

THE SOCIAL MORALITY OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF ADALBERT HAMMAN (1910-2000)

While reflecting on the enormous contribution of Jacques-Paul Migne (1800-1875) on the centenary of his death, Adalbert Hamman (1910-2000) praises the perennial usefulness of "returning to the Fathers". He affirms that far from being "une excursion archéologique"¹, such a retrieval of patristic texts has led to a far-reaching appreciation of dimensions in early Church life and in early theology which had been neglected for many centuries. Indeed, the patristic era of theology has been described by Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) as one possessing "une vitalité explosive"². Despite the controversies which erupted from time to time and the sprouting of heretical movements, it is an age of enormous theological fertility. The "actualité des Pères", de Lubac insists, is indeed "une actualité de fécondation"³.

In several powerful texts taken from the vast *opera omnia* of Adalbert-G. Hamman, one encounters the French patristic scholar's strong conviction that many Church Fathers are especially keen to stress the theme of social concern. They preached and wrote about the responsibility of Christians to overcome injustices and inequalities which were causing painful hardships on many members of society.

¹ A.-G. Hamman, *Jacques-Paul Migne. Le retour aux Pères de l'Église* [Le point théologique 16], Paris 1975, p. 165.

² H. de Lubac, *Paradoxes*, Paris 1946, p. 68. The full text by the towering French theologian asks: "Mais comment retrouver le christianisme sinon en remontant à ses sources, en tâchant à le ressaisir dans ses époques de *vitalité explosive*?" Cf. A.-G. Hamman, *L'apostolat du chrétien. Réflexion sur les données bibliques* [Collection Credo], Paris 1956, p. 15; Id., *Vie liturgique et vie sociale*, Paris 1968, p. 292; Id., *Je crois en un seul baptême. Essai sur baptême et confirmation* [Doctrine pour le Peuple de Dieu 6], Paris 1970, p. 44; Id., *Les racines de la foi. La catéchèse des Pères de l'Église*, Paris 1983, p. 127; Id., *Abrégé de la prière chrétienne*, Paris 1987, p. 95; Id., *La vie est un long jour de fête*, Paris 1995, pp. 235, 326.

³ H. de Lubac, *Preface*, in AA.VV., *Les chemins vers Dieu* [Lettres Chrétiennes 11], intro., choice of texts by F. Quéré-Jaulmes - A.-G. Hamman, Paris 1967, p. 7; Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 296; Id., *Jacques-Paul Migne*, pp. 163, 164; Id., *La vie*, pp. 194, 231, 243.

The Church Fathers, most of whom were bishops and pastors of local Churches, were very much aware of the social situation of their flocks. One of the ailments affecting the spiritual and existential health of their communities was the scandal of social inequality. The rich and the well-to-do were strongly urged to share their resources with the needy. The immensely practical sermons of men like John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers overflow with these strong words of advice. Hamman affirms that these Fathers "apportent un dossier de théologie sociale"⁴. By putting theological orthopraxis into the limelight, they sought to emphasise the necessity of healing broken social relationships. They also explained how an active and sincere participation in the liturgy possessed a therapeutic influence on those afflicted by division, and also served to strengthen positive social relationships.

It can be said with certainty that one of the most prominent exponents within this field of social thought was John Chrysostom. He can be correctly described as one of the earliest pioneers of the social teaching of the Church. His powerful sermons to his flock in Constantinople are remarkable in their social content. From his writings, this Church Father makes us aware of the precarious conditions experienced by a sizeable percentage of the population of Constantinople at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth. He continually reminds the inhabitants of that metropolis of their duty to assist each other and share their belongings.

In an explanatory note to a collection of patristic texts edited by Hamman, *Jean Chrysostome commente saint Paul*, the French scholar affirms that the bishop of Constantinople often takes up the issue concerning "the rich and the poor, the precarious nature of richness, and human solidarity... [It is a topic which...] is very close to his heart"⁵. I shall elaborate upon the theme of this paper by studying three main areas of reflection as explored by Hamman in his manifold presentation of John Chrysostom. These are: 1) The relationship between *leitourgia* and social justice; 2) Mutual responsibility; and 3) The importance of almsgiving.

⁴ Ambroise de Milan, *Richesse et pauvreté ou Naboth le pauvre* [Collection Les Pères dans la foi 4], intro., notes, them. guide by A.-G. Hamman, Paris 1978, pp. 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 66.

⁵ "Une fois de plus, Jean Chrysostome fait ici un long développement sur les riches et les pauvres, sur la précarité de la richesse, sur la solidarité humaine. Excursus qui montre à quel point la question lui tient à cœur" (Jean Chrysostome *commente saint Paul* [Collection Les Pères dans la foi 35-36], notes, them. guide by A.-G. Hamman, Paris 1988, p. 318 note 8). Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 348-349.

1. *The Relationship between Leitourgia and Social Justice*

Many of the Fathers of the Church, especially those belonging to the Golden Age of patristic literature, highlight the complementary relationship between vibrant liturgy and authentic Christian witness. Reading these texts and elaborating upon their precious content, one can safely extend the well-known axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* to include *lex vivendi*. John Chrysostom is no exception. The convergence of liturgy and social action is focused upon⁶ in what Hamman calls "la quotidienneté de nos vies"⁷. Chrysostom constructs his scriptural foundations to his social doctrine by basing himself on St Paul. Indeed, Hamman comments that "Jean Chrysostome a bien perçu que pour l'Apôtre la diaconie ou service des pauvres était une forme de liturgie, sacralisée par le diaconat"⁸.

This authentic Christian witness is the consequence of one's life *in* Christ. This unity of the Christian with his Lord and Master – a unity which is not only moral and spiritual, but also real, physical and substantial – encompasses the individual's entire existence. This mystic embrace, to use a phrase associated with Gregory of Nyssa, is described by John Chrysostom in strongly evocative language in one of his homilies on the First Letter to Timothy. Chrysostom imagines Jesus as saying:

I [Christ] descend on earth not just to mingle with you, but to bind myself to you. I am eaten, reduced to pieces, so that the fusion and the union may be profound. Things joined together remain each in itself: but I weave myself into all your parts; I see nothing else between the two of us: I see that the two become one⁹.

In this beautiful text, John describes the realism of the symbiosis which exists between Christ and his authentic followers¹⁰. A concise phrase by John Chrysostom, in his *Catecheses ad Illuminandos* (Baptismal Instructions),

⁶ Cf. H. Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria. Interrelated Themes in Patristic Sacramental Theology as Expounded by Adalbert-G. Hamman O.F.M.* [Melita Theologica Supplementary Series 4], Malta 1999, p. 103.

⁷ A.-G. Hamman, *La vie*, 99; Id., *Comment les Pères de l'Église ont-ils prêché l'eucharistie?*, in *Parole et Pain* 2 (1965), p. 419; Id., *La Messe et sa catéchèse chez les Pères de l'Église*, in *La Ciudad de Dios* 181 (1968), p. 458; Id., *La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens (95-197)*, Paris 1971, p. 241.

⁸ Jean Chrysostome *commente saint Paul*, pp. 42-43, note 3.

⁹ Author's trans. of John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Letter to Timothy*, 15, as quoted in A.-G. Hamman, *Le mystère du salut* [Collection Credo], Paris 1954, p. 248. Cf. A.-G. Hamman, *Mystical Body*, in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. A. Di Bernardino, Cambridge 1992, I, p. 577.

¹⁰ Cf. Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 131.

expresses the essence of relationships within the community: "We are members one of the other". It is interesting to note the wider context from where this slogan is taken. John is expressing the genuine interest of the authentic Christian in the wellbeing of others, the foundation of social morality. He exhorts his listeners who are neophytes: "Therefore, do not look only to your own health and freedom from disease, but take considerable thought and care that your fellow member is set free from the hurt which comes from this evil and that he flees this disease. For *we are members one of the other*"¹¹.

The inextricable relationship between the Eucharist and social commitment is clearly presented by Hamman through several key texts by the bishop of Constantinople. Indeed,

John Chrysostom consistently exhorts his flock to recall that the celebration of the Eucharist entails a lifelong process of doing away with egoism, in order to embrace altruism. This is an endeavour which Hamman has described in his autobiography as 'comment concilier la foi et la tâche temporelle, faire non seulement cohabiter mais coopérer culte et souci social'¹².

In fact, very often Chrysostom binds the Eucharist to mutual love. Hamman writes that John "associe eucharistie et l'amour des autres, des pauvres"¹³, and highlights various instances where the bishop of Constantinople underlines this relationship, as for example in *Homily 27*¹⁴ on 1 Corinthians and *Homily 30*¹⁵ on the same Letter.

In my book, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria: Interrelated Themes in Patristic Sacramental Theology as Expounded by Adalbert-G. Hamman O.F.M.*¹⁶, I have dwelt at length on the interdependence between *leitourgia* and *diakonia* in John Chrysostom. The complementarity of these two features of Christian life lies at the basis of social morality. In a collection of patristic texts on the Eucharist, *La Messe*, edited by Adalbert Hamman, the bishop of Constantinople is described in these words by the French scholar: "Anxious to connect liturgy and life, charity received and charity

¹¹ John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 5, 14, as quoted in A.-G. Hamman, *Le baptême et la confirmation* [Collection Le mystère chrétien. Théologie sacramentaire], Paris 1969, p. 139.

¹² Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 10; Hamman, *La vie*, p. 242.

¹³ Jean Chrysostome *commente saint Paul*, p. 154, note 3.

¹⁴ Hamman presents this text under the heading "L'Eucharistie et les pauvres" in *ibid.*, pp. 280ss.

¹⁵ The text is presented by the incisive words "Solidarité et complémentarité" in *ibid.*, pp. 295ss.

¹⁶ Cf. especially pp. 190-192.

practised, John Chrysostom reveals the prolongation of the Eucharist in the life of the Christian"¹⁷. An attentive study of his sermons reveals the recurring appeal that Christians give homage to the body of Christ whom they encounter daily in the poor. Typically, Chrysostom does not mince his words while preaching that remaining passive in the face of social inequality is tantamount to worshipping the Bread of Heaven without engaging oneself in the prophetic task of sharing earthly bread¹⁸.

One of the most vivid illustrations of the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice by John Chrysostom is that which mentions the "two altars" in the life of the Christian. The text is impressive, and its forcefulness typical of the great orator. He succeeds in drawing an admirable connection between the altar which is sanctified when the bread offered on it becomes the body of Christ, and the living altar of mercy which is the body of the poor. Hamman affirms that this second altar "is found everywhere, at all street corners, in all places"¹⁹. This is what he says with great audacity:

This altar is composed of the very members of Christ, and the Body of the Lord is made [your] altar. That then revere [...] This altar [...] brings more awe] than this which we now use [...] Clamour not. For this altar is admirable because of the sacrifice that is laid upon it, but that, the altar [of mercy], not only on this account, but also because it is even composed of the very sacrifice which [makes] the other [...] admired. Again, this is but a stone by nature; but [it] become[s] holy because it receive[s] Christ's Body: but that is holy because it is itself Christ's Body²⁰.

This text which is so central to the theme of this paper is quoted by Adalbert Hamman in many of his works²¹. This is a sure sign of the French

¹⁷ A.-G. Hamman, ed., *The Mass. Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, Staten Island (New York) 1967, p. 30. Cf. Jean Chrysostome *commente saint Paul*, pp. 42-43.

¹⁸ Cf. A.-G. Hamman, *Le Christ et l'eucharistie*, in *La Table Ronde* 250 (1968), p. 181; Id., *Le mystère du salut*, pp. 258-259; Id., *La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens*, p. 215.

¹⁹ Hamman, ed., *The Mass*, p. 30.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Letter to the Corinthians* 20,3, as quoted in Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, 284; English trans. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* [A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. First Series 12], ed. P. Schaff, Grand Rapids (Michigan) 1983, p. 374.

²¹ For example, Hamman, *Comment les Pères de l'Église ont-ils prêché l'eucharistie?*, p.418; Id., *La Messe et sa catéchèse chez les Pères de l'Église*, p.465; Id., *Le Christ et l'eucharistie*, p.181; Id., *Les Pères comme source de la théologie spirituelle*, in *Seminarium* 21 (1969), p. 206; *Les racines de la foi*, p.205.

scholar's conviction regarding the complementary relationship between sacramental orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

The bishop of Constantinople was well known to rebuke his listeners as well as the rich and the city authorities. Using an abrasive tone with those who were not ready to help others, even in small matters, John preaches:

For you the Father has not spared his own Son, his only born Son; yet you disregard this Son when he dies of hunger. [...] God has given his own Son to us, and you have not given [...] even a crumb of bread [to him] who has been immolated and delivered up to you²².

Like other patristic authors, John Chrysostom refers in his writings to the agape meal, about which much has been written by specialised scholars. When he talks about this fraternal meal which usually followed the celebration of the Eucharist, the bishop of Constantinople explains that such table fellowship, especially with the needy, can be seen as an extension of the sacrament, and "a concrete expression of the *diakonia* associated with it"²³. Hamman, in his presentation of a collection of texts by John, telegraphically describes the agape meal by these words: "Repas de charité, ou l'on invitait les pauvres, les veuves sans moyen"²⁴. Chrysostom, like his Western contemporary Augustine, refers also to funerary repasts which were also intended to provide food for those in need²⁵.

In his *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, John encourages the rich to share with the poor and to sit at the same table after having partaken in the same Eucharistic bread²⁶. In another homily, this time on the first Letter to the Corinthians, he "exhorted those who had received the Eucharist to continue to foster the bonds of Christian friendship which were strengthened there, because some served generously while others

²² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Letter to the Romans* 15, as quoted in Hamman, ed., *The Mass*, p. 30. Cf. Hamman, *La Messe et sa catéchèse chez les Pères de l'Église*, p. 465.

²³ Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 129. Cf. Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 225; Id., *Les racines de la foi*, p. 205.

²⁴ Jean Chrysostome *commente saint Paul*, p. 177. Cf. Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 176.

²⁵ Cf. A.-G. Hamman, *La prière*, II, *Les trois premiers siècles*, Tournai 1963, p. 272; Id., *Vie liturgique*, 180; Id., *Refrigerium*, in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. A. Di Berardino, Cambridge 1992, II, p. 731.

²⁶ Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 7, 2, as quoted in Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, pp. 178-179. Also cf. Id., *L'apostolat du chrétien*, p. 79.

were served"²⁷. In yet another homily on the first Letter to the Corinthians, he once again urges his fellow Christians to embrace altruistic attitudes of sincere concern and disinterested solidarity. Again he binds such behaviour with a Eucharistic lifestyle. He states:

If therefore [you come] for a sacrifice of thanksgiving, do on [your] part nothing unworthy of that sacrifice: by no means either dishonour [your] brother or neglect him in his hunger [...] Since Christ for his part gave himself equally to all, saying, *Take, eat*. He gave his body equally [to all], but [you do] not give so much as the common bread equally [... You have] tasted the blood of the Lord, and not even thereupon [do you] acknowledge [your] brother [...] But now [you dishonour] the Table itself; he having been deemed worthy to partake of it and [you] not judging him worthy [to sit at this table]²⁸.

So far, we have seen how John lived up to his duty as shepherd of his flock. He reminded his flock, in season and out of season, that the celebration of the Eucharist is only completed in that firm commitment which brings Christians in direct contact with "the drama of poverty and suffering in the world"²⁹. It is within this context that he "emphasises charity in order that communion may be a true sharing and that the poor may have their share"³⁰.

2. *Mutual Responsibility*

One of the most widespread patristic images to describe the bonds of communion among Christians is the grain image. Inaugurated and forged at Baptism, these bonds are strengthened when the members of the community partake of the same Eucharistic bread. In one of his homilies on the first Letter to the Corinthians, John Chrysostom states:

²⁷ Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 186. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Letter to the Corinthians* 11, 19, as quoted in A.-G. Hamman, *Liturgie et action sociale. Le diaconat aux premiers siècles*, in *La Maison-Dieu* 36 (1953), p. 158.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Letter to the Corinthians* 27, 4, as quoted in Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, 180; English trans. John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the First Epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* [A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church 4], Oxford – London 1839, pp. 378-379.

²⁹ Author's trans. of Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 307: "Saint Jean Chrysostome n'a cessé d'inculquer à ses auditeurs l'extension du signe eucharistique au-delà du pain, jusqu'au drame de la pauvreté et de la souffrance du monde".

³⁰ Hamman, ed., *The Mass*, 169. Cf. Id., *La prière, I, Le Nouveau Testament*, Tournai 1959, pp. 119-120.

For as the bread consisting of many grains is made one, so that the grains nowhere appear, they exist indeed, but their difference is not seen by reason of their conjunction; so are we conjoined both with each other and with Christ: there not being one body for you, and another for your neighbour to be nourished by, but the very same for all. Wherefore also he [Paul] adds, *For we all partake of one bread*. Now if we are all nourished of the same and all become the same, why do we not also show forth the same love, and become also in this respect one?³¹

This spirit of solidarity and mutual concern in John is probably the result of his monastic formation and life where it was common practice to assist those in need³².

This mutual responsibility and gratuitous availability to others brings to mind the content of the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. According to John Chrysostom, this scene of the final judgement of humanity, as described by Jesus, should spur those partaking of the Eucharist to a change of heart and a willingness to manifest what Hamman describes as "une charité vecuë"³³. It is in the light of that same Gospel pericope that John highlights the duty of Christians to alleviate the pain of the least of their brethren. He affirms: "The Lord [has] first bidden the servant unto his own table; and [do you] not bid him, no not even after this? [...] He first gave [you] to drink out of his own cup, and [do you] not impart to him so much as [a cup of] cold water?"³⁴

In a similar passage, John goes to the extent to putting these words on the lips of Jesus who begs before a rich man: "I desire to be nourished by you and to be invited at your table. [...] And if you invite me, I will tell everyone of your good deed, and before this assembly I will praise him who nourished me"³⁵.

³¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Letter to the Corinthians* 24, as quoted in Hamman, ed., *The Mass*, p. 158.

³² John Chrysostom, *La conversion* [Collection Les Pères dans la foi 8], intro., notes, them. guide by A.-G. Hamman, Paris 1978, p. 21.

³³ A.-G. Hamman, *Mystère eucharistique*, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, Paris 1961, IV/2, col. 1577; Id., *Vie liturgique*, p. 150.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* 45 (46), 3, as quoted in Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, 180; English trans. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* [A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. First Series 10], ed. P. Schaff, Grand Rapids (Michigan) 1983, p. 286: "Le Christ nous a invités à sa table, et nous avons la dureté de ne pas l'inviter à notre tour... Il nous a fait boire à sa coupe, et on ne lui donne pas un verre d'eau froide".

³⁵ Author's trans. of John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Letter to the Romans* 16, 6, as quoted in Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 180: "Je désire être nourri par toi, être invité à

The strong sense of responsibility for one's neighbour urges John Chrysostom to make his listeners become more aware of the sinfulness of inconsistency in their Christian life. In one of the more well-known passages from his corpus, he criticises those who were keen on adorning the temple of God with gold and other precious materials, while they remained stone-hearted, leaving the poor in rags and misery:

For the church is not a gold foundry nor a workshop for silver, but an assembly of angels. [... Do you wish to] honour Christ's body? Neglect him not when naked; do not, while here [you honour] him with silken garments, neglect him perishing [outside] of cold and nakedness³⁶.

On the permanent validity of this text, Hamman exclaims: "Texte admirable entre mille, qui n'a rien perdu ni de sa force ni de son actualité"³⁷.

3. *The Importance of Almsgiving*

An important consequence of what has been discussed above is the practical assistance of those in need. Alleviating the hardships and pangs of the deprived is a central issue in social morality. Almsgiving is a practical advice which John Chrysostom gives when the society in which he lived was faced with the gross inequalities between the rich and the poor. In a short article on alms and almsgiving in *The Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Hamman mentions John by name as one of the Fathers who was most clear and direct when it came to preaching and teaching about the centrality of almsgiving. The French Franciscan states that in the fourth century,

deteriorating social and economic conditions led the Greek and Latin Fathers to emphasise the importance of almsgiving and to reawaken the Christian conscience to discover the duty of sharing. Basil, John Chrysostom and Ambrose see the whole problem in the light of theology: alms are the regulator of God's gifts and a duty of justice³⁸.

In other words, almsgiving is nothing other than a rightful restitution to the poor of what by right had already been theirs. During this process of

ta table... Et si tu m'y invites, je publie ta gloire, et devant cette assemblée je fais l'éloge de mon nourricier".

³⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 50, 4, as quoted in Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 283; English trans. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, p. 313. The same text is also found in A.-G. Hamman, *L'eucharistie à l'âge d'or des Pères de l'Église*, in *Parole et Pain* 9 (1972), p. 290.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ A.-G. Hamman, *Alms – Almsgiving*, in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, I, p. 25.

disinterested solidarity, Christ is discovered hidden beneath the filthy rags of the poverty-stricken³⁹.

Most naturally, John is not alone in preaching about the supreme value of almsgiving. Given that the theme of this year's conference carries in its subtitle the words *Oriente e occidente tra IV e V secolo*, it is our duty to highlight the Western response, if any, to what was being produced in the East. Some papers which have been or are to be delivered seek to study this dimension in the West. At any rate, it is well-known that Chrysostom and his giant contemporary in the West, Augustine, were very much on the same wavelength with regard to almsgiving. It is important to affirm that

Augustine consistently based his message on social justice, in stating that when those who were excessively rich gave alms, their action was none another than a restitution to the poor. John Chrysostom in turn affirmed that it was hypocrisy to celebrate the Eucharist or preach about it, and simultaneously to shun the duty of fighting against those forms of misery which eroded the dignity of the human person. In fact, the Eucharist offers Christians an invitation to participate in the creation of a renewed society⁴⁰.

For John, almsgiving is priestly in character. Hamman explains that "Saint Jean Chrysostome s'est plu à établir le parallélisme entre le Christ et le nécessiteux, entre la table du Seigneur et la faim du monde. Ce parallélisme éclaire le caractère en quelque sorte 'sacerdotal', selon le mot de l'Antiochien, de l'offrande et de la charité"⁴¹. He makes this affirmation also when in his commentary on Paul's advice to the Corinthians that they put aside an offering for the poor, he states:

But for the present lay it up [... that is, a contribution] at home, and make [your] house a church; [your] little box, a treasury. Become a guardian of sacred wealth, a self-ordained steward of the poor. [Your] benevolent mind assigns to [you] this priesthood⁴².

After having led the reader to ponder upon these incisive words by John Chrysostom, Adalbert Hamman comments on the moral strength of this fiery affirmation which, after all, mirrors the social situation at Constantinople at the beginning of the fifth century. Since John strikes a

³⁹ Cf. Jean Chrysostome, *La conversion*, p. 155; Id. *commente saint Paul*, pp. 295ss, 348-349.

⁴⁰ Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 197. Cf. Hamman, *La vie*, p. 349; Id., *La Messe et sa catéchèse chez les Pères de l'Église*, p. 465; Id., *Vie liturgique*, p. 307.

⁴¹ Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 299.

⁴² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Letter to the Corinthians* 43, 1, as quoted in Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 284; English trans.: John Chrysostom, *The Homilies... on the First Epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, p. 606.

parallel between Christ and the needy, between the table of the Lord and the altar of the hungry, Hamman explains that for the bishop

almsgiving is not only sacred in nature, but – in a sense – confers upon the Christian a sort of 'priesthood' which [...] binds the individual to Christ the high priest. The Eucharist on one hand, and alms on the other, are expressions of the same love. The offering made on the altar and the Eucharistic offering acquire their full significance only if the love sacramentalised in and derived from the sacrament of Christ's sacrifice actually comes to the aid of the poor who are also themselves the altar of God and the body of Christ⁴³.

Reading between the lines of this text, it is clear that John Chrysostom is urging all Christians to give alms and to share in different ways, each according to his or her situation. If such an attitude is embraced by many, the chasm between the rich and the poor can be bridged. This is what several Church Fathers and Hamman call "péréquation", or the equal distribution among socially unequal strata of individuals within the community and within society⁴⁴. Although not all individuals are called to embrace the radicality of evangelical poverty, Hamman – interpreting Chrysostom – holds that nonetheless "all can share, all can give alms... He compares alms to the purifying bath at the entrance to the church"⁴⁵.

Concluding Remarks

One can safely affirm that one of the most important contributions of John Chrysostom to theology is his teaching on the theme of social morality which bubbles out of his heart and mind. Through this paper, one can conclude clearly that this dimension is directly connected to John's Eucharistic texts. It is evident from his *corpus* that a liturgical celebration which is inward-looking and closed to the social milieu defeats its purpose. In the wide-ranging bibliography of Adalbert Hamman, one finds a strong emphasis on the orthopractical dimension of theology. With Hamman, the "Return to the Patristic Sources" becomes a process whereby

⁴³ Author's trans. of Hamman, *Vie liturgique*, p. 284: "Non seulement l'aumône a valeur sacrée, mais elle confère au chrétien une sorte de sacerdoce, qui [...] l'assimile au Christ grand prêtre. De part et d'autre – dans l'eucharistie, dans l'aumône – s'exprime un même amour. L'offrande à l'autel, l'oblation eucharistique ne prennent leur signification plénière que si la charité, sacramentalisée et puisée dans le sacrifice du Christ, vient réellement au secours des pauvres, qui, eux aussi, sont l'autel de Dieu et le corps du Christ".

⁴⁴ Cf. Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 187; Jean Chrysostome, *La conversion*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Jean Chrysostome, *ibid.*

"la foi [devient] expérience de vie, à l'école des Pères"⁴⁶. In this paper we have sought to identify a number of instances where Hamman refers to John Chrysostom, in particular his social morality. The beauty of several texts is more than evident. In fact,

one notes that John Chrysostom drew a parallel between Christ and the needy, between the venerable table of the Lord and the holy hand of the hungry. For him, charity therefore acquires a priestly dimension. Consequently, sharing with others entails living as a royal priesthood and viewing the commitment to serve the poor as a spiritual cult⁴⁷.

Such a lifestyle embraced by the authentic Christian is conducive to a transformation in relationships within the ecclesial community and within society. These relationships will be characterised by justice, solidarity and the respect of human dignity. It is the sum total of these features which makes the prophetic message of John Chrysostom still valid today to all men and women of good will at the beginning of the third Christian millennium.

HECTOR SCERRI
Faculty of Theology
University of Malta

⁴⁶ Hamman, *La vie*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, p. 191.