

The Image of Moses in John Chrysostom's View of Jews and Judaism

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1. Introduction

Chrysostom was neither the first nor was he the last Christian exegete to use Moses in shaping his view of Jews and Judaism. Notwithstanding the pastoral and theological importance which Chrysostom attributed to key scriptural events such as the Exodus and the reception of the Sinai covenant, for him Moses was a thoroughly Christian saint, “the greatest of the prophets,”¹ who both exemplified Christian virtue and illuminated Jewish intransigence to the will of God.

Chrysostom placed his discussion of Jews and Judaism within the context of his understanding that contemporaneous Jews were estranged from their Israelite lineage because of their failure to accept Christianity as the fulfillment of the promises God made to their forefathers. In this sense, Chrysostom's treatment of the principle figure of the Exodus narrative is part of a broader theological argument in which he attempted to define the place of Jews and Judaism within his fourth century Antiochene Christian universe.

In this paper I shall discuss the ways in which Chrysostom presented Moses as a prototypical Christian leader to his flock in his sermons and writings as part of his effort to bolster Christian claims to the legacy of Moses and refute those of the Jewish community. As part of this discussion I will examine the ways in which Chrysostom used his theological understanding of Moses in general and

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1. *In Acta apostolorum 4*, PG 60.45 (NPNF1 11.27). Philip Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 38 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

the Law and Sinai covenant in particular to help articulate his views of Jews and Judaism.

2. Moses as a Christian Man of Virtue

Any examination of Chrysostom's view of figures from the Old Testament must lie within the category of virtue. Chrysostom was first and foremost a preacher. Like many of his contemporaries, John was steeped in Greek *paideia* in general and sophistic rhetorical methods in particular. The sophistic method of oratory that John learned from Libanius, the master of his day, provided the basis for sermons which are powerful and often polemical. One aspect of such oratory of which John made extensive use was the encomium—a panegyric homily that extols the virtue of an historic figure. Exegetes, both Alexandrian and Antiochene, used encomiums patterned after the Stoic βίος as a way to convey theological and pastoral messages to their respective flocks—albeit in different ways. The early church fathers promoted scriptural and hagiographic exemplars as virtuous models that their flocks should emulate.

The Stoic man of virtue was a staple in Chrysostom's writings and the Old Testament provided an ample supply of figures to be adapted to this model. Where the Alexandrians absorbed the allegorical *theoria* of Stoic thought, the Antiochenes were much more literal in their application of the Stoic virtuous exemplar. As Leokadia Malunowiczówna noted, for Antiochenes such as John Chrysostom, the Stoic concept of the supreme good was not some form of Alexandrian allegorical abstraction but rather was directly related to God². For Chrysostom, Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai was more of an opportunity to discuss the prophet's great humility and qualities as a leader than it was a chance to explore some type of mystical, spiritual ascent one finds in Gregory of Nyssa's treatment of the subject. While both Chrysostom and Gregory explored the nature of the prophet's virtue, Chrysostom was more concerned with the practical application of such virtue in the daily life of his Antiochene community.

2. MALUNOWICZÓWNA LEOKADIA, "Les Éléments Stoëciens Dans La Consolation Grecque Chrétienne," *Studia Patristica* 13(1975): 35.

Here as elsewhere, Chrysostom's approach indicates that he believed that the true value of the scriptural text was the virtuous examples it provided with figures such as Moses —an example which the Antiochene preacher consistently urged his congregants to emulate. In his exegetical homily on Acts, John instructs the members of his flock to “be filled with zeal and imitate Moses. He saw one suffering wrong and avenged him; he despised royal luxury, and for the sake of those who were afflicted he became a fugitive, a wanderer, lonely and deserted.”³ Thus, Chrysostom was able to present Moses not simply as an Old Testament prophet but also a proto-Christian monastic.

In her analysis of Chrysostom's exegetical view of Noah, Hagit Amirav describes why Chrysostom was attracted to the Stoic model, noting that “the Stoic-like emotional control of the virtuous man and his detachment from the multitude's usual preference and goals are eulogized ... as a means of overcoming unavoidable confrontations between the wicked and the righteous.”⁴ Chrysostom grafted familiar Stoic attributes onto figures such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others in an effort to communicate to his flock the virtue he saw in these scriptural personages and which he desired his congregation to emulate. The Antiochenes, and especially Chrysostom, were in short, less concerned about exploring the mystical ascent of the figure from the sensual world to the divine than they were about communicating a practical, virtuous way of life to their flocks⁵. In terms of Moses, John invariably saw this “unavoidable confrontation between the wicked and the righteous” as a battle between the Christian and Jewish understanding of both the prophet and the Exodus narrative.

Chrysostom depicted Moses as a “great and noble man” [ὁ μέγας καὶ γενναῖος ἀνήρ]⁶ who, like the others whom Chrysostom considered heroes of the

3. *In Acta apostolorum* 43, PG 60.306 (NPNF1 11.266).

4. AMIRAV HAGIT, *Rhetoric and Tradition: John Chrysostom on Noah and the Flood*, Tradition Exegetica Graeca (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 166.

5. To be fair, Chrysostom makes reference to the spiritual characteristics of Moses' ascent up Mount Sinai but his reference has more to do with his perception of the spiritual superiority of the Christian New Covenant in contrast with the carnal qualities of the Old. For example, Chrysostom expounding on Matthew tells his flock that “in the Old Testament, it was upon Moses' going up, that God came down; but here, when our nature has been carried up into heaven, or rather to the royal throne, then the Spirit makes his descent.” *In Matthaem* 1, PG 57.15 (NPNF1 10.2).

6. *Adversus Iudaeos* 6, PG 48.909. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*,

Jewish scripture, exhibited great obedience, faith, and endurance. In John's homilies, Moses struggled and overcame hardship and exile so that the Antiochene preacher's flock "might learn the patience of the saints" [ἵνα μάθῃς τῶν ἁγίων τὴν ὑπομονήν]⁷. Throughout John's homilies, Moses is extolled for his meekness, humility, and patience. Indeed, the prophet's reluctance to assume the mantle of leadership made him in Chrysostom's eyes not only an ideal model for Christian leadership but also for the priesthood⁸.

Chrysostom couched his diatribe against Judaism within the context of his presumption that Jews were "still dwelling in the history of Moses" [ἐπιμένουν ἔτι τῇ ἰστορίᾳ Μωϋσέως] and believed they were saved because of their lineage to figures such as Moses⁹. John asked his flock, "What profit had Moses' sons, not having emulated perfection?"¹⁰ In John's diatribe there was often an underlying pastoral component. Chrysostom was concerned that his flock was overly assured of their own personal salvation and Judaism was often used as a foil to convey this pastoral message. John exclaimed to his listeners, "Oh that it were possible that I could perform good works as your substitute, and that you could receive the rewards of those works!" John, however, posed another question to his congregation and asked, "If the virtuous Moses could not save the Jews how then could he who was 'not holier than Moses' (i.e., Chrysostom) save his own flock?"¹¹

Chrysostom argued that it was the failure of the Jewish people to adhere to the universal categories of virtue—which Moses and the other great Israelite saints possessed—that had cut them off from the inheritance of their righteous ancestors. Although the Jewish people "were sprung from those holy men ... they were neglecting the virtue of the soul" and it was this virtue that was the governing criterion for relationship with Moses. Chrysostom saw this criterion established in scripture, "for Scripture often speaks of the laws of relationship,

trans. Paul W. Harkins, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 161.

7. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 1, PG 49.31 (NPNF1 9.342).

8. *De sacerdotio* 4, PG 48.661 (NPNF1 9.61).

9. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 8, PG 61.456 (NPNF1 8.319).

10. *In Matthaicum* 9 PG 57.181 (NPNF10.56).

11. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 13, PG 49.142 (NPNF1 9.430). "... οὐκ εἶμι Μωσέως ἁγιώτερος".

not meaning the relationship of nature, but that of virtue and wickedness; Scripture calls a man son and brother of the one whose character he shares”¹².

Chrysostom used virtue to establish a Christian bloodline stretching back to figures of the Old Testament such as Moses. John was certainly no Marcionite. He reviled those “who receive the wild doctrines of Valentinus and Marcion, and all whose minds are similarly diseased, exclude the Law given by God to Moses from the catalogue of the Divine Scriptures”¹³. By all accounts, the Jewish community in Antioch was a vibrant one that regularly attracted members of Chrysostom’s flock. As Robert Wilken, Paul Harkins, and others have argued, such attraction to the services of the Jewish synagogue was the foundation of John’s polemical orations directed “Against Judaizing Christians”¹⁴. Chrysostom, no doubt, felt compelled to refute the competing claims of Jews, whether contemporary with him in Antioch or found on the pages of the New Testament text. Thus, in Chrysostom’s homilies, virtue acted as a type of spiritual bloodline that superseded the Jewish historic and ethnic lineage.

3. Covenant and Law

Since Chrysostom embraced the Old Testament as a Christian document and rejected any Marcionistic tendencies in the Church, he considered it necessary to explain the function and the purpose of the law. John reasoned that even though the New Covenant was destined to supersede the law, the law was still necessary since “Had the law not been given, all would have been wrecked upon wickedness, and there would have been no Jews to listen to Christ; but now being given, it has effected two things; it has schooled its followers in a certain degree of virtue, and has pressed on them the knowledge of their own sins”¹⁵. In this very Pauline model, John explained that “The law ... is not the

12. *De Lazaro* 2, PG 48.983. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 41.

13. *De sacerdotio* 4, PG 48.667 (NPNF1 9.65).

14. Regarding Chrysostom’s invective directed at Jews and Judaism, see Robert Wilken’s classic treatment on the subject. WILKEN ROBERT L., *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1983), 112-16.

15. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, PG 61.655 (NPNF1 13.29).

adversary but the fellow-worker of grace”¹⁶. It was in this light that Chrysostom affirmed that Christ acted as “one honoring the law, and admiring Moses, and not setting himself in opposition to the ancient doctrines”¹⁷. In John’s exegesis, Moses and Christ were in perfect agreement, despite the protestations of the scriptural Jews with whom he often argued in his sermons. John responded to the argument that the New Covenant was in opposition to the Old and argued that, “if [Christ] had been an alien from the Old Covenant, he would not have striven for Moses, neither would he have argued positively from the things done once for all at the beginning; he would not have studied to show that His own precepts agreed with those of the Old”¹⁸.

The law therefore had a function in as much as it helped advance and fulfill the future Christian covenant. Indeed, in Chrysostom’s exegesis Christ was the one who gave the law as part of the overall divine economy “for the glory of the Law is to turn men unto Christ” [δόξα γὰρ νόμου, πρὸς Χριστὸν ἐπιστρέψαι]¹⁹. Chrysostom emphatically declared that there is “one God of New and Old Testaments” and this God he stated is “the God also of our forefathers, the giver also of the law”²⁰. Since “Christ also gave the law,” however, it follows that “what therefore it was His to give, it is His to annul” [Εἰ τοίνυν αὐτὸς ἔδωκε, κύριος ἂν εἴη καὶ λῦσαι πάλιν].

Although Chrysostom declared that Christ cast out the Sinai covenant, he refrained from severe disparagement of it. John likened the old covenant and its law to that of a garment that has begun to fray or a house that has decayed. In either case the owner repairs the garment or the house. In a similar fashion “the new [covenant] then has not simply caused the old to cease, but because it had become aged, as it was not [any longer] useful”²². Neither the garment nor the house is inherently bad but each has simply become worn. John contended that the same is true of the old covenant which scripture speaks of not “as evil, but

16. Ibid. Here Chrysostom refers to Gal. 3.24.

17. In *Matthaeum* 25 PG 57.330 (NPNF1 10.170).

18. In *Matthaeum* 62 PG 58.598 (NPNF1 10.360).

19. In *epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 7, PG 61.445 (NPNF1 12.311).

20. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 47, PG 55.215. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill, 2 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 1:308.

21. In *epistulam ad Galatas commentaries* 3, PG 61.655 (NPNF1 13.29).

22. In *epistulam ad Hebraeos* 14, PG 63.114 (NPNF1 14.436).

only as having some fault and deficiency” [Οὐχ ὡς πονηρὸν τοίνυν ἐνταῦθα φησιν, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἔχον τό αἰτίωμα καὶ ἐλάττωμα]²³. For Chrysostom, there is no incompatibility between the old and the new. Indeed, he told his flock that “you will learn from comparison that the one is not contradictory to the other”²⁴. The old law has simply become worn out and thus “Christ reminds us that they had studied and possessed the old law for a long time, and that now it is time for them to ascend to a loftier law”²⁵.

The loftier law of which Chrysostom spoke was a spiritual law that was distinct from the old “law of carnal commandment” [οὐ κατὰ νόμον ἐντολῆς σαρκικῆς]. Chrysostom made a distinction between the earthly nature of the Jewish covenant and the spiritual nature of the Christian. Moses and the Jews, he tells his flock, were instructed to “wash their garments” whereas Christians were commanded to “wipe clean the robe of their soul.”²⁶ Moses brought down “letters” from Mount Sinai but Christians “have been entrusted with the giving of the spirit.”²⁷ John acknowledged that his hero Paul declared that “We know that the law is spiritual”²⁸ but explained that while the law is “spiritual indeed” it nevertheless “did not bestow a spirit”²⁹.

In fact, Chrysostom attempted to make the case that it is was not Christianity but Judaism that was in opposition to Moses. John argued that the Jewish religious leadership, through endless innovation, “were inventing many novelties” and “while their own commandments were kept, those of God were transgressed”³⁰. The result was that, by the time of Christ, there was “unspeakable corruption of the Jewish state” and “the Jewish constitution had begun to dissolve”³¹.

Thus, Chrysostom incessantly sought to separate the Sinai Covenant from the people to whom it was given. He did not contend that the old law was never

23. *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 14, PG 63.115 (NPNFI 14.436).

24. *De paenitentia* 6, PG 49.321. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *St. John Chrysostom: On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. Gus George Christo, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1998), 83.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *In Matthaicum* 2 PG 57.23 (NPNFI 10.8).

27. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 6, PG 61. 438 (NPNFI 12.307).

28. Rom. 7:14.

29. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 6, PG 61.438 (NPNFI 12.307).

30. *In Matthaicum* 51 PG 58.509, (NPNFI 10.304).

31. *In Matthaicum* 79, PG 58.720 (NPNFI 10.458).

intended for the Jewish people, he argued rather that they were incapable of seeing its ultimate fulfillment in the new. In a similar fashion, John attempted to separate Moses from the prophet's own people. John was naturally concerned that members of his flock (especially those that matriculated to the Jewish synagogue) would question why the contemporaneous Jews failed to see the connections between the Old Testament and the New that their priest and pastor stated were so obvious. John, as always, had a preemptive answer to potential questions: "And why are you troubled that the Jews believe not Christ, seeing at least that they believe not even the Law? For they were therefore ignorant of the Grace also, because they knew not even the Old Covenant nor the glory which was in it. For the glory of the Law is to turn [men] unto Christ"³² For Chrysostom, the Mosaic Law was a Christian law and its true meaning could only be found in the Christian fulfillment that Moses fully anticipated.

4. Moses and the Jewish People

In his presentation of Moses, Chrysostom painted an image of a holy man at odds with his own people. In this regard, the Exodus narrative provided ample material to convey such an image³³. John's intent was to indict both the scriptural Jews who rejected Christ and the contemporaneous Jewish community that persisted in this rejection. In this light, Moses became a Christ-like figure suffering the rebuke of his own people but forgiving them and even interceding before God on their behalf despite their defiance. John told his listeners that they should not be surprised that Christ's own people rejected him, even after he performed miracles, "for they stoned even Moses, after the sea which they had crossed on foot³⁴; after the victory ... after ten thousand miracles in the land of Egypt and the Red Sea and the wilderness"³⁵. Although

32. *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 7, PG 61.445 (NPNF1 12.311).

33. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 3, PG 60.416 (NPNF1 11.355). "Thus then did Paul grow bright out of those that thwarted him and plotted against him, thus Job out of the many scourges, thus Jeremy out of the miry pit, thus Noah out of the flood, thus Abel out of the treachery, thus Moses out of the bloodthirsty Jews, thus, Elisha, thus each of the worthies of old, not out of relaxedness and softness, but out of tribulations and trials, came to be attired with their bright crowns."

34. Num. 14:10, Ex. 17:4.

35. *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 5, PG 61.46 (NPNF1 12.27).

Chrysostom was an adherent to the Antiochene, literal school of interpretation he nevertheless could not resist opportunities for such an overt typological association as this.

John is especially fond of the example of Miriam's defiance toward Moses (Num. 12). Chrysostom saw in Miriam's dissension a type of the Jewish rejection of Christ in the Gospel narratives. In this typological association, Moses became a Christ-like model of forgiveness when he interceded with God on Miriam's behalf (albeit unsuccessfully)³⁶. Moses' anticipatory emulation of Christ, therefore, put him in the line of the great Christian saints³⁷.

In John's estimation, it is the Christians and not the Jews who are the true followers of Moses. Indeed, John asks, "When they [i.e., the Jews] say that Moses and the prophets knew not Christ and said nothing about his coming, what greater outrage could they do to these holy men than accuse them of failing to recognize their Master, than to say that those saintly prophets are partners of their impiety?"³⁸ Chrysostom saw in the hostility which the Israelites evinced toward Moses in the wilderness foreshadowing of things to come in the Christian narrative. John tells his congregation that Moses would be in agreement with such an assessment when he offered his song at the summit of Mount Nebo before he died³⁹. More precisely, Chrysostom tries to convince his flock that Moses predicted that the Jews would fall away and that the Gentiles would take their place. As proof he offered the prophet's declaration, "For I will provoke you to jealousy, by them which are no nation, and by a foolish nation I will anger you." In this verse from the Song of Moses, Chrysostom contends that the "foolish nation" that would provoke Israel was the Greeks (i.e., the Gentiles) for "what could be more foolish than the Greeks?"⁴⁰ Moses, according to John, was consistent with all of the prophets and was simply saying what Isaiah would later say "in a clearer and plainer way."

In these respects, John depicted Moses as a Christian prophet exasperated with his people. John described Moses' Jewish followers as "senseless" and

36. *Ad populum Antiochenum* 20, PG 49.203 (NPNF1 9.475).

37. *In Matthaeum* 5, PG 57.59 (NPNF1 10.32).

38. *Adversus Judaeos* 1, PG 48.850. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 19.

39. Deut. 32:21.

40. *In epistulam ad Romanos* 18, PG 60.574 (NPNF1 11.480).

“ignorant” with regard to the prophet’s teachings⁴¹. In order to preserve the integrity of his Christian Moses, John associated any difficult passages in the Old Testament text that might contradict his image of the prophet with the actions of Jews. For example, in the famous Song of the Sea, after the Israelites escaped Pharaoh’s chariots, Moses and the Israelites sing “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?” Chrysostom placed the blame for such apparent polytheism on the weakness of the Jewish followers of Moses. As a form of rhetorical emphasis, John put the question to Moses and imagined the prophet’s response. “What do you mean, Moses? Is there any comparison at all between the true God and false gods? Moses would reply: ‘I did not say this to make a comparison; but since I was talking to the Jews, who had a lofty opinion of demons, I condescended to their weakness and brought in the lesson I was teaching in this way’⁴².

5. Moses and the Christians

The praise that John offered Moses was always made within the context of Christian superiority over and against Judaism. John explained to his congregation that each one of his congregants, as baptized Christians, experienced something much greater than the Jews did at Sinai for, he says, “in the Old Testament, it was upon Moses’ going up, that God came down; but here, when our nature has been carried up into heaven, or rather unto the royal throne, then the Spirit makes his descent”⁴³.

In Chrysostom’s exegetical view, Moses also had to assume his rightful place behind Jesus in the Christian metanarrative. John both directly stated and indirectly hinted that Christ is the lawgiver and Moses the one who received the law. As proof of this point, the Antiochene preacher notes that in the New Testament, Christ speaks “by his own authority ... not with reference to another, like the prophet Moses”⁴⁴. Both Moses and Jesus performed miracles, however, the prophet “works miracles as a slave, the other as Lord.” As proof, Chry-

41. In *epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 7, PG 61.445 (NPNF1 12.311).

42. *Adversus Judaeos* 1, PG 48.886. Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 105-06.

43. In *Matthaeum* 1, PG 57.15 (NPNF1 10.2).

44. In *Matthaeum* 25, PG 57.327 (NPNF1 10.168).

sostom observed that Moses performed miracles with his staff, upraised arms, and prayer but Christ performed his miracles “by word and command only.” Moreover, Chrysostom appeared to think that if Christ had performed miracles as did Moses, “the multitudes ... would not have marveled”⁴⁵.

In Chrysostom’s order of things, Moses though great and performing miracles, is secondary even to the Apostles. John explains this order when he asks, “For what if Moses clave a sea? Yet Peter walked on the water, and was able to remove mountains, and used to work cures of all manner of bodily diseases, and to drive away savage demons, and by the shadow of his body to work those wonderful and great prodigies; and changed the whole world”⁴⁶. Also for John, the Apostles were greater than Moses and the prophets because “those had to deal with only one nation, and with their own people; but these with the whole world, and with men whom they never knew”⁴⁷. John also regarded the fire of Pentecost as greater than the fire of Sinai. Moses beheld the fire of the burning bush on Sinai, he argues, but the fire of the Holy Spirit sat upon the heads of the Apostles⁴⁸.

Nevertheless, though Chrysostom categorized Moses as inferior, he described Moses as one completely in concert with the Christian narrative. As we saw above, Chrysostom was by no means averse to typological association when he felt that such associations would advance the Christian narrative or, as he put it, when the “type is near the truth”⁴⁹. Chrysostom assumes many of the standard typological associations of Moses and the Exodus narrative. The Red Sea is a type of the baptismal font and the Tabernacle a type of the Holy Table. John explained the function of the Exodus in plain, typological terms and went on to say, “for as you eat the Lord’s Body, so they the manna: and as you drink the Blood, so they water from a rock”⁵⁰. Moses thus became a type of Christ and the Exodus a type of the Christian baptism and Eucharist. John emphasized the physical to spiritual nature of this typology. Such a spiritual transformation from old to new translates to John’s association of Moses with Christ when, in his

45. *In Matthaicum* 28, PG 57.352 (NPNF1 10.187).

46. *In Matthaicum* 56, PG 58.551 (NPNF1 10.332).

47. *In Acta apostolorum* 4, PG 60.44 (NPNF1 11.26).

48. *Ibid.*

49. *In epistolam i ad Corinthios* 23, PG 61.191 (NPNF1 12.133).

50. *Ibid.*

comparison of the two figures he proclaimed that, “[God] sent us, Moses from the wilderness, but his son from heaven. If then, after he is come, you abide in Egypt, you will suffer with the Egyptians; but if leaving the land you go up to the spiritual Israel, you will see all the miracles”⁵¹. In such a fashion, Chrysostom sought to connect the experience of his flock with that of the Israelites whom he identified as their spiritual ancestors.

6. Chrysostom’s Use of Diatribe

One can see in these homiletical references to Moses, the type of diatribe against Jews that observers commonly associate with his eight discourses *Against Judaizing Christians*. Such language is part of the rhetorical technique of *psogos* (blame), the rhetorical counterpart to *encomium* (praise), that Robert Wilken describes as “the use of half-truths, innuendo, guilt by association, abusive and incendiary language, malicious comparisons, and in all, excess and exaggerations”⁵². Wilken explains that “with these words, the audience’s ears pricked up and the chatter subsided, for the congregation knew it was in for a performance”⁵³. Ruth Webb notes that in the sophistic oratorical method which Libanius taught and Chrysostom learned “the possibilities for *psogos* were always present in virtual form in the knowledge of both audience and speaker. It is the unspoken other side of encomium that the encomiast has to argue against, and mere statement would not be enough, he needs to demonstrate, to show his reasons”⁵⁴. Thus the invective was an expected reality that had a rhetorical function but, as Elizabeth Jeffreys explains, it also “had a role in ‘real life,’ and was a useful weapon against opponents whose religious beliefs or intellectual stance might be dubious”⁵⁵.

51. *In Matthaeum* 39, PG 57.437 (NPNF1 10.252).

52. WILKEN, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century*, 116.

53. *Ibid.*

54. WEBB RUTH, "Praise And persuasion: Argumentation and Audience Response in Epideictic Oratory," in *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 135.

55. JEFFREYS ELIZABETH, "Rhetoric in Byzantium," in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 173. Although the use of *psogos* has its roots

For homilists such as Chrysostom, who utilized classical forms of speech such as paraenesis, the goal was not simply to extol what was virtuous but to condemn that which they saw as harmful. J. de Waal Dryden notes that, for Libanius, “paraenesis is divided into two categories, encouragement and dissuasion (προτροπήν καὶ ἀποτροπήν)”⁵⁶. Within the rhetorical environment in which Chrysostom preached, it was not enough for John to simply encourage his flock to emulate Moses but he also had to discourage them from following the path espoused by Jews who also made claims about the prophet. The Jewish position regarding Moses and the law was well known to John’s flock (at least from the scriptural text). From the perspective of his audience, Chrysostom’s failure to address Jewish claims to Moses with strong language would have constituted a glaring omission.

Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen note that John Chrysostom is indiscriminate in his use of *psogos*⁵⁷. Indeed, Chrysostom’s use of *psogos* was not exclusively applied to Jews but was extended to whomever Chrysostom saw as an opposing ideological force, whether they were heretical Christians or defenders of the Roman religious cult. In one homily he may disparage women and extol men and in another he could reverse the praise and blame. In the rhetorical application of encomium and *psogos* there was a sense of symmetry in that the intensity of the praise contained in the encomium was matched by a proportionate level of invective directed against the target of blame. In the present case, the excessive praise of Moses and the Christian claims to fulfillment of the law were matched by commensurate vituperative attacks directed at Jews and their claims to Moses and the Sinai covenant. The rhetorical methods employed by Chrysostom demanded the refutation of these claims with language that seems excessively harsh to the modern ear. Mayer and Allen conclude correctly that Chrysostom’s “hostile statements against the Jews

in the sophistic methods of antiquity, its use continued long after Chrysostom. Jeffreys offers the famous Secret History of Procopios’ invective directed toward Justinian and his wife Theodora as an example.

56. DE WAAL DRYDEN J., *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter: Paraenetic Strategies for Christian Character Formation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 24.

57. MAYER WENDY and ALLEN PAULINE, *John Chrysostom*, ed. Carol Harrison, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1999), 148-49.

which recur throughout [his homilies] ... should be read with this point firmly in mind⁵⁸. Chrysostom was bound by the rhetorical conventions he employed and his audience expected not only conformance to these conventions but also a degree of stimulation and entertainment⁵⁹.

Certainly the figure of Moses provided Chrysostom with an opportunity to stimulate his audience with such invective. In the language that Chrysostom used to defend his view of Moses we can discern both the importance he attaches to the prophet as a pastoral and theological figure and, to a certain degree, the arguments against his claims that he apparently perceived as emanating from the Jewish community. I say “apparently” because we know so little about the nature of the Jewish communities in fourth century Antioch and Constantinople and any proselytizing or polemicizing in which they may or may not have engaged. Indeed, much of what we know about Jewish practices there derives from Christian sources.

7. Conclusion

Moses occupied a prominent place in the homiletical universe of John Chrysostom. Given Chrysostom’s rhetorical style, this preeminent location was completely understandable. The sophistic rhetorical methods on which John relied required that great men of history be presented as models of virtue. Moses was a logical choice for John both in terms of his prominence and his antiquity. Indeed, Chrysostom made use of all of the major figures of the Old Testament to cover a variety of classical and Christian virtues. Moses, however, was a special case. As with the patriarch Abraham, there is no single treatment on the leader of the Israelite Exodus found in the corpus of Chrysostom’s work. John, however, makes hundreds of references to Moses throughout his homilies and discourses.

58. Ibid.

59. Laurence Broadhurst notes, with regard to the theatrical style of the Second Sophistic, that “even the briefest reference to the Second Sophistic will mention its penchant for elaborate ornamentation. It is often suggested that in the Second Sophistic rhetoric is increasingly removed from the realm of forensics and into the domain of theatrics.” BROADHURST LAURENCE, “Melito of Sardis, the Second Sophistic, and ‘Israel,’” in *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianities*, ed. Willi Braun, *Studies in Christianity and Judaism* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 58.

The Moses of the Pentateuch possessed many qualities that made him such a useful homiletical tool for the Antiochene preacher. John saw in Moses' meekness and humility, attractive qualities for Christians in general and Christian priests in particular. For Chrysostom, virtue was the life blood of his claims to Christian relationship with the Israelite saints. For a Christian priest, preaching in a city with a vibrant and attractive Jewish community, the advancement of such an assertion that claimed Christian inheritance of the Mosaic legacy was not without its challenges. Part of John's challenge was not only supporting his own claims to Mosaic inheritance but also refuting those of a Jewish community that regularly attracted members of his own flock to its services. John combatted such syncretism with an invective equal to that which he offered Christian heretics, Greek philosophers, and followers of the Roman religious cult.

Even with such diatribe directed at Judaism, Chrysostom was no Marcionite. In John's writing there is no rejection of the law and covenant but rather an articulation and amplification of Pauline distinctions. For John, the law did indeed have a function but its purpose was purely Christian in nature. John refrained from disparagement of the law given his reliance on the Old Testament narrative and the holy men and women within that text. Nevertheless, he contended that the Mosaic law had fulfilled its usefulness. Since, in John's exegetical mindset, the Sinai covenant was given by Christ, the Logos, it was therefore Christ's to annul since it had been replaced by the New. Chrysostom contended that the function of the law was to "turn men to Christ," and concluded that it was Jews and not Christians who were in opposition to that law.

John attempted to paint a picture of an intransigent Jewish community that fought Moses then and continued in their opposition to what he saw as the Christian intent of the law. Chrysostom used the scriptural events detailing such dissension against Moses as part of his ongoing diatribe against scriptural and contemporaneous Jews. Indeed, John saw little difference between the experience of Moses leading his people in the Exodus and the prophets to follow.

Throughout John's writings he gave us a Moses who was a man of virtue and a saint but nonetheless inferior to Christ and the Apostles in the sense that each had a profoundly different and more significant mission. Chrysostom, therefore, sought to preserve the supremacy of the New Testament while simultaneously

extolling the virtue of a preeminent figure of Judaism. A thoroughly Christian Moses emerges in whose mouth Chrysostom felt perfectly comfortable to place his own words.

Such praise was balanced by invective in the rhetorical environment within which Chrysostom operated. While such harsh language strikes a discordant chord in the contemporary ear it was nevertheless part of the expectations of John's contemporaneous audience. The prominence of Moses in both the Jewish and Christian traditions made the prophet an appealing figure with which John could put forth his positions with regard to his attitude toward Jews and Judaism. The Antiochene priest deemed the vibrancy of the local Jewish community and its ability to attract members of Chrysostom's flock to be of such a concern that he saw fit to break off an attack on Arianism to address the issue. The invective John used indicates both the importance he attaches to the subject as well as the potential legitimacy of the Jewish relationship to Moses in the eyes of his congregation. Put another way, a homilist in charge of forming his flock does not waste time or energy refuting that which needs no refutation.

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