

# Parenthood in Late Antiquity: The Evidence of Chrysostom

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FAMILY STRUCTURE in late antiquity is an evolving topic. Evelyn Patlagean, far ahead of the scholarly field, has published extensively on family structure in this period of transition.<sup>1</sup> The topic touches upon other very important issues—religion, asceticism, gender roles, private and public space. While this paper is relevant to some of those tangential issues, its primary purpose is to detail the private relationship between parents and children in late antiquity, drawing upon the abundant writings of John Chrysostom for evidence. Blake Leyerle similarly used Chrysostom to explicate childhood in late antiquity. In separate places she states that Chrysostom indicates on the one hand that parents seem to love their children, but on the other that owing to the use of household slaves, parents did not have much of a relationship with their children.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Chrysostom offers compelling evidence that

<sup>1</sup> Among her other works, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance* (Paris 1977); *Structure sociale, famille, chrétienté à Byzance (IV<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup>)* (London 1981). See also B. Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine," *P&P* 115 (1987) 3–51; S. Harvey, "Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography," *J ECS* 4 (1996) 27–56; H. Moxnes, ed., *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London 1997); B. Leyerle, "Appealing to Children," *J ECS* 5 (1997) 243–270; A. Jacobs, "A Family Affair: Marriage, Class, and Ethics in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles," *J ECS* 7 (1999) 105–138; G. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity* (New York 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Leyerle (*supra* n.1) 245 (parental love), 254–255 (lack of relationship). She notes studies of Classical family structure that also suggest the parental relationship was encroached upon by slave nurses and tutors. See K. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family* (Oxford 1991); M. Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore 1990).

parents had a close relationship with their children. Leyerle was primarily interested in Chrysostom's religious/rhetorical use of the subject of childhood, and not the relationship between parents and children.

While Chrysostom has traditionally been seen as an impassioned voice for asceticism,<sup>3</sup> he often displays a detailed understanding of, and empathy for, the strong love that binds and perpetuates family. He does on occasion denounce marriage, sexual procreation, and family—most notably in his treatise *De uirginitate*. This work, justifiably, has often been cited as typical of fourth-century Christian ascetic rhetoric, not only because of its ascetic theme but also because of the great prestige and influence that he enjoyed. However, as will be seen, Chrysostom throughout his numerous sermons and treatises provides anecdotal testimony that he knew his audience would understand regarding the deep love and joy that parents and children shared. It would seem thoroughly inconsistent and contrary to rhetorical purpose for an impassioned proponent of asceticism to be constantly reminding his audience of the unique joy to be found amongst family. This evidence implies that he was more moderate on issues of marriage and family than a select reading of *De uirginitate* might suggest. In fact, the evidence of Chrysostom can be used to show that in the fourth-century East, there did exist a general societal desire for children, a desire that was supported by a general understanding that parents normally had a very loving relationship with their children.<sup>4</sup> This would

<sup>3</sup>E.g., E. Clark, "Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine," *Jour. of Feminist Studies in Rel.* 5 (1989) 25–46.

<sup>4</sup>Gillian Clark points out: "The negative interpretation [of asceticism] depends in part on a bleak picture of late antique social relationships. Twentieth-century interpreters have suggested that spouses were resentful of arranged marriages, and that both men and women were encouraged by medical and philosophical discourse to think of sexual activity as dangerous and depleting. Mothers, it has been said, were in any case indifferent to the children conceived against their wishes and cared for by household slaves": "Women and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: The Refusal of Status and Gender," in V. Wim-bush and R. Valantasis, edd., *Asceticism* (Oxford/New York 1995) 40.

stand in contradiction to some of the conclusions in the excellent work of Patlagean.

Patlagean's seminal scholarship serves as a benchmark for the study of late antique/early Byzantine social structure. She conjectures that beginning in the fourth century and as a consequence of Christian rhetoric—Chrysostom a foremost example—society began to reject traditional marriage and family.<sup>5</sup> In turn, this rejection had a significant impact on the demography and social structure of early Byzantium.<sup>6</sup> Patlagean even goes so far as to say that monastic communities began to replace the central role of the family and family structure.<sup>7</sup> Again, to the contrary, the sermons and treatises of Chrysostom will demonstrate a strong recognition of, and empathy for, the continuation of traditional family structure in the fourth-century East.

### The Evidence of Chrysostom<sup>8</sup>

No one questions Chrysostom's reputation as a highly skilled rhetorician, but to what extent is the rhetoric of Chrysostom relevant to the broad social realities of the fourth century? The

<sup>5</sup>Patlagean, *Pauvreté* (*supra* n.1) 152–153.

<sup>6</sup>Patlagean, "Sur la limitation de la fécondité dans la haute époque byzantine," *Annales ESC* 24 (1969) 1369: "La ponction démographique sur la génération présente, et par conséquent sur l'avenir, opérée dès l'enfance ou à la veille de mariage, comme le montrent les récits hagiographiques, dispose désormais d'un procédé dont la réussite est démontrée par le dépérissement des formes individuelles de soustraction au mariage à partir du V<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ce grand effort constructeur des monastères se ralentit dans l'ensemble au cours des dernières décennies du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les calamités qui ravagent l'Empire au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, dont la peste n'est que la plus grave, surviennent, semble-t-il, au moment où la ponction monastique s'exerçait depuis assez de générations pour que l'effet en soit déjà cumulé. Les conséquences de la rencontre ont pu alors être sensibles." English transl. E. Forster and P. M. Ranum, "Birth Control in the Early Byzantine Empire," in R. Forster and O. Ranum, edd., *Biology of Man in History* (Baltimore 1975) 1–22.

<sup>7</sup>Patlagean (*supra* n.6) 1369: "Telle est du moins la conclusion démographique que nous proposons. Mais la structure sociale n'en a pas moins été modifiée de façon définitive. La famille et le groupe de familles n'y jouent plus un rôle irremplaçable."

<sup>8</sup>I have included extensive quotations from Chrysostom so that the reader can judge more accurately the tone of Chrysostom's message.

answer depends in part on a determination of his audience. It has generally been argued that Chrysostom's audience was the wealthy upper class.<sup>9</sup> No doubt they were part of his audience, but I believe that audience was representative of Christian urban society as a whole—artisans, merchants, etc. Otherwise it is difficult to understand the tumultuous events toward the end of his career when on several occasions mass rioting broke out in support of Chrysostom.<sup>10</sup> He enjoyed enormous popularity across a broad spectrum of society because of his eloquence, and because of his ability to convey the *Lebensanschauung* of non-elites. These are the qualities that make his writings useful for the study of social structure.

It is often thought that the fathers of the church, including Chrysostom, were generally hostile to traditional marriage and family structure and widely denounced sexual procreation, instead advocating asceticism.<sup>11</sup> Patlagean, in arguing her case for widespread sexual renunciation in the fourth century, has stated that nowhere in Christian sermonizing can a positive attitude be found in regard to having a large family.<sup>12</sup> However, in the works of Chrysostom several passages refer to the common desire for many children and the joy that they bring:

<sup>9</sup>R. MacMullen, "The Preacher's Audience," *JThS* 40 (1989) 503–511; D. O'Roark, "Close-Kin Marriage in Late Antiquity: The Evidence of Chrysostom," *GRBS* 37 (1996) 399–411; Leyerle (*supra* n.1).

<sup>10</sup>Socr. *HE* 6.16. On these events see T. Gregory, *Vox Populi* (Columbus 1979) 41–79, at 68 "Aside from his apparent holiness, the most important factor in explaining John's popularity was his ability to appeal to a wide body of public opinion." See also J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom* (Ithaca 1995) 211–271.

<sup>11</sup>On the complex topic of asceticism some basic works are: P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York 1988); S. Elm, "Virgins of God": *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1994); Wimbush and Valantasis (*supra* n.4).

<sup>12</sup>Patlagean (*supra* n.6) 1366: "Mais l'éloge de la famille nombreuse en tant que telle ne se rencontre ni dans la prédication, bien sûr, ni dans les éloges des inscriptions funéraires." See also E. Eyben, "Family Planning in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *AncSoc* 11/12 (1980–81) 64: "it should be pointed out that early Christianity nowhere advocates a wealth of children."

εἰ γὰρ καὶ μεγάλη ἡ φροντίς ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους γίνεται, ὅμως οὐ παυόμεθα εὐχόμενοι αὐξηθῆναι τὴν φροντίδα ταύτην ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐπιδοθῆναι τουτὶ τὸ πλήθος, καὶ πολλαπλάσιον γενέσθαι καὶ ἄπειρον.

For although great concern arises from the number, nevertheless we do not stop praying that this concern be increased for us, and that that number be increased, and become many times as many and without limit.<sup>13</sup>

In his treatise on virginity Chrysostom described the perfect marriage as one that contained in part, "many fine children."<sup>14</sup> If early Christianity did not necessarily advocate large families, Chrysostom at least acknowledged a general societal desire for them. This is not to say that large families were universally desired, as there was some debate over the pros and cons of having many children versus none, or only one:

οἶον, ὁ παιδας οὐκ ἔχων, οὐδὲν οὕτω δεινὸν νομίζει, ὡς ἀπαιδίαν· ὁ πολλοὺς ἔχων πάλιν μετὰ πενίας, οὐδὲν οὕτως ὡς πολυπαιδίαν αἰτιᾶται· ὁ ἕνα ἔχων, οὐδὲν χεῖρον τοῦ ἕνα ἔχειν νομίζει. ἐντεῦθεν γάρ, φησί, καὶ ῥαθυμίας γίνεται, καὶ ἐν λύπῃ τὸν πατέρα καθίστησιν, ἀεὶ περιπόθητος αὐτῷ τυγχάνων, καὶ οὐδεμίαν ἐπιστροφὴν δεχόμενος.

In this way, he who has no children thinks nothing is so terrible as childlessness. Again, he who has many amid poverty alleges nothing is worse than abundance of children. He who has one thinks nothing is worse than to have one. For then, he says, the child becomes lazy and brings distress to his father, always being much loved by him and receiving no reproof.<sup>15</sup>

Childlessness was considered a malady, and was especially lamented by those who reached old age without children:

ἴστε γὰρ ὅπως οἱ ἐν γήρᾳ φθάσαντες, μάλιστα καὶ ἐν ἀπαιδίᾳ τὸν ἅπαντα διάγοντες χρόνον, ἐπιθυμοῦσι παίδων.

For you all know how those who have arrived at old age, and

<sup>13</sup>Hom. 4 in 2 Thess. (PG 62.492).

<sup>14</sup>Virg. (PG 48.579–580).

<sup>15</sup>Hom. 1 in 2 Tim. (PG 62.605).

especially those who have passed the whole time in childlessness, long for children.<sup>16</sup>

The poor man might complain of the extreme hardship of raising a large family, but some fathers though burdened with many children nevertheless could not suffer to lose one:

καὶ γὰρ πατέρες, καίτοι ὑπὸ τῆς πολυπαιδίας πολλακίς κοπόμενοι, ὅμως οὐδένα βούλονται ἀποβαλεῖν.

For fathers, even though often wearied by having many children, nevertheless do not wish to lose a one.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout Chrysostom's works there is testimony for parental involvement in the care and maintenance of children. He stated that one of the drawbacks of parenthood was that the many cares that accompanied it often prevented parents from devoting any time to more spiritual matters.<sup>18</sup> This was one of his arguments for women to maintain their virginity—spouse and children take up too much time and are a constant distraction. This argument (like others below) implies that mothers were extensively involved in the lives of their children. If parents routinely handed over their children to nurses to raise, Chrysostom's argument would be pointless and would not carry any weight with his audience. He did not earn his reputation as a great rhetorician and sermonizer by making pointless arguments.

When Chrysostom exhorted his congregation to be more active, some Christians replied that the responsibilities of being a husband and a parent took up too much time and energy and they could not do all that he asked:

καὶ μὴ μοι λέγε, ὅτι γυναῖκα ἔχω, καὶ παιδιά κέκτημαι, καὶ οἰκίας προϊστάμαι, καὶ οὐ δύναμαι ταῦτα κατορθοῦν.

And tell me not, "I have a wife, and I have children, and I am

<sup>16</sup>*Hom. 32 in Gen.* (PG 53.295); see also *Pecc.* (51.358–359), *Virg.* (48.578).

<sup>17</sup>*Hom. 4 in 2 Thess.* (PG 62.492).

<sup>18</sup>*Virg.* (PG 48.566).

master of a household, and I am not able to set right these things" (that an active Christian should).<sup>19</sup>

This, again, is evidence that parents were involved in raising their children, even to such a degree that family life might interfere with Christian life. The fact that family obligations could even be offered as an excuse implies that it was commonly understood that a husband/father was expected to be involved in the lives of his children, perhaps to the extent that he sacrifice other aspects of community involvement. Parents might also plead the expense of raising children as a valid excuse for not being generous in charity, or conversely as an excuse for amassing large fortunes, since fathers wished to pass on a substantial inheritance to their sons and provide dowries to their daughters.<sup>20</sup>

The evidence of Chrysostom reflects great parental concern for children and also reveals a rather extensive parental involvement in the play, education, and emotional support of children. In his *De sacerdotio libro 1* he recalls the words of his mother, when she told him that even as an infant, he was a great comfort to her.

διά τοι τοῦτο καὶ ἔτι νήπιος ὢν καὶ μηδὲ φθέγγεσθαι πο  
μαθὼν, ὅτε μάλιστα τέρπουσι τοὺς τεκόντας οἱ παῖδες, πολλήν  
μοι παρεῖχες τὴν παράκλησιν.

On account of this, even when still an infant and not yet having learned how to speak, when children especially delight their parents, you provided to me much comfort.<sup>21</sup>

Chrysostom clearly expected others to identify with the sentiment that the period of infancy was a treasured time of joy for parents. This not only implies that parents were involved with their infants but that they did in fact have an emotional

<sup>19</sup>Hom. 43 in Mt. (PG 57.464).

<sup>20</sup>Stat. 20 (PG 49.202); Hom. 79 in Jo. (59.432); Hom.1 in 2 Tim. (62.605); Hom. 10 in 1 Thess. (62.459); Hom. 18 in Rom. (60.582).

<sup>21</sup>Sac. 1 (PG 48.625).

investment in them. This early emotional investment is made all the more clear in a passage from *De uirginitate*. Chrysostom throughout this pamphlet argued against marriage, and part of his argument is an enumeration of the many cares, pains, and woes that marriage entails. One of these is childbirth and the consequent emotional vulnerability that comes with parenthood:

ἡ γὰρ ἀθλία καὶ ταλαίπωρος κόρη, καίτοι οὕτω σφοδρῶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἀλγηδόνων ἐκείνων κατατεινομένη, δέδοικε τούτων οὐχ ἦττον μήποτε λελωβημένον καὶ ἀνάπηρον ἀντὶ ἀρτίου καὶ υἱοῦς προέλθῃ ... τοῦ δὲ παιδίου πεσόντος εἰς τὴν γῆν καὶ πρώτην ἀφέντος φωνὴν ἕτεροι πάλιν διαδέχονται φροντίδες, ὑπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ τῆς ἀνατροφῆς.

The poor miserable girl, although so tormented by pain (labor pain), fears no less than it that a damaged and crippled baby be born instead of one perfect and healthy ... When the child is born and gives its first cry, other anxieties for its safety and upbringing succeed in turn her earlier cares.<sup>22</sup>

This passage reveals the powerful emotions that were a part of not just infancy, but labor and birth itself, and even with the first cry of a newborn mothers had already invested their emotions.

In *Homilia 17 in Matthaëum*, Chrysostom used an anecdote about breast-feeding and discussed how parents, in trying to ween their child, hurl many mockeries at the child and, if that fails, will sometimes apply bitter salves to the nipple in order to repulse the child's longing:

ὁ μαστός, ὅταν τὸ αὐτοῦ πληρώσῃ πᾶν, καὶ πρὸς τὴν τελειότεραν τράπεζαν τὸ παιδίον παραπέμπῃ, λοιπὸν ἄχρηστος φαίνεται, καὶ οἱ πρότερον ἀναγκαῖον αὐτὸν εἶναι νομίζοντες τῷ παιδίῳ γονεῖς, μυρίους αὐτὸν διαβάλλουσι σκώμμασι· πολλοὶ δὲ οὐδὲ ῥήμασιν αὐτὸν μόνον διαβάλλουσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πικροῖς ἐπιχρίουσι φαρμάκοις, ἵν' ὅταν μὴ ἰσχύσῃ τὰ ῥήματα τὴν ἄκαιρον περὶ

<sup>22</sup>*Virg.* (PG 48.579), transl. S. Shore, *John Chrysostom: On Virginité; Against Remarriage* (Lewistown 1983) 93.



αὐτὸν διάθεσιν ἀνελεῖν τοῦ παιδίου, τὰ πράγματα σβέσῃ τὸν πόθον.

The breast, when it has fulfilled its purpose and passed the child on to a more complete meal, hereafter seems useless; and the parents who before thought it (the breast) to be necessary for the child, hurl countless jests at it. And many do not stop at mockeries alone, but also smear it with bitter potions, so that when words are not sufficient to abolish the child's unseasonable partiality towards it, deeds may quell the desire.<sup>23</sup>

This does not necessarily prove that it was the mother who breast-fed her child, but it shows the continued involvement of parents in the caretaking decisions of early childhood.

Parental concern for small children extended to the daily task of preventing accidents:

τὰ παιδία τὰ μικρὰ, ἐπειδὰν μαχαίρας ἐπιλάβηται ἢ ξίφους, διὰ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι δεόντως κεχρηῆσθαι, πολλακίς εἰς προὔπτον ἑαυτὰ κίνδυνον ἐμβάλλει, ὅθεν οὐδὲ ἀφιαῖσιν αἱ μητέρες ἀδεῶς τῶν τοιούτων ἐφάπτεσθαι.

Small children, when they pick up daggers or swords, through not knowing how to use them properly often put themselves in manifest danger, wherefore their mothers do not freely allow them to lay hold of such things.<sup>24</sup>

ἡμεῖς, ἐὰν ἴδωμεν παιδίον μάχαιραν κατέχον, κἄν μὴ πληγὴν ἴδωμεν, μαστιγοῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγορεύομεν αὐτῷ μηδέποτε αὐτὴν κατασχεῖν.

We, if we see a child holding a knife and do not see him beaten, whip him and forbid to him ever to hold it.<sup>25</sup>

These passages are important because they demonstrate the practical involvement of parents in the lives of their children. It is especially to be noted that Chrysostom says *mothers*, not nurses or attendants, take care not to let their children hazard an accident with bladed danger. A child picking up a knife is

<sup>23</sup>Hom. 17 in Mt. (PG 57.261–262).

<sup>24</sup>Hom. 66 in Gen. (PG 54.570–571).

<sup>25</sup>Hom. 17 in Mt. (PG 57.256).

not an especially extraordinary event, but rather belongs to the more mundane, everyday-life context. Of course nurses and tutors continued to be used by some families, but these passages show that mothers were with their children in the daily context in which such an incident might take place. They also give evidence for corporal punishment as a means of discipline, but this is a topic that will be discussed below.

Another potential risk that worried parents was that of kidnappers enticing children with candy:

ἀνδραποδισταὶ πολλάκις παιδία μικρὰ συλῶντες καὶ κλέπτοντες οὐ πληγὰς καὶ μάστιγας, οὐδ' ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων ὑπισχνοῦνται, ἀλλὰ πλακοῦντας καὶ τραγήματα καὶ ἕτερα τοιαῦτα, οἷς ἡ παιδικὴ χαίρειν εἴωθεν ἡλικία, προτείνουσιν, ἵνα τούτοις ἐκεῖνα δελεασθέντα, καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν αὐτῶν ἀποδόμενα εἰς κίνδυνον ἐμπέσῃ τὸν ἔσχατον.

Often kidnappers who steal and carry off small children do not promise blows and whippings or anything else of this sort, but rather cakes and sweetmeats and other such things in which the childhood age is accustomed to delight, so that enticed by these things they give up their freedom and fall into extreme danger.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, parents in late antiquity warned their children not to play with knives and to beware of strangers offering candy. Constantine passed legislation that inflicted capital punishment on anyone convicted of kidnapping—slaves and freedpersons to be thrown to the wild beasts, freeborn persons to be killed in gladiatorial combat (*Cod.Th.* 9.18.1). That Constantine strengthened legislation against this crime reflects how heinous kidnapping was considered, and it also reflects a significant societal appreciation for children and the bond between parents and their children that was considered inviolable. It is clear that parents

<sup>26</sup>*Stat.* 16 (PG 49.168).

were involved in the everyday play and supervision of children, and there is considerable evidence that late antique society demonstrated appreciation and affection for its children.

Parents might play with children by making scary faces or by telling them stories, a pastime that children especially loved.<sup>27</sup> Some children teased their parents by constantly asking them silly questions.<sup>28</sup> Children, using potsherds and clay as their materials, played at building houses.<sup>29</sup> Parents might regulate the amount of playtime by hiding favorite toys, in order that children might not neglect necessary things:

ἐπὶ τῶν παιδίων τῶν μικρῶν, ὅταν μὲν ἐπιθυμῇ τὸ παιδίον παιδικῶν ἀθυρμάτων, μετὰ πολλῆς σπουδῆς ἐκείνα κρύπτομεν, οἷον σφαῖραν καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα, ἵνα μὴ ἐμποδίζηται τῶν ἀναγκαίων· ὅταν δὲ αὐτῶν καταφρονήσῃ καὶ μηκέτι ἐπιθυμῇ, ἀδεῶς αὐτῶν μεταδίδομεν, εἰδότες ὡς οὐδεμία βλάβη λοιπὸν αὐτῷ ἐντεῦθεν γίνεται, τῆς ἐπιθυμίας ἐκείνης οὐκέτι ἰσχυροῦσης ἀπαγαγεῖν αὐτὸν τῶν ἀναγκαίων.

In the case of small children, when the child desires childish playthings, with great haste we hide them, such as a ball and such like, in order that they not impede serious matters; but whenever he thinks slightly of them and no longer desires them, we easily give them back, knowing that no damage to him from them remains, as that desire is no longer sufficient to pull him away from serious matters.<sup>30</sup>

### Fatherhood in Late Antiquity

Recent work on the relationship between fathers and sons in late antiquity has focused on paternal discipline, in one case the institution of *patria potestas*, in another the use of corporal punishment.<sup>31</sup> The central role of the father in Classical family

<sup>27</sup>Hom. 52 in Ac. (PG 60.364–365).

<sup>28</sup>Hom. 9 in 1 Thess. (PG 62.445).

<sup>29</sup>Hom. 23 in Mt. (PG 57.318–319).

<sup>30</sup>Hom. 25 in Heb. (PG 63.174); cf. Hom. 23 in Mt. (57.318–319).

<sup>31</sup>A. Arjava, "Paternal Power in Late Antiquity," *JRS* 88 (1998) 147–165; T. S. de Bruyn, "Flogging a Son: The Emergence of the *pater flagellens* in Latin Christian Discourse," *J ECS* 7 (1999) 249–290.

structure continues in late antiquity. This is perhaps unsurprising, but in consideration of Patlagean's theory that society was increasingly rejecting marriage and the procreation of children, it is interesting to find such rich and abundant testimony of paternal affection and traditional family values, especially when espoused by a Christian rhetor. The authority of the *paterfamilias* was still extensive but in reality society dictated restraint. The continued existence of the ancient *consilium* also served to mitigate a father's authority and to allow family members to participate in domestic decisions.<sup>32</sup>

Chrysostom testifies to the demonstration of paternal affection toward even very young children:

οὐχ ὀρώμεν τὰ παιδία, ὅταν ὑπὸ τῶν πατέρων βασταζόμενα ἐντείνῃ πληγὰς εἰς τὰς γνάθους τοῦ φέροντος, πῶς ὁ πατήρ ἡδέως παρέχει τῷ παιδί τῆς ὀργῆς ἐμφορηθῆναι, καὶ ὅταν ἴδῃ κενώσαντα τὸν θυμὸν φαιδρύνεται;

Do we not see children, when being carried by their fathers, aim blows at the jaw of the carrier, how the father sweetly allows the child to have his fill of rage and, when he sees the passion drained, brightens up?<sup>33</sup>

This shows not only the involvement of fathers in the lives of their young children, but also the affectionate and tender relationship that could develop between fathers and children at this very early stage. Other passages provide a glimpse of how fathers might play and interact with their infant children:

διὰ τοῦτο καὶ πατέρες, κὰν ἀπάντων ὧσι φιλοσοφώτεροι καὶ ῥητορικώτεροι, οὐκ αἰσχύνονται τοῖς παισὶ συμπελλίζοντες· καὶ

<sup>32</sup>Stat. 3 (PG 49.57). The *consilium domesticum* was a family council that included primarily the husband, wife, and children, but could also include household slaves, extended family, and close family friends. A *consilium* might be convened to discuss any important issue that affected the family, such as the marriage arrangements of a son or daughter. Only the *paterfamilias* could call a *consilium* and while he was under no obligation to carry out its advice, it was expected that he would strongly consider its opinions. See W. K. Lacey, "Patria Potestas," in B. Rawson, ed., *The Family in Ancient Rome* (Ithaca 1986) 137ff; J. A. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (Ithaca 1967) 107–108.

<sup>33</sup>Hom. 4 in 1 Cor. (PG 61.38). See also Hom. 3 in 1 Tim. (62.530).

οὐδεὶς ἐγκαλεῖ τῶν ὁρώντων, ἀλλ' οὕτω καλὸν εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα δοκεῖ, ὡς καὶ εὐχῆς ἄξιον εἶναι. κἂν πονηροὶ γένωνται πάλιν, οὗτοι μένουσι διορθοῦντες, ἐπιμελόμενοι, συστέλλοντες αὐτῶν τὰ ὀνειδίη, καὶ οὐκ αἰσχύνονται.

Because of this (love) fathers, even if they be rather philosophic and scholarly, are not ashamed to lisp with their children, and no observer finds fault but thinks the gesture to be so fine as to be worthy of praise. Even, again, if they should turn out bad, fathers persist in setting right, exercising care, moderating criticisms of them, and are not ashamed.<sup>34</sup>

εἰ γὰρ πατὴρ οὐχ ὀρᾷ τὴν ἀξίαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλὰ συμμελλίζει τοῖς παιδίοις, καὶ τροφήν καὶ ἐδέσματα καὶ πόματα οὐχ Ἑλληνικοῖς ὀνόμασι καλῶν, ἀλλὰ παιδικῇ τινι διαλέξει καὶ βαρβάρῳ, πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὁ Θεός.

For if a father does not consider his own dignity, but lisps to his children and calls food and meats and drinks not by their Greek names but by some childish and barbarous word, so far more does God.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly Chrysostom was describing behavior that he expected his audience to be easily familiar with. Fathers carrying their young children about and engaging with them in “baby-talk” are portrayed as everyday life. Chrysostom takes for granted that a father is interested in his children and cares for them, even at this early stage of development when they are especially fragile. Chrysostom considered paternal love to be wholly natural and perhaps even unavoidable:

“καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν, ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νουθεσίᾳ Κυρίου.” οὐκ εἶπεν, ἀγαπᾶτε αὐτά· τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ ἀκόντων αὐτῶν ἡ φύσις ἐπισπάται, καὶ περιττὸν ἦν περὶ τῶν τοιούτων νόμον τιθέναι.

“And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but raise them in the knowledge and admonition of the lord.” He (Paul) does not say, “show them affection.” For this nature manages,

<sup>34</sup>Hom. 33 in 1 Cor. (PG 61.278).

<sup>35</sup>Hom. 3 in Tit. (PG 62.678).

even in those unwilling, and it was superfluous to make a law concerning such things.<sup>36</sup>

It is probably not surprising to discover that Chrysostom considered paternal love to be natural, but in attempting to understand familial relationships in past cultures—especially given the seemingly harsh attitude of ancient society implied by abandonment—even the most “natural” sentiments should not be assumed.<sup>37</sup>

The care and attention that fathers showed toward their infants is also seen of young children. Chrysostom uses the example of how a father protects and guides his star-crossed child:

... καθάπερ πατήρ φιλόστοργος παιδίφ δυστυχῶς ἔχοντι πρὸς ἅπαντα, πανταχοῦ συμπεριάγων καὶ συμπεριακολουθῶν.  
 ... just as an affectionate father with a child who is unfortunate in all things, leading or following about with him everywhere.<sup>38</sup>

Chrysostom was also familiar with indulgent fathers who spared nothing so that their children might not suffer unhappiness:

πολλὰ καὶ πέρα τοῦ δέοντος οἱ πατέρες χαρίζονται τοῖς παισὶ, τῶν σπλάγχνων αὐτοῖς διαθερμαινομένων [ἐκεῖνοι] τῶν πατρικῶν· κἂν ἴδωσι τὸ παιδίον κατηφιάσαν, τηκόμενον, αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον ἐκεῖνου δάκνονται, καὶ οὐ παύονται, ἕως ἂν τῆς ἀθυμίας τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ἀνέλωσι.

Fathers give their children many things even beyond what is needful, their fatherly hearts being warm toward them; when they see their child downcast, pining, they are themselves more afflicted than he, and do not stop until they have removed the cause of his dispiritedness.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Hom. 21 in Eph.* (PG 62.150).

<sup>37</sup> M. Golden, “Did the Ancients Care when their Children Died?” *Gar 35* (1988) 152–163.

<sup>38</sup> *Hom. 14 in Rom.* (PG 60.534).

<sup>39</sup> *Hom. 9 in Phil.* (PG 62.253–254).

Chrysostom further illustrates the interaction and concern of fathers for children in the context of everyday life:

... ἐπεὶ καὶ πατὴρ φιλόστοργος τοῖς ἀπολειφθεῖσι παισὶ τῆς τραπέζης τὰ λείψανα διαφυλάττει, ἵνα παραγενόμενοι παραμυθίαν τῆς ἀπουσίας εὕρωσι τὴν τούτων φυλακὴν.

... since also an affectionate father guards the leftovers from the table for his absent children, so that when they arrive they find in the guarding of these things a consolation for their absence.<sup>40</sup>

Paternal affection is especially evident in times of crisis, and Chrysostom gives vivid testimony to the depth of paternal sentiment that misfortune and illness might occasion:

ἴστε γὰρ, ἴστε πῶς πολλάκις ἠϋξάντο πατέρες ὑπὲρ παιδῶν τιμωρίαν ὑποσχεῖν, καὶ ὅπως βαρύτερον αὐτοῖς ἐστὶν εἰς κολάσεως λόγον, τὸ τοὺς παιδας ὄρῶν τιμωρουμένους, ἢ ἑαυτοὺς ὑπευθύνους γεγονότας.

For you know, of course, how often fathers have prayed to suffer punishment in place of their children, and how it is harder for them to see their children punished for purpose of chastisement than to be made answerable themselves.<sup>41</sup>

On occasion a father might be called upon to enforce the prescribed diet of his sick child who does not wish to eat the foods that will rebuild his strength:

καὶ ταῦτὸν γίνεται, οἷον ἂν εἴ τις πατὴρ πέρα τοῦ δέοντος μαλθακοῦ παιδίου, καίτοι ἀρρωστοῦντος, πλακοῦντα ἐπιδῶ καὶ ψυχρὸν καὶ ὅσα τέρπει μόνον, τῶν δὲ χρησίμων μηδεμίαν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιοῖτο· εἶτα ἐγκαλούμενος παρὰ τῶν ἱατρῶν, ἀπολογοῖτο λέγων· τί πάθω; οὐκ ἀνέχομαι κλαῖον τὸ παιδίον ἰδεῖν. ἄθλιε καὶ ταλαίπωρε καὶ προδότα· οὐ γὰρ ἂν πατέρα τὸν τοιοῦτον εἴποιμι· καὶ πόσῳ βέλτιον ἐν βραχεὶ λυπήσαντα, διαπαντὸς ὑγιείᾳ παραδοῦναι, ἢ τὴν πρόσκαιρον ταύτην χάριν, διηνεκοῦς ἀθυμίας ὑπόθεσιν ποιήσασθαι.

<sup>40</sup>Hom. 9 in Gen. (PG 53.77).

<sup>41</sup>Hom. 29 in Gen. (PG 53.269). See also Stat. 21 (49.213–214); Hom. 15 in 2 Cor. (61.504); Hom. 35 in Jo. (PG 59.202); Hom. 22 in Heb. (63.158).

And it is the same as if some father of an excessively weakly child, although he is sick, were to give him cakes and cold (drinks) and only what pleases, and take no care for needful things, then, when admonished by the physicians, were to say in defense, "What must I suffer? I cannot bear to see the child weeping." Poor wretched betrayers! For I would not call such a man a father. How much better it is, by giving pain briefly, to restore him to health forever, than to make this temporary favor the cause of continuing unhappiness.<sup>42</sup>

Fathers were expected to teach their children good habits and to supervise their education.<sup>43</sup> It was Chrysostom's concern that fathers should not let their children spend too much time in idle leisure.<sup>44</sup> He advised fathers not to let their sons consort with the servants, or only with those servants who conducted themselves appropriately.<sup>45</sup> Fathers were responsible for getting a tutor for their children, to instruct them in proper behavior, and to keep them out of trouble.<sup>46</sup> Tutors could be harsh on their charges, and it was the responsibility of the father to act as liaison between his children and tutor. Fathers tried to maintain a delicate balance in administering the tutelage of a child:

πολλάκις πατήρ τῷ μὲν παιδαγωγῷ τὸν παῖδα ὑβρίσαντι κατ' ἰδίαν ἐπιτιμᾷ λέγων· μὴ ἔσο τραχύς, μηδὲ σκληρός· τῷ δὲ νέφ τὰ ἐναντία λέγει· κἂν ἀδίκως ὑβρίζῃ, φέρε· ἀπὸ τῶν ἐναντιῶν ἔν τι χρήσιμον συνάγων.

Often a father privately censures the tutor for maltreating his child, saying "Do not be harsh or hard," but to the youth says the opposite, "Even if he maltreats you unjustly, bear it," composing something useful out of these opposites.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Hom. 30 in Ac.* (PG 60.226). See also *Hom. 12 in 1 Cor.* (61.95–96).

<sup>43</sup> *Hom. 2 in Tit.* (PG 62.671–672). See also F. Schulte, *S. Joannis Chrysostomus de inani gloria et de educandis liberis* (Münster 1914); English transl. M. L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Ithaca 1951) 85–122.

<sup>44</sup> *Hom. 14 in Gen.* (PG 53.113–114).

<sup>45</sup> *Educ. lib.* (Schulte 13–14.38; Laistner 102).

<sup>46</sup> *Stat. 15* (PG 49.154); *Hom. 5 in Eph.* (62.39); *Hom. 35 in Mt.* (57.411).

<sup>47</sup> *Hom. 35 in Mt.* (PG 57.411).



In Chrysostom's view it was above all the duty of the father to develop the proper moral attitude of his children and to guide their chastity through the turbulent period of adolescence.<sup>48</sup> He repeatedly exhorted fathers to arrange early marriages for their sons:

μη τοίνυν ἀμελῶμεν τῶν νέων, ἀλλ' ἰδόντες τῆς καμίνου τὴν πυράν, πρὶν ἢ εἰς ἀσέλγειαν ἐγκυλισθῆναι, σπουδάζωμεν κατὰ τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ νόμον αὐτοὺς συνάπτειν πρὸς γάμον, ἵνα καὶ τὰ τῆς σωφροσύνης αὐτοῖς διατηρῆται, καὶ μηδεμίαν λύμην δέξωνται ἐξ ἀκολασίας, ἔχοντες ἀρκοῦσαν παραμυθίαν, καὶ δυνάμενοι τῆς σαρκὸς τὰ σκιρτήματα καταστέλλειν, καὶ κολάσεως ἐκτὸς εἶναι.

Then let us not neglect the young, but seeing the furnace fire before they are involved in licentiousness, let us be eager to unite them in marriage according to God's law, so that the ways of moderation be preserved in them and they receive no defilement from intemperance, having sufficient consolation, and being able to repress the impulses of the flesh and be free from chastisement.<sup>49</sup>

He lamented that fathers made a great effort to train sons in the arts and literature while equal training in virtue was neglected.<sup>50</sup> This need not mean that he expected parents to enroll their children in monasteries. In fact, he is explicit in not expecting parents to prevent children from marriage, as this would be too heavy a burden:

οὐ παύομαι παρακαλῶν ὑμᾶς καὶ δεόμενος καὶ ἀντιβολῶν, ὥστε πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων τέως ὑμῶν ῥυθμίζειν τοὺς παῖδας ... θρέψον ἀθλητὴν τῷ Χριστῷ. οὐ τοῦτο λέγω ὅτι γάμου ἀπάγαγε καὶ εἰς τὰς ἐρημίας ἀπόστειλον καὶ τὸν τῶν μοναχῶν παρασκευάσον ἐλέσθαι βίον· οὐ τοῦτο λέγω. βούλομαι μὲν τοῦτο καὶ πάντας ηὑχόμεν καταδέξασθαι, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ φορτικὸν εἶναι

<sup>48</sup> *Educ. lib.* (Schulte 7.16; Laistner 94–95).

<sup>49</sup> *Hom. 59 in Gen.* (PG 54.517–518); cf. *Hom. 59 in Mt.* (PG 58.582–583); *Hom. 9 in 1 Tim.* (62.546); *Hom. 5 in 1 Thess.* (62.427); *Educ. lib.* (Schulte 27.81; Laistner 119–120). See also A. Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1996) 31.

<sup>50</sup> *Educ. lib.* (Schulte 8.18; Laistner 95).

δοκεῖ, οὐκ ἀναγκάζω. θρέψον ἀθλητὴν τῷ Χριστῷ καὶ ἐν κόσμῳ ὄντα διδάξον εὐλαβῆ ἐκ πρώτης ἡλικίας.

I do not cease from exhorting you and begging and entreating, that before all else you first train your sons ... Raise an athlete for Christ. I do not say this, divert him from marriage, send him to the deserts, prepare him to choose the monastic life; this I do not say. I wish for this and have prayed for everyone to allow it; but since it seems to be a burden, I do not require it. Raise an athlete for Christ and teach him from first youth to be pious while dwelling in the world.<sup>51</sup>

Thus Chrysostom understood that despite all the Christian rhetoric promoting asceticism, the social reality of fourth-century Antioch meant the continuation of traditional family structure.<sup>52</sup> He understood that urban families were not commonly rejecting marriage as Patlagean has suggested. Chrysostom in fact recognized that most of his audience would continue to raise their children in an urban and secular context, and the point of this address was to encourage parents to provide the moral guidance that these children would need to avoid the sinful temptations of the city. He advised parents to point out the finer achievements of statesmen and soldiers as examples toward which children should aspire.<sup>53</sup>

A father, in his capacity as instructor and disciplinarian, had recourse to several means of discipline. In the case of young children, a father might resort to corporal punishment or refusing the child a place at the dinner table.<sup>54</sup> Chrysostom recognized these methods as common forms of discipline and he also understood them to be manifestations of fatherly love.<sup>55</sup> A child who was especially forward and difficult to control might actually have his feet tied and be subject to special rules that

<sup>51</sup> *Educ. lib.* (Schulte 8.19; Laistner 95).

<sup>52</sup> For the best discussion of the rhetoric of Chrysostom and the reality of Antioch see P. Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York 1988) 305–322.

<sup>53</sup> *Educ. lib.* (Schulte 28.84; Laistner 120–121).

<sup>54</sup> *Stat.* 16 (PG 49.168), 7 (49.94), 17 (49.176).

<sup>55</sup> *Stat.* 7 (PG 49.94).

prevented him from leaving the house.<sup>56</sup> In extreme cases, disorderly children who were undutiful to their parents deserved to be servants.<sup>57</sup> It was necessary to combine fatherly advice with strict discipline so that children might learn not only the course of proper behavior but also a fear of delinquency.<sup>58</sup>

Saller has made the case that in Classical Rome corporal punishment was reserved for younger children while older sons were not beaten but instead threatened with disinheritance.<sup>59</sup> This would also appear to be the case in late antiquity.<sup>60</sup> In several homilies Chrysostom discusses the occasional need for fathers to expel their immoral and misbehaving sons from the paternal household.<sup>61</sup> It was incumbent upon the father to enforce this sort of discipline to prevent sons from licentiousness such as gambling and carousing.<sup>62</sup> If the wayward son corrects his behavior and once again shows himself worthy of paternal favor it is possible that he will be restored and may again succeed to his father's inheritance.<sup>63</sup> But Chrysostom recognized that some fathers were overbearing and misused their authority and the practice of disinheritance:

ἀλλὰ τί φησι; “μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν,” οἷον οἱ πολλοὶ ποιοῦσιν, ἀποκληρονόμους ἐργαζόμενοι, καὶ ἀποκηρύκτους ποιῶντες, καὶ φορτικῶς ἐπικείμενοι, οὐχ ὡς ἐλευθέρους, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀνδραπόδοις. διὰ τοῦτο φησι· “μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν.”

But what does he (Paul) say? “Do not provoke your children to anger,” as many do, making them disinherited and coarsely

<sup>56</sup> *Hom. 39 in Gen.* (PG 53.366).

<sup>57</sup> *Hom. 22 in Eph.* (PG 62.157).

<sup>58</sup> *Hom. 4 in Heb.* (PG 63.44); *Stat. 7* (49.94).

<sup>59</sup> R. Saller, “Corporal Punishment, Authority, and Obedience in the Roman Household,” in B. Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford 1991) 162.

<sup>60</sup> De Bruyn (*supra* n.31) 282–283.

<sup>61</sup> *Paralyt.* (PG 51.51); *Diab. 1* (49.249); *Hom. 18 in Gen.* (53.149).

<sup>62</sup> *Hom. 59 in Mt.* (PG 58.582–583); *Hom. 22 in Eph.* (62.162).

<sup>63</sup> *Diab. 1* (PG 49.249).

imposing on them as though free but slaves. This is why he says "Do not provoke your children to anger."<sup>64</sup>

This passage also demonstrates the possibility of a tense relationship between some fathers and sons. Chrysostom, however, while allowing for the great authority of a father, also recognized that nature and custom tempered the harshness of this authority:

καὶ ὁ πατήρ δὲ ἀπὸ τε τῶν τῆς φύσεως, ἀπὸ τε τῶν νόμων τῶν ἔξωθεν μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς εὐκολίας κέχρηται τῇ κατὰ τοῦ παιδὸς ἀρχῇ· κἂν ἄκοντα παιδεύσῃ καὶ ἐπιπλήξῃ, οὐδεὶς ὁ κωλύσων, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνος ἀντιβλέψαι δυνήσεται.

And the father, from both his nature and external custom, employs his rule over his son with much good temper. And if he instruct an unwilling son and strike him, there is no one who will prevent it, but that man will not be able to look him in the face.<sup>65</sup>

Chrysostom in fact believed that fathers and sons were naturally inclined to be friends, but he also understood that the father-son relationship could be less than ideal.<sup>66</sup> It seems to have been widely understood that fathers and sons would normally have a close relationship,<sup>67</sup> and Chrysostom called upon fathers to bring their sons to church.<sup>68</sup>

The evidence of Chrysostom displays considerably more emphasis on the relationship between father and son than on that between fathers and daughters. He only rarely specifically refers to this relationship, and it is always characterized by a protective father superintending his daughter's chastity and worthiness.<sup>69</sup> A father's love for his daughter was best evidenced in the arrangement for a suitable husband who would

<sup>64</sup>Hom. 21 in Eph. (PG 62.150, on Eph. 6:4).

<sup>65</sup>Hom. 10 in 1 Thess. (PG 62.455).

<sup>66</sup>Hom. 1 in Col. (PG 62.303).

<sup>67</sup>Hom. 32 in 1 Cor. (PG 61.272); Hom. 4 in Heb. (63.43–44).

<sup>68</sup>Hom. in Rom. 12:20 (PG 51.176).

<sup>69</sup>Sac. 3 (PG 48.657).

make her happy. It was Chrysostom's opinion that a father, by attending the theater, disgraced and demeaned his daughter.<sup>70</sup>

Fathers, even on their deathbed, should be mindful of protecting the best interests of their children. A father who is dying should choose one of his relatives to assume the fatherly role over his children.<sup>71</sup> Otherwise, widows displayed great concern that their children might suffer through lack of a father's protection and guidance.<sup>72</sup> It was fitting that aged fathers should be attended to their graves by their sons.<sup>73</sup>

### Motherhood in Late Antiquity

Motherhood began with childbirth, without modern medicine and a painful and dangerous procedure. Chrysostom recognized that the danger and pain of childbirth could be used as a powerfully persuasive argument—at least to the potential mother—against having children, and he made just such an argument in his treatise on virginity:

κᾶν μὲν εὐθέως κῆση, μετὰ φόβου πάλιν ἡ χαρά· οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐν τῷ γάμῳ φόβου χωρίς. ὁ δὲ φόβος, μήποτε γενομένης ἀμβλώσεως διαφθαρῆ μὲν τὸ συλληφθέν, κινδυνεύσει δὲ περὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἡ κύουσα. ἂν δὲ πολὺς μεταξὺ γένηται χρόνος, ἀπαρρησίαστος ἡ γυνὴ ὡσπερ αὐτὴ κυρία οὖσα τοῦ τεκεῖν. ὅταν δὲ ὁ τοῦ τόκου καιρὸς ἐπιστῆ διακόπτουσι μὲν καὶ διασπῶσι τὴν ἐπὶ τοσοῦτῳ χρόνῳ πονηθεῖσαν νηδὺν ὠδῖνες, αἱ καὶ μόναι ἱκαναὶ πάντα συσκιᾶσαι τὰ τοῦ γάμου χρηστά.

And if she becomes pregnant immediately, once again joy is mixed with fear—nothing that has to do with marriage is without fear. She fears that she might lose in a miscarriage what has been conceived and being pregnant her own life will be endangered. If, on the other hand, the pregnancy is protracted, the wife does not speak freely, as if she were in charge of the hour of delivery. When the time of birth is at

<sup>70</sup>Hom. 7 in Mt. (PG 57.82).

<sup>71</sup>Hom. 7 in Rom. (PG 60.452).

<sup>72</sup>Hom. 6 in 1 Thess. (PG 62.433).

<sup>73</sup>Hom. 4 in Heb. (PG 63.43–44).

hand, labor pains rend and tear the hard-pressed womb for an incredible time; such pain is sufficient by itself to overshadow the good aspects of marriage.<sup>74</sup>

Here Chrysostom presents a vivid image of the many anxieties that might accompany pregnancy and birth. He portrays the pregnant woman as worriedly pondering the prospect of a miscarriage and the consequent threat to her own life. He also provides a graphic image of the pain and agony a woman might experience in labor and birth. It would not have been necessary for most women to learn from Chrysostom that childbirth was a painful and dangerous event as this was common knowledge, and so it is significant that Chrysostom also recognized that this common knowledge did not prevent women from having children:

τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον καὶ ἡ γυνὴ καὶ αὐτὴ πολλάκις μετὰ τοὺς πολλοὺς μῆνας ἐκείνους, μετὰ τὰς ὠδῖνας τὰς ἀφορήτους, μετὰ τὰς νύκτας τὰς ἀύπνους, μετὰ τὸν τῶν μελῶν διασπασμὸν, μικρᾶς τινοῦ περιστάσεως γενομένης, πρὸ τοῦ προσήκοντος καιροῦ τὸ βρέφος ὠθήσασα ἀμόρφωτον καὶ ἀδιατύπωτον, ἢ μεμορφωμένον μὲν, οὐκ ἄρτιον δέ, οὐδὲ ὑγιές, ἢ καὶ νεκρὸν πολλάκις, μόλις τὸν κίνδυνον διέφυγε, καὶ ὅμως ὡσπερ ἐπιλαθομένη τούτων ἀπάντων, τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνέχεται, καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ὑπομένει. καὶ τί λέγω τὰ αὐτά; πολλάκις καὶ συναποθανεῖν τῷ τεχθέντι συνέβη, καὶ οὐδὲ τοῦτο τὰς λοιπὰς ἐσωφρόνισε καὶ ἀνέπεισε φυγεῖν τὸ πρᾶγμα· τοσαύτην ὁ Θεὸς ἐγκατέσπειρε τοῖς λυπηροῖς τὴν ἡδονὴν ὁμοῦ καὶ τὴν εὐφροσύνην.

Indeed, in the same way often the woman, after those many months, after the insufferable pains, after the sleepless nights, after the spreading of the limbs, when some small problem arises she pushes out the fetus before the proper time, unformed and misshapen, or else formed but not fully developed or healthy, or even dead often, and she herself scarcely escapes the danger; and yet as though forgetting all this, is content with and submits to these very things. And why do I say these very things? Often it also happens that

<sup>74</sup> Virg. (PG 48.578–579); transl. Shore.

she dies along with the fetus. And this does not make other women more prudent and persuade them to avoid the business; such is the pleasure and happiness that God implanted together with the sufferings.<sup>75</sup>

Chrysostom makes clear that even though childbirth often put the mother's life at risk, women were not avoiding the experience of becoming mothers. This again speaks against Patlagean's thesis of a general movement in late antiquity to avoid marriage and procreation.<sup>76</sup>

Patlagean has held that there was a trend in the fourth century, fostered especially by Christian rhetoric (both orthodox and heretical), to limit sexual procreation through abstinence.<sup>77</sup> She is certainly correct to point out some of the examples in early Christian rhetoric that seem to discourage sexual procreation. In fact Chrysostom himself wrote a treatise encouraging certain women to remain virgins, the *De virginitate*. The treatise is well known and often quoted in support of the notion that in the fourth century abstinence became the preferred method of family limitation. It cannot be doubted that early Christian rhetoric preached that pious virginity was better than marriage, and it certainly discouraged remarriage among widows. As we have seen, however, Chrysostom, the greatest of the early Christian rhetors, also preached that marriage was good and even encouraged fathers to arrange marriages for their sons at the earliest opportunity.<sup>78</sup> More significantly, he preached that women were saved by means of children, through the act of giving birth and the raising of children:

<sup>75</sup>*Hom. 17 in Gen.* (PG 53.144).

<sup>76</sup>Patlagean (*supra* n.6) 1361, 1368–1369.

<sup>77</sup>Patlagean, *Pauvreté* (*supra* n.1) 152–153.

<sup>78</sup>Patlagean herself stated that fourth-century Christian rhetoric did not seem to have a negative effect on the birth rate of the middle class in Asia Minor, though this was based upon epigraphic evidence that she termed problematic. E. Patlagean, "Familles chrétiennes d'Asie mineure et histoire démographique du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Transformation et conflits au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle ap. J.-C.* (*Antiquitas* I.29 [Bonn 1978]) 169–186.

οὕτω καὶ ἐνταῦθα τὸ γυναικεῖον γένος παρέβη, οὐ τὸ ἀνδρεῖον. τί οὖν; οὐκ ἔχει σωτηρίαν; ναί, φησί. ποίαν δὴ ταύτην; τὴν διὰ τῶν τέκνων· οὐ γὰρ δὴ περὶ τῆς Εὐᾶς ἔλεγεν· “ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν τῇ πίστει καὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ καὶ τῷ ἁγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης.” ποία πίστει; ποία ἀγάπῃ; ποίῳ ἁγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης; ὡς ἂν εἰ ἔλεγε· μὴ κατηφείς ἐστε, αἱ γυναῖκες, ὅτι τὸ γένος ὑμῶν διαβέβληται· ἔδωκεν ὑμῖν ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἑτέραν ἀφορμὴν σωτηρίας, τὴν παιδοτροφίαν· ὥστε μὴ μόνον δι’ ἑαυτῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι’ ἑτέρων σώζεσθαι. ὄρα πόσα κατὰ ταυτὸν ζητήματα τίκτεται. “ἡ γυνὴ ἀπατηθεῖσα,” φησὶν, “ἐν παραβάσει γέγονε.” τίς; ἡ Εὐᾶ. αὐτὴ οὖν σωθήσεται διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας; οὐ τοῦτο φησιν, ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἡ φύσις ἡ γυναικεῖα σωθήσεται. αὕτη δὴ οὐκ ἐν παραβάσει γέγονε; ναί, γέγονεν, ἀλλὰ παρέβη μὲν ἡ Εὐᾶ, σωθήσεται δὲ τὸ γυναικεῖον γένος διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας. διὰ τί γὰρ μὴ καὶ διὰ τῆς οἰκειᾶς ἀρετῆς; μὴ γὰρ ἐκείνη τοῦτο ταῖς ἄλλαις ἐξέκλεισε; τί οὖν πρὸς τὰς παρθέτους; τί δὲ πρὸς τὰς στεῖρας; τί δὲ πρὸς τὰς χήρας, τὰς πρὶν ἢ τεκεῖν τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀποβαλοῦσας; ἀπολώλασιν; ἐλπίδα οὐκ ἔχουσι; καὶ μὴν αἱ παρθένοι εἰσὶν αἱ μάλιστα εὐδοκιμοῦσαι. τί ποτε οὖν βούλεται εἰπεῖν; ... ὁ οὖν λέγει, τοῦτο ἐστίν· ὅτι ὡσπερ πάντες ἀπέθανον ἄνθρωποι διὰ τοῦ ἐνός, ἐπειδὴ ὁ εἷς ἥμαρτεν, οὕτω καὶ πᾶν τὸ γυναικεῖον γένος παρέβη, ἐπειδὴ ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν ἡ γυνὴ. μηδὲν οὖν ἀλγείτω· ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ ὁ Θεὸς παραμυθίαν οὐ μικράν, τὸ τεκεῖν παιδία. ἀλλὰ τοῦτο τῆς φύσεως, φησί. καὶ ἐκεῖνο τῆς φύσεως· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὸ τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ τῆς παιδοτροφίας κεχάρισται. “ἐὰν ἐπιμείνωσι,” φησί, “τῇ πίστει καὶ τῇ ἀγάπῃ καὶ τῷ ἁγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης.” τουτέστιν, ἐὰν αὐτοὺς ἐν ἀγάπῃ μετὰ τὸ τεκεῖν καὶ ἀγνεῖα διατηρήσωσιν. ἐν τούτοις οὐ μικρὸν ἔξουσι τὸν ὑπὲρ τούτων μισθόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ σφόδρα μέγαν, ὅτι ἀθλητὰς ἔθρεψαν τῷ Χριστῷ.

And so the female sex transgressed, the male did not. What then? Will women not be saved? Yes, he says. By what means? By the means of children. For indeed it is not concerning Eve that he said, “If they remain in faith and charity and holiness with modesty” (1 Tim. 2:15). What faith? What charity? What holiness with modesty? It is as if he said, “Women, be not downcast because your sex was misled. God gave you another means to salvation, by the rearing of children, so that they are saved not only through themselves but also through others. See how many questions are raised by the same thing.



"The woman was tricked," he says, "and became a transgressor." Who? Eve. Then will she be saved by child-bearing? He does not say this, but that the female race will be saved. Then did she not become a transgressor? Yes, she did. But while Eve transgressed, the female race will be saved through child-bearing. Now why not also through their own virtue? For has that virtue not excluded others from this? What about virgins? What about the barren? What about widows, who have lost husbands before having children? Will they perish? Do they have no hope? Virgins are especially held in high repute. What then does he wish to say? ... So what he means is this: that just as all men perished through that one, when he erred, so also the whole female sex transgressed, when the woman became a transgressor. But let her not grieve: God gave her no small consolation, child-bearing. But this is natural, he says. Another thing is also natural: it is not only natural, but the raising of children is also pleasurable. "If they continue," he says, "in faith and charity and holiness with modesty": that is, if after begetting they preserve them in charity and sanctity. In this they will have no small reward in behalf of them, but indeed very large, because they raised an athlete for Christ.<sup>79</sup>

Chrysostom is explicit that women are saved by means of child-bearing. Women who have children and raise them in a healthy and proper manner can expect salvation. He does not deny that virgins are held in the highest esteem, but he makes it clear that sexual procreation is a means to salvation. The theology is of course Pauline, and Chrysostom is commenting on this theory of salvation as expressed by Paul in 1 Timothy. Chrysostom, in certain circumstances, might praise virginity, but in others he clearly recognized the legitimacy of sexual procreation and even called attention to it as a means of salvation. Chrysostom, traditionally seen as an impassioned ascetic, and an influential voice on early Christianity, was not completely one-sided on the issue of sexual procreation.

<sup>79</sup>*Hom. 9 in 1 Tim. (PG 62.545–546).*

It is clear that, like fathers, mothers cared deeply for their children and displayed affection for them. Chrysostom discusses how the bond between a mother and her children would not allow her thoughtlessly to bring harm upon her children:

οὐδεμία οὕτως ἐστὶ μήτηρ ἄστοργος καὶ μισότεκνος ὡς τοῦτον ὃν ὄδινε καὶ ἔτεκε καὶ ἔθρεψε, μηδεμιᾶς ἀναγκαζούσης προφάσεως, μηδὲ βιαζομένου τινός, κακίζειν καὶ διαβάλλειν παρὰ πᾶσιν.

No mother is so heartless and child-hating as to revile and accuse before all him whom she labored with and bore and raised, without some necessitating reason or compulsion.<sup>80</sup>

Chrysostom offers here a clear image of the affectionate relationship that might develop between mother and child, arising from the intimate contact that a mother and child shared through the nurturing process. Elsewhere he describes a scene in which mothers are wailing and rolling on the ground lamenting the prosecution of one of their children.<sup>81</sup> Mothers mourned the death of beloved children, and an affectionate mother as she is setting the dinner table is sad that not all her children will be home for dinner.<sup>82</sup> Mothers were greatly distressed when a young child fell ill, and on these occasions a mother might wish that she could be sick instead of her child.<sup>83</sup> In the realm of education a mother's role, at least in late antiquity, seems to have been to offer comfort and support. We are told how a child, frightened by his teachers, is comforted by his mother:

καὶ γὰρ ἐπὶ τῶν παιδίων τῶν μικρῶν οὕτω γίνεται· διδάσκαλοι τὰ παιδιά φοβοῦσι καὶ τύπτουσι, καὶ δεδακρυμένα πρὸς τὰς μητέρας παραπέμπουσιν· αἱ δὲ μητέρες ὑποδεξάμεναι τοῖς κόλποις τοῖς ἑαυτῶν κατέχουσι καὶ περισφίγγουσι, καὶ τὰ δάκρυα καταψήσασαι καταφιλοῦσι, καὶ τὴν ὀδυνωμένην αὐτῶν ἀνακτῶνται ψυχὴν, πείθουσαι δι' ὧν λέγουσιν, ὅτι χρήσιμος ὁ τῶν διδασκάλων αὐτοῖς φόβος.

<sup>80</sup> *Sac. 6* (PG 48.683).

<sup>81</sup> *Stat. 13* (PG 49.137).

<sup>82</sup> *Stat. 18* (PG 49.184), 9 (49.104).

<sup>83</sup> *Stat. 13* (PG 49.142).

For it also happens so with little children. Teachers terrify and strike children, and send them weeping to their mothers. The mothers receive them to their bosoms and hold and embrace them and kiss away their tears and restore their pained spirits, and persuade them through what they say, that fear of the teachers is useful to them.<sup>84</sup>

Chrysostom provides an image of the tenderness and affection that mothers shared with their children. This image of the frightened child running home from school to the caring mother is not one that was readily apparent in the Classical world. Dixon described the role of the mother in the education of young children as mainly that of disciplinarian, virtually indistinguishable from the paternal role, rather than as an affectionate refuge.<sup>85</sup> This is not the image Chrysostom offers here, and it is possible that a more distinct maternal role was developing in this period.

The relationship between mother and daughter receives more attention from Chrysostom than that between mother and son. He says that the young daughter stays at home with her mother and is occupied with childish cares and concerns.<sup>86</sup> He exhorted mothers to train their daughters in proper behavior and be watchful over them and instruct them in the management of the household, in anticipation of the day that they become wives:

αἱ μητέρες, τὰς θυγατέρας μάλιστα διανείμασθε· εὐκολοὺς ὑμῖν ἢ φυλακὴ αὕτη· περισκοπεῖτε, ὥστε οἰκουροὺς εἶναι· πρὸ δὲ πάντων εὐλαβεῖς αὐτὰς εἶναι παιδεύετε, κοσμίας, χρημάτων καταφρονεῖν, ἀκαλλωπίστους μένειν. οὕτω πρὸς τὸν γάμον ἔκδοτε. ἂν οὕτω αὐτὰς διαπλάττωμεν, οὐκ αὐτὰς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα διασώσετε τὸν μέλλοντα αὐτὴν ἀγαγέσθαι· οὐ τὸν ἄνδρα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ παιδία· οὐ τὰ παιδία, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἔγγονα.

<sup>84</sup> *Stat.* 6 (PG 49.81).

<sup>85</sup> S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London 1988) 131, 134.

<sup>86</sup> *Virg.* (PG 48.586).

Mothers, govern your daughters carefully. This guardianship is easy for you; keep watch that they are home-bodies. Before everything educate them to be pious, moderate, to think little of wealth, to remain unadorned. So give them in marriage. If we mold them so, you will save not only them but also the husband who intends to take her in marriage, not just the husband but also the children, not just the children but also the descendants.<sup>87</sup>

Thus Chrysostom expected mothers, more than fathers, to raise and train their daughters. It was a mother's obligation to make sure she gave in marriage a daughter properly trained in the virtuous attributes of a good wife. Mothers were to serve as models in proper behavior and modesty for their daughters who would imitate this worthy behavior.<sup>88</sup> It is also apparent that Chrysostom expected daughters to imitate the behavior of their mothers in passing on this knowledge and training to their own children. He expected married couples to have children and grandchildren—to perpetuate the family.

There is a slight indication that mothers were involved in establishing the position and careers of their young adult sons.<sup>89</sup> Chrysostom's own mother, a widow, was clearly involved in arranging his education, among other things, but of course in the case of a widow we might expect greater involvement.<sup>90</sup> Finally, just as it was proper for sons to bury their fathers, daughters were expected to oversee the burial of their mothers.<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

In sum, an examination of a broad range of Chrysostom's work demonstrates that he was remarkably familiar with the

<sup>87</sup>*Hom. 9 in 1 Tim.* (PG 62.547–548); cf. *Educ. lib.* (Schulte 29.90; Laistner 122).

<sup>88</sup>*Hom. 10 in Col.* (PG 62.374).

<sup>89</sup>*Hom. 14 in Phil.* (PG 62.285).

<sup>90</sup>*Sac. 1* (PG 48.624).

<sup>91</sup>*Hom. 4 in Heb.* (PG 63.43–44).

emotions and issues of parenthood. That he made frequent use of a positive portrayal of family life should mitigate the perception of Chrysostom as a harsh ascetic. This article alone contains over one hundred references to seventy-one different works, the vast majority being homilies, yet is by no means an exhaustive study of the portrayal of family life in Chrysostom. His reputation as a great rhetorician and his frequent use of this topic implies that his audience could readily relate to the positive experience of family. He provides evidence for the common desire for children and the strong relationship between parents and children. This evidence would seem to contradict the notion that in the fourth-century East, and in part under the influence of Christian rhetoric, traditional family structure was breaking down.

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