The aim of this article, by examining the way in which John Chrysostom interprets and applies the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, is to assess how this parable fits into his theology of salvation and, more importantly, what relationship he draws between it and the topics of wealth and poverty and care for others (usually the giving of alms).  

In terms of the writing and preaching of John Chrysostom, there has been considerable analysis over the last two centuries of his exegesis.

(1) The research on which this article is based constitutes part of a larger project, Poverty and Welfare in Late Antiquity, supported by a Discovery Project grant awarded Pauline Allen, Bronwen Neil and myself by the Australian Research Council. Our approach is to examine the subject from two different perspectives by way of three focused studies: one on Antioch and Constantinople via the writings of John Chrysostom; one on North Africa via the writings of Augustine; and one on Italy via the works of Leo I. In this way we hope to be able to trace the continuities and discontinuities in thought and practice between three distinct geographic regions across the later fourth to mid fifth centuries CE. The two perspectives from which we examine these geographic regions are those of the reality (economic, material, social) of poverty and welfare, in so far as this can be recovered, and of the discourse about poverty and welfare that these three influential Christian clerics employ. The project, which runs from 2006–2008, is in its early phase and this article constitutes a preliminary analysis of one aspect of the second of these two perspectives: the Christian discourse. For preliminary results from analysis of the first perspective see W. Mayer, Poverty and society in the world of John Chrysostom, in: W. Bowden, A. Gutteridge, C. Machado (eds.), Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity (Leiden: Brill, 2006) (Late Antique Archaeology 3.1) 465–484; and Idem, Poverty and generosity towards the poor in the time of John Chrysostom, in: S. Holman (ed.), Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008) 140–158.

and theology, and a smaller quantity of work on his moral stance on wealth and poverty, but no study which focuses on this particular parable in his works or on its role in his discourse on poverty. Rudolf


Brändle’s detailed study of the pericope Matt 25:31–46 in John Chrysostom’s works is the closest analogy. Of perhaps even greater interest in regard to the gospel pericope that is the focus of this article, contrary to the prevailing image of John Chrysostom as one of the greatest expositors of the Pauline epistles, it is his use of the gospels that has in reality excited the greatest interest. Within this body of scholarship one might expect interest in the gospels of Matthew and John to dominate, since two lengthy series of homilies in which John exegetes them survive. But in fact the attention of scholars focuses almost exclusively on his use of Matthew. Examination of his use of Lukan pericopes is


singly rare. This is somewhat peculiar when we consider that six homilies in which Luke 16:19–31 is the primary focus survive, while the parable receives mention to a greater or lesser degree in, at the very least, a further thirty-eight homilies, three letters, six treatises and three commentaries. While it is likely that at least one and perhaps four of the homilies which focus on the parable were delivered at An-


(10) The number is likely to be greater since the research on which this paper is based relies primarily on a word search for the name Lazarus via the TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae), plus a manual search of the ninety homilies on Matthew by scripture verse. A search for references to the rich man of the parable alone (that is, where Lazarus receives no mention) is not yet complete.
tioch,\(^{11}\) the letters and at least one of the treatises stem from the period of John’s exile,\(^ {12} \) while yet another of the treatises belongs to the first year of his diaconate.\(^ {13} \) His use of the parable thus spreads across the full breadth of his career.

Because of their extended focus on the topic, in the first four homilies on Luke 16:19–31 we can observe most of the range of how John approaches the exegesis of this parable and applies it to ethical exhortation. For John, while the parable is primarily soteriological — it teaches that God is just and that the virtuous who suffer in this life will be rewarded in the life to come, while the wicked who prosper will be punished;\(^ {14} \) and that we are called to repentance now before it is too late — it also reminds us about the proper use of wealth (that it should be spent on others in almsgiving and love of the poor), it teaches us about the nature of virtue (that is, that one should suffer with patience and a thankful heart), and it teaches us to look not at the surface (‘rich’ and ‘poor’), but to discern what lies behind people’s masks and so emulate what should truly be emulated (Lazarus’ spiritual wealth rather than the rich man’s material wealth). Poverty and wealth, which seem tangential to the soteriological message of the par-

\(^{11}\) In the opening to De Lazaro conc. 4 (PG 48,1007.8–12) John mentions his failure to continue to preach on the parable at the previous synaxis because of the festivals of Babylas and the twin martyrs (in this context clearly Juventinus and Maximinus; see W. Mayer, St John Chrysostom. The Cult of the Saints (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006) 89–90). The festivals of all of these martyrs are indigenous to Antioch, which locates conc. 4 there also. The internal indications that conc. 1–4 were preached in sequence are sufficient to suspect that all four were preached in the same year.

\(^{12}\) Epp. 5, 8, 10 ad Olymp. (CPG 4405), SC 13bis,120–124, 158–216, 242–304; and Quod nemo laeditur sed a seipso (CPG 4400), SC 103. The letters were written in the second half of 404 (see R. Delmaire, Les «lettres d’exil» de Jean Chrysostome. études de chronologie et de prosopographie, Recherches Augustiniennes 25 [1991] 71–180, at 147). In ep. 17 ad Olymp. (SC 13bis, 384. 33–34) John cites the treatise Quod nemo laeditur by title and says that it was recently written. Delmaire (148) dates the letter to spring 407, which locates the treatise in the third year of John’s exile.


\(^{14}\) An exegesis which is closely aligned to the Lukan beatitudes (Lk 6: 20–26).
able, are thus brought into play via discussion of true wealth and true poverty, and via John’s definition of virtue, in which the giving of alms plays a central role.\(^\text{15}\)

In the first homily, John takes up the topic in response to a festival on the previous day which he associates with drinking, revelry and overeating.\(^\text{16}\) This leads him via a lengthy prooimion to the sequel of the previous day’s sermon (in which staying away from excess — \textit{whether you eat, drink, or do anything, do all to the glory of God} [1 Cor. 10:31] — featured prominently). In the present sermon we now see the person who lives in excess punished and paying the price for it (exemplified by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus).\(^\text{17}\) That the rich man is associated with wickedness is indicated by how he ended up (in Hell). That he lived a life totally free of adversity is indicated by Luke’s remark that he had a good time every day (Lk 16:19).\(^\text{18}\) Even before we learn the final result, his inhumanity and cruelty are demonstrated by his contempt for the poor man at his gate. If he could ignore a person who was in such a pitiful state and right at his gate, it indicates that he showed no pity towards anyone else.\(^\text{19}\) After emphasising the rich man’s wickedness, inhumanity and cruelty at some length,\(^\text{20}\) Lazarus is introduced as by contrast righteous and a person who exercises virtue. Just as the rich man’s end and his behaviour in this life indicate his character, so Lazarus’ character is indicated by how he ends up (in Abraham’s lap) and by his patience concerning his poverty.\(^\text{21}\)

After a number of digressions, John asserts that the fact that Lazarus did not criticise God (blaspheme) is indicated by the angel escort assigned him.\(^\text{22}\) This makes Lazarus all the more remarkable, since he endured extreme poverty. John finds nine ways in which he paid a harsh price: (1) he suffered extreme ill health; (2) he didn’t even get to eat the crumbs falling from the rich man’s table; (3) he was too weak

\(^{\text{15}}\) On almsgiving as the pinacle of all good works in John’s writings see \textit{Brändle, Matthäus 25,31–46...}, 189.

\(^{\text{16}}\) \textit{De Lazaro conc. 1, PG 48, 963.2–30}.

\(^{\text{17}}\) Ibid., 970.14–22.

\(^{\text{18}}\) Ibid., 970.52–58.

\(^{\text{19}}\) Ibid., 970.59–971.2.

\(^{\text{20}}\) Ibid., 971.44–972.2.

\(^{\text{21}}\) Ibid., 972.2–7.

\(^{\text{22}}\) Ibid., 975.22–40. The assertion is made more lively and effective by the quotation of the kinds of criticisms John frequently hears.
to fend off the dogs from licking his sores; (4) he suffered isolation;\(^{(23)}\) (5) his isolation was exacerbated by experiencing it at the rich man’s gate (in the middle of others revelling, who were completely unmoved by his plight); (6) his anguish was amplified by knowing that a man who exhibited no virtue lived so well, while Lazarus who exhibited every virtue experienced such horrors; (7) he had no one else to share his experience, which might have provided comfort; (8) he didn’t even have the comfort of the resurrection, but lived with the thought that there was no remediation for his sufferings beyond this life; and (9) it is common nature for people to judge the poor as being responsible for their own suffering.\(^{(24)}\) This latter point leads John to compare Lazarus to Job (Job 4:2,6) and Paul (Acts 28:4), both of whom were likewise thought to have deserved their fates.\(^{(25)}\) A common lay interpretation of the parable is then addressed — namely that if the rich man was punished there after he died, the result was a draw (0–0), but if he also enjoyed his own possessions there in honour, then the rich man came out ahead (2–0).\(^{(26)}\) John is horrified by this response and is at pains to disabuse his listeners of the idea that the righteous and the wicked will receive equal reward when they die.\(^{(27)}\) The remainder of the homily is spent in arguing that one shouldn’t confuse externals with what people are like inside. The rich man in reality was ulcerated on the inside, as Lazarus was on the outside; just as the dogs licked Lazarus’ wounds, so demons licked the rich man’s sins; and just as the one was starved for food, the other was starved of virtue. Ultimately no one can escape God’s judgment and punishment, as a consequence of which we shouldn’t consider the rich blessed, but those who live in virtue; nor ought we to condemn the poor, but rather the wicked.\(^{(28)}\)

In the second homily John moves from the situation of the two protagonists in the parable while alive to their situation after death. His aim on this occasion is to teach the rich person to think that wealth is no great thing without virtue and the poor to think that poverty is

\(^{(23)}\) By *eremia* John here means absence of household support, i.e., family or servants who might provide care (see *Quod nemo laeditur* 10, SC 103, 108.29–34). This is distinct from a lack of someone to share his experience, which he lists as a separate point (7).

\(^{(24)}\) *De Lazaro conc. 1*, PG 48, 975.41–977.47.

\(^{(25)}\) Ibid., 977.47–978.11.

\(^{(26)}\) Ibid., 978.12–16.

\(^{(27)}\) Ibid., 978.16–35.

\(^{(28)}\) Ibid., 978–981.
nothing evil. This lesson can be drawn from the parable, since death brought a reversal of circumstance for the rich man and Lazarus so that everyone knew who the real rich person was and who it was who was truly poor. So poor was the rich man in death that he couldn’t even get hold of a drop of water and in a reversal of roles it was he who came begging to Lazarus — and not even directly to Lazarus, but via a mediator, Abraham. Lazarus, on the other hand, received an angel escort into the lap of Abraham. This leads John to the analogy that in the present life poverty and wealth are just masks, which death strips away, exposing what was inside. He then draws a lesson concerning repentance. What happened to the rich man counsels us to seek repentance in this life, since the parable shows that we have no recourse to it after death. In death, even if we were rich and powerful, we stand before the judge stripped of everything and everyone.

A question prompted by this section of the parable is why Lazarus didn’t end up in the lap of some other righteous person, but rather Abraham. John replies that this is because Abraham was hospitable towards strangers and so seeing Lazarus with Abraham is a criticism of those who are not (a pointed message for the rich man). As he reflects further on the issue of hospitality he argues that hospitality towards the outcast and those who are unknown is a much greater virtue than hospitality towards those who have high status and so almsgiving (which he associates with philoxenia) is about avoiding scrutinising the object of it first, but rather giving even to those who are undeserving, as exemplified by both Abraham and Job. This is because we don’t know whether or not we are providing hospitality towards angels. The deserving aspect of the poor lies solely in their need. If we start

(30) Ibid., 986.18–21.
(31) In De Lazaro conc. 6, PG 48, 1039 John points out that the rich man’s words to Abraham ("pity me", Lk 16: 24) are the same words employed by beggars.
(33) Ibid., 984.38–46.
(34) Ibid., 986–987. The same idea is adduced in De Lazaro conc. 6, PG 48, 1032–1035.
(36) De Lazaro conc. 2, PG 48, 988.48–51; repeated in De Lazaro conc. 6, PG 48, 1039.
scrutinising our fellow servants, then God will do the same to us and so, if we persist in demanding an account of them, it is we who are likely to lose God’s philanthropy. This latter idea ties in with another argument put forward in this homily, namely that money is the Lord’s regardless of its source. The rich person’s role is as executor of money that belongs to one’s fellow servants of God and which ought therefore to be distributed to the poor.

In the third homily the topic of repentance again receives attention. Resuming discussion at the point where the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus, John says that if, like the rich man, we were there and hearing Abraham’s reply when there was no opportunity for repentance, we would have reason to howl, but since we’re hearing this here, we can wash away our sins, acquire direct speech with God (parrhêsia), and convert our lives through fear of what happened to him. God speaks of the punishment to come ahead of time, because he’d prefer us to avoid it. John next moves onto exegesis of the verb “ἀπέλαβε” (Lk 16:25: Τέκνον, μνήσθητι, ὃτι ἀπέλαβες σὺ τὰ ἀγαθὰ σου). This, he explains, is used instead of the simple root verb in order to express the idea of repayment. No matter how evil a person is, they have usually done one or two good things. This particular verse of the parable indicates that the rich man, no matter how sunken into wickedness, did some good, while Lazarus, no matter what peak of virtue he’d attained, had at least sinned a little. Basically, regardless of their experience in this life, both arrive naked after death, stripped of the little good or the little sin they have done and everything is restored to balance in terms of the judgment meted out. Hence, when we see someone living in wickedness, but suffering nothing terrible here, we shouldn’t consider them blessed but weep for them, since they’ll be stripped of their little good and will endure everything terrible there (as did the rich man). Likewise, when we see a virtuous person suffering here, we should consider them blessed and imitate them, since stripped of their sin, they will be rewarded amply there (as in the case of Lazarus). This idea that God’s judgment is evenhanded and that

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(37) De Lazaro conc. 2, PG 48, 989–990.
(38) Ibid., 988.6–32.
(39) Ibid., 996.15–44.
(40) De Lazaro conc. 3, PG 48, 996.49–997.50. John develops exegesis of the same verb in De Lazaro conc. 6, PG 48, 1040–1044 in a similar fashion, adducing Job, Ahab and Judas alongside Lazarus.
after death we will receive punishment or reward in proportion to what is required to make up an equilibrium is central to John’s interpretation of this parable. The conclusion that naturally flows from this, namely that our sufferings here on earth have the capacity proportionally to carve away our payment for sin in the next life, is an idea which he frequently expresses. This argument as a whole is used to explain why the righteous often suffer here on earth.41

Another idea raised in this homily which recurs elsewhere in his exegesis of the parable is that criticism of God, whether one is rich or poor, does not result naturally from either condition, but is a matter of choice (free will). One of John’s reasons for reading the parable to his audience is to show that not even wealth can benefit the person who is lazy, while not even poverty can harm the person who is alert. It is neither poverty nor sickness that compel a person to curse God, but rather disposition or dereliction of virtue.42 A similar idea is expressed in the homily De peccata fratrum non evulganda. There he argues that being rich isn’t bad but rather the bad use of wealth, nor is poverty good, but rather the good use of poverty. The rich man in this parable was punished not because he was rich, but because he was cruel and inhumane, while the poor man in Abraham’s lap was praised not because he was poor, but because he bore his poverty with gratitude. By nature some things are good, some bad, others neutral. Wealth and poverty fall into this last category. It is according to the choice (will) of the user that they become good or bad.43 If one uses one’s wealth for philanthropy it becomes a basis for good; if we use it for greed, theft and violence, we’ve reversed position. In this latter case it is not wealth that is responsible, but the use of wealth for violence. So in the case of poverty, if we endure it nobly, giving thanks to God, we will receive a crown. But if we criticise God’s foreknowledge (pronoia), we’ve used it badly.44

In the fourth homily, which examines the rich man’s plea to Abraham to at least send Lazarus to warn his brothers, the themes of God’s just balancing of rewards and punishments, the inherent goodness in God’s plan that the righteous suffer here on earth, and that the parable

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(42) Ibid., 1002.
(43) On the connection for John between this essentially Stoic viewpoint and wealth and voluntary poverty (asceticism) see MAYER, Poverty and generosity... (n. 1).
is a warning to the rich not to be proud and a comfort to the poor are all repeated. The explanation for why Abraham refuses to send Lazarus does give rise to some new material, however. The rich man’s plea demonstrates the beneficial effect of the punishment on him (suddenly he is more concerned for others), while the reaction of the Jews (a rare reference to them by John in the context of this parable), who refused to listen to Moses or the prophets, demonstrates the pointlessness of sending someone from the dead.\textsuperscript{45} As John explains, the teaching of the prophets (scripture) is more trustworthy than any message from the dead and, in any case, Hell itself is like the secular lawcourts (ineffective as a deterrent).\textsuperscript{46} What is of interest in this homily as John wraps up his exegesis of this parable and the lessons to be drawn from it is the bringing together of the notion of salvation by grace, on the one hand, and of works righteousness on the other. The latter is an idea that more naturally stems from his thesis that the good works we perform in this life have a direct impact on the judgment we will receive. Discussion of the role of the conscience as our own internal judge and how it leads to repentance leads him to argue that confession isn’t about letting God know what we’ve done (since he knows it already) but about our learning how much pardon we are in need of, and how substantial is God’s grace.\textsuperscript{47} By the end of the homily, however, after adducing the exemplum of Joseph to demonstrate how like Lazarus he did not complain when he was cast into slavery but waited for God’s plan to work itself out, he returns to the idea of utilising the conscience immediately when we sin to avoid future punishment, in which almsgiving (\textit{eleemosyne}), among other more personal actions, plays a significant role.\textsuperscript{48}

God’s pronoia; theodicy; the role of good works in mitigating punishment; why the righteous suffer; not considering the rich blessed and avoiding despising the poor; not criticising God when we suffer, but giving thanks in poverty; using wealth and poverty in a good way; taking comfort from Lazarus, since our life could never be as bad as his; and the role of almsgiving in virtue are all themes that arise throughout John’s homilies, treatises, commentaries and letters, whenever this parable is adduced. Of interest when we look beyond these homilies is what moral faults prompt him to adduce the parable.

\textsuperscript{45} De Lazaro conc. 4, PG 48, 1009.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 1010.1–25.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 1011–1012.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 1016.39–51.
Excess of one kind or another, as in the cases we have just observed, is an obvious trigger. Less obvious is the abuse of supernatural powers such as amulets to effect healing. In the single instance in which this practice prompts him to adduce the parable, John first adduces the exemplum of the paralytic by the pool who simply waited for God’s help for years, despite watching others being healed (Jn 5:1–9). Lazarus too, he then argues, struggled the whole time with starvation, illness and isolation, not just for thirty-eight years, but his entire life. Yet, despite all that he suffered he chose not to resort to supernatural aid but rather to die in that state than to betray any portion of his piety. Resort to such aid by the audience is thus unpardonable. Another trigger is despondency. In his eighth letter to Olympias the punishment which the rich man received in Hell is used to comfort her. Despite the chasm, from heaven Lazarus could see the rich man enduring torment, and hear him and respond. Olympias is counselled to reflect that in the next life she will have this same advantage in regard to those who are currently persecuting John. In another letter addressing her depression he takes a slightly different tack, adducing the rich man’s punishment in order to advise her to mourn for John’s persecutors because of the inescapable punishment that awaits them.

In these instances issues of justice, punishment and the virtuous bearing of suffering are the primary focus. In other examples it is poverty and wealth. In his fourth homily on Matthew, John adduces the exemplum of the three youths in the furnace (Dan 3), which then becomes an extended metaphor. Enduring the furnace of poverty becomes preferable to bowing down to mammon, while those who choose poverty in preference to this will be radiant both here and in the next life. Those who are rich unjustly here, on the other hand, will pay the ultimate penalty there. Lazarus, he claims, exited this furnace no less radiant than the three youths, while the one who was rich in the form of bowing down to the image was condemned in Hell. This leads him to exhort: let the rich hear this, who inflame the furnace of poverty. Meanwhile, let us descend into the furnace of poverty and introduce the dew of almsgiving and extinguish the flame so that we might share their

(49) Adv. Iudaeos or. 8, PG 48, 936.
(50) Ep. 8 ad Olymp., SC 13bis, 200. It is not insignificant that the parable is adduced in this letter just as John has finished praising Olympias’ hospitality and charity.
(51) Ep. 5 ad Olymp., SC 13bis, 122.
crowns (i.e., those of the three youths and Lazarus). Here the parable is enveloped within a more fully developed Old Testament exemplum. Together they both direct the attention of the audience to how they should deal with poverty and consider wealth, advice which is familiar from John’s exegesis of the Lazarus parable throughout his works. In another homily, however, he addresses the issue of what happens in a case where poverty is so severe that the injunction towards caring for others (eleemosyne) is unable to be carried out. In that case, like Lazarus, one is crowned for the virtue of patience alone (all that a person so severely constrained is capable of), and for enduring all that one suffers with a thankful heart. On a rare occasion Lazarus is adduced in an entirely different way — as proof that a martyr must have been escorted to heaven by angels, since Lazarus was honoured in this way.

The scriptural exempla with which John links this parable are of interest. In some cases it is the two ways (Matt 7:13–14), in others the foolish virgins (who were rejected because they failed in almsgiving: Matt 25:1–13). The three youths in the furnace, Job, Abraham, and Joseph are all commonly adduced. When poverty and wealth are the focus of advice, Matt 25:35–36 is at times linked with the parable. When Lazarus’ endurance of sickness rather than poverty is the focus, we also see him linked with Paul’s colleague Timothy. The association of the parable with the paralytic by the pool (Jn 5:1–9) is more rare. In some cases the parable is found clustered together with a number of these exempla.

(52) In Matt. hom. 4, PG 57, 53–54.
(53) Exp. in psalm. 127, PG 55, 367.31–368.12.
(54) De s. Droside, PG 50, 689.
(55) E.g., Ep.5 ad Olymp., SC 13bis, 122; and see De Lazaro conc. 7, PG 48, 1047–1054, where he uses Matt 7:13–14 to interpret the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, seguing from one into the other.
(56) E.g., In Matt. hom. 78/79, PG 58, 711–712; Adv. oppugn. vitae monasticae, PG 47, 374.
(57) E.g., In Matt. hom. 81/82, PG 58, 736 (which also links Lazarus to the foolish virgins).
(58) E.g., In Phil. hom. 15, PG 62, 274 (which also links Lazarus with Job, Daniel and the three youths).
(59) See In paralyticum demissum, PG 51, 58.
(60) E.g., Ep. 10 ad Olymp., SC 13bis, 262–278 (Job, Paul, three youths in furnace, Joseph); In illud Isaiae: Ego dominus, PG 56, 147–148 and 152 (Job, Abraham, Joseph).
For John, while the parable is primarily soteriological, it also offers significant scope for drawing out moral advice on the topics of wealth, poverty and almsgiving. This is achieved as much by drawing conclusions from the consequences of the rich man’s chosen use of his wealth, as it is by equating Lazarus’ uncomplaining patience concerning his lot with virtue and a thankful heart. From these readings of the parable messages about how one should approach poverty and wealth (as inherently neutral) and how they should be used (for good) are readily drawn. Praise of the virtue of almsgiving (eleemosyne) and, on one occasion, explicitly philoptochia (love of the poor) develops as a natural consequence. These virtues are held up for emulation by those who are not so poor that they cannot give something, while for the truly indigent, like Lazarus, poverty is promoted as a virtue in itself, when linked with avoidance of criticism of God, and thankful and patient endurance of one’s lot. It is in this respect that the strongly soteriological message of the parable has a role to play. In John’s broader discourse on poverty, the telos of our earthly existence (our eternal existence) is of far greater importance than life itself. The two are seamless and the consequences of behaviour here are played out with inevitability in the life to come. The two corollaries of this — that both suffering and lack of suffering here are balanced out in the life to come, and that the judgment to come is unstoppable but not unalterable and can be mitigated in advance by one’s behaviour here — are vividly expressed in this parable. The rich man pays the price for his cruelty and unwise use of wealth on earth; Lazarus is rewarded in heaven for his wise use of his poverty here. The rich man is shown in death to be truly poor (he has not even a drop of water to drink); Lazarus is shown in death to be truly rich (he is honoured with an escort of angels). So poor in reality is the rich man that he is never named, while the man who appeared so poor as to be anonymous is not only honoured with a name, but his name is passed down through posterity. The rich man’s repentance after death and his concern for his brothers comes too late for his own soul, but it does show the beneficial effect of the rich man’s punishment. Lazarus’ unending suffering on earth, on the other hand, helps to explain why God allows the virtuous to suffer here; they will receive the reward for their virtue in heaven.

In the end, while for John the parable is not always explicitly about poverty and wealth, it is fundamentally about what happens to the

(61) See De Lazaro conc. 6, PG 48, 1034.
soul after death and about God’s just judgment. These soteriological concerns play an important role within his discourse on poverty to the extent that, even when no explicit connection is drawn, concerns about wealth, poverty and care for others lurk not far below the surface.62

**SUMMARY**

The way in which John Chrysostom interprets and applies the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is examined with a view to how it fits into his theology of salvation and, more importantly, what relationship he draws between the parable and the topics of wealth and poverty, and the giving of alms. Homilies 1–4 and 6–7 *De Lazaro* are the primary focus, but the exemplum is examined within the context of John’s other homilies, letters and treatises also. It is concluded that, whereas the parable is more often interpreted by John with a view to salvation and eschatology, concerns about wealth, poverty and care for others are usually not far from his mind.