
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

because—whether at any given moment we "feel" it or not—we *know* that we always have, as we always need, the blood of the Lamb of God, of the Son of God, our Propitiation, cleansing us from all sin.

H. C. G. MOULE.

ART. III.—CHRYSOSTOM AS AN INTERPRETER OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

Chrysostom, a Study in the History of Biblical Interpretation. By FREDERICK HENRY CHASE, M.A., Christ's College, Theological Lecturer at Pembroke College, and Tutor of the Clergy Training School, Cambridge. Deighton, Bell, and Co. 1887.

IT is curious that the one Father whose name every Sunday-school child knows, and who alone out of all the Fathers is referred to in the margin of the Authorized Version (Acts xiii. 18), should be so little read by us English Churchmen. Augustine is far more often studied and referred to. There are, no doubt, reasons for this. The influence that Augustine has had upon the whole realm of Western theology has made us insensibly have much in common with his writings. We know not why, but we feel as we read them that the thoughts are like our own; we can understand them and appreciate them. And there are deeper reasons than Augustine's influence upon the Western Church generally. For to his teachings of the relation of the individual soul to sin and to God the Protestant Church owes almost its very existence, if, as Melancthon tells us, it was the study of St. Augustine that under God led Luther to accept the doctrine of Justification by Faith. We cannot imagine that Luther would ever have arrived at the same clear understanding of this vital truth from the study of Chrysostom. For Chrysostom had never passed through such a crisis as Augustine passed and as Luther passed in his turn. Chrysostom's views alike of sin in its extent and depth and of the freeness with which God forgives the sinner are far less decided than Augustine's. Chrysostom does not commend himself so easily as Augustine to the man who is convicted of sin and who is seeking a guide to the truth. Nor, we must add, does he commend himself so easily as Augustine to those among us who like to see sharp dogmatic statements of the unity and catholicity of the Church. Though his statements about the Lord's Supper verge on the blasphemous—so strong a belief has he in what is called the Real Presence—yet he had no Donatist schism to contend with and to draw out a dogmatic exposition

of the nature of the Church. Some strong passages may be found in his writings, but they have to be searched for. For, unlike Augustine, he does not systematize. Augustine owes his popularity and influence largely to the fact that he argues out certain doctrines to their logical conclusions, almost regardless of their relation to other doctrines: and he thus becomes the champion at once of Roman Catholicism and of Calvinism. Chrysostom can lay claim to no such honour. His name is connected with no special doctrine. No party or "school of thought" boasts of being the true followers of Chrysostom.

And yet he deserves our careful study, partly for our own sake, partly for the sake of others. I say for the sake of others, having in my mind other than English or indeed Western Christians. For it will soon be a matter of importance that we should place in the hands of our rapidly increasing Indian brethren such tested commentaries as they will be most likely to receive. Within a few years they will assuredly read the Fathers, and we cannot imagine that so typically Western a writer as Augustine would be the best that they could have. And though we can no more hope to restrain the flood of native Indian Christian thought than to put bounds to the sea, yet it is our duty to try and place before them such books as they will be most likely to appreciate with the greatest amount of benefit to themselves; and of the Eastern Fathers Chrysostom is probably—as I hope will be gathered from this paper—at once the most scholarly and the most devout.

There is further, at the present moment, a special reason why we should study the writings of our great predecessors in the faith, more particularly as regards their interpretation of Scripture. For it has been urged that their principles of interpretation are almost entirely wrong, believing as they did that "everything in Scripture which, taken in a natural sense, appears unedifying, must be made edifying by some method of typical or figurative explanation."[1] This charge refers, of course, primarily to their explanations of the Old Testament; but it is very certain that such principles would react also on their interpretation of the New Testament; while the charge, if true, would tend to cause distrust of the results attained by the primitive Church in their investigations of the highest and holiest mysteries. But, however true it may be of some of the Fathers, the charge is not true of all. The principles of Chrysostom and the Antiochene school to which he belonged, were directly opposed to merely edificatory exposition. The Antiochene school, generally speaking, erred upon the other side. It was,

[1] Professor Robertson Smith, "The Old Testament," etc., p. vii. (Chase, p. 38).

in fact, a protest against the allegorizing methods of Alexandria, and it has, therefore, fallen under the severe censure of those who, unable to defend their opinions satisfactorily by grammatical exegesis, have recourse to other and less easily examined methods.[1] Its primary aim was to understand the grammatical and plain meaning of Holy Scripture, convinced that the Holy Spirit intended the more important lessons to be learned from this, and that other lessons, learned by other means, were subordinate to these. And, in fact, the Church at Antioch was almost obliged to take this line; for it was nearly torn in pieces by conflicting sects, each claiming that its own views were true, and each appealing to Scripture as the ultimate authority. It is clear that, wherever this was the case, great stress would be laid on finding out the exact meaning of the passages of Scripture quoted. It is, therefore, not surprising that Athanasius, in his arguments against the Arians, should have somewhat deserted the methods of the Alexandrians and approached those of the Antiochenes. His words "are one continuous appeal to Scripture." "Allegory with him is secondary and ornamental, and never long kept up."

But we are dealing with Chrysostom. How does he stand as an interpreter of the Old Testament? Low enough as regards his interpretation of words and phrases. For he seems to have been almost entirely dependent on the Septuagint, and ignorant alike of the Hebrew language and of Jewish customs.[2] But in his general principles he is extremely satis-

[1] Mr. Chase's note on p. 59 deserves careful study. After quoting the opinions of Alexandrian and of Antiochene Fathers, he refers to "three typical English theologians." Hooker says, "I hold it for a most infallible rule in expositions of sacred Scripture, that where a literal construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst." Fuller, "In a word, for matters of number, fancy is never at a loss, like a beggar never out of his way, but hath some haunts where to repose itself. But such as in expounding of Scripture reap more than God did sow there, never eat what they reap thence, because such grainless husks, when seriously threshed out, vanish all into chaff." Dr. Newman, however, says, "It may be laid down as an historical fact that the mystical interpretation and orthodoxy will stand or fall together." To this Mr. Chase very truly answers, "It might be enough to urge in reply that, there being no external law or standard in the matter of mystical interpretation, authority can only be allowed to it when the absolute infallibility of private judgment is conceded. But the appeal is to history. One typical fact will suffice. The Gnostics, the earliest depravers of the Christian faith, found their support in mystical interpretations of the Gospels. . . . In the region of mystical interpretation there is no critical police: every man does what is right in his own eyes."

[2] In connection with this the following points are to be observed: First, that the general ignorance of Hebrew shown by the Fathers has its advantages. It probably saved the Church from adopting the methods of interpretation that existed in the Synagogue, and led to a much freer

factory, and it would have been well for the Christian Church if they had always been borne in mind. He says that God used certain expressions only out of condescension to human weakness. Such, for instance, are the words, "Let us make man in our image," and "He took one of his ribs." He further points out that there has been progress in Divine Revelation. God in Scripture "orders each detail with reference to the special crisis for man's good, thus correcting the weakness of each successive generation." The legislation of sacrifices "is due to our weakness. The case is parallel to that of divorce. God, desiring to uproot greater evils, permitted the less. He suffered what He did not desire that He might secure that which He did desire." To Chrysostom the Lord's words, "It was said of them of old time," imply a recognition of the different stages of His people's education. "He spoke thus to shame any hearer who shrank from rising from these commands to higher things; just as a teacher might say to an idle child, 'Don't you see the time you have wasted in learning spelling?'"[1]

It is important, too, that, unlike teachers of Alexandrian tendency, Chrysostom insists on the reality of the sins said to have been committed by Old Testament saints. "The aim of all Scripture," he tells us, "is the reformation of mankind," and he does not shrink from believing that one means of causing that reformation is to delineate the effects of sin. "Scripture has recorded not only the good deeds, but also the sins of the saints." Noah's drunkenness is a warning to those who are "sunk beneath the flood of other terrible sins."

---

and apparently truer view of inspiration. Not being able to refer to the original, the Fathers were not tempted to lay that stress on the inspiration of every letter which we find among the Jews who were contemporary with them.

Secondly, it is a pity that comparatively little has been done to elucidate how far the early Christian writers were influenced by Jewish exegesis of their own and previous generations. Patristic students have, as a rule, been little acquainted with Jewish methods of exegesis. Talmudic scholars have generally paid little regard to the Fathers. It is usual to set down the derivations found in Origen and other Fathers as mere blunders, but anyone acquainted with Rabbinic methods will hesitate before doing so, for their so-called blunders are often exactly parallel to Jewish midrashes, and it may be questioned whether they are not due to the adoption of Jewish explanations current at the time. If so, they are *in themselves* no proof of the writer's ignorance of Hebrew, although this may of course be proved by the way in which they are adduced.

Thirdly, it is possible that some of the mistakes are due to false readings in the Greek lists from which they seem to have gained information as to the meaning of Hebrew names. Such may be the origin of Chrysostom's interpretation of Eden (Ἐδέμ) as "the *virgin* earth." Read Λ for Δ, and it is at once intelligible.

[1] Cf. pp. 42-47.

But how did he interpret prophecies? Did he here also yield to the prevailing fashion of the time, and find prophecies of Christ wherever he liked, or, as Mr. Spurgeon quaintly says of a modern writer, "see Jesus where Jesus is not legitimately to be seen?" This question is investigated by Mr. Chase at some length. We cannot pretend to give even a summary of his investigation. But two points come out very clearly; the first due to the school in which Chrysostom was trained, the second to the era in which he lived. For as to the first, it was altogether in agreement with his Antiochene training that he should try to discover an historical basis in the Psalms and Prophecies. They bore a message to the men of the time in which they were first written. "The prophecy of Isaiah," he says, "becomes clearer and easier if we know in what state the world was and what the condition of the wounds of the Jewish people, when the prophets applied their remedies."

The second point was surely due to the general feeling of his time, though it would be hard to say that the feeling has even yet died out, or will die out until we have a deeper knowledge of the nature of inspiration. For he says that a prophecy at times lies imbedded, having an apparent but no real connection with its context on either side.[1] "If the prophecy cuts the context in two, and is an interruption, there is nothing strange or novel in that; for it is thus that many of the prophecies found utterance in the Old Testament, because it was needful that they should be veiled for the time, that the books themselves should not be destroyed. For even the prediction of Christ's birth, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive,' while it *seems* to have a close connection with the history, has really nothing to do with it." No wonder that Chrysostom often found himself in difficulties when expounding a passage. Yet I am not sure that the canon is not still secretly acknowledged, though no one puts it into words as clear as Chrysostom's.

In the remainder of the book[2] Mr. Chase treats of Chrysostom as an interpreter of the New Testament. Of the three chapters devoted to this, the first, upon criticism and scholarship, is clearly the result of much minute examination of his writings. To the ordinary reader, indeed, it would seem at first sight to be a matter of purely antiquarian interest whether Chrysostom caught the exact meanings of tenses and prepositions—but it is really far otherwise. For the study of this chapter will point out one great secret of Chrysostom's success as a popular preacher, and of the continuance of his influence to our own day. The secret is that his preaching was based

[1] P. 72.

[2] Pp. 79-194.

upon criticism and scholarship. It is a lesson that the working clergy would do well to take to heart. Here is a man who was preaching lengthy sermons two or three times a week to a congregation composed of the most diverse elements, who nevertheless found his scholarship useful at every turn, and used it continually. It may teach us that however much pressure of work we may have, we cannot really spare the time to neglect our careful study of the Greek Testament, and that every hour which we give to it through the week will amply repay itself in its effect upon our Sunday labours. Not that Chrysostom is always dragging in his grammar—reminding one of a clergyman quoting Greek to a "bush" congregation—it is the naturalness and ease of the allusions that gives the charm. He speaks from a full knowledge, the result of much study. His criticism and scholarship give substance to his eloquence.[1]

In the last two chapters Mr. Chase deals with Chrysostom's interpretation of the Gospels, Acts, and Pauline Epistles. And here we meet with an opinion which seems curious to our present ideas—the opinion that not only the older Apostles but also St. Paul were men of no education. St. John was "absolutely uneducated, the son of a father who was abjectly poor." St. Paul was a "leather-worker, a poor man, unversed in worldly learning, only able to speak Hebrew, a language despised by all men, and most of all by Italians." "His mind was once poor and mean, absorbed in matters pertaining to contracts and skins." The mistake is not likely to be made by men of our generation. Perhaps it were better for us if we were more possessed by the feeling which prompted it, for we

[1] It must not, however, be thought that Chrysostom's scholarship is immaculate. Mr. Chase's investigation shows that in Chrysostom's eyes ἐν may stand for almost any preposition in the Greek language, even for ἀπὸ! while at least one of his etymologies is refreshing from its *naïveté*. The hart, for instance, is called ἔλαφος—διὰ τὸ ὄφεις ἐσθίειν. As, therefore, the hart panteth after the water-brooks and also devours serpents, "Do thou follow this example. Do thou devour the spiritual serpent, and thou shalt be able to be athirst with a longing for God" (p. 104).

In connexion with Chrysostom's scholarship, reference may here be made to his views of the Canon. Mr. Chase points out that, though he usually limited his quotations to the Syrian Canon, which excluded 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and the Apocalypse, yet that he seems to have occasionally referred to at least the first and the last of these books. Mr. Chase is inclined to accept as genuine the fragments in Cramer's Catena on 2 Peter attributed to Chrysostom. We wish, however, that Chrysostom's voice about traditions were less unsatisfactory. He does not, as it appears, often refer to them, but he says distinctly that "the Apostles delivered many things without writings. . . . Therefore let us regard the tradition of the Church as worthy of credence. It is tradition; ask no more" (p. 81).

may well doubt if our present tendency to trace to its furthest limits the personal powers and influence of the human instrument is calculated in the long-run to deepen our respect for Scripture. Our motive is good. It springs from a desire to remove stumbling-blocks out of the way of our weaker brethren; but it tends to make us, even in our devotional readings of the Word, look at the instrument rather than the Divine Agent. Chrysostom was in no such danger. The ignorance and weakness of St. Paul, and of the other writers of the New Testament, only brought out the more strongly the greatness of the Divine power. "Nothing," he says, "could be more ignorant than Peter, nothing ruder than Paul." "Truth was the one and only thing they cared for."

It is tempting to linger over Chrysostom's views of the relative dates of the Gospels, of their substantial unanimity, notwithstanding their divergence in details; to notice his attempts to reconcile seeming contradictions, as when he says, by way of explaining both, "before the cock crow," and "before the cock crow twice," that in each single cock-crowing the cock crows three or four times; to consider his opinion of miracles, that they were given to the unbelieving, that while prophecies and teachings influenced the more thoughtful, they influenced the duller minds, that they are for the sake of those who lack understanding; and to recall his sensible remarks on the interpretation of our Lord's parables, that every detail of a parable must not be pressed—"the drift of a parable must be seized—curiosity must ask no more." But we must hurry on to mention briefly some hints that he gives as to the interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles. It is almost like reading a modern commentary to see how he insists on the importance of considering the date at which each Epistle was written, and the character of the people to whom it was addressed. Every Epistle, too, was written with some special motive. The words must be studied, not as bare words, but with reference to the general mind of the writer, and in close connexion with their context.

Mr. Chase tests Chrysostom's powers as an expositor by a detailed examination of a few passages. We think that we can best consult our readers' convenience if we transcribe his summary of Chrysostom's treatment of the Epistle to Philemon:[1]

> He bids us notice that St. Paul does not make his request at once; how he leads up to it; how he would have Philemon think that he had other reasons for writing, to express his affection, to ask that a lodging might be prepared. When he speaks of the hearts of the saints being refreshed by his friend, he does not add, "much more should my heart be." He hints at this, but he gives it gentler expression. We must note too how

[1] P. 179.

gradually he approaches the name which may rouse resentment. He prefaces it with his own. His plea is his own personal influence; his age; then the highest claim of all, "a prisoner also of Christ Jesus." Yet still he keeps the name back. First there comes the word of entreaty, "I beseech thee," then a word of commendation, "for my child," the very name he gives to Timothy; again there comes the argument of his chain, "whom I have begotten in my bonds;" then at last the name itself, Onesimus.

Again, Chrysostom calls attention to St. Paul's delicate choice of words. He does not say ἀπόδεξαι, but προσλαβοῦ, for Onesimus is worthy not only of forgiveness but of respect; not ἔφυγε but ἐχωρίσθη; not ἔκλεψε, a slave's crime, but ἠδίκησε, the fault of a friend against a friend.

There is "a true spiritual grace" in the words, "I, Paul, write it with mine own hand." How importunate his manner, yet how winning (ἐντρεπτικῶς καὶ χαριέντως). If St. Paul does not refuse to give his bond for the man, Philemon cannot refuse to receive him. Throughout the Apostle has two things in mind. He must use every safeguard against the refusal of his request. Yet nothing on his part must hint that his confident assurance fails.

Finally, as Chrysostom notes, εὐχῇ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν κατέκλεισεν.

I cannot close this paper on Chrysostom without, at the risk of apparent repetition, again reminding my readers of the character of Chrysostom's writings. They are not commentaries, but homilies, the first part, at all events, of sermons actually preached. The charge has been brought against the clergy of the Church of England that they neglect the systematic exposition of Holy Scripture. If the charge be true—and I fear that it cannot be altogether denied—we are not only neglecting an important part of our duty, but we are in danger of substituting mere human opinions for the teaching of Scripture. Some preachers fear to expound, lest they should not be able to deal in their discourse with the special needs of the time. Probably we are all tempted to think a great deal too much of "the special needs of the time," and too little of the fundamental needs of the human heart. But even if this be not the case, Chrysostom supplies an example of the possibility of combining the two kinds of preaching. Never was a preacher who preached more suitably to the needs of the time; never was a preacher who expounded the Word of God more faithfully and more fully.[1]

A. LUKYN WILLIAMS.

[1] It would not be fair to take leave of Mr. Chase's exceedingly interesting volume without noticing that it is much more than a record of Chrysostom's views and a critical estimate of his powers as an interpreter of Holy Scripture. There are detailed notes scattered throughout the book upon points of special interest—*e.g.*, p. 123, the fact that the observance of Christmas Day among the Antiochenes did not in A.D. 386 date back more than ten years, with the reasons given by Chrysostom to show that December 25th was the true anniversary; and p. 124, of more importance, illustrations of the meaning of τοῦ πονηροῦ in the Lord's Prayer. Mr. Chase gives reasons for thinking that Chrysostom's inter-