JOHN CHRYSOSTOM’S EXEGESIS OF THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY (JOHN 12:1-8)\(^1\)

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Abstract

John Chrysostom’s (354 AD) exegesis of the Johannine account of Jesus’ anointing at Bethany is examined (John 12:1-8). As an Antiochene exegete, Chrysostom’s approach dictates sensitivity both to the history and social values implicit in the text, as well as the effect of the text on the present reader. Chrysostom’s interpretation of the key motifs in the Bethany event is examined: firstly, Mary’s status as a disciple is delineated, secondly, the significance of the anointing of the feet and finally, Chrysostom’s characterization of the antagonist Judas and the danger of greed is evaluated in detail. The essay is concluded with a discussion of the value of Chrysostom’s exegesis for contemporary NT studies.

1. Introduction

John Chrysostom (354 AD) can be described as one of the most prolific and eloquent writers among the Greek Fathers. The renowned Patristics scholar Johannes Quasten goes so far as to describe him as “...one of the most congenial personalities of Christian antiquity” (1990:429). His fame is especially seated in the steadfast character of his leadership in the Eastern Church and also in the extensive corpus of literature he composed. Among many other writings, Chrysostom has left an extensive list of exegetical

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commentaries in the form of homilies on both the Old and New Testaments. However, despite these laudations, Chrysostom is often, with a few exceptions, ignored by modern Biblical scholarship.  

The aim of this study is to view the exegesis of Chrysostom on a particular pericope, namely the account of the anointing of Jesus’ feet in John 12:1-8. The primary source of his exegesis is homily 65.2-3 in his Homilies on the Gospel of John, although several of his other writings will also be considered in secondary perspective. The study is undertaken in two sections: Firstly, Chrysostom’s various exegetical premises regarding the Bethany anointing will be examined, and secondly, the contribution of his exegesis to contemporary Biblical scholarship will be delineated.

2. Chrysostom’s Exegesis of John 12:1-8  
John Chrysostom falls into the category of Antiochene exegetes. Many scholars, like Young (1997:120-125), Froehlich (1984:19) and Hall (1998:156) agree that Antiochene exegesis is especially a reaction against the allegorical interpretation of the Alexandrian exegetes which was quite popular in the day. Froehlich (1984:20) notes:

“There can be little doubt that the hermeneutical theories of the Antiochene School were aimed at the excesses of Alexandrian spiritualism.”

The Antiochene exegetes had a specific two-fold scriptural hermeneutic, namely that scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the role of humans and history is acknowledged. This then implied that the study of the language and rhetoric of the text is important as well as the history behind the text, because the Holy Spirit is revealed in history. This would be a fresh alternative to the highly allegorical hermeneutic of the Alexandrians. The Antiochene School of interpretation flourished especially from the first Council of Nicaea (325 AD) until the council of Chalcedon (451 AD). Homily on John 65 is an epitomical product of this school of exegesis.

With regard to the parallel sections of the Bethany account, Chrysostom considers the Johannine account equivalent to the Markan (Mk 14:3-9) and especially Matthean (Mt 26:6-13) accounts, but regards the similar Lukan (Lk

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2 See Decock (2005:57ff) and also Hall (1998:19-41) for an extensive discussion on the absence of pre-modern Scripture interpreters in modern scholarship as well as the value of the former to the latter.

3 The authors will mostly use the literal translation of the NPNF unless the translation is not faithful to the original, which is the case in some remote instances. Translations from the NPNF used will be indicated in the footnotes, while citations without a footnote reference should be regarded as the authors’ own.
7:36-50) version not as the same event. Reference to these parallel sections will be made in the duration of the study.

The sections of Homily on John 65 will be the main point of departure for delineating aspects of Chrysostom’s exegesis on the Bethany account. Secondary references from other Chrysostomian writings and even other authors of classical and Christian antiquity, however, are indispensable for this task, and will also receive attention. Firstly, attention will be given to Chrysostom’s affirmation of Mary’s discipleship; secondly, his interpretation of the anointing of Jesus’ feet; thirdly, Judas’ reaction (as Chrysostom views it) is discussed; and finally, the ethical application in the conclusion of the homily (i.e. the dangers of greed) will be evaluated.

2.1. Mary, the Disciple

Chrysostom starts the second section of this homily (Homily on John 65.2) with a very positive description of Mary. He calls Mary a disciple:

“And Martha served” [Jn. 12:2]; which establishes the fact that the meal was in her house, for they received Jesus as loving and beloved ... Mary did not serve, for she was a disciple. Here again she acted in the more spiritual way. For she did not serve as someone who was invited, nor did she serve any of the others. But she surrounds Him alone with honour, and approaches Him not as a man, but as God.

In this homily, Chrysostom gives ample attention to characterization. As Antiochene exegete, he is very sensitive to the history and the literary narratology of the pericope. He establishes Mary as an influential protagonist – a disciple. Later in the homily, he would also affirm Judas as the antagonist in the strongest possible terms. It is important to note that Chrysostom uses the word μαθητής, which has a sacral and panegyrical connotation in this context (although she is not part of the δύοδεκα). Mary is not merely a servant (δηάθνλνο) like Martha, or a pupil ἑτταυγρος or even just a friend (φίλος). Chrysostom emphasizes the fact that Mary’s status was different than that of Martha. His exegesis is therefore sensitive to the social micro-structure of the household, and he uses it to illustrate Mary’s status to his audience. Both Friedrichsen (2003:717-739) and Wilkens (1995) provide detailed analyses of the background of the term “disciple”. However, the Chrysostomian context itself provides insight into the term, rather than venturing into etymology and running the risk of lexical and etymological fallacies. In this strong rhetoric, she is awarded the status of μαθητής, especially to establish the contrast with

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4 Modern commentators like Morris (1995:510), along with Lindars (1982) also state that only the Lukan account may point to a different event, while Barrett (1978:409) opens the possibility for Lukan or Markan influence on John.

5 He also adds the remark that the event at Bethany serves as “proof” (σημείον) of the “genuineness” or “factuality” (ειδολογία) of Lazarus’ resurrection.
Judas. Chrysostom therefore includes Mary in the closest social circle of Jesus.

This status affirmation is elaborated further by three important features of the gathering. Firstly, Chrysostom describes Mary as acting in a “more spiritual way” (πάλιν ἐντεῦθε αὕτη πνευματικῶτερον). The use of the nominative-neuter comparative adjective indicates that, to Chrysostom, Mary’s character is supported by her actions. This spiritual action surpasses the banal actions of the other participants at the gathering; she has done more than any of the other male disciples, who were just feasting. Secondly, Mary’s exclusive attention to Jesus also supports her receiving this higher-status indicator. There is a clear pun or nuance signified in the word choice and rhetoric of the homily. Chrysostom notes that she approaches Jesus as God, and she is faithful in this because she serves Jesus alone. This sentence clearly refutes any form of Arian doctrine possibly present with the audience. This is the defining aspect of being a disciple. He would later accuse Judas of worshipping gold (Homily on John 65.3). To Mary, not even the high price of nard would influence her faithfulness to Jesus. Thirdly, Chrysostom explicitly states that Mary surrounds Jesus with honour (πεξίζηζεζη ηληηκήλ). The use of the word πεξίζηζη is linked with the pouring out of the nard and the fragrance that filled the room. This entire act was an act of surrounding Jesus with honour.

The homily under discussion does not provide much biographical information on Mary. This information was already provided in an earlier homily (Homily on John 62.1) with the discussion of John 11:1-16. It is then important to note that Chrysostom does not equate Mary with the sinful woman in the Lukan parallels. Chrysostom also interprets this appellation to mean a prostitute. He notes that the woman in this version has an evil conscience. These terms are never reserved for Mary. He rather admires Mary’s faith in Jesus, especially with regard to the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:17-44; cf. Homily on John 62.2).

### 2.2. The Anointing of Jesus’ Feet

Chrysostom remarks that Mary’s motive for anointing Jesus’ feet was directly related to her view of Jesus as being divine. He states (Homily on John 65.2):

… she poured out the ointment, and wiped (His feet) with the hairs of her head, which was the action of one who did not entertain the same opinion concerning Him as did others;⁷

There are once again a few important phrases in Chrysostom’s language to take into account. Chrysostom explicitly states that Mary wiped

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⁷ Translation: NPNF.
Jesus’ feet with “the hair of her head” (ταῖς θριξὶ τηῖς κεφαλαῖς). It is quite significant to view Chrysostom’s interpretation of the action of wiping the feet in a different homily (Homily on Matthew 80.1):

“And not as to a mere man did she come unto Him; for then she would not have wiped His feet with her hair, but as to one greater than man can be. Therefore that which is the most honorable member of the whole body, this she laid at Christ’s feet, even her own head”

It is quite significant to view Chrysostom’s interpretation of the action of wiping the feet in a different homily (Homily on Matthew 80.1):

One sees the similarities between the contents of Homily on Matthew 80.1 and Homily on John 65.2. Chrysostom’s commentary on Matthew also states that the woman came to Christ on the basis of his divinity. The “opinion” (ὑπόληψις, cf. Homily on John 65.2) that Mary and the sinful woman had regarding Christ is therefore important for Chrysostom. This main premise of this opinion or presupposition is that Jesus is divine, or God.

Chrysostom also interprets the action of the anointing in a significant manner. He uses the language of honour and shame in his exposition to understand the event. Within the body, the various members have different degrees of honour. Traditionally, the head was a high-status member; while the feet were considered lower-status members (cf. Martin 1995:30ff; Grudem 2001:25-65). Chrysostom incorporates this in his exegesis on other writings also, for instance (Homily on Ephesians 10.1):

“Some indeed there are, which are more especially principal members, others less so: for example, the head is more a principal member than all the rest of the body, as containing within itself all the senses, and the governing principle of the soul. And to live without the head is impossible; whereas many persons have lived for a long time with their feet cut off. So that it is better than they, not only by its position, but also by its very vital energy and its function.”

One immediately finds traces of Hellenistic philosophy in Chrysostom’s understanding that the head is the carrier of the soul (cf. Plato, Timaeus 44d; Proclus, Commentary on Timaeus 95.48; Orphic Fragments 21a; Aristotle, On the Parts of Animals 2.10, On the Generation of Animals 2.6; Artemidorus, Dream Handbook). According to Chrysostom, Mary’s high opinion (ὑπόληψις) of Christ is further emphasized in that she considers her most honourable body part only worthy to be at Christ’s feet, the meanest of body parts.

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8 Translation: NPNF.
9 Translation: NPNF.
10 Chrysostom often uses honour and shame in his expositions, especially in his Homily on 1 Corinthians 31 when discussing the various members of the ecclesiastical body (cf. Stander 2003a:520-522). He does conclude however, that all the members of the body have the same honour (Homily on Ephesians 10.1; Homily on the Statues 11.12).
Chrysostom uses the same line of argumentation when discussing the washing of the disciples’ feet (Stander 2003b:908).

Chrysostom’s interpretation of the anointing of Jesus’ feet is clearly discernable as Antiochene exegesis. If the authors may digress for a moment; the particularity of Chrysostom’s exegesis is complemented when examining some Alexandrian interpretations of the head and feet:

Ambrose\(^{11}\) (Epistle 41.11) discusses Mary’s washing of Jesus’ feet and states that God is the head of the body, while the prophets may be its eyes, and the apostles its teeth, because they bring the food of the gospel to the breasts. Very interestingly, Ambrose notes that the stomach represents those who distribute riches to the poor. He states that even to be the feet, of which he acknowledges as lowest-status carriers, or the heel of Christ would be enough for him. Ambrose also links the feet with the sinful human nature. He states (On the Mysteries 6.29-33) that a new Christian was to be anointed on the head and the feet needed to be washed. Sins were forgiven \textit{ex opere operato} with baptism, and the washing of the feet symbolized the forgiving of hereditary sins.

Augustine (Tractates on the Gospel of John 56.4), who was influenced by Ambrose, associates the feet, that are always dirty, with the “human feelings” \textit{(humanus animus)}; always stained with sin. Again here, a rather low opinion of the feet emerges. This is why sinners need to be washed (referring to baptism), just like the feet needed to be washed as in John 13:6-10.

Jerome (On Illustrious Men 1), in turn, asseverates regarding the apostle Peter that his martyrdom of being nailed upside-down on a cross, his head to the ground and feet in the air, symbolized Peter’s unworthiness to be crucified in the same manner as Christ.

All these references illustrate how the position of the feet and head in early Christian didactics was commonly understood. It has also shown the way Alexandrian exegetes are inclined to interpret this motif over and against the Antiochene exegetes such as Chrysostom. This sort of hamartiological reasoning is not found in Chrysostom’s exegesis of this account.

Mary, therefore, in fact not only empties or pours out \textit{(ἐκχέω)} her flask of nard, but almost more importantly to Chrysostom, empties herself of all her honour, which was even more valuable than monetary affluence in ancient times. This honour surrounds Jesus \textit{(πεξηκίζεως ἡληκήλη)} and acts in the same way as the smell of the perfume – it fills and surrounds the entire room, as implied by the homily.

\textbf{2.3. Enter Judas…}
The homily now moves to describe the ultimate antagonist. Chrysostom devotes the rest of \textit{Homily on John} 65 to discussing Judas, and it is helpful, at

this point, to divide the remaining section of the homily into smaller logical parts. Firstly, Judas rebuke against Mary will be viewed, with special emphasis on the contrast Chrysostom draws between Mary and Judas; secondly, Jesus response to Judas is examined; and finally, Chrysostom’s elaboration on Judas as a lover of money will be discussed.

2.3.1. “But Judas rebuked her”
Chrysostom interprets the actions of Judas in contrast to those of Mary (Homily on John 65.2). He collates the two characters saying “But Judas rebuked her...” (ἀλλ’ ἐπετίμησεν ὁ Ἰούδας). When one looks at the cohesion of the homily, one finds that Chrysostom uses the word ἀλλά here to mark a strong break with the previous section, and also to introduce the antagonist. The contrasts: Mary, the “true” disciple (μαθήτρια) who empties her wealth (ἡ...κύξιν...ἐμέρε) and honour (περιίστησι τὴν τιμήν) before Jesus, and Judas, the traitor (προδότης), who is not only a “lover of money” (χρημάτων ἔρωτα), but also has “excessive wickedness” (πονηρίαι πολλά); Mary is described as acting in a “more spiritual way” (πάλιν ἐνταῦθα αὐτῇ πνευματικώτερον), while Chrysostom quotes John 6:64 and 70 to describe Judas - he is, respectively, one who does not believe (οὐ πάντες πιστεύουσι) and he is a devil (ἐίς ἐξ ὦμῶν διάβολος ἐστιν). Chrysostom also compares their motives. Mary’s motive was based on her admiration of Jesus as being God, but Judas’ motive was false, he rather worships gold. He does it “really under the pretense of circumspection” (προσεχματι δήθεν εὐλαβείας), for this is what a προδότης does, he “pretends”. Mary, on the other hand, has no pretenses, but acts worthy of being a disciple.

2.3.2. Jesus’ Response to Judas
Chrysostom interprets Jesus response thus (Homily on John 65.2):

“What does Christ then say? “She has done a good work for My burying” [John 12:7]. But why did He not expose the disciple for the sake of the woman, and why not say to him what the Evangelist has declared, that because of his own thievery he rebuked her? In His affluent patience, He wanted to show regard to him”.

The text in John 12:7 does not read as Chrysostom quotes it. He provides an informal Jesus saying possibly from memory. Chrysostom states that Jesus “wanted to show regard to him” (ἐντρέψασα αὐτὸν ἐβούλετο), and did not expose Judas as a traitor, even in defense of Mary. This is in fact a difficult phrase to translate. The semantic problem lies with the word ἐντρέψα. There are a number of possible meanings of this word (ἐντρέψαω). What does Chrysostom mean by this? According to Blass-Debrunner (§126), ἐντρέψω in the NT is an etymological substitution for the Attic αἰδεομα; hence Louw and
Nida’s (1988:2:310) rendering “to shame, to embarrass.” The Chrysostomian context, however, does not suggest such a translation. The classical meaning can also mean “respect” or “regard”, showing the word to be a contronym. The *NPNF* translates it “to put to a better mind.” This archaic translation is not effective. The translation used in this study is closer to the Attic use, particularly that of Demosthenes, meaning “to feel [or] show regard” or even “respect” (αἰδεῖος). Ryan (1982:5) notes that Chrysostom often prefers classical readings, especially Demosthenic, due to the influence of his teacher Libanius. This is also supported by the context, as it springs from the “affluent patience” (τῇ πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ) of Christ. Chrysostom wants to indicate that Jesus did not retaliate by shaming Judas (the Evangelist, however, does shame Judas), but even respected him out of His own volition (ἐβυίεην) on the basis of longsuffering and general good manners. This is even more remarkable, since Jesus was, according to Chrysostom, aware of Judas pretensions.

Furthermore, Chrysostom also accounts for the Matthean version, where it is not Judas alone who rebukes the woman, but all the disciples. He states the following:

“How then says another Evangelist, that all the disciples used these words? [Mt 26:70]. All used them, and so did he, but the others not with like purpose.”

As mentioned, this attests to the fact that Chrysostom regards these events as the same. Attempting to reconcile these events, he points out that Judas’ “purpose was not the same” (οὐ τῇ αὐτῇ προσφέρσει). Once again, the translation preference for προσφέρω (literally, “to purpose” or “propose”) agrees with the Demosthenic use. He implies that Judas had different intentions than the other disciples. This intention is delineated in the next section.

### 2.3.3. Judas as Lover of Money

Why would Jesus make a thief or lover of money a steward? This question is posed and answered by Chrysostom (*Homily on John* 65.2):

“…God knows the secret reason; but that, if we may say something by conjecture, it was that He might cut off from him all excuse. For he could not say that he did this thing from love of money, (for he had in the bag sufficient to allay his desire,) but from excessive wickedness which Christ wished to restrain…”

Although this seems to be a mystery to him (ἀπόδεικτον λόγον ὁ Θεὸς οἰδεν), an interesting theory is given by Chrysostom. He states that Jesus gave Judas

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12 Translation: *NPNF*.
13 Translation: *NPNF*. 
the bag of money as a restraint (κατέχω) against the excessive wickedness of Judas. It seems to be implied that Jesus gave Judas the bag in order that he may easily steal from it rather than do direr things for money. The Attic use of κατέχω does have a nuance of embezzlement, which would not necessarily be eisegetical in this context. He assumes the omniscience of Jesus in this regard. In turn, Chrysostom also believes that Jesus gave Judas the money bag so that he may not have an excuse for handing Jesus over. Judas did not need money, ironically, as he could always steal from the bag; yet he handed Jesus over. Chrysostom incorporates this first instance of irony to highlight Judas’ “excessive wickedness”. He also remarks that when Jesus mentioned his burial, he also alludes to Judas. This observation is striking and most modern commentators overlook this connection. Commentators spend many pages on the aspect of anointment and burial, which is not done by Chrysostom. Chrysostom’s statement is valid, since Jesus’ burial certainly refers to his death, an event directly linked with Judas. He does not provide more information on the burial itself in this homily, nor in Homily on Matthew 80, which he regards as the same event. He rather continues to elaborate and reiterates on this statement (Homily on John 65.2):

“…as if He had said, ‘I am burdensome and troublesome, but wait a little while, and I shall depart.’”

Chrysostom seems to read something different in Jesus statement. As said, modern commentators seem to venture very deep into the significance between anointing and Jesus burial, while Chrysostom interprets it merely as a statement indicating Jesus’ troubled constitution at the time. This is the second application of irony by Chrysostom to emphasize Judas’ wicked disposition. The third account of irony is spelled out by Chrysostom (Homily on John 65.2):

“But none of these things turned back that savage madman; yet in truth Jesus said and did far more than this, He washed his feet that night, made him a sharer in the table and the salt, a thing which is wont to restrain even the souls of robbers, and spoke other words, enough to melt a stone, and this, not long before, but on the very day, in order that not even time might cause it to be forgotten. But he stood out against all”\(^{14}\).

Chrysostom aims to illustrate that Jesus did not reject Judas even though he knew the truth about Judas. Jesus rather showed Judas courtesy and acceptance, and never treated him any different than the other disciples. Jesus even washed his feet and ate with him. Sharing “in the table and salt” (τραπέζης σωτῆρ μετέδωκε καὶ ἁλῶν) is a gesture symbolizing hospitality and

\(^{14}\) Translation: NPNF.
friendship (cf. also Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 18.10, who uses this same expression) (along with sharing and dipping the bread), which Jesus offered Judas, and Judas replied with betrayal. Jesus’ hospitality and kind words were “enough to melt a stone,” but Chrysostom states that it was not enough and calls Judas a “savage madman” (θηριώδη καὶ ματινομενον)\(^\text{15}\). He is in fact calling Judas beastly and insane. One can see the rhetoric moving into a climax also signifying the close proximity of the conclusion of the homily. It seems that he does not want to leave the issue of Judas and especially the sin of greed. It also becomes convenient to Chrysostom to conclude the homily with this issue, since a great deal of his exegetical homilies end with ethical applications regarding wealth and poverty.

### 2.4. Ethical Application of the Homily: The Dreadfulness of Greed

Chrysostom starts to conclude the homily with impressive and gripping rhetoric illustrating the intense dreadfulness of the sin of greed or, that is, the “love of money” (φιλαργυρία)\(^\text{16}\). Vehemently he states (*Homily on John* 65.3):

“For a dreadful thing is the love of money, dreadful! It incapacitates both eyes and ears, and makes people more dangerous to deal with than a wild beast, causing a person to consider neither conscience, nor friendship, nor fellowship, nor the salvation of their own soul, but after removing them from all these things, it makes those seized by it its slaves, like some savage tyrant. And the dreadful part of such bitter slavery is that it persuades them even to be grateful for it. And the more they become enslaved, the more their pleasure is increased. And, moreover, with this the sickness becomes incurable; with this the beast becomes hard to conquer.”\(^\text{17}\).

Chrysostom begins by describing the consequences of greed. The rhetoric of the conclusion is immediately strengthened by a double exhortation: “Δεινὸν γὰρ ἡ φιλαργυρία, δεινὸν”. He describes greed as being “dreadful” (δεινὸν). The marker for the conclusion is given (γὰρ), followed by the above statement. Chrysostom impressively frames the term “greed” with its characteristic:

1. Δεινὸν [γὰρ]
2. ἡ φιλαργυρία
3. δεινὸν ...

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\(^{15}\) Athanasius also relates greed to being mad and savage (cf. *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya* 25.589)

\(^{16}\) Judas is called a lover of money (φιλάργυρος) and a thief (κλέπτης), while he also refers to greed as the lust for money (χρημάτων ἔρωτα).

\(^{17}\) The authors provide their own translation of the section which is more faithful to the rhetoric.
This masterful stylistic invention above serves to introduce the ardent and disconsolate verbosity about to ensue. The eventualities of greed are discussed:

Firstly, it is the “disabling” or “incapacitating” (πεξόσ) of the eyes and ears. By this it is implied that a person consumed (or enslaved, as he later explicates) by greed has his or her rational perceptions lamed or mutilated. Thus, greed causes people to act irrationally and irresponsibly. They cannot see or hear anymore. The term is a commonly used metaphor in the virtue-discourses of Aristotle (see below) and Demosthenes (cf. The Second Olynthiac) to refer to the subject being incapacitated for reaching virtue, with Chrysostom following in that tradition. In classical discourse, the term mostly implies the maiming or laming of limbs. Chrysostom, in like manner, applies it to the logical faculties or sight and hearing. The inference of this is that the human nature, according to Chrysostom, is transformed (rather, deformed), into that of a wild animal and worse. This is the second instance in which greed is related to animal-like behaviour. Previously, he called Judas “insane and beastly” (θηριωδη και μαινόμενον; cf. 2.3 above). Chrysostom’s reasoning is therefore deductive – most of the norms in the conclusion are deduced from the behaviour of Judas. This terminology is hardly coincidental.

Aristotle affirms in On the Soul a bipartite psychology, in which the rational and perceptive soul is distinguished from animals, which may only possess an alogical, nutritive soul that is only biologically functional. Emotion, with its relation to moral virtue, involves perception, deliberation and calculation. Animals, according to Aristotle, are incapable of emotion, therefore incapable of virtue (Fortenbaugh 2006:122). Even the word used by Chrysostom, namely θηριωδία, is distinctively Aristotelian. Chrysostom, in this case, refers to the incapacitation of the “eyes and ears” (και δρθαλμωφς και δτα), thus, the faculties of cognition and, in turn, virtue. Resultantly, in light of the aforementioned, it is not surprising that Chrysostom particularizes greed in relation to other virtues prevalent both in classical philosophy and early Christian moral theology. This animal-like behaviour (greed) elicits a consideration for neither conscience (συνειδός)nor nor friendship (φιλια), neither fellowship (κοινωνια) nor salvation (σωτηρια). Chrysostom provides a pun on the term apostasy in that greed “removes” (ἀθεηεκη) the person from these virtues. In essence, the love of money results in abrogation from some of the most constitutive virtues.

18 As exhibited, Chrysostom recurrently uses Demosthenic forms. In this case, he prefers the form from Demosthenes for conscience, namely συνειδος (from σύνοιδο) and not the typical NT preference συνεῖδης (cf. also John Chrysostom, Letter to Olympias 13.2). It also has a nuance of “consciousness”, and is popular with philosophers like Plutarch, Epictetus and Philo. This same link between greed and the corruption of the conscience is made by numerous ecclesiastical authors (cf. Asterius, Homily on the Psalms 4.18; Origen, Homily on Luke 30.172; Maximus the Confessor, Epistle in Questions to Thalassius, Centuries on Love 1.75, 2.9, 3.4).
Secondly, Chrysostom incorporates yet another metaphor, namely that of “bitter slavery” (πικρᾶς δουλείας).19 Greed is like a savage and merciless tyrant (τυραννις χαλεπῆς).20 Again, he aggregates greed with χαλεπός (alongside θηριοδία).21 This same association is made in Polycarp to the Philippians 4:1, calling greed the beginning of all evils (ἀρχή ... πάντων χαλεπῶν φιλαργυρία). But even this slavery is contrary to convention, since those enslaved are content and grateful for their disposition.

The third metaphor utilized by Chrysostom is that of greed as a disease (νόσημα). Once the victim of greed has been seized by its snare of pleasure, it is like a disease that cannot be cured. Notwithstanding the typical metaphorical nature of this statement, it does seem that Chrysostom even links greed to physical illness and death, as he refers to Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, who was struck with leprosy after taking more than his share in 2 Kings 5:23. He also lists the actions of Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts 5:1-11, who kept back a part of the communal share. Judas and the “rulers of the Jews” (τοὺς Ἰουδαίων ἀρχόντας) are also mentioned as being guilty of greed. Chrysostom clearly refers to the Jewish council at the time of Jesus’ death.

The final section is used by Chrysostom to expound the notion of greed as idolatry (εἰδωλολατρεία), specifically from Paul’s argument in Colossians 3:5. He states that greed is the “worship” (προσκυνέω) of money, which is, in turn, devil-worship. The homily is ended in typical fashion with an exhortation (pressing forward to receive the true, heavenly possession) and a doxology.

3. Conclusion
The findings of this enquiry into Chrysostom’s exegesis of the Bethany event do provide some important pointers in the reading of the Johannine text. In the first instance, Chrysostom does not hesitate to give value to Mary’s role in the narrative, despite the fact that she is a woman; he calls her a disciple. This view has value especially to a gender-sensitive reading of the Bethany account. His use of social values like honour and shame to interpret the text immediately adds significance to the reading of his homilies for social-scientific analysis. Secondly, Chrysostom extensively utilizes terms and concepts not only in Christian theology, but even classical philosophy, like

19 Cf. also Amphilochoius, Against Heretics 194;
20 The NPNF provides a rather inconsistent translation. It renders the phrase τυραννις χαλεπῆς to “harsh mistress”, while the context clearly refers to a despot who captures and enslaves people. Interestingly enough, Athanaeus also uses the term τυραννις when relating to the greed of Dionysius (Deipnosophistae 2.1.120)
21 Chrysostom deviates here from the popular NT citation in 1 Timothy 6:10, which states that the love of money is “the root of all evil” (κακῶν). Basil the Great also uses the same terminology as Chrysostom (cf. Homily on the Holy Passover 28.1089).
22 Athanasius calls greed the “leprosy of the soul” (Λέπρα ψυχῆς) (Letters to Castor 28.857).
Aristotle, and rhetoric, like Demosthenes. This typical Antiochene trademark of exegesis would furthermore welcome his exegetical homilies in historical-grammatical analyses of the Johannine text. Finally, the ethical application of the NT text as a hermeneutical bridge has tremendous value in a society especially plagued by fraud, theft and corruption.

Decock (2005:61) states that one of the greatest values of the pre-modern Christian approach to Scripture is its emphasis on the present reader. Chrysostom is, in this case, no exception. His exegesis is admirable in that it places due emphasis on the importance of history and social values in the text, but still aims to instruct the present reader through his ethical and deliberative rhetoric. Although it is admitted that Chrysostom does not fully apply a (modern) scientific approach to the text, in that he does not distance himself from the text and subject of study (an axiom of modern scientific study), it would be unjustifiable to judge a pre-modern author on modern standards. Chrysostom’s dual emphasis on both history and the effect of the text on the present reader would be more justified in a Post-Modern context. In the words of Decock (2005:67), to Chrysostom, “understanding Scripture is not merely for information but ultimately transformation.”

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


