John Chrysostom’s *Homilia dicta postquam reliquiae martyrum* (PG 63:467-72) and the Hazards of Platonic Reminiscence

On more than one occasion John Chrysostom (bishop of Constantinople, 398-404 CE) claimed in his preaching that Plato's teachings had vanished from the earth and been "lost in silence." (e.g. *Homilia habita postquam presbyter Gothus*, PG 63.501). But Constantine Bosinis, reflecting on John Chrysostom's employment of two metaphors from Plato's *Phaedrus*: the wings of love and the charioteer of the soul in his homiletic output, ("Two Platonic images in the rhetoric of John Chrysostom" *Studia Patristica* (2006) 433-438), notes that Chyrostostom "repeats verbatim the philosophical axiom of Plato on the higher status of madness" from *Phaedrus* 244a. at opening of a homily Chrysostom's delivered in the presence of the empress Eudoxia (*Homilia dicta postquam reliquiae martyrum*, PG 63:467-72). According to the title given in the manuscripts, this followed a nocturnal translation of anonymous relics to a martyrium of the apostle Thomas located some nine roman miles from the city center. Bosinis' description of the reference is exaggerated, but nonetheless the source of the allusion is plain enough. Chrysostom's objection to Plato's liberal use of irony (*Hom 4. In Acta apostolorum*, PG 60.48) is itself undercut by his own ironic reworking of Plato's paradox of beneficial madness for a Christian audience.

I will argue that such ironic Platonizing contributed to Chrysostom's deposition and exile at the Synod of the Oak in 403 CE. The ninth century patriarch Photius preserves an account of the otherwise lost *acta* of the synod (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 59) in which he reports that the Syrian monk Isaac produced his own libellus of charges, among them that while preaching Chrysostom had claimed the altar (trapeza) to be "full of furies" and that he also had boasted that he was passionately in love (ero, mainomai), and "he should have explained what Furies are and what it means to say 'I am passionately in love,' for these expressions are unknown to the church." Chrysostom's major biographers have followed Photius himself in dismissing such charges as "bizarre" (atopous), but precise correspondances can be found for both examples (for the first: *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* (PG 61:381-610; for the second, the spurious *Hom 2. In Psalmum 50*: PG 55:585 shows that a dedicated imitator found such phrasing unproblematic). Platonizing with respect not just to its conspicuous irony and paradox, its highly charged and figured language (the "sublimity," to *Platono hypsos* Chrysostom ordinarily despises, I will conclude that Chrysostom's opening to the homily before the empress cited by Bosinis could have precipitated an similar instance of misunderstanding and the alienation of an audience, like Isaac, unprepared for such *tours-de-force*.

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