



# The practice of everyday death: Thanatology and self-fashioning in John Chrysostom's thirteenth homily on Romans

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The purpose of this article is to investigate the relationship between the discourse of death, or thanatology, and self-fashioning, in John Chrysostom's thirteenth homily *In epistulam ad Romanos*. The study argues that thanatology became a very important feature in the care of the self in Chrysostom's thought. The central aim here is to demonstrate the multi-directional flow of death, as a corporeal discourse, between the realms of theology, ethics, and physiology. Firstly, the article investigates the link between the theological concepts of sin and death. Secondly, the study argues that death also becomes a highly paradoxical discourse when it enters the realm of Chrysostomic virtue-ethics, where the mortification of excessive passion leads to life, while 'living' in passion only results in death on every level of existence – death as a discourse therefore becomes interiorised, a process functioning as a subset of a more extensive biologisation of the spiritual life-cycle. Finally, Chrysostom also utilises death in a very physiological way, especially in his comments on the relationship between sin and the passions, and one's physical health and appearance (which is also related to the soul).

## Introduction

For an event so mutual among human beings, death is often quite difficult to express, let alone fully understand. Michel de Certeau (1984) explains this difficulty as follows:

Considered on the one hand as a failure or a provisional halt in the medical struggle, and on the other, removed from common experience and thus arriving at the limit of scientific power and beyond familiar practices, death is an elsewhere ... given over, for example, to religious languages that are no longer current ... Death is the problem of the subject. (De Certeau 1984:191–192)

I am interested in these religious languages, specifically the early Christian dialect we so often utilise to articulate the ineffable problem of death. For the purposes of this article, I will examine how John Chrysostom uses the discourse of death, or thanatology, as a tool to explain Christian self-fashioning.

Few experiences have so profoundly shaped the ancient Christian *imaginaire* as death. Martyrdom, both as discourse and practice was, after all, one of the most influential discursive formations in early Christianity. The immense influence and power of martyr shrines have been emphatically noted by Peter Brown (1982), who concludes that the martyr shrines significantly changed the behavioural ebb and flow of late ancient society. In the image of the martyr, death became something that was mystified and even eroticised (Mayer 2006:14). A righteous and holy death was considered a precious commodity, a grace that was not afforded to all. And despite the widespread association of death and corpses with impurity, the remains of the holy martyrs were seen as being holy, blessed, carrying the *praesentia* of both the saint and God. It is within the cult of the saints and the popularisation of literatures of martyrdom that death became purified and thus highly ritualised (Mayer 2006:14–17). The death of the martyr was celebrated as his or her spiritual 'birthday.' This ritualisation, in turn, added a new dimension to the mnemonic aspect of death – the faithful dead were no longer only remembered and memorialised, but their death was celebrated; their death, in fact, gave them life. Long after the inscriptions on their tombs and sarcophagi faded, their presence lingered in the solemnisation of their deaths. In this sense, death represented a source of life, and a font of meaning for the early Christian church.

Besides the value and emphasis placed on the deaths and tombs of the martyrs, Éric Rebillard (2012:37–88) has also identified a shift, more generally, in late ancient Christian views regarding cadavers, a shift also relevant to the significance of Christian thanatology. From his reading of Augustine's *De cura mortuis gerenda* ['On the care of the dead'], Rebillard (2012:51–88) concludes that there was a valuation of the body of a dead person in the fourth century, especially visible

in the emphasis placed on providing an honourable burial, even for the poor, the proliferation of legislation focusing more on the prohibition of cadaver violation instead of tomb violation, and the general preference for inhumation rather than cremation.

The martyr accounts let slip an important clue in the understanding of the discourse of death in the early church – early Christian thanatologies were pregnant with operations for subjectivation, that is, identity-formation and self-fashioning. It can be seen in something as simple as the famous statement that often introduced martyrdom, namely, ‘I am a Christian.’ Thus, to understand death in early Christianity, the martyr accounts are probably not in all cases the most logical starting point – they rather seem to be closer to a point of conclusion. Is it not possible that the martyrologies of early Christianity were part of a much wider and pervasive thanatological discourse, one that manifests itself not only in the arenas on the days of the games or in later festivals commemorating the martyrs, but also in the very bodies of Christians in their *vie du quotidienne*? Were these great martyr figures not merely superstars of the practice of death that, for some, started with the first time they fasted or in the act of baptism? Is the case of the martyr not simply the event in which this discursive practice of death or mortification is fulfilled to the extreme, where the grip of thanatology on the believing body becomes so fierce and full-circle that the body itself magnificently collapses like a star experiencing gravitational disintegration?

In this article I will be investigating early Christian thanatology, but not in the sands of the arenas; I will rather look for death in the daily experiences of the majority of people who did not die the splendidly violent deaths of martyrs, ordinary Christians who attended church, listened to or read Scripture, experienced passions, Christians who fasted and feasted – after all, every martyr also started at this point – at the point of the daily mortification of the flesh. I will also limit my investigation to the thought of John Chrysostom, and as a case study I will examine his thirteenth homily *In epistulam ad Romanos* [‘On the epistle to the Romans’] – such a focused case study will serve better in introducing the nature and dynamics of the discourse of death in Chrysostom’s thought regarding Christian self-fashioning and identity-formation.<sup>1</sup> So to understand death in early Christianity, we first need to escape the arena, and start at the body.

## Death and body: Between theology, ethics, and physiology

The most important point to take note of, at the outset, is that thanatology is a highly corporeal discourse; it inevitably utilises the language of the body and embodiment on various levels of meaning, levels related both to the physiological, the psychic (related to the soul), and the spiritual. My central aim here is to demonstrate the multi-directional flow of death, as

a corporeal discourse, between the realms of theology, ethics, and physiology. By Chrysostom’s time, the discourse of death was already firmly rooted in what we can call the practice and care of the self, and the regulation of the body. The centrality of the care of the self has been aptly demonstrated by Michel Foucault (1986), who considers it the central concept in ancient ethical thought – I rely very much on Foucault’s formulation of the care of the self in this article. This usurpation of death by operations of subjectivation (and unbecoming) is laid bare in three discursive moments in the thought of Chrysostom: firstly, it is seen in the link between the theological concepts of sin and death, and especially in Chrysostom’s understanding of what flesh and soul are; secondly, death also becomes a highly paradoxical discourse when it enters the realm of Chrysostomic virtue-ethics, where the mortification of excessive passion leads to life, while ‘living’ in passion only results in death on every level of existence – death as a discourse therefore becomes interiorised, a process functioning as a subset of a more extensive biologisation of the spiritual life-cycle; finally, Chrysostom also utilises death in a very physiological way, especially in his comments on the relationship between sin and the passions, and one’s physical health and appearance. It is especially apparent in Chrysostom’s medicalisation of sin and virtue. In light of these three contexts, namely theology, ethics, and physiology, I aim to show that death should not be understood as a final event only, but rather as a discourse representing a number of exchanges, negotiations, and developments within the practice of the formation and care of the self.

## Sin, mortality, and the pilotage of the flesh

In Chrysostom’s discussion of Paul’s statements in Romans 7:14–8:15, he makes a crucial connection between sin, death, and the earthly body. Death was the result of sin, and in this way, death has seized the body and so made it mortal. However, the problem of mortality and the brevity of the earthly life also introduced yet another crisis – death instigates an inclination toward pathic excess:

For with death, Paul says, the trouble of passions also came in. For when the body had become mortal, it was hence required of it to receive concupiscence, and anger, and pain, and all the other passions, which required a great deal of discipline to prevent them from flooding us, and sinking reason into the depth of sin. For in themselves they were not sin; but, when their excessiveness was unbridled, it resulted in this transgression. (*Hom. Rm 13.1*)<sup>2</sup>

We see here that Chrysostom blames death for causing people to excessively indulge in the passions. In this homily, Chrysostom is thoroughly Platonic in his argumentation. He believes that in order to live virtuously, one needs to control the passions. The passions in themselves are not harmful, but they are deadly in their excess. In terms of his virtue ethics, Chrysostom was quite eclectic. At times he uses

1. For the provenance and background details of Chrysostom’s homilies on Romans, see Mayer (2005:179–181). For this article I will be using Migne’s text as primary source for the homily. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

2. PG 60.507.53–58: Μετά γάρ τοῦ θανάτου, φησὶ, καὶ ὁ τῶν παθῶν ἐπεισῆλθεν ὄγκος. Ὅτε γάρ θνητὸν ἐγένετο τὸ σῶμα, ἐδέξατο καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν ἀναγκαίως λοιπὸν, καὶ ὀργὴν καὶ λύπην καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα, ἃ πολλῆς ἐδέετο φιλοσοφίας, ἵνα μὴ πλημύραντα ἐν ἡμῖν καταποντίσῃ τὸν λογισμὸν εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀμαρτίας βυθόν. Αὐτὰ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἦν ἀμαρτία· ἡ δὲ ἀμετρία αὐτῶν μὴ χαλινομένη, τοῦτο εἰργάζετο.



Platonic reasoning, and at other times he uses Aristotelian and even Stoic philosophy (for Chrysostom's use of Platonic imagery, see Bosinis 2006:433–438; Rylaarsdam 2014; and for a more thorough evaluation of the philosophical frameworks utilised by Chrysostom, see Laird 2012).

However, because people are subject to death, they necessarily want to experience as much pleasure and indulgence as they can; it is at this point that the passions turn sinful. So how should the reality and consequences of death be dealt with, how should the body be managed in light of its mortality? In what appears to be a veiled anti-Manichean polemic, Chrysostom introduces an impassioned apology for the flesh. The flesh is not in itself sinful. 'Do not think that he is accusing the flesh,' Chrysostom explains while expounding Paul's reference to 'the body of this death' (Rm 7:24), which Chrysostom simply considers as 'the mortal body – that which has been overcome by death, not that which generated death.' Thus, 'the body is explained as being "of death," as being restrained by it,' Chrysostom affirms, 'not as producing it' (*Hom. Rm* 13.3).<sup>3</sup>

But although the flesh is not sinful in itself, it remains weak because of its subjection to death. The consequences of death and the weakness of the flesh can only be managed by the governance of the soul. 'Now we agree that the flesh is not as great as the soul, and is inferior to it, yet not contrary, or in opposition to it, or evil,' Chrysostom intimates, 'but that it is placed beneath the soul as a harp beneath a harper, and as a ship under the pilot' (*Hom. Rm* 13.1).<sup>4</sup> Thus, in Chrysostom's thought the body is not something the soul should escape from (unlike Platonic thought, in this case); rather, as Foucault (1977:29) has insightfully observed, the soul represents those technologies for governing and caring for the body, for shaping the self – all serving to manage the threat of sin and the problem of mortality. The soul becomes the safeguard and refuge for the body. Paul 'is not finding fault with the body, but pointing out the soul's superiority,' Chrysostom believes, Paul is simply 'giving the governing power [κῦρος] to the soul' (*Hom. Rm* 13.1).<sup>5</sup>

Foucault's observation (1977:29) that the soul functioned as a duplication of the body in ancient thought is perhaps more relevant than he noted in his own work on the topic. In early Christian thought, as well as in Galenic thought, the soul was a material phenomenon, consisting simply of a much lighter matter than flesh. One's regimen in terms of diet, exercise, and even the climate of one's living area influenced the soul (Shaw 1998:27–52). Overeating, for instance, makes the soul heavy and bloated, and this influences the body. Teresa Shaw (1998:131–138) has illustrated how ancient medical thought shaped early Christian ideas, especially those of

3.PG 60.512.18–26: μὴ νόμιζε τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτὸν κατηγορεῖν... τὸ θνητὸν σῶμα, τὸ χειρωθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ θανάτου, οὐ τὸ γεννησάν τὸν θάνατον... οὕτω καὶ τὸ σῶμα θανάτου λέγεται, ἐπειδὴ κατεσχέθη παρ' αὐτοῦ, οὐκ ἐπειδὴ προεξένησεν αὐτόν.

4.PG 60.509.43–47: Ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐλάττωνα μὲν ὁμολογοῦμεν εἶναι τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν σάρκα καὶ καταδεεστέραν, οὐ μὴ ἐναντίαν οὐδὲ μαχομένην οὐδὲ πονηράν, ἀλλ' ὡς κιθάραν κιθαριστῆ, καὶ ὡς ναῦν κυβερνητή, οὕτως αὐτὴν ὑποκείσθαι τῇ ψυχῇ.

5.PG 60.509.53–510.3: οὐ τὸ σῶμα διέβαλεν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς ψυχῆς ἔδειξεν. Αὐτὴ τὸ κύριος τῆς ψυχῆς τίθεμενος.

Chrysostom, about the relationship between the soul and the body, and the effects they had on each other. Wendy Mayer (2015:11–26) has also shown how the concept of psychic therapy, that is, the healing of the soul and, in turn, the body, functioned in the homilies of John Chrysostom, and argues that the preacher occupied the role of a medical philosopher, and that through theology and the medium of the late ancient sermon, ancient Roman medicine both endured and was also transformed. This means that the health of the soul directly influenced that of the body, for Chrysostom, and it also means that excessively indulging in passions of the soul like greed, gluttony, and sexual immorality logically led to the death of the body. I will return to the relationship between the health of the body and that of the soul shortly, as it is crucial for understanding the discourse of thanatology in Chrysostom's thought.

Thus, Christian self-fashioning and self-mastery, in other words, psychic governmentality, in this instance, represents the processes in which the individual aims to manage and overcome the grip of death, and its oft-sinful consequences, on the body. The mortal flesh becomes the harp with which the soul produces a symphony of righteous volition that drowns out the grave silence of death, ushering in the corporeal song of health and immortality. The question of moral choice (προαίρεσις) features extensively in the discussion here (for more extensive discussions of moral choice in Chrysostom, see Laird 2012; Pagels 1985:67–99). 'Now the essence of the soul and body and that of moral choice are not the same,' Chrysostom explains, 'for the first two are God's works, and the other is a motion [κίνησις] from ourselves towards whatever we wish to direct it' (*Hom. Rm* 13.2).<sup>6</sup> Thus, volition, or free will, becomes the energy that drives the psychic governance of the flesh. But this argument of the governance of the body by means of the soul becomes rather complicated in Chrysostom.

## The interiorisation of death and the paradox of the passions

Having discussed the links between physical death, sin, and the psychic governance of the body, I will now turn to the next discursive moment in the operation of thanatology in Chrysostom's thought, namely the interiorisation of death. But this process of interiorisation did not occur independently; it was part of that very sophisticated and complex discursive operation which is the biologisation of the spiritual life cycle. Yet the life of the spirit is again portrayed in highly corporeal terms, since the body can serve as a model for any symbolic and functional system, as well as the notion of the physical link between soul and body, as noted above. The events of the physical life served as simulacra for the spiritual; a spiritual *désévénementialisation* of mortality. So, as the physical body has a birth event, so too does the body of spirit – spiritual birth was, of course, very closely linked with baptism in the early church. 'As then the wind is not visible, although it makes a

6.PG 60.510.25–28: Οὐ γὰρ ταυτὸν ψυχῆς οὐσία καὶ σώματος καὶ προαιρέσεως, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἐστὶν ἔργα Θεοῦ, τὸ δὲ ἐξ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν γινόμενη κίνησις, πρὸς ὅπερ ἂν αὐτὴν βουληθῶμεν ἀγαγεῖν.



sound, so neither is the birth of that which is spiritual visible to our bodily eyes,' explains Chrysostom, 'yet the wind is a body, although a very light one; for that which is the object of sense is body' (*Hom. Jn 26.2*).<sup>7</sup> As with the materiality of the soul, the invisibility of the pneumatic birth does not discount its existence.

Spiritual growth is also biologised. Breast milk was a common metaphor in early Christian literature, particularly in Chrysostom, and with a very vibrant textual life. Doctrine was considered milk, and teaching was often compared to breastfeeding (see *Hom. I Cor 8.1*; *Hom. Eph 9.1*; *Hom. Heb 7.2, 9.3*; *Stat. 9.3*). In one of Chrysostom's homilies, he depicts Christ as a nurse, with a somewhat vampiric twist: 'There are often mothers that after labour give out their children to other women as nurses; but Christ does not to do this, but he himself feeds us with his own blood, and by all means permeates us with himself' (*Hom. Mt 82.5*).<sup>8</sup> Milk was, after all, seen as processed blood. Spiritual infancy and maturity were not the only dimensions of this pneumatic biologisation – Chrysostom incorporates numerous other aspects, most notably medicalisation, where the spiritual and psychic life is described as being either healthy or diseased, with doctrine, preaching, or divine chastisement often being seen as spiritual medication. Just as there is physical exercise, so too there are the gymnastics of the spirit, the contest against the lusts of the world. Again, it is important to note that these moments of psychic and pneumatic biologisation, in Chrysostom's view, had very real effects on the health of the body.

As there is spiritual birth, growth, health, and disease, so too can there be spiritual life and death. But, quite ironically, spiritual life and death are highly paradoxical. 'Do not permit your body then to live in this world, so that it may live then! Make it die, that it may not die,' the preacher admonishes, 'the one who is dead to this life, is then most alive' (*Hom. Rm 13.5–6*).<sup>9</sup> This is in fact the very beginning of Christian martyrdom – those minute ephemeral suicides and moments of unbecoming that believers need to experience in their very flesh. The martyrs in the arena are simply those who have taken the spiritual life cycle to its most extreme conclusion. Through their physical deaths, they have become truly alive. But martyrdom dawns from the daily practices of self-renunciation and unbecoming, practices that represent the sole foundation of Christian subjectivation. 'Let us continually mortify the flesh in its works,' Chrysostom says, 'I do not mean in its substance, certainly not, but in its impulses [ὀρμή] towards evil works' (*Hom. Rm 13.6*).<sup>10</sup>

7.PG 59.155.15–19: Ὡσπερ οὖν ὁ ἄνεμος οὐ φαίνεται, καίτοι γε φωνὴν διδούς· οὕτως οὐδὲ ἡ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ φαίνεται γέννησις ὀφθαλμοῖς σώματος, καίτοι γε σῶμα ὁ ἄνεμος, εἰ καὶ λεπτότατον τὸ γὰρ αἰσθῆσει ὑποβαλλόμενον, σῶμα.

8.PG 58.744.5–9: Μητέρες πολλάκις εἰσὶ, καὶ μετὰ τὰς ὄδινας ἐτέρας ἐκιδόασαι τροφοῖς τὰ παιδιά; αὐτὸς δὲ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἡμᾶς τρέφει οικειῶ αἵματι, καὶ διὰ πάντων ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ συμπλέκει.

9.PG 60.520.3–5, 34: Μὴ τοίνυν ἀφῆς ζῆσαι τὸ σῶμα νῦν, ἵνα τότε ζῆση· ποιήσον αὐτὸ ἀποθανεῖν, ἵνα μὴ ἀποθάνῃ... Οὐκοῦν ζῶν οὗτος μάλιστα ἐστὶν ὁ νεκρωθεὶς τῷ βίῳ.

10.PG 60.520.14–17: ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν διηνεκῶς αὐτὸ νεκρῶσωμεν. Οὐχὶ τὴν οὐσίαν λέγω, μὴ γένοιτο, ἀλλὰ τὰς ὀρμὰς τὰς ἐπὶ τὰς πονηρὰς πράξεις.

The more the works and passions of the flesh are mortified (νεκρῶω), the more the spirit comes to life. Just as the passions often appeared as demons to the monks living in the desert, so too the mortification of the flesh is described as 'competing with the angels' by Chrysostom (*Hom. Rm 13.8*; see also Muehlberger 2013:36–37, 111–112).<sup>11</sup>

At this point the pilotage of the soul reaches its pinnacle. By mastering the body and the passions, the spirit can truly live, while revelling in excess only brings death. When Chrysostom lauds the martyrs, he does not simply admire their act of physical self-sacrifice – the martyrs are praised above all for being individuals who have mastered their flesh and their passions. When speaking of the martyr-mother of the Maccabees (see 2 Macc 7; 4 Macc), Chrysostom constantly highlights how she overcame her passions, and when admonishing his audience to follow her example, he focuses less on her physical sacrifice, but more on how she overcame the passions (De Wet 2012:3–21). Chrysostom writes:

Let us ... inscribe her contests and wrestling matches *on our heart* ... so that by imitating the virtue of these saints here, we may be able to share their crowns too there, with us displaying as much endurance *in the irrational passions* as they exhibited philosophy in their tortures, in anger and desire for money, bodies, vainglory and all other such things. (*Hom. Macc. 1.11*; translation: Mayer 2006:145; my italics)<sup>12</sup>

Here it is not so much the concept of martyrdom that is interiorised, but rather an instance where Chrysostom reaches back to the already interiorised symbolic roots of martyrdom, namely the mortification of the flesh.

## Of feasting and fasting: Physiological underpinnings

We should not assume that the conceptual linkage between sin and mortality, and the interiorisation of death, were mere metaphysical and a-somatic moments in the dynamics of Chrysostom's thanatology. The mortification of the body did not acquiesce in the realm of the literary or metaphorical. A discourse so corporeal as death could not possibly operate sensibly and meaningfully without seizing the physical body – this grip on the body, as I have already indicated, was facilitated by means of the soul. There are constant exchanges between theology, ethics and physiology in Chrysostom's thanatology. This is also why Chrysostom's works are so littered with medical discourse (Mayer 2015:11–26). The interiorisation of death had a very real effect on the physical body and making sense of physical death. Toward the conclusion of the homily under discussion, Chrysostom posits two men before his audience: the first has given himself over to excessive and extravagant passions, a 'slave to the pleasures.' He is rich (of course), and spends his whole day in feasting and drunkenness. The second man, modelled

11.PG 60.519.13–14: τὸ τοῖς ἀγγέλοις ἀμιλλᾶσθαι.

12.PG 50.622.51–63: τοὺς ἀγῶνας καὶ τὰ παλαίσματα... τῆς καρδίας ἡμῶν ἀπογράψαντες... ἵνα ἐνταῦθα μιμησάμενοι τὴν ἀρετὴν τῶν ἁγίων τούτων, κάκει τῶν στεφάνων δυνηθῶμεν αὐτοῖς κοινωνῆσαι, ὅσην ἐν τοῖς κινδύνοις φιλοσοφίαν ἐπεδείξαντο, τοσαύτην ἐν τοῖς ἀλόγοις πάθειν ἡμεῖς καρτερίαν ἐπιδεικνύμενοι, θυμῷ, καὶ ἐπιθυμίᾳ χρημάτων, σωμάτων, δόξης.

on the image of the monk, lives in poverty, fasting every day and sometimes going without food for three days – he is a man of strict discipline (φιλοσοφία). Chrysostom then asks which one of these two is truly alive.

Chrysostom expounds little of the latter subject, save for his discipline in reading, prayer, fasting, moderation in sleep, and abstention from wine. Rather than discussing the health benefits of fasting and moderation here, as is common in many treatises from late antiquity (for more on the interplay between ancient medical knowledge and the control of the passions, especially with regard to fasting, see Rousselle [1996:160–178; Shaw 1998:79–128]) Chrysostom focuses in this homily on the physical dangers of overindulgence. The bulk of the homily's conclusion is reserved for the slave to the passions, especially the love of wine, money, and lust. This man is described as one riddled with disease (νόσημα) both in body and soul; his body becomes a grave for his soul. His intoxication makes him both deaf and blind, just like a corpse. His saliva is tainted, and his body is dry and overheated from the wine. It is important to note Chrysostom's framework of medical knowledge in this instance. Like most ancients, Chrysostom believed that bodily health was regulated by means of the humours. Chrysostom states, 'This body of ours, so short, and small, consists of four elements, namely of what is warm, that is, of blood; of what is dry, that is, of yellow bile; of what is moist, that is, of phlegm; of what is cold, that is, of black bile. And let no one think this subject foreign to that which we have in hand' (*Stat.* 10.4).<sup>13</sup> The foods that the rich eat, as Chrysostom so often complains, are often very decadent, usually sweet and heavy foods, especially meat and wine. These foods, according to Chrysostom, made the body 'soft' and fat, and also affected the health of the soul – both meat and wine heated and moistened the body, which also led to increased sexual libido in ancient medical thought (Shaw 1998:79–128). The rich not only eat the wrong foods, but they also eat excessively (see *Hom. Mt* 44.1–2; *Hom. Jo* 22.1–3; *Hom. Col* 1.3–4; *Hom. I Tm* 14.2–3). Diet occupied a central place in ancient self-fashioning.

On the other hand, the food which monks and the people of the countryside eat is simple, usually only consisting of bread, some salt, herbs, grains, and pulse (*Hom. Mt* 49.1; *Hom. II Cor* 19.2–3; *Hom. I Tm* 14.2–3; *Stat.* 3, 6, 19). The foods that Chrysostom, and most other late ancient Christian ascetics, prescribed were foods that had a cooling and drying effect. As Shaw (1998:81–91) notes, the monastic and virginal body should be cool and dry. This is also why bathing should be avoided unless one is extremely ill, since bathing moistens the body. But the cooling and drying dietary regimen is also a regimen of ageing and mortification. In Roman medical thought, and this is also true for Chrysostom, the ageing of the body was considered a cooling and drying process (*Hom. Tt* 4.1). Hence, the dead body is cold and dry. Even the dietary regimen that Chrysostom prescribes is one that presupposes

13.PG 49.113.7–12: Καὶ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα τὸ ἡμέτερον τὸ βραχὺ τοῦτο καὶ μικρὸν ἐκ τετάρων συνέστηκε στοιχείων, θερμὸν μὲν τοῦ αἵματος, ξηρὸν δὲ τῆς χολῆς τῆς ζανθῆς· καὶ ὑγρὸν μὲν τοῦ φλέματος, ψυχρὸν δὲ τῆς μελαίνης χολῆς. Καὶ μὴ τις ἄλλοτριον ἡμῶν εἶναι νομιζέτω τοῦτον τὸν λόγον.

and furthers the process of mortification. Thanatology was present in the plates of food eaten by early Christian ascetics; death was inscribed in one's diet. A diet that mortified the body, however, vivified the soul.

Furthermore, the effects of greed and lust, however, are much worse. They cause madness (μανία) in that, unlike the lust for wine, greed and sexual lust never find satisfaction. Greed and lust are often depicted in terms of mental illness in Chrysostom's thought (Salem 2010:140). This is true suicidal behaviour for Chrysostom: 'What then can be worse than madness of this sort, and what more wretched' Chrysostom objurgates, 'when a man is preparing rocks for his own self on every side, and shoals, and precipices, and gulfs, and pits without number, while he has but one body, and the slave of one belly?' (*Hom. Rm* 13.11).<sup>14</sup> This pitiable affluent man has become a disgraceful martyr of his own passions, dying a long and restless death both in body and soul, without being able to take his riches with him. This person will experience a resurrection unto judgement, while the righteous' body will be resurrected unto eternal life (for more on Chrysostom's views on resurrection, see De Wet 2011:92–114).

## Conclusion

'For it is from the actions that it becomes manifest which is alive and which is dead,' Chrysostom proclaims (*Hom. Rm* 13.6).<sup>15</sup> I have attempted to show in this article how the discourse of death in relation to self-fashioning operated in a sample of Chrysostom's corpus. The most important preliminary finding is that death functioned as a highly embodied discursive *practice* in Chrysostom, a practice intimately associated with Christian self-fashioning. In this practice there was constant interaction between theology, ethics, and physiology. Thanatology was also a productive practice in that it provided Chrysostom with an apparatus to both normalise and pathologise individual behaviour with the same paradoxical language. Because of its mortality, which was related to sin, the flesh has become subject to the passions. This subjugation increased the scope of death into the realm of the psychic, and in order to manage the effects of sin and mortality, the soul had to pilot the flesh carefully through the tempestuous seas of the passions. This psychic direction was especially important, since bodily and psychic health directly impacted one another.

Death was also interiorised and given its place in the spiritual life, in which the desires of the flesh had to be mortified daily in order to truly live. By mortifying the passions of the flesh, the spirit was vivified. The psychic pilotage of the flesh had very physiological effects; excessive indulgence rendered the body a restless living corpse, diseased and mad. Death inscribed itself onto the very diet of early Christian ascetics. Finally, by understanding the operation of thanatology in Chrysostom's thought, it also provides us with a space in

14.PG 60.523.5–9: Τί ταύτης τοίνυν τῆς μανίας γένοιτ' ἂν χειρόν, τί δὲ ἀθλιώτερον, ὅταν αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ πανταχοῦ σκοπέλους κατασκευάζῃ καὶ ὑφάλους καὶ κρημνοὺς καὶ φάραγγας καὶ μυρία βάραθρα, σῶμα ἔχων ἓν, καὶ γαστρί δουλεύων μίᾳ;

15.PG 60.520.54–55: ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν πράξεων καὶ ὁ ζῶν καὶ ὁ τεθνηκὼς φαίνεται.



which to read martyrdom as a phenomenon inextricably bound to daily practices of Christian self-fashioning.

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