

ON DIVINE PHILANTHROPY*
FROM PLATO TO JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

B Y
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IV. SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO CHRYSOSTOM'S
USE OF *PHILANTHROPIA*

There is a paradoxical definition according to which «Chrysostom was no theologian, but he possessed a theology.»¹ This witty judgment is, however, impaired by its anachronistic evaluation of the man, since by classical patristic standards Chrysostom was a most impressive theologian by virtue of his being the most acclaimed interpreter of Scriptures.² Indeed, even Chrysostom's enormous literary output could be put under the caption of «this theology of incompleteness,»³ since he also, like all Biblically-minded writers, would «leave completeness to the Holy Spirit through the building up of the Church as the Body of Christ. The schizoid intellectual's security demands completeness.»⁴

In order to situate Chrysostom as a theologian, we must also know what position he held in the long struggle for exegetical supremacy between the rival schools of Antioch and Alexandria.⁵ Educated in the Antiochene tradition of anti-allegorical hermeneutics, Chrysostom, however, overcame the all too exclusive bias of his elders and dared to use allegories.⁶ Thus, by combining the two rather complementary methods he was more

* Συνέχεια ἐκ τῆς σελ. 152 τοῦ προηγούμενου τεύχους.

1. Clow, *Expositor* 23 (1922), p. 362. Cited by C. Baur, *op. cit.*, I, 356.
2. H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, I (Paris, 1951) 38; «Il n' existait pas de théologie systématique; toute l' érudition théologique se concentrait dans l' exégèse.» Cf. also, Z. Alszeghy, *Nova creatura: La Nozione della grazia nei commentari medievali di S. Paolo* (Rome, 1953), p. 4.
3. G. H. Williams, «Georges Vasilievich Florovsky», *loc. cit.*
4. Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychiatric Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care* (London, 1966), p. 591.
5. Eustathius of Antioch was vehemently opposed to Origen's allegorizing. See *De engastromycho-Contra Origenem* PG 18, 656-657.
6. *In Matt. Comment. Hom.* 52,1 PG 57, 519; *In Ioannem Hom.* 85,1 PG 59, 461. Henri de Lubac wrote in «Typologie' et 'Allégorisme', *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947), pp. 180-226, especially p. 196, «Le scrupule relatif à l' allégoria est chose tout à fait récente». For example K. J. Woollcombe, «The Biblical Origins and Patristic Development of Typology», *Essays on Typology by G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe* (London, 1957), pp 39-75, especially p. 57, n. 1, wrote: «Chrysostom occasionally incorporates a piece of allegorism into his homilies, but makes it plain that he has borrowed it from another source.»

able to search after the unity of the inspiration in the Scriptures.⁷ The superficial Antiochene analogies often seem short-sighted in comparison with the Alexandrian intuition of deep typological connections.⁸ The Patristic use of allegory is justified since it appears almost exclusively in homiletical «applied theology.»⁹ Nonetheless, Chrysostom is famous for his sober historical and psychological method in the art of interpreting the main source of theology—Holy Writ.¹⁰ He did invoke the authority of the oral tradition, too,¹¹ but the more conspicuous aspect of the revelation was for Chrysostom as for all the Fathers mainly to be found in the Scriptures.¹²

Following the example of apophatic thinking given by the Capadocians and Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom also insisted, against the Anhomoians, that God, even revealed, remains incomprehensible.¹³ The perfect knowledge of God the Father is the exclusive privilege of the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ If we know anything about God, this is only because the Revealer of the divine secrets, Jesus of Nazareth, is not only man, but also God.¹⁵ His heavenly doctrine is given to us in order that we may imitate our Teacher according to the personal capacity of each.¹⁶

7. Jacques Guillet, «Les Exégèses d' Alexandrie et d' Antioche, conflit ou malentendu?» *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947), pp. 257-302, esp. p. 296.

8. *Ibid.*, p.p. 291-292.

9. Georges Florovsky, «Revelation and Interpretation», *Biblical Authority for Today*, ed. Alan Richardson and W. Schweitzer (London and Philadelphia, 1951), pp. 163-80, esp. p. 180.

10. Adolf Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder von Kana: Die Auslegung von Jo 2,1-11 bei den Vätern und heute* (Tübingen, 1966), p. 270.

11. For Chrysostom the Apostles are, personally, at once, «βιβλία καὶ νόμοι.» «*In Matth. Hom.* I, 1 PG 57,15; cf. PG 62, 361.

12. H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, p. 56, pointed out: «que l'Écriture contienne toute la révélation, ce fut... la thèse à peu près unanime jusqu' à la veille de la réforme.» Vladimir Lossky gives a balanced appreciation of the problem: «Whilst the Protestant doctrine of the 'sufficiency of Scripture' received a negative meaning, by the exclusion of all that is 'Tradition', the defenders of Tradition saw themselves obliged to prove the necessity of union between two juxtaposed realities, each of which remained insufficient alone. (However) if the two are 'fulness,' there could be no question of two 'pleromas' opposed to one another, but of two modalities of one and the same fulness of the Revelation communicated to the Church.» See «Tradition and traditions,» p. 13.

13. René Latourelle, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

14. *In Joannem Hom.* 15,2 PG 59, 98-100.

15. *In Coloss. Hom.* 5,1-2 PG 62, 331-333; *In Romanos Hom.* 27,1 PG 60, 643-644.

16. *In Joannes Hom.* 15,3 PG 59, 100.

As the Cappadocian Fathers made a distinction between the essence of God and His energies,¹⁷ so did Chrysostom between the absolutely unknowable divine οὐσία (essence) and the partially cognizable divine οἰκονομίαι (dispensations).¹⁸ Following more particularly St. Basil's subtle insight,¹⁹ Chrysostom differentiates the power of God (δύναμις), by which He punishes, from *philanthropia* and *chréstotês* by which those that repent are saved.²⁰

It is high time to illustrate with concrete examples my contention that the notion of divine philanthropy links together all the aspects of Chrysostom's cataphatic theology.

After having appropriated the Cappadocian theological formula: God in one essence and Three Hypostases,²¹ Chrysostom ascribes the attribute of *philanthropia* distinctly to all Three Divine Persons: God (the Father) is the source of philanthropy;²² the philanthropy of Christ is attested several times,²³ while that of the Holy Spirit, explicitly, is attested only once.²⁴ The Trinity is invoked after the closing formula «χαρίτι καὶ φιλανθρωπία», more often than Christ alone.²⁵ This predilection for the Trinitarian ending makes it even clearer that for Chrysostom *philanthropia* is the property of the Three Divine Persons.

That God is in want of naught (ἀνευδεής)²⁶ proves the contingency of the creation, which came into being sheerly out of divine philan-

17. Basil, *Ad Amphiloichium Ep.* CCXXXIV PG 32, 868C; Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Theophaniam* VII PG 36, 317; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ecclesiast.* VII PG 44, 732; (W. Jaeger), V, 415.

18. *De Incomprehens.* I PG 48, 706D; (Flacellière), pp. 98-100. Cf. *In Romanos Hom.* 27, 1 PG 60, 644-645. Cf. PG 52, 404: «ὀλίγον τῆς Θεότητος».

19. Saint Basil, *The Letters*, trans. R. Deferrari, III, 372-73.

20. *In Romanos* XVI PG 60, 560.

21. *Huit catéchèses baptismales* I, 21, (Wenger), p. 119. Cf. *In Joannem* IV PG 59, 49.

22. «πηγή· γὰρ ἐστὶ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας.» *In Genes.* XXVI PG 53, 238.

23. *Cur in Pentec. acta etc. In princip. Act.* IV PG 51, 97; *Comment. in Matthewum* III PG 57, 34; PG 57, 337; 364; 468; 469; *In Philipp. Comment.* PG 62, 286.

24. PG 59,75. The *philanthropia* of the Holy Spirit is indirectly indicated through the satellite notion of κηδεμονία: «Καὶ γὰρ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον σφόδρα ἡμῶν κήδεται.» *In Romanos* XV PG 60, 510 His philanthropy appears even more clearly through His presence in baptism, which is characterized as an action of divine philanthropy. *In Romanos* XVI PG 60, 554.

25. I have found 379 homilies with a closing Trinitarian doxology, and only 135 with a Christological conclusion.

26. *Ad Stagirium* I PG 47, 428.

thropy.²⁷ Even the impassibility of God is paradoxically juxtaposed with His philanthropy.²⁸ Moreover, Chrysostom expressed his view that God can «feel» by emphasizing His intense «erotic» love toward us, even though the balance is preserved by a theological oxymoron — «ἔρωτα ἀπαθῆ» (impassible eros).²⁹

Συγκατάβασις (divine condescension), an associate of *philanthropia*, mainly signifies the verbalized Scriptural expression which permits us to have a glimpse of the constant divine πρόνοια (providence), as well as of the abyss of God's philanthropy, which cannot be verbalized.³⁰

For Chrysostom's Christology the basic assumption is that «the unknown God is none else but Christ.»³¹ He was baptized neither by Judaic nor by Christian baptism, but only by the Johannine baptism of repentance, and that only in order to manifest Who He really was.³² He had to reveal His divinity to the Apostles only gradually, taking into account their Old Testament idea of monotheism as being of a monohypostatic Godhead.³³ At the Incarnation, without changing His divine nature, Christ really assumed human flesh.³⁴ And this mystery, foretold by Isaias, is, according to Chrysostom, «the ocean and abyss of the philanthropy of God.»³⁵

Here I have to open a short parenthesis on Theodore of Mopsuestia († 428), the famous contemporary and compatriot of Chrysostom.³⁶

27. Above, «Θεολογία» 54 (1983) pp. 138, 135.

28. «ἀπαθὲς τὸ Θεῖόν ἐστι, καὶ κολάζη... οὐ μετ' ὀργῆς τοῦτο ποιεῖ, ἀλλὰ μετὰ φιλανθρωπίας.» A. Théodore (Dumortier), p. 96.

29. *De Providentia* VI, 1 (Malingrey), p. 94. Bowman L. Clarke pointed out, in *Language and Natural Theology* (The Hague-Paris, 1966), p. 107, this general principle: «If God is to include all actual value, he must be universally and perfectly sensitive to all creatures.»

30. In *Genes.* X PG 53, 89. But, elsewhere, συγκατάβασις and φιλανθρωπία follow each other as if they were synonymous (In *Genes.* PG 53, 99; PG 53, 114; PG 53, 209; *Huit catéchèses baptismales*, Wenger, p. 123; In *Epist. I ad Cor.* III PG 61,24-25), however, when it is said «διὰ τῶν ρημάτων συγκαταβάσεως» (In *Genes.* XIII PG 53, 106) in contradistinction to the ἄφατος *philanthropia*, (In *Genes.* XIII PG 53, 105; PG 53, 113. Cf. In *Matth.* LXXI PG 58, 664) it is permissible to say that the term *synkatavasis* stands for the concrete expressions of the ineffable *philanthropia*.

31. In *inscript. altar. et in princip. Act.* I PG 51, 73.

32. *De baptismo Christi* PG 49, 367-368.

33. In *Matth.* LXXI PG 58, 662.

34. In *Joannem* XI PG 59, 79.

35. In *Matth.* V PG 57, 56.

36. J. Quasten. *op. cit.*, III, 401.

Indeed, it is from a right understanding of Theodore's Christology that the meaning of his use of the divine *philanthropia* will depend also.

Against the older attempts to completely whitewash Diodorus of Tarsus³⁷ more recent studies justify the traditional disrepute of his Christology.³⁸ He has in fact rejected not only the errors of the Apollinarists, but also the unity of person which they were trying, in their own mistaken fashion, to defend.³⁹ Such a trenchant solution led him to nothing less than «a denial of the reality of the incarnation.»⁴⁰

In spite of the minor positive contributions effected by Theodore in his fight against Apollinaris, Eunomius and Macedonius,⁴¹ his major Christological doctrine is more than questionable, not merely from the point of view of the later Chalcedonian orthodoxy, but from a simple comparison with his contemporary and schoolmate, John Chrysostom. Their respective use of the notion of *συνάφεια* (conjunction) reveals a striking difference.

Theodore may occasionally speak of the «exact conjunction» of the two natures in one Son of God,⁴² but he cannot be more explicit as to what he really thinks by his «synaphic» or «conjunctional» union, than when he says: «If this conjunction be abolished, then what was assumed (by the Logos) would become nothing more than a simple man like ourselves.»⁴³

For Chrysostom, on the other hand, «conjunction» (*συνάφεια*)

37. Nikolai Fetissof, *Diodor Tarssky* (Kiev, 1915) p. 231 (in Russian), asserted that Diodorus was «Athanasius of Antioch.» And L. Mariès, *Etudes préliminaires à l'édition de Diodore de Tarse sur les Psaumes* (Paris, 1933), p. 163, defended «l'orthodoxie même de Diodore.»

38. Pietro Parente, *op. cit.*, p. 65, wrote: «Diodore contrappone le sue idee sull'unione ipostatica, che presentano costantemente in Cristo due soggetti, due io.»

Günter Koch, *Die Heilswertwirklichkeit bei Theodor von Mopsuestia* (Munich, 1965), p. 240, argues that «So kommt bei Diodor... die Wirklichkeit der Menschwerdung in Gefahr».

39. Francis A. Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Rome, 1956), p. 188.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

41. Robert Devreesse, *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste* (Città del Vaticano, 1948), p. 97.

42. «Naqipûtâ hatitâ, « la conjonction exacte des deux natures.» *Les Homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste*, traduction, introduction, index par Raymond Tonneau et Robert Devreesse (Città del Vaticano, 1949), p. 67.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

serves mainly to designate the union of the married couple⁴⁴ or of Christ and the Church,⁴⁵ but even when he applies it to the mystery of the Incarnation Chrysostom is careful to stress the fact that the unique personal bearer of the two realities is the Logos.⁴⁶

If Theodore can think that the two persons (the Logos and the man assumed) can be said to be one, because they are of two totally different natures — although this «oneness» is merely an operation «dans notre pensée»⁴⁷ — all the dangers of Apollinarianism could not excuse him for speaking as if he had never read the Fourth Gospel: «In fact this is not God who became the flesh.»⁴⁸

Chrysostom knew also how to speak eloquently on the two natures in Christ,⁴⁹ but he never lost from sight the unity of the Incarnate Divine Person: «To believe in One born from Mary... in One who was buried and resurrected... The One who said 'Let there be heaven.' [This] is the Same who planted these churches.»⁵⁰

On the contrary, in Theodore's Christology the Word and the assumed man formally unite in one *prosôpon*, but this «person» is not the Divine Person of the Word.⁵¹

44. *In Matth.* LXII PG 58, 597: *A Théodore* (Dumortier), p. 60; *Ad viduam juniorem* 7 PG 48, 610.

45. *Huit catéchèses baptismales* (Wenger), p. 161. Cf. *De Sacerdotio* III, V (Nairn), p. 55.

46. «Τῆ ἐνώσει καὶ τῆ συναφείᾳ ἓν ἐστὶν ὁ Θεὸς Λόγος καὶ ἡ σὰρξ» (*In Joannem Hom.* XI, 2 P 59, 79-80). «Συνάπτων τὴν θείαν φύσιν τῆ ἀνθρωπίνῃ, τὰ αὐτοῦ τοῖς ἡμετέροις.» *In Matth.* II PG 57, 26.

47. *Les Homélie catéchétiques* (Tonneau-Devreesse), p. 209.

48. *Ibid.* When J. Turmel, *Histoire des dogmes*, II (Paris, 1932), 318, tried to make out of Chrysostom a good pupil of Diodorus, by quoting his «two persons» passage (*In Hebr.* 3), Camillus Hay, «St. John Chrysostom and the Integrity of the Human Nature in Christ,» *Franciscan Studies*, XIX (September-December, 1959), 298-347, especially p. 314, p. 73, pointed out that this expression is found in a commentary which was posthumously published by an Antiochene priest, on the basis of notes.

49. *In I ad Timoth.* VII, 2 PG 62, 536-537.

50. *Contra Judaeos et Gentiles* XIII PG 48, 851.

51. Fr. A. Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 282. Cf. P. Parente, *op. cit.*, p. 70 and Milton V. Anastos, «The Immutability of Christ and Justinian's Condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia,» *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No. 6 (1951), pp. 423-60.

After reading R. A. Norris' book *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford, 1963), especially pp. 235-61, I can only say that it was reckless for Theodore to play at being self-styled psychoanalyst of Christ's manhood without being first a qualified theologian, in the patristic sense, an intimate of the Trinity.

When we see that «typically Antiochene difficulties in the interpretation of the unity in Christ do not exist for Chrysostom,»⁵² and take into consideration the classical politeness of not naming explicitly a person who is criticized,⁵³ we are entitled to suspect a tacit opposition between these two most prolific exegetes of Antioch.⁵⁴

Theodore's distorted Christology has for its invalidating consequence the reduced effusion of the divine philanthropy as limited to the creature, the homo assumptus.⁵⁵

(To be continued)

52. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. J. S. Bowden (New York, 1965), p. 338.

53. As for example Diodorus did not name Origen's name while attacking his exegesis: L. Mariès, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

54. It is revealing that in the Nestorian school of Nisibis Henana Adiabenus (†610) dared to prefer John Chrysostom to the officially endorsed Théodore of Mopsuestia. See Mauricius Gordillo, *Theologia orientalium cum Latinorum comparata: Commentatio historica I* (Rome, 1960), 66-67. Cf. J. B. Chabot, *Littérature syriaque* (Paris, 1934,), p. 58.

55. Divine philanthropy is mentioned in *Comment. in Jonae* IV PG 66, 314 C; *Nahumi* I PG 66, 405 B; *Zachariae* XII PG 66, 584 A; *Malachiae* I PG 66, 601; *In Matth.* PG 66, 705 B; 709 A; *In Joannem* PG 66, 732B.