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Albert Hahn Gaal

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_gaala@csl.edu

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Short Title

CHRYSOSTOM: THE PRIESTHOOD

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Jesuita Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
ALBERT JOHN DODD

June 1933

J. H. Thiele
REVISOR

John C. ...
REVISOR

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J. A. Thiele
Adviser

Arthur C. Papp
Reader

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CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTANCE OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM IN THE CHURCH

It is regrettable that the many and varied writings of John Chrysostom have been neglected to such a great extent throughout the history of the Christian Church since his time. The source of this neglect probably is the fact that Chrysostom did not add any new theological insights to the development of Christian dogma. In the area of dogma he was not an extraordinary theologian nor an original thinker. In interpreting the Gospel to meet the new problems of his time he made little or no attempt to reorient the dogma of the Church away from the orthodox standards of either Nicea or Constantinople nor to reinterpret the doctrine of his day to meet the rapidly changing conditions of his era. In the area of history of dogma Chrysostom was a willing follower of the old, established way and thus made no impact on the dogmatic formulations of the Church. Basically he was a follower in this respect and not a leader. He certainly was not a great or brilliant theologian.

Furthermore, the Church has continued to neglect John Chrysostom because of his identification with the Antiochean School of interpretation which itself was discredited through its close connection with Nestorius in the Christological controversy of the following century. Thus the destruction of the Antiocheans prevented any school of theologians from

springing up out of the theological orientation of the dead Chrysostom to perpetuate his ideas. Considered to be fully orthodox himself by the following generation, no theologian of stature dared to associate himself with Chrysostom for fear of being branded a Nestorian or at least a suspect of heresy. Chrysostom was thus separated from his fellow theologians by a mere quirk of history. He stands separated from the main stream of thought. He became a saint to be admired and wondered about as one would contemplate a very profound work of art, but he has never become a theologian to be followed. The Church through its neglect has dealt a very hard blow to an important man in its history, making him little more than a shadowy figure in the minds of most Christians.

Chrysostom was a practical man, and therein lies both his strength and his weakness. He dealt with the basic fears and problems of Christians as they faced the stress of everyday living. Chrysostom remains for all time an exemplar of a good pastor and reveals in himself what a good pastor should and must be to his people. His interests lay not in the very obscure dogmatic formulations which consumed the energy of his contemporaries but in helping people overcome their spiritual difficulties as they faced the multitude of temptations in a hostile pagan culture.

Because of his interest in the problems of people, he should remain a guide to clergy and laity alike in the never

ending struggle of the Church with the surrounding world. For this very reason a great deal, if not all, of the work done with the multiplicity of his writings by students and scholars has been done in practical areas of his theology; mainly, education, homiletics, and Biblical interpretation.

Nevertheless, there is another very important area of thought in Chrysostom's writings which needs study and much research because of its vital importance for Christian thought and for a correct understanding of the history of the Church. This is the area which concerns itself with Chrysostom's conception of the priesthood and its place in the structure of the Church. Naturally it is important to learn what the position of this early Church father was in this matter and how he conceived the office of the priest to be related to the Church and to God.

Chrysostom's writings give an excellent picture of the status of the priest in the structure of the Church during the period which immediately followed the establishment of the Christian Church as the Roman state religion. Standing as he does just after the close of the ante-Nicene period and near the beginning of the post-Nicene era, he gives a view of the Christian priesthood which is not completely overlaid with an accretion of misconceived sacerdotalism and superstitious sacramentalism. A study of the situation of the Church through Chrysostom's eyes clearly reveals the opinions of the early Church with regard to place, authority

and duty of the priests. Chrysostom is one of the few writers on the ministry of the early Church who writes early enough to provide a fairly unbiased opinion of the place of the priest in the Church also in its earlier periods.

Similarly, Chrysostom gives an excellent picture of the early tensions formed by the introduction of the extreme ascetic ideal, an ideal which captured Chrysostom early in life and spiritual development, and the equally valid duty of the Christian to transform the society around him. A study of Chrysostom plainly shows the tension between withdrawal from the world and the ideal of remaining in society to serve others through the Gospel message. The inward struggle which involved Chrysostom in this tension as an individual is a symbol of the outward struggle which to a great extent has troubled the Church since its inception. It is a problem which faces each generation anew, and which must be resolved. Otherwise the Church will suffer and falter in its obligation both to the individual seeker of the truth and to society, which is constantly engaged in a complex struggle for peace and security in an insecure world. Chrysostom in a large measure touches upon many of the problems which the Church has faced in its formulations on the ministry. He faces the difficulties inherent in the priest's responsibility to God, to the Church, to society, to government, to his culture and above all to himself, together with the relationships of these various factors to each other in the process of history.

This is not to say that Chrysostom can clear away in a moment the many and varied difficulties which through the centuries have accumulated in the theology of the Christian Church. Perhaps he can give only a beginning of an ideal for the construction of a theology of the ministry. The Church may find in Chrysostom a series of insights neglected over the years through carelessness. Then this is the problem which faces the Church--to study Chrysostom's homilies and basic writings, perhaps gathering from them new, important insights that can help to make the work of the ministry more effective in the confusing days which the Church faces in the Atomic Age.

¹ Marcus Ward, *The Byzantine Church: An Introduction to the Study of Eastern Christianity* (London: The Christian Literature Society, 1911), p. 17. For further study of this relationship cf. H. D. Gwynne, *Church and State in Byzantium* (London: The Press Ltd., 1939).

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY ASCETIC YEARS IN THE LIFE OF CHRYSOSTOM

It is self-evident that in order fully and completely to comprehend the theological orientation and thinking of a Christian theologian, a detailed study of his life and its more significant relationships with the vast movements of theological thought and philosophy of his era must be made.

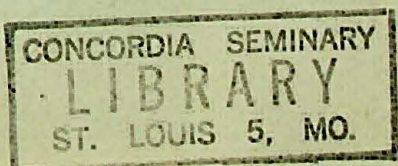
The era in which John Chrysostom lived (345?-407) was one of extreme complexity in which the traditional Graeco-Roman ideals, beliefs and philosophies were disintegrating or slowly perishing before the onrush of the bold, new and vastly different Christian outlook and approach to the many problems which have beset men and society throughout the ages. Furthermore, new social and cultural relationships were rising out of the chaotic conditions and gradually merging with the more traditional modes of thought. One of these primary new relationships was a nascent Caesaropapism as shaping the intercourse of the imperial power of the Eastern emperor and the Christian Church in the East.¹ This relationship is highly significant in guiding Chrysostom's thought on the relationship of the clergy to the state. It must be noted that the

¹Marcus Ward, The Byzantine Church: An Introduction to The Study of Eastern Christianity (Madras, India: The Christian Literature Society, 1953), p. 17. For further study of this relationship cf. S. L. Greenslade, Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1954).

Eastern Church has been dominated by a Caesaropapistic complex since the era of Constantine the Great and the Council of Nicea.

Theologically the Christian Church was in a state of flux, uncertain as to the pattern and direction which the evolving systems of doctrine would take in their practical application to the life and character of the Church. During his lifetime Chrysostom saw the first great dispute, the Arian controversy, rise to its greatest heights and gradually succumb to orthodox, Trinitarian theology. However, the great Christological controversies were not yet in the making in his lifetime, while in the west the two great anthropological contenders, Augustine and Pelagius, had yet to make their lasting impact on the structure of the theological content of western philosophy. Thus Chrysostom could be said to stand astride two eras in the history of the Church.

It is only natural therefore that Chrysostom was deeply affected by the theological and philosophical trends of the era. Throughout his life there is a constant tension between practical Christian morality and the stricter ascetic forms. This tension especially reveals itself in his writings on the priesthood. It is an almost certain fact that his stress on practical living and morality comes from his close contact and association with the Antiochean School of interpretation, which stressed a literal and common sense interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, while placing strong emphasis on the



use of the Bible in daily life.² His stress on the various forms of asceticism may stem from some form of Neo-Platonism, which some writers claim to find expressed in his homilies and other writings.³ However, it is quite possible (and much more probable) that the strange stream of introspective and mystical thought patterns which dominate the Eastern Church lead him to value the contemplative more highly than a life closely connected with the world.⁴

Another moving force in his life was the classical Greek education which he received at the philosophical school of Libanius.⁵ This situation is not in the least extraordinary. Sons of the Christian nobility in the Empire were given a secular education in the philosophy of the pagans. Writers have noted that had Chrysostom been a pagan by birth, he perhaps would have been chosen to succeed his teacher as the head of the school.⁶ However, it is not valid to conclude that he

²Paul Gerhardt Littmann, "The Historical and Grammatical Interpretation of John Chrysostom Evaluated on the Basis of His Homilies on Romans," Bachelor's Thesis (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1947), pp. 5f.

³John G. Mager, "Chrysostom: A Study of His Theology, His Sermon Methods, and His Preaching," Bachelor's Thesis (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1943), pp. 7f.

⁴Ward, op. cit., pp. 165f.

⁵W. R. W. Stephens, Saint John Chrysostom: His Life and Times (3rd edition; London: John Murray, 1883), pp. 12f.

⁶Ibid., p. 13. Stephens quotes Sozomen who reports that Libanius considered Chrysostom the best qualified to succeed him "had not the Christians stolen him from us."

was without a Christian education during his formative years while living with his widowed mother and an older sister in Antioch. It is likely that he attended a school of the grammarist during his youth. No doubt, his mother, Anthusa, also trained him in the fundamental Christian truths during part of his childhood. It is probably for this reason that John puts a high value on the Christian's duty to educate his children in the home and teach the fundamentals of Christian truth.⁷

The immediate circumstances which catapulted Chrysostom out of his secular life as a rising law student in Antioch and into a life of self-abnegation and strict asceticism cannot be fully discerned. Perhaps the dissolute life of the pagan city drove him to seek the favor of God in a life of sanctity.⁸ It is also quite possible that his close friend Basil was the driving influence in the decision to abandon the world with Chrysostom as an ardent follower of his lead.⁹

It is certain, however, that closely bound up with the decision to lead the ascetic life of self-abnegation was the desire on his part to receive Holy Baptism. As to the reason

⁷M. L. W. Laistner, Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire: Together with an English Translation of John Chrysostom's Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up Their Children (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1951), pp. 94-122.

⁸Stephens, op. cit., p. 14.

⁹Littmann, op. cit., p. 12.

for his neglect of baptism before this time, it is only possible to make inferences and conjectures, inasmuch as there is no reliable information on the subject. Stephens presents a long and complicated argument, made thoroughly complex by a detailed discussion of the various local schisms and inter-party divisions, in which he claims that Chrysostom refused baptism by any but a Catholic bishop.¹⁰ However, the very complexity and logic of the argument militate against its acceptance. Quite probably Chrysostom followed the custom of the times in seeking to put off his baptism, so that as many sins as possible could be washed away before a life of strict obedience was begun.¹¹ After three years of instruction he was baptized by Melitius, the Bishop of Antioch, in the year 370. Concerning this baptism and its vital relationship to the new life of obedience and service, Stephens comments:

There can be no doubt that baptism, from whatever cause delayed, must on that very account have come home to the recipient with a peculiar solemnity of meaning. It was an important epoch, often a decisive turning-point in the life, a deliberate renunciation of the world, and dedication of the whole man to God. So Chrysostom evidently felt it; from this point we enter a new phase in his life. He becomes for a time an enthusiastic ascetic, and then settles down into that more tranquil and steady, but intense glow of piety and love to God which burned with undiminished force will the close of his career.¹²

¹⁰ Stephens, op. cit., pp. 17ff.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 15f.

¹² Ibid., p. 22.

Melitius also utilized this opportunity to appoint Chrysostom as a lector in the Church at Antioch, a minor position. From this time until his death Chrysostom's life was bound up with the life and history of the Church.

In deadly earnest Chrysostom began to lead his life of self-abnegation by living the ascetic life in his own home. Cut off from friends and former associates, he spent his time in fasting, meditation, prayer and study of the Holy Bible.¹³ Desiring companionship in his new life, Chrysostom turned to Basil. Together with Theodore, who later became Bishop of Mopsuestia, and Maximus, who later became Bishop of Seleucia, they formed a voluntary association and spent their days in living lives of strict discipline. It would be incorrect to term this association a monastic association. Monasticism as it came to be established in the Church in later years is relatively unformed in any single mold at this time. Usually each individual or set of individuals settled on some group of rules and discipline relative to their own specific set of conditions. Thus groups and individuals were quite highly individualistic in their practice of the ascetic life. Ward makes the following comment about the evolution of monastic ideal in the Eastern Church, when he comments:

It has been noted that Christian monasticism is rooted in that general ascetic tendency which is the common ground of renunciation in all religions.

¹³Ibid., p. 27.

In the Eastern Church we can trace at least four stages of early development. First the ascetic tendency takes specific forms against a Church having too much to do with the world. Next we find the desert anchorites who have run away from the world, the flesh and the devil. Then comes the cenobite stage with the solitaries gathering together in various forms of rudimentary community life. In the course of this process the desert ascetics of Egypt and Syria learned to support the contemplative life on the barest minimum of sustenance and herein they make the greatest contribution to the monastic ideal of the east: that the body may be so transformed as to be absorbed into God. Finally, by the wisdom and energy of St. Basil, monasticism is regulated in order to check the ascetic excesses which tended to verge on sub-Christian dualism, and to overcome the evils attendant on idle solitude.¹⁴

However Chrysostom did not stress the contemplative life together with the others to such a high degree that it warped their outlook concerning life completely out of shape. While they practiced privations of many sorts and strict discipline, their observance of these rigors had as their basic purpose the severing of earthly connections in order to permit them to utilize their time in the study of the Scriptures. They were not, therefore, pointless pillar-dwellers seeking unity with God through the mystical means of negation of self-desire and the self. For Chrysostom and his friends it was certainly not privation for privation's sake alone, although the stress on good works and an obedient life were part of the general structure of their association and their ultimate concern.

¹⁴Ward, op. cit., p. 166.

For instruction in the Scriptures they turned to an excellent teacher, Diodorus, the founder of the Antiochean School of interpretation.¹⁵ Their method of interpretation was eminently practical and literal, in direct opposition to the allegorical interpretation of the Alexandrian School.¹⁶ During this period Chrysostom learned to apply Scripture to practical daily living and not to set it apart as some means of gaining estoric knowledge hidden from the average man. Eventually, however, this practical school of interpretation was destroyed due to its connection with the Nestorians in the succeeding generation, and even the writings of Theodore were condemned as heretical. In respect to his relations with this group of practical scholars, Littmann aptly comments:

Chrysostom was influenced largely by his practical features and consequently worked with a literal and common sense interpretation of Scripture.¹⁷

Practical though Chrysostom might be, still the ascetic ideal held him firmly in its grasp. When Theodore decided to withdraw from their association and return to the "world" for love of a girl, Chrysostom rebuked him sharply in two biting letters, addressed gravely to the "fallen Theodore." In the second letter he especially censures and scores Theodore for abandoning the highest form of Christian life, the ascetic,

¹⁵Littmann, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 4f.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 14.

and convicts him of sinning greatly against God by the breaking of his solemn vow of celibacy. Throughout the remaining years of his life Chrysostom never subsequently altered in its substance his position in this matter of celibacy and the function of the servant of God. In later years he seems to have moderated his extreme position to a certain extent. Nevertheless, at this time Chrysostom argues against Theodore's lapse:

"Marriage is right," you say; I assent also to this. "For marriage," we read, "is honorable and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge;" but it is no longer possible for thee to observe the right conditions of marriage. For is he who has been attached to a heavenly bridegroom deserts him, and joins himself to a wife the act is adultery, even if you call it marriage ten thousand times over; or rather it is worse than adultery in proportion as God is greater than man. Let no one deceive thee saying: "God has forbidden not to marry;" I know this as well as you: He has not forbidden to marry, but he has forbidden to commit adultery, which is what you are wishing to do, and may you be preserved from ever engaging thyself in marriage! Why dost thou marvel if marriage is judged as if it were adultery, when God is disregarded?¹⁸

Soon after this incident in Chrysostom's life, a number of local bishoprics fell vacant. According to the custom of the time, Chrysostom and Basil were seized as candidates by the people and clergy in an effort to compel them to accept

¹⁸John Chrysostom, "Second Letter to the Fallen Theodore," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by W. R. W. Stephens and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), IX, 113.

ordination.¹⁹ Ecclesiastical regulations and usage relating to the proper age for priests and bishops had long since fallen into disuse and had become a dead letter.²⁰ It was common practice in the Church to elevate men in such a way, and many of the leaders of the Church were elevated in just such a crude manner in the face of protestations from the candidates. Through trickery Chrysostom managed to escape ordination and was unable to continue his contemplative, withdrawn life. Basil, deceived into believing that John had yielded to the multitudes, finally acquiesced to the demands of the people and clergy. Chrysostom's great treatise, On the Priesthood, was written to Basil in defense of his trick in assisting in deceiving his friend. However, this treatise is more than a mere apologetic. It soon became his normative work on the duties, responsibility and requirements for the priesthood. For this reason Littmann comments discerningly:

When Basil was consequently made bishop, he complained bitterly to Chrysostom. Chrysostom, therefore tried to explain his action and comments on the priestly office in his treatise on the priesthood. It is a more mature work than the letters to Theodore and contains no excessive praise for the monastic life.²¹

Shortly before a persecution of the ascetic monks by the Emperor Valens in 373, Chrysostom left Antioch to live

¹⁹Stephens, op. cit., pp. 40f.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 55f.

²¹Littmann, op. cit., p. 15.

the life of a recluse in a cenobitic type monastery which was probably based on the Pachomian rule.²² Again it must be remembered that these monastic associations were formed by groups of ascetic anchorites who had come together in primitive communities to practice strict discipline and to observe a contemplative life.²³ Quite often these were the groups of fanatics who made such an impact on the Eastern Church, causing conflict and inter-party schisms. After four years among these cenotibes, Chrysostom withdrew to a cave and practiced life as a solitary anchorite for almost two years until his health was undermined by his excesses.²⁴

These, then, are the years of extreme withdrawal from the world and even from the Church during which he attempted to lead the godly life, separated from all forms of "worldly" influences. It is interesting to note that he failed in his attempt to cut away his ties with society and the world. He remained too practical fully to renounce the world of fellow men. Just as the mystic, so also the extreme ascetic must come down from the heights of his ecstasy back into the valley of reality. This is the enervating force which asceticism contains in its very essence and at its very core. Chrysostom discovered this, and to a certain extent it tempered his view on the tension between withdrawal from reality and practical

²²Stephens, op. cit., pp. 60ff.

²³Supra., pp. 11f.

²⁴Stephens, op. cit., p. 82.

community living in the day to day relationships among people. A mature Christian, he returned to society to use those talents which he had developed in the service of God and his fellow-man. This becomes the critical turning point in his life. Chrysostom committed himself to a course which would be difficult for him to carry out, that of maintaining a proper balance between the ascetic ideal and the ideal of Christian service. Apparently he discovered the failure of a complete form of one-sided living. The strict ascetic life must always lead either to self-immolation or to a complete degeneration of the personality. This, however, does not deny the validity of a limited and adequately conditioned system of self-abnegation, a system which realizes the failure of extreme asceticism and seeks moderation in the ideal.

The discovery was of relatively minor importance in the overall ecclesiastical structure of the Church. A limited number of perfunctory duties were the extent of the services rendered by the deacon in the Byzantine worship. He had no official position in the establishment of Church policy, although it was quite usual for the deacon to serve as unofficial advisor to the higher clergy in the diocese. The authority and the prestige of the deaconate centered in the fact that they had control of the distribution of the alms to the poor in the

1. R. W. Stephens, *Saint John Chrysostom: His Life and Times* (3rd edition; London: John Murray, 1903), p. 66.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

CHAPTER III

CHRYSOSTOM SERVES AS A PRIEST IN THE CHURCH

Melitius was without a doubt overjoyed to learn that Chrysostom had decided to return to the society which he had deserted in his attempt to become an ascetic anchorite in a secluded cave. In 381, before leaving for the Council of Constantinople, he ordained Chrysostom to the diaconate.¹ Ironically Meletius never had an opportunity fully to see and ascertain the wisdom of his choice. During this vitally significant Council which finally sealed the fate of Arianism, Meletius died suddenly, robbing the Church of a wise, gentle leader and reopening the inter-party schisms in Antioch.

From the viewpoint of sacerdotal authority and power the diaconate was of relatively minor importance in the overall ecclesiastical structure of the Church.² A limited number of perfunctory duties were the extent of the services rendered by the deacon in the Eucharistic worship. He had no official position in the establishment of Church polity, although it was quite usual for the deacon to serve as unofficial adviser to the higher clergy in the diocese. The authority and the prestige of the diaconate centered in the fact that they had control of the distribution of the alms to the poor in the

¹W. R. W. Stephens, Saint John Chrysostom: His Life and Times (3rd edition; London: John Murray, 1883), p. 86.

²Ibid., p. 87.

congregation of the city.³ No doubt many deacons used this authority to gain supporters among the lower classes of the city. The diaconate also served the Church by managing the vast estates and properties which had been given to the Church by rich members. This situation is well described by Boucher in his comment on Chrysostom's statements in Homilies LXVI and LXXXV on Matthew. He writes:

He shows how it was already looked on as the natural protector of the distressed, and how the Church he served not only supported 3000 poor, but supervised establishments for the care of the sick, of strangers, widows, and Church servants. He even complains that many rich men, mistrusting the charitable disposition of their heirs, had endowed the Church with houses, carriages, mules and other animals with their grooms; so that the ecclesiastical officers had to busy themselves with all kinds of worldly cares, collecting rents, wrangling with wine merchants, corn-chandlers, and so on.⁴

Perhaps this became the first time that Chrysostom became aware of the day-to-day problems of the masses, of the trials of the common laborers and slaves. It is ironic that these people to whom he ministered practiced of most cruel necessity the self-denial which Chrysostom considered to be such a worthy and noble work. Evidently a man's viewpoint concerning the worthiness of a work or service is shaped by his origin and the position of his family in the society and its social structure. Nevertheless, it is to Chrysostom's

³Ibid., p. 89.

⁴E. S. Boucher, A Short History of Antioch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1921), pp. 143f.

credit that he elevated alms-giving to a status almost equal to that of virginity and self-privation.⁵ Practical experience among the masses of suffering humanity served to reshape in part his view of what is good and noble.

Seeing the excellent qualities of leadership which his deacon had and recognizing his talents as an orator, Bishop Flavian ordained Chrysostom to the priesthood in 381.⁶ He soon became the chief preacher in the diocese, well-known for his homiletical genius and brilliant, practical method of exegesis.

In his sermons there are strong indications of a very powerful desire to alter conditions in the city throughout both the pagan community and the Church. Again and again his ascetic inclinations break through in his homilies, as he with equal zeal attacked the excesses of pagan and Christian. Conditions warranted such attacks. There is little doubt that decay had rotted the pagan civilization and its various forms of culture through to the very core. Intellectually the pagan culture was dead, or at least sterile.⁷ It had bankrupted itself through the years with its futile sophistry, seeking a key to the source of knowledge and truth. Throughout this era

⁵John Chrysostom, "Matthew, Homily LXXVII," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by George Prevost and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), X, 468.

⁶Stephens, op. cit., p. 103.

⁷Ibid., pp. 118-138.

Christianity was engaged in a deadly struggle with a pagan system that had lost its broad intellectual basis and which consequently was without a firm foundation.⁸ Even Symmachus argued in favor of paganism only on national and classical grounds.⁹ Intellectual pagans were aesthetic pagans only. It is for this very reason that the paganism of Chrysostom's era was much more deadly than the forms which had preceded it. Paganism now indulged in excesses of carnal and sensual lust, unchecked by any form of classical insight. In spite of the opposition of Christians, there are Imperial decrees against pagan excesses well into the fifth century.¹⁰

It must be further remembered that perhaps a majority of the Christians were less than nominal members of the Church in this period. Theodosius I had officially proscribed pagan religions and had leveled harsh penalties against those who engaged in pagan rituals or ceremonies.¹¹ Since the official proscription of pagan learning and religion were Imperial edicts, great numbers of pagans joined the Church in order to

⁸M. L. W. Laistner, Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire: Together with an English Translation of John Chrysostom's Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up Their Children (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1951), pp. 8ff.

⁹Eva Matthews Sanford, The Mediterranean World in Ancient Times, in the Ronald Series in History, edited by Robert C. Brinkley and Ralph H. Gabriel (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1938), p. 562.

¹⁰Laistner, op. cit., p. 8.

¹¹Maude Aline Huttman, The Establishment of Christianity and the Proscription of Paganism (New York: Columbia University, 1914), pp. 195-217.

maintain their positions of authority in the government and in the military service. They anticipated the possible loss of their prestige if they should remain loyal to their old practices and beliefs. Nominal membership in the newly established Church seemed to be the easiest way of freeing themselves from their very dangerous and delicate position. As early as the days of Constantine the Great, the special privileges granted to the Christian clergy by him had to be restricted and in some measure revised. Many pagans at that time attempted to join the clergy in order to escape the duties laid upon pagan citizens while gaining a number of special privileges.¹²

Finding his work stimulating and enjoyable in Antioch,⁷ Chrysostom introduced changes into the structure of the life of the community and helped alter conditions which militated against his ascetic background. His best work, homiletically and exegetically, was done during this period of relative peace and tranquility. He seemed to be quite happy in his work and to a certain extent tempered his extreme asceticism with the ideal of practical Christian living in society.

The only disturbing element in his work during his stay in Antioch comes early in his priesthood. In 387 the populace of the city revolted against the oppressive taxation of the Emperor Theodosius I. After the excesses of mob violence, the

¹²Ibid., pp. 62f.

citizens feared that the Emperor would retaliate with a number of stern repressive measures against both citizens and city. Terrified as to whether or not the Emperor would send soldiers to slaughter the population, panic raged in the city as the local magistrates took stern measures of their own to punish the offenders. Bishop Flavian, urged by both pagan and Christian, began the eight-hundred-mile journey to the court at Constantinople to beg for the people and the city. During his absence in the Lenten season, Chrysostom used the opportunity to rebuke the people for their crimes in a bold series of sermons entitled, "On the Statues."¹³

Through the intercessions of Flavian and some anchorite monks, the danger to the city was averted, and no harsh penalties were imposed. It is interesting to note, however, the difference in the relations of the Church and State in the east from those in the west. When a similar event a few years later provoked Theodosius to kill a great number of the people of Thessalonica, Ambrose of Milan did not beg or plead with the Emperor. With authority Ambrose forced him to do penance in public for the sin and humiliated him severely.¹⁴ Already the medieval pattern is here evident. Church dominated State in the west, while in the east the Church became a mere bureau of the government to be manipulated at the whim of politicians and ambitious generals.

¹³Stephens, op. cit., pp. 154ff.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 194ff.

Even as Chrysostom was living and working in the relative obscurity of Antioch, a complicated series of events was taking place which reshaped his life and led him down the road to ruin and ultimately to death in exile. It must be noted, however, that he was not manipulated by the course of events which destroyed him, but he did not or would not attempt to dominate them. Therein lies his failure. He contributed to the degeneration of the situation by making the wrong choice at critical moments. When firmness was called for, he seemed to vacillate. Again at times when compromise might have saved the day, he was inflexible. Through his nature ran a defect--tactlessness. Putting his trust in the wrong people, especially his deacon, Chrysostom moved through the situation in Constantinople with an air of unreality, detached from practicality. In the face of disaster when his plans for reform had failed, he retreated into his ascetic introspection and played the part of the martyr. He became his own Judas.

Chrysostom's destruction began in 398. Theodosius I died in 395, leaving the Empire to his two incompetent, worthless sons, Arcadius and Honorius.¹⁵ Honorius received the western half of the Empire, while the eastern portion fell to Arcadius. Soon afterward Arcadius fell under the domination of the cruel Eunuch Eutropius. Eutropius belies description. At best he

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 202f.

was corrupt, satanic and a power-crazed maniac. Nevertheless, he was brilliant despite his character and disability.

The second event which was to cause such a change in Chrysostom's life was the death of Nectarius, Archbishop of Constantinople. Truthfully it must be admitted that his death was no great loss to the Church. He had distinguished himself by doing nothing of importance while serving in his position as Archbishop.¹⁶ Immediately a power struggle ensued for the vacant position. Seeking to dominate the situation and gain control of the see for an associate was Theophilus, Archbishop of Alexandria, a personage whose degenerate character was exceeded only by Eutropius. This attempt was part of the plan on the part of the Alexandrian see to seize supremacy in the eastern portion of the Church.

Eutropius, realizing that not all of the contesting factions would be pleased by the outcome, decided to please none. Imperial soldiers kidnapped Chrysostom and brought him secretly to Constantinople. Upon his arrival, Eutropius forced Theophilus to consecrate Chrysostom.¹⁷ Early in 398 after a short delay Theophilus consecrated Chrysostom as Archbishop of Constantinople.

¹⁶B. J. Kidd, A History of the Church to A. D. 461 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922), II, 417.

¹⁷Stephens, op. cit., pp. 215f. Eutropius produced proof that Theophilus had sought to make himself secure in a civil war between Theodosius and Maximus by supporting both sides in the conflict.

Immediately Chrysostom began enforcing a number of reforms among the clergy and bishops, chief of which was the requirement that they give up their concubines.¹⁸ With a maddening ascetic zeal, Chrysostom shocked the whole city, especially the clergy, by selling many of the riches of the episcopal palace and giving the proceeds to the poor. Banned were banquets for bishops and for visiting clergy. Corrupt bishops were deposed from their sees ruthlessly, while at the same time Chrysostom extended the authority and power of the archepiscopal see over areas never before under its sway.

Needless to say, Chrysostom's reforming policies made many more enemies for him than it did friends. Corrupt clergy and carnal bishops were repulsed by the idea of moderation and recoiled at the thought of self-abnegation and restraint of their passions and lusts. Heedless of the pressures which were building up around him and the supporters who were daily falling away from his cause, Chrysostom continued the reform movement with no thought for the consequences. Practicality had given way to asceticism. Nevertheless, these reforms did not disturb the bishops as much as his claim to supremacy in the Eastern Church.

The real conflict between Chrysostom and Theophilus has its roots in the struggle between Constantinople and its rival Alexandria and their respective positions in the basic ecclesiastical structure of the Church. Chrysostom enraged the

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 219f.

independent bishops of Asia Minor and Syria, claiming jurisdiction over them, although the exact area of his see and authorith had never been fully defined in the past.¹⁹ These claims threatened the security and prestige of the see of Alexandria, and Theophilus was ready to press the claim of of his see in order to gain dominance of the bishops of the Eastern Church. Conflicting claims lead to struggles for power. Chrysostom's desires ended in such a struggle. It can be said that Chrysostom's defeat and exile are but one phase in the ecclesio-political power struggle which remained a source of conflict until its final settlement at Chalcedon in 451 in connection with the Nestorian Controversy.²⁰

Eventually the sensual Eudoxia, wife of Arcadius, tired of the reforming activities and voiced her opinion to John's enemies. In 399 Chrysostom lost his one ally at the Imperial court. Eutropius, having been degraded by the barbarian Gainas in a political struggle, fell out of favor and fled for his life. Given sanctuary by Chrysostom, he became the subject

¹⁹Kidd, *op. cit.*, p. 427. Kidd introduces evidence that the see of Constantinople was technically under the authority of the Bishop of Heraclea, having come into existence only a generation or two before Chrysostom's time when Constantine moved the Imperial court there. Constantinople thus could be said to be a relative late-comer among the patriarchial sees when compared to Alexandria which was in existence from the earliest days of the Church. This is the source of the struggle between the two.

²⁰H. St. L. B. Moss, *The Birth of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 35f. Moss claims that even the Christological struggle was motivated by this rivalry.

of two sermons on the vanity of wealth and power.²¹ Soon after, Eutropius attempted to escape and was executed.

Gainas soon followed Eutropius into disgrace and death, leaving Eudoxia as the dominant influence at court. Relations became strained between Chrysostom and the court, although officially all was pictured as harmonious. Powerful enemies in Theophilus, Severian of Gabala, Antiochus of Ptolemias, Acacius of Berea and Epiphanius of Cyprus now observed every activity of Chrysostom, seeking an opportunity to depose and kill him. They found many allies among the clergy and nobility, and by 403 the plot had taken definite form.

Opportunity to depose Chrysostom came when he gave four Nitrian monks sanctuary from the excesses of Theophilus, who claimed that they held Origenistic heresies.²² Naturally he knew that by intimating that Chrysostom formally favored the heretics, a solid case could be made by using the ancient method of guilt by association.

Theophilus, by some adroit political moves, removed all suspicion from himself, even though he had been the one accused and summoned to give an account of his actions in persecuting the Nitrians.²³ Shortly thereafter he made himself master of the situation, due in a large part to John's inability to grasp the full import of the situation and to

²¹Stephens, op. cit., pp. 251-6.

²²Ibid., pp. 298-302

²³Ibid., pp. 307f.

act effectively.²⁴ Suddenly Chrysostom discovered that he was the defendant and Theophilus, the orthodox accuser. A rump council, dominated by the Egyptian and the disaffected Asian bishops, convened at Chalcedon and promptly deposed Chrysostom when he refused to recognize their validity to conduct a competent, legitimate council.²⁵ Nevertheless, upon receipt of the decree of excommunication and deposition from the council, the Emperor issued an edict, banishing Chrysostom from the city.

Remaining near Nicomedia, Chrysostom made known his appeal for a general council of the Church to determine the validity of the excommunication and deposition. An uprising of the people soon forced the Emperor to rescind his decree. Within a short time Chrysostom returned and was restored to his see. Nevertheless, technically he was excommunicated.²⁶

Soon after his return, he offended Eudoxia by condemning her excesses. Seeing his opportunity, Theophilus attacked his enemy again. However, the second attack was much stronger than the first, inasmuch as Theophilus was armed with the Twelfth Canon of the Council of Antioch (341). This decree forbade a deposed bishop from appealing to the government and secular authority or from resuming his duties until the

²⁴Ibid., pp. 308f.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 310ff.

²⁶Ibid., p. 322.

excommunication imposed on him was officially lifted by a duly constituted Council. Nevertheless, even this canon, for all its seeming validity, was regarded as invalid by much of the Church, inasmuch as it had been decreed by an Arian Council with the intention of preventing the orthodox bishop Athanasius from returning to his see.²⁷

Nevertheless, a second rump council was successful in compelling Chrysostom to go into exile. Deserted by friends and persecuted by enemies, Chrysostom gave himself into the hands of the Imperial authorities who banished him to the rugged, deserted mountains near the Black Sea. Still seeking to gain a fair trial by a general Council, he appealed to the Western Church in two letters to Innocent, Bishop of Rome for its intercession with the Eastern bishops.²⁸ It availed him nothing. Chrysostom, realizing the futility of struggle with his enemies, accepted his role as a martyr. Three years after his exile, he died in Comana in Pontus during the summer of 407. He died a persecuted martyr, not so much because of his virtues, but because of his weaknesses as an individual.

²⁷ Charles Joseph Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents, translated from the German and edited by Henry Nutcombe Oxenham (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), II, 438f.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, "Letters to Innocent, Bishop of Rome," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church, translated by W. R. W. Stephens and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), IX, 309-313.

CHAPTER IV

THE GLORY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

It would be only natural to assume that Chrysostom would elevate and exalt the office of the priesthood (i.e., The Holy Ministry) to a position of pre-eminence in the structure of the Christian Church. Such an estimate would in essence be correct and valid. However, to assume a very radical sacerdotalism on his part would be to belie many of the facts regarding his position and opinion of the vital function of the priesthood. While elevating the office of the priesthood, he does not elevate the priest nor endow him with a superabundance of supernatural powers as has been done by others throughout the centuries. To claim that he does do this would be to impose foreign categories upon his thinking and to ignore the repeated structures which he places on the authority and position of the priest.

Chrysostom believes that it would be impossible for the Church to exist in an empirical state as we know it without the office of the priesthood to serve as the representative of God to men. For this very valid and cogent reason he lays great stress on the authority and power of the priestly office. This authority and power glorifies the priestly office and raises the priest to a level or position above the ranks of other men. Because the priest is the servant of God, there is maintained between them a mystical bond which can be broken

only on the part of the priest by his willing mortal sin. To cast his position in terms better suited to our current western thought patterns (with a warning of the inherent dangers in such a course), it could be said that Chrysostom conceives of the priesthood as part of the bene esse of the Church as it exists in its historic, emperical state.

The priest has been chosen by the will of God out of the great mass of humanity on earth to be His representative to men in the Church and outside of it.¹ Furthermore, the priest is the direct successor of Christ on earth and carries out His will and office.² All this the priest does by bearing the message of redemption through Christ's incarnation and resurrection to men through teaching and by means of the "Mysteries" of the Church (i.e., The Sacraments). For these reasons it is self-evident that in Chrysostom's thinking the priest is in a close spiritual fellowship and relationship with Christ and acts as His spokesman.

¹John Chrysostom, "St. John, Homily LXXVI," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by G. T. Stupart and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), XIV, 326f. Hereafter in this chapter this series will be designated as Nicene. Volumes referred to in a previous footnote will carry this designation and the volume number. New volumes and series of homilies which are in different volumes will be footnoted in their full form inasmuch as different volumes were translated by different translators and appeared in different years.

²John Chrysostom, "Second Corinthians, Homily XI," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by J. Ashworth, revised by Talbot W. Chambers and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), XII, 334.

As was previously mentioned, Chrysostom considers the office of the priest to elevate a man far above the ranks of other men, due to this close intimate relationship of service in the office of the Church. Because of this office and authority, the priest is to be regarded as higher in dignity and authority than any earthly magistrate or king.³ On this point, he goes so far as to exclaim that priests are higher and more worthy than the angels in heaven because of the vast power given them by God when they mediate His grace in the "Mysteries."⁴ However, it must be well noted at this point that much of this is theoretical in nature. In the practical application of his teachings to the situations of his day, Chrysostom usually remained subservient to the will of the government and did not stress any claim of the clergy to exercise authority over the processes of civil law and government polity.

Stemming from the concept of the intimate fellowship of the priest with God, there flows the natural assumption that the priest has the inherent ability lodged in his office to mediate the mercy of God between God and the laity of the Church. It is for this reason that the deacon intercedes for the universal Church in the daily public prayers during the

³Nicene, John Chrysostom, "Second Corinthians, Homily XV," XII, 353ff.

⁴John Chrysostom, "St. John, Homily LXXXVI," op. cit., XIV, p. 326f.

Eucharistic service.⁵ Similarly the priest has the ability to invoke the Holy Spirit at the Eucharist and at Baptism.⁶ Thus the priest serves the dual purpose in his functions as Mediator. On the one hand, the priest is the spokesman of God, guiding and directing the blessings of the Spirit of God to the laity through his intercessory powers. On the other hand, the priest has another definite function. He becomes the representative of the universal Church by bringing the prayers of the laity to God.

Thus even as the priest is the representative of the Christ to men, so also is he the representative of men to God. In this second capacity he offers up prayers and the requests of the laity as well as their sacrifices of thanksgiving for the blessings of God in the Eucharistic service and at other important times. However, this is not to lay down a rule that the laity cannot pray directly to God for blessings nor intercede for others. Chrysostom directly says that the laity should also intercede on behalf of the clergy and the bishops of the Church during the Eucharistic service.⁷ Thus, it becomes evident that the concept of intercession is

⁵John Chrysostom, "Romans, Homily XIV," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by J. B. Morris and W. H. Simcox, revised by George B. Stevens and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), XI, 447.

⁶Nicene, John Chrysostom, "First Corinthians, Homily XXX," XII, 176f. This series of homilies is bound with the series on Second Corinthians in the same volume.

⁷Nicene, John Chrysostom, "Second Corinthians, Homily XVIII," XII, 365f.

not highly strictured by the glory and authority of the priestly office, as if only the priest could offer up the prayers on behalf of the Church.

Furthermore, it naturally follows from Chrysostom's concern to maintain the representative quality of the priesthood that he stresses the elective function of the clergy and laity in choosing bishops and priests. Because the priest (and on the higher level, the bishop) is the representative of the universal Church, he is to be chosen by the vote of the clergy and prominent laity of the diocese in which he is to serve.⁸ Thus viewed from the vantage point of the laity, inasmuch as they ratify the selection of the bishop or the priest, there is no difference in the intrinsic worthiness of the priestly office over the function of the laity.⁹ The difference between laity and clergy is not one of degree of holiness but of function and responsibility in the Church.

Ordination, according to Chrysostom, serves the purpose of setting men apart who are worthy of the dignity of the priestly office and its functions. It would not be unfair to comment that Chrysostom does not regard this rite to be a Sacrament of the Church in the usual sense of the word. He

⁸Ibid., p. 366. It is interesting to note that while this elective process was rapidly eliminated in the western Church through the expansion of the papacy with its claim of universal domination, it remained intact in the eastern Church well into the Middle Ages.

⁹Ibid.

admits that ordination comes from the Holy Spirit and that it confers authority on the priest.¹⁰ However, there is very little indication that ordination serves the purpose of conferring any sort of special holiness or virtue on the priest ordained by the presiding bishop. Rather by this rite a man is separated from the rest of mankind to serve in a special capacity with special responsibility. By these means catholic doctrine is maintained, the priest standing in the direct, didactic line of the Apostles. Orthodoxy is maintained by ordination.

Both the mediatorial and intercessory functions of the priest in regard to the laity are made most explicit in the relationship of priesthood to the laity in the sacramental system of the Church. Chrysostom evaluates the "Mysteries" as the form and means by which God offers mercy, forgiveness, and grace to all believers. To determine the number of the sacraments according to Chrysostom's thinking, of course, depends on the definition of the term, sacrament. Nevertheless, assuming that the sacrament is a vehicle by which God confers mercy and forgiveness on the believer, it would not be imposing a false category to assert that Chrysostom seems to hold to three Sacraments: Holy Baptism, Holy Eucharist and

¹⁰John Chrysostom, "Acts, Homily XLIV," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by J. Walker, J. Sheppard and H. Browne, revised by George B. Stevens and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), XI, 269. This series of homilies is bound in the volume with those on Acts; however the translators are not the same.

Penitence.¹¹ Of the three the Eucharist and Penitence are the most important in the system which Chrysostom outlines in his writings. Of necessity, therefore, a study of these latter Sacraments and their relationship to their use by the priest needs be made.

Some preliminary observations must be made in regard to the unique relationship of the priest and the Sacraments before a detailed study can be made. A major concept in the relationship of the priest to the Sacraments is the stress which Chrysostom places on the ability of the priest to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments.¹² It was previously noted that this key concept stems from the intimate relationship of the priest and Christ.¹³ However, Chrysostom applies certain important strictures to the power and ability of the priest to perform the "Mysteries" of the Church on behalf of the laity of the Church. Let it first be noted that Chrysostom does not fall into the deadly heresy of Donatism which makes the validity of the Sacraments rest on the faith of the priest or upon his worthy life, while

¹¹Penitence will be used throughout this section to signify the system of publicly imposed and publicly fulfilled penalties for sin which was dominant in the early Church to distinguish it from the doctrine of private penance which evolved through the succeeding centuries especially in the west.

¹²Nicene, John Chrysostom, "Second Corinthians, Homily XX," XII, 374. Also cf. footnote 6 on page 34.

¹³Supra, p. 33.

claiming that acts performed by unbelieving and unworthy priests are invalid in the sight of God.¹⁴ On this point he believes that the power of God supersedes the weakness of men and provides a valid Sacrament. Nevertheless, in a similar manner the worthiness of a priest does not add any extra glory or value to the Sacrament.¹⁵ Finally, the priest cannot go beyond the specific commands of God and cannot lay upon the laity any rules or commands not given in the Word of God, the sacred Scriptures, or in the sacred traditions of the Church. To do this would make the priest unworthy to hold the sacred dignity of his office.

Turning then from these general considerations of the varied and complex relationships of the priest and sacred acts, it becomes necessary to study the concepts of the rites of Penitence and the Eucharist in Chrysostom's thought, since in these rites the priest's dignity and power is fully shown forth. On these pivotal issues hangs much of Chrysostom's theology of the priesthood.

Concerning Penitence, Chrysostom believes that the priest has inherent in his office the ability to absolve the repentant sinner of his sins and to bind the unrepentant man's sins until he repents.¹⁶ Concerning this ability to bind or

¹⁴Nicene, John Chrysostom, "First Corinthians, Homily VIII," XII, 44.

¹⁵Nicene, John Chrysostom, "First Corinthians, Homily III," XII, 12.

¹⁶Nicene, John Chrysostom, "Second Corinthians, Homily XIV," XII, 348.

absolve, Chrysostom holds to the popular belief of the times that Christ gave this power of the keys to Peter.¹⁷ At this juncture, however, his thought processes seem to break down, inasmuch as he never makes it clear as to whether or not Peter had the authority or ability to pass this power to succeeding generations of clergy. Chrysostom seems to imply that the power was passed on to the universal Church as a whole (i.e., both to laity and clergy), but that only the ordained priesthood has the ability and the privilege of using this power in the Church publicly. Clearly there are indications that he did not consider the power inherent in each local congregation as a separate, self-contained unit, apart from the universal Church. On this point he goes so far as to say that the laity have no right to make use of this office in public as representatives of the Church.¹⁸ There is no restriction placed on its use by the laity in private, however.

The importance of Penitence is made plain by Chrysostom's belief that repentance is the second baptism and implicitly is more valuable than the initiatory rite.¹⁹ This belief

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, "St. Matthew, Homily LIV," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by George Prevost, revised by M.B. Riddle and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), X, 334.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, "St. John, Homily LXXXVI, op. cit., XIV, 326f.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, "Hebrews, Homily IX," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by T. Keble, revised by Frederic Gardiner and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), XIV, 411.

stems from the idea of Chrysostom that sins committed after Holy Baptism are much more damning than any committed before admission to the Holy Church.²⁰ Chrysostom holds the very popular view of most of the Fathers that baptism removes only those sins committed before it and neutralizes original sin, making it a defect in the nature. Commenting on the Lord's Prayer in this respect, Chrysostom says:

If then the prayer belongs to believers, and they pray, entreating that sins may be forgiven them, it is clear that not even after the laver is the profit of repentance taken away. Since, had He not meant to signify this, He would not have made a law that we should so pray. Now He who both brings sins to remembrance, and bids us ask forgiveness, and teaches how we may obtain remission, and so makes the way easy; it is perfectly clear that He introduced this rule of supplication, as knowing, and signifying, that it is possible even after the font to wash ourselves from our offenses; by reminding us of our sins, persuading us to be modest; by the command to forgive others, setting us free from all revengeful passion; while by promising in return for this pardon us also, He holds out good hopes, and instructs us to have high views concerning the unspeakable mercy of God to man.²¹

Why this preoccupation with the penitential ideal?

Despite his high evaluation of Penitence, Chrysostom did not set out in a conscious manner to devalue baptism completely and remove it from a prominent place in Christian teaching. On the contrary, he extoles it and its power to forgive the sinner.²² His great emphasis on penitence is derived largely

²⁰Nicene, John Chrysostom, "Acts, Homily I," XI, 8.

²¹Nicene, John Chrysostom, "St. Matthew, Homily XIX," X, 135f.

²²Nicene, John Chrysostom, "St. Matthew, Homily LXI," X, 376f.

from the pastoral emphasis which runs throughout his thinking on the priesthood. The priest is constantly to be interested in the spiritual life of the flock. In order to maintain this life, sins must be forgiven and removed. Since Holy Baptism has only much limited power and is only a one-time action, penitence must be elevated to a more prominent place than the other rite in the ministerial care of the priest. Penitence is vital to the life of the Church, for without it no one has the ability to save himself. Not even Peter or the Virgin had the power to do so.

Without a doubt, Chrysostom was affected by the historic position which he holds in the Church regarding the development of the penitential system. Williams comments validly:

This exaltation of the priest in his office of forgiveness may well be connected with the fact that Chrysostom occupies a nodal point in the evolution of penitential discipline. As the spiritual counselor of the citizens of a sophisticated capital, Chrysostom sought an alternative for the humiliating public penance (exomologesis) with its several stages or stations of readmission to communion. Even this repentance for a major sin was permitted by the Church at large only once after the cleansing bath of Baptism (the latter frequently postponed for this reason, as in the case of Chrysostom himself, until adulthood). His contemporaries such as Ambrose still held to one faith, one baptism and one (public) penance. But Chrysostom, perhaps because of his monkish understanding of the range of inward sinfulness, came to believe in the iteration of penance and in a diversified therapy for sinners.²³ (*Italics Williams*)

²³George H. Williams, "The Ministry in the Patristic Period," The Ministry in Historical Perspectives, edited by H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 70.

Similarly the Eucharist is a pivotal point of the priest's relation to the laity and to God. This rite rapidly became the high point of the Christian liturgical worship and the nodal point of the Christian cultus and community structure, a specific instance in which Christ is directly communicated to men through the mediation of the priesthood. Chrysostom recognizes the Eucharist to be a sacrifice of the Lord Christ on the altar. However, this does not imply that the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary in time and history is not complete. Christ's atonement was sufficient to complete a full and all-inclusive redemption for the sins of all men into all eternity.²⁴ The Eucharist is something which is super-temporal and super-historical. It transcends the earthly and temporal, granting to men through the Spirit a unique opportunity to participate in the sacrifice of Calvary daily. It becomes an experience of faith and of believing thanksgiving for the mercy and grace of God. Concerning the awesome spectacle of the rite, Chrysostom vividly comments:

When you see the Lord immolated and lying upon the altar, and the priest bent over the sacrifice, praying, and all the people empurpled by the precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and on earth? Or are you not lifted up to heaven? Is not every carnal affection deposed? Do you not with pure mind and clean heart contemplate the things of heaven? Oh, how wonderful? Oh, the love of God for men! He who sits on high with the Father is in that moment held in the hands of all. He gives himself to any who wish to embrace

²⁴Nicene, John Chrysostom, "Hebrews, Homily XVII," XIV, 452.

and receive Him. All who accept Him do so with a full faith. Do these things seem to you to be worthy of contempt? Are they such that anyone could despise them?

Would you learn of this great holiness from yet another miracle? Picture to yourself Elias, and the multitude standing about, and the victim already laid upon the altar. All the people are motionless and they observe a deep silence while the prophet prays alone. Suddenly the sacrifice is consumed by fire from heaven. These are remarkable things and awe-inspiring. Now leave this scene and consider present day rites. You behold not only the marvelous, but that which passes all admiration. Here stands the priest bringing down not fire but the Holy Spirit. He prays long, not that a flame sent from on high may descend and consume the offering, but that grace may descend upon the sacrifice and thereby inflame the souls of everyone and render them more sparkling than silver tried in the fire. Who then can despise this most awful mystery, unless he has utterly lost his mind? Are you not aware that the soul of man could not abide the splendor of that sacrifice? All would perish were it not for the abundant assistance of this grace of God.²⁵

Chrysostom similarly comments in another section of this same work:

When the priest has invoked the Holy Spirit and performed that most awful sacrifice, and constantly handled the Lord of all, where, pray tell me, where shall we rank him? What the purity and what the piety that we shall exact of him? Only think what manner of hands should they be which perform such a ministry? And what tongue that speaks those words? There ought to be nothing purer, nothing holier, than the soul which receives so great a spirit. In that moment angels are in attendance upon the priest. The space around the altar is filled with the whole order of heavenly powers in honor of Him who lies thereon.²⁶

²⁵John Chrysostom, "On the Priesthood," translated by W. A. Jurgens (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), pp. 31f. Hereafter in this chapter this translation will be known as Jurgens.

²⁶Ibid., p. 95.

The depth and the magnitude of these statements concerning the sacramental acts of the priest reveals an incisive insight into the complexities of the prominent position of the priest in the administration of the Holy Sacraments in the Church. One is compelled to agree in his estimate of the dignity and glory of the priestly order in this vital sphere of influence and authority.

Nevertheless, great dignity and authority are not without their definite drawbacks and impose their corresponding duties and complex responsibilities on the conscience of the priest within the function and structure of his ministrations. Concomitant with the exalted place of the priest in the Church and before God is the almost dreadful responsibility of the priest of maintaining the flock of God without the loss of a single member through neglect or error. Authority always results in responsibility, but it would not be unfair to assert that at a number of crucial instances Chrysostom becomes almost pathological in his fear of this possibility. The loss of one single soul is a matter which will cause the priest a great amount of worry and grave fears that he may lack ability as a priest and that he may have brought about his own soul's damnation.²⁷ Chrysostom comments with a heavy heart:

Now you have heard of the trials which pertain to our present life; but how shall we endure those of the future, when are compelled to render an accounting for every one of those who are entrusted to our care?

²⁷Nicene, John Chrysostom, "Acts, Homily III," XI, 22ff.

For the penalty consists not in shame alone, but even in eternal chastisement. As for the words, "Obey your superiors, and be subject to them for they watch over your souls as men who must render an account," although I have already cited them I will not even now be silent respecting them, for the fear of this warning constantly preys upon my mind. . . . It will not be possible to urge inexperience as an excuse, to take refuge in ignorance nor to pretend necessity or coercion. . . . Because he who is appointed to correct the ignorance of others and to warn them of the approaching conflict with the devil, cannot plead ignorance as an excuse and say, "I did not hear the trumpet and I did not foresee the conflict."²⁸

Chrysostom thus pictures the priest who does not face the many obligations and responsibilities toward his people as certainly facing eternal damnation for his laxity and his sloth. In a similar manner, the shepherd who himself mortally sins cannot hope for mercy or forgiveness and must come to a realization that because of his sin he is damned without any recourse.²⁹ A treacherous paradox rears its head. The glory and dignity of the priesthood are to be desired, but the underlying responsibility serves to drive away those who are most qualified for the task. Chrysostom cannot resolve the conflict for himself or for others. He questions whether anyone is able to face the inherent dangers in the office to obtain the glory. The office is to be desired, but its very desirability can destroy and damn the seeker. But the prize is there, and its very dangers make the office even more glorious for the man who is able to bear the temptations. But how to find such men? That is Chrysostom's query.

²⁸Jurgens, op. cit., p. 91.

²⁹John Chrysostom, "Acts, Homily III," op. cit., XI, 22ff.

CHAPTER V

QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

Chrysostom stresses the qualifications of an excellent priest in his manifold writings and especially in his great normative work on the subject: On the Priesthood. Because of the vast amount of dignity and authority, as well as the resulting responsibility which inheres in the priestly office, there is a natural concern on Chrysostom's part that only those having the proper qualifications be permitted to attain to this position in the Church. Should an inexperienced or an inferior candidate enter the sacred order of priests, he will certainly destroy both himself and the members of the parish which is under his rule. Again the tension found in Chrysostom both to withdraw from the world, and, on the other hand, to remain in society expresses itself most vividly as he stresses the qualifications for the priesthood. He stresses as one of the chief characteristics of a good priest, a lack of pride and ambition to gain the dignity of the priesthood.

Perhaps the primary qualification of the man who seeks the office of the priesthood is that he did not seek the office which has been given as a trust to him. This is not a play on words. Chrysostom believes that a man who deliberately seeks the dignity and glory of the priesthood cannot be and is not worthy of the honor of the office because of his very attempt to seek ordination and gain the dignity of the priestly office

for his own satisfaction.¹ Seeking the priesthood proves that a man is unworthy because of the sinful ambition and deadly pride in his heart. The worthy man is he who constantly and consistently refuses to accept the dignity and flees from it when pressed to accept until the weight of circumstances forces him reluctantly to yield to the electors.² Deceit and lies are perfectly acceptable methods of avoiding danger and escaping when ordination is near.³ If all else fail the candidate should immediately flee and hide safely away until the danger is past. When acceptance is finally forced upon the unwilling candidate, it must come only after much sorrow and weeping. For firm resistance to the electors proves that the candidate is truly worthy, and the amount of worthiness rises in proportion to the amount of unwillingness which a candidate demonstrates before the congregation.

Williams makes this comment, summing up the position of the greater majority of the ancient Fathers on this point:

Chrysostom's initial reluctance to accept the responsibilities of the episcopate, or rather his recoiling from it as something dreaded and perilous, was an attitude he shared with many other of the great episcopal pastors of the fourth century. Some of their protestations of utter unworthiness strike the modern reader as pathological; and some of the ruses whereby they sought to escape being "captured," "snared," and "seized" for the episcopate seem theatrical. Closer

¹John Chrysostom, "On the Priesthood," translated by W. A. Jurgens (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), p. 39. Hereafter in this chapter this translation will be known as Jurgens.

²Ibid., pp. 40f.

³Ibid., pp. 5f.

scrutiny of their behavior and arguments, however, gives us perhaps a clearer idea of the ministry in Christian antiquity than any other approach. Reluctance rather than readiness was taken as a sign of valid vocation.⁴

Preparation for the priesthood would have been thought to be a horrible perversion of the will of God in the manner of selecting candidates.

It can be demonstrated that a great deal of the warped emphasis on the unwillingness of the candidate as the primary criterion for admission to the priesthood was a violent reaction to the continual struggle of the Church to prevent corrupt office-seekers from dominating the Church, a process which had been quickened by the establishment of the Church as the only authorized State religion by Theodosius I. Ample proof of the many and varied cabals can be adduced to prove that bribery and other forms of corruption increased as the Church became more and more of a bureau of the government and began to have influence in the government.⁵ Not even the very humble office of deacon was exempt from the plottings of the office-seekers who lavished bribes attempting to attain even this office with its attendant authority. Chrysostom bitterly complains about the practices of the times.⁶

Perhaps, however, the underlying reason for this fear

⁴George H. Williams, "The Ministry in the Patristic Period," The Ministry in Historical Perspectives, edited by H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 68.

⁵Ibid., p. 68.

⁶Jurgens, op. cit., pp. 48ff.

of responsibility stems from the extreme concept of individual salvation which permeates the Church during this period. By entering into the priesthood, the candidate exposes himself to possible destruction if he should fail in his duty to his congregation. Basically this attitude in Chrysostom is a selfish type of perversion. Chrysostom is interested in saving primarily himself, and should the opportunity show itself, to help others along the most lonesome path to salvation. Christians in the fourth century were no longer altruistic about helping others in need of spiritual assistance. Salvation became more and more an extremely individualistic movement, and the concept of mutual edification which revealed itself in the earlier periods gradually drops away in this century of stress. The communal aspect of the Gospel slowly disappears or is neglected in the rush to work out one's own salvation. Only the increasing emphasis on the sacramental system and its various aspects of worship kept the Church from fragmenting itself.

The social emphasis of the Gospel, nevertheless, is not wholly lost in Chrysostom's application of the individualistic conception of salvation to the duties and obligations of the priest. When the circumstances have forced ordination and responsibility upon the unwilling candidate, he then is to apply every energy to the care of his congregation's needs. Needless to say, this attitude is not altruistic either. This care for the needs of the congregation has its roots in the hard fact that the salvation of the priest is now linked to

that of the congregation is a type of spiritual symbiosis. If the congregation is lost, the priest will be lost. Similarly the reverse is true.

This desire to preserve the souls of those entrusted to him will lead the priest to develop those abilities of instruction and guidance to prevent those who depend upon him and his ministrations from lapsing into sin.

Chrysostom, therefore, considers the ability to instruct the gainsayers and the members of his congregation to be a basic requirement for the candidate to possess and develop to a high degree of skill.⁷ If this is done, the priest can be assured that none of his congregation will lapse into their pagan ways. Primarily the priest is to use the sermon in the daily service to instruct and admonish his members as to their duties and obligations in living the Christian life in the pagan society around them. For this reason Chrysostom usually prepared his homilies so that they were didactic in their basic structure and hortatory in nature and scope.⁸ It would seem that this didactic function of the priest is second only in importance to the liturgical functions of the priest in the sacrifice of the Eucharist and his dealing with the penitent

⁷Ibid., pp. 69-74.

⁸Paul Gerhardt Littmann, "The Historical and Grammatical Interpretation of John Chrysostom Evaluated on the Basis of His Homilies on Romans," Bachelor's Thesis (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1947), pp. 36-9. Littmann describes Chrysostom's homilies as consisting of two sections. The first was an exposition of the text, and the second consisted of a series of exhortations and admonitions to Christian growth.

sinners in the Sacrament of Penitence and initiates in the rite of Holy Baptism.

Even so, in some ways it would seem that his preaching function perhaps had more of an impact on the average Christian than the very complex liturgical ceremonies and rites in which and during which he was nothing more than an observer or a passive recipient. In his sermon the priest has an opportunity to warn of the multitude of dangerous and hidden heresies, as well as to speak directly to the needs of the people and instruct them as to the dangers in the pagan society.⁹ Lefroy praises this practical didactic function of the priest in the early centuries of the Church:

Indeed, for the first four centuries of the Church's history the didactic office was, as God designed it to be, the effective agency by which the knowledge of His love was to be promulgated; and whether we turn to the attitude of the Church towards the catechumens, comprising the audientes or the competentes; or towards the baptized; or towards the masses of the population, the verdict of history is that for at least twelve generations of human life the word of the Risen and Returning Redeemer was implicitly obeyed. The Gospel was preached to every creature.¹⁰ (Italics Lefroy)

Chrysostom himself perhaps best of all points out the duty of the priest in this area of pastoral work when he says concerning the need for didactic preaching on the part of the priest:

⁹Jurgens, loc. cit., pp. 71ff.

¹⁰William Lefroy, "The Moral Sphere of Ministerial Work," The Christian Ministry: Its Origin, Constitution, Nature, and Work (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), p. 271.

Indeed, this the most perfect end of teaching: to lead one's disciples by word and deed to the blessed life which Christ instituted. It is not sufficient to teach by example alone. That is not my word, but the word of the Saviour Himself. "But whosoever," he says, "shall do and teach, he shall be called great." Now, if doing were the same as teaching, the second word would have been superfluous; and it would have been enough simply to have said, "Whosoever shall do." By distinguishing between the two he shows that it is one thing to act and another to preach, and that in order to edify perfectly each stands in need of the other.¹¹
(Italics Jurgens)

Furthermore, Chrysostom realized that correct knowledge and interpretation of the Scriptures are basic to correct preaching. It is essential to know the Bible accurately because it is the inspired Word of the Spirit, which has been given to the Church.¹² Thus the laity are strongly advised to study the Bible, so that they will better be able to ward off the challenges of paganism and heresy.¹³ However, the main task of Bible study falls upon the priest who must be so well acquainted with the Word that he will be enabled to apply Scripture correctly in all situations, no matter how strange or different they might appear to be. It is reasonable to assume that this was true especially when dealing

¹¹Jurgens, op. cit., p. 79.

¹²John Chrysostom, "St. John, Homily I," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by G. T. Stupart and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), XIV, 180.

¹³John Chrysostom, "St. Matthew, Homily XLVII," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by George Prevost, revised by M. B. Riddle and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), X, 294f.

with heretics who accepted the Bible as the Word of God but put false interpretations upon it. Concerning this problem, Littmann aptly remarks:

Many of Chrysostom's homilies clearly show his great familiarity with the whole of Scripture. He used Scripture alone to fortify his argument in his homilies of a controversial nature. He nowhere in his homilies on Romans relied upon existing tradition or the authority of the Church to back up his arguments. "The dispute with the most rationalistic and critical Arians seems never to have turned on the authority, but only on the interpretation of Scripture." The controversial situation provided some degree of incentive for Chrysostom to arrive at the exact meaning of the words of Scripture.¹⁴

Chrysostom grasped the importance of this didactic function in the life of the Church. The Word must be examined and used as the prime tool in the work of the priest. Chrysostom undoubtedly valued the Word highly, perhaps unconsciously even more than the Sacraments which were awesome but not as plastic in their application to the needs of the individual Christian. The instruction must fit the circumstances, and only the Word is able to be so used, inasmuch as the Sacraments were to a certain extent inflexible in their rigidity and form.

It goes without saying that Chrysostom realized that instruction and admonition were not sufficient in themselves. Properly used they edify. Negatively used they can destroy a man by hardening his heart. The priest must therefore be able also to deal with his people as a wise administrator and use the judicial function in the Sacrament of Penitence prudently to get the best results.¹⁵ These functions require that a

¹⁴Littmann, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁵Jurgens, op. cit., pp. 19f.

priest bring the Word to bear on the individual and be able to work with various types of personalities, realizing the strengths and weaknesses of each and in turn applying the best method in each case. The function of the priest in pastoral care is similar to that of the physician who must prescribe different treatments for varied illnesses.¹⁶ He knows that the wise priest must be aware of the necessity to bind or loose sin, as well as to excommunicate when all else fails.¹⁷ Concerning this ability to deal with people of varied needs and caring for those with differing characters, Chrysostom comments:

A priest must be sober and watchful; he must have a thousand eyes to see in every direction, inasmuch as he lives not for himself alone, but for the whole people. . . . But when a man's services are divided among so many, and he must be solicitous for the needs of each of his subjects, can he offer anything worthwhile toward their development unless he possesses a strong and virile character?¹⁸

According to Chrysostom, not only the special pastoral functions require wisdom and ability. The priest must be able to exercise very sagacious planning when administering the affairs of the parish and its temporal possessions. Church property had grown in value throughout the years. This calls for ability in the areas of finance and a knowledge of the

¹⁶Williams, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁷Jurgens, op. cit., pp. 58f.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 41f.

best way to distribute alms among the poor. Chrysostom realizes the dangers in improper or lax handling of the distribution of the alms.¹⁹ There will be enemies of the priest who will spy out every action of the priest in this sphere of authority, waiting to accuse him of misuse of the Church's property should there be any possibility of fraud or laxity in the distribution of alms. To prevent this and to make certain that there is an ample flow of money into the treasury, the priest should openly distribute the alms as soon as the money or property comes into his possession.²⁰ In this way he will allay all suspicion of fraud and protect himself from temptation.

Similarly the priest must use a great degree of wisdom when he deals with widows and virgins. Both classes of women will be the cause of the gravest difficulties which the priest must face. Widows constantly contemplate remarriage instead of remaining in their present condition or come to the priest constantly with requests for an increase or advance payment of their alms.²¹ However, virgins are the source of the worst temptations which the priest must face in his ministrations. Chrysostom believes that only with trepidation and great fear can the priest associate with virgins and give proper guidance.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 51ff.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

Here the temptation to sin is the greatest, even when the priest over a period of time has managed adequately to sublimate his natural sexual impulses. Should a virgin break her vow of chastity, she is condemned without hope of salvation.²² Because of the dangers both to priest and virgin, Chrysostom comments with a note of dread:

Great is the apprehension of him upon whom falls this care. The danger and distress are greater if (God forbid) anything untoward should happen. Daughter to her father is ever hidden anxiety, a care that banishes sleep.²³ (Italics Jurgens)

Chrysostom can give no easy advice to the virgin and the priest. He comments on the only course open to the priest in removing the virgin from temptation:

He who orders her to remain always at home must put an end to these occasions for her going out, by providing her with all necessities, and with a woman who will manage things. He must prevent her from attending funerals and nocturnal vigils; for the cunning serpent knows (oh, how well he knows) how to spread his poison even by means of good works. The virgin must be protected on every side. Seldom in the course of a year should she be out of the house; and even then only for necessary and unavoidable reasons.²⁴

Thus it goes without saying that Chrysostom defends the belief in clerical celibacy, no matter what the circumstances, and would even advocate lay celibacy. His early attitude is evident from his second letter to the "fallen Theodore." By means of celibacy Chrysostom would maintain ascetic purity even in the midst of the "world" and its temptations. It

²²Ibid., p. 55.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 56

would appear that Chrysostom in later life realized that the imposition of this ethic as a sign of spiritual sanctity creates more difficulties than would a more natural (and consequently liberal) approach to the situation and to a certain extent eased the almost impossible strictures which he had placed on the Christian seeking the holy life in his youth. However, Chrysostom, as well as the other defenders of the celibate ideal, did not realize that if celibacy were the natural order of creation, the countless warnings against laxity would not be necessary. Most defenders of the celibate ideal lack consistency. Logic demands that the celibate take the final step and emulate Origen. The imposition of celibacy is one of the attempts to maintain an ascetic type of existence in an aesthetic society. It would seem that Chrysostom's view was moderated in later years after his life in society was resumed. Perhaps his practicality lead him to such conclusions about the impracticability of maintaining such a stern ethic.

Translated by W. ...
... 1955, pp. 112.

CHAPTER VI

DANGERS INHERENT IN THE PRIESTHOOD

Chrysostom's emphasis on the extreme individuality of salvation, in keeping with the times, leads him to the very logical conclusion that to remain in society is dangerous and should be avoided. Essentially this is the basic, perhaps the prime danger of the priesthood; that the priest must constantly associate himself with people and with a warped society. Living in society is dangerous, because society means that other people will impinge on the priest's personality. Association with people means association of ideals and ideas. Such association is dangerous because it inevitably leads to temptation for the priest, temptation to slaken in the rigor of the ascetic life and so to destroy the rigidity and stability which the ascetic has built up over the years to protect himself from the possibility of succumbing to sin. All too easily, Chrysostom believes, society can tempt the unwary priest to barter his regulated life for the vanity of wealth and power.¹ Deadliest of all, of course, are the hidden and minifest temptations to engage in sexual sins of various kinds.² Sexuality is a source of apprehension for Chrysostom and the other Church fathers

¹John Chrysostom, "On the Priesthood," translated by W. A. Jurgens (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), pp. 93f.

²Ibid., pp. 92f.

because of the extreme emphasis placed on it by the perverted pagan society. Danger in this sexual realm is increased a thousandfold over the danger faced by the ascetic hermit, living in his cave or sitting atop a pillar. The solitary life had thus been equated with the secure life. In society the priest can never be certain that the barriers which his will has imposed and erected against his natural drives and emotions will not break down under the stress and thus destroy him. In the face of such spiritual strains, Chrysostom comments:

The hermit is engaged in a hearty conflict which occasions him no inconsiderable effort. Yet, if his labors be compared with those which the priesthood involves, the difference will be seen to be as great as the distinction between commoner and king. In the case of the hermit, the struggle is indeed a difficult one; but still it is a common effort of body and soul--or rather the great burden of the work is accomplished by disciplining the body. . . . In the case of the priest we are concerned . . . with purity of the soul. . . .³

Commenting on the difficulties of the ascetic who makes an attempt to assume the duties of the priest and live in the company of people in society, Chrysostom sadly remarks:

When such a man enters the struggle the like of which he has never before experienced, he is bewildered, dazed and becomes quite helpless. Not only does he make no progress in virtue, but he is likely to lose what virtue he already has.⁴
(Italics mine)

It would seem that Chrysostom is tempted to assert that the office of the priest destroys the very virtues needed in

³Ibid., p. 97.

⁴Ibid., p. 100.

a candidate if he is to be worthy of the office. This approach to the problem of ambition and pride brings out a strange quality in his reasoning. Authority leads to the destruction of the priest because temptation to manifest greater glory will assert itself in the midst of society. The ascetic life of the cenobite will not be endangered in such a manner. Away from intercourse with men, ambition and pride cannot ruin the heart of the ascetic. The prime difficulty with the argument, of course, is that the young Chrysostom failed to realize that the ascetic in the wilderness can be just as proud of his lack of ambition as the priest in society who seeks out advancement in the regular structured system of the organized Church. There is no real difference. Different types of ambition and pride manifest themselves under different conditions in different ways in individuals. For all of his realization of the basic differentiation in human personality, Chrysostom did not learn this essential truth about people until much later in life when he worked among them daily as a pastoral adviser. Until then he did not understand that simple emotions are expressed in complex and sometimes unfathomable reactions.

Similarly, Chrysostom argues that a concomitant feature of the tendency to seek advancement in the Church is the resulting envy which both the priest and his enemies will have toward each other.⁵ Herein a basic danger of the priesthood

⁵Ibid., pp. 38ff.

is underscored. Men of all ranks and stations will criticize the priest and his various methods, causing enmity on the part of the people toward the priest.⁶ For reason ecclesiastical politics always is soul-destroying. Eventually the bidding and striving for office (which is almost inherent in the office) will certainly cause the priest to perish. While Chrysostom realized that politics and religion do not mix well, he failed to see that withdrawal from the situation would not help the affair. Should all the qualified declare themselves to be unworthy of the office and fear for their salvation, who would take care of the Christian community? The only possible answer is that the unworthy would gain control over the Church and destroy it in their attempts to gain the ascendancy. Then the Church would not be destroyed through the failure of the priest to care properly for the people but through the greater sin of neglect on the part of all who would withdraw from their society through their false ethic.

This individualistic stress in thinking among the ascetics of the fourth and following centuries is a defect which Bainton rightly criticizes when he makes the incisive comment on the relation of priest to cenobite which follows:

No more compact summary of the results of the previous

⁶John Chrysostom, "Acts, Homily III," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, translated by J. Walker, J. Sheppard and H. Browne, revised by George B. Stevens and edited by Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), XI, 22ff.

chapter is to be found in the contemporary literature than Chrysostom's tract On the Priesthood. . . It was written to justify the decision to remain a monk rather than to undertake the more onerous tasks of a parish minister. What a reversal of values comes here to light! At first monasticism was deemed the most rugged form of the Christian life, the very successor to martyrdom. Now the priesthood had come to be regarded as more arduous and monasticism was defended as the safest way to heaven, for though here one might not rise so high, neither could one fall so low.⁷ (Italics mine)

Here the situation is accurately described, a complete reversal of the early attitude toward the position of the priest and cenobite. The Church in earlier centuries had stressed the various aspects of unity and co-operation in transforming society through regenerate individuals. By the end of the fourth century Chrysostom represents the attitude of the day that the task of the Church is transforming the individual by withdrawing from society because society is incapable of being transformed even by the most regenerate individuals. On the contrary society will cause the regenerate individual to retrogress into a sinful condition. In dealing with the priesthood this formula is accelerated tenfold by the processes of temptation. To a certain extent even the organized Church seems to be suspect, and the ability of the Church to remain separated from society and its pagan ideals is questioned. Thus it must be noted again that the one great strength of the

⁷Roland H. Bainton, "The Ministry in the Middle Ages," The Ministry in Historical Perspectives, edited by H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 82.

ascetic must yield to the Church and its authority. However, the implication is always there, though never concretized, that eventually the ascetic by his holy life will reach a point in his meditation and sanctity where the Sacraments will be of little more value to him. This could validly be termed a perfectionist tendency (rather than a synergistic one) which can cause the young Chrysostom to remark:

But if I cannot aid another, then I shall certainly think it is sufficient to rescue myself from the flood and in this I will be contented.⁸

Again he exclaims:

I think, nevertheless, that my punishment will be less severe when I am called to account for not having saved other, than it would be if I were to ruin others as well as myself by becoming worse after having received so great an honor.⁹

With these words Chrysostom undermines much the position which he attempts to defend at a number of vital points. It is evident that salvation has developed with such an individualistic basis that it no longer matters whether the ascetic shows love to the rest of humanity or even to his fellow Christians. There is room for nothing more in such a tendency than a pressing to the goal of individualistic salvation. The rest of mankind is forgotten in the rush to reach the haven of salvation. Even the priesthood with its authority and glory is to be abandoned to others with the weak excuse that the

⁸Jurgens, op. cit., p. 103.

⁹Ibid.

ascetic is too easily prone to temptation and sin that will plague the priest. Even the glory of the Eucharist is to be abandoned in the attempt to assault the gates of glory.

This tendency in Chrysostom's early theology is brought about by its emphasis on the unworthiness of the individual in accepting responsibility for the souls of others. It is basically a surrender to fear and self-seeking of an even deadlier form than office-seeking in the Church. At least the self-seeking priest is serving his people in some manner or other, and this service is infinitely better than the service rendered by an ascetic, celibate cenobite dwelling in a cave or atop a pillar.

It is to Chrysostom's credit that as he worked among his people in Antioch and Constantinople, he came to realize the dangers inherent in such a radical withdrawal from society and responsibility. It would appear that in later life some modifications appeared in his approach to this problem which mellowed his attitude toward asceticism and withdrawal from the problems of a pagan society.

CHAPTER VII

THE PARADOX OF CHRYSOSTOM

Chrysostom leaves a great many unresolved tensions in his position on the priesthood and its various relationships to the Church and individual Christian. These tensions when analyzed appear to stem from many of the seeming contradictory statements and attitudes which reveal themselves in Chrysostom's writings. Difficulties also arise in defining his precise attitude because of the vast amount of literature accredited to him, much of which was written at various times and under varying conditions. His early and later writings differ. It would be unrealistic to assume that he could not have modified his earlier theology on the priesthood in his later life when he had gained maturity and experience in the pastoral office. These factors make an exact synthesis very difficult and require that in a few places certain conjectures must be assumed to be true without their complete delineation in his writings. Also many of the subtle overtones of thought must be shaded over so that a complete and well-rounded picture can be gained.

The most incisive tension which presents itself when evaluating Chrysostom's position on the priesthood is the apparent ambivalent attitude which Chrysostom had toward the office of the priest. Recognizing it as the highest office on earth, he still maintains that a multitude of dangers surround

it, dangers which make him draw back in terror. He prizes the office so highly that he exalts it above the position of the angels, but he would leave it to others because the ascetic life might be hindered by it. Elevating the office to the greatest heights in the Eucharist where man and God are united, he abandons it to the office-seekers.

This tension will be recognized as one which has faced the Church in varying forms throughout the ages. Basic is the question of whether or not the Church should work in society or withdraw from the "world" to lead a life of sanctity and holiness. This tension expresses itself in Chrysostom in the relationship of the individual to the taking on of the responsibility of the priesthood. Should the individual expose himself to the dangers inherent in the pagan society or should he remain aloof from the struggle? Chrysostom would seem to solve the tension by advocating a withdrawal ethic. He realizes the need for workers and urges others to take up the task which he regards as difficult and dangerous. But by a twist of fate, after failing to achieve peace and security as an ascetic, he returned to society to take up the duties of a priest. He did exactly the opposite in his own life of what he claimed to be the best course in his own normative writings. Perhaps he attempted to combine the two contradictory elements in his nature and theology by attempting to practice the ascetic life in society. To a certain extent he succeeded. Nevertheless, also to a certain extent he failed in this approach.

The spirit of the Christian community is not wholly lost in his extreme individualistic emphasis. In the Church the priest has the most vital role. He is the spiritual mediator between the congregation and God. Because of his ordination both God and the universal Church have entrusted the priest with the highest authority and glory in the world. The priest has great authority and honor in administering the Sacraments of the Church. His greatest moment of honor is achieved in the Eucharist when Christ is sacrificed and immolated upon the altar through the priest's invocation of the Holy Spirit. Similarly his power to bind and loose sins places on him the greatest glory. These liturgical functions then are the source of the priesthood's glorious position in the world.

Concomitant with that glory and authority is the priest's great responsibility toward the people whom he serves. He must account for the loss of every soul which might perish under his care. From this dreadful responsibility Chrysostom recoils in terror. To be responsible for the spiritual lives of so many Christians is too awful a responsibility. Because it is so terrifying a thought, only the most qualified should be permitted to enter these sacred orders. It is a primary criterion that the candidate be completely unwilling to assume the dignity of the office. Readiness is revealed by a desire to flee from the responsibility of the office. Ambition and office-seeking are signs of complete unworthiness on the part of the candidate.

Nevertheless, when a candidate is ordained, he must begin in deadly earnest to care for his congregation. He is to use the preaching office as the primary means of instructing and admonishing the members of his parish. This calls for careful and adequate preparation and a high degree of eloquence to overcome any heretics or pagans who might oppose the Word or the Church. All priests must excel in this task or their congregations will be lost to the wiles of the Devil and the heretical teachers.

In addition to eloquence and a perfect knowledge of the Scriptures, the priest must also be able to deal with many different types of people. For this he needs a great deal of wisdom and common sense, inasmuch as he must understand that each individual reacts to stress in his own way. Especially when dealing with Christians in the judicial function during the Sacrament of Penitence, the priest must know how to apply good sense to the disposition of the case. In a similar way when he must deal with the temporal affairs of the Church, a great deal of wisdom and common sense is needed to prevent any thought of malfeasance of duty. This is vitally important when dealing with widows and virgins.

Chrysostom believes that the ascetic is not qualified to accept these many and varied responsibilities because of his inexperience. Multitudes of temptations will assault him with intent of causing him to fall and be lost. Thus the emphasis on fleeing the task and leading the contemplative life as an ascetic cenobite.

This is the paradox of Chrysostom. The office of the priest is glorious, yet it may carry the seeds of destruction in it for any man who takes hold of it. It is the highest office created by God, but it can cause the individual to lose all hope of salvation if failure results even by accident. Chrysostom understands that the office can elevate a man to immeasurable glory or crush him to the earth in horrible and eternal destruction. From experience Chrysostom learned that both are possible and experienced both with equal intensity.

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