

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES IN CHRYSOLOGUS' SERMONS ON THE LOST SON

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Abstract

Many sermons of Peter Chrysologus have been preserved for us. Five of these sermons deal with the parable of the Lost Son. In this article these five sermons are studied from an economical perspective. These sermons will be discussed with reference to aspects such as wealth, poverty, acquisitiveness, squandering, prodigality, etc. This article will therefore shed light on the prevailing view of economic issues in Chrysologus' world, though this was not the primary and intentional focus of these sermons.

Introduction

There is at the moment a tremendous interest in the economic world of the ancients, and this is also true for the economy of the Patristic era. The North American Patristic Society has recently decided to regularly dedicate a special session to this theme, and the Society of Biblical Literature has also accepted "Early Christianity and the Ancient Economy" as one of their regular 'programme units'. During the past few decades a large number of publications have appeared that indicate a lively interest in economic aspects of the ancient world.¹ This article aims to contribute to this discussion.

In South Africa the question of wealth and poverty is always at issue. In June 2009 the newly elected President of South Africa, Mr. Jacob Zuma, said in his maiden State of the Nation address in Parliament that the fight against poverty remains the cornerstone of government's focus.² The question of the church's role in social questions and particularly of the contribution of the church to poverty relief is one which has been asked since the beginning of the church, one which is still on the agenda, and one which will remain a practical responsibility for the church as long as it exists.³ This theme is even more important in the light of the "contemporary preoccupation with social history" of the early Christians.⁴

¹ To name only a few: Hengel, M. (1974); Walsh, W.J. & Langan, J.P. (1977); Countryman, L.W. (1980); Osiek, C. (1983); Phan, P.C. (1984); Hanson, C.L., (1988); Gonzalez, J. (1990); Ramsey, B. (1991); Karayiannis, A.D. (1994); Leyerle, B. (1994); Murphy, F.X. (1997); Swift, L.J. (1997); Taylor, J. (2001); Buell, D.K. (2003); Dunn, G.D. (2004); Finn, R. (2006); Mayer, W. (2006); Holman, S.R. (2008).

² <http://www.news24.com>.

³ Compare Ramsey, B. (1985:195): "It is safe to say that, for the Fathers, the problem of poverty and wealth was the most important specific social issue that the early Church faced – as, indeed, it has perennially been."

⁴ Compare Allen, P & Mayer, W. "Computer and homily: Accessing the everyday life of early Christians", *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993), 261.

There is at present a great interest in the homilies of the church fathers – not so much for their theological content as for their usefulness as ancient sources, since a homily is by definition anchored in its environment, and it is obvious that these homilies can provide valuable information about their contemporary context.⁵ Mayer also says that homilies give us access to the daily life of the world in which they played a role.⁶

In the introduction to his English translation of 53 of Peter Chrysologus' homilies, Palardy (2004:20) points out that Chrysologus, too, often addressed economic questions in his preaching: "In many sermons, Chrysologus expresses his concern about the contrast between the rich and the poor in Ravenna. He frequently reminds the rich of their obligation to aid the less fortunate around them." About 183 sermons by Peter Chrysologus (c. 380 – 450) have been preserved, mainly homilies about New Testament texts. There are also sermons on the confession of faith, festival sermons, praises for saints, and occasion sermons. Of the 59 sermons taken from the gospel of Luke, five are on the Parable of the Lost Son.⁷ In this article these five homilies are approached from a specific angle: namely, what they have to say on economic topics will be examined. In the study of these sermons it has become clear that there is a number of references to wealth and poverty in general, but also to concepts such as acquisitiveness, squandering, prodigality, economic independence and dependence, generosity, and so on. These sermons will now be discussed with reference to the abovementioned key words, and Chrysologus' spiritualisation of the story as it appears in the fifth sermon will also be referred to.

Acquisitiveness

The younger son is described as acquisitive, as someone who in his impatience cannot wait for his inheritance and thus wants it immediately. He has a desire for instant wealth (*cupiditas ad censum praeceptis*). This impatient desire leads to his taking wrong economic decisions. His acquisitiveness leads him to ask prematurely for his inheritance, and it is said that he stole his father's possessions.⁸

Prodigality

This parable is widely known as 'The parable of the prodigal son', which clearly focuses on the spendthrift nature of the younger son. In the word of the Latin Church Fathers, the son is referred to as the '*filius luxuriosus*' and '*filius prodigus*' or '*prodigens*', all of which refer to his luxurious lifestyle. Much emphasis is laid on the fact that he wasted and squandered the money. It is also clearly stated on what he squandered his money: by living luxuriously, through gluttony and greed (*luxuriae*,

⁵ Compare Ganss, GE, 1953 (1965):9 "Their sermons and homilies quite naturally reflect the social conditions of the times ... But we should remember that in the discourses we also see the ideals of virtue which the preachers and their hearers recognized."

⁶ Mayer, W. 2008:567.

⁷ The following text was used: Olivar, A. (1975), *Sancti Petri Chrysologi Collectio Sermonum*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, vol. XXIV, Brepols, Turnholt.

⁸ *Adulescentior iste plane non aetate, sed sensu; qui congregavit bona patris ...*(1.4)

ventri et gulae – luxury, the stomach and the throat). This story is actually a typical illustration of the expression 'easy come, easy go'.

The consequences of prodigality

Eventually, as a result of his prodigality, the son ends up in the utmost poverty, that is to say, famine. He has no food to eat and longs for the pigs' husks, but he does not receive even those. The end result is complete bankruptcy (*tota ruina*).

The son's clothes, or lack thereof, also say something about his economic situation. He, who was rich when he left his father, came back poor – so poor that he had no shoes on his feet.⁹ It is in fact said that his wealth stripped him naked; took his clothes away from him.¹⁰ His father cannot bear to see him in such a tragic state, and so he is immediately clothed when he arrives back home.¹¹ He receives the best robe, a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. The new and best clothes are an indication that he once more shares in the abundance that there is with the father. In the same way the great feast stands in direct contrast with the famine that he had suffered. Both are indications that his economic situation has changed radically.

The loss is not only a material loss; he also loses the blessedness of the father's rest, through the loss of his status as son.¹²

Honour and shame

Something that corresponds very closely to the younger son's economic situation is the aspect of his social status. The concepts of honour and shame were extremely important values in ancient society and they also play a very important role in these sermons by Chrysologus.¹³ In their commentary on Luke 15: 11-32, Malina and Rohrbaugh (1993:290) indicate the way in which the younger son's decision to demand his inheritance prematurely, broke his ties with his father, his brother and also the community.¹⁴ A practical consequence of the son's decision to leave the home and squander his possessions is his loss of honour. In the first sermon the preacher says that wealth robbed the son of his good name and left behind nothing of his honour.¹⁵ Later in the same sermon the loss of his good name (*fama*) and glory / honour (*gloria*) are referred to; his good name is buried and his honour dies, while his bad reputation grows.¹⁶ In the same way as with his clothes, his honour is also restored when he

⁹ *Quam pauper rediit qui ditatus abscesserat et de tota substantia calciamenta in pedibus non reportat!* (3.4)

¹⁰ *Ecce quemadmodum sine patre sensus nudavit filium non ditavit.* (1.3)

¹¹ *Pater hic qui in secundis esse non passus est peccatorem ...* (3.4)

¹² *... quam miserum sit amarum quam sit, quietis paternae beatudinem perdidisse* (1.5) en *Ego perdidit quod erat filii* (2.2).

¹³ These sermons can also be described completely from an 'honour and shame' perspective, but here it is only used in so far as it ties in with the economic condition of the son. Compare Pilch, JJ & Malina, B.J. (1998) and Rohrbaugh, R.L. (1996) for a more complete analysis of these social values in ancient society.

¹⁴ For Chrysologus' description of this, see 'What does wealth do to you' below, footnotes 25 and 26 (p.5).

¹⁵ *...spoliavit fama, ... quod est gloriae, nil reliquit.*(1.3)

¹⁶ *... sepelitur famae, perit gloriae, qui manet turpitudini, crescit infamiae.*(1.5)

returns to his father. The robe that he receives is a physical covering of his nakedness, and it also covers his shame.¹⁷ More, it is the best robe, which indicates that his situation has changed from absolute honourlessness to a position of honour. The ring on his finger, furthermore, is a symbolic indication that his earlier honour has been restored and also that he is once more received into the household and thus into the community.¹⁸

Bad economic decision-making

Chrysologus says that the younger son paid to be enslaved instead of being paid.¹⁹ As an economic decision, this makes no sense at all. The younger son who enters into such a contract is, ironically enough, here called '*mercator*' (trader or businessman). In contrast with this truly stupid transaction, the agreement with his father is described as a '*dulcis conditio*'; a contract with favourable conditions. Chrysologus understands the statement that 'the son went far away' in a figurative rather than in a literal sense. The expression '*abiit longe plus mente*' can also be interpreted as meaning that he went out of his mind, or lost his head, which corresponds with the idea that he did something irrational. At the end of the first sermon it is also said that the son was foolish to leave his father and very wise to go back.²⁰ In the third sermon a bad economic decision is referred to in similar terms; in this case a barter transaction. The preacher says that the father did not ask the son why he had exchanged such great honour for such great shame.²¹

Remuneration and earnings

When the younger son realises how ridiculous his situation is, he sees that it would be much better to work for his father as a hired labourer for a small wage.²² In the fourth sermon, too, there is a reference to remuneration, but here it is with reference to the older brother. He is criticised for thinking that he can compensate (*compensat*) his father with his labour, for the privilege of having been born.²³ The whole idea of earning something by the keeping of certain rules is here placed in opposition to the grace of the father who receives back the younger son without his having done anything to earn it. The younger son realises that he does not deserve his father's grace and for this reason is prepared to work as a hired labourer.²⁴

¹⁷ Compare Pilch, J.J. & Malina, B.J. (1998:22-23) "... the dishonored poor are known in terms of their nakedness."

¹⁸ *Paterna pietas contenta non est innocentiam reparare solam nisi pristinum restituat et honorem.* (3.4) Compare Malina, B.J. and Rohrbach, R.L. (1993:291): "The robe, the ring, if a signet ring, and the shoes for his feet, would have been signs that the younger son was being accepted as a member of the household rather than a servant or hired hand".

¹⁹ ... *et abiit longe plus mente quam loco; ut dato, non accepto pretio misere se venderet servituti.* (1.4)

²⁰ ... *quid sit adolescentior in abscessu insipiens, sapientissimus in regressu ...* (1.7)

²¹ *Non dixit: unde venis? fuisti ubi? ubi sunt quae tulisti? quare tantam gloriam tanta turpitudine commutasti?* (3.4)

Compare also the remarks about honour and shame above.

²² ... *miseræ verna mercedis ...* (2.4)

²³ *En patri filius nascendi beneficia qua servitute compensat!* (4.3)

²⁴ *Hic ergo adolescentior quia perdidit quod erat naturae, iudicat se quod est gratiae non mereri.* (2.4)

Economic independence versus economic dependence

The son's independence is accorded to him and he is given his share, but this independence turns into a sorry freedom (*misera libertas*). His freedom is transformed into slavery and his condition is described as that of someone who suffers lack. Naturally, too, a slave is economically dependent and performs the social role of a possession rather than a possessor. This transition from independence to dependence is worded as follows in the second sermon:

*Look! To what point of his power has the son come? Look! To what have wanton pleasure and youthful license promoted him?*²⁵

In the third sermon the same change of status from rich to poor is described in a striking manner:

*He was rich when he departed; how poor he has returned! Of all his substance he brings back not even shoes on his feet!*²⁶

What does wealth do to one?

Wealth itself is characterised here as an agent, and what it does to the younger son is related in detail. Various concepts are used to describe it. In the following passage the word *facultates* (possessions) is used:

*Material riches, by contrast, tear unity apart, break the bond of brotherly love, disrupt family relationships, and violently sunder the ties of love between the members of a family.*²⁷

The word '*census*' (riches) is used in a similar way in the next passage. Wealth itself is the active agent here. Wealth is, as it were, personified as an evil power that is responsible for all the negative consequences:

See how, without the father, this wealth did not enrich the son; it stripped him. It took him away from his father's bosom, expelled him from his house, withdrew him from his country, despoiled him of his reputation, and robbed him of his chastity. Whatever there is of life, good morals, filial reverence, liberty, glory – of all these it left him nothing. Indeed, it changed a citizen into a wanderer, a son into a hired servant, a rich man into a beggar, a free man into a slave. It separated him from a devoted father, and made him the

²⁵ *Ecce potestatis suae filius quo devenit! Voluptas luxuriae, adulescentiae libertas ecce filium quo promovit!* (2.4) Note that all translations in this article are from Ganss, G.E. (1965).

²⁶ *Quam pauper rediit qui ditatus abscesserat et de tota substantia calciamenta in pedibus non reportat!* (3.4)

²⁷ *Ceterum facultates unitatem scindunt, fraternitatem separant, cognationem spargunt, parentum perdunt et violant caritatem.* (1.2)

*companion of the swine. Consequently, he who spurned obedience to his father's sacred love became the servant of the muddy herd.*²⁸

This description by Chrysologus spells out clearly how wealth attacked the son's social status and destroyed his honour. In the last sentence the contrast is stated unambiguously: it took him from his loving father (a position of honour) and landed him in a herd of unclean pigs (a position of absolute shame).

What does poverty do to one?

It is striking that famine is also characterised as an active agent in the second sermon, in this case as a positive force:

*Hunger calls him back whom abundance had exiled. Hunger enabled the son to understand his father, whereas abundance had caused him to recognize only a sire. If even involuntary hunger did all this, try by experiment how beneficial a voluntary fast can be.*²⁹

We see here how Chrysologus presents famine, as the most extreme form of poverty, as something positive, comparing it with fasting. This paves the way for the spiritualising that follows in the fifth sermon.

Sharing

The younger son does not want to share his father's property with him – rather, he wants to possess it alone, and for this reason he asks for his portion.³⁰ Chrysologus points out in the fourth sermon that a call is also made for the older brother to be generous. The father says to the older son that everything that is his also belongs to the son. He encourages the older son to share his current possessions with his brother, so that ownership can also be communal in the future.³¹ This statement and specifically the words *participa* and *communia* are typical language used to describe a partnership.

Prudence and frugality

The fact that the father only divided his property at his son's request and not earlier is not a sign of avarice, but rather of his love. He did not keep back the inheritance

²⁸ *Ecce quemadmodum sine patre census nudavit filium, non ditavit. Ecce quemadmodum census filium e gremio patris, eiecit de domo, exemit patria, spoliavit fama, exuit castitate. Quod vitae, quod morum, quod pietatis, quod libertatis, quod est gloriae, nil reliquit. Denique in peregrinum civem, filium in mercennarium, in egestantem locupletem, liberum mutavit in servum et iunxit porcis a patre piissimo quem seiunxit, ut serviret caenoso pecori, qui pietati sanctae parere contempsit. (1.3)*

²⁹ *Fames revocat quem saturitas exsularat. Fames illi patrem dedit sapere, cui copia tulerat sentire genitorem. Et si tantum praestitit vel invita fames, probate quid voluntarium possit conferre ieiunium. (2,1)*

³⁰ *... ea, quae patris erant, noluit possidere cum patre (1.1)*

³¹ *Certe si consilium patris sequeris et praeceptum, participa praesentia cum fratre; ut cum ipso tibi communia sint futura. (4.4)*

because he begrudged it, but in order to keep it safe for the future. He kept it to preserve it as a nest egg for his sons, to prevent it from being lost.³²

The older brother is praised for his prudence; in the fourth sermon it is said that he spoiled the highest virtue of prudence with the extreme faults of envy and resentment.³³ The fact that the older brother is jealous of his younger brother and begrudges him everything, spoils the positive quality of prudence. When frugality is practiced excessively, it becomes a form of competitiveness and greed, and in this way the praiseworthy virtue becomes a repellent vice. The father, on the other hand, is simultaneously prudent and generous; something readily apparent from the description “*indulgentissimus provisor*’ (1.63) (a most indulgent provider). The younger son’s overdone “generosity” translates into prodigality and a wasteful lifestyle, while the older son’s excessive frugality turns into envy and greed. The father, however, embodies prudence without miserliness (*providentia non invidentia*).

Safekeeping

We are told in several ways that the inheritance is safe with the father.³⁴ It is very clearly expressed by the word pairs *absoluta custodia* and *secura possessio*: with the father there is absolute safekeeping and safe possession,³⁵ The term ‘*absoluta custodia*’, especially, sounds like a guarantee that the money is being well looked after in a place of safekeeping. Further, the father himself is called ‘*custos*’; he is the one who looks after the money.³⁶

Generosity

Standing in contrast to the younger son’s acquisitiveness is the father’s generosity; he does not refuse to give him the inheritance. Furthermore, this generosity is something that he displays immediately.³⁷ As soon as the son asks, the father, rather than taking offence, immediately complies with the request. At the request of one son, the inheritance is divided between the two sons. This also attests to the father’s fairness. In a striking image, it is said that the father does not incubate his money.³⁸ He pays attention to it and looks after it, but does not cling frantically to it.

Profit and loss

³² *Qui petente uno ambobus totam substantiam mox divisit... ut scirent filii quod ante tenebat pater, non fuisse avaritiae, sed amoris; providentia, non invidentia, non dedisse. Tenebat pater servare substantiam filiis, non negare; et manere ea pigneribus cupiens, non perire.* (1.2)

³³ ... *sumum frugalitatis bonum extremo zeli malo perdidit et livoris.* (4.1)

³⁴ *Tenebat pater servare substantiam filiis ...* (1.2); *Est penes patrem ... absoluta custodia, ... securia possessio.* (1.4); *Quae conposita fuerant patre moderante ...* (1.5); *... penes patrem abundaverat ...* (1.5)

³⁵ *Est penes patrem dulcis conditio, libera servitus, absoluta custodia, timor laetus, blanda ultio, paupertas dives, securia possessio.* (1.4)

³⁶ ... *ut vel tardo sapiat patrem custodem, non incubatorem fuisse substantiae.* (1.5)

³⁷ ... *prompta genitoris largitas ...* (1.1)

³⁸ ... *patrem custodem, non incubatorem ... substantiae* (1.5)

Profit or gain is rarely referred to, except to say that while the sons worked for the father, the abundant profit went to the sons.³⁹

About loss, much has already been said.⁴⁰ Reference is made to everything that the son has lost by wasting it. There is another loss as well – the loss of the son himself; the lost son, the son who wandered away. This is a great loss, and so there is great joy when he is found. In contrast to this, the older brother sees his return as a loss because it makes his own share of the inheritance smaller.⁴¹ The son himself had lost his sonship, as well as his citizenship and his freedom,⁴² but through the father's mercy they are restored.

In the fourth sermon the (possible) loss of the older son is mentioned, when the father says to him: “Be glad then and rejoice, so that he may also be glad that you were not lost.”⁴³

Supervision

Proper control and management are necessary. The father is described as someone who supervises and makes sure that things do not get out of hand. When the son leaves his supervision, things go completely wrong. The word ‘*moderante*’ is used to describe this paternal supervision.⁴⁴ Unlike the father, the younger son does not possess the virtue of self-control (*moderatio*), and this is why he wastes his money so quickly. In the second sermon the general comment is made that an intemperate person can never be satisfied and that desire cannot be appeased.⁴⁵ This too refers to a lack of self-control and discipline.

Focus on the future

It is mentioned that the father forgets his losses and looks forward rather than back. He does not ask his son where he has been and where all the possessions are that he had with him when he left.⁴⁶ At the end of the fourth sermon an appeal is made to the older brother to also look ahead, to the future sharing of profit with his brother.⁴⁷

Characteristics of a debtor

³⁹ Namque *ad patrem labor respicit, fructus redundat in filios* (1.4)

⁴⁰ See ‘prodigality’ above, p.2.

⁴¹ *Frater credit damnum qui rediisse conspicit cohaerem.* (4.3) It is clear that the concept of limited good plays a role here. See Pilch, J.J. & Malina, B.J. (1998:122-126).

⁴² *Ego perdi quod erat filii; ille quod pater est, non amisit.* (2.2); *Hic ergo adulescentior, quia perdiderat quod erat naturae, ...* (2.4). See also above, footnote 18.

⁴³ *Gaude ergo, et inventum gaude, ut ille te gaudeat non perisse.* (4.4)

⁴⁴ *Quae composita fuerant patre moderante, prodigente filio dissipantur* (1.5)

⁴⁵ *Luxuriosus satis capere non potest; voluptas nescit expleri.* (2.5)

⁴⁶ See footnote 11.

⁴⁷ See Sharing above (p.6).

In the introduction to the fifth sermon, Chrysologus uses an image from economic world to describe his 'debt', and in this image he names one of the characteristics of a clever debtor. He states it as follows:

Not to pay his obligations is often a trait of a clever and shameless debtor. By long and artful cavilling he taxes his creditor's patience ... In the case of so great a loan entrusted to me, I am, through my own power, a rather unsuitable debtor. Therefore, pray that through God's power I may be found a payer acceptable to yourselves.⁴⁸

The debt that he refers to here is his promise in the previous sermons to get to the deeper spiritual interpretation of the parable.⁴⁹ As opposed to the wily debtor who does not keep his promise, the trustworthy person who repays what he owes is here described as someone who can make good his debt only by the power of God. Chrysologus presents himself as this debtor and asks the congregation to pray for him so that he does not attempt the spiritual interpretation in his own power.

Spiritualising the parable

The fifth sermon differs greatly from the previous four, each of which presents the literal exposition of a particular part of the parable.⁵⁰ In this sermon, instead, a spiritual interpretation of the whole parable is presented.

The **possessions or inheritance** divided between the two sons are interpreted in different ways in the spiritual interpretation of the passage. The portion given to the younger brother is, according to Chrysologus, the typical human character or attitude (*habitus*), speech, knowledge, reason and judgement, things that distinguish humans from other living beings on earth. Chrysologus says these are what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote of the law of nature (*lex naturae*). He also calls them the five gifts of nature (*beneficia naturae*). The older brother, on the other hand, received the five books of the Law. Each brother received five gifts, but still there is a difference in the value of what was given. Chrysologus continues by saying that both the law of nature and the books of the Law were intended to lead the two sons to knowledge of the Father and to worship of their Creator. In the first sermon he says that the sons are blessed, whose total possession is in the love of the father, whose whole possession consists of obedience to and honour of the father.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Callidi debitoris est et inverecundi saepe pacta non solvere, et patientissimum creditorem longa et artificio cavillatione protelare... Vos orate ut quia in tanto credito per me sum minus idoneus debitor, per deum vobis idoneus solutor existam.* (5.1)

⁴⁹ Compare: *Profunda post scrutabimur, ...* (2.6); *Historiam loquimur adhuc, et iam cogitamus arcanum nudare mysterium ... Sed differendum est ...;* (3.5) *Sed iam sermonem historicum concludamus, ut postea quae sunt mystica, quae profunda, Christo relevante, pandamus.* (4.5)

⁵⁰ The first sermon discusses Lk. 15:11-16, the second Lk. 15:17-19, the third Lk. 15:20-24 and the fourth Lk. 15: 25-32.

⁵¹ *Beati filii quorum tota est in patris caritate substantia. Beati quibus manet tota in obsequio patris, in patris cultura possessio.* (1.2)

The **squandering** of his inheritance happened through the desire for worldly eloquence and through foolish debates.⁵²

The **famine** is explained as a hunger for the truth, where philosophy's search for truth has borne no fruit.⁵³

The **fruit or profit** is then the truth, which cannot be found through heathen philosophy and eloquence.⁵⁴

In the spiritualisation, the **wage** received by the younger son for his work as pig-herder is also mentioned. The pigs, as unclean animals, refer to demons, which he feeds with incense, sacrifices and blood, and the wages that he receives for this are nothing but false answers.⁵⁵ The wage for which he wants to work as his father's hired servant is named here as 'the wage of forgiveness' (*veniae ... mercedem*).⁵⁶ He cannot claim any entitlement, as he no longer deserves the honour of sonship.⁵⁷

Loss is also mentioned here: the loss of honour that comes from the loss of sonship.⁵⁸ The robe given to the son refers, according to Chrysologus, to that robe lost by Adam: the everlasting glory of immortality.⁵⁹

The ring that he is given is described as a 'sign of honour, as proof of freedom, as a **guarantee** of the Spirit, as a seal of faith and as dowry of the heavenly marriage'.⁶⁰ The words used here to describe the ring (*titulum, insigne, pignus, signaculum en arra*) almost all have economic connotations: the words are used when a business deal or partnership is concluded and some object is given as a guarantee or sign to seal the agreement. Even though it is used here in a more figurative sense, the wording is still reminiscent of a business transaction. The terms *arra* and *pignus* also indicate a future expectation, something like a deposit or first payment given for something that will later belong to you fully. The ring as guarantee thus also serves as **security**, as confirmation that the wanderer's sonship and honour have been fully reinstated.

⁵² *Hinc est quod luxuriosus ... dissipabat dei patris dementi disputatione substantiam. Et cum consummasset coniecturis ...* (5.4)

⁵³ *... egestatem summam, famem magnam cognoscendae veritatis miserrimus sustinebat ...* (5.4)

⁵⁴ *... quia philosophia quaerendae divinitatis indixit laborem; veritatis inveniendae fructum contulit nullum.* (5.4)

⁵⁵ *Ut pasceret daemones thure, victimis, sanguine, falsarum responsionum mercedem pro tali labore relaturus.* (5.5)

⁵⁶ *Hoc est dicere quia non mereor iam filii gloriam, vel veniae consequar pro mercenario labore mercedem ...* (5.6)

⁵⁷ *... quia non mereor iam filii gloriam, ...* (5.6)

⁵⁸ *... et cui honor subolis perit, ...* (5.6) Pilch, J.J. & Malina, B.J. (1998:xx) point out that in terms of social status, family relationships are absolutely the most important factor: "In the Mediterranean world, where kinship is basic, a human being is primarily male or female (husband/wife, son/daughter, brother/sister:kinship terms) rather than rich or poor (economic terms), powerful or powerless (political terms), pious or impious (religious terms). See also Honour and shame above (p.3).

⁵⁹ *Dedit stolam primam: illam quam Adam perdidit, immortalitatis gloriam sempiternam.* (5.6)

⁶⁰ *Posuit anulum in manu eius: anulum honoris titulum, libertatis insigne, pignus spiritus, signaculum fidei, arram caelestium nuptiarum.* (5.6)

The calf that is slaughtered refers in the spiritualisation of the parable to Christ's death, given as a **sacrifice**. Chrysologus refers here to Paul who says: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rom.8: 32). The sacrifice itself is of course also an economic act, since our sins are paid for with this sacrifice. The price of the sacrifice is very high because the sacrifice, to which the fatted calf refers to, is God's own Son.

At the end of the fifth homily Chrysologus explains what the father meant with the words: "And all that is mine is thine". He explains as follows:

How? Because for you is the law, for you is the prophecy, for you the temple, for you the priesthood, for you the sacrifices, for you the kingdom, for you the gifts, for you – and this is the greatest gift of all – Christ was born.

The homilist again refers to the "possessions" which the younger brother has received and to the fact that his father shared everything with him, which links up with the **liberality** of the father that has been discussed above.

In the subsequent section the elder son is shown that he is not worthy to partake of the feast of the father and to taste (lit. to possess) his joy, since he wants his brother to perish because of his own envy. The narrative begins with the **loss** of the younger son, and ends with the loss of the elder son, who does not want to participate in the common banquet. In Luke's version of the narrative, the same end is suggested, but the door is left open for the elder son if he would decide to enter and to join the banquet.

Conclusion

In this article Chrysologus's sermons on the Parable of the Lost Son is studied from an economical perspective and many references to negative aspects such as greed, prodigality, loss, the negative consequences of wealth, bad economic decisions and short-sightedness are contrasted with positive aspects such as liberality, generosity, profit, the positive consequences of famine, saving, provision, vision of the future and security. Studied from this perspective, it does not only give us a better understanding of the sermons of Chrysologus, but it also gives us insight into Chrysologus idea of sound economic principles. It sheds light on the prevailing view of economic issues in the patristic world, though this was not the primary and intentional focus of these sermons.

A striking characteristic of these sermons is to notice how the homilist unites contrasting concepts to show how different Christians' priorities should be: abundance can also be regarded as misery, and poverty can also be beneficial. Note, for example, the following quotations:

*In his father's house is agreeable order, free service, perfect care, pleasant reverence, kindly correction, rich poverty, unworried possession.*⁶¹

*The wealth which was given to the son brought him to suffer want. If it had been refused to him, it would have kept him rich. Consequently, he who is in his father's house had abounded in wealth while not controlling it fell into want out on his own because he did control it.*⁶²

It is clear in both these quotations that the decisive factor for the well-being of the son was whether he was with his father or not. When he was with his father, he was doing well, though he did not have his share of inheritance. When he left his father, it was the beginning of his suffering. When he returned, he was welcomed back and he again shared in his father's abundant kindness.

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⁶¹ *Est penes patrem dulcis conditio, libera servitus, absoluta custodia, timor laetus, blanda ultio, paupertas dives, segura possessio.* (1.4) (my bold)

⁶² *Fillium data facit egere substantia, quae divitem negata servasset: ut penes se difficeret habendo, qui penes patrem abundaverat non habendo.* (1.5) (my bold)

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