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# Prayer and gender in John Chrysostom's homilies *On Hannah*

## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this article is to examine the intersections of prayer and gender in John Chrysostom's (ca. 349-407 CE) homilies On Hannah (CPG 4411). Chrysostom speaks about prayer in many of his homilies. However, in the homilies On Hannah, notions of prayer and gender, especially masculinity, intersect quite clearly, which is not always the case with other discussions of prayer in Chrysostom's oeuvre. The questions in this article include the following: What does Chrysostom do with the gender of Hannah as a woman of prayer in these homilies? How is the problem of infertility, and its intersection with prayer, handled in the homilies? How does Hannah pray as a woman, and what does this mean for the men in Chrysostom's audience? In order to address these matters, the study examines the issue of Hannah's infertility, which was the main motivation for her prayer. Chrysostom's portrait of Hannah as an example of how to pray is then analysed, focusing especially on Hannah's internalisation of her prayer, as Chrysostom perceives it. The article aims to demonstrate that prayer, like many other aspects of early Christian life and worship, was a highly gendered concept and issues of gender lie at the heart of our understanding of Christian spiritual practice in antiquity.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the year 387 CE, John Chrysostom (349-407 CE) preached a series of sermons casually known as *On Hannah* (CPG 4411);<sup>1</sup> these homilies led up

<sup>1</sup> The original Greek titles of the homilies are much more descriptive and elaborate (for the titles, see Hill 2003:65, 82,

to the celebration of Pentecost of that year. By then, it had been a difficult year for the citizens of Antioch, since earlier, during Lent, the images and statues of the emperor were destroyed during a riot. Thankfully, a terrible crisis was averted after one of the city's bishops, Flavian, visited the emperor and interceded for the city. These homilies seem to have been delivered five or six weeks prior to Pentecost of 387 CE, possibly in the Old Church of Antioch, close to the marketplace of the city. Hill (2001:328; 2003:62) remarks that Chrysostom's audience in Antioch may have consisted of men only, since he addresses them as ἄνδρες, although this is not entirely certain. Simply because Chrysostom's oratorical orientation was directed towards the men does not necessarily mean that women were absent. The themes and content of the homilies are rather varied, including issues such as prayer, fasting, and the correct education of children. The golden thread between these homilies is the exposition of the character of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, especially her prayer, which we read in 1 Samuel 1:9-18 (LXX 1 Reigns 1:9-18).<sup>2</sup> Hannah was infertile and desperately wanted to have a child. In *Hannah*, Chrysostom provides a close exegetical reading of the text, focusing on the implications of specific phrases and clauses. His use of the figure of Hannah fits in with the more general use of scriptural *exempla* in early Christian thought (Lai 2019:587-612). As an *exemplum*, Hannah functions as a model for teaching, learning, and imitation.

In this article, I am specifically interested in the intersections of prayer and gender, especially masculinisation, in the *Hannah* homilies. Chrysostom speaks about prayer in many of his homilies. For example, in his 19<sup>th</sup> homily *On Matthew*, he provides a detailed analysis of the Our Father prayer and, in his exegetical homily *On Psalm 4*, Chrysostom describes what might even be termed as an "art" (τρόπος) of prayer (Hill 2006:1-18). It should also be noted that there are two homilies *On Prayer* (*De precatone*; CPG 4516) attributed to Chrysostom, but these were most likely composed by a different pseudo-Chrysostomic author (Voicu 2018:245-260). My interest in *Hannah* lies in the fact that, in these homilies, notions of prayer and gender intersect quite clearly, which is not always the case with other discussions of prayer in Chrysostom's oeuvre. If Hill is correct that the audience only consisted of men, then it is even more interesting that Chrysostom uses a woman exemplar for prayer, especially when there are others such as Moses or Job or Jesus himself. Kornarakis (2009:437-460) made a study of prayer and the human cry in Chrysostom's thought, also with reference to Hannah and others, but

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96, 107, 121). As there is currently no critical edition of these homilies, I will use Migne's (1862) text in the *Patrologia Graeca* (PG) series. The translation used is that of Hill (2003:65-132). On background and introductory issues of the *Hannah* homilies, see Hill (2001:319-338).

2 Chrysostom used the so-called Lucianic, or Antiochene, recension of the Septuagint (LXX) (Hill 2005:57-59).

the scope of that study is somewhat wider than the current study. Kornarakis' study has other aims. Sandnes (2015:282-288) provides a useful analysis of Chrysostom's interpretation of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. Simmons (1993:351-367) and Szczur (2011:17-37) examine Chrysostom's reading of David's prayer in his exegesis of the Psalms. The current study complements those of Kornarakis, Sandnes, Simmons, and Szczur. The following questions are pertinent for this study: What does Chrysostom do with the gender of Hannah as a woman of prayer in these homilies? How is the problem of infertility, and its intersection with prayer, handled in the homilies? How does Hannah pray as a woman, and what does this mean for the men in Chrysostom's audience? In order to address these issues, I will first examine the issue of Hannah's infertility, which was the main motivation for her prayer. I will then analyse Chrysostom's portrait of Hannah as an example of how to pray, focusing especially on Hannah's internalisation of her prayer, as Chrysostom perceives it. In this article, I aim to demonstrate that prayer, like many other aspects of early Christian life and worship, was a highly gendered concept, and issues of gender lie at the heart of our understanding of Christian spiritual practice in antiquity.

## 2. PRAYER AND HANNAH'S INFERTILITY

Infertility (ἀπαιδία) represents an interesting and complex problem in early Christian discourse. Ancient Christian authors such as Ephrem the Syrian associated infertility with sin, and linked faith and repentance with fertility. This is evident in Ephrem's understanding of Sarah, who was also infertile. Ephrem (*Commentary on Genesis* 14, in Assad 2010:155-160) states that, while she was infertile, Sarah was characterised by a lack of faith. But when she gained faith and trust, she became fertile. In Ephrem, then, fertility and faith run parallel to one another. Faith might even be characterised, in this instance, as the fertility of the soul, which eventually also influences the body (Hunt 1998:165-184; Frishman 2009:169-172).

Chrysostom's views on infertility are somewhat different – he does not link infertility and sin by default. Chrysostom (*Against divulging the sins of brothers* 6, in Masi 1998:364) states:

They [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] were in all respects bright and esteemed, but all of them had barren wives, and lived without children until an advanced age. Thus, when you see a husband and wife yoked together in virtue, when you see them favoured by God ... giving

heed to piety, but unable to have children,<sup>3</sup> do not assume that the childlessness is in any way a retribution for sins.<sup>4</sup>

This idea is also prevalent in *Hannah*. Chrysostom (*Hannah* 1.3; Migne 1862:54:637) begins with a brief exposition of 1 Timothy 2:15, which states that women will be “saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (NRSV). Chrysostom then explains that it is not simply the act of pregnancy and birth that brings salvation, but raising children to have virtue and, most importantly, self-control (σωφροσύνη). Why was Hannah then not given a child, and why did God not grant her a child sooner? Chrysostom’s (*Hannah* 1.4; Migne 1862:54:638) answer to this is:

It was not out of hatred, in fact, nor revulsion that he [God] closed her womb, but to open to us the doors on the values the woman possessed, and for us to espy the riches of her faith and realise that he rendered her more conspicuous on that account (Hill 2003:75).

Issues of fertility and barrenness were highly gendered in ancient discourse, and infertility was often viewed as a woman’s problem (King 1998:27-37, 88). Thus, when Chrysostom deals with infertility, he needs to manage the gendered assumptions associated therewith. Chrysostom uses the female body, in this instance, as a pedagogical script and he presents an interesting tension between physical infertility and spiritual fertility. Hannah’s infertility, therefore, has a pedagogical function. Paradoxically, God “closed her womb” (ἀπέκλεισεν αὐτῆς τὴν μήτραν) to “open” the doors of human understanding. The idea that illness and disability had pedagogical functions was very common in early Christian thought (De Wet 2020:343-371). Hannah’s body thus becomes a “lesson” in virtue formation, particularly on how to persevere and how to pray. Chrysostom notes, in this same section, that many men of his day exerted great pressure on their wives to bear children, especially sons. Procreation was one of the main purposes of marriage in ancient Roman and Jewish society (Wheeler-Reed 2017:39-62). In the case of Hannah, however, Elkanah neither exerted pressure on, nor rebuked her. But Hannah kept praying and promised to dedicate the child, Samuel, to God, if he was conceived and born.

We now witness one of the first important characteristics of prayer as it relates to gender. In Chrysostom’s thought, prayer is a principle of fertility. Chrysostom (*Hannah* 1.5; Migne 1862:54:640) starts by likening Hannah’s tears in prayer to the rain that is needed to produce crops:

3 In Greek, this phrase reads εἶτα παιδιά μὴ κεκτημένους. In a variant reading of the text, we have καὶ ἀπαιδίαν νοσοῦντας, meaning “diseased with infertility”, demonstrating how common it was to link infertility with disease in ancient thought.

4 My own translation.

Instead of saying anything at first, she began with wailing, and shed a warm flood of tears. And just as, when rainstorms fall, even the harder ground is moistened and softened, and easily bestirs itself to produce crops, so too did this happen in the case of this woman: as though softened by the flood of tears and warmed with the pangs, the womb began to stir in that wonderful fertility [τὴν καλὴν ἐκείνην τεκνογονίαν] (Hill 2003:77).

Prayer then has a distinct procreational function. It is through prayer, and not only by the man's seed, that a woman's body is truly fertilised. This idea fits in well with Chrysostom's broader understanding of marriage, sex, and procreation. In his treatise *On virginity*, Chrysostom had to address the accusation that, if virginity became universal, the human race would no longer exist since no children would be born. "And today our race is not increased by the authority of marriage but by the word of our Lord". Chrysostom (*On virginity* 15.1, in Shore 1983:22) explains, "who said at the beginning: 'Be fertile and multiply.'" Chrysostom adds that fornication caused the human race to perish, with reference to the wickedness of the people during Noah's time. God is, therefore, able to increase humanity without sexual intercourse, as he caused the angels to multiply (*On virginity* 17-18; Shore 1983:25-27). Procreation is, therefore, removed somewhat from the act of sexual intercourse, which had negative connotations of the Fall and sin, and brought closer to God's volition and prayer. In the ancient world, fertility was very closely linked to the actions of the gods (De-Whyte 2018), and Chrysostom is no exception to these presuppositions (De Wet 2017:1-9). In these homilies, God is a God of fertility. In *Hannah*, we note how this principle is practically applied. Through her prayer, God made Hannah fertile, as Chrysostom (*Hannah* 2.1; Migne 1862:54:643) eloquently explains at the very start of the second homily:

[Prayer] set to rights her natural deficiency, opened her closed womb ... reaping a bumper crop from barren rock ... And so anyone would not be wide off the mark in calling this woman the child's mother and father at the same time: even if the husband sowed the seed, her prayer supplied the potency to the seed and rendered the beginnings of Samuel's birth more august. After all, it was really not only the parents' sleeping together and having intercourse, as in other cases; rather, prayers, tears and faith formed the beginnings of birth, and the prophet had more august parents than other children, having come into being as a result of his mother's faith. Hence of this woman, too, you could appositely say, 'Though sowing in tears, they will reap in joy' [Ps. 126:5] (Hill 2003:82).

Chrysostom calls Hannah Samuel's mother and father, since her prayers also made her fertile. This is a rare occasion, in which sterility seems to also be attributed to the male seed. Hannah's prayers gave "potency" (δύναμις) to

the seed. Prayer, therefore, had simultaneously a healing and a fertilising action. Without prayer and faith, sexual intercourse is not enough to generate offspring. In Chrysostom's thought, procreation is, therefore, a complex intersection between physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects. Often in the homilies, Chrysostom explains that free will is more significant than nature, showing that, even if nature has caused infertility, the will to pray and beg for a different outcome can have an effect. Kornarakis (2009:258) writes that Hannah differentiated between her *desire* and her *necessity* to become a mother, and this self-denial enabled Hannah's cry to become a fruitful prayer.

Chrysostom further likens prayer to a consultation with the divine physician. If we understand that infertility was considered and constructed in ancient times as a disease (Flemming 2013:565-590), the rhetoric becomes even more striking. According to Chrysostom (*Hannah* 3.1-2; Migne 1862:54:654),

[w]ithout even having to set foot over the threshold of your house, you are able to consult your physician in your room and speak to him without an intermediary on any topic you please ('I am a God nearby,' he says, remember, 'and not a God far off' [Jer. 23:23]) ... This physician, after all, can cure not only childlessness but also any kind of ailment at all both of soul and of body, should he so wish. And the remarkable feature is not only that it happens without hardship, travel, expense and intermediaries, but that he performs the cure even without pain: he does not put a stop to the problem by iron and fire, as the medical fraternity do; instead, he has only to nod, and all the depression, all the pain and the whole complaint recedes and disappears ... this physician requires no payment in cash – only tears, prayers and faith (Hill 2003:99).

Prayer, in this instance, becomes medicalised in Chrysostom's discourse. The use of medical imagery in Chrysostom's thought has recently received a great deal of attention. The idea that Chrysostom considered himself a therapist of the soul is now commonly accepted among many Chrysostom scholars (Mayer 2015a; 2015b; Samellas 2002; 2015; De Wet 2019; 2021). Prayer is especially significant since, in this instance, it functions primarily as a medicine of the soul that has a direct impact on the body. Prayer is an excellent example that demonstrates how closely interlinked the body and soul were in Chrysostom's moral- and medical-philosophical discourse. Prayer occupies the role of the medical consultation. We should remember, in this instance, that not many people in antiquity had access to doctors – medicine and healing were primarily located in the household (Draycott 2019). Furthermore, doctors usually met with patients via intermediaries, often the *paterfamilias* of the house, or a midwife, or even a slave, especially in the case of women (Flemming 2000). The advantage of prayer is that none of the usual obstacles to healthcare apply. There is no need for intermediaries; there

are no painful and invasive procedures (which was a significant bonus); the doctor can be consulted directly in one's home, without the need for travel, and, most importantly, the treatment does not cost any money. Chrysostom, therefore, reconstructs the notion of infertility in spiritual terms, positioning it in the realms of the body and the soul. The treatment of infertility is not only a physical treatment, but also a spiritual treatment via the practice of prayer.

Finally, in her act of giving Samuel back to God, by dedicating him to the temple, Hannah becomes even more fertile. Chrysostom (*Hannah* 1.6; Migne 1862:54:641) explains that

she did not take her son from God on credit but on condition of returning him wholly to him once again and reaping the fruit of his upbringing (Hill 2003:78).

Through prayer, Samuel became an offering, which Hannah bore in her womb, to God. According to Chrysostom, after Hannah had Samuel, she even rivalled Abraham, and he calls her "a priestess in her very being" (*Hannah* 3.3; Migne 1862:54:656). Hannah gave a double offering, both an (irrational) heifer and a (rational) child. Her sacrifice was greater than that of the priest. Hannah's other children were also conceived through prayer and faith. In this way, all her offspring were brought forth through what we might call fertile words of faith. Moreover, Chrysostom seems to hint that Hannah cancels the curse of labour and childbearing brought upon Eve. Thus, Chrysostom's entire ethic of procreation is built on a double foundation of nature and faith, and prayer becomes the main and final fertilising action. As a woman, Hannah occupies an active and a passive position, which makes her a flexible and versatile exemplar to use, since Chrysostom relates her both to men and women, to fathers and mothers. By placing her in an active position, she is masculinised; however, her passivity still fixes her body in the space of women. This gendered tension in the figure of Hannah remains in Chrysostom's discourse.

### 3. HOW TO PRAY LIKE HANNAH

In the *Hannah* homilies, Chrysostom presents Hannah as a model for how to pray, and, in this presentation of Hannah, we note how prayer further becomes a gendered practice. Prayer is related in terms of *virtue*, and this concept is inextricably connected to gender and, especially, masculinity, as will be shown. Chrysostom (*Hannah* 2.2; Migne 1862:54:645) begins by explaining Hannah's mindset, attitude, and concentration while praying:

[E]mulate the woman's faith and longsuffering ... so that you may come to know the woman's gentle and mild attitude [τὸ πρᾶον καὶ τὸ ἡμερον φρόνημα]. 'It happened,' the text goes on, 'that when she

continued praying before the Lord, Eli the priest observed her mouth' [1 Reigns 1:12 LXX]. Here the historian testifies to the twofold virtue [ἀρετήν] of the woman, her persistence [καρτερίαν] in prayer and the alertness of her mind [τὸ τῆς διανοίας ἐγρηγορός], the former by saying 'she continued' [ἐπλήθυνε] and the latter by the addition 'before the Lord' [ἐνώπιον Κυρίου]. I mean, while we all pray, we do not all do it before the Lord: when the body is lying on the ground and the mouth is babbling on, and the mind wandering through all parts of the house and the marketplace, how will such people be in a position to claim that they prayed before the Lord? In fact, they pray before the Lord who summons their soul away from all distractions and have nothing in common with the earth, but transport themselves to heaven and expel all human thinking from their soul. Just so did this woman, then, on that occasion: she recollected herself completely and concentrated her thinking, and thus called upon God with her soul in pain (Hill 2003:85).

In this instance, Chrysostom provides a very interesting exegesis of 1 Samuel 1:2/1 Reigns 1:12 LXX. He pays specific attention to the phrases ἐπλήθυνε and ἐνώπιον Κυρίου, that showcase Hannah's virtue in prayer. Virtue (ἀρετή) was a highly masculine and masculinising concept in Chrysostom's thought (De Wet 2014:227-250). The first issue that draws attention is the state of Hannah's mind when she was in prayer. The phrase τὸ ἡμερον φρόνημα explains this. The word ἡμερον denotes a tamed or controlled, even a "civilised" mind, as opposed to an uncontrolled animalistic one. The idea, in this instance, is that Hannah was in full control of her thoughts. Ancient (male) authors often regarded women as being unable to control their emotions (Allard *et al.* 2018:23-44). This is significant when Chrysostom uses this imagery in relation to a woman. The underlying Platonic imagery, which Chrysostom is fond of using (Bosinis 2006:433-438), should not be ignored. Akin to Plato's charioteer, Hannah is in full control of her subjectivity while praying. This enables Hannah's soul to ascend to heaven, as it were, with the implication that her soul was light and not burdened by earthly troubles of the household and marketplace. This is what the phrase of praying "before the Lord", ἐνώπιον Κυρίου, truly means in Chrysostom's exegetical imagination. It refers to controlling one's mind, thoughts, and emotions, certainly a very masculine disposition. In the previous section, in *Hannah* 2.1 (Migne 1862:54:644-645), Chrysostom uses the common nautical metaphor to refer to Hannah. She was like a ship in the middle of a violent tempest (that is, her emotions), but not once could the tempest overwhelm the vessel, since it had an expert steersman (or -woman) at the helm. The theme of the self-controlled praying individual is central to the homilies, and Hannah provides a perfect *exemplum* for Chrysostom in this instance, since she did experience emotional distress, but was not overwhelmed by it. In fact, in the previous homily (*Hannah* 1.6; Migne 1862:54:641), Chrysostom mentions that Hannah's suffering made

her prayer stronger: "her prayer was made more assiduous by her suffering" (Hill 2003:79). The more challenges Hannah experienced in her process of praying, the greater and more masculine her victory was. Hannah's mind was not absent, but it was fully involved in the prayer.

In his exegesis of the phrase ἐπλήθουε ("she continued") in his text, Chrysostom's advice assumes a very practical guise when it comes to prayer. He explains (*Hannah* 2.2; Migne 1862:54:645-646):

But how is it that the text says that 'she continued' her prayer? Surely the woman's length of prayer was short, for one thing: she did not reach to drawn-out expressions nor extend her supplication to great length; rather, the words she uttered were short and sweet [ὀλίγα καὶ ψιλὰ] ... So why did he suggest it in saying, 'She continued'? She kept saying the same thing over and over again, and did not stop spending a long time with the same words. This, at any rate, is how Christ bade us pray in the Gospels: telling the disciples not to pray like the pagans, and use a lot of words, he taught us moderation [μέτρον] in prayer to bring out that being heard comes not from the number of words but from the alertness of mind [ἐν τῇ νήψει τῆς διανοίας] ... And how is it that Paul exhorts us in the words, 'Persevere in prayer,' [see Luke 18:1-5] and again, 'Pray without ceasing' [1 Thess. 5:17]? I mean, if we must not reach to lengthy statements, and must pray constantly, one command is at variance with the other. It is not at variance, however – perish the thought; it is quite consistent: both Christ and Paul bade us make brief and frequent prayers at short intervals. You see, if you extend your prayers to great length without paying much attention in many cases, you would provide the devil with great security in making his approach, tripping you up and distracting your thoughts from what you are saying. If, on the other hand, you are in the habit of making frequent prayers, dividing all your time into brief intervals with your frequency, you would easily be able to keep control [σωφρονεῖν] of yourself and recite the prayers themselves with great attention [νήψεως] (Hill 2003:85-86).

In this section, Chrysostom practically Christianises Hannah, and applies an exegesis that makes the text reflect Christian prayer practices. It is obvious that Chrysostom overstretches the meaning of the phrase ἐπλήθουε, but he is not concerned with this problem. He rather wants to reconstruct Hannah as an ideal example of the Christian at prayer and makes Hannah's performance reflect the words of Christ and Paul (as Chrysostom also understood those). Since the most important principle in prayer should be alertness of mind, Chrysostom suggests that people repeat short prayers almost like a mantra. The mind is kept engaged when the prayers are short and simple. This reflects how Hannah prayed, Chrysostom opines. The use of terms such as νήψις signifies that short and frequent prayers are sober prayers, in which the mind is not absent and clouded. The use of the rhetoric of sobriety is significant in

Chrysostom's analysis of Hannah's prayer, since the priest at first thought that Hannah was drunk (see 1 Sam. 1:13-14). While Hannah appeared drunk to the priest and the boy, Chrysostom interprets her prayer as one of great sobriety. When our prayer is sober, we are able to control ourselves, as is noted in Chrysostom's use of the word *σωφρονεῖν*, which is again a highly masculine term.

He does not only comment on the length and frequency of prayers, but also gives advice on the occasion of prayer. In 1 Samuel 1:9, we read that Hannah went to pray after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh. Chrysostom interprets this as Hannah having prayed after her meal, in other words, midday. This, he believes, is also why the priest thought she was drunk. Hannah's prayer is then also reinterpreted as a type of vigil, a prayer when everyone else is at rest and perhaps sleeping (after the meal, as is common in the Mediterranean). Chrysostom glances not only at the content of the prayer, but also at the frequency and timing. Prayer is described as a bridle of the thoughts – note again the masculinising and Platonic language of self-control – and a strategy to avoid gluttony and drunkenness. Gluttony and drunkenness were known for clouding the mind, and prayer, therefore, safeguards the diner from these dangers. It is very interesting that Chrysostom mentions that, even when one is slightly intoxicated, one can and should still pray! He (*Hannah* 2.5; Migne 1862:54:650-651) explains:

And so even if we get up from the table with a hangover, even if drunk, let us not even then give up the habit. I mean, even if you prayed in this fashion one day, on the next day you would correct the shame of the day before. So when we are getting ready for lunch, let us remember this woman, her tears and this admirable drunkenness: the woman was drunk, not from wine, but from deep piety (Hill 2003:93-94).

It is then very clear that Chrysostom develops a very specific *τρόπος*, or art, or mode of prayer based on his reconstruction of Hannah in prayer. The advice is practically applicable to the daily lives of his congregants. How does Hannah pray? Despite being a woman, she prays like a man; she prays in a masculine state of emotion and self-control, with great virtue.

#### 4. THE INTERNALISATION OF PRAYER

I will now discuss the most important aspect of Chrysostom's advice on prayer, namely the internalisation, even psychologisation, of the practice of prayer (see also Kornarakis 2009:458). This point also relates to the previous one on Hannah being an example of how to pray (like a man). Hannah's internalisation of prayer is a further symbol of her masculine state of mind, in that she continues to control her prayer even under duress. Chrysostom

(*Hannah* 2.2; Migne 1862:54:646) tells us that the priest forced Hannah to stop praying, a command that she had to obey. But he then tells us that, although her voice had to stop praying, “her heart cried out inside all the more fervently” (Hill 2003:87). Chrysostom (*Hannah* 2.2; Migne 1862:54:646) then proceeds to tell us what prayer really is:

This is what prayer is most of all, you see, when the cries are raised inside; this is the particular mark of the distressed soul, giving evidence of prayer not in volume but in ardor of mind [τῆ προθυμῖα τῆς διανοίας]. This is the way Moses prayed, too; hence, though he uttered no word, God said, ‘Why are you calling out to me [Exod. 14:15]?’ I mean, human beings hearken only to this voice of ours, whereas God hears those crying out on the inside ahead of it. So, it is possible for those not calling out to be heard, for those walking in the marketplace to pray in the mind with great assiduity, and for those meeting with friends and doing any old thing to call on God with an ardent cry – inside I mean – and to do so without it being obvious to anyone present (Hill 2003:87).

Chrysostom, therefore, proposes a transformation in the mechanisms of prayer. It is not a shift from formal or institutionalised to informal prayer outside of religious institutions. There is still a measure of formality and structure to Chrysostom's art of prayer (Ὁ τῆς εὐχῆς τρόπος, see *Exposition on Psalm* 4 3; Migne 1862:55:43). Frequently repeated short prayers provide a formal structure for prayer. Prayer, however, in this scheme, is indeed individualised and even democratised, and moved to the realm of the soul and within the mechanisms of internal (and masculine) self-control. There is no need for long and complicated, or even educated prayers, but rather short, concise, and intense prayers.

The prayers should also be said in the heart and soul first before they become audible. Skilled oratorical talents are not a requirement for prayer. This is the relevance of the phrase τῆ προθυμῖα τῆς διανοίας. The notion of προθυμῖα implies an active predisposition, one that is zealous and takes initiative. This term should also be understood as having masculine overtones since it stands in contrast to ῥαθυμῖα. Whereas distracted individuals pray and their thoughts dwell on the marketplace or in other places, the ones who truly pray are able to actually be in the marketplace, but their soul would remain in prayer without distraction. In his homily 19 *On Matthew* 3 (Migne 1862:57:276), while interpreting Matthew 6:6 – where Jesus mentions that one should go into one's room and pray privately – Chrysostom states:

Thus, even if you shut the doors [of your room], he wants you to do this, instead of closing the doors, close the doors of your mind.<sup>5</sup>

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5 My own translation.

One might consider this to be an ancient form of mindfulness. Chrysostom understood Jesus' withdrawal at Gethsemane in a similar way, as Sandnes (2015:284) explains:

His [Jesus'] withdrawal to pray is a lesson on how to pray (παιδείων ἡμᾶς). Chrysostom implicitly connects this to the prayer instruction in Matt 6:5-15, where Jesus urges prayer in solitude and concentration, a paradigm for private prayer free from the disturbances of everyday life.

This mindfulness, of course, requires a great deal of focus and self-control. Despite being a woman, Hannah embodied all these characteristics in Chrysostom's mind.

The internalisation of prayer does not conflict with institutionalised prayer. The practice of prayer was slowly and unevenly institutionalised in the church (McGowan 2014:183-216), but by the time of Chrysostom, there were three formal times for prayer, namely 9:00 in the morning, 12 at noon, and 15:00 in the afternoon, along with other evening prayers at mealtimes (Ferguson 1998:938-939). In Chrysostom's fourth homily about Hannah, he aligns his art of internalised prayer with the institutionalised prayer of the church.

Hannah is, therefore, used as an example in which prayer is internalised – but the internalisation of prayer also implies the intensification of prayer. Prayer can now take place at any time or in any location, and it takes hold of the body, soul, and mind of the individual. The internalisation of prayer makes it easy to follow institutionalised prayer schedules and occasions, since one can now pray at any time on the inside. It also makes prayer possible for all and acts as a measure of self-control, especially in curbing lust and avoiding gluttony and drunkenness. Anyone, especially the “man of the world” (in contrast to the monks who are not of this world), can now pray intensely and with *προθυμία*, like Hannah. The individual body is now made a “house of prayer”, a temple in the truest sense (in which the praying person embodies the entire sacrificial cycle), in Chrysostom's rhetoric of the internalisation of prayer, and this includes the bodies of men, women, and even slaves. The body becomes part of the framework of Christian institutionalised prayer; the body becomes a site of prayer. The internalised prayer testifies to a masculine soul that is able to control the prayers and cries within the site of the body.

For Chrysostom, silence and reservation are important elements of prayer. In the same homily, shortly after the section quoted above, Chrysostom explains that when one prays, one enters the palace of God in heaven, and silence, respect, and reservation are called for – in this way, the people who pray

emulate the mystical form [τὸ μυστικὸν ἐκεῖνο μέλος; of God, the angels and the archangels] ... For since He Himself is invisible [ἀόρατος], He also wants your prayer to be the same (Homily 19 on *Matthew* 3; Migne 1862:57:277).

The internalisation of prayer brings with it a very strong mystical element and functions on an invisible and seemingly incorporeal level, similar to the nature of God. The language of heavenly ascent in prayer is very common in the homilies on Hannah and in this homily on Matthew 6, as well as in his *Exposition on Psalm 4*.

In basic terms, Chrysostom understands prayer as “conversation with God” (ὁ Θεὸς διηλεκτικῶς ὁμιλῶν) (Ferguson 1998:938). However, this understanding of prayer assumes that those who pray need to structure their prayer according to the nature and character of God. For Chrysostom, prayer is not simply talking to God, but it implies ascending in one's mind to heaven and conversing with God on his own mystical and invisible terms. Conversing with God implies meeting God, not on the earthly plane, but on the heavenly plane. There is even a measure of angelomorphism in Chrysostom's thought, in this instance. While the idea of God's condescension, or συγκατάβασις, is very important in Chrysostom's theological thought (see especially Hill 1981:3-11; Rylaarsdam 2014), with prayer the believer should not wait for God to descend but should ascend to where God and the angels are. The mystical language and nature of prayer is also evident in the clear Platonic rhetoric we observe in this passage. It means that Bouyer's (1982:436) proposal, which Hill (2001:337; 2003:63) also accepts, that Antioch was known for “an asceticism without mysticism”, should not be accepted too hastily.

The bodily comportment (σχῆμα) – or to use Bourdieu's (1984:437, 466-468) term, the bodily *hexis* – becomes complex in this regard. On the one hand, with the internalisation of prayer, Chrysostom tells us that bodily *hexis* is now secondary to the disposition of one's mind and soul. A disciplined soul is required. Shortly after the above section, Chrysostom (*Hannah* 4.6; Migne 1862:54:668) explains that Paul was bound and lying on his back in prison while praying; Hezekiah was lying on his back ill in bed, and the robber was praying while on the cross. The internalisation of prayer increases its grip on the individual body, even though the locus of prayer shifts inward, since one can now pray in any bodily position or comportment.

Most importantly for our focus on gender, we find that the internalisation of prayer is a masculinising strategy. Foucault (1977:24-31) noted that, in antiquity, including Christianity, the soul was not a dimension or entity separated from the body; it was rather a technology of power and self-control over the body. In this way, prayer also functions as a mode of power and

control over the body. When Hannah prays the way she does, internally and in the face of opposition, she displays self-control and “philosophy” to the same extent as the most manly of Christian saints, including Moses, Paul, and even Christ himself. Chrysostom also applied this masculinising strategy of psychic self-control to other women of the Old Testament, especially the mother of the Maccabean martyrs (De Wet 2018:43-67).

## 5. CONCLUSION

From this analysis of the *Hannah* homilies, it has become evident that gender does play an important role in Chrysostom's formulation of an art of prayer. The use of Hannah as an *exemplum* is even more significant if we consider the possibility that the congregation consisted, wholly or in the majority, of men (or was, at least, rhetorically oriented towards men). Chrysostom's explanation of Hannah's prayer strategy functions simultaneously as a strategy of masculinisation. Hannah is sketched as a very masculine praying woman. The tension between her masculine soul and state of mind, and her female embodiment, is retained in Chrysostom's discourse. Her prayer and tears were, in fact, so virile that they, and not so much her husband's seed, caused her to conceive Samuel. Hence, Chrysostom calls her both the mother and father of Samuel. Moreover, the self-control Hannah exercises in her performance of prayer is equally masculine. To pray like Hannah is to pray like a man, which would have resonated well with Chrysostom's audience if the majority of them were men. She is in control of her emotions and her grief; she remains composed, and her prayer is rooted internally, and this internal locus of control also regulates her body. However, there is also a tension in the reconstruction of Hannah's gendered prayer. While she is an example of self-control and even virility and fertility, she assumes the role of a docile woman when the priest confronts her. While she is quite masculine in her prayer habit, she is not presented as an unruly woman. This implies that men can more easily associate and emulate a woman like Hannah. This is the main purpose of Chrysostom's rhetoric, namely emulation. In sum, Chrysostom's strategy of teaching people how to pray is simultaneously a pedagogy of masculinisation, which instructs the individual Christian not only how to converse with God, but also how to control the body and its emotions through the intermediary of the soul. By locating prayer internally, in the realm of the heart and soul, it becomes a potent practice of power – the art of prayer was simultaneously an art of masculine self-control.

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