

## CHARITY AS WORSHIP OF GOD

*"You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8)*

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### Abstract

This article argues that there is a uniquely Johannine perspective on poverty and charity. In order to access this perspective, a careful analysis of the contexts - macro and micro - of Jn 12:8 is indispensable. After a contextual analysis of Jn 12:8, it becomes evident that the final redactor uses it, elucidated by its contexts, to prove that there are horizontal and vertical perspectives to poverty and charity: both God and humans could be poor, hence, objects of human charity.

**Keywords:** God, Charity, Worship

### Introduction

The theme of the "Poor" is relevant in social, economic and theological debates in contemporary society. Of course, the poor and poverty are examined on different fronts, depending on the spheres of the questioners. Governments, multinationals, church groups and individuals are all actively engaged in the question of the poor and poverty, on how either to eliminate poverty or alleviate the suffering of the poor.<sup>1</sup> On the economic front, R. Mark Isaac, Anne Bradley, Lord Brian Griffiths of Fforestfach, Dato Kim Tan and Robert A. Sirico,<sup>2</sup> put the blame of poverty on the door-steps of multinationals, the rich and governments: they are not doing enough to let "wealth" go around, hence, the need to appeal to the Christian roots of Western Economics in order to conscientize the "haves" to do something about the plights of the "have-nots."

Socially speaking, Lawrence W. Reed, Marvin Olasky and Peter Greer propose theories toward the alleviation of poverty. The title of Reed's article is tantalizing, "A Poverty Program That Worked"! Reed took his cue from the failure of American government's efforts to alleviate poverty for its citizenry through welfarism and reliefs. According to Reed, one program worked - the transfer of charity away from Governments to individual's liberty, on the belief that Americans are compassionate people. Reed validates his argument by showing that:

In spite of a horrendous civil war, half a dozen economic downturns, and wave after wave of impoverished immigrants, America progressed from near universal poverty at the start of the century to within reach of the world's highest per-capita income at the end of the century. The poverty

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<sup>1</sup> Anne BRADLEY and Art LINDSLEY (eds.), *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*, Institute for Faith, Work and Economics, 2014. (This is an e-book, no printed version yet. We will be indication appropriate chapters and/or locations).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 respectively.

that remained stood out like the proverbial sore thumb because it was now the exception, no longer the rule. In the absence of stultifying government welfare programs, our free and self-reliant citizenry spawned so many private, distress-relieving initiatives that American generosity became one of the marvels of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Even though one maybe highly suspicious of the above quote, given the economic state of Hispanic and African Americans, and American foreign policies, it is interesting to know that many governments try their hands on different policies towards poverty alleviations. As far as we are concerned, the gospel of John offers us the possibility of exploring Jesus' statement: "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8a).<sup>4</sup> Using historical critical method, we intend, fundamentally, to understand Jesus' statement in its historical and literary contexts.

Since no one speaks from nowhere, as the saying goes, is there a biblical understanding of the "poor"? There surely is, going by the ubiquitous use of relative terms in the Old Testament, the meaning of which must impinge on the use of similar terms in the New Testament. Walter C. Kaiser has given a brief, but succinct, overview of the different Old Testament terms covering the semantic sphere of the referent word for the "poor."<sup>5</sup> Of the 2000 references to the poor present in the Bible,<sup>6</sup> Kaiser attempts a definition of the "poor" in these words:

Traditionally, the poor are generally referred to as those who are destitute, lacking even the most basic necessities to keep body and soul together. At best, a poor person is one who has little or nothing in the way of goods, possessions, wealth, or even the means to maintain a subsistence level of living.<sup>7</sup>

The most frequent referent vocabulary for the poor,<sup>8</sup> in the Old Testament, are *'euyon* (עֲיֹוֹן [Deut 15:7]) and *'ani* (אֲנִי [Is 61:1])), "afflicted." Other less frequent terms include *dal* or *dalah* from the verb *dalal* (דָּלַל [Ex 23:3]) "to languish, *cheser*

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence W. REED, "A Poverty Program That Worked," in *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*, loc. 3998 of 6306.

<sup>4</sup> All scriptural quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989, except where indicated.

<sup>5</sup> Walter C. KAISER, "Poverty and the Poor in the Old Testament," in *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*, chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 864.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 875.

<sup>8</sup> E. Bammel, "The Poor in the Old Testament," in *The Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. 6, 1968, pp. 888-894; F. C. Fensham, "Widow, Orphan and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21, 1962, 129-139; Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan and the Sojourner," *Interpretation* 41, 1987, 341-353; D. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament Law*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.

(אָרָר [2 Sam 3:29]), "to be needy" or "to lack," and *miskan* (מִסְכָּן [Ecclesiastes 4:13; 9:15-16]) "to be a beggar."<sup>9</sup>

Kaiser's interest is to give a synopsis of the terms for the concept of the "poor" rather than a semantic evolution and contextual analysis of the appearances of each term. Gary Anderson pays more attention to the theological meaning given to the concept of poverty and how it serves in different Second Temple authors to signify a *leitmotif* for bridging the divide between the rich and the poor, through the concept of charity.<sup>10</sup> In other word, the definition of "sin" as a "debt" that needs to be repaid or compensated for, a conception of sin which Anderson construes to be a Second Temple idea,<sup>11</sup> developed from the absence of the Temple during the Assyrian exile (721 B.C.),<sup>12</sup> that necessitated the conception of charity to the poor as worship of God, and savings for the forgiveness of sins. Going by Anderson's logic, the poor became an altar of sacrifice to God, an idea that continues into rabbinical Judaism.<sup>13</sup>

The clean sweep made by Kaiser and Anderson does not account for the specificity of the context and nomenclatural differences among the Second Temple usages of the term for the poor and the variation in the rationale for the theological motives of each Second Temple writing. For instance, Adam locates the evolutionary concept of the poor from a wisdom tradition which was constructed both from the perspectives of the rich and the poor.<sup>14</sup> The anthology of wisdom literature by the rich, in Proverbs and Ben Sirach, favors the conception of wealth as blessing from God and reward for a righteous life;<sup>15</sup> while the poor solves the problem of the poor

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<sup>9</sup> After is said and done, the best referent for the meaning of a word is its context, especially its contextual usage. This has been made evident by Berghe who, after evaluating a century-long debate on the different attempts at defining the differences between the Hebrew words "Ani" and "Anaw," suggests a contextual hermeneutics of words. Cf. Paul VANDEN BERGHE, "ANI et ANAW dans les psaumes," in *Le Psautier: ses origines, ses problèmes littéraires, son influence*, Louvain-Leuven: Publication Universitaires, 1962, pp. 273-295 at 294-295.

<sup>10</sup> Gary A. ANDERSON, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, Yale, NH: University Press, 2013, especially "Part ONE." Anderson claims that "[t]his book is, in many respects, a natural outgrowth of my previous publication, *Sin: A History*." Gary A. ANDERSON, *Charity*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Gary A. ANDERSON, *Sin: A History*, Yale, NH: University Press, 2009, chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>12</sup> Gary A. ANDERSON, *Charity*, pp.17-18. (The book of Tobit is what he explores in this connection).

<sup>13</sup> Gary A. ANDERSON, *Charity*, pp.112-122.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel L. ADAMS, "Poverty and Otherness in the Second Temple Instructions," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, Daniel C. HARLOW, Karina Martin HOGAN, Matthew GOFF, and Joel S. KAMINSKY, Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011, pp. 189-203.

<sup>15</sup> Adams argues that the books of Sirach and Proverbs were assembled by the rich or their cronies, so wealth is considered positively. Cf. Samuel L. ADAMS, "Poverty and Otherness in the Second Temple Instructions," pp. 194-195.

and poverty by locating the reward of the poor in heaven.<sup>16</sup> To be fair to Adams, he admits that there are buffer zones in this conception, in the sense that there are Second Temple writings that support both ideas within the same book, a pointer to the danger of the fallacy of generalization and an invitation to contextual studies of concepts and terminologies.

Our article will progress in three stages: first, we will situate the uniqueness of Jn 12:8 in its present context; second, we will argue that it is a preformed-dominical saying; and, third, we will show that it is a bearer of a unique meaning, in contradistinction to its usages in Matt 26:11 and Mk 14:7.

### **Overview**

In a recent publication,<sup>17</sup> Timothy J. M. Ling, has explored the subject of the "poor" in John's gospel. This was actually a doctoral dissertation, which Ling submitted to the University of Kent, 2003. In it, Ling challenges the sectarian origin of John's gospel by proposing an alternative vision for conceiving the origin of John's gospel. Using the Essenes as a clue, he argues for a "virtuoso religion," a kind of "pietistic" group found all around Judaea at the time of Jesus. This group, found among the Judaeans, creates a class of a sort, which did not fit the cosmopolitanism constitutive of non-Judaeen villages. And, having the religious outlook of the essences, voluntary poverty will be the norm among them.

A close look at the writings of Brian Capper,<sup>18</sup> Ling's thesis moderator, on "virtuoso religion" hypothesis, one is able to guess the background inspiration to Ling's work.<sup>19</sup> The Judaeen idea put forward by both Capper and Ling, to our mind, circumscribes the interpretation of the gospel of John to Judaeans and the poor folks among them, since Ling posits the existence of two classes of Judaeans, the religious leadership of the day, who will qualify as the rich, and the antithetical group, the poor.<sup>20</sup> This article is neither about the hermeneutics of the poor in John's gospel, in general, nor the exegesis of John 12:1-11, in particular. It is about Jn 12:8: what kind of statement it is, and what meaning to give to it, in its present context. As just noted above, in the writings of Capper and Ling, attempts have

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<sup>16</sup>Adams considers the unique contribution of "4QInstruction" to be eschatological reward of the poor. Cf. Samuel L. ADAMS, "Poverty and Otherness in the Second Temple Instructions," pp. 199-203.

<sup>17</sup>Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judaeen Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: University Press, 2006.

<sup>18</sup>Brian J. CAPPER, "John, Qumran, and Virtuoso Religion" in *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*, Mary L. COLOE and Tom THATCHER, Atlants, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011, pp. 93-116.

<sup>19</sup>For evidence of this, see: Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judaeen Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 94-95, especially footnotes 185 and 189.

<sup>20</sup>Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judaeen Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 91-92.

been made to explain the concept of the poor in the synoptic gospels and John,<sup>21</sup> which is well attested to in Ling's rich bibliography at the end of his book. However, after a survey of about 50 commentaries on the gospel of John, we failed to notice an entry on the explanation of Jn 12:8! At best, references is made, in commentaries, to Deut 15:11 as the source of Jn 12:8a, with even a mention of Jn 128b. Of course, we did not look at every commentary ever written on John's gospel, all we claim is that there is paucity of literature on the meaning of Jn 12:8, and we want to look closely at it, and to suggest a possible meaning.

For a contextual analysis of Jn 12:1-11, we need an overview of how authors approach the gospel of John, different from the social scientific analysis of Ling. One of the presuppositions of Johannine scholarship,<sup>22</sup> over the years, is the view that the Gospel of John has a double meaning, literal and metaphorical/spiritual.<sup>23</sup> Even though the nomenclature for qualifying this double meaning varies with authors, there is a seeming consensus that the message being communicated by the final redactor of the Gospel is that beyond the literal meaning, without neglecting the literal sense of the text, when the Gospel is viewed and studied synchronically.

Historical critical studies of the Gospel of John lay emphasis on the composition and redaction of the Gospel.<sup>24</sup> The implication of this, for our study, is that the pericope to be studied may have come from a *Sitz Im Leben*, which is no longer overtly noticed, a topic which will occupy us down the road. So, while we explore the provenance of Jn 12:8, with historical critical criteria,<sup>25</sup> we will re-introduce it into its macro-context for a synchronic analysis. For now, suffice it to say that we need to decipher the contexts, both macro and micro, of our pericope. Before that, let us delimit our pericope.

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<sup>21</sup>For the opinions of some authors on the poor, in the gospels, see: Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judaean Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 98-145.

<sup>22</sup>For a complete bibliographical materials on Johannine studies, since Bultmann, see: Michel GOURGUES, "Cinquante ans de recherche johannique: de Bultmann à la narratologie," in Michel GOURGUES et Léo LABERGE (eds.), *De bien des manières, la recherche biblique aux abords du XXIe siècle*, Paris: Cerf, 1995, pp. 229-306, especially 290-309. For bibliography till date, see: Alain MARCHADOUR, "Venez et vous verrez ». *Nouveau commentaire de l'évangile de Jean*, Paris: Bayard, 2011; Jean ZUMSTEIN, "L'Évangile selon Jean," in Camille FOCANT et Daniel MARGUERAT (dir.), *Le Nouveau Testament commenté*, Paris, Bayard; Genève, Labor et Fides, 2012, pp. 400-509.

<sup>23</sup>The first mention of a "spiritual gospel" was by Clement of Alexandria, reported by Eusebius. Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* VI, xiv, 7. For recent authors who take this for granted, see: Craig R. KOESTER, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, Meaning, Mystery, Community*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995.

<sup>24</sup>Wahlde is an example of this kind of work. Cf. Urban C. von WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 1-3, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010; Raymond Edward BROWN, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, Francis J. MOLONEY (ed.), New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003.

<sup>25</sup>For the method for detecting a preformed material in the New Testament, see: Ayodele AYENI, *The Antithesis "Neither Jew nor Greek" in Gal 3:28a: Its Context, Application, Meaning and Origin*, Frankfurt: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012, *passim*.

### **Delimitation of the Pericope of Jn 12:8**

From a thematic perspective, the twin themes of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11) and the quest for the whereabouts of Jesus by the Pharisees (Jn 11:57), both correlate the same theme of the death of Lazarus and the imminent death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> The locative clause (Jn 12:1: "Jesus . . . came to Bethany") which begins chapter 12, presenting both a change of subject matter (from the reaction to the raising of Lazarus to a dinner table) and time lag (six days before the Passover) separates the chronology of the narratives of Jn 11 and Jn 12. These two thematic indices, which link Jn 11 to Jn 12:1-11, provide some parameters for arguing that an independent unit begins at Jn 12:1 and ends at v. 11, since the desire to arrest Jesus was renewed in that verse. If this is the case, that the search for Jesus continues in Chapter 12:11, and that the idea of partying to celebrate the raising of Lazarus, which took place in chapter 11, continues in chapter 12, one wonders what grammatical import to accord to οὖν- "therefore, then, accordingly" which begins Jn 12.1? Is it indicative of a continuation of the subject matter of Jn 11:57 by locating Jesus' whereabouts? Yes, but there is more. There seems to be another motif, not often explored, which could suggest a change of idea, leading to considering Jn 12:1-11 as an independent unit or a pericope - the symbolism of the death of Lazarus.<sup>27</sup> Jn 12:1-11 puts the death and resurrection of Lazarus in relief with Jesus' impending death. Consequently, while grammatically, οὖν- "then" links Jn 12:1-11 to Jn 11, the death and resurrection of Lazarus, Jn 12:1-11 is still an independent pericope because of the meaning Jesus' death will have for the poor. This delimitation can be further strengthened through the linkages to be established between our micro and macro-contexts.

It is pertinent to notice too, that the presence of Τῇ ἐπαύριον - "the next day," another time clause, in Jn 12:12, clearly indicates that a new subject matter is to be treated, and the issue of anointing raised in Jn 12:1-11 is over with. The theme of the so-called "Triumphant entry into Jerusalem" takes over from the narrative on death and resurrection from Jn 12:12. Therefore, we delimit our pericope to be Jn 12:1-11.

### **Macro-Context: Jesus' Power over Death - "I am the resurrection and Life"**

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<sup>26</sup> Michel Gourgues has argued succinctly to the effect that "time" in John's Gospel does not cover many days. From the paucity of the chronological time frame from which Jesus' activities took place, especially those leading to his death, we are justified to talk of "the imminent death and resurrection of Jesus." Cf. Michel GOURGUES, "The Superimposition of Symbolic Time and Real Time in the Gospel of John: The Symbolism of Light as Time Marker," in *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 31, 2008, 54-65.

<sup>27</sup> The transition from the raising of Lazarus to the ritualistic embalming of Jesus, by Mary, brings out a second/spiritual reading of this pericope.

In an incisive book, Henry George Widdowson summarizes the problematic plaguing the sphere of linguistics, in the second half of the twentieth century, as the neglect of "context" in textual interpretation.<sup>28</sup> For him, "Pre-text, context and text," all three, help the hermeneutics of every text. For our purposes, we construe "context" here, linguistically, but in its non-semantic role;<sup>29</sup> that is, in its textual component: theme, lexis and syntax.

The themes of "death" and "resurrection" dominate Jn 11. The story of the raising of Lazarus in Jn 11 progressed through three stages: illness, death and resurrection of Lazarus. The presence of the disciples, the naming of personages like Martha, Mary and Lazarus, make the story come to life in a special way. The story reaches its apogee in Jesus' declarative statement "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:25-26).<sup>30</sup> This statement was concretized, in part, in Jn 11: Lazarus, who was dead and raised to life by Jesus. The second part of the statement "and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" remained in abeyance. Consequently, it seems better to translate οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα "may not die for eternity."<sup>31</sup> This provides the possibility of dying a physical death, like Lazarus, and be raised to eternal life. Since we do not have Lazarus walking down the streets today, his resurrection might have been pointing to a second degree of resurrection - eternal resurrection like Jesus', given the second level reading of Johannine theology. This meaning flows from Jesus' claim to be "life" and "resurrection." So, the resurrection of Lazarus, in the macro-context of Jn 11, has a direct consequence for the conception of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In order to prove the veracity of the preceding statement - "the resurrection of Lazarus, in the macro-context of Jn 11, has a direct consequence for the conception of the death and resurrection of Jesus" - it is necessary to prove that there exists a link between Jn 11 and Jn 12:1-11; to Jn 12:1-11 we now turn.

### **Micro-Context (Jn 12:8): The Poor and the Death of Jesus**

When we put the macro-context above in relief with the micro-context of Jn 12:1-11, there are lexical and thematic resonances between them - Jn 11 and Jn 12:1-11. The major personages of Jn 11 - Jesus, Lazarus, Martha, Mary and Judas<sup>32</sup> - are

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<sup>28</sup>Henry George WIDDOWSON, *Text, Context, Pre-Text: Critical Issues in Discourse Analysis*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, *passim*.

<sup>29</sup>For semantic purposes, we need to look at all three - pre-text, context and text - in order to arrive at meaning.

<sup>30</sup>Schnackenburg considers these two verses as the highest revelatory form of Christology in John's gospel. Cf. Rudolf SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1980, p. 316.

<sup>31</sup>My translation.

<sup>32</sup>The mention of Judas, after saying that Lazarus was among those (ἐκ τῶν ἀνακειμένων [Jn 12:2]) reclining at table, suggests the presence of more than those mentioned in this pericope as being present at this dinner; why should we exclude the presence of more disciples other than Judas

present in both pericopes. The roles of the doubting<sup>33</sup> Martha (Jn 11:20-27, 39-40) changes to service (Jn 12:2), and that of the believing Mary (Jn 11:32) to anointing (Jn 12:3), and the dead Lazarus (Jn 11:1-16) to a living Lazarus (Jn 12:1-2), in the presence of Jesus - the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25). Only the resurrection of Lazarus is emphasized in Jn 12:1 - "the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead" - certainly, to underscore the importance of the resurrection of Jesus.

In addition to thematic agreements, it is imperative to point out lexical incongruities. Lexically speaking, therefore, the vocable πτωχός- "poor" comes across as a lone word in Jn 11-12, even though it appears three times in Jn 12:1-11 (vs. 5.6.8). Not only that, the phraseology - "for you will always have some poor people among you,"<sup>34</sup> - in response to Judas' request for alms to be given to the poor, pushes the boundary of meaning from "text" to "context": what is the social (contextual) evocation of that clause (text) for Jesus' audience? Is Jesus not worthy of receiving "charity"<sup>35</sup> the way a poor person should? The strength of the argument on lexicality and thematics stem from the fact that the narrative of Jn 12:1-11 moves away from Lazarus (Jn 11), whose resurrection and friendship with Jesus occasioned the dinner in question, to Jesus who is a recipient of an act of charity from Mary (Jn 12:1-11). In order to effect this change of perspective, the concept of the πτωχός- "poor" was used.

Vocabulary	Macro-Context Jn 11	Micro-Context Jn 12:1-11
Death/νεκρός/ἀποκτείνω/ἀποθνήσκω <sup>36</sup>	9 (Jn11:21.25.26.32.37.44.50.51.53)	3 (Jn 12:1.9.10)
Resurrection/ ἐγείρω /ἀνάστασις	3 (Jn 11:22.24.25)	2 (Jn 12:1.9)
Burial/ἐνταφιασμός	0	1 (Jn 12:7)

Iscariot? Judas, in addition to his role, symbolizes the presence of other disciples, just as we had other disciples accompany Jesus to the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:7-16); and, Judas will be singled out again at the last supper (Jn 13:29).

<sup>33</sup>Even though Martha said "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world," (Jn 11:27) her statement afterwards, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days" (Jn 11:39) shows that her doubts persisted, and Jesus' reprimand "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn 11:40) corroborates our point.

<sup>34</sup>My translation.

<sup>35</sup> We intentionally switch from "alms" in the preceding sentence to "charity" here because "alms" are given to the living, but charity extends even to the dead, like burying the dead. To be fixated with "alms" is to see what Mary did for Jesus to be a waste.

<sup>36</sup> We did not include τελευτάω in Jn 11:39, in our counting.

Poor/πτωχός	0	3 (Jn 12:5.6.8)
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We need to focus on the meaning of the "poor" because the whole of Jn 11 does not even mention that word or concept; for it to have appeared here means that there is a message which the final text of Jn 12:1-11 wishes to transmit. Still, the meaning of the "poor" in Jn 12:5-6 is so obvious and common place, that one wonders the necessity for the saying "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me," if no special meaning is intended for that statement. This statement becomes all the more interesting because the only appearance of πτωχός - "poor," outside of Jn 12:1-11, is in Jn 13:29, and the context is that of the Last Supper (Jn 13:2), where, among other things, Jesus was living behind a legacy of service, as part of his farewell to his disciples. What have the poor to do with Jesus' death, then? It is, of course, obvious that the use of the concept "poor" in Jn 13:29 was conjectural, in the sense that the disciples were deciphering the significance of Jesus' instruction to Judas Iscariot; but it nonetheless established the fact that Jesus and his community had the habit of almsgiving to the poor, and the disciples remembered that.

It is pertinent to notice that Jn 12:8 only has the word "poor" linking it to its micro and macro-contexts. As the chart above shows, the different affinities between the pericopes of Jn 11 and Jn 12:1-11 provide us with hermeneutical elements for understanding Jn 12:8, which incorporates the word "poor" as a clue to its usual meaning (Deut 15:11). Less we forget, the unique words - burial and poor - which separate the micro-context of Jn 12:8 from its macro-context suggest a dual meaning for Jn 12:8 because it is a bearer of meaning from its original *Sitz Im Leben* (among the Jews - Deut 12:11) and has acquired a new one in its present context. Let us look at Jn 12:8 closely.

### **"You will always have the poor with you" (Jn 12:8a): Its Provenance**

One advantage accruing from the comparative analysis above, of the micro and macro-contexts, is to show the difference which persists, in spite of the unity which exists, between the two: namely, the phraseology "You will always have the poor with you" (Jn 12:8a) occurs without explanation. Indeed, we showed that the term "poor" was used twice prior to the statement in Jn 12:8a and once in Jn 13:29, but all three occurrences (Matt 26:11; Mk 14:7; Jn 12:5-6) were understood because they were explained. It is not the case here (Jn 12:8a) - no explanation is given!<sup>37</sup> It is precisely because the meaning of the "poor" and the statement that enshrines it is not self-evident, that we need to ask for its "provenance," in order to decode its meaning.

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<sup>37</sup> Most Johannine commentators simply refer to Deut 15:11, no more no less!

The uniqueness of Jn 12:8 vis-à-vis Mk 14:7 and Matt 26:11<sup>38</sup> is obvious. Schnackenburg's intuition accords with ours when he says that,

The associations and context gave it [Jn 12:1-11] its particular Johannine colouring: Jesus, who will not be with his friends physically for much longer, is for believers secretly glorified even in his death and for the community the figure to whom honour and worship are due.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, the context of John is different from that of Matthew and Mark.<sup>40</sup> While Matthew and Mark place the anointing in the house of Simon the Leper, even though the location - Bethany - is the same as that of John, the context is different because the raising of Lazarus provides the *raison-d'être* for the dinner offered on Jesus' behalf in Jn 12:1-11. Another element of detail is the fact that Matthew and Mark have the ointment poured on Jesus' head, while John has it poured on Jesus' feet. One may add a question: is the nameless woman of Matt 26:7 and Mk 14:3 the same as Mary, in John 12:1-11?

Synoptic and Old Testament scholars usually link the meaning of this text to the Old Testament meaning of "charity" because of the presence of εἰς μνημόσυνον αὐτῆς - "in her memory" (Matt 27:13; Mk 14:9).<sup>41</sup> The presence of εἰς - "toward" suggests the idea of motion, which may be construed as reward attributable to somebody.<sup>42</sup> The concept of "memorial" is absent in Jn 12:1-11 and the revelation of the divinity of Christ, in Jn 11 preceding Jn 12:1-11, is missing in Matthew and Mark.

Moreover, there is an added difficulty of chronology: at the outset of chapter 11, an allusion to a certain Mary "[n]ow a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill" (Jn 11:1-2).<sup>43</sup> So, did the anointing take place before the death and resurrection of

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<sup>38</sup> Authors consider Lk 7:36-50 in their comparison of these pericopes, we do not explore Luke because the formula we are studying is missing in Lk 7:36-50. However, it is pertinent to note that Luke agrees with John that it was the feet of Jesus that was anointed (Lk 7:38).

<sup>39</sup>Rudolf SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 372-374..

<sup>40</sup> For a more elaborate comparative analysis, see: WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 2, pp.

<sup>41</sup> Francis M. MACATANGAY, "Acts of Charity as Acts of Remembrance in the Book of Tobit," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 2013, 69-84.

<sup>42</sup> Lk 7:48 links charity to the forgiveness of sin, a tradition Anderson explored in his book on "Sin" mentioned above. In other words, the reward for charity is the remittance of one's sins.

<sup>43</sup>Schnackenburg is of the opinion that the link between Jn 11:1-2 (Martha and Mary) and Jn 12:1-8 (Martha and Mary) is the editor's knowledge, from tradition, of the anointing that took place in Bethany - the emphasis is location. We are of the opinion that the meaning to be given to Jn 12:1-11 is the real reason why Jn 12:1-11 comes after the narration of the raising of Lazarus. Cf. Rudolf SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 366.

Lazarus or after? The principle of "multiple attestation" will help us to clarify this. Multiple attestation will show that it was a saying that is as remote as the ministry of Jesus Christ.

### **Multiple Attestation**

Scripture scholars are quick to notice the presence of parallel or similar expressions in Matthew and Mark: "For you always have the poor with you" (Matt 26:11a; Mk 14:7a). This is what is technically called "multiple attestation": the presence of parallel statements, phrases/clauses or formulas in different places in sacred Scriptures. This fact of repetition indicates the "preformed"<sup>44</sup> nature of Jn. 12:8.

The fascination with multiple attestation springs from two presuppositions: first, the material in question predates its present context of use, and, second, that there exists a precise meaning attributed and attributable to parallel statements, which accounts for why they are used without explanations. Linguistically, at least from the perspective of Widdowson's linguistic theory, there exists a "pre-text" which makes the semantic decoding of "For you always have the poor with you" possible. More often than not, the origin of "For you always have the poor with you" is traced to Deut 15:11: "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth." It is argued that, since the context of the sabbatical year and jubilee shaped the meaning of how the poor should be treated, even if the pre-text to Deuteronomy 15 itself is the consequence of liberation from Egypt (Deut 15:15), the meaning of the neo-testamental understanding of "For you always have the poor with you" (Matt 26:11, Mk 14:7, Jn 12:8) should be based on Deut 15:11. Two arguments militate against this solution: first, the context<sup>45</sup> of usage and, second, lexis.

Lexically speaking, there is a difference between οὐ γὰρ μὴ ἐκλίπη ἐνδεῆς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς- "[s]ince there will never cease to be some in need on the earth" (Deut 15:11) and τοὺς πτωχοὺς γὰρ πάντοτε ἔχετε μεθ' ἑαυτῶν, ἐμὲ δὲ οὐ πάντοτε ἔχετε- "[y]ou always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8). The concept of γῆ- "land," which the Septuagint translates as γῆ and ἰσχυρῶς- "needy person," translated as ἐνδεῆς by the Septuagint, introduce two concepts alien to the three versions in the New Testament (Matt 26:11, Mk 14:7, Jn 12:8). According to

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<sup>44</sup> Timothy prefers to use the term "preform" to the traditional term "formula." "preformed" and "formulaic" are said of materials in the New Testament that antedate their usage. Cf. Mark M. YARBROUGH, *Paul's Utilization of Preformed Tradition in 1 Timothy*. An Evaluation of the Apostle's Literary, Rhetorical and Theological Tactics (Library of New Testament Studies, 417). London – New York, T&T Clark, 2009.

<sup>45</sup>In order to see the nuances of words, it is important to look at words in their contexts. The result of such contextual analysis is what we present under lexical analysis.

Louw-Nida, ἐνδεής means a transient state of being "in need," while πτωχός means a permanent state of poverty. This is what they have to say:

57.53 πτωχός, ἢ, ὄν: pertaining to being poor and destitute, implying a continuous state - 'poor, destitute'." [They also say:] " 57.51 ἐνδεής, ἐς: pertaining to lacking what is needed or necessary for existence - 'poor, needy.' οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς 'there was no one in the group who was in need' Ac 4.34 ἐνδεής is similar in meaning to πτωχός (57.53), but the focus seems to be more upon a severe lack of needed resources rather than upon a state of poverty and destitution.<sup>46</sup>

The semantic difference between these two words ἐνδεής and πτωχός is significant because there seems to be a belief in a common good or the communal ownership of goods, as indicated in Acts 4:34, where the term ἐνδεής is used; just as God gave the "land" to corporate Israel and not to individuals entrenches the same meaning in the context of Deut 15:11.<sup>47</sup> On the contrary, Paul gives a classic nuance to the term πτωχός when he writes: ὅτι δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε - "that though he [Jesus Christ] was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2Co 8:9b). Jesus' incarnation puts him in a permanent state of material poverty (Gal 4:4-5). Hence, the distinction "rich" and "poor" is germane to the concept of πτωχός and not to the terminology ἐνδεής.<sup>48</sup>

Even though it is usually not advisable to understand the gospels from the view point of Pauline corpus, synoptic scholars have studied the "Sendungsformel"<sup>49</sup> of Jn 3:17 in comparison with Gal 4:4. Why not approach the earthly poverty of Jesus Christ, in Jn 12:3-8, which necessitated charity done for him, as if for a poor person, as part of the condition of his earth existence?<sup>50</sup> If the "sending" of Christ culminates in his "hour," that is, his death, Jesus should be a recipient of charity like any poor person. Charity done to Christ, then, has a salvific importance because it makes possible the realization of Christ's mission by human contributions toward that mission. Consequently, the idea that Jesus was not a poor

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<sup>46</sup>*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Quoted from *Bibleworks 9*.

<sup>47</sup> Our analysis is contextual rather than sociological. For a list and opinions of few authors who use sociological data to explain the meaning and nuances of poverty, see: Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judaean Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, pp.98-114.

<sup>48</sup> Proverbs 13:8; 22:2; Sirach 10:22; James 2:5, especially the Greek version.

<sup>49</sup> Eduard SCHWEIZER, "Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund der 'Sendungsformel': Gal 4.4f. Rm 8.3f. Joh 3.16f. 1 Joh 4.9," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1966, 199-210.

<sup>50</sup> Pierce and Reynolds have recently made a grammatical case for why "the descent of Christ" from heaven preceded his "ascent into heaven," strengthening the argument, some worth, of the "sending formula." This is the case because the "Son of Man" formula necessarily implies that the earthly Jesus is divested of some of his heaven glory, as long as he was human. Cf. Madison N. PIERCE and Benjamin E. REYNOLDS, "The Perfect Tense-Form and the Son of Man in John 3.13: Developments in Greek Grammar as a Viable Solution to the Timing of the Ascent and Descent," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 60, 2014, 149-155.

person deserving of charity, which is the implication of Judas Iscariot's statement - "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (Jn 12:5) - is erroneous. As a matter of fact, Mary's anointing of Jesus consummates, figuratively, the mission of Jesus and announced Jesus' resurrection because only a corpse should normally be embalmed! This will become clearer when we explore the meaning of "charity" in association with the "poverty" of a poor person. Indeed, if charity often substituted for the sacrifices offered at the Temple in Jerusalem, how fitting for Mary to offer her sacrifice of charity to Christ a visible temple<sup>51</sup> of God, who has come to her home!

The complementary statement, "but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8b), gives a dominical perspective to a statement supposedly taken from Deut 15:11. We now have both an appropriation and surplus meaning or transcendence. This changes the dynamics of the sphere of semantics Deut 15:11 may have on Jn 12:8 because the "incarnation" - "and the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14a) - makes it possible to have Christ, the Son of Man, for a time, but not always. So, the semantic context of "[y]ou always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8) is elucidated by the purpose and mission of Christ, especially his death.

### **Unique Vocabulary**

"Unique vocabulary" is another element used to detect a preformed material, in addition to multiple attestation and others.<sup>52</sup> As regards Jn 12:8a, the presence of the word "poor" conjures a pre-text for its hermeneutics, since we argued above that scholars naturally think of Deut 15:11. Along this line of thinking, the concept of the "poor" and "poverty" has been revamped and enriched by new researches into Second Temple Judaism as "pre-text" for reading the New Testament.

In the past six years, Gary A. Anderson, has published monumental books, which demonstrate how Jewish concepts of sin and charity both evolved in inter-testamental times. Perhaps we will soon have the pleasure of reading the same kind of work on the concepts of the poor and poverty. Before then, however, the neo-testamental *hapax legumenon* ἐνδεής (Acts 4:29), in contradistinction to the ubiquity of πτωχός, in the New Testament, used to describe the "poor," clearly shows a discontinuity in the mind of early Christians. This is no less the case

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<sup>51</sup> The temporality and transitory nature of God's dwelling among the Jews is underscored by the use of the Greek aorist verb ἐσκήνωσεν ("he dwelt" just once and for a brief moment) in Jn 1:14, from the verb σκηνόω. This brief "dwelling" is also associated with the feast of Tent - ἡ σκηνοπηγία (Jn 7:2). Coloe develops the idea of Jesus as a Temple, from his incarnation and the feast of Tabernacle. Cf. Mary L. COLOE, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001, pp. 115-143.

<sup>52</sup> Meier talks of the primary criteria of "historicity," in contradistinction to "dubious" ones, in the context of the gospels; namely: "embarrassment, discontinuity, multiple attestation, coherence, rejection and execution." Cf. John P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 1, New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991, pp. 167-201.

because the Greek and Roman worlds in which the Good news entered never recognized the exclusive or "divine" right of the Jews to any land, which would have warranted the conception of the poor ἀσένδεής, a situation marked by lack of distributive justice, which the sabbatical and jubilee years redressed.<sup>53</sup>

From the emphasis laid on the manumission of slaves in both first and second Temple Judaism, vestiges of which are still found in Pauline formulas - "there is no longer slave or free" (Gal 3:28)<sup>54</sup> and the variants in 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:11 - show an emergent understanding of the poor and poverty that is not based on the Jewish right to land and identity, but from a sociological reality.

The function of the "uniqueness of vocabulary" here aims to buttress the point that Jn 12:8 is foreign to its present environment. Consequently, whatever meaning it now has must factor in its new or present environment or context, which we have termed macro and micro-contexts.

### **Rupture from its Environment:<sup>55</sup> Jn 12:8 versus Jn 11:1-12:11**

A third element "rupture from its environment," which we use here, to argue that Jn 12:8 is foreign to its present location, proves that there is an intrusiveness that Jn 12:8 constitutes in its actual position. The introduction or description given of Martha and Mary, in Jn 12:1-2, whom the redactor had mentioned already in Jn 11:1-2, says at least two things; first, the story inserted into Jn 12:3-8 is well known in Jesus' circle; second, the redactor of John's gospel was out to find a fitting place for it in the gospel of John. By "fitting place" we mean to give the story a theological (Johannine) meaning via a context. Of course, Johannine scholarship is aware of the redactional process called *wiederaufnahme*,<sup>56</sup> which is able to explain the reprise of an idea previously touched upon, but the examples given by scholars

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<sup>53</sup> For how early Christians appropriated this concept, see: Carolyn OSIEK, "The Ransom of Slaves: Evolution of a Tradition," *Harvard Theological Review* 74, 1981, 365-386 at 365; *Ibid.*, Carolyn OSIEK, "Slavery in the Second Testament World," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22, 1992, 174-179. This article mistakenly cited *Similitudes* 1.10 instead of *Similitudes* 1.8 [p. 177].

<sup>54</sup> Richard Horsley has dedicated to this dyad and other conceptions of slavery a few critical studies. Cf. Richard A. HORSLEY, "Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings," *Semeia* 83/84, 1998, 153-200.

<sup>55</sup> These three criteria - multiple attestation, unique vocabulary and rupture from its environment - are the only three we looked at here, even though it is possible to explore all six criteria for detecting a preformed material. Here are the six: 1) Rupture from its environment, 2) Unique beginning, 3) Introductory formula, 4) Distinctive style, 5) Disparate vocabulary, and 6) Multiple attestations. The translation and arrangements are mine. Cf. Michel GOURGUES, « Les formes pré-littéraires, ou l'Évangile avant l'écriture », in Bernard POUDERON (dir.), *Histoire de la littérature grecque ancienne*, vol. 2 : *De Paul à Irénée de Lyon*, coll. « Initiations aux Pères de l'Église », Paris: Cerf, 2013, pp. 265-282 at 2-3.

<sup>56</sup> Marie-Émile BOISMARD, "Un procédé rédactionnel dans le quatrième évangile: la Wiederaufnahme," in *L'évangile de Jean: sources, rédaction, théologie*, M. DE JONGE (dir.), Gembloux: J. Duculot/Leuven: University Press, 1977, 235-241.

do not cover as many verses as what we have here. Indeed, Boismard studied the use of *wiederaufnahme* in Jn 11, but from a different perspective.<sup>57</sup>

Given the episodes of the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11) and the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Jn 12:12-19), it is legitimate to talk of a discontinuity. The nature of this discontinuity is such that Jn 12:8 deduces its meaning from the understanding of this apparent alien environment into which it has been inserted.<sup>58</sup> So, we are not dealing with the usual *wiederaufnahme*, which normally comprises few verses; here, we have a saying attributed to Christ, and it seeks elucidation. The statement, "but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8b), puts Jesus in relief with "You always have the poor with you" (Jn 12:8a) as well as the whole of Johannine theology, especially the "I am" passages, since *ἐγὼ ἐμὲ* - "me" (Jn 12:8b) here, refers to the divinity of Johannine Jesus. Here precisely is the hermeneutical usefulness of the macro-context of Jn 12:8, because from it, the meaning of Jn 12:8 becomes evident.

### **Exegetical Analysis of Jn 12:1-11**

What is now obvious, we hope, from our analysis, is the fact that the meaning of Jn 12:8 is not evident, for the reasons we have adduced, and in order to make it evident, we needed to study its macro and micro-contexts. We now insert Jn 12:8 into its micro-context, and the story of Jn 12:1-11 could be represented thus:

**A** Jesus came to Bethany to Lazarus whom he raised from the dead (Jn 12:1)

**B** Martha served Jesus and those reclining at table with him (Jn 12:2)

**C** Mary anointed Jesus's feet and wiped them with her hair (Jn 12:3)

**E** Judas<sup>59</sup> said that the money for the ointment were better given to the poor (Jn 12:4-6)

**C'** Jesus defended Mary: You always have the poor, you do not always have me (Jn 12:7-8)

**B'** Large crowd came to see Jesus and Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead (Jn 12:9)

**A'** The Chief priests came to Bethany<sup>60</sup> to arrest Jesus and to kill Lazarus (Jn 12:10-11)

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>58</sup> Look at the chart above.

<sup>59</sup> Scholars have laid a lot of emphasis on the role played by Judas, quite often, in a negative light. We intend to show that his question was the catalysis for the use of Jesus' statement in Jn 12:8. For views on Judas, see: Raymond Edward BROWN, *The Gospel According John I-XII*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970, p. 447-454; Francis J. MOLONEY (ed.), *The Gospel of John*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998, pp. 356-358.

<sup>60</sup> The locative adverb *ἐκεῖ*- "there" (Jn 12:9), meaning Bethany, and the conjunctive particle *δὲ*- "but/and/so" (Jn 12:10), beginning a follow up sentence, suggests that the "chief priests" were part of the "large crowd" that came (*ἐκεῖ*-there) to Bethany, only with a different agenda. So "Bethany" is implied in this verse - Jn 12:10.

The correlation among our chiasmic pairs is "based on language, concepts and content."<sup>61</sup> The drama that unfolded during the dinner was not a public knowledge, but limited to the participants at the dinner (Jn 12:3-8).<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the discussion about Jesus being "the resurrection and the life" was limited to Jesus and Martha (Jn 11:17-27). This privy information add flavor to the context of their respective pericopes. The possibility of excluding the "dinner saga" from Jn 12:1-11 and that the flow of Jn 11-12 would remain intact invites a scrutiny of Jn 12:3-8. And as we have said, the concept of the "poor" is a pointer to the meaning of Jn 12:8.

### **The Conspiracy to Kill Jesus and Lazarus as a Denial of the Possibility of Resurrection (Jn 12:1. 9-11)**

The explicit naming of biblical figures conjure the reality of a narrative. And, given the double referents to Mary, Martha and Lazarus at the begin of two chapters (Jn 11:1-3; Jn 12:1-2) authenticate the prime actors in both chapters. Also, the congruent motifs at the end of Jn 11 and Jn 12:9-11 - the search for and desire to put Lazarus to death because his resurrection elicited faith in the people renews the importance of the resurrection saga of Jn 11 and the determination of the religious leadership of the Jews to deny the possibility of the resurrection.

Jesus and Lazarus put forward at the beginning of the pericope (Jn 12:1) in celebration mood, after the resurrection of Lazarus, got mentioned again at the end (Jn 12:9-11) as deserving of death. As far as the leadership of the day was concerned, faith in Jesus had to be suppressed, even if killing were necessary - "it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (Jn 11:50). The contestation between Jesus - "the resurrection and Life" (Jn 11:25) and the Jewish option to defend nationhood alludes to the distinctiveness of the role of faith in the process of discipleship. Indeed, if the Jewish people associated resurrection with charity - burying the dead, as exemplified by the book of Tobit, the determination of who dies and who lives cannot be made by mortals but God alone - here, Jesus Christ.<sup>63</sup>

If the hypothesis put forward by Capper and Ling is anything to go by, the claim that Bethany is known for its hospitality,<sup>64</sup> what a fitting place it would be for the manifestation of the reward for charity and arms given, especially one done to Jesus himself.

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<sup>61</sup>Traditionally, "chiasmus" is "based on language, concepts and content." Cf. Nils W. LUND, *Chiasmus un the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992, p. xvi. Chiasmus also needs to be an "inverted parallelism" or an "antithesis." Cf. John W. WELCH (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, Provo, UT: Research Press Publications, 1981, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Brown maintains that the author is not an eyewitness. Cf. Raymond Edward BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p. 452.

<sup>63</sup> We will expatiate on these points in 3.3 below.

<sup>64</sup>Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judean Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 94-95, 179.

### **Charity to the Poor Guarantees Immortality (Jn 12:3-7)**

The synoptic contexts of "you always have . . ." clearly left a Second Temple imprint on the way that saying should be understood. The emphasis, in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, on "remembrance" ("in memory of her" [matt 26:13; Mk 14:9]) recalls the link made between God's remembrance of acts of charity done to the poor, especially as narrated in the book of Tobit,<sup>65</sup> with a unique reference to the burying of the dead. The unique emphasis laid on the corporal work of mercy associated with burying the dead is put in relief by Matthew and Mark as the symbolism of what Mary did - "she has anointed my body before hand for burial" (Mk 14:8). Also, the *liber arbiter* "whenever you choose you can do good for them," inserted in between "you always have the poor" and "you do not always have me," in Mk 14:7, maintains its dependence on a popular Jewish understanding, corroborated by Jn 13:29, "maybe Jesus was asking Judas to give something to the poor" which means, at that epoch, that almsgiving to the poor is not tied to sabbatical and Jubilee years anymore, since Jesus community had a purse for the poor.

However, a marked difference exists between the synoptic tradition and John: John alone says that the ointment was poured on Jesus' feet, the others say over his head.<sup>66</sup> The washing of feet, which replaces the institution narrative in John's gospel, takes up, in another form, the worship of God - since Jn 11, via dialogues and the use of "I am" formula (Jn 11:25), established the divinity of Jesus - and links it to mutual service, as Jesus' parting legacy for his community (Jn 13:1-20). The fact that "feet washing" was a customary sign of hospitality to a guest (Lk 7:44-50), translated as service, when Jesus, master and Lord, washed his disciples feet. It is imperative to see Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet as worship of God because she realized him to be God prior to the anointing, thanks to the saga narrated in Jn 11:32.<sup>67</sup> Of course, Martha said the same thing (Jn 11:21) as Mary did, their subsequent actions display the difference in their faith. The apparent waste of a costly perfume or ointment on Jesus' feet reveals a high degree of faith, consequent upon the raising of Lazarus.

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<sup>65</sup> Francis M. MACATANGAY, "Acts of Charity as Acts of Remembrance in the Book of Tobit," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 2013, 69-84; Ibid., "Burial of the Dead as Imitation and Anticipation of God's Restoration of Israel in the Book of Tobit," (a paper read at the 2014 CBA, Providence, Rhode Island); Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, Yale, NH/London: University Press, 2013, especially chapters 2 and 5, "Charity as Service to God" and "Deliverance from Death."

<sup>66</sup> See footnote 34.

<sup>67</sup> *Ad rem* here, is Moloney's statement, "it is Mary, not Martha, who accepts Jesus revelation as the resurrection and the life (cf. vv. 24-25). Only Mary accepts Jesus' revelation of himself as she confesses 'if you had been here.' Mary is the character in the story reflecting true faith (vv 29, 32) while Martha has fallen short of such faith (vv. 21-22, 24, 27)." Cf. Francis J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, p. 330. See footnote 33.

Jesus makes three linkages among his divinity, hour and resurrection,<sup>68</sup> in order to help us to understand his rebuke of Judas' criticism of Mary's charity<sup>69</sup> to himself and the meaning of Mary's gesture of kindness and faith - "Leave her alone" (Jn 12:7a). First, Jesus shows himself as God by giving life to dead Lazarus; second, Jesus proves that his glory is his resurrection, since he says to his disciples that Lazarus' illness was not leading to death but glory - resurrection; but Lazarus was already dead when Jesus made his statement, so Jesus' statement "so that she may keep it for the day of my burial" as the standard translation of ἵνα εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ ἐνταφιασμοῦ μου τηρήσῃ αὐτό fails to manifest the anticipatory role of the resurrection or glorification of Jesus, which is the meaning of the "hour" of Jesus. I suggest that ἵνα εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ ἐνταφιασμοῦ μου τηρήσῃ αὐτό should be translated as "in order that it [τὸ μύρον] may guard/preserve [me] against the day of my burial." The idea of decay is remote from the imminence of the resurrection. So that anointing "preserves" from decay, thereby foreshadowing the resurrection or the glorification of Christ. "Death," for Johannine theology, is not physical. Little wonder Jesus talks about his burial (ἐνταφιασμοῦ μου) and not his death! Third, the preoccupation with Jesus' "hour," right after the pericope of Jn 12:1-11, suggests the imminence of Jesus' death and resurrection. Also, the fact that Mary was not at the grave to embalm Jesus may suggest an expectation of his resurrection.

While the Synoptic gospels emphasize the imperative to help the poor, in consonance with Second Temple meaning of Deut 15:11, albeit in a new light, Jn 12:8 factors in the recognition of the divinity of Jesus Christ to give a richer, if not Johannine, understanding to the Dominical saying: "you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Both notions cohere without contradiction: helping the poor as service to God and savings for the forgiveness of one's sins, but also the worship of God in Jesus Christ as a guarantee of resurrection, foreshadowed in the resurrection of Lazarus, and immortalized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **"You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8): A Neo-Testamental Dominical Saying and an Imperative to Help the Poor**

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<sup>68</sup> Wahlde makes this evident in his three-layer reconstruction of the origins of the gospel of John. Cf. Urban C. von WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 2, loc. 7635-7651.

<sup>69</sup> Old Testament scholars make a distinction between almsgiving and charity. Alms are given to the living, while charity is done for the living and the dead. We chose to talk about "charity" here for two reasons: 1) If we were to view Mary's action from the point of view of almsgiving, then, it would be considered wasteful, as Judas apparently thought, owing to the monetary value of the ointment in question, and 2) charity is linked to the burying of the dead, and the emphasis here is the "burial" of Jesus. For the biblical nuances between "almsgiving" and "charity," see: Gary A. ANDERSON, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, Yale, NH: University Press, 2013, pp. 14-52, especially the subtitles, "Charity as an Expression of Faith in God," "Charity as Service to God," and "A Loan to God," pp. 14-34.

The first point of importance to tackle here is the attribution of Jn 12:8, and its synoptic parallels in Mark and Matthew, to Deut 15:11. We have shown earlier that there are literary arguments, vocabulary and contextual mutations, that militate against equating Jn 12:8 with Deut 15:11. Here, we need to look at the arguments of Capper and Ling, which claim, on the basis of "virtuoso religion" and the etymological meaning of "Bethany"<sup>70</sup> as the "house of the poor," that places of hospitality to the poor and Qumran-like houses of residents of people who practised voluntary poverty were common-place phenomena in Judaea.<sup>71</sup>

One fact is admitted by Capper's and Ling's position - poverty was a reality in first century Judaea - however poverty was understood. Consequently, the statement "You always have the poor with you" (Jn 12:8a) makes sense in a very real and existential way because of the prevalence of poverty in Bethany. Beyond this point, though, the text of the Jn 11:1-12:11 sheds more light on the exegetical meaning of Jn 12:8. This is the case for two reasons: first, the second part of the statement, "but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8b), points to the fact that the identity of Jesus forecloses the meaning of "You always have the poor with you" (Jn 12:8a); especially the sole dependence on its Deuteronomic meaning (Deut 15:11). Second, since historical authors accept Jn 12:8 to have been a redactional addition at the third stage of the evolution of the gospel of John,<sup>72</sup> this final canonical text we have must have a specific meaning controlled by its present contexts.<sup>73</sup>

It is now clear that Judas' accusation of Mary's wastefulness, as regards the ointment used to anoint Jesus' feet, was the fitting pretext for the final editor of Jn 11:1-12:11 to present the meaning of Jesus' (dominical saying) statement, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8). Judas' concerns for the poor neglected the wider scope of "charity," a term which did not exclude almsgiving, but goes beyond it.

Obviously, the paucity of Johannine texts dealing with the concept of the poor may puzzle one as to the connection Jesus has with the poor. Marc Girard has shown

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<sup>70</sup>Capper and Ling overlook the argument of Ernest Munachi Ezeogu on the etymology of names, especially that of Mary - an Egyptian name. Is it not possible, as Ezeogu argues, that Jesus' family, from his mother's side and Lazarus' family were immigrants from Egypt (Jn 19:25-27), hence their solidarity, and we can see similar solidarity even today among immigrant churches and communities in the diaspora, in a foreign land? After all, Capper and Ling did not say that every house in Bethany was a welcome place for the poor. It is important to note that Jesus went into the house of Mary and Martha, which happens to be in Bethany and a necessary connection between house-οικία (Jn 11:31) and village-κώμη (Jn 11:1) has to be proved! On Ezeogu's articles, see: Ernest Munachi EZEUGU, "The African Origin of Jesus: An Afrocentric Reading of Matthew's Infancy Narrative (Matthew 1-2)" in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, Musa W. DUBE, Andrew M. MBUI, and Dora R. MBUWAYESANYO (eds.), Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, pp. 259-282.

<sup>71</sup>Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judaean Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 165-181.

<sup>72</sup>Urban C. von WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 2, loc. 7635.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, loc. 7635-7651.

that even the life of Jesus, in comparison with the three major Old Testament words for the poor (אָרְבֵּי, עָנִי and דָּל),<sup>74</sup> provides sufficient grounds for talking about Jesus' poverty. In his own words, Girard concludes:

D'après la terminologies biblique, donc, trois traits définissent la condition du pauvre: ne pas respirer ['ānāω], ne rien avoir ['eb°yôn], et ne pas pouvoir [dal]. Or, ces trois traits résument à eux seuls tout le psychodrame de la Passion: Jésus meurt dans la dépendance totale ['eb°yôn], immobilisé [dal] et étouffé, asphyxié ['ānāω].<sup>75</sup>

In the drama of the cross, Marc Girard finds the poverty of Jesus in solidarity with the poor of this world. His analysis was exclusively based on the etymological nuances of the three mentioned Hebrew words for describing the poor. This analysis is helpful for our purposes because it shows Judas' misconception of the identity of the poor and Jesus' share in it. Also, Marc Girard's synthesis, especially his attribution of that to the "Passion" of Christ fits well with the explicit imminence of Jesus' "hour" in Jn 12.

If we had hinted at the second level reading that scholars admit to exist as a hermeneutical principle embedded in the gospel of John, it is because with the aid of a second level reading, what had been both explicitly and implicitly written down in Jn 11-12<sup>76</sup> dove-tail in proving the meaning of Jn 12:8 - a divine Jesus, whose glory is dimmed by the poverty of his human condition.

### **Conclusion**

The fact that Matt 26:11, Mk 14:7 and Jn 12:8 preserve a similar saying, this saying has to go back to Jesus, which we term Dominical Saying; hence, the necessity to preserve it. In order to decipher the meaning of this Dominical Saying, it was necessary to look at the context where it is inserted, because if the gospel writers had received a uniform meaning for this saying, they would have conserved it, uniformly; but they did not. As it stands, our best bet is to understand the intentionality of the final redactor of Jn 12:1-11 via contextual analysis, which we have done.

In our case, it is evident that the resurrection of Lazarus pointed out a better notion of the resurrection for Christians - the resurrection of Christ. This is the case

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<sup>74</sup> Marc GIRARD, *Le Pauvre, Le sacrement de Dieu: méditation biblique et théologique*, Montréal, Médiaspaul, 1994, p. 153.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p 153. Here is my translation: "According to biblical terminologies, therefore, three traits define the condition of the poor: inability to breathe ['ānāω], having nothing ['eb°yôn], and being powerless [dal]. Now, these three traits alone summarize the psychodrama of the Passion: Jesus dies in total dependence ['eb°yôn], immobilized [dal] and choked, asphyxiated ['ānāω]."

<sup>76</sup>We do not imply that other passages of John's gospel could not be evoked with the same richness. If, in fact, we do explore the whole Gospel, a clearer picture will appear.

because a second level reading of the text warrants this conclusion, in consonance with scholarly approach to the study of John's gospel - a gospel couched in two layers, literal and spiritual. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the traditional imperative to help the poor, "[y]ou always have the poor with you," (Jn 12:8a) with "but you do not always have me" (Jn 12:8b), provides the final redactor of John with the possibility of broadening the scope of charity, from help to the poor, to include worship of God. Will it be wrong to consider prayer to God as a form of direct worship of God, since we no longer have him in person, like Mary did? Indeed, the poor will always be among us, if we are not one of them already; the question remains, though, will we remain open handed to them while not forgetting to worship God through prayers? For charity to the poor must go hand in hand with the worship of God.

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