

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

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Marital relations, family life, and human sexuality, especially the question of celibacy, are among the issues frequently addressed in the Christian literature of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In the Western Church the best known of these works is Augustine's treatise *On the Good of Marriage* (401 A.D.). This treatise is a theological response to an ongoing discussion on marriage which began with Jovinian who asserted that baptism is what really sanctifies. Thus there was no real difference in sanctity between married and celibate Christians¹. While Jovinian's views on marriage were popular among the people, they were not well received by those who favoured asceticism. Two of his prominent opponents were Jerome and Ambrose with the result that he was censured by local synods held at Milan and Rome. Even Pelagius, in his *Letter to the Matron Celantia*, seeks to distance his views of marital continence from the views of Jovinian².

The writings of the Eastern Church reveal that a similar dialogue took place there as well³. As in the West, the influence of ascetic movements and the issue of sanctity lay at the heart of much of the discussion. The ascetic position tended to espouse a form of dualism in which matters of the soul were elevated and matters of the body were neglected, and at times denigrated. For the ascetics issues of sexuality appear to have posed the greatest threat to spiritual development. This is the context in which John Chrysostom penned his writings on marriage and family.

John Chrysostom (d.407) was raised, along with his sister, by his widowed mother. As a young man, he sat under Meletius the Confessor, Bishop of Antioch, studied theology and became a "reader" in the church. While he was still living in his mother's house he became attracted to asceticism and began to pursue the mortification of the flesh. Later he moved to the mountains to live as a hermit for four years. When his body could no longer endure the rigours of the ascetic life Chrysostom returned to the city where he began his ministry. His writings reveal that issues pertaining to marriage, family and human sexuality were a concern throughout his ministry.

¹ David Hunter, trans. and ed., *Marriage in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 20.

² Pelagius, *Letter to the Matron Celantia* in Hunter, trans. and ed., *Marriage in the Early Church*, 99.

³ E.g. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*; John Chrysostom *On Virginity*, *Against Remarriage* and *Letter to a Young Widow*.

Chrysostom's Antiochene material on this topic (380-397) consists of two letters to his friend Theodore⁴, a variety of sermons⁵ and four treatises⁶. Two important documents on the subject of celibacy date from the period of Chrysostom's episcopate in Constantinople (397-404). These treatises reflect the concerns of a bishop over the behavior of priests and consecrated virgins (*subintroductae*). These pastoral letters, *Adversus eos qui apud se habent virgines subintroductas* and *Quod regulares feminae viris cohabitare non debeant*,⁷ insisted that men and women consecrated as virgins (celibates) for ministry should live in segregated housing and not under the same roof, as had been the habit of some. In addition to these items Catherine Roth suggests that *Homily X* from Chrysostom's sermons on Colossians (3:18-25) and a series of three sermons on marriage and divorce may also date from this period⁸. The material from the third period of Chrysostom's ministry, the period of exile (404-407), consists mainly of letters and reveals a man who enjoyed good, open and warm relationships with women⁹.

⁴ *Ad Theodorum Lapsum in Patrologia Graeca*, 47:277-316. English translation by W. R. W. Stephens, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 9:87-116.

⁵ This sermonic material includes Chrysostom's Homilies on: Genesis (Homily XV); Psalm 44 and Psalm 113; Matthew (Homily XVII) (Homily LXII); John (Homily LXI); 1 Corinthians (Homilies XV, XVI; XIX; XXXVII); 2 Corinthians (Homily XIII); Ephesians (Homily XX, XXI); Colossians (Homily XII); 1 Timothy (Homily VIII-XV); and Titus (Homily IV).

⁶ *Letter to a Young Widow* [trans. W.R.W. Stephens in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 9:119-128]; *Against Remarriage*, trans. Sally Reiger Shore in *John Chrysostom: On Virginity, Against Remarriage* (New York & Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 129-145; *On Virginity*, trans. Sally Reiger Shore in *John Chrysostom: On Virginity, Against Remarriage*, p.1-128; *Address On Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to bring up their children* in William Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Late Roman Empire* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1951).

⁷ English translations of these texts can be found in Elizabeth Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York & Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 158-248.

⁸ In Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson, trans., *St. John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986) 14.

⁹ Johannes Quasten (*Patrology*, III, 469) notes 236 letters dating from Chrysostom's exile. Seventeen of these were written to the deaconess Olympias. See also *Patrologia Graeca*, 52:549-623 and 4 letters translated by Stephens in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 9:287-303.

1. SINGLENESS

Chrysostom's views on the "single life" differ from those of both his culture and the heretical movements of his day. In response to the heretics who sought to denigrate marriage and exalt virginity, Chrysostom held that one must uphold the honor of both states¹⁰. For him the value of the state of virginity was not based in the fact that it was a renunciation of something that was "base." Virginity, rather, was only something of value or honor when it was understood as the setting aside of one "high calling" in order to pursue another. Thus, in the writings of John Chrysostom, the single life versus the married life is not a matter of good versus evil but rather the choice of one of two honorable states.

The implications of this line of reasoning are profound. First, it is clear Chrysostom rejected the heretical notion that the ascetic life, and virginity in particular, was a means for achieving salvation. Instead he held that one who is physically a virgin and yet consumed by lust and shameful thoughts might endanger their soul by remaining single!¹¹ Chrysostom also considered that a lack of self-control among those who profess virginity to be worse than adultery¹². For this reason he advised those who would profess virginity to search their hearts and be certain of their decision. In his opinion it was better for a person to recognize that they could not control their sexual passions and seek marriage rather than be driven by desire¹³.

If, in Chrysostom's mind, marriage and singleness were both honorable states, then one must ask, "How is it that he would advocate virginity as the better option?" The answer to this question is revealed in his understanding of the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:25-29 where he writes:

Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none" (KJV).

The two dimensions of this passage which Chrysostom focused on are: (1) the existential realities of marriage; and, (2) the implications of the believer's eschatological expectations.

¹⁰ *On Virginity* VIII-X.

¹¹ *On Virginity* XXVI, XXXVIII, XXXIX and LXXVII.

¹² *Against Remarriage* 3.

¹³ *On Virginity* XIX, XXV.

1. The Existential Realities of Marriage

Chrysostom had a realistic view of marriage. He clearly understood that marital life was not total bliss. Compared to the painful realities of some marriages he believed that many Christians would be better off if they remained single. Thus part of his argument in the treatise *On Virginity*, as well as in *Against Remarriage*, is built upon a discussion of the ‘troubles in the flesh’ which are part of the life of the married.

In *On Virginity XXVIII* Chrysostom discusses Paul’s command to couples that they ‘not deprive one another’ (1 Cor 7:5). His point is a simple one. Since marriage is a hedge against licentiousness and harlotry, neither the man nor the woman are in a position to control their own bodies but must submit themselves to the other. Indeed, the wife who is continent contrary to the wish of her husband bears the greater responsibility should he commit adultery¹⁴. On this point Chrysostom is in agreement with Augustine who chastised Ecdicia for forcing her husband to make a vow of continence he could not keep¹⁵.

In addition to the ways in which marital obligations can prevent men and women from pursuing a more ascetic lifestyle, Chrysostom also notes how finances¹⁶, jealousy¹⁷, the pain of childbirth¹⁸, and the administration of the household¹⁹, all contribute to the difficulties of married life. It is for these reasons he advocates the simplicity of the celibate lifestyle.

When Chrysostom argues against second marriages three matters concern him greatly. On the one hand he questions the integrity of the bereaved who seem able to turn their backs upon their previous relationship as if the loss were nothing²⁰. He also questions the wisdom of re-entering a state of being which one knows from experience can be difficult²¹. Finally, he expresses a practical concern over the state of hostility and strife which can develop because of jealousy between the new wife and the old wife’s children²².

¹⁴ *On Virginity XLVIII*. See also *Homilies On The Epistles of Paul to The Corinthians: Homily XIX* in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1914), vol. 12.

¹⁵ See Augustine, *Epistle 262* as cited in Elizabeth Clark, “Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 5 (Fall 1989), 44-46.

¹⁶ *On Virginity LI, LIII-LV*.

¹⁷ *On Virginity LII*.

¹⁸ *On Virginity LXV*.

¹⁹ *On Virginity LXVII*.

²⁰ *On Virginity XXXVII*.

²¹ *Against Remarriage*.

²² *On Virginity XXXVII*.

Nevertheless, Chrysostom does allow the remarriage of a widow as a safeguard to the sin of adultery²³.

For Chrysostom chastity was not simply an ascetic practice. Rather, it formed the basis for a distinctly Christian counter-culture in which celibate virgins and widows could be liberated from the cares and concerns of this world. Liberated from the yoke and obligations of marriage the celibate believer was free to dedicate their energies to the household of faith, the bride of Christ. In elevating virginity in this way Chrysostom provided a mechanism whereby both men and women, but especially women, could step beyond the limiting constraints which their culture placed upon them. Thus Peter Brown rightly considers Chrysostom's views on virginity to be a direct challenge to the morality of the city²⁴.

2. The Believer's Eschatological Expectations

Chrysostom did not simply focus on the present but also looked to the day when God would consummate the Kingdom of Christ. In that kingdom there would be no need for marriage because the church itself would be wed to the true bridegroom, Christ²⁵. Just as he believed that Adam and Eve lived as virgins prior to their fall from grace²⁶ so he also believed that in the restoration all those who are Christ's will live as virgins.

Chrysostom, like many in the early church, appears to have approached his eschatology proleptically. That is to say, the combination of the passage of time and the "distresses" of his own day convinced him that the eschatological coming of Christ was imminent. By viewing life in this manner it was not difficult to conceive that the boundary between the time of expectation and the time of realization was neither firm nor impermeable. Thus Chrysostom queries: "What good is marriage for those not likely to gain from it?"²⁷ He therefore exhorts his people to set aside the cares of this world and to devote themselves to the concerns of the Bridegroom.

Viewed in this light virginity, or celibacy, was not an act which secured salvation but rather an act whereby one demonstrated their desire to make the things of Christ preëminent in their lives. The vow of chastity was to the order of virgins what the marriage vow was to the married, namely, an act of binding in which the one making the vow took up a yoke of commitment toward the other. The difference, however, was that the commitment was made to Christ. This commitment was made in the belief of the imminent parousia and the believer's obligation to be found faithful to his/her Lord.

²³ *Homilies on Timothy: Homily XV* in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), vol.13.

²⁴ *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 306.

²⁵ *On Virginity* LXXIII.

²⁶ *On Virginity* XV.

²⁷ *On Virginity* LXXIII.3.

2. MARRIAGE

The high value which Chrysostom placed on the practice of virginity should not be perceived as a slight against marriage. As noted above, his treatise *On Virginity* is built upon a foundation which seeks to uphold the value and sanctity of marriage. Even his comments regarding the pitfalls of marriage reveal he was a pastor who was moved by the circumstances in which his people had to live. Not only was he aware of the more difficult aspects of marriage, he sought to apply the teaching of the Scriptures so as to encourage the development of truly Christian households.

His fundamental beginning point in this regard was that marriage is good²⁸. By this he meant that it is a legitimate way of life approved by God. In taking this view he immediately set himself against the ascetic heresies of his day which rejected all forms of concupiscence, including legitimate marital sex²⁹. This, however, does not mean that Chrysostom had bought into his culture's views on sexuality and marriage. The fact that he also believed in the value of virginity clearly demonstrates that he had not. Even more significantly, however, is the function or purpose which he attributes to marriage. Where society declared that marriage was for the begetting and rearing of children Chrysostom declared that it was for the moderation of life³⁰. By this he intended that marriage was the context in which a man and a woman could give expression to their sexual urges without stooping to the lewdness and the immorality of the surrounding culture. Because marriage was to act as a hedge guarding the believer from immorality, those who violated the boundaries of that hedge injured themselves, their spouse, and whomever else was involved³¹.

Chrysostom's views stand in contrast to other voices his congregation would have heard. Where these voices advocated public eroticism and viewed the home merely as a place for breeding children, Chrysostom declared that with or without children the only legitimate place to practice one's sexuality was within marriage. In seeking to remove eroticism from the marketplace, and by encouraging marriage partners to share their bodies with each other, Chrysostom upheld the value of marital concupiscence. Furthermore, by upholding the value of marital concupiscence and decrying

²⁸ *On Virginity* IX. See also *Homilies on Ephesians: Homily 20* in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), vol. 13; *Homilies on Colossians: Homily XII* in *ibid.*, vol. 13.

²⁹ *Homilies on Timothy: Homily XII*.

³⁰ *Homilies on Colossians: Homily XII*. See also *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew: Homily XVII* in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), vol. 10.

³¹ *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew: Homily XVII*.

the lasciviousness of his day he established that the sexual act was honourable within marriage and dishonourable outside of it.

This view becomes clearer when we consider Chrysostom's views on the relationship between Adam and Eve. Both in *On Virginity and Homily XV* on the book of Genesis Chrysostom stated his belief that the act of concupiscence did not occur until after Adam's fall from grace³². In Chrysostom's thinking Adam and Eve's prelapsarian relationship was not marriage as we now know it but rather a joining of two lives to do the work of God. Thus, although Adam and Eve each possessed their sexual characteristics, and the capacity to engage in sexual activity, they did not exercise that capacity³³. It is only after the Fall, and because of the effect and curse of sin, that the human condition was been reduced to the level of physical appetites and pleasures. Marriage as we know it is therefore God's gift of grace for the present age.

Once again Chrysostom differs from the heretical notions of his day. The heretics affirmed that the sexual act itself was base and sinful. Chrysostom affirmed that the very act of creation made concupiscence possible. Adam and Eve's previously unrealized sexual identity was a gift from God and therefore good. Even the belief that concupiscence did not enter human experience until after the Fall did not in itself make the sexual act sinful. Instead it recognizes that because of the fall from grace and death entering the human condition there existed no other means to secure human existence except by the begetting of children. In this way the latent, and as yet unused, capacities with which God had endowed Adam and Eve were rendered essential. Not even the existence of sexual perversions negates the value of that which is unperverted neither do they disqualify marital concupiscence. Rather these things demonstrate the extent to which human passions have been awakened and, at times, perverted by sin. Perversions, therefore, expose the wisdom, sanctity and purity of intimate marital relations.

3. FAMILY LIFE

Chrysostom's views on marriage and family are not confined to discussions of celibacy, human sexuality, and the relative value of marriage. As a pastor he was concerned with the quality of relationship which within the home.

1. Husbands and Wives

Chrysostom's views on family life contain elements which are both hierarchical and egalitarian. For example, in a sermon on Genesis 2:20-22

³² *On Genesis: Homily XV.14* in Robert C. Hill, trans., *Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on Genesis: 1-17* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1986).

³³ *On Genesis: Homily XV.13*.

Chrysostom uses a line of reasoning which appears to place the woman in a secondary position to that of man. Yet, within this sermon Chrysostom affirms that although Eve derived her existence from Adam she stood equal to him, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. As his equal she was to be his helpmate³⁴. Interestingly, the pinnacle of the equality between men and women is revealed in the need for co-operation and interdependence in the begetting of children!³⁵

With respect to the roles of men and women and their relations one to another we find that Chrysostom sometimes appears to intertwine his Christian views with traditional elements. For example, when addressing women concerning their responsibility to their husbands he urges the wife to be modest, to be circumspect in her behaviour, and to attend to the things of her own household³⁶. For many twentieth-century readers, the concept of marital submission is one of the more difficult aspects of Chrysostom's theology of marriage. His comments on 1 Corinthians 14:34 suggest that he may have accepted the cultural view that women were intellectually inferior to men³⁷. For this reason he submits the woman to the man and requires that she be silent in the church. This apparently low opinion is somewhat moderated, however, by other remarks which not only make older women the instructors of younger women³⁸, but also the counselors of their own husbands³⁹.

The balanced nature of Chrysostom's views are evident in his comments on Ephesians 5:22-33, where it is apparent that he qualifies the injunction to wives in three significant ways. First, he sets the command in the context of

³⁴ While Chrysostom's sermons on Genesis tend to suggest that he held to the view that the male-female hierarchy was in some way implicit in the method of Eve's creation, nevertheless his comment on 1 Timothy 2:14 suggests a view in which Adam and Eve were equals and not one subordinate to the other. See *Homilies on Timothy: Homily IX*.

³⁵ *On Genesis, Homily XV*.

³⁶ *Homilies on the Gospel of John: Homily LXI.2,3* in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), vol.14. See also *Homilies on Timothy: Homily VIII*, where Chrysostom calls into question the attitude being conveyed by women who adorn their bodies with the finest clothing and hair styles. According to Chrysostom such immodest behaviour betrays the soul and raises questions about the woman's moral and spiritual condition.

³⁷ *Homilies On The Epistles of Paul to The Corinthians: Homily XXXVII*. Similar comments are made in *Homilies on Timothy: I Timothy, Homily IX*, where he speaks of women as being talkative, weak, and fickle.

³⁸ *Homilies On Titus: Homily IV* in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), vol.13.

³⁹ *Homilies on the Gospel of John: Homily LXI.2*.

the gospel experience of salvation in which there is no distinction made between male and female. In this way submission is separated from any notion that men may be spiritually superior⁴⁰. Second, he places his comments within the context of the familial system by connecting a harmonious husband-wife relationship with children who are well brought up⁴¹. By this we may understand Chrysostom in at least two ways. It is possible that he intended to uphold the Graeco-Roman pattern of the *paterfamilia*. It is also possible he wished to affirm that when there is a peaceful relationship between the husband and wife, the children will be better behaved. Given the manner in which he defines the role of the husband, it is my belief that Chrysostom's view was closer to the second position than it was to the first.

A third way in which his instructions to the wife are qualified can be seen in his instructions to the husband⁴². Chrysostom points out that the husband is not the absolute authority in the house, but rather an underling who is responsible to one who is greater, namely Christ. For this reason the husband is told to love his wife sacrificially according to the pattern of Christ's sacrificial love for the Church. This suggests that no sacrifice is too great for the husband to make for his wife. In this way the wife is not an exalted slave. Rather she is made a true equal to her husband. Although she has been commanded to submit to him, he has also been commanded to look out for her needs and welfare — even if it costs him his own freedom.

Finally, Chrysostom's comments marital relations demonstrate sensitivity to the issue of spouse abuse when he writes "What kind of marriage can there be when the wife is afraid of her husband? What sort of satisfaction could a husband have, if he lives with his wife as if she were a slave, and not with a woman by her own free will? Suffer anything for her sake, but never disgrace her, for Christ never did this with the Church."⁴³ Later in the same sermon he addresses the issue of abuse again when he states: 'he (i.e. husband) must never exercise his authority by insulting and abusing her (i.e. his wife).'⁴⁴

2. Parents and Children

As in the case of marriage, Chrysostom's views are very balanced. Parents, and especially the father, were responsible to make sure that their

⁴⁰ *Homilies on Ephesians: Homily XX* (on verses 22-24).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.* (on verses 23-31).

⁴³ *Homily 20* on Ephesians 5:22-23 in Roth and Anderson, trans., *John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life*, p.47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.60.

children lived a disciplined life⁴⁵. Daughters, as well as sons, bear the scrutiny of Chrysostom's gaze. Thus we find that parents are enjoined to take care of the way in which their children develop⁴⁶. This discipline, however, was not to be cold and unmerciful. It was not to be such an imposition upon the child that they would be frustrated and rebel. Rather it was to be loving, gentle and encouraging. The parent who failed in this regard only had themselves to blame if their child became provoked or discouraged⁴⁷. In contrast to the rest of society, the goal of the Christian parent is not the production of "good citizens" who will ensure the future of the city. Instead, the Christian's loyalties are to another kingdom. For this reason the goal of Christian parenthood is not simply the raising of healthy well-adjusted children but leading them to faith in Jesus Christ⁴⁸.

As for the children, they are called upon to honour their parents⁴⁹. Chrysostom portrays the act of honour as filial obedience coupled with reverence for one's parents. He concludes his discussion by saying, "If a man have not this honour for parents he will never be gentle toward those unconnected with him."⁵⁰ Elsewhere Chrysostom reveals that one way in which this honour and devotion can be expressed is by caring for the widows within the family. Thus he admonishes the church, "It is not fitting that believing women should be maintained by unbelievers."⁵¹

3. Separation, Divorce and Remarriage

Chrysostom allows that separation and divorce were provisions in the old covenant⁵². Nevertheless, following Matthew 5:31-32 he considers these to be concessions to sin and not acceptable. Indeed the only point on which he allows for the possibility of divorce is when one party has engaged in adulterous activity⁵³. For this reason he affirms the instruction of the apostle

⁴⁵ Chrysostom considered that what was generally true for the whole church was particularly true for those who were church leaders (cf. 1 Timothy, *Homily X*). Here we find that Chrysostom was concerned that the behaviour of these children would be a reflection of the leadership qualities of those in authority, not to mention the source of potential scandal.

⁴⁶ Regarding daughters, see *Homilies on Colossians: Homily X; Homilies on Timothy: Homily X*. Regarding sons, see *Homilies on Ephesians: Homily XXI*.

⁴⁷ *Homilies on Ephesians: Homily XXI; Homilies on Colossians: Homily X*.

⁴⁸ *Homilies on Ephesians: Homily XXI*.

⁴⁹ *Homilies on Ephesians: Homily XXI; Homilies on Colossians: Homily X*.

⁵⁰ *Homilies on Ephesians: Homily XXI*.

⁵¹ *Homilies on Timothy: Homilies XIV-XV*

⁵² *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew: Homily XVII.4 and LXII.2*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul states that Christians should not separate from their spouses. Where there has been a separation, he again agrees with Paul by instructing them to seek reconciliation⁵⁴.

The one exception which he makes to this rule occurs in his instructions regarding the marriages of Christians with unbelievers. When compared to the treatment given to other verses, these five verses (1 Cor 7:12-16) and their meaning for Christians, are given significant attention. This treatment suggests that this was a matter of concern to his congregation. In this case Chrysostom upholds the apostolic command as the normative guide and concedes that, if the unbelieving spouse seeks the dissolution of the marriage, separation is acceptable⁵⁵. On the basis of Chrysostom's writings on virginity, one might expect that he would discourage the remarriage of divorced persons as being unwise. In fact, he goes further than that and builds on his understanding of Matthew 5:31-32. In his view, these second marriages are nothing less than adulterous unions⁵⁶.

CONCLUSION

Chrysostom's theology of marriage and family is demonstrably different from that of the religious and social milieu in which he and his congregation lived. At points his comments readily identify the ways in which he disagreed with the heresies and/or practices of his day. A contextual reading of his writings on this subject reveals an intentional attempt to construct a distinctly Christian view on these matters.

In summary, there are at least four points at which we can discern his distinctive "Christian vision."

1) He defined a distinctly orthodox view of the celibate lifestyle by which he was able to uphold the value of both celibacy and marriage.

2) He removed concupiscence from the realm of the "base things" and made it an act of honour within marriage.

3) Chrysostom's views on both virginity and marriage provided women with a greater sense of dignity than the culture afforded them. The order of the consecrated virgin provided these women with freedom from the "pains" of marriage. While within marriage, the behaviour of the truly Christian husband exalted the wife as an equal and one worthy of the same (or greater) respect as that which he himself received.

4) Chrysostom's views on marriage and family shifted the role of the family from that of preparing new citizens for the service of the city to the Christian discipleship of all who are within the household.

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⁵⁴ *Homilies On The Epistles of Paul to The Corinthians: Homily XIX.4.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew: Homily XVII.4.*