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PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT
IN THE CATECHETICAL HOMILIES OF JOHN
CHRYSOSTOM

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the previously underexamined dimension of physical and spiritual nourishment in John Chrysostom's catechetical homilies, addressing two central inquiries: 1) Chrysostom's expectations for new church members' approach to eating and drinking, and 2) the connection between nourishment and their life as members of the liturgical community. Through a systematic analysis, the study reveals a threefold approach to Question 1. Firstly, Chrysostom cautions against the abuse of sustenance, emphasizing its corruptive impact on both body and soul. Secondly, the author expounds upon the functions of nutritional moderation, using the concept of fasting as an image of salutary abstinence from sin. Thirdly, Chrysostom discusses spiritual nourishment, distributed through homiletical discourse and the Eucharist. Addressing Question 2, the study finds connections between hymnody and nutritional moderation, promoting an "angelic" lifestyle that prepares individuals for deeper spiritual nourishment. The article concludes by highlighting the universal applicability of Chrysostom's teachings on nourishment, intended for all members of the Church, regardless of their level of spiritual maturity, guiding them from moderate consumption of physical sustenance to participation in spiritual nourishment and the pursuit of eternal life.

KEYWORDS

nourishment; liturgical; catechetical rhetoric; patristic; John Chrysostom

For late fourth century patristic authors, church membership and Christian identity involved the entire human being, body and soul. This holistic approach is vividly exemplified in the discussions on physical and spiritual nourishment presented by John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) to his baptismal candidates and neophytes. These discussions, dispersed across nine of the Antiochene preacher's twelve extant catechetical homilies,¹ raise questions

1 *Cat.* 1; 2/4; 3/1–7. The remaining three catechetical homilies, *Cat.* 2/1–3, include no references to physical or spiritual nourishment. Chrysostom's catechetical homilies are commonly dated to the 380s or 390s, i.e., to his presbyterate at Antioch, see Reiner Kaczynski, "Einleitung," in *Johannes Chrysostomus, Catecheses Baptismales: griechisch, deutsch = Taufkatechesen I*, ed. Reiner Kaczynski, Fontes Christiani 6/1

that, thus far, have garnered insufficient attention. The present article seeks to address the following two inquiries:

1. How does Chrysostom expect new members of the Church to approach eating and drinking?
2. How does the issue of nourishment correspond to their life as members of the liturgical community, anticipated in the catechetical homilies?

A systematic analysis of the pertinent passages extracted from Chrysostom's catecheses indicates that the first question necessitates a three-fold investigation. The exploration of these stages will concurrently yield resolutions to our second query. Subsequently, a glimpse into related themes, unexplored by the catechist, will be provided. Finally, concluding remarks will be presented.

CAUTIONS AGAINST NUTRITIONAL ABUSE

First, Chrysostom consistently admonishes his catechetical audiences about the potential misuse of food and drink. This emphasis is hardly surprising, given the author's past experience as an ascetic² and subsequent proclivity towards ethical preaching.³ In particular, however, he seeks to ground his instruction in scripture. According to Chrysostom's interpretation of the Fall (Gen 3), it was due to lack of dietary self-restraint that the primordial man ignored the divine command and violated the honor bestowed upon him by God.⁴ For the homilist, this event has enduring implications beyond paradise. In his contemporary context, a similar lack of self-restraint has corruptive consequences for the entire human being, manifesting on both corporeal and spiritual levels. From the author's perspective, the absence of nutritional moderation constitutes the root of all evils; various sins spring forth from indulgence in luxury and drunkenness.⁵

What exactly does this process entail? In Chrysostom's view, gluttony and drunkenness cause reduced attention towards self-control over the body, or a relaxation of the beneficial tension within the body. While the author acknowledges the adverse physical impacts of excessive eating⁶, his catecheses predominantly emphasize the spiritual repercussions of such consumption. Apparently due to the interconnected nature of the corporeal and psychological aspects of the human being, the relaxation of beneficial

(Freiburg [im Breisgau]; Basel; Wien; Barcelona; Rom; New York: Herder, 1992), 38–39, 44–45; Auguste Piédagnel, "Introduction," in *Trois catéchèses baptismales*, eds. Auguste Piédagnel & Louis Doutreleau, Sources Chrétiennes 366 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 38–39; Paul W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press; London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1963), 10, 15–18; Antoine Wenger, "Introduction," in *Huit catéchèses baptismales inédites*, ed. Antoine Wenger, Sources Chrétiennes 50 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1957), 22–27, 63–65.

2 This aspect of Chrysostom's life is assumed by modern scholars such as J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom – Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 1995), 24–35; Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time, Vol. I: Antioch*, trans. M. Gonzaga (London & Glasgow: Sands & Co Ltd, 1959), 104–14. Palladius points in a similar direction, albeit rather briefly, see *Dial.* 5, PG 47:18.

3 So e.g. Georges Florovsky, *Aspects of Church History: Volume Four in the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing Company, 1975), 81.

4 *Cat.* 3/2.3, SC 50:135: Ἄλλ' ὑπὸ ἀκρασίας ἐκείνος ἀπατηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῆς γυναικός, κατεπάτησε τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἐντολήν καὶ ὕβρισεν εἰς τὴν τοσαύτην τιμὴν.

5 *Cat.* 3/4.3, SC 50:202.

6 See e.g. *In Col. hom.* 1.5, PG 62:306; *In Heb. hom.* 29.4, PG 63:208.

bodily tension, as outlined by Chrysostom, leads to the deterioration of the soul's health.⁷

In practical terms, excessive consumption of alcohol temporarily impairs one's rational faculty, exposing reason (διάνοια) to harmful passions. Consequently, this leads to uncontrolled speech and actions, depriving individuals of virtue.⁸ Chrysostom further explains that wantonness and drunkenness act as fuel voluntarily added to the burning fire of carnal passions and sins.⁹ Furthermore, the lack of sobriety and alertness hampers one's desire for the word of God.¹⁰ Thus, drunkenness not only serves the spiritual powers opposing God but can be characterized as "a self-chosen demon."¹¹ Allowing such developments reflects carelessness in matters of salvation, potentially resulting in severe eternal consequences.¹²

In addition to warning against physical drunkenness, Chrysostom advises his hearers to be wary of a non-physical and even more perilous condition. This state, although unrelated to alcohol consumption, can be metaphorically depicted as a form of inebriation. In the catechist's view, this condition

takes many and varied forms. For anger makes us drunk; so, too, vainglory, loss of all sense, and all the destructive passions which arise in us produce a kind of drunkenness and satiety which darkens our reason. For drunkenness is nothing more than the distraction of our minds from their natural ways, the straying of reason, and the dislocation of our understanding.¹³

In his catecheses, Chrysostom utilizes the metaphor of inebriation in a negative sense, employing it for cautionary purposes. In this regard, his

7 *Cat.* 3/4.3, SC 50:201–2: οὕτω πάλιν ἡ ἀμετρία ἐκατέρωθεν διαφθείρει τὸν ἄνθρωπον. Ἡ γὰρ ἀδηφαγία καὶ ἡ μέθη τοῦ σώματος ἐκλύει τὸν τόνον καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς διαφθείρει τὴν ὑγίειαν. For an in-depth exploration of late antique patristic conceptualizations of sin as a malady of the soul and their Hellenic origins, see discussion and literature in Harri Huovinen, "Towards Participation in the Healthy Body: Spiritual Healing and Church Membership in Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom," in *Homilies in Context*, eds. Anni Maria Laato, Serafim Seppälä & Harri Huovinen, *Studia patristica Fennica* 9 (Helsinki: Suomen patristinen seura ry, 2020), 115–73.

8 *Cat.* 3/4.7, 8, 9, SC 50:204–5.

9 An in-depth examination of the patristic views of the connection between eating and sexual desire falls out of the scope of this study. See e.g. John Cassian, *Inst.* 6.1, SC 109:262; John Climacus, *Scal.* 14, PG 88:864. For corresponding views in earlier Hellenic authors, see Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1998), e.g. 53–64. See also Robert C. Fuller, *Spirituality in the Flesh: Bodily Sources of Religious Experience* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 101.

10 *Cat.* 3/4.12, SC 50:206.

11 *Cat.* 3/1.5, SC 50:111; *ibid.* 3/4.3, SC 50:202; *ibid.* 3/4.9, SC 50:205: Μέθη αὐθαίρετός ἐστι δαίμων. More than two decades prior to Chrysostom's catechetical homilies, Cyril of Jerusalem had regarded gluttony and habitual drinking as diabolical, see *Catech.* 4.37, RR 1:130. For Chrysostom's views on the effects of alcohol usage, see Jessica Wright, "Brain, Nerves, and Ecclesial Membership in John Chrysostom," in *Revisioning John Chrysostom: New Approaches, New Perspectives*, eds. Chris L. de Wet & Wendy Mayer, *Critical Approaches to Early Christianity* 1 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019), 380–82. On demonic possession, see Claire Elayne Salem, *Sanity, Insanity, and Man's Being as Understood by St. John Chrysostom* (PhD diss., Durham University, 2010), 20–35, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3269>.

12 *Cat.* 3/4.3, 11, SC 50:202, 206.

13 *Cat.* 3/4.4, SC 50:202–3: Ποία τοίνυν ἐστὶ μέθη οὐκ ἀπὸ οἴνου; Πολλὴ καὶ διάφορος· καὶ γὰρ ὀργὴ ποιεῖ μέθην καὶ κενοδοξία καὶ ἀπόνοια καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν ὀλεθρίων παθῶν τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τικτομένων, ὥστερ μέθην τινὰ καὶ κόρον ἐν ἡμῖν ἐργάζεται καὶ σκοτοῖ τὸν λογισμὸν τὸν ἡμέτερον. Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐστὶ μέθη ἢ ἔκστασις τῶν κατὰ φύσιν φρενῶν καὶ παρατροπὴ λογισμῶν καὶ ἐκπτώσις συνέσεως. The Harkins translation revised by the present author, see Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 82. For the same theme, see also *Cat.* 3/4.5–7, SC 50:203.

approach differs from the positive use of this imagery evident elsewhere in his works¹⁴, as well as in coeval authors such as Paulinus of Nola. The latter likens Christian joy and prayerful hymnody to a form of drunkenness, but with sobriety.¹⁵

Despite these warnings against gluttony and drunkenness, Chrysostom does not outright deny the pleasure of nourishment in his catecheses. Instead, he directs attention to its correct use, urging his audience to avoid excessive eating and drinking. Concurrently, he expresses confidence in their capacity to limit themselves to what is necessary.¹⁶ This leads us to our next point.

THE FUNCTIONS OF MODERATION

Secondly, Chrysostom actively advocates for moderation in both eating and drinking.¹⁷ According to him, a well-regulated diet confined to essential nutritional needs fosters the well-being of both the body and the soul.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the primary emphasis of the catechist lies in the spiritual practice of fasting. How, then, does he approach this matter?

Previously, we observed Chrysostom discussing drunkenness in both literal and metaphorical terms. Now, a similar dual approach is evident in his treatment of fasting. Accordingly, he asserts that fasting is not solely about abstaining from corporeal sustenance; rather, abstaining from sin constitutes “a more exact kind of fasting,” or “true” fasting.¹⁹ Christians can, and indeed must, observe such fasting regardless of whether they abstain from food and drink. While Chrysostom himself is known to have adhered to a strict ascetic regimen throughout his life²⁰, this statement reveals a relatively lenient attitude towards his congregants. Nonetheless, even after the relaxation of Lenten restrictions on food, the neophyte audience is encouraged to

14 See e.g. *Post. reliq. mart.* 2.1, PG 63:467: Τί εἶπω καὶ τί λαλήσω; σκιρτῶ καὶ μαίνομαι μανίαν σωφροσύνης βελτίονα· πέτομαι καὶ χορεύω καὶ μετάρσιος φέρομαι καὶ μεθύω λοιπὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς ταύτης τῆς πνευματικῆς.

15 Paulinus of Nola, Ep. 15.4, FC 25/1:368: “inebriari ad sobrietatem”. See also *ibid.* 22.2, FC 25/2:474: “sobrie temulenti”.

16 *Cat.* 3/4.3, 4, 6, SC 50:202, 203. Similarly Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 4.27, RR 1:118; Basil of Caesarea, *Reg. fus.* 19.2., PG 31:969; *ibid.* 20.3, PG 31:973, 976. For further patristic evidence on these themes, see Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, “Monks Baking Bread and Salting Fish: An Archaeology of Early Monastic Ascetic Taste,” in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perception in Byzantium*, eds. Susan Ashbrook Harvey & Margaret Mullett (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017), 187–91.

17 I believe Robinson to be correct in interpreting Chrysostom’s view of moderation “not simply as shorthand for ‘less rigorous asceticism’.” In her view, Chrysostom “extends moderation into a rigorous principle of Christian asceticism, rooted in normative ancient concepts of health and virtue.” See Dana Robinson, *Food, virtue, and the shaping of early Christianity* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 24–25.

18 *Cat.* 3/4.3, SC 50:201: ἡ χρεια καὶ ἡ συμμετρία τῆς μεταλήμψεως καὶ τῆ τοῦ σώματος ὑγιεία καὶ τῆ τῆς ψυχῆς καταστάσει πολλὴν παρέχει τὴν ὠφέλειαν. See further discussion and references in Jaclyn LaRae Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and his Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138. For discussion on Chrysostom’s views on involuntary hunger and famine, see Hennie Stander, “Chrysostom on hunger and famine,” *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 67(1), 2011: 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i1.880>.

19 Miron summarizes Chrysostom’s approach thus: “[B]odily fasting must be unconditionally accompanied by spiritual fasting which consists [i]n holding back from mean things, inappropriate gestures, thoughts and words.” See Vasile Miron, “The Christian-Orthodox teaching about fasting in St. John Chrysostom’s work,” *Dialogo (Constanta)*, Vol. 7 (2), 2021: 87, dialogo-conf.com/.

20 Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 20–21, 28–35.

continue “fasting from sin.”²¹ Chrysostom’s perspective on the nature of these sins, however, must be gleaned from his other writings.²² Nevertheless, in his view, fasting from sin is imperative as post-Lenten freedom tends to lead Christians to slothfulness.²³ To underscore this perspective, the catechist cites an infamous example from the history of the Israelites who, due to such relaxation, forgot God’s great deeds and turned to idolatry instead (Ex 32).²⁴

For Chrysostom, the matter of non-corporeal fasting holds considerable pastoral significance. He voices his concern over the impediment that “horseracing and satanic theatre shows” pose to church attendance in his native Antioch. According to his diagnosis, the decline in attendance is a direct result of the lethargy of Christians who, rather than pursuing piety, turn to entertainment. To address this issue, the homilist advises his remaining hearers to refrain from squandering the wealth they had won by fasting.²⁵ Intriguingly, he provides little explicit detail on what he considers this wealth to comprise.²⁶

Despite the apparent focus on abstinence from sin, Chrysostom also discusses what he perceives as the salutary nature of physical fasting. For instance, in a homily on the Gospel of Matthew, he asserts: “He who fasts is light and winged; he prays with an awakened mind, burns out the evil passions, appeases God, and humbles the presumptuous soul.”²⁷ However, in his catechetical works, Chrysostom provides limited detailed explanations on this subject. He simply states that fasting generates temperance²⁸ and contributes to time management. To illustrate the latter point, the catechist references the Lukan character, Cornelius, who “did not waste his life in drinking-parties, drunkenness, or gluttony.” This not only shielded Cornelius from spiritual harm but also helped him to spend his time “in prayer and almsgiving.” Such earnest involvement in these activities rendered him worthy of an angelic vision. (Acts 10:1–4).²⁹ Inspired by this example, Chrysostom exhorts his soon-to-be-baptized candidates as follows:

Let us have great zeal for virtue along with our abstinence from food and our abstinence from evil. Let us spend the whole day long in prayers and confessions, in reading and in compunction of the soul; let all our zeal be so directed that our discourse be of spiritual things.³⁰

21 *Cat.* 3/4.1–2, SC 50:200–1. See also *In Gen. hom.* 8.2, PG 53:84.

22 See e.g. *De stat.* 3.11–12 (PG 49:52–53), where Chrysostom associates fasting with withdrawal from lustful viewing, running to the theater, violence, avarice, and slander.

23 *Cat.* 3/4.15, SC 50:208.

24 *Cat.* 3/4.17, SC 50:209.

25 *Cat.* 3/5.1, SC 50:215. In *Cat.* 1.19 (FC 6/1:144), Chrysostom associates the theatre and horse-races with “the pomps of the devil,” which are explicitly renounced during Christian initiation. Thus, in his mind, the attendance of believers at such events should not only be discouraged but banned altogether. In subsequent patristic literature, a similar approach would be adopted by the author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, see *EH* 2.3.5, PG 3:401.

26 Similarly Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 4.27, RR 1:118.

27 *In Matt. hom.* 57.4, PG 58:563: Ὁ νηστεύων κοῦφός ἐστι καὶ ἐπτερωμένος, καὶ μετὰ νήψεως εὐχεται, καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας σβέννυσι τὰς πονηρὰς, καὶ ἐξιλεοῦται Θεόν, καὶ ταπεινοὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπαιρομένην. Translated by the present author.

28 *Cat.* 3/4.15, SC 50:208.

29 *Cat.* 3/6.29, SC 50:244.

30 *Cat.* 3/1.46, SC 50:132: Καὶ μετὰ τῆς ἀποχῆς τῶν βρωμάτων καὶ τῆς τῶν κακῶν ἀποχῆς, πολλὴ ὑμῖν γινέσθω τῆς ἀρετῆς ἢ σπουδῆ· καὶ τὸν καιρὸν ἅπαντα τῆς ἡμέρας διανείμαμεν, τὸν μὲν ἐν εὐχαίς

This theme finally brings us to our second question regarding Chrysostom's perspective on the relationship between nourishment and liturgical life. The catechist, referring to the Syriac-speaking Christians from the countryside who visited his church in Antioch, states:

Therefore, let us not look simply at their appearance and the language they speak, while we overlook their virtue. Let us observe carefully their angelic life and the love of wisdom shown in their way of life. They have driven out of their lives all luxuriousness and gluttony. They have not only put these things aside but also the rest of the slack conduct commonly found in the cities. They eat only as much as can suffice to sustain life, and all the rest of their time they keep their minds occupied in hymns and constant prayers, imitating in this the angelic way of life.

Just as those incorporeal powers have for their only task to sing in every way the praises of the Creator of all things, so too these wonderful men support the needs of the body only because they are bound to the flesh, but all the rest of the time they devote to hymns and prayers.³¹

In other words, these exemplary Christians regarded corporeal sustenance strictly as that—sustenance—and, consequently, refrained from unnecessary nourishment. This, in turn, allowed them to focus on an angelic life of hymnody and prayer. However, this is not the ultimate goal. Instead, the constant chanting of hymns, in Chrysostom's view, contributes to the purification of the candidates' minds, preparing them for the reception of even more profound spiritual nourishment. The catechist encourages his hearers as follows:

If we will thus purify our minds by constantly chanting the lessons of piety, we will henceforth be able, by preparing ourselves beforehand, to make ourselves worthy to receive the magnitude of His gift, and to guard the good things which are given.³²

This theme will be scrutinized more closely in the subsequent section.

καὶ ἔξομολογήσει, τὸν δὲ ἐν ἀναγνώσει καὶ κατανύξει ψυχῆς καὶ ἡ σπουδὴ ὑμῶν πᾶσα γινέσθω ὥστε περὶ τῶν πνευματικῶν ἡμῖν εἶναι τὰς διαλέξεις. The Harkins translation revised by the present author, see Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 41.

31 *Cat.* 3/7.4–5, SC 50:249–50: Μὴ τοῖνυν πρὸς τὸ σχῆμα ἀπλῶς ὀρώντες καὶ τῆς γλώττης τὴν διάλεξιν παρατρέχωμεν αὐτῶν τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἀλλ' ἀκριβῶς αὐτῶν καταμάθωμεν τὸν βίον τὸν ἀγγελικόν, τὴν φιλόσοφον διαγωγὴν. Πᾶσα γὰρ τρυφή καὶ ἀδηφαγία παρὰ τούτοις ἀπελήλαται· οὐ μόνον δὲ ταῦτα ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ λοιπὴ βλακεία ἢ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι πολιτευομένη καὶ τοσαῦτα μόνον σιτοῦνται ὅσα πρὸς τὴν τῆς ζωῆς σύστασιν αὐτοῖς ἀρκέσαι δύναται, καὶ τὸν λοιπὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον ἐν ὑμνοῖς καὶ διηκεέσιν εὐχαῖς τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀπασχολοῦσι διάνοιαν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τὴν ἀγγελικὴν διαγωγὴν μιμούμενοι.

Καθάπερ γὰρ ἐκείναις ταῖς ἀσωμάτοις δυνάμεσιν ἐν τούτῳ μόνον ἔργον ἐστὶ τὸ διὰ παντὸς ὑμνεῖν τὸν τῶν ὄλων δημιουργόν, τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον καὶ οἱ θαυμαῖοι οὗτοι ἄνδρες καὶ τοῦ σώματος τὴν χρεῖαν παραμυθοῦνται διὰ τὸ σαρκὶ συμπεπλέχθαι, καὶ τὸν ἄλλον ἅπαντα χρόνον τοῖς ὑμνοῖς καὶ ταῖς εὐχαῖς προσανέχουσι, [...]. The Harkins translation revised by the present author, see Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 120–21.

32 *Cat.* 3/1.33, SC 50:125: Ἐὰν οὕτως ἐκκαθάρωμεν ἡμῶν τὴν διάνοιαν κατεπάδοντες τὰ εὐσεβῆ διδάγματα, δυνησόμεθα ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη ἑαυτοὺς προευτρεπίσαντες καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὑποδοχὴν τοῦ μεγέθους τῆς δωρεᾶς ἀξίους καταστήσαι καὶ πρὸς τὴν φυλακὴν τῶν διδομένων ἀγαθῶν. The Harkins translation revised by the present author, see Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 36. In Harkins's view (210–11), "[t]he lessons of piety are the Sacred Scriptures, which are a sure cure for the ills of the soul." The scholar makes a further reference to Chrysostom's *De mut. nom.* 4.1 (PG 51:146), where such chants are said to function as incantations against the passions.

SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT: IMMATERIAL AND MATERIAL

More than a century prior to Chrysostom, Origen of Alexandria (185–254) had deliberated on the nature of spiritual hunger and the divine Word—or words—as its remedy.³³ Nevertheless, Chrysostom refrains from providing his catechetical audiences with comprehensive theological or philosophical analyses of the human need for, or the nature of, spiritual nourishment. Instead, he addresses related issues in a practical manner, well-suited for the initiatory context. Thirdly, then, in his exposition, spiritual nourishment is distributed in two forms, immaterially, on the one hand, and through material means, on the other.

Now, it appears self-evident that spiritual nourishment, due to its inherent nature, should involve an immaterial mode of reception. Indeed, Chrysostom regards the spiritual exhortation provided during the initiatory process as a form of nourishment, one that satiates the hearers. He pledges to set before them an even more abundant spiritual table that provides sustenance for their journey homeward.³⁴ While such rhetoric may conjure associations with an actual meal, in this context, the homilist likely alludes to verbal—i.e., intangible—nourishment.³⁵

Simultaneously, Chrysostom implies that the distribution of such spiritual nourishment is not without its risks. Verbal instruction may, in some instances, encompass human reasonings that obfuscate the proclamation of sound ecclesiastical doctrines. The new Christians are advised to regard such teaching as more perilous than toxic drugs.³⁶

Spiritual nourishment is also distributed through material means, specifically, in the tangible form of food and drink.³⁷ The Eucharist, indeed, constitutes the divine “gift” and “the good things” mentioned earlier, the

33 See e.g. Origen, *Num. hom.* 11.6, OW 7:88; *ibid.* 27.1, OW 7:255–58; *PE* 27.9.13, OW 3:368–69; *PA* 2.11.3, 7, OW 5:186, 192; *Ser.* 22–23, OW 11:38–39. Cf. A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 83–84: “Auditory imagery has of course been used in the Christian tradition to convey the notion of divine inspiration, but Origen interprets the mind’s encounter with God in terms of many senses. The sense of taste, for example, is appealed to in texts where Origen speaks of the mind: being nourished by the food of wisdom, a nourishment that is capable of restoring the *imago Dei* to its state of perfection. [PArch 2.11.3.] The surrounding text forms an extended meditation on spiritual growth, expounded through images of eating and nourishment. At the end of Book II of *On First Principles*, Origen returns to this imagery, and in an extended simile even describes the mind as feeding – moderately, and on appropriate foods – in the state of perfection. In all respects, he says, this food must be understood to be the contemplation and understanding of God. [PArch 2.11.7.]”

34 *Cat.* 3/7.1, SC 50:247–48.

35 Cf. Pseudo-Macarius, who likens spiritual proclamation to nourishment, see *Hom.* 17.12, GH 174; *ibid.* 18.5., GH 179; Cyril of Jerusalem, who associates nourishment of the soul with sacred readings, see *Catech.* 1.6, RR 1:36. Considering that in *Procatech.* 4, 14 (RR 1:6, 18) Cyril associates the ἀνάγνωσις of scripture with verbal—and therefore (at least to some extent) audible—reading in an ecclesial context, the above exhortation can hardly be taken as a reference to silent reading by individual Christians. See also Basil of Caesarea (*Reg. fus. prooem.*, PG 31:889) who, alluding to Lk 12:41, likens his own instruction to the act of providing each of the hearers with their portions of food at the proper time; Paulinus of Nola (*Ep.* 45.1, FC 25/3:980), for whom reading Augustine’s letter is like receiving nourishment.

36 *Cat.* 3/1.24, SC 50:120. Along the same lines, Cyril of Jerusalem views the errors of the heretics as poisoning the souls, see *Catech.* 7.1, RR 1:207. Cf. Origen, who depicts the enemy of Christ, i.e., death, as dead bread, see *Luc. schol.* 9.27, PG 17:341.

37 *Cat.* 3/3.27, SC 50:196: ἡ τροφή ἡμῶν πνευματικὴ καὶ τὸ πόμα ἡμῶν πνευματικόν. *Ibid.* 3/3.29, SC 50:197: τῆς τροφῆς αὐτοῦ τῆς πνευματικῆς καὶ τοῦ ποτοῦ καταξιούμενοι.

participation in which is preceded by preparatory hymnody.³⁸ In this realm too, Chrysostom refrains from a detailed exposition of the theological essence or the liturgical enactment of the Eucharist, nor does he suggest a specific frequency of sacramental participation.³⁹ Nevertheless, he does provide elementary instruction on the consecration. Drawing on the accounts of Moses praying for manna and producing water from the rock (Ex 16–17), the homilist teaches that “this other Moses”—i.e., Christ—“stretches forth His hands to heaven and brings down the food of eternal life.” Christ also “touches the [holy] table, strikes the spiritual table,” thus causing “the fountains of the Spirit [to] gush forth.”⁴⁰ Evidently, it is through this liturgical act that the physically consumable Eucharistic gifts are transformed into “the Master’s body and blood,” providing spiritual nourishment for the participants.

While the catechist discloses little about the nature of the sacramental transformation of the Eucharistic elements, he underscores their subsequent corporeal and hematological essence. As expected, his emphasis is both soteriological and ecclesiological. For instance, evoking the Johannine imagery of consuming the flesh of Jesus, Chrysostom asserts that for the participants of this “spiritual table,” Christ is both the meal and their abode, for he says: “Whoever eats my flesh abides in me, and I in him” (cf. Jn 6:56).⁴¹ Furthermore, alluding to the traditional corporeal imagery of the Church, the catechist contends that the eucharistic gifts are, in fact, means by which participants are being united—i.e., into the Body of Christ—and further nourished. Through participation in these gifts, believers are also transformed into dwelling places of the Holy Spirit.⁴² In an attempt to describe the sheer abundance of the spiritual nourishment offered in this sacrament, the catechist waxes lyrical: It is “the awesome table heavy laden with countless favors.”⁴³ It is “the royal table” whose benefits the neophytes are invited to enjoy. There, he promises, the Master bestows His grace upon them in abundance. “Even if our contribution is small, He lavishes His great gifts upon us.”⁴⁴

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, Chrysostom also explores other functions of the Eucharist. One of these is closely connected to the ecclesial identity and roles of his neophyte audience, which he portrays using

38 This view would be echoed later in *EH* 3.3.5, PG 3:457, 460.

39 In earlier and coeval patristic literature, weekly (*Did.* 14.1, SC 248:192) and daily (Ambrose, *Sacr.* 5.4.25, SC 25 bis:132, 134) reception had been encouraged.

40 *Cat.* 2/4.26, SC 50:165–66. Translation from Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 64–65. Cf. Origen, who depicts the preached word as spiritual manna, see *Ex. hom.* 7.8, OW 6:214–17. Cf. Ambrose, who gives manna a eucharistic interpretation, see *Myst.* 8.46–49, SC 25 bis:182, 184.

41 *Cat.* 1.5, FC 6/1:118: Βούλει μαθεῖν, πῶς καὶ τράπεζά σοι γίνεται; »Ο τρώγων με«, φησίν, »ὥσπερ ἐγὼ ζῶ διὰ τὸν Πατέρα, καὶ κεῖνος ζήσεται δι’ ἐμέ.« Ὅτι δὲ καὶ οἶκος σοι γίνεται. »Ο τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει, καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ.« Cf. Jn 6:56 (NA28): ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ.

42 *Cat.* 3/2.27, SC 50:149: Μετὰ γὰρ τὴν ἐκεῖθεν ἄνοδον εὐθέως ἐπὶ τὴν τράπεζαν ἄγονται τὴν φοικτὴν καὶ μυρίων γέμουσαν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀπογεύσονται καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ δεσποτικῆ καὶ οικητήριον γίνονται τοῦ Πνεύματος. *Ibid.* 2/4.19, SC 50:162: Εἶδετε ποία πάντας ἡμᾶς τρέφει τροφή; Ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς τροφῆς καὶ συνεστήκαμεν καὶ τρεφόμεθα.

43 *Cat.* 3/2.27, SC 50:149.

44 *Cat.* 3/3.6, SC 50:185–86.

martial imagery.⁴⁵ In baptism, the new Christians have received a spiritual “armoring.”⁴⁶ Moreover, God has prepared for them a meal that surpasses any physical armor in strength. This spiritual sustenance offers an advantage over the adversary, enabling tireless engagement in combat against him. The homilist pontificates:

If he [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 fire 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, he will run away like a cowardly beast.⁴⁷

In this manner, Chrysostom endeavors to persuade his hearers of the spiritual assistance granted to them in the Eucharist by presenting a reversal, so to speak, of the Petrine image of the roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8). The image of a fearsome carnivore is not applied to the adversary, but rather to the Christian who has now been nourished with the blood of Christ. In a related passage, the catechist draws on the Mosaic theme of smearing the blood of the lamb on the “doors” to mark the houses (Ex 12:7). He combines this narrative with his interpretation of the Pauline image of the body of the Christian as a temple of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). In Chrysostom’s interpretation, the mouths of the believers are the blood-smearred doors of the temples which now, after the Eucharist, contain Christ. Having depicted such an image, the homilist declares: “If the angel stood in awe when he saw the type, much more likely is it that the devil will flee when he sees the truth.”⁴⁸

Participation in eucharistic nourishment imposes ethical obligations as well. Having received the divine gift in their hands and mouths, the believers are urged to refrain from using these body members for sinful deeds or words. Immediately after stating this, Chrysostom expands the admonition to encompass the entire human being. In this context, he briefly revisits a musical theme:

When you have considered that, after the hand and tongue, the heart receives this awesome mystery, plot no treachery against your neighbor, but keep your mind clean from all wickedness. In this way you will be able to keep secure your eyes and ears. For is it not absurd, after hearing that mystic voice which comes down from heaven—I mean the voice of the cherubim—to defile your ears with songs for prostitutes and with degenerate melodies?⁴⁹

45 See discussion in Harri Huovinen, “Martial Imagery and Church Membership in the Catechetical Rhetoric of John Chrysostom,” *Phronema* 37.1 (2022): 99–118.

46 *Cat.* 3/1.1, SC 50:108; *ibid.* 2/4.11, SC 50:157; *ibid.* 3/4.27, SC 50:213.

47 *Cat.* 2/4.12, SC 50:158: Ἄν γὰρ ἴδῃ σε μόνον ἀπὸ τῶν δείπνων ἐπανιόντα τῶν δεσποτικῶν, καθάπερ λέοντα ἰδὼν τις πῦρ ἀπὸ στόματος ἀφιέντα, οὕτω φεύγει παντὸς ἀνέμου σφοδρότερον· κὰν δείξης αὐτῷ τὴν γλῶτταν ἡμαγμένην τῷ αἵματι τῷ τιμίῳ, οὐδὲ σῆναι δυνήσεται· ἂν δείξης τὸ στόμα πεφοινιγμένον, καθάπερ θηρίον εὐτελες [*sic*] οὕτως ἐπὶ τὰ ὀπίσω δραμεῖται. The Harkins translation revised by the present author, see Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 60. In another setting, Chrysostom employs similar imagery to describe the reaction of the devil to the contemplation of scriptural teachings, see *In Gen. hom.* 14.4, PG 53:118.

48 *Cat.* 2/4.15, SC 50:159–60: Εἰ γὰρ ἄγγελος ἰδὼν τὸν τύπον ἠδέσθη, πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὁ διάβολος ἰδὼν τὴν ἀλήθειαν φεύξεται.

49 *Cat.* 1.6, FC 6/1: Ἄλλ’ ἐνθυμηθεὶς πάλιν, ὅτι μετὰ τὴν χεῖρα καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν ἡ καρδία δέχεται τὸ φρικτὸν ἐκεῖνο μυστήριον, μὴ ῥάψης ποτὲ κατὰ τοῦ πλησίον δόλον, ἀλλὰ κακουργίας πάσης καθαρὰν διατήρησι σου τὴν διάνοιαν· οὕτω καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἀκοὴν ἀσφαλίσασθαι δυνήσῃ. Πῶς γὰρ οὐκ ἄτοπον,

While the reference to the celestial voice could perhaps be associated with the baptismal hymnody sung by the ecclesiastical chanters, in this context, the catechist may in fact allude to the actual angelic presence and song at the concluding rites of initiation or, as the case may be, the Eucharist.⁵⁰ At any rate, having undergone the baptismal entry into the presence of such a heavenly host,⁵¹ the members of the Church must now avoid auditory influences that could potentially rekindle spiritually detrimental passions. Instead, Chrysostom seemingly encourages his new Christian audience to let their souls to be transformed by the recitation of psalmody.⁵²

WHAT WAS LEFT UNSAID?

Apart from examining the actual evidence recorded in Chrysostom's catecheses, his approach to the topic under investigation can be more thoroughly elucidated by exploring some of the themes he might have been expected to cover but did not. What, then, was left unsaid?

Despite his emphasis on nutritional moderation, Chrysostom shows little interest in the details of corporeal fasting. One might expect him to provide new Christians with basic instructions on topics such as the quantity of food that should be consumed or avoided, the designated seasons for fasting,⁵³ or at least the practice of pre-baptismal fasting.⁵⁴ However, these aspects remain unaddressed. Similarly, little is mentioned regarding the spiritual role ascribed to fast-related hunger as preparation for the mystical union with God,⁵⁵ or the relationship between respect for the created gifts of food and drink, on the one hand, and fasting, on the other.⁵⁶ Moreover, Chrysostom displays relatively little interest in issues such as appropriate types of food, their quality,⁵⁷ or taste.⁵⁸

μετὰ τὴν μυστικὴν ἐκείνην φωνὴν καὶ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν φερομένην, τὴν ἐκ τῶν χειρουβιμ λέγω, πορνικοῖς ἄσμασι καὶ κατακεκλασμένοις μέλεσι τὴν ἀκοὴν μολύνειν; The Harkins translation revised by the present author, see Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 178.

50 Cf. *Cat.* 3/2.20, SC 50:145. Cf. *ibid.* 3/7.5, SC 50:250. See also *In Col. hom.* 9.2 (PG 62:363, 365) where Chrysostom mentions the hymnody of the cherubim without delving into its alleged liturgical context. For further discussion on fourth century views on the liturgical and celestial aspects of baptismal hymnody, see Harri Huovinen, "Participation in Psalmody and Church Membership in Cyril of Jerusalem," *Journal of the International Society for Orthodox Church Music*, Vol. 7:1 (2023): 9–12, <https://doi.org/10.57050/jisocm.113242>.

51 Cf. *Exp. in ps.* 109.5, PG 55:273.

52 See *Exp. in ps.* 140.1, PG 55:427; *ibid.* 144.1, PG 55:465; *ibid.* 145.1, PG 55:472.

53 See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 37; Robinson, *Food, virtue, and the shaping*, 40–41. Cf. *Did.* 8.1–2, SC 248:172; *Const. Ap.* 8.47.64, 69, SC 336:298, 300; John Cassian, *Inst.* 3.10, SC 109:114; *ibid.* 5.9, SC 109:202.

54 Cf. *Did.* 7.4, SC 248:172.

55 Cf. Bynum (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 33), who identifies this theme with the later medieval rather than the early Christian approach to fasting.

56 Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 4.27, 6.35, RR 1:118, 206.

57 For these themes in Chrysostom's other works, see references in Robinson, *Food, virtue, and the shaping*, 39–40; in Roman antiquity, see Dustin Shawn Youngblood, *The culinary world of Juvenal: Food and identity at Rome from Republic to Empire* (PhD Diss., Florida State University, 2016), see e.g. 9–24, *passim*, diginole.lib.fsu.edu/; Andrew Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013). See also Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 19.4, FC 25/2:440; *ibid.* 23.6–9; FC 25/2:488–98.

58 Cf. Aristotle, who regarded taste as the least important of the human senses, see *NE* 1118a, 130, 132. For discussion on ancient views of taste in the hierarchy of the senses, see Caroline Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 11–26, 30–33; Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 3, 10–11, 15. See also Paul Freedman,

This minimalistic approach may be understandable, considering that the Chrysostomian series of catechetical homilies was hardly designed to provide a comprehensive exposition on a singular theme such as nourishment. Even key doctrinal issues are covered more cursorily in his catecheses than in corresponding works by, for instance, Cyril of Jerusalem.⁵⁹ That being said, it seems implausible that the fast-related themes mentioned above would have remained entirely uncovered in the Antiochian program of Christian initiation. Given that Chrysostom explicitly delegated the instruction on chief content of the Christian faith to some other teacher of his congregation,⁶⁰ he may have employed a similar approach with certain fasting-related issues. Another possible reason for his minimalism may lie in the fact that he offered detailed expositions on this matter on other occasions.⁶¹

Another notable feature concerns the apparent absence of any distinctively “catechetical” approach to nourishment. Granted, Chrysostom seems to avoid burdening the newly initiated Christians with minute details of fasting practices or theological processes of spiritual nourishment. Nevertheless, his fundamental views on abstinence from and intake of nourishment, as well as their spiritual functions, closely resemble corresponding views found in contemporaneous Christian writings addressed to ascetic communities.⁶² This could be interpreted as indicating that Chrysostom sought to educate the new members of the Antiochian congregation to adopt an ascetical lifestyle in spite of their urban environment.

Lastly, and curiously, despite the congregational context of his catecheses, Chrysostom appears rather unconcerned with the communal

ed., *Food: The History of Taste. California Studies in Food and Culture* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

59 Cf. e.g. Chrysostom’s discussion of the Trinity which, in the critical edition of his catecheses, covers less than two pages, see *Cat.* 3/1.19–24. Cyril, on his part, dedicates ten homilies to the exposition of the theme, see *Catech.* 8–10.

60 For evidence of the existence of another teacher (or other teachers?) in the Antiochian congregation, see *Cat.* 2/3.4, SC 366:226: Ἀλλὰ τὸν μὲν περὶ πίστεως λόγον τῷ διδασκάλῳ παραχωρήσομεν. In Harkins’s interpretation, “[t]he teacher par excellence,” referred to in this passage, “is the bishop”. See Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*, 319. However, based upon Chrysostom’s catecheses alone, conclusively determining the identity of this teacher is difficult.

61 See e.g. *In Gen. hom.* 1–31, PG 53. According to several scholars, Chrysostom delivered the homilies on Genesis in Antioch during the latter part of the 380s. This observation implies the potential for the texts to have been composed either prior to the catechetical homilies or contemporaneously, cf. n. 1 above. Furthermore, according to Hill, the first half of the set of homilies on Genesis—i.e., the ones discussing fasting—were delivered “just before and during Lent,” that is, during the season of baptismal catechesis. See Robert C. Hill, “Introduction,” in *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 5–6.

62 Cf. e.g. Basil of Caesarea, *Reg. fus.* 16.2; 18; 19; 20; 37.2; John Cassian, *Inst.* 5. Obviously, in-depth examination of this resemblance must be reserved for another study. Suffice it to quote König, who aptly notes: “There are numerous examples of preachers and writers with ascetic experience trying to forge a version of ascetic practice which is compatible with the day-to-day urban lives of their readers and congregations: for instance, that is a constant concern of John Chrysostom.” See Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 327. For further discussion on the place of asceticism in late antique city life, see Joona Salminen, *Asceticism and Early Christian Lifestyle* (ThD Diss., University of Helsinki, 2017), hdl.handle.net/.

consequences of nutritional moderation or the lack of it.⁶³ Instead, his cautionary statements related to the themes examined herein primarily target the edification of individual believers. Such an approach is evidently motivated by an aim to underscore each neophyte's personal responsibility to avoid spiritual hazards stemming from a lack of bodily control. Indeed, the catechist aims to guide them toward a new lifestyle guided by (his view of) Christian ethical standards.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

John Chrysostom's catechetical homilies encompass a multitude of statements on physical and spiritual nourishment that, until now, have received insufficient attention. The present article sought to address this research gap by answering the following two questions:

1. How does Chrysostom expect new members of the church to approach eating and drinking?
2. How does the issue of nourishment correspond to their life as members of the liturgical community, anticipated in the catechetical homilies?

A systematic analysis of Chrysostom's catechetical homilies revealed a threefold approach to Question 1. *First*, the author cautioned his hearers against abuse of inherently good and necessary sustenance. In his view, gluttony and drunkenness had corruptive consequences for the entire human being. Nonetheless, Chrysostom's main focus was on the tendency of nutritional abuse to compromise the health of the soul, thereby evoking harmful passions that further led to outward vice, neglect for the divine, and, ultimately, unfortunate eternal consequences. The author also employed the concept of drunkenness as a metaphor by which he cautioned his hearers against the non-physical condition of irrationality.

Secondly, Chrysostom expounded upon the functions of nutritional moderation. While he briefly touched upon the beneficial effects of corporeal fasting, the author provided scant information on the practicalities of fasting. Primarily, he discussed the issue from the metaphorical perspective, using fasting as an image of salutary abstinence from sin.

Thirdly, Chrysostom addressed the distinct forms of spiritual nourishment. On the one hand, he viewed spiritual exhortation as a nourishment of sorts, distributed through the immaterial means of homiletical discourse. On the other hand, he laid his primary focus on the Eucharist as the material and tangible form of spiritual nourishment.

As for Question 2, the following findings were made: Chrysostom addressed the topic of hymnody particularly in connection with nutritional moderation. He encouraged his new Christian hearers to limit themselves to only the necessary amount of corporeal sustenance, enabling them to

⁶³ Cf. John Cassian, who addresses the problem of vanity associated with fasting, see *Inst.* 11.4, SC 109:430. See also John Climacus, who emphasizes the communal consequences of gluttony, see *Scal.* 4, PG 88:715, 725.

lead an “angelic” lifestyle of hymnody and prayer. This, in turn, would prepare them for the reception of more profound spiritual nourishment, provided through homiletical discourse and the Eucharist. Furthermore, it was suggested that Chrysostom considered baptismal and/or eucharistic rites to involve a possibility to witness the celestial hymnody of the cherubim.

Finally, it is noteworthy that while the present sources approached the themes of physical and spiritual nourishment from the perspective of elementary Christian teaching, this part of Chrysostom’s initiatory instruction was not solely designed with the “catechetical” process in mind. Owing to the fact that his catechetical corpus consists of homilies targeted to yet-to-be-baptized candidates and neophytes alike—and due to the apparent presence of more experienced believers at the catechetical synaxes—the homilist evidently considered his views on physical and spiritual nourishment to be applicable to all Christians irrespective of their level of maturity. As an experienced ascetic-turned-clergyman, Chrysostom attempted to guide his newly-initiated Christian hearers—and indeed all the members of the Church—from moderate consumption of corporeal nutrition to the participation in spiritual nourishment and, ultimately, eternal life.

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