

## “Let None Desert the Church on My Account” Some Inconsistencies Regarding the Chrysostomic Vision on the Unity of the Church<sup>1</sup>

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*By comparing St. John Chrysostom's statements on Church unity after his dismissal, one can notice serious inconsistencies between the texts written by John himself and the statements attributed to him by Palladius of Helenopolis, who attempted to attenuate the outcome of the Johannite schism. In fact, the discrepancies are considerable and the Chrysostomic epistles addressed to the oriental bishops (85-90) imply that St. John encouraged the schism.*

**Keywords:** *John Chrysostom, Palladius of Helenopolis, Johannite schism, Chrysostomic epistles, Arsacius, Atticus of Constantinople, Ecclesiology*

Patristic Theology has always been a common reference for the main Christian confessions, even though they have perceived different specific emphases, authors, works, or teachings contained therein. While the Orthodox Church claims to have preserved and cultivated a culture centered on the patristic heritage, the Roman Catholic Church has recovered and transmitted the texts in fundamental patristic collections (I would only mention the works of Caesar Baronius, Giovanni Domenico Mansi, Jacques Paul Migne) while to the Protestant theologians must be given the credit for critically researching and addressing in an academic way the relevance of patristic writings.

Characterizing the 20th century patristic revival Charles Kannengiesser underlines two main features:

the sheer comprehensiveness of the discipline, and its expanded social dimension. The first feature, comprehensiveness, allowed scholars to define patristics in a new way marked essentially by academic professionalism. The second feature, social extension, involved patristics breaking out of its former clerical and theological ghetto and extending its appeal to new categories of scholars. It entered into collaboration with other disciplines and achieved rec-

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Katherin Papadopoulos for her valuable comments on a first draft of this paper and for the translation review.

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ognition in secular universities. [...] Thus, out of its ecclesiastical past, patristics entered the realm of professional academia.<sup>2</sup>

For the Orthodox Church Patristic Theology represents more than a source of knowledge and is considered to be an objective manifestation of the dynamic aspect of the Holy Tradition. Therefore, the patristic writings are listed among the eight “sources” of this kind of Divine Revelation, along with the symbols of faith, the dogmatic explanations, canonical collections, liturgical books etc.

However, before it developed as an academic discipline, following the manuscript tradition, the exact identity of the author, and rendering in a context more accurate to the historical truth of the texts of the Holy Fathers, Patristic Theology had mainly an apologetic purpose. Thereupon all confessions have instrumentalized patristic texts according to their needs, and these works were regarded as a treasure of spiritual authority that can answer with absolute arguments to any subject, with sufficient conviction to overcome any difference of opinion. And when such fundamental patristic arguments were not found, they were invented.

A massive falsification of patristic sources was discovered by the participants at the 7th Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 787), the iconoclasts relying on dubious texts that circulated under the authority of Holy Fathers (pseudepigraphs), or were abusively used, truncated or taken out of context to serve their own doctrinal visions. Consequently, the participants at the Nicaea Council analyzed the patristic fragments

through the historical-critical method in order to highlight the truth, and to show that they treat patristic testimonies with great earnestness and competence. The contextual principle is also used constantly and it is sometimes confirmed by archaeological and chronological material.<sup>3</sup>

That is why we could say that the origins of patristic research can be identified quite early, by the end of the eighth century.

Beyond the confessional stereotypes that have crystallized and perpetuated over time in the field of patristics, notable progress has been made in the modern research. For example, a synthesis of this converging evolution of the various directions of approach relevant to the personality of St. John Chrysostom and his teachings is the volume of Adolf Martin Ritter, *Studia Chrysostomica*,<sup>4</sup> where the 13 studies of the illustrious professor at Heidelberg

<sup>2</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, “The Future of patristics”, in: *Theological Studies* 52 (1991), p. 128, 131.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului*, vol. II, Iași, Trinitas 2000, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Adolf Martin Ritter, *Studia Chrysostomica. Aufsätze zu Weg, Werk und Wirkung des Johannes Chrysostomos (ca. 349–407)*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck 2012.

reflect the newer positions of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Patristics, noting their tendencies to reach a common vision.

Unfortunately, the Orthodox research still does not dare to approach the patristic literature in an analytical way, and when certain contradictions arise, whether they are only apparent or profound, it is preferable to ignore the problem, either by omission or by the mystification of the obvious.

The need for such investigations is all the more necessary, as there has always been a temptation to distort the truth by adapting it to the needs of the moment or subordinating it to an emotional discourse. The results of these patristic researches are very important because the ecclesiastical history has inherited a strong tendency to distort the reality and to mystify hagiography, which is

infiltrated today more and more by false piety, by a false spirituality, by a feigned holiness which is easily detected due to the sentimental excesses, due to the asceticism's dismissal, due to the adogmatic pietism centered on itself...<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the stake in knowing these details becomes an imperative if we take into account the fact that

the ahistorical self-generated lie of the pseudo-agiographic rhetoric structures has thus achieved its purpose: poisoning the Church's life with a pseudo-belief, with a pseudo-devotion crystallized in particular manners of speech and behavior, or so-called rules of spirituality.<sup>6</sup>

### The Chrysostomic case. Background

Such a case of distortion of the patristic vision that requires clarification is St. John Chrysostom's attitude towards the schism of Constantinople, which began after the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 404. On that day he left the capital under military escort for a seventy-day-long journey to the place of his exile in Armenia,<sup>7</sup> “the most desolate place in the world, in Cucusus”.<sup>8</sup> After a short stop in Nicaea, the bishop arrived on September 20<sup>th</sup> in this small town situated in the Taurus Mountains, about 1,000 kilometres away from the capital. Here St. John resided until the summer of 407 A.D., when he was sent into a new exile, this time to Pityontis, on the eastern shore of the Black

<sup>5</sup> Agapie Corbu, “Studiu introductiv”, in: Chiril de Schitopolis, *Viețile pustnicilor Palestinei*, trans. Agapie Corbu, s.l., 2013, p. XXVII.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXIX.

<sup>7</sup> Anne-Marie Malingrey, “O viață, o prietenie, o corespondență și două mesaje din exil”, in: Ioan I. Ică jr. (ed.), *Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur. Scrisori din exil*, Sibiu, Deisis 2008, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Chrys., *ep.* CIX, PG 52, 667.

Sea in today's Abkhazia. Exhausted by forced marches he died on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 407 near Comana.<sup>9</sup>

The inconsistencies or contradictions that we are going to consider refer to the Chrysostomic vision of maintaining the unity of the Church after his submission in the summer of 404 A.D., as is apparent on the one hand from his letters from Cucusus and from Palladius' account on the other, which gives us a series of accounts of St. John on this subject. Orthodox tradition based on Palladius conception upholds St. John Chrysostom as a proponent of church unity even in the midst of the tumult caused by his deposition. But as I will demonstrate below, John's own words would contradict this.

### *The schism*

Immediately after Chrysostom's second expulsion, a devastating fire ravaged the capital in which both the cathedral and the Senate house burned down. The supporters of St. John were held accountable for these destructive acts, and therefore their arrest and punishment were ordered. However, Sozomen's account suggests that the prefect's investigation into identifying the arsonists was more of a pretext for a wave of intimidating actions directed against the clergy that remained faithful to the exiled bishop:

Other officers were commissioned to arrest all the bishops and clerics who had favored the cause of John, and to imprison them in Chalcedon. Those citizens who were suspected of attachment to John were sought out and cast into prison, and compelled to pronounce anathema against him.<sup>10</sup>

The investigation of the defendants was accompanied by numerous violent acts committed by the secular authorities and the clergy hostile to the great hierarch as they had not hesitated to use armed force, even when they scattered John's partisans on Easter night (April 16/17, 404 A.D.). In spite of numerous investigations, humiliations, deportations and tortures, the authorities reached no conclusions, and after two months, on August 29, 404, they decided to allow some of St. John's supporters to return.<sup>11</sup>

Only a few days after the bishop's expulsion, a new bishop of Constantinople was appointed and installed. It was the brother of Bishop Nec-

<sup>9</sup> A.-M. Malingrey, "O viață, o prietenie", p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> Soz., *h.e.*, VIII, 22, PG 67, 1573; English translation in: Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, New York, Christian literature Co. 1887, p. 413.

<sup>11</sup> *CTh.* 16, 2, 37 (404 aug. 29); English translation in: *The Theodosian Code and Novels and Sirmondian Constitutions*, a translation with commentary, glossary, and bibliography by Clyde Pharr, London, Oxford University Press 1952, p. 446.

tarius, Arsacius, who could not rise up to this high calling, “a man with less power of speech than a fish, and of action than a frog”,<sup>12</sup> and the crowds of scandalized Christians continued the public protests, which forced the imperial authorities to issue new edicts in order to compel those who were not in communion (with Arsacius) to be so.<sup>13</sup>

Under the pretext of the exile of St. John Chrysostom, the choices of the masses “become more polarized, the groups delineate more and more rigidly and formally, without compromise or middle way”.<sup>14</sup> It is very interesting that in this case the antagonism is not created between Christians and pagans or between “Orthodoxy” and “Heresy”, but between two factions that share the same faith. The split is caused, on the one hand, by a difference in perception of the role of the bishop in late antique society and, on the other hand, by the non-canonical nature of the deposition of St. John and the imposition of communion with his declared enemies.

The magnitude of the riots and the variety of the social strata involved in the events that followed the deportation of St. John are attested by legal documents kept in the Theodosian Code, where we find punitive provisions and attempts to end the street tensions by making the slave-owners responsible for the public unrest. Likewise, members of various professional associations in the capital were intimidated with severely damaging fines “of 50 pounds (about 16 kg) of gold for those of their number who shall be discovered to participate in these illicit assemblies”.<sup>15</sup>

Another law, published on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 404, referred to the clergy and sought to impose communion with the new archbishop of Constantinople:

Governors of provinces shall be admonished that assemblies shall be forbidden as illicit if such assemblies are held by persons who rely on the religion of the orthodox churches, but spurn the sacrosanct churches and attempt to convene elsewhere. Persons who dissent from the communion of Arsacius, Theophilus, and Porphyrius, Most Reverend Bishops of the sacred law, shall undoubtedly be driven from the Church.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue concerning the Life of St. John Chrysostom*, XI, trans. Herbert Moore, London–New York, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1921, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91-92.

<sup>14</sup> Andrei Cornea, *Ecclesiocrația. Mentalități culturale și forme artistice în epoca romano-bizantină (300-800)*, București, Teora 1998, p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> *CTh.* 16, 4, 5; *The Theodosian Code*, p. 450.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

Surprisingly, the death of Eudoxia, on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 404 – either after a miscarriage<sup>17</sup> or a domestic violence episode<sup>18</sup> – not only failed to put an end to the conflict but, from the point of view of the Johannites, it actually constituted the indisputable proof of the iniquity committed against their bishop. Therefore, the Empress's death fed those *tumultuosa conventicula* to whom the decrees of Arcadius referred; he had to restore order by force, while continuing to support Arsacius until his death (November 11, 405). Only four months later, on March 6, 406, another famous enemy of St John, “a priest named Atticus, who had taken an active part in the schemes against John”,<sup>19</sup> was installed as the archbishop of Constantinople, and so the tensions within the Christian community were perpetuated. Being himself a monk subordinated to Archimandrite Isaac, Atticus worked closely with him to reconcile the clergy of Constantinople with the monastic communities, and after Isaac's death he confirmed Dalmatius as their leader.<sup>20</sup>

The two enthronements were accompanied by extensive attempts to obtain their recognition as legitimate bishops of Constantinople, but this aim was very difficult to achieve as long as St. John was still alive.

Palladius of Helenopolis mentions in his *Dialogue* a provision in this regard that concerned the clergy:

The edict against the bishops contained the following threat: “If any of the bishops does not communicate with Theophilus and Porphyrius and Atticus,<sup>21</sup> let him be expelled from the Church, and deprived of his personal property”.<sup>22</sup>

A similar document was also issued against laymen who refused communion with Atticus:

Those in high position are to be deprived of their official dignities, soldiers are to lose their girdles, the common people are to be heavily fined, and submit to banishment.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See: Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, University of California Press 1982, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore of Tremithus, *On the life, the exile and the sufferings of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople*, XXIX, PG 47, lxxxiii. However, this seventh-century biography shows numerous chronological inconsistencies and is not one of the most credible sources on the life of St. John Chrysostom.

<sup>19</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, XI, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> Nicolas Costas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: homilies 1-5, texts and translations*, Leiden, Brill 2003, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps there is a confusion made by Palladius, and indicates Atticus instead of Arsacius.

<sup>22</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, XI, p. 91; PG 47, 37: „Εἴ τις οὐ κοινωνεῖ τῶν ἐπισκόπων Θεοφίλω καὶ Πορφύριω καὶ Ἀττικῷ, τῆς μὲν Ἐκκλησίας ἐκβαλέσθω, τῆς δὲ ἰδίας τῶν πραγμάτων οὐσίας ῥιπατέσθω”.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91-92. The text summarises the edicts from *CTh.* 16, 4, 4 §i 16, 4, 5.

The persecution extended beyond the borders of Constantinople and spread into Asia Minor and Syria where anti-Johannite bishops were installed: Victor in Ephesus and Porphyrius in Antioch; while some supporters of St. John were overpowered by this demonstration of force, others organized themselves into a distinct entity, identified with the group of the Johannites, and initiated the “Johannite Schism”.<sup>24</sup>

Peter van Nuffelen distinguishes three groups into which the Church of Constantinople was divided, which implicitly existed in the provinces of Asia Minor and, in particular, in Antioch. These factions were:

1. St. John’s enemies, grouped around Arsacius and Atticus, who enjoyed the support of the monks led by Abbot Isaac – one of the main accusers of John at the Synod of the Oak;
2. St. John’s partisans who accepted communion with Arsacius or Atticus;
3. The Johannites schismatics who refused communion with the bishops imposed by secular authority and who, like the heretics, gathered for religious services outside of the city walls.<sup>25</sup>

### *The two Johannite factions*

The so-called schismatics are the ones who refused communion with Theophilus and the bishops who deposed St. John Chrysostom at the Synod of the Oak, and subsequently also denounced the communion with Arsacius and Atticus, the “illegitimate” successors to the throne of the bishop of Constantinople (group 3 above).

After Arsacius was elected bishop of the capital, benefiting from imperial support, St. John’s opponents swiftly retaliated, seeking to destroy the budding opposition as soon as possible. Alongside the investigation aimed at identifying the arsonists of the cathedral, the leaders of this resistance movement were also being pursued. Consequently, the faithful followers of St. John – bishops, clerics, deaconesses, laymen – were targeted by numerous inquiries, and eventually they were deprived of goods, sent to prison or deported to various provinces of the Empire in order to disband the Johannite group.

Paladius recalls in his *Dialogue* several cases of Johannite bishops who had been punished and sent into exile.<sup>26</sup> Another series of close collaborators of St. John, who were either investigated or managed to avoid persecution, is mentioned in the Chrysostomic letters and deserves more rigorous research.

<sup>24</sup> Peter van Nuffelen, “Palladius and the Johannite Schism”, in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64 (1/2013), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, XX, p. 174-179.



The state of schism and the resistance of the Johannites was also encouraged by the Western standpoint on the deposition and exile of St. John Chrysostom. At the suggestion of Pope Innocent (†417), Emperor Honorius wrote a letter in which he urged his brother to find a peaceful solution, proposing to convene a council in Thessalonica in order to analyze and validate, if necessary, the decisions of the Synod of the Oak. Against the backdrop of political tensions caused by Stilicho's military actions in Illyricum,<sup>27</sup> Honorius's envoys were subjected to torture, and remained imprisoned in Thrace for several months in 406, after which they were released.<sup>28</sup> The Western intervention was interpreted by the Constantinopolitan court as a serious interference, while the Westerners considered the Oriental gesture a sufficient reason for breaking communion with Atticus.<sup>29</sup>

The Johannites who accepted communion (group 2 above) are cursorily mentioned by the same Palladius when he summarises the situation of the rest of St. John's supporters saying that

As to the rest of the bishops in communion with John, some lost heart altogether, and communed with Atticus, and were transferred to other Churches, in Thrace; others are lost to sight.<sup>30</sup>

The pressure exerted by the authorities, the constant threats of "overthrow, confiscation of wealth, imprisonment, and the like"<sup>31</sup> led some Johannites to succumb and accept communion with Arsacius a few months after St. John's deportation, and a significant number of clergy rejoined the Church after the death of the great hierarch on September 14<sup>th</sup> 407, and entered into communion with Atticus by dint of the general amnesty granted by the opponents of the Johannites.

Dating to a letter addressed by Bishop Synesius of Cyrene to Theophilus of Alexandria<sup>32</sup> on January 15-20, 412 A.D., in which was requested the rehabilitation of Alexander initially ordained by St. John as the bishop of Basilioupolis in Bitinia, due to the amnesty given three years previously,<sup>33</sup> Peter van Nuffelen believes that there was a massive reintegration agreement

<sup>27</sup> John Hugo Wolfgang Gideon Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*, Oxford, Clarendon 1990, p. 227.

<sup>28</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, IV, p. 28-31.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society. From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, New-York, Oxford University Press 2001, p. 500-501.

<sup>30</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, XX, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> Chrys., *ep.* XXIX, PG 52, 627.

<sup>32</sup> Denis Roques, *Études sur la correspondance de Synésius de Cyrène*, Brussels, Peeters 1989, p. 47-64 apud P. van Nuffelen, "Palladius and the Johannite Schism", p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Synes., *ep.* LXVI, PG 66, 1409: "τοῦτὶ μὲν ἔτος ἤδη τρίτον ἐξήκει μετὰ τὴν ἀμνηστίαν καὶ τὰς διαλλαγὰς".



for the Johannites after the death of their illustrious bishop, which came into force sometime between mid-408 and the end of 409.<sup>34</sup>

Writing the *Dialogue* relatively shortly after John’s death, before the amnesty granted to the Johannites, Palladius tries to mitigate the schismatics’ resistance by invoking a call for unity St. John Chrysostom had supposedly made himself. While waiting for the outcome of the Synod of the Oak, the hierarch said goodbye to the still loyal bishops, urging them “inspired by the (Holy) Ghost” [ἐμπνευσθεῖς τῷ πνεύματι]:

Pray for me, brethren, and, if you love Christ, let none desert the Church of which he is in charge on my account [ἐμοῦ ἕνεκεν μή τις ἀπολείπη τὴν ἐαυτοῦ ἐκκλησίαν]; for like the writer of the words, “I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is at hand” (2 Tim 4:6). And I shall endure much persecution, and depart from this life, I see. For I know the cunning of Satan; he can no longer bear the annoyance of my invectives against him. The Lord have mercy upon you. Remember me in your prayers.<sup>35</sup>

Palladius insists on this subject and some phrases further interrupts the lamentation of the bishops and lets St. John resume the exhortation:

Say no more, brother, only remember what I said; do not desert your Churches [τὰς ἐκκλησίας ὑμῶν μὴ ἀφῆτε]. The teaching of-fice did not begin with me, nor did it come to an end in me<sup>36</sup>.

The peculiar situation of the Johannites is underlined by the dilemma of Bishop Eulisius of Apamea in Bithynia, who points out that:

It is inevitable, if we keep our Churches, that we shall be forced to commune with them and to sign (your sentence of condemnation). [ἀναγκασθῆναι καὶ κοινωνῆσαι καὶ ὑπογράψαι].<sup>37</sup>

The reaction of St. John is unexpectedly vehement:

Commune with them, lest you rend the Church; but do not sign. For my conscience is clear of any thought deserving my deposition. [Κοινωνήσατε μέν, ἵνα μὴ σχίσσητε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ὑπογράψητε δέ· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐμαυτῷ σύνοιδα ἄξιον καθαιρέσεως ἐννοήσας].<sup>38</sup>

Palladius’ ability to skillfully insert the eirenic exhortations of the great hierarch in the critical moments of the discussion indicates a subtle attempt to change the tone. Beyond expressing St. John’s clear desire for the Church’s

<sup>34</sup> P. van Nuffelen, “Palladius and the Johannite Schism”, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, VIII, p. 66; PG 47, 27.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 67; PG 47, 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*; PG 47, 28.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

unity to be preserved, transferring the responsibility for the schism to his enemies, these passages indicate the need for a reconciliation of the Johannites with the Church, while the last text provides the minimum criterion that must to be considered in order to accept the communion with Theophilus, Arsacius or Atticus: to firmly refuse to sign his conviction.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time Palladius creates a contrast between St. John Chrysostom's exhortation to unity and the attitude of Theophilus, whom he reproaches through the voices of bishops Lupicinus, Demetrius and Eulisius in the same episode

Overthrow not the estate of the Church, and rend not the Church, for whose sake God from above entered into flesh. As it appears that by your disorderly action you are overthrowing the canons of the 318 bishops at Nicaea, and are trying a case beyond your boundaries, do you cross over to us, that we may first hear what you have to say, in this city where good laws prevail.<sup>40</sup>

The enthusiasm for a united Church is resumed by St. John in Palladius' account even before the second exile, when before giving himself up to the tribune Lucius, he addresses Olympia and the group of close believers:

What I want to ask you is this: let no one dis sever you from the goodwill you have always borne to the Church; and whoever succeeds me, if he be brought forward for ordination not by his own wish, and without place-hunting, with the approval of all, bow your heads to him, as you have done to John. The Church cannot exist without a bishop.<sup>41</sup>

St. John's steadfastness is impressive, or rather Palladius, through the voice of the great bishop, proves this point. The texts underline Chrysostom's readiness to accept a successor at the head of the Church, who cannot deny its eminently hierarchical structure even when it is deprived of its bishop, and reflect Palladius' intention to join in the official Church through communion, without subscribing to the condemnations made by Theophilus, Aca-cius, Antioch and Severian.

The fact that the sources describing the situation created in Constantinople and the Church of Asia and Syria are exclusively Johannite makes

<sup>39</sup> P. van Nuffelen, "Palladius and the Johannite Schism", p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, VIII, p. 68-69; PG 47, 28: "Μὴ κατάλυε τὰ πράγματα τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ μὴ σχίζε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, δι' ἣν ὁ Θεὸς εἰς σάρκα κατήλθεν. εἰ δὲ ἀτακτῶν καταλύεις τοὺς ἐν Νικαίᾳ κανόνας τῶν τῆς ἐπισκόπων καὶ ὑπερόριον δικάζεις δίκην," σὺ πέρασον πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν εὐνομούμενην πόλιν".

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, X, p. 86-87; PG 47, 35: "Τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ παρακαλῶ μὴ τις ὑμῶν ἀνακοπῇ τῆς συνήθους εὐνοίας τῆς περὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ὅς ἂν ἁκονάχθῃ ἐπὶ τὴν χειροτονίαν, μὴ ἀμφιβατεύσας τὸ πρᾶγμα, κατὰ συναίνεσιν τῶν πάντων, κλινάτε αὐτῷ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑμῶν ὡς Ἰωάννην. Οὐ δύναται γὰρ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἄνευ ἐπισκόπου εἶναι".

it very difficult to reconstruct a realistic image of the schism produced by the exile of St. John. Even so, we can admit that some bishops accepted the conditions of this amnesty and were transferred to other churches after they were brought back from exile.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the visible difference, we can say that the two factions of the Johannite group did not occupy contrary positions, but adopted diverse ways in order to carry forward the inheritance entrusted to them by the great bishop. If the so-called “schismatics” opposed with all their strength any abusively and non-canonically installed bishop on the throne occupied legally by St. John, the position of the Johannites who opted for accepting the communion with Arsacius and Atticus must be seen not a weakness or betrayal, but rather as the fulfillment of the last words addressed to them by the venerable preacher before the exile.

### **The Johannite Schism from the perspective of Chrysostomic correspondence**

Of course, this Chrysostomic exhortation must be read in that particular context, under the pressure of those circumstances, and determined by Palladius’ personal agenda, as he was interested in his rehabilitation and other deportees or prisoners, although St. John’s message – one he regularly delivered in the extant epistolary corpus – is quite different. There are the 240 letters written during his exile at Cucusus, namely 1 in Constantinople, 2 in Nicaea, 2 in Caesarea in Cappadocia, 5 on the road from Caesarea to Cucusus, 140 in Cucusus, 8 in Arabissus and 82 other pieces which don’t provide any indication as to where they were written. Regarding the date of the letters, 114 were written in 404, 12 in the range 404-405, 39 in 405, 1 in 405 or 406, 46 in 406, 1 in 407, and another 18 written sometime during 404-407.<sup>43</sup>

Recent research has shown that these texts constitute a collection of epistles grouped and selected to serve a purpose,<sup>44</sup> and among many others they could be meant as an ideological support for “schismatics”, presenting the religious situation in a favorable light to the Johannite community. Considering this premise, although there is no doubt about the authenticity of

<sup>42</sup> P. van Nuffelen, “Palladius and the Johannite Schism”, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Robinson Coleman-Norton, “The Correspondence of S. John Chrysostom (With Special Reference to His Epistles to Pope S. Innocent I)”, in: *Classical Philology* 24 (3/1929), p. 280. See also: Roland Delmaire, “Les ‘lettres d’exil’ de Jean Chrysostome: études de chronologie et de prosopographie”, in: *Recherches Augustiniennes* 25 (1991), p. 71-180, and Wendy Mayer, “The ins and outs of the Chrysostom letter collection: New ways of looking at a limited corpus”, in: Bronwen Neil and Pauline Allen (eds.), *Collecting Early Christian Letters: From the Apostle Paul to Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2015, p. 129-153.

<sup>44</sup> W. Mayer, “The ins and outs”, p. 129.

the letters, their content must be regarded with a slight reservation, precisely because only certain pieces of the Chrysostomic vast correspondence have been preserved and transmitted, namely those compatible with the interests of the Johannites and favoring the scission. In none of these epistles is there any actual exhortation to accept communion with the opponents of St. John. Quite to the contrary.

Thus, even before being sent into his second exile, in his first letter to Pope Innocent St. John presents the situation of the Church of Constantinople in very dark terms, describing a massive division that can affect the whole Orient and even the whole of Christianity:

What is one to say to the disorders in the other Churches? For the evil did not stop even here but made its way to the east. For as when some evil humor is discharged from the head, all the other parts are corrupted, so now also these evils, having originated in this great city as from a fountain, confusion has spread in every direction, and clergy have everywhere made insurrection against bishops, there has been schism between bishop and bishop, people and people, and will be yet more; every place is suffering from the throes of calamity, and the subversion of the whole civilized world. Having been informed then of all these things, my lords, most honourable and devout, exhibit the courage and zeal which becomes you, so as to put a stop to this great assault of lawlessness which has been made upon the Churches.<sup>45</sup>

Deeply affected by the maneuverings of Acacius of Beroea (Aleppo), Severian of Gabala (Jabala), Antioch of Ptolemaida and the aggressive manner in which they had disrupted the celebration of the Resurrection, St. John avoids making it known that he had lost the imperial support by employing a vague and unlikely formula, “all this was done against the will of our most devout emperor”.<sup>46</sup> Although the pressure exerted by political factors is not mentioned, it is implied in the very extent of the schism, which he described in medical terms as a “humor” that infests the provinces of the East, “ravaging everyone”.

Either he understands the unexpected proportions that the split would eventually take, or he calls for a rhetorical artifice, for St. John the conflict has a global resonance, and the stake for resolving the crisis is the peace of all the Churches in the world:

For the contest now before you has to be fought on behalf of nearly the whole world, on behalf of Churches humbled to the ground,

<sup>45</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *First Letter to Innocent, Bishop of Rome*, English translation in: P. Schaff (ed.): *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series*, vol. 9: *Chrysostom: On the Priesthood, Ascetic Treatises, Select Homilies and Letters, Homilies on the Statutes*, New York 1889, p. 311-312.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

of people dispersed, of clergy assaulted, of bishops sent into exile,  
of ancestral laws violated.<sup>47</sup>

The idea is resumed in several other epistles drafted throughout 404 when he accuses his opponents that “they have brought disorder into the whole world and have confounded the Churches”,<sup>48</sup> “and have filled up almost the entire world with so many scandals”.<sup>49</sup>

As in the first letter addressed to Pope Innocent, St. John identifies the source of the crisis as that particular group of opponents in the capital, who caused the schism as he wrote to Arabius:

You must pray not only for Constantinople, but for the whole world.  
Yes, the evil began there, in Constantinople, but it poured out like  
a stream of wickedness and defiled the churches all over the earth.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, the great hierarch addresses the bishops who had remained faithful, assuring them that:

What you are doing is not limited to me, but it passes over to all  
the Churches. That not one city is ravaged, but two, three, and  
even whole nations all over the earth.<sup>51</sup>

Contrary to Palladius’ testimony that emphasizes the Chrysostomic urge to unity and communion, as well as the readiness to accept a successor at the head of the Church of Constantinople, the letters of St. John repeatedly condemn those who accepted communion with Arsacius, whom he accuses of usurping the episcopal throne, challenging the canonicity and legitimacy of his election as the bishop of the oriental capital:

I also heard of that babbler, of Arsacius, whom the queen had placed on the episcopal seat, that he had persecuted all the brethren who did not want to have communion with him, many of whom he threw into prison for my sake. He has the appearance of a sheep, but he is a wolf; he has the image of a bishop, but he is adulterous. Because the woman who lives with another man while her husband is alive is adulterous. So this is also adultery, not a carnal adultery, but a spiritual one, whereas I am alive, he took from me the throne of the Church.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Idem, *Second Letter to Innocent, Bishop of Rome*, p. 312-313.

<sup>48</sup> Chrys., *ep. LXXXIX*, PG 52, 655.

<sup>49</sup> Chrys., *ep. LXXXVIII*, PG 52, 654. See also: *ep. LXXXVII*, PG 52, 654.

<sup>50</sup> Chrys., *ep. CXXI*, PG 52, 675.

<sup>51</sup> Chrys., *ep. CLIII*, PG 52, 702.

<sup>52</sup> Chrys., *ep. CXXV*, PG 52, 685. This letter is considered not authentic, but we still mention it because it is related to factional propaganda circulating around John’s exile. See: W. Mayer, “The ins and outs”, p. 133-134.

Therefore, St. John Chrysostom seeks to mobilize his supporters to resistance, appreciating and encouraging those who earnestly stand for his cause, while blaming those who have entered into communion with Arsacius, as evidenced by the group of letters addressed to the Palestinian bishops Lucius, Maris, Eulogios, John and Theodosius.<sup>53</sup> In the first two epistles St. John creates a strong antithesis between the courage demonstrated by the recipients and the “crowd” of those who chose to “throw themselves into the abyss” by signing the communion with Arsacius, thus enlarging the “great whirlpool of wickedness” and “the storm that troubled the Church”:

Letter 85 (To bishop Lucius)

[...] For this reason I thank you, and I do not cease to admire and bless you that in such a great whirlpool of wickednesses, when so many people threw themselves into the abyss and dashed themselves against the rocks, you have not stopped walking the right path, condemning the evil that has been done and turning your back on those who have committed it, as befits you. And for this very reason, we pray you both persist in this good ardour and show even greater zeal. For you know how big your reward will be; what kind of prizes will be, how large the crowns, when in the midst of so many people who bring disturbances, you go the opposite way and straighten the evils born from here [...] Nothing is stronger than virtue and the search for those means that fortify the churches. Therefore, having enough mindset to attract help from God, please do everything in your power to be a powerful wall for the churches around the world through this mindset.<sup>54</sup>

Letter 86 (To bishop Maris)

Your upright and steady mindset, which you had when the storm that troubled the church was at its beginning, didn't remain concealed from me. I know that even now, when evil has increased, your Reverence persists in the same ways. That is why, even from such a great distance, we send you the due greetings and bless you, and admire you, while many were throwing themselves into the abyss by committing unlawfulness against the church, you went the opposite way to the others, turning your back on those who dared this and preserving the freedom worthy of you [...].<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> The Epistles 85-89 appear to have been written at the beginning of September 404, shortly after St. John Chrysostom reached Cucusus.

<sup>54</sup> Chrys., *ep.* LXXXV, PG 52, 653.

<sup>55</sup> Chrys., *ep.* LXXXVI, PG 52, 653.

St. John Chrysostom takes his time to express his gratitude and praises “proper manliness” (ἡ προσηκούσα ἀνδρεία) with which these supporters detach themselves from those who disturb “almost everybody”, encouraging them to deny with the same zeal the communion or “fellowship” (τὸ μὴδὲν κοινόν) with those who cause the scission, an essential act for the protecting of the Church and for the restoration of peace within it:

Letter 88 (To John, bishop of Jerusalem)

I write to you and pray that you maintain even now the piety and manliness which you showed in the beginning by turning your back on those who have filled the churches with so many disturbances, and to give it an end worthy of its beginning, or rather, much brighter. For no small reward awaits you, if you turn your back, as is fitting, and if you have no fellowship with those who have brought so great a storm and have filled almost the entire world with so many scandals. This is the security of the churches, this is the wall, this your crowns and prizes.<sup>56</sup>

Letter 89 (To Theodore, bishop of Skytopolis)

And I pray that what you have done before, adorning yourself and securing the churches, you will do even now; and turn your back, with proper manliness, on those who have brought this entire disorder into the world, and have troubled the churches. For this is the beginning of the end of the storm, this is safety for the churches, this is the correction of the evil, when you, the healthy ones, turn your back on those who have done so much evil and have no fellowship with them.<sup>57</sup>

The lack of news from his close associates, that he underlines constantly in his correspondence, and the magnitude of the coercive measures taken against the Johannites have shaken for a while St. John’s hope that he will be rehabilitated, so that by the end of November 404 he stopped encouraging his supporters to resist forced communion with Arsacius, all the more so as the pressures on the clergy were becoming stronger, as suggested by the letter to Paeanius at the end of November 404:

The Palestinians and Phoenicians, as I know well, have not accepted the <bishop> sent there by our enemies nor deemed him worthy of an answer. The <people> of Aegae, as I know, and of Tarsus are ranged with them, and the <people> of Castabala here have made it clear to one of my friends that those from Constan-

<sup>56</sup> Chrys., *ep.* LXXXVIII, PG 52, 654.

<sup>57</sup> Chrys., *ep.* LXXXIX, PG 52, 655.



tinople are trying to force them to agree with their lawlessness, though they are holding out at present.<sup>58</sup>

The death of Arsacius in November 405 and the postponement of the election of a new bishop in Constantinople encouraged the Western clergy and Pope Innocent to send in the spring of 406 a delegation with letters and instructions for the organization of a council in Thessalonica in order to review the canonical condemnation issued at the Synod of the Oak. The hesitation in Constantinople and the news of the council in Thessalonica rekindled the hope of St. John Chrysostom that he would be re-established in his see. As a result, he addresses a series of epistles to the western bishops (Letters 149-161, 183-184), whom he thanks for the support and affection they had shown him, since:

Because of your love you have stirred up the whole Orient, you have won many people who love you, and many who revolt with righteous rebellion against the iniquities committed and who are with you. Please, show the same zeal to the end.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, he asks them to intervene:

Because the misfortunes are not over, but on the contrary they increase, I ask you not to weaken the fight, not to yield to the evil, but to give the cure you can as long as the wounds bleed the body of the Church.<sup>60</sup>

We note the ecumenical dimension of the Western initiative that Chrysostom emphasizes in his epistles, because the effects of their actions and the possible rehabilitation of St. John would reflect in the entire Eastern Church. The venerable hierarchy is conscious that his dismissal has divided the East, and the measures taken by his enemies against the Johannites have extended the schism into all the provinces of Asia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt.

In order to meet the efforts made, St. John also addresses the clergy of Thrace and Macedonia (letters 162-164), counting on their support and resistance to the imperial repression, which is why he praises their zeal and mobilizes them to carry on this fight further:

Great was the zeal of your love so far! I thank you for having lasted so long with your courage and you did not give in to any of those who tried to fool you. I pray that the end of your struggle will be just as beautiful.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Chrys., *ep.* CCIV, PG 52, 725. English translation in: Timothy D. Barnes and George Bevan (eds.), *The Funeral Speech for John Chrysostom*, Translated Texts for Historians 60, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press 2013, p. 142.

<sup>59</sup> Chrys., *ep.* CLVI, PG 52, 703.

<sup>60</sup> Chrys., *ep.* CLXXXIII, PG 52, 715.

<sup>61</sup> Chrys., *ep.* CLXIII, PG 52, 705.

But the election of Atticus and the seizure of the Western delegation put an end to the rehabilitation hopes that John Chrysostom might have still nurtured. However, the energy with which the venerable hierarch acted and the influence he still exerted even from the “most isolated place on earth” are impressive. For this reason, his opponents did everything possible to change the place of exile and eventually sent St. John to Pythius in a forced march which he was unable to withstand, dying on the road near Comana on September 14, 407.

## Conclusions

Reading both the letters of St. John and the *Dialogue* of Palladius of Helenopolis, there are clear discrepancies that prove a distortion of the Chrysostomic message. Thus, under the pressure of his time and personal agenda, Palladius embraces the path of moderate resistance and tries to regain his status as bishop sacrificing the vision that Chrysostom regularly transmits through the epistolary corpus. The collection of epistles preserved by the Johannites in order to serve them as ideological support must also be regarded with a slight reserve, precisely because only certain pieces of the extensive correspondence, compatible with the schismatics’ interests and favourable to the schism, were preserved and transmitted.

The contradictions between the two sets of statements could be considered first of all of a historical-philological nature and must be seen in the context in which they were made, even if theoretically they reflect the position of the same person on the same subject. But their true nature remains still to be researched.

This case is just an example which shows us how a patristic text was instrumentalised or fabricated to serve an idea, even one as noble as preserving the unity of the Church. At the same time it emphasizes the need for a profound analysis of patristic texts to determine as much as possible those specificities that reveal the authentic message of the works of the Holy Fathers. And if the discovery of truth is placed at the heart of the patristic scholars’ concerns, regardless of their confession, then patristic theology may become the binder that unites us even more on the common path of meeting Christ.