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2 Poverty instead of Property

How difficult the further history of the Church struggled with the radicalism of the new Torah is illustrated by the very topic of "poverty instead of property". We only need to read Chrysostom in the 4th century as he tries to criticise property and hold on to complete poverty:

"Tell me, where does your wealth come from? You owe it to someone else? And this other, to whom does he owe it? To his grandfather, they say, to his father. Will you now, going far back in the family tree, be able to give proof that this property was acquired by a just way? You cannot. On the contrary, the beginning, the root of it, necessarily lies in some injustice. Why? Because from the beginning God did not create the one rich and the other poor, and made no exception by showing the way to gold treasures to the one and preventing the other from seeking them out, but gave the same earth to all to possess. If, then, this is the common property of all, how is it that you have so much of it by the day, and your neighbour has not a clod of land? Wealth must be acquired justly, there must be no robbery attached to it. Of course, you are not responsible for what your miserly father has scraped together. You own the fruit of the robbery, but the robber was not you! But admitting that your father did not commit robbery either, but that his wealth sprang up from somewhere, what about it? Does that make wealth a good? Absolutely not. But neither is it a bad thing, you say. If you are not stingy, you tell the poor, it is not a bad thing; if it is not, it is bad and a dangerous thing. Yes, you reply, if one does no evil, he is not evil, even if he does no good. Quite so. But does not this mean doing something evil, if one wants to be master of everything for himself alone, if he wants to enjoy common things alone? Or is not the earth and all that is in it the property of God? If, then, all our possessions belong to God, they also belong to our brothers in God's service. What belongs to the Lord God is all common property. Or do we not see that it is also held this way in a large household? For example, everyone gets the same quantity of bread. It comes from the Lord's storehouse. The house of the Lord is open to all. All royal property is also common property: cities, markets, squares, arcades belong to all together, we all participate in them. Just look at the household of God! He has made certain things common property, so that he may shame the human race with them, e.g. air, sun, water, earth, sky, light, stars, - He distributes all this equally as among brothers. He created the same eyes, the same body, the same soul for all of them; they all have the same structure, from the earth, from a single man he had everything originate, he assigned the same house to all of us. But all this did nothing for us. He also made other things common property, e.g. baths, cities, squares, promenades. And notice how there is no strife in such common property, but everything goes peacefully. But as soon as someone tries to take something for himself and makes it his private property, then the quarrel begins, as if nature itself were indignant about the fact that, while God wants to keep us together peacefully by all possible means, we are intent on separating from one another, on appropriating special property, that we pronounce the "mine and thine", that chilling word. From then on the struggle begins, from then on the repugnance. But where this word is not there, there is no struggle and no dispute. So community of property is more the adequate form of our life than private property, and it is natural. Why does no one fight in court over the marketplace? Is it not because it is the common property of all? About houses, on the other hand, or about money, we see eternal negotiations in court. What we have necessarily is all there for common use; but we do not observe this communism even in the smallest things. That is why God has given us those necessary things as common property, so that we may learn from them to possess the other things in a communistic way (ἔχειν κοινῶς). But we do not allow ourselves to be taught in this way either.

But to return to what has been said: How would it be conceivable for the rich man to be a good man? That is impossible; he can only be good if he shares his wealth with others. If he possesses nothing, he is good; if he shares, he is good. As long as he merely possesses, he cannot be a good man. Is this, then, a good, the possession of which makes us bad men, but the divestment of which makes us good men? It is not the possession, but the non-possession of money that makes us good people. Wealth, then, is not a good. If you could have it and spurn it, then you are a good person. Therefore, if in possession of wealth we tell others about it, or if we spurn the one offered, we are good; if we accept it, possess it, we are not good."[[1]](#footnote-1)

This detailed quotation shows how Chrysostom speaks to the conscience of his contemporaries and warns against wealth.[[2]](#footnote-2) "An unbiased, clear view of the social reality and the possibly even more oppressive need in Constantinople - despite imperial bread donations for the poorest of the poor on the part of the Communists" convinced Chrysostom "that hardly any tangible relief could be achieved by means of merely private almsgiving".[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the quoted excerpt from Chrysostom's homily on 1 Tim 4:1-10, the preacher reflects more fundamentally on the relationship between wealth and poverty.[[4]](#footnote-4) How is wealth to be evaluated if "everything created by God is good" and "not reprehensible" (1 Tim 4:4)? Chrysostom’s "answer is that it is not only the way in which it comes into being but also, and above all, the way in which it is used that determines" how to evaluate property.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, he maintains that from the beginning human beings were not created rich or poor, indeed not even some were destined for riches and others for poverty. Injustice always clings to wealth, even if it has come from the ground, yes, even if one is not oneself responsible for the creation of wealth. The starting point is Chrysostom's thought that everything created by God, everything that is natural, is common property. He calls the expression "mine and thine" chilling words that did not exist in God’s mind or in the beginnings,[[6]](#footnote-6) and without them, there would not be the inadequate form of private property. It is the communist life of owning everything "in common" that is the more natural. His conclusion: spurn wealth or give it away.

In many ways, these reflections and instructions are reminiscent of the message and actions of Marcion, who obviously possessed wealth, but used it for the community. Yet it was evident that not only people in the 2nd century were offended by Marcion's possessions and business activities,[[7]](#footnote-7) for as late as the 5th century, in the Vita Abercii, a hagiographic writing describing the (fictitious) life of St. Abercius of Hieropolis, Marcion is the prototype of the large owner who used his resources not only for the city and the poor, but for his own interests.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The problem may already lie in the Beatitudes, which warn against wealth but at the same time promise possessions to the poor. Just as the hungry shall be filled and the weeping shall laugh again, so too the poor are promised a way out of their misery. Poverty as such is no more a good than hunger or weeping. With the promise of the "kingdom of heaven", Marcion has described a ladder of ascent that could not have been steeper and higher, since it leads from the lowest point of existence to the limitless, imperial, even divine realm of rulership. Silver, so the further recommendation from the mouth of Jesus, should therefore not be hoarded but invested, so that it doubles its value (\*Ev 19:11-28), yes, not only doubles or gilds, but multiplies itself almost a hundredfold (\*Ev 8:4-17).

While Paul, to whom Marcion refers in this regard, speaks of "progress", "innovation" and "novelty" and at the same time of service to the poor (Gal 2:10),[[9]](#footnote-9) it was obviously Marcion who, with all his emphasis on poverty, introduced into Christianity the idea of dynamic economic progress, coupled with asceticism, with which Christianity could storm the Roman Empire and other world empires. Buying and selling, owning lands and houses, with the imperial court and cities as partners, seem to have been his world, according to an early critical account of and against him.[[10]](#footnote-10) Business and profit-making for a different world order, where what is acquired is shared with others, especially the poorest, speak from this moral philosophy. Such possessions and their distribution were more than the usual social tribute known from that time, even more than the Jewish tithe. Acquiring and sharing soon became part of the centre not only of Christian morality but also of its ritual. On Sunday, as Justin reports about Christians in Rome,[[11]](#footnote-11) money is collected, but not as coins or small notes placed on the ground in front of the altar as in today's churches, but, as Irenaeus explains, the gift of money belongs on the altar and is part of the divine sacrifice in service to the poor.[[12]](#footnote-12)

A little later than Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria writes a detailed sermon in the form of a treatise on the subject of "Which Rich Man May Be Saved" (*Quis dives salvetur*).[[13]](#footnote-13) It is in fact the "first detailed and coherent statement on the problem of wealth and property from a Christian perspective known to us".[[14]](#footnote-14) The text is an interpretation of Mk 10:17-31, and this passage first takes us back to the history of the origins of the New Testament with regard to the determination of "poverty instead of property" or "richness instead of wealth". Before we turn to Clement's interpretation, here is the pericope according to \*Ev and Lk:[[15]](#footnote-15)

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| **\*Ev 18:18-30** | **Lk 18:18-30** |
| 18 Someone asked him, saying, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” | 18 One of the leading men asked him, Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? |
| 19 But he replied, “Do not call me good. (Only) one is good, the Father. 20 But he said, “I know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honour your father and mother. 21 I have observed all these since my youth.” 22 But when Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You lack one thing: Sell all that you own, and give it to the poor, then you will have a treasure in heaven. And after that: come, and follow me.” | 19 Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. 20 You know the commandments: Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness; honour thy father and thy mother! 21 He answered, All these things have I observed from my youth. 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you lack: Sell all that you own, and give it to the poor, then you will have a treasure in heaven. And after that: come, and follow me.” |
| 23 But when he heard this, he became sad because he was very rich. 24 But when Jesus saw him, he said, “How difficult it is for the wealthy to enter into the kingdom of God.” | 23 But the man was very sad when he heard this, for he was exceedingly rich. 24 Jesus saw that he had become very sad, and said: How hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God |
| 26 But the listeners said, “Who then can be saved?” 27 But he said, “What is impossible for men is possible for God.” 28 But Peter said, “See, we have left the possessions and have followed you.” 29 But he said to them, “Truly, I say to you: There is nobody who has left house or parents or brothers or sisters or wife or  children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 who does not receive seventyfold in this time, and eternal life in the world to come.” | 26 But the listeners said, “Who then can be saved?” 27 But he said, “What is impossible for men is possible for God.” 28 But Peter said, “See, we have left the possessions and have followed you.” 29 Jesus answered them: “Truly, I say to you: everyone who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will receive for it many times over in this present time and eternal life in the world to come. |

Although this is one of the best attested pericopes of the \*Ev and we have a detailed and pronounced commentary on it by Tertullian, modern research is characterised by contradictions and guesswork concerning this passage. This uncertainty in interpretation is partly due to the fact that the text has not been secure for a long time, and partly due to the various research approaches with which this text has been approached. Matthias Klinghardt, with his textual reconstruction of \*Ev, contributed the essentials to clarification, as we shall see, but he himself did not draw any conclusions regarding content that would have differed from older research. Older research had distinguished itself by wanting to recognise an almost anti-Marcionite thrust in this text. Firstly, Christ claimed here (against Marcion) that there was only one God, secondly, that this God was a good God (not only a just god, as Marcion reproached him), and thirdly, that this one, good God was the God of the Decalogue and the Torah.[[16]](#footnote-16) Klinghardt emphasises that for the traditional position of advocating Luke's priority in relation to \*Ev this passage “constitutes an insurmountable impediment".[[17]](#footnote-17) But even his own reading seems to me still overshadowed by older reading habits when he considers the differences between the two versions in \*Ev and Lk to be small.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The differences between the two versions relate in particular to the three entrance themes mentioned: According to Marcion, Jesus rejects calling himself good, pointing out that only one is good, the Father. Tertullian clarifies that Marcion understood this statement as Christ rejecting to be worshipped because he did not want to be worshipped as "supreme and as supremely good God".[[19]](#footnote-19) Tertullian herewith virtually confirms the fact that Marcion with his text enters the distinction between the supreme God, the God of Christ, and the creator god, a distinction which Tertullian tries to deny. This difference also becomes clear in the next verse 20, when the interlocutor - who is unnamed in \*Ev, but in Lk advances to one of the leading men - says of himself that he knows the commandments. This statement is changed in Lk and instead of being a statement of the interlocutor of Jesus, is being put into the mouth of Jesus as a kind of enquiry. Yet, Jesus is going to answer that the enumerated commandments of the Decalogue, which the man has "observed" since his "youth", are not sufficient for following Jesus. Lk, however, shifts the text in such a way that Jesus himself points to these commandments and thus to the Torah.

Certainly, Tertullian asks the rhetorical question: Jesus, who according to Marcion does not utter the reference to the commandments, could surely not be against the Ten Commandments. But this rhetorical question only makes clear that Marcion's Jesus distances himself from the Torah in the first place through the formulation. This does not mean for \*Ev that Jesus is against the content of the commandments of the Decalogue, but Jesus (like Lk) points to their insufficiency. What is missing is the radical demand for poverty. Selling everything and giving the proceeds to the poor, only this acquires a treasure in heaven.

Thus, if one reads the texts carefully in comparison, it becomes clear that Tertullian was right when he also emphasises the theological and Torah-critical conception in Marcion. Lk then reads like a subtle, albeit clear, correction of this Marcionite critique.

As could already be seen in the Beatitudes and the Woes, poverty is not as such a desirable goal, neither is it according to this text, but wealth is to be given up so that the poor can no longer remain poor, and the voluntarily poor can acquire heavenly riches.

How difficult it is for the rich to comply with this demand is expressed in verse 24. Lk underlines it with the well-known example of the camel that can pass more easily through the eye of a needle in verse 25. This intensification, which makes it seem fundamentally impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, is missing in \*Ev, since Marcion himself is a shining example of the fact that even a very well-to-do person can break away from his wealth.

The next argument might have provided the basis for Lk’s intensification with his example of the camel, but can also be read without it. The argument is that what is impossible for a human being, God can certainly make possible. Peter infers the fact that he and the other disciples had left their property which is taken up by Jesus. On the one hand he is critical of Paul, stating that his demand is not only about giving up property, but also about leaving home and family (parents, brothers, sisters, wife, children); furthermore, Jesus connects it with a promise that one will still receive in this time seventy times what one has given up and in the world to come eternal life.

The comparison of the two versions shows - and this comparison would be supported if the two other synoptic versions were added - that the radicality of the demand for poverty and the prospect of reward from \*Ev were taken over by the synoptics.

To see how this "new Torah" was further taken up, we return to Clement of Alexandria. A disciple of the philosophical school of the Stoa, equally influenced by Middle Platonism and Jewish Alexandrian philosophy, he develops his own doctrine of poverty, property and wealth at the beginning of the 3rd century. Although he shares with the Stoic Seneca the view that poverty, property and wealth are ethically indifferent things (ἀδιάφορα) and is therefore not fundamentally opposed to property and wealth,[[20]](#footnote-20) he cites the commandment of charity as a decisive criterion for the meaningfulness of property and wealth: "if no one owned anything", he reasoned, there would also be no possibility of communal ownership, which would be "in open contrast and contradiction to many ... beautiful teachings of the Lord".[[21]](#footnote-21) We note the outstanding importance of the commandment to love one's neighbour, missing in \*Ev and added in the Synoptic tradition. The well-being of one’s neighbour "becomes the ethical standard".[[22]](#footnote-22) Even in the face of the Stoa and especially the individual-ethical nature of a Seneca, Clement formulates a community orientation that will eventually find expression in Chrysostom, already quoted. It is therefore not surprising that even in the 19th century, the founder of Marxism and communism, Karl Marx, refers to this Christian teaching.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In his Critique of Political Economy of 1859/1860, Marx drew on the Beatitude of the Poor and wrote: "The treasurer, by the way, in so far as his asceticism is combined with energetic industriousness, is essentially Protestant by religion and even more Puritan."[[24]](#footnote-24) In the context of the passage, Marx interprets poverty to mean that Christians, especially Protestants and Puritans, extract objectified wealth such as money from the economic cycle and bury it in the ground along with the dead body, that both may be preserved for eternity. As Marx notes, this represents not only a ritual practice that, he was told, pagans practised in Delhi, India, but also that the followers of Martin Luther, once a mendicant monk, practised. Asceticism means taking resources from the world economy to invest them in a heavenly and transcendent economy of eternity.

In fact, Luther had fought precisely against the accumulation of money and earthly riches by the church, one of the main causes of the reform movement that started from him with the aim of freeing the church from the mammon of this world.[[25]](#footnote-25) "The Reformation then quite decisively strengthened the tendency towards de-churching and de-sacralisation of material goods".[[26]](#footnote-26) What had once been the property of the gods or the sole possession of God, of which God gave to creatures, distributed it to them or lent it, now became the property of the secular hand. Reformed theology was concerned with breaking the close link between wealth and the Gospel, which according to Clement and Chrysostom was rightful as long as it was placed in the service of the neighbour; as a result, however, this then also led to the fact that hardly any theological thought was given to this connection and the handling of money. With the post-Reformation separation of church and state, "the sovereign church regiment of subsequent centuries also largely took the money business away from pastors and theologians and thus spared them a judgement in this matter".[[27]](#footnote-27) Yet Goethe criticised Protestants as well as Catholics with his well-known verse in "Faust" when he wrote: "The church has a good stomach, has eaten up whole countries and yet has never overeaten itself; the church alone, my dear women, can digest unjust goods".[[28]](#footnote-28) Nevertheless, the church law of the Lutheran Church of Brunswick at the beginning of the 20th century states that this church in its entirety factually owns nothing.[[29]](#footnote-29) This did change enormously after 1919, when suddenly great material wealth was returned to the churches and they were confronted with the new task of dealing ethically and theologically with property, possessions and wealth, from which Christians had long tried to detach themselves. Poverty had thus in fact already yielded seventy times, and certainly many times more, returns that no one could have earned with the highest interest rates.

Max Weber's interpretation of Protestantism, although diametrically opposed to Marx's, also builds on Luther as Marx read him. According to Weber, however, Protestantism is not about the hoarding of earthly goods for eternity, but about the use and investment of individuals's time and money in the secular market as its breeding ground, so that money in turn generates money. Purposeful and lasting commitment leads to the dynamics of progress in this world. Weber finally summarises in "The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism":

"For by transferring asceticism out of the monastic cells into professional life and beginning to dominate inner-worldly morality, it helped to build that mighty cosmos of the modern economic order, bound to the technical and economic prerequisites of mechanical-machine production, which today determines with overwhelming compulsion the lifestyle of all individuals born into this engine - not only of those directly economically active - and will perhaps determine it until the last hundredweight of fossil fuel has burned up. Only like 'a thin cloak which might be cast off at any time' should, in Baxter's view, the care of external goods lie around the shoulders of his saints."[[30]](#footnote-30)

Even though Marx and Weber approach wealth and its dynamics from virtually opposite poles, they reach the same impasse, according to which property exerts a power on man like the bed of Procrustes. The harder man tries to get rid of wealth, the harder it exerts its power over him. Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) probably saw this most acutely. He became famous not only as a philosopher and Marxist systematist, founder and editor of his journal "Die neue Zeit", as co-preparer together with August Bebel and Eduard Bernstein of the Erfurt Programme of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, but also as the author of the great study "The Origin of Christianity".[[31]](#footnote-31) Adolf Martin Ritter has not answered the question raised by this thinker and his monograph, whether the "originally social-revolutionary, proletarian-communist movement, at the latest since its recognition by the Roman state ... has become a subdued 'little night music' of the soul".[[32]](#footnote-32) Ritter believes it to be an open question.[[33]](#footnote-33) Kautsky, however, puts his finger in a deep wound of the Christian tradition. Even if he does not go into details as we try to do in this study here, Kautsky had already noticed that in the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus the criticism of the rich and the redemption of the poor are formulated.[[34]](#footnote-34) If one reads the anti-Marcionite dialogue of Adamantius, it immediately becomes clear what outstanding significance this parable possessed for Marcion, since this dialogue quotes the text at length.[[35]](#footnote-35) For the parable connects to Marcion's central passage of John the Baptist as the boundary between the Law and the Prophets on the one hand and the preaching of God's kingdom of heaven on the other (\*Ev 16:16), which has been dealt with many times in our study. Tertullian explicitly refers to this connection between the parable and the person of John.[[36]](#footnote-36) The parable of Lazarus is meant to illustrate this difference and the subsequent statement that corroborates it: "Heaven and earth pass away faster than even a single stroke of the words of the Lord" (\*Ev 16:17), a saying that Lk changes from “the words of the Lord” to the Jewish “Torah” - and he thus allows more than just a stroke of the Lord's words to be altered or taken out. Here follows the parable of Lazarus according to the two versions of \*Ev and Lk:

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| **\*Ev 16:19-31[[37]](#footnote-37)** | **Lk 16:19 -31** |
| 19 But he also told another parable: “There was a rich man named Neves; he dressed in purple and byssus and enjoyed every day lavishly. | 19 Now there was a rich man; he dressed in purple and byssus and enjoyed every day lavishly. |
| 20 And a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, lay at his gate. 21 And he longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table. But even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 But it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by angels into Abraham’s lap. The rich man also died and was buried in Hades. 23 He is now raising his eyes and sees, while he is in pain, Abraham far away and Lazarus rest in his lap. | 20 And a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, lay at his gate. 21 And he longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table. But even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 But it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by angels into Abraham’s lap. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 Now he lifted up his eyes in Hades, and while he was in pain, saw Abraham far away and Lazarus rest in his lap. |
| 24 And he called out, saying, ‘Father Abraham,  have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in this burning heat.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received the good things, but Lazarus equally the bad things. And now he is being comforted here, but you are in agony. 26 Besides, between you and us there is a deep abyss, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and they also cannot come across from there to us.’ | 24 And he called out, saying, ‘Father Abraham,  have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in this burning heat.’ 25 But Abraham said, My child, remember that you have received thy good in your lifetime, but Lazarus equally the bad things. And now he is being comforted here, but you are in agony. 26 Besides, between you and us there is a deep abyss, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and they also cannot come across from there to us.’ |
| 27 ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to  my father’s house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he warns them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29 But he says to him, ‘They have  Moses and the prophets there; to him[[38]](#footnote-38) they should listen.’ 30 But he said, ‘No, father; rather, if someone goes to them from the dead, they will turn back.’ 31  But he said, ‘If they have not listened to Moses and the prophets, they would, if one of the dead came to them, also not listen to him.’” | 27 ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to  my father’s house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he warns them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hearken unto them. 30 But he said, ‘No, father; rather, if someone goes to them from the dead, they will turn back.’ 31  But he said, ‘If they have not listened to Moses and the prophets, they would, if one of the dead came to them, also not listen to him.’” |

For us today, it is difficult to read and understand this text differently than we are used to in the long tradition of Lk’s interpretation. Tertullian, however, points out that Marcion meant this parable differently following the saying to John: According to "Marcion, this passage means that the Creator's reward in the underworld, whether torment or cooling, is for those who have listened to the Law and the Prophets, while it actually designates as heavenly the bosom and haven of his Christ and God."[[39]](#footnote-39)

As this and the rest of the account make clear, the narrative according to Marcion had two sections:

(1) The first section runs from verse 16 to 26 and tells of the death of the rich man (Neves) and the poor man (Lazarus). Lazarus ends up in Abraham's bosom, Neves in Hades. Neves asks Abraham to send Lazarus to help, but Abraham's answer is clear: the rich man has already received the good, Lazarus the bad, consequently the latter is comforted with Abraham, the rich man must suffer. The abyss prevents any crossing over. With this scenario, Marcion outlines how he also read the Beatitudes and the Woes of the Jewish scriptures.

(2) This first section is followed by the second, which runs from verse 27 to verse 31. In it Abraham is no longer encountered. While the rich man has hitherto been concerned about himself, his gaze turns in two directions. On the one hand, as Tertullian reports, the rich man now looks upwards to the heavenly Father; on the other hand, he is no longer concerned about himself but rather about his brothers and wants to come to their aid. The answer at this point resembles the first one only from a distance. There is no longer a fundamental condemnation of wealth, a hiatus between condemnation and salvation that even the person who wanted could not jump over, but a way and a choice is opened up as to whether one will keep the law of Moses and the Prophets with its legalities or whether one will listen to "him". This listening is not yet enough for Neves, hence his wish that "one of the dead" go to his brothers so that they may repent. Certainly, the father's response is sceptical - those who have not listened to Moses and the Prophets will not listen to one who would come to them from the dead. Despite this scepticism present in Marcion's version, the story does offer an illustration that the only solution to the dilemma of entanglement in wealth and poverty is to change one's line of vision, away from the Law and Prophets to the heavenly Father, and away from oneself and towards one's brothers, rich or poor.

The setting straight of this Marcionite narrative in Lk is subtle but effective. Lk inserts Abraham twice in the second section of the story, so that the change of view intended by Marcion disappears. Although he accepts the chronological tension of Abraham referring to Moses and the Prophets, Abraham in his text becomes a prophet speaking about the one who would come from the dead to the living. Important is the related small change in verse 29, according to which the brothers are indeed to listen to Moses and the Prophets and not - as Marcion put it - to "him", Christ and his Father. So the same tendency of correction is present in Lk as we noted in Lk 16:16, where the "words of the Lord" have become "the Law" or “the Torah”. From an antithesis story of Neves and Lazarus, which recommends a change of viewpoint because of the fundamental condemnation of people into rich and poor according to the Law, the story is altered by Lk to a dramatic narrative, if not consistent, which cements precisely this hiatus.

The critique of the rich in Marcion's version is no less severe than in Lk, but unlike the fatality of wealth in Lk (consider Mk 19:25 || Lk 18:25 || Mt 19:24, according to which it is harder for rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle), Marcion sees a way out for the impass. As evidenced by the correction in Lk, Marcion's position was tightened in this regard. Recall Acts, which begins by describing the life of the church as a great community of goods. To this day, the message radiates: " They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need" (Acts 2:45). And: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32). But in the very next chapter a dramatic story is told to deter the audience:

"1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. 3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.” 5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened." (Acts 5:1-5)

There is already a certain ambiguity in this narrative. For according to Peter, Ananias would not have had to sell his property at all; moreover, he would have been able to freely dispose of the proceeds even after the sale. So was it only the fact that he wanted to share, but then did not share everything, that was shameful and ultimately fatal for him?

It is not insignificant to see how the radical beatitude of poverty with a view to gaining the kingdom of heaven, which from the beginning also conceded a certain chance to wealth, became ingraint in a social, religious institution that had to work on this theme again and again.

Even Marcion probably made the topic of ownership, property or asceticism and poverty one of the central contents of his life. Having been part of the class that lived in above-average wealth - at least by the Jewish and Christian standards of the time – in \*Ev he tried to show how one should deal with such wealth. Finally, in the 2nd century, his movement counted a number of martyrs, who sacrificed their own lives to the point of death in order to follow the Jesus as portrayed by Marcion. Finally, Marcion had written the idea of an investment in divine goods, in innovation, progress and the dynamism of capital into his pamphlet and manifesto, to which he significantly gave the name "New Testament" and with which he endowed the young cult he called Christianity with its own holy scripture. Of course, his competitors have tried to obscure these origins and twisted what was once written down as a critique of this world and its history into a historical account of Jesus's life. A collection characterised by the urban way of life with Jesus as the protagonist, who spends more time in cities than in the countryside and who suffers his life's fate in a city, became more and more the story of a charismatic from the countryside and those who were inspired by him there.[[40]](#footnote-40) Christianity, however, learned the great importance of economics, the striving for novelty and the dynamism of progress from the entrepreneur Marcion, who in turn owed them to his reading of such approaches in Paul's letters. More clearly than the uber-rich philanthropist of the 19th century, Andrew Carnegie with his "Gospel of Wealth" of 1889,[[41]](#footnote-41) Marcion had Jesus say: " Blessed the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens."

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1. Chrysostomus, Homily XII on 1 Tim 4 (PG 62,563 - 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Only look at the reaction in a congretation after a reading from James with his critique wealth during the Pinochet Regimes (1973-1990) – half the congregation left in protest, see with further lit. A.J. Batten, Thematic Affinities between the Letter of James and the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles (2014), 254-256. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A.M. Ritter, Studia Chrysostomica. Aufsätze zu Weg, Werk und Wirkung des Johannes Chrysostomos (ca. 349-407) (2012), 45-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. How many layers of poverty there were in antiquity is shown by A.R. Hands, Charities and social aid in Greece and Rome (1968), 62-76. On state support of the poor, see ibid. 89-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A.M. Ritter, Studia Chrysostomica. Aufsätze zu Weg, Werk und Wirkung des Johannes Chrysostomos (ca. 349-407) (2012), 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See on these chilling words and the development of the concept of property, A. Künzli, Mein und Dein. Zur Ideengeschichte der Eigentumsfeindschaft (1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See the anonymous presbyter in Iren., Adv. haer. IV 27-32, on this see M. Vinzent, Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels (2014), 52-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. T. Nissen and W. Lüdtke, S. [Sancti] Abercii vita Suppl. Die Grabschrift des Aberkios. Ihre Überlieferung und ihr Text (1910). See M. Vinzent, Equal to the Apostles – Hagiographical Figuration of Abercius versus Marcion (2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. D. Georgi, Der Armen zu gedenken. Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem (1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Again the anonymous presbyter, see on him the note above and M. Vinzent, Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels (2014), 52-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Justin 1Apol. 67,6. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Iren., Adv. haer. IV 18,6. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See on this sermon A.M. Ritter, Christentum und Eigentum bei Klemens von Alexandrien auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen "Armenfrömmigkeit" und der Ethik der kaiserzeitlichen Stoa (1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See the commentary in M. Klinghardt, The Oldest Gospel and the Formation of the Canonical Gospels (2021), 1021-1023. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. So ibid. See also A.v. Harnack, Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche (1924); K. Tsutsui, Das Evangelium Marcions. Ein neuer Versuch der Textrekonstruktion (1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. M. Klinghardt, The Oldest Gospel and the Formation of the Canonical Gospels (2021), 1013. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid. 1018. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Tert., Adv. Marc. IV 36,2: „Aliud est si etiam adorari, qua deus optimus et ultro bonus, non vult.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See A.M. Ritter, Christentum und Eigentum bei Klemens von Alexandrien auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen "Armenfrömmigkeit" und der Ethik der kaiserzeitlichen Stoa (1993), 291-300. On the history of the concept of adiaphora, see M. Vinzent, Von der Moralität des Nichtmoralischen. Die ethische Grundlage für die Ermöglichung der Hamburger Oper (1999); M. Vinzent, Das objektiv Freie bei Luther und Lessing. Anmerkungen zu Lessings Faust (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Clem. Alex., Quod div. salv. 13,1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A.M. Ritter, Christentum und Eigentum bei Klemens von Alexandrien auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen "Armenfrömmigkeit" und der Ethik der kaiserzeitlichen Stoa (1993), 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See on this M. Vinzent, Nature – our common good, a Patristic challenge of property? (2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. K. Marx, Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (1859), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. R. Staats, Deposita pietatis — Die Alte Kirche und ihr Geld: Hans Freiherrn von Campenhausen zum 16. Dezember 1978 in Dankbarkeit (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Faust I (1808), Spaziergang: “Die Kirche hat einen guten Magen, hat ganze Länder aufgefressen und doch noch nie sich übergessen; die Kirche allein, meine lieben Frauen, kann ungerechtes Gut verdauen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. C. Schmidt-Phiseldeck, Das evangelische Kirchenrecht des Herzogtums Braunschweig (1903), 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. M. Weber, Die protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus (1904), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. K. Kautsky, Der Ursprung des Christentums. Eine historische Untersuchung (1908). See on this with further lit. A.M. Ritter, Christentum und Eigentum bei Klemens von Alexandrien auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen "Armenfrömmigkeit" und der Ethik der kaiserzeitlichen Stoa (1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. So the note of the editor K. Kupisch in K. Kautsky, Der Ursprung des Christentums. Eine historische Untersuchung (1977), xlviif. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. A.M. Ritter, Christentum und Eigentum bei Klemens von Alexandrien auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen "Armenfrömmigkeit" und der Ethik der kaiserzeitlichen Stoa (1993), 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. K. Kautsky, Der Ursprung des Christentums. Eine historische Untersuchung (1908), 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Adam., Dial. 2,10. On it cf. M. Klinghardt, The Oldest Gospel and the Formation of the Canonical Gospels (2021), 970-977. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Tert., Adv. Marc. IV 34,10. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. One should note that much of this text is attested by Adamantius and his Dialogue and it seems that what we find in Klinghardt’s reconstruction of \*Ev is a text which has already been heavily contaminated or reworked by the canonical redaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Here a small but significant change in Klinghardt's reconstruction must be made. Tertullian explicitly reports (Adv. Marc. IV 34,15): "Immo, inquit, nostri dei monela de caelo non Moysen et prophetas iussit audiri, sed Christum: Hunc audite." Klinghardt, who has read over this passage, quotes from two other passages in which Tertullian cites the textus receptus at this point. If one looks at the Neves-Lazarus story in both versions of Marcion and Lk, one recognises tensions in both that make one wonder what the preceding oral tradition might have offered. In my opinion, one can see from this narrative that Marcion possibly did not only pass on what he found, but also incorporated his own imagination into the narrative. In any case, the narrative does not originally sound like one that was designed for Marcion's narrative intention - on the other hand, it does not seem to have served for Lk's either. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Tert., Adv. Marc. IV 34,12: „Sed Marcion aliorsum cogit, scilicet ut utramque mercedem creatoris sive tormenti sive refrigerii apud inferos determinet eis positam qui legi et prophetis obedierint, Christi vero et dei sui caelestem definiat sinum et portum.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. J. Rüpke, Biographisches für Großstadtmenschen: Die Transformation der Logienquelle Q in einen Spiegel für ein urbanes Selbst im Lukas-Evangelium (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. A. Carnegie, The autobiography of Andrew Carnegie (2009); A. Carnegie, The Gospel of Wealth, and Other Timely Essays (1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)