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# Golden mouth, empty pockets: an investigation of the motivations and aims behind John Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty

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*GOLDEN MOUTH, EMPTY POCKETS:*

*AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND AIMS BEHIND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S  
THEOLOGY OF WEALTH AND POVERTY*

A MASTER'S THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SEMINARY FACULTY IN CANDIDACY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

BY

MATTHEW INGALLS

PORTLAND, OR

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# GEORGE FOX

## EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

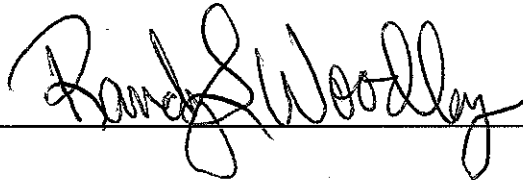
### THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

**Title:**               **GOLDEN MOUTH, EMPTY POCKETS:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND AIMS  
BEHIND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S THEOLOGY OF WEALTH  
AND POVERTY**

**Presented by:**   **MATTHEW INGALLS**


**Date:**               **MAY 1, 2013**

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.



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*(Randy Woodley)*



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*(Merle Strege)*

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To Abigail for her sensibility  
and to Elliot for his emerging conscience

## ABSTRACT

Title: GOLDEN MOUTH, EMPTY POCKETS: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE  
MOTIVATIONS AND AIMS BEHIND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S THEOLOGY OF WEALTH  
AND POVERTY

Author: Matthew Ingalls

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This thesis seeks to master the field of scholarly discourse surrounding John Chrysostom's motivations and aims for his theology of wealth and poverty. The study takes care to situate Chrysostom in his social, political, and theological contexts. Then the paper sets out to examine ancient attitudes toward Chrysostom and his theology. Then a comprehensive description of modern Chrysostomic studies is attempted. These approaches are grouped into three broad categories. The first is the "theistic factor" category, which encompasses scholars who understand Chrysostom primarily from a theological standpoint. The second category is the social-scientific approach. Practitioners of this method seek to examine Chrysostom through the scrutiny of social history. The third and final category involves an approach that takes seriously the ways in which Chrysostom was shaped by desert monasticism. These divergent approaches combine to form a robust dialogue about a man of lasting influence in the area of wealth and poverty. The study does read each source critically by acknowledging strengths and weaknesses. The thesis also seeks to synthesize the approaches in order to construct a solid framework through which Chrysostom can be accurately read. Finally, the thesis seeks to interject Chrysostom's Late Ancient theology into the contemporary and emerging Christian conversation

regarding the disparity between the wealth of North American Christians and the poverty of Majority World Christians.

Chapter one introduces the reader to Chrysostom and the major proposals concerning his motivations and aims. The survey of these proposals reveals the three major categories within Chrysostomic studies: the theistic factor, social-scientific, and the influence of desert monasticism. The chapter also provides a brief biography and an introduction into the social and political mores of Late Antiquity.

Chapter two offers a summary of the theology in question. Chrysostom's generative notions center around his belief that the primitive divine social structure was one of egalitarianism and that Christ is ontologically present in the suffering of the poor, in a way comparable to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

In Chapter three, the entire field of Chrysostom studies is surveyed. Chrysostom's Late Antique biographers are consulted first, and then the three major approaches to Chrysostom are considered. The synthesis seeks to compile likely conclusions about Chrysostom's motivations and aims and posits several areas where scholarship is inconclusive.

Chapter four addresses the fact that this study has been produced in an affluent Christian context while the majority of the world suffers life-threatening poverty. It is proposed that the current North American debate surrounding a theology of wealth and poverty could benefit from listening to both Chrysostom's strong points and weaknesses.

Finally, chapter five offers a concluding summary of the material presented, methodology, and the positions proffered.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
SPLLA	<i>Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity</i>
WEPCS	<i>Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society</i>
UNU-WIDER	United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research

## GLOSSARY

**SYNAXIS:** an Orthodox worship service

**CIVIC EUERGETISM:** the prevailing Antique model of generosity wherein the wealthy made contributions to civic organizations and not individuals.

**PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEM:** an emerging model for civic generosity in Chrysostom's day wherein the wealthy gave alms directly to impoverished individuals or families.

**AMBO:** the reading desk in a sanctuary from which the holy scriptures were normally read. Chrysostom, due to his poor health read his sermons sitting down at the ambo rather than the pulpit.

**AGORA:** Ancient marketplaces which were typically the geographical and social center of urban areas.

**PHILOTIMIA:** establishing one's social status by publicly displaying acts of generosity.

## Chapter 1

### Matters of Introduction

*This is robbery: not to share one's resources.*<sup>1</sup>

John Chrysostom (c. 347 C.E. – 407 C.E.) earned a reputation during his life and in historical reflection as a great preacher. His orations filled the great cathedrals in Antioch and Constantinople, often eliciting vocal applause. Greatness aside, it is the content of his homilies that contemporaries and modern readers find shocking. He rarely, if ever, relented from a staunch critique of cultural and systemic excess in his see. His theology of wealth and poverty, articulated so cogently from the floor ambo of the great cathedral in the eastern capital of Constantinople, won him both acclaim and loyalty amongst the common class and ignited subversive angst amongst his rich parishioners. Away from his fame as preacher, his episcopal administration pursued with great alacrity a high moral standard for clergy under his supervision. His granite commitment to such a standard both marred his working relationship with clerical co-workers and drew followers of fierce loyalty. We might surmise, however, that it was not his stubbornness alone that polarized his observers and acquaintances. The fiery figure that history judges him to be must owe at least some of his controversy to the content of his message.

Popular treatments often laud Chrysostom as a champion of worker's rights, income equality, and communal ownership—an ancient bishop moving his congregation and city toward a just society.<sup>2</sup> There is little scholarly doubt that John preached these things. What is regarded

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<sup>1</sup> John Chrysostom as quoted in Charles Avila, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 83.

<sup>2</sup> See John Chrysostom, *On Living Simply: The Golden Voice of John Chrysostom*, Robert Van de Weyer trans. (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1997); Diana Butler Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 67-70; and Gilbert Markus, *The Radical Tradition: Revolutionary Saints in the Battle for Justice and Human Rights* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 17-29.

as inconclusive is why John preached what he did about wealth, property, economics, and social-class distinction. What was his inspiration? Where did his ideas come from? Was he simply a product of his time, his downfall nothing more than being in the wrong political position at the wrong time? Or was he unique? If so, how do we account for his exceptional social theology? Concurrently, Chrysostom studies attempt to outline the facets of Chrysostom's sociological aim. This approach seeks to concretize Chrysostom's ubiquitous social claims. It asks to what model for society Chrysostom was appealing. How would the social norms have changed had Chrysostom wrought the changes he preached? This study's primary concern is to both reconstruct the source of Chrysostom's aim toward a just society and to raise important questions for further Chrysostom scholarship. The first objective will be to situate John in his contemporary world. The next objective will be to come to a basic understanding of the nature of his theology. Additionally, we will consult the conclusions of his ancient biographers along with perform a thorough study of current social-historical Chrysostom analysis. Finally, we will consider possible intersections between John, his theology and motivations, and the socio-economic situation of the twenty-first century Church.

In order to understand the motivation behind his message, detailed attention will be given to a reconstruction of his life and times. Common to human experience is the integration of motivation and context. Sociologist Peter Berger writes,

Every individual biography is an episode within the history of society, which both precedes and survives it. Society was there before the individual was born and it will be there after he has died. What is more, it is within society, and as a result of social processes, that the individual becomes a person, that he attains and holds onto an identity, and that he carries out the various projects that constitute his life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1990) 3.

Berger's theory about the individual will by my methodological approach to Chrysostom. John was a contextual being. It is perhaps too restrictive to regard him as a product of his time, but to deny the connection between his personal history, cultural shifts, social paradigm, and contemporary theological movements is to deny his humanity. As I will show, his experience and interpretation of that experience yields significant evidence in the pursuit of my question. His life and time will serve as lenses through which we shall filter the rest of our study.

Second, my study will attempt to sketch the nature of Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. It may seem obvious, but it would be imprudent to attempt to proffer conclusions about why Chrysostom preached what he did without some understanding of what that message was. Though this section will not require excessive space, it will be imperative to the cogency of our conclusions.

Equally important to understanding how John came to understand wealth as robbery and how he sought to redeem it is an investigation into his ancient biographers. Since they wrote in the years immediately following John's death they may shed light on how his time evaluated him. I will ask—what explanation did they give for Chrysostom's positions? What factors did they cite as influential in John's life? At this point it will also be important to evaluate the authority and biases of these ancient historians. Chrysostom's follower Palladius, for instance, penned a biography just a year after Chrysostom's death. On the one hand, Palladius rises above the credibility of other ancient historians because he provides an eye-witness account. On the other, he was not an unbiased chronicler, but wrote in order to vindicate John.<sup>4</sup> By taking account of these ancient historians, their biases, and conclusions we can assemble a

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<sup>4</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 292.

contemporary conclusion(s) in order to provide some accountability to modern historical approaches.

Chrysostom's theology continues to intrigue modern and postmodern scholars, admirers, and critics. These voices by far exhibit the largest spectrum of Chrysostom studies. It is my intention to evaluate each position on its own and then to create a dialogue of critical conversation around Chrysostom's motivations and aims. Generally, scholars fall in one of three camps: first, what Charles Avila calls the *theistic factor* in John's theology.<sup>5</sup> This approach attempts to interpret John in light of his understanding of God's initial design for resources. John's aims and motivations are here intertwined. He aims for a renewal of God's original intention for monetary social interaction because he is motivated by his vision of what that design is and was.<sup>6</sup> This approach takes as its primary evidence John's own sermons. The *theistic factor* approach does well to take his prodigious and often dialectical homilies and reconstruct his theology. They do, however, tend to downplay the influence of Chrysostom's cultural milieu.

The second camp utilizes a social-scientific approach.<sup>7</sup> These scholars are not together in conclusion, but in method. They attempt to interpret John in light of any number of sociological

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Avila, *Ownership*, 102.

<sup>6</sup> For examples of this approach see Nicu Dumitrascu, "Poverty and Wealth in the Orthodox Spirituality (with Special Reference to St. John Chrysostom)," *Dialog*, no. 4 (December 1, 2010):300-305; R.A. Krupp, *Shepherding the Flock of God: the pastoral theology of John Chrysostom* (Peter Lang: New York, 1991); Justo Gonzalez, *Faith & Wealth: a History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); Rudolf Brandle, "This Sweetest Passage: Matthew 25:31-46 and Assistance to the Poor in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," in *WPECS*, Susan R. Holman ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 127-139; Kelly, *Golden Mouth*; Avila, *Ownership*.

<sup>7</sup> See Silke Sitzler, "Identity: the indigent and the wealthy in the homilies of John Chrysostom," *Viligiae Christianae* 63, no. 5 (January 1, 2009): 468-479; Chris L. de Wet, "Vilification of the Rich in John Chrysostom's Homily 40 *On First Corinthians*," *Acta Patristica Et Byzantia*, Vol. 21.1, 2010; Wendy Mayer, "Poverty and Generosity toward the Poor in the Time of John Chrysostom," in *WPECS*, Susan R. Holman ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 140-158; Francine Cardman, "Poverty and Wealth as Theater: John Chrysostom's Homilies

lenses. Leyerle, for example, draws a parallel between Chrysostom's preaching on gaining honor and the system of the ancient agora, where public displays of generosity earned patrons societal fame and stature.<sup>8</sup> Others, like Mayer and de Wet interpret Chrysostom within the framework of the Late Antique transition from euergetism (alms given to a foundation or community to benefit impoverished groups) to a patron-client system of generosity. In each of these cases, it is not Chrysostom's theology that is primary, but his homilies situated within the social oscillations of his time. Chrysostom's motivation is then rendered as a response, either in the positive or negative, to his society's movement.

Social-scientific scholars come to wide and divergent conclusions about Chrysostom's aims, typically based upon which facet of Chrysostom is in view. Generally, however, they see him as a bishop who attempted to provide a Christian identity to his evolving world. While the social-scientific method appropriately situates Chrysostom in the paradigm and happenings of the Late Antique period, it also tends to offer two apparent weaknesses. First, most such treatments fail to appreciate the profound influence of the drastically counter-cultural ascetic desert movement on Chrysostom and his ideals. Second, these writings typically fail to appreciate Chrysostom's own sense of a reflective and sincere religious conviction, reducing conviction to the restrictive appropriation of societal forces. Both of these conclusions shall be evidenced in chapter three.

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on Lazarus and the Rich Man," in *WPECS*, Susan R. Holman ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 159-175; Blake Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on almsgiving and the use of money," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (January 1994): 29-47; and G. L. Kurbatov, "The Nature of Class in the Teaching of John Chrysostom," Andrius Valevicius trans., *Ezegodnik Muzeja Istorii I Religii I Ateiznoz* 2 (1958), [Http://www.cecs.acu.edu.au/Kurbatov%20article.pdf](http://www.cecs.acu.edu.au/Kurbatov%20article.pdf) (accessed February 20, 2013).

<sup>8</sup>Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," 30-43.

The third camp encompasses those who explicate Chrysostom through his experience in desert asceticism.<sup>9</sup> These interpreters utilize several approaches but share an appreciation for Chrysostom's experience in the profoundly counter-cultural movement of Syrian monasticism. They seek to expose the ways in which Chrysostom's motivations come from the desert and his aims draw his hearers toward lives modeled after the ideal desert community.

As this thesis unfolds, it will require a fair and thorough analysis of each individual voice in the Chrysostom conversation. I have set out to describe in detail strengths, weaknesses, insights, and nuance in order to provide the clearest view possible of Chrysostom, his theology, motivations, and aims. I have also attempted to weave these divergent voices to create some kind of conclusive interpretation of Chrysostom.

Finally my argument will close with a short proposal concerning Chrysostom's usefulness in constructing a current theology of wealth and poverty. I have sought to conservatively appropriate the heart of his Late Ancient aims to the dire situation facing the affluent church vis-à-vis the majority world. Certainly Chrysostom's aims sprout from historically peculiar circumstances, but his creativity and scriptural exegesis remain valid talking points for Christians who wish to enact a more just and verdant global economy.

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<sup>9</sup> See, Catharine P. Roth, introduction to John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom on Wealth and Poverty* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); F. X. Murphy, "The Moral Doctrine of St. John Chrysostom," *Studia Patristica* (January 1, 1972): 52-57; Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Margaret M. Mitchell, "Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods which are Not Good: John Chrysostom's Discourse against Wealth and Possessions," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life*, William Schweiker and Charles Mathews eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004):88-121; Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988); Aideen M. Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City* (Duckworth: London, 2004); Aideen M. Hartney, "Men, Women, and Money: John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City," *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001): 527-534.



It is the man and his time to which we turn now. Before we can adequately appreciate the work of scholars and the usefulness of his work, we must detail and understand the man himself. We begin our study with an overview of his life and times. In the next chapter, we will consider Chrysostom's theology in his own words. Only after this groundwork has been applied can we move on to critical evaluation and conclusions.

### A Brief Biography

In the case of John Chrysostom his end has garnered him far more attention than his beginning. For that reason it is, perhaps, easier to begin with the end. He died in exile, in the province of Pontus along the Black Sea on September 14, 407.<sup>10</sup> His death was the dark conclusion of two successive depositions in 403 and 404. He had spent the intermediary time at different locations surrounding Constantinople until it was decided that he should be moved to Pityus in Armenia on the eastern end of the sea, an 1100 kilometer walk. It proved to be too great a journey for his weakened and embattled frame.<sup>11</sup>

His first exile came at the Synod of the Oak, arranged by Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, with Chrysostom *in abstentia*. Theophilus made the journey from Alexandria to Constantinople to face charges of his own in regard to libel against Nitrian monks. He had, however, taken the long land route, waging a war of propaganda against John along the way.<sup>12</sup> There was little doubt Theophilus' primary objective in the capital was to depose John. Kelly also notes that Emperor Arcadius afforded John a chance to sit as judge at Theophilus' trial, but Chrysostom declined on the grounds that Theophilus' charges originated outside his own

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<sup>10</sup> Robert T. Meyer, in his introduction to *Palladius: Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom* (New York: Newman Press, 1985), 2.

<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, *John Chrysostom*, Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen trans. (London: Routledge, 2000), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 212-13.

jurisdiction. Kelly muses that this was the defining moment in Chrysostom's downfall; had he been more concerned with the political landscape he would have seen this as an opportunity to cut-off Theophilus before he had a chance to work his plan against him.<sup>13</sup> It was at this point that many of Chrysostom's allies "washed their hands of him."<sup>14</sup>

Up to this point Theophilus had little ground upon which to arrange a synod against Chrysostom. In Constantinople he found two deacons whom Chrysostom had sacked, who agreed to furnish charges against him. Theophilus then, by Chrysostom's own admission, won the support of much of John's own clergy.<sup>15</sup> With the Constantinopolitan church in uproar, the stage was set for a synod of deposition, the Synod of the Oak. With forty-six charges against him and a council filled with former adversaries, it did not take long for the synod to issue a decree exiling John.<sup>16</sup> It should here be noted that the majority of the charges entail extreme harshness toward subordinate clergy.<sup>17</sup> Whatever the authenticity of the claims, it is clear that Chrysostom built a reputation of a high, even extreme, standard.

In the wake of Chrysostom's arrest, multitudes took to the street in indignation and protest. Though bothersome, the riots probably did not affect any significant change in Chrysostom's fate. It is, however, likely that a sense of divine anguish finally caused the Imperial Court to reverse its decision regarding John. Several events are proposed by ancient accounts, such as an imperial miscarriage or an earthquake. Whatever the nature of the event, Emperess Eudoxia "took this to be a signal of God's anger at the expulsion of [God's]

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 215-16.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>15</sup> As noted in Chrysostom's letter to Pope Innocent I included in Palladius, *Dialogue*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 218.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 223-22, 299-301.

consecrated representative, and begged Arkadios to order John's immediate recall."<sup>18</sup> The next Sunday the Orator returned to his bishop's throne in Hagia Sophia and delivered an extemporaneous sermon of jubilation and triumph.<sup>19</sup>

The reconciliation between the imperial family and Chrysostom proved weak. On the occasion of a Sunday *synaxis* (worship liturgy), just across the street from the cathedral a statue was dedicated to the honor of Eudoxia. The synaxis was disturbed by the noise at the dedication ceremony and John openly criticized it as a sacrilegious distraction. Kelly notes that Eudoxia's infuriation led her to begin talks of another synod for John's deposition. This, in turn, led to Chrysostom, in a public address, intimating a comparison between Eudoxia and the biblical character Herodias who demanded John the Baptist's head on a platter (Mt 14:1-12; Mk 6:14-29).<sup>20</sup> The tension reached its climax during the events of Easter 404. Bishops called to the city to judge Chrysostom's case advised Arcadius that Chrysostom had preemptively, thereby unlawfully, returned to his bishopric. Taking this finding to be as definitive as a synod and in his and Eudoxia's favor, Arcadius confined Chrysostom to his episcopal residence.<sup>21</sup> Chrysostom's clerical staff officiated at Easter vigils and catechumenate baptisms in his stead. It was deemed unsuitable for Chrysostom's clergy to officiate at these sacred rites, thus Arcadius assembled a force to disrupt the services. Disruption soon became violence, the baptismal font running red with the blood of the victims.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 236-37.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 239-40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 243; cf. Socrates, 6.18.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 244.

Chrysostom's clerical adherents were now officially relieved of episcopal duties, while he remained confined to his residence for an additional two months.<sup>23</sup> Kelly proposes that apparent inaction of the government to remove John from the city stemmed both from his remaining popularity among the majority of local citizens and from the lingering superstition of the imperial family.<sup>24</sup> Arcadius did finally issue an order of exile in June, but only after Chrysostom's competing bishops agreed to bear responsibility for the exile.<sup>25</sup> Peace was not, however, accomplished through Chrysostom's exile. His followers would continue to meet in opposition to the congregation at Hagia Sophia even in Chrysostom's absence.

Chrysostom's life prior to his installment as archbishop in Constantinople is not so shrouded by political backchannels or fraught with controversy. He was born sometime between 340 and 350 to a Christian mother who would soon be widowed.<sup>26</sup> Mayer and Allen note that Chrysostom's family must have accumulated some means because, "He was sent to school and received the full education that was standard for the male children of the families which belonged to the more elevated classes."<sup>27</sup> Other than this generic classification of his early income, nothing else is known about Chrysostom's childhood social status. His education was overseen by Libanius, a renowned pagan orator. Soon after graduation, John was baptized by the pro-Nicene bishop of Antioch, Meletius.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 248; cf. Palladius, 10 and Sozomen 8.22.

<sup>26</sup> Mayer, *John Chrysostom*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; cf. Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, 5.

Chrysostom then began a pursuit of an ascetic lifestyle under the tutelage of Diodore and his ascetic school. According to Sterk, Chrysostom did not initially retreat into the desert. Instead, he joined with other young men in leading lives marked by chastity, simplicity, and prayer under the instruction of Diodore.<sup>29</sup> These young men did not necessarily live by themselves, they may have gathered daily together. Later he moved to the mountains where Sterk argues it was likely he was semi-eremitic, because he seems to have been in some contact with other monastics.<sup>30</sup> However, he spent the final two years in solitude.<sup>31</sup> The formative nature of the ascetic experience cannot be overstated in Chrysostom studies. He himself once called Diodore his spiritual father and teacher.<sup>32</sup> He was eventually drawn to a full withdrawal from society into the cloistered atmosphere of Syrian desert asceticism. For six years he struggled within both a cenobitic and anchoritic monastic atmosphere. Palladius here notes the severe damage rendered to Chrysostom's body during his ascetic pursuits.<sup>33</sup> Mayer and Allen speculate that perhaps a combination of poor health and the return to Antioch of Meletius, after enduring exile, prompted John's return to the city.<sup>34</sup>

Mayer and Allen sufficiently adduce the mystery around the next twelve years of John's life as a presbyter in Antioch. They posit that the only fact available to historians from this period of his life is that he preached a great deal.<sup>35</sup> This is supported by Chrysostom's ancient

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<sup>29</sup> Sterk, *Renouncing the World yet Leading the Church*, 142-143.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> As noted in Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

biographers and their lack of speculation around the period, as well as the voluminous recorded sermons that one cannot attribute, as a whole or even as a majority, to a mere five-and-a-half years in Constantinople. Whatever the nature of his service, his reputation must have outgrown the borders of Antioch in order to reach the ear of Arcadius in the wake of Constantinople's bishop, Nectarius' death.

Eutropius, a eunuch in the imperial house, submitted John as a suitable replacement for Nectarius. Arcadius summoned Chrysostom to his capital, escorting him out of Antioch at night and as a surprise to John in order to avoid the upheaval of public protest at losing their beloved orator.<sup>36</sup> Kelly posits a combination of several factors that led to John's abrupt promotion to archbishop of the Roman world's second most influential see: first, Eutropius must have been impressed with John, probably in character and ability. Second, the imperial court may have been aware of John's exemplary conduct during the Antiochene riots of 387. Third, the emperor and his constituents were hoping for a zealous proponent of Nicene orthodoxy in order to diminish the influence of Arianism in the capital. Finally, the emperor was likely hoping Chrysostom would advance the influence of the Constantinopolitan see.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the motivation, John was consecrated by the senior bishop at the synod, Theophilus of Alexandria. Both Socrates and Sozomen record that Theophilus had opposed John's consecration because he had another candidate in mind but relented after Eutropius threatened him.<sup>38</sup> It never becomes completely clear why Theophilus so vehemently opposed John five-and-a-half years later, but

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<sup>36</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 105; cf. Palladius, *Dialogue*, 5, who argues for Eutropius' awareness of John's character and abilities; Socrates 6.2 who argues John was chosen for his eloquence and instructiveness; and Sozomen 8.2.

<sup>38</sup> Socrates 6.2; Sozomen 8.2.

Socrates surmises that from the moment of John's consecration, Theophilus began plotting his overthrow.<sup>39</sup>

### Chrysostom's Political, Social, and Economic Milieu

The turbulent events of Chrysostom's tenure in Constantinople are emblematic of the larger Christian situation that unfolded during his lifespan. Mayer and Allen outline a Roman world where Christianity was ascending but not yet the dominant religious force. Christianity itself was fractured, Constantinople being a bastion of Arian influence. They argue that Judaism, pagan groups, and the imperial cult still cultivated vast imperial and popular influence.<sup>40</sup> Orthodoxy was unfolding in councils and discourse, a stage being set for the mid-fifth-century struggle to define the ontological nature(s) of Christ. It was also a time of ascetic escape. Chrysostom was not alone in his pursuit of the monastic life in the desert. The fourth-century was fraught with influential figures forging monastic virtue in the wilderness. Chrysostom's time is considered the golden-age of desert monasticism.

As mentioned above, Chrysostom credited his time in the deserts of Syria under Diodore and in anchoritic devotion as formative. The desert movement began with Antony the Great, sometime prior to the turn of the fourth century. It was common in the deserts around Alexandria and Antioch. Scholars have proposed many options for its origin and motivations. Some categorize it as a rejection of imperial privilege following the reign of Constantine. Others suggest that the movement grew out of a search for new martyrdom given the new emperor's amiable attitude toward Christians.<sup>41</sup> Neither of these positions take into account the drastic

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<sup>39</sup> Socrates 6.5.

<sup>40</sup> Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

withdrawal into the desert prior to Constantine, even during the Diocletian persecutions.

Goehring notes, however, that the ascetics themselves never provide historically comfortable theories of origination. Instead, they are unified in attributing their retreat to divine inspiration and the desire to pursue the divine life.<sup>42</sup> Later I will evaluate the extent of the desert movement's influence on Chrysostom, but it is at the height of this intense milieu of ascetic dedication that Chrysostom came of age.

The political landscape of the empire shifted dramatically in Chrysostom's time. The empire split between the western political center of Rome and the eastern political center of Constantinople. Emperor Theodosius first made his permanent residence in Constantinople. After his death, his son, Honorius, domiciled in Rome, while his other son, Arcadius, ruled the East from Constantinople. Ecclesiastical power also shifted to Constantinople. In 381 the Second Ecumenical Council named Constantinople the second most influential see in the empire behind Rome.<sup>43</sup>

The citizens of Constantinople were deeply divided economically. Gonzalez notes that the upper echelon of society enjoyed tremendous luxury while masses lived in putrid, near unlivable, poverty. Cameron, too, describes the living quarter of the common people as packed tightly in poorly constructed shacks.<sup>44</sup> The shift in both ecclesial and imperial power to Constantinople made the city a premier trade center in the Late Antique world. The economic divides emerged over the struggle for land. The vast majority of fertile land in Constantinople

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<sup>42</sup> James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 35.

<sup>43</sup> Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, 4; cf. Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: AD 395-700* (New York, NY : Routledge, 2011), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, 47-8.



and the surrounding region was owned by only a few, forcing most people to move to the city, live in tenements, and work low-wage jobs.<sup>45</sup>

These varying classes were ever before Chrysostom and his hearers. Chrysostom's often vivid portrayals of wealthy and penurious lifestyles reveal his familiarity with both social extremes. On at least one occasion Chrysostom introduced his sermon as a direct response to his passing by indigent beggars along the road to synaxis.<sup>46</sup> The poor were likely all around him. Mayer argues that nearly ten percent of ancient Antioch lived in squalor, out of work and reliant upon begging for income.<sup>47</sup> These families dwelled in the streets, provided drastic images of the harshness of life at society's bottom. According to Mayer some families were exposed at night, clothed in rags, blind, maimed, leaning on sticks throughout the cities.<sup>48</sup> Mayer also argues that Chrysostom identifies several different levels of poverty in his world. There were day-laborers who may have suffered from unjust lending practices or unfair wages.<sup>49</sup> There were also those who had taken on poverty voluntarily through ascetic commitments.<sup>50</sup> There were widows, orphans, and strangers who found themselves in dire need, separated from sustainable sources of provision.<sup>51</sup> And finally, there were the homeless beggars on the edge of society. These men and women found themselves on the streets because of injury, illness, or even mental illness.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *Faith & Wealth*, 201.

<sup>46</sup> Chrysostom, *On Almsgiving*.

<sup>47</sup> Wendy Mayer, "Poverty and Society in the World of John Chrysostom," in *SPLLA*, William Bowden, Adam Gutteridge, and Carlos Machado eds., (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006) 469.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 477.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 472-475.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 469-470.

Chrysostom's awareness encompassed all these layers of Late Antique social stratification and he was clearly impacted by his experience viewing their everyday struggles.

Crucial to reconstructing Chrysostom's situation is understanding Roman law concerning private property. Two key principles in this field are the primacy of agriculture and the principle of absolute ownership. Avila writes concerning the Patristic Age:

Agriculture continued to hold its privileged position in the economy of the Roman Empire. It provided the greatest part of the national income by far, and the vast bulk of state revenue. Of all the surpluses that went to corporations, like cities and churches, to the senatorial and curial orders, and to all the professional classes, nearly ninety percent came from agricultural land rents, and only a little more than ten percent from urban property of all kinds—houses, gardens, warehouses, baths, and bakeries.<sup>53</sup>

Wealth, in the time of Chrysostom, then, is to be understood as primarily about land. This will be imperative later in deducing Chrysostom's theological intentions, for land will play a key role in his vision of the just society. Contemporary readers may be too quick to connect Chrysostom's use of wealth with currency. Instead, it will be important to keep the issue of land and its produce as the primary corollary of Chrysostom's idea of wealth.

Essential to property law in Late Antiquity is the concept of absolute control. From the very beginning of Roman law property was viewed as under the absolute control of the owner – commonly the *paterfamilias*. According to Jolowicz and Nicholas, the definition of ownership is “the unrestricted right of control over a physical thing, and whosoever has this right can claim the thing he owns wherever it is and no matter who possesses it.”<sup>54</sup> Chrysostom, as shall be explored, rebuffs this common notion time and again. Since this was the legal reality of his day as well as the popular conception of ownership, Chrysostom appears to have derived a counter-cultural approach to poverty that will be explicated in the next chapter.

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<sup>53</sup> Avila, *Ownership*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> H.F. Jolowicz and Barry Nicholas, *Introduction to the Study of Roman Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 140.

Finally, the prevailing paradigm concerning the limited nature of resources is latent in Chrysostom studies. Malina quotes a common fourth-century proverb, “Every rich person is either unjust or the heir of an unjust person.”<sup>55</sup> This maxim derived from the belief that society is closed in terms of goods. In order for one to have more, someone else must have less. Accumulation is then seen as greed. De Wet argues the concept of limited goods was the prevailing paradigm in Chrysostom’s world.<sup>56</sup> He further describes the model by writing:

The reason someone is rich is because others are poor, the rich have more than their share. This was one of the main reasons for the negative perceptions of the rich in peasant societies. Most wealthy individuals had to balance their wealth accumulation and status acquisition aspirations.<sup>57</sup>

Throughout this study it will be evident that Chrysostom relied upon the limited goods model, augmenting it with his own theological interpretation.

The events of Chrysostom’s life unfolded within unique political, social, and economic models. Without cursory understanding of his circumstances and milieu, it would be needless to venture onward. His theology was rooted in his life and context. He must be studied within the context of the birth of monasticism; in a time of transition from euergetism to personal benefaction; within the confines of Roman property law; and finally, within the paradigm of limited goods. Out of this complex Late Antique environment, he devised a theology of wealth and poverty. It is to that theology that we turn in the next chapter. After a thorough reconstruction of Chrysostom’s theology, then we may conduct our investigation into his aims and motivations.

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<sup>55</sup> Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 104.

<sup>56</sup> De Wet, *Vilification of the Rich*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2

### **Chrysostom's Theology of Wealth and Poverty**

Chrysostom's theology has been alluded to earlier in our research, but before we can undertake extensive analysis of his aim we will need more than allusions to work with. This chapter will seek to underscore the primary themes of Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. I introduce this pursuit, however, with some caution. Chrysostom was not a systematic theologian. Most of our understanding of his theology comes from over nine hundred surviving homilies spanning more than twenty years of public ministry. It bears holding in mind that Chrysostom may have evolved away from or further entrenched within some of the following positions. Nevertheless, the following serves as a cursory introduction to the thought world of Chrysostom, to the extent it benefits this study's search for Chrysostom's aims and motivations.

At its core, his theology rises from his understanding of God's original intention for creation and society and ends in exhortation for society to return to this original design.<sup>58</sup> Chrysostom envisaged God's primordial order to consist of two parts: first, God did not create social stratification:

God in the beginning did not make one man rich and another poor. Nor did he afterwards take and show to anyone treasure of gold, and deny to the others the right of searching for it: rather he left the earth free to all alike.<sup>59</sup>

Chrysostom's sense of initial divine order provides an essential "wall" for his theological framework. For Chrysostom, salvation history necessitates a return to a pre-fall order of society. If that society was without stratification then Chrysostom's aim will necessarily entail methods for returning to this divinely orchestrated egalitarianism.

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<sup>58</sup> For a graphical representation of Chrysostom's understanding of salvation history see the appendix.

<sup>59</sup> John Chrysostom, *1 Timothy 4:1-3*, vol. 13 of *NPNF*, 1st ser., Philip Schaff, trans. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 447.

Second, Chrysostom posited a strict sense of divine ownership over all creation. Avila calls this Chrysostom's *theistic factor*:

Throughout our selection of passages, the theistic factor is dominant. John looked at the prevailing social order and saw that it did not seriously, practically recognize the Creator as the Absolute Owner of all things. So John went 'back to basics' and emphasized that all wealth, primarily and essentially, belongs to God, the one Lord.<sup>60</sup>

John, then, could extol his congregation to any action he could identify as God's intention; since God is seen as the ultimate owner of all resources his intentions necessarily trump all others.

This is precisely the rhetoric he utilizes throughout his homilies, as evidenced in the following passage where Chrysostom questions the rich in his audience:

But is not this an evil, that you alone should have the Lord's property, that you alone should enjoy what is common? Is not 'the earth God's, and the fullness thereof?' If then our possessions belong to one common Lord, they belong also to our fellow-servants.<sup>61</sup>

God as ultimate owner has purposed resources for the benefit of humanity. Therefore if individual owners hoard resources to their own benefit they disregard God's ownership of their resources. Human ownership is a misnomer, more aptly labeled stewardship.<sup>62</sup>

Chrysostom's ideal for goods is that they be held in common. Commonly held resources reflect both God's intention of social egalitarianism as well as God's enduring right to ultimate control over resources. Krupp notes that John's idealism caused him to encourage the city of Constantinople to engage in a massive redistribution of wealth so that all citizens would have basic necessities met.<sup>63</sup> However, the ideal of commonly held goods often ran aground against the social reality. He therefore, typically made pragmatic prognostications to the rich concerning

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<sup>60</sup> Avila, *Private Ownership*, 102; Avila also argues that John's sense of God's ownership was real, not symbolic or ceremonial, 97.

<sup>61</sup> Chrysostom, *1 Tim 4:1-3*, *NPNF*, 447-8.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Krupp, *Shepherding the Flock of God*, 189.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-1.

their wealth. Gonzalez notes this tension in Chrysostom—on the one hand, all should be returned to common stewardship; on the other, rich and poor are not classifications that will soon go away.<sup>64</sup> Instead, Chrysostom typically worked within the system of his day by seeking to reform the use of wealth. Krupp argues that John accepted only two legitimate purposes for wealth: first, to advance the Church. Second, wealth should be utilized to meet basic human needs.<sup>65</sup> Anything beyond these uses entails luxury and, therefore, a departure from God’s design for wealth.

Chrysostom did not believe that wealth itself was evil. As we discussed in the previous chapter, Chrysostom did adhere to the public paradigm of limited goods, which enabled him to consider the origination of wealth as sinful.<sup>66</sup> Krupp explains that Chrysostom employed two assumptions about the gaining of wealth: first, wealth is always achieved at another’s expense. Second it is always achieved wrongly if one looks closely.<sup>67</sup> These two assumptions are perhaps never so explicitly combined as in the following from his sermon on 1 Tim 4:1-3:

But suppose the wealth is not gained wrongfully. And how is this possible? So destructive a passion is avarice, that to grow rich without injustice is impossible . . . . But what if he succeeded to his father’s inheritance? Then he received what had been gathered by injustice. For it was not from Adam that his ancestor inherited riches, but, of the many that were before him, some one must probably have unjustly taken and enjoyed the goods of others.<sup>68</sup>

While Chrysostom insisted on the wrongful acquisition of all wealth he admitted that one might have inherited innocently. He insisted that one should not be held responsible for the “covetous

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<sup>64</sup> Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth*, 205.

<sup>65</sup> Krupp, *Shepherding the Flock of God*, 192; cf. Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth*, 203.

<sup>66</sup> See 12-13.

<sup>67</sup> Krupp, *Shepherding the Flock of God*, 193.

<sup>68</sup> Chrysostom, *1 Timothy 4:1-3*, *NPNF*, 447.

acts” of his/her predecessor. In regard to the nature of wealth, he concluded that it was neither good nor bad.<sup>69</sup> Moral uprightness was achieved or denied not by the possession of wealth, but by the use of it.

Almsgiving is the appropriate use of wealth. Almsgiving, in accordance with the two uses Krupp has identified, could take on several forms like contributing to the church treasury or providing food, shelter, or clothing for an impoverished person(s). Avila notes that Chrysostom regarded almsgiving as the redistribution of wealth to the proper holders. Chrysostom wanted the wealthy to not only see their possessions as under God’s ownership, but also as owed to the impoverished. This is why Chrysostom can regard hoarding as robbery: the excess in one person’s holdings could and should be used for the sake of the one struggling to meet basic needs. Chrysostom explicated this principle in a homily on Lazarus and the rich man:

. . . [T]he failure to share one’s own goods with others is theft and swindle and defraudation. What is this testimony? Accusing the Jews by the prophet, God says, “The earth has brought forth her increase, and you have not brought forth your tithes; but the theft of the poor is in your houses.” Since you have not given the accustomed offerings, He says, you have stolen the goods of the poor. He says this to show the rich that they hold the goods of the poor even if they have inherited them from their fathers or no matter how they have gathered their wealth . . . . For our money is the Lords, however we may have gathered it. If we provide for those in need, we shall obtain great plenty.<sup>70</sup>

Chrysostom went on to compare the wealthy to a manager of God’s treasury. God has intended that the treasury be dispensed among the poor and almsgiving is the method chosen for dissemination. In this way almsgiving was the proper realignment of goods in order to meet God’s original design, wherein all humans were without need.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.; for further discussion of Chrysostom and the nature of wealth see Avila, *Ownership*, 87-88. Brandle, “The Sweetest Passage,” 129; Krupp, *Shepherding the Flock of God*, 192-94.

<sup>70</sup> John Chrysostom, “Second Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man,” in *St. John Chrysostom on Wealth and Poverty*, Catharine Roth, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984) 49-50.

Brandle adds important nuance to Chrysostom's vision for almsgiving in his case study on Chrysostom's interpretation of Mt 25:31-46. Brandle seeks to illustrate a connection between social ethics (i.e. almsgiving) and salvation. He highlights Chrysostom's doctrine of the real presence/incarnation of Christ in the poor as the integrative force behind all of Chrysostom's theology.<sup>71</sup> Brandle posits that Chrysostom thought redemption was ongoing, available in the opportunity to provide food and warmth for the Christ living in the impoverished.<sup>72</sup> In this way, almsgiving and generosity are received directly by Christ and are an integral part of the salvation experience.

In conclusion, Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty revolved around his concept of God's original design for society and resources. He believed social stratification was a human creation, whereas God's original intention was social egalitarianism. He also attempted to illustrate for his constituents that God was the ultimate and only owner of their resources. He did not view wealth as essentially evil. He did believe, along with his contemporaries, that wealth was only achieved unjustly. However, he also resisted qualifying wealth as good. Instead, he regarded the *use* of inherited wealth as the standard for judging it good or evil. He believed that almsgiving, properly executed, could realign resources the way God had intended. He also believed almsgiving to play a crucial role in salvation, because he believed in the real, incarnational presence of Christ in the materially poor.

Now that a theological foundation has been laid we may proceed to inquire about Chrysostom's aims and motivations. Was Chrysostom simply preaching his congregation and society toward a renewal of God's original order? If so, could it be said that Chrysostom's

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<sup>71</sup> Brandle, "The Sweetest Passage", 136.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 137.



motivation was shaped exclusively by theology? Or did he utilize his theology to reinforce the societal and cultural norms of his milieu? If so, could we declare contemporary social-scientific investigation to be valid? Or perhaps, the evidence does not place him neatly into either category. The next chapter will investigate these questions along with the corresponding evidence put forth by the breadth of Chrysostom studies.

## Chapter 3

### **Motivations and Aims: the Conversation**

In this chapter I wish to provide readers with a thorough study of Chrysostom's motivations and aims concerning his theology of wealth and poverty. I will begin in the fifth-century with three of his ancient biographers, in order to grasp a contemporary reaction to Chrysostom's theology. Following the historians of Late Antiquity, I will survey more recent scholarship on the subject—beginning with the theistic factor approach, then the social-scientific approach and, finally, by reading Chrysostom through desert asceticism. I will catalogue each scholar's methodology and contributions to my topic. As this research unfolds, thematic concerns will emerge. It will become apparent where scholarship agrees and where there are considerable differences. I will also attempt to acknowledge any positions offered by scholarship that are not substantiated with correlating Chrysostom evidence. Additionally, I will endeavor to articulate questions derived from identified positions. Finally, I hope to synthesize the work highlighted in this chapter in order to adequately characterize Chrysostom's motivations and aims.

#### Historians of Late Antiquity

Chrysostom's contemporaries and the following generation took great note of the orator's life and travails. His student, Palladius wrote an apologetic biography of him shortly after his death. Church historians Socrates and Sozomen wrote about his life, ministry, and depositions within fifty years. By gathering their impressions of his motivations and aims I seek to assert a Late Ancient answer to my question. Space will be given to acknowledge the biases of each source and the occasion for their writing. However, most pertinent to this thesis will be the

manner in which the sources describe Chrysostom's theology rather than their conclusions about the man.<sup>73</sup>

At the time of Chrysostom's depositions, Palladius was bishop of Helenopolis, probably having been consecrated by John. He investigated one of the far-reaching controversies of Chrysostom's Constantinopolitan career and was in attendance at the Synod of the Oak where John was first deposed. Afterward, Palladius led a delegation to Rome in order to plead John's case before Pope Innocent I. He also suffered exile by the Emperor Arcadius for his connection to Chrysostom and likely wrote his *Dialogue* from this exile.<sup>74</sup> Sterk contends that the occasion for Palladius' *Dialogue* was twofold: first, he sought to vindicate Chrysostom from the charges and treatment of his two depositions. Second, he hoped to set John up as the archetype of the pious bishop.<sup>75</sup> However, Palladius does provide an eye-witness account of Chrysostom's time in Constantinople. Biased as his assertions may be, he is not easily tossed aside by scholarship.<sup>76</sup>

Palladius briefly mentions Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. He focuses instead on the details of Chrysostom's two exiles. Since the majority of modern writing on Chrysostom centers on his theology of wealth and poverty, it may come as a surprise that Palladius, a friend and colleague, makes scant mention of it. His brevity is actually his foremost contribution to our discourse. He writes about Chrysostom's relationship to wealth and poverty in matter-of-fact tone and only utilizes scripture in justifying his actions. Scripture, then, could be seen as Palladius' perspective on Chrysostom's motivating factor. His appeal to scripture and

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<sup>73</sup> Sources not yet translated into English and panegyric accounts from the sixth-century onward will not be included in this discussion.

<sup>74</sup> See Robert T. Meyer, introduction to Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of Saint John Chrysostom*, ed. and trans. Robert T. Meyer, (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1985) 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> Sterk, *Renouncing the World*, 156.

<sup>76</sup> For the trustworthiness of Palladius see Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 292.

his descriptive language illustrates the commonplace nature of Chrysostom's stance and action on wealth and poverty. To a Late Ancient bishop, Chrysostom's social concern was laudable, but not astonishing enough to dissect. Modern scholars have noted the similarity between Chrysostom and the Cappadocians.<sup>77</sup> Where Palladius does describe Chrysostom's actions, they are astonishing to modern readers, yet commonplace to the author himself. His most lengthy descriptions involve Chrysostom's reforms as bishop of Constantinople:

After this he began to speak about injustice, condemning avarice, that metropolis of evil, with the intent of building a firm foundation for righteousness. . . . Then he stirred up the party of purse watchers and he called attention to their way of life. He begged them to be satisfied with their wages and not be forever chasing after the savory odors of the wealthy. . . . Next he applied the sword of correction against the rich, lancing the abscesses of their souls, and he admonished them to be humble and considerate of the rest of mankind.<sup>78</sup>

He also details Chrysostom's reduction of episcopal spending and the redirection of funds toward a hospital. These brief selections are the entirety of Palladius' words on Chrysostom and social finances.

In other passages, Palladius does illustrate a general admiration for voluntary poverty, simplicity, and generosity.<sup>79</sup> Again, this demonstrates his comfort with Chrysostom's theology. His comfort is important to our study because it provides for the possibility that Chrysostom was motivated, perhaps even subconsciously, by his theological rearing. The modern tendency to regard him as unique perhaps has more to do with the uniqueness of his rhetorical flourish than the content of his message.

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<sup>77</sup> See Brandle, "This Sweetest Passage," 130; cf. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 59-60, 63-64, Brown draws parallels between Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, and Augustine.

<sup>78</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Constantinopolitan Socrates Scholasticus wrote his *Ecclesiastical History* as a continuation of Eusebius' seminal history. He aimed at impartiality and reporting factual information. He does not claim the authority of an eye-witness to Chrysostom's affair, but he was a resident of the capital during the time period. He composed his history between 438 and 443.

Socrates' basic concern was to recount the events of Chrysostom's episcopal career in Constantinople. Accordingly, he makes little to no mention of John's economic theology. He does suggest that John's moral expectations were exceptional for the age.<sup>80</sup> He also regards Chrysostom as overly stubborn, jealous, politically aloof, and all too generous with forgiveness for baptized sinners.<sup>81</sup> Again, what are we to conclude from his lack of interest in Chrysostom's social concern? It is possible he was unaware of it or simply thought it unimportant to his work. If he was aware of it, we can at least deduce that it was not of significance to him, which is not inconsistent with the hypothesis that Chrysostom's theology of wealthy and poverty was commonplace. Therefore his motivations and aims must at least have appeared to Late Antique observers as comparable to the Christian norm. I would not deny Chrysostom nuance from his contemporaries, only that for bystanders like Socrates or Palladius such nuance was of little consequence.

Sozomen, a lawyer from Palestine, wrote his *Church History* in Constantinople between 439 and 450.<sup>82</sup> The history relies heavily on Socrates and where Socrates sought unbiased objective history, Sozomen delivers his biases liberally. However, where Socrates provides little

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<sup>80</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.4-6.5.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 6.4, 6.11, 6.15-16, and 6.21.

<sup>82</sup> See Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 293.

information germane to this thesis, Sozomen several times delves into Chrysostom's relationship to the wealthy and the common. In describing Chrysostom's brazen ministry at Antioch he writes, "This boldness pleased the people, but grieved the wealthy and the powerful, who were guilty of most of the vices which he denounced."<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere Sozomen writes that it was common for Chrysostom to "exhort the powerful to return to the practice of virtue when they abused their wealth."<sup>84</sup> What Sozomen assumes is that his readers knew John was right in his exhortation. Again, this illustrates the commonplace nature of Chrysostom's preaching on the topic.

However, Sozomen also keys modern readers into the nuance of Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. Sozomen records a conversation between Chrysostom and the wealthy widow Olympias. Chrysostom becomes aware of Olympias' uncritical generosity toward well accommodated clerics and exhorts her to apply her generosity only to those in need. According to Sozomen, John's pragmatism further increased the enmity of some Constantinopolitan clergy.<sup>85</sup> Whether Sozomen relates the historical reality or makes a conjecture is tangential to the point for this study. That Sozomen thought it was believable for his readers to think Chrysostom's prescription for alms might elicit clerical animosity is instructive. Perhaps Chrysostom's theology was common enough, but in practice was inconsistent with the laity's perceptions of Church conduct. In this sense, Chrysostom's theology flows nicely with concurrent theological musings, but his implementation of that theology may have swum upstream against the reality of episcopal policy, at least in Constantinople.

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<sup>83</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.2.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.8.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.9.

The Late Ancient view of Chrysostom revolves around the circumstances of his two controversial depositions. Their silence on or scant inclusion of Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty perhaps indicates the commonplace nature of Chrysostom's theology during this time period. All three wrote positively of generosity and voluntary poverty. And Sozomen's description of Chrysostom's relationship with the episcopal house of Constantinople leaves room for the possibility that Chrysostom's aims did not represent a homogenous Christian response to a theological framework that may have been homogenous. If nothing else, their voices should compel us to intently seek to understand Chrysostom in his own age and theological milieu.

#### Theistic Factor

The Theistic factor approach attempts to view Chrysostom's motivations and goals through his relationship to God. Generally this approach gives Chrysostom's self-evaluation credence, wherein John is motivated by the disparity between society and God's original plan and aims at re-enacting that social design. Scholars utilize this design to varying degrees. The variance is perhaps attributable to the issue of wealth and poverty playing either a minor or major role in their own research. For instance, Chrysostomus Baur wrote a seminal Chrysostom biography, but devoted only a chapter to Chrysostom's moral teachings.

Baur argues that Chrysostom's moral doctrine was the central aim of his entire ministry.<sup>86</sup> Central to that moral doctrine was the issue of wealth and poverty. Baur counts ninety sermons exclusively devoted to the topic, which does not include the numerous occasions the orator "wandered" into the subject.<sup>87</sup> Baur places Chrysostom's motivation within the realm of his

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<sup>86</sup> Baur, *John Chrysostom*, 373.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

sincere anger at the disparity between the luxury of rich Christians and the putrid subsistence of those in the streets.<sup>88</sup> One might acknowledge that this is only a tangential connection to Chrysostom's notion of God; however, the evidence he notes illustrates that Chrysostom's anger is couched in a sense of cooperation with God. For instance, he cites a Chrysostom sermon that maligns those who ignore beggars because they have ignored Christ, who is present in their poverty.<sup>89</sup> Baur also encourages interpreters to trust Chrysostom: "The sympathetic concern for the poor and unfortunate came from the heart of Chrysostom."<sup>90</sup> Here Baur ventures into territory beyond the scope of objective history, but his work leading to this judgment aligns closely with the available evidence. His work on Chrysostom's motivations also illustrates his adherence to the theistic factor approach, since Chrysostom's anger comes not from cultural, rational, or even moral sources, but from a conviction about the identity of God.

As far as Chrysostom's aim, Baur explicates several elements: first, Chrysostom self-designated himself as an ambassador for the poor.<sup>91</sup> Second, his advocacy took the shape of aiming his congregants toward almsgiving.<sup>92</sup> These alms were not offerings to the church treasury, because the treasury was intended for travelers, widows, the sick, captives, and consecrated virgins.<sup>93</sup> Instead, Chrysostom encouraged individual patronage to the poor. Third, he intended alms to be unconditional for the purpose of dignity.<sup>94</sup> Fourth, Chrysostom concluded

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 377-78.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



that the slavery system was a consistent threat to the redemption of God's creation and sought reform, arguing for equality between slave and master, and even by idealizing emancipation.<sup>95</sup> Baur tends to ignore, or be unaware of, further questions around Chrysostom's aims. For instance, he does not inquire as to whether Chrysostom's advocacy for the poor materialized in ways that did indeed improve conditions for the impoverished. Instead, he takes the orator at his word, perhaps too generously. However, he is formative for contemporary Chrysostom studies and deserves consideration as this study progresses.

Unlike Baur, Avila sets Chrysostom's motivation squarely within his understanding of God. It is from Avila's work that I have drawn the designation of the "theistic factor":

Throughout our selection of passages, the theistic factor is dominant. John looked at the prevailing social order and saw that it did not seriously, practically recognize the Creator as the Absolute Owner of all things. So John went "back to basics" and emphasized that all wealth, primarily and essentially, belongs to God, the one Lord.<sup>96</sup>

Avila's evidence is sound. He scrupulously advances the thesis that Chrysostom contrasted God's design for resources with the way the wealthy actually used their resources. If God was truly to be owner then property utilization should be in accord with the intentions of God.

However, Roman property law emphasized the absolute control of an owner, thus justifying any purchase or use of resources.<sup>97</sup> Chrysostom, in Avila's view, saw the disparity between God as owner and his parishioners' adherence to Roman property law. He was thus motivated by this disparity and sought to transform the ownership attitudes of Christians and reconcile them to the property intentions of the Absolute Owner.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>96</sup> Avila, *Ownership*, 102.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 93, 97, 103-104.

In regard to Chrysostom's aims, Avila contends that every facet was motivated by Chrysostom's vision of God. Since God created all humans without social stratification, Chrysostom directed his congregation toward social equality.<sup>99</sup> Avila sees the transformation of property law as essential to Chrysostom's aims. God initially created resources that were common to humankind; therefore, one must come to view his/herself as a steward of God's resources. Once humankind's perspective is transformed, they will work to make those resources common again through the discipline of almsgiving.<sup>100</sup> This designation of stewardship rather than ownership sets Chrysostom in sharp contrast with his culture and again emphasizes Chrysostom's central motivation: returning the social order to God's design. Additionally, God endowed all humans with dignity; thus any social degradation or distinction must be rectified with an awakening to universal human solidarity.<sup>101</sup>

In summary, Avila sees two Chrysostom goals: first, a redefinition of property law, moving individuals and families from owners in the Roman sense to stewards of God's materials. Second, he seeks a return to the social equality intended by God, wherein no one would go without basic necessities and an attitude of solidarity would be pervasive amongst every rank and class. Avila never views these claims critically. His work remains within the realm of theological inquiry—he simply attempts to sketch Chrysostom's teachings, not question their effectiveness. It is also worth noting that Avila's work on Chrysostom appears in a book that surveys early Christian teaching on ownership. To be sure, ownership was a vital factor in Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty, but it is a narrow window into the whole of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 94, 98.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 98-99, 103.

Chrysostom's perspective. Therefore, while Avila contributes compelling evidence, we should be careful to read him in the context of his own thesis and resist any propensity to push his claims about ownership to credential universal claims.

Gonzalez mirrors Avila's proposals. He too views Chrysostom's motivations within his awareness of the disparity between God's design and the reality of human society. Gonzalez, however, identifies the disparity as being between a divine anthropology of mutuality and the insulated hierarchy of Late Antiquity:

Chrysostom's theology is built on the presupposition of a greater continuity between creation and redemption than much later theology, especially Western held. Thus mercy and mutual service are the mark of both being human and being a Christian. The created order has been organized by God in such a way that it moves all of creation toward its intended goal. Human solidarity is born both out of our created similarity and out of our created differences, for both are intended to bring us together.<sup>102</sup>

He goes on to argue that Chrysostom saw dependence as an integral component of the human person, yet John's society smoldered in the independent attitude of the wealthy. For evidence Gonzalez cites a Chrysostom homily that imagined two cities, one comprised of just the wealthy and one of only the non-wealthy. Chrysostom mused, which city should fare better? The rich without the production of the day laborers or the common people without the burden of the rich? In the end, Chrysostom imagined that the common city would thrive, but the rich, overrun with jealousy would come to destroy it.<sup>103</sup> For Gonzalez this supports his claim that Chrysostom was motivated by a divinely arranged society of mutuality.

If mutuality was to be achieved, Chrysostom had to aim at the transformation of social attitudes. This is why Gonzalez's primary argument about Chrysostom's aim is the bond of solidarity—a relational attitude based in social equality. However, solidarity for Chrysostom,

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<sup>102</sup> Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth*, 202.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 207-208; John Chrysostom, *1 Corinthians* 34.8.

argues Gonzalez, was not purely emotional. The aim was to manifest itself in the communal holding of property. Like Avila, Gonzalez sees the transformation of Roman property law as essential to Chrysostom's vision:

The traditional Roman view of property as absolute dominion must be rejected in favor both of common property and of a narrowly defined and clearly limited private property. Private property is really not such; it is rather a usufruct or a loan given to its owners as administrators for the goal of human solidarity. . . . Thus both the physical welfare of the poor and the salvation of the rich are at stake.<sup>104</sup>

The divinely ordered community includes the redemption of the rich through alms, provides for the needs of the poor, and enables the destitute to offer a priceless opportunity to the rich. In this sense, Chrysostom aims for social and economic mutuality, in Gonzalez and Avila's word, solidarity.

Gonzalez too remains in the field of reconstructing Chrysostom's theology. He never questions Chrysostom's theological sincerity or the effectiveness of his claims. He also does not search for extra-theological sources for his motivations. The theistic factor remains the paradigm through which he reads Chrysostom. This is not to say that Gonzalez fails to interpret Chrysostom within his social context, but his primary investigation centers on Chrysostom's teachings, not on social factors other than theology that might have motivated him toward the aims he sought.

Krupp too utilizes the theistic factor. Property and ownership are again the primary operating considerations:

John's preaching on wealth must be viewed in the context of his teaching on property and ownership. Ultimate ownership belongs to God alone and all possession by [humans was] conditional, a form of stewardship. The issue was not absolute control of property because of ownership but rather ascertaining God's will in the use of property. The

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 209.

words, ‘mine own’ are a “curse and abominable . . . brought in by the Devil.” The love of money seen in the concept of absolute ownership corrupts the soul.<sup>105</sup>

Krupp interprets Chrysostom through John’s conviction that God is the rightful owner of all property. Therefore those who possess property must see themselves as stewards and distribute their wealth in a manner faithful to divine character. However, Krupp also argues that Chrysostom wished to create a system of patronage that relieved the clergy of monetary responsibility. If the wealthy would take to distributing their wealth to the poor on their own, the episcopal administration could make available more time for pastoral care.<sup>106</sup>

Krupp summarizes Chrysostom’s aims succinctly: needs-based moderation and the condemnation of ostentation. Krupp remarks that on at least one occasion Chrysostom urged his congregants to consider communal ownership. Typically, however, he moderated his objective by deploring luxury as a selfish misuse of resources that depleted the Church treasury and the availability of necessities for the struggling classes.<sup>107</sup> Needs-based moderation, however, freed resources from selfish encumbrances for the sake of providing for the needs of others. Chrysostom’s hoped moderation would enact a pre-fall community of generosity and resource equality. Such a community rectified two wrongs: On the one hand, it would rid society of social stratification and unbalanced resource holdings; on the other, it would provide the opportunity for a spiritual cleansing of individuals who might choose to relinquish the sinful attitudes of selfishness and absolute ownership.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Krupp, *Shepherding*, 189.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-192.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-197.

Krupp's work to this point raises a pertinent question: *Did Chrysostom aim at socially elevating the poor or only toward the social demotion of the rich?* Krupp's work acknowledges Chrysostom's vision for the wealthy: almsgiving, moderation, generosity, dependence upon God, and stewardship rather than ownership, but he does not proffer a prophetic voice to the poor. For the poor, perhaps; but what are the poor to do? Have they a role to play in the transformation of the city back to providential structure? Or can only the wealthy reclaim society? These questions and others will lead us into the social-scientific approach considered below. Where the theistic factor encircles theological issues, the social-scientific approach seeks to uncover Chrysostom in relation to the entirety of his social world. Rather than asking what he taught about God, the social-scientific approach will ask: What was his relationship to the rich? The poor? To social movements?

Brandle's theological approach to Chrysostom centers on John's incarnational reading of Matthew 25:31-46. Whereas others hinge their argument on Chrysostom's understanding of providential design, Brandle focuses on Chrysostom's argument for the real presence of Christ in the poor.<sup>109</sup> Brandle contends that Chrysostom taught in response to Christ's presence in the poor for the sake of the poor's temporal salvation and the eternal salvation of the rich. At this point it is helpful to quote Brandle at length as he precisely recalls his argument:

John Chrysostom's thoughts on redemption are particularly impressive. Redemption for him is not limited to what happened on the cross. Redemption is not something finished, but rather something that continues to happen in our everyday life. John formulates this conviction with the help of statements taken from Matt 25:31-46. Continual meditation on this passage allowed John's conviction to grow that the Risen One was not only giving us a steady stream of impulses to help the poor but was also promising us his helping presence. For he who feeds the hungry, gives drink to the thirsty, clothes the naked, and visits the sick and imprisoned comes into contact with Christ the Redeemer. Out of love,

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<sup>109</sup> Brandle, "This Sweetest Passage," 133.

Christ is prepared to be fed by his servants. He is hungry so that we do not need to starve. It is for our salvation that Christ goes naked.<sup>110</sup>

Chrysostom was then compelled to see Christ ontologically present in the beggars as he did in the mystery of the Eucharist. Therefore, the wealthy must give alms to ease the suffering of Christ and receive his grace through the alms. Brandle also notes that Chrysostom sought the individual generosity of alms over offerings to the church, also in order to ease Christ's situation. Offerings to the church were likely to be allocated to furnishings or to the treasury, alms met needs directly. Brandle translates Chrysostom on this point:

For what is the use of his table being full of golden cups while he perishes with hunger? First fill him who is hungry, and then abundantly deck out his table also. Do you make him a cup of gold, while you fail to give him a cup of cold water? And what is the use of that? Do you provide cloths bespangled with gold for his table, while you fail to give himself so much as the necessary covering?<sup>111</sup>

This is not to say that Chrysostom did not utilize episcopal funds for poverty alleviation. In fact, Chrysostom busily sought deep reforms in episcopal expenditures in both Antioch and Constantinople.

Unlike the theistic factor voices we have encountered thus far, Brandle does investigate some of Chrysostom's concrete approaches to social transformation. First, he gives a comprehensive description of Chrysostom's definition of alms. He classifies it as "a behavior of loving openness to fellow humans and can be expressed in varying acts of compassion."<sup>112</sup> Compassion could mean a word of encouragement, money, or some other form of material support. Brandle maintains that John saw this spirit of alms as the highest value of asceticism, a path to becoming like God. Alongside the salvific aims already described, Brandle also notes

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>111</sup> John Chrysostom as quoted and translated by Brandle, "This Sweetest Passage," 134.

<sup>112</sup> Brandle, "This Sweetest Passage," 131.

John's hope that such alms would produce a grand solidarity within his congregation and cities. Chrysostom also employed his theological framework in the activities of the churches in Antioch and Constantinople. In Antioch the church founded a hostel for travelers, a hospital for the ill, and a registry for the support of impoverished widows. Brandle does note that John wished the clergy could have been relieved of these duties to attend to more spiritual matters. In Constantinople, however, Chrysostom appears to have been a reformer. For instance, Chrysostom diverted funds from clerical housing to a central hospital. Then he erected several smaller hospitals and began construction on a leper colony.<sup>113</sup> For Brandle, these projects and almsgiving are means toward caring for the present Christ. In sum, Chrysostom was motivated by his understanding that Christ endures in the earthly suffering of the indigent and marginalized. He desired, then, to move his congregation in the direction of receiving the grace of this Christ through a broad definition of individual almsgiving, a renewed spirit of social solidarity, and corporate projects like hostels and hospitals.

Chrysostom's most recent biographer, J.N.D. Kelly, combines the above scholars. He, like Brandle, assigns the height of Chrysostom's motivations to his reading of Matthew 25:31-46.<sup>114</sup> This reading, according to Kelly, was created by Chrysostom's strict adherence to Antiochene literalism, which also allowed Chrysostom to conclude that God's original design did not include private ownership or social stratification. Along with Avila, Krupp, and Gonzalez, Kelly sees Chrysostom aiming his congregation toward a perspective of generous stewardship actualized through alms reliant upon a genuine spirit and not upon the worthiness of

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 132; cf. Palladius, *Dialogue*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 98.



the recipient.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, Kelly views Chrysostom as aiming his audience toward an attitude of spiritual egalitarianism, wherein Christ shows no partiality for social status, but invites cripples and princes alike to his banquet.<sup>116</sup> This again, alludes to Gonzalez and Avila's solidarity. Kelly also notes that it would be incorrect to label Chrysostom's aims as de-facto socialism, because Chrysostom never envisaged a central government controlling generosity, but depended upon the voluntary divestment of individuals.<sup>117</sup> Finally, he mentions that Chrysostom's ideal was a city modeled after the communal virtue of the monastics.<sup>118</sup>

There remains a subsequent approach within the broad boundaries of the theistic factor: orthodox confessionalism. Such scholars have investigated Chrysostom in order to outline his theology, praise it, and defend its persistent authority. At times, their work borders on panegyric, but they also provide a window into the orator's lasting imprint upon moral thinking. They often exhibit presumptions that hinder the progression from research to conclusion. However, it would also be fallacious to assume their intentions undermine any research and/or interpretive skills they may possess. For this reason, they should be included in our Chrysostom investigation.

Costel's work provides helpful insight into John's anthropology, which benefits the pursuit of his motivations and aims. Costel argues for a functional dipartite Chrysostom anthropology: peace and friendship.<sup>119</sup> Costel urges that peace and friendship were the quintessential function of humanness—to divest of these was tantamount to the divestment of

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 98-99

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ciulinaru Costel. "The Priority of Virtues in the Social-Moral Order of Life of All Mankind, According to Saint John Chrysostom," *Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies* 3, no. 4 (March 2011): 204.

one's basic human nature. Because anthropology is function then John can aim at the functions in his sermons; people should move toward attitudes and actions of peace and friendship, thereby integrating the basic attributes of God's human design. These more colloquial terms are reminiscent of Avila and Gonzalez's word: solidarity.<sup>120</sup> They are also words drawn from Chrysostom's own language. However, Costel only defines these terms through hyperbolic analogy:

From the evangelical orchard, speckled with all kinds of flowers, one more beautiful, scented and attractive than the other, our great moralist gathered and given the bunch of flowers of peace and friendship, of sincere collaboration and understanding, which surpasses all barriers.<sup>121</sup>

Costel also fails to consider Chrysostom's social or contemporary theological influence. Instead, he seems to presume a motivation drawn strictly from scripture.

Dumitrașcu's confessional approach comes along with his own aim to shape his modern readers and their understanding of wealth and poverty. For this reason, his work and Chrysostom's are difficult to distinguish—he appears to presume full accord between himself and Chrysostom on the subject. Nonetheless, he outlines several integral observations regarding Chrysostom's motivations and aims. First, he insists that John harbored personal motivations:

Chrysostom understood the paradox of wealth that makes you poor and poverty that can enrich you, because he had experienced both. He sold his own property and used it to help the poor, convinced that only in so doing could he truly serve God.<sup>122</sup>

Mayer and Allen have refuted that John came from wealth, but as a desert ascetic he would have likely left behind whatever means he possessed.<sup>123</sup> The notion that Chrysostom gave up his

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<sup>120</sup> Avila, *Ownership*, 98-99, 103; Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth*, 202.

<sup>121</sup> Costel, "Priority of Virtues," 207.

<sup>122</sup> Dumitrașcu, "Poverty and Wealth," 301.

<sup>123</sup> Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, 5.

property “convinced that only in so doing could he truly serve God,” is not substantiated by Dumitraşcu. The second motivation Dumitraşcu cites is primary. He regards the reality of sin as Chrysostom’s prime motivation. Sin is a reality that is easily manifested in the life of luxury. One might rightly observe her relation to property as one of caretaker; more often, however, the wealthy became entrapped by their wealth, the possession becoming possessor. Chrysostom saw this lifestyle as inherently oppositional to freedom in Christ.<sup>124</sup>

If, as Dumitraşcu argues, the presence of depravity was a principal motivating factor for Chrysostom, then his aims rightfully sought to alleviate the reality of sin through communal mutuality, transformed relationship with property from owner to caretaker, material help for the poor and marginalized, and the practice of virtues over selfishness. Dumitraşcu proposes that Chrysostom’s ideal society would function in mutuality—sustained equally by the generosity and virtue of the rich and the labor of the poor.<sup>125</sup> Chrysostom also sought to deconstruct the cultural understanding of absolute proprietorship. Instead, Chrysostom taught that possessions were loans made available to individuals by their true heavenly owner, to be utilized in acts of love and generosity.<sup>126</sup> Finally, Dumitraşcu identifies two Chrysostomic hopes for the rich:

When he speaks to the rich, he aims to achieve two goals—on one hand, exhorting them to help the poor and marginalized (because it is not their fault that they were born so or never had the skills to enhance their small inheritance); and, on the other hand, seeking the purification of their fortunes, gained by their rising above their selfishness and by practicing the virtues (especially charity).<sup>127</sup>

The first aim intimates a complex notion: the poor do not deserve the consequences of their social status. Dumitraşcu does not delve further into Chrysostom’s thought world around the

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<sup>124</sup> Dumitraşcu, “Poverty and Wealth,” 301-302.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

origins of poverty plight. Instead, he focuses on Chrysostom's aim for the rich—to use God's riches to meet needs. His next point also centers on Chrysostom's aim for the rich: the disintegration of selfishness by way of charity. Orthodox practitioners utilize Dumitraşcu's research in exhortation, but his findings fall closely in line with the other theistic factor voices we have encountered. He too does not situate Chrysostom in his social milieu and does not seek to discover to what degree Chrysostom was effective in enacting his aims.

In summary, the theistic factor approach offers several heretofore undisputed conclusions. First, Chrysostom found motivation from his sense that God was the ultimate owner of all resources. Second, Chrysostom sought to move his constituents from owners to stewards through unconditional almsgiving. The theistic approach has also posited solidarity as one of Chrysostom's primary aims. The definition of this solidarity, however, remains ambiguous. They have also done little to consider Chrysostom's society and its influence on his aims. For further thoughts on solidarity and a thorough reconstruction of Chrysostom's culture, we turn next to the social-scientific approach.

### The Social-Scientific Approach

Leyerle provides a bit of a bridge from the work exhibited in the theistic factor to the social-scientific approach. On the one hand, she submits a profoundly theistic motivation and aim, while reaching her conclusions not by theology, but by reconstructing Chrysostom's social situation. She begins with rebuilding the Late Antique system of *philotimia*—whereby the wealthy asserted their social status of patron by procuring clients in the local marketplace.<sup>128</sup> The *agora*, therefore, served primarily as a theater for social stratification rather than the center of provision for basic needs. Patronage assured work for the able as well as prestige for the rich.

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<sup>128</sup> Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," 31-32.

The destitute, however, had no commodity to offer in the emerging patron-client system. The system of public honor often, according to Chrysostom, pushed the poor to harrowing tricks like eating through leather or piercing their own skull with a nail.<sup>129</sup>

Leyerle argues that Chrysostom was motivated by the inherent sin of vanity in *philotimia*, while also hoping to provide for the indigent.<sup>130</sup> The constant pursuit of honor in *philotimia* enslaved the rich to status rather than Christ and left the poor bereft of a viable place in society. The sinful effects of *philotimia* also found their way into the church. Since status was achieved through public perception, every appearance became an attempt to reinforce positive perception, even in church. Leyerle identifies this, too, as a key motivating factor for Chrysostom's theology.<sup>131</sup> She also briefly argues that Chrysostom was equally motivated by Christ's austere life and lowly beginnings.<sup>132</sup> More insidiously, however, Leyerle also posits that Chrysostom was motivated by his own financial gain in seeking to reform *philotimia*. According to Leyerle, *philotimia* was a threat to priestly authority over the rich as well as a threat to the consistent flow of money into the church treasury. She provides little evidence for her point; nonetheless, she does assert that Chrysostom had only to gain in comfort and wealth if he could achieve his aim at a reformed Christian culture of honor and status.<sup>133</sup>

Even if Chrysostom could be shown to have sought more tithes, it is the case that he would only have seen a share of the offerings. The church at Constantinople employed more

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<sup>129</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 21 on 1 Cor 9:1*, vol. 12 of *NPNF*, 1<sup>st</sup> ser., ed., Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA:Hendrickson, 1994).

<sup>130</sup> Leyerle, "John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," 34.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-47.

than a hundred clerical attendants and no historical account paints Chrysostom as having enjoyed lavish comforts, as Leyerle assumes. Additionally, one might ask: If Chrysostom was so concerned with his own wealth, why did he encourage disseminating money directly to individuals? Why not pursue a system in which the Church receives all funds? If the goal was more money for the clerics, then directing people to give money somewhere other than to the church is self-defeating. Regardless, Leyerle does evince Chrysostom's frustration with what he perceived to be the sinful roots of the social machinations of his day, thereby theistically grounding Chrysostom's motivation.

The aim, according to Leyerle, was to create a Christian community of mutuality. This community depended on the rich giving without constraint to the poor while the impoverished provided the rich with an opportunity to receive honor from God.<sup>134</sup> She suggests a similar Chrysostom aim as Avila and Gonzalez's of solidarity: "Chrysostom tried not only to prod wealthy Christians into acts of charity but also, and perhaps more importantly, to dislodge his rich parishioners from their conviction that an uncrossable social gulf separated them from the poor."<sup>135</sup> Mutuality, however, does not necessitate economic equality—the rich remain rich and the poor remain impoverished. There is, perhaps, inherent in greater generosity a move toward the middle for both groups, but the economic and honor stratifications remain mostly intact.

Leyerle summarizes the characteristics of the society Chrysostom was aiming for:

The traditional system has undergone some inversion but has not been supplanted. Wealth continues to undergird patron-client relations, but now it is the rich who are to take upon themselves the role of clients and court the poor, who can secure for them valuable patronal services with God. Because the poor, however, could now participate in the system of gift and countergift that structured society, Chrysostom's view of the city

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 38, 41.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 29.

shifted. No longer arising from greed, commerce now underscored humanity's mutual need.<sup>136</sup>

The aim is an attitudinal transformation of society rather than an altogether new economic system. Nonetheless, it was an aim toward a society dependent upon the participation of every stratum.

Leyerle's work on Chrysostom's motivations and aims does well to both situate him within his social world and take seriously the theistic underpinnings of his position. With the exception of the largely unwarranted charge of monetary self-interest, Leyerle has constructed an evenhanded approach to Chrysostom. However, Leyerle does appear to overlook Chrysostom's emphasis on the provision of needs. Leyerle highlights the role of the poor in society, but fails to appreciate that the system Chrysostom proposed also ensures that no person in society would go without basic necessities. The oversight is all the more ironic when Leyerle concludes her article with her translation of a Chrysostom statement that places a premium on needs:

For this reason we have built cities and markets and houses, in order that we may be united with each other—and not just in our houses, but also in the bond of love. Since our nature was created needy by the one who made us, and not self-sufficient. God has advantageously arranged that the help derived from living with each other should supply whatever we need.<sup>137</sup>

The rich need the poor in order to be honored by God and the poor need the rich that they might participate in society. But the poor also need alms, because they are starving and need bread.

Cardman also interprets Chrysostom through the language and situation of the agora, but she melds it with the language and situation of the ancient theater.<sup>138</sup> Chrysostom maligned the theater and its effects on the mores of his parish. Cardman argues Chrysostom's rhetoric is

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>137</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 19.1 on John 1:41-42*, as translated by Blake Leyerle in "John Chrysostom on Alms and the Use of Money," 43.

<sup>138</sup> Cardman, "Poverty and Wealth as Theater," 172.

intentionally theatrical so as to entertain his flock and give them opportunities to see reality.<sup>139</sup> He does this by theatricalizing rich and poor in his homilies. John takes care to create a moving image of them in the mind's eye. He wants his audience to really see their situations, but not for mere entertainment. He hopes that by seeing the exaggerated, theatricalized characters, they will be more likely to see the characters of their own lives. Cardman posits that Chrysostom drew a connection between the fiction of the theater and the fiction of social classifications. Just as the actors in a play put on masks and afterward take off the masks that conceal their true identity, so too, will Judgment Day discard the masks of social class revealing the virtuous and the wicked.<sup>140</sup> For Cardman, then, John drives toward the teaching of virtue for the sake of souls. Virtue begins with seeing the poor, responding to their needs with alms, and thereby crediting salvation to the souls of the rich.<sup>141</sup>

Cardman also postulates that Chrysostom utilizes the marketplace motif of exchange in arguing his aims. Like Leyerle before her, she sees Chrysostom recreating the marketplace in the exchange he wishes to see between the rich and poor: namely, an exchange of material (alms) on the part of the rich and spiritual (salvation) on the part of God via the poor.<sup>142</sup> She sees this as an aim at appealing to the self-interest of the rich, motivated by John's concern for their souls. Her approach, like Leyerle, fails to consider if Chrysostom cared at all for relieving the extreme deprivation to which he bore witness. She misses it even when she remarks that Chrysostom sought to shape the rich so that they would not interrogate the indigent in order to discover their

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 171.



worthiness, but would give alms wherever a need was present.<sup>143</sup> For her the meaning of the alms is entirely situated in the self-interest of the agora, sans any concern that people cease starving.

She also remarks that Chrysostom's use of the theater and marketplace in his homilies elicits an objectifying response that concretizes the social fabric.<sup>144</sup> In other words, Chrysostom's argument makes it important to society to have beggars as an opportunity to act virtuously. There is therefore no incentive to elevate the lowest class of people. In fact, the incentive is to ensure that there remain beggars to whom salvific alms may be dispensed. She goes so far to remark that part of Chrysostom's aim was for "the poor to endure their plight in patient silence."<sup>145</sup> This is an appropriate challenge to Chrysostom. The evidence does not appear to substantiate the goal of eliminating class structure altogether. Instead, Chrysostom appears to have been concerned with fashioning collegiality amongst the classes based upon respective gifts—alms from the rich, connection to God from the poor—and a system that relieved some of the pains inherent in residing in the lowest social strata. Chrysostom's aim did not, however, deconstruct class. Such an upheaval of society could only happen under the command of the fully present Christ at his *parousia*.

Kurbatov represents the sharpest social critique of Chrysostom's motivations and aims. He, like Cardman, claims that Chrysostom was not interested in transforming social hierarchies. He goes further though, proposing that Chrysostom was primarily motivated by his social standing amongst the ruling class and a desire to keep the peace between classes. He thinks that

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Chrysostom was deeply influenced by an Antiochene revolt against a tax levied by Theodosius I that threatened the livelihood of Antioch's lowest working class.<sup>146</sup> Kurbatov surmises that the rest of Chrysostom's teaching career was devoted to keeping peace between the classes.<sup>147</sup> In this pursuit Chrysostom acted as the ruling elites' chief panegyric. He defended them by creatively finding ways to justify their wealth and convince the impoverished that their plight was a blessing.<sup>148</sup> There are two significant flaws to Kurbatov's argument. First, he relies heavily upon a hasty reconstruction of Chrysostom's social standing. There is no evidence that Chrysostom considered himself part of the ruling class or had any hand in setting social policy. Kurbatov assumes that Chrysostom was born into nobility, but others have shown that the ancient remarks about Chrysostom's family do not offer conclusive information regarding Chrysostom's social-economic background.<sup>149</sup> Secondly, Kurbatov gives no reason for Chrysostom's constant invectives directed at the rich and their opulent lifestyles. If Chrysostom was indeed seeking to justify the status quo of the class system, then his rhetoric toward the rich would have been counter-productive. Kurbatov's work was generative for social-scientific inquiry into Chrysostom because it was unique and he attempted to study Chrysostom outside the hagiographic cult that surrounded him in the 1950s. However useful Kurbatov's approach may be, his conclusions are too circumstantial to be considered reliable.

Sitzler also argues that Chrysostom sought to maintain the mores of Greco-Roman stratification, while creating Christian identities for the rich and poor within the Christian community. Her argument relies on the use of identity theory in interpreting Chrysostom's

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<sup>146</sup> Kurbatov, "The Nature of Class in the Teaching of John Chrysostom," 10.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 12-13, 15.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 5-6; see Mayer, *John Chrysostom*, 5.

homilies. Identity theory proposes that groups coalesce based upon the construction of contrasts, values, and functions through discourse and narrative.<sup>150</sup> Chrysostom's homilies fall within the sphere of identity narrative. Sitzler proposes that Chrysostom created an "us" and "them" by portraying the differences between the rich, "us," and the poor, "them."<sup>151</sup> She bases this classification on Chrysostom most often directing his invectives to the rich. She does not, however, provide explicit evidence showing that Chrysostom himself identified with the rich—or the poor. According to Sitzler, Chrysostom also developed positive identities for rich and poor based upon the value of almsgiving for the rich and redemptive power for the destitute. Essential to the identity of the rich in the Christian community was the function of almsgiving, a virtue that John valued above every virtue, save voluntary poverty.<sup>152</sup> In this way, Chrysostom was able to mimic the social structure of status through benefaction within the church for the rich. Therefore, joining the Christian community did not necessitate giving up one's social honor, because that honor could be achieved through almsgiving. Thus, Chrysostom sought to create an identity for the rich in the Christian community not unlike their identity within the broader society.<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, unlike Greco-Roman social stratification of the Late Antique age, Chrysostom also sought a viable identity for the poor by endowing them with redemptive power. In Chrysostom's social imagination, the poor offered the rich salvation; "The poor and the wealthy are to be connected by a system of Christian patronage in which, in return for the provisions of the rich, the poor play a critical role in accessing eternal reward."<sup>154</sup> By taking the

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<sup>150</sup> Sitzler, "Identity," 469.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 471-472.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 477-478.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 478-479.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 475.

indigent on as clients the rich were in fact purchasing salvation. It would be the beggar who would open the gates of heaven to them. Therefore, Chrysostom aimed toward two clearly defined roles, one modeled after Greco-Roman society and the other in stark contrast to it.

Despite constructing two separate identities for the rich and poor by delineating their differences, Chrysostom also sought to develop one coherent religious community. The two identities actually function to create the one community; “I would like to suggest that Chrysostom’s discourse constructs identity in a way that allows for a plurality of identities to exist within the community.”<sup>155</sup> Sitzler also acknowledges that Chrysostom created both an “us” and “them” and sought the equation of the two:

It can be argued that Chrysostom is seeking to modify traditional relationship by making “us” = “them,” poor and rich are not poles apart, they are joint members of one group, the Christian community. Thus rich and poor are members of one group, but also distinctly different groups in themselves.<sup>156</sup>

In this way, Chrysostom did attempt to construct a highly nuanced community of stratified solidarity. On the one hand, all are equal before the Creator, endowed with gifts to be contributed to one another. On the other hand, the social stratification was allowed to comele, even be given a rightful place in the patterns of the Christian community.

Sitzler contributes several sources of Chrysostom’s motivations. First is Chrysostom’s concern for the salvation of his city and congregation. Second, he must value the Christian community enough to engage in the critical and somewhat pragmatic construction of it. Third, he either knowingly or subconsciously draws inspiration for his model from his culture’s value of honor through philotimia. One of the strengths of Sitzler’s argument is that Chrysostom does not appear to be reduced to a single motivation. He apparently drew from several sources to

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 477.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 474.

come to his conclusions. This appears to be consistent with both the evidence Sitzler offers and the evidence I have highlighted in this work.

Sitzler also adds color to our emerging picture of Chrysostom's aims. Primary for her is the aim of identity structures: first for the rich and poor, but second for the whole Christian community. As many have cited, solidarity plays a role in Chrysostom's aims, but for Sitzler, solidarity is contingent upon the identity of the rich remaining closely allied with the Greco-Roman world: "I believe that instead of seeking to transcend normal Greco-Roman social hierarchies, Chrysostom sought to accommodate them, constantly negotiating their form and function so as to complement and enhance his Christian community."<sup>157</sup> In sum, Chrysostom sought to create a powerful, critical, and without parallel Christian identity for the poor; but he also hoped to negotiate a Christian identity for the rich through almsgiving that maintained their superior social status culturally, and within the congregation.

Following Sitzler closely, de Wet also interprets Chrysostom through his interaction with the classes. De Wet proposes that Chrysostom's leading rhetorical device was the vilification of a hypothetical rich person living in luxury whilst the poor waste away in abusive austerity. De Wet argues that societal shift away from civic *euergetism* to a system of patronage further divided the rich and poor.<sup>158</sup> *Euergetism* assured honor through public generosity to civic organizations that often benefited the poor. Patronage allowed the individually rich to publically adopt clients who were typically able to offer a day's work. The indigent and destitute, unable to compete for positions as clients, were left unaided. For this reason Chrysostom vilified a

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 479.

<sup>158</sup> De Wet, "Vilification," 84-86.

stereotypical rich person in order to encourage them to move toward benefaction on behalf of the poor—to become a “lover of the poor.”<sup>159</sup>

Also essential to de Wet’s work is the cultural paradigm of the Limited Good, which “entails that all goods exist in limited amounts and can only be increased or expanded at the expense of others.”<sup>160</sup> If a rich person sought to expand her wealth, society decried her as a thief. Chrysostom, however, sought to play on this paradigm by urging the rich to accumulate spiritual wealth by becoming benefactors to the impoverished:

Chrysostom wants to illustrate to the wealthy that seeking spiritual riches, or the “robbery of heaven,” holds more advantages than accumulating wealth. He proposes that there is a higher law than the seemingly logical and obvious rule of the limited good. Spiritual goods increase with diminution, that is, giving away leads to increase. . . . By this Chrysostom establishes a spiritual economy based on almsgiving.<sup>161</sup>

Chrysostom utilizes the limited good to vilify the rich by acknowledging that their material wealth derives from robbery, but he does so to move them to a spiritual good, almsgiving. The limited good also allows Chrysostom to blame the wealthy for the dilapidating status of Antioch. He wishes to move them beyond basic honor through public generosity toward patronage of the beggars. Departing from many other social-scientific interpreters, de Wet argues that Chrysostom did seek to alleviate poverty and create a true sense of compassion for the beleaguered.<sup>162</sup> De Wet urges that Chrysostom’s system of private benefaction is crippled if separated from his pursuit of compassion:

The shift to the new economic model can only be effective if there is an emotional outcry toward the poor. . . . This compassion for the poor (and the vilification of the hypothetical “excessively rich person”) leads to an emotional-and-economic culture of compassion

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

and sharing, both being congruent products of the new Christian social imagination so characteristic of late antiquity and especially Chrysostom.<sup>163</sup>

Therefore, according to de Wet, Chrysostom was motivated by the dilapidating condition of his city and the extreme conditions of the lowest class created by a shift from civic euergetism to patronage. He aimed at a model of benefaction that would include the poorest clients. He sought to achieve this by vilifying the rich in order to warn the burgeoning middle class and motivate the rich into action, enticing them with a spiritual system of almsgiving that would allow them to expand the riches without the public labeling their efforts as plunder.

Wendy Mayer is, perhaps, the preeminent voice in contemporary Chrysostom Studies. Her work ranges from a critical reading of Chrysostom's rise to the bishop's throne at Constantinople to a thorough reconstruction of the poor in the orator's world.<sup>164</sup> She has also contributed with great clarity to the discussion of Chrysostom's economic influences and aims. She argues that in order to understand Chrysostom one must comprehend Late Antique attitudes toward different forms of poverty. She contends that the affluent of Late Antiquity generally lauded voluntary poverty and self-sufficient simplicity, but they also maligned neediness of every kind.<sup>165</sup> Like de Wet, she explains the prevalence of the Limited Good paradigm in Chrysostom's world, but she also explicates its effects on class relations:

If people who are approached by a beggar believe that both what they possess and what is available within their society is limited, then they also believe that the act of giving without return dangerously diminishes their own resources. Generosity toward others is desirable only if one receives something else in return. If reciprocity is a key concept within this framework, it is easy to see how the person who needs to take from others to

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>164</sup> Wendy Mayer, "John Chrysostom as Bishop: The View from Antioch," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55, no. 3 (July 2004): 455-466; Wendy Mayer, "Poverty and Society in the World of John Chrysostom," 469-477.

<sup>165</sup> Mayer, "Poverty and Generosity," 151-152.

survive is accorded the same social value as a thief, and how his or her actions are conceived of as socially destabilizing.<sup>166</sup>

The importance of reciprocity is the hinge-pin of the social-scientific approach. Though different scholars use variant images or realms to explain this phenomenon, they essentially all agree that what was lacking in Chrysostom's world was a place for the beggar in society. One way or another, Chrysostom is seen as having sought a position for the poor in society's system of reciprocity. This is precisely what Mayer argues. According to her, Chrysostom's system of alms was engineered on the principal that the poor have something to offer to the wealthy; alms were not to be seen as a drain on the wealthy and their limited goods. Instead, alms were a spiritual investment with eternal returns. Chrysostom pursued a more cohesive society where even the lowest strata could play a role in the central practice of exchange.<sup>167</sup> Where patrons selectively chose clients who could labor in reciprocity for their wages, Chrysostom sought to broaden that patronage to the indigent with the promise that the generosity of the rich would not go uncompensated.

Mayer does conclude that Chrysostom at least intended to convince his audience that poverty alleviation was possible. Poverty alleviation, however, led to Chrysostom's society par excellence, modeled after the first Christian community described in Acts.<sup>168</sup> Again, Chrysostom consistently encouraged unconditional alms as the vehicle toward his idealized community, but also as a salve for the putrid spiritual status of the rich.<sup>169</sup> Mayer's Chrysostom

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 154, 158; cf. Mayer, "Poverty and Society," 466.

<sup>168</sup> Mayer, "Poverty and Society," 468.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 466; Mayer, "Poverty and Generosity," 154.



is complex. He draws from scriptural, theological, and social influences toward a community of reciprocity and alleviation.

Mayer also notes that one of John's concerns was to distinguish between alms for the voluntary poor versus alms for the structurally poor. Because society tended to value voluntary poverty, generosity to ascetics prevailed. Chrysostom, however, directed his congregants toward giving to ascetics only if a need could be verified.<sup>170</sup> In many instances, the voluntary poor did not live in want for necessities, such as Olympias, a famous widow ascetic who despite her simple lifestyle maintained a vast treasury. His encouragement to give to only those in need highlights the primacy of necessities within his schema. Alms depended upon verifiable economic poverty on the part of the recipient.

In summary, the social-scientific approach considers Chrysostom within the economic system of his day. They highlight the significant influence of patronage, exchange, *philotimia*, and reciprocity on Chrysostom's proposals. They generally see his aims tilted toward provision of a Christian identity for both the rich and the poor within society's economic framework. The identity of the poor, however, is created for the sake of the patrons' souls and not for the sake of their own temporal welfare. According to the conclusions of the social-scientific approach, if poverty alleviation occurred, it was tangential to Chrysostom's spiritual aims.

#### The Influence of Desert Asceticism

Chrysostom spent six formative years immersed in Syrian desert asceticism. The years were spent both as a cenobite under the care of Diodore and as a mountain hermit. Even after his body disqualified him from the harsh life of asceticism, he idealized the purity of the monk before his congregation. He went so far as to urge the parishioners of both wealthy and

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<sup>170</sup> Mayer, "Poverty and Society," 473-474; Mayer, "Poverty and Generosity," 151-152.

impoverished ilk to emulate the desert *abbas* and *ammas*. Although John was a product of Late Antique culture he was perhaps more intimately formed by the desert movement, which was intensely and intentionally counter-cultural. In recent years, scholarship has gone to great lengths to illustrate Chrysostom's connection to the social shifts of his time. It seems an oversight in that pursuit to not also investigate the way in which the micro-culture of monasticism created the ethos from which Chrysostom, his work, and theology emerged. However, the following scholars have argued, with varying comprehensiveness, that Chrysostom did aim toward a practical monastic identity for both rich and poor.

In Roth's introduction to her translation of five Chrysostom sermons on Lazarus and the Rich Man, she takes care to highlight the role of asceticism in Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. She argues that Chrysostom sought to develop a model of asceticism appropriate to the circumstances of his hearers, his goal being that all Christians would reflect the spirit of asceticism: good works, alms-giving, and hospitality.<sup>171</sup> He acknowledged that his purist aim was unattainable: common property, such as that of the cenobites and the Christian community of Acts. Sensing that his hearers could not fully divest and still exist in Roman society, he sought to push them toward a spiritual asceticism. For Roth this spiritual asceticism illustrated Chrysostom's true concern in matters of wealth and poverty. She argues, "Although St. John does not deny that poverty is a misfortune, he says nothing about trying to escape from it. He is concerned with spiritual, not material well-being."<sup>172</sup> This interpretation seems unwarranted because Chrysostom's remarks on alms synthesize his concern for spiritual and physical well-being. Roth investigates Chrysostom too restrictively by creating a vision of the just society

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<sup>171</sup> Catharine P. Roth, *St. John Chrysostom on Wealth and Poverty*, 12-14.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

where the people are virtuous, but starvation and social stratification remain unmodified.

Chrysostom's vision is vividly spiritual, but as earlier cited evidence illustrates, it is also concerned with eliminating the grinding nature of survival for the city's penurious.

Her work does contribute to the investigative conversation by asserting, rightly, the role of asceticism in the aim of Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. If Chrysostom was shaped by Late Antique culture, how much more by a sub-culture in which he trained with great intensity and focus for more than a decade? If the whole picture of Chrysostom is to come into focus the role of asceticism must be investigated thoroughly. Yet current scholarship falls woefully short of such an investigation.

Murphy, however, also argues that Chrysostom sought to craft a monastic identity for both the pecunious and the indigent. Murphy makes this case by first considering Chrysostom's relationship to contemporary philosophy. According to Murphy, John often utilized sophistic rhetorical style in sermons in order to engage with all audiences from children to monks.<sup>173</sup> He also argues that John adopted a Platonic anthropology that delineated the soul into three parts: reason, irascibility, and concupiscence.<sup>174</sup> Chrysostom further divided concupiscence into three separate passions: avidity for possessions, sexual pleasure/gluttony, and ambition.<sup>175</sup> In regard to the human problem Chrysostom is merely a Christian iteration of popular philosophy. Murphy argues, however, that his solution is a new psychological synthesis of perfection achieved by a blending of faith and love. Chrysostom acknowledged that monasticism was one path to this

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<sup>173</sup> F. X. Murphy, "The Moral Doctrine of St. John Chrysostom," 53-54.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

perfection, but vehemently defended the universal efficacy of the Christian way of life. For evidence Murphy provides his own translation of a Chrysostom passage:

The beatitudes announced by Christ are not reserved exclusively for monks. For this would imply the condemnation of the rest of the world; and we could reasonably accuse God of cruelty. If the beatitudes were only for monks, if the secular had no hope of achieving them, God himself, by permitting people to marry, would have lost the human race.<sup>176</sup>

This initial citation perhaps seeks to bring equality between laity and ascetics, not drawing laity toward practical monasticism. However, Murphy urges that the spirit of the monastic life remained Chrysostom's ideal toward which all Christians must strive. The essential quality of the monastic lifestyle expressed through the blending of faith and love, was service to one's neighbor as an express replication of the character of Christ. According to Murphy, for this reason Chrysostom actually condemned the monastic retreat into the desert as a dereliction of the Christian responsibility to neighbors.<sup>177</sup> Murphy concludes that, "In the end, he held up the monastic ideal of continual prayer, meditation, fasting, and alms-giving as an ideal buttressed by the imitation of Christ, and within the reach of all."<sup>178</sup> Although Murphy makes little to no mention of class issues, we can again see the theme of social solidarity flowing from theological equality. Murphy does not use the word solidarity but describes Chrysostom's axiom thusly: "God has made all [humans siblings], so that the interest of one is the interest of all."<sup>179</sup> Murphy, therefore, provides a voice in the Chrysostom conversation for a doctrine of human depravity influenced by Platonism, a unique blending of faith and love for the sake of neighbor with

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<sup>176</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 7 on Hebrews 7*, as translated by F. X. Murphy, "The Moral Doctrine of Saint John Chrysostom," 55.

<sup>177</sup> Murphy, "The Moral Doctrine of Saint John Chrysostom," 56.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

explicit concern for emulating Christ, and an aim toward communal solidarity heavily shaped by the monastic ideal.

Sterk provides the most comprehensive work on Chrysostom the ascetic. Her broader work is a survey of the rise of monks to the episcopate, but she devotes generous space to reconstructing Chrysostom's relationship with monasticism from adolescence to his end in Constantinople. She also provides key insights into how monasticism shaped Chrysostom's approach to wealth and poverty. She notes a letter from John to his friend Theodore, who would become the bishop of Mopsuestia, in which Chrysostom lauds the endeavor of his ascetic community to not even think about wealth.<sup>180</sup> She argues that Chrysostom and Theodore were members of a Syrian *bnay qyama*, "sons of the covenant":

These young men might live with the clergy of a local church or remain at home, but members of such brotherhoods committed themselves in a covenant to Christ and to a life of celibacy, prayer, and renunciation. They served the clergy in various pastoral and liturgical functions and therefore formed a natural pool from which local bishops might draw to fill clerical vacancies in the church.

That Chrysostom was involved in strict voluntary poverty from a young age is a correlative to his later preaching on the topic, but does not by itself substantiate a direct link between his experience and later teaching. In current scholarship his experience with monasticism and his later theology remain distinct realms of inquiry. The scholars who approach Chrysostom from the point of view of monasticism investigate his theology in generalities, while the majority of his theological inquisitors speak of his monasticism in generalities. Accordingly, Sterk does not deal directly with Chrysostom's wealth and poverty aims. She does argue that Chrysostom attempted to set up the virtues of monasticism as the ideal for his congregation.<sup>181</sup> Monasticism

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<sup>180</sup> Sterk, *Renouncing the World yet Leading the Church*, 143.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

was the Christian life par-excellence and Chrysostom sought to form a community inspired to renounce wealth and success for the sake of monasticism's true and simple philosophy.

Sterk is also careful to acknowledge that Chrysostom's romantic views on ascetics evolved as he encountered monks who did not live the angelic life he idealized. He grew weary of monks who avoided ecclesiastical service or who disengaged from the world in a way that squelched all opportunities for service.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, his idealism toward the voluntary poverty of monastics did not wane, only his perception of the usefulness of some ascetics. Thus he continued to uphold the generosity and simplicity of monastics as the ideal model for financial affairs.

According to Margaret Mitchell, Chrysostom's chief inspiration came from his experience with asceticism.<sup>183</sup> His experience with asceticism shaped the way he interpreted the other motivating factors in his life—social anthropology, popular philosophy, cosmology, and Late Antique economic theory. His aims, she argues, rely upon a personal conversion to the ascetic heart of detachment: "Only the ascetic rejection of earthly goods, coupled with prophetic outrage at the injustice their improper use causes will suffice. Thereupon an outward sign of this correct inward attitude will be almsgiving."<sup>184</sup> Almsgiving was Chrysostom's prime objective. Almsgiving provided his congregation and society with a practical method to redistribute wealth equitably.<sup>185</sup> According to Mitchell, on occasion Chrysostom even presumes that almsgiving could alone achieve a just society; its centrality, therefore, cannot be understated. Mitchell departs from the mass of Chrysostom studies when she suggests that Chrysostom did not just

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>183</sup> Mitchell, "Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods which are not Good," 111.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 113.

idealize communal property. Instead, she argues that Chrysostom did truly seek to move his congregation toward a utopian society unlike their socially stratified world. In her view, Chrysostom used his words, his rhetoric, to attempt to convince his mostly upper-class audience that a communistic society was both appropriate given the Gospel and achievable given the experience of the church in Acts.<sup>186</sup> I think Mitchell argues this point well. In the passage Mitchell cites, Chrysostom does appeal to Acts 2 in order to emphasize the achievable nature of his proposal.<sup>187</sup> However, Chrysostom did not typically appeal to social upheaval. This appears to be an outlier in the body of his voluminous work. It is perhaps the case that Chrysostom did idealize communal property and attempted at least once to aim his congregation toward that ideal. In short, Mitchell situates Chrysostom within his admiration of an ascetic attitude and illustrates that his primary aim was the equitable redistribution of wealth through almsgiving.

Social historian Peter Brown has not written a work exclusively on Chrysostom, but his survey of the relationship between leadership and poverty in the later Roman period provides a helpful lens for Chrysostom studies. He counts John as one among many theological brethren, who happened to be the most eloquent. He describes Chrysostom as an outstanding exemplar of the homogenous and resilient Mediterranean-wide Christian discourse on the poor.<sup>188</sup> He compares Chrysostom to other Late Antique episcopal leaders, such as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory the Great, and Augustine. He considers Chrysostom to be the superior preacher, but quite in line with the theological framework of the day. He was the product of a larger theological school on wealth and poverty who wielded a loud and public voice. The aims of this

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 115-119.

<sup>187</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 11.3 on Acts 4:23*.

<sup>188</sup> Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 64.

theological school were poverty elimination, continued redemption by receiving Christ's mercy present in the poor, and a mystical solidarity in the Christian community that hinged upon Christ's presence in the Eucharist and the destitute.<sup>189</sup> Like Krupp, he also notes Chrysostom's pragmatism in encouraging individual patronage: "If individual Christians were more generous, he argued, the clergy would not be burdened with the time-consuming business of poor relief."<sup>190</sup> Brown is also helpful in solidifying an oft-made claim: Chrysostom sought solidarity between the rich and poor made efficacious by the real presence of Christ in the poor.<sup>191</sup>

He is the first in this study to consider Chrysostom within the larger theological movements of his day. John is sometimes remembered as if he was a unique thinker on wealth and poverty, but his real uniqueness was one of ability not substance. His post at Constantinople gave this theology a very public audience while his colleagues preached in smaller settings and wrote for other theologians. In sum, Chrysostom belonged to a larger theological tradition that aimed for a community of mutual solidarity where no one had needs and the clergy were to tend to souls rather than finances.

However, Brown does distinguish Chrysostom from the crowd of theologians by interpreting him through a mixture of the social-scientific approach and the deep influence of desert monasticism. According to Brown, Chrysostom sought the social and, thereby, financial transformation of his city by renovating the Christian household into micro-monasteries.<sup>192</sup> While Chrysostom lauded the Syrian mountain solitaries he also worried that urban parishioners would reduce charity and austerity to the virtues of monks rather than universal Christian virtues.

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 14, 95, 96, and 106.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 65-66; cf. Krupp, *Shepherding*, 190.

<sup>191</sup> Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 86.

<sup>192</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 309-314.



To counter this perception, Chrysostom offered an *oikonomia* modeled after the mountain monastics:

The Beatitudes of Christ were not addressed to solitaries only. . . . For if it be not possible, in the married state, to perform the duties of solitaries, then all things have perished, and Christian virtue is boxed in.<sup>193</sup>

For Brown, the *oikonomia* as the basis of the city is dependent on the many Greco-Roman philosophers that preceded Chrysostom, but the form Chrysostom sought was distinctly shaped by eremitic practice and thought. Central to this aim was the molding of the model housewife, who was to be integrated into the Christian household in a way that would keep her from the superfluity of civic life:

She and her children were to be persuaded to adopt the same inward-looking austerity as [the husband]. She would learn to cut back on her jewelry and dress; for she must not walk past the poor with the price of many dinners hanging from her ears. . . . John hoped to integrate the young woman into a household whose meticulous discipline made of it a little monastery, ruled by the same precepts of the Gospel as those meditated by the monks on the distant mountainside.<sup>194</sup>

The result of this household austerity would be a collection enough to nourish the poor of Antioch many times over. These “monastic families” were to be the salve for the wounds of urban structural poverty. The motivation was drawn both from the social ideal of *oikonomia* and the virtues of desert asceticism. These two mingled and were then aimed at the heart of society—the household.

Brown’s work aptly situates Chrysostom both within Late Antique Greco-Romanism and the distinctly counter-cultural desert monastic movement. He illustrates Chrysostom’s reliance on his social, theological, and monastic influences in a way that shapes a fuller picture of Chrysostom. Others have tended to view him primarily either through theological inquiry or

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<sup>193</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 7 on Hebrews 7*, vol. 14 of *NPNF*, 1<sup>st</sup> ser., ed. Philip Schaff, trans. F. Gardner, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1978) 402.

<sup>194</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 312.

through the critical lens of social history. Brown effectively portrays Chrysostom as a complex individual, not to be restricted to crisp Modern categories, but fluidly influenced by multiple sources, not least of which is the often overlooked reaches of desert monasticism.

Hartney closely follows Brown's identification of Chrysostom's monastic ideals coupled with a concern for the Classical *oikos*. While Brown sees Chrysostom's pursuits as the effective end of the classical city, Hartney sees Chrysostom's aims as a reinforcement of Classical ideals thinly overlaid by Christian practices modeled faintly after his own experience in a Syrian monastic community. Where Brown perceived Chrysostom's advice to housewives as a rejection of excess for the sake of the suffering poor, Hartney sees an assertion of normative gender hierarchy, retaining the *paterfamilias* of Classic Rome.<sup>195</sup> Chrysostom followed Aristotle in believing that the nature of the city derived directly from the household.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, if the city was to be reformed, the sin of the household had to be Chrysostom's central concern. Hartney believes Chrysostom's sense of sin in the household derived directly from the influence of gender roles. The sins to be redeemed were the lavish expenditures for the sake of honor on the part of wives and the tendency of husbands to endorse their wives' requests.<sup>197</sup> For Hartney, poverty alleviation is not a facet of the change which Chrysostom pursued. Instead, the excess is abhorred because it fails to reflect the gender defined roles of the model *oikos*. She defends the position that Chrysostom did not seek any alterations to social stratification. Instead, according to Hartney, Chrysostom's "new city" was to be built upon the presence of both rich and poor:

Chrysostom does not speak of an entirely new city where everyone will be poor and humble, but rather a more ordered version of what currently exists, and where there will

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<sup>195</sup> Hartney, "Men, Women, and Money," 532.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 530; Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City*, 190.

<sup>197</sup> Hartney, "Men, Women, and Money," 530-531; cf. Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City*, 103-116.

always be a more well-off group of people who will bestow the alms needed by their poorer counterparts. He does not offer any alternative ways as to how wealth or property will be generated by his other city, seeming rather to assume a certain amount of material possessions will automatically be present.<sup>198</sup>

For all purposes, then, Chrysostom's "transformation," in Hartney's estimation, is little more than an aesthetic upgrade to Late Ancient society.

However, like Brown, Hartney does interpret Chrysostom through the powerful influence of desert monasticism. She too surmises that the new family was intended to be modeled after the desert communities of Chrysostom's youth.<sup>199</sup> Nonetheless, Hartney lacks a conclusive connection between the transformed polis of Chrysostom's conviction and the monastic communities that shaped him. Her readers are left wondering in what ways the *oikos* she describes looks like the cenobitic pods of rural Antioch. I have consistently been surprised by the lack of attention scholars give to Chrysostom's pleas for poverty alleviation.

I think Hartney and others are correct in their criticism: Chrysostom did not envision poverty elimination. Yet, much of the work I have outlined treats Chrysostom with disdain, as if he had no interest in eliminating the suffering. The evidence in view, I find this a difficult thesis to defend.

Desert Monasticism certainly influenced Chrysostom. As a young monastic in a covenantal group he learned the ascetic values of common property, meeting needs, and the renunciation of wealth. Each of these is implicit to his theology of wealth and poverty if not explicit. To be sure, the influence of monasticism was limited, Chrysostom even criticized the monastics of Constantinople, but it is still a major motivating factor alongside his theological framework and Late Antique social systems and paradigms.

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<sup>198</sup> Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City*, 191.

<sup>199</sup> Hartney, "Men, Women, and Money," 528-529, 532.

## Synthesis

My aim throughout this chapter has been to create a conversation across time and approaches regarding the shaping of John's influences and hopes. I think the conversation has allowed several thematic questions to emerge. First, was Chrysostom concerned with the physical welfare of the poor? Or was his system of almsgiving only aimed at the salvation of wealthy souls? His homiletic approach to the matter centers on descriptions of extreme suffering.<sup>200</sup> He self-designates himself as an "ambassador for the poor."<sup>201</sup> He urges his congregation to become "lovers of the poor."<sup>202</sup> And he consistently concerned his congregation with meeting the basic needs of beggars.<sup>203</sup> Additionally, a concern for the spiritual welfare of the affluent should not be viewed as incapable of coexisting with a desire to meet needs. Current scholarship appears to either assume a care for the needs of the impoverished or dismiss it without any evidence. A critical and complete reading of Chrysostom should, it seems, at least engage Chrysostom's claimed desire to meet needs. As it is, there appears to be a significant gap in understanding Chrysostom and his relationship to the needs of the impoverished.

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<sup>200</sup> See John Chrysostom, *Homily 21 on 1 Cor 9:1*.

<sup>201</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Almsgiving* 1, quoted and translated by Brown, *The Body and Society*, 309; cf. Wendy Mayer, "John Chrysostom on Poverty," in *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, ed. Pauline Allen, (Leipzig, Germany: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2009) 69; also Mitchell, "Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods which are Not Good," 88.

<sup>202</sup> De Wet, "Vilification," 85. De Wet describes Chrysostom's desire to move his audience from *philopatris* to *philoptochos*.

<sup>203</sup> Chrysostom, *Homily 21 on 1 Cor 9:1*. The tone of the second half of the sermon hinges on the overly met needs of the wealthy and the unmet needs of the poor; cf. John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus* 2.5, in *St. John Chrysostom on Wealth and Poverty*, Catharine Roth trans., (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1984). At one point Chrysostom exhorts, "For if you wish to show kindness, you must not require an accounting of a person's life, but merely correct his poverty and fill his need," 52.

Second, solidarity emerged over and over again, but with variant definitions. Solidarity, according to Avila and Gonzalez, meant an upheaval of social class structure.<sup>204</sup> For the majority, however, Chrysostom's solidarity was a sense of mutuality within the Christian community intended to coincide with, even support, stratification. If Avila and Gonzalez are correct we must consider Chrysostom a complete failure in this regard. There is no evidence that a social upheaval ever occurred. It is perhaps the case, as Cardman asserts, that Chrysostom did indeed see class stratification as unchristian, but also realized it would never go away.<sup>205</sup> Therefore Chrysostom sought what solidarity he could create within the existing system, hoping with expectation that Christ's return would redeem society's hierarchy. This seems to fit the evidence best. As Cardman points out, Chrysostom did believe that stratification was a temporal mask that would be undone in the end, just as actors are unmasked at the end of a production.<sup>206</sup> Thus Chrysostom sought a pragmatic best case scenario of mutuality between rich and poor. Almost all of our voices agree that he achieved measured solidarity by creating a system of exchange where the rich offered unconditional alms and the poor opened the gates of heaven to them.

Finally, was Chrysostom a product of Late Antiquity or an outlier shaped by radical theology? The answer is both. Chrysostom was influenced by Late Antique matters like the exchange of the agora, the reciprocity of Limited Good economics, *philotimia*, the power in transforming the *oikos*, Platonic and Sophist philosophy, and Roman Property Law. He was also emblematic of the Christian intellectual response to poverty. The scrutiny he receives on the

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<sup>204</sup> Avila, *Ownership*, 98-99, 103; Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth*, 202-209.

<sup>205</sup> Cardman, "Poverty and Wealth as Theater," 167.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

matter has more to do with the eloquence of his speech and the power of his see than with any uniqueness. However, he did seek to reshape the status quo. He hoped to create a Christianized way to live within society for his congregation. Most clearly, he sought to make the virtues of monasticism practicable within every sphere of society. He wished to create an *oikos* modeled after his experience in cenobitic monasticism. He preached toward a marketplace that included the poorest of the poor in the patronage of the day. He desired for his constituents to seek honor not by flaunting luxury or power, but by attending to the Christ present in the suffering of the poor. Further, he advocated for a move away from a perspective of absolute ownership toward stewardship. Whatever the extent of his Late Antique influences it is apparent he did not endorse society as it was. He sought to enact a transformation; not through revolution, but through modest and pragmatic proposals shaped by his social milieu, theological convictions, and modeled after his ideal monasticism.

## Chapter 4

### Chrysostom and the Twenty-First-Century Majority World

The statistics concerning contemporary poverty are staggering. Thirty-thousand children die every day from starvation and preventable diseases.<sup>207</sup> Every day, six-thousand people die from HIV/AIDS in Africa where life-extending medicine is too expensive to purchase.<sup>208</sup> One billion people do not have access to clean drinking water.<sup>209</sup> Almost three-billion people live on the purchasing power of two dollars a day or less.<sup>210</sup> Meanwhile, one percent of the world's population holds forty percent of its wealth.<sup>211</sup> Conversely, the poorest fifty percent of the world owns a mere one percent of its resources—hence the name, Majority World. When regional distribution is accounted for, the vast majority of resource ownership is found in North America. Additionally, North American residents eat almost twice as many daily calories as residents of the Majority World.<sup>212</sup> The North American church, even in the middle of a recession, abides at the top of the world's social stratum. As I write from a context of North American affluence, I cannot help but include a short chapter on what Chrysostom might contribute to an emerging Christian discourse on the Church of North America and its relationship and responsibility to the Majority World and her dying poor.

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<sup>207</sup> Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005) 1.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>211</sup> UNU-WIDER, *The World Distribution of Household Wealth*, (New York: UNU-WIDER, 2005), [http://www.wider.unu.edu/events/past-events/2006-events/en\\_GB/05-12-2006/](http://www.wider.unu.edu/events/past-events/2006-events/en_GB/05-12-2006/) (accessed February 24, 2013).

<sup>212</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians*, 30-31.

I should admit at the outset that my thesis is not established with any credibility in the realm of twenty-first-century global economic theory. Therefore, I will seek to remain in the context of a theology of wealth and poverty. I do not hope to set out economic policies. Rather, I wish to suggest areas where Chrysostom might advance the evolving Christian conversation about wealth and poverty.

Chrysostom is not without modern counterparts. Many of his theological kinsfolk are already working diligently to shape the North American Church's response to global poverty. Chrysostom's aims and motivations are fixed in his Late Antique context. It would be imprudent to carelessly carry out his Late Antique aims within an ever-expanding global economy. However, shadows of his theological convictions continue to hold a place in contemporary settings. For instance, when Gordon Cosby founded the socially concerned Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., he insisted that members join a small group and sign a covenant confessing that God was the true owner of all their goods.<sup>213</sup> His expectations for small group piety are reminiscent of Chrysostom's attempt to create a monastery out of the classical household. But what else of Chrysostom's initiatives and thoughts could yield substantive help in the challenge before the affluent church, concretized in the statistics above? Below, I will consider the strengths and weaknesses of several Chrysostomic aims outlined above.<sup>214</sup>

One of Chrysostom's most memorable contributions to the fourth-century discourse on poverty was his ability to recreate the poor with words. He crystallized their plight alongside the luxurious lifestyle of the wealthy in order that the impoverished would be seen and heard. Whereas in the agora or the streets, people could hurry past the beggars, Chrysostom's elaborate

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<sup>213</sup> Gordon Cosby, *Handbook for Mission Groups* (Waco, TX: Word, 1975), 140.

<sup>214</sup> See chapters 2 and 3.



word images were inescapable for his captive audience. Perhaps North American pastors and priests could glean from this approach. Statistics tell only a shred of a story. It is easy to ignore the disembodied figures of multinational reports. Chrysostom, however, stood as a bridge between his hearers and the indigent. He walked his hearers into the homes of the hungry, the psyche of the beggar, and the experience of a night exposed to the cold. The wrenching circumstances of abject poverty are all too distant for affluent congregations in North America. A natural and achievable first step toward an active theology of wealth and poverty is to ensure that the congregation is at least aware of the people who endure abject poverty.

Mitchell has argued that Chrysostom, along with his fourth-century contemporaries, created the social designation of “the poor.”<sup>215</sup> The poor were never a category of the Classical polis. In addition to recreating the circumstances of the poor, Chrysostom and his colleagues also sought to create a social imagination around the people group in need. Without this foundational social framework, generosity has no aim. For how can a society sense a responsibility to a group of people it does not recognize as a group? A comparable problem exists today, surrounding the very designation these Patristic voices created for their fourth-century hearers. Our failure is not that we do not name poverty, but that our name for the impoverished is too weak and potentially diminutive. “The poor” does not encapsulate the structural injustice that causes many forms of poverty, nor does the designation convey the life-or-death nature of their circumstances. It is time for a renewed attempt to find language that precisely identifies those in desperate need. Better words for the destitute and dying around the globe may enact more precise generosity.

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<sup>215</sup> Mitchell, “Silver Chamber Pots and Other Goods which are not Good,” 100-101.

While Chrysostom's treatment of the plight of the poor is admirable, I would not advocate a duplication of his attempt to dignify the penurious in Late Antiquity. Chrysostom sought to create a community of solidarity by persuading his congregation that the beggar possessed spiritual capital that could be acquired through almsgiving. His position would only eliminate generous participation from Protestants. The generative principle of Protestantism is that grace is dispensed only as a response to faith (*sola fide*). An interjection of salvific almsgiving would alienate the impoverished from this extensive section of the affluent Church. Additionally, Chrysostom's schema dignifies the poor only vicariously. For the poor offer nothing of themselves; their offering derives from God. Thus Chrysostom dignifies God, not the poor. A viable twenty-first-century approach must include a truly dignifying option for the indigent. Solidarity is contingent upon mutual dignity. If Chrysostom's community of solidarity is to be realized, the affluent Church must engage in true and equal partnership with the people of the Majority World.

Salvific almsgiving is too narrow an approach for today's complexities, and Chrysostom's creation of spiritual capital for the poor denigrates true solidarity. However, Chrysostom's conviction that the real presence of Christ continues to endure the hardships of the hungry, naked, and imprisoned is worth modern consideration. The text of Mt 25:31-46 does not unequivocally necessitate the ontological presence of Christ in the poor. It also does not necessarily rule out Chrysostom's theorem. The stakes being so high, it is perhaps time for the affluent Church to ask itself if Christ continues to suffer the terrible lashes of Majority World living standards or the piercing nails of structural injustice. The icon and person of Christ constitutes the whole of the Christian vision. If his continued suffering cannot move the Church to action, it is hard to conceive of a greater impetus.

Chrysostom's assertion that Christians not interrogate the poor, but simply meet the needs they see, also deserves the North American Church's consideration. Worthiness of impoverished persons has been a focus of North American giving to benevolent causes.<sup>216</sup> In order to discern worthiness, some form of interrogation must be present. Interrogation, however, degrades the community of solidarity Chrysostom and I have proposed. It presumes the power of the giver to decide the worthiness of the recipient. I imagine Chrysostom quipping, *does the worthiness change the need?* If someone is hungry, does their unworthiness lessen their hunger? If the giver decides the recipient is unworthy, they walk away with a sense of self-justification while the person in need remains in need.

Can the affluent Church ever consider Chrysostom's claim that wealth is robbery? Private property is the normative paradigm of capitalist societies. Equally, private assets are accumulated in concert with the success of one's work. Chrysostom's claim that not sharing is in effect robbery is antithetical to all that is consumer culture. However, I think listening to his logic is worth the Church's time. Although the position that God in the beginning did not make rich or poor is not conclusively supported by biblical example, it is the case that resources were created in order to form a system of mutual benefit – humans care for plants and animals, and in return, the animals and plants provide sustenance (Gen 1:28-31). Suppose one person hoards water, while another dies of thirst. Is it too much to say that God created some of the hoarded

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<sup>216</sup> See the following sample articles working to reduce the Christian stigma toward serving persons living with HIV and AIDS. The stigmatic response centers on the (un)worthiness of HIV/AIDS patients based upon the sexual nature of the disease's transmission: David Swan Jr., "Breaking the Silence: How can Church Leaders Overcome Stigma and Promote Compassion in Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic?," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 35, no. 1-2 (2008): 203-214; James E. Perkinson, "Breaking the Silence, Bearing the Stigma: the Pastoral Prophetic Responsibilities of the Church in the Political Economy of HIV/AIDS," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 35, no. 1-2 (2008): 161-172; Auli Vähäkangas, "The Church as a Healing Community? The Case of HIV/AIDS Stigma," *Africa Theological Journal* 28, no. 1 (2005): 48-56; Denise Ackermann, "Engaging Stigma: an Embodied Theological Response to HIV and AIDS," *Scriptura*, no. 89 (2005): 385-395.

water for the care of the one who died? Chrysostom seems to suggest that what the one hoards was meant to keep the other alive. Robbery connotes knowingly acquiring goods that once belonged to someone else. My example may stop short of robbery. It is both the case that over-consumption may happen without conscious intention and without a belief that the resource may have served the purpose of keeping someone a continent away alive.

Unlike Chrysostom's setting, the modern world is not shaped by the concept of limited good. Since Late Antiquity held to the idea that all goods had limits, they could more clearly see Chrysostom's point: One person having too much water necessitates another person having to go without that water. A global system does not fit so neatly into Chrysostom's scheme. The water-saturated Pacific Northwest, for instance, cannot be faulted for their excessive water supply or accused of robbing water rightfully purposed for thirsting people in Africa's Sahara regions. On the other hand, there may be twenty-first-century situations that do fit Chrysostom's criteria. For instance, a rise in demand for palm oil in North America has meant the clearing of irreplaceable forests in the Philippines.<sup>217</sup> These forests, lost forever to rows of palm trees, once provided sustenance to native peoples and unique wildlife. In this case, Chrysostom is correct: The excessive possession of palm oil for one group necessitated the inadequate supply of resources for another group. The benefit of Chrysostom's perspective is that it enables Christian consumers and owners to consider that their choices may have direct effects on the lives of Majority World people, and it provides a theological framework that reimagines the purpose of creation as a system of universal care.

Just as Chrysostom did not propose the destruction of his own social system out of pragmatism, so, too, the affluent Church need not overthrow capitalism. Instead, I would

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<sup>217</sup> For an introduction to the complexities of the situation see Natasha Gilbert, "Palm-oil Boom Raises Conservation Concerns," *Nature* 487, no. 7405 (July 5, 2012):14-15.

propose the same ingenuity that Chrysostom employed. The Church needs to create a Christianized identity for people within every social strata of the current system. As I argued above, this identity must take dignity seriously. This entails the serious engagement of the Majority World, not as clients, but as equals. Equal engagement would create a true community of solidarity situated within the capitalistic landscape. John's creative pragmatism may be his greatest contribution to our conversation. We must discover ways in which rich and poor can partner in the work of Christ toward stability and sustenance for the human and created communities. This is not to say that rich and poor should adhere to social mores or that systems of injustice should be allowed to continue. Rather, a countercultural approach to possessions, shaped by God's purpose for resources rather than consumerism's values of self-inflation and self-preservation, might be precisely the beginning point of a Christian identity for rich and poor within the global economy.

Ronald Sider has written copious amounts of material comparable to Chrysostom's view of possessions. Sider has not written about Chrysostom specifically, but his arguments for generous Christian benevolence echo some of Chrysostom's deepest convictions. Sider advocates for Christians taking to social action, simplified living, and pervasive generosity.<sup>218</sup> He argues, like Chrysostom, that God is present amongst the poor, and if rich Christians wish to join God in his work, they, too, must be willing to join hands with the poor. Sider's image of joined hands is similar to Chrysostom's community of solidarity. His arguments toward generosity are akin to Chrysostom's system of almsgiving. And his desire for the restructuring of unjust systems is also similar to Chrysostom's attempts to redefine the practice of *philotimia*. Certainly he and Chrysostom are not theologically identical. However, Sider and others continue

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<sup>218</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians*, 183-202.

Chrysostom's work for the modern age.<sup>219</sup> They stand in the orator's shadow, writing and speaking words that may find roots and fresh momentum in the work of John Chrysostom.

Works like Sider's illustrate the enduring concerns of Chrysostom. Although few continue to cite him in thoughts on wealth and poverty, Chrysostom, as a father of just social theology, deserves a new hearing in the conversation. Though his aims are fixed in time and some of his arguments untenable, he does offer timeless suggestions of theological spirit: the real suffering of Christ in the impoverished, an ideal community of solidarity, an initiative toward adequately naming the poor, rhetoric aimed at bringing the visual reality of impoverishment into the church service, a merciful approach to meeting needs, and a renewed sense of God's intentions for resources. Certainly the implementation of any of these aims requires more than a section of a master's thesis, but the goal is the furtherance of a conversation—a conversation that may dictate the fate of billions living in starvation, staggering destitution, unimaginable squalor, and other preventable situations. In truth, it is a conversation bearing weight upon the fate of the world's majority.

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<sup>219</sup> For similar works see Luke T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: What Faith Demands* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006); Ronald Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999); Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2005).

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

For all his tactlessness and political naïveté, Chrysostom championed the church's social responsibility toward the poor, the practice of hospitality, and the need for Christians to live in simplicity. His words still echo through time, ringing with Christian conviction regarding love for the neighbor.

—Barbara Butler Bass, *A People's History of Christianity*

I hope that I have illustrated the complex nature of understanding an historical individual like John Chrysostom. It is not enough to singularly investigate his theology, his social setting, or his life experiences. The best approach for any historian is to take an account of all available evidence. Bass's quotation above exemplifies a popular characterization of Chrysostom. She has not said anything untrue about him, but the expression is too narrow and idealized. Conversely, I have tried to take a broader view of Chrysostom that relies upon a blend of theological, historical, and social-historical resources. I attempted to use these methods to reconstruct the inner-Chrysostom and his aims. I have also worked to interject this reconstructed Chrysostom into our contemporary social standing. In agreement with Bass, I have also proposed that we should learn from his short-sightedness as well as his ingenuity in order to construct an active and adequate theology of wealth and poverty in our uniquely dire social circumstances.

Cogent in detail, lucid in originality, and permeated with contextual considerations, Chrysostom's homilies provide a rich field of theological study, particularly with regard to social issues. He trimmed his various images and prognostications to fit particular circumstances, which makes strictly categorizing him difficult. However, several foundational assumptions align to form the heart of Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. First, Chrysostom believed that Christ set history on a course backward to the primordial design of the Almighty. Chrysostom idealized the pre-fall world and sought to model his congregation and city after its

tenets. Socio-economic equality was the chief ideal of the pristine city Chrysostom desired. Second, Chrysostom believed that Christ was present in the suffering of the indigent. His language for Christ's presence in the poor mirrored his language for Christ's presence in the Eucharist. He believed with certitude that Christ really dwelled ontologically amongst the suffering and marginalized. Christ's presence provided salvific opportunities for the one who would seek to alleviate the suffering. These two facets form the heart of Chrysostom's theology of wealth and poverty. His motivating influences shaped him and brought him to these essential theological conclusions. Those two conclusions, in turn, went on to form the impetus for all of his aims.

Chrysostom's motivating influences came from both the prevailing cultural paradigm of his age and from the mores of an enigmatic group of monastics who lived in the mountains and caves surrounding Antioch. He seems to have drawn from his understanding of Sophist and Platonic philosophy, Roman property law, Aristotle's primacy of the *oikos* and *polis*, the limited good approach to economics, and the public practice of *philotimia*. Chrysostom saw advantages and weaknesses in each of these influences. For instance, he sought to utilize the strength and power of the *oikos* to transform his culture. Each, however, exhibited essentially the same weakness: social stratification. This weakness plays well with Chrysostom's first theological underpinning—that Christ's salvation was meant to move society back to a time when social stratification, disproportionate resource distribution, and personal property did not exist. The primary motivating factor for Chrysostom was the pull between the reality of his social setting and the social design first initiated by God and made available through Christ.

Chrysostom proposed a flurry of efforts intended to nudge, even push, his constituents and culture closer to the objective of social egalitarianism under the auspices of God himself.



Theistic factor proponents point to efforts at solidarity as Chrysostom's dominant aim. They suggest that Chrysostom preached equality from the pulpit, and if he could not achieve social equality, he could at least achieve attitudinal and spiritual solidarity within his congregation. Social-scientific exponents tend to be less optimistic but agree that solidarity was the principal aim. They, however, couch solidarity in almsgiving underpinned by Chrysostom's second foundational theological principle—that Christ's real presence resides in the poor and suffering. They propose that Chrysostom utilized almsgiving as a spiritual exchange between the giver and receiver. His system created a transaction in which the giver relieved the suffering of Christ and in return Christ rewarded the giver with salvation. This served to create both a Christian identity for the rich and a place for the poor in the economic exchanges of the day. The system achieved solidarity not through social, or even spiritual, equality but by wrapping rich and poor into a relationship of mutual need.

Keen observers have also sought to highlight the way desert monasticism shaped Chrysostom's social policy. These authors note that Chrysostom sought to reclaim divine social order by transforming congregants into Christians modeled after the Christians Chrysostom studied under in the desert. Chrysostom developed a sense of the heart of monasticism—simplicity, generosity, and hospitality—so as to make it practicable for households. In other words, Chrysostom did not expect his parishioners to follow the highly impractical letter of asceticism, but he did hope they would enact the spirit of monasticism. Through pragmatic monasticism, Chrysostom sought to rediscover some shadow of the Genesis social construction. He did not envision a realization of heaven on earth, only a precursor to Christ's final vindication, which would fully realize perfect social equality.

In all, these three approaches have left us with both definitive conclusions and lingering questions. It is conclusive that Chrysostom was both deeply shaped by Late Antique socio-economics and formed by his experience in the highly counter-cultural movement of desert monasticism. His aims were theological, economic, and pragmatic. He aimed toward a system of monetary exchange that included beggars, while rewarding generosity. And he probably sought solidarity both through a reformation of attitudes and by creating a system of mutuality. There is also ample evidence to suggest that Chrysostom did intend to alleviate the physical pains of poverty. He did not, as some have suggested, have no regard for the plight of the poor. Although his social agenda was complex and leaned heavily upon creating benefits for the rich, this does not sufficiently discount Chrysostom's personal claims of compassion.

Several unresolved questions have also surfaced. First, and perhaps foremost, did Chrysostom's preaching have any positive ramifications for the poor of Antioch and Constantinople? At this point there is tangential evidence at best. Ancient sources include references to Chrysostom's episcopal efforts to care for orphans, widows, and sojourners, but Mayer and Brown have both illustrated that beggars were not beneficiaries of these efforts.<sup>220</sup> If Chrysostom called himself an ambassador of the poor, is the efficacy of his ambassadorship not worth pursuing?

An exact understanding of Chrysostom's definition of solidarity also remains to be concretized. For theistic factor interpreters, solidarity necessarily entailed the deconstruction of social distinctions. Social-scientific proponents, however, argue that Chrysostom's solidarity was not one of social equality but economic mutuality. Solidarity was not antithetical to social stratification, but could be found by incorporating beggars into patronal exchanges. The status of

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<sup>220</sup> See Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 65-66; Mayer, "Poverty and Society in the World of John Chrysostom," 473-477.

the rich changed not at all, while beggars could be granted some form of social standing because they possessed the commodity of salvation. These two versions of solidarity remain unresolved and both offer compelling supporting material. More work needs to be done in order to accurately describe Chrysostom's hopes.

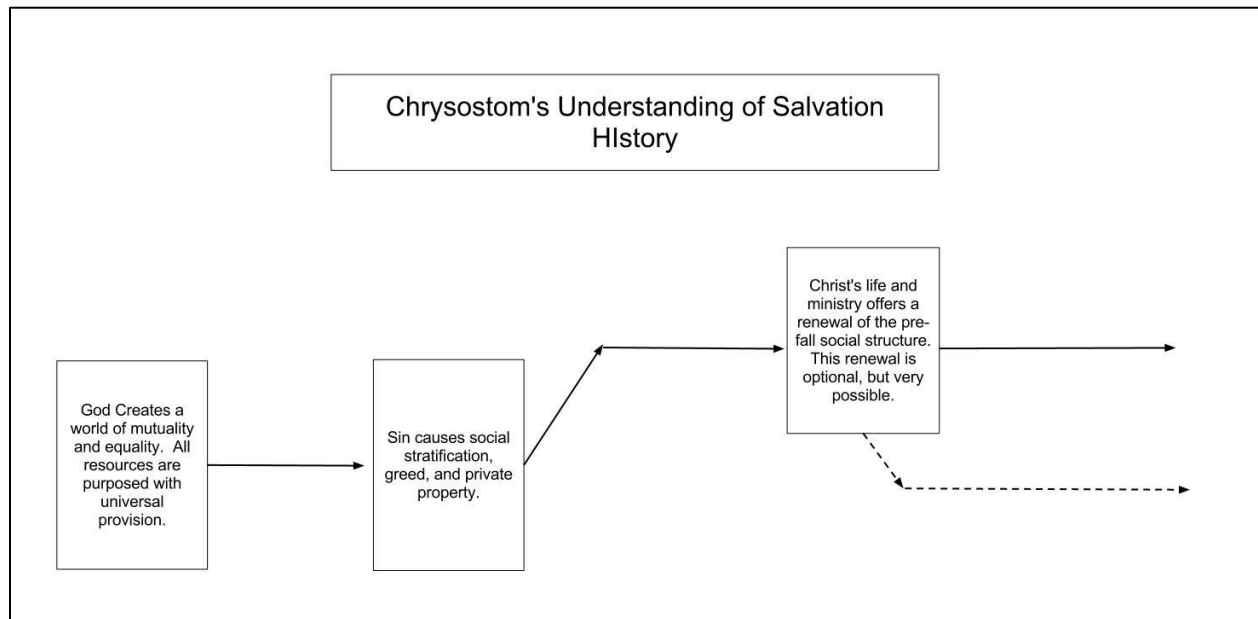
I have also proposed that Chrysostom has much to contribute to the current formation of a theology of wealth and poverty in response to the daily realities of the Majority World vis-à-vis the grand resources of the North American affluent Church. Chrysostom's role as an ambassador for the poor is a much needed model for the twenty-first-century affluent Church because Chrysostom's community of solidarity cannot be achieved without rich and poor understanding each other's realities. Like Chrysostom, pastors and priests occupy a veritable stage to serve as a bridge between these divergent worlds. Ultimately, this ambassadorship is intended to move the affluent Church toward relationships of dignity and mutual need with the Majority World. Chrysostom's aims—solidarity and poverty alleviation—are valid and deeply needed. His system of almsgiving could foreseeably relieve much of the strains of poverty, but it fails to achieve real solidarity. Real solidarity, even in Chrysostom's construction, depends on mutuality. But Chrysostom's mutuality does not exist because the poor offer the rich nothing. God offers the rich salvation on the part of the poor. An authentic relationship of solidarity will require authentic mutuality.

Ultimately, Chrysostom's pursuit of practical monasticism—generosity, hospitality, and simplicity—forms the foundation of tangible poverty alleviation. Buoyed by solidarity, the affluent Church should heed Chrysostom's imperatives. Dignity and mutuality without generosity, hospitality, and simplicity do nothing to right the disproportionate status quo. The

world's majority need the affluent Church to consider the spirit of monasticism as a viable approach to living with wealth.

Chrysostom preached sitting down from the floor *ambo* of some of Late Antiquity's grandest cathedrals. From the floor, he roared strict but pragmatic imperatives toward society's highest. He urged the lofty to see Christ amongst the lowly. He reached his positions by drawing from popular philosophy, common social practices, Roman property law, contemporary Christian theology, and the values of desert monasticism. He urged his congregation to see the egalitarian design of the universe and challenged them to recognize their property as God's property, intended for the meeting of basic needs. With a golden mouth he directed his people toward solidarity, not social upheaval, and the recognition that all humans are spiritually equal, deserve a place in social practices, and are worth emptying their pockets to care for and feed.

## Appendix



For further reflection refer to chapter two.

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