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**THE NICENE AND POST NICENE FATHERS  
SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347–407)**

**BIOGRAPHY:**

Born in Antioch in 349. John's father died soon after his birth and he was raised by his mother. He was baptised and later installed as a reader. John began his education under the pagan teacher Libanius. From Libanius John acquired the skills for a career in rhetoric, as well as a love of the Greek language and literature. As he grew older, however, he became more deeply committed to Christianity and went on to study theology under Diodore of Tarsus (one of the leaders of the later Antiochian school).

He lived with extreme asceticism and became a hermit circa 375; he spent the next two years continually standing, scarcely sleeping, and committing the Bible to memory. As a consequence of these practices, his stomach and kidneys were permanently damaged and poor health forced him to return to Antioch.

He was ordained as a deacon in 381 by Saint Meletius of Antioch, and was ordained as a priest in 386 by Bishop Flavian I of Antioch. Over the course of twelve years, he gained popularity because of the eloquence of his public speaking, especially his insightful expositions of Bible passages and moral teaching.

One incident that happened during his service in Antioch illustrates the influence of his sermons. When Chrysostom arrived in Antioch, the bishop of the city had to intervene with Emperor Theodosius I on behalf of citizens who had gone on a rampage mutilating statues of the Emperor and his family. During the weeks of Lent in 397, John preached twenty-one sermons in which he entreated the people to see the error of their ways. These made a lasting impression on the general population of the city: many pagans converted to Christianity as a result of the sermons. As a result, Theodosius' vengeance was not as severe as it might have been.

In 398 John was ordained — against his will — as Patriarch of Constantinople, by Saint Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who was forced to ordain him by imperial order.

As soon as he became a Patriarch, he started a reform movement of the church of Constantinople. He meant well but was without tact. He attacked the bishops and priests for their morally lax way of life. He was gold tongued but also sharp tongued. Within three months of his ordination, the clergy were up in arms against him. They started circulating rumours against him, that he lived a life of luxury secretly. He attacked the monks and prevented them from leaving their monasteries. He attacked the rich of the city for their way of life and threatened them with fire from heaven. He attacked the common people for their love of the theatre, and there was always an air of contempt in his sermons.

In spite of this he had the support of Eudoxia, the impress. But sooner or later all of these things came back to haunt him.

Around the year 400, he became aware of building tensions, for even the empress Eudoxia turned against him. The next year Pope Theophilus of Alexandria was summoned to Constantinople. He stayed as a guest of the Empress. During his stay, all those that were disgruntled with Chrysostom came to him with lists of complaints. Theophilus did not like Chrysostom, since he accepted some monks that he had defrocked (the tall brothers). The Empress, who thought that some of Chrysostom's sermons were veiled attacks on her luxurious way of life, wanted to get rid of him, and found in Theophilus a ready accomplice. A synod was assembled at the orders of the Emperor which banished Chrysostom on the basis of charges that were mostly false.

An earthquake struck next day and the Empress, terrified hastily made up with Chrysostom. Another Synod was assembled which annulled the first one and restored Chrysostom to his chair.

Two months later, he returned to his old habit of attacking everyone. The Empress erected a silver statue of herself in the court of her palace and Chrysostom was incensed. He delivered a scathing sermon against her. The Empress was so upset that she decided he had to go. Soon after the Emperor issued a decree stripping him of his office, but he refused to obey. On Easter day April 16, 404, the Empress sent the soldiers to arrest him. He hid for two months but in the end he surrendered. Exiled to Armenia, he died in exile in 407, three years after he had been banished.

Saint Theophilus, on his dying bed, told his successor Saint Cyril, that what he had done was wrong and asked him to restore him even though he had died five years earlier. Saint Cyril ordered his name to be added to the Synaxarion and to the commemoration of the saints in the Liturgy.

In 438, his relics were brought back to Constantinople by the new Emperor, where they were laid in the Cathedral with Patriarchal honours. The Emperor, kissing the casket and asking the great saint forgiveness for what his parents did to him.

## **HIS LEGACY:**

He was a saintly man who showed an enthusiasm for ascetic and monastic virtue. He had the harmlessness of the dove without the wisdom of the serpent. He knew human nature better than individual men. Besides, he was irritable of temper, suspicious of his enemies, and easily deceived and misled. He showed these defects in his quarrel with the court and the aristocracy of Constantinople. With a little more worldly wisdom and less ascetic severity he might perhaps have conciliated and converted those whom he repelled by his Pulpit fulminations. Fearless denunciation of immorality and vice in high places always commands admiration and respect, especially in a bishop and court preacher who is exposed to the temptations of flattery. But it is unwise to introduce personalities into the pulpit and does more harm than good. In his denunciation of Eudoxia, the

Empress, he tried to emulate his namesake John the Baptist, but it would have been better if he had emulated the conduct of Christ, the purest of the pure, towards Mary Magdalene and the woman taken in adultery.<sup>1</sup>

His sermons against the Jews are antisemitic. They were used by the Nazis to justify their persecution of the Jews.

### **HIS WRITINGS:**

Chrysostom was the most fruitful author among the Greek Fathers. The best have been preserved and have already been noticed in chronological order. They may be divided into five classes: (1) Moral and ascetic treatises, including the work on the Priesthood; (2) About six hundred Homilies and Commentaries; (3) Occasional, festal and panegyric orations; (4) Letters; (5) Liturgy.

His most important and permanently useful works are his Homilies and Commentaries. They go together; his homilies are expository, and his commentaries are homiletical and practical Continuous expositions, according to chapter and verse, he wrote only on the first eight chapters of Isaiah, and on the Epistle to the Galatians. All others are arranged in sermons with a moral application at the close. We have from him Homilies on Genesis, the Psalms, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of John, the Acts, the Pauline Epistles including the Hebrews, which he considered Pauline. Besides, he delivered discourses on separate texts of Scripture, on church festivals, eulogies on apostles and martyrs, sermons against the Pagans, against the Jews and Judaizing Christians, against the Arians, and the famous twenty-one orations on the Statues.

### **DOGMATIC THEOLOGY:**

Chrysostom was no theologian, he was a homilist, so much so that it had been said that you could write a book on Theology without ever mentioning John Chrysostom. But his homilies reflected orthodox dogma.

Here is what the editors of the Nicene/Post Nicene series say about him:

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<sup>1</sup>An excerpt from the Prolegomena of the editors of the Nicene/Post Nicene Fathers series I vol. IX

Chrysostom belonged to the Antiochian school of theology and exegesis, and is its soundest and most popular representative. It was founded by his teacher Diodor of Tarsus (d. 393), developed by himself and his fellow-student Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 429) Both Diodor of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia were implicated in the Nestorian heresy and their writings anathematized.

Like all the Greek fathers, he laid great stress on free-will and the cooperation of the human will with divine grace in the work of conversion. Cassian, the founder of Semi-Pelagianism, was his pupil and appealed to his authority. Julian of Eclanum, the ablest opponent of Augustin, quoted Chrysostom against original sin; Augustin tried from several passages to prove the reverse, but could only show that Chrysostom was no Pelagian.

We look in vain in Chrysostom's writings for the Augustinian and Calvinistic doctrines of absolute predestination, total depravity, hereditary guilt, irresistible grace, perseverance of saints, or for the Lutheran theory of forensic and solifidian justification.

He teaches that God foreordained all men to holiness and salvation, and that Christ died for all and is both willing and able to save all, but not against their will and without their free consent. The vessels of mercy were prepared by God unto glory, the vessels of wrath were not intended by God, but fitted by their own sin, for destruction. The will of man, though injured by the Fall, has still the power to accept or to reject the offer of salvation.

"When we have begun," he says, in commenting on John i. 38, "when we have sent our will before, then God gives us abundant opportunities of salvation." God helps those who help themselves. "When God," he says, "sees us eagerly prepare for the contest of virtue, he instantly supplies us with his assistance, lightens our labours and strengthens the weakness of our nature." Faith and good works are necessary conditions of justification and salvation, though Christ's merits alone are the efficient cause. He remarks on John vi. 44, that while no man can come to Christ unless drawn and taught by the Father, there is no excuse for those who are unwilling to be thus drawn and taught. Yet on the other hand he fully admits the necessity of divine grace at the very beginning of every good action. "We can do no good thing at all," he

says, “except we are aided from above.”<sup>1</sup>

Elaine Pagels wrote a comparison of Augustin and John Chrysostom in her book: *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*:

what the Jews and early Christians had read for centuries as “a story of human freedom became, in [Augustine’s] hands, a story of human bondage.” Instead of being a story about the gift of moral freedom, as St. John Chrysostom proclaimed, Augustine taught that “Adam’s sin not only caused our mortality but cost us our moral freedom, irreversibly corrupted our experience of sexuality...and made us incapable of genuine political freedom.”<sup>2</sup>

We will comment on some examples of his writings, as much as space permits.

### **TREATISE ON THE PRIESTHOOD: (IN SIX BOOKS)**

Written as a dialogue between Saint John Chrysostom and his friend Basil (not Saint Basil the Great.) They were both monks and they made a pact that neither of them will accept the priesthood without the other. Chrysostom, however, cheated Basil by convincing him to be ordained and then refusing ordination himself! Basil felt betrayed and came to chide his friend with tears in his eyes. Saint John Chrysostom describes this meeting in his First Book paragraph 6:

Having yielded to these remonstrances, and afterwards having learned that I had escaped capture, he came to me in deep dejection, sat down near me and tried to speak, but was hindered by distress of mind and inability to express in words the violence to which he had been subjected. No sooner had he opened his mouth than he was prevented from utterance by grief cutting short his words before they could pass his lips. Seeing, then, his tearful and agitated condition, and knowing as I did the cause, I laughed for joy, and, seizing his right hand, I forced a kiss on him,

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<sup>1</sup>An excerpt from the Prolegomena of the editors of the Nicene/Post Nicene Fathers series I vol. IX

<sup>2</sup>Pagels, Elaine Adam, *Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988) p. xxvi.

and praised God that my plan had ended so successfully, as I had always prayed it might. But when he saw that I was delighted and beaming with joy, and understood that he had been deceived by me, he was yet more vexed and distressed.

Chrysostom, who was still a lay monk, kisses the right hand of Basil who was then a priest. But I think what he did was well meant but mean! Later on, he would be forced to accept the Patriarchate against his will.

In Book III paragraph 4, he says this:

For the priestly office is indeed discharged on earth, but it ranks amongst heavenly ordinances; and very naturally so: for neither man, nor angel, nor archangel, nor any other created power, but the Paraclete Himself, instituted this vocation, and persuaded men while still abiding in the flesh to represent the ministry of angels.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS TO CATECHUMENS: (TWO INSTRUCTIONS)**

As therefore any one who takes and recasts a golden statue which has been tarnished by time, smoke, dust, rust, restores it to us thoroughly cleansed and glistening: so too this nature of ours, rusted with the rust of sin, and having gathered much smoke from our faults, and having lost its beauty, which He had from the beginning bestowed upon it from himself, God has taken and cast anew, and throwing it into the waters as into a mould, and instead of fire sending forth the grace of the Spirit, then brings us forth with much brightness, renewed, and made afresh, to rival the beams of the sun, having crushed the old man, and having fashioned a new man, more brilliant than the former. (First instruction, 3)

To John Chrysostom, baptism is restoration of the image of God that has been tarnished. There is no mention here of an original sin that is washed away by baptism, but rather a renewal of our nature which has gathered *much smoke from our faults*.

### **THREE HOMILIES CONCERNING THE POWER OF DEMONS:**

These three homilies were all given at Antioch when Chrysostom was a priest there under the Episcopate of Flavian. They deal with errors against which Chrysostom throughout his life most strenuously contended. In an age of great depravity there seem to have been many who tried to excuse the weak resistance which they made to evil, both in themselves, and in others, by maintaining that the world was abandoned to the dominion of devils, or to the irresistible course of fate. To counteract the disastrous effects of such philosophy, which surrendered man to the current of his passions, it was necessary to insist very boldly and resolutely on the essential freedom of the will, on moral responsibility, and the duty of vigorous exertion in resisting temptation.<sup>1</sup>

In an indirect way, they answer some of the errors of Augustine. For it was the latter, who claimed that “all, on account of the sin of Adam, were delivered into the power of the devil”

Dost thou wish to form another example to see once more how a Demon arranges matters when God allows him to use his own power? Consider the herds, the flocks of Job, how in one instant of time he annihilated all, consider the pitiable death of the children, the blow that was dealt to his body: and thou shalt see the savage and inhuman and unsparing character of the wickedness of the Demons, and from these things thou shall know clearly that if God had. entrusted the whole of this world to their authority, they would have confused and disturbed everything, and would have assigned to us their treatment of the swine, and of those herds, since not even for a little breathing space of time could they have endured to spare us our salvation. (Homily I paragraph 6)

The third homily has a magnificent commentary on the troubles of Job and how he endured them by his diligence (free will) even when the devil was given authority by God to tempt him. By exercising his free will he was justified. Proof that man can please God by exercising his

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<sup>1</sup>An excerpt from the Prolegomena of the editors of the Nicene/Post Nicene Fathers series I vol. IX

free will. And this happened before grace was given to man through Jesus Christ (during the Old Testament), “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” (Jn 1:17) The same argument can be made about Enoch who pleased God and was translated into heaven.

### **EUTROPIUS, PATRICIAN AND CONSUL (HOMILIES I & II)**

Eutropius was a slave that rose to power became second only to the Emperor. He fell out of favour and was to be executed. He took refuge in the Cathedral at Constantinople. John Chrysostom gave him refuge in the altar where the soldiers could not enter to arrest him. Then the next day, sitting in his ambon, ordered the curtains to be open to show Eutropius cowering in fear, then, in front of more than five thousand spectators, delivered a sermon about this man’s fall from grace, starting by the words “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity”

Such is the force of this calamity: it has made one who was illustrious and conspicuous appear the most insignificant of men. And if a rich man should enter the assembly he derives much profit from the sight: for when he beholds the man who was shaking the whole world, now dragged down from so high a pinnacle of power, cowering with fright, more terrified than a hare or a frog .... (Homily I paragraph 4)

Needless to say after this public humiliation, Eutropius left the church. He was later executed. Many feel that in this incident Saint John Chrysostom put theatrics before his pastoral duty.

### **A TREATISE TO PROVE THAT NO ONE CAN HARM THE MAN WHO DOES NOT INJURE HIMSELF**

A comparison between the temptation of Adam and that of Job and how Job prevailed and Adam failed. The moral: don’t blame it on the devil, you can resist like Job. Again, here he defends moral freedom against the fatalism of Augustine.

### **CONCERNING THE STATUES (21 homilies)**

Delivered when he was a priest at Antioch. The inhabitants of Antioch revolted against excessive taxation, and destroyed the statues

of the Emperor, who became so incensed that he decided to destroy the city.

Chrysostom, compelled as he was to adapt his style to circumstances as they arose, almost always without preparation, delivered on the spur of the occasion these Homilies, which are certainly well deserving of admiration. At one time his object here is to console a people struggling with present distress; at another, to strengthen minds that were sinking under the extremity of danger; and above all, by repeated admonition, to persuade the people of Antioch, on occasion of the threatened calamities, to correct the vices and to wipe away the crimes that had thus provoked God's wrath.

### **EXEGETICAL WORKS:**

The commentaries of Chrysostom are of unequal merit. We must always remember that he is a homiletical commentator who aimed at the conversion and edification of his hearers. He makes frequent digressions and neglects to explain the difficulties of important texts. Grammatical remarks are rare, but noteworthy on account of his familiarity with the Greek as his mother tongue.

In the Old Testament he depended altogether on the Septuagint. The Homilies on the Pauline Epistles are considered his best, especially those to the Corinthians, where he had to deal with moral and pastoral questions. The doctrinal topics of Romans and Galatians were less to his taste, and it cannot be said that he entered into the depths of Paul's doctrines of sin and grace, or ascended the height of his conception of freedom in Christ. His Homilies on Romans are argumentative; his continuous notes on Galatians somewhat hasty and superficial. The eighty Homilies on Matthew from his Antiochian period are very valuable.<sup>1</sup>

### **HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW: (EIGHTY HOMILIES)**

Delivered while yet a priest in Antioch. His main object in these homilies is moral, and he searches out with diligence both the meaning and the applications of particular passages, usually concluding with an

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<sup>1</sup>An excerpt from the Prolegomena of the editors of the Nicene/PostNicene Fathers.

eloquent exhortation to some special virtue.

Some of the most remarkable of these exhortations are on the subject of Alms-giving. The Theatres are the theme of his frequent reprobation, and the Monks of the mountains near Antioch of his praise. He frequently attacks the Anomoean or extreme Arian Heresy, and sometimes also the Manichaeian. Commenting on the first verse in Matthew 1 he says:

Being Son of the Unoriginate God, and His true Son, He suffered Himself to be called also Son of David, that He might make thee Son of God. He suffered a slave to be father to Him, that He might make the Lord Father to thee a slave. (Homily II paragraph 3)

In **Homily III** he answers the question why are there two harlots in the ancestry of Christ? Rahab and Tamar were both harlots. Solomon was also born of Uria's wife, an adulteress.

For He hath come as a Physician, not as a Judge. Therefore in like manner as those of old took harlots for wives, even so God too espoused unto Himself the nature which had played the harlot. (Paragraph 5)

In **Homily VIII**, he comments on the Lord's sojourn in the land of Egypt:

Egypt receives and preserves Him, driven from His home, and plotted against, and obtains a sort of first impulse towards her union unto Him; so that when in after-time she should hear Him preached by the apostles, she might have this at least to glory of, as having received Him first. (Paragraph 5)

In Paragraph 6, he adds this:

And now, shouldest thou come unto the desert of Egypt, thou wilt see this desert become better than any paradise, and ten thousand choirs of angels in human forms, and nations of martyrs, and companies of virgins, and all the devil's tyranny put

down, while Christ's kingdom shines forth in its brightness. And the mother of poets, and wise men, and magicians, the inventor of every kind of sorcery, and propagator thereof among all others, her thou wilt see now taking pride in the fishermen, and treating all those with contempt, but carrying about everywhere the publican, and the tentmaker, and protecting herself with the cross; and these good things not in the cities only, but also in the deserts more than in the cities; since in truth everywhere in that land may be seen the camp of Christ, and the royal flock, and the polity of the powers above. And these rules one may find in force, not among men only, but also in woman's nature. Yea, they, not less than men, practise that search of wisdom, not taking shield, and mounting horse, as the Grecians' grave lawgivers and philosophers direct, but another and far severer fight are they undertaking. For the war against the devil and his powers is common to them and to the men, and in no respect doth the delicacy of their nature become an impediment in such conflicts, for not by bodily constitution, but by mental choice, are these struggles decided. Wherefore women in many cases have actually been more forward in the contest than men, and have set up more brilliant trophies. Heaven is not so glorious with the varied choir of the stars, as the wilderness of Egypt, exhibiting to us all around the tents of the monks.

In **Homily XII**, (Paragraph 3) commenting on the text "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo! the heavens were opened unto Him.":

Wherefore were the heavens opened? To inform thee that at thy baptism also this is done, God calling thee to thy country on high, and persuading thee to have nothing to do with earth.

#### **COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF ACTS:**

Here again he follows the same principles, the clear and full exposition of the historical sense, while seizing every opportunity to expand on the moral aspect of the exegesis. Here he is probably at his best.

In Homily XXII, commenting on the conversion of Cornelius, he takes the opportunity to preach about the virtue of almsgiving:

This is the fountain by which the plant of love is nourished: for nothing is so wont to nourish love, as the being merciful: it makes its branches to lift themselves on high. This fountain is better than that in Paradise (Gen. ii. 10); a fountain, not dividing into four heads, but reaching unto Heaven itself: this gives birth to that river “which springeth up into eternal life” (John iv. 14): on this let Death light, and like a spark it is extinguished by the fountain: such, wherever it drops, are the mighty blessings it causes. This quenches, even as a spark, the river of fire: this so strangles that worm, as naught else can do. (Mark ix. 44.) He that has this, shall not gnash his teeth. Of the water of this, let there be dropped upon the chains, and it dissolves them: let it but touch the firebrands, it quenches all.

## **HOMILIES ON FIRST CORINTHIANS:**

Now if neither husband nor wife hath power even over their own body, much less have they over their property. Hear ye, all that have husbands and all that have wives: that if you must not count your body your own, much less your money. (Homily XIX paragraph 2)

How relevant is this advise even today. The rest of this homily is excellent especially about the sexual relationship between husband and wife. (Compare this to Augustine’s views).

In **Homily XXII**, he explains the blessedness of marital fidelity:

Let us suppose for argument’s sake one man having a wife, yet defiling the marriage-bed of his neighbor and taking pleasure in this wicked robbery, enjoying his paramour. Then let us again oppose to him another who loves his own spouse. And that the victory may be greater and more evident, let the man who enjoys his own wife only, have a fancy also for the other, the adulteress, but restrain his passion and do nothing evil: (although neither is

this pure chastity.) ... Now then, having brought them together, let us ask them accordingly, whose is the pleasanter life: and you will hear the one glorying and exulting in the conquest over his lust. (Paragraph 7)

Here he speaks freely of a man “enjoying his own wife”, a far cry from Augustine’s contempt for any pleasure attendant on marital relations.

In HOMILY XXVI, (Paragraph 7), comparing Sarah to “women of today”, he has this to say:

Abraham took his brother’s son: his wife found no fault with him. He commanded her to travel a long journey; she spake not even against this but followed. Again, after those many miseries and labours and toils having become lord of all, he yielded the precedency to Lot. And so far from Sarah being offended at this, she did not even open her mouth, nor uttered any such thing as many of the women of these days utter, when they see their own husbands coming off inferior in such allotments, and especially in dealing with inferiors; reproaching them, and calling them fools and senseless and unmanly and traitors and stupid. But no such thing did she say or think, but was pleased with all things that were done by him.

A little later, he treats the subject of wife abuse:

For surely it comes of extreme lawlessness when thy partner of life, she who in the most intimate relations and in the highest degree, is united with thee; when she, like a base slave, is dishonoured by thee. Wherefore also such a man, if indeed one must call him a man and not rather a wild beast, I should say, was like a parricide and a murderer of his mother. For if for a wife’s sake we were commanded to leave even father and mother, not wronging them but fulfilling a divine law; and a law so grateful to our parents themselves that even they, the very persons whom we are leaving, are thankful, and bring it about with great eagerness; what but extreme frenzy can it be to insult her for whose sake God bade us leave even our parents? (Paragraph 8)

In **HOMILY XXXII**, he speaks about marital love and fidelity in such a beautiful way:

If a man love his own wife as he ought to love, even though he be never so much inclined to wantonness, he will not endure to look upon another woman, on account of his affection for her. “For love,” (Cant. viii. 5.) saith one, “is strong as death.”

In **Homily XXXIX**, paragraph 10, commenting on I Cor 15:11, he says:

Thus too, for example, when he spake of a believing wife and an unbelieving husband, companying with one another by the law of marriage, that the wife might not consider herself defiled by that intercourse and the embraces of the unbeliever, he said not, “the wife is not unclean,” nor, “she is no wise harmed by the unbeliever,” but, which was much more, “the unbeliever is even ‘sanctified’ by her,” not meaning to signify that the heathen was made holy through her, but by the very great strength of the expression anxious to remove her fear.

What amazes me is how that celibate saint understands more about marriage than many married men!

In **HOMILY XXX**, he speaks about God’s love for us:

For if the sun, which is but a creature, needeth not our eyes; for he abideth in his own proper brightness, even though none should look upon him, and we it is who are the gainers when we enjoy his beams; much more is this so with God. But that thou mayest learn this in yet another way; how great wilt thou have the distance to be between God and us? as great as between gnats and us, or much greater? Quite plainly it is much greater, yea, infinite. If then we vainglorious creatures need not service nor honour from gnats, much rather the Divine Nature [none from us], seeing It is impassible and needing nothing. The measure of that which He enjoyeth by us is but the greatness of our benefit, and the delight He taketh in our salvation. (Paragraph 4)

How different this is from Augustine's assertion that God "does not enjoy us then, but makes use of us"<sup>1</sup>

## **HOMILIES ON EPHESIANS:**

**Homily XX** on Ephesians 5, commenting on verse 25:

"Husbands," saith he, "love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church."

Wouldest thou have thy wife obedient unto thee, as the Church is to Christ? Take then thyself the same provident care for her, as Christ takes for the Church. Yea, even if it shall be needful for thee to give thy life for her, yea, and to be cut into pieces ten thousand times, yea, and to endure and undergo any suffering whatever,--refuse it not. Though thou shouldest undergo all this, yet wilt thou not, no, not even then, have done anything like Christ. For thou indeed art doing it for one to whom thou art already knit; but He for one who turned her back on Him and hated Him. In the same way then as He laid at His feet her who turned her back on Him, who hated, and spurned, and disdained Him, not by menaces, nor by violence, nor by terror, nor by anything else of the kind, but by his unwearied affection; so also do thou behave thyself toward thy wife. Yea, though thou see her looking down upon thee, and disdainng, and scorning thee, yet by thy great thoughtfulness for her, by affection, by kindness, thou wilt be able to lay her at thy feet.

What a great husband would this great saint had made!

### **SUMMARY:**

A great orator and exegete but not a great pastor.

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<sup>1</sup>Augustine of Hippo: *On Christian Doctrine* Book I, chapter 31

## MAX LUCADO

Max Lucado is a prolific writer. His books fill half the shelves of many a Christian book store (the other half is filled with the “Left Behind” books) Lucado is a favourite with many youth, unfortunately our own youth. He has a style that is the envy of many. But what about the content of his books? Well, let us examine some writings of his.

In his book *IN THE EYE OF THE STORM*, under the heading *HOLINESS IN A BATHROBE*, page 233, he writes:

God’s goodness is your goodness. You are absolute perfection. Flawless. Without defects or mistakes. Unsullied. Unrivalled. Unmarred. Peerless. Virgin pure. Undeserved yet unreserved perfection. No wonder heaven applauds when you wake up. A masterpiece has stirred. “Shh,” whisper the stars’ “look at the wonder of that child.” “My!” gasp the angels, “what a prodigy God has created.” So while you groan, eternity gasps with wonder. As you stumble, angels are star struck. What you see in the mirror as morning disaster is, in reality, a morning miracle. Holiness in a bathrobe. Go ahead and get dressed. ... comb the hair and cover the moles. Do it for yourself. Do it for the sake of your image. ... but don’t do it for God. He has already seen you as you really are, and in his book, you are perfect.

How can we reconcile this with what St. Paul tells us, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” (Rom 7:18) And with his description of himself as the “chief among sinners” (1 Tim 1:15) How can I be “absolute perfection. Flawless. Without defects or mistakes. Unsullied. Unrivalled. Unmarred. Peerless. Virgin pure,” while Saint Paul sees nothing good in him and considers himself chief among sinners?

And how can God see me as perfect, while “his angels he charged with folly” (Job 4:18) and, “the heavens are not clean in his sight.” (Job 15:15)

And how can we be “flawless” while, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” (Rom 3:23)

And how can I be perfect when St. Paul tells us, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if

that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:12)

St James defines perfection for us, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” (James 3:2) How many times do we “offend in word” every day? And if so, how can we be perfect?

And, if I am so perfect, why would heaven applaud, since the Lord Himself told us that “ joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” (Luke 15:7) And why would the angels gasp when they see me perfect as I am, while the Lord assures us that, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:10)

In the same book, under the heading: *THE CHOICE* (p 238), describing the way God went about creating, Lucado writes:

I am sure his commands were delightful! “Hippo, you won’t walk ... you’ll waddle!” “Hyena, a bark is too plain. Let me show you how to laugh!” “Look racoon, I’ve made you a mask!” “Come here giraffe, let’s stretch that neck a bit.”

To me, this is taking the name of the Lord in vain, this is silliness, making God Almighty sound like a character out of Sesame Street.

### **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUCADO:**

Jesus siblings thought their brother was a lunatic. They weren’t proud, they were embarrassed! “He’s off the deep end, mom. You should hear what people are saying about him.” “People say he’s loony.” “It’s a good thing Dad isn’t around to see what Jesus is doing.”

Speaking about the Lord Jesus with irreverence erodes His image in our minds and distorts it. Inventing discussions between the Lord and some imaginary “siblings” serves only to destroy the doctrine of perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, a doctrine testified to by the Fathers of the church.

commenting on the miracle of the healing of the woman with the

issue of blood (Mark 5: 24-34) Lucado writes: “First, Jesus heals before he knows it. The power left automatically and instantaneously. It’s as if the Father short-circuited the system.”

If Jesus can heal without knowing it, then he is not omniscient. And if power can automatically leave him without his permission then he is not omnipotent or almighty “Pantocrator” And if the Father can do things without the Son’s knowledge or “short-circuit the system” then there is something wrong within the Trinity. Then the Son is not of one essence with the Father and we are bordering on Arianism or Jehovah’s witnesses’ beliefs. The whole characterization is heretical and acceptable.

In his book, *NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE SAVIOUR*, Lucado blasphemes the Lord Jesus Christ with the following statements. On page 131 he writes:

Now, look into the picture. Look closely through the shadowy foliage. See that person? See that solitary figure? What’s he doing? Flat on the ground. Face stained with dirt and tears. Fists pounding the hard earth. Eyes wide with a stupor of fear. Hair matted with salty sweat. Is that blood on his forehead? That’s Jesus. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Does this look like the picture of a saintly Jesus resting in the palm of God? Hardly.

It appears that in Lucado’s attempt to help us identify with the human side of Jesus, he has engaged in gross speculation, in effect rewriting the bible’s account of Jesus’ time in the Garden, and by that he portrays to us a different Jesus, he pictures a sinful Jesus. Fear is a sin (Rev 21:8) If Jesus fell into the stupor of fear as Lucado contends, then Jesus fell into sin and could not possibly be God and Saviour as he claimed to be and that is blasphemy. Lucado affirms that this cannot be “the picture of a saintly Jesus resting in the palm of God” Our Liturgy tells us that Jesus is “in the Fatherly bosom at all times.” We do not describe Jesus as “saintly” for he is the source of all holiness.

Somewhere else he says this:

You can be sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the world will

ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus You see, in God, by virtue of your adoption, you have a **divine affinity**, you have **eternal security**, and you have a golden opportunity. I cannot imagine an orphan turning down an opportunity to be adopted. With one decision, with one raising of the hand, with one agreement to leave the orphanage, that person all of a sudden goes from being abandoned to claimed, from having no name to a new name, no future to a new future, he leaves the orphanage, and enters the house of the father. That's what God offers you. **There is no quiz, no examination, no charge.** All you have to do is say "yes" to the Father.

This doctrine of "eternal security" together with belief in the "Pre-tribulation rapture" (The left behind heresy) constitutes what is called "Dispensationalism," a view rejected by the Orthodox and the Catholics as well as the mainstream Protestants.

Check your church library and bookstore and see if Lucado has a prominent place there. And have no doubt about it, if you read his books you become a partaker of his heretic and blasphemous views.

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