

# *Christology and the Christian Life in the Preaching of John Chrysostom*

Ashish J. Naidu, Ph.D.

## **Introduction**

The present study examines John Chrysostom's incarnational theology and its relation to his soteriological thought with particular reference to his understanding of baptism as it pertains to the Christian life. The first subsection will investigate the ontological aspects of Chrysostom's incarnational thought as it emerges in his polemic preaching against the Neo-Arians in his commentary on John, and will demonstrate that he views the Logos-Son as the single subject in Christ, underscoring his personal continuity in and after the incarnation. It will be pointed out that Chrysostom's Christological thought is undergirded by the idea of God's personal involvement in the economy of salvation: only if Christ is the natural Son of God can he make us by grace what he is by nature.

The second subsection will examine the soteriological implications of Chrysostom's Christological thought. Here the study will highlight two inter-related soteriological motifs that are characteristic of his incarnational theology: restoration of human nature and adoption as sons. It will be shown that Chrysostom's understanding of the Christian life is underpinned by a soteriology that is relational in nature. In Chrysostom's view, the soteriological ideas of the gift of adoption and the conforming of the Christian to the likeness of Christ are one and the same, and the baptismal context is where they are actualized. Chrysostom's understanding of the Christian life, it will be argued, is the outworking of his unitive Christology.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Ontology of the Incarnation**

The polemic tone of Chrysostom's statements on the person of the Logos is unmistakable in his homilies on the prologue to John's Gospel. Although his refutation of Neo-Arian doctrine of the essential dissimilarity (*ἀνόμοιος*) of the Logos and the Father is scattered and unsystematic, he consistently underscores the divinity and consubstantiality of the Logos by pointing out his co-eternality and equality with the Father.<sup>2</sup> In a critical passage he distinguishes the person of the Logos from the Father, mentioning his eternal nature, his consubstantiality and his procession. Chrysostom maintains that the Logos is:

A Being, a distinct Person, proceeding from the Father Himself without alteration. He (John) has indicated this, as I have said, by his appellation "the Word." Therefore, just as the expression "In the beginning was the Word" reveals His eternity, so "He was in the beginning with God" has revealed to us His co-eternity."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This article is an adaptation of a paper that was read at the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting, ETS, New Orleans, LA, USA, in November 2009. For an exhaustive examination of this functional relationship in John Chrysostom see, Ashish J. Naidu, *Transformed in Christ: Christology and the Christian Life in John Chrysostom* (Paternoster, UK, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup>See Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 2 vols., Patristic Monograph Series, vol. 8 (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979) for a comprehensive and an in-depth treatment of Neo-Arianism from primary source material.

<sup>3</sup>John Chrysostom, Homily 4, in *John*, Fathers of the Church, 33:45-46 (*Patrologia Graeca* 59.47). Further, Chrysostom

The Logos is co-eternal with the Father, he always existed alongside the Father - there never was a time when he was not. Consistent with the credal pronouncements, Chrysostom affirms that the Father is unbegotten and the Son is begotten of the Father.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he asserts that the Logos was not created and then chosen by God to have a transitory sovereignty, “but one that is His by nature and essence.”<sup>5</sup> Chrysostom often argued against the Neo-Arian doctrine of the dissimilarity between the essences of the Son and the Father, which they associated with the subsequent existence of the former. He contended that there was no essential difference between the Father and the Son and asserted that the Logos was not subsequent to but co-eternal with the Father. Illustrating this point by employing the well-known Cappadocian illustration, he avers that just as light has its origin in the sun, and that it does not appear subsequent to the sun (and vice-versa), the Son likewise is neither created, subsequent, nor inferior to the Father, but is co-eternal with Him possessing all the qualities of divinity.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Chrysostom reasoned that because the Son is co-eternal with the Father he is not a creature, and that because he proceeds from Him he is of the same essence (οὐσία) as the Father: “For if the son were not of the same Essence, there must be another God and if He were not co-eternal, He would exist later than the Father; and if He did not proceed from the Father’s Essence, it is evident the He must have been made.”<sup>7</sup> Chrysostom further substantiates his argument by asserting that the Father would not have anyone dissimilar or distinct in essence from him in his bosom. The fact that the only begotten Son came from the Father’s side (Jn.1:18) is the ultimate proof that he is of the same substance, and shares in the natural communion of the Godhead. Affirming this perichoretic sharing of attributes between the Father and the Son, he observes:

That is also the reason, as I have said, why the Evangelist mentioned the Father’s bosom: to clear up the whole matter for us by this one word. [It implies] that They have full conformity and agreement of substance, that Their knowledge is identical, that Their power is equal. For, the Father would not have anyone distinct (ἑτεροούσιον) from His own essence in His bosom, nor would any other have dared—since he was a slave and an ordinary person, to be himself in the bosom of the Lord, for this is a prerogative only of His own Son who is on terms of complete equality with Him who begot Him and is in no way inferior to

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adds that the Λόγος was as “eternal as the Father himself, for the Father was never without the Word but always God was with God, though each in His own Person.” Ibid., (PG 59.47). Chrysostom’s commentary on the Gospel of John is available in an updated English translation in the Fathers of the Church series. See *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist*, trans. Sr. Thomas Aquinas Goggin, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 33 (Washington, DC: The CUA Press, 1957); *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist*, trans. Sr. Thomas Aquinas Goggin, Fathers of the Church, vol. 41 (Washington, DC: The CUA Press, 1960). The Fathers of the Church series will henceforth be cited as *FOC* and *Patrologia Graeca* as *PG*.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Homily 2, *FOC* 33:22 (PG 59.33).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Homily 3, *FOC* 33:35 (PG 59.41).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., Homily 4, *FOC* 33:46-47 (PG 59.48). Sustaining his argument from Hebrews 1:3, where the Son is called the Father’s “radiance” or “brightness” he adds, “we do not talk as they do, however, but affirm that He exists also in His own Person. For this reason, when Paul (*sic*) had said that He is the ‘brightness,’ he added that He is also the ‘image of his substance’, in order that he might make it clear that the Son is His own Person and is of the same substance (οὐσία) as that of which He is the image.” Ibid., Homily 7, *FOC* 33:78 (PG 59.61). Elsewhere he refers to the eternity of Son as the, “ageless existence of the Only-begotten” - Ibid., Homily 8, *FOC* 33:81 (PG 59.65).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., Homily 4, *FOC* 33:49 (PG 59.49).

Him.<sup>8</sup>

If the Evangelist wanted to show the inferiority of the Son's divinity, argues Chrysostom, he would not have used terms like "Life and Light" (vs. 3-5) which refer to the Son as a personal agent in creation (because through him all things were made) and revelation (because he illumines all things), attesting to his equality and identity with the Father: "What is said of the Father as creator is meant also of the Son; he would not have said it if he had not the same opinion of Him as of the Creator and as not inferior to anyone."<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, in his commentary on the book of Genesis on the words, "Let us make man in our image" (1:26), Chrysostom discusses the Son's role in creation underscoring his equality with the Father. He argues:

So who is this to whom he says, "Let us make a human being? Who else is it than the Angel of Great Counsel, Wonderful Counselor, Figure of Authority, Prince of Peace, Father of the age to come, Only-begotten Son of God, like the Father in being, through whom all things were created? To him is said, "Let us make a human being in our image and likeness." This text also deals a mortal blow to those entertaining the position of Arius. I mean, he did not say by way of command, Make such a creature, as though to a subordinate to one inferior in being, but "Let us make" with great deference to an equal. And what follows shows us further the equality in being.<sup>10</sup>

Besides being active in creation and its sustenance, the Life and Light of Logos have brought about a change; death has lost its foothold and the darkness of sin has been vanquished: "When Life came to us, the power of death has been destroyed, and when the Light has shone for us, darkness is no more, but Life always remains in us and death cannot overcome it."<sup>11</sup> For Chrysostom, the divine nature of the Logos as co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father is evident in his participation in creation, revelation and redemption.<sup>12</sup>

In the incarnation, the Logos, who is co-eternal, consubstantial and equal with the Father suffered no alteration. In the assumption of flesh he remained unchanged in his divine nature, "His substance (οὐσία) was not transformed (μετέπεσεν) into flesh, but remaining what He is, He thus took the form of a slave."<sup>13</sup> Further, the Logos suffered no loss in the incarnation, but always remains in the same state of perfection;<sup>14</sup> "not that His substance changed into flesh, but that, after assuming flesh, His substance remained intact."<sup>15</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Homily 15, *FOC* 33:146 (*PG* 59.99).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., *FOC* 33:52 (*PG* 59.50); Chrysostom likens the creative activity of the only-begotten to an incessant spring which produces fathomless depths. Homily 5, *FOC* 33:63 (*PG* 59.56).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., Homily 8, in *Genesis*, *FOC* 74:109 (*PG* 53.72).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., Homily 5, in *John*, *FOC* 33:65 (*PG* 59.57).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Homily 11, *FOC* 33:107 (*PG* 59.79).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., Homily 14, *FOC* 33:130-131 (*PG* 59.91).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., Homily 11, *FOC* 33:107-108 (*PG* 59.79).

Chrysostom asserts, “He can do all things as long as He remains God; but if He receives a transformation, and one for the worse, how would He be God? Change is out of keeping with that pure nature.”<sup>16</sup> The reason Chrysostom consistently defends the notion of the unchanging nature of the Logos even after the incarnation, is because he views the Logos as the personal subject in Christ. The person of Christ existed before the incarnation (being who he is, he “took the form of a slave”) and is the same divine Logos. In asserting that the person of Christ is the eternal Logos who added humanity to himself without a transformation, Chrysostom maintains the personal continuity and unity in Christ, thus affirming that the Logos is the single subject in Christ.

### **The Soteriological Ramifications of the Incarnation**

Consonant with the teaching of the Fathers, the doctrinal threads of incarnation, restoration and salvation are interwoven in the intricate tapestry of Chrysostom’s soteriology. Underscoring this *consensus patrum*, Georges Florovsky has rightly stated, that “In this lifting up of human nature into an everlasting communion with Divine Life, the Fathers of the early Church unanimously saw the very essence of salvation, the basis of the whole redeeming work of Christ.”<sup>17</sup> The historical incarnation of which Chrysostom speaks as the οἰκονομία,<sup>18</sup> is underscored as being the cause of the restoration of sinful and fallen humanity and is correspondingly inseparably united to Chrysostom’s understanding of redemption. In so far as the φιλανθρωπία of God and the οἰκονομία of Christ are related, the incarnation is understood as an integral part, a cornerstone of the divine plan of redemption and not just a cosmic event. For Chrysostom, the incarnation, life and death of Christ viewed as a composite picture, is a reflection of God’s love, manifested in the divine condescension of the second person of the Trinity. Discussing this issue in his commentary on *Genesis*, Chrysostom writes:

Do you see the Lord’s inventive love (φιλανθρωπίαν)? . . . Why are you surprised if to this end he has devised all those stratagems and countless others? He who by nature was in the bosom of the Father deigned to take the form of a servant, to submit himself to all other bodily conditions, to have a woman for mother, to be born of a virgin, to be carried in the womb for nine months, to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, to be thought the son of Joseph, Mary’s husband, to grow up gradually, to be circumcised, to offer sacrifice, to suffer hunger and thirst and weariness, finally to meet his death, and not simply death but that death thought most shameful - I mean crucifixion. All of this was accepted for us and for our salvation by the Creator of everything, the one who never changes, who brings everything from non-being to being, who looks down upon the earth and makes it tremble, the splendor of whose glory not even the Cherubim, those incorporeal powers, cannot see but cover their eyes with their wings as they reveal the marvel to us; he whose praise angels, archangels and countless hosts forever sing- he it is who for us and for our salvation deigned to become man, plotted for us the way of exemplary living and bequeathed to us adequate instruction by the example he personally gave in assuming the same nature as ours.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., *FOC* 33:108 (*PG* 59.79).

<sup>17</sup>Georges Florovsky, “The Lamb of God,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4 (1951): 13-28, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup>See G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952), 57-67, for the patristic use of the term οἰκονομία and the variety of meanings attached to it. Prestige observes that term οἰκονομία is a constant favorite with Chrysostom. p. 62. He concludes that, “It need only be added that the supreme instance of divine economy, whether in the sense of dispensation, condescension, or special providence, was exhibited in the Incarnation, for which the word ‘oekonomia,’ without any verbal qualification is the regular patristic term from the third century onwards.” p. 67.

<sup>19</sup>Chrysostom, Homily 23, in *Genesis*, *FOC* 82:102 (*PG* 53.205).

Fallen human nature, marred by sin and consequently corrupted by death had to be restored to its original fullness. In the historical incarnation of Christ, the union of the human and the divine natures provided the context for the restoration and redemption of humanity. Through his death, Christ vanquished the curse of sin and reversed the consequences of the fall, and between these two crucial events of the incarnation and crucifixion in the history of salvation, his exemplary life is viewed as a mimetic paradigm for the practice of the Christian life.<sup>20</sup>

The doctrine of the incarnation in Chrysostom's view is the cardinal doctrine of the Church, for, "this doctrine forms no small teachings of the Church, and is its chief doctrine with regard to our salvation and one through which all things have come to exist and are directed. Through it death has been destroyed, and sin has been removed, and the curse has vanished, and countless blessings have come into our lives."<sup>21</sup> In the incarnation, "the Lord (δὲσπότης) and Ruler of all (πάντοκράτωρ)" himself condescended to bring about this restoration and redemption.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the sacramental ramifications of this doctrine have very practical implications: the Christian life is viewed as a response to the redemptive work, and a reflection of the incarnational presence of Christ in the Church. Christ is the source of life and grace and he mediates these benefits to us by his presence in the sacramental mysteries. The reality of restoration of humanity therefore is firmly rooted in union with him, manifesting itself in the life of the Christian.<sup>23</sup>

There are two inter-related soteriological motifs that are characteristic of Chrysostom's incarnational theology, both of which underscore the divine nature of Christ and his equality with the Father. The first motif can be characterized as restorative, where the incarnation of Christ is perceived as the basis for the restoration of fallen human nature. The second motif can be described as relational and views salvation as humanity enjoying fellowship with God by grace through Christ. By virtue of becoming incarnate, Christ the eternal Son gave us the privilege of relating with God as sons. These relational privileges are appropriated by the Christian through sacramental participation in Christ, identifying oneself with the Savior, in his life, death and resurrection.

### ***The Restoration of Human Nature***

The fellowship that humanity enjoyed with God at creation was subsequently severed by sin leading to

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., Homily 16, in *Genesis*, FOC 74:221 (PG 53.134). Cf. Homily 12, in *John*, FOC 33:117 (PG 59.84).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Homily 31, in *John*, FOC 33:299 (PG 59.177).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., Homily 12, FOC 33:113 (PG 59.82).

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Homily 14, FOC 33:137-38 (PG 59.95-96).

corruption and death.<sup>24</sup> This distance was remedied by the Savior himself, in that he assumed flesh and provided the context for redemption in the incarnation. This redemption involved the restoration of human nature from the corruption of death to life eternal. Chrysostom points out that the fall had a detrimental effect on human nature. Taking his cue from Amos 9:11, “I will raise up the tabernacle of David that has fallen,” Chrysostom associates the condition of fallen humanity with the “tabernacle” of David, observing that the “tabernacle” of human nature had an “irreparable fall,” and only God as its creator could restore it. By assuming human nature, Christ restored it and raised it up and thereby, “deemed it worthy of His royal throne.” The only way this could have been accomplished was through the incarnation of the Savior himself, because he “who fashioned it in the beginning” was able to reform it. This restoration is realized in the believer through the “regeneration of the water and the Spirit.”<sup>25</sup>

Chrysostom employs two metaphors to illustrate how human nature was restored by the incarnation of the Logos: One from the sphere of building construction depicts Christ as a skilled architect; and the other, a matrimonial metaphor, portrays Christ as a royal bridegroom, the son of a king. Chrysostom likens the fallen human condition to a dilapidated building, lying in a state of complete disrepair and in need of immediate attention of a skilled builder. Discussing how Christ affected its renovation, Chrysostom avers:

Even as some skilled architect who restores a house fallen to decay with age, so He restored our common human nature. Like the architect, He supplied parts that had been broken off, fastened together the separated and disjointed portions, and raised up again that which had completely fallen down.<sup>26</sup>

The human condition continuing in its state of corruption and death needed the creator of humankind, the one who “fashioned Adam from the earth” to step into the situation and restore humanity to its original fullness. This transformation required the very creator himself to become incarnate and bring about the restoration of human nature and to refashion the soul.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, he pictures Christ as a royal bridegroom marrying a maiden of low estate, observing that, in spite of being the son of a king, he condescends to the point of taking the initiative in her betrothal and afterwards escorts the bride to his Father’s house. In the incarnation, Christ took the initiative in assuming and uniting human nature to himself and led it upwards: “Human nature did not go up to heaven, but He Himself came to it, rightly despised and worthless as it was, and when the espousals had taken place He did not permit it

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<sup>24</sup>Chrysostom mentions the infinite gulf between God and humanity, observing that the latter had been weighed down with countless sins. See Homily 27, *FOC* 33:264 (*PG* 59.159).

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, Homily 11, *FOC* 33:109 (*PG* 59.80). Commenting on the same thought elsewhere Chrysostom affirms, “The forming of our nature is from above, of the Holy Spirit and water.” *Ibid.*, Homily 26, *FOC* 33:251(*PG* 59.153).

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, Homily 12, *FOC* 33:114 (*PG* 59.83).

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

to remain longer here, but took it away and brought it to His Father's house.”<sup>28</sup> By uniting human nature to himself, Christ re-established it, thereby returning it to commune with the divine nature. Chrysostom firmly holds to the notion that the incarnational union forms the basis for a redeeming union, in the sense that salvation is made possible because of the union of human and divine natures in Christ: “In truth, to mingle the high with the low works no harm to the honor of the high, but raises the lowly up from its very humble estate.

Accordingly, this is also true in the case of Christ. He in no wise lowered his own nature by His descent, but elevated us, who had always been in a state of ignominy and darkness, to ineffable glory.”<sup>29</sup> The incarnation of Christ, is therefore viewed as the zenith of God's redemptive act of restoration, in that human nature and divine nature have been brought together in an intimate fellowship and communion in the person of Christ: “even so has he done, joining the old covenant with the new, God's nature with man's, the things that are His with ours.”<sup>30</sup> The onus was on the Savior to bring this about. The Redeemer himself condescended and assumed human nature in order to realize the central purpose of the divine economy, “God himself, remember, despite his divinity, took to himself our human flesh, and for no other reason than the salvation of the human race became man.”<sup>31</sup>

### ***Adoption as Sons***

The other soteriological motif associated with Chrysostom's incarnational theology is the conferral of the gift of adoption through Christ, a concept that is relational in nature. When the Son of God assumed flesh and became man, he entered into brotherhood with us in order to make us by grace what he is by nature. Through grace, we are made the sons of God by the Son of God, in order that we might share in the intimate fellowship of the Father and the Son. Therefore, the one who can make us the sons of God has to be divine himself. Consistent with the words of Irenaeus,<sup>32</sup> Chrysostom affirmed the soteriological import of the incarnation in relational terms of the bestowal of sonship:

It is that the “Word became flesh” and the Master took on the form of the slave. He became the Son of Man, though He was the true Son of God, in order that He might make the sons of men children of God.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, while commenting on the first verse of the Gospel of Matthew, Chrysostom observes, “When

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., Homily 18, *FOC* 33:176 (PG 59.115).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., Homily 11, *FOC* 33:106 (PG 59.79).

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., Homily 2, in *Matthew*, section 2, *Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers* (Henceforth *NPNF*) 10:10 (PG 57.26).

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., Homily 3, in *Genesis*, *FOC* 74:46 (PG 53.37).

<sup>32</sup>“He became the Son of Man, though He was the true Son of God, in order that He might make the sons of men the children of God.” Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.10.2 (PG 7.)

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., Homily 11, in *John*, *FOC* 33:106 (PG 59.79). Cf Homily 6, *FOC* 33:72 (PG 59.61).

therefore you are told that the Son of God is Son of David and of Abraham, do not doubt that you too, the son of Adam, shall be son of God. For not at random, nor in vain did He abase Himself so greatly, only He was minded to exalt us. Thus He was born after the flesh, that you might be born after the Spirit. He was born of a woman, that you might cease to be the son of a woman.”<sup>34</sup> By making us his sons, and therefore brothers of the only-begotten, God by his grace has enabled us to share in the blessings of heaven .<sup>35</sup>

Once the curse of sin held sway, divested humanity of fellowship with God and distanced both parties from each other; but now through Christ, we are deemed worthy to be to be called his friends and even his body.<sup>36</sup> Chrysostom underscores the change that is brought about through grace in relational terms underscoring the unique standing that we have with God through Christ. Commenting on Jn. 1:16-17, Chrysostom discusses the superiority of the gifts of grace we receive through Christ, in comparison to the ones that were merely shadows of reality to come in the Old Testament, observing, “Not only was pardon for our sins granted to us, since we shared in this with them- since all have sinned - but also justice, and holiness, and adoption of sons, and grace of the Spirit, much more splendid gifts and richer by far. Through this grace we have become dear to God, no longer merely as servants, but as sons (υἱοὶ) and friends (φίλοι). That is why he said: ‘grace for grace.’”<sup>37</sup>

The incarnation reversed the consequences of the fall: through Christ we have been redeemed from a state of mortality, corruption and imperfection to a state of immortality, incorruption and perfection. The restoration and renewal of humanity in and through Christ culminates in an intimate relationship: the privilege of being adopted into the family of God, and by grace to share in the natural fellowship of the Godhead. Moreover, Chrysostom affirms that the gift of adoption through Christ is granted in the sacramental context of baptism, where we receive the restorative grace of the Spirit who regenerates and reforms us to relate with God as sons in the same way as Christ does, “Having been born from above and, so to speak reformed (ἀναστοιχειωθέντες), it is this way that we have been called sons (υἱοὶ).”<sup>38</sup> The believer is conformed to the likeness of Christ and made the son of God by God the Son having been renewed by grace.

### **Baptism, Adoption, and Restoration of the Divine Image in the Christian (John 3:1-21)**

The purpose of this section is to point out that in Chrysostom’s view the conferral of the gift of adoption and the conforming of the Christian to the likeness of Christ are one and the same, and the sacrament of baptism

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., Homily 2, in *Matthew*, section 2, *NPNF* 10:10 (PG 57.26).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., Homily 79, in *John*, *FOC* 41:363 (PG 59.431).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., Homily 19, *FOC* 33:190-191 (PG 59.122).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., Homily 14, *FOC* 33:135 (PG 59.93-94).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., Homily 14, *FOC* 33:134 (PG 59.93) Cf. Homily 11, *FOC* 33:109 (PG 59.80).

is the means through which this is actualized. To be made the sons of God is to be conformed to Christ's likeness and thus be renewed in the image of God. Consequently, to be renewed in the divine image, is to become by grace what Christ is by nature.<sup>39</sup> The Christian's identification and union with Christ at baptism initiates a new life with its unique privilege: the heavenly kinship (συγγενείας) of adoption. This spiritual regeneration has implications for the Christian life because a genuine change has occurred.<sup>40</sup> Chrysostom illustrates this regeneration through the use of different metaphors.

Employing the spiritual birth imagery, Chrysostom distinguishes sharply between the earthly birth according to the flesh and the heavenly birth according to the Spirit, and warns of the eternal consequences for those who have not experienced the latter. The individual who has not been born of water and the Spirit has not yet received the renewal of divine image, which Chrysostom refers to as the "Master's stamp" (Δεσποτικὸν σύμβολον).<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere he calls it, "the royal stamp" (χαρακτῆρα τὸν βασιλικόν),<sup>42</sup> or "the image of sonship" (υἰοθεσίας εἰκόνα).<sup>43</sup> Such an individual is considered a "stranger" and a "foreigner" and bears the "garment of death" and the "curse of destruction."<sup>44</sup> He understands baptism as bringing a radical change in the life of the believer, comparing it with the first creation and contrasting it with the eschatological implications of this spiritual birth. In the first creation man was created after the earth was formed, but now the new man is created before this world will be transformed. In the former creation, man was made in the "image of God" (εἰκόνα Θεοῦ) but now (at baptism) man is made "one with God Himself" (νῦν αὐτῷ τῷ Θεῷ ἦνωσε).<sup>45</sup> Here Chrysostom emphatically relates the restoration of the divine image in the new creation with divine communion.<sup>46</sup> A condition from which sinful humanity had departed and can now be restored through the work

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., Homily 15, in *Romans*, NPNF 11:453 (PG 60.541). "However, we who are free to receive the honor not in name only, but in deed. And this Paul declared, saying: 'You have not received a spirit of bondage so as to be again in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by virtue of which we cry: 'Abba! Father!' Having been born from above and, so to speak reformed, it is this way that we have been called sons.'" Ibid., Homily 14, in *John*, FOC 33:133-134 (PG 59.93).

<sup>40</sup> ". . . baptism results in our experiencing a mystical birth and purification from all sins committed before it, but to remain pure subsequently, and to acquire no taint again after this, depends on our will and effort." Ibid., Homily 10, FOC 33:101 (PG 59.76).

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., Homily 25, FOC 33:243 (PG 59.148).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., Homily 10, FOC 33:100 (PG 59.75).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., (PG 59.76).

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., Homily 25, FOC 33:243 (PG 59.148).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., Homily 25, FOC 33:245 (PG 59.150).

<sup>46</sup>Chrysostom distinguishes between "image" (εἰκόνα) and "likeness" (ὁμοίωσις) in his *Commentary on Genesis*. He points out that "image" refers to the matter of "control" or dominion and having all creation under subjection: "God created man as having control of everything on earth, and nothing on earth is greater than man, under whose authority everything falls." Ibid., Homily 8, in *Genesis*, FOC 74.110f (PG 53.72-73); Cf. Homily 10, in *Genesis*, FOC 74.133 (PG 53.85). "Likeness" is understood as reflecting God in our moral faculties: "we resemble him in our gentleness and mildness and in regard to virtue." Chrysostom sustains his moral understanding of 'likeness' by quoting Christ's words from the sermon on the mount, "Be like your Father in heaven. [Matthew

of the Spirit at baptism. Adhering to the common practice of catechetical instructions drawn from the creation account of Genesis,<sup>47</sup> he alludes to the events from the primeval prologue in reference to the life sustaining features of water and the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about this change in the baptized, “as the womb is to the embryo, so the water is to the believer, since he is formed and shaped in the water.”<sup>48</sup> The sacramental context of baptism is the means of this spiritual birth, for the Christian is born of the Spirit and has experienced a new birth in conformity to Christ because the “image of sonship” (υιοθεσίας εικόνα) has been impressed on the believer in this process.<sup>49</sup>

The one who is baptized has a heavenly kinship and has been renewed, changed and united to Christ. Individual merit cannot earn this gift, as it is solely the work of God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> In keeping with the renewal motif, Chrysostom alludes to Pauline terminology from Romans 6, underscoring the distinction between “the old man” and “the new man” and noting how the individual identifies with and participates in the mystery of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection:

In it the divine covenant is fulfilled: burial and death, and resurrection and life and all these take place at once. When we immerse our heads in water, just as if in a grave, the old man is buried, and having sunk down, is entirely hidden once for all; then, when we emerge, the new man rises again. Just as it is easy for us to be immersed and to emerge [from the water], so it is easy for God to bury the old man and raise up the new. This is done thrice that you may learn that the power of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit performs all this.<sup>51</sup>

Through baptism the believer also appropriates the sacramental benefits of the crucifixion, in that not only pardon for sins but also a new quality of life are granted.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Chrysostom associates the renewal and

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5:45].” Homily 9, in *Genesis*, *FOC* 74:120 (*PG* 53:78). This renewal in the image of God is viewed as the reversal of the consequences of the fall and is reflected in the moral and virtuous life of the believer.

<sup>47</sup> See Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, trans. Sr. M. Gonzaga, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols., (Gateshead on Tyne: Sands & Co. Ltd., 1959), 1:82.

<sup>48</sup> Chrysostom states that the only-begotten Son of God has counted us worthy of great mysteries, even though we are unworthy and do not deserve them. Citing 2 Cor. 5:17, he avers that Christ has made us a “another creature”. Discussing how the aforementioned takes place, he remarks, “The forming of our nature is from above, of the Holy Spirit and water.” Chrysostom, Homily 26, in *John*, *FOC* 33:251 (*PG* 59:153).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 10, *FOC* 33:100 (*PG* 59:76).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 25, *FOC* 33:248 (*PG* 59:151).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 25, *FOC* 33:247 (*PG* 59:151). Discussing this metaphor of being buried with Christ, being dead to sin and raised to new life in Romans 6, Chrysostom emphatically associates the cross with baptism. What the cross was to Christ, baptism is to the Christian. Christ went to the cross willingly and so the Christian mortifies his or her sin and therefore has the same attitude to sin as a corpse. See Homily 11, in *Romans*, *NPNF* 11:408 (*PG* 60:483).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Homily 27, in *John*, *FOC* 33:261-262 (*PG* 59:158). Addressing the neophytes on a related issue of how sacrifice of Christ on the cross has overturned and written off the debt that Adam incurred through his transgression and subsequent sins, Chrysostom assures them that they are not liable to the consequences of the former contract of death. The believer has now been given a new lease of life by Christ who did not just erase the certificate of ancestral debt but shred it to pieces, “the nails of the cross tore up the decree and destroyed it utterly, so that it would not hold good for the future.” Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, 3.21-22, *ACW* 31:63 (*SC* 50:163-164). See *Baptismal Instructions*, Translated by Paul W. Harkins, *ACW*, volume 31 (Critical Greek Text by Antoine Wenger, *Jean Chrysostome: Huit catéchèses baptismales inédites*, *SC* 50, Paris, 1957).

restoration of the divine image in the baptized with being conformed to the likeness of Christ. Employing Pauline language on matters relating to this discussion, Chrysostom notes, that in baptism, the old person marred by sin has been buried and the new has been raised reflecting this change. In this process we have “put off” the old and “put on” the new, Christ himself:

Baptism is a burial and a resurrection. For the old man is buried with his sin and the new man is resurrected being renewed according to the image of his Creator. We put off the old garment, which has been made filthy with the abundance of our sins; we put on the new one, which is free from every stain. What am I saying? We put on Christ Himself. For all you, says, Paul, who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, for Chrysostom, “to put on Christ” or to be “clothed with Christ” at baptism, is to have Christ indwell the Christian, resulting in the individual’s nature being conformed to the nature of Christ, the eternal Son. Elaborating on what this means in his *Commentary on Galatians 3:26-27*, Chrysostom remarks:

Why did Paul not say: “All you who have been baptized in Christ have been born of God?” For this was the conclusion of the proof that they were sons. But he puts it in a much more awe-inspiring way. For if Christ is the Son of God and you have put on Christ, since you have the Son in yourself, you have become like to Him and you have been brought into one relationship (συγγένεια) and into one nature (ἰδέαν) with Him.<sup>54</sup>

For Chrysostom, therefore, to receive the gift of adoption at baptism or to be impressed with “image of sonship” is the same as saying that the Christian has been conformed to the likeness of Christ, and to be conformed to Christ is to be renewed in the image of God.

This, we underscore, is central to Chrysostom’s sacramental understanding of baptism. The inner change and renewal of the image of God in the Christian at baptism, to a large extent, underpins Chrysostom’s preaching on the Christian life. This thought is echoed in his *Baptismal Instructions*. Chrysostom often quotes 2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come,” in his catechetical homilies, as a reminder of the gift of transformation that the believer has received at baptism.<sup>55</sup> To be conformed to the likeness of Christ is to be restored in the divine image. The conferral of adoption at baptism inaugurates a new way of life for the believer, because the Christian by definition is Christ-like.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., *Baptismal Instructions* 2.11, *ACW* 31.47.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., *Commentary on Galatians 3:26-27*, *NPNF* 13.30 (*PG* 61.656). Cf. Ibid., *Commentary on Romans 13:14*, *NPNF* 11.518 (*PG* 61.623-624). Likewise, discussing the same thought in his catechetical instructions he maintains: “St. Paul says: *For all you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. So I exhort you to do your every deed and action just as if you had Christ, the Creator of all things and the Master of our nature, dwelling within you. And when I say Christ, I mean also the Father and the Holy Spirit. For this is what Christ Himself promised us when He said: *If anyone love me and will keep my commandments, the Father and I will come and make our abode with him*.” Ibid., *Baptismal Instructions* 4.3, *ACW* 31.67.

<sup>55</sup>The Chrysostom’s Fourth Instruction addressed to the neophytes is based on the 2 Cor. 5:17. See *Baptismal Instructions* 4.1-33, *ACW* 31.66-78. As a mystagogue, Chrysostom makes reference to 2 Cor. 5:17 about nine times, more than any other in verse in his catechetical instructions.

<sup>56</sup>For a similar emphasis on Chrysostom’s view of the Christian life as a life that reflects this change brought about through Christ being formed in the Christian, see, Iain R. Torrance, ““God the Physician”: ecclesiology, sin and forgiveness in the preaching of St. John Chrysostom,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44, (1999): 163-176.

## The Christological Implications of Chrysostom's Incarnational Theology

This portrayal of the restoration (and renewal) of human nature through the incarnation as mediated to the believer through the sacraments suggests that the infrastructure of Chrysostom's understanding of the Christian life is underpinned by a firm correspondence between his Christological and sacramental thought. His emphasis on the person of Christ as the Word who assumed flesh, without a transformation, implies that he maintains a personal continuity in Christ. Chrysostom consistently highlights the point that Christ is the changeless eternal Son, who is consubstantial and equal with the Father. It is he who makes it possible for us to relate with God as sons in a personal way, enabling us to share in the natural fellowship of the Godhead by renewing and restoring us in the image of God, in the sacramental context of baptism. This is consistent with saying that God gives us himself in and through Christ.<sup>57</sup> Such a Christology requires that the personal subject of Christ to be the Logos himself and therefore views the incarnation as a condescension of grace.

The different epithets that Chrysostom ascribes to Christ in his ministry of restoration underscore the same point. Chrysostom's portrayal of Christ as a skilled architect who restores fallen human nature to its original condition suggests that only the creator who fashioned human nature in the beginning could repair and restore it as it was intended to be. Christ as the royal bridegroom, who reaches out to fallen humanity to unite us with himself, points to the divine initiative in this redemption and restoration. Christ as the fountain and root of all blessings, who mediates these gifts to us and yet remains in the same state of perfection, signifies that he is the sacramental source through whom these gifts are conveyed. All three aspects of Christ's restorative ministry have a personal dimension: we receive these benefits through the person of Christ. Only if Christ is Son by nature can he bring about this restoration, and only if the Logos is the personal subject in Christ can he convey these benefits to us.

Furthermore, Chrysostom's understanding of baptismal regeneration as being conformed to the likeness of Christ, also reflects a Christology that points to the unity of Christ with the Father and his consubstantiality. To be made the sons of God is to be conformed to the likeness of the Son of God. To be clothed with Christ at baptism is to have the eternal Son dwell in us, and to be conformed to his likeness is to experience a renewal in God's image. In this sacramental vouchsafing we have been made "one with God" (reconciled) through Christ. Chrysostom's association of the conferral of adoption with being conformed to the likeness of Christ and thus with our renewal in the divine image is consistent with saying that only if Christ is divine and one with God can

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<sup>57</sup> Donald Fairbairn's recent study of grace in the early church underscores this very point from Cyril's perspective, "Christ does not simply give us grace, he *constitutes* the grace that he gives us. God the logos incarnate is both the giver and the gift." He convincingly argues that there was a theological consensus at the turn of the fifth century in regard to the person of Christ and the mediation of grace. Fairbairn notes that the Chrysostom's Christological terminology is similar to both Athanasius and Cyril. His contention is that Athanasian and Cyrillian thought mirrored this consensus of the fathers from both the Alexandrian and the Antiochene schools. See, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church*, eds. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2003), 69. Torrance concluded that the Apostolic Fathers' concept of grace was influenced by Judaism and Hellenism and did not have the "radical" and personal character presented in the New Testament. See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948), 133.

we receive these benefits by being made like him. Chrysostom's portrayal of Christ as the Creator, Lord and Ruler, who condescended to restore the heavenly kinship that humanity enjoyed before the fall, can be appropriately described as a Christology of restoration (and renewal).

Ashish J. Naidu, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Theology  
Talbot School of Theology  
Biola University  
13800 Biola Ave  
La Mirada, CA 90639

Email: [ashish.naidu@biola.edu](mailto:ashish.naidu@biola.edu)  
Tel: (562) 944 0351 ext. 3515