appears that frequently he would assert the scripture and allow it to speak in its own defense. For example, in the *Sermons on Genesis*, Chrysostom strikes at the core of the allegorical interpretative school as he commends a literal understanding of the book. A literal creation in a literal six days was the understanding and exposition of John.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Neill, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Examples of thematic are the *Sermons on the Statues* and his work on personal life and the home.

<sup>85</sup> Chrysostom John and Robert C. Hill, *Homilies on Genesis*, Fathers of the Church ; V. 74, 82, 87 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986). Cf. Chrysostom John, *Homilies on Genesis* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986).

## CONCLUSION

Chrysostom's contributions to evangelism in the early church are unmistakable. His eloquence and the sheer multitude of writings make his contribution to the early church critical. When the church needed a well-spoken leader, Chrysostom had been prepared by God for just such a role.

The life of Chrysostom demonstrates the value of godly heritage and the importance of a solid foundation. His preparation for ministry was rich in learning. The skills he gained here were honed to a razor-sharp edge in the forge of the priesthood and bishopric. His deep love for Christ combined with these acquired skills and God-given talent to make Chrysostom a man of importance in the early church.

The writings of Chrysostom demonstrate the breadth of his abilities. His writings are from most every book in the New Testament. He deals with theological issues, such as the problem of pain and the creation of the world. He deals with practical matters, such as how does one live life as a Christian while living in a pagan empire. He deals with issues of church and discipleship, teaching both new Christians and priests how to exert the truth of their Christianity into their every-day lives.

The evangelistic methods of Chrysostom demonstrate his compassion and his vision for reaching the lost. While some have regarded him as a loose canon, his reputation as an evangelist and compassionate pastor have made his example legendary in nature and powerful in pattern.

APPENDIX ONE

**Chronology of St. John Chrysostom's Life**

- ca. 344-354 - Born at Antioch in Syria.
- ca. 367/8        Baptism
- 370-376        Monk, near Antioch.
- 381            Ordained Deacon at Antioch.
- 386            Ordained Priest and began to preach.
- 398            Leaves Antioch to be archbishop of Constantinople.
- 401            Visits Ephesus and elsewhere.
- 403            Synod of the Oak. Chrysostom banished and recalled.
- 404            Definitively banished to Cucusus in Lower Armeina.
- 407            Dies at Kormana on September 14.

## APPENDIX TWO

### List of the Many of the Writings of Chrysostom

#### Exegetical Works:

- The Beatitudes: Excerpt from the Commentary on Matthew.
- The Lord's Prayer: Excerpt from the Commentary on Matthew.

#### On the New Testament:

- Matthew
- The Beatitudes: Excerpt from the Commentary on Matthew.
- The Lord's Prayer: Excerpt from the Commentary on Matthew.
- John
- Acts
- Romans
- I & II Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- I & II Thessalonians
- I & II Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- On the Paralytic Let Down Through the Roof

#### Letters:

- Exhortation to Theodore
- Letters to Innocent I, Pope of Rome
- Letters to Olympia
- Letter to a Young Widow - Also known as *On Virginit*y
- Letter to some Priests of Antioch

#### General Work:

- A King and a Monk Compared

#### Liturgical Works:

- The Divine Liturgy of St. John - Adapted to music in a multitude of settings.
- Prayer of St. John Chrysostom According to the Hours of the Day and Night
- Prayers of Preparation Before Holy Communion

**Sermons and Treatises:**

- Easter Sermon
- Sermons on the Statues
- On Eutropius
- Instructions to Catachumens / Baptismal Instructions
- On Lowliness of Mind
- On Caution Regarding Anathematization
- On the Power of Demons
- On the Priesthood
- Homily on St. Babylas
- Homily on St. Ignatius: Steophens-Brandram translation.
- Sermons on the Statues
- To Those Who Had Not Attended the Assembly, on Resentment
- A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself

**Polemical Works:**

- Against the Judaizers 1-6, 7, 8 - Also known as *Discourse against Judaizing Christians*
- Against Marcionists and Manichaeans
- Against Publishing the Errors of the Brethren

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