

The Patristic Roots of Post-Reformation Views on the Properties of Scripture as Exhibited in the Preaching of John Chrysostom

By David T. King

When one begins to study the literature of the Reformation and Post-Reformation orthodox divines, the attentive reader becomes increasingly aware that these theologians of those eras never intended to employ a *tabula rasa* dismissal of the past, of which they were so often accused by their opponents,¹ in their pursuit to reform and restore the church of their day to the authority of that infallible rule bequeathed to her by her Lord, and upon which she was built, namely the word of the true and living God as we find it in Holy Scripture. In his monumental work on the development of Protestant orthodoxy following the Reformation, Richard A. Muller has meticulously documented “a fundamental continuity” between them and the Reformers “on the subjects of prolegomena, Scripture, and God.”²

When Muller focuses particularly on Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi externum*³ for these Protestant divines, he is careful to acknowledge that:

Neither the Reformers nor their orthodox successors invented the notion of attributes of Scripture. Rather, they inherited from the church fathers and the medieval doctors the assumption that various attributes or properties could be noted concerning the character of Scripture in its normative use in the church....⁴

Nonetheless, the Reformers and their orthodox successors understood that such qualities of God’s word were drawn from Scripture itself, as can be “seen in Reformed dogmatics and in the Reformed exegetical tradition from the time of Calvin and Vermigli onward.”⁵ These properties of Scripture, as outlined in Muller’s work, are as follows: 1. Truth, Certainty, and Infallibility; 2. Purity, Holiness, Perfection, Sufficiency; 3. Perspicuity and Efficacy; and 4. Scripture is the infallible rule of faith and judge of controversies. It is the purpose of this cursory examination to demonstrate how these properties of

Scripture, as affirmed by the Reformers and their successors, in the above order, were anticipated in the pastoral ministry of John Chrysostom (A.D. 349–407).

A SON OF ANTIOCH

First and foremost, beyond all other things which may be posited of him, John Chrysostom was a preacher of Holy Scripture. He informs us explicitly: “We preach not the things that come from our own mind but the teachings vouchsafed to us by the Lord through the Holy Scriptures, proclaiming them publicly and making them resound constantly.”⁶ Though he occasionally

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1. See *John Calvin & Jacopo Sadoletto, A Reformation Debate: Sadoletto’s Letter to the Genevans and Calvin’s Reply*, ed. John C. Olin (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 30–31, 57ff.

2. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4.419. Hereafter PRRD. See also his *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

3. *Principium cognoscendi externum*: The external principle of knowing for the Protestant orthodox. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms, Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 246.

4. Muller, PRRD, 2.295

5. Muller, PRRD, 2.296.

6. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. Robert Charles Hill, *Fathers of the Church (FC)*, Vol. 74 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), Homily 11:9, p. 148. Greek text: οὐ τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς οικείας διανοίας φεγγόμενοι, ἀλλὰ τὰ παρὰ τοῦ Δεσπότου διὰ τῶν θείων Γραφῶν ἡμῖν δωρηθέντα διδάγματα, ταῦτα εἰς μέσον προτιθέντες, καὶ ταῦτα συνεχῶς ἐνηχοῦντες. *Homiliae in Genesim*, Homilia XI, §3, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca (PG)* 53.94.

engaged in thematic and textual homilies, the principal work to which he gave himself was to expositional preaching through books of the Bible.⁷ His homiletical gifts were exceptional, and it was for this reason that John was later to be given the sobriquet, Chrysostom (Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος) “the Golden-Mouth,”⁸ due to his eloquence as an orator. If Suicer is correct, though the usage was anticipated by others, Chrysostom is the first writer who referenced the Bible under its present name τὰ βιβλία, the Books.⁹

While still a teenager, his mother, Anthousa (widowed around the age of twenty) sent him to the famous school of the pagan professor of rhetoric, Libanius, a prominent citizen of the Syrian city of Antioch. It was under his tutelage that John, along with his friend Theodore¹⁰ (later bishop of Mopsuestia), was “trained in all aspects of the arts of composition and public

speaking, including the actual preparation and delivery of speeches of different kinds.”¹¹ In his biography of John Chrysostom, Kelly comments that “his chief debt to his teachers was for the classic purity of his Greek diction and the astonishing elegance of expression he acquired from them.”¹² But being in personal agreement with one of the greatest from our day, namely that “preachers are born, not made,”¹³ John demonstrated from the very beginning of his debut as a preacher that he was unusually gifted for the work to which he was called.¹⁴ Having been ordained to the office of presbyter, probably early in 386 by Antioch’s bishop, Flavian (now in his late seventies), it became clear that he “had apparently singled him out to be not only the city’s preacher *par excellence*, but also his own personal assistant.”¹⁵ From the very day of his ordination, for nearly the next “twelve years (386–397), John stood out as the leading pulpit orator of Antioch,”¹⁶ the capital city of Syria. Kelly comments that “it is generally agreed that he preached extempore” and that “people were amazed” that he would do so with “no scrap of paper or book in his hand but held forth impromptu, something they had never seen before.”¹⁷ The ancient church historian Sozomen informs us that when the pagan sophist Libanius lay dying (around the year 392 or 393), his friends inquired of him whom he desired to succeed him as the instructor of rhetoric at his school in Antioch. His reply to them was; “It would have been John, had not the Christians taken (stolen, ἐσώλησαν from σὺλάω) him from us.”¹⁸

It is also generally acknowledged that John was a student of Diodore of Tarsus (a see in Cilicia of which he was its bishop from the year 378 until his death a decade and a half later); but he (like John) was a native of Antioch, and the one who is commonly regarded as the father of the school of Antiochene exegesis.¹⁹ Though some have challenged whether John actually studied under Diodore, Kelly points out that John “himself was to confirm it many years later when Diodore, now bishop of Tarsos, visited Antioch and he acclaimed him from the pulpit as his spiritual father and teacher.”²⁰ This influential figure in the life of Chrysostom held a very high view of Holy Scripture. In his “sole surviving work, the *Commentary on the Psalms*,”²¹ he wrote in the preface to it:

“All Scripture is inspired by God,” according to blessed Paul, “and useful for teaching, for reproving, for correcting, for training in righteousness.” It teaches what is good, reproves sins, corrects omissions, and thus brings a person to perfection; in fact, he goes on to

7. This method of preaching was recovered by the Reformers beginning with Zwingli. See Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship That is Reformed According to Scripture* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 69.

8. This title originated sometime around the middle of the fifth century and gradually replaced his name John.

9. J. C. Suicer, *Thesaurus ecclesiasticus*, 2nd ed., volume 1 (Amsterdam, 1728), col. 687. Cf., e.g., Chrysostom, *Four Discourses of Chrysostom, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, trans. F. Allen (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869), 3rd Sermon, §2–3, pp. 62–68; and *De Lazaro Concio* III, §2–3, PG 48.993–994; and *In Matthaeum*, Homilia IX, §4, PG 57.181. See also A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, first series (NPNF1), vol. 14, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John*, Homily 32.2

10. Theodore was another staunch representative of Antiochene exegesis, and who is remembered today as one of the most brilliant, as well as controversial, theologians and scriptural commentators of the eastern church.

11. J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 6. The normal age for the pupils of Libanius was 14–18. John graduated from his school at age 18.

12. Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 7.

13. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 119.

14. Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 55.

15. Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 57.

16. Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 57.

17. Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 57–58.

18. NPNF2, vol. 2, *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen*, Book VIII, Chapter 2. Cf. Sozomeni, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Liber VIII, Caput II, PG 67.1513; Ἀιβάνιος ὁ Σύρος σοφιστῆς . . . λέγεται Ἰωάννην εἰπεῖν, εἰ μὴ Χριστιανοὶ τοῦτον ἐσώλησαν.

19. Diodore’s famous hermeneutical maxim survives in a fragment of his *Quaestiones* on the Octateuch: “We (in Antioch) far prefer τὸ ἱστορικόν τοῦ ἄλληγορικόν (as practiced in Alexandria).” *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), xi–xii.

20. *Golden Mouth*, 19. Cf. *Laus Diodori*, PG 52.761–6.

21. *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51*, xii.

say, "so that the person who belongs to God may be ready, prepared for every good work." You would not be wrong to infer that this general commendation of the divine Scripture applies to the book of the divine Psalms. After all, it gives gentle and kindly instruction in righteousness to those willing to learn, reproves willful people in a caring manner and without harshness, and corrects whatever chance failings befall us when our choices are awry.²²

In his introduction to this work of Diodore, Hill notes that "Diodore is in no doubt of the divine inspiration of the biblical authors, προφηται all" and that his precedent led "Chrysostom, Theodore and Theodoret to do likewise."²³

It was at the very height of his popularity as a preaching presbyter in Antioch, under the oversight of his bishop Flavian, that John's life was to undergo a rather sudden, dramatic turn of events. Either in late October or early November of 397, due to circumstances entirely beyond his knowledge or control, and quite literally overnight, John was extradited by imperial order to become the new bishop of the city of Constantinople upon the sudden death of Nectarius. Kelly informs us that "the emperor's (Arcadius) letter had insisted that the operation should be carried out as discreetly as possible," because "it was feared that the populace [of Antioch] might be tempted to demonstrate if they learned that their adored preacher was being taken from them."²⁴

Though it was a common expectation in John's day for the bishops of a particular metropolis to deliver their sermons from the episcopal throne, he was not personally constrained by this time-honored custom in his ministry as the bishop of Constantinople.²⁵ The early church historian, Socrates, informs us that, as a bishop he would mount the ambo (ἄμβων),²⁶ which was positioned in the middle of the church, "from which he was accustomed to address the people in order to be the more distinctly heard."²⁷ This was most likely a practice continued which he began as a presbyter in Antioch, where he stood, rather than sat, to preach.

THE PRECISION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Perhaps no early church father had a greater love for and devotion to the Holy Scriptures than John Chrysostom. Belonging to the Antiochian school of theology and exegesis, he is by far the best representative of its "cardinal virtue, *akribeia* (ἀκρίβεια), precision"²⁸ as an attribute of the sacred text, and it was John's own personal favorite property of Holy Scripture. Throughout his sermons he is continually exhorting

his congregants to "see here once again, I ask you, the precision of Sacred Scripture."²⁹ Examples of his exegetical and theological commitment to the ἀκρίβεια of Holy Scripture could be multiplied from his sermons in the Schaff/Eerdmans series where, more often than not, the term has been mistranslated as "accurate," or "exact," rather than "precise" as shown in the various citations below:

But mark, I pray thee, the accuracy (precision) of the prophets.³⁰

Σὺ δὲ μοι σκόπει τῶν προφητῶν τὴν ἀκρίβειαν.³¹

For so great was the accuracy (precision, ἀκρίβεια) of the prophets, that they omit not even these things, but foretell His very journeyings, and changes of place, and the intent with which He acted therein; that thou mightest

22. Ibid., 1.

23. Ibid., xvii.

24. *Golden Mouth*, 104.

25. Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom* (London: Routledge, 2000), 26.

26. Ambo: An elevated reading desk from which the Scriptures were read.

27. *NPNF2: Volume II, The Ecclesiastical History, by Socrates Scholasticus*, Book VI, Chapter 5.

28. *Homilies on Genesis 1-17*, p. 14. Chrysostom made repeated use of the word *precision* (*akribeia*, ἀκρίβεια) in connection with Holy Scripture, and one of Chrysostom's favorite phrases was "the precision of Sacred Scripture." For Chrysostom, *precision* is a distinctive feature of the biblical text. See, for example, *FC 82, Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, 18.3, 9, 20; 20.5; 21.8, 11; 22.5, 6; 23.4, 8; 24.5; 25.10, 20; 26.15; 27.16, 17, 23; 29.22; 30.4; 31.18; 33.4; 35.4, 8, 9; 36.12; 38.6; 39.11; 43.3, in which we find this phrase or its equivalent some 28 times: pp. 4, 9, 15, 38, 56, 59, 71, 90, 93, 107, 131, 139, 155, 173, 174, 179, 213, 222, 249, 278, 306, 309, 310, 334, 359, 381-382, 437. See also *Homilies on Genesis 1-17*, Homily 7.9-10, 13.5, 13, 15.11, pp. 96, 171, 175, 200; *FC 87, Homilies on Genesis 46-67*, Homilies 49.3, 55.5, pp. 43, 109; and Robert Charles Hill, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, 2 vols. (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 1.80, 132, 158, 282, 304-305, 343 (e.g., "See the wisdom of the inspired author, who speaks of everything with precision," and "Note the inspired author's precision"). In short, this principle of ἀκρίβεια is a feature of Holy Scripture to which Chrysostom repeatedly alludes and uses throughout his writings/sermons to describe the sacred text. These are but a few examples of his use of ἀκρίβεια, his most favorite property of Holy Scripture.

29. *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, Homily 18.9, p. 9. Ὅρα μοι πάλιν ἐνταῦθα τῆς θείας Γραφῆς τὴν ἀκρίβειαν, *Homiliae in Genesim*, Caput III, Homilia XVIII, §3, PG 53.152. Interestingly enough, beyond Antioch one finds this emphasis elsewhere on the *akribeia* of Scripture in one of Chrysostom's contemporaries, Epiphanius of Salamis. "And see the precision (ἀκρίβειαν) of Scripture." *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III (Sects 47-80, De Fide)*, trans. Frank Williams (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 616 (78. Against Antidicomarians, 19, p. 6). Cf. *Adversus Haereses*, Liber III, Tom. II, LXXVIII, §19, PG 42.729D.

30. *NPNF1*, vol. 10, *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 6.6.

31. *In Matthæum*, Homily VI, §4, PG 57.67.

learn, how they speak all by the Spirit. For if the secrets of men cannot by any art be known, much more were it impossible to learn Christ's purpose, except the Spirit revealed it.³²

Τοσαύτη γὰρ ἦν τῶν προφητῶν ἡ ἀκρίβεια, ὡς μηδὲ ταῦτα παραλιπεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰς μεταβάσεις προφητεύειν, καὶ τὴν γνώμην μεθ' ἧς ταῦτα ἐποίησεν ἵνα μάθῃς, ὅτι πάντα Πνεύματι ἐφθέγγοντο. Εἰ γὰρ τὰ ἀνθρώπων ἀπόρητα ἀμίχχανον εἰδέναι, πολλῶ μᾶλλον τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὸν σκοπὸν ἀδύνατον ἦν μαθεῖν, μὴ τοῦ Πνεύματος ἀποκαλύψαντος.³³

Seest thou the accuracy (precision, ἀκρίβειαν) of prophetic language?³⁴

Εἶδες ἀκρίβειαν προφητικῆς ῥήσεως.³⁵

And mark thou, I pray thee, the accuracy (precision, ἀκρίβειαν) of the prophet, how he foretold all things.³⁶ Σὺ δέ μοι θαύμασον τοῦ προφήτου τὴν ἀκρίβειαν, πῶς πάντα προεῖπε.³⁷

What fruit do ye get from your services? Surely if you were getting any profit by them, ye ought to have been long leading the life of true wisdom (τῆς φιλοσοφίας), with so many Prophets twice in every week discoursing to you, so many Apostles, and Evangelists, all setting

32. *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 40, §2.

33. *In Matthæum*, Homily XL, §2, PG 57.440.

34. *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 57, §1.

35. *In Matthæum*, Homily LVII, §2, PG 58.559.

36. *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 66, §3.

37. *In Matthæum*, Homily LXVI, §3, PG 58.629.

38. *NPNF1*, vol. 11, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily 29, §3.

39. *In Acta apostolorum*, Homilia XXIX, §3, PG 60.217.

40. *NPNF1*, vol. 11, *Homilies on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Homily 16, §9.

41. *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Romanos*, Homilia XVI, §9, PG 60.562.

42. *Homilies on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Homily 25, §2.

43. *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Romanos*, Homilia XVI, §2, PG 60.630.

44. *NPNF1*, vol. 13, *Homilies on First Epistle of Paul to Timothy*, Homily 7, 1 Timothy 2:2–4.

45. *In epistolam i ad Timotheum*, Homily VII, §2, PG 62.537.

46. *NPNF1*, vol. 14, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John*, Homily 5, §2.

47. *In Joannem*, Homilia V, §2, PG 59.55.

48. Hill (1947–2007) was one of the leading patristic scholars on John Chrysostom. He taught in the School of Theology at Australian Catholic University and in the School of Divinity at the University of Sydney. He was a member of the Roman Communion and past-president of the Australian Catholic Biblical Association. He held a doctorate in theology (STD from the Angelicum in Rome).

forth the doctrines of salvation, and placing before you with much exactness (precision, ἀκρίβειας) that which can form the character aright.³⁸

Τί καρποῦσθε ἀπὸ τῶν συνάξεων; Καίτοι εἰ γέ τι ὄφελος ὑμῖν ἐγένετο, πάλαι πάντας ἔδει τὸν τῆς φιλοσοφίας βίον ζῆν, τοσοῦτων μὲν προφητῶν δεῦτερον τῆς ἐβδομάδος ὑμῖν διαλεγομένων, τοσοῦτων δὲ ἀποστόλων, εὐαγγελιστῶν, πάντων τὰ σωτήρια δόγματα προτιθέντων, καὶ τὰ δυνάμενα ἦθος ῥυθμίσεια μετὰ πολλῆς ἀκριβείας παριστάντων ὑμῖν.³⁹

Observe the accuracy (precision, ἀκρίβειαν) of the Prophet, and the judgment of the Apostle, what a testimony he has cited, how exceedingly apposite! For it not only shows us that those to be saved are some and not all, but also adds the way they are to be saved.⁴⁰

Εἶδες ἀκρίβειαν προφητικὴν, καὶ σύνεσιν ἀποστολικήν, οἷαν μαρτυρίαν ἐπήγαγε, πῶς σφόδρα ἐπιτηδεῖαν; Οὐ γὰρ μόνον ὅτι τινές εἰσιν οἱ σωζόμενοι καὶ οὐχὶ πάντες, δείκνυσιν ἡμῖν αὕτη, ἀλλὰ καὶ πῶς σωθήσονται προστίθησι.⁴¹

And when writing to the Galatians with great precision (ἀκρίβειας), he [i.e. Paul] exacts of them Christian spirit and perfectness in this matter. But here he does not use this vehemency, because the faith was lately planted in them.⁴²

Καὶ Γαλάταις δὲ ἐπιστέλλων, μετὰ πολλῆς ἀκριβείας ἀπαιτεῖ παρ' αὐτῶν τὴν ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις φιλοσοφίαν καὶ τελειότητα. Ἐνταῦθα δὲ οὐ κέχρηται τούτῳ τῷ τόνῳ, διὰ τὸ νεόφωτον εἶναι παρ' αὐτοῖς τὴν πίστιν.⁴³

You see how accurate (precise, ἀκρίβειας) are the expressions of Scripture!⁴⁴

Ὅρᾳ πῶς ἡ Γραφή μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς ἀκριβείας κέχρηται τῷ λόγῳ.⁴⁵

Do you see the precision of his [i.e. John's] teaching?⁴⁶

Εἶδες διδασκαλίαν ἠκριβωμένην.⁴⁷

From Chrysostom's perspective, the precision of Scripture required the responsibility of precision (ἀκρίβεια) on the part of the exegete/hearer/reader as well, namely, a careful examination of the text. Robert Charles Hill (recently deceased),⁴⁸ who was perhaps the best modern day translator of the works of many early church Greek fathers, and whose prolific work has made many of Chrysostom's literary remains available for the first time in English, noted that it was Chrysostom's "belief in the extent of inspiration" that led him "to prize the *akribeia*, 'precision of Scripture,' (an oft-mistranslated

term, rendered inadequately as “accuracy”—an ironic fate for this champion of precision), prompting in the exegete by way of response to God’s considerateness (συγκατάβασις,⁴⁹ not “condescension” as it is commonly translated) a like precision in exegesis.⁵⁰ Hill observed that “for Chrysostom, precision is both a characteristic of the biblical text and an obligation on the biblical commentator.”⁵¹ To put it another way, ἀκρίβεια was so much a part of his concept of Scripture and exegesis, that one would not at all be going beyond the margin of truth to state figuratively that he was as bound to it (as we would say in the deep south) as “white on rice!” Thus, as a faithful pastor, he would continuously exhort the members of his congregation in such language as follows:

Accordingly, let us attend with precision (ἀκρίβεια), dearly beloved, to the text and see what Scripture says about Cain on the one hand and Abel on the other, and let us not pass it by heedlessly. I mean, Sacred Scripture says nothing idly (ἀπλῶς) or by chance; instead, even if it happens to be a syllable or a single jot, it has some treasure concealed in it.⁵²

Elsewhere he reminds his hearers:

It would be good for you to have such a precise (ἀκριβῶς) knowledge of the Scriptures and the stories they tell as to make unnecessary for us a longer sermon in explaining their meaning.⁵³

And again:

Pay precise (ἀκριβείας) attention, however: the reading out of the Scriptures is the opening of the heavens.⁵⁴

Thus, as a son of Antioch, Chrysostom’s most cited and emphasized property of Scripture, which he also required of the commentator, was that of ἀκρίβεια (precision). Consider the following examples from John Chrysostom as a representative of the patristic roots of Post-Reformation views on the properties of Holy Scripture.

1. TRUTH, CERTAINTY, AND INFALLIBILITY

The truth, certainty, and infallibility were properties of Scripture that were clearly presupposed in the comments and sermons of Chrysostom. He did not hesitate to remind his congregants that “the mouths of the inspired authors are the mouth of God.”⁵⁵ Elsewhere in another homily he affirmed the same view of Scripture

again: “Why, the mouth by which God speaks, is the mouth of God. Just as our mouth is the mouth of our soul, though the soul has no mouth, so the mouth of the Prophets is the mouth of God.”⁵⁶ For him, these attributes of Holy Scripture were bound up with the divine inspiration of the text. In his commentary on Psalm 4, he stated:

If, however, you do not believe the biblical authors, we can supply clear, unmistakable evidence that they were inspired, and that they told us nothing on their own account but with the inspiration coming from that divine love which is higher even than the heavens. Everything said by them achieves its purpose, and everything reaches fulfillment in the truth of reality, whether it is a question of ancient things or recent. What was said by the inspired authors about the Jews came true, and the fulfillment of it was clear to everyone; likewise what was said about Christ in the New Testament — which demonstrates above all the divine

49. See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 2: The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 187.

50. *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, p. 18. Cf. Robert Charles Hill, “Akribeia: a principle of Chrysostom’s exegesis,” *Colloquium: the Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 14 (Oct. 1981): 32–36; and Old, 185ff.

51. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, Psalm 7, vol. 1, p. 24.

52. *Homilies on Genesis 18–45*, Homily 18.17, p. 13. Greek text: Προσέχουμεν τοίνυν μετὰ ἀκριβείας, ἀγαπητοί, τῷ εἰρημένῳ, καὶ ἴδωμεν τί μὲν περὶ τοῦ Κάιν διηγέται ἡ Γραφή, τί δὲ περὶ τοῦ Ἄβελ, καὶ μὴ ἀπλῶς παραδράμωμεν. Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀπλῶς καὶ ὡς ἔτυχεν φθέγγεται ἡ θεία Γραφή, ἀλλὰ κἂν συλλαβὴ τυγχάνῃ, κἂν κεραία μία, ἔχει τινὰ ἐγκεκρυμμένον θησαυρόν. *Homiliae in Genesim*, Homilia XVII, §4, PG 53.154.

53. *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, Psalm 7, volume 1, p. 111. Greek text: Ἐδεῖ μὲν οὕτως ἀκριβῶς τῶν Γραφῶν καὶ τῶν ἱστοριῶν εἶδέναι τὴν γνώσιν, ὡς μὴ δεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς μικροτέρου λόγου πρὸς τὴν τούτων διδασκαλίαν. *Expositio In Psalmos*, Psalmum VII, §1, PG 55.80.

54. *St. John Chrysostom: Old Testament Homilies, Volume Two, Homilies on Isaiah and Jeremiah*, trans. Robert Charles Hill (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), 65. See also Robert C. Hill, *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 30. Greek text: Ἀλλὰ προσέχετε μετὰ ἀκριβείας· ἡ γὰρ τῶν Γραφῶν ἀνάγνωσις τῶν οὐρανῶν ἐστὶν ἀνοίξις. *In illud, Vidi dominum, Homilia II*, §2, PG 56.109.

55. *St. John Chrysostom: Old Testament Homilies, Volume Two, Homilies on Isaiah and Jeremiah*, p. 65. Greek text: Τὰ γὰρ τῶν προφητῶν στόματα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστὶ στόμα. *In Oziam*, Homilia 2, §2, PG 56.110.

56. *NPNF1*, vol. 11, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily 19, §5. Greek text: Τὸ στόμα, δι’ οὗ ὁ Θεὸς φθέγγεται, στόμα ἐστὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καθάπερ γὰρ τοῦτο τὸ στόμα τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμῶν ἐστὶ, καίτοι ψυχῆς οὐκ ἔχουσις στόμα· οὕτω καὶ τὸ στόμα τῶν προφητῶν στόμα ἐστὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ. *In Acta Apostolorum*, Homilia XIX, §5, PG 60.156.

character of both Scriptures. Now, if what is said about God in Scripture comes from God, it is all true.⁵⁷

He would assure his congregation that “sound doctrine and saving truth are to be learned with accuracy (i.e., precision, ἀκριβείας), not from evil spirits, but from the Holy Scripture.”⁵⁸ He would make reference to “the unerring truth of Scripture,”⁵⁹ as well as to “the light of the divine Scriptures” as “a more accurate (precise), an unerring standard of realities.”⁶⁰ Four times in the following three citations, he emphasized that the Scriptures are more worthy of belief (ἀξιοπιστοτέρα) than everything else:

In order to learn another reason why the teaching of the prophets is more worthy of belief (ἀξιοπιστοτέρας) than the report of those who rise from the dead, consider this fact, that every dead person is a servant, but what the Scriptures utter, the Master has uttered. So even if a dead person rises, even if an angel descends from Heaven, the Scriptures are more worthy of belief (ἀξιοπιστοτέρας) than any of them. For the Master of

57. St. John Chrysostom: *Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 1, p. 68.

58. Allen, *Four Discourses of Chrysostom*, §2, p. 42. Greek text: τὰ γὰρ ὑγιῆ δόγματα καὶ σωτήρια οὐ παρὰ δαμιόνων, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τῆς θείας Γραφῆς ἔστι μετ’ ἀκριβείας μαθεῖν. *De Lazaro Concio II*, §2, PG 48.984.

59. NPNF1, vol. 14, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 68, §2. Cf. τῆς Γραφῆς ἀνευδές, *In Joannem*, Homilia LXVIII, §2, PG 59.375.

60. NPNF1, vol. 10, *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 13, §8. Cf. ἂν τὸ φῶς δέξηται τῶν θείων Γραφῶν, ἀκριβέστερον καὶ ἀνεξάπτητον τῶν ὄντων ἔσται κριτήριον. *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, Homilia XIII, §4, PG 57.215.

61. St. John Chrysostom *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), fourth sermon, p. 85. Greek text: Ἴνα δὲ καὶ ἐτέρωθεν μάθῃς, ὅτι ἀξιοπιστοτέρα ἢ τῶν προφητῶν διδασκαλία τῆς τῶν ἀνισταμένων ἀπαγγελίας ἐκεῖνο σκόπησον, ὅτι νεκρὸς μὲν ἅπας δούλος ἔστιν· ἃ δὲ αἱ Γραφαὶ φθέγγονται, ταῦτα ὁ Δεσπότης ἐφθέγγετο· ὥστε κἂν νεκρὸς ἀναστῆ, κἂν ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καταβῆ, πάντων ἔστωσαν αἱ Γραφαὶ ἀξιοπιστοτέρας. Ὁ γὰρ τῶν ἀγγέλων Δεσπότης, καὶ τῶν ζώντων Κύριος, αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνας ἐνομοθέτησε. *De Lazaro Concio IV*, PG 48.1010. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 1:4–5; Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) Q&A 4.

62. St. John Chrysostom *On Wealth and Poverty*, Fourth Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man, §3, 86–87. Greek text: Ἄλλ’ ὁ θεὸς ἅπαντα ταῦτα προειδὼς, ἀπετείχισεν αὐτῶ τὴν ἐπιβουλὴν διαλεχθῆναι τοῖς ζῶσιν ἀθρώποις, παιδεύων ἡμᾶς πάντων ἀξιοπιστοτέρας ἡγεῖσθαι τὰς θείας Γραφάς. *De Lazaro Concio IV*, PG 48.1010–1011.

63. NPNF1, vol. 13, *Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, Chapter 1, Ver. 8, 9. Cf. *In epistulam ad Galatas commentaries*, Caput I, PG 61.624–625.

64. NPNF1, vol. 13, *Homilies on the First Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Homily 8, Comments on 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17. Greek text: ἄπερ γὰρ ἂν εἴπῃ ἡ Γραφή, ταῦτα τῶν ὀρωμένων πιστοτέρα. *In Epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses*, Homilia VIII, §3, PG 62.442. In addition to these examples, see also NPNF1, vol. 14, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John*, Homily 25, §2; *In Joannem*, Homilia XXV, §2, PG 59.150.

the angels, the Lord of the dead and the living, Himself has given the Scriptures their authority.⁶¹

And referring to the impossibility of one rising from the dead to testify, he stated in the same sermon:

But God who foreknew all these things prevented this attack. To spare us, He did not allow anyone even to come from the other world and speak of what is there to living people. In this way He teaches us to consider the holy Scriptures the most trustworthy of all (ἀξιοπιστοτέρας).⁶²

We see elsewhere in his commentary on Galatians, Chrysostom made precisely the same point again in more detail:

When Abraham was requested to send Lazarus, he replied, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them: if they hear them not, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead.” (Luke xvi: 31.) And Christ introduces Abraham thus speaking, to show that He would have the Scriptures accounted more worthy of credence (ἀξιοπιστοτέρας), even than one raised from the dead: Paul too, (and when I say Paul, I mean Christ, who directed his mind,) prefers them before an angel come down from heaven. And justly, for the angels, though mighty, are but servants and ministers, but the Scriptures were all written and sent, not by servants, but by God the Lord of all. He says, if “any man” preach another Gospel to you than that which we have preached,—not “if this or that man:” and herein appears his prudence, and care of giving offence, for what needed there still any mention of names, when he had used such extensive terms as to embrace all, both in heaven and earth? In that he anathemized evangelists and angels, he included every dignity, and his mention of himself included every intimacy and affinity. “Tell me not,” he exclaims, “that my fellow-apostles and colleagues have so spoken; I spare not myself if I preach such doctrine.” And he says this not as condemning the Apostles for swerving from the message they were commissioned to deliver; far from it, (for he says, whether we or they thus preach;) but to show, that in the discussion of truth the dignity of persons is not to be considered.⁶³

Moreover, he repeats virtually the same point yet again in one of his homilies on 1 Thessalonians: “For whatever things the Scripture says, are more to be trusted than things we see.”⁶⁴ Indeed, while commenting upon the

Apostle John in contrast to the disciples of pagan philosophers, who asserted “everything on uncertain and fallacious arguments,” he declared:

Not so this fisherman; for all he saith is infallible (ἀσφαλείας); and standing as it were upon a rock, he never shifts his ground. For since he has been thought worthy to be in the most secret places, and has the Lord of all speaking within him, he is subject to nothing that is human.⁶⁵

Thus, in the manner of these examples, John Chrysostom expressed his own views on the veracity, certainty and infallibility of Holy Scripture.

2. PURITY, HOLINESS, PERFECTION, SUFFICIENCY

In his exegesis of the pivotal passage of 2 Timothy 3:16–17, John underscored the purity, holiness, perfection, and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. Chrysostom comments that Scripture would supply “if anything is deficient,” and Timothy would have the Scriptures “in place of” the Apostle Paul. The concept of extrabiblical tradition does not appear even to have entered the mind of this ancient Antiochene exegete. Speaking of the Apostle Paul, he stated that “having offered much exhortation and consolation from other sources, he adds that which is more perfect, derived from the Scriptures,” and then goes on to note:

For this reason he writes: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (θεόπνευστος), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” All what Scripture? all that sacred writing, he means, of which I was speaking. This is said of what he was discoursing of; about which he said, “From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures.” All such, then, “is given by inspiration of God”; therefore, he means, do not doubt; and it is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

“For doctrine.” For thence we shall know, whether we ought to learn or to be ignorant of anything. And thence we may disprove what is false, thence we may be corrected and brought to a right mind, may be comforted and consoled, and if anything is deficient, we may have it added to us.

“That the man of God may be perfect.” For this is the exhortation of the Scripture given, that the man of

God may be rendered perfect by it; without this therefore he cannot be perfect. Thou hast the Scriptures, he says, in place of me. If thou wouldst learn anything, thou mayest learn it from them. And if he thus wrote to Timothy, who was filled with the Spirit, how much more to us!⁶⁶

In one of his sermons on the Gospel of John, Chrysostom declares the sufficiency of Holy Scripture in this language:

Great is the profit of the divine Scriptures, and all-sufficient (διαρκής) is the aid which comes from them. And Paul declared this when he said, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written aforetime for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (Romans 15:4, and 1 Corinthians 10:11) For the divine oracles are a treasury of all manner of medicines, so that whether it be needful to quench pride, to lull desire to sleep, to tread under foot the love of money, to despise pain, to inspire confidence, to gain patience, from them one may find abundant resource.⁶⁷

Using the imagery of a prospector searching for precious metals, to describe the purity and sufficiency of Holy Scripture, he would remind his hearers repeatedly:

You see, if those who dig up metals do not pass over even tiny fragments, but on striking a vein of gold look around carefully for nuggets, much more should we do this in the case of the Scriptures. Admittedly, in the case of metals the search is very difficult for the prospectors: the metals are earth and the gold is nothing but earth, and their natural commonality deceives the eye of the prospectors; yet instead of desisting they give evidence of utter diligence, knowing as they do by sight what is really earth and what is really gold. In the case of Scripture, on the other hand, it is not like this: the gold does not lie mixed up with earth — it is pure gold (καθαρόν χρυσίον). “The Lord’s sayings are untainted,” Scripture

65. NPNF₁, vol. 14, *Gospel of St John*, Homily 2, §3. See also *In Joannem*, Homilia II, PG 59.31 (ἀσφαλείας – certain, safe, secure, reliable, firmness, infallible).

66. NPNF₁, vol. 13, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy*, Homily 9. Cf. *In Epistulam ii ad Timotheum*, Homilia IX, PG 62.649–650. Cf. WCF 1:5, 8.

67. NPNF₁, vol. 14, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John*, Homily 37.1. Cf. *In Joannem*, Homilia XXXVII, §1, PG 59.207.

says, remember, “silver purified by fire, tested by earth” — that is to say, the Scriptures are not metals that require hard labor; rather, they provide a treasure ready for those searching for the wealth coming from them. It is in fact sufficient (ἀρκεῖ) merely to peep within, and go away filled with every benefit; it is sufficient (ἀρκεῖ) only to open them, and at once discern the sparkle of the jewels.⁶⁸

It was the great desire of Chrysostom for those who sat under his preaching to be thoroughly acquainted with and educated in the Holy Scriptures. He made this abundantly clear time and time again from his pulpit:

This, after all, is the object of all our vigilance and enthusiasm, that you would all become perfect and complete, and that nothing of the contents of the Holy Scriptures would escape you. Acquaintance with them, remember, will also make the greatest contribution to your progress towards an excellent life, provided you are prepared to be sober and alert, and will make you readier for the difficulties virtue involves.⁶⁹

As Hughes Oliphant Old observed: “John may never have studied the doctrine of the perfections of Scripture as it was taught in the theological schools of Protestant orthodoxy, but he seems to have understood it just as well.”⁷⁰

68. *St. John Chrysostom, Old Testament Homilies, Volume Two: Homilies on Isaiah and Jeremiah*, Homily Two on Isaiah 6, p. 65. Cf. *In Oziam*, Homilia 2, §2, PG 56.110. See also Robert Hill, “St John Chrysostom’s Teaching on Inspiration in ‘Six Homilies on Isaiah,’” *Vigilae Christiana* 22 (1968): 28–29.

69. *Homilies on Genesis 18–45*, Homily 28.2, p. 184.

70. Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, Volume 2*, p. 195.

71. FC 68, *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1979), Disc. 1.6.5, pp. 23–24. Cf. *Adversus Judæos*, Oratio Prima, §6, PG 48.852.

72. NPNF1, vol. 13, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Homily III, Comments on 2 Thessalonians 1:9, p. 10. Greek text: πάντα σαφῆ καὶ εὐθέα τὰ παρὰ ταῖς θείαις Γραφαῖς, πάντα τὰ ἀναγκαῖα δῆλα. In *epistulam ii ad Thessalonicenses*, Homilia III, §4, PG 62.484–485. Cf. WCF 1:7.

73. As Chrysostom pointed out, “having others to read to thee privately...” See NPNF1, Vol. 12, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Homily 36.9. Likewise, so argued Cæsarius of Arles (470–543): “If those who are illiterate love God in truth, they look for learned people who can read the sacred Scriptures to them.” See FC 31, *Saint Cæsarius of Arles, Sermons (1–80)* (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1956), Sermon 8.1, 49.

74. Early in 388 or 389, John preached some seven sermons on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. See *St. John Chrysostom On Wealth and Poverty*, Fourth Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man, pp. 10–11. See *Conciones VII de Lazaro*, PG 48.963–1054.

3. PERSPICUITY AND EFFICACY

It would by no means be a stretch of the imagination to state unequivocally that no early church father emphasized the perspicuity and efficacy of Holy Scripture more than John Chrysostom. His sermons and commentaries are literally full of such expressions! Perhaps the first example worth highlighting is an occasion in September of 386, while sensing the need to rebuke Christians who were being drawn to and influenced by the ceremonial practices of a Jewish minority in Antioch, he made a statement in passing that leaves us with a personal insight into his own conversion, which underscores both the perspicuity and efficacy of Holy Scripture: “It was the Scriptures,” he said, “which took me by the hand and led me to Christ.”⁷¹

In what is perhaps his most well-known statement on the perspicuity of Holy Scripture, Chrysostom offers the illustration of how if the representative or herald of an earthly king were to enter a city to pronounce a message from the same on matters of great importance, all would immediately become silent in his presence, and give him their most earnest attention. Chrysostom then reminds his congregants that when they enter the church, and the Scriptures are read, they are listening to “letters sent from God.” He then goes on to state that their need for a homily “arises from our sloth” declaring, “All things are clear and open that are in the divine Scriptures; the necessary things are all plain.”⁷²

No early church writer was more assiduous about urging his congregants to procure and read (or have read to them) the Scriptures! Chrysostom’s constant, repeated exhortations to his congregants, as such, presuppose at least three things; (1) That the Scriptures were accessible to the people of his time, (2) that illiteracy was no excuse for ignorance of the Scriptures,⁷³ and (3) that the Scriptures were essentially perspicuous and efficacious. The following citations are from his third sermon⁷⁴ on Lazarus. The first comes from section one of this sermon:

I also always entreat you, and do not cease entreating you, not only to pay attention here to what I say, but also when you are at home, to persevere continually in reading the divine Scriptures. When I have been with each of you in private, I have not stopped giving you the same advice. Do not let anyone say to me those vain words, worth of a heavy condemnation, “I cannot leave the courthouse, I administer the business of the city, I practice a craft, I have a wife, I am raising children, I am in charge of a household, I am a man of the world; reading the Scriptures is not for

me, but for those who have been set apart, who have settled on the mountaintops, who keep this way of life continually." What are you saying, man? That attending to the Scriptures is not for you, since you are surrounded by a multitude of cares? Rather it is for you more than for them. They do not need the help of the divine Scriptures as much as those who are involved in many occupations. The monks, who are released from the clamor of the marketplace and have fixed their huts in the wilderness, who own nothing in common with anyone, but practice wisdom without fear in the calm of that quiet life, as if resting in a harbor, enjoy great security; but we, as if tossing in the midst of the sea, driven by a multitude of sins, always need the continuous and ceaseless aid of the Scriptures. They rest far from the battle, and so they do not receive many wounds; but you stand continuously in the front rank, and you receive continual blows. So you need more remedies. Your wife provokes you, for example, your son grieves you, your servant angers you, your enemy curses you, your fellow soldier trips you up, often a law suit threatens you, poverty troubles you, loss of your fortune depresses you, and many causes and compulsions to discouragement and grief, to conceit and desperation surround us on all sides, and a multitude of missiles falls from everywhere. Therefore we have a continuous need for the full armour of the Scriptures.⁷⁵

Chrysostom proceeds then to emphasize the salvific need which is met in the reading of the Scriptures:

We must thoroughly quench the darts of the devil and beat them off by continual reading of the divine Scriptures. For it is not possible, not possible for anyone to be saved without continually taking advantage of spiritual reading.⁷⁶

In his customary fashion, Chrysostom continues to stress the importance of reading the Bible, and thus the efficacious nature of this discipline:

Reading the Scriptures is a great means of security against sinning. The ignorance of Scripture is a great cliff and a deep abyss; to know nothing of the divine laws is a great betrayal of salvation. This has given birth to heresies, this has introduced a corrupt way of life, this has put down the things above. For it is impossible, impossible for anyone to depart without benefit if he reads continually with attention.⁷⁷

This translation of Chrysostom's third sermon on Lazarus and the rich man as provided by Roth, and published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press (an Eastern Orthodox Publication), omits by and large all of sections two and three of this sermon, wherein Chrysostom expresses repeatedly his views on the clarity and efficacy of Holy Scripture. Thus we look to an older translation as provided by F. Allen to fill in the gap. To be sure, this is a rather lengthy citation, but it sets forth very vividly Chrysostom's characteristic convictions on the perspicuity and efficacy of Holy Scripture. He rebukes the neglect of Holy Scripture, as well as the charge of its obscurity. That which is of particular interest is how Chrysostom exegetes the passage in Acts 8:26–40 concerning the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip at the end of section three. Again, he states in sections two and three:

2. Many other such things there are that beset our soul; and we have need of the divine remedies that we may heal wounds inflicted, and ward off those which, though not inflicted, would else be received in time to come—thus quenching afar off the darts of Satan, and shielding ourselves by the constant reading of the Divine Scriptures. It is not possible—I say, it is not possible, for any one to be secure without constant supplies of this spiritual instruction.⁷⁸ Indeed, we may congratulate ourselves (i.e. one ought to be content), if, constantly using this remedy, we ever are able to attain salvation. But when, though each day receiving wounds, we make use of no remedies, what hope can there be of salvation?

Do you not notice that workmen in brass, or goldsmiths, or silversmiths, or those who engage in any art whatsoever, preserve carefully all the instruments of their art; and if hunger come, or poverty afflict them, they prefer to endure anything rather than sell for their maintenance any of the tools which they use. It is frequently the case that many thus choose rather to borrow money to maintain their house and family, than part with the least of the instruments of their art. This they do for the best reasons; for they know that when those are sold, all their skill is rendered of no avail, and the entire groundwork

75. Roth, 58–59.

76. Roth, 59. Chrysostom often employed this turn of phrase, "it is not possible, not possible..."

77. Roth, 60. Caesarius of Arles from the west made essentially the same point as Chrysostom; see FC 31, *Saint Caesarius of Arles, Sermons (1–80)*, Sermon 8.3, p. 52.

78. Translator's note, "Or without constantly making use of spiritual reading."

of their gain is gone. If those are left, they may be able, by persevering in the exercise of their skill, in time to pay off their debts; but if they, in the meantime, allow the tools to go to others, there is, for the future, no means by which they can contrive any alleviation of their poverty and hunger. We also ought to judge in the same way. As the instruments of their art are the hammer and anvil and pincers, so the instruments of our work are the apostolic and prophetic books, and all the inspired and profitable Scriptures. And as they, by their instruments, shape all the articles they take in hand, so also do we, by our instruments, arm our mind, and strengthen it when relaxed, and renew it when out of condition. Again, artists display their skill in beautiful forms, being unable to change the material of their productions, or to transmute silver into gold, but only to make their figures symmetrical. But it is not so with thee, for thou hast a power beyond theirs—receiving a vessel of wood, thou canst make it gold. And to this St. Paul testifies, speaking thus: “In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and earth. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work,” (2 Tim. ii. 20, 21). Let us then not neglect the possession of the sacred books. For gold, whenever it becomes abundant, causes trouble to its possessors; but these books, when carefully preserved, afford great benefit to those who possess them. As also where royal arms are stored, though no one should use them, they afford great security to those who dwell there; since neither thieves nor burglars, nor any other evil-doers, dare attack that place. In the same way, where the inspired books are, from thence all satanical influence is banished, and the great consolation of right principles comes to those who live there; yea, even the very sight of these books by itself makes us slower to commit iniquity, Even if we attempt any forbidden thing, and make ourselves unclean, when we return home and see these books, our conscience accuses us more keenly, and we become less likely to fall again into the same sins. Again, if we have been steadfast in our integrity, we gain more benefit, (if we are acquainted with the word;) for as soon as one comes to the gospel, he by a mere look both rectifies his understanding and ceases from all worldly cares. And if careful reading also follows, the soul, as if initiated in sacred mysteries, is thus purified and made better, while holding converse with God through the Scriptures.

“But what,” say they, “if we do not understand the things we read?” Even if you do not understand the

contents, your sanctification in a high degree results from it. However, it is impossible that all these things should alike be misunderstood; for it was for this reason that the grace of the Holy Spirit ordained that tax-gatherers, and fishermen, and tent-makers, and shepherds, and goatherds, and uninstructed and illiterate men, should compose these books, that no untaught man should be able to make this pretext; in order that the things delivered should be easily comprehended by all—in order that the handicraftsman, the domestic, the widow, yea, the most unlearned of all men, should profit and be benefited by the reading. For it is not for vain-glory, as men of the world, but for the salvation of the hearers, that they composed these writings, who, from the beginning, were endued with the gift of the Holy Ghost.

3. For those without—philosophers, rhetoricians, and annalists, not striving for the common good, but having in view their own renown—if they said anything useful, even this they involved in their usual obscurity, as in a cloud. But the apostles and prophets always did the very opposite; they, as the common instructors of the world, made all that they delivered plain to all men, in order that everyone, even unaided, might be able to learn by the mere reading. Thus also the prophet spake before, when he said, “All shall be taught of God,” (Isa. liv.13). “And they shall no more say, everyone to his neighbor, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest,” (Jer. xxxi. 34). St. Paul also says, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the mystery of God,” (1 Cor. ii. 1). And again, “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,” (1 Cor. ii. 4). And again, “We speak wisdom,” it is said, “but not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to nought,” (1 Cor. ii. 6). For to whom is not the gospel plain? Who is it that hears, “Blessed are the meek; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart,” and such things as these, and needs a teacher in order to understand any of the things spoken?

But (it is asked) are the parts containing the signs and wonders and histories also clear and plain to everyone? *This* is a pretence, and an excuse, and a mere cloak of idleness. You do not understand the contents of the book? But how can you ever understand, while you are not even willing to look carefully? Take the book in your hand. Read the whole history; and, retaining in your

mind the easy parts, peruse frequently the doubtful and obscure parts; and if you are unable, by frequent reading, to understand what is said, go to someone wiser; betake yourself to a teacher; confer with him about the things said. Show great eagerness to learn; then, when God sees that you are using such diligence, He will not disregard your perseverance and carefulness; but if no human being can teach you that which you seek to know, He himself will reveal the whole.

Remember the eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia. Being a man of a barbarous nation, occupied with numerous cares, and surrounded on all sides by manifold business, he was unable to understand that which he read. Still, however, as he was seated in the chariot, he was reading. If he showed such diligence on a journey, think how diligent he must have been at home; if while on the road he did not let an opportunity pass without reading, much more must this have been the case when seated in his house; if when he did not fully understand the things he read, he did not cease from reading, much more would he not cease when able to understand. To show that he did not understand the things which he read, hear that which Philip said to him: "Understandest thou what thou readeſt?" (Acts viii. 30). Hearing this question he did not show provocation or shame: but confessed his ignorance, and said: "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (ver. 31). Since therefore, while he had no man to guide him, he was thus reading; for this reason he quickly received an instructor. God knew his willingness, He acknowledged his zeal, and forthwith sent him a teacher.

But, you say, Philip is not present with us now. Still, the Spirit that moved Philip is present with us. Let us not, beloved, neglect our salvation! "All these things are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come," (1 Cor. x. 11). The reading of the Scriptures is a great safeguard against sin; ignorance of the Scriptures is a great precipice and a deep gulf; to know nothing of the Scriptures, is a great betrayal of our salvation. This ignorance is the cause of heresies; *this* it is that leads to dissolute living; *this* it is that makes all things confused. It is impossible—I say, it is impossible, that any one should remain unbenefited who engages in persevering and intelligent reading. For see how much one parable has profited us! how much spiritual good it has done to us! For many I know have departed, bearing away abiding profit from the hearing; and if there be some who have not reaped so much benefit, still for that day on which they heard these things, they were

rendered in every way better. And it is not a small thing to spend one day in sorrow on account of sin, and in consideration of the higher wisdom, and in affording the soul a little breathing time from worldly cares. If we can effect this at each assembly without intermission, the continued hearing would work for us a great and lasting benefit.⁷⁹

Chrysostom urged his congregants to acquire for themselves copies of the Scriptures. It stands to reason that no pastor would exhort those under his care to acquire something beyond their reach:

Tarry not, I entreat, for another to teach thee; thou hast the oracles of God. No man teacheth thee as they; for he indeed oft grudgeth much for vainglory's sake and envy. Harken, I entreat you, all ye that are careful for this life, and procure books that will be medicines for the soul. If ye will not any other, yet get you at least the New Testament, the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If grief befall thee, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take thence comfort of thy trouble, be it loss, or death, or bereavement of relations; or rather dive not into them merely, but take them wholly to thee; keep them in thy mind.

This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures. We go into battle without arms, and how ought we to come off safe? Well contented should we be if we can be safe with them, let alone without them.⁸⁰

Moreover, Chrysostom embraced, in his day, the Post-Reformation Orthodox maxim that "Scripture is to be explained from Scripture."⁸¹ One needs not to peruse a great deal of studies on the Reformation to be reminded that "the constant use of Scripture to explain Scripture" was "an interpretive technique that well supported the *sola Scriptura* of the Reformation" and "one that was also characteristic of patristic and medieval exegesis."⁸²

79. Allen, *Four Discourses of Chrysostom, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, third sermon, §2–3, pp. 62–68. See *Concionis VII, de Lazaro* 3.2–3, PG 48:993–996.

80. NPNF1, vol. 13, *Homilies on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians*, Homily 9. Cf. *In Epistulam Ad Colossenses*, Homilia IX, PG 62.361–362. See also NPNF1, vol. 14, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John*, Homily 32.2. Cf. *In Joannem*, Homilia XXXII, §3, PG 59.187–188. See also NPNF1, vol. 10, *The Christian Priesthood*, Book 4, §7–8; and NPNF1, vol. 14, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John*, Homily 11.1.

81. *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*. See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 277.

82. *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard

Robert Charles Hill noted that “he [i.e., Chrysostom] is a great believer in his principle ‘Scripture interprets itself.’”⁸³ One of the best illustrations of this can be seen from his gloss on Isaiah chapter five. True to the Antiochian rejection of the tendency to use allegory as a means of interpretation, Chrysostom nonetheless recognizes when Scripture itself employs its use:

There is something else we can learn here. What sort of thing is it? It is when it is necessary to allegorize Scripture. We ourselves are not the lords over the rules of interpretation, but must pursue Scripture’s understanding of itself, and in that way make use of the allegorical method. What I mean is this. The Scripture has just now spoken of a vineyard, wall, and wine-vat. The reader is not permitted to become lord of the passage and apply the words to whatever events or people he chooses. The Scripture interprets itself with the words, “And the house of Israel is the vineyard of the Lord Sabaoth.” To give another example, Ezekiel describes a large, great-winged eagle which enters Lebanon and takes off the top of a cedar. The interpretation of the allegory does not lie in the whim of the readers, but Ezekiel himself speaks, and tells first what the eagle is and then what the cedar is. To take another example from Isaiah himself, when he raises a mighty river against Judah, he does not leave it to the imagination of the reader to apply it to whatever person he chooses, but he names the king whom he has referred to as a river. This is everywhere a rule in Scripture: when it wants to allegorize, it tells the interpretation of the allegory, so that the passage will not be interpreted superficially or be met by the undisciplined desire of those who enjoy allegorization to wander about and be carried in every direction. Why are you surprised that the prophets should observe this rule? Even the author of Proverbs does this. For he said, “Let your loving doe and graceful filly accompany you, and let your spring of water be for you alone.” Then he interprets these terms to refer to one’s free and lawful wife; he rejects the grasp of the prostitute and other woman.⁸⁴

A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 340.

83. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on the Psalms*, volume 1, p. 30 and fn. 287.

84. Duane A. Garrett, *An Analysis of the Hermeneutics of John Chrysostom’s Commentary on Isaiah 1–8 with an English Translation* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), Isaiah Chapter 5, 110–111. Cf. *Interpretatio in Isaiam prophetam*, Caput V, §3, PG 56.60. Cf. WCF 1:9.

85. FC 74, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, Homily 13.8, p. 172. Cf. *Homilies in Genesim*, Caput II, Homilia XIII, §2, PG 53.107.

86. *Ibid.*, FC 74, p. 175; PG 53.108.

And elsewhere Chrysostom declared:

Anyhow, in case by wanting to make a display of these people’s stupidity we, too, find ourselves induced to utter unseemly remarks, let’s have done with their folly and turn aside from such idiocy; let us follow the direction of Sacred Scripture in the interpretation it gives of itself, provided we don’t get completely absorbed with the concreteness of the words, but realize that our limitations are the reason for the concreteness of the language. Human senses, you see, would never be able to grasp what is said if they had not the benefit of such great considerateness.⁸⁵

He then proceeds in the same sermon to declare:

You see, despite the use of such precision by Sacred Scripture, some people have not questioned the glib words of arrogant commentators and farfetched philosophy, even to the extent of denying Holy Writ and saying the garden was not on earth, giving contrary views on many other passages, taking a direction opposed to a literal understanding of the text, and thinking that what is said on the question of things on earth has to do with things in heaven. And, if blessed Moses had not used such simplicity of expression and considerateness, the Holy Spirit directing his tongue, where would we not have come to grief? Sacred Scripture, though, whenever it wants to teach us something like this, gives its own interpretation, and doesn’t let the listener go astray. On the other hand, since the majority of listeners apply their ears to the narrative, not for the sake of gaining some profit but for enjoyment, they are at pains to take note of things able to bring enjoyment rather than those that bring profit. So, I beg you, block your ears against all distractions of that kind, and let us follow the norm (τῷ κανόνι) of Sacred Scripture.⁸⁶

Thus Chrysostom was a forerunner of Post-Reformation Orthodox views on the perspicuity and efficacy of Holy Scripture, as well as affirming Scripture to be its own best interpreter. He anticipated and rejected the later apologetic accretion of Rome’s insistence for the requirement of an infallible human magister:

Scripture says, remember, “Do not call anyone on earth your teacher.” When therefore we take an inspired book in our hands, let us concentrate, collect our thoughts and dispel every worldly thought, and let us in this manner do our reading with great devotion, with great attention so that we may be able to be led by the Holy

Spirit towards the understanding of the writings and may gain great benefit from them.⁸⁷

4. SCRIPTURE IS THE INFALLIBLE RULE OF FAITH AND JUDGE OF CONTROVERSIES

In one of his homilies on the Book of Acts, Chrysostom employs the illustration of someone wishing to convert to Christianity, but not knowing which group of Christians with which he should unite, poses the question, "I wish to be come a Christian, but I know not whom to join." This imaginary figure then states, "there is much fighting and faction among you, much confusion: which doctrine am I to choose?" Chrysostom then responds:

How shall we answer him? "Each of you" (says he) "asserts, 'I speak the truth.'" (b) No doubt: this is in our favor. For if we told you to be persuaded by arguments, you might well be perplexed: but if we bid you believe the Scriptures, and these are simple and true, the decision is easy for you. If any agree with the Scriptures, he is the Christian; if any fight against them, he is far from this rule (κανόνος). (a) "But which am I to believe, knowing as I do nothing at all of the Scriptures? The others also allege the same thing for themselves. What then (c) if the other come, and say that the Scripture has this, and you that it has something different, and ye interpret the Scriptures diversely, dragging their sense (each his own way)?" And you then, I ask, have you no understanding, no judgment? "And how should I be able (to decide)," says he, "I who do not even know how to judge of your doctrines? I wish to become a learner, and you are making me forthwith a teacher." If he say this, what, say you, are we to answer him? How shall we persuade him? Let us ask whether all this be not mere pretence and subterfuge (i.e., evasion)... "There is such a multitude of men, and they have different doctrines; this a heathen, that a Jew, the other a Christian: no need to accept any doctrine whatever, for they are at variance one with another; but I am a learner, and do not wish to be a judge" — but if you have yielded (so far as) to pronounce against (καταγινώσκειν) one doctrine, this pretext no longer has place for you. For just as you were able to reject the spurious, so here also, having come, you shall be able to prove what is profitable. For he that has not pronounced against any doctrine at all, may easily say this: but he that has pronounced against any, though he have chosen none, by going on in the same way, will be able to see what he ought to do. Then let us not make pretexts and excuses, and all will be easy. For, to show you that all this is mere excuse, answer me

this: Do you know what you ought to do, and what to leave undone? Then why do you not what you ought? Do that, and by right reason seek of God, and He will assuredly reveal it to thee.⁸⁸

Chrysostom directs him nowhere but to the Scriptures to make this determination! Notice that when such a person begins to complain as a novice that he's facing what Roman apologists and postmodern advocates today describe as the problem of hermeneutical pluralism, Chrysostom cuts through such sophistry judging it to be no more than "mere pretence and subterfuge." It is as though Chrysostom's own presuppositions anticipated the words of one in our own day to the effect that "Christians will insist that the sovereign/personal God is a talking God; that he has left a record of his words in Scripture; that we can understand those words truly, if not wholly or flawlessly."⁸⁹ To state the principle another way, we need not understand Holy Scripture exhaustively or infallibly in order to understand it sufficiently.

Elsewhere Chrysostom reminds us that "we possess an exact (precise, ἀκριβῆ) balance (ζυγὸν, scales, measurement), and square and rule (κανὼνα) for all things... Wherefore I exhort and entreat you all, disregard what this man and that man thinks about these things, and inquire from the Scriptures all these things."⁹⁰ Moreover, in another place, he tells us that "a rule (κανὼν) admits neither addition, nor subtraction, since that destroys its being a rule (κανὼν)."⁹¹ It is striking that the learned

87. FC 82, Homily 35.2, p. 305. See also NPNF1, vol. 11, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily XXXIII. Chrysostom insisted elsewhere: "We have 'not lordship over your faith', beloved, nor command we these things as your lords and masters. We are appointed for the teaching of the word, not for power, nor for absolute authority. We hold the place of counselors to advise you." NPNF1, vol. 13, *Homilies on Ephesians*, Homily 11, Ephesians 4:4–7.

88. NPNF1, vol. 11, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily 33. Cf. *In Acta apostolorum*, Homilia XXXIII, §4, PG 60.243–244.

89. D. A. Carson, *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 544.

90. NPNF1, vol. 12, *Homilies on Second Corinthians*, Homily 13. Cf. *In Secundam Ad Corinthios Epistolam Commentarius*, Homilia XIII, PG 61.496–498.

91. NPNF1, vol. 13, *Homilies on the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, Homily XII, Comments on Philippians 3:16. Cf. *In Epistolam Ad Philippenses Commentarius*, Caput III, Homilia XII, PG 62.273. Basil of Caesarea (329–379) made the same observation in his refutation of Eunomius: "For, surely, O wisest of men, the rule (κανὼν) and the norm (γνώμων), as long as they do not fall short of being the rule and the norm, do not need any supplementation for their precision. Additions are made, after all, when something is missing. But if the rule and the norm should be imperfect, there would be no justification for designating them as such." FC 122, *St. Basil of Caesarea Against Eunomius*, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz

and voluminous French Romanist author, Louis Ellies Du Pin, stated of Chrysostom that he “looks upon the Holy Scripture as the ground and rule of all the truths of Religion” and that he “exhorts all the faithful to read it exactly: and this advice he presses an infinite number of times.”⁹² Indeed, the nineteenth century biographer of Chrysostom, August Neander concurred:

Chrysostom had not derived his opinions upon points of doctrine from the secret traditions of the church, but from a study of the Bible. From his youth upwards his life and Christian views had been formed and matured by the reading of Holy Writ; and he was far from making the exposition of the inspired writings subordinate to the traditions of the Church. He considered the Scripture to be a direct and independent source of knowledge, fully sufficient of itself to determine the truths of our faith; and to this living fountain he alone referred.⁹³

The only excursion by Chrysostom into unwritten tradition is where he offers a gloss on 2 Thessalonians 2:15: “It is a tradition, seek no farther.”⁹⁴ But this passage from him cannot be adduced to prove his support for an extrabiblical source or basis for doctrine. For in the very next homily on 2 Thessalonians, he informs us what he understood the Apostle Paul to mean by such a reference: “Tradition, he says, which is through works [i.e. actions]. And this he always calls properly tradition.”⁹⁵

(Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), Book 1.5, p. 91. Cf. *Adversus Eunomium*, Liber I, §5, PG 29.513.

92. See Louis Ellies Du Pin, *A New History of Ecclesiastical Writers: Containing an Account of the Lives and Writings of the Primitive Fathers, A Judicious Abridgment and Catalogue of all their Works; with Censures Determining the Genuine and Spurious and a Judgment upon their Style and Doctrine: Also their various Editions, Together with A Compendious History of the Councils*, Volume the Third (London: Abel Swalle and Timothy Childe, 1693), 39. Du Pin (1657–1719) was eventually censured and condemned by the Archbishop of Paris in April of 1696 for bringing to light the doctrinal positions of many early church writers in contrast to Rome and for his Gallicanism.

93. August Neander, *The Life of John Chrysostom*, trans. J. C. Stapleton (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1845), 250.

94. *NPNF1*, vol. 13, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Homily IV, Comments on 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

95. *Ibid.*, Homily V, comments on 2 Thessalonians 3:6. See also H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., reprinted 1954), 321; and G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958), 20.

96. St. John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God*, trans. Monk Moses (Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2015), 119. Cf. *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt*, Caput XV, PG 52.516.

CONCLUSION

Although as a son of late fourth century Antioch John Chrysostom’s presuppositions precluded Augustinian thought on such doctrines as original sin and grace, nonetheless his views on the properties of Holy Scripture anticipated the mature reflections of the Reformation and Post-Reformation orthodox divines on the same. In this regard, he knew no patristic superior (and perhaps no equal) in his day if this judgment is to be rendered in the light of his literary remains alone. And to be sure, this review has only scratched the surface of his testimony to this end.

At the end of his life, having been driven into exile by imperial edict, weak and sick in body from one journey after another in a dangerous climate and equally dangerous localities, existing everywhere there under the threat of Isaurian raiders who were engaged in the pillaging and murder of all in their path, his health continued to deteriorate due in large part to the cruelty of his military escort who held him captive. He wrote what was to be his last treatise, *On the Providence of God*. Even then, he included therein a response to an accusation against the Scriptures that we hear from certain quarters in our own day:

Tell me, how many people have been scandalized by the Scriptures? From them, how many heresies have derived the pretext for their own existence? Therefore, on account of those who were scandalized, should the Scriptures have been blotted out, or never have been given to begin with? Not at all! Rather, they should most certainly have been given, on account of those who would reap profit from them. As for those who are scandalized—again I will not stop saying the same things—let them impute the scandals to themselves. Those who were to derive exceedingly great profit from the Scriptures would have been wronged if the senselessness and heedlessness of the others had deprived them of this benefit from receiving the Scriptures.⁹⁶ ■