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Principles, Practices, and Problems-The Pastoral Theology of St. John Chrysostom

Jack Ferguson

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, revferg@lhi.net

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Seminar Paper

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Early Church Fathers: St. John Chrysostom

Quentin F. Wesselschmidt

Principles, Practices, and Problems:

The Pastoral Theology of

St. John Chrysostom

Jack D. Ferguson

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Introduction

Whenever one examines the pastoral theology of an individual there are actually two separate, yet related, subjects which come under consideration. The first of these includes pastoral theology as a set of biblical principles, church doctrines, ecclesiastical disciplines, and applied methodologies. Any discussion in these areas necessitates an understanding of what the Scriptures say about the origins and functions of the pastoral office in general, and of what the textual evidence discloses concerning early Christian pastors in particular. A thorough acquaintance with the historical and modern day teachings of the Christian Church also contributes to a deeper appreciation for the development of pastoral theology. This is, likewise, true of a familiarity with the various ways in which the Church has organized and systematized its approaches to ministry throughout the previous two millennia, and of the multitude of methods which it has employed in order to convert biblical principles, doctrinal beliefs, and institutional systems into the everyday care of souls.

The second subject relates to the man himself as pastor. His personal and family background, his formal and informal education, the historical setting in which he lived, the particular and unique circumstances which developed around him, his individual world view, as well as his own relationship with God form the nucleus of his pastoral theology. The interactions which he had with other people, the oral and written works which he produced, the pastoral challenges which he faced in his ministry, and the critical issues

which were part of his life experience all serve as ready sources of information which reveal much about the nature, substance, and application of his pastoral theology.

Without following too closely the reductionistic patterns of the secular world, it may be useful to establish a basic framework for pastoral theology by isolating several illustrations or explanations of it. The ministries of St. Paul, St. Timothy, and St. Titus abound with scriptural illustrations, and these are evident in the defense which St. Paul made of his mission to the gentile world,¹ in the counsel which he offered to St. Timothy on how to conduct his ministry,² and in the advice which he gave to St. Titus on the function and demeanor of a bishop.³ Briefly, pastoral theology is ". . . the doctrine of the knowledge of God and of divine things, applied by a pastor to the spiritual needs of his flock."⁴ Some have called it ". . . the art of applying the truth."⁵ Others think of it in terms of the cure of or the care for souls.

These detailed, separate, yet related subjects bring us, then, to a consideration of St. John Chrysostom. In an article entitled "The Pastor as Icon", Robert Wilken compares the pastoral theology

¹Galatians 2:1-10.

²II Timothy 2:1-7.

³Titus 1:5-16.

⁴Erwin L. Lueker (Ed.), Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis and London, 1975), p. 607.

⁵Ibid.

of St. Gregory of Nazianzen, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory the Great in an effort to establish the essence of the priesthood and, hence, that of pastoral theology. He concludes that,

"Unlike the physician whose healing is confined to the body and hence to the surface, the priest is concerned with the inner life, the hidden chambers of the heart, which are barred if there is no bond of trust between people and pastor."⁶

Chrysostom himself revealed a portion of his attitudes and beliefs by saying that ". . . the priestly office is indeed discharged on earth, but it ranks amongst heavenly ordinances. . . ." ⁷ For him the priesthood was the highest calling imaginable. He was a bishop with the heart and soul of a monk, and his homilies and other writings offer a translucent theological view of the Christian life which is as genuine as it is inspiring.

St. John Chrysostom served in the upper ranks of the clergy in two of the major metropolitan areas in the East. He was both deacon and presbyter in Antioch the capital of Syria, and he was bishop in Constantinople the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. Antioch was an ancient, prosperous, and beautiful city with a population of plus or minus 200,000. It was the first place on record where the followers of Jesus of Nazareth were called Christians,⁸ and it had also been one of the locations for the

⁶Robert L. Wilken, "The Pastor as Icon", in Dialog, Vol. 32, Winter 1993, p. 22.

⁷St. John Chrysostom, Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood = Priesthood III.4, in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers = NPNF, First Series, Vol. IX. Trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), p. 46.

⁸Acts 11:26.

apostolic work of both St. Peter and St. Paul.⁹ Apart from its noble orthodox Christian heritage, Antioch had experienced the disruptive influences of heresy and schism since A.D. 330. Arianism, Sabellianism, and Meletianism had overrun this community and the surrounding region with disastrous and disabling results.

By contrast, Constantine the Great had re-designed the already extant city of Byzantium into the Christian capital of the East. He named it Constantinople, his Nova Roma. This was the seat of emperors and empresses, and it had been the home of the Arian Emperor Constantius II (r. 337-361), of the Apostate Emperor Julian (r. 361-363), and of the Great Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379-395). From A.D. 395-408 it was domus regis for Emperor Arcadius and for Chrysostom's great nemesis, Empress Eudoxia. This was the city of spacious palaces and apartments, of the magnificent cathedral Hagia Sophia, of other notable churches such as Hagia Irene and Hagioi Apostoloi which exhibited Constantine the Great's new domed style of architecture, and there was also the huge hippodrome which sprawled across the downtown area. Following the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in A.D. 325, Constantinople was the site of the Second Ecumenical Council in A.D. 381. The people of both Antioch and Constantinople were Greek-speaking. They lived in pluralistic societies of orthodox and heterodox Christians, pagans of every known variation, and Jews of every sect and persuasion. An ever-increasing number of devotees demonstrated the fact that virginity, celibacy, and varying forms of monasticism provided viable

⁹Acts 14:26-28; Galatians 2:11.

alternative life-styles for the Christian men and women of the mid-to-late fourth century.

These brief references provide a partial identification for the world which St. John Chrysostom entered in perhaps the year 347.¹⁰ His father was Secundus and his mother was Anthousa, a Christian woman of remarkable faith and piety.¹¹ Although his family name or patronymic is unknown, history identifies him from the earliest time simply as John, or John of Antioch. He did not receive the epithet "Golden Mouth", or "Chrysostom", until at least the close of the fifth century, and perhaps even later.¹² Between A.D. 368 and 370 he received Christian Baptism as an adult, and shortly thereafter Bishop Meletius of Antioch consecrated him as a lector. Once again, the dates are uncertain, but St. John engaged in a rigorous period of strict monasticism and asceticism, possibly as early as A.D. 372, and perhaps until as late as A.D. 381. What is certain is that during that time he escaped ordination into the priesthood by means of a crude deception at the expense of his

¹⁰N.B.: Chrysostom's birth year is uncertain, but most reasonable estimates range from A.D. 346-349. Other attempts at dating his birth extend from A.D. 344-354.

¹¹St. John Chrysostom, Letter to a Young Widow = Widow 1, in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers = NPNF, First Series, Vol. IX. Ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), p. 122.

¹²W. R. W. Stephens, Saint John Chrysostom: His Life and Times (London, 1880), pp. 13 and 427; and Chrysostom, Priesthood in the Prolegomena ed. by Philip Schaff, NPNF IX, p. 5.

N.B.: Some scholars assign the first use of the term "Chrysostom" in connection with John of Antioch to Pope Vigilius in A.D. 553.

friend, Basil.¹³ His explanation, in part, is that he took the priesthood so seriously that he did not wish to appear too eager to enter it, thus detracting from his own credibility.

The remainder of St. John Chrysostom's life is fairly well documented. He was a Deacon at Antioch from A.D. 381-386, and it is probable that during this period he wrote one of his most notable works entitled the Treatise Concerning the Priesthood.¹⁴ From A.D. 386-398 he was a Presbyter at Antioch, and between September of 386 and the Autumn of 387 he preached his eight Discourses Against Judaizing Christians. In A.D. 398 Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, a formidable enemy, ordained him Bishop of Constantinople. During Easter week of his third year of residence at Constantinople in A.D. 404, St. John Chrysostom began a series of fifty-five homilies in the form of A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, and he completed it before the end of the year. His first exile of only a few days duration occurred in A.D. 403 at the hands of the outraged Empress Eudoxia. His respite was brief, and he was banished again in A.D. 404. His second exile lasted until his death in A.D. 407 at Comana while he was en route to Pityus on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. It was not until January 27, 438 that his relics were returned to Constantinople.

The importance of this limited outline of the life of St. John Chrysostom is that it highlights the pastoral periods of his work

¹³Chrysostom, Priesthood I.6; NPNF IX, pp. 34-35.

¹⁴N.B.: Some scholars date this document between A.D. 375-381, although most modern scholars do not.

within the context of the two metropolitan communities which he served. It also locates within these periods several of his major works which yield, upon examination, a wealth of material as well as many points of comparison concerning the rudiments of his pastoral theology. One way to access and identify this information is to examine, first of all, the basic principles of pastoral theology as they present themselves in the larger corpus of St. John Chrysostom's treatises, letters, homilies, and commentaries, especially his Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood. Subsequently, it is beneficial to narrow the search and consider some of the positive ways in which St. John, as presbyter and bishop, put his principles into practice. This requires a review of several of his written works from the perspective of studying case histories. Notable sources here include An Exhortation to Theodore After his Fall, Letter to a Young Widow, and Instructions to Catechumens. Finally, it is enlightening to look at a problem area in St. John's pastoral theology regarding his treatment of the Jews and Judaizing Christians. On the surface, at least, this necessitates exposing and explaining one of the negative aspects of his pastoral work by comparing the background, purpose, and content of Discourses Against Judaizing Christians with A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. With all of these sources and issues in mind, then, a framework for the remainder of this presentation gradually takes shape. What emerges is a detailed consideration of the principles, practices, and problems of St. John Chrysostom's pastoral theology.

Part I: Principles

It is somewhat risky to classify the beliefs of people and their singular approaches to such entities as the Word of God, the holy ministry, and the Christian life. These multi-faceted topics, plus the general rigidity of categories can easily lead to falling into the trap of relying upon narrow definitions or false implications, thereby overlooking or ignoring other significant elements and details. Therefore, whatever one might conclude about St. John Chrysostom, it is likely to result in a partial or truncated representation of his theological views. However, one can at least say that his life, ministry, and writings, reveal a man who was rigorously ascetic and nominally synergistic in his attitudes toward faith, life, and eternal salvation, and that he vigorously urged these pieties upon his clergy and the laity alike.¹⁵ As a theologian he was thoroughly christocentric in his understanding of the pastoral office. He was an insightful and pastoral agent of instruction, intervention, and healing in the daily lives of his parishioners, considering that they were part of a fallen humanity. Thus, he characterizes his understanding of the priesthood in terms of its vigilant, protecting, self-sacrificing, and Christ-like nature by pressing home the point that,

"A priest ought to be sober minded, and penetrating in discernment, and possessed of innumerable eyes in every direction, as one who lives not for himself alone but for so great a multitude."¹⁶

¹⁵Chrysostom, Priesthood V and VI, NPNF IX, pp. 70-83; and Chrysostom, Widow 7, NPNF IX, pp. 127-128.

¹⁶Chrysostom, Priesthood III.12, NPNF IX, p. 51.

The comments and analyses which other biographers and historians have made regarding St. John likewise support these general assessments.¹⁷

The formative influences of St. John Chrysostom's pastoral theology grew from a colorful variety of sources. His teacher Libanios was one of the more important and forceful figures in his life, as was his mother Anthusa.¹⁸ The adoption of rhetoric as a guide to the truth, in combination with a select, yet lively, acquaintance with the works of non-Christian authors contributed to his skill and relevance as a homiletician. He also gained frequent encouragement and considerable direction from the responses of his listeners. However, nothing had more influence on his private life or on his pastoral work than his vast and remarkable knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.¹⁹

St. John is an exemplary representative of the Antiochene school of biblical theology. In Syrian Antioch the characteristic method of interpretation was literal and non-allegorical. It depended upon the integrity and exegetical revelation of the text itself, using Scripture to interpret Scripture. True to form, the Word of God for St. John was both precise and reliable. It is not surprising that he thought of God's Word in terms of a divine

¹⁷Stephens, Chrysostom, pp. 390-395; and Dr. Neander, The Life of St. Chrysostom (London, 1845), pp. 295-296, 381-386.

¹⁸J. N. D. Kelly, Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom - Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop (Ithaca, NY, 1995), pp. 5-7.

¹⁹Robert Allen Krupp, Shepherding the Flock of God: The Pastoral Theology of John Chrysostom (New York, 1991), pp. 56-61.

condescension. In other words, it was God's loving gift to human kind, reaching down to where people lived, and touching them at the level of their deepest and greatest need.²⁰ Due to a compelling sense of necessity St. John repeatedly emphasized this thought in his preaching. He believed that since God is knowable only incompletely in the here and now, mere glimpses of him are all that the Scriptures make visible. However, people can readily see his kingship in this world through the variety of methods by which he loves and cares for them.²¹

As a result of his approach to biblical interpretation, and on the basis of his unlimited acquaintance with the texts of the Old and New Testaments, it is possible to identify several of St. John's principles of pastoral theology. First of all, he considered a pastor to be like a physician who not only varies his treatments, but who also has the best of medicines at his disposal. As he indicates in one of his homilies,

". . . indeed the school of the Church is an admirable surgery--a surgery not for bodies, but for souls. For it is spiritual and sets right, not fleshly wounds, but errors of the mind, and of these errors and wounds the medicine is the word. This medicine is compounded, not from the herbs growing on the earth, but from the words proceeding from heaven--this no hands of physicians, but tongues of preachers have dispensed."²²

²⁰Ibid., pp. 71-72, and 77.

²¹Ibid., pp. 83-84.

²²St. John Chrysostom, Homily: Against Publishing the Errors of the Brethren = Against Publishing Errors 1, in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers = NPNF, First Series, Vol. IX. Ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), p. 235.

Robert Krupp notes the twofold fact that, according to St. John's view, the call of the pastor is to motivate people to godly living through preaching and teaching, and he is likewise responsible for the practical outcome of his message in terms of its acceptance or rejection by his hearers.²³ In the Second Instruction to Catechumens the Bishop of Constantinople tells the candidates for Holy Baptism that,

"I have come to ask first of all for some fruit in return for the words lately said out of brotherly love to you. For we do not speak in order that ye should hear simply, but in order that ye should remember what has been said, and may afford us evidence of this by your works. Yea, rather, not us, but, God, who knows the secrets of the heart."²⁴

Regarding the public discharge of the divine office, the primary goal of a pastor's sermon is to please God rather than the congregation or the outside world.²⁵ To that end, the skillful and effective pastor must remain indifferent both to the praise which emanates from those who favor him, as well as to the envious and slanderous remarks which come from his critics and detractors.²⁶

It is not surprising, then, that St. John patterned his biblically oriented theology and christocentric ministry after St. Paul, the greatest preacher and teacher in the New Testament. In

²³Krupp, Shepherding the Flock, pp. 53-56.

²⁴St. John Chrysostom, Instructions to Catechumens = Catechumens II.1, in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers = NPNE, First Series, Vol. IX. Trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), p. 165.

²⁵Chrysostom, Priesthood V.7, NPNE IX, pp. 72-73.

²⁶Ibid., V.1 and 8, NPNE IX, pp. 70 and 73; and Ibid., V.4-5, NPNE IX, pp. 71-72.

St. Paul he found someone who had mastered with skill and discipline the spiritual treatments for the people whom he shepherded, and St. John wisely chose this apostle as his model.²⁷ Although he had been a monk and continued to live an ascetic life-style, St. John did not find a suitable model for ministry in Christian monasticism. What he did take from the cloister and the hermitage, however, was the practice of daily moderation and the spiritual focus of the monks. He considered these things to be worth emulating by every Christian. From a secular point of view, St. John also looked to urban life as a model for ministry. Whereas Emperor Julian the Apostate had attempted to de-centralize political power and disperse it throughout the various urban centers in the Roman Empire, St. John recognized in this the possibility for the Church to benefit more people if it structured its teaching and acts of charity the same way.²⁸

One significant result of these different influences is that St. John's pastoral theology had an impact in four primary areas: morality, dogmatics, apologetics, and polemics.²⁹ He saw each living person as being a target for temptation and seduction.³⁰ This meant that the cross of Christ had to occupy the central

²⁷Krupp, Shepherding the Flock, pp. 38-39.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 37-38.

²⁹St. John Chrysostom, Discourses Against Judaizing Christians = Against Judaizing Christians in the Introduction of The Fathers of the Church, A New Translation, Vol. 68. Ed. by Hermigild Dressler and Trans. by Paul W. Harkins (Washington, D. C., 1979), p. xxiv.

³⁰Krupp, Shepherding the Flock, p. 107.

position in each Christian's life; that faith was not only the capacity to believe in God, but also the power to live a radically changed life; that Holy Baptism was an absolute necessity for salvation; and that daily repentance was necessary for the forgiveness of post-baptismal sins.³¹ As a remedy for the ravages of sin in human beings, St. John identified six medicines in the pharmacopoeia of pastoral care, all of which lead to genuine repentance. They include the condemnation of one's own sin, the maintenance of a humble spirit, prayer, almsgiving, the elimination of anger by forgiving one's debtors, and the conversion of others to the Christian Faith.³²

St. John's pastoral theology led him to recognize the Church as the Body of Christ, the Army of Christ, and the spiritual Mother of the Faithful.³³ These categories or identifications, necessitated both a division of labor, and a classification for areas of responsibility within the Church. For St. John, this meant that the bishops were the primary leaders of the Church, and they served as the visible figures of Christ the Shepherd. They presided over the Church hierarchy, led the Church in its ministry, and preserved the unity of the Flock of God. The priests, on the other hand, tended to the spiritual health of the Flock. They gave absolution to penitents, ministered at the Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism, and decided the outcome of disputes which arose among the

³¹Ibid., pp. 86-89, and 109.

³²Ibid., pp. 109-110.

³³Ibid., pp. 115-116.

people. The deacons and deaconesses, by comparison, were servers. They were like Olympias, the noteworthy deaconess who associated with St. John Chrysostom from the onset of his episcopacy at Constantinople on February 26, 398 until the time of his death in exile on September 14, 407. These servers attended to the needs which social functions and Christian hospitality dictated. They assisted the clergy at Holy Baptism, and performed works of charity and kindness within the Church and the community. In contrast to the higher ranking clergy, St. John believed that the foremost function of the laity was to serve as virgins and monks. Otherwise, they were to raise families, work in society, and be advisors to bishops.³⁴

These ecclesiastical descriptions form a matrix for St. John's institutional view of the Christian Church, and they are the natural outgrowth of his understanding of what Scripture teaches concerning the spiritual care of people. However, on a practical level, the good reputation of a pastor usually grows from the positive ways in which he puts his theology to work. Having some understanding of the principles of St. John Chrysostom's pastoral theology, one might ask the question, Was St. John a pastor in the practical sense of the word? Did he touch the hearts and meet the spiritual needs of those to whom he ministered? What effect did he have on the day to day lives of his people? The answers to these questions provide the agenda for the following section.

³⁴For a more detailed discussion of the roles of the laity, bishops, priests, deacons, and deaconesses see Krupp, Shepherding the Flock, pp. 116-128.

Part II: Practices

In his consecutive roles as deacon and presbyter in Antioch, and as bishop in Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom consistently demonstrated that he both recognized and understood the needs, problems, and life-styles of his clergy, his congregants, and the other members of the communities which he served. He spoke frequently and boldly about the social and moral issues of his day. Avoiding the theater and the hippodrome, giving alms to meet the needs of the poor, displaying modesty of dress and moderation in all things, and practicing chastity both inside and outside of marriage were favorite themes in his preaching, teaching, and pastoral care work.³⁵ He considered it his special province to reform the lower and higher ranking orders of the clergy, including members of the episcopate, and to present the spiritual challenges of the Christian Faith to the hoi polloi and the upper crust of the two cities in which he lived, including the imperial household.³⁶ Many of his own clergy despised him for his pious efforts and his emendations to their habits and life-styles, as did the citizens from the meaner elements of society as well as the people of means themselves. However, the majority of the Christian rank and file seemed to love him effusively. Large crowds gathered in churches to protest the injustices which Bishop Theophilus had spawned against him at the Synod at the Oak (A.D. 403), and they turned out

³⁵Chrysostom, Priesthood in the Prolegomena, Ed. by Philip Schaff in NPNF IX, pp. 10-11.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 11-12; and for a lengthy discussion of clerical and lay reforms see Stephens, Chrysostom, pp. 216-236.

en masse on the Bosphorus as well as in town to celebrate his speedy return.³⁷ Less than a year later during Easter week of A.D. 404, the combined efforts of St. John's ecclesiastical and imperial enemies generated a new wave of assaults, imprisonments, and riotous acts of violence within the Christian community due to the bishop's arrest, trial, and banishment.³⁸

If the written accounts of these events were the only records to which modern historians could gain access, then any current evaluation of St. John Chrysostom's pastoral work would be meager at best. Fortunately, however, the primary source material which comes from his own hand yields an enormous wealth of information which, in turn, exposes many of the practical applications of his pastoral theology. It is not feasible in these brief pages to do an extended case study of all, or even a few, of the scenarios which St. John's letters, homilies, discourses, and treatises present. Yet it is possible to examine some of them in cursory fashion in order to gain an appreciation for the spirituality, practicality, and effectiveness of his pastoral care.

The first of St. John's writings which offers some insight into his pastoral theology in practice is a collection of two letters which he wrote to Theodore of Mopsuestia, a slightly younger fellow monk, who had forsaken the ascetic life for the prospect of marrying Hermione, a young woman with whom Theodore had irresistibly fallen in love. These letters appear together under

³⁷Stephens, Chrysostom, pp. 320 and 322.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 337-338, and 341-342.

the title An Exhortation to Theodore After his Fall, and they are the earliest of St. John's extant works. He wrote them sometime between A.D. 374-381, near the beginning of his monastic period.³⁹ They represent the impassioned plea of a man wrestling for the religious commitment and spiritual well-being of a friend, and they reflect a thorough grounding in the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁰

Letter I might easily bear the subtitle "It is not too late to turn back". After opening the letter on what appears to be a genuine note of sadness, St. John reminds his friend of the despair which the devil's victims often experience, and then assures him that even great sinners can experience reconciliation between themselves and God. He says,

"And speak not to me of those who have committed small sins, but suppose the case of one who is filled full of all wickedness, and let him practice everything which excludes him from the kingdom, and let us suppose that this man is not one of those who were unbelievers from the beginning, but formerly belonged to the believers, and such as were well pleasing to God, but afterwards has become a fornicator, adulterer, effeminate, a thief, a drunkard, a sodomite, a reviler, and everything else of this kind; I will not approve even of this man despairing of himself, although he may have gone on to extreme old age in the practice of this great and unspeakable wickedness."⁴¹

Thus, he speaks consistently of God's loving-kindness and his willingness to restore those who have strayed, and also to severely

³⁹St. John Chrysostom, An Exhortation to Theodore After his Fall = Letters to Theodore in the Introduction, in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers = NPNF, First Series, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), p. 87.

⁴⁰Chrysostom, Letters to Theodore I.5, 8, and II.2, NPNF IX, pp. 94-95, 96, and 112-113.

⁴¹Ibid., I.4, NPNF IX, p. 93.

punish those who stubbornly refuse to repent, as he proves by means of the ancient and modern anecdotes which he uses.⁴² Perhaps the most touching and personal part of this letter comes at the point when St. John adjusts his focus to the central issue of the choice between marriage and monasticism, between Theodore's present woman and his previous way of life. It seems to be St. John's heart speaking the words,

"I know that thou art now admiring the grace of Hermione, and thou judges that there is nothing in the world to be compared to her comeliness; but if you choose, O friend, you shall yourself exceed her in comeliness and gracefulness, as much as golden statues surpass those which are made of clay. For if beauty, when it occurs in the body, so fascinates and excites the minds of most men, when the soul is refulgent, with it what can match beauty and grace of this kind?"⁴³

The letter closes with a renewed plea for genuine repentance, and for perseverance in the same.

Letter II seeks to appeal to Theodore's common sense and his sense of guilt even more so than the first letter. It might well proclaim the subtitle "A promise made is a promise kept". St. John tells Theodore that his behavior simply makes no sense, that what he is doing is comparable to adultery, and that in full view of certain punishment he should look to Christ as his Savior.⁴⁴ In an overly biased diatribe he presents an image of married life which is intended to frighten away even the most prospective and

⁴²Ibid., I.10, 15, and 17-18, NPNF IX, pp. 98, 106-107, and 107-109.

⁴³Ibid., I.14, NPNF IX, p. 103.

⁴⁴Ibid., II.1 and 3, NPNF IX, pp. 111-112, 113, and 114.

resolute bridegroom. With exceptionally broad and humorless strokes he writes,

"Would you have me speak of the domestic cares of wife, and children and slaves? It is an evil thing to wed a very poor wife, or a very rich one; for the former is injurious to the husband's means, the latter to his authority and independence. It is a grievous thing to have children, still more grievous not to have any; for in the latter case marriage has been to no purpose, in the former a bitter bondage has to be undergone. If a child is sick, it is the occasion of no small fear; if he dies an untimely death, there is inconsolable grief; and at every stage of growth there are various anxieties on their account, and many fears and toils. And what is one to say to the rascalities of domestic slaves? Is this then life, Theodore, when one's soul is distracted in so many directions, when a man has to serve so many, to live for so many, and never for himself?"⁴⁵

One shudders to think of what more he could have said. Perhaps that is why he presents a final disclaimer in which he acknowledges his excessive measures, and intimates that he wrote it contrary to his own will and against the good advice of many other people.⁴⁶ The letter does not end exactly here, but on the hopeful note of Theodore's future reconciliation to God and to his former friends and associates.⁴⁷

St. John's appeals to his friend may ultimately have been effective, because Theodore did not marry, and was eventually ordained into the priesthood in A.D. 383. At the age of seventy-two, in A.D. 428, Theodore was still Bishop of Mopsuestia.⁴⁸ In

⁴⁵Ibid., II.5, NPNF IX, p. 115.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 115-116.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 116.

⁴⁸Chrysostom, Letters to Theodore in the Introduction, NPNF IX, p. 87.

any case, what the letters reveal about St. John is that he had the courage to confront difficult pastoral issues with sound counsel based on the Word of God. He was willing to struggle with a friend whom he thought was behaving recklessly and sinfully, rather than condemn him out of hand and turn his back on him. He believed that Theodore had made promises to God and commitments to his fellow monks in good faith, and that these things outweighed any promises which he might have made to Hermione. A man who is capable of expressing himself this forcefully on a critical issue of such magnitude, and who is willing to commit himself this passionately on behalf of his friend, is a pastor in deed as well as in word, and his theology is evident in his ministry.

Another of St. John's letters which indicates similar traits is one which he wrote to a young widow. Internal evidence allows for the dating of this letter between A.D. 378 and 382, at a time when St. John was either a monk, or else had recently accepted ordination as a deacon.⁴⁹ The death of the widow's husband was also a fairly recent occurrence, but not so recent that she had not had some opportunity to experience the initial stages of her grief. St. John waited to write this letter until, in his estimation, a suitable period of time had elapsed.⁵⁰ The contents of the letter suggest the appropriate title "Courage, Strength, and Hope". Consequently, the Deacon predicates his pastoral care for this bereaved woman on the biblical truth that God is the real

⁴⁹Chrysostom, Widow in the Introduction, NPNF IX, p. 119.

⁵⁰Ibid., 1, NPNF IX, p. 121.

Comforter.⁵¹ Using his own mother Anthusa as an example, he assures the woman that "widow" is a title of honor and respect. He attempts to identify with her loss, to comfort her with the knowledge that her Christian husband is better off now than before his death, and to affirm the bond of love which still exists between them, and which distance cannot destroy.⁵² With great tenderness and pastoral affection he writes,

"Now if it is not the name of widow which distresses you, but the loss of such a husband I grant you that all the world over amongst men engaged in secular affairs there have been few like him, so affectionate, so gentle, so humble, so sincere, so understanding, so devout. . . . Wherefore in proportion as you grieve that God has taken away one who was so good and worthy you ought to rejoice that he has departed in much safety and honor, and being released from the trouble which besets this present season of danger, is in great peace and tranquillity."⁵³

Other delicate issues rise to the surface as St. John continues to bridge the chasm between the care giver and the one for whom he cares. He recognizes the genuineness of the widow's present need for security, yet he attempts to draw her on by reminding her of other wives, less fortunate than herself, who have experienced widowhood as a result of war. Unlike them, she has had the advantage of her husband's last hours, and of being able to grieve over his body. Unlike her sisters in sorrow, including the wife of Emperor Valens, she has learned from her husband how to settle the affairs of the family, and how to conduct his burial

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., 3, NPNF IX, p. 123.

⁵³Ibid.

with the appropriate honors, and he reminds her how truly fortunate she is by comparison.⁵⁴ Before drawing his letter to a close, St. John urges the widow to look to God for her security, and thereby to store up her treasures in heaven. He promises her that if she will live the same kind of virtuous life that her husband did, then after her death she will surely be his soul mate in the world to come.⁵⁵

Although one might rightly take issue with portions of his theology, and in spite of the fact that one might wince at his methodology, little doubt exists as to whether or not St. John was a pastor to this widow during her time of need. His care for her reaches out from the Scriptures, from the recent past, from personal experiences in his own family, and from his heart. It is not surprising, therefore, to know that the care of widows was one of those pastoral subjects which St. John strongly commended to the clergy and laity alike throughout his ministry. Perhaps this was because of the memory of his own mother who became a widow at the young age of twenty.⁵⁶

Another category of people who occupied a special place in St. John's ministry was the catechumens. Two sets of requirements and reminders which he wrote for their benefit appear together under the title Instructions to Catechumens. The background information about these instructions is exceptionally sparse; however, some

⁵⁴Ibid., 4 and 5, NPNF IX, pp. 124-125.

⁵⁵Ibid., 6 and 7, NPNF IX, pp. 126 and 127.

⁵⁶Chrysostom, Priesthood in the Prolegomena, NPNF IX, p. 5.

scholars believe that,

"Catechumens were divided into four classes according to the stages of their preparation. It is to those who were in the final stage, the competentes or elect as they were called, that the following instructions are addressed.⁵⁷

In the first instruction, St. John welcomes the catechumens as brothers in the faith. He praises them for not putting off baptism until a later time in their lives, and encourages them to make proper preparations for baptism in the present.⁵⁸ He also refers to baptism as burial, circumcision, and a cross, looking upon it as a gradual process of illumination.⁵⁹ In that regard, he finds it comparable to the wrestling schools,

"For in the wrestling schools falls of the athletes are devoid of danger. For the wrestling is with friends, and they practice all their exercises on the persons of their teachers. But when the time of the contest has come, when the lists are open, when the spectators are seated above, when the president has arrived, it necessarily follows that the combatants, if they become careless, fall and retire in great disgrace, or if they are in earnest, win the crowns and the prizes. So then, in your case these thirty days are like some wrestling school, both for exercise and practice. . . ."⁶⁰

This first instruction ends with the pastoral admonishment for the catechumens to guard their mouths against what comes out of them, and to avoid taking oaths.⁶¹ This last subject also finds repeated emphasis elsewhere in St. John's writings.

⁵⁷Chrysostom, Catechumens I.1, NPNF IX, p. 159, footnote 1.

⁵⁸Ibid., I.1 and 2, NPNF IX, pp. 159 and 160.

⁵⁹Ibid., I.2, NPNF IX, pp. 160-161.

⁶⁰Ibid., I.4, NPNF IX, p. 162.

⁶¹Ibid., I.5, NPNF IX, pp. 163-164.

The second instruction appears to have no direct connection with the first, other than the fact that it is a continuation of St. John's pastoral advice to his catechumens. It begins with that beautiful statement about the essence of the relationship between teacher and pupil,⁶² wherein St. John speaks to his catechumens along the same vein in which St. James writes to his original readers in his New Testament letter.⁶³ In fact, an accurate summary for this second instruction is "Bear fruit that befits repentance". St. John urges his students to transfer both their behavior and their desires to the Kingdom of Christ, and to celebrate their new life in Christ as they would a marriage.⁶⁴ They are to discipline themselves against backsliding, think of Christ as their compassionate Confessor, and, adorning themselves with dignity and modesty, give their ornaments to the poor through Christ.⁶⁵ In terms of the salvation of humankind, he says that the Lord is not like people who go to the slave markets for the purpose of buying only the best,

"But Christ, buying ungrateful and lawless slaves, put down the price of a servant of first quality, nay rather much more, and so much greater that neither speech nor thought can set forth its greatness. For neither giving heaven, nor earth, nor sea, but giving up that which is more valuable than all these, his own blood, thus He bought us."⁶⁶

⁶²See quotation and footnote 24 on p. 11 above.

⁶³James 2:14-26.

⁶⁴Chrysostom, Catechumens II.2, NPNF IX, pp. 166 and 167.

⁶⁵Ibid., II.3 and 4, NPNF IX, pp. 167, 168, 169-170.

⁶⁶Ibid., II.5, NPNF IX, p. 170.

Following this amazing analogy of the Gospel, St. John concludes his second instruction with the admonition to avoid looking for omens in every chance occurrence or remarkable coincidence of life, and to shun the use of amulets and charms. Instead, the catechumens should let Christ be their staff and allow his almighty word to be the power of their lives,

"For thus not only a man who meets you, but even the devil himself, will be unable to hurt you at all, when he sees thee everywhere appearing with these weapons; and discipline yourself by these means henceforth, in order that when thou receivest the seal thou mayest be a well-equipped soldier. . . ."⁶⁷

These, then, are St. John's pastoral instructions to his candidates for Holy Baptism. They represent the knowledge of a trained theologian, the experience of a man well-acquainted with the ways of the world and of The Enemy, and the wisdom of a pastor who demonstrates his daily care for the well-being of his flock. In conjunction with the concern he showed for his fallen friend, and the comfort he provided for a young widow, these instructions exemplify the unavoidable conclusion that St. John's pastoral theology was not a matter of mere words or lofty ideals. Rather, he anchored it in the eternal nature of the Word of God, sailed it across the spiritual seas with Christ as the helmsman, and then applied it to the countless vicissitudes of mortal life so that anyone who followed in his wake might find safe harbor. In a phrase, what St. John believed, confessed, preached, and taught provided a practical basis for daily Christian living.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 171.

Part III: Problems

St. John Chrysostom's pastoral theology and his practical applications of it are open to certain valid criticisms because they are not devoid of problems. At a minimum, his synergistic approach to justification, his incomplete understanding of the efficacy of Holy Baptism, his rigid insistence upon the universal employment of the values and ascetic practices of monasticism, and the lack of tack which he sometimes displayed when dealing with pastoral concerns are four problem areas, among others, which frequently draw attention and comment. Another high profile area which regularly comes to the surface manifests itself in the combination of his relationship with the Jews in the communities he served, and in his attitude toward the Judaizing members of own his congregations. His public remarks reveal, at times, the prejudicial language, the indiscriminate assaults, and the vehement nature of anti-Semitism. This particular Jewish issue is the final subject of this paper.

There is no excusing the approach which St. John Chrysostom took toward the Jews and Judaizers of his day. He frequently spoke about them in an insensitive and inflammatory fashion, filling his words with innuendo, and basing them on half truths and untruths. Much of what St. John had to say about these people influences how his pastoral theology is evaluated today, and the effected portions of his writings continue to serve as sources of embarrassment for the Christian Church, especially in its varied relationships with the world-wide Jewish community. Certain questions in this regard

require answers. How, for example, can a pastoral theology accommodate a stance which is so indifferent to the religious position of others? How can a preacher who represents the side of truth and love incorporate so much fear and hatred into his message? A review of the historical circumstances, a careful consideration of the eight homilies which St. John preached against the Jews and Judaizers in Antioch, and an examination of several selections from the fifty-five sermons on the Book of Acts which he delivered in Constantinople, will facilitate some answers to these questions. They will provide a means for arriving at some tentative conclusions about the pastoral theology of St. John Chrysostom and about his homiletical approach to Jews and Judaizers during the late fourth and very early fifth centuries.

An appreciation, then, for historical factors and frames of reference usually brings with it a more complete understanding of that curious combination of the events, statements, actions, and world views of people which are part of the residue of the past. Syrian Antioch, for instance, could boast of an illustrious Christian history.⁶⁸ By the mid-fourth century A.D., the majority of its citizens were Christian, and many of them were in positions of power⁶⁹. It is also important to recall that, during the fourth century, Christians in Antioch were living in a pluralistic society, and they daily encountered a host of cultural and religious peculiarities from both the pagan and Jewish communities

⁶⁸See pages 3 and 4 above.

⁶⁹Kelly, Golden Mouth, p. 2.

which they found distracting or tempting.⁷⁰ In this setting, pagans generally did not proselytize, but Jews did. Jewish fast and feast days, and the possibility of celebrating Easter as the Passover, attracted Christians to the local synagogue.⁷¹ Judaizing Christians often occupied themselves with the superstitions, magical rites, and miraculous healings associated with the Jews.⁷² Consequently, certain members of St. John's congregation were integrating Christian practices with Jewish ones, and he viewed this as a subversion of the faith. These practices included seeking council from Jewish tribunals, a latent heterodox identification with Jewish monotheism born out of Arianism, the common attraction of pilgrimages to Palestine, and the mutual popularity of venerating the martyred Maccabees whose tomb was in Antioch.⁷³

From a political standpoint, during the reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate, the Jews were a free people for the first time since Emperor Alexander Severus died in A.D. 235. This fact had brief, but sweeping, political and religious implications. Julian had made certain overtures to the Jews, and in A.D. 363 he initiated a program of rebuilding their temple in Jerusalem with government help, and of restarting the Jewish sacrificial system.

⁷⁰Chrysostom, Against Judaizing Christians in the Introduction of Fathers of the Church, Vol. 68, p. xxvi.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. xxvi-xxvii.

⁷²Ibid., p. xxx.

⁷³Ibid., pp. xli-ylvii.

Part of the significance of the renewed presence of the temple is that it seemed to falsify some of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels regarding the temple's destruction, and the emperor planned to use this as a refutation against the Christians.⁷⁴ Also, Julian had issued edicts of toleration for pagans, Jews, Christians, and heretics, and the pagans and Jews had already begun to take reprisals against the Church for properties which it had seized. In Antioch and elsewhere, this new association of the Jews with the emperor served to further alienate Christian bishops from the Jewish community.⁷⁵

As a pastor within the Christian community of Antioch, St. John had ample reasons to be anxious. The Antiochene Jews had organized themselves into a powerful and active force. They had one synagogue in the city and another at Daphne a few miles away. They were attracting noticeable numbers of Christians because of their teachings, fasts, festivals, and modes of worship.⁷⁶ The Judaizing members of the Church were engaging in the practices of swearing particularly binding oaths before Jewish tribunals in the synagogue, and seeking impartial judgments from them. They were going to the rabbis for physical cures, and they were seeking

⁷⁴Kelly, Golden Mouth, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁶Peter S. Zaas, A review of "Robert L. Wilken, John Chrysostom and the Jews; Paul W. Harkins (Trans. and Ed.), St. John Chrysostom; and John G. Gager, The Origins of Anti-Semitism", in Religious Studies Review, Vol. 11, Num. 4, October 1985, p. 338; Kelly, Golden Mouth, pp. 2 and 63; and Krupp, Shepherding the Flock, pp. 214-216.

spiritual renewal and inspiration in the religious services. They also raised the issue of the legitimacy of Jewish law.⁷⁷ Dressler synthesizes St. John's predicament in the Introduction to the bishop's homilies Against Judaizing Christians by noting that,

". . . [Chrysostom] assails the Jews of Antioch, or more particularly the demi-Christians who were jeopardizing their faith by their participation in Jewish practices.

These Judaizing Christians must be reclaimed for the Church; others who were weak and on the brink must be frightened to keep them from falling. Hence, Chrysostom's language must be strong in his instruction of the sick and his denunciation of their disease. But what must not be forgotten is that his many direct addresses to and accusations of the Jews must have been chiefly rhetorical."⁷⁸

The editor makes the similar point that, in denouncing both the Judaizers and the Jews, Chrysostom was largely employing one of the literary techniques of the apologists of his day.⁷⁹ He wanted to make the strongest case possible against what he interpreted as a vile and divisive threat to the integrity of the Christian Church and the Gospel of Christ.

St. John's homiletical comments about the Jews and Judaizers of Antioch come out of the shadows and into the light by approaching them from both their larger and narrower historical contexts. What occasioned the first of his eight sermons on this subject was the rapidly nearing Jewish holidays during the Autumn

⁷⁷Chrysostom, Against Judaizing Christians in the Introduction, pp. xl-xliv; Zaas, in Religious Studies Review Vol. 11, Num. 4, October 1985, pp. 338; and Kelly, Golden Mouth, p. 63.

⁷⁸Chrysostom, Against Judaizing Christians in the Introduction, p. xxxvii.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. xxxv.

of A.D. 386. He returned to this theme several times through the Autumn of the following year.⁸⁰ Kelly dates these eight homilies as follows:

- I - September 2, 386.
- II - Several days later during September.
- III - January 31, 387.
- IV-VIII - Autumn of A.D. 387 (a series).⁸¹

Their subject matter ranges from general warnings against backsliding, to pastoral pronouncements against celebrating Easter with the Jews and against engaging in other Jewish rituals or observances, to the insistence that the fall of Jerusalem and the temple prove that the old dispensation has been replaced by the new. In particular, Homily VIII encourages stronger Christians to give a helping hand to weaker brothers who have slipped in their spiritual practices.⁸²

The intensity of St. John's periodic preoccupation with these concerns is so overwhelmingly great that Kelly indicates this in stark detail when he says that,

"He [John] is so distressed by the Judaizers' disloyalty that he begs his auditors to be diligent in tracking them down -- women searching out women, men men, slaves slaves, freemen freemen, even children children."⁸³

In these eight sermons St. John is extremely pressing in his diatribes against the Judaizers. He argues that members of his

⁸⁰Chrysostom, Against the Jews I.1.5; II.1.1; and IV.1.1-2; Fathers of the Church Vol. 68, pp. 3, 35, and 71-72.

⁸¹Kelly, Golden Mouth, pp. 63-65.

⁸²Ibid., p. 64.

⁸³Ibid., p. 64.

flock are running to the Jews without so much as a momentary consideration for what they are doing, or for what consequences their actions might have.⁸⁴ He says,

"I blame the Jews for violating the Law. But I blame you much more for going along with the lawbreakers, not only those of you who run to the synagogues but also those of you who have the power to stop the Judaizers but are unwilling to do so."⁸⁵

One of his greatest cares is that Christians seem to be showing little more than indifference toward the salvation of their brothers in Christ. He urges those who are well to search out the ones who are diseased. In a very moving passage in his eighth homily on this subject he reasons and pleads,

"If you find a gold coin lying on the ground, do you say to yourself: 'Why didn't so-and-so pick it up?' Do you not rush to snatch it up before somebody else does?

Think the same way about your fallen brothers; consider that tending his wounds is like finding a treasure."⁸⁶

When attacking the Jews, he builds his case on the basis of theology, apologetics, and personal insults. Theologically, he accuses them of murdering the prophets, and of accepting the Scriptures while rejecting the Christ. He likewise charges them with the role they played historically in the crucifixion of Jesus.⁸⁷ Apologetically, St. John condemns the Jews for not

⁸⁴Chrysostom, Against the Jews III.6.10; and IV.3.5, Fathers of the Church Vol. 68, pp. 69 and 78.

⁸⁵Ibid., IV.7.7, Fathers of the Church Vol. 68, pp. 93-94.

⁸⁶Ibid., VIII.4.2-3, Fathers of the Church Vol. 68, pp. 217-218.

⁸⁷Ibid., VI.2.10, 3.5, and 6.11; Fathers of the Church Vol. 68, pp. 154, 156-157, and 171-172.

worshiping the true God, for worshiping demons in place of him, and for rejecting Jesus as the Christ.⁸⁸ He adds insult to injury by insisting that the Jews abandon the poor, that they are ungrateful and dishonest people, and that they murder their own children.⁸⁹

Whether or not one considers these homilies to be discourses, diatribes, or dangerous and deceitful attempts at righting a wrong, the arguments in them proceed logically, forcefully, emotionally, and graphically. St. John was facing a pastoral problem of sizeable proportions. Based on the historical circumstances and the acceptable conventions of his day, he chose an approach which demonstrates his uncompromising, relentless, rhetorical, and taunting nature. His methodology, in this case, is unacceptable in our place and time. However, the fact remains that he did not live in our place and time, and it is essential to evaluate both him and his pastoral work from the perspective of who he was and when he lived.

This point becomes doubly clear after reviewing selections from the fifty-five sermons on the Book of Acts which St. John preached in Constantinople while he was bishop in that city. He began to engage in his episcopal duties following his consecration late in February of A.D. 398. What is immediately obvious is the fact that the historical circumstances, the personal challenges, and the ecclesiastical responsibilities which he faced in

⁸⁸Ibid., I.3.1, 6.2; II.3.5; and IV.3.6; Fathers of the Church Vol. 68, pp. 10-11, 22, 44-45, and 78-79.

⁸⁹Ibid., I.6.8; and VIII.8.9; Fathers of the Church Vol. 68, pp. 25 and 238.

Constantinople were remarkably different from those in Antioch.⁹⁰ For one thing, he had other pressing, and frequently more personal, issues to deal with besides the Jewish/Judaizer problem. By the Autumn of A.D. 399 he was handling the delicate matters associated with the fall from position and power of the imperial official Eutropius. By A.D. 403 he found Bishop Theophilus and the Synod at the Oak threatening his own position. Although his first exile lasted only a few days it was, nevertheless, inscribed as an undeniable bench mark on his life and ministry. By Spring of the following year he had once again fallen afoul of Empress Eudoxia, and by the time of the Easter vigil he saw his life and career crumble into the dust and dismay of arrest, dislocation, deportation, and permanent exile. Apparently, too, the Jewish problem was not as pronounced in Constantinople as it was in Antioch. St. John seems to have shown a greater preoccupation with his parishioners running to the theaters and to the hippodrome, or wearing fine clothing and expensive jewelry than what he expressed concern over them going to the synagogue.⁹¹ As Krupp points out,

" . . . John's reference to the Jews in his homilies was heavily colored by the context in which he spoke. In Antioch there was great competition for the souls of the city, and the combination of Jewish rituals with the Christian faith was a serious threat to the flock. . . . In Constantinople where no such danger seemed to exist, his words are much more tempered and even conciliatory in his treatment of the Jews in his homilies on the book of Acts."⁹²

⁹⁰See pages 4 and 5 above.

⁹¹See page 15 above.

⁹²Krupp, Shepherding the Flock, p. 218.

It was during the week of Easter in A.D. 400 when St. John began his series of sermons on The Acts of the Apostles which lasted until the end of that calendar year.⁹³ His tact and tone in reference to the Jews is so different that it is remarkable. For instance, he often seems to refer to them more historically, impersonally, and dispassionately than previously. In Homily XXIX he says in reference to the Jews that,

"On all occasions we find them making a great point of showing this, that the blessing is peculiarly theirs, that they may not flee (from Christ), as thinking they had nothing to do with Him, because they had crucified Him. 'Because they knew Him not,' he says: so that the sin was one of ignorance. See how he gently makes an apology even on behalf of those (crucifiers). And not only this: but he adds also, that thus it must needs be. And how so? 'By condemning Him, they fulfilled the voices of the prophets.'"⁹⁴

If ever there was an issue over which one might expect St. John to launch a pointed attack or sweeping diatribe it would be precisely here; however, it does not come. St. John appears to speak more favorably and less caustically of the Jews, even to the point of being somewhat sympathetic. In Homily XXVI he announces the plan of God on their behalf and provides them with room for repentance from their past deeds. He writes,

"'And,' it says, ' he slew James the brother of John with the sword:' (taking him) at random and without selection. But, should any raise a question, why God permitted this, we shall say, that it was for the sake of these (Jews) themselves: thereby, first, convincing them, that even

⁹³St. John Chrysostom, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles = Acts of the Apostles in the Introduction, in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers = NPNF, First Series, Vol. XI. Ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), p. ix.

⁹⁴Ibid., XXIX (Acts 13:16-17), NPNF XI, p. 183.

when slain (the Apostles) prevail, just as it was in the case of Stephen: secondly, giving them opportunity, after satiating their rage, to recover from their madness; thirdly, showing them that it was by His permission this was done."⁹⁵

Once again, an onslaught of vicious, vindictive words does not come when past experiences would otherwise lead one to expect it. This is remarkable insofar as the Book of Acts contains a host of occasions upon which St. Luke casts the Jews in a negative light, and as a fifth-century commentator the bishop provides himself with ample opportunities for denigrating them both as individuals and as a race, yet he has either blunted his homiletical axe or else he has refrained from allowing it to fall.

Although occasions repeatedly present themselves, St. John does not take issue with the Jewishness of the patriarchs, Christ, the apostles, or St. Paul. In fact, he seems to set them apart from any racial or previous religious context and refers to them in significantly glowing terms. In Homily VII, for example, he captures a particular moment in time by portraying the Jews and Peter together. He says that,

". . . they stood in awe of the gentleness of Peter, in that he, speaking to men who had crucified his Master, and breathed murder against himself and his companions, discoursed to them in the character of an affectionate father and teacher. Not merely were they persuaded; they even condemned themselves, they came to a sense of their past behavior."⁹⁶

It is possible, then, that St. John deliberately handled matters differently when dealing with biblical texts and personages, as

⁹⁵Ibid., XXVI (Acts 12:1-2), NPNF XI, p. 168.

⁹⁶Ibid., VII (Acts 2:37), NPNF XI, p. 44.

opposed to what he did when encountering current situations and living people who were part of his community. However, this hardly seems likely because the scriptural accounts are what provided support for his homiletical diatribes in Antioch, while they do not appear to have done so in Constantinople. A comparison between the Sitz im Leben of Antioch and Constantinople reveals marked differences. The urgency of the moment in each case was not the same. Perhaps the man was different, too. At least it is demonstrable that he approached the demands of his pastoral tasks differently in each case.

Additional pieces of evidence highlight the approach which St. John took toward the Constantinopolitan Jews and Judaizers. In a matter of fact fashion he acknowledges that great differences exist in philosophy and polity between the Jews and Christians.⁹⁷ He discusses historically the role which circumcision played for the Judaizers in the Christian community of the first century A.D.⁹⁸ He illustrates succinctly the differences between the effect of St. Paul's ministry among the Jewish and Gentile communities.⁹⁹ Thus, it is difficult to avoid noticing that, in his homilies on the Book of Acts, St. John displays a softer side toward the Jews and Judaizers of A.D. 400 in Constantinople than what he shows toward those who lived in Antioch between A.D. 386 and 387.

⁹⁷Ibid., X (Acts 4:1), NPNF XI, p. 69.

⁹⁸Ibid., XXXII (Acts 15:1) and XXXIV (Acts 15:35), NPNF XI, pp. 201, 214 and 216.

⁹⁹Ibid., XXXVIII (Acts 17:16-17), NPNF XI, p. 232.

Conclusion

It was with a certain amount of deception and considerable reluctance that St. John Chrysostom first accepted his call to serve as an ordained deacon in the Church of Antioch. He had been content to live the ascetic life of a monk, and was not at all convinced of his abilities to function in the pastoral office. This, at least, is what he claimed, yet his claims do not square with the succeeding facts of his life and ministry. As a deacon, presbyter, and bishop in two large metropolitan communities in the world of Late Antiquity, he showed himself not only to be equal to the tasks which his pastoral offices thrust upon him, but also to be in possession of a pastoral theology which he daily converted from thoughts and words into acts of care and kindness. Although he possessed a keen sense of spiritual discernment, he was not always the most tactful in the applications of his medicines to the maladies of his imperial, clerical, and lay contemporaries. In spite of his great love for human souls and for the encouragements which he gave to others to look after their fallen brothers and sisters, he certainly possessed blind spots within himself which prevented him, at times, from seeing the beam in his own eye, and which allowed him, at other times, to search diligently for the speck which he knew had lodged itself in the eye of another. Great preacher though he was, his golden mouth could inflict wounds as easily as it could instill healing. These things, however, represent flaws within the man himself, and not within his pastoral theology.

Having reviewed the basic principles, practices, and problems of St. John's pastoral theology, it is possible to put forward some observations and conclusions. First of all, theologically, exegetically, and homiletically his reasoning is quite sound with very few exceptions, and he is sensitive to the multiplicity of needs and conditions in the lives of human beings. What is insensitive is the abrasiveness of some of his language, and it is this which sometimes gets in the way of his effectiveness as a pastor. Secondly, care for one's neighbor by one's neighbor is an important theological and homiletical element. In St. John's view, guardianship and watchfulness over the spiritual and physical lives of people belong as much to the realm of the individual Christian as what they are part of the province of the pastor. Consequently, his pastoral theology is grounded in the Word of God. The fact that it is both heaven directed and earth bound reveals its true theological and practical natures. Third, it is instructive to recall that his homilies against the Jews were not preached to the Jews but to the members of his own congregation. Without excusing or minimizing the abusiveness of his prejudicial language, it is important to take into account the fact that St. John had several momentous pastoral care issues which he was addressing in Antioch. Yet, if not by the standards of his own day, then certainly by ours, his homiletical approach in speaking to these concerns, and to the people connected with them, appears to be inferior to the urgency of his task. For all this, it is interesting to note, as Kelly does, that,

"After all the abuse he had heaved upon them, it is ironical that many years later, when his own career lay in ruins, John was to acknowledge that the Jews of Constantinople counted among his sympathizers."¹⁰⁰

Fourth, significant differences existed between the historical settings of Antioch and Constantinople, and there were also noticeable personal and pastoral differences between the deacon and presbyter, on the one hand, and the bishop on the other. Whatever one makes of these things, it is essential to factor them into the final equation. Some of the distinctions came about by virtue of the uniqueness of the offices themselves. Others occurred because of the gradual maturation of the man who accepted the offices. In all events, St. John Chrysostom brought a practical, pastoral theology to his ministry which equipped him to extend the Law of God and the saving grace of Christ to the hearts and lives of people.

¹⁰⁰Kelly, Golden Mouth, p. 66.

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