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*Homilies and Hobby Horses:  
Chrysostom on the Lord's Supper and the Poor in  
Homilae in Matthaeum 50.3*

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**Abstract:** John Chrysostom is widely regarded as the exegete *par excellence* of the Patristic era, a champion of the literal sense of Scripture. But how well does the preacher fit this popular portrait? As a case study in Chrysostom's homiletical method, this essay examines Chrysostom's fiftieth homily on Matthew, paying particular attention to its exhortation to care for the poor as a necessary ethical entailment of the Eucharist. The essay concludes that this sermon—particularly the first half—does evidence some of Chrysostom's celebrated exegetical prowess, but Chrysostom's ethical agenda drives the second half of the sermon down a path only distantly related to the text at hand. Following this, the essay briefly considers the extent to which this sermon is representative of Chrysostom's preaching as a whole, the rationale behind Chrysostom's particular focus on the poor, and the social, material, and ecclesial circumstances which may have influenced Chrysostom's ethical agenda.

### Translation of *Homilae in Matthaeum* 50.3

Believe, therefore, that even now this is that Supper at which he also reclined. For that one in no way differs from this. For it is not that a human being makes this, and he himself made that one; but instead, he himself makes both this one and that one. Therefore, whenever you see the priest giving it to you, do not think that the priest is the one doing this, but that the hand of Christ is stretched out . . .

Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not overlook him naked; do not honor him here in silk clothing, yet overlook him outside, being killed by icy cold and nakedness. For the one who said, “This is my body,” and confirmed the matter by his word, this one also said, “You saw me hungry, and did not feed me,” and, “Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of these, the least, you did not do it to me.” For this one does not need coverings, but a pure soul; but that one needs much care. Therefore let us learn to live rationally and virtuously, and to honor Christ as he himself wills; for to the one being honored, that honor is most pleasing which he himself wants, not which we suppose. For Peter also thought he was honoring Christ by preventing him from washing his feet, but what resulted was not honor but its opposite. So you also, honor him with this honor which he himself has ordained, spending your wealth on the poor. For God does not need golden vessels, but golden souls.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This translates the excerpt in Rodney A. Whitacre, *A Patristic Greek Reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 171–72. For the Greek text used by Whitacre, see J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 58 (Paris: Imprimerie

## Introduction

John Chrysostom is widely regarded as the most disciplined, rigorous exegete among the early church fathers. During his years in Antioch and Constantinople, he preached sequentially through a considerable portion of the Bible, and his vast extant homilies have been cherished throughout church history for their exacting attention to the biblical text. For instance, Thomas Aquinas reportedly said that he would have traded the city of Paris for Chrysostom's commentary on Matthew.<sup>2</sup>

This essay will expound a portion of Chrysostom's fiftieth homily on Matthew and probe what it reveals of Chrysostom's exegesis, theology, and pastoral agenda. Particular attention will be paid to the extent to which the Chrysostom of this sermon matches the popularly received Chrysostom, Antiochene of Antiochenes, champion of unstinting submission to the literal sense of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> I will argue that this sermon—particularly the first half—does evidence some of Chrysostom's celebrated exegetical prowess, but Chrysostom's ethical agenda drives the second half of the sermon down a path only distantly related to the text at hand. To put it colloquially, even Chrysostom had his hobby horses.

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Catholique, 1857), col. 507–9; hereafter referred to as Migne, PG. In the rest of this essay, citations of the homily are my own translation from the Greek text in Migne, though I have also consulted the translation in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 310–14; hereafter referred to as Schaff, NPNF.

<sup>2</sup>The statement appears, though without documentation, in Jerome D. Quinn, “Saint John Chrysostom on History in the Synoptics,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24 (1962): 140.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), I:783, 786.

### **Preceding Material in the Homily**

The portion of the homily under special consideration is a pair of excerpts from the third section of Chrysostom's fiftieth homily on Matthew. I have singled out these two excerpts for special consideration because of the way the first Eucharistic excerpt grounds the second ethical one. In order to comment on how these sections of the sermon relate to Chrysostom's overall homiletical method, we first need to survey the first half of the homily.

The text on which the homily is based is given by Schaff as Matt 14:23–24.<sup>4</sup> However, the first half of Chrysostom's homily expounds the entire narrative from v. 23–36, in which Jesus walks on water, calls Peter to do the same, and then, upon disembarking, heals multitudes. Chrysostom's sensitive exposition of the storm sequence focuses especially on Christ's use of the storm to test and strengthen the disciples' faltering faith. For instance, Chrysostom points out that, whereas Christ was previously with his disciples in the boat when a storm arose (Matt 8:23–27), this time he allowed them to weather the storm alone for a time. And Christ did not come to them at once, but allowed them to struggle through the night. Further, he allowed them to be troubled by the very sight of himself walking on water, allowing their fear to peak before allaying it with his “Take heart; it is I.” Chrysostom draws the broader lesson, “For, since one cannot be tempted both for a long time and violently, when the righteous have almost escaped from their conflicts, because he wants them to gain more, he intensifies their struggles.”

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<sup>4</sup>Schaff, *NPNF*, 10:310.

The hinge between this exposition and the liturgical and ethical reflection that follows is the comparison Chrysostom draws between Jesus healing the sick and believers experiencing salvation in Christ through the Lord's Supper. Chrysostom exhorts his hearers, "So, let us also touch the hem of his garment; or rather, if we are willing, we have all of him. For indeed his very body is now set before us, not his garment only, but even his body; not only to touch, but also to eat and be filled." Next, Chrysostom draws attention to the greater benefits possessed by those who have the whole Christ through the gospel message, as opposed to those who merely touched the hem of his garment:

So let us draw near with faith, everyone who has a disease. For if those who touched the hem of his garment drew so much power from him, how much more those who possess him whole? Now to draw near with faith is not only to receive the offering, but also with a pure heart to touch it; to be of the mind that one is approaching Christ himself. What of it, if you do not hear a voice? Instead you see him laid out; or rather you also hear his voice, while he speaks by the evangelists.

According to Chrysostom, Christians not only see Christ laid out in the Lord's Supper, they also hear him speaking in the Gospels, addressing them with a word of salvation.

### **The Homily's Eucharistic Theology**

From this exhortation Chrysostom immediately proceeds to the first excerpt translated above: "Believe, therefore, that even now this is that Supper at which he also reclined. For that one in no way differs from

this.” Here Chrysostom asserts the continuity of the Eucharist with the Lord’s Supper at which Christ himself presided. This continuity consists in precisely the fact that, just as Christ presided at that Supper, so he also presides at this one: “For it is not that a human being makes this, and he himself made that one; but instead, he himself makes both this one and that one. Therefore, whenever you see the priest giving it to you, do not think that the priest is the one doing this, but that the hand of Christ is stretched out.” This brief discussion evidences two important components of Chrysostom’s eucharistic theology: the Lord’s Supper makes present the saving events narrated in the gospel; and Christ himself is present and active in the Supper to confer his benefits upon his people.<sup>5</sup>

Broadly speaking, these two emphases in Chrysostom’s eucharistic thought develop biblical affirmations. Regarding the first, recall that the Passover, which is the old covenant type of the Lord’s Supper, re-presented the Exodus to each succeeding generation of Israelites, such that through their membership in the covenant the event of the Exodus constituted their own identity. Scripture instructs the host of the Passover meal to say to his son in explanation of the

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<sup>5</sup>The summary of Chrysostom’s eucharistic theology in Hugh Whybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite* (London: SPCK, 1989), 63 shows that these are core elements in his eucharistic thought: “The saving acts of Christ are themselves made present in the sacraments, which both enable each generation to appropriate God’s salvation, and point forward to its consummation at the end of time. . . . Chrysostom lays particular stress on the Eucharist as the ‘anamnesis’ of the many things God has done for us, and especially of the sacrifice of the cross. He urges his congregation to realize that at the Eucharist they are truly in the Upper Room. It is Christ who presides, as at the Last Supper; and when the priest gives them Communion, they must understand it to be the hand of Christ himself which reaches out to them. The Eucharist is an imitation of the death of Christ, and a participation in it.”

rite, “It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt” (Exod 13:8; cf. Exod 13:14, Deut 26:5–11).<sup>6</sup> Regarding Christ’s presence in blessing in the Supper, recall Paul’s questions, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). Those who rightly partake of the Lord’s Supper share together in the benefits of Christ’s saving work. As one body, they enjoy fellowship with their risen Savior; thus, it is for both Paul and Chrysostom.<sup>7</sup>

### The Homily’s Exhortation to Charity

This brief exposition of eucharistic theology leads Chrysostom to expound the ethical entailments of the Eucharist, prominent among which is care for the poor. In the material between our two excerpts, Chrysostom first asserts that just as Christ is the one who offers us his body in the Lord’s Supper, so in baptism God himself, not the priest, is the one who “possesses [our] head with invisible power” and “inscribed [us] among his own children.” Because God has thus given

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<sup>6</sup>For insightful exegetical reflections along these lines, see Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 201–18.

<sup>7</sup>Gordon Fee’s comments on 1 Corinthians 10:16 move along these lines: “The ‘fellowship,’ therefore, was most likely a celebration of their common life in Christ, based on the new covenant in his blood that had previously bound them together in union with Christ by his Spirit. But while their ‘fellowship’ was with one another, its basis and focus were in Christ, his death and resurrection; they were thus together in his presence, where as host at his table he shared anew with them the benefits of the atonement. It is this unique relationship *between believers and with their Lord*, celebrated at this meal, that makes impossible similar associations with other ‘believers’ at the tables of demons.” Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 467.

himself to us in the gospel and its sacred mysteries, we have no excuse if we withhold necessary goods from our brothers and sisters in Christ: “For if he did not spare himself for our sake, what must we deserve, who spare our wealth and spend lavishly on a soul ( $\psi\chi\eta\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\phi\epsilon\delta\omega\eta\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ ) on behalf of which he did not spare himself?” The phrase  $\psi\chi\eta\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\phi\epsilon\delta\omega\eta\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$  could more idiomatically be rendered “live in lavish luxury”; the phrase creates a stark contrast between unsparing human consumption and unsparing divine giving. God has given himself to us in Christ, and those who partake of his goodness must embody that goodness toward others.

From here Chrysostom again reiterates that the gospel is the greatest manifestation of divine benevolence and that this benevolence is held before us daily in the sacred mysteries of the church’s liturgy. He then spirals in toward a more specific ethical exhortation: “Therefore let no Judas approach this table, no Simon; for these two perished through covetousness. So let us flee from this pit; nor should we count it enough for our salvation, if after we have stripped widows and orphans, we offer a gold and jeweled cup for this table.” Chrysostom argues that offering a golden soul is far more important than furnishing the Lord’s table with a golden cup: “For, if you desire to honor the sacrifice, offer your soul, for which it was slain. Gild this with gold; but if it remains worse than lead or potter’s clay, while the vessel is of gold, what is the gain?”

At the conclusion of this exhortation, in our second excerpt, Chrysostom turns his attention to the positive obligation to care for the poor:

Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not overlook him naked; do not honor him here in silk clothing, yet overlook him

outside, being killed by icy cold and nakedness. For the one who said, “This is my body,” and confirmed the matter by his word, this one also said, “You saw me hungry, and did not feed me,” and, “Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of these, the least, you did not do it to me.” For this one does not need coverings, but a pure soul; but that one needs much care.

In this section Chrysostom specifies how it is that one is to gild one’s soul, namely, caring for the poor. Drawing on Matt 25:31–46 as well as the Synoptic Last Supper traditions, Chrysostom juxtaposes Christ’s identification of the Eucharist as his body with his identification with his poor brothers and sisters, and he fuses these two Christological solidarities into one theological and ethical edifice.<sup>8</sup> The same Christ who pronounced the eucharistic words of institution pronounced his solidarity with those in need. Chrysostom writes, “This one does not need coverings, but a pure soul; but that one needs much care.” “This one” refers to Christ’s eucharistic body, which requires of us not material assistance but spiritual purity; “that one” is Christ present in

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<sup>8</sup>For discussion of the impact of Matthew 25:31–46 on Chrysostom’s theology and ethics, see Rudolf Brändle, “This Sweetest Passage: Matthew 25:31–46 and Assistance to the Poor in the Homilies of John Chrysostom,” in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) discussed further below. See also Wendy Mayer, “John Chrysostom on Poverty,” in *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, ed. Pauline Allen, Bronwen Neil, and Wendy Mayer (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2009), 103, who writes, “The concept of positive reciprocity that John introduces into his discourse goes hand-in-hand with a more broadly reconstructed role for the economic poor, in which the encounter between the giver and the poor takes on a sacramental, in addition to eschatological, dimension. A large portion of that construction centres on the identification of the poor with the person of Christ (one encounters Christ in the recipient of almsgiving, just as one encounters him in the eucharist), a connection which John builds in large part on the basis of Matthew 25:31–46.”

his suffering, needy people. Chrysostom thus upbraids those who perform acts of religious devotion that are ultimately superfluous and self-serving while neglecting Christ himself in acute need outside the church walls.

Chrysostom continues by contrasting the honor we presume to offer Christ with the honor he himself deems fitting:

Therefore let us learn to live rationally and virtuously, and to honor Christ as he himself wills; for to the one being honored, that honor is most pleasing which he himself wants, not which we suppose. For Peter also thought he was honoring Christ by preventing him from washing his feet, but what resulted was not honor but its opposite. So you also, honor him with this honor which he himself has ordained, spending your wealth on the poor. For God does not need golden vessels, but golden souls.

Again, Chrysostom's point is that religious offerings that God has not required only serve to condemn the offerer who neglects what God has in fact required. Immediately after the excerpt cited here Chrysostom clarifies and qualifies the thrust of his exhortation: "And I say these things, not forbidding such offerings to be provided; but requiring you, with them and before them, to give alms. For he does indeed accept the former, but much more the latter." In the rest of the homily Chrysostom continues in the same vein, meditating on the care Matt 25:31–46 requires us to show to Christ present in his people, extolling the eternal reward laid up for those who serve Christ in this way, and arguing that almsgiving cleanses from sin.

## The Exegete in the Pulpit

How does this homily match up to Chrysostom's reputation as an exacting exegete? Concerning those renowned abilities, Johannes Quasten writes,

Always anxious to ascertain the literal sense and opposed to allegory, he combines great facility in discerning the spiritual meaning of the scriptural text with an equal ability for immediate, practical application to the guidance of those committed to his care. The depth of his thought and the soundness of his masterful exposition are unique and attract even modern readers.<sup>9</sup>

As Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen put it, “The literal interpretation of scripture generally favored at this time in Antioch (as opposed to the allegorical method preferred in that other influential eastern city, Alexandria) shines through in the matter-of-fact historical comment, pragmatic theological debate, and observations on the techniques employed by Paul and the gospel writers.”<sup>10</sup>

One noteworthy feature of Chrysostom’s exegetical method is what he called *ἀκριβεία*, which we might translate as “precision” or

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<sup>9</sup>Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Vol. III: The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 433.

<sup>10</sup>Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, eds., *John Chrysostom, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2000), 26–27. I am aware that Mayer and Allen’s statement perpetuates an unsustainable dichotomy, but critiquing this dichotomy is beyond the scope of this essay. See also Ashish Naidu’s discussion of the importance Chrysostom placed on reading passages in context and discerning their overall purpose and aim in Ashish J. Naidu, *Transformed in Christ: Christology and the Christian Life in John Chrysostom*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 188 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 71–72.

“exactness.”<sup>11</sup> Chrysostom argued that God does not waste words in his revelation to men, so interpreters of the sacred word must attend carefully to every detail. As Robert Hill puts it, “His first rule . . . for himself as well as for his listeners, was to respond to the *akribēia* of the Scriptural accounts with a like *akribēia* in our study of them: precision and care must mark the approach of any interpreter of what God has deigned to speak to us.”<sup>12</sup> Chrysostom’s attention to scriptural detail was greatly aided by the deep, comprehensive knowledge of Scripture he gained during his monastic years, which were almost totally given over to the study and memorization of Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

The next question, then, is whether and to what extent this homily exemplifies Chrysostom’s customary exegetical prowess. I would argue that evidence of Chrysostom’s sharp exegetical eye is indeed present, especially in the homily’s first half. As discussed above, Chrysostom astutely compares Christ’s interaction with his disciples in this storm to his treatment of them in a storm earlier in Matthew, noting how in this instance he put their faith to a more difficult test, “leading them to a greater degree of endurance.” And again, Chrysostom notes that Jesus did not come to his disciples at once, but allowed them to languish in fear so that they would be taught to “bear all occurrences bravely.” Both of these observations, I would argue, evidence patient attention to the literal sense of the text and to the spiritual implications of that literal sense. Since these observations arise from careful attention to the smallest details of the text, they

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<sup>11</sup>For discussion see Robert C. Hill, “Akribēia: A Principle of Chrysostom’s Exegesis,” *Colloquium* 14 (1981): 32–36.

<sup>12</sup>Hill, “Akribēia,” 35.

<sup>13</sup>Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, 6.

serve as examples of Chrysostom's customary ἀκριβεία. Such examples from the homily's first half could easily be multiplied.<sup>14</sup>

What then should we make of the sharp pivot from textual exposition to distantly relevant moral exhortation? The first thing to note is that this pivot was common in Chrysostom's sermons. Mayer and Allen write,

The exegetical homilies are often more distinctive, since in these John tends to pursue a close verse-by-verse exegesis of the pericope or scriptural lection, which he then follows with an ethical discourse on some issue. This second half of the sermon is not always directly related to the subject-matter of the first. Instead it can be occasioned by some concern which happens to be close to John's mind at the time or he may continue a theme which was initially addressed in other sermons preached before the same audience.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>For instance, Chrysostom comments on the greatness of Peter's faith which often lands him in danger because it sets him upon tasks beyond his measure; on Christ's wisdom in inviting Peter to walk on water in order, ultimately, to alert Peter to his own weakness; and again, how Christ's revelation of himself in this storm exceeded that which he revealed in the previous storm, leading the disciples by degrees to greater knowledge of himself. For convenient reference see Schaff, *NPNF*, 10: 311–12.

<sup>15</sup>Mayer and Allen, *John Chrysostom*, 30; See also Thomas R. McKibbens, "The Exegesis of John Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospels," *The Expository Times* 93 (1982): 266; Brändle, "This Sweetest Passage," 132. Commenting on Chrysostom's homilies on Genesis, Hughes Oliphant Old writes, "These sermons, coming early in his career, are often characterized by a threefold arrangement. They begin with a long exordium in which any number of things, more or less connected with the text, might be discussed. Then there is an exposition of the lesson for the day, during which the preacher commented on several verses phrase by phrase. Finally there is a long exhortation to the living of the Christian life. The exhortation usually develops from the exposition, but the connection is sometimes less than obvious. One does not

Given the apparent regularity with which Chrysostom more or less appended an independent ethical discourse to his exposition of Scripture, it seems best to regard this topical disconnect as the result of a pastoral decision rather than an exegetical one. In other words, we should not conclude that Chrysostom intends the latter half of the homily to derive directly from the text at hand. This may be a fine distinction, but it locates the disconnect between text and application not in Chrysostom's exegetical method, so to speak, but in his broader pastoral agenda.

With that in mind, it is not surprising that the topic Chrysostom turns to is the care of the poor. This subject was a major focus of Chrysostom's ministry in Antioch and particularly Constantinople.<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Brändle even goes so far as to say that "the passage Matt. 25:31–46 is the integrative force behind the central thoughts of John Chrysostom's theology. His decisive theological ideas collect and order themselves around the power emanating from this passage as though

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always find the sort of introduction, body, and conclusion, all developing a single theme, which today we are taught to expect of well-thought-out public speaking. It is often more like a three-course meal: salad, main course, and dessert. Each course is different, although they all complement each other" (Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 2, the Patristic Age* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 174). It is significant for our present purposes that Old says the exhortation "usually" develops from the exposition. It would seem that here in Matthew, as sometimes in Genesis, Chrysostom developed an ethical exhortation with little discernible connection to the homily's text.

<sup>16</sup>See John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); Mayer, "John Chrysostom on Poverty"; Wendy Mayer, "Poverty and Generosity Toward the Poor in the Time of John Chrysostom," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 140–58.

crystallizing around a nucleus.”<sup>17</sup> The present homily may be taken as evidence in favor of Brändle’s thesis, since once Chrysostom draws the analogy between those healed by Jesus and believers’ reception of the eucharist, it is Matt 25:31–46 which theologically grounds the exhortation to follow, and language from that passage courses through the rest of the sermon. In a chain of analogies, Chrysostom reasoned from physical healing, to spiritual healing in the eucharist, to the obligation of those who receive Christ’s body to care for that body as it suffers in the world. If the final destination is rather remote from the starting point, the integrative power of Matt 25:31–46 in Chrysostom’s thought offers an attractive explanation of why the homily traveled in this particular direction.

Regarding the social, material, and ecclesial circumstances which may have influenced Chrysostom’s ethical agenda, it is difficult to speak with certainty. Chrysostom likely preached these homilies on Matthew in Antioch, perhaps around 390.<sup>18</sup> Chrysostom himself estimated that roughly 10% of the city were wealthy, 10% were very poor, and the rest fell somewhere in the middle.<sup>19</sup> Yet it is difficult to know precisely how the material context of Chrysostom’s ministry influenced his frequent appeals to almsgiving. It is possible, as Wendy Mayer suggests, that Chrysostom’s attitude toward the poor amounted

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<sup>17</sup>Brändle, “This Sweetest Passage,” 136. Evidence supporting Brändle’s claim is found in the frequency with which Chrysostom’s sermons on a variety of texts culminate in exhortations to almsgiving based on Matthew 25:31–46. Brändle discusses the forty-fifth homily on Matthew (*NPNF* 10:287) and the sixteenth homily on Romans (PG 60:547), among others.

<sup>18</sup>See discussion in Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. III, 437; and Schaff, *NPNF*, 10:ix.

<sup>19</sup>Migne, PG 58:630; see discussion of the economic landscape of Syrian Antioch during the time of Chrysostom in Mayer, “John Chrysostom on Poverty,” 71–74.

to a new civic model that subverted cultural conceptions of poverty and, as such, met with ongoing resistance. Thus Mayer, at any rate, ascribes Chrysostom's frequent appeals to the recalcitrance of his audience on this point.<sup>20</sup>

However, Mayer elsewhere surmises, "John's discourse in respect to economic and voluntary poverty cannot be used as a mirror of socio-economic realities. In some instances an explicit event, individual, or set of individuals sparks off his discourse or is employed to illustrate it. The degree to which reality of this kind is embellished rhetorically varies widely."<sup>21</sup> This leads Mayer to conclude, similarly to Brändle, that Chrysostom's primary purpose in exhorting his hearers to almsgiving is soteriological: he wants all of his hearers to care for the poor in order that they will be found among Christ's sheep on the last day.<sup>22</sup> These two conclusions need not be in tension. It may well have been the case that Chrysostom was motivated to preach frequently on poverty, in part, because of the lack of response he observed among the congregation, and was all the more eager to do so because of the eternal significance he ascribed to almsgiving.

### A Gentle Qualification

In light of this study, I would suggest that the present homily gently qualifies the popular perception of Chrysostom as a ruthlessly

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<sup>20</sup> Mayer, "Poverty and Generosity," 141–42.

<sup>21</sup> Mayer, "John Chrysostom on Poverty," 109. For confirmation of this conclusion, see Mayer's preceding discussion of the tension between Chrysostom's portrayals of the material conditions of poverty depending on whether he is commanding poverty as a way of life or commanding the care of the poor.

<sup>22</sup> Mayer, "John Chrysostom on Poverty," 110.

disciplined exegete. This sermon clearly demonstrates his customary exegetical care, but fully half of it is devoted to a relatively distant ethical theme. Of course, scholars of Chrysostom are fully apprised of this tendency in Chrysostom's preaching, so the minor adjustment I am suggesting bears on the popular picture of Chrysostom rather than more detailed scholarly portraits. Whatever one makes of the merits of Chrysostom's hortatory habits, it is at least worth pausing to consider the ease with which one of the great exegetes of all time regularly returned to well-worn homiletical grooves.