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THREE

"YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU BUT YOU
DO NOT ALWAYS HAVE ME" (JOHN 12:8):
CHARITY AS WORSHIP OF GOD¹

Ayodele AYENI, CSSp

1. Introduction

The theme of the "Poor" is relevant in social, economic and theological debates in contemporary society. Of course, the poor and poverty are examined on different fronts, depending on the spheres of the questioners. Governments, multinationals, church groups and individuals are all actively engaged in the question of the poor and poverty, on how either to eliminate poverty or alleviate the suffering of the poor.² On the economic front, R. Mark Isaac, Anne Bradley, Lord Brian Griffiths of Forestfach, Dato Kim Tan and Robert A. Sirico,³ put the blame of poverty on the door-steps of multinationals, the rich and governments: they are not doing enough to let "wealth" go around, hence, the need to appeal to the Christian roots of Western Economics in order to conscientize the "haves" to do something about the plights of the "have-nots."

¹ I sincerely thank professors J.C. OKOYE, L. LABERGE and M. GOURGUES for their critique and suggestions of the first draft of this article. That said, any shortcomings of this article are mine.

² Anne BRADLEY and Art LINDSLEY (eds.), *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*, Institute for Faith, Work and Economics, 2014. (This is an e-book, no printed version yet. We will be indication appropriate chapters and/or locations).

³ BRADLEY - LINDSLEY, *For the Least of These*, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 respectively.

Socially speaking, Lawrence W. Reed, Marvin Olasky and Peter Greer propose theories toward the alleviation of poverty. The title of Reed's article is tantalizing, "A Poverty Program That Worked"! Reed took his cue from the failure of American government's efforts to alleviate poverty for its citizenry through welfarism and reliefs. According to Reed, one program worked - the transfer of charity away from Governments to individual's liberty, on the belief that Americans are compassionate people.⁴ It is interesting to know that many governments try their hands on different policies towards poverty alleviations.

The gospel of John offers us the possibility of exploring Jesus' statement: "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (John 12:8a).⁵ Using historical critical method, we intend, fundamentally, to understand Jesus' statement in its historical and literary contexts. Walter C. Kaiser has given a brief, but succinct, overview of the different Old Testament terms covering the semantic sphere of the referent word for the poor.⁶ The most frequent referent vocabulary for the poor⁷ in the Old Testament are *'ebyon*

⁴ Lawrence W. REED, "A Poverty Program That Worked", in BRADLEY - LINDSLEY (eds.), *For the Least of These*, loc. 3998 of 6306.

⁵ All scriptural quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989, except where indicated.

⁶ Walter C. KAISER, "Poverty and the Poor in the Old Testament", in BRADLEY - LINDSLEY (eds.), *For the Least of These*, chapter 2.

⁷ E. BAMMEL, "The Poor in the Old Testament," in *The Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. 6, 1968, pp888-894; F. C. FENSHAM, "Widow, Orphan and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21, 1962, 129-139; Donald E. GOWAN, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan and the Sojourner," *Interpretation*

(Deut 15:7) and *'ani* (Is 61:1), "afflicted." Other less frequent terms include *dal* or *dalah* from the verb *dalal* (Ex 23:3) 'to languish', *chaser* (2 Sam 3:29)] 'to be needy' or 'to lack', and *miskan* (Ecclesiastes 4:13; 9:15-16) 'to be a beggar'.⁸ Of the 2000 references to the poor present in the Bible,⁹ Kaiser attempts a definition of the poor in these words:

Traditionally, the poor are generally referred to as those who are destitute, lacking even the most basic necessities to keep body and soul together. At best, a poor person is one who has little or nothing in the way of goods, possessions, wealth, or even the means to maintain a subsistence level of living.¹⁰

Kaiser's interest is to give a synopsis of the terms for the concept of the poor rather than a semantic evolution and contextual analysis of the appearances of each term. Gary Anderson, on the other hand, pays more attention to the theological meaning of poverty and how it serves in different Second Temple authors to signify a *leitmotif* for bridging the divide between the rich and the poor, through the concept of charity.¹¹

41, 1987, pp341-353; D. BAKER, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament Law*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.

⁸ P. Van den Berghe suggests a contextual hermeneutics of words. Cf. Paul VAN DEN BERGHE, "ANI et ANAW dans les psaumes," in *Le Psautier: ses origines, ses problèmes littéraires, son influence*, Louvain-Leuven: Publication Universitaires, 1962, pp273-295 at 294-295.

⁹ KAISER, "Poverty and the Poor in the Old Testament", loc. 864.

¹⁰ KAISER, "Poverty and the Poor in the Old Testament", loc. 875.

¹¹ Gary A. ANDERSON, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, Yale, NH: University Press, 2013, especially "Part

The clean sweep made by Kaiser and Anderson does not account for the specificity of the context and nomenclatural differences among the Second Temple usages of the term for the poor and the variation in the rationale for the theological motives of each Second Temple writing. For instance, S.L. Adams locates the evolutionary concept of the poor from a wisdom tradition which was constructed both from the perspectives of the rich and the poor.¹² The anthology of wisdom literature by the rich, in Proverbs and Ben Sirach, favors the conception of wealth as blessing from God and reward for a righteous life;¹³ while the poor solves the problem of the poor and poverty by locating the reward of the poor in heaven.¹⁴ To be fair to Adams, he admits that there are buffer zones in this conception, in the sense that there are Second Temple writings that support both ideas within the same book, a pointer to the danger of the fallacy of generalization and an invitation to contextual studies of concepts and terminologies.

ONE." Anderson claims that "[t]his book is, in many respects, a natural outgrowth of his previous publication, *Sin: A History*." Cf. ANDERSON, *Charity*, p1.

¹² Samuel L. ADAMS, "Poverty and Otherness in the Second Temple Instructions," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, Daniel C. HARLOW, Karina Martin HOGAN, Matthew GOFF, and Joel S. KAMINSKY, Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011, pp189-203.

¹³ Cf. ADAMS, "Poverty and Otherness in the Second Temple Instructions," pp194-195.

¹⁴ Adams considers the unique contribution of "4QInstruction" to be eschatological reward of the poor. Cf. ADAMS, "Poverty and Otherness in the Second Temple Instructions," pp199-203.

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

1.1 Overview

This article investigates the meaning of John 12:8 in its present context. After a survey of about 50 commentaries on the gospel of John, one fails to notice an entry on the explanation of John 12:8! At best, references is made, in commentaries, to Deut 15:11 as the source of John 12:8a, with even a mention of John 12:8b. Granted that this research did not investigate every commentary ever written on John's gospel, the claim is being made here that there is paucity of literature on the meaning of John 12:8, and the present research is being undertaken to look closely at it, and to suggest a possible meaning.

For a contextual analysis of John 12:1-11, one of the presuppositions of Johannine scholarship over the years is the view that the Gospel of John has a double meaning, literal and metaphorical/spiritual.¹⁵ Even though the nomenclature for qualifying this double meaning varies with authors, there is a seeming consensus that the message being communicated by the final redactor of the Gospel is that beyond the literal

¹⁵ The first mention of a "spiritual gospel" was by Clement of Alexandria, reported by Eusebius. Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* VI, xiv, 7. For recent authors who take this for granted, see: Craig R. KOESTER, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, Meaning, Mystery, Community*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995.

meaning, without neglecting the literal sense of the text when the Gospel is viewed and studied synchronically.

1.2 Delimitation of John 12:8

From a thematic perspective, the twin themes of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11) and the quest for the whereabouts of Jesus by the Pharisees (John 11:57), both correlate the same theme of the death of Lazarus and the imminent death and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁶ The locative clause ("...Jesus came to Bethany") which begins chapter 12, presenting both a change of subject matter (from the reaction to the raising of Lazarus to a dinner table) and time lag (six days before the Passover) separates the chronology of the narratives of John 11 and John 12. These two thematic indices provide some parameters for arguing that an independent unit begins at John 12:1 and ends at v. 11, since the desire to arrest Jesus was renewed in that verse. Moreover, the presence of the phrase - "the next day," another time clause in John 12:12 clearly indicates that a new subject matter is to be treated, and the issue of anointing raised in John 12:1-11 is over with. The theme of the so-called "Triumphant entry into Jerusalem" takes over from the narrative on death and resurrection from John 12:12. Consequently, while John 12:1-11 is grammatically linked to John 11, the former is still an independent pericope because of the meaning Jesus' death will have for the poor. Therefore, we delimit our pericope to be John 12:1-11.

¹⁶ Cf. Michel GOURGUES, "The Superimposition of Symbolic Time and Real Time in the Gospel of John: The Symbolism of Light as Time Marker," in *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 31, 2008, pp54-65.

2. John 12:8 in its Immediate Context

Though John 12:1-11 is construed as an independent pericope, it must be observed that it has thematic and lexical links to John 11. The major personages of John 11 - Jesus, Lazarus, Martha, Mary and Judas - are present in both pericopes. The two texts also show a change in the situation of the major characters. In the presence of Jesus, the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), the doubting Martha (11:20-27, 39-40) now serves Jesus (12:2); the believing Mary (11:32) now anoints Jesus (12:3), and the dead Lazarus (11:1-16) now lives and dines with Jesus (12:1-2).

In addition to thematic agreements, it is imperative to point out lexical incongruities. Lexically speaking the word *ptōkos* - poor comes across as a lone word in John 11-12, even though it appears three times in John 12:1-11 (vs. 5.6.8). Not only that, the phraseology - "for you will always have some poor people among you,"¹⁷ - in response to Judas' request for alms to be given to the poor, pushes the boundary of meaning from "text" to "context": what is the social (contextual) evocation of that clause (text) for Jesus' audience? Is Jesus not worthy of receiving "charity"¹⁸ the way a poor person should? The strength of the argument on lexicality and thematics stem from the fact that the narrative of John 12:1-11 moves away from Lazarus, whose resurrection and friendship with Jesus occasioned the dinner in question, to Jesus who is a recipient of an act of charity from Mary (John 12:1-11). In order to

¹⁷ My translation.

¹⁸ We intentionally switch from "alms" in the preceding sentence to "charity" here because "alms" are given to the living, but charity extends even to the dead, like burying the dead. To be fixated with "alms" is to see what Mary did for Jesus to be a waste.

effect this change of perspective, the concept of *ptōkos* - 'poor' was used. The only appearance of this vocabulary outside of John 12:1-11 is in John 13:29, and the context is that of the Last Supper (John 13:2), where, among other things, Jesus was living behind a legacy of service, as part of his farewell to his disciples. The use of the concept in John 13:29 was conjectural, in the sense that the disciples were deciphering the significance of Jesus' instruction to Judas Iscariot; but it nonetheless established the fact that Jesus and his community had the habit of almsgiving to the poor, and the disciples remembered that.

2.1 "You will always have the poor with you" (John 12:8a): Its Provenance

In the parallel Synoptic texts where the expression "You will always have the poor with you" is found (Matt 26:11; Mark 14:7), as well as in other occurrences of the term 'poor' in John (John 12:5-6 and 13:29), the contexts clearly explain the meaning of the term. This is not the case with John 12:8a - no explanation is given!¹⁹ It becomes necessary to ask for its "provenance," in order to decode its meaning.

Indeed, the context of John 12:8 is different from that of Matthew and Mark. While Matthew and Mark place the anointing in the house of Simon the Leper, even though the location - Bethany - is the same as that of John, the context is different because the raising of Lazarus provides the *raison-*

¹⁹ Most Johannine commentators simply refer to Deut 15:11, no more no less! For a more elaborate comparative analysis, see: Urban C. von WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 1-3, Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010, Vol. 2.

d'être for the dinner offered on Jesus' behalf in John 12:1-11. Another element of detail is the fact that Matthew and Mark have the ointment poured on Jesus' head, while John has it poured on Jesus' feet. It is also not said if the nameless woman of Matt 26:7 and Mark 14:3 the same as Mary in John 12:1-11? Moreover, there is an added difficulty of chronology. John 11:1-2 makes reference to a certain Mary who anointed Jesus' feet. This story is yet to be narrated in John 12: "[n]ow a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill" (John 11:1-2). One is left to ask if the anointing took place before the death and resurrection of Lazarus or after? R. Schnackenburg explains that such a text predates its context, and the author lifts it from tradition to compose the Gospel.²⁰ It indicates the 'preformed'²¹ nature of John 12:8. This text exhibit particular characteristics which help to clarify its nature as a preformed material.²² The ones

²⁰ Schnackenburg is of the opinion that the link between John 11:1-2 (Martha and Mary) and John 12:1-8 (Martha and Mary) is the editor's knowledge, from tradition, of the anointing that took place in Bethany - the emphasis is location. We are of the opinion that the meaning to be given to John 12:1-11 is the real reason why John 12:1-11 comes after the narration of the raising of Lazarus. Cf. Rudolf SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1980, p366.

²¹ Timothy prefers to use the term 'preform' to the traditional term 'formula'. 'Preformed' and 'formulaic' are said of materials in the New Testament that antedate their usage. Cf. Mark M. YARBROUGH, *Paul's Utilization of Preformed Tradition in 1 Timothy*. An Evaluation of the Apostle's Literary, Rhetorical and Theological Tactics (Library of New Testament Studies, 417). London - New York, T&T Clark, 2009.

²² There are six criteria for detecting a preformed material: 1) Rupture from its environment, 2) Unique beginning, 3) Introductory formula,

to be discussed here are: multiple attestation, unique vocabulary and rupture from its environment.²³

2.2 Multiple Attestation

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

The fascination with multiple attestation springs from two presuppositions: firstly, the material in question predates its present context of use, and, secondly, there exists a precise meaning attributed and attributable to parallel statements, which accounts for why they are used without explanations. Linguistically, at least from the perspective of Widdowson's linguistic theory, there exists a 'pre-text' which makes the semantic decoding of "For you always have the poor with you" possible. More often than not, the origin of the statement is traced to Deut 15:11: "Since there will never cease to be

4) Distinctive style, 5) Disparate vocabulary, and 6) Multiple attestations. The translation and arrangements are mine. Cf. Michel GOURGUES, « Les formes pré littéraires, ou l'Évangile avant l'écriture », in Bernard POUDERON (dir.), *Histoire de la littérature grecque ancienne*, vol. 2 : *De Paul à Irénée de Lyon*, coll. « Initiations aux Pères de l'Église », Paris: Cerf, 2013, pp. 265-282 at 2-3.

²³ Meier talks of the primary criteria of "historicity," in contradistinction to "dubious" ones, in the context of the gospels; namely: "embarrassment, discontinuity, multiple attestation, coherence, rejection and execution." Cf. John P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 1, New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991, pp167-201.

some in need on the earth". It is argued that, since the context of the Sabbatical year and Jubilee shaped the meaning of how the poor should be treated, even if the pre-text to Deuteronomy 15 itself is the consequence of liberation from Egypt (Deut 15:15), the meaning of the neo-testamental understanding of "For you always have the poor with you" (Matt 26:11, Mark 14:7, John 12:8) should be based on Deut 15:11.

A possible implication of Jesus' statement in John 12:8 is that Jesus should be a recipient of charity like any poor person. Charity done to Christ, then, has a salvific importance because it makes possible the realization of Christ's mission by human contributions toward that mission. Consequently, Judas Iscariot's statement is erroneous since it implied that Jesus was not a poor person deserving of charity - "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (John 12:5). As a matter of fact, Mary's anointing of Jesus consummates, figuratively, the mission of Jesus and announces Jesus' resurrection because only a corpse should normally be embalmed! This will become clearer when we explore the meaning of 'charity' used in association with the idea of poverty. Indeed, if charity often substituted for the sacrifices offered at the Temple in Jerusalem, how fitting for Mary to offer her sacrifice of charity to Christ a visible temple of God, who has come to her home!

The complementary statement, "but you do not always have me" (John 12:8b), gives a dominical perspective to a statement supposedly taken from Deut 15:11. We now have both an appropriation and surplus meaning or transcendence. This changes the dynamics of the sphere of semantics Deut 15:11 may have on John 12:8 because the incarnation - "and

the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14a) - makes it possible to have Christ, the Son of Man, for a time, but not always. So, the semantic context of "[y]ou always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (John 12:8) is elucidated by the purpose and mission of Christ, especially his death.

2.2 *Unique Vocabulary*

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

In the past six years, Gary A. Anderson, has published monumental books, which demonstrate how Jewish concepts of sin and charity both evolved in inter-testamental times. Perhaps we will soon have the pleasure of reading the same kind of work on the concepts of the poor and poverty. Before then, however, the neo-testamental *hapax legumenon* 'endeas' (Acts 4:29), in contradistinction to the ubiquity of *ptōkos* in the New Testament, used to describe the 'poor', clearly shows a discontinuity in the mind of early Christians. This is no less the case because the Greek and Roman worlds in which the Good news entered never recognized the exclusive or 'divine' right of the Jews to any land, which would have warranted the conception of the poor as 'endeas', a situation marked by lack

of distributive justice, which the sabbatical and jubilee years redressed.²⁴

From the emphasis laid on the manumission of slaves in both first and second Temple Judaism, vestiges of which are still found in Pauline formulas - "there is no longer slave or free" (Gal 3:28)²⁵ and the variants in 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:11 - show an emergent understanding of the poor and poverty that is not based on the Jewish right to land and identity, but from a sociological reality. The function of the "uniqueness of vocabulary" here aims to buttress the point that John 12:8 is foreign to its present environment. Consequently, whatever meaning it now has must factor in its new or present environment or context.

2.3 Rupture from its Environment: John 12:8 versus John 11:1-12:11

A third element 'rupture from its environment', is used here to argue that John 12:8 is foreign to its present location. John 12:8 constitutes an intrusiveness in its actual position. The introduction or description given of Martha and Mary in John 12:1-2, whom the redactor had mentioned already in John

²⁴ For how early Christians appropriated this concept, see: Carolyn OSIEK, "The Ransom of Slaves: Evolution of a Tradition," *Harvard Theological Review* 74, 1981, 365-386 at 365; Carolyn OSIEK, "Slavery in the Second Testament World," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22, 1992, 174-179. This article mistakenly cited *Similitudes* 1.10 instead of *Similitudes* 1.8 [p177].

²⁵ Richard Horsley has dedicated to this dyad and other conceptions of slavery a few critical studies. Cf. Richard A. HORSLEY, "Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings," *Semeia* 83/84, 1998, 153-200.

11:1-2, says at least two things. Firstly, the story inserted into John 12:3-8 is well known in Jesus' circle; secondly, the redactor of John's gospel was out to find a fitting place for it in the gospel of John. By 'fitting place' we mean to give the story a theological (Johannine) meaning via a context. Of course, Johannine scholarship is aware of the redactional process called *wiederaufnahme*,²⁶ which is able to explain the reprise of an idea previously touched upon, but the examples given by scholars do not cover as many verses as what we have here.

3. Exegetical Analysis of John 12:1-11

What is now obvious, from the analysis above, is the fact that the meaning of John 12:8 is not evident. We now insert John 12:8 into its micro-context, and the story of John 12:1-11 could be represented thus:

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

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

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

E Judas²⁷ said that the money for the ointment were better given to the poor (John 12:4-6)

²⁶ Marie-Émile BOISMARD, "Un procédé rédactionnel dans le quatrième évangile: la Wiederaufnahme," in *L'évangile de Jean: sources, rédaction, théologie*, M. DE JONGE (dir.), Gembloux: J. Duculot/Leuven: University Press, 1977, pp235-241.

²⁷ Scholars have laid a lot of emphasis on the role played by Judas, quite often, in a negative light. We intend to show that his question was the catalysis for the use of Jesus' statement in John 12:8. For

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

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

A' The Chief priests came to Bethany²⁸ to arrest Jesus and to kill Lazarus (John 12:10-11)

The correlation among our chiasmic pairs is "based on language, concepts and content".²⁹ The drama that unfolded during the dinner was not a public knowledge, but limited to the participants at the dinner (John 12:3-8).³⁰ Likewise, the discussion about Jesus being "the resurrection and the life" was limited to Jesus and Martha (John 11:17-27). This privy information add flavor to the context of their respective pericopes. The possibility that the flow of John 11-12 would remain intact if the 'dinner episode' is excluded invites a

views on Judas, see: Raymond Edward BROWN, *The Gospel According John I-XII*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970, pp447-454; Francis J. MOLONEY (ed.), *The Gospel of John*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998, pp356-358.

²⁸ The locative adverb *ekei* - "there" (John 12:9), meaning Bethany, and the conjunctive particle *de* - "but/and/so" (John 12:10), beginning a follow up sentence, suggests that the "chief priests" were part of the "large crowd" that came (*ekei*-there) to Bethany, only with a different agenda. So 'Bethany' is implied in this verse - John 12:10.

²⁹ Traditionally, chiasmus is "based on language, concepts and content." Cf. Nils W. LUND, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992, pxvi. Chiasmus also needs to be an "inverted parallelism" or an "antithesis." Cf. John W. WELCH (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, Provo, UT: Research Press Publications, 1981, p9.

³⁰ Brown maintains that the author is not an eyewitness. Cf. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p452.

scrutiny of John 12:3-8. And as has been said earlier, the concept of the poor is a pointer to the meaning of John 12:8.

3.1 *The Conspiracy to Kill Jesus and Lazarus as a Denial of the Possibility of Resurrection (John 12:1,9-11)*

The double referents to Mary, Martha and Lazarus at the beginning of the two chapters (John 11:1-3; John 12:1-2) authenticate the prime actors in both chapters. Also, the congruent motifs at the end of John 11 and John 12:9-11 - the search for and desire to put Lazarus to death because his resurrection elicited faith in the people - renews the importance of the resurrection saga of John 11 and the determination of the religious leadership of the Jews to deny the possibility of the resurrection.

Jesus and Lazarus, put forward at the beginning of the pericope (John 12:1) in celebration mood, after the resurrection of Lazarus; are mentioned again at the end (John 12:9-11) as deserving of death. As far as the leadership of the day was concerned, faith in Jesus had to be suppressed, even if killing were necessary - "it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50). The contestation between Jesus - "the resurrection and Life" (John 11:25) and the Jewish option to defend nationhood alludes to the distinctiveness of the role of faith in the process of discipleship. Indeed, if the Jewish people associated resurrection with charity - burying the dead, as exemplified by the book of Tobit, the determination of who dies and who lives cannot be made by mortals but God alone - here, Jesus Christ.³¹

³¹ We will expatiate on these points in 3.3 below.

3.2 *Charity to the Poor Guarantees Immortality* (John 12:3-7)

The synoptic contexts of "you always have the poor. . . ." clearly left a Second Temple imprint on the way that saying should be understood. The emphasis, in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, on "remembrance" ("in memory of her" [Matt 26:13; Mark 14:9]) recalls the link made between God's remembrance of acts of charity done to the poor, especially as narrated in the book of Tobit,³² with a unique reference to the burying of the dead. The unique emphasis laid on the corporal work of mercy associated with burying the dead is put in relief by Matthew and Mark as the symbolism of what Mary did - "she has anointed my body before hand for burial" (Mark 14:8). Also, the *liber arbiter* "whenever you choose you can do good for them," inserted in between "you always have the poor" and "you do not always have me," in Mark 14:7, maintains its dependence on a popular Jewish understanding, corroborated by John 13:29, "maybe Jesus was asking Judas to give something to the poor" which means, at that epoch, almsgiving to the poor is not tied to sabbatical and Jubilee years anymore, since Jesus' community had a purse for the poor.



³² Francis M. MACATANGAY, "Acts of Charity as Acts of Remembrance in the Book of Tobit," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 2013, pp69-84; MACATANGAY, "Burial of the Dead as Imitation and Anticipation of God's Restoration of Israel in the Book of Tobit," (a paper read at the 2014 CBA, Providence, Rhode Island); ANDERSON, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, 2013, especially chapters 2 and 5, "Charity as Service to God" and "Deliverance from Death."

However, a marked difference exists between the synoptic tradition and John: John alone says that the ointment was poured on Jesus' feet, the others say over his head. The washing of feet, which replaces the institution narrative in John's gospel, takes up, in another form, the worship of God - since John 11, through dialogues and the use of "I am" formula (John 11:25), established the divinity of Jesus - and links it to mutual service, as Jesus' parting legacy for his community (John 13:1-20). The fact that feet washing was a customary sign of hospitality to a guest (Luke 7:44-50), translated as service, when Jesus, master and Lord, washed his disciples feet. It is imperative to see Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet as worship of God because she realized him to be God prior to the anointing, thanks to the saga narrated in John 11:32.³³ Of course, Martha said the same thing (John 11:21) as Mary did, their subsequent actions display the difference in their faith. The apparent waste of a costly perfume or ointment on Jesus' feet reveals a high degree of faith, consequent upon the raising of Lazarus.

Jesus makes three linkages among his divinity, hour and resurrection,³⁴ in order to help us to understand his rebuke of Judas' criticism of Mary's charity³⁵ to himself and the

³³ *Ad rem* here, is Moloney's statement, "it is Mary, not Martha, who accepts Jesus' revelation as the resurrection and the life (cf. vv. 24-25). Only Mary accepts Jesus' revelation of himself as she confesses 'if you had been here.' Mary is the character in the story reflecting true faith (vv 29, 32) while Martha has fallen short of such faith (vv. 21-22, 24, 27)." Cf. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John*, p330.

³⁴ Wahlde makes this evident in his three-layer reconstruction of the origins of the gospel of John. Cf. Urban C. von WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 2, loc. 7635-7651.

³⁵ Old Testament scholars make a distinction between almsgiving and charity. Alms are given to the living, while charity is done for the

meaning of Mary's gesture of kindness and faith - "Leave her alone" (John 12:7a). Firstly, Jesus shows himself as God by giving life to dead Lazarus; secondly, Jesus proves that his glory is his resurrection, since he says to his disciples that Lazarus' illness was not leading to death but glory - resurrection; but Lazarus was already dead when Jesus made his statement, so Jesus' statement "so that she may keep it for the day of my burial" (the standard translation of the text) fails to manifest the anticipatory role of the resurrection or glorification of Jesus, which is the meaning of the "hour" of Jesus. I suggest that the text be translated in this way: "in order that it (*to myron*) may guard/preserve [me] against the day of my burial." The idea of decay is remote from the imminence of the resurrection. So that anointing 'preserves' from decay, thereby foreshadowing the resurrection or the glorification of Christ. Death, for Johannine theology, is not physical. Little wonder Jesus talks about his burial and not his death! Thirdly, the preoccupation with Jesus' hour, right after the pericope of John 12:1-11, suggests the imminence of Jesus' death and resurrection. Also, the fact that Mary was not at the grave to embalm Jesus may suggest an expectation of his resurrection.

living and the dead. We chose to talk about "charity" here for two reasons: 1) If we were to view Mary's action from the point of view of almsgiving, then, it would be considered wasteful, as Judas apparently thought, owing to the monetary value of the ointment in question, and 2) charity is linked to the burying of the dead, and the emphasis here is the "burial" of Jesus. For the biblical nuances between "almsgiving" and "charity," see: ANDERSON, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, pp14-52, especially the subtitles, "Charity as an Expression of Faith in God," "Charity as Service to God," and "A Loan to God," pp14-34.

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

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

The first point of importance to tackle here is the attribution of John 12:8, and its synoptic parallels in Mark and Matthew, to Deut 15:11. We have shown earlier that there are literary arguments, vocabulary and contextual mutations, that militate against equating John 12:8 with Deut 15:11. Here, we need to look at the arguments of Capper and Ling, which claim, on the basis of 'virtuoso religion' and the etymological meaning of 'Bethany' as the 'house of the poor', that places of hospitality to the poor and Qumran-like houses of residents of people who practiced voluntary poverty were common-place phenomena in Judaea.³⁶

Capper and Ling admit that poverty was a reality in first century Judaea. Consequently, the statement "You always

³⁶ Timothy J. M. LING, *The Judaean Poor and The Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: University Press, 2006, pp165-181.

have the poor with you" (John 12:8a) makes sense in a very real and existential way because of the prevalence of poverty in Bethany. Beyond this point, though, the text of John 11:1-12:11 sheds more light on the exegetical meaning of John 12:8. This is the case for two reasons. Firstly, the second part of the statement, "but you do not always have me", points to the fact that the identity of Jesus forecloses the meaning of "You always have the poor with you"; especially the sole dependence on its Deuteronomic meaning (Deut 15:11). Secondly, since historical authors accept John 12:8 to have been a redactional addition at the third stage of the evolution of the gospel of John,³⁷ this final canonical text must have a specific meaning controlled by its present contexts.³⁸

It is now clear that Judas' accusation of Mary's wastefulness, as regards the ointment used to anoint Jesus' feet, was the fitting pretext for the final editor of John 11:1-12:11 to present the meaning of Jesus' (dominical saying) statement, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me" (John 12:8). Judas' concern for the poor neglected the wider scope of charity, a term which did not exclude almsgiving, but goes beyond it. Obviously, the paucity of Johannine texts dealing with the concept of the poor may puzzle one as to the connection Jesus has with the poor. Marc Girard has shown that even the life of Jesus, in comparison with the three major Old Testament words for the poor ('evyôn, 'ônî and dal),³⁹ provides sufficient grounds for

³⁷ Urban C. von WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Vol. 2, loc. 7635.

³⁸ von WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, loc. 7635-7651.

³⁹ Marc GIRARD, *Le Pauvre, Le sacrement de Dieu: méditation biblique et théologique*, Montréal, Médiaspaul, 1994, p153.

talking about Jesus' poverty. In his own words, Girard concludes:

D'après la terminologies biblique, donc, trois traits définissent la condition du pauvre: ne pas respirer ['ānāw], ne rien avoir ['eb^cyôn], et ne pas pouvoir [dal]. Or, ces trois traits résument à eux seuls tout le psychodrame de la Passion: Jésus meurt dans la dépendance totale ['eb^cyôn], immobilisé [dal] et étouffé, asphyxié ['ānāw].⁴⁰

In the drama of the cross, Marc Girard finds the poverty of Jesus in solidarity with the poor of this world. His analysis was exclusively based on the etymological nuances of the three mentioned Hebrew words for describing the poor. This analysis is helpful for our purposes because it shows Judas' misconception of the identity of the poor and Jesus' share in it. Also, Marc Girard's synthesis, especially his attribution of that to the Passion of Christ fits well with the explicit imminence of Jesus' hour in John 12. If we had hinted at the second level reading that scholars admit to exist as a hermeneutical principle embedded in the gospel of John, it is because with the aid of a second level reading, what had been both explicitly and implicitly written down in John 11-12⁴¹ dovetail in proving the meaning of John 12:8 - a divine Jesus,

⁴⁰ GIRARD, *Le Pauvre*, p 153. Here is my translation: "According to biblical terminologies, therefore, three traits define the condition of the poor: inability to breathe ['ānāw], having nothing ['eb^cyôn], and being powerless [dal]. Now, these three traits alone summarize the psychodrama of the Passion: Jesus dies in total dependence ['eb^cyôn], immobilized [dal] and choked, asphyxiated ['ānāw]."

⁴¹ We do not imply that other passages of John's gospel could not be evoked with the same richness. If, in fact, we do explore the whole Gospel, a clearer picture will appear.

whose glory is dimmed by the poverty of his human condition.

4. Conclusion

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

In our case, it is evident that the resurrection of Lazarus pointed out a better notion of the resurrection for Christians - the resurrection of Christ. This is the case because a second level reading of the text warrants this conclusion, in consonance with scholarly approach to the study of John's gospel - a gospel couched in two layers, literal and spiritual. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the traditional imperative to help the poor provides the final redactor of John with the possibility of broadening the scope of charity, from help to the poor to include worship of God. Will it be wrong to consider prayer to God as a form of direct worship of God, since we no longer have him in person, like Mary did? Indeed, the poor will always be among us, if we are not one of them already; the question remains, though, will we remain open handed to them while not forgetting to worship God through prayers? For charity to the poor must go hand in hand with the worship of God.