

“Awe-Inspiring, in Truth, Are the Mysteries of the Church”: Eucharistic Mystagogy and Moral Exhortation in the Preaching of St. John Chrysostom

DARIA SPEZZANO
Providence College
Providence, RI

We entrust to You, loving Master, our whole life and hope, and we ask, pray, and entreat: make us worthy to partake of your heavenly and awesome Mysteries from this holy and spiritual Table with a clear conscience; for the remission of sins, forgiveness of transgressions, communion of the Holy Spirit, inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, confidence before You, and not in judgment or condemnation.

—Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

“Awe-inspiring, in truth, are the mysteries of the Church; awesome, in truth, her altar.”¹ St. John Chrysostom was a founding figure in the development of the Byzantine mystagogical tradition, not only because he is associated with the Divine Liturgy,² but also because of his preaching on

¹ John Chrysostom, Homily 46 on the Gospel of John (*PG*, 59:257–62), in *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist: Homilies 1–47*, trans. Sr. Thomas Aquinas Goggin, S.C.H., Fathers of the Church 33 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1957), 470.

² There is debate about the extent to which Chrysostom is responsible for authoring the Divine Liturgy that bears his name. For Robert Taft’s analysis of this complicated question, based on overlapping vocabulary between Chrysostom’s homilies and the Divine Liturgy, see “The Authenticity of the Chrysostom Anaphora Revisited: Determining the Authorship of Liturgical Texts by Computer,” *Orientalia christiana periodica* 56 (1990): 5–51. Taft offers the hypothesis that Chrysostom adapted “an existing Antiochene Greek anaphora [a no longer extant “Liturgy of the Apostles”] inserting it, with his own redactional emendations, into the already existing anaphoral setting of the Great Church” (46). Hans-Joachim Schulz notes that Chrysostom’s homilies “are filled

the Eucharistic mysteries, woven throughout the scriptural exegesis of his liturgical homilies.³ The themes he sounded, in particular the continual exhortation to his hearers to be mindful and properly disposed for the terrible and awe-inspiring mysteries, would become part of the fabric of Byzantine liturgical spirituality. But Chrysostom's influence extends to the West as well, for instance to Thomas Aquinas, who, it is said, would rather have Chrysostom's homilies on Matthew than be lord of Paris,⁴ and who shares with Chrysostom the title of "Doctor of the Eucharist."⁵ While the promotion of reverence in liturgical celebration and the demands of social justice are sometimes perceived today as being in tension with each other, for Chrysostom they are inseparable. In accord with the Second Vatican Council's teaching in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of Christian life," the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* chooses a quote from Chrysostom to instruct that "the Eucharist commits us to the poor."⁶ It does so with good reason. Chrysostom urgently and vividly preaches to his wealthy congregation that not only must they approach the altar with awe and holy fear, but they must care for the poor in order to receive the Eucharist worthily. Here his characteristic moral exhortations to almsgiving find their deepest source: without care for the poor, one eats and drinks the Eucharist, like Judas at the Last Supper, to one's own condemnation.

Chrysostom's Eucharistic Mystagogy

Chrysostom's preaching on the Eucharist is profoundly rooted in Scripture and shaped by his theological and pastoral concerns. Mystagogy, as Jean

to overflowing with liturgical references" (*The Byzantine Liturgy* [New York: Pueblo, 1986], 150).

- ³ Kenneth Howell notes that Chrysostom "wrote more about the Eucharist than any other Eastern Father," and that "his references to the Eucharist are usually tied to moral concerns and to a wide variety of scriptural texts." Howell, "The Eucharist and the Life of Christ in the Preaching of John Chrysostom," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 19, no. 3 (2021): 791–824, at 793–94.
- ⁴ William of Tocco, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino de Guillaume de Tocco* (1323), critical ed. with introduction and notes, ed. Claire le Brun-Gouanvic, *Studies and texts* 127 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 172 (see further 171–73).
- ⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "Letter on the Occasion of the 16th Centenary of the Death of St. John Chrysostom," August 2007. Cf. Benedict XVI, Address at Angelus, September 18, 2005, Saint Peter's Square.
- ⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1397; Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §10.

Daniélou has pointed out, is an exegesis of the rites: "It consists of reading in the rites the mystery of Christ and contemplating under symbols the invisible reality."⁷ The mystagogy of the Greek Fathers is shaped by local traditions, as is their scriptural exegesis. While the distinction risks being overdrawn, Alexandrian mystagogy is characterized by anagogy, while Antiochene mystagogy—including Chrysostom's—by a focus on the relation of the liturgy to the historical events of Christ's earthly life.⁸ Unlike his contemporary Theodore of Mopsuestia, however, Chrysostom is not concerned to assign to each liturgical action a specific mimetic meaning. Chrysostom everywhere "reads in the rites the mystery of Christ," exemplifying Daniélou's observation that this mystery is the one object of the Christian faith, subsisting under different modes:

It is prefigured in the Old Testament; it is accomplished historically in Christ's life on earth; it is contained in the mystery of the sacraments; it is lived mystically in souls; it is accomplished socially in the Church; it is fulfilled eschatologically in the heavenly kingdom.⁹

For Chrysostom, the entire liturgy has a "mystery character," because it is "so much an anamnesis of the saving work of Christ and a revelation of heavenly reality that its earthly form is wholly irradiated by these aspects."¹⁰ Chrysostom uses the term "mystery" in relation not only to the sacraments, but more fundamentally to the entire economy of redemption, flowing from the Paschal mystery, in which they operate. The mystery is a secret except to faith; it expresses a relation between, on the one hand, a historic event of salvation history or a material element of the rite, and on the other, a spiritual reality. The first element of the mystery is known by the senses or natural

⁷ Jean Daniélou, "Le symbolisme des rites baptismaux," *Dieu Vivant* 1 (1945): 15–43, at 17 (trans. mine).

⁸ René Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la Divine Liturgie du VIIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1966), 47. In the later Byzantine tradition, this "Antiochene" influence would become exaggerated, resulting in a highly codified interpretation of the liturgical symbols in which every detail was associated with some historical event surrounding Christ's death and resurrection. A totally different approach developed in the mystagogy of the Alexandrian tradition; pseudo-Dionysius, for example, makes few explicit references to salvation history, or even to Christ, in his *Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, focusing instead on the illumination and union of members of the hierarchy with the One.

⁹ Daniélou, "Le symbolisme," 17.

¹⁰ Schulz, *Byzantine Liturgy*, 15.

reason, the second only by faith.¹¹ While Chrysostom's notion of mystery is "undeniably" inspired by Origen, the former never contrasts the visible and invisible universe, but presents them as two integrating parts of the one mystery, underlining in Antiochene fashion the significance and reality of its visible element.¹²

Working within his local tradition of exegesis, Chrysostom preaches the mystery of Christ in the liturgy by first developing in his hearers the eyes of faith, which perceive the mystery through sensible signs by a kind of *theoria*. He then leads them to a "contemplative exegesis"¹³ of the historical events sacramentally signified in the rites—the Last Supper and sacrificial self-offering of the Lord in his Passion and death. In his Eucharistic mystagogy, he further links the events of salvation history represented in the sacraments with moral exhortation, in order that the mystery can be accomplished socially in the Church and eschatologically in the salvation of his listeners (the other modes of the mystery noted by Daniélou). In the background of his thought can be found a defense against heresy—here in particular, docetism and Eunomianism—which bars access to the mystery. The rhetorical figure of Judas at the Last Supper emerges as an exegetical locus for Chrysostom as he confronts his hearers with the present reality of the mystery and moves them to a recognition of its ethical and eschatological implications.

In the Presence of the Mystery

Chrysostom characteristically seeks to place his listeners into the midst of the reality of the events of salvation history. Those events, which unfolded in the mystery of Christ's institution of the Eucharist, his Passion, sacrificial death, and resurrection, unfold here and now for those who participate in the liturgy:

Believe that even now this is the supper of which he himself partook. For this meal is in no way different from that one. It is not at all the case that a simple human being prepares this meal while Jesus alone prepared that one; rather, he alone prepares this one as he did that. Therefore, when you see the priest giving you communion, do not

¹¹ Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 75–76. See also Gerhard Fittkau, *Der Begriff des Mysteriums bei Johannes Chrysostomus* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1953), 69–85.

¹² Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 76–77.

¹³ Bradley Nassif, "'Spiritual Exegesis' in the School of Antioch," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 343–377, at 365.

think that it is the priest who is doing it. Think instead that it is Christ's hand that is being extended to you.¹⁴

Christ is present at the Eucharist not only as high priest but also as the victim slain to reconcile us to God:

You are approaching the awesome and holy sacrifice. Show reverence for the goal of the sacrificial offering. The slain offering is Christ. And for whom was he slain, for what purpose? That he might make peace between heaven and earth (Col 1:20), to make you a friend of the angels, to reconcile you to the God of all, to make you, an enemy and an adversary, a friend.¹⁵

Chrysostom's powerful rhetoric demands from his hearers an awestruck reverence in the presence of Christ's saving sacrifice. He employs a vivid sacramental realism to convey the immediacy of this sacrificial presence: "When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying [on the altar], and the high priest standing by the victim and praying over it, and everyone stained red with that precious blood, do you feel you are standing on earth among men? Are you not transported at once to heaven?"¹⁶ The blood of Christ, foreshadowed in the sacrifices of the temple and the sprinkling on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt, is now present in truth and has an even greater power; it is the salvation of our souls, beautifying and inflaming them: "It makes our intellect brighter than fire; it renders our soul more radiant than gold."¹⁷ It makes the devil flee, when he sees "not the blood of the type smeared on the doors, but the blood of the truth smeared on the mouths of the faithful."¹⁸

The sacramental rites are a constant testimony of God's saving dispensation

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homily 50 on Matt, no. 3 (PG, 58:501–10), in *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, ed. E. B. Pusey, J. H. Newman, J. Keble, and C. Marriott, A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church 34 (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1838), 678–87. English translations of this text have been somewhat modernized.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homily 1 on the Betrayal of Judas, no. 6 (PG, 49:373–92). trans. Daniel Sheerin, *The Eucharist*, Message of the Fathers of the Church 7 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986), 144–47.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homily 3 on the Priesthood, no. 4 (PG, 48:623–92, at 642); trans. Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 151.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homily 46 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 470).

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 3.15 (PG, 49:231–40), trans. Paul Harkins, *Ancient Christian Writers* 31 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963), 61.

in Christ's Passion, death, and resurrection. Comparing the gnostics and anti-docetic Christian sects, who refused to believe that Christ was crucified, to those Jews who were offended by Christ's command to eat his flesh and drink his blood, Chrysostom remarks that, in the liturgy, Christ has bound up the memorial of all his benefits with the Eucharistic mysteries, "by this again stopping the mouths of heretics":

For if Jesus did not die, of what are the rites the symbols? Do you see how much diligence has been used so that we would always remember that he died for us? For since the Marcionists, and Valentinians, and Manichaeans were to arise, denying this dispensation, he continually reminds us of the Passion even by the mysteries, . . . at once saving, and at the same time teaching by means of that sacred table."¹⁹

It is the Lord sacrificed and raised in power who is made present in the mysteries to save us. When we taste the Lord's Blood and partake of his Body, "which was crucified, which was nailed, which is offered in sacrifice," we partake of something "which is in no way different or separate from that which is enthroned on high, which is adored by the angels, which is next to Power Incorrupt. Of that we taste. Oh, how many are the ways to salvation!"²⁰ The liturgy makes the historical realities of salvation immediately present for those who are able to perceive them.

The Eyes of Faith

Chrysostom is aware of a double task in his mystagogical preaching. He must both convince his listeners of the reality of the mystery invisibly present in the liturgical actions and, by an exegesis of the narrative represented, bring them to a realization of its meaning and impact. The effectiveness of Chrysostom's preaching on the anamnestic quality of the mysteries depends first upon his opening the eyes and minds of his hearers to see in the sacramental actions their spiritual reality. In his preaching on the institution narrative in Matthew, he urges: "Since then the Word says, *This is my Body*, let us both be persuaded and believe, and look at it with the eyes of the mind." Because the human soul is embodied, sensible realities are required for the bestowal of heavenly gifts, "but that which is done is perceived by

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, nos. 1–2 (PG, 58:737–46), in Pusey, Newman, Keble, and Marriott, *Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St Matthew*, 1082–94. English translations have been somewhat modernized.

²⁰ Chrysostom, Homily 3 on Eph, no. 3 (PG, 62:24–30), in Sheerin, *Eucharist*, 298–303.

the mind.” Through these sensible things, Christ’s presence is made known to those who perceive him by faith: “How many now say, ‘I would wish to see his form, the mark, his clothes, his shoes.’ Lo! You see him, you touch him, you eat him.”²¹

Chrysostom frequently urges his hearers to develop the eyes of the soul or mind, which are the eyes of orthodox faith, to see the reality taking place before them. In a baptismal homily he writes:

What takes place here requires faith and the eyes of the soul, so that you pay heed not only to what is seen, but that you make the unseen visible from the seen. This is what the eyes of faith can do. . . . They see nothing of visible things, but the invisible things they see as if they were lying before their eyes.²²

It is nevertheless always through the medium of the present physical reality that the spiritual gift is perceived and received by the faithful:

God has made for us two kinds of eyes: those of the flesh and those of faith. When you come to the sacred initiation, the eyes of the flesh see water; the eyes of faith behold the Spirit. Those eyes see the body being baptized; these see the old man being buried. The eyes of the flesh see the flesh being washed; the eyes of the spirit see the soul being cleansed. The eyes of the body see the body emerging from the water; the eyes of faith see the new man come forth brightly shining from that sacred purification. Our bodily eyes see the priest as, from above, he lays his right hand on the head and touches [him who is being baptized]; our spiritual eyes see the great High Priest as He stretches forth His invisible hand to touch his head.²³

In this “split vision,” Chrysostom keeps the two modes of physical and spiritual seeing tightly connected by oscillating between them; he refuses to

²¹ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 4.

²² Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 2.9 (p. 46).

²³ Chrysostom, *Catechesis ultima ad baptizandos* 3, in *Trois catéchèses baptismales*, ed. and trans. A. Piedagnel, *Sources Chrétiennes* [SC] 366 (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 212–42; trans. as 11.11–12 in Harkins, *Baptismal Instructions*, 164. Harkins identifies this homily as the third in a series discovered in the *codex graecus* 129 in the Synodal Library of Moscow and published by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus in 1909 (*Varia graeca sacra* [Petropoli, 1909], 166–175).

abandon the eyes of the body.²⁴ Employing a “sensory rhetoric,” he trains his initiates to visualize the spiritual reality accessed by their physical perceptions, yet not by substitution, since the physical perceptions launch and direct the imaginal ones.²⁵ Chrysostom is very aware of the power of images; his vivid language seeks to cultivate a kind of inner mental theater for his congregation to learn to exercise a “sacramental vision” of reality, especially of the rituals of worship.²⁶ The eyes of the spirit transform and enhance bodily sight rather than ignoring it.²⁷ Chrysostom does not propose, like Origen, an ascent of several stages in the perfection of those who are able to understand deeper levels of spiritual meaning.²⁸ Initiated believers must always access the deeper mystery with the eyes of faith through literal or physical signs. Elsewhere, Chrysostom makes a distinction between those who wrongly understand carnally (by looking *only* at the literal sense and not penetrating the meaning more deeply) and those who understand spiritually (by penetrating “beneath all mysteries with inward eyes”²⁹).

Such a “double vision,” which seeks deeper meanings that are firmly rooted in the historical or literal sense, is characteristic of the Antiochene tradition of *theoria* in exegesis. Bradley Nassif has noted that a form of the word *theoria* is used by Chrysostom in his exegesis of some texts to indicate the vision attained with the “eyes of faith” of the patriarchs and martyrs.³⁰

²⁴ Georgia Frank, “‘Taste and See’: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century,” *Church History* 70:4 (2001): 619–44, at 635.

²⁵ Frank, “‘Taste and See,’” 642. Frank’s conclusions apply also to the catechetical instructions of Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia; she is interested in questions of ritual rather than of exegesis and does not investigate a connection with the Antiochene tradition.

²⁶ David Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 243–47. Rylaarsdam presents an excellent discussion of Chrysostom’s homiletical methods for developing the eyes of faith in his hearers; see esp. 231–61.

²⁷ Frank, “‘Taste and See,’” 636.

²⁸ See Origen, *On First Principles* 4 (PG, 11:341–412). See Rylaarsdam, *Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, 244.

²⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 47 on John (PG, 59:262–70; *Commentary on Saint John*, 478).

³⁰ Nassif, “‘Spiritual Exegesis,’” 267 and note 142. Nassif has noted the difficulty of defining a single or exact meaning of *theoria* in Antiochene exegesis (374). In his full-length study of Chrysostom’s use of the word *theoria* in his New Testament homilies (“Antiochene *theoria* in John Chrysostom’s Exegesis” [PhD diss., Fordham University, 1991]), Nassif argues that *theoria* as an explicit hermeneutic was not a prominent feature of Chrysostom’s scriptural exegesis, a “tolerated principle” rarely applied (193–94), though the esteem of Nassif’s study for the spiritual sense is evident. He notes that Chrysostom had a dual concern for the historical meaning of the text and its spiritual and pastoral application (184) and argues that he would apply *theoria* in his preaching only a little at a time, to an audience who were sufficiently advanced to receive it (289).

A form of the same word (θεωροῦσι) is used in the passage quoted above from Chrysostom's *Catechesis ultima ad baptizandos* as well.³¹ Because the rites are by nature symbolic, they also require a theoretic vision of faith to see the deeper meaning of the liturgical signs. That meaning is closely tied for this Antiochene Father to the historical narrative that the Eucharistic rites represent.

Contemplation of the Mystery

Having urged his listeners to a *theoria* of the rites themselves, Chrysostom's rhetorical task is to lead them to a theoretic contemplation of the meaning of the *historia* represented. Nassif observes that, in Chrysostom's scriptural exegesis, the text has one meaning, which contains figurative and spiritual dimensions grounded in the literal sense. *Theoria* for him is an illuminated perception of the divine activity in Scripture, a "contemplative exegesis of the literal sense."³² The "theoretic task of homiletical discourse" often takes the form of spiritual reflections of a moral nature,³³ and Nassif notes that Chrysostom's ultimate purpose is the spiritual and ethical transformation of his flock.³⁴ Can the same be said of his mystagogy of the Eucharist?

Chrysostom's treatment does, as will be discussed below, lead him to moral exhortation. This is so, however, because his purpose, flowing from a deep conviction of the mystery of Christ present in the liturgical celebration, is to instill in his listeners the proper disposition in the face of that tremendous reality with all its spiritual power. Ethical action, willingly participating in "the heavenly way of life modeled by Christ and the saints," is the required response to God's generous "adaptation" in coming down to us by taking on flesh to raise us up to himself.³⁵ Just as God has adapted himself to us in Christ, so we should become more like God "by imitating godly virtues."³⁶ Andrew Hofer notes that Chrysostom "wanted his listeners to embody the

³¹ Chrysostom, *Catechesis ultima ad baptizandos* 3 (SC, 366:220). Nassif briefly examines the use of *theoria* in Chrysostom's mystagogy of the liturgical rites, finding the theoretic method operating implicitly in Chrysostom's use of sacramental typology. The word *theoria* itself rarely appears, and Chrysostom is not concerned to give hermeneutical explanations to this audience ("Antiochene *theoria*," 256). However, Nassif does not consider here passages such as that quoted above from *Baptismal Instruction* 11 (*Catechesis ultima ad baptizandos* 3), in which Chrysostom explains the operation of the eyes of the body and the eyes of faith or the spirit.

³² Nassif, "Spiritual Exegesis," 365; see "Antiochene *theoria*," 256–76; 296–97.

³³ Nassif, "Antiochene *theoria*," 287.

³⁴ Nassif, "Antiochene *theoria*," 300.

³⁵ Rylaarsdam, *Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, 148–49.

³⁶ Rylaarsdam, *Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, 153.

Word preached to them,” for their salvation.³⁷ Because care for the poor makes one like God in generosity, “Chrysostom gives a deifying role for the mercy of almsgiving” similar to the effect of participation in the Eucharist.³⁸ Appropriate behavior within the assembly and almsgiving outside of it are the necessary responses to the mystery, part of the disposition required of those who have been given the privilege of seeing with the eyes of faith “that which is more precious than all things”; not only is it seen, “but also touched, and not only touched, but also eaten.”³⁹ Chrysostom’s treatment of the mystery of the Eucharist, while always grounded in the underlying historical narrative, draws out, by a “contemplative exegesis of the literal sense,” its spiritual depths and ethical implications.

The Awe-Inspiring Mysteries

Preaching on the blood of Christ, which “has been poured forth and has opened the way to heaven,” Chrysostom compares it, flowing from the altar as from a fountain, to the stream that flowed from the fountain in paradise (Gen 2:10). The fountain in paradise was sensible and watered earthly trees, but this incorruptible fountain, “sending forth spiritual streams,” heals souls; it “takes its beginning from above, and has its source there, and from there it is fed.” It is the Paraclete who sends forth its many streams, and the Son is its custodian, “not keeping its channel open with a mattock but making our hearts receptive.” Chrysostom describes the spiritual reality and effects of this mystery which lies before his listeners in a beautiful passage worth quoting in full:

This fountain is a fountain of light, shedding abundant rays of truth. And beside it the Powers from on high have taken their stand, gazing on the beauty of its streams, since they perceive more clearly than we the power of what lies before us and its unapproachable flashing rays. Just as if one were to put one’s hand or tongue into molten gold—if

³⁷ Andrew Hofer, O.P., *The Word in Our Flesh: The Power of Patristic Preaching* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 210.

³⁸ Hofer, *The Word in Our Flesh*, 216n40. Hofer refers to Blake Leyerle, “John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (1994): 29–47. Citing Homily 20 on 2 Cor, no. 3 (*PG*, 61:539–40), and Homily 6 on Titus, no. 2 (*PG*, 62:698), Leyerle writes, “Chrysostom thus can even claim that giving alms is like celebrating the eucharist, and that it ‘makes one holier than priests’ and ‘equal to God’” (47).

³⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 24 on 1 Cor, no. 5 (*PG*, 61:197–206), trans. Sheerin, *Eucharist* 293–98.

that were possible—he would at once make the object golden, the mystery lying before us here affects the soul, but much more so. The stream gushes up more vigorously than fire; it does not burn, however, but only cleanses what it touches.

This Blood was formerly foreshadowed continually in altars, in sacrifices of the Law. This is the price of the world; by it Christ purchased the Church; by it he adorned her entirely. Just as a man in buying slaves gives gold and, if he desires to beautify them, does this with gold, so also Christ has purchased us with his Blood and adorned us with his Blood. Those who share in this Blood have taken their stand with angels, and archangels, and the Powers from on high, clad in the royal livery of Christ and grasping spiritual weapons. But I have not mentioned anything great, for they are wearing the King Himself.⁴⁰

Chrysostom never departs from his sacramental realism, in accord with which he reads in the rites the narrative of Christ's Passion, death, and resurrection, and preaches on the significance of his saving blood. But his vivid rhetoric expands upon this literal sense by weaving together typology and a vision of the heavenly liturgy. Those who receive communion are brought into direct contact with the mystery and made glorious as they drink Christ's blood; they are purified and coated as with molten gold, and made members of his heavenly army.

Chrysostom continually reminds his hearers of the awe and compunction they should feel in the presence of this mystery: "What then ought he not to exceed in purity that has the benefit of this sacrifice, than what sunbeam should not that hand be more pure which is to sever this Flesh, the mouth that is filled with spiritual fire, the tongue that is reddened by that most awful Blood?"⁴¹ Gerhard Fittkau has noted that, in almost half of the instances in which *mysteria* refers to the Eucharist in Chrysostom's text and is modified with an adjective, the latter conveys the idea that the mysteries are awesome or "terrifying." He summarizes the many contexts in which this notion appears: "'Holy and terrifying' are above all, the sanctuary . . . of the church, where the Eucharist is celebrated, as well as the time during which it is carried out, the prayers of the liturgy, the call of the deacon: 'Holy things to the

⁴⁰ Chrysostom, Homily 46 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 470–71).

⁴¹ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 5.

holy,' the Our Father and the creed in the liturgy of dedication, and finally the holy kiss of peace and mutual embrace . . . during the eucharistic meal."⁴²

Edmund Bishop has observed that a religious sentiment of awe and dread attaching to the Eucharist became prevalent in the region of Antioch in the second half of the fourth century, and was "a note particularly characteristic" of John Chrysostom's preaching on the mystery, in comparison with earlier writers and his contemporaries.⁴³ Joseph Jungmann connects this shift to an increased emphasis on the majestic presence of Christ at the liturgy as divine high priest and sacrificial victim, especially emphasized by Chrysostom, which itself was part of an Antiochene offensive against the subordinationism of the Arians.⁴⁴

A specific heretical teaching related to Arianism may have played a role in shaping Chrysostom's thought on religious dread and the Eucharist. In the first year of his priesthood (386), Chrysostom preached a series of homilies against the Eunomians, dealing with the theme of the incomprehensible nature of God. The Eunomian heresy was an extreme form of Arianism which taught that the Son and Spirit are not even of like substance with the Father. The Eunomians also taught that human beings can have a perfect knowledge of God, knowing God as he knows himself; because God is simple, Eunomius held, he is as knowable to human beings as he is to himself.⁴⁵ Chrysostom urges that no created nature can comprehend God,

⁴² Fittkau, *Der Begriff*, 125 (trans. mine). Fittkau refers in this quote to the following texts of Chrysostom (in order): *Contra eos qui subintroductas habent virgines* 10 (PG, 47:495–514), 10; Homily 2 on 2 Cor, no. 6 (PG, 61:391–403); Homily 17 on Hebrews, no. 5 (PG, 63:127–34) Homily 6 on Isa 6:1 9 (*In illud: Vidi Dominum*), no. 3 (PG, 56:135–42); Homily 40 on 1 Cor, no. 1 (PG, 61: 347–54); Homily 1 on the Betrayal of Judas, no. 6 (PG, 49:373–92). See Schulz, *Byzantine Liturgy*, 16–17, for a slightly different trans. of Fittkau; cf. Schulz, 210n215–211n24.

⁴³ Edmund Bishop, "Appendix II. Fear and Awe Attaching to the Eucharistic Service," in *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, ed. R. H. Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 92–97, at 94.

⁴⁴ Joseph Jungmann, *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965), 248–50. Ashish Naidu examines the correlation between Chrysostom's Christology and Eucharistic theology, arguing that Chrysostom's commitment to the unity of the person in Christ (unlike his contemporary Theodore) is reflected in his focus on the practical implications of "intimate union with Christ," who is both God and man, and so "demands moral purity in the life of the Christian" (*Transformed in Christ: Christology and the Christian Life in John Chrysostom* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012], 147).

⁴⁵ Paul Harkins, "Introduction," in *St. John Chrysostom: On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, Fathers of the Church 72 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 23. These homilies are found in PG, 48:747–812.

but that this belongs to the Only-Begotten Son;⁴⁶ he frequently exhorts the heretics to forego their “arrogant presumption” in favor of “holy dread,” and be like the angels who veil their eyes at God’s glory.

Do you think that the angels in heaven talk over and ask each other questions about the divine essence? By no means! What are the angels doing? They give glory to God, they adore him, they chant without ceasing their triumphal and mystical hymns with a deep feeling of religious awe.⁴⁷

The angels, intelligent beings closest to God are the models of orthodoxy, filled with “astonishment and holy dread” in God’s presence, and Chrysostom naturally places them in the context of liturgical prayer; their perfect worship should be imitated by all the faithful.⁴⁸ God whom they perceive and adore is present in Christ sacrificed, a fearsome reality:

It is not only men who are making their voices heard in that prayer, a prayer which is filled with the holiest fear and dread. Angels, too, fall down in adoration before their Lord. Archangels beg his favor. They have that sacred moment to fight for them as their ally; they have the sacrifice to lend them aid.⁴⁹

Daniélou argues that the holy dread occasioned by the Eucharistic mystery is at the heart of Chrysostom’s homilies against the Eunomians, the liturgy representing the essential moment of the manifestation of God, and at the same time the highest human form of religious feeling.⁵⁰ In these homilies, preached at the beginning of his career, Chrysostom does not treat the nature of God considered abstractly in his polemic against the Eunomian heretics, but “the transcendence of God experienced as a presence terribly real,”⁵¹ which should be encountered “with the deepest holy fear.”⁵²

⁴⁶ E.g., Homily 4 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, no. 24.

⁴⁷ Chrysostom, Homily 1 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, no. 24.

⁴⁸ Chrysostom, Homily 4 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, no. 7.

⁴⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 3 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, no. 40.

⁵⁰ Jean Daniélou, “Introduction. III: La terreur sacrée,” in *Jean Chrysostome: Sur l’incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, trans. Robert Flacelière, ed. Ann-Marie Mallongrey, SC 28 (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 37.

⁵¹ Daniélou, “Introduction. III,” 39 (trans. mine).

⁵² Chrysostom, Homily 6 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, nos. 25–26.

Worthy and Unworthy Disposition

As already noted, Chrysostom's concern for reverence in the presence of the mystery does not extend only to heretics. Once again, the angels are models as he admonishes his congregation to approach the Eucharist with the proper disposition:

Consider with what sort of honor you were honored, of what sort of table you are partaking. That which when angels behold, they tremble, and dare not so much as look up at it without awe on account of the brightness that comes from there, with this we are fed, with this we are commingled, and we are made one body and one flesh.⁵³

What, for Chrysostom, constitutes the proper disposition for participation in communion? First, one must see (with the eyes of faith) that Christ is truly present, and so come with devotion: "He gives himself to you not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within you. Let then no one approach with indifference, no one fainthearted, but all with burning hearts, all fervent, all aroused."⁵⁴ In the Eucharist, Christ graciously commingles, intertwines, and interweaves himself with us, so that we are made one with his life-giving Body.⁵⁵ The faithful whom Christ nourishes with his own flesh in the mysteries should be like infants who eagerly lay hold of the breast and fix their lips on the nipple with desire: "With the like let us also approach this table, and the nipple of the spiritual cup. Or rather, with much more eagerness let us, as infants at the breast, draw out the grace of the Spirit."⁵⁶ Chrysostom employs an even more physical metaphor elsewhere in describing this eagerness for communion: "He has given us this body both to hold and to eat, a thing proper to intense love. For we often even bite with our teeth those whom we love vehemently."⁵⁷

Participation in the "most awesome mysteries"⁵⁸ of the liturgy is an unde-

⁵³ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 5.

⁵⁴ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 4. Howell notes on this text that Chrysostom underlines how the Eucharist, allowing an encounter with Jesus that satisfies the deep desires of the heart, especially shows the divine condescension of the Incarnation ("Eucharist and the Life of Christ," 797).

⁵⁵ I draw here from Rylaarsdam's translation of Chrysostom's Homily 15 on 1 Tim no. 4 (PG, 62:586; *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy*, 147).

⁵⁶ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 5.

⁵⁷ Chrysostom, Homily 24 on 1 Cor, no. 4.

⁵⁸ Chrysostom, Homily 18 on 2 Cor, no. 3 (PG, 61:521–30), trans. Sheerin, *Eucharist*, 323–25.

served gift bestowed on us by Christ: “The Only-Begotten Son has deemed us worthy of great mysteries—great ones, and such as we do not deserve, but such as were fitting for him to give.”⁵⁹ And so gratitude is also proper:

For this cause, even the awful mysteries, so full of that great salvation, which are celebrated at every communion, are called a sacrifice of thanksgiving, because they are the commemoration of many benefits, and they signify the very sum of God’s care for us, and by all means they work upon us to be thankful.⁶⁰

All that Christ did for us—that he was crucified, and poured forth his blood, and gave himself to us “for a spiritual feast and banquet”—is remembered in the sacrifice, and is the cause of thanksgiving in heaven and earth:

For this is the thing both to free us from earth, and to remove us into heaven, and to make us angels instead of men. Because they too form a choir and give thanks to God for his good things bestowed on us, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will towards men.”⁶¹

Yet Chrysostom is well aware of human weakness, and his preaching on the Eucharist is full of dire warnings against reception by the sinful, “for no small punishment is appointed to them that partake unworthily.”⁶² He warns both priest and people who would receive Christ’s holy flesh to “hear and tremble,” for “he has set before us himself sacrificed.”⁶³ Presumptuous reception of communion by those who have not repented for their offenses is a bold and insolent “assault” on the Body of Christ, likened to the betrayal by Judas and the crucifixion.⁶⁴ “Let no one, then, be a deceiver, no one full of evil, no one holding venom in his mind, lest his partaking lead to condemnation.”⁶⁵ To approach unrepentant is “perilous,” and the punishment for such transgression is severe:

⁵⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 26 on John (*PG*, 59:153–58; *Commentary on Saint John*, 251). This text refers to baptism.

⁶⁰ Chrysostom, Homily 25 on Matt, no. 4 (*PG*, 57:327–33).

⁶¹ Chrysostom, Homily 25 on Matt, no. 4.

⁶² Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 5.

⁶³ Chrysostom, Homily 50 on Matt, no. 3.

⁶⁴ Chrysostom, Homily 5 on 1 Tim, no. 5 (*PG*, 62:525–30), trans. Sheerin, *Eucharist*, 305–8.

⁶⁵ Chrysostom, Homily 6 on the Betrayal of Judas.

Do you not know that this table is filled with a spiritual fire? Fountains gush forth with water, but this table has a kind of mysterious flame. Therefore, do not carry corn stalks or wood or hay as you approach it. You might cause a more destructive conflagration and burn your soul to ashes as it shares in the mysteries. . . . If you have any wickedness there, drive it out and banish it from your soul.⁶⁶

The impenitent take upon themselves the punishment owed to Judas and all those who put Christ to death:

Consider how indignant you are against the traitor, against them that crucified him. Look, therefore, lest you also yourself become guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ. They slaughter the all-holy Body, but you receive it in a filthy soul after such great benefits.⁶⁷

Not only grave sin but also carelessness, “the darkness, the abyss of apathy,” corrupts and soils the soul, turning it to evil. There are Christians who “with shameless effrontery” dare to receive Christ’s Body “lightly and incidentally, from custom and ordinance, rather than from consideration and understanding.”⁶⁸ Those who leave the service early, and those who “chatter away” to each other during the prayers fail in their responsibility to pray for the afflicted (here the demoniacs) and so are “unsympathetic, inhuman, cruel.” They are themselves in danger of the demons, who, like flames from their neighbor’s burning house that the distracted participants have not helped to quench, might “make their way along the street and seize hold of *your* soul.”⁶⁹

The Two Tables

In the beginning of his commentary on John, Chrysostom draws a contrast between the arenas of pagan spectacles and the Divine Liturgy in the Church. In this “spectacle” of the liturgy, the Gospel of John—“very holy, most awful, and teeming with such great mysteries, and productive of so many benefits”—is to be preached, making those who listen well like angels, dwelling on earth as if in heaven.⁷⁰ Chrysostom develops the image of two antithetical tables, the “shining table, laden with such good things and prepared by God himself,” offered in the mysteries, and the devil’s table

⁶⁶ Chrysostom, Homily 6 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, nos. 35, 38.

⁶⁷ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 5.

⁶⁸ Chrysostom, Homily 3 on Eph, nos. 3–5.

⁶⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 4 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, nos. 36–39.

⁷⁰ Chrysostom, Homily 1 on John (*PG*, 59:23–30; *Commentary on Saint John*, 4).

of the spectacles, where “everything is license, everything is corruption.” Such “filth”—listening to harlots and watching “effeminate men being cuffed and cuffing one another”—makes one unworthy of the mysteries.⁷¹ Excoriating those who run from church to attend the chariot races with “Satan’s assembly,” he complains: “They have no thought or memory of our words, nor of the spiritual and awesome mysteries which are celebrated here; but like captives in the snares of the devil they spend the whole day there, surrendering themselves to the satanic spectacle,” and partaking “of the table of demons.”⁷²

The Church, with the Lord’s table at its center, is by contrast the arena of spiritual combat against the devil. For Chrysostom the stakes of participating in the mysteries are high: the Eucharist is not only the scene of angelic adoration but also the place where Christians, led by Christ their King, battle with Satan. Yet they are protected in the fight by the armor of the sacraments; the devil is terrified by those who participate in the Lord’s Supper, for they “come back from that table like lions breathing out fire.”⁷³

If the devil merely sees you returning from the Master’s banquet, he flees faster than any wind, as if he had seen a lion breathing forth flames from his mouth. If you show him a tongue stained with the precious blood, he will not be able to make a stand; if you show him your mouth all crimsoned and ruddy, cowardly beast that he is, he will run away.⁷⁴

As in the contests of Christian martyrs, the faithful, watched by the divine Judge, must become like lions fighting the devil, lest they be vanquished by him. Referring to the practice of leading in those possessed by demons so

⁷¹ Chrysostom, Homily 1 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 10–11).

⁷² Chrysostom, *Sermon 7, On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine Roth in *St. John Chrysostom: On Wealth and Poverty* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 126; Homily 1 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 11).

⁷³ Chrysostom, Homily 46 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 469). Thomas Aquinas places this quote from Chrysostom at the conclusion of an article in the *Summa theologiae* on the Eucharist’s power to preserve one from future sins, arguing that “because it is a sign of Christ’s Passion, whereby the devils are conquered, it repels all the assaults of the demons” (*ST III*, q. 79, a. 6). He places a longer section of the text in the *Catena on Luke 22*, lec. 5: “Christ did this to lead us to a closer bond of friendship, and to declare his love toward us, offering himself to those who desire him, not only to see, but also to handle, and eat, and embrace, and entirely satisfy their affection. Therefore, as lions breathing forth fire, we depart from that table, made terrible to the devil” (trans. mine).

⁷⁴ Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 3.12 (p. 60).

that the assembly may pray over them, Chrysostom compares the altar, the table of the Lord, to a judge's tribunal before which prisoners are brought. Here Christ "is going to take his seat, as it were, at the high tribunal, and to reveal himself in the mysteries."⁷⁵ The arena of the mysteries, where faithful Christians adorned with Christ's blood do battle alongside "angels, and arch-angels, and the Powers from on high, clad in the royal livery of Christ and grasping spiritual weapons,"⁷⁶ is also the arena of judgment. For Chrysostom, the Eucharistic table is "holy and terrifying" because Christ is truly present not only as priest and sacrifice, but also as judge.

Judas at the Lord's Table

The theme of the Lord's table as the place of judgment in Chrysostom's preaching takes on a recurring rhetorical form in the figure of Judas at the Last Supper.⁷⁷ Chrysostom as usual places his listeners into the midst of the historical narrative. Like Judas and the other apostles at the Last Supper, Chrysostom's hearers are in the awful presence of the Lord at his Eucharistic table: "Christ is here, and he who spread that table spreads this one as well."⁷⁸ Judas, unworthy as he was, came to the mysteries and shared in the holy table—even as foolish Christians dare to come to communion without a clear conscience.⁷⁹ They drink to their condemnation. At the Last Supper, Christ offered to Judas the blood which his betrayer had already sold for thirty pieces of silver—"O the madness, the insanity of Judas!"⁸⁰ Judas came to the table, but after this, Satan entered him; because "he came to the mysteries with such a disposition as that having approached them, he did not become better."⁸¹ Chrysostom warns that, though the priests cannot know "who are sinners and unworthy partakers of the mysteries," God takes care of it and delivers them to Satan, punishing them with calamity.⁸² "Thus you may learn concerning those who partake unworthily of the divine mysteries, that them especially the devil invades and enters at once, as he did to Judas of old."⁸³ Chrysostom thus admonishes his flock, "Let there be no Judas

⁷⁵ Chrysostom, Homily 4 on the Incomprehensible Nature of God, no. 34.

⁷⁶ Chrysostom, Homily 46 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 470), quoted above.

⁷⁷ Howell also notes the rhetorical importance of Judas in Chrysostom's warnings to prepare worthily for the Eucharist, noting that "the Christian at the sacred table is in precisely the same position as Judas" ("Eucharist and the Life of Christ," 813).

⁷⁸ Chrysostom, Homily 6 on the Betrayal of Judas.

⁷⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 5 on 1 Tim, no. 5.

⁸⁰ Chrysostom, Homily 5 on the Betrayal of Judas.

⁸¹ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 1.

⁸² Chrysostom, Homily 5 on 1 Tim, no. 5.

⁸³ Chrysostom, Homily 6 on the Betrayal of Judas.

now, let there be no one wicked, no one harboring venom, no one bearing one thing on his lips and another in his mind,”⁸⁴ “Let no Judas receive, lest he suffer the fate of Judas.”⁸⁵

Judas’s unworthy disposition for the mysteries consists not only in his wicked thoughts and treachery, but more specifically in his greed, on account of which he betrayed Christ. All that he had received—the washing of his feet, his sharing at the Lord’s table, his custody of the purse—became causes of punishment for him. So, Chrysostom warns, “Let us also fear that we may ever imitate Judas by avarice.”⁸⁶

Let no Judas then approach this table, no Simon; no, for both these perished through covetousness. Let us flee then from this gulf; neither let us account it enough for our salvation, if after we have stripped widows and orphans, we offer for this table a gold and jeweled cup.⁸⁷

Chrysostom criticizes those who dress the church in silken garments and provide it with golden vessels without caring for the poor. He points out that they falsely honor Christ if they refuse to clothe or even look at him in their brother: “Do not therefore while adorning his house overlook your brother in distress, for he is more properly a temple than the other.”⁸⁸ By this neglect they prove themselves traitor:

You do not betray Christ? When you neglect a poor man wasted with hunger, or perishing with cold, you are liable to the same punishment as Judas. And when we partake of the mysteries unworthily we are lost in the same way as those who kill Christ.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Chrysostom, Homily 6 on the Betrayal of Judas.

⁸⁵ Chrysostom, Homily 82 on Matt, no. 6.

⁸⁶ Chrysostom, Homily 47 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 483).

⁸⁷ Chrysostom, Homily 50 on Matt, no. 4.

⁸⁸ Chrysostom, Homily 50 on Matt, no. 5. Leyerle describes Chrysostom’s rhetorical skill in exhorting the rich to attain eternal honor by investing in the poor rather than in the passing public status of wealthy patronage (“John Chrysostom on Almsgiving,” 37–40). Responding to Leyerle, Fr. Michael Sherwin examines how Chrysostom urges the rich to seek divine patronage, especially through the intercession of the saints and of the poor to whom they give alms, in order to become, like them, friends of God. For Chrysostom, “the network of divine patronage is maintained, not at the table of the rich, but at the table of the poor” (“Friends at the Table of the Lord: Friendship with God and the Transformation of Patronage in the Thought of John Chrysostom,” *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 998 [2004]: 387–98, at 388).

⁸⁹ Chrysostom, Homily 47 on John (*Commentary on Saint John*, 483–84).

One cannot partake in the offerings “other than unworthily, when one neglects the hungry; when, more than overlooking them, one puts them to shame.”⁹⁰ By a refusal to provide for Christ in the poor, Christians “dishonor the table,” for “he has counted you worthy to partake of it, but you do not count him worthy of your food.”⁹¹

The sin of avarice is a particular offense against the Body of Christ that Chrysostom frequently criticizes in his congregation, most notably in his *Sermons on Wealth and Poverty*. In the context of his mystagogy, however, the Eucharistic heart of his concern for the poor becomes evident. In his homily on 1 Cor 11, Chrysostom says that Paul reminds us of Christ’s “time, his table, and his betrayal” on the night of the Last Supper (as we are reminded of them in the mysteries as well) in order to bring us to compunction for our unwillingness to “share a little meat” with our brother, though the Master even gave up his own self for us. Indeed, “This is that Supper:” Christ sits at this table no less than that, for “the first table had no advantage above that which comes after it. For even today also it is he who does all, and delivers it even as then.” Christ gave his Body “equally to all, saying, ‘Take, eat’”:

If therefore, you come for a sacrifice of thanksgiving, do on your part nothing unworthy of that sacrifice: by no means either dishonor your brother, or neglect him in his hunger; do not be drunken, do not insult the Church.⁹²

In the mysteries, the Church is at the Last Supper, where the Lord is to be received worthily and the poor provisioned. Avarice and the division it brings are offenses against the Eucharistic communion of Christ’s Body. At festivals, prayer should follow the reception of communion, rather than drunkenness and contempt for the poor. The faithful should imitate not Judas, but the angels. As at the Last Supper, so now the disciples should attend with vigilance and holy dread, purifying themselves so that they will not be condemned.⁹³ Worthy reception leads disciples from the Eucharist to almsgiving, and almsgiving leads them back into the house of God:

⁹⁰ Chrysostom, Homily 27 on 1 Cor, no. 6 (*PG*, 61:223–32), trans. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 12 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 157–63.

⁹¹ Chrysostom, Homily 27 on 1 Cor, no. 6.

⁹² Chrysostom, *On First Corinthians*, Homily 27 on 1 Cor, nos. 5–6. Sherwin notes that Chrysostom presents the Eucharist as a banquet that “displays the [divine] patron’s power, and reveals his network of friends,” especially including the poor who are friends of Christ (“Friends at the Table of the Lord,” 395–96).

⁹³ Chrysostom, Homily 27 on 1 Cor, no. 7.

Let then no Judas be present, no covetous man. If any one be not a disciple, let him withdraw, the Table does not receive such a one. For *I keep the Passover*, he says, *with my disciples*. This Table is the same as that, and has nothing less. For it is not that Christ wrought that, and man this, but he does this too. This is that upper chamber, where they were then; and hence they went forth unto the mount of Olives. Let us also go out unto the hands of the poor, for this spot is the mount of Olives. For the multitude of the poor are olive-trees planted in the house of God.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Like Dives, in the *Sermons on Wealth and Poverty*, Judas becomes a rhetorical focus for Chrysostom's preaching on avarice and the condemnation awaiting those who do not receive Christ in the poor. In the narrative context of the Last Supper, however, Chrysostom's characteristic moral exhortations to almsgiving find their deepest source. The awe-inspiring and dreadful presence of the mystery of Christ in the Eucharist demands a disposition made worthy by communion with the poor and afflicted, lest one eat and drink to one's own condemnation. Judas and Dives each face a moment of judgment and are lost; one at the first Eucharist, the other at death. The Christian enters the arena of judgment even before death, for either great good or ill, as he participates in the "awe-inspiring mysteries of the Church." The figure of Judas at the Last Supper functions in Chrysostom's mystagogy as a figure of the unworthy Christian at the Eucharist, a rhetorical means of salutary warning and a reminder of the moral and social responsibilities of those who are privileged to approach the "holy and terrifying" table of the Lord.

For Chrysostom, the Eucharist is truly the "source and summit of Christian life." His preaching on the Eucharist, focusing in Antiochene fashion on the salvation-historical aspects of the mystery of Christ made present, demands of the faithful the reverent humility of angels and a generosity to their brothers like that of Christ, who gave up his own self for us. Chrysostom's teaching derives its ethical and eschatological dimensions from his "contemplative exegesis of the literal sense"—the historical narrative represented in the rites. His rhetoric places his hearers into the reality of that narrative, making them present in holy dread at the Lord's table, along with the disciples warning them lest they be a Judas there. This gives

⁹⁴ Chrysostom, Homily on Matt, 82, no. 5.

Chrysostom's mystagogy immediate impact, and demands of his flock the vision of faith, devotion, compunction, charity, and above all, awe in the presence of the mystery:

Wherefore I beseech you that we do not do this to condemnation; let us nourish Christ, let us give him drink, let us clothe him. These things are worthy of that Table. Have you heard holy hymns? Have you seen a spiritual marriage? Have you enjoyed a royal Table? Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit? Have you joined in the choir of the Seraphim? Have you become a partaker of the powers above? Do not cast away so great a joy, do not waste the treasure.⁹⁵

For Chrysostom, almsgiving makes one able to stand at that "shining table . . . prepared by God," where all are beggars before the precious gift of Christ himself. Imitating God's own generosity, one can dare with the angels to enjoy so great a treasure.

Receive me today, Son of God, as a partaker of Your mystical Supper. I will not reveal Your mystery to Your adversaries. Nor will I give You a kiss as did Judas. But as the thief I confess to You: Lord, remember me in Your kingdom.

—Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

N.V

⁹⁵ Chrysostom, Homily 27 on 1 Cor, no. 7.