John Chrysostom’s Homilies on Hebrews: An Antiochene Christological Commentary?

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ABSTRACT. The dominant thrust of scholarly readings of Chrysostom’s Christological exegesis of Hebrews label it as being typically Antiochene. Patristic scholars like Rowan Greer and Frances Young have asserted that Chrysostom’s commentary on Hebrews has all the hallmarks of the Antiochene Christological tradition. It highlights Christ’s human achievement of obedience by progress through temptation and suffering; it stresses Christ’s human experience and condition to such an extent that one is obliged to separate the Logos from it; and focuses on the moral or virtuous Christian life rather than on the transformation of nature. The point being conveyed is that these emphases betray an Assumed-Man Christology and place Chrysostom squarely in the Antiochene Christological tradition. In response, I will attempt to demonstrate that although Chrysostom belongs to the Antiochene exegetical tradition, he does not belong to the Antiochene Christological tradition. Two critical points will be outlined from Chrysostom’s commentary on Hebrews: the personal continuity of the Logos-Son in Christ and the reality of Christ’s identification with us in his obedience, suffering, and death as being essential for our salvation. Moreover, it will be shown that Chrysostom views Christ’s identification with us as grounds for our reconciliation with God and adoption into his family. In short, I argue that Chrysostom’s understanding of the Christian life is an outworking of his unitive Christology. Chrysostom, it will be pointed out, views Christ as one divine acting subject.

KEYWORDS: John Chrysostom, Christology (Antiochene/Alexandrian perspective), Soteriology (patristic perspective), Hebrews (patristic perspective), Patristics
A Brief Survey of Scholarship on John Chrysostom’s Exegesis of Hebrews

The dominant thrust of the scholarly readings of Chrysostom’s Christological exegesis of Hebrews label it as being typically Antiochene, and hardly focus on the doctrinal framework that undergirds his preaching on the Christian life.¹ For instance, Rowan Greer’s study of Antiochene exegesis of Hebrews presupposes that Chrysostom’s exegesis as being essentially similar to his fellow pupil Theodore. He even argues that Chrysostom’s Christology is Antiochene in nature because of his emphasis on the moral aspects of the Christian life betraying his assumed Man Christology. Such a Christology underscores the co-operation of the free will of the assumed Man with the divine will of Word: “The incarnation is totally the work of God, but that work could never have been effective had not the free will of the assumed Man allied him with the divine purpose.”² Greer deduces the aforementioned conclusion from Chrysostom’s use of double predication when speaking of Christ, and artificially imposes an “assumed Man” concept wherever Chrysostom speaks of Christ’s humanity in his exegesis of Hebrews.³ Moreover, Greer contends that Chrysostom’s understanding of salvation in moral terms with its emphasis on the life of virtue affirms this idea, “Chrysostom prefers to conceive salvation in moral than metaphysical terms. That is, the perfection of man as a moral creature more than it is the transformation of his nature. Certainly, despite Chrysostom’s use of philosophical cate-

¹ This article is an adaptation of a paper that was delivered in November 2007 at the 59th Annual ETS Meeting in San Diego, California, USA.
³ For instance commenting on Chrysostom’s exegesis of Heb. 1:2ff, Greer asserts, “What Chrysostom seems to mean is that the Word is Son by nature, and the assumed Man Son by grace, and that through the incarnation there is but one Son.” Ibid., 49.
gories attendant upon the notion of mutability, he never re-
gards salvation as the divinization of man’s nature.” 4 Reading
Chrysostom’s commentary without reference to its context can
be misleading, and this is reflected in Greer’s conclusion. He
concludes that Chrysostom nowhere develops a “satisfactory
Christology” in his exegesis of Hebrews, and that much of what
he says has no “explicit basis in the text of the epistle. But one
must give him credit for attempting to preserve in more careful
language the religious insights of the text. Thus the strong dou-
ble judgment of Hebrews regarding Christ’s person finds ex-
pression in Chrysostom’s double predication.” 5

In a later publication of his work, Greer seems to have al-
tered his views slightly, admitting that there are instances in
Chrysostom’s exegesis of Hebrews where the, “absence of the
assumed Man is most severely felt,” but in doing so Chrysos-
tom, “introduces a considerable degree of confusion and obscu-
rit y into his thought.” Yet, Greer maintains that Chrysostom’s
exegesis and Christology must be viewed in reference to the
classical Antiochene exegesis presented by Theodore, and whe-
ver he departs from the Antiochene line, he does so delibera-
tely in order “to avoid controversy.” 6

Discussing Christological ideas in Greek commentaries on
Hebrews both from Alexandrian and Antiochene perspectives,
Frances Young categorizes Chrysostom’s homilies on Hebrews
as typical of the Antiochene commentaries which focus on the
theme of Christ’s human achievement of obedience by progress
through temptation and suffering. In other words, the exampla-
ry nature of Christ’s human struggle and triumph is undersco-
red in the work of salvation, in contrast to Cyril who speaks of
the pre-incarnation Logos and the post-incarnation Logos, and
not of the distinction between the Logos and Man, safeguarding

4 Ibid., 37-38.
5 Ibid., 59-60; 74.
6 Ibid., The Captain of our Salvation, A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Hebrews,
289, 291.
the unity of Christ’s person. Although the presupposition of the commentators is the Nicene Faith (viz., that Christ is ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ, and the assertion of the Λόγος ἀτρεπτὸς), where the idea of any change or improvement in the person of Christ through the incarnation was inconceivable, Young avers that Cyril concentrates on the “invincible activity of divine power, the injection of divinity into humanity, while Chrysostom underscores the exemplary power of human suffering and the achievement of human victory over sin.” Furthermore, Young points out that whereas Cyril’s anxiety to safeguard the unity of Jesus Christ, “tended to underplay the suffering apart from the physical aspects which he could attribute to the flesh alone, Chrysostom emphasizes his experience of the human condition to such an extent that he is obliged to separate the Logos from it; this is the only way he knows of safeguarding both the reality of Jesus Christ’s involvement, and the divine nature of the Logos.”

Young also finds Chrysostom’s understanding of Christ’s sacrifice for sin and his attribution of our salvation to the love of God as reflecting a Christology that is essentially Antiochene in character, in the sense that his human nature (which functions as mediator) and divine nature (as one sitting on the throne) are divided, consequently implying a division of will and purpose, and thus a division in Christ’s person. She concludes:

Chrysostom wants to attribute salvation to the love of God dealing with sin, and yet he assumes that the sacrifice offered by the Man, Christ, propitiates the wrath of God, the Father. Father and Son are apparently divided, but since he consistently speaks of the High Priesthood of Christ being a function of his Manhood, while his sitting on the throne of judgement is a function of his Divinity, the implication is an uncomfortable division between God and Man within the Person of Christ himself.

8 Ibid., 157.
9 Ibid., 159.
Essentially, Young is underscoring the point the Chrysostom’s Christology is divisive in nature and is therefore consistent with Antiochene Christology.

The aforementioned studies on Chrysostom’s exegesis of Hebrews presuppose Chrysostom’s Christology to be Antiochene in nature and study it in the light of the Antiochene Christological thought of his contemporaries, without making much qualification. Scholars like Greer and Young seem to take Chrysostom’s use of double predication when speaking of Christ’s human and divine nature as implying a division in the person of Christ, and therefore assume that his Christology is not a unitive one, in the sense of viewing the Logos-Son as single subject in Christ. Wherever Chrysostom’s Christology appears to be strongly unitive in character, it is dismissed as being obscure or confusing (Greer) or whenever he speaks of the different operations of Christ’s humanity and divinity, it is taken as lending support to a duality in Christ’s person (Young). I will demonstrate that Chrysostom’s picture of Christ, as it the emerges in his homilies in Hebrews, is a unitive one, consisting of a varied mosaic that is rich in practical theology when viewed from the perspective of the Christian life in the context of the life and faith in the Church.

**Chrysostom’s view of the Ontology and Personal Continuity of the Son in His Incarnate and Post-resurrection Existence**

In the light of the scholarly readings which portray Chrysostom’s Christology as being rather less than sure footed, even suggesting a duality in his understanding of Christ’s person and consequently viewing his soteriology as being inconsistent, my purpose here is to suggest otherwise. I propose that Chrysostom’s Christological thought is unitive: he views the Logos-Son as the single subject in Christ who entered brotherhood with humanity, identifying with us in his human nature, suffering, and death in order to make us members of one family and restore our fellowship with God.
Chrysostom’s Christological picture with reference to the ontology of the Son in Hebrews is structured by two intertwined foci: incarnation and humiliation (*kenosis*). The exegetical use of the prologue of John’s Gospel and the kenosis theme of Philippians 2 in his exposition of the first two chapters of Hebrews, suggests that he views the Christological concepts of these passages as being consonant with each other. For Chrysostom, the motif of the Word becoming flesh from the Johannine prologue is parallel to the motif of the humiliation of Christ in Phil 2:6-7, and he often blends these two themes together in his exegesis. This is apparent from his commentary on these two key Christological passages. Conflating the two ideas of the incarnation and humiliation in his commentary on Jn 1:14, he writes:

The Word became flesh and the Master took on the form of the slave. He became the Son of Man although he was the true Son of God, in order that he might make the sons of men children of God (...) He did not lower his own nature (*ιδίαν φύσιν*) by his descent, but elevated us, who had always been in dishonor and darkness, to ineffable glory.”10

The Logos, the true Son of God, descended and assumed human nature (took on the form of the slave) in order to make us God’s children and give us the privilege of divine fellowship. Likewise, in his exposition of Phil 2:6-7, Chrysostom observes:

Speaking here of his divinity, Paul no longer says, he became, he took, but he says he emptied Himself, taking the form of a ser-

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vant, being made in the likeness of men. Speaking here of his hu-
mantude he says, he took, he became. He became (εγένετο) the lat-
ter [i.e. human], he took (ελαβεν) the latter; he was (ιππρχε) the 
former [i.e. God]. Let us not then confuse or divide. There is one 
God, there is one Christ, the Son of God, when I say, “one” I 
mean a union (ενωσιν), not a confusion (συγκυσιν); the one nature 
(φύσεως) did not degenerate into the other, but was united (ημω-
μένης) with it.11

Three points in particular are noteworthy in these two passages 
which shed light on Chrysostom’s discussion of the Sonship of 
Christ in Hebrews. First, in the incarnation, the Logos descen-
ded to assume human nature without undergoing any change 
in his own nature. Second, it is apparent that Chrysostom views 
the Logos as the Christ’s personal subject because he equates 
God, Christ, and the Son of God (there is one God, there is one 
Christ, the Son of God”). Third, the Logos is viewed as the per-
son to whom being and becoming is applied, in that Chrysos-
tom distinguishes being (who the Logos is in his divinity) from 
becoming (what the Logos does in his humanity). Christ, the 
Logos-Son, did not become God or assume deity upon himself, 
because he always was (ιππρχε). Rather, the Son of God became 
man and took (ελαβεν) the form of a servant upon himself. The-
se presuppositions animate Chrysostom’s Christological exege-
sis of the first two chapters of Hebrews, where he speaks of the 
one subject Christ the Son of God, and refers to his person as 
the Word, the express image of the Father, the brightness of the 
Father’s glory, and the one who took the form of a servant (or 
slave), often distinguishing who he is from what he does.12

to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, 

12 See Ibid., Homily 1, in Hebrews, sections 2-4, NPNF 14:367-368 (PG 63.21-24).
In keeping with the personal continuity motif, Chrysostom invokes the kenosis theme to expound Heb 1:5 (“For to which of the angels did God say, ‘you are my Son, this day I begotten you.’ And again, ‘I will be his Father, and he will be my son.’”) asserting:

For these things indeed are spoken with reference also to the flesh: “I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son” — while this, “You art My Son, this day have I begotten You,” expresses nothing else than “from [the time] that God is.” For as He is said to be, from the time present (for this befits Him more than any other), so also the [word] “Today” seems to me to be spoken here with reference to the flesh. For when He hath taken hold of it, thenceforth he speaks out all boldly. For indeed the flesh partakes of the high things, just as the Godhead of the lowly (καὶ γὰρ σάρξ κοινωνεῖ τῶν ὑψηλῶν, ὡσπεροῦν καὶ ἡ θέσης τῶν ταπεινῶν). For He who disdained not to become man, and did not decline the reality, how should He have declined the expressions? (…) For [if] He Himself being God and Lord and Son of God, did not decline to take the form of a slave, much more ought we to do all things, though they be lowly.13

Chrysostom equates God, Lord, and Son of God with Christ, noting once more that being who he is, he took the form of a slave in becoming human and thus as the Son of God he partakes of the flesh in the incarnation. In this union the divine partakes of the lowly and the flesh partakes of the divine. Earlier in his commentary, Chrysostom refers to this same thought, making use of the kenotic motif again to explain who the Son is in his deity (the brightness of his Father’s glory) and what is accomplished through the incarnation. The one who now sits at the right hand of the Father is the same who partook of the flesh in his humiliation:

13 Ibid., *NPNF* 14:373 (*PG* 63.24).
Therefore just as “the form of a slave” (Phil 2:6-7) expresses no other thing that a man without variation [from human nature], so also the ‘form of God’ expresses no other thing than God (…). Having said, “Who being the brightness of His glory,” he added again, “He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty.”

The one who descended in the incarnation is the one who now sits on the throne. Furthermore, the ontological consistency of the Son in underscored from the perspective of his ministry of reconciliation and subsequent exaltation: the Son himself purged our sins and then sat down:

“By Himself,” (δι' ἑαυτοῦ) he says, “having purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” He here sets down two very great proofs of His care: first the “purifying us from our sins, then the doing it “by Himself.” And in many places, you see him making very much of this—not only of our reconciliation with God, but also of this being accomplished through the Son. For the gift being truly great, was made even greater by the fact that it was through the Son.

He illustrates the soteriological exigency of the Son’s personal continuity in the incarnation using two images. He calls the first image an ἐξοδὸν or a “going out,” where the Son himself “went out” in order to effect a reconciliation between God and humanity. The image is that of king who wishes to be reconciled with those who have offended him and are in chains outside, therefore he himself goes out of his palace to bring about this reconciliation. Commenting on Heb 1:6, on Christ as the πρωτότοκος εἰσαγάγη (firstborn who brings in), he observes:

For as in royal palaces, prisoners and those who have offended the king, stand without, and he who desires to reconcile them, does not bring them in, but himself going out discourses with them, un-

14 Ibid., NPNF 14:372 (PG 63.22).
15 Ibid., NPNF 14:373 (PG 63.24).
til having made them meet for the king’s presence, he may bring them in, so also Christ has done. Having gone out to us, that is, having taken flesh, and having discoursed to us of the King’s matters, so He brought us in, having purged the sins, and made reconciliation.\textsuperscript{16}

The other image is that of obtaining an inheritance or receiving something as a possession, and this is viewed as an \textit{εἰσέδον} or a “coming in,” where the Son is depicted as returning with human nature and thus exalting it on the throne of God:

For the saying, “and when again He brings in the First-Begotten into the world,” means this, “when he puts the world into His hand.” For when He was made known, then also He obtained possession of the whole thereof, He did not say these things concerning God the Word, but concerning that which is according to the flesh. For if according to John, “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him” (John 1:10): how is He “brought in,” otherwise than in the flesh?\textsuperscript{17}

In both these images Christ the Son is viewed as the one who “goes out” and “comes in”: in the incarnation he went out (from the Father) and entered brotherhood with us by becoming the firstborn in order to make it possible for us to become the sons of God and to enjoy divine fellowship by bringing us to glory.

Furthermore, Chrysostom capitalizes on the theme of the heavenly session of Christ and the reverence and worship that is extended to him to underscore the continuity of the Son in his pre-incarnate and post-resurrection existence. In his commentary on Hebrews 1:6, “Let all the angels worship Him,” he states that the writer underscores the superiority of Son among the hosts of heaven from the fact that he is worshiped. This adoration is extended to the ascended Son who, after assuming hu-

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., Homily 3, section 1, NPNF 14:375 (PG 63.27).

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., Cf. Homily 5, section 1, NPNF 14:388 (PG 63.45-46).
man nature in the incarnation, is now seated on the throne. Like a master who introduces someone into the house and commands all those entrusted to his care to respect and reverence him, the ascended Christ likewise receives the reverence and worship that is extended to him by all the angelic beings in heaven.\(^{18}\) The one who is the object of angelic worship cannot but be divine intrinsically. This becomes the focus of Chrysostom’s exposition in the rest of the first chapter of Hebrews. The ascended Christ who is now worshiped in heaven is the preexistent Son. This was not an external honor bestowed on him but something which belonged to him before the incarnation because he is the same person.

Although the Son is now enthroned and exalted, he had entered brotherhood with us, having assumed our nature in the incarnation, identifying with us in his suffering and death in order reconcile us with God. He who sits at the right hand of God is the humiliated Son who became our brother in order to make us the children of God. In a crucial passage Chrysostom underscores these issues and lays out the reason for the very incarnation of the Son:

He that is so great, He that is “the brightness of His glory,” He that is “the express image of His person,” He that “made the worlds,” He that “sits on the right hand of the Father,” He was willing and earnest to become our brother in all things, and for this cause did He leave the angels and the other powers, and come down to us, and took hold of us, and wrought innumerable good things. He destroyed death, He cast out the devil from his tyranny, He freed us from bondage: not by brotherhood alone did He honor us, but also in other ways beyond number. For He was willing also to become our High Priest with the Father: for he adds, “That He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God.” For this cause (he means) He took on Him our flesh, only for love (φιλανθρωπία) to man, that He might have mercy upon us. For neither is there any other cause of the economy, but this alone.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., Homily 3, section 1, NPNF 14:375 (PG 63.27-28).
For He saw us, cast on the ground, perishing, tyrannized over by death, and He had compassion on us.\textsuperscript{19}

Being who he is, the Son was willing to enter brotherhood with us in all things. He condescended in partaking of the flesh in the incarnation in order to free us from the bondage of death and to reconcile us with God to share in the fellowship of heaven as sons through his own personal mediation.

**Chrysostom’s View of the Necessity of Christ’s Solidarity with us in His Humanity, Suffering, and Death**

Chrysostom’s exposition of the motif of Christ’s entering brotherhood with us in his homilies on Hebrews reflects a soteriological thrust consistent with his incarnational thought on the prologue of John’s Gospel. In partaking of the flesh and identifying with us in his human nature, suffering and death, Christ made it possible for us to become members of God’s family. Consequently, in uniting with him in faith, we are made joint-heirs and express that reality in the practice of the Christian life. Before studying Chrysostom’s view of Christ’s experience of suffering and death, we shall briefly examine his understanding of the need for Christ’s solidarity with us in his humanity.

Christ’s oneness with us in his humanity is viewed from both incarnational and sacerdotal perspectives, themes that are closely connected in Chrysostom’s soteriology. By entering brotherhood with us, the divine Son united human nature to himself and by virtue of his ascension and exaltation raised it to glory.\textsuperscript{20} Chrysostom consistently underscores the idea that the incarnation was not an appearance but a reality: the Son of God truly entered the human realm, he partook of flesh and blood just like humans are made of flesh and blood.\textsuperscript{21} Out of divine love

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., Homily 5, sections 1-2, *NPNF* 14:389 (*PG* 63.47).
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., Homily 4, section 5, *NPNF* 14:384 (*PG* 63.59-60).
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., Homily 4, section 5, *NPNF* 14:384 (*PG* 63.59-60).
he pursued human nature and took hold of it in the incarnation in order to elevate it to heaven:

For when human nature was fleeing from Him, and fleeing far away (for we “were far off” — Ephesians 2:13), He pursued after and overtook us. He showed that He has done this only out of kindness (φιλανθρωπία), and love (αγάπη), and tender care (κηδεμονία). As then when he saith, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (c. 1:14)—he shows His extreme interest in behalf of human nature, and that God makes great account of it, so also in this place he sets it forth much more by a comparison, for he says, “He taketh not hold of angels.” For in very deed it is a great and a wonderful thing, and full of amazement that our flesh should sit on high, and be adored by Angels and Archangels, by the Cherubim and the Seraphim.22

Although we have been given the privilege of being made the brothers of Christ and therefore the sons of God, Chrysostom (as always), safeguards the distinction between the Son and us as sons by noting who Christ is in relation to the Father and what he does in his function as the one who entered brotherhood with us. The difference between him and us is made clear by the fact that he possessed that dignity by nature. In order to bring many sons to glory and make us members of the same family (2:10-11), the Son of God became our brother. The divine Son united us as members “of one” (ἐξ ἕνος) family. Chrysostom writes:

Moreover “He” is of the Father, as a true Son, that is, of His substance (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ); “we,” as created, that is, brought out of things that are not, so that the difference is great. Wherefore he says, “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (v. 12), “saying, I will declare thy name to my brothers.” For when He clothed Him-

22 Ibid., Homily 5, section 1, NPNF 14:388 (PG 63.46).
self with flesh, He clothed Himself also with the brotherhood, and at the same time came in the brotherhood (ἀδελφόν).\(^{23}\)

In distinguishing who Christ is by nature and what he does in his function as our brother, Chrysostom safeguards the unity of Christ’s person by pointing out the ontological distinction between him and us. Being of the same substance as the Father, he clothed himself with brotherhood in order to make us by grace what he is by nature.

Moreover, in Chrysostom’s view, Christ entering brotherhood with us and his function as our high priest are two aspects of one soteriological picture. The corresponding motifs of adoption and reconciliation are viewed as complementary. As the Son he gives us the privilege of brotherhood with him, and in his function as our high priest he reconciles us with God having purified us from our sins:

For the Son is a faithful High Priest, able to deliver from their sins those whose High Priest He is. In order then that He might offer a sacrifice able to purify us, for this cause He has become man. Accordingly he added, “in things pertaining to God,” that is, for the sake of things in relation to God. We were become altogether enemies to God, (he would say) condemned, degraded, there was none who should offer sacrifice for us. He saw us in this condition, and had compassion on us, not appointing a High Priest for us, but Himself becoming a High Priest. In what sense He was “faithful,” he added [viz.], “to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”\(^{24}\)

The Son himself became our high priest through the economy of the incarnation out of divine compassion, in order to restore fellowship with the Father who was alienated from us. He was not only willing to become man and identify with us in his humanity, but also acts as our high priest representing us before

\(^{23}\) Ibid., Homily 4, section 4, *NPNF* 14:384 (*PG* 63.41).

\(^{24}\) Ibid., Homily 5, section 2, *NPNF* 14:389 (*PG* 63.47).
God, “Even the mere willing to become man was a proof of great care and love; but now it is not this alone, but there are also the undying benefits which are bestowed on us through Him, for, he says, ‘to make reconciliation’. “25 Christ’s solidarity with humanity is viewed in tandem with his ministry of reconciliation as our high priest. He is God’s Son and our personal representative. Furthermore, Chrysostom employs the head-body image to explain Christ’s identification with us and its implications for the faithful. His oneness with us in his humanity ultimately leads to our exaltation. He partook of our nature in order that we might be able to partake of his. He is the head and we are his body. Discussing the phrase, “For we have been made partakers (μετοχοί) of Christ” (Heb 3:14), Chrysostom comments:

We partake of Him (he means); we were made One, we and He (ἐν ἐγενόμεθα ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτός) — since He is the Head and we the body, “fellow-heirs and of the same body; we are one body, of His flesh and of His bones.” (Eph 3:6; Rom 12:5; Eph 5:30) “If we hold fast the beginning of our confidence [or, the principle of our subsistence, our faith] steadfast unto the end.”26

The reason we can enjoy the privilege of being called fellow heirs of Christ and be united with him is due the fact that he first partook of the flesh in the incarnation. As the ascended Son and our high priest he has accomplished the task of restoring our fellowship with God.

Moreover, Chrysostom notes that in entering brotherhood with us in the incarnation, Christ also identified with us in his suffering and death. His suffering was part of his human nature, “he was willing and earnest to become our brother in all things” for, “He was born, was brought up, grew, suffered all things necessary and at last He died.”27 In partaking of the

25 Ibid., section 3, NPNF 14:389 (PG 63.48).
26 Ibid., Homily 6, section 4, NPNF 14:394 (PG 63.56).
27 Ibid., Homily 5, section 1, NPNF 14:388 (PG 63.47).
flesh, he also entered the realm of human suffering; he made our suffering his own. His suffering was no different from our experience. Chrysostom presses the point that the divine Son identified with us in every way in his human nature, except sin.

Discussing his understanding of Christ’s suffering as his glory, Chrysostom adduces the words of Christ from John 12:23 (where he refers to his sufferings and subsequent death as “glory”) in his interpretation of Heb 2:7 (Ayou crowned him with glory and honor”) to affirm that the cross of Christ was his glory and honor. He endured suffering for our salvation and called it his glory, in order to persuade us to bear our affliction and to look forward to our sharing in the “fruit of the Cross” and future glory.28 Furthermore, Christ became the “Captain of our salvation” through his suffering (2:10). In enduring the suffering that he was subjected to, he was made perfect (τελειώσαι), like a champion wrestler who serves as an example to others. Commenting on how Christ has “become” the “Captain of our salvation” Chrysostom avers:

He [God] has done what is worthy of His love towards mankind, in showing His First-born to be more glorious than all, and in setting Him forth as an example to the others, like some noble wrestler that surpasses the rest. “The Captain of their salvation,” that is, the Cause of their salvation (...) “To make perfect through sufferings.” Then sufferings are a perfecting, and a cause of salvation. Do you see that to suffer affliction is not the portion of those who are utterly forsaken; if indeed it was by this that God first honored His Son, by leading Him through sufferings? And truly His taking flesh to suffer what He did suffer, is a far greater thing than making the world, and bringing it out of things that are not. This indeed also is [a token] of His loving-kindness, but the other far more. And [the Apostle] himself also pointing out this very thing, says, “That in the ages to come He might show forth the exceeding riches of His goodness, He both raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:7, 6)

28 Ibid., Homily 4, section 3, NPNF 14:383 (PG 63.39).
“For it became Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through-sufferings.” For (he means) it became Him who takes tender care, and brought all things into being, to give up the Son for the salvation of the rest, the One for the many. However he did not express himself thus, but, “to make perfect through sufferings,” showing the suffering for any one, not merely profits “him,” but he himself also becomes more glorious and more perfect. And this too he says in reference to the faithful, comforting them by the way: for Christ was glorified then when He suffered. But when I say, He was glorified, do not suppose that there was an accession of glory to Him: for that which is of nature He always had, and received nothing in addition.29

Several points are noteworthy in this passage. First, Christ’s experience of suffering is exemplary; he was allowed to suffer in order to set an example for the faithful and not because he was sinful or imperfect and needed to be perfected morally. Second, his suffering was a means of perfection in the sense he qualified (humanly speaking) as an exemplary champion. The Son was honored through this process, whereby he was willing to suffer in his flesh for our salvation. Third, he did not need to be perfected in order to be glorified, for that is his prerogative by nature; his perfection belonged to his incarnate experience. Finally, Christ’s suffering is viewed as a prerequisite for our glorification. As an accomplished wrestler who has been perfected through enduring affliction sets an example to others, Christ likewise, through his exemplary suffering, has done the same for the faithful. In this sense he has become the “cause of our salvation” through his experience of suffering and ascension to glory. This thought is complemented in Chrysostom’s exposition of Heb 5:13, where he speaks of perfection through suffering. He points out that this perfection (τελειοτης) is not of nature but of virtue (ἀρετή).30 Christ therefore is viewed as the

29 Ibid., section 4, NPNF 14:384 (PG 63.40-41).
30 Ibid., Homily 8, section 6, NPNF 14:406 (PG 63.73).
archetype of perfection for the faithful. His suffering is a paradigm for the virtuous Christian life, for perfection of virtue comes through suffering. The language of perfection therefore is ascribed to the process by which we are saved and perfected and not to the Son’s being.

Two points in particular can be inferred from Chrysostom’s interpretation of the passages that deal with Christ’s suffering in his homilies on Hebrews. First, he draws attention to the reality of Christ’s experience of suffering, underscoring the idea of knowledge through experience. Second, in keeping with the epistle’s focus, he maintains that because the ascended Christ knows what it means to suffer, he truly sympathizes with us. In his commentary on 2:18 (“for he himself suffered, when he was tempted, he is able to help them who are tempted”), Chrysostom observes that in entering brotherhood with us and enduring affliction, Christ knows not only as God but also as man:

He went through the very experience of the things which we have suffered; “now” He is not ignorant of our sufferings; not only does He know them as God (ἐνθρωπός ὁ Θεός), but as man (ἐνθρωπός ὁ ἀνθρωπός) also He has known them, by the trial wherewith He was tried; He suffered much, He knows how to sympathize. And yet God is incapable of suffering: but he describes here what belongs to the Incarnation, as if he had said, Even the very flesh of Christ suffered many terrible things. He knows what tribulation is; He knows what temptation is, not less than we who have suffered, for He Himself also has suffered.31

Just as the experience of suffering was real, so is the knowledge that was gained through his suffering in the flesh. Further on in his commentary on the passage, Chrysostom underscores the latter point again saying, “since many men consider experience (πείρας) the most reliable means of knowledge, he wishes to show that He who has suffered knows what human nature suf-

31 Ibid., Homily 5, section 2, NPNF 14:389 (PG 63.47).
fers.” In Chrysostom’s view, Christ’s experience of suffering was imperative in order to become our sympathetic representative. By underscoring Christ’s experiential knowledge through his suffering, Chrysostom can confidently speak of Christ’s knowledge as being complete. He can sympathize with us because he himself entered our suffering and knows it first hand.

In addition to underscoring Christ’s solidarity with us in his humanity and suffering, Chrysostom also considers the death of Christ. In keeping with the Epistle’s teaching, Chrysostom emphasizes the complete human experience of Christ: a Savior who has identified with us his human nature, suffering and death. The reality of our salvation depends on this complete identification with us. Chrysostom resorts to his oft employed metaphor of a physician to expound the idea of Christ “tasting death” in his discussion of Heb 2:9 (“...so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone”): Christ “tasted” death like a physician who partakes of what is prepared for his patient in order to persuade and encourage him to follow suit without fear:

> For as a physician though not needing to taste the food prepared for the sick man, yet in his care for him tastes first himself, that he may persuade the sick man with confidence to venture on the food, so since all men were afraid of death, in persuading them to take courage against death, He tasted it also Himself though He needed not.

Further, Chrysostom notes that the expression Christ “tasted” death signifies that he genuinely partook of that experience, albeit only for a short period of time because he arose immediately thereafter. Christ’s death is also viewed as a means of purification and a completion of what was foreshadowed in the old covenant. Capitalizing on the imagery presented in Hebrews 9, Chrysostom speaks of a real spiritual cleansing made possible

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32 Ibid., section 5, *NPNF* 14:390 (*PG* 63.50).
through the death of Christ. In the Old Testament the sacrifices could only cleanse outwardly: because their efficacy was restricted to the physical, the purifying was bodily, and their effects were temporary. This contrasts with the sacrifice and death of Christ, where the purifying is spiritual and the effects are everlasting. Chrysostom emphatically speaks of the death of Christ in regard to its role in the reversal of our alienation with God. Christ’s death is understood as a once for all event, plumbing the depths of the sins of humanity through his death:

He became a ransom by one death... His death nullified the tyranny of death... He died that He might deliver us... For He died indeed for all, that is His part: for that death was a counterbalance against the destruction of all men... Lo! He bore the sins. He took them from men, and bore them to the Father; not that He might determine anything against them [mankind], but that He might forgive them.34

It was necessary that the Savior himself experience death on behalf of the ones whom he will release from its bondage, in order to restore our fellowship with God. His death was more than just an identification with us in our mortality but a means through which he accomplished a deliverance for us. Christ could only “destroy death” and “cast out the devil from his tyranny” by entering brotherhood with us in all things.35 His experiencing death is viewed as the ultimate salve that saved humanity from its fatal disease of sin, for his death ended the plight that humanity was subjected to since the fall. Remarking on the uniqueness of Christ’s death, Chrysostom avers:

For as a medicine, when it is powerful and productive of health, and able to remove the disease entirely, effects all after one application; as therefore, if being once applied it accomplishes the whole, it proves its own strength in being no more applied, and

34 Ibid., Homily 17, section 4, NPNF 14:447 (PG 63.129).
35 Ibid., Homily 5, section 1, NPNF 14:389 (PG 63.47).
this is its business; whereas if it is applied continually, this is a plain proof of its not having strength. For it is the excellence of a medicine to be applied once and not often.36

The point being underscored is that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is akin to a potent medicine. Christ’s death was the fulfillment of the shadow of the Old Testament ritual sacrifices, for its effectiveness is reflected in the soteriological effect: securing redemption on behalf of sinful humanity once and for all. Ultimately, in Chrysostom’s view, this is the main purpose of the incarnation, that Christ, “might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil.”37 In entering brotherhood with us in his incarnation, Christ entered the experience of death as well in order to secure our salvation.

Thus Christ’s complete identification with us in his humanity, suffering and death is viewed as a prerequisite for our spiritual renewal. He partook of the flesh in order that we might partake of the blessings of heaven. Chrysostom’s threefold emphases of Christ’s solidarity with us in his humanity, suffering and death, suggests that he views the reality of these experiences as essential for our salvation. For Chrysostom a docetic Christology is untenable, for a Savior devoid of a complete incarnate experience is deficient and imperfect. Christ’s solidarity with us is the means to our purification and perfection as sons. As the Son he is our redeemer, as the high priest he is our mediator, and as the captain of our salvation he is our example.

The Christological Implications of the Personal Continuity of the Son and His Solidarity with us in His Humanity, Suffering and Death

Chrysostom’s view of the personal continuity of the Son in the incarnation and ascension in Hebrews is consistent with his incarnational reflections on John’s Gospel. The ontology of the

36 Ibid., Homily 17, section 5, NPNF 14:448 (PG 63.130).
37 Ibid., Homily 4, section 6, NPNF 14:385 (PG 63.41).
preexistent Logos-Son, similar in nature and equal in power and honor to the Father, was not altered in the partaking of the flesh. The single personal subject of Christ in the incarnation was the Logos-Son. The one who is the heir of all things, the very brightness of the Father’s glory, the express image of the Father, who had a distinct hypostatic existence before all ages, partook of the flesh by entering brotherhood with us. His humiliation in the incarnation, his solidarity with humanity, and his subsequent exaltation provided the means for us to enjoy the privilege of sharing in his glory. On this basis, Chrysostom can speak of the continuity of Christ the Son in his incarnate existence with regard to his identification with us in all things. His identification with us in his human nature, suffering and death did not distort his personal integrity. The Logos-Son is the one to whom being and becoming are referred, therefore whatever is said of Christ with regard to his incarnate state refers to the person of the Son. Being who he is, the divine Son willingly identified with humanity in entering brotherhood with us in order that we might be able to partake of the grace he enjoys by virtue of his nature.

In speaking of the incarnation of the Logos-Son in terms of “the flesh partaking of the high things and the Godhead of the lowly,” Chrysostom is essentially making use of the communica-tio idiomatum principle to affirm the divinity and unity of Jesus Christ’s person.38 When Chrysostom speaks of Christ’ perfection through suffering, his learning of obedience, and death on the cross, it is clear that he means the single subject behind all

38 He also makes use of this idea in his homilies on John’s Gospel. Commenting on the statement of the Son being given his disciples by the Father in Jn. 17:6, he reasons how can the divine Son receive anything since he is one with the Father? Chrysostom explains, “this cannot be said of the Son merely as man, for it is clearly evident to all that what belongs to the lesser nature belongs also to the greater, but the opposite is not the case.” The point being made is that the attributes of both natures are the attributes of the person. The properties of the flesh are the properties of the Son. Ibid., Homily 81, in John, FOC 41:380 (PG 59.339).
of this is the Logos-Son. He made these human experiences his own in entering brotherhood with us, in the humanity that he assumed. Chrysostom is aware of confusion this might cause and is quick to point out the misuse of the principle by the Neo-Arians in particular, who reasoned that since God cannot be born or suffer, Christ could not be God. Although Chrysostom is careful not to ascribe the human experiences to the divine nature of the Son, he nevertheless speaks of the Son as the single subject of the union. Perfection through suffering, knowledge through experience, learning of obedience, and death are ascribed to the Logos-Son in his humanity per se, he went through these human experiences as man rather than in his divine nature. The predications with reference to Christ should be considered with regard to his person and actions: who he is and what he does. Moreover, in speaking of Christ’s actions in terms what he does “as God” and what he does “as man,” he is employing terminology that is essentially similar to that of Athanasius. Chrysostom takes the same view as Cyril did later; both ascribe the experiences of Christ to the Logos while still maintaining that the Logos did not change in his own nature. Chrysostom’s Christology should therefore be regarded as being unitive, in the sense that he views the Logos-Son as the single subject of Christ, whose complete solidarity with humanity was exigent in order that he might become our redeemer.

In Chrysostom’s view, it was soteriologically imperative that Christ identify with us in every way, for the reality of our salvation is contingent on the authenticity of his identification with us. In order to make us partakers of the divine fellowship, the

39 See, Ibid., Homily 3, in John, FOC 33:34 (PG 59.41).
Son had to partake of the flesh, and this can only happen if there is a personal continuity of the Son in the incarnation, his human experiences of suffering, his knowledge through experience, and his “tasting of death.” He can therefore sympathize with us in his ministry as our high priest for he made our experiences his own. His identification with us is grounds for our reconciliation with God and adoption into his family. To say that pre-existent Son entered brotherhood with us is consistent with saying that God himself has personally entered the experiences of human life and identified with us in order to atone for our sins and save us.