

Friends at the Table of the Lord

Friendship with God and the Transformation of Patronage in the Thought of John Chrysostom

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Patronage As Friendship

In her treatment of John Chrysostom's conception of almsgiving, Blake Leyerle argues that Chrysostom offers his congregation an alternative way to view the place of the poor in the network of patronage.

Chrysostom sketched an alternative economic system in which the rich had to acknowledge their indebtedness precisely to those who were poor and insignificant in the eyes of the world. His message was one of mutuality. He obtained this mutuality by investing the very poor, who had previously been excluded from patron-client relations because they had nothing to contribute, with a valuable commodity, namely, special access to God.¹

Chrysostom's congregation, Leyerle explains, viewed any expenditure on the poor as a "senseless cultivation of people from whom no reciprocal good could be expected." Chrysostom, however, "countered this prevailing opinion with a longer view of social interaction." He argued that by giving to the poor, his congregation "would find on the day of judgment that they had secured for themselves the most effective of patrons."²

An analysis of Chrysostom's conception of friendship with God supports Leyerle's analysis. Chrysostom asserts that Christians are called to become the friends of God. This claim is significant because of the way the language of friendship was used in late-Roman society. Although in the Hellenistic and Roman periods friendship was never a mere synonym for the relationship between patron and client, friendship was often presented as the ideal relationship that should exist between a patron and his client.³

¹ Blake Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," *HTR* 87: 1 (1994), 41.

² *Ibid.*, 40. See also *In Genesim*, hom. 34 (PG 53, 315) for a wonderful explanation of the poor as our "benefactors."

³ David Konstan, "Patrons and Friends" *Classical Philology* 90 (1995): 329–330.

As a result, the imperial system of patronage was rendered more palatable to the educated elite of the empire by being drawn into the classical conception of friendship between the virtuous.⁴ David Konstan explains that, “for writers on friendship generally in the Greek and Roman tradition, to be a friend meant to engage in an elective and mutual relationship based on altruistic generosity that transcended differences of status.”⁵ By applying this ideal to the relationship between patron and client, “the language of friendship tended to hide some of the objectionable compromises incumbent on courtiers.”⁶ The emperor could make demands upon the educated, and the educated could ask favors of the emperor, because both – according to the ideal – were united in the pursuit of virtue and the common love of the good. This ideal seems to have pervaded all levels of patronage. The local patron was considered the friend of his clients.⁷

When one analyzes Chrysostom’s use of the term “friend of God,” one discovers that Chrysostom employs the analogy of friendship with God as part of his attempt to establish a new form of patronage in the Christian community. First, instead of the rich and powerful or even the well educated being our local patrons, who, as “friends of the emperor,” intercede for us before him, for Chrysostom the saints and the poor are the true friends of our heavenly emperor. Second, all Christians have God as their friend and patron. God’s patronage, however, is unique. In divine patronage, it is primarily the patron who pursues the client (and not the other way around). Lastly, the network of divine patronage is maintained, not at the table of the rich, but at the table of the poor. In the pages that follow, we shall consider each one of these features of Chrysostom’s understanding of divine friendship.

⁴ Peter Brown offers a succinct analysis of this in *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 45–48. See also Richard Saller, “Patronage and Friendship in Early Imperial Rome: Drawing the Distinction” in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, edited by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London: Routledge, 1989), 49–62; and *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 11–15, 24–25.

⁵ David Konstan, “Patrons and Friends,” 340–341.

⁶ David Konstan, “Patrons and Friends,” 340.

⁷ For example, when trying to discourage a young acquaintance from entering into the service of the “Great Houses,” Lucian states that he will begin by narrating “all that must be done and suffered by those who take salaried posts and are put on trial in the friendship of our wealthy,” adding “if the name friendship (*philia*) may be applied to that sort of slavery” (Lucian of Samosata, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, Loeb Classical Library, translated by A. M. Harmon. [London: W. Heinemann: New York, 1913], Vol. 3, 413; see also 416). All quotations of Lucian throughout this article are from Harmon’s translation.

The Saints As Local Patrons and Friends Of The Emperor

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill describes the network of patronage as involving “exchanges between those closer to the centre of power and those more distant from it, and has the effect of mediating state resources through personal relationships.”⁸ A local patron protected and provided for his clients and demanded services from them in return. In his role as protector, the local patron functioned as a *suffragator*. In imperial Rome, a *suffragator* was one who could plead your cause before the emperor and seek favors (*gratiae* or *carites*) for you from him.⁹

David Konstan has noted that the eastern Roman empire never developed a “vocabulary of clientship,” containing Greek equivalents for Latin terms such as “*suffragator*.” Instead, they tended to address problems of patronage through the vocabulary of friendship.¹⁰ Appeal to the ideal of friendship in political discussions was not a new development in Greek thought. Already in the classical period the ideal of friendship was employed to describe the character of the relationships that should exist between the citizens of a city-state. As the social reality changed, however, so did the political portrayal of the ideal of friendship. If in the classical period treatises on friendship portrayed friendship as primarily a relationship between equals, where mutual aid and assistance were emphasized, in the Hellenistic period the focus shifts to friendship as a relationship between unequals and the frank sincerity and selflessness that should exist between them.¹¹

As the ideal of friendship begins to change, so does the nature of the candor (*parrhêsia*) that is essential to it.

In the classical period, when citizens derived their equality from their participation in a democratic city, *parrhêsia* designated the right of free speech, and pertained to anyone who enjoyed full civic status at Athens. The shift in the meaning of *parrhêsia* from freedom of speech to personal candor, from a political right to a private virtue, is coordinate with the change from egalitarian city-state to a regime of powerful rulers in a position to dispense patronage. The friend is no longer the type of the ideal citizen; now, he is a man of individual courage and integrity, able to put the interests of a superior ahead of his own.¹²

⁸ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Patronage in Roman Society: from Republic to Empire,” 77.

⁹ Richard Saller, “Patronage and friendship in early Imperial Rome: drawing the distinction,” 58.

¹⁰ David Konstan, “Patrons and Friends,” 333–334.

¹¹ David Konstan, “Patrons and Friends,” 333.

¹² David Konstan, “Patrons and Friends,” 334.

This ideal of friendship enabled Hellenistic theorists to portray the ideal local patron as a friend of the emperor. In essence, the local patron is a client of the emperor. He both implements the emperor's commands and intercedes before the emperor on behalf of his own clients. Yet, because the local patron acts from courage and integrity and habitually puts the interests of the emperor ahead of his own, he can be regarded as a friend of the emperor and enjoys "personal candor" in his dealings with the emperor.

These elements of imperial patronage and the ideal of friendship applied to it would have been familiar to John Chrysostom and the Christian community in fourth century Antioch. Indeed, Chrysostom's own teacher, Libanius, exercised this function in Antioch on numerous occasions. For example, in 362 Libanius interceded before the emperor on behalf of Antioch's town council in an effort to assuage the emperor's wrath against them. As Peter Brown relates, Libanius "was sufficiently sure of his friendship with the emperor Julian to stand up for the town council of Antioch in his presence."¹³

A study of John Chrysostom's works reveals that he portrays saints of the Old and New Testaments and the holy ones of his own day as friends of the heavenly emperor and as enjoying personal candor (*parrhêsia*) before him. Chrysostom especially portrays Abraham as one who has this frankness of speech before God. Abraham, the Letter of James proclaims, "was called the friend of God (*philos theou*)" (Js 2, 23). Chrysostom seems to draw on this biblical tradition when he describes Abraham as a petitioner who comes into the presence of his Lord in order to beg a favor, to beg an act of clemency from his patron. Like Libanius in the presence of the emperor, Abraham can speak freely in the presence of God to avert his wrath (at least, partially).

In painting his portrait of Abraham, however, Chrysostom does not use the example of Libanius. Instead, he turns to several more recent intercessors who had exercised a similar boldness of speech on Antioch's behalf.¹⁴ The occasion was the riot against the imperial statues in 387, and the intercessors were the monks.¹⁵ In the homilies he preached as these events were unfolding, he describes the monks as "citizens of the desert" who "hastened into the city" to intercede for it. The monks "in one day descended, discussed the issue, removed the misfortune, and went back up to their dwellings" (*Homilae de Statuis*, Hom. 17, 2 [PG 49, 174]). In this context, Chrysostom invites his congregation to recognize that Abraham too was a "citizen of the desert" who enjoyed a power that no earthly foe could overcome (ibid. [PG 49, 177]). Chrysostom later alludes to Antioch's brush with

¹³ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 61.

¹⁴ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), v. 3, 434.

¹⁵ See Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 106–108.

imperial wrath when commenting upon Abraham's intercession on behalf of Lot.¹⁶ In Chrysostom's view, Abraham's conversation with God reveals two things: God's generous long-suffering and the intercessory power of the virtuous (*In Genesim*, hom. 42: [PG 53, 390–391]). These are both central elements of antique patronage: the patient generosity of the patron and the persuasively bold candor of an intermediate client.¹⁷ Thus, from Chrysostom's perspective, Abraham's encounter with God at the Oak of Mamre reveals that God is a patron who condescends to treat his clients according to the rules of patronal friendship.

In Chrysostom's view, not only the patriarchs, but also the prophets are friends of God who have *parrhêsia* in his court. Chrysostom, for example, describes the prophet Daniel as "a friend of God (*theou philon*) who enjoyed great personal candor before God, a candor that rested upon his wisdom and justice and upon many other actions which successfully bore witness to his character" (*Contra Anomoeos, homiliae*, hom. 3 [PG 3, 195–197]).

Chrysostom explicitly employs the analogy of friendship with the emperor to describe the particular intimacy existing between God and the apostles. In the first of his homilies on the Gospel of John, Chrysostom offers the following reflection.

For if we desire to know what is going on in the palace, what the emperor has said, what he has done, what he is counseled concerning his subjects (though often these things have nothing to do with us), much more is it desirable to hear what God has said, especially when it all concerns us. And all of this [John the Evangelist] will openly tell us, as being a friend (*philos*) of the Emperor himself, or rather, as having Him speaking within him, and from Him hearing all things which He heard from the Father. 'I have called you friends,' He says, 'for all things that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you' (Jn 15, 15) (*In Joannem*, hom. 1 [PG 59. 26. 40]).

The Emperor has made known to the apostles the secret things of his Father, because they have become intimates at the Emperor's court.¹⁸

The emphasis in this description of the apostles is not in this case on the candor proper to friendship, but on the sharing of secrets that friendship fosters. Nevertheless, the role of the apostles remains the same as that of Abraham or any of the other saints. For Chrysostom, the apostles and saints are like emissaries from the imperial court of heaven who come down from the cosmic capital and go out to the

¹⁶ See for example, *In Genesim*, hom. 42 (PG 53, 392), where Chrysostom invites his congregation to reflect upon "our own affairs" which can teach them how the virtue of a few can save a multitude.

¹⁷ Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, 7–39.

¹⁸ Chrysostom adds in a later homily that "since to speak of secrets appears to be the strongest proof of friendship," Christ essentially is saying to the apostles that they have "been deemed worthy even of this communion (*koinônia*)" (*In Joannem*, hom. 77 [PG 59, 415.38]).

terrestrial provinces to share the imperial secrets of salvation with those whom the Emperor wishes to draw into friendship: with those whom the heavenly Emperor desires to draw into a new form of patronage.¹⁹ Thus, Chrysostom counsels the sick members of his congregation to turn to the Lord's "known friends." They should "run to his friends (*philos autou*): to the martyrs and saints, to those who can speak to him with great confidence and freedom" (*Adversus Judaeos*, disc. 8, 6, 8 [PG 48, 937.6]). Moreover, just as on the earthly level one's fate was bound up in the fate of one's *suffragator*, so too, in Chrysostom's view, on the heavenly level. Chrysostom asserts, for example, that because of God's great love for Abraham, God was willing to treat all of Abraham's friends as if they were his own friends. Because they are friends of Abraham, they can become friends of God (*In Genesim*, hom. 31 [PG 53, 288]).

In describing saints as the friends of God, Chrysostom was part of a larger fourth-century phenomenon. Peter Brown has observed that among the late-Roman aristocracy something new was occurring at this time. With the rise of the cult of the saints, the "warmth of late-Roman senatorial *amicitia* and the intensity of late-Roman loyalty to *patroni*" were now also becoming part of the aristocracy's "relationship with the other world."²⁰ In Brown's view, this new relationship with heavenly power-brokers corresponded to a deeply felt need: "the need for intimacy with a protector with whom one could identify as a fellow human being, relations with whom could be conceived of in terms open to the nuances of known human relations between patron and client."²¹

Crucially, however, Chrysostom reminds his congregation that these heavenly emissaries work in and through the Emperor, in and through Christ, the anointed one. It was Christ who first called the apostles and saints, and it was Christ who sent them on their mission. At this point Chrysostom begins to transform radically the traditional notion of patronal friendship.

The Pursuing Patron: God As Friend

Chrysostom describes God's attitude toward the Old Testament Patriarchs as one of friendship. First, as we have seen, God reveals his secrets to his friends. For example, concerning Noah, Chrysostom states that "as a friend to a friend (*philos philō*), [God] converses with

¹⁹ *In Joannem*, hom. 1 (PG 59, 26.50): "Just as we would all run together if we saw one from above suddenly come down from heaven, promising to describe openly everything that was there, so too let us now do the same. It is from there that this man speaks to us. He is not of this world, as Christ himself declares, 'you are not of the world' (Jn 15, 19), and he has speaking within him the Comforter, the Omnipresent, who knows the things of God."

²⁰ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 60.

²¹ *Ibid.* 61.

the just man concerning the retribution he is about to inflict upon the human race" (ibid., hom. 24 [PG 53, 209]). Chrysostom recognizes a similar sharing of secrets occurring in God's friendship for Abraham. Chrysostom notes that after sending the angels to destroy Sodom, God remains with Abraham "as if communing with the just man, like a friend to a friend (*philos philō*), about what he was going to do" (ibid., hom. 42 [PG 53, 387]).

Implicit in Chrysostom's descriptions of God's friendship is the view that although God has the power and authority to be a demanding and even brutal patron, he chooses not to be. In his great love for humanity, God chooses to treat his dependent clients as intimate friends. In support of this claim, Chrysostom draws his congregation's attention to the way that God "instructed" Adam.

See how much esteem he displays for the human being from the very beginning. For, it does not say, 'He commanded,' or 'He ordered,' but He instructed.' Like a friend instructing a friend (*philos philō*) about certain necessary actions, God treats Adam in this same way, wishing by means of this honor to persuade him to obey his instructions.²²

Even after Adam sinned, Chrysostom notes, God did not treat Adam as a slave. Instead, he once again revealed the abundance of his goodness.

Look, beloved, at the exceeding goodness of God: how, just as a friend in conversation with a friend (*philos philō*) and remonstrating with him over a transgression of his instructions, he enters into dialogue with Adam (*In Genesim*, hom. 17 [PG 53, 138]).

Adam sinned, and God continues to act as a patient patron. Controlling his anger, God gently speaks with Adam about the inevitable consequences of his disobedience. That God was the patron of the patriarchs would have been easily understood by Chrysostom's congregations. That God allowed certain of them to enjoy a remarkably bold candor in his presence would also have been within the normal categories of patronage. Yet, Chrysostom portrays God as doing even more. In Chrysostom's estimation, God literally pursues the friendship of those who are infinitely below him, those, indeed, who are his enemies. To understand the extent to which Chrysostom's account steps out of the normal framework of patronage, it will be helpful to turn to a classical description of patronage. Lucian of Samosata, as is noted above, wrote a work to dissuade a young friend from entering the service of a patron. In it, Lucian describes the difficulties entailed

²² *In Genesim*, hom. 14 (PG 53, 114). Unless otherwise noted, the translations of Chrysostom's works found in this essay are my own, although I consulted and drew upon the translations of his works published in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* series as well as the translations of Robert C. Hill and Paul W. Harkins published by Newman Press and Catholic University of America Press.

merely in becoming a client. Even to make a “beginning of friendly relations” with a patron,

calls for much running hither and thither, and for continual camping on doorsteps; you must get up early and wait about; . . . you must follow [the patron you are cultivating] zealously, or rather, lead the way, shoved on by the servants and filling out a guard of honour, as it were. But your man does not even look at you for many days on end.²³

Even accounting for the polemical context of Lucian’s account, it nonetheless accurately describes one aspect of patronage that most of Chrysostom’s contemporaries would have recognized. Potential clients must pursue the favor of their prospective patrons. Divine patronage, however, is radically different. God, who is “abundantly and infinitely rich,” nevertheless “desires and earnestly endeavors to obtain our friendship” (*In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, hom. 23 [PG 63, 164.1]). Lucian’s would-be client must run after his potential patron. Chrysostom, on the other hand, describes Christ as saying to his apostles, “I ran after your friendship (*philia*)” (*In Joannem*, hom. 77 [PG 59.415.44]). Indeed, Chrysostom interprets the Final Discourse in John’s Gospel as Christ saying to his apostles, “it is not as a rebuke that I tell you that I lay down my life for you, or that I ran to meet you, but in order to lead you into friendship (*philian*)” (*ibid.*, hom. 77 [PG 59.415.64]). Christ comes into the world as a generous patron and protector in order to draw his disciples into intimacy with himself and to give them a share in the life of his household. Unlike other patrons who stand aloof while prospective clients pursue them, Christ runs after them and seeks to draw them into his friendship.

Patronage At The Table Of The Poor

The context in which Christ makes his offer of friendship is also important. He initiates this new relationship during the Final Discourse at the Last Supper. It is in the context of a banquet that he tells them that they are no longer slaves, but chosen friends (Jn 15, 14–17). Meals are filled with social meaning, a meaning discovered by those who can read the message they contain. “The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries.”²⁴ This is especially true of the dinners offered by wealthy Romans to their friends and clients. At these meals, the relationships between guests and patron were displayed for all to see. Lucian, for example, refers to the “first dinner” that was offered in order to introduce a new member of the

²³ Lucian of Samosata, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, 429–431.

²⁴ Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Implicit Meanings* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 249.

patron's entourage.²⁵ At this meal the new client is given a definite place of distinction as a sign of the patron's affection: "a place at the table a little above the rich man, with two of his old friends sitting at your side."²⁶ This position also displayed the new client's status in relationship to the patron's "old friends," as Lucian's description of their jealousy reveals.²⁷ In other words, the placement of clients around their patron validated "the ranks and statuses of all the other diners, reinforcing visually the distinctive ties which linked together and integrated the disparate elements of the Roman social fabric: the ties of *clientela*."²⁸

Chrysostom is well aware of a banquet's role in forging and revealing the lines of patronal friendship, and he does not hesitate to describe the Divine Liturgy in the same terms. The Eucharistic feast displays the patron's power, and it reveals his network of friends. For example, Chrysostom describes the liturgical feast of a martyr in the follow terms.

Those who hold extravagant feasts and who love the esteem of others who do the same, give frequent and constant banquets, alike to display the over abundance of their own wealth, and to show friendly-mindedness (*philosôphrosunê*) toward their faithful friends. So also the grace of the Spirit, affording us proof of his own power, and displaying much friendly-mindedness toward the friends of God (*theou philous*), sets before us continuously and one after another the tables of the martyrs.²⁹

²⁵ Lucian of Samosata, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, n. 14, 434.

²⁶ Ibid. n. 14, 436.

²⁷ Ibid. n. 17, 440.

²⁸ John D'Arms, "Control, Companionship, and Clientela: Some Social Functions of the Roman Communal Meal," *Echos du monde classique/Classical Views* (1984): 344. An analysis of the structure of the Last Discourse in John's Gospel reveals that it contains all the central elements of patronage. Johnson and Dandeker, drawing upon the work of many scholars, assert that elements essential to patronage are "inequality, reciprocity and intimacy" founded upon "a durable, two-way relationship of 'lop-sided' or 'vertical' friendship." Moreover, they add that those who have studied the classical system of Roman patronage agree in viewing it as "an asymmetrical friendship relation, involving: (1) a reciprocal exchange of goods and services, (2) a personal relationship of some duration, (3) two parties of unequal status offering different kinds of goods and services in exchanges" (Terry Johnson and Christopher Dandeker, "Patronage: relation and system," in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, pages 221 and 224). This describes exactly the relationship existing between Jesus and his disciples in the Last Discourse. There is a perduring personal relationship ("remain in me as I remain in you" [15, 4]); between parties of unequal status ("I am the vine and you are the branches" [15, 5]); offering reciprocal exchanges of different kinds of goods and services ("everything you ask of the Father in my name he will give you. What I ask of you is that you love one and other." [15, 16–17]).

²⁹ *In Sanctum Ignatium martyrem*, (PG 50, 587.4). Interestingly, "friendly-mindedness" (*philosôphrosunê*) is also the word used by Lucian to describe what the aspiring young client expects to receive from his patron (Lucian of Samosata, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, n. 11, 430).

The Spirit reveals its power and displays the martyrs as God's friends. In addition, just as Lucian's "first dinner" functioned as an event in which a new patronal friendship was established, so too, in Chrysostom's view, does the Eucharist function as the place where Christ enters into friendship with us. With the sprinkling of the blood of the old covenant, Moses ratified a compact between slave and master. In Christ, however, a new compact is entered into where "friend deals with friend (*philos pros philon*)" (*In epistulam ad Colossenses*, hom. 6 [PG 62, 342.8]). Moreover, in this covenant, the signs of patronage are conferred in a deeper way. Two signs of patronage were eating at the patron's table and wearing the patron's style of clothing.³⁰ Christ, however, does more. He himself becomes the food they eat and the clothes they wear. Thus, speaking to the newly baptized, Chrysostom reminds them that in this spiritual banquet Christ becomes all things for them. He is their garment, their food and their friend (*Ad illuminados Catecheses* 1–2 [PG 49, 233.35]).

Significantly, Chrysostom also describes the Eucharist as the banquet of the poor. He notes that God does not hesitate to invite the poor to fill his vestibules and to be the honored guests at his table. At this banquet the patron displays the poor as his valued friends. Chrysostom calls his congregation's attention to this. They are not to be ashamed of the poor who join them in this meal, because in doing so they would be dishonoring the friends of Christ (*In Epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses*, hom. 11, 5 [PG 62, 468]).

Chrysostom tells his congregation to follow the example of their patron. Christ's action at the Eucharist becomes something Christians are called to imitate at their own tables. If Christ holds banquets for the poor, then Christians should do the same. "Let your table be filled with the maimed and the lame" (*ibid.*). Chrysostom recognizes a ready objection. To those who would respond that instead of holding banquets for the poor we should attend the banquets of the rich, because the table of the rich "increases friendships," Chrysostom counters that friendships with the rich are actually of little value. Indeed, "nothing is colder than those who are made friends" at the tables of the rich, while the tables of the poor "produce friendship (*philian*), not with humans, but with God" (*In epistulam Colossenses*, hom. 1 [PG 62.308.52]).

Elsewhere, Chrysostom once again offers Abraham as the ideal to follow. Abraham does not hold a feast for the wealthy or for retainers who can be of material use to him. Instead, Abraham sits at the door of his tent and waits for the opportunity to offer hospitality to strangers. In doing so, Abraham exhibits what for Chrysostom is a

³⁰ For evidence of the importance of clothing, see Lucian of Samosata, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, 431.

key Christian virtue: he exhibits *philoxenia*. The letter to the Hebrews alludes to Abraham when it states, “Do not neglect to show *philoxenia*, for through it some have entertained sojourning angels unawares” (Heb 13, 2). The common translation of *philoxenia* is hospitality, but a better rendering is “friendship toward the stranger.”³¹ Abraham is praised because he included strangers within his network of *philia*.³² He is praised because he considered strangers as *philoï*, as friends. Abraham, Chrysostom explains,

sat down and watched for passers-by . . . not examining whether they were known to him or not; for it does not belong to *philoxenia* to worry about such things: friendly-mindedness (*philosôphrosunês*) involves sharing one’s possessions with all who pass-by. Since he cast a wide net of *philoxenia*, he in turn was judged worthy to welcome the Lord of all with his angels. On account of this, Paul too said, ‘Do not neglect *philoxenia* for through it some have entertained sojourning angels unawares’ (Heb 13,2), referring precisely to the patriarch. Thus Christ too said, ‘Whoever receives one of the least of these in my name, receives me’ (Mt 18, 5) (*In Genesim*, hom. 41 [PG 53, 378]).

Chrysostom, therefore, is inviting his congregation to see the poor in a new way. They are somehow the hidden emissaries of Christ. The poor, the *xenoi*, those who are literally strangers to the terrestrial network of patronage, become for the Christian powerful friends of God who stand in his court and who will plead their cause on the day of judgment.³³ Thus, Chrysostom exhorts his congregation,

Let us learn and strive after [Abraham’s] virtue. If we do this, then in the same fashion we, too, will come upon such a catch; rather, we will always come upon such a catch, if we so choose (*In Genesim*, hom. 41 [PG 53, 379]).

By imitating Abraham’s hospitality toward the poor, Christians can have Christ and his emissaries as the guests at their table. By casting the net of *philoxenia* widely, they too can catch such guests as friends and themselves be caught up into the network of divine friendship.

³¹ Frederick Gardiner in his translation of Chrysostom’s homilies on Hebrews notes that “neither the A. V. ‘to entertain strangers,’ nor the R. V. ‘to show love to strangers,’ have hit upon the natural meaning of *philoxenia*, adopted throughout by St. Chrys[ostom].” (*The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle to the Hebrews* in *NPNF* series, volume 14, 514, n. 3).

³² Chrysostom is very specific. Scripture commands us to have *philoxenia* because we are not simply to “entertain” strangers (*xenodokia*), but should receive them with love (*meta tou philein tous xenous*) (*In epistulam ad Hebraeos*, hom. 33 [PG 63, 227.55]).

³³ For a treatment of the poor as *xenoi*, see Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 92–93.

Conclusion

John Chrysostom challenges his congregations to see their world in a new way. In a society where the pursuit of power – and its accompanying goods and services – was mediated through networks of patronal friendship, Chrysostom tells his people to pay attention to the testimony of the Scriptures. The Scriptures proclaim that the saints (patriarchs and apostles) and the poor are all the friends of God. For the people of late antique society, this assertion has a specific meaning. It implies that the saints and the poor are significant powerbrokers in the network of patronage. The Christian, therefore, should pursue their friendship. Through lives of prayer and virtue, they become the friends of the saints. Through lives of generosity they become the friends of the poor. In both these friendships, they become the friends of God. The language of friendship with God, therefore, provides Chrysostom with a powerful instrument for the transformation of patronage. By imitating the holy ones of old, such as Abraham, the faithful of Chrysostom's congregation not only become the friends of God's friends; they themselves become the friends of God. Abraham becomes God's friend by incorporating the stranger into his network of friendships. He becomes God's friend, by setting a table and holding a feast for the poor. All Christians, Chrysostom argues, should do the same if they wish to be the friends of God.

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