

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Gospel of John and Antiochene christology: The diverging paths of Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom

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Abstract

This article questions the value of the categories ‘the school of Antioch’ and ‘Antiochene christology’ on the basis of the significant theological differences between the two central figures in the school: John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, both of whom studied together at the school of Diodore of Tarsus in the late fourth century. Drawing on scholarship which has pointed to the coherence of Theodore’s exegesis and christology, I show that Chrysostom’s exegesis and christology are also coherent, but in a way which is at odds with those of Theodore. As opposed to Theodore’s distinctions between the two testaments and between the human and the divine in Christ, Chrysostom has a strongly unitive reading of scripture’s two testaments and of the person of Christ. In my argument I especially employ Theodore’s and Chrysostom’s respective exegetical works on the Gospel of John.

Keywords: christology; John Chrysostom; Gospel of John; Theodore of Mopsuestia; school of Antioch

What, exactly, is the school of Antioch? And wherein lies its coherence? A whole host of answers has been provided over the last couple of centuries. To take just three examples: perhaps most typical is Robert Charles Hill’s *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch*, in which the school of Antioch is rooted in the monastic school (*askētērion*) led by Diodore of Tarsus, where both Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom were students; while these three historically connected figures are included in the school, Hill also expands its circle beyond the school’s historical bounds to include the later Theodoret whose exegesis, he thinks, is a part of the larger Antiochene whole.¹ By contrast, in his influential work *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, Aloys Grillmeier maintains that ‘Antiochene’ christology begins sometime in the third century, includes Diodore of Tarsus, and finds its apex in Diodore’s student, Theodore of Mopsuestia; thereafter ‘Antiochene’ christology ceases to exist.² In an entirely different vein, Adam Schor only begins his analysis of the ‘school of Antioch’ *after* Theodore, focusing on the personal ecclesiastical network of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, who has no recorded

¹Robert C. Hill, *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

²Aloys Grillmeier, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, vol. 1 of *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, trans. John Bowden, 2nd edn (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1975), pp. 414–39.

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historical relationship with the school of Diodore of Tarsus or his students.³ There is certainly slippage in scholarly usage of the terms ‘Antiochene Christianity’, ‘Antiochene christology’ and the ‘school of Antioch’, and the relationship among these is rarely, if ever, elucidated.⁴ This fact, however, only makes the categorisation even more problematic. Indeed, if one were to attempt to cobble these various terms together into a single edifice, the whole Antiochene façade would begin to crumble.

When speaking about a school, though, Grillmeier and Hill are undoubtedly on firmer historical footing when they root Antiochenism in Diodore of Tarsus’ monastery, where Theodore of Mopsuestia was a student. And in recent years studies on the relationship between christology and exegesis in Diodore’s and Theodore’s work have illuminated the close theological relationship between teacher and student: John O’Keefe and John Behr have both shown that, in the extant writings of Diodore and Theodore, the Old Testament is severed from the New, and likewise, the human Jesus from the divine Son; the *historia* of the New Testament being severed from the *historia* of the Old Testament leads to the divine Word being distanced from the Assumed Man.⁵ There is real coherence to the theology and exegesis of these two figures.

Nevertheless, while these observations apply neatly to the works of Diodore and Theodore,⁶ they do not apply equally to all of those typically associated with the Antiochene school. For example, Theodore’s famous student, Nestorius of Constantinople, does not appear to have the same exegetical impetus as his teacher; more significantly, in his christology and exegesis, John Chrysostom, a student of Diodore and colleague of Theodore, does not align particularly well with these two figures. This perhaps comes as some surprise, given the tendency of scholarship to define the ‘school of Antioch’ in terms of Theodore of Mopsuestia, such that deviations from Theodore’s norm are often explained away. This picture of Antiochenism, however, cannot hold. Even if the school coheres exegetically in some manner, as Miriam DeCock has recently argued,⁷ it is much more diverse than is usually recognised.

³Adam M. Schor, *Theodore’s People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); and ‘Theodoret on the “School of Antioch”: A Network Approach’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15/4 (2007), pp. 517–62.

⁴While ‘Antiochene’ usually refers to christology, and the ‘school of Antioch’ to exegesis, in common usage, the two often overlap. For example, Andrew Louth, ‘John Chrysostom and the Antiochene School to Theodoret of Cyrillus’, in Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (eds), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 342–52, uses the term ‘Antiochene school’, noting that it glosses over differences, and makes it sound as if there is an institutional element at play (p. 342). Others, such as Bradley Nassif, ‘The “Spiritual Exegesis” of Scripture: The School of Antioch Revisited’, *Anglican Theological Review* 75/4 (1993), pp. 437–70, and earlier than him D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), employ the term uncritically – the latter to speak of both christology and exegesis.

⁵John J. O’Keefe, ‘“A Letter that Killeth”: Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8/1 (2000), pp. 83–103; John J. O’Keefe, ‘Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology’, *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), pp. 39–60; John Behr, *The Case Against Diodore and Theodore: Texts and their Contexts* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), esp. pp. 41–5.

⁶Theodore does, however, have his defenders: see Hauna T. Ondrey, *The Minor Prophets as Christian Scripture in the Commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford: OUP, 2018). O’Keefe’s work was itself an intervention into attempted resuscitations of Theodore’s theological reputation, apparently for the purpose of *ressourcement*, esp. in Rowan Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian* (London: Faith Press, 1961).

⁷Miriam DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John in Antioch and Alexandria* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2020).

Specifically, in what follows I show that the work of John Chrysostom, who stands at the historical centre of the Antiochene tradition, constitutes an exegetical-theological trajectory which, while in some ways exegetically 'Antiochene', does not cohere with Diodore and Theodore christologically. Chrysostom's divergence from Theodore can especially be seen in a comparison of the two figures' interpretations of the Gospel of John. For both Chrysostom and Theodore, O'Keefe's and Behr's observations hold: exegesis and christology have an intimate relationship. Where Theodore severs the Old Testament from the New and the divine from the human nature of Christ, Chrysostom adopts a robust appreciation for the unity of the testaments, along with the ontological unity of Christ.

A statement in the prologue of Theodore's *Commentary on John* provides us with an interpretative key for appreciating the exegetical-theological chasm between himself and Chrysostom: Theodore states that, unlike preachers, he will include nothing 'superfluous' in his commentary.⁸ In contrast, Chrysostom (the preacher!) appears to find that superfluity – or, better, abundance – is necessary for biblical interpretation, since scripture's signification is itself abundant: it goes beyond 'the letter'. The abundance of Chrysostom's interpretation which Theodore's *Commentary* lacks is thus primarily a typological one: no single verse in the Gospel is limited to itself – no verse is an island – but any given verse 'runneth over' into the rest of the Gospel and indeed to the rest of scripture. Chrysostom reads the whole Gospel of John as a coherent and interconnected story, which is contained within a larger story: the continuous narrative (*historia*) of scripture. Every jot or tittle finds its proper place within these abundant scriptural contexts. While Chrysostom's exegesis thus coheres with what was by his time a traditional Christian way of exegesis (and at least since Irenaeus), Theodore rejects this tradition: famously, he allows for little typological interpretation. In the *Commentary on John*, though, he goes even further, even neglecting to interpret scripture *in any way* that makes use of cross-references; his commentary does not operate according to the interpretative principle that 'scripture interprets scripture'. Furthermore, while Theodore restricts the scope of the Gospel – or constricts its voice – to speak almost exclusively about christology (a christology directed *adversus Iudaeos*), Chrysostom allows it to speak as a coherent narrative with referents both human (moral/exemplary) and divine (christological) which operates within a larger scriptural narrative. Within this larger scriptural narrative of God's loving, condescending, salutary activity, Jesus – the Word become flesh – can freely be read as a single narrative subject, *and therefore a single theological subject* with both divine and human referents, and even natures.

The argument of this paper, then, is more about John Chrysostom than it is about Theodore. This focus is necessary not only because Chrysostom's christology has been subject to much less scrutiny over the last century, but also because his writings expose the inutility of the historical-theological categorisation of 'Antiochene christology' or the 'school of Antioch'. We need John Chrysostom (as his disciple John Cassian observed already in the mid-fifth century⁹) to demonstrate that authentic Antiochene exegesis and theology do not *necessarily* breed Nestorianism, and that the christology which is so often referred to as 'Antiochene' is not the only one native to Antioch.

⁸This is admittedly a rhetorical trope, but it proves to be a significant one, not least because in Theodore's mind it means the difference between orthodoxy and heresy.

⁹See esp. books 6 and 7 of Cassian's *De incarnatione*.

Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Commentary on John*

Theodore's *Commentary on John* survives fully only in a Syriac translation of the Greek original. Although George Kalantzis has argued that the Greek fragments found in catenae are closer to the original while the Syriac was emended to accord more closely with a Nestorian christology, it is more likely the other way around: as is typical of catenae, the Greek fragments have been edited to accord more closely with an Ephesian-Chalcedonian christology.¹⁰ Kalantzis is certainly correct to note that the Syriac translation witnesses to a classic Antiochene 'assumed man' christology for which Theodore's student Nestorius would become famous; in the Syriac *Commentary*, Theodore differentiates sharply in his exegesis between the human being and the divine Only Begotten.¹¹ This theological character of the commentary is its most arresting aspect. Much of the rest of the commentary is simply paraphrase, with little typological exegesis, rarely bringing any other scriptures to bear – whether other texts from John or from the New or Old Testaments more broadly. Furthermore, other than his sometimes-extensive christological interpretations to clarify the relationship between Christ's two natures (or persons), Theodore provides few other expansions of the Gospel text.

These aspects of the *Commentary on John* will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with Theodore's *Commentary on the Psalms* (which is, as far as I can tell, the text of Theodore's which has received the most scholarly attention). And Theodore is explicit in the introduction to his *Commentary on John* that his goal is to not to engage in any 'superfluous' interpretation – a superfluity which he elsewhere associates with the excesses of allegory:¹²

In any of our commentaries on the Scriptures, we are quite attentive that we not include superfluous words in our exposition. ... Indeed we think that the duty of the interpreter is to explain those words which are difficult to many, while the duty of the preacher is to speak about those topics which are already clear enough. Even superfluous topics can sometimes be useful to a preacher, but the interpreter must explain and say things concisely. However, when it is the case that an explanation cannot be clear unless we use many words – and this happen when we come upon

¹⁰George Kalantzis, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis Apostoli*: Text and Transmission', *Augustinianum* 43/2 (2003), pp. 473–93. Kalantzis follows the tradition of Robert Devresse, *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste* (Vatican: Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, 1948), and Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, who largely think that the accusations against Theodore were fabricated to accord more closely with Nestorius' theology. Although Kalantzis' claims have not been refuted *in extenso*, in the recent English translation of the Syriac of Theodore's *Commentary on John*, Marco Conti spells out compelling reasons for doubting Kalantzis' conclusions; see *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Gospel of John*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), pp. xxvi–xxix.

¹¹Here I follow the scholarly tradition which has continued to hold that Theodore's christology is indeed proto-Nestorian: Kevin McNamara, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Nestorian Heresy', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 19/3 (1952), pp. 254–78; McNamara, 'Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Nestorian Heresy II', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 20/2 (1953), pp. 172–91; Francis Aloysius Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Rome: Gregoriana, 1956); Richard A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963); and, more recently, Frederick G. McLeod, *The Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

¹²See *Comm. Gal.* 4:24; cf. Rowan A. Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), pp. 114–15.

verses which have been corrupted by the deceit of the heretics ... – then we will not avoid discussing them in detail.¹³

Theodore's attack on 'superfluous' homiletical interpretation in the commentary's preface is deeply informative of his exegesis more broadly, and bears out throughout the work. As I have already noted, Theodore rarely seeks to relate the words of the Gospel to any other scriptures. And, when he does, these are mostly theological explanatory glosses from other Gospels or from Paul. He makes almost no reference to the Old Testament, despite the many allusions to it in the Gospel itself. Theodore tends to cite the Old Testament only when the text itself forces him to: for example, following the text of John 3:14, he mentions the serpent that was 'lifted up' in the wilderness. Even here, however, he attends more to his own particular christology, clarifying that the one lifted up is one who 'appears to be mortal and suffers'.¹⁴ This dearth of Old Testament references is very similar to his interpretation of the Psalms, but in the other direction: in the *Commentary on the Psalms*, Theodore only interprets psalms typologically when the prior interpretative tradition – especially the Gospels themselves – requires it of him; and, even then, he overlooks many Psalms which other patristic interpreters find are ripe for christological interpretation, including Psalm 22 ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?') which the Gospel employs extensively in the passion narrative.¹⁵

Thus, Theodore's opposition to superfluity – his interpretative reticence – is theologially freighted. It is not just that Theodore is opposed to overly loquacious preachers (a laudable enough position, perhaps), but he is opposed to the sort of things that so many other ancient Christian preachers and commentators do: bringing scriptural texts together such that Christ, who is already present in the text, may be unveiled.

Still, Theodore does find *his own* christology in the text. He explicitly states in the preface of the *Commentary* that he will expand upon Jesus' christological statements in order to combat heresy.¹⁶ He specifically targets the 'Arian' Asterius, accusing him of 'causing the reader to miss anything that is useful', and 'lingering on those questions that are obvious'.¹⁷ But Theodore also has positive reasons for his christological expansions. Also in the preface, he discusses the historical composition of the work: the disciples of the aged apostle John, having brought the three other canonical Gospels to him, ask him for his opinion of the documents; Theodore notes that 'some details had been neglected' by the other evangelists, especially some of Jesus' miracles and 'doctrine' or 'the question of his divinity'.¹⁸ In so focusing on the Gospel's christology, Theodore hopes to mitigate the misinterpretation of Jesus' humble words which

¹³Theodore, *Comm. Jo. praef.* (Vosté 4–5; Conti, 2). The edition of the text consulted is J.-M. Vosté, *Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis Apostoli*, CCSO 115–16 (Paris; Leuven: 1940); ET: Conti, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*.

¹⁴*Comm. Jo. 2* (Vosté, 72–3; Conti, 34). This interpretation clearly does the work of demonstrating Theodore's particular christology. On Theodore's typological reticence in the *Commentary*, see Greer, *Theodore*, pp. 119–22.

¹⁵Although the opening line of Psalm 22 is employed only in Matthew and Mark, the Psalm forms the exegetical basis of other parts of John's Passion narrative, particularly in the casting of lots for Jesus' garments (John 19:23–4), in which Ps 22:18 is quoted.

¹⁶See Theodore, *Comm. Jo. prol.* (Vosté, 4); see also his comment quoted above, that he speaks about christology because some verses have been 'corrupted by the deceit of the heretics'.

¹⁷*Comm. Jo. praef.* (Vosté, 4; Conti, 2).

¹⁸*Comm. Jo. praef.* (Vosté, 7–8; Conti, 3).

would result in the ‘greater confusion among the Jews’, thus ‘resulting in ... cruelty against him’ (apparently at the hands of the Jews).¹⁹ Theodore wants to guard the words that ‘demonstrate his greatness’ against the ‘words of humility’ which are ‘not consistent with the Lord’s majesty’ – that is, those which show ‘his weakness’ and which therefore ‘cannot be suitable to him’.²⁰ Theodore’s positive reasons for expounding on Christ’s divinity are thus mixed up with his own conviction that humble statements about the Lord must be distanced from the Only Begotten.

For the sake of illustrating these disjunctures – between the human being and God, and between the Old and New Testaments – we take Theodore’s interpretation of Jesus’ words in John 12:27–8: ‘Now my soul has been troubled, and what should I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? But for this reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!’ After offering a straightforward paraphrase of Christ’s speech, Theodore writes, ‘The things experienced by the assumed man revealed, then, the nature of God the Word dwelling in him and how great the dignity was of him who is the cause of all these events.’²¹ Christ’s being ‘troubled’ is not indicative of the ‘passion [that] afflicts’ a single narrative subject,²² but of the division between ‘God the Word’ and the ‘assumed man’. Although Theodore does see an economic unity of Word and man in the figure of Christ, his goal is to differentiate carefully between the two. Thus, as Theodore proceeds in his discussion of John 12, he offers a striking speech-in-character of *only* the assumed man, who speaks about God the Word, who is *other than him*: ‘God the Word, who assumed me and united me to himself, has confidently given me the victory of judgment. He made me his own once and forever when he assumed me, and it is evident that he will never leave me, lest I do something rash.’²³

At moments such as these, of which there are many in the *Commentary*, Theodore evidently seeks to clarify Jesus’ christological statements. However, he ends up doing violence to the texts themselves in order to maintain the separation of the natures in a merely economic (i.e. non-ontological) union. That is, Theodore hardly recognises that the Jesus whom he speaks of is placed by the evangelist within a *narrative*, and therefore ought to be interpreted – like the other characters of the narrative – as a single subject.

The parsing – or parcelling out – of two persons within the single economic union is mirrored in Theodore’s understanding of the discontinuity of the Old and New Covenants. We could say that for Theodore the unity of the testaments, like his understanding of Christ’s union, is conventional rather than natural. Although the distance between the Old and New Testaments is in this *Commentary* only implied in the fact that the Old Testament is hardly even alluded to, it is explicit elsewhere in his works. Recently, Hauna Ondrey, who otherwise has a high opinion of Theodore’s Christian exegesis, shows that the Old Testament relates to the New Testament not in its *verba*, but in its *res* (or the *facta* which the *verba* describe); certain *events* – sometimes prophetic speech events – foretell of Christ.²⁴ Unlike so many other interpreters of this age, Theodore does not hold that the words of the Old Testament are themselves

¹⁹*Comm. Jo.* praef. (Vosté, 10; Conti, 4).

²⁰*Comm. Jo.* praef. (Vosté, 11; Conti, 4–5).

²¹*Comm. Jo.* 5 (Vosté, 242; Conti, 111).

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Comm. Jo.* 5 (Vosté, 244; Conti, 112).

²⁴See Ondrey, *Minor Prophets as Christian Scripture*, esp. pp. 82–91; Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, pp. 93–8.

ordered in such a way that a vision (*theōria*) of Christ as the New Covenant is hidden therein. Instead, in Theodore's exegesis there is only the faintest relationship – one must strain one's eyes to see it – between the Old and New Testaments. The same could also be said for the relationship between the two *prosōpa* united in the economic person of the Messiah. While the two must be joined, Theodore supposes, one must work to differentiate between the earthly and the heavenly.

In a number of other places Theodore presents a contrast with John Chrysostom. Some of this we will touch as we proceed to consider the value of Chrysostom's exegesis and christology. But one more item that is worth noting for now is Theodore's understanding of the composition of the Gospel of John and its relationship to the historical *facta/res*. Theodore is, as far as I am aware, unique in the early church in his perspective that the Gospel of John arranges events in their historical order. Theodore holds that the evangelist, having read the other three Gospels, sets out to provide the historical sequence of events.²⁵ While interesting, Theodore's account of the Gospel's *historia* is an interpretative dead end. It does virtually no interpretative work with respect to what Theodore otherwise identifies as the Gospels' subject matter: the natures (or persons) of Christ.²⁶ The narrative sequence, or (even more simply) the narrative unity of the Gospel is not at all attended to in Theodore's interpretation.

The exegetical and theological disjunctures in the *Commentary on John* are virtually identical to what O'Keefe found in his reading of Theodore and Diodore's interpretations of the Psalms.²⁷ Theodore consistently differentiates between the divine and the human in Christ, while distancing the words of the Old Testament from the New.

John Chrysostom's *Homilies on John*

Like Theodore and many other ancient commentators on John, John Chrysostom begins his series of homilies by addressing the circumstances of the Gospel's composition and the person of the evangelist.²⁸ And Chrysostom's whole interpretation of the Gospel can be glimpsed in his approach to its *historia*. Opening his second *Homily on John*, he states:

If John were about to address us and to tell us about his own affairs, it would be necessary to speak of his family, his native land, and his education. However, since

²⁵*Comm. Jo.* praef. (Vosté, 9).

²⁶*Comm. Jo.* praef. (Vosté, 10–11).

²⁷O'Keefe, 'Letter that Killeth'.

²⁸It is worth noting, though, that unlike Theodore's *Commentary*, these sermons were not, apparently, preached as a single series; indeed, Chrysostom appears to give two different introductions to the *historia* of the Gospel, one each in *Hom. Jo.* 1 and 2. See the series of articles by Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer: 'Chrysostom and the Preaching of Homilies in Series: A New Approach to the Twelve Homilies "In epistulam ad Colossenses"' (CPG 4433), *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 60/1 (1994), pp. 21–39; 'Chrysostom and the Preaching of Homilies in Series: A Re-examination of the Fifteen Homilies "In epistulam ad Philippenses"' (CPG 4432), *Vigiliae Christianae* 49/3 (1995), pp. 270–89; 'The Thirty-Four Homilies on Hebrews: The Last Series Delivered by Chrysostom in Constantinople?' *Byzantion* 65/2 (1995), pp. 309–48. Also see Wendy Mayer, *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom: Provenance, Reshaping the Foundations* (Rome: Orientalium, 2005). This research does not however mean that Chrysostom didn't preach series on individual books of the Bible: indeed, there is plenty of evidence of continuity in the sermons themselves – which appears to come from their delivery rather than their later editing. See James Daniel Cook, *Preaching and Popular Christianity: Reading the Sermons of John Chrysostom* (Oxford: OUP, 2019), pp. 201–10.

not he, but God through his agency, is speaking to humanity, it seems to me to be superfluous and beside the point to inquire into these details. Yet it really is not superfluous, but very necessary, to do so. When you learn who he was, and whence, and his parentage, and what sort of man, and after this you listen to his voice and all his teaching, then you will know truly that these utterances were not his, but belonged to the divine Power moving his soul.²⁹

As Chrysostom continues, he shows that the ‘superfluous’ historical details of John’s life are in fact necessary because, when we hear of John’s humble humanity, the sublime divinity of the Gospel rings in our ears. John’s very humanity, so superfluously interpreted by Chrysostom, is a sign that God is the Gospel’s true author:

The ‘barbarian’ and ‘illiterate’ [John] utters such words as no man on earth has ever known, and not merely speaks them, but also convinces by them – though if the former alone were true it would still be a great marvel. But if, actually, in addition, he furnishes another proof greater than this, that his words are God-inspired, in the fact that all his hearers through all time believe, who will not marvel at the power dwelling within him?³⁰

In distinct contrast to Theodore’s self-imposed task of defending Christ’s divinity against the Gospel of John’s humbler statements, for Chrysostom *the divinity of the Gospel is seen in its humility*. The Gospel is a coherent, narrative whole, and its divine ‘In the beginning’ is inseparable from its human author, John, the impoverished, uneducated fisherman, and indeed the truth of the latter illumines the truth of its divine authorship. Likewise, throughout the Gospel, Christ’s humble words and actions reported in the Gospel are not signs merely of his humanity, but when he speaks as a human being he demonstrates his divinity and his divine *philanthrōpia*.

Christ’s sublime divinity and humble humanity are connected through Chrysostom’s well-known reliance on the principle of divine condescension or adaptability (*synkatabasis*). As David Rylaarsdam has shown, this principle comes primarily from Chrysostom’s rhetorical sensibilities, in which the good orator adapts his speech to his audience, delivering the right word at the right time with the goal of persuasion; the orator is not thereby inconsistent, but is consistent in his *telos* to persuade.³¹ According to this principle, when the ‘the Word becomes flesh’ (Chrysostom almost always prefers scriptural language), he does truly become human, but without compromising his divinity – without changing. It is in large part because of this consistent principle that Chrysostom conceives of Christ as an ontological unity. That is, there is no need to posit separate human and divine *anthrōpoi* or *prosōpa*, because *synkatabasis* accounts for the gulf between the human and the divine: Christ may truly become human while truly remaining divine. There is a fundamental unity to Christ the ‘rhetor’ in a soteriology of *synkatabasis*: the Word who becomes human trains humanity up to salvation.

²⁹*Hom. Jo.* 2.1 (PG 59, 29.21–31; Goggin 1.12). English translations taken from *John Chrysostom: Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist*, 2 vols., ed. Sr. Thomas Aquinas Goggin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1957–9).

³⁰*Hom. Jo.* 2.2 (PG 59, 31.35–42; Goggin, 1.16).

³¹David Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

Because of the fundamental unity of Christ, when Chrysostom discusses Christ's humbler speech versus his more exalted speech,³² he accounts for the difference adverbially: that is, the one Christ speaks sometimes 'as God' and sometimes 'as a human being';³³ sometimes 'according to the economy' and sometimes 'according to the divinity' (or '[divine] nature').³⁴ In what remains the finest treatment of Chrysostom's christology, Camillus Hay writes about this adverbial distribution of Christ's speech and actions: 'Whenever Christ acted ὡς ἄνθρωπος [as a human being] or ἄνθρωπίνως [humanly], He did so for either of two reasons: to prove the reality of the economy, or our of condescendence (συγκατάβωσις) to His hearers.'³⁵ These two uses of humble speech in the Gospel have the same end: both prove that God really came in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ – an ontological unity – to save humanity – an economic/narrative unity.

Whereas Chrysostom's statements about Christ speaking or acting 'as man' and 'as God' may at first blush sound similar to those of Theodore, these expressions come from Chrysostom's conviction that Christ is a single subject, which unity has come about through God's condescending (synkatabatic) economy. While Chrysostom and Theodore both engage in 'partitive exegesis' which they inherit from earlier Nicene theologians, Chrysostom is in this regard much closer to the tradition of pro-Nicene theologians such as Athanasius of Alexandria and Gregory of Nazianzus. Indeed, Chrysostom's *logic* is identical to Gregory's insofar as the theological emphasis rests on the unity of the God-man's historic person as narrated in the Gospels.³⁶ As for these earlier Nicene ecclesiastics, the singularity of the Gospel's 'protagonist' – the single Christ who is at once divine and human – comes from Chrysostom's attention to the narrative (*historia*). Thus, while Hay rightly notes that Chrysostom 'presuppose[s] the existence of one Personal Principle in Christ ... the Divine Logos',³⁷ we would add that singularity of Christ's person comes from Chrysostom's reading of the Gospel itself: Christ is a singular narrative subject and demands to be treated as such.

The unity of Christ's literary and therefore theological character is demonstrated in Chrysostom's exegesis of the same passage discussed above in reference to Theodore's exegesis: John 12:27–8. Unlike Theodore, who pays little attention to the narrative context, Chrysostom understands that Jesus' words are spoken out of his consideration for

³²*Hom. Jo.* 3.4 (PG 59, 42.31); *Hom. Jo.* 27.1 (PG 59, 157.21).

³³*Hom. Jo.* 38.3 (PG 59, 214.58).

³⁴*Hom. Jo.* 3.3 (PG 59, 41.19–20); *Hom. Jo.* 3.4 (PG 59, 42.1–3); *Hom. Jo.* 38.3 (PG 59, 214.57–9); *Hom. Jo.* 53.2 (PG 59, 294.27–8); *Hom. Jo.* 67.1 (PG 59, 371.37); *Hom. Jo.* 78.2 (PG 59, 424.45–6). This usage is very common throughout Chrysostom's other works: see e.g. *Anom. [De incomp. hom.]* 1.280–1 (SC 28bis, 124); *Hom. Heb.* 1.2 (PG 63, 16.52–6); *Hom. Eph.* 7 (PG 62, 54.52–5); *Hom. 1 Cor.* 39.4 (PG 61, 338.27–339.2).

³⁵Camillus Hay, 'St John Chrysostom and the Integrity of the Human Nature of Christ', *Franciscan Studies* 19 (1959), p. 311; he provides examples of *synkatabasis* in the *Homilies on John* on pp. 311–3.

³⁶See e.g. on Athanasius, Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, trans. Matthias Westerhoff (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), pp. 118–9; and, on Gregory of Nazianzus, Brian E. Daley, *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), pp. 134–6, and esp. Christopher Bealey, 'Gregory Nazianzus on the Unity of Christ', in Peter W. Martens (ed.), *In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early Church in Honor of Brian E. Daley*, JF (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), pp. 97–120. Many others have noted the similarities with Athanasius and other 'Alexandrians', such as Hilary of Poitiers and even Cyril of Alexandria: see esp. Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, pp. 418–21; also Melvin E. Lawrenz, *The Christology of John Chrysostom* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1987), pp. 162–4.

³⁷Hay, 'Integrity of Human Nature', pp. 313–14.

his disciples. Because of his attention to the narrative, Chrysostom knows that Jesus has just told his disciples that they must, like him, lay down their lives out of love (12:25–6). Therefore, when Jesus describes his own soul as troubled at the prospect of his violent and unjust death, he does so for the benefit of those who will follow after him in martyrdom, taking into account their weakness. In other words, Jesus teaches his disciples that his humanity is just like theirs: ‘Lest they might assert that He was altogether free from human pain and so found it easy to accept death, and that He gave us encouragement without Himself being in any danger of death, He showed that, even though He dreaded death, He did not refuse to undergo it, because of its efficacy for our salvation.’³⁸

Whereas Theodore speaks of ‘the assumed man’ to explain Jesus’ troubled soul in John 12, Chrysostom explains it with reference to Christ’s ‘divinity’, ‘humanity’ and even ‘human nature’. That is, the trouble which Jesus felt came from ‘the weakness of human nature (*physis*)’.³⁹ A little later, he says: ‘This very effectually shows his humanity, and that the [human] nature did not wish to suffer death, but was clinging to the present life, and it proves that He was not without human feelings. ... Christ’s Body was, to be sure, altogether free from sin, but it was not without physical needs; otherwise, it would not have been a real body.’⁴⁰ Although Chrysostom here, like Theodore and many Christian interpreters of the Gospels before them, differentiates between more sublime and humbler statements, Chrysostom does not sever the divine and human *persons*. Instead, perhaps foreshadowing a later ‘Antiochene’ dyophysite christology, he speaks of the two natures – one divine and one human – of the single Christ, which, according to the Gospel narrative, are inseparable.

We can be sure that at least part of Chrysostom’s emphasis on the unity of the person of Christ comes from his attention to the coherence of the Gospel narrative: throughout the *Homilies*, Chrysostom reflects on the Gospel’s unity of subject matter and narrative continuity, and interprets accordingly – and not only when considering christology. To return to the second *Homily on John*, here we see one aspect of the unity of the Gospel: its subject matter includes at once dogma (‘sublime teaching’) and ethics (‘a virtuous way and philosophy of life’).⁴¹ As Chrysostom continues, he shows just how expansive are the dogma and ethics which John’s Gospel teaches. The evangelist John uttered:

teachings about that incorrupt and blessed Nature; about the powers closely associated with It; about immortality and everlasting life; about the nature of mortal bodies and of the immortal beings they will afterwards become; about punishment, about the future judgment, and about the accounts to be rendered: for words, for deeds, for thoughts, and for intentions. And [it is not within human power of itself] to know why man exists, why the world, and what man actually is, and what he seems to be, but is not; what vice is, and virtue.⁴²

³⁸*Hom. Jo.* 67.1 (PG 59, 371.32–6; Goggin, 2.229). Although Chrysostom does not mention that Christ’s words are from *synkatabasis*, he does explain that these words do not describe his *divinity*, but are from the *oikonomia* (*Hom. Jo.* 67.1–2; PG 59, 371.37–45). This term is polyvalent and could refer either to Christ’s incarnation (and thus to his incarnate flesh) or to the salutary intention of Christ’s words.

³⁹*Hom. Jo.* 67.1–2 (PG 59, 371.37–45; Goggin, 2.229, translation emended).

⁴⁰*Hom. Jo.* 67.2 (PG 59, 371.53–60; Goggin, 2.229–30, emended).

⁴¹*Hom. Jo.* 2.1 (PG 59, 30.35–40; Goggin, 1.13–14).

⁴²*Hom. Jo.* 2.1 (PG 59, 30.45–53; Goggin, 1.14).

As opposed to the pagan philosophers, John the lowly fisherman, by the power of the Spirit, has spoken truly about all things human and divine. And, as the homilies proceed, the audience begins to learn that the Gospel speaks especially about Christ's condescending, saving interactions with humanity, and human responses thereto – both of faith and of unbelief. In Chrysostom's expansive vision of the Gospel's subject matter, he makes room for each part of the Gospel to speak in its own voice, while still being related to the whole. This is in distinct contrast with Theodore's interpretation in which the subject matter of the whole Gospel is Jesus' divinity, and protecting that divinity from the humanity: as we have seen, even those parts of the Gospel which do not speak at all to the distinction of the natures or persons are made to conform to Theodore's preconception of the Gospel's subject matter.

For Chrysostom, more central even than the coherence and breadth of the Gospel's subject matter is its narrative continuity. We have already seen this on a small scale in Chrysostom's reading of Jesus' words to the disciples in John 12 discussed above. It is also clear, however, on a larger scale. In his exegesis of individual passages in the *Homilies on John*, Chrysostom continually draws insights from comparisons with other parts of the Gospel. To repeat: for John Chrysostom the unity of the Gospel comes not only from its theological subject matter (as it also does for Theodore), but especially from the Gospel's narrative continuity in which each individual part relates organically to the whole.

Chrysostom's appreciation for the Gospel's narrative unity, which is related to his reading of Christ's true divine-human union, is seen both in Christ's interactions with humanity (the *oikonomia*) and in human responses to him. One of the most striking positive – and thus exemplary – human responses to Christ is seen in the Samaritan woman (John 4). Chrysostom judges her faith to be so exemplary precisely because her reaction can be compared to those who have come before in the Gospel narrative. Throughout the *Homilies on John* 31–4, which read as a continuous series on the Samaritan woman, we hear that neither Nathanael (John 1:43–51) nor Nicodemus (John 3:1–21) responded with such faith, despite the fact that they were men and therefore had a scriptural education to fall back on.⁴³ Nicodemus, for all his piety seen in John's passion narrative, received the title of neither 'apostle' nor 'evangelist' – titles which Chrysostom freely bestows upon the Samaritan woman for her role in spreading the news about Jesus the Messiah.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Chrysostom notices that, because of the woman's faith, Christ reveals more to her than he does to either of the men in the episodes mentioned.⁴⁵ In Chrysostom's homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, we also see such narrative continuity, where the stories of the exemplary Gentiles – and Christ's associated miracles – must be read in the light of one another, revealing as they do both Christ's power and human faith.⁴⁶ Whether in his moral or dogmatic exegesis of particular passages, Chrysostom attends to the unity of the whole Gospel narrative.

At the same time, this narrative continuity, from the beginning to the end of the Gospel of John, extends well beyond the Gospel, into the Old Testament. Indeed, the stories of the Gospel cannot be understood properly except in relation to the Old Testament. For example, Jesus' enigmatic statements to Nicodemus about rebirth through water *can* be understood – Nicodemus should have understood them –

⁴³See *Hom. Jo.* 32.2 (PG 59, 186.1–2).

⁴⁴*Hom. Jo.* 32.1 (PG 59, 184.38–51); *Hom. Jo.* 34 (PG 59, 193.28–30).

⁴⁵*Hom. Jo.* 33.1 (PG 59, 188.50–1).

⁴⁶See *Hom. Matt* 26 and 52.

when they are read in keeping with the Old Testament: miraculous births are seen in Adam and Eve and in God's provision of children to 'barren women' (Sarah, Hannah, etc.); salvific miracles are wrought through water in the exodus, the cleansing of Naaman (2 Kings 5) and even in the Gospel of John with the healing of the man paralysed for 38 years (5:1–14).⁴⁷ In contrast, Theodore's reading of John's sacramental passages (the 'new birth' of John 3 and the 'bread of life' of John 6) – though they are read in a typological vein – do not carry this same kind of typological abundance in which the saving events of the New Testament are read in continuity with one another and in continuity with the saving events of the Old Testament.

A still more striking demonstration of the continuity of the Old and New Testaments is Chrysostom's reading of the passion: in the eighty-fifth *Homily on John*, taking his cue from the narrative which itself already abounds with Old Testament allusions and citations, Chrysostom takes pains to spell out the abundance of correlations between the crucifixion scene and Old Testament prophecies. For example, in discussing Psalm 22, Chrysostom observes:

Now, the soldiers divided His garments among themselves, but not His tunic. Notice how they frequently caused prophecies to be fulfilled by their wicked deeds. I say this for this detail had been foretold of old. Furthermore, even though there were three crucified, the prophecy was fulfilled only with reference to Christ. Why, indeed, did they not do this in the case of the other two, but only with regard to this One alone? Kindly notice, too, the exactness of the prophecy. The Prophet declared not only that they divided the garments among themselves, but also that they did not divide them. Thus, the soldiers divided some of Christ's garments into parts, but they did not divide the tunic; on the contrary, they settled its possession by lot.⁴⁸

Note the extreme contrast with Theodore who does not comment on Psalm 22 at all in his *Commentary*. These prophetic fulfilments are so important for Chrysostom because, while the events themselves appear to debase the Lord, they are in fact the means whereby the human Jesus' *divinity* is shown. As Chrysostom states, 'By all these details the Evangelist made it clear that Christ Himself is Lord of all.'⁴⁹ The prophecies show that 'the details which seem to be most ignominious of all are the ones that preach most eloquently of our blessings'.⁵⁰ In Jesus' death and suffering, his humanity is clear enough, but the prophecies, along with Jesus' own testimony that the death was one he willed (i.e. which was within his own power), demonstrate that Jesus is in his person truly divine. The Old Testament prophecy serves to reveal the divinity that is married to the humanity in the person of Christ. Only in the union of the two natures can Christ's salvation be wrought. The relationship between typological/prophetic exegesis and christology in Chrysostom's homilies is thus thoroughly at odds with that of Theodore, which does not 'superfluously' draw out – or even allow for – the union of the Old and New Testaments and thus the union of the human and the divine in the Crucified One.

⁴⁷*Hom. Jo.* 26.2 (PG 59, 155.31–43).

⁴⁸*Hom. Jo.* 85.1 (PG 59, 461.17–27; Goggin, 2.430–1).

⁴⁹*Hom. Jo.* 85.2 (PG 59, 463.3–4; Goggin, 2.434).

⁵⁰*Hom. Jo.* 85.3 (PG 59, 463.59–61; Goggin, 2.436).

Conclusion

Based on these stark differences between John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, we might be tempted to argue that Chrysostom is not, in the end, Antiochene. But this would be to beg the question. For, if John Chrysostom, the great preacher of Antioch, educated alongside Theodore of Mopsuestia and under Diodore of Tarsus, is not Antiochene, then who is? Theodore is not the only Antiochene, nor, perhaps, even a representative one. Therefore, instead of proving that Chrysostom is not Antiochene, this comparison has shed light on the diversity of the so-called school of Antioch, and thus of Antiochene exegesis and theology. Although Theodore and John were educated by the same teacher, and share a commitment *inter alia* to Nicene Christianity and to literal and moral exegetical tendencies, there is sufficient diversity to question if it is at all useful to speak about Antiochene exegesis or christology: as we have now seen, the christology and exegesis of Antiochene theologians – and even those who studied at Diodore's 'school of Antioch' – are not inevitably Nestorian. Therefore, just as the christological debates between Alexandrians and Antiochenes develop much more complexly in the centuries that follow the careers of John and Theodore, so also *in its very origins* the 'Antiochene school' was exegetically and theologically diverse.

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