John Chrysostom's Critique of Spousal Violence

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John Chrysostom's writings can serve as resources for the history of domestic abuse. Addressing social and economic factors that contributed to family violence, Chrysostom poignantly describes the terror of wives threatened and battered by their husbands, as well as ways in which women themselves perpetrated household violence. Chrysostom draws on classical moralist philosophy and Christian scripture to urge harmony in the household. While affirming a hierarchical model for marriage, the preacher nonetheless argues that a husband must never beat his wife under any circumstance. Despite the limits of Chrysostom's "reforming vision," his condemnation of spousal violence is far stronger than that of contemporaries such as Basil of Caesarea and Augustine.

In a tirade against men who beat their wives John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407 C.E.) vividly and poignantly characterizes the streets of the city as filled with cries and shouts spilling over from domestic disturbances taking place within the houses. He describes a battering episode so violent and severe that all the neighbors hear it and come running: "How can mere words describe what it is like when loud cries and wails travel through the alleyways, and neighbors and passersby run to the house of the one disgracing himself in this way, as though some animal were ravaging inside?"[1] John Chrysostom's homilies and treatises speak of—and *to*—men who inflict violence upon their wives through beatings, verbal abuse, force, and threats. Adamant that no husband should hit his wife for any reason, he exhorts husbands to rule their wives gently, without resorting to physical and emotional violence. A comparison of Chrysostom's sermons with the writings of other Christian clerics of his time reveals a stronger condemnation of spousal violence than most of his

1. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.7 (PG 61:222).

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contemporaries. Chrysostom also expresses specific concern and counsel for women who are victims of spousal violence.

As an observant commentator on society and the people around him, John Chrysostom can provide the twenty-first-century reader with a small glimpse into fourth- and fifth-century family life. This view is refracted through the lens of Chrysostom's own time and his culture-bound theological and social beliefs regarding marriage and gender; however, his homilies and writings, especially when studied together with other late antique evidence, can add to the historian's picture of family life in the Greco-Roman world. This essay considers the experience of late antique women who suffered physical violence at the hands of their husbands, Chrysostom's assessment of the causes of this violence, and the strategies that Chrysostom, an influential cleric, used to address spousal abuse.[2]

LATE ANTIQUE HOUSEHOLD VIOLENCE

Speaking about late antiquity, Peter Brown writes, "We are in a world characterized by a chilling absence of legal restraints on violence in the exercise of power."[3] The literature from the Greco-Roman world suggests there was a great deal of physical violence in the household, though most references to domestic violence pertain to physical punishment of slaves and children. Moral treatises on anger usually made a special point of encouraging moderation in the punishment of slaves, because slaves were seen to be especially vulnerable to their master's brutality.[4]

There have been a number of recent studies about corporal punishment of slaves and children,[5] but significantly less attention has been given to

2. An earlier version of this essay was presented at a session of the Eastern Orthodox Studies Group at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN, November 18, 2000. The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments, critique, and advice of Blake Leyerle, Mary E. Shields, N. Clayton Croy, John E. Birkner, the anonymous *JECS* reviewers, the members of the Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Seminar at the University of Notre Dame, and faculty colleagues from Capital University and Trinity Lutheran Seminary.

3. Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 50.

4. For instance, Seneca, *De ira* 1.15.2 (LCL 214:144), advises masters to punish their slaves only after their anger has cooled, lest their rage cause needless and inappropriate cruelty. Greek and Roman comedies were filled with slapstick humor involving masters striking their slaves. The comical slave complains about the many bruises he has received from his master, and the audience laughs, knowing that the blows and beatings are well deserved. See, e.g., Plautus, *Amphitryon* 290–340 (LCL 60:30–35).

5. See, e.g., Richard Saller, "Corporal Punishment, Authority, and Obedience in the Roman Household," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl

the issue of physical "chastisement" of wives.[6] However, one can glean a little information from plays, moral treatises, and other ancient literature. The fact that moralists such as Plutarch criticize abusive husbands indicates that people were aware of spousal violence, and that, at least among the philosophers, it was considered "poor form" and unmanly to express anger by using force against one's wife.[7] On the other hand, historian Valerius Maximus speaks without reproach about a husband who beat his wife to death:

> [Egnatius Mecennius] beat his wife to death with a club because she had drunk wine. No one brought a charge against him or even reproached this deed. Everyone judged that the penalty she paid to outraged Sobriety was an excellent lesson. For indeed any woman who seeks to use wine immoderately closes the door to all virtues and opens it to every vice.[8]

Plays and popular literature may also reveal something about societal attitudes regarding domestic violence. Often a comedy included an abusive wife who beat and mistreated her husband.[9] The mistreated husband was a comic figure precisely because this situation was an inversion of the proper order. Rarely was the husband depicted onstage as beating his wife.[10]

Rawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 144–65; and John J. Pilch, "'Beat His Ribs While He is Young' (Sir 30:12): A Window on the Mediterranean World," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 23 (1993): 101–13.

6. A notable exception is Patricia Clark, "Women, Slaves, and the Hierarchies of Domestic Violence: The Family of St. Augustine," in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations,* ed. Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (New York: Routledge, 1998), 109–29.

7. E.g., Plutarch, "De cohibenda ira," *Moralia* 460.12 (LCL 337:139) and "Coniugalia praecepta," *Moralia* 139.8 (LCL 222:304).

8. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 6.3.9 (LCL 493:38). Jo-Ann Shelton briefly discusses this passage in *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 47–48.

9. Pierre Grimal, *Love in Ancient Rome*, trans. Arthur Train, Jr. (New York: Crown, 1967), 87–88.

10. However, one revealing example of spousal violence occurs in Petronius' bawdy narrative, the *Satyricon*. An angry Trimalchio strikes his wife in the face with a drinking cup, calls her vile names, and threatens her with further violence (*Satyricon* 74 [LCL 15:170–72]). While the reader is supposed to be amused by the incident and the wife's overreaction to her husband's violence, the scene exemplifies Petronius' disdain for the *nouveau riche*. Patricia Clark, "Women, Slaves, and Hierarchies," 118, comments: "This scene of marital squabbling with its violent overtones underscores the unspeakable vulgarity with which Trimalchio conducts his household. Visible and habitual domestic discord, Petronius implies, is lower-class behavior and signals unmistakably the humble origins of Trimalchio and his wife."

With the exception of inflicting death, a husband's physical punishment of his wife was not prohibited by law.[11] Jo-Ann Shelton observes, "Battered wives had no legal recourse and could only hope for the intervention of their families."[12] Sarah Pomeroy likewise writes, "The primary protection a married woman had against a husband's abuse was the continuing surveillance by her own family."[13] A woman's family and social connections *could* serve as a potential source of protection. In most cases the wife usually remained in the *potestas*, or authority, of her father; thus for legal purposes she was still a member of her family of origin. If the woman's family of origin was of equal or higher status than the husband's family, the husband could experience social, economic, and political pressure to treat her better. Reports of mistreating a wife could result in a failed political endeavor or financial transaction, as well as the husband's loss of face. Plutarch recognized the protective role of women's families, and conjectured that the custom arose for Roman women to marry men who were not closely related so that their family could help them if their husbands mistreated them.[14]

In some cases the availability of divorce could provide financial incentive for husbands not to mistreat wives, because an unhappy wife could leave the marriage and take most of her dowry and all her personal property with her.[15] In Roman law until the time of Justinian either husband or wife could initiate divorce, and a father could initiate a divorce on his daughter's behalf.[16] Though the ideal matron was the *univira*, the woman who had married only once and who remained faithful to her husband

11. In the case of a wife who committed adultery, a man could kill the other man if the offender was lowborn, but he could not kill his wife—though the courts were sometimes lenient if the husband killed both of them when catching them in the act. A death penalty for adultery could be imposed only by the courts or by the woman's father or guardians from her side of the family. See Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 129.

12. Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, 48.

13. Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 91.

14. Plutarch, "Questiones Romanae," *Moralia* 108 (LCL 289:160).

15. For a discussion of the complex matter of financial settlements in the case of divorce, see Susan Treggiari, "Divorce Roman Style: How Easy and How Frequent Was It?" in Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children*, 38–39.

16. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law,* 82–91. However, in Constantine's divorce laws, initiated in 331 and remaining in effect until Julian's repeal of them thirty years later, greater restrictions were placed on unilateral divorces (CTh. 3.16). See Judith Evans Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine's Marriage Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 228–34.

even after his death,[17] in non-Christian society relatively little stigma was attached to divorce and remarriage. The ready availability of divorce, however, did not ensure that the victim would make use of this solution.[18] Affection for children would be a compelling reason for a woman to remain in an abusive marriage, since the husband normally retained custody.[19]

Among Christians there was a general disapproval of second marriages, especially after divorce.[20] For instance, Basil of Caesarea said that if a woman left her husband because of his poverty or because he beat her, she should be considered an adulteress if she remarried. Divorce is not warranted because the wife has a duty to be patient in the midst of suffering at her husband's hands: "If she left because she could not endure his beatings, she should have been forbearing rather than be separated from her husband."[21] If the woman left her husband under these circumstances, however, Basil said that the abandoned husband was permitted to take another wife.[22] Such ecclesiastical disapproval of divorce and remarriage, even in the case of marital battering, might well have influenced women to remain in violent marriages.

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM AS A RESOURCE FOR WOMEN'S HISTORY

Numerous commentators have remarked on the wealth of information that John Chrysostom provides about daily life in late antiquity, on topics such as folk customs, popular songs, wedding practices, children's toys, and urban life, to name just a few.[23] The reader must always remain conscious of Chrysostom's rhetorical use of such references, since his

17. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law,* 31–46, 82–91.

18. Patricia Clark, "Women, Slaves, and Hierarchies," 127–28 n. 16, argues that "the assumption that ease of divorce implies a diminished incidence of spousal abuse is open to question."

19. Treggiari, "Divorce Roman Style," 39–40; and Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 89.

20. See, for instance, the eulogy of Fabiola in Jerome, *ep.* 77 (LCL 262:312–16), in which the church father awkwardly defends Fabiola, who had divorced and remarried before her conversion to Christianity.

21. Basil of Caesarea, *ep.* 188.9 (LCL 243:36).

22. Basil of Caesarea, *ep.* 188.9 (LCL 243:38).

23. For examples of use of Chrysostom's homilies as a resource for social history, see Blake Leyerle, "Appealing to Children," *JECS* 5 (1997): 243–70; and J. C. B. Petropoulos, "The Church Father as Social Informant: St. John Chrysostom on Folk-Songs," *SP* 22 (1989): 159–64.

purpose was the moral edification of his audience rather than the creation of an ethnographic study for use by later generations.[24] Furthermore, Chrysostom's status, gender, and membership in the clerical ranks affected the *kind* of information—and the *presentation* of the information—that he provides in his homilies and treatises. Nevertheless, as an observant commentator on society, Chrysostom does offer potential resources for social history.

J. C. B. Petropoulos writes:

> It is remarkable that even where Chrysostom is outstanding from a stylistic or a rhetorical point of view . . . he may include material which also betrays the eye—and ear—of an astute informant. Some of Chrysostom's testimonia, be it noted, are of considerable interest to the social anthropologist and ethnographer because they constitute a firsthand report from the field, as it were; in a great many cases he provides independent evidence which may help the specialist in reassembling a picture of popular life in late antiquity.[25]

Chrysostom's writings reveal familiarity with many aspects of women's domestic life. For instance, he comments on the songs that women sing at their looms and the lullabies that wet nurses sing to children.[26] He is familiar with women's child-rearing practices, and as Blake Leyerle comments, "Chrysostom was surprisingly conversant with breastfeeding and weaning techniques."[27]

Pauline Allen observes that "Chrysostom's acquaintance with his congregation extended beyond the walls of the building or buildings in which he preached."[28] It is not improbable that some of Chrysostom's comments

24. Wendy Mayer raises this issue in her essay, "The Homily as Historical Document: Some Problems in Relation to John Chrysostom," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 35 (2001): 17. She criticizes interpreters' "failure to take the rhetorical dimension of the homiletic medium into adequate consideration." Elizabeth A. Clark, in her analysis of Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita Macrinae,* argues that "we cannot with certainty claim to hear the voices of 'real' women in early Christian texts, so appropriated have they been by male authors." (Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *CH* 67 [1998]: 31.)

25. Petropoulos, "Church Father as Social Informant," 159.

26. Ibid., 162–63.

27. Leyerle, "Appealing to Children," 250.

28. Pauline Allen, "The Homilist and the Congregation: A Case-Study of Chrysostom's Homilies on Hebrews," *Aug* 36 (1996): 419. On one occasion Chrysostom tells his congregation that the presbyter "visits, counsels, admonishes, and comes in the middle of the night whenever you summon him" (*In 1 Thess. hom.* 10.1 [PG 62:456]). See Pauline Allen, "John Chrysostom's Homilies on I and II Thessalonians: The Preacher and His Audience," *SP* 31 (1997): 19.

about spousal violence are based on his conversations with victims and observation of situations he witnessed in Antioch and Constantinople.[29] There is evidence that in the course of his pastoral work in both cities Chrysostom regularly engaged in private conversation and counseling with women, especially women of the upper classes.[30] Chrysostom's close personal relationship with the wealthy Constantinopolitan widow Olympias has been well studied.[31] Extant correspondence suggests that some Antiochene women, both matrons and widows, were Chrysostom's patrons; and, as Wendy Mayer argues, they "may well have been direct recipients of his pastoral care."[32] One of the duties of the bishop was supervision of female ascetics, and there was also the expectation that the bishop would regularly visit the homes of wealthy women. In his treatise *On the Priesthood* Chrysostom himself writes about the pastoral care of women:

> The presider, who tends the entire flock, cannot care only for the portion comprised of men and then overlook the women, especially since they need greater vigilance because they easily fall into sin. The bishop must give equal, if not greater, attention to managing the women's well-being. For he must look after them whenever they are sick, console them when they mourn, rebuke them when they are lazy, and aid them when they are oppressed.[33]

The rhetorical point of this passage was, of course, to emphasize—and even exaggerate—the difficulties of pastoral care. The twenty-first-century reader cannot know the degree to which Chrysostom actually looked

29. Chrysostom's sermons are notoriously hard both to date and to locate geographically, except on those occasions where he provides internal clues. Most of the homilies and other works cited in this essay are generally believed to date from the time of his ministry in Antioch prior to his elevation to bishop of Constantinople in 398. This essay will not attempt comparisons between Antiochene and Constantinopolitan society with regard to frequency, severity, and tolerance of family violence.

30. Studies of Chrysostom's relationships with women do suggest he was actively involved in pastoral care of women, though most extant evidence deals with his relationship with ascetic women in Constantinople. Wendy Mayer, "Constantinopolitan Women in Chrysostom's Circle," *VC* 53 (1999): 265–88.

31. See, for instance, C. Broc, "Le rôle des femmes dans l'Église de Constantinople d'après la correspondance de Jean Chrysostome," *SP* 27 (1993): 150–54; Ramón Teja with Mar Marcos, *Olimpiade la diaconessa (c. 395–408)*, Donne d'oriente e d'occidente 3 (Milan: Jaca Book, 1997), 49–92, 113–45, and *passim;* and Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1979), 46–57, 67–69, 77–78, 112–16, and *passim*.

32. Wendy Mayer, "Patronage, Pastoral Care and the Role of the Bishop at Antioch," *VC* 54 (2001): 70.

33. *De sacerdotio* 6.8 (SC 272:332).

after, consoled, rebuked, and aided his female parishioners. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Chrysostom presumed that a cleric's responsibility *did* include pastoral conversation with women. As bishop Flavian's assistant at Antioch, Chrysostom may well have had occasion to accompany Flavian on pastoral visits to women, or he may have conducted such visits on the bishop's behalf. Mayer's examination of Chrysostom's letters, sermons, and other material suggests the possibility that "John had direct contact and was more intimate with a greater number of women of the upper classes than has hitherto been supposed."[34]

Chrysostom's repeated admonitions to husbands not to beat their wives reveal his recognition that spousal violence was a problem among the members of his congregation. He makes reference to women enduring their husbands' beatings, violence, and anger. Language for men's treatment—or potential treatment—of their wives includes references to beating, striking with the hand, physical blows, and punishment: τύπτειν, χειράς ἐπάγειν, πληγή, κολάζειν.[35] John Chrysostom speaks of husbands' harshness, roughness, abuse, and violence: θρασυμένους, τραχυνόμενον, λοιδρία, βία.[36] He exclaims: "So many ways have been invented by men wishing to punish their wives!"[37] Particularly striking is Chrysostom's attention to verbal and emotional violence.[38] He criticizes men who belittle and debase their wives with insults, and he also speaks with reproach about men who attempt to control their wives through fear, force, and threats.[39]

Chrysostom seems to be aware of batterers motivated by jealousy and desire for obsessive control over their wives. Modern studies of domestic violence have found that one characteristic frequently found in abusive

34. Mayer, "Constantinopolitan Women," 273.

35. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.6–7 (PG 61:221–22); *De virginitate* 40.1–2 (SC 125:233–34).

36. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.6–7 (PG 61:221–22); *De virginitate* 40.1–2 (SC 125:233–34).

37. *De virginitate* 40.3 (SC 125:234).

38. Modern studies of family violence reveal that "[e]ven in cases in which physical assaults become quite severe, women often report the verbal abuse and derogation as being more painful and damaging than the physical attacks and injuries." Angela Browne, "Violence in Marriage: Until Death Do Us Part?" in *Violence between Intimate Partners: Patterns, Causes, and Effects,* ed. Albert P. Cardarelli (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 59.

39. *In Eph. hom.* 20.2–3 (PG 62:136–39). Chrysostom is consistent in his eschewing of physical violence toward offspring as well as spouses. In the case of one's *children,* however, Chrysostom is less reluctant to suggest threats of punishment. Blake Leyerle, "Appealing to Children," 257, notes: "Even if beating [children] was a common and accepted form of discipline, Chrysostom was against it, preferring instead the use of stern looks, reproachful words, or threats of future punishment."

husbands is extreme, unfounded jealousy, coupled with a desire to isolate the wife from contact with others by monitoring and controlling her every action.[40] This sort of situation is described in Chrysostom's treatise *On Virginity*. Chrysostom offers an insightful and poignant picture of the experience of the woman whose husband is jealous without cause:

> But that miserable and afflicted wife endures far greater oppression than her husband. For when she sees the one who should be her comfort in every distress, and from whom she should expect advocacy, being savage and more hostile to her than all others, where can she look henceforth? To whom can she flee for refuge? Where can she find escape from evils when her harbor has become choked up with mud and is laden with thousands of jutting rocks? . . . When will it be possible for her to live without tears? What night? What day? What holiday? When will she be free from wailing and crying and lamentation? She endures threats, maltreatment, and continual abuse—either from the husband aggrieved for imaginary causes or from the brutish servants. There is surveillance and scrutiny. Her entire life is filled with terror and trembling. For not only are her comings and goings the subject of interrogation, but even her words, glances, and sighs are meticulously cross-examined. She is compelled to be as still as a stone, enduring everything silently, confined to her rooms worse than a prisoner.[41]

Here Chrysostom gives us a picture of the anguish and inner turmoil of the mistreated wife who is subjected to her husband's jealousy and suspicions.

In his portrait of the distrustful husband and abused wife Chrysostom speaks of husbands who use their servants to monitor their wives' words and actions so that the wife is under constant surveillance even in the husband's absence: "If she wishes to speak or sigh or go out, she has to give explanations for everything and give the reason to those corrupt judges, namely, the house servants and multitude of slaves."[42] Though the ascetic treatise *On Virginity* frequently employs rhetorical exaggeration to discourage people from marrying, Chrysostom's description of the husband's use of servants to isolate and monitor female family members is corroborated by other late antique sources. Household porters could be ordered to prevent a wife or daughter from leaving the home so that women could be virtual prisoners in their own residences.[43] Slaves could

40. Browne, "Violence in Marriage," 60; Carol J. Adams, *Woman-Battering* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 42; and Joy M. K. Bussert, *Battered Women* (New York: Lutheran Church in America, 1986), 46.

41. *De virginitate* 52.3–5 (SC 125:292–94).

42. *De virginitate* 52.5 (SC 125:294).

43. For instance, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 18 the daughter Thecla needs to bribe the household porter with a bracelet in order to leave the house.

be enlisted as informants, reporting to the *paterfamilias* or other authority figures about a household member's actions.[44]

Any discussion of women and household violence must also recognize that wives were not only victims of physical and psychological violence but also perpetrators. Free women were embedded in a hierarchical system in which they could victimize slaves and children, perhaps venting the rage caused by their husbands' ill-treatment of them. Chrysostom makes reference to mothers' violence against children by comparing his audience to a child who has been hit and scolded by its mother. The audience had been chastised by him in a previous sermon, yet just as a child clings to its mother, the Constantinopolitan audience returned to church to hear him again: "You acted liked a child when it has been hit and scolded but who will not even then be separated from its mother, but instead follows her, crying, holding on to the sides of the mother's clothes and trails after her wailing."[45] Though Chrysostom disliked corporal punishment of children, here he adopts the persona of a mother who uses physical violence against her child—describing a scene that was no doubt familiar to his audience.

Particularly disturbing is Chrysostom's description of women's treatment of female slaves: "There are women so fierce and savage that the welts from their floggings do not stop bleeding within the same day. For they strip their slave girls, often even tying them to their beds, and call their husband for this purpose."[46] Greco-Roman literature contains numerous derisive references to women who abused their slaves.[47] John Chrysostom likewise speaks about the shamefulness of women who abuse and terrorize their female slaves. Using language that parallels his description of the spousal battering episode that could be heard by all one's neighbors and the people passing by,[48] Chrysostom gives his audience a

44. See, for instance, the role slaves play in controlling free women's behavior in Augustine's *Confessiones* 9.18–20 (CCL 27:144–46). For an extended discussion of the complex web of authority and control in household relationships, particularly the relationships between free women and slaves, see Clark, "Women, Slaves, and Hierarchies," 109–29.

45. *Nov. hom. 10* (PG 63:512): *In illud: Pater meus usque modo operatur.*

46. *In Eph. hom.* 15.3 (PG 62:109), trans. in Blake Leyerle, "Sermons on City Life," in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice,* ed. Richard Valantasis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 259.

47. E.g., Ovid, *Art of Love* 3.241–44 (LCL 232:134); Juvenal, *Satires* 6.487–95 (LCL 91:122–24); and Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 3.16 (LCL 44:124). Clark discusses these references in "Women, Slaves, and Hierarchies," 123.

48. See the quotation from *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.7 (PG 61:222) that opened this essay.

picture of the abusive mistress whose violence not only fills the household but disturbs the neighbors:

> When women get angry with their female slaves, they fill the whole house with their shouting. Many times if the house happens to be situated on a narrow street, even passersby can hear the woman's shouts and the slave's outcry. What could be more unseemly than this? To hear this wailing? Immediately all the neighboring women pry into the situation and ask, "What's going on in there?" "That harridan," one replies, "is beating her slave." What could be more disgraceful than this?[49]

In this homily, which counsels moderation in beating female slaves (and expresses a preference for disciplining them with threats and verbal chastisement), Chrysostom provides the reader with a chilling glimpse into women's ability to be perpetrators of household violence.

Several references to women's verbal abuse of their husbands raise questions about the experience of male victims of spousal violence, especially mental and psychological violence. In *Homily 15 on Acts* men's experience of verbal violence from their wives is compared to Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 8. The husband is counseled to endure this suffering patiently and win the martyr's crown. In his exhortation to endure insults patiently Chrysostom urges husbands not to respond violently to verbal abuse from their wives:

> Does your wife abuse [ὑβρίζει] you? Do not yourself become a woman, for it is womanly to be abusive. It is a sickness of the soul and a diminishment. Do not think it is unworthy of you when your wife abuses you. It is unworthy when *you* are abusive while she is patient: then you are acting shamefully, then you are disgraced. But if you endure it when you are abused, the evidence of your strength is great. I do not say these things to cause wives to be abusive. Certainly not! But I say this in case it should occur through the instigation of Satan. It is the responsibility of strong men to bear the weak.[50]

It is difficult to gauge the prevalence of women's verbal abuse of husbands in Chrysostom's congregations. Recent literature points out that, while women's abuse of men comprises only a small fraction of contemporary occurrences of spousal violence, there are women who *do* inflict physical and verbal violence on their husbands.[51] The treatise *On Virginity*

49. *In Eph. hom.* 15.3 (PG 62:109) (trans. Leyerle, "Sermons on City Life," 258).

50. *In Acta apost. hom.* 15.6 (PG 60:126).

51. For a discussion of the complexities involved in studying contemporary women's violence against husbands, see Barbara Wexler, *Violent Relationships: Battering and Abuse among Adults* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), 17–23.

suggests that Chrysostom thought wealthy women were sometimes inclined to perpetrate verbal and emotional violence against husbands of a lower social and economic class.[52] In such cases financial dependency could keep men in violent relationships. As with contemporary cases of women's violence against their husbands, male victims' suffering may well have been compounded by society's ridicule of abused husbands. Feelings of shame might keep the abused husband silent and powerless. One can only speculate about the emotional impact on a male victim watching a comedic stage performance of the mistreated and battered husband, who was a stock character in ancient plays. When Chrysostom speaks of men verbally abused by their wives, it is hard to know whether these descriptions are based on Chrysostom's awareness of actual situations and to what degree these are influenced by the ubiquitous stereotype of the domineering and shrewish wife. In his *Homily 15 on Acts* Chrysostom's emphasis on the "manliness" of the husband who silently endures his wife's abuse was a reversal of popular notions about the "effeminacy" of the mistreated husband.[53] Chrysostom's chief pastoral response to the male victim was not to suggest that the husband leave his abusive wife but instead to encourage the husband not to succumb to what Chrysostom felt to be the more serious "spiritual danger" of responding violently to his wife's provocations by becoming an abuser himself.

ASSESSMENTS OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE IN JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, THE MORALISTS, AND THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

Numerous Greek and Roman treatises have been written on marriage and on the control of anger. As noted above, most references about controlling physical violence deal with chastisement of slaves, but there are also a number of references to wife beating. Moralists such as Plutarch and Seneca gave three major reasons not to use force against one's wife. First, it is "poor form" to lose one's temper and succumb to physical violence—whether the victim be your wife, child, friend, or slave. The wise man

52. *De virginitate* 40.1 (SC 125:232).

53. However, Chrysostom *did* use the trope of the "womanized" and mistreated husband in his ascetic treatises to discourage men from marrying or entering into household arrangements with *subintroductae* ("spiritual wives"). See *De virginitate* 40.1 (SC 125:232); and Blake Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom's Attack on Spiritual Marriage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 121.

maintains his composure and does not get angry. Loss of control is regarded as childish and effeminate, and the man who is overcome by anger is the object of contempt and ridicule.[54] If one's wife gives cause for provocation, a husband should calm himself by saying, "I knew that my wife was a woman," excusing her failing on account of her gender.[55] Patricia Clark writes: "The *topos* of the good *paterfamilias* is distinguished from that of the bad chiefly by the presence of self-control. . . . The first model, the angry, despotic, and violent husband, is traditionally condemned primarily because he cannot control himself or his family."[56]

The second theme found in the moralists is their insistence that "your wife is not your slave." She is to be treated with the dignity befitting her station.[57] Conscious of issues of rank and status—and reflecting the belief that lowborn husbands are more likely to be violent than highborn spouses—the Greek and Roman authors are especially concerned that husbands of lesser status might try to debase their wives. Plutarch writes:

> Men who are unable to leap onto their horses because of their own weakness or effeminacy train the horses to kneel down and lower themselves. In the same way some men who have obtained wellborn or wealthy wives do not better themselves but instead subjugate their wives as though they would have more authority if their wives were demeaned. Rather, just as one takes into account the stature of the horse when using the bridle, one should likewise consider the rank of his wife.[58]

Plutarch insists that there is something unnatural about humbling a highborn wife. A man who demeans, mistreats, and debases his wife demonstrates his own weakness and effeminacy. A more masculine man can effectively control both wife and horse—particularly the *noble* wife and *noble* horse—without subjugating and humbling them.

Finally, the moralists argue that there are better ways to control one's wife than to resort to violence. Kindness, reason, and expressions of love are more effective than force, fear, or threats.[59]

We find all of these themes in the writings of John Chrysostom. The first theme, the control of anger, is used by Chrysostom especially in

54. Seneca, *De ira* 2.11 (LCL 214:188); and Plutarch, "De cohibenda ira," *Moralia* 457 (LCL 337:117).
55. Plutarch, "De cohibenda ira," *Moralia* 463 (LCL 337:154).
56. Clark, "Women, Slaves, and Hierarchies," 119.
57. Plutarch, "Coniugalia praecepta," *Moralia* 139.8 (LCL 222:304).
58. Plutarch, "Coniugalia praecepta," *Moralia* 139.8 (LCL 222:304–6).
59. Ibid.

regard to the treatment of slaves.[60] However, he also condemns the immoderacy of husbands who lose their temper at their wives. Preaching to men in the congregation, Chrysostom uses strong language to condemn angry and violent husbands. He says that a wife beater cannot even be called a man, but is a wild beast or like "a murderer of his father or mother."[61] Chrysostom recognizes that wives will not always be obedient. Thus he counsels the husband to be patient. Indeed, the difficult and disobedient wife can be a sort of "training ground" and "school of philosophy" providing the husband with opportunity to practice patience and self-control. The husband should take as his example the model of Socrates, who patiently endured his difficult wife Xanthippe and used the unpleasant situation for his own self-improvement.[62]

It is the latter two arguments, concern for the dignity of freeborn women and conviction that terror is an ineffective means of control, that are the most prevalent in Chrysostom's discussion of the treatment of wives. In *Homily 20 on Ephesians* Chrysostom tells husbands: "For someone can subdue a slave through fear, but even *he* will soon try to escape. But your life partner, the mother of your children, the source of every joy, must not be bound through fear and threats, but by love and a kind disposition."[63] Though Chrysostom describes women's subjection as a sort of slavery resulting from Eve's sin,[64] his admonitions to husbands stress that one's wife is not to be *treated* as a slave. Chrysostom insists upon the equal dignity of free marital partners, though the husband is to command and the wife is to obey: "For even if the wife is under subjection to us, it is as a wife, as a free woman, as equal in honor."[65] He compares

60. E.g., *De inani gloria* 66–72 (SC 188:164–74); *In Acta apost. hom.* 15.6 (PG 60:126).

61. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.7 (PG 61:222).

62. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.8 (PG 61:224).

63. *In Eph. hom.* 20.2 (PG 62:137).

64. E.g., *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.2 (PG 61:215). See Elaine Pagels, "The Politics of Paradise: Augustine's Exegesis of Genesis 1–3 versus that of John Chrysostom," *HTR* 78 (1985): 67–99; Valerie Karras, "Male Domination of Woman in the Writings of Saint John Chrysostom," *GOTR* 36 (1991): 131–39; Elizabeth A. Clark, "Sexual Politics in the Writings of John Chrysostom," *ATR* 59 (1977): 3–20; and eadem, "The Virginal *Politeia* and Plato's Republic: John Chrysostom on Women and the Sexual Relation," in Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends,* 1–34. David C. Ford deals with Chrysostom's interpretation of the Adam and Eve passage in *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1996), 90–91, 150.

65. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.2 (PG 61:214–15).

the relationship between husband and wife to that of a king and his high-ranking officer.[66] Chrysostom exhorts husbands:

> Then make your rule glorious. And it will be glorious when you do not dishonor your subject. The king will appear so much more dignified if he treats the officer under him with dignity; similarly if he dishonors and demeans the greatness of that rank, he is indirectly cutting off a significant portion of his own glory.[67]

In *Homily 10 on 1 Timothy* the relationship between husband and wife is compared to that of bishop and presbyter: "If he who presides over the church has partners [κοινωοὺς] in his authority [ἀρχῆς], so also does the husband have a partner—his wife."[68] Nonna Verna Harrison argues that in Chrysostom's "androcentric and asymmetrical" vision of marriage the husband is nevertheless best served when the wife has dignity and freedom to be a genuine companion:

> [H]er equality frees him from loneliness by giving him a real companion and dialogue partner. In modern terms she is a person just as he is a person, capable of free, mutual interaction in love, not a mere object, puppet, or slave. Although she is created for his sake, she is most helpful as a genuine collaborator, so for her to fulfill this function their relationship must involve genuine mutuality. She will help her husband most if he also helps her, enters into dialogue with her, and respects her freedom and dignity.[69]

66. For a discussion of the way in which women's subjection to men is interrelated with the rest of Chrysostom's views about leadership and subjection in various societal roles, see Ford, *Women and Men,* 125–29, 138–68, 189–99. Ford's positive assessment of Chrysostom's hierarchical views regarding marriage—especially Ford's assertion that "it is more glorious, more spiritually advantageous, indeed *more Christlike,* to be inferior, to be in a state of humble submission to those in authority" (144)—is critiqued in Nonna Verna Harrison's review essay, "The Inevitability of Hermeneutics: David C. Ford on St. John Chrysostom," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 44 (2000): 195–205.

67. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.8 (PG 61:222).

68. *In 1 Tim. hom.* 10.2 (PG 62:549). Harrison, "Inevitability of Hermeneutics," 200, argues that "when he calls the wife a 'second authority' in the home after her husband, this involves much more than childcare and housework, as it would for a suburban housewife today. She would have supervised the servants and perhaps helped manage extensive landed estates and agricultural and commercial enterprises. When her husband was away for long periods on military or civic service, as often happened, she would be left in charge of the household."

69. Nonna Verna Harrison, "Women and the Image of God according to St. John Chrysostom," in *In Dominico Eloquio/In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken,* ed. Paul M. Blowers, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 266–67.

Chrysostom insists that a husband is not to treat a freeborn wife as though she were lower than her station as a free woman, and he is never to strike her. He addresses the men in his congregation, saying:

> And to you husbands I say: "Let there be no offense that can constrain you to beat your wife." And why do I say "wife?" For neither would it be acceptable for a man to beat and lay hands on a maidservant. But if it is a great disgrace for a man to beat a female slave, how much worse is it to stretch forth your right hand against a free woman?[70]

Chrysostom's condemnation of wife beating is reminiscent of Plutarch's insistence that husbands should not debase their wives. The husband is to refrain from beating his wife on account of her dignity as a free woman, as well as the dignity of the marriage bond between free partners. In *Homily 20 on Ephesians* Chrysostom asks his congregation, "For what sort of marriage can it be when a wife is terrified of her husband? What sort of pleasure can a husband enjoy if he lives with his wife as though she were his slave and not a free woman?"[71] In *Homily 10 on Colossians* Chrysostom exhorts his audience: "Do not fight! For nothing is more bitter than such fighting when the husband battles against his wife."[72]

Like Plutarch, who was concerned with men who married women of somewhat nobler social status, Chrysostom attends to the domestic violence that can result from marriages contracted by partners of different social or economic status. On the one hand, Chrysostom recognizes the particular vulnerability of a wife who is of lower status than her husband. In his treatise *On Virginity* Chrysostom writes:

> [W]hat if she is well behaved and gentle but he is brash, contemptuous, hot-tempered, wrapping himself in pretensions, either because of his great wealth or because of his great power? And what if he regards the free woman as his slave and treats her no better than the maids? How will she endure such force and violence?[73]

Conversely, Chrysostom says that marriages between wealthy women and poor men also have potential for violence. He believes that wealthy women tend to dominate their husbands. He fears that in response to women's assertion of power husbands will resort to fear and force to try to humble their wives. Even though the wife's "dominance" creates an unnatural situation in which the proper order of things has been over-

70. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.7 (PG 61:222).
71. *In Eph. hom.* 20.2 (PG 62:137).
72. *In Col. hom.* 10.1 (PG 62:365).
73. *De virginitate* 40.1 (SC 125:232).

turned, it is probably better for a poor man to simply permit his wife's dominance than to use force and threats:

> For when she has been subjected to her husband through force, fear, and violence, it will be more unbearable and unpleasant than if she commands him with total authority. Why do you suppose this is? Because this force drives out all love and pleasure. If neither love nor desire are present, but instead fear and duress, how valuable can the marriage be henceforth?[74]

The treatise *On Virginity* quoted above was written chiefly to encourage the unmarried and the widowed to abstain from marriage and undertake an ascetic life. Though Chrysostom uses the specter of the carnivalesque inversion of marital authority to dissuade men from marrying, we also see in Chrysostom a concern for the quality of a marriage and a regard for mutual affection between nuptial partners—a marital affection that is destroyed by violence.[75]

Chrysostom, like Plutarch and Seneca, also emphasizes the ineffectiveness of using fear and force to control spouses. Chrysostom tells husbands that there are more effective ways to rule one's unruly wife. He uses the example of Christ's relationship to his bride the church:

> You should conduct yourselves toward your wives in the same way that [Christ] showed much care to her who turned away from him, spit on him, and scorned him, putting her at his feet not with threats, violence, terror, or other such things. Even if you see her showing you contempt, scorning you, or despising you, you will be able to subject her to yourself through great care, love, and affection. For there are no bonds more powerful than these, especially for husband and wife.[76]

In Chrysostom's view of marriage the husband is to rule and the wife is to obey. The wife's obedience brings about harmony in the household.[77] Chrysostom tells women: "If 'the one who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment' [Rom 13.2], how much more so if she does not submit to her husband! For thus God willed it from the beginning."[78] However, the proper and most effective way for the Christian husband to rule his wife is by means of kindness and affection, following Christ's example.

74. *De virginitate* 54.1 (SC 125:302).

75. In her study of John Chrysostom's treatise against "spiritual marriage" Blake Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows,* 121, refers to inversion of gender roles as "comic gender-bending" intended to shame men into the behavior prescribed by Chrysostom. Chrysostom uses a similar argument in *De virginitate* 54.1 (SC 125:302).

76. *In Eph. hom.* 20.2 (PG 62:137).

77. *In Col. hom.* 10 (PG 62:366).

78. *In Eph. hom.* 20.1 (PG 62:136).

It is necessary to comment on the portrayal of women in the ethical and philosophical writings that have influenced Chrysostom. While the Greco-Roman moralists are insistent that it is best not to lose one's temper and that there are better ways to control one's wife and slaves than to resort to corporal punishment, one nevertheless gains the impression from such writings that it is very difficult to be a husband and a slave owner. Slaves are clumsy, inept, and dishonest; wives can be shrill, domineering, and nagging; and it really takes all the effort a man can muster not to hit them. A *paterfamilias* must constantly calm himself by saying, "He's only a slave—he can't do any better." Or, "I knew she was a woman when I married her."[79] In fact, it takes a great deal of heroic effort and praiseworthy restraint not to lose one's temper, and one should consider difficult wives and slaves to be a continual opportunity for self-improvement and an ongoing test of one's self-control. The famous example of Socrates' patient endurance of his nagging wife is frequently mentioned in the moralist writings.[80] His difficult wife Xanthippe is a school of virtue, and Socrates is the ongoing student suffering under her training. As noted above, John Chrysostom himself makes reference to Socrates' nagging wife in one of his sermons. Though husbands are frequently told not to beat their wives, one could argue that the subtext of many of the moralist writings is that the nagging and disobedient wife may well deserve the beating, and it is she who provoked the attack. Strikingly, on one occasion Chrysostom tells husbands, fathers, and masters that their position makes them victims of metaphorical violence, soldiers under siege:

> [The monks] rest far away from the battle. Therefore they do not receive many wounds. But you perpetually stand in the front lines and sustain continual blows. Thus you are in need of more remedies. For your wife provokes you, your son vexes you, your servant enrages you, your enemy plots treachery, your friend is envious, your neighbor insults you, your comrade trips you up, many a lawsuit threatens you, poverty worries you, loss of property makes you miserable, success puffs you up, and misfortune humbles you. Surrounding us on every side are many resentments and worries, many disturbances and sorrows, many incitements to conceit and compulsions to despair. A thousand arrows attack us from every direction. Thus there is constant need for the full armor of the scriptures.[81]

79. Plutarch, "De cohibenda ira," *Moralia* 463 (LCL 337:154); and Seneca, *De ira* 2.30.1 (LCL 214:231).

80. E.g., Seneca, *De constantia* 18.5 (LCL 214:102).

81. *De Lazaro* 3.1 (PG 48:992).

Though the head of household is the person with greatest potential for coercive power and violence against family members and slaves, he is the metaphorical victim of assaults by his wife, children, and servants.

Chrysostom's assessment of spousal violence, sympathy for the victim, and critique of those who apply emotional and physical violence as a form of control are particularly striking when his writings are compared with those of his contemporaries. Basil of Caesarea, addressing a question about a man who murdered his wife with an axe, wrote that if he had killed someone while beating that person with a leather strap or pliant rod for the sake of correcting that person's behavior, the death should be deemed involuntary. Using an axe or a sword indicates intent to kill, while employing a strap or rod signals that the intent was chastisement and correction of the household member.[82]

In *City of God* Augustine speaks of the need of the *paterfamilias* to use physical violence and threats when necessary to keep *concordia* in the household:

> [M]asters ought to feel their position of authority a greater burden than servants their service. And if any member of the family interrupts the domestic peace by disobedience, that one is corrected either by word or blow, or some kind of just and legitimate punishment, such as society permits, that he or she may be the better for it, and be readjusted to the family harmony from which one had dislocated oneself.[83]

In *Confessions* Augustine includes a chilling account of violence in his community and family of origin. Speaking about his mother Monica's marriage to his father Patricius, Augustine says that "she was given to a man whom she served as though he were her master" (*tradita viro servivit veluti domino*).[84] Augustine describes Monica's relationship with her husband, as well as her advice to battered women:

> Though that man was filled with great benevolence, he also had a fiery temper. But she knew not to resist her angry husband either in deeds or in words. When he was unreasonably enraged, she waited for an opportune time and explained the reason for her action when he calmed down. Therefore when many matrons who bore on their faces the marks of beatings, even though their husbands were gentler [than Patricius], complained in their conversations about the behavior of their husbands, she admonished their tongues, saying seriously—though pretending to joke [*per iocem*]—that from the time they heard their marriage contracts recited they

82. Basil of Caesarea, *ep.* 188.8 (LCL 243:28–30).
83. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 19.16 (CCL 48:683).
84. Augustine, *Confessiones* 9.19 (CCL 27:145).

> should consider these contracts the means by which they had been made slaves [*instrumenta quibus ancillae factae essent*].[85] Thus, mindful of their station, they ought not exalt themselves against their masters. Whenever the women, knowing how savage a husband she endured, were amazed that they had neither heard nor been given clear evidence that he ever attacked his wife, or that they had disagreed even one day in a domestic dispute, they casually asked the reason. Then she taught the rule which I mentioned above. Those who followed it expressed their appreciation when they tried it. Those who did not follow it were oppressed and mistreated.[86]

Though we cannot be certain about the actual experiences of the historical Monica, the situation described by Augustine is one in which his mother constantly accommodates her words and behavior to avoid a severe battering episode. In this account Monica *knows* that Patricius is violent, and the threat of violence is always present.

Peter Brown, in his biography of Augustine, said that Patricius never beat Monica, and that is certainly what Augustine seems to want his reader to believe.[87] However, a careful look at the text reveals that Augustine does not directly say that his father never hit his mother. Rather, he shifts the reader to the point of view of the battered women friends who express amazement that they had never seen marks and bruises on her, and that they had never heard reports that she had been beaten. The reader should remember, though, that according to Augustine's testimony, Monica herself would not tell them if she had been beaten; she is critical of women who share that information with others.[88] Furthermore, even one severe battering episode can create a situation in which the husband can control his wife through psychological terror. The woman

85. David G. Hunter, "Augustine and the Making of Marriage in Roman North Africa," *JECS* 11 (2003): 81, observes that on a number of occasions Augustine speaks of the *tabulae matrimoniales,* or marriage contracts, as documents that "reinforce the subordination of wives to their husbands." Augustine refers to the marriage contracts as "documents of purchase" (*instrumenta emptionis*) that make the wife the *ancilla* of her husband, who is now her *dominus.* See, e.g., Augustine, *serm.* 37.7 (CCL 41:454) and 332.4 (PL 38:1463).

86. Augustine, *Confessiones* 9.19 (CCL 27:145).

87. Peter Brown, *Augustine: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 31.

88. Patricia Clark, commenting on this episode, notes the culture of silence described in the *Confessions* ("Women, Slaves, and Hierarchies," 114). Monica is critical of wives who band together to speak about their husband's abuse. In the episode that follows the quotation above, female slaves are beaten because they are verbally critical of Monica. Augustine's circumlocutions regarding his father's treatment of Monica follow this pattern of silence.

thus expends considerable effort in her interactions with her husband in order to avoid future beatings. Patricia Clark comments:

> Whether or not Monnica [sic] was actually beaten by her husband is a question that cannot be answered; opinions vary and Augustine's account is ambiguously worded. In fact, it was not necessary for a husband like Patricius actually to strike his wife. The shadow of his imminent violence and the vivid reminders on the bruised faces of other wives would have been sufficient to ensure that she was obedient, nonconfrontational, rational, and controlled—controlled in effect by the implicit threat of violence.[89]

Augustine claims that Monica's strategy for avoidance of battering was to act in a servile manner to placate her husband. Though Augustine says his mother spoke *per iocem*, it is important to note that she is described as counseling her battered friends to consider themselves slaves (*ancillae*) of their husbands. The family dynamic depicted by Augustine—the servitude of the wife and the psychological terror imposed by her husband—is one that John Chrysostom would find tragic and repulsive.

PASTORAL CARE AND THE PREVENTION OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

John Chrysostom recognized the potentially fatal consequences of household violence. He said that the Hebrew scriptures permitted divorce for the sake of protecting wives from the deadly outcome of their husband's anger:

> Why did God grant [divorce] to the Jews? Quite clearly on account of their hardness of heart, so that they might not fill their houses with the blood of relatives. For tell me, what would have been better—that the hated woman be thrown out or that she be slaughtered at home? For they would have done this if they were not permitted to divorce. This is why it is written, "If you hate her, send her away."[90]

It should be noted that Chrysostom felt Jewish husbands were particularly "hard hearted" and prone to anger and violence against their wives; conversely, he thought that the Gentile Corinthians whom Paul addressed in his epistle would ideally be more "reasonable."[91]

89. Ibid., 115.

90. *De virginitate* 41.1 (SC 125:234).

91. For a discussion of Chrysostom's regrettable vituperation of Jews, see Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

Chrysostom's advice to women suffering from beatings reflects his pastoral concern for the quality of the marriage and the desire to be faithful to New Testament counsels concerning marriage and divorce. Though the gospels quote Jesus as prohibiting divorce except for adultery, we will see below that in certain circumstances Chrysostom uses Paul's writings to permit women to separate from violent husbands and to discourage victims from returning to batterers.

Chrysostom's chief method of pastoral care was the homily by which he instructed the congregation. He believed that the preacher was a sort of physician, applying different medical treatments to different members of the audience in his care of sick souls.[92] Wendy Mayer's work on Chrysostom's "audience" points to the likelihood that a significant portion of Chrysostom's listeners were female.[93] Mayer also takes into account the physical location of men and women. In the Great Church in Antioch and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople the women seem to have been in galleries above the men on the main floor. In the Old Church in Antioch men and women were separated by a wooden partition that divided the church crosswise so that men were in front and women in the back. Other churches used partitions that bisected the space lengthwise. Mayer writes:

> If men and women were segregated, it would be easier for Chrysostom to focus his attention on one or the other when he wished to direct encouragement towards them or highlight them for their particular failings. It is easier to gesture towards a subsection of the audience or to fix them with one's eye if they are grouped together within a particular section of the nave or upstairs in a gallery.[94]

In his homilies dealing with marriage Chrysostom sometimes specifically addresses husbands, and other times wives. One can imagine gesturing toward or fixing his gaze upon men as he lambasted spousal battery, and one can see him looking at the women in the gallery above as he exhorted them to "turn the other cheek" to endure the violence.

There is evidence that other clergymen from this period exhorted women

92. *De sacerdotio* 4.2.12 (SC 272:108–14).

93. Wendy Mayer, "Female Participation and the Late Fourth-Century Preacher's Audience," *Aug* 39 (1999): 139–47. One must be cautious when using references to sermons in order to posit the composition of the historical audience. The homiletic text is a rhetorical piece that may describe the *intended* hearer or the *ideal* audience. Nevertheless, the numerous references and addresses to women in Chrysostom's audience suggest that they were regularly present in significant numbers.

94. Wendy Mayer, "The Dynamics of Liturgical Space: Aspects of the Interaction Between St. John Chrysostom and His Audiences," *EL* 111 (1997): 109.

to remain with abusive husbands, emphasizing the indissolubility of marriage and the wife's duty to accept her husband's authority—and even his ill-treatment. Chrysostom's contemporary Basil of Caesarea seems to be aware of women who have left their husbands due to the husband's violence. In Homily 7 of *Hexaemeron* Basil uses a zoological example, the viper who was believed to mate with the sea lamprey, in order to argue that the wife must remain with her husband despite his drunkenness and beatings:

> The viper, the most savage of reptiles, approaches the sea lamprey for marriage. Announcing its arrival with a hiss, the viper summons her from the depths to conjugal union. She obeys and is united to the venomous animal. What does this mean? Even if the husband is rough, the wife must bear it and use no excuse to tear the union asunder. He is a batterer? But he is your husband. A drunkard? But he is united to you by nature. He is harsh and implacable? But he is now your member and the most honored of members.[95]

Basil does address husbands as well, again invoking the zoological example: "Let the husband also listen to the lesson for him. The viper vomits forth its venom out of reverence for marriage. So will you not put aside the harshness and inhumanity of soul out of reverence for your union?"[96]

During this period Christian clerics in the West also emphasized the husband's authority and rights. One of the issues addressed by the first Council of Toledo in 400 C.E. was the punishment of wives. A decree from this council says that the wives of clerics are bound to accept their husband's physical chastisement. The decree draws the line at killing one's wife, and it says that the cleric has power "except for murder" or "except unto death" (*potestas praeter necem*): "If the wives of any clerics have sinned, they should accept this authority of their husbands, except unto death, of imprisoning and binding them in their house and forcing salutary—but not deadly—fasts, lest they have more license for sinning."[97] The decree goes on to say that a poor cleric without servants may bind his wife in the home to keep her from escaping, so that he is not deprived of domestic help.[98]

95. Basil, *Hexaemeron* 7.5 (PG 29:160).

96. Ibid.

97. *Con. Tolet. I* 7.44, in *Amplissima Collectio Conciliorum* III, ed. Joannes Dominicus Mansi (Florence, 1759); facsimile edition (Paris & Leipzig: H. Welter, 1901), col. 999.

98. Ibid.

Like his contemporaries, Chrysostom speaks of the wife's obligation to endure physical chastisement from her husband, even when Chrysostom regards that treatment as unjust and unwarranted: "For if it is necessary to turn the other cheek to the Gentiles who strike you on the right, it is even more necessary to endure a harsh husband."[99] Here we have an example of what Blake Leyerle calls "the limits of Chrysostom's reforming vision."[100] Chrysostom says that a patient wife who endures beatings can reform her husband through her example of gentleness. Chrysostom urges the wife to consider the martyr's reward accruing for her in heaven, as well as the praise she will receive in this life for her endurance.[101]

Yet contrary to the other clerics mentioned above, Chrysostom permits couples to separate in certain situations. In the case of a Christian woman married to an unbeliever, Chrysostom believes it is best for the couple to separate if their religious differences lead to severe conflicts in the household. Chrysostom appears to be aware of pagan husbands who beat their wives for refusing to participate in the sacrifices and worship of non-Christian gods. Thus he advises, "If he beats you every day and fights with you over this, it is better to be separated."[102]

Chrysostom's views on separation by women married to believers is based on Paul's words in 1 Cor 7.10–11: "To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from the husband, but if she *does* separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband."[103] Chrysostom does not specifically tell women to leave abusive husbands. In fact, in his treatise *On Virginity* he says that Paul instructs women to bear this bondage patiently, "to endure nobly this undeclared war, this battle without truce."[104] However, Chrysostom goes on to say that if a woman has been separated (χωρισθεῖσαν) from a husband who beats her, she has two choices: she may live apart from her husband and remain celibate or she may return to her abusive husband. Thus, without specifically advising a wife to separate, Chrysostom indirectly permits it. In fact, Chrysostom actually seems to criticize women who return to violent husbands:

99. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.87 (PG 61:222).

100. Leyerle, "Sermons on City Life," 249, uses this phrase with reference to Chrysostom's failure to condemn the institution of slavery.

101. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.87 (PG 61:222).

102. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 19.4 (PG 61:155).

103. NRSV; emphasis added.

104. *De virginitate* 40.1 (SC 125:234).

> For she must prevail over the force of her passion; or if she does not wish to do this, she must flatter her overbearing husband and submit herself to him for whatever he wishes, whether he beats her, or bathes her with abuse, or subjects her to the contempt of the household, and so forth.[105]

Separation because of the husband's violence does not yield the spiritual benefits offered by a mutually agreed upon separation for the sake of pursuing celibacy, but separation is permitted.[106] It should be noted that this ascetic treatise claims that the only reason women return to abusive husbands is because they cannot endure celibacy. Chrysostom's rhetoric praises celibacy and castigates those who lack sexual self-control. His focus on celibacy in *On Virginity* may be the reason why Chrysostom does not consider other possible reasons for a wife's return to her husband, reasons such as economic factors, family and social pressures, or the fact that the husband normally retained custody of the children.

The advice that may have had the most potential for preventing the problem of spousal violence may have been Chrysostom's counsel regarding the parents' selection of a husband for their daughter and his suggestion that women elect celibacy as a means of avoiding spousal violence. In *On Virginity* he recommends virginity as the surest means of escaping an abusive marriage.[107] *Homily 12 on Colossians* advises parents to be careful in selecting a gentle and wise husband for their daughter, one who will not treat her as a slave:

> When you are planning to marry off your daughter, do not look for wealth, illustriousness of his family, or greatness of his birthplace. These are all superfluous. Rather, if you wish your daughter to live in happiness, look for piety in his soul, gentleness, true intelligence, and fear of the Lord. If you seek a wealthier man, not only will you not help her, but you will hurt her, for you will make her a slave instead of a free woman. She will not enjoy pleasure from the wealth, but instead she will experience the odiousness of servitude. Do not seek these things, but rather seek a man of equal status, or—if that is not possible—a poorer man, rather than a rich man if you wish to marry your daughter to a husband instead of selling her to a master [ἀποδόσθαι δεσπότῃ].[108]

105. *De virginitate* 40.2 (SC 125:234). This passage may also suggest the possibility of marital rape or the wife's submission to unwanted or demeaning sexual relations.

106. For a discussion of John Chrysostom's views on divorce, see Ford, *Women and Men,* 183. Ford argues that "Chrysostom is enough of a realist to recognize that certain marriages simply are not ordained by God" and that "Chrysostom does allow the possibility for divorce, with the implication that either wife or husband has the right to initiate it."

107. *De virginitate* 40.1–3 (SC 125:232–34).

108. *In Col. hom.* 12 (PG 62:390).

With such advice Chrysostom reveals his concern for the well-being of young brides as he poignantly appeals to parents to look for husbands who will treat their daughters well.

If it is possible to use modern studies about domestic violence to gain insights about domestic violence in the fourth and fifth centuries, there are several observations that could be made with regard to the effectiveness of Chrysostom's sermons, writings, and pastoral care in curbing household violence. First, it has been found that victims of domestic violence tend to take seriously their pastors' counsel, particularly if the priest or minister tells them to bear the violence and try to change the husband through their own quiet acceptance of beatings.[109] In this case, one can imagine women in Chrysostom's congregation choosing to remain with their husbands for religious reasons because the preacher has exhorted wives to endure their husband's blows. Even though Chrysostom's admonitions to wives to obey harsh husbands are nearly always followed by exhortations to husbands not to abuse their wives, it was probably the wives who best heeded Chrysostom's counsel.

Secondly, many treatment programs for batterers use external checks and controls on the husband's behavior, such as male-led support groups that use peer accountability to other men. When coupled with severe legal consequences for failure to control violent behavior, such peer accountability groups have had some success in curbing battery.[110] Late antique society was a complex network of social and kinship relationships. One can imagine that pressures applied by other men in one's social network could serve as a restraint against men's violence against their wives—and these restraints would probably have more force than a twenty-first-century peer support group because the fourth-century husband was deeply imbedded in the social, economic, political, and kinship network.[111] One can also imagine that a charismatic and influential religious leader may sometimes have been effective in restraining household violence if he

109. Bussert, *Battered Women*, 59–65.

110. Bussert, *Battered Women*, 52–53; Adams, *Woman-Battering*, 24–25, 58–62, 95–99; Sana Loue, *Intimate Partner Violence: Societal, Medical, Legal, and Individual Responses* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2001), 124–26; and Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 211–19.

111. Regarding contemporary North American violence, Albert P. Cardarelli cites studies that suggest that offenders "who have a stake in conformity" (such as employment or social status that could be jeopardized) are "more likely to desist from further violence following arrest" than those who are unemployed or have a prior criminal record ("Confronting Intimate Violence: Looking toward the Twenty-First Century," in idem, *Violence between Intimate Partners,* 183).

applied pressure—and continual surveillance—on an offending husband. It is also possible, however, that intervention by a religious leader might result in battering episodes of even greater severity due to the husband's anger at his attempted involvement in the domestic matter.[112]

Furthermore, while Chrysostom's condemnations of spousal violence are strong and eloquent, such words of admonishment are concentrated primarily in his treatise *On Virginity* and in sermons on biblical texts dealing with spousal relationships. Sometimes he did raise the issue when the homiletic text was unrelated to marriage,[113] but most frequently Chrysostom's sermons addressed spousal violence in conjunction with Pauline texts on marriage such as 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5, and Colossians 3. While his parishioners would have heard strong condemnation of spousal violence at various times when the text specifically called for this attention, Chrysostom did not address this issue from the ambo in a sustained or regular manner.

Finally, though John Chrysostom strongly condemned wife battering at various times in his writings, there is no evidence that Chrysostom intervened in specific situations among his parishioners or exhorted the community to apply social pressure to reform the behavior of men who beat their wives.[114] Rather, by using language of the "shamefulness," "bestiality," and "effeminacy" of resorting to violence, he appeals to men's "self-concept" to encourage batterers to control their own behavior.[115] There are a number of letters that reveal Chrysostom attempting to bring about peace in household conflict.[116] However, none of the extant letters show

112. For a discussion of incidents in which North American batterers have violently retaliated against their wives for seeking external sources of help that were perceived as challenges to their marital authority (e.g., police, courts, restraining orders), see James Ptacek, "The Tactics and Strategies of Men Who Batter: Testimony from Women Seeking Restraining Orders," in Cardarelli, *Violence between Intimate Partners,* 117–20. Also see Loue, *Intimate Partner Violence*, 123.

113. E.g., *In Acta apost. hom.* 15.6 (PG 60:126).

114. It is characteristic of Chrysostom to recommend that church members apply social pressure (and even force) to reform the behavior of errant members. E.g., *In illud, Si esurierit inimicus* 3; *Adversus Judaeos* 1.4 (PG 48:848–49). I have not found similar injunctions concerning wife beating, nor have I found evidence that Chrysostom gave shelter to women fleeing from abusive husbands.

115. This is parallel to Chrysostom's words about the punishment of household slaves. Blake Leyerle, "Sermons on City Life," 249, speaks of Chrysostom "appealing to the self-concept of the master" when he preaches against the physical abuse of slaves.

116. E.g., *ep.* 117 (PG 52:672–73) in which Chrysostom urges the Constantinopolitan noblewoman Theodora to be reconciled to a member of her household whom she had banished.

that Chrysostom intervened in cases of spousal violence. Therefore, while John Chrysostom has one of the most forceful critiques of spousal violence found among the Church Fathers, he may not have curtailed it among his parishioners in any significant way.

CONCLUSION

In the sermons and treatises of John Chrysostom we have one preacher's response to household violence, as well as a compelling and disturbing glimpse into the society he observed. Given the paucity of information about spousal abuse in antiquity, Chrysostom's writings provide one of the most important sources for recovering a partial picture of domestic violence during that time. He describes the alleys of the city as filled with cries of distress spilling out from the fights within the houses. Chrysostom paints a vivid picture of the terror and distress of women who were mistreated. He describes the raging of angry and jealous husbands. He speaks of husbands who experience insults and verbal abuse from their wives. Of particular interest is Chrysostom's special concern for the vulnerability of those women who did not have the benefit of influential social and family connections.

The very fact of Chrysostom's eloquence and rhetorical skill in these passages, however, might raise questions regarding the extent to which his portrayal of marital violence was shaped by his agendas, especially the asceticism enjoined in his early writings. One of his most poignant accounts, that of the battered wife whose every word and action is scrutinized and controlled by her jealous husband, was written precisely to prevent marriage in the first place.[117] The same treatise, *On Virginity*, offers the image of the separated wife who returns to her batterer, whom she must constantly mollify and to whom she must "submit herself . . . for whatever he wishes," suggesting the threat of marital rape and sexual humiliation.[118] In these passages Chrysostom's descriptions are doubtless shaded by his "ascetic agenda" as he provides women with compelling reasons not to marry. However, accounts of domestic violence from our own time describe similar dynamics, such as the controlling tactics of batterers, the isolation of victims, and the trauma caused by verbal and emotional violence. Thus, the twenty-first-century reader should not dismiss Chrysostom's portraits of domestic terror as implausible or unlikely,

117. *De virginitate* 52.3–5 (SC 125:292–94).
118. *De virginitate* 40.2 (SC 125:234).

especially when Chrysostom's writings are considered together with other ancient accounts. At the same time, contemporary readers must remain aware of the differences between their own culture and that of ancient Antioch or Constantinople. For instance, some late antique women with strong social and kinship networks may have had more resources for protection from spousal violence than do many twenty-first-century victims.

While some of Chrysostom's writings about spousal violence were motivated by his desire to discourage marriage, most of his references to spousal violence are homiletic exhortations to harmony, directed to people in the context of their married lives. Thus, though some of his passages about domestic abuse are concerned with limiting sexual passion, the vast majority of Chrysostom's treatment of this topic is more closely linked with his desire to control another sort of passion—the passion of *anger.* In fact, Chrysostom's homilies provide a fairly positive assessment of marriage, with the potential for husband and wife to live according to Chrysostom's ideal of marital harmony: "For when [husband and wife] are in concord, the children are raised well, the household is well ordered, and neighbors, friends, and relatives enjoy the pleasantness of their harmony."[119] In the majority of Chrysostom's references to the topic of spousal abuse his chief concern is not to discourage marriage itself but to check the anger and violence that disrupt marital concord. Toward this end, Chrysostom's main strategy is to appeal to the man's self-image. The batterer is unruly—like a wild, raging animal. The man who gives in to anger is considered "effeminate," while the *true* man remains calm and reasonable even when his wife provokes him. A reasonable man will also appreciate a harmonious marriage with a wife who can be a genuine partner. Chrysostom, at times, stresses the relative equality of marital partners so that the wife, though subordinate to her husband, is to be treated as a partner and not a slave. The husband's dominion over his wife is not absolute, and her submission is not to be brought about nor maintained by violence.

Nevertheless, Chrysostom's rhetoric about hierarchy in the family—male dominance and female submission—continues to affirm the social structures that were the context of this violence. Here Chrysostom remains constrained by his own culture, as well as by scriptural passages that prohibit divorce and/or enjoin women to submit to their husbands. Though in some instances he allows for women's separation from violent husbands, at other times they are told to endure the violence. Wives are to

119. *In Eph. hom.* 20.1 (PG 62:136).

"turn the other cheek" and look forward to the martyr's reward they will receive in heaven.[120]

However, scriptural passages such as the fifth chapter of Ephesians also become occasions for sermons that directly addressed the topic of family violence. Unlike a number of his clerical contemporaries who spoke approvingly of the husband maintaining household *concordia* through threats and application of physical punishment, Chrysostom's message to men remains consistently opposed to physical violence. A husband is not to strike his wife for any reason. Nor is he to terrorize or threaten her. Furthermore, while in most ancient literature "the onus in reconciliation and domestic peace-keeping lay with the wife,"[121] Chrysostom places the larger portion of the responsibility on the husband. His condemnation of wife beating is stronger and more frequent than similar admonitions found in the writings of either the non-Christian moralists or the Christian preachers of his era. In the evocation of sympathy for the victim and his scathing criticism of household violence—whether physical or emotional, by husband or by wife—Chrysostom's "golden tongue" speaks eloquently to his age and our own.

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120. *In 1 Cor. hom.* 26.87 (PG 61:222).
121. Clark, "Women, Slaves, and Hierarchies," 122.