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T True religion fundamentals in the thinking of St. John Chrysostom

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Abstract

Any theological or spiritual doctrine that claims it springs from the divine revelation has its starting point in the belief in the truths revealed by God to men, for that all have the same infallible and infinitely true Word as the guarantor. However, not all truths are of equal importance to all teachers. The evolution of personal conscience, the influences of time, environment, training, and often a godly mission that gives chosen souls the task of sending a spiritual message: so many causes that give a different orientation to the meditations of saints and their teachings. The Fathers are generally less exclusivist and this gives their teaching a fullness of which has nurtured many generations of Christians. However, they did not remain untouched by the concerns of their time; the care they wore for the souls who needed to be sanctified did not allowed them to balance a perfectly harmonious body of doctrine. To reach souls and raised them spiritually the Fathers should give impressive power to the ideas either contained, or too forgotten, but in fact fundamental to life. This meant to print on the entire overall a determined sense and therefore can be easily distinguished authors from various different trends. We must add that some Fathers were some lively temperament; a longer study of their lives reveals a busy ones. Personal spiritual experiences of such vibrating souls do not remain excluded to the building of the spirit; they upset those encountered in their way and they rebuild and revive others to life. In short, all influences suffered from outside, all spiritual experiences and apostolic care for souls dictates Chrysostom a certain attitude and love of people; man and its communion with God - eternal finality in God.

Keywords

Redemption, love, resurrection, eternal life, communion with Christ.

1. God's saving love

Attitude which usually borrows God in His dealings with us will profoundly affect the character of His spiritual teachings. His justice will inspire repentance; His holiness, religious worship; His greatness, songs of praise and admiration; His kindness, love. St. John Chrysostom sees in God, above all, His inexpressible mercy, this kindness to people, kindness which leans toward their needs and draws them to a follow Him.

In any true Christian, who understood the teachings of Christ, this consideration is in first place. St. John had special reasons to meditate especially to the goodness of God and then talk about it. He wanted to bring souls to God. Or, he says, „People cannot be so easily lured by speaking about the great and sublime things of God, as by talking about the kindness and goodness that are useful for the salvation of people who listen”.¹ The unfortunate history of Arians is still recent; in their searches for the divine essence and work, far from being close to God, they were lost in unbelief. Out of precaution, Chrysostom runs from all such speculation. His pastoral concern or we could say his field of research is the relationship of God with His creatures. Here's what is in the interest of salvation of souls: communion with Christ.

These relationships are very different, depending on the circumstances and people, but always the one who has the last word is goodness; therefore, after he shows God's judgment and punishment, Saint John is pleased to bring into question His goodness: because “we must not under any circumstances talk only of «His wrath» but also of His goodness, if lest we want to take the hearers into despair rather than complacency”.² Thus he finds fiery accents to talk about this mercy of God for us: “Oh! If we had so great will to go to Him, how great tender is in His paternal depths! His mercy is a burning fire”.³ In reality, God's goodness is unspeakable: it cannot be imprisoned in our poor human language: it escapes our expressions like water that flows through our fingers.⁴

¹ *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 12, PG 60, 611d.

² *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 18, PG 59 115 a.

³ *Homilies on Hosea*, Homily 3,3, PG 56, 133d

⁴ *Homilies on the Gospel of Mathew*, Homily 22, 5-6, PG 57, 306-308.

Another reason that often brings on the lips of St. John Chrysostom the description of God's goodness is the desire that he conceived for his believers to practice themselves the divine mercy. This charity makes them like God himself. Thus we will find in Christians' charity the characteristics that Saint Chrysostom reveals about the goodness of God. Mercy has a theocentric character and becomes a model for human charity. This unspeakable goodness has divine blessings.

Among these blessings, the most important of all others is *our salvation*. The first will of God is the human salvation that He passionately wants to see accomplished, so to speak, the one in which He puts His entire goodwill.⁵ "the Father of glory"⁶ is the beginning of each gift and grace of the entire spectrum and cycle of the Divine dispensation. He is the beginning and the Spring of intension, will, and the first impulse, as St. John Chrysostom says.⁷ He works "all in all" (I Corinthians 12, 6)⁸ through the Son, in synergy with the Holy Spirit. I.e. all human-divine oikonomy, that begins with the decision before the ages for our salvation and consummates in the coming of the Kingdom of glory. The Apostle Paul calls Father the Saviour⁹, because salvation comes from Him and "in Him are ye in Christ Jesus"¹⁰, "that God may be all in all".¹¹ He is the "Head of Christ" and also "the Head of all of us in the Church"¹² says St. John, succeeding the Apostle Paul, because being the Father of the Son by nature He became our Father by grace and honor through the Incarnation of the Son.¹³ And we have become through Christ and in the Holy Spirit His children, things that represent the entire oikonomy and all gifts.¹⁴ We have become, as a

⁵ PG 49, 248a.

⁶ Ephesians 1, 17.

⁷ *Homilies on Ephesinas*, Homily 1,4, PG 62, 15. *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 39, 5, PG 61, 340, see Saint John Damascene, *Homilies on Ephesians*, Homily 1, 17, PG 95, 825D.

⁸ *Homilies on Colossians*, Homily 10, 3, PG 62, 369.

⁹ I Timothy 1, 1.2, 3, Titus 3,4.

¹⁰ I Corinthians 1, 30, see II Corinthians 5, 18, Romans 11, 36, Hebrews 2, 10

¹¹ I Corinthians 15, 28.

¹² *Homilies on Ephesinas*, Homily 20,4, PG 62, 140, I Corinthians 11, 3.

¹³ *Homilies on Galatians*, Homily 1, 5, PG 62, 619.

¹⁴ *Homily on Psalm 150*, PG 55, 496, *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 1, 4, PG 60, 400, *Homilies on Mathew*, Homily 19, 4, PG 57, 278, *Homilies on Galatians*, Homily 14, 1, PG 61, 657

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Church, says St. John, “paternal house”, “Father’s house”.¹⁵ He created us to save us and He does not want anything more than that.¹⁶ He loves our salvation more than we love our wealth¹⁷; He desires our salvation more than we desire it ourselves.¹⁸ In everything He does, He has only one purpose: our salvation.¹⁹

He considered our salvation when he sent his Son into the world. Here is proof of the great kindness that God shows us. However, those who denied the incarnation felled into this heresy only because they did not know to attribute to God so much goodness, they did not know the goodness of God.²⁰ The Son of God received from His Father and shares the same love for people. And He does everything for our salvation. Because all that is happening in the by the oikonomy of grace it happens “through the Son” (διά) or “in Son” (έν)²¹, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”²² St. John Chrysostom, commenting on the text from Romans 3. 24-25 says that “Christ succeeded in everything”²³ and in another place says that Christ “is always the cause of all”²⁴: of the incarnation, of His cross, of His resurrection and ascension and of the descending of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ revealed, made known and fulfilled (εκπλήρωσε) the work of the Divine oikonomy “through His works”²⁵, therefore only through Him we have our salvation.²⁶ As at the creation of the world God’s Word had a perfect role “by him were all things created” (Col. 1,16), so now He himself becomes central to the economy of the Divine economy as Savior-Messiah.²⁷ Because He is Jesus, which means the Saviour and that means at the same time, sal-

¹⁵ *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 10, PG 60, 481. See PG 62, 77, 87, 387.

¹⁶ *Homilies on Ephesinas*, Homily 1,2, PG 62, 13

¹⁷ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 3, 4, PG 53, 36.

¹⁸ *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 25, 3, PG 60, 631.

¹⁹ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 24, 8, PG 53, 217.

²⁰ *Ibid*, Homily 28, 3, PG 53, 255.

²¹ Romans 5, 1-21, I Corinthians 8, 6, Ephesians 1, 16, 20.

²² John 1, 3, see Romans 14, 24-26, Colossians 1, 16.

²³ *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 7, 2, PG 60, 444, *Homily on Psalm 109*, PG 55, 28

²⁴ *Homilies on Ephesinas*, Homily 2,1, PG 62, 18

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Homily 1, 4, PG 62, 15.

²⁶ See Nicholas Cbasilas, *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 19, PG 150, 412A, *The Life in Christ*, 3, 573.

²⁷ See PG 62, 320. PG 61, 438. PG 63, 31.

vation itself and the fulfillment of this salvation.²⁸ The profound meaning of the Epistle to the Colossians (Col. 1,15-19) teaches plainly that the Son of God is not only the creative cause of all creation, but also the center and the purpose and its sense and its ultimate end. The great Apostle tells us that all things were created “through Him”, but also “into” or “in” Him, the causal, “through Him” transforms into “in Him”.²⁹ All that were created by Him have “in Him” their existence and life and reason and purpose. Christ is without question the principle and the end of all, as He made it known to His beloved disciple (Rev. 22:13). The many Christ-centered expressions (“principle”, “the Head of the Church”, “eschatological Adam” etc.)³⁰ of the Apostle Paul means precisely this they make us understand the “Gospel” of the Apostle about “the economy of the mystery”, i.e. the Gospel about the Church as “mystery of Christ”. St. John Chrysostom shows the wonder of the theology of Paul, who perseveres to emphasize that Christ is the firstborn after “the last birth” (ὁστέρων γενέσθαι), i.e. not only in the first creation, but first of all in the economy of salvation, which has more than all a Christocentric character. He came to bring the testimony of the truth, with no doubt, but at the same time, according to St. John, for the love for men³¹ and for their salvation.³² Because His will is no different from that of His father, who does not want any of us to perish.³³ His food says himself, is to do the Father’s will and Chrysostom explains: Jesus Christ called food people’s salvation³⁴, for “Christ loved the world and the Father and the Holy Spirit in the same way”.³⁵ Father’s love that is made known by the grace of Christ and by the communion with the Holy Spirit contains the full loving economy of God for the people and for our salvation.³⁶ In the person and with the incarnation of Christ, to whom God the Father gave His grace, is made known among us that “God’s grace has saved all

²⁸ *Homilies on Galatians*, Homily 1, 3, PG 61, 617

²⁹ *Homilies on Colossians*, Homily 1, 16, PG 82, 608B, see Saint Athanasius the Great, *Against Arianism*, 2, 14, BEΠ 30, 199-200.

³⁰ Colossians 1, 15-19, Ephesians 1, 10, 22-23. 3, 9. II Corinthians 15, 45, Colossians 3, 11. See *Homilies on Colossians*, Homily 3, 2-3, PG 62, 319-320.

³¹ *Homilies on Second Timothy*, Homily 4, 2, PG 62, 620b

³² *Homilies on Second Thessalonians*, Homily 4, 2, PG 62, 487d.

³³ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 57, 1, PG 59, 312b – Ibid. 6, 1, PG 59, 61c

³⁴ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 45, PG 59, 255a

³⁵ *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 30, 6, 622.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Homily 9,3, PG 60, 470, see John 3, 16, Romans 5, 5-8.

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mankind”³⁷. And Father through the Son gives us the communion with the Holy Spirit, whom we unite and we take in our being only in Church.³⁸ And where led this love and will for our salvation? To poverty, death on the cross, even before He was sure that we want to serve Him.³⁹ Indeed, death on the cross proves God’s goodness still more than creation.⁴⁰ We must add that Christ would have died to save even a single soul, because “He has the same love for every man that has for the whole world”.⁴¹ And to anyone who insults Him, He could address emotional reproaches:

“You have dare to despise Me, the one who brought you out of nowhere; the one who gave you a soul with a single breath; the one who made you the master of all world; the one who created for you heaven and earth, air and sea, and all that exists; Me, whom I have been insulted by you until I was more detested than the devil, far from abandoning you because of this; I have endeavored to find new graces to overwhelm you with them; I have endured for you spitting, whipping and most shameful death; the death that mediated for you in heaven; the one who gave you the Holy Spirit; the one who invited you into His kingdom; who gave so glorious a fate; I, whom I wanted to become your head, your husband, your robe, your home, your roots, your food, your drink, your shepherd, your king and your brother; finally, I, whom I have chosen you to be the child of the same Father, and heir and co-heir to the kingdom and the one who got you out of darkness and made you partaker of the joy of light”.⁴²

But even these reproaches he has not done.

Chrysostom especially likes to praise the divine blessings, which regards salvation:

“the mercy of God has united heaven and earth; the mercy of God had made man to be seated on the royal throne; the mercy

³⁷ Titus 2, 11, See Romans 5, 15, 21, see Saint Athanasius the Great, *Homilies on Psalm*, 19, 6, BE11 32, 68

³⁸ Hebrews 6, 4, Philipians 2, 1, Romans 5,5, *Homilies on Second Corinthians*, Homily 30, 2, PG 61, 608.

³⁹ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 34,1, PG 59, 194b.

⁴⁰ *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 7, 9, PG 60, 454b.

⁴¹ *Catechesis* 2, 5, PG 49, 239bc.

⁴² *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 3, 2, PG 61, 25a

of God revealed Him on earth; God's mercy has converted the Master into servant; God's mercy gave the beloved to the hands of enemies, the Son for the rebellious, the Master for the servant, He who is free for slaves. And His mercy does not stop here; it led us even more higher. Not only freed us from evil, but has made us even more wonderful promises".⁴³

The reason this love of God for us comes exclusively from His kindness.⁴⁴ It is a disinterested love. God expects nothing from us except our salvation; no service, no glory, nothing we could give Him: what for? God lacks nothing. If He wants to be served and praised by us, it is because He wants that His love for us to become even more ardent: He wants only our salvation.⁴⁵

This kenosis of God for the salvation of men is an idea quite common in Saint's work. "God cares less about His glory than our salvation".⁴⁶ There is only one way to present things here. In reality, God can no longer give away any glory, nor He can renounce His essence and as this is the principle that exists in all, the glory is the end of all things. But here's exactly where Chrysostom triumphs: "Is not our salvation closely tied very closely to *His glory*, because our salvation praises Him?⁴⁷ And our salvation praises Him, because our salvation is His greatest gift, the gift of God himself. This gift of God to men, in all moments of their lives, leads to the glory of God, because: "doing good thing continually means to praise God".⁴⁸ This glory will burst especially on the final judgment, "in which the chosen ones, getting possession of goods of God will be His glory. The glory of perfect good lies in being able to share and communicate".⁴⁹

St. John Chrysostom thinking is rooted, as it can be seen, in theology of relation: God-Mercy, He links mercy to the whole saving economy of the Holy Trinity. In the mystery of the economy of salvation all became through the love of Triune God, the giver of life: "Father and Son and Holy

⁴³ *Homilies on Galatians*, chapter II, 84, PG 61, 646d.

⁴⁴ *Homilies on the Gospel of Mathew*, Homily 23, 1, PG 57, 318.

⁴⁵ *Homilies on Ephesinas*, Homily 9,4, PG 62, 75, see PG 51, 160

⁴⁶ *Homilies on Ephesinas*, Homily 1,2, PG 62, 13

⁴⁷ *Homilies on Hebrews*, Homily 29, 2, PG 63, 205

⁴⁸ *Homily on Psalm 113*, 3, PG 55, 309, According *Homilies on Gospel of John*, Homily 45, 3, PG 59, 255, *Homilies on Gospel of Mathew*, Homily 42, 5,, PG 58, 473

⁴⁹ *Homilies on Second Corinthians*, Homily 3, 4, PG 61, 410d

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Spirit work together every time”⁵⁰ Seeing God in this manner and attaching to His nature even naturalness of doing good deeds for our salvation - a voluntary desire which has its principle in free love of creatures: this attitude of soul draws very important practical consequences. The goodness of God is a clear fact, the primordial act in order of salvation and spiritual perfection; it does not depend on anything other than itself. This certainly dominates the teaching of John Chrysostom about free collaboration of man with God’s action.

St. John exposes in other forms these ratios between the goodness of God and our salvation. God regards our salvation not only as a glory of His own, but He also calls it His wealth⁵¹ and for this reason: His wealth consists mainly in spreading his gifts over all people:⁵² “God appeared rich, when He could forgive men their trespasses, for the salvation of men is the wealth of God (Πλούτος γάρ θεού των ανθρώπων η σωτηρία)”⁵³.

St. John presents and summarizes our salvation as God’s *joy*. For those who were disturbed in their faith in God by his exile, he exposes in a beautiful passage, the reasons to believe in eternal love of the Lord:

“You have a God who loves you more tenderness than a father with an intensity more active than that of a mother; a God who loves with a passion more ardent than the newlyweds; a God who is excited of your salvation and enjoyed more than you think that you escaped from danger and death ...; a God who confesses all forms of affection: affection of a father for his sons, of a mother for his children, of a farmer for his harvest, of an architect for his work, of a husband for his wife, of a young man for his fiancée; God who wants you to drive away evils from you as Sunrise is far away from Sunset and as heaven is high above the earth... or rather, not only like, but still more... For God’s providence is unexplained, His solicitude is incomprehensible, His goodness is ineffable, His love is unailing”.⁵⁴

According to St. John, we can see two main characteristics of God’s goodness; they will be found in Saint’s own attitude regarding the souls

⁵⁰ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 86, 4, PG 59, 472 and Homily 25, 2, see *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 29, 3, PG 65, 244-5.

⁵¹ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 80, 1, PG 59, 433d.

⁵² *Homilies on Second Thessalonians*, Homily 3, 1, PG 62, 480c.

⁵³ PG 51, 24-25.

⁵⁴ PG 52, 498c.

and in his advices on the subject. Condescension is God's disposition that, without considering the dignity of His sovereignty, accommodates with our weakness⁵⁵ to contribute to our salvation.⁵⁶ Unworthy of His greatness, this divine condescension is worthy of His infinite goodness⁵⁷ and it is the rule of His conduct regarding us.

The condescension of God is manifested very different.⁵⁸ St. John likes to point out how the holy authors talk about God, and then it becomes an exegetical process.⁵⁹ Exegetical studies make us love God, Who is even more condescending than a father. "A father is not interested in his dignity, but he likes to chant with his little children and used to designate food, words that are not even Greek, a foreign language and childish".⁶⁰

Another feature of the goodness of God for people is *His mercy*: "There is nothing that God loves more or more characteristic for Him than His mercy".⁶¹ Thus "He is more content to save, rather than punish".⁶² This is what He wants: "always to forgive and never to punish".⁶³ These formulations are pretty common in Chrysostom's work and they become sweeter and tenderer when they are applied to Jesus Christ.⁶⁴

The Lord will not give up His judgments, but

"His conduct about us is a mixture of kindness and justice...

Kindness and justice, these are the two principles that guide the Lord in everything He does. Had He been law strictly, everything would have perished; if He would have showed only kindness, people would become, for the most part lazy".⁶⁵

That is why God shows both His true goodness full of mercy and pardon, and His justice, by threatening and punishing. Even in the latter case,

⁵⁵ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 51, 2, PG 54, 453.

⁵⁶ *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 8, 6, PG 60, 462.

⁵⁷ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 64, 2, PG 59, 356b

⁵⁸ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 3, 3, PG 53, 35, *Homilies on the Gospel of Mathew*, Homily 6, 3, PG 57, 65

⁵⁹ *Homilies on Titus*, Homily 3, 2, PG 62, 678d., *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 64, 1, PG 59, 353d.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 1, 3, PG 61, 386a

⁶² *Homilies on Romans*, Homily 10, 1, PG 60, 476a

⁶³ PG 50, 782-783.

⁶⁴ *Homilies on the Gospel of Mathew*, Homily 2, 2, PG 57, 26, *Ibid.* 41, 1, PG 57 445d, *On the Priesthood*, 4,1, PG 48, 622c.

⁶⁵ *Homily on Psalm 90*, 5-6, PG 55, 287.

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He is ultimately inspired by goodness. I.e. the “punishments” and benefits are the manifestations of His love. If He threatens is doing it to straighten.⁶⁶ If he turns His face from us, and seems to abandon us in our troubles, in our anxieties, in our sorrows, it is to bring us back to Him much safer.⁶⁷ A punishment as the flood which captured the sinners unrepented is also a reflection of God’s mercy, because putting an end to their crimes God prevents them from exposing themselves to more terrible punishment.⁶⁸ “Hell itself reveals as much as heaven does God’s care for us... We must not believe that Hell is made of hardness and cruelty, but rather pity, a great affection, care and love of God for us”.⁶⁹

In God, the infinitely perfect Being, mercy and justice are not separable. Often in Scripture the word justice in relation to God means love (φιλανθρωπία) and rightly so. “To peoples, justice is merciless; to God this thing does not happen, but justice is mixed with compassion and so much compassion that His justice can even be called it love.”⁷⁰

Can we see, in the outlined allegations from above, the major problem of the antinomies of the divine perfections, especially since Marcion, to whom St. John refers sometimes liked to put in opposition justice and goodness? St. John solves this problem practically, in the way of love and his solution places in God the primacy of love. Precisely this primacy of love enables God to forgive us and grant us His help despite our ingratitude; because His law is to remain faithful to His goodness.⁷¹ Chrysostom loves to exalt the full of mercy goodness of God.⁷² Whatever our sins are, none exceeds His love for people.⁷³

God wants nothing more than to forgive; He wants it even more than us,⁷⁴ because He does not want the death of the sinner but his repentance.⁷⁵ Saint Chrysostom believed that God would not allow the death of a sinner

⁶⁶ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 22, 4, PG 53, 190c.

⁶⁷ *Homily on Psalm 12*, 1 PG 55, 150

⁶⁸ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 24, 4, PG 53, 211

⁶⁹ *Homilies on First Timothy*, Homily 15, 3, PG 62, 583, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 9, 2, PG 61, 77b

⁷⁰ *Homily on Psalm 142*, 1 PG 55, 448

⁷¹ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 56, 6, PG 54, 494c.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Homily 42, 4, PG 54, 391b, *Homilies on Statues*, 3, 6, PG 49, 56.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Homily 19, 4, PG 53, 163.

⁷⁴ *Homilies on Hosea*, 6, 3-4, PG 56, 139-140.

⁷⁵ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 44, 2, PG 54, 408

who could still repent.⁷⁶ But He asks us to give His mercy the chance to send towards us a little opportunity,⁷⁷ a pretext.⁷⁸ Then He has for sinners nothing than an attitude of kindness and tolerance.⁷⁹ Apparently He even has a weakness for them when they return to Him sincerely. He shows them more tenderness⁸⁰ because they are like the poor people, and treat them with more sympathy than the righteous ones who are like the rich people⁸¹ in world of divine grace.

As it can be seen, Chrysostom sketched himself through this last characteristic, as well as the others. Caring for the salvation of souls, condescension towards those small and humble, mercy for sinners have profoundly affected both his life and his teachings: “He made completely disappear the despair of people, because the devil caught the sinners through despair and prevents them to repent and do penance”.⁸²

2. The Resurrection and eternal life

A second series of truths that seem fundamental in the thought and teaching of St. John Chrysostom revolves around man and its end that gives a meaning to life. Faith alone makes man able to perceive the meaning of life, because only faith provides the Christian new eyes open to see what it cannot be seen and be excited by the beauty of the unseen. There are eyes that have been given by Christ; similar to those we already have, they open themselves only towards a single world: the eyes of the body towards the visible world, the eyes of faith towards the unseen world. “Thus, the one who looks towards the unseen world does not look to the seen worlds. Doesn’t it happen the same thing happens to us? When we reflect on an invisible object our bodily eyes shall suspend their work”.⁸³

⁷⁶ *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 9, 2, PG 61, 77b

⁷⁷ *Homilies on Repentance*, 1, 3, PG 49, 282c.

⁷⁸ *Homilies on Hosea*, 5, 5, PG 56, 135a.

⁷⁹ *Homily on the Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus*, 7, 2, PG 48, 1046d.

⁸⁰ *Against Eumonius*, 5, 7, PG 48, 746-747

⁸¹ *Homilies on Repentance*, 7, 3, PG 49, 326

⁸² *Le Synaxaire arménien de Ter Israel*, translated by PhD G. Bayan PO 16, 22

⁸³ *Homilies on Acts*, 52, 4, PG 60, 364d

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The same characterizes the faith and vision that will have practical consequences of the utmost importance for the true believer, for the Christian whose moral life is inspired by the principles of his faith; it will totally change his life, and it will make it a life in Christ, i.e. one life and not two - the life "in Christ".

The Christian life is oriented toward the unseen, the divine, towards the future and heavenly life. It is not necessary to insist too much on the worldly life. "The fundamental issue of the Christian faith is true expectation of life after death".⁸⁴ Fundamental! Thus we should not imagine and speak of it in a carelessly manner.⁸⁵ Present life is nothing but a journey; the end is important;⁸⁶ the end is placed in the future life. This life on earth is given to us only to foreseen the future life⁸⁷ and it has no value but as the foundation of the future life.⁸⁸ "The greatness of man consists in virtue, in devotion to realities of the future life, in the endeavor to gain the everlasting life, to despise the present life".⁸⁹

The faith in the future life is reflected in believe of resurrection, according to St. John, this is the condition for receiving the joys promised by God to his faithful.⁹⁰ In this regard, the belief in resurrection is one of the fundamental truths of Christianity.⁹¹ Faith and resurrection are *one* and the same reality, the same being. When you say faith you confess and proclaim the resurrection, and when you proclaim the resurrection, you certify the one, true faith, and its power. It dominates our whole moral life; it makes virtue reign in the eternal life.⁹² Our whole conduct, and indirectly our whole faith, is supported by it. Resurrection is the content of the Christian life.

"The man who does not expect to rise and realize its deeds will not rush at all to practice virtue; and, so, who will not practice virtue will not believe in resurrection because there are two things that creates each another: passion through unbelief and

⁸⁴ PG 56, 299.

⁸⁵ *Homilies on Colossians*, 2, 4-5, PG 62, 315a.

⁸⁶ *Letters* 105, PG 52, 664.

⁸⁷ *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 30, 5, PG 59, 182.

⁸⁸ *Homilies on the Statues*, 6, 4, PG 49, 86

⁸⁹ *Homily on Psalm 48*, 6 PG 55, 232b.

⁹⁰ *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 39, 3, PG 61, 336

⁹¹ *Homilies on Hebrews*, Homily 9, 1, PG 63, 77

⁹² PG 50, 417.

unbelief through passion. A conscience filed with countless injustices, fearing future revenge, shivering and wanting to get relief through a change of life for the better, seeks its rest in unbelief. And when it will deny the resurrection and judgment will say I will not give account of my sins”.⁹³

St. John Chrysostom is obliged to insist more on this elementary truth, because it meets some very strong opposition. It is ridiculed by those who borrow objections from pagans. Besides, St. John Chrysostom hurries to answer them: some of them do not speak of transmigration? Others do not believe in “resurrection of garments and shoes”, after a general conflagration - and we will not laugh? - And others come to tell us about their famous atoms!”⁹⁴

And most feared is the language of those who show a virtual skepticism “Give me the today, they say, and you may take tomorrow”, or “Who ever came from the other world to tell us what happens there?”⁹⁵ To this are added the heretics who deny the resurrection of the body and do not recognize, by the explaining of the Scripture, but a spiritual resurrection in baptism.⁹⁶ Exegetical and philosophical discussions do not lead to anything. Christians should be through their lives, the witnesses of the resurrection and of the life to come. But they must be worthy, faithful witnesses.

“If we confess that there will be a resurrection and countless blessings but we despise them and then we attach to the things down here, who will believe us? ... Passions rebel against us, push us to repudiate our confession; but we mustn’t cede, for we are the confessors sent by God.”⁹⁷

Thus, faith in the future life and resurrection is to St. John Chrysostom the principle of true life here on earth. This life is a life in and for resurrection, life with the risen Christ to be forever with the risen Christ. The man who lives in Christ wishing for eternal blessings no longer gaze on things down here, but all are transfigured in Christ. Faith directs his, so to speak, his thinking, feeling and longing for the eternal world, already present:

⁹³ *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 17, 3, PG 61, 143b.

⁹⁴ *Homilies on First Thessalonians*, Homily 7, 2, PG 62, 436

⁹⁵ *Homilies on Second Corinthians*, Homily 9, 2, PG 61, 462b.

⁹⁶ *Homilies on First Thessalonians*, Homily 7, 2, PG 62, 435d

⁹⁷ *Homilies on Acts*, Homily 47, 3, PG 60, 330

True religion fundamentals in the thinking of St. John Chrysostom

“Whoever is embraced by God’s love can not bear the sight of the one fallen under the bodily eyes. Endowed with different eyes, I mean those of faith, he contemplates (future benefits) without ceasing, and reaches his soul to them. He walks the earth as a man who has assets in the heavens: this is how he does everything; nothing human will stop him from searching the virtue. Because such a soul no longer sees the bright side of life, any difficulties or obstacles; but he goes through all this running, rushing to his homeland. And like a runner who runs away he is not careful to obstacles, even if it hits him thousands of times, but he is focused on the race, easily passes and rushes towards the end which is established. Likewise, one who is committed to virtue and who wants to ascend from earth to heaven, drop down here all things visible and entirely consecrate on race and does not stop nor get caught in the nets of these visible things before achieving this goal.”⁹⁸

From this changed and transfigured vision of the world follows a totally different attitude from that of the pagans regarding the property and life events. Riches? The unfaithful one desire and believers despise them. Poverty? The unfaithful complains and the believer enjoys. Death? The unbeliever sees in it nothing but a corpse, and the believer sees in it nothing than sleep. We should see how Chrysostom constantly exalts this attitude of faith regarding the events, the pleasures of riches and glory of this world, and how rationally he devotes himself to it with zeal and recommended it in all circumstances. From here he draws all his practical paradoxes of faith which should have sounded strange to the ears of his still pagans or paganized Christians listeners, but made possible to penetrate in the spirits the natural sense of life of true Christian “in Christ”.

We understand that the belief of God’s love and resurrection, which not only illuminates the reason the lights of heaven, but invades the whole practical life of the believer in order to transform it into a heavenly life, could pass in the eyes of St. John Chrysostom as true, perfect life in Christ. At least, faith gives the sense of understanding of the human things to the true believer because he sees “their extreme weakness and he is convinced that they are useless from the moment he became a believer”. The perfect man is the believer who implements this conviction inspired by faith.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 28, 6, PG 53, 259c.

⁹⁹ *Homily on the Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus*, 5, 2, PG 48, 1020c.