

## Religious Recognition

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# Interactions with Others in John Chrysostom as a Means to Manage a Diversity of Visions

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**Abstract:** Two opposing opinions about “the Maccabees” feature in the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys*. According to the homilist, “the Maccabees” can be recognized as martyrs; yet, many others fail to see it. The construction of this conflict relies heavily on another confrontation identifiable in the same text: a dialogue between the homilist and “the Jew”, who thinks differently and, in the opinion of the homilist, incorrectly. These tensions in the source may be taken to reflect “identity-political” issues of the time and evaluated accordingly. My analysis challenges this view by emphasizing how difficult it is to reconstruct historical encounters between persons/groups based on such a source. I suggest, instead, that the conflict and dialogue should be considered parallel examples of how, in the context of late antiquity, a Christian intellectual mind conceptualizes “difference” (of opinions or between identities) and how it deals with it. The analysis shows that the homilist’s argumentation is built on seemingly commonsensical or authoritative fair-to-all “facts”. Yet, interactions with others provide the homilist with ways to govern and re-produce those very facts. Rather than social struggles, the interactions reflect and represent the level of otherness contained in the discourse of the homilist.

**Keywords:** identification, interpretation, recognition, Jews and Christians, others/otherness

## Introduction: An Ancient Christian Homily in Times of “Identity Politics”

The Greek word *ὁμιλία* translates simply as social intercourse or a communal gathering.<sup>1</sup> One may thus say that, even at the most elementary level, a homily communicates *about* something and *for* someone or, as is commonly the case, for a group of listeners. Addressing their audiences, homilists tend to include other characters – historical, imaginary, or contemporary – than those who are physically present. In this way, factual, ideological, and social matters often intertwine in speeches that aim at exhortation and/or education. As a result, the homilist is connected to a complex web of relations, in which there abound what may be called “identities”. The function of such a web can be referential: it brings the homilist into an interactive environment whereby the speaker and the implied audience may better understand their past, present and/or future and, often most importantly, to better relate to each other. Thus, a homily may preserve representations of interactions that recount the social and ideological situatedness and relatedness of its composer. As I suggest in the following analysis,

1 O’Shea & Rover, “Homily”, 62.

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the implied interactions with others that resemble such a web of relations may be most profitably understood as the speaker's primary resource for the promotion and defence of his worldview, sense of place and identity.

The source analysed in this article is an ancient Christian homily, *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys*, connected with the feast of the Maccabees, ascribed to John Chrysostom and usually dated to the late fourth century; hence the source has a traditional, historical context.<sup>2</sup> The text depicts a homilist who sets out to solve two distinct problems: first, he touches upon a dispute among his contemporary Christians as to whether or not the so-called "Maccabees", who had died for the sake of the Mosaic law and whose feast was at hand, could be counted as martyrs; secondly, he argues with and against a Jew about Jeremiah's prophecies, claiming that they should be understood as words of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Both discussions have to do with accurate identification of the subject matter (the Maccabees and the prophecies of Jeremiah) and, consequently, their recognition. Moreover, both bring the homilist into interaction with others within whom his view differs. In the course of the homily, the audience – which also includes the later "listeners" of the text – learns that these two distinct problems presented in the homily are mutually related, although the characters with whom the homilist interacts in discussing these two issues are connected only through his character. My analysis seeks to answer the following questions: why does the homilist perform acts of identification and recognition in the company of such others as those who are distinctively identifiable in the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys*, and what can we learn from these interactions and the established relations?

Nowadays, when identity construction is considered to be a more-or-less universal human activity, the depicted situations and social interactions reflected in historical sources are easily translated into some projection of "identity politics". As a result, a scholar may tend to define some of the characters who are identifiable in the source as more vulnerable than others, potentially to defend them and to expose the injustices done.<sup>4</sup> I do not wish to place myself outside this trend; I, too, see that we need to discipline ourselves to be concerned with the voices rarely heard in the traditional Christian discourse, which is predominantly characterized by adult, male, and elite people with abilities. At the same time, it is useful to ask whether or not, or in what sense struggles for identity may be discernible in the traditional historical sources which we have, and whether or in what sense it is possible to reconstruct past "policies of difference" from those sources. The question is general and theoretical; however, as is characteristic of historical textual analysis, the issue cannot be observed generally but individual sources need to be examined separately in order to gain critical insight.

Regardless of time and place, all texts construct social and political reality as much as they reflect existing social and political conditions. In this sense, writing always has the potential to impact the present,

<sup>2</sup> For introductions to John Chrysostom's life, see Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric*, 241–54, and Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 5–10. For a brief introduction to this particular text, as well as its newest English translation, see Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 119–134. The Greek text is reconstructed from Montfaucon's edition (reprinted in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* 63, 523–30) and from A. Wenger's corrections and completion of it; see Wenger, "Restauration de l'Homélie", 599–604. In this article, the references to the text are made to *Patrologia Graeca* (henceforth PG) and Wenger; the English quotations from the homily follow Mayer's translation, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> For the description of the feast, which includes the description the conflict and a demonstration of a correct approach to solving it, see PG 63, 525 ll. 15–50. The so-called encounter with the Jew is related in PG 63, 526 ll. 30–530 ll. 43, and Wenger, "Restauration de l'Homélie", 601–3. For the structure of the homily, see Tolonen, "Preaching, Feasting", 122.

<sup>4</sup> A fundamental difference between historical projects aimed at restoring the voices or identities of past minorities and contemporary "identity politics" is that in the latter, by definition, those minorities represent themselves. As Cressida Heyes ("Identity Politics") writes, "Identity politics starts from analyses of oppression to recommend, variously, the reclaiming, redescription, or transformation of previously stigmatized accounts of group membership. (...) the term signifies a loose collection of political projects, each undertaken by representatives of a collective with a distinctively different social location that has hitherto been neglected, erased, or suppressed." Historical analyses, in contrast, are attempts of outsiders – sometimes of the heirs of the past hegemonies who nevertheless have no more immediate access to the past – to revive those voices which, presumably, were suppressed at some point in history.

while it is also based on a system which depends on contemporary norms and meanings.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary theories of recognition emphasize that single identities are always constructed in relation to other identities, and pay attention to identity-related argumentation, the contents of which are defined by and in the context of the established social relations. Such a theoretical frame shifts the focus of analysis from self-contained individuals onto the relations between the persons and/or matters involved, as well as onto the normative social structures reinforced or (re)constructed in their interactions. It invites us to view identity formation as a socially-constructed struggle for recognition, emphasizing the involvement of different identities, which are recognized or yet-to-be recognized. Thus, identity is not conceived as something that can be claimed by an individual, irrespective of the response of others, nor is it only a matter of constant change and fluctuation; rather, it is represented, promoted and negotiated. It becomes *something*, as it is collectively communicated, produced and sustained. Moreover, as a matter of (mutual) recognition, one's identity and the identities of others can function as social property which can be meaningfully materialized within a web of mutually-recognized relations.<sup>6</sup>

## Task: Application of the Theoretical Frame to the Analysis of a Historical Text

It may be anticipated that analytical and hermeneutical tools derived from such a theoretical frame may entail greater sensitivity regarding the various aspects and actors involved in argumentative situations connected with the construction, maintenance and/or exploitation of identities. Fortunately, situations which are accessible to us solely through historical textual data must not be excluded, for the emphasis of recognition theories on the normative aspect of effective social roles and statuses seems advantageous for the analysis of descriptive written accounts.<sup>7</sup> The bulk of the extant historical textual data – and perhaps theological writings, in particular – may be seen as either constructing social norms and conditions, or reflecting the maintenance or sometimes the challenging of the existing ones. Homilies could be useful for the testing of such a theoretical frame in historical textual studies, because of their formal style which explicitly aims at exhortation and education. I observe the interactions and mutual relations in the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* through this lens, borrowed from contemporary recognition theories, in order to evaluate the construction and/or exploitation of the normative social statuses and structures implied in its argumentative environment.

<sup>5</sup> From the so-called linguistic turn, post-structuralist and post-modern paradigms have encouraged historians to realize the gap between the past and history, namely, the historical reality *as it was* in the now lost past and historical reality *as it is reflected* in written sources and as we presently conceive of it and construct it. Reconstructions of “what really happened”, when they are based on a text, build on a picture which itself is already a reconstruction of the “what really happened”, and thus the sources lead historians to interact with the previous and existing views and interfere in the production of history. For an illuminative discussion, see Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 17–19.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser are most notable among the contemporary theorists of recognition. For a general introduction, see Iser, “Recognition”. This article is mainly informed by Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”. However, my familiarity with the related themes is primarily derived from a project at the Finnish Academy-funded Centre of Excellence (“Reason and Religious Recognition”, 2014–2019) and, among its members, Heikki J. Koskinen and the director of the Centre, Risto Saarinen. This analysis can be contextualized in this broader research project, in which historically oriented scholars attempt to test the application of contemporary theories of recognition to their fields of research, as well as to develop the frame further to better suit the phrasing questions in the field of historical textual analysis. For other respective attempts, see Palmén & Koskinen, “Mediated Recognition” and Riggs, “In Search of the Good”.

<sup>7</sup> In light of the theoretical frame applied here, the notions of identification and (one-sided/mutual) recognition are deeply interconnected. Taylor (“The Politics of Recognition”, 34–35) maintains that this is characteristic of modern and postmodern era, while in pre-modern societies identities were determined by the existing social hierarchies and taken so much for granted that recognition was intrinsic to them. In my analysis, I differentiate between acts of “identification” and “recognition”, indicating by the latter the ways in which the homilist invest the matters he (re)identifies with (contemporary to him) relevance. The distinction between acts of “identification” and “recognition” is derived from the analytical tools, not from the source, in which neither the concept of identification nor that of recognition appears. References to other relevant theoretical reflections are found in the notes.

In previous research, the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* and the problems related to it have most often been analysed in order to reconstruct the text's *Sitz im Leben*. As a rule, scholars have taken the feast of the Maccabees in late fourth-century Antioch or early fifth-century Constantinople as the "real" historical context of the text.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the dispute over the veneration of the Maccabees as martyrs has been considered local and urgent in that contemporary context – this is the case even if scholars readily acknowledge that a very similar issue is connected with the Maccabees in several other sources as well.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the fourth century CE is known for the rivalry and hostilities between Christian and Jewish communities. John Chrysostom as a key representative of the period is so notoriously famous for his attitudes toward Jews that it is difficult not to read his agenda into his polemical writings which in any way concern Jews or Judaism.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* has been taken as a snapshot of the history of growing Christian aggression toward Jews and Judaism, in terms of both the attempt to "Christianize" the Maccabees and the argumentation against a Jew which it contains.<sup>11</sup>

While the usefulness of such interpretative orientations is obvious, I believe that the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* deserves to be looked at from an additional perspective, which is less motivated by the historical character of John Chrysostom, the historical reconstructions of the development of the Christian veneration of the Maccabees, or a specifically anti-Jewish atmosphere. My purpose is not to neglect or replace the existing discussions, but rather to add to them and, in the ideal case, converse with them. Admittedly, the theoretical emphasis of the analysis shifts the focus from the already well-documented historical aspects: one may even argue that it matters little, if at all, for this analysis where and when

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**8** A more detailed historical contextualization suggests that the homily was delivered either in Constantinople (probably in 399 or 400) or possibly in Antioch. In either case, the homilist informs us that he delivered it a day before the feast of the Maccabees. Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 119–20. For some recent studies in which the text is situated with John Chrysostom in such reconstructions, see e.g. Vinson, "Gregory Nazianzen's Homily", 180–86; Rutgers, *Making Myths*, 22–27, 42–48; and Rouwhorst, "The Emergence of the Cult", 81–84, 87, 93, 95–96. Kennedy (*Greek Rhetoric*, 250) writes that "homilies were delivered more or less extempore and apparently taken down by stenographers at the time", reflecting the perhaps most general approach of historians and theologians to homilies. Yet, he adds that some of them "exist both in a rather rough version and also in a more polished one, indicating later editing, possibly as late as the tenth century". This latter remark is not less important than the former, which is why I insist on noting the distinction between a speech (possibly) delivered at a specific occasion and the speech preserved in written form; what is extant today is the literature in which speeches were preserved. On important considerations on the relationship between the spoken and written accounts, see also Leemans, "General Introduction", 43; Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication*, 6.

**9** Dating from roughly the same period, the homily *In the Praise of the Maccabees* by Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as a homily on the Maccabees ascribed to Augustine of Hippo, expresses comparable controversy around the veneration of the Maccabees; see Rouwhorst, "The Emergence of the Cult", 84–89, 93–95. Among these, I find the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* to be most explicit in its defence of the recognition of the Maccabees and, thus, I have chosen it for this analysis. Hundreds of years later, Bernard of Clairvaux notably still referred to the difficulty that some Christians could have regarding their veneration; see the English translation of his letter (no. 98) in James 1953, 144–47. What all of these sources have in common is a defence of the veneration of the Maccabees against accusations. For an interesting study, which discusses the defence of the Jewish identity of the Maccabees and their status as venerated saints by Renaissance humanists, see Collins, "The Renaissance of the Maccabees".

**10** Although "Jewish interpretation" is a generic category used by the Antiochene exegetes of the time (for more, see note 38 below), texts attributed to John Chrysostom (the series of homilies *Against the Jews*, in particular) have also been taken to reflect attitudes to contemporary, "real" Jews. Wilken's (*John Chrysostom*) analysis of the mix of rhetoric and reality in this sources is recommended.

**11** References to the Maccabees are relatively frequent in historical studies which deal with schismatic Christian attitudes and positions taken toward Jews and Judaism; see, for instance, Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 90; Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication*, 83–84, 166. For a historical study which takes a critical stance on the trend of scholarly readings of Jews in Christian sources as often fictional and also maintains that the case of the Maccabees is an example of actual historical tensions around "Jewish traditions", see Rutgers, *Making Myths*, 6–9, 12–17.

exactly the encounters presented in the homily took place, or if they ever did.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the interactions with others are not only defined by their immediate historical relatedness of the individuals in question; they also depend on existing social structures and norms and the effects of more long-standing statuses and ideologies. Finally, as the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* is a literary document dating back to a time when few could express themselves (or have their thoughts expressed) in writing, I take it to be possible that the source exposes (socially acceptable) patterns of thinking and behaviour which were characteristic of its composer and his immediate social reality, as well as the general intellectual milieu of the time. Moreover, it could also be taken to reflect the approving attitudes and intellectual commitments of those who inherited it.<sup>13</sup>

In what follows, I shall first outline the web of relations described in the homily: namely, what and who are concerned in the interactions which make up its core. I make no categorical distinction between one as historical and the other as theological, or one as real and the other as rhetoric; for the purposes of my analysis, the homilist's alleged interactions with other identifiable characters – with both the other Christians and the Jew – are equally interesting. Thereafter, I analyse the acts of identification and recognition in discussions on the Maccabees and the words of Jeremiah, paying particular attention to the issues under negotiation, namely, the construction of the facts that the homilist resorts to. Finally, I focus on the social fabric of the environments in which these acts take place, concluding that his interactions with his chosen others help the homilist to clarify his own stance. On a more general level, the conclusion is not so surprising. Yet, what may be novel about it is the emphasis on constructed social situatedness as an effective, powerful tool, which I take as intrinsic to the critical perspectives provided by contemporary social political discussions. My argument is that the homilist's acts of identification and recognition are characteristic of the more general trend observable in the homily: the homilist exhibits plurality and difference strategically, utilizing existing norms and statuses, for the sake of maintenance of his own worldview, identity and established status. This analysis highlights the significance of the recognizer and personal interests involved in the recognition which is granted, as well as the homilist's inherent power to define the social discourse while recounting it.

## A Web of Relations: Defining a Conflict and Dialogue in the Homily

Eleazar and the seven boys with their mother – or “the Maccabees”, as the homilist also calls them – denote the pious Jews who were executed by Antiochus Epiphanes during the Maccabean Revolt in the 160s BCE.<sup>14</sup> Since the late fourth century (at the latest), these Maccabees had a feast in the Christian calendars,

<sup>12</sup> This emphasis is connected with the trend in the study of early Christianity of re-evaluating Christian images of others. Even if a clear consensus has not emerged, the question has been widely acknowledged whether or not interactions with the Jews, as reported by Christian writers, should be taken to represent real, historical encounters or polemic, theological constructs; for a representative study with regard to both analyses of early Christian sources as well as models of their interpretations, see Lieu, *Image and Reality*. The same is true of the diverse other arch-opponents, the various sorts of “heretics” or “pagans” which abound in Christian sources and often serve the rhetorical purposes of their author; see e.g. Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue*. In contrast to these trends, studies on the case of the Maccabees in late antiquity most often tend to conclude that Christian views about the Maccabees reflect actual social tension and a conflict surrounding their feast, probably related to anti-Jewish sentiments; see the references in note 11. Additionally, see Hahn, “The Veneration of the Maccabean”, who reconstructs the Antiochene sites of veneration of the Maccabees, yet excludes the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys*. See also Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *Christian Memories*, 29–77 (discussion on this particular source on pp. 44–50), whose extensive analysis on the Christian reception of the Maccabees is not an exception to this: his approach is derived from post-colonial criticism but the study aims at a historical reconstruction of the gradual Christian takeover of the Jewish heritage of the Maccabees.

<sup>13</sup> In his epilogue to his study of the homilies *Against the Jews*, Wilken's (*John Chrysostom*, 161–64) provides a useful reminder about the distinction of what the texts may have meant when they were first composed and the various meanings ascribed to them later on. Once written down, homilies may gain a position from which they can reflect the attitudes of their copyists or readers in times and places far removed from the social or political circumstances of the text and its original composer.

<sup>14</sup> To be sure, the Maccabees are not people whom the homilist knew in person; rather, he seems to be familiar with their stories. These stories are told, for example, in 2 Maccabees 6–7 and 4 Maccabees. Due to the lack of a specific reference to a source or identifiable quotations in the homily, it is difficult to more precisely say how the homilist may have known them.

according to which they were celebrated annually. The feasting must have further established a reputation for them.<sup>15</sup> We may assume that the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* reflects this general historical context. Moreover, it is only against this background – that is, against the assumption that the figures of Eleazar, the seven brothers and their mother were already known to the audience of this text and venerated (at least by some) – that we may understand why the matters of their identity and alleged status became matters of dispute.

In the course of his presentation, the homilist places himself in two separate situations. I call the first one a *conflict* in order to indicate that the situation implies a state of opposition between ideas and/or a confrontation between the people (groups or, possibly, divisions of an in-group) who represent those ideas. In the text, the conflict is described in the following way:

“[...] today we shall correct the weaker among our brothers and sisters. I say this since many of the more naïve, due to a mental incapacity, are being swept along by the Church’s enemies [and] do not hold the appropriate opinion of these saints, nor, in the same way, do they number them in the rest of the chorus of the martyrs, saying that they didn’t shed their blood for Christ but for the law and the edicts that were in the law, in that they were killed over pig’s flesh. Come then, let us correct their way of thinking. For it would be truly shameful for them to celebrate a festival in ignorance of the festival’s basis.”<sup>16</sup>

As we see here, it seems that the close proximity to the feast of the Maccabees serves as the locus of conflict about the identity of those celebrated figures. The homilist gives two distinct and opposing opinions about this matter: he himself holds that the Maccabees, who had lived almost two hundred years before Christ, could be counted as martyrs among other martyrs for Christ; in contrast, “many” other Christians insist that the Maccabees died for the law alone, thereby disqualified as martyrs.

The second argumentative situation in which we find the homilist appearing in the course of his work concerns a specific scriptural reference and its interpretation. Formally, it appears to be a *dialogue*, although the opinions are just as starkly contrasted in this one as in the conflict described above. The other party involved, with whom the homilist has a conversation, is an anonymous Jew whose historicity is very implausible.<sup>17</sup> Before addressing the Jew, the homilist explains to his audience:

“[...] come, let’s capture him [i.e. the Jew] with his own weapons, engaging him in debate with nothing from Paul or Peter or John, but from the prophets, so that he might learn that while the facts are on his side, the meaning is on ours. So, then, which of the prophets states this: that he [i.e. Christ] gave the old covenant? Jeremiah. [...] Where and when? Listen to his [i.e. Jeremiah’s] words and learn clearly from what is said: [...]”<sup>18</sup>

The matter at stake here is also connected to identification. In this case, the subject of the debate is the correct identification of the one who gave the old covenant; in order to find the answer, (a word from) Jeremiah needs to be consulted. It cannot be overly-emphasized that the homilist is in charge of the setting of these situations as we know them; he deliberately takes up a critical question connected with the identity of the Maccabees, postponing his praise of them, which leads him to encounter the Jew and discuss Jeremiah.<sup>19</sup>

Although their feast is approaching, the Maccabees and their status as martyrs is not a topical issue in the dialogue between the homilist and the Jew. In fact, it seems that the Jew should have no opinion about whom the status of a martyr may be granted. While the Christians are split into two camps regarding the question of recognition of the Maccabees as martyrs, the homilist and the Jew stand in the text as representing two identifiably separate interest groups as far as their common scriptures – not common martyrs – are concerned. Thus, having introduced to his audience a complex situation in which these two discourses intertwine, the identification of the old covenant and the law as given by Christ (in the one

<sup>15</sup> For a general introduction on the early history of the veneration of the Maccabees, see Rouwhorst, “The Cult of the Seven”, 183–97; Berger, “The Cult of the Maccabees”.

<sup>16</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 41–43; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 123.

<sup>17</sup> For this, see especially the section entitled “The Crafting of a Diversity” below.

<sup>18</sup> PG 63, 526 ll. 52–61; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 31–33; translated in Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 123.

with the Jew) helps the homilist to argue (in the other with the other Christians) that the Maccabees, who suffered and died for that law, performed these acts for the sake of the lawgiver, that is, for Christ. This connection is made obvious for the audience of the homily; yet, the conflict about the Maccabees and the dialogue with the Jew regarding Jeremiah's words remain throughout the work as two different situations. Thus, the web of relations constructed revolves around the agency and interactions of the homilist.<sup>20</sup>

Both of these situations are comprised of a common fact and a related practice which are not questioned: all Christians feast the Maccabees and both the homilist and the Jew try and make sense of a certain passage of scriptures.<sup>21</sup> Another essential similarity of the two argumentative environments is the alleged attendance of other people or, perhaps more correctly, an opposing opinion (expectedly) embodied by someone or a group of people. When the homilist describes these specific interactive environments in the course of the homily, his own argumentation becomes characteristically responsive to those views. His visions become distinctively defined against these lived situations; that is to say, they are contextualized in the given complex web of relations, which include those between the homilist and the representatives of different views, as well as their relations to the common subject matters.

## Correct vs. Incorrect Identification and Recognition of Irresponsive Matters

The homilist declares, “For I do not hesitate to count them [i.e. the Maccabees] with the other martyrs, to the extent that I declare that they are even more brilliant.”<sup>22</sup> In the given situation, this declaration may be taken as a statement of recognition of the Maccabees and promotion of their recognized status, modelled as follows:

<b>The homilist recognizes “the Maccabees”</b>	<b>as saints/martyrs.</b>
[A <sub>1</sub> =recognizer]	[B <sub>1</sub> =the recognized, the object of the act] [C <sub>1</sub> =the contents of the recognized status]

The modelling suggests that the act of recognition consists of the following primary components. For one, there is the homilist, who is the recognizer, and the persons or matters which are (to be) recognized. The existence of these two elements underlines that an act of recognition is always relational, even if not (necessarily) mutual or interpersonal.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the act implies recognition of the persons or matters *as* something. Presumably, this “something” should express a positive attitude toward the object of the act and, ideally, grant him/her/them/it a positive social/societal/institutional status.<sup>24</sup> In the case presented, these conditions, it may be argued, are sufficiently met. The homilist establishes, or reinforces, a certain relation with the Maccabees, granting them a status that is, in his eyes, distinctive and glorious. Yet, it is

<sup>20</sup> The main bulk of the homily is devoted to the construction of the argument that Christ gave the law (PG 63, 526 ll. 22–528 ll. 42; Wenger, “Restauration de l’Homélie”, 601–03; PG 63, 529 ll. 4–530 ll. 55; Wenger, “Restauration de l’Homélie”, 603–04; for the translation, see Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 125–33). The question about the Maccabees does not appear in this large section at all. For the structure of the homily, see note 3 above, as well as Tolonen, “Preaching, Feasting”, 122.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, one should pay attention to the sporadic references to the feast, which seem to suggest that all did feast, only not in the way the homilist wanted them to; see e.g. PG 63, 525 ll. 44–50; 527 ll. 58–528 ll. 3; PG 530 ll. 45–55; Wenger, “Restauration de l’Homélie”, 603–04; translated in Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 124, 127, 133–34. Like the feast, scriptures are also considered a given, common context, and the practice of searching for support in scriptures is not questioned.

<sup>22</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 50–52; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 124.

<sup>23</sup> The Finnish recognition theorist Arto Laitinen has suggested an analytical distinction between mutual and unilateral acts of recognition. Laitinen claims that a person can unilaterally recognize not only other persons but also any entity which can be said to have valuable recognizable features. In such a case, the act of recognition does not need to be, and often cannot be, understood as mutual. For the full discussion, see Laitinen, “On the Scope of ‘Recognition’”. From the perspective of historical studies, as well as perhaps textual analyses in general, Laitinen’s distinction is meaningful, for even the relationships between persons or groups often appear to be unilateral in historical sources, and interpersonal/group relations are primarily described by one side, not both parties involved.

<sup>24</sup> As Iser writes, “you do not only admit that she has this feature but you embrace a positive attitude towards her for having this feature”. For an introduction to contemporary recognition theories, see Iser, “Recognition”.

fair to ask whether the case of the Maccabees should not be considered a hermeneutical matter or an act of (re)identification, rather than an act of recognition.

The recognition of somebody/something *as something* contains a specific contentual component, or a (social-)normative dimension, which distinguishes it from other ways of knowing or identifying. Thus, while an act of recognition depends on its preceding act of identification, identification does not inevitably lead to recognition.<sup>25</sup> In the context of late-antique Christianity – be it Eastern or Western, “orthodox” or “heretic” – the status of a martyr was both positive and particular.<sup>26</sup> When someone was identified as a martyr in such a milieu, the intended identification was affirmative in nature. Most likely, both sides behind the dispute over the Maccabees would have shared this view. Thus, the recognition of the Maccabees as martyrs granted the Maccabees not so much a new identity as an already-known honorary title, a certain status among other martyrs, which was positive in the eyes of the Christians who celebrated them.<sup>27</sup>

Notably, such a status was granted to dead people, for to qualify as a martyr by definition one should have died.<sup>28</sup> At least the Maccabees – if, indeed, they were considered historical persons who struggled at all – had been dead for some centuries by the time this dispute over their recognition emerged. Thus, regarding the applicability of contemporary recognition theories or “identity politics” to such an affair, the following reservation stands: the act of identification of the Maccabees as martyrs and their recognition as such among other martyrs could not have resulted from the Maccabees’ struggle for such a recognized status. Moreover, when the homilist grants the Maccabees a positive status, he does not wait for a response or affirmation from them. Nevertheless, the source suggests that such a status – granted or not – existed and could be contested and granted. Thus, if we are willing to observe this affair from the perspective of recognition, our conception of recognition should not require that its objects (i.e. the ones recognized) benefited from it or that they sought it; rather, we must conclude that recognition of someone/something can be struggled for by a third party or people from whom that someone/something has nothing to gain. Indeed, to identify the Maccabees as martyrs is not a matter of recognition as such. Their identification as martyrs becomes an act of recognition only because the homilist so insists. And as he strives for presenting himself as the giver of such recognition, the promoted recognition must be seen to serve his interests. Thus, as I hope to demonstrate, the analysis should also and primarily consider his agency, that is, the agency of the recognizer.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The main distinction that scholars often draw between identification and recognition is the positive evaluation intrinsic to recognition, whereas identification does not necessarily affirm anything. On the other hand, recognition is often connected with “identity politics”, as struggles for recognition aim at the production of particular identities; again see Iser, “Recognition”.

<sup>26</sup> The question of when the Greek word *μάρτυς*, which translates as ‘witness’, came to denote martyrs as a distinct group is not an easy one. Yet, as Jan Willem van Henten (*The Maccabean Martyrs*, 6) rightly observes, it is “an honorary title in Christian texts [...] to indicate a person who was executed because he or she remained loyal to the Christian faith and identity”. See also Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 14. Latin-speaking Christians took the word for a martyr from the Greek, which indicates that they used it as denoting a certain status. The exemplarity of the martyr-saints was considered authoritative and, by the fourth century CE, recognized martyrs were also increasingly used for organizing Christian calendars and topography. The earliest calendars of Christian martyrs date to the late fourth century CE. Grig’s “A brief history of martyrdom” in *Making Martyrs*, 8–26, is recommendable for a concise account of the emergence of martyrs/saints and their veneration up until the fourth century. On the importance of martyrs for fourth-century Christian piety, see Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 88–90. For general introductions to the Christian cult of the saints in fourth-century sources, see e.g. Leemans, “Introduction”, and Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 11–34.

<sup>27</sup> This is supported by the source itself, in which one struggles to find a clear definition of the status of the martyr/saint claimed for the Maccabees. What one finds instead is the repeated notion of their recognition as being the same as, or as qualified as, “the rest of the chorus of the martyrs”; cf. PG 63, 525 ll. 37–38, 50–52.

<sup>28</sup> Although definitions of a martyr are varied, the notion most commonly denotes a person who died more or less voluntarily for a cause; for references, see note 26 above.

<sup>29</sup> This important shift of focus from the recognized to the recognizer is also suggested by Risto Saarinen, who observes from his analysis of religious/theological material that, in addition to the identity of the recognized, acts of recognition often – and sometimes primarily – construct and re-shape the identity of the recognizer. I am grateful for Saarinen for sharing his unpublished manuscript and providing many such important new theoretical openings for collaborative thought and discussion; see Saarinen, *Recognition and Religion*.



In the homilist's dialogue with the Jew, select "words from the prophets"<sup>30</sup> play a role parallel to that of the Maccabees. The homilist discusses them, too, in order to re-interpret them and grant them an elevated status. It matters for him, as well as his audience, that the words are recognized as Christ-given. Yet, just like the Maccabees, Jeremiah does not have agency or a say in the matter; thus, the significance of the act is to be evaluated from the perspective of the homilist or the social environment in which he places himself to advocate for this recognition.

The words the homilist takes from Jeremiah are:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, signifying the present time, and I shall make a new covenant with you, one unlike the covenant which I made with your fathers."<sup>31</sup>

What the homilist observes in this passage is the notion of two covenants – the new and, respectively, the old. In his view, the new covenant was undoubtedly made by Christ, while the identity of the giver of the older one could be debated.<sup>32</sup> Because of this identification, it becomes natural for him to consider the new as relating to himself. The era, which he understands the prophetic words as signifying, is not only contemporary to his time but also a reference to the very situation in which he finds himself and his audience embedded (τὸν παρόντα καιρὸν δηλῶν).

Notably, the discussion is not only a commentary on scriptures; it is an interactive reading practice. The presence of the Jew reminds of others who would consider the opposite view to be worthy of defence and, more importantly, it provides the words of Jeremiah with an alternative meaning – a meaning which the homilist may reinterpret. For one, the homilist recognizes Jeremiah's words as words of Christ. Secondly, he grants them contemporary relevance, exposing them as something that is addressed to him and his audience. These acts of identification do not change the old covenant in any notable way. Yet, the identifications claim the words from Jeremiah to have a status that is affirmative from the perspective of the homilist and presented as newly and continuously granted to him and his fellow Christians.<sup>33</sup> While the homilist's identification and recognition of Jeremiah's words are made explicit in his argumentation, the normative premises decisive for this enterprise remain implicit.

## Using Scriptures, Using Common Sense: Resourcing Common "Facts"

The paradigmatic figure, whose agency is demonstrated throughout the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* in both the dialogue with the Jew and the conflict about the Maccabees, is the homilist himself.<sup>34</sup> The composition is thus a self-representation of an individual who presents himself as an example of a certain mode of perception, reasoning, and behaviour. The homily gives a minute description of the homilist in

<sup>30</sup> PG 63, 526 ll. 52–54; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 125.

<sup>31</sup> PG 63, 527 ll. 12–15; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 126. The verses correspond to but are not identical with vv. Jer 31:31–34; in the Septuagint, the same passage is found in Jer 38:31–34, as indicated in Mayer's translation.

<sup>32</sup> PG 63, 526 ll. 30–32; 527 ll. 15–17; translated in Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 125–26.

<sup>33</sup> It is not exactly a *new* status, as we shall see, unless perhaps in the eyes of the Jew. Rather, the homilist seeks to give an impression of himself as possessing more accurate knowledge. Comparably, the status of the Maccabees as martyrs was not new to the audience and, yet, the homilist argues for its recognition laboriously, actively involving himself in the making, or maintenance, of that status.

<sup>34</sup> Unlike many other homilies on the saints, and in contrast to what the title suggests, the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* is not a discourse on the example of the Maccabees. For a comparison between this homily, in which the homilist serves as the chief example, and other homilies such as *On the Maccabees* ascribed to John Chrysostom where the saints exemplify virtues to be imitated, see Tolonen, "Preaching, Feasting", 129–133. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski makes a similar distinction, as he discusses John Chrysostom's homilies *On the Maccabees* in connection with exemplary virtues; see *Christian Memories*, 66–70.

situations where he successfully formulates arguments, derived from facts which are normative to him.<sup>35</sup> Thus, we see that with the help of his example, his companions – the Jew and the many Christians, as much as the implied audience – realize how scriptures are to be read and how the relevant matters to be identified and recognized. The practice results in a smooth rebuttal of the opposing view; the representatives are silenced if not converted to the homilist's view.

In his dialogue with the Jew, the homilist makes an interesting remark: “While the facts are on his side, the meaning is on ours.”<sup>36</sup> I take this confident statement to hint at the homilist's familiarity with the fact that the words of Jeremiah, when taken literally, do not speak about Christ. In other words, he could not say that the Jew did not know how to read scriptures correctly. Yet, he could claim that the Jew lacked the capacity to grasp the more figurative meaning of the words. The same approach can be utilized in the conflict about the Maccabees. For one, the “many others” also knew to feast the Maccabees; what they were lacking in the homilist's view was the correct understanding of why and how to do it. Secondly, those people used as their excuse that the Maccabees did not factually die for Christ; namely, “they did not shed their blood for Christ but for the law and the edicts that were in the law, in that they were killed over pig's flesh.”<sup>37</sup> From the homilist's perspective, they resembled “the Jew” in repeating the case as it was known.

This state of affairs – that he sees the hard evidence to support the argument of his opponents – seems not to bother the homilist; rather, it appears to be an advantage. With the Jew, he readily emphasizes that they are looking at the very same thing: the promises of God in the words of Jeremiah. He also admits that those promises may seem like two different things to a Jew and to a Christian. For exactly these reasons, he is determined to show that closer and clearer investigations reveal that there is only one true meaning behind those facts, by means of which the Jew, too, could be persuaded. The same goes for the Maccabees: the homilist does not aim to change the factual story about them; he urges their spectators to furnish what they see with a deeper vision of what the story is.<sup>38</sup>

The way in which the homilist quotes the words of Jeremiah as “facts” common to both Jews and Christians deserves a closer look. For the homilist takes up “from the prophets” words characterized by elements which, as we shall see, do not compare to the Masoretic text or the manuscripts of the Septuagint. Initially, there is his additional comment embedded in the words of Jeremiah, according to which the statement implies the present time and occasion (τὸν παρόντα καιρὸν δηλῶν).<sup>39</sup> The addition directs the words of Jeremiah to the homilist, to his partner Jew, and to his audience. The re-direction is not only marked by the additional commentary line but it is embedded already in the scriptures he uses. For he quotes Jeremiah, saying: “I shall make a new covenant *with you*, one unlike the covenant which I made with your fathers.”<sup>40</sup> His reading implies that he and his audience are included in the recipients of Jeremiah's promises, while the contemporary Jew is excluded.

<sup>35</sup> The practice could be compared to the rhetoric and literary device, commonly known in ancient sources as *ekphrasis* (from the Greek, ἐκφράζω, ‘to describe’). In the context of saints and martyrs, *ekphrasis* would typically be focused on the saint's good qualities and actions in a way which would persuade the listeners not only to admire but also imitate them. Grig, “Making Martyrs”, 111–117, and Fruchtmann, “Modeling a Martyrial Worldview”. Here, however, the homilist seems to give a detailed and demonstrative description of himself in situations in which he masterfully manages a difference of views.

<sup>36</sup> τὰ πράγματα παρ' αὐτῷ δὲ νοήματα παρ' ἡμῖν; PG 63, 526 ll. 55–56; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 125.

<sup>37</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 39–41; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 123.

<sup>38</sup> This suits well the Antiochene exegetical tradition represented by fourth-century Christian writers, such as Diodore and Theodore of Mopsuestia, as well as Theodoret and John Chrysostom in their footsteps, which stood in between what its representatives considered over-interpretation of scriptures (the Alexandrian “allegorical” interpretation) and undervaluation or dismissal of their spiritual meaning, which was a defect they could characterize as the “Jewish interpretation”. For a description of Diodore's distinction between the literal and spiritual senses of scripture, as well as his balancing on the middle way between excessive and inadequate understanding, see Breck, *The Power of the Word*, 77–79. While Breck's analysis is limited to the patristic discourse, Kahlos' article (“Pagan-Christian”) on pagan-Christian debates on interpretative techniques of scriptures provides the phenomenon with a broader historical context, in which figurative reading was the norm among the Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian educated elite, while interpretative techniques were varied and the authority of source materials, as well as the authenticity of given interpretations, was contested.

<sup>39</sup> PG 63, 527 ll. 13; translated in Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 126.

<sup>40</sup> καὶ διαθήσομαι ὑμῖν διαθήκην καινὴν, οὐ κατὰ τὴν διαθήκην ἣν διεθέμην τοῖς πατράσιν ὑμῶν; PG 63, 527 ll. 13–15; transl. from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 126. My italics.

Needless to say, even if the homilist was wanting to build on scriptural grounds which were common and authoritative to Jews and Christians alike, his reasoning reflects a particular, thoroughly Christian understanding. For one, the identification of the new covenant as given by Christ seems to be considered as commonly known a fact as the words from Jeremiah, for neither the homilist nor the Jew question it: yet, it is a norm by which the Jew is excluded from the new covenant. Based on this alleged consensus, the homilist further identifies the giver of the new covenant with the giver of the old, for how could Christ have made a new covenant if he had not made the one before it, too?<sup>41</sup> By this identification, the Jew is also excluded from the addressees of Jeremiah's words.

By the time of composition of this homily, there was nothing new in such a view; the homilist reads scriptures of "the old" in a way which is known from many other Christian sources, starting from the New Testament.<sup>42</sup> Yet, what is notable here is what the homilist claims to be doing. He tells his audience how he is determined to "capture the Jew with his own weapons, engaging him in debate with nothing from Paul or Peter or John, but from the prophets."<sup>43</sup> But would a Jew have felt any particular ownership of such "weapons"? Had the homilist addressed a Jew who actually knew his scriptures, his partner in dialogue might not have agreed with him even on the identification of the words he used as "words from Jeremiah"; according to the Masoretic text, as well as the manuscripts of the Septuagint, the words are addressed to the house of Israel (and Judah).<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the homilist's knowledge of the scriptural fact common to Jews and Christians is not actually common, but particular in a sense that reflects his particular Christian background and identity. As we do not know the origin of his citation, it goes beyond the scope of this analysis to evaluate whether or not the homilist may have been aware of the influence of a Christian interpretation on it. Nevertheless, it is plausible that those words – and not some other words – from Jeremiah were probably already considered by the homilist as having an exceptional prophetic status, because of the fact that Christians could connect to them.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the scriptural facts that he knows have – at one point or another – been influenced by the very interpretation he favours. More importantly, while the dialogue cannot be said to represent an attempt at reconciliation between Jewish and Christian interpretations of a common source, the presence of "the Jew" still helps the homilist to grasp what the words of Jeremiah really mean *to him*. Their mutual discussion demonstrates the significance of those particular verses, which were an integral part of the homilist's traditional self-identification, for not only him but allegedly for the Jew, too, as if the select passage of Jeremiah would be as decisive for the Jewish self-identification as it was for the Christian.<sup>46</sup>

In much the same way, the homilist was also able to demonstrate how to arrive accurately at correct understanding from common-sense perceptions. This practice is well attested in his dealing with the approaching feast of the Maccabees. He instructs his audience to cure the misguided people by their own exemplary festive mode, exhorting them to follow his example, namely, to demonstrate during the feast

<sup>41</sup> PG 63, 527 ll. 18–21; translated in Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 126.

<sup>42</sup> For the use of this particular passage, see e.g. Heb 8:8–13. For other early Christian uses and exegesis on these and related verses, see Adeyemi 2006, 21–29.

<sup>43</sup> PG 63, 526 ll. 52–54; transl. from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 125. The homilist's attempt reflects an argumentative technique which is common: namely, he begins from premises shared between him and his opponent and uses those premises, presuming that his opponent is then bound to the same conclusions he makes based on them. For more about this argumentative technique, see Palmén & Koskinen in volume.

<sup>44</sup> According to *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the reference in v. 31:31 to the house of Judah may be an addition (הַיְהוּדָה); Kittel, 1937, 764. The Septuagint Jeremiah corresponds with the *BHS* (τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰουδᾶ); Ziegler 1957, 362–63. The Hebrew or Greek scriptures of the Greek-speaking late antique Jews have not been preserved.

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted here that we should not imagine John Chrysostom, or any late-antique homilist, to have necessarily preached with a "bible" in their hand. Quite the contrary, it is likely that they also used scriptures based on their learning and memory. A similarly altered quote of Jer 31:31 may be found in John Chrysostom's commentary on John (v. 1:17).

<sup>46</sup> While these verses/words of Jeremiah often appear in Christian sources in similar hermeneutical enterprises, there is (not surprisingly) no evidence for any ancient Jewish reading of the same verses in which the "new covenant" was understood as reference to Christ or Christianity. On the contrary, there are some later, medieval Jewish texts which aim to point out that the Christian identification of the new covenant with Christ is false; see Adeyemi 2006, 29–31, 75–85.

how to observe the Maccabees in the right manner in order to correct the imperfect view of others.<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that in order to solve the conflict of opinions about the Maccabees, the homilist resorts to the use of clear vision and pure eyes as the basis of the act of identification and recognition he advocates.<sup>48</sup> According to his argumentation, when a person *clearly* contemplates the virtue of the Maccabees, that person simply cannot avoid recognizing them as martyrs, for even if Christ is apparently absent from the story of the Maccabees, their courage and exceptional deaths can only point to Christ. He gives this as the primary reason why the Maccabees should be counted among the rest of the martyrs. Thus, his homily does not address the question of whether the clearest vision or the purest eyes when laid on the Maccabees would lead to such a conclusion; rather, his vision defines and determines what is clear and pure. As in the case of the “common” scriptures with the Jew, the visions which the homilist deems common to all who are able to see things clearly are governed and reproduced by his own experience.

## The Crafting of Diversity and its Representatives

So far in this article, I have observed how the homilist may safely identify, as well as recognize, both the Maccabees and the words of Jeremiah as something he considers to be of positive value. In a way, he is free to do so, because both the Maccabees and (the words of) Jeremiah are irresponsive matters which do not argue with him or with anyone; they are not seekers of his recognition in the first place. We have also noted that the homilist’s facts, on which he builds his persuasive views, are steeped in his worldview and reproduced in the text according to his norms and standards. As we pull our attention back to the elements in the homily which provide these one-sided acts with social and allegedly interactive contexts, matters become more diverse. Because the homilist crafts both his understanding of the status of the Maccabees and his exegesis of Jeremiah in a situation characterized by interaction, the contexts of both discussions are pluralistic in the (albeit narrow) sense that they introduce an alternative point of view, represented by someone/a group of people other than the homilist. Yet, as we shall see, they do not prevent the normative, standardizing elements embedded in his worldview from flourishing; quite the contrast, the homilist presents diversity willingly, yet only to the extent he can successfully manage. Moreover, this successful management depends on the maintenance of his hegemonic position, on the basis of which he can define what the common facts to be negotiated are and what those others are like with whom he chooses to interact.

A closer look at the ways in which the diversity of visions is crafted in the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* reveals several similarities between the opponents by whom the homilist is confronted but who never encounter one another in the homily: the “many Christians” and “the Jew”. These similarities are apparent when the opponents are contrasted with the homilist. In other words, the second opinion of some Christians about the Maccabees functions in the homily in much the same way as the second opinion of the Jew about scriptures. This observation should, I believe, encourage us to question the historicity of the representations of these interactions in the source.<sup>49</sup>

An awareness of a second opinion about the Maccabees characterizes the environment and, respectively, the social interaction related to the feast of the Maccabees. According to the homilist, his audience should be attentive to the many people who celebrate the Maccabees “in ignorance”.<sup>50</sup> However, it is worth noticing that the primary knowledge we have of this second opinion is that it is all negative: “[D]ue to a mental incapacity, ... [they] do not hold the appropriate opinion of these saints, nor, in the same way, do they

<sup>47</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 44–50.

<sup>48</sup> As for many intellectuals in late antiquity and beyond, reason – or pure perception – is the “commonly acknowledged” tool to which one can resort. See e.g. Glinka 1984, 12–16.

<sup>49</sup> The similarities between these two situations are, as I have argued elsewhere, intentional: they are crafted as comparable for the sake of sharpening the homilist’s argumentation. In my view, these structural similarities alone are notable enough to alert us to think that they would somehow reflect the homilist’s spontaneous reactions to an approaching feast. Cf. Tolonen, “Preaching, Feasting”, 128–129.

<sup>50</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 42–43; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 123.

number them in the rest of the chorus of the martyrs.”<sup>51</sup> Based on the source, we might reconstruct their view in the following ways:

<b>(R<sub>1</sub>)</b>	<b>Many others recognize</b> [A <sub>2</sub> ]	<b>the Maccabees</b> [B <sub>1</sub> ]	<b>as non-martyrs;</b> [non-C <sub>1</sub> , rejection of C <sub>1</sub> ]
or			
<b>(R<sub>2</sub>)</b>	<b>Many others recognize</b> [A <sub>2</sub> ]	<b>the Maccabees</b> [B <sub>1</sub> ]	<b>as something else;</b> [C <sub>2</sub> ]
or			
<b>(R<sub>3</sub>)</b>	<b>Many others do not recognize</b> [A <sub>2</sub> as the negation of A <sub>1</sub> ]	<b>the Maccabees</b> [B <sub>1</sub> ]	<b>as martyrs</b> [C <sub>1</sub> ]

It is again fair to ask whether these other opinions about the Maccabees have anything at all to do with recognition. A reason to presume so could be derived from the fact communicated by the homilist that those “many others”, too, celebrated them.<sup>52</sup> In the context of late-antique feasts, this could indicate that they not only identified but also recognized them as something. Indeed, some scholars have claimed, for instance, that up until the fourth century CE, the Maccabees had a local Jewish feast and status, as well as an appeal for Christians based on that.<sup>53</sup> This claim could be compared to the second reconstruction (R<sub>2</sub>). Others, opposed to that, have suggested that there was only resistance or reluctance, even emotional reservations such as shame, among Christians to venerate martyrs that were, by their identity, Jewish.<sup>54</sup> This, in turn, could be compared to the first reconstruction (R<sub>1</sub>). However, our attempts to model the opinions of the many other Christians as acts of identification and recognition reveal a fundamental problem which we have with this source: namely, the secondary nature of the testimony it gives concerning anyone else than its composer.<sup>55</sup> It is indeed difficult to hold the views of others here as complete opinions, or to reconstruct comprehensive views based on the extant knowledge, when the source tells us next to nothing about how those others would have identified or recognized the Maccabees (the contentual component). It is surely possible that the others, too, had reasons to celebrate the Maccabees, but we cannot know their view of those Maccabees.<sup>56</sup>

Under these circumstances, the third reconstruction (R<sub>3</sub>) appears to be the most convincing, because it brings us to observing the recognizer. It highlights the crucial difference, which is discernible in the homily, namely, the difference between the homilist’s act and that of the representatives of the other, alternative view(s). The account of the homilist allows us to reconstruct no more than this: he saw those others primarily as people who did not identify matters the way he did. Unlike him, they could not recognize what/whom he recognized or how he recognized it/them. From the perspective of those many others, the identification of the Maccabees remains unclear and, in light of this source, their own identity is no clearer. Thus, with the evidence we have, we cannot get rid of the homilist’s dominant perspective. The homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* does not recount two equal acts of identification and recognition of the Maccabees, which could resemble anything of a mutual struggle. Instead, the source demonstrates the homilist’s identification and recognition of the Maccabees, as well as his interest in rejecting the opposite opinion.

<sup>51</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 35–38; translation from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 123.

<sup>52</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 33–50; PG 530 ll. 45–55; Wenger, “Restauration de l’Homélie”, 603–04; transl. from Mayer, *St John Chrysostom*, 123–24, 133–34.

<sup>53</sup> See Vinson, “Gregory Nazianzen’s Homily”; Hahn, “The Veneration of the Maccabean”.

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. Rouwhorst, “The Emergence of the Cult”, 93–95.

<sup>55</sup> Similar questions about the recognition of “the Maccabees” as martyrs can also be found in some other Christian homilies from approximately the same period: a homily ascribed to Gregory of Nazianzus and another to Augustine, while many of the studies referred to analyse (some of) those and other sources in connection with the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys*. Yet, what all the homiletic sources have in common is that they take a positive stance toward the issue and inform us little, if at all, about the views which are opposed to the recognition of the Maccabees as martyrs. Thus, the problem identified here may arguably be valid for those cases as well.

<sup>56</sup> The other, comparable late-antique homilies are no more informative, for although they characterize the opponents somewhat differently, they take the same side in the alleged dispute as the homilist. For references, see note 9 above.

We also learn from the homilist that those “many others” who were against the recognition of the Maccabees as martyrs were weak and sick, misled and ignorant.<sup>57</sup> This corresponds to typical portrayals of “the other” in ancient polemic writings.<sup>58</sup> In Christian writings, being (like) a Jew was often added to the list of features that characterized a person pejoratively as either naïve or incapable.<sup>59</sup> In the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys*, the case of the dialogue with the Jew confirms the conclusion made about the many ignorant Christians: the Jew placed in the dialogue is present but not represented. He enters the stage when needed, but appears to be neither willing nor capable of responding to anything that the homilist says; his ignorance paves the way for the homilist’s insightful reading of those scriptures he is willing to read.<sup>60</sup> These representations of others serve the homilist as a means of demonstrating his view in contrast to certain other, his rejected views. The allegedly alternative views do not represent actual voices which are about to be or are in a process of becoming marginalized, at least not in the sense that we could recover from them a more diverse reality. Rather, I suggest, they correspond to the amount of diversity the homilist is able, or willing, to identify and voice within his own discourse.

In both the dispute and the dialogue, the homilist discusses hermeneutical matters, that is to say, matters which are open to interpretation. Indeed, by way of engaging in these two situations and managing them ideally and insightfully, he highlights not only his intellectual exemplarity but also his own social capacity, the sovereignty of his perception and reasoning. The common function of the interactions in this text is to provide the homilist with a context in which he can tackle the following questions: “Who are the Maccabees really?” and “Whom do the words of Jeremiah really concern?” The perspective applied in this analysis should, however, help us to distance ourselves from these questions raised by the homilist in order that we may ask, who this homilist is trying to interact with and why.

On one hand, by focusing on the polemical aspects and rejection of other views, we may observe that the homilist does not leave room for anything else than his own vision. His act of identification and recognition is crafted in a pluralistic milieu in order that those other voices may be shown to be secondary and imperfect. On top of this, by way of playing according to the (allegedly) same rules and winning over his opponents by their “own weapons”, the homilist demands that the others, who represent an opposing view, finally accept not only his view but also his norms and standards. Seen in this way, the homily may be characterized as an aggressive reaction to or an assault on plurality. Differences are managed by strict normative control and variant interpretations are set in a hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, however, even if the homilist does not seem to hold his opponents in high esteem, his strategy of argumentation reveals a need to be in agreement with his chosen others.<sup>62</sup> Those chosen others are Christians on both sides of the dispute, as well as what he conceives as Jews. To reach an agreement with these groups in front of his audience apparently promotes his own view; alternatively, managing these differences could make him more consistent and universal in

<sup>57</sup> PG 63, 525 ll. 33–36.

<sup>58</sup> See Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue*, 67; Tervahauta, “Ignorant People”; and Rauhala, “Danger and Delusion”.

<sup>59</sup> The method of argumentation in which a Jew is used as a rhetorical device is well-attested in late-antique homilies, including those ascribed to John Chrysostom; see Maxwell 2006, 4–5 n. 9; Wilken, *John Chrysostom*, 107, 112–6.

<sup>60</sup> As Joslyn-Siemiatkoski (*Christian Memories*, 45–6) rightly observes in connection with this particular homily, the homilist uses a “stereotyped” Jew, identifiable already in second-century Christian polemic, who is “a figure of Jews who possessed the truth of Christianity in their own Scriptures but were unwilling to embrace it”.

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the hermeneutic issues are connected with more than a case of figurative vs. literal reading. For a comparison, see Blossom Stefaniw’s (“Straight Reading”) analysis of Epiphanius’ attack on Origen’s “allegorical” interpretation. According to Stefaniw, Epiphanius accuses Origen of deviant interpretation, declaring in the process his own reading as “normal and commonsensical”. Stefaniw notes that their conflict over interpretation has often been conceptualized in terms of literal vs. allegorical interpretations, although a broader ideological aspect of exegesis is at play.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor (“The Politics of Recognition”, 32–33, 36) borrows from George Herbert Mead the concept of “significant others”, by which he characterizes the dialogical, or relational, aspect of identity formation. He sees that such others (i.e. other persons) and interactions with them are so influential that “the conversation with them continues within us” even when they are no longer present. The expression “chosen others” reflects a similar idea: I see that some certain – and not any – others provide the homilist with a “course of contact”, which helps him to situate himself; he gains something from negotiations with *them*. At the same time, calling these others chosen, I suggest that other others, too, could have a say; thus, the homilist may be seen as constructing or reinforcing otherness.

his claims. In this respect, it could be noted that the homilist's acts of identification and recognition do not completely exclude difference: for one reason or another, he acknowledges these specific others by way of inviting their otherness into his reasoning and allowing them to represent diversity in his world.

## Conclusion: Conflict and Dialogue in the Homilist

Contemporary theories do not provide answers for historians, but they help us become aware of the questions intrinsic to our time and interests. They may also introduce new conceptual tools for our task, which is to problematize the sources and challenge our present understanding of them. In other words, they have the potential to offer us new ways of thinking. This analysis may serve as one such methodological experiment, exploiting contemporary recognition theories through historical textual analysis, the results of which could encourage similar readings of different sources. Where, then, has this analysis of “identity politics” in the context of an ancient Christian homily led us?

I have proposed that the analysis of the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* should be primarily concerned with the agency which is comprehensively represented in the source. Thus, throughout the analysis, I have attempted toward a reconstruction and critical evaluation of such an agency. For one, I have noted that at the time of composition of the homily, the Maccabees and Jeremiah were not struggling for anything at all. Consequently, constructions of identity and the reinforcement of statuses of, or related to, these figures should be analysed as the efforts of those who had an interest in claiming them. The acts of identification and recognition performed in the homily must be understood as contributing to the identity of that agent/those agents who performed them. In other words, identifiers and recognizers here had a concern for their own identity.

The persons interacting with the homilist in the conflict and dialogue connected to those identifications and recognitions are essentially his characters, not historically credible representations, for they serve a specific and inevitable function in the composition. Yet, they should not be seen only as caricatures or rhetorical devices. Adding to that pejorative function, I suggest that we see the representations of the chosen others as part of the diversity which the identity of their creator can bear and within which he willingly converses. What remains for us to analyse from the complex web of relations and demonstrations of interaction contained in the homily *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* is the agency of the homilist, his capacity to conceptualize difference, and his means of managing it. The primary task of the others, whom the homilist is ready to include in his reasoning, is to interact with him in ways that reinforce his identity, as well as his status as recognizer in the eyes of his audience.<sup>63</sup>

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