WHEN PATRONS ARE NOT PATRONS: A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC READING OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (Lk 16:19–26)

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INTRODUCTION

Social-scientific criticism, as an exegetical method, analyses texts in terms of their strategy (the pragmatic and rhetorical dimensions of the text) and situation (the social circumstances in which the text was produced). An analysis of the strategy of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus indicates that the many oppositions in the parable function to highlight their only similarity: the rich man and Abraham’s unwillingness to attend to those in need. How is this possible, especially in the case of Abraham, the ultimate example of hospitality in the Jewish tradition? This question is addressed by looking at the important role that patronage and clientism played in the world of Jesus (which was an advanced agrarian aristocratic society), focusing inter alia on hospitium (the relationship between host and guest).

It is argued that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is an illustration of the great class disparity that existed in first-century Palestine between the urban élite and the exploited rural peasantry. In the parable, the rich man symbolises the élite and Lazarus the exploited poor. The poor man’s name – Lazarus – is not accidental: it typifies the way in which Jesus sided with the poor, with the expendables and the socially impure of his day. The gist of the parable is this: When patrons who have in abundance do not pass through the gate to the poor, a society is created wherein a chasm so great is formed between rich (the élite) and poor (the peasantry) that it can no longer be crossed. When this happens – when patrons do not fulfil their role as patrons – no one can become part of the kingdom – neither Lazarus, nor the rich man. As such, the parable identifies Jesus’ historical activity essentially as political (the restructuring of society) and not as religious or theological.

Attention is also given to the interpretation history of the parable and to the questions of authenticity and integrity. It is argued that the parable most probably ends in Luke 16:26 and embodies the nucleus of Jesus’ teaching on topics like patronage, generalised reciprocity and the economic exploitation of the peasantry by the ruling élite. The parable can thus be traced to the historical Jesus.

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

The earliest interpretations of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus were the allegorical interpretations of Augustine, Gregory the Great and Ambrose (Wailes 1987:255–260). In an attempt to break away from these allegorical interpretations, Luther and Calvin employed a historical and literal approach to the parable (that can be typified as theological). They did not, however, succeed in avoiding the perils of allegorisation.

1According to Augustine, the rich man refers to the Jews, Lazarus to the Gentiles, the five brothers to the five books of the Law and Lazarus’ sores to confession. In Augustine’s view, Lazarus typifies the Christ figure, while Ambrose saw Lazarus as Paul. Gregory the Great (circa 540–604) interpreted the parable in the same vein. The rich man represents the Jews, who used the law for vain motives, while Lazarus symbolises the Gentiles, who were not ashamed to confess their sins (Lazarus’ many wounds and sores). The crumbs that fall from the rich man’s (the Jew’s) table represent Jewish law and the licking of Lazarus’ sores signifies healing, that is the confession of sins to the holy doctors (the papacy). Because the Gentiles’ sins are forgiven, they will go to heaven, and the Jews will receive eternal torment upon their lips as a result of the law that was on their lips but which they chose not to fulfill. Morally speaking, the parable cautions against ostentation, exalts the virtue of poverty and admonishes the believer to lose no opportunity for doing good works of mercy (Kissinger 1979:38).

2Luther’s historical-Christological interpretation of the parables entailed an interpretation of the Scriptures in their ‘plain sense’ (a plain and literal reading of the text without considering, if possible, hidden or symbolic meanings in the text). Each text has as reference point (centre of meaning) Jesus Christ (Luther’s so-called ‘Christum freire’ principle; see Kissinger 1979:44–45). Luther identified at least three meanings in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Firstly, the parable teaches that it is not sufficient merely to do no evil and to do no harm but rather that one must be helpful and good. Secondly, the parable shows that God does not desire the dead to teach us, but that we should cling to the Scriptures. And, thirdly, it is an abominable and pagan practice, before the eyes of God, to consult the spirits and practise necromancy (Kissinger 1979:45–46). In this theological interpretation, the Reformations sola Scriptura principle is clearly visible, which also speaks for Luther’s interpretation of ‘Abraham’s bosom’ as referring to the faith (sola fide) that is promised in the gospel. In his interpretation of the parables, Calvin tried to avoid any kind of allegorisation and looked for the central theme of each parable (Kissinger 1979:48). The central point of the rich man and Lazarus is to show the final state of those who neglect the poor while they revel in pleasures and indulge themselves. Calvin also commented on the meaning of ‘Abraham’s bosom’: it is a metaphor that points to the fact that God’s children are strangers and pilgrims in the world; but if they follow the faith of their father Abraham, they will inherit the blessed rest when they die (cf. Torrance & Torrance 1972:116–122). As was the case with Luther, Calvin’s theological interpretation of the parable followed traces of the sola fide principle of the Reformation, an allegorical reading of the parable in theological dress. See also Rauschenbush (1950:73–75), who replaced the sola fide principle of Luther and Calvin with the concept of economic injustice: Jesus regards a life of sumptuous living and indifference to the want and misery of a fellow human at the doorstep as deeply sinful and immoral. This becomes clear in the parable, as the rich man is not accused of any crimes or vices but he is still sent to hell.
The first historical-critical reading of the parable was that of Jülicher (1910[1886]:634), which identified two (loosely connected) parts in the parable. Luke 16:19–26 (the opposite of very different lives of the rich man and the poor Lazarus in this world) and Luke 16:27–31 (the complete and permanent reversal of the fortunes of the rich man and Lazarus in the afterlife). Jülicher's interpretation of the parable has, in a certain sense, dominated the interpretation of the parable until the present in three ways. Firstly, most scholars divide the parable into two parts, an opinion that has been the staple of the scholarly literature ever since (Hock 1987:449). Secondly, most scholars look for the main point of the parable in the second part; some scholars, however, find the main point of the parable in the first part; while some identify a distinctive message in both parts. Thirdly, scholars have proposed an array of extra-biblical stories that the first part of the parable supposedly borrows from.

In this regard, however, there is also a difference of opinion.

So wealth is characterised as a dividing power, since it creates semi-human relations between social classes. Jesus thus tells the parable to warn the rich that they must show generosity before it is too late and they are also cast into hell as Dives (the rich man) was.

3. According to Herzog (1994:115), most interpretations of the parable are deeply indebted to the interpretation by Bultmann (1930) that the parable can be divided into two parts. Hock (1987:449), however, was correct when he stated that this division of the parable already formed part of Jülicher's analysis in 1910.

4. See Hock (1987:449, note 5) for a list of scholars who interpret the parable by dividing it into the two parts identified by Jülicher (1910). To Hock's list can be added the interpretations of Gressmann (1918), Cadoux (1930), Smith (1937) and Oesterley (1936).

5. See, for example, Marson (1949), Jeremiah (1972) and Fitzmyer (1985). The point of view of Jeremiah in this regard suffers. According to Jeremiah (1972:182–186), the thrust of the parable (which should be named the parable of the six brothers) is that of 'the challenges of the hour', in which evasion is impossible. The emphasis of the parable is to be found in its added 'epilogue': the rich man's five brothers - like the rich man - live a careless life in the bank of a stream, unable to reach the water (= Lk 16:26). Bultmann (1963:203) saw the parable as a Jewish legend, a variation of the above-mentioned Egyptian and Jewish folkloric story based on a folkloric account of the reversal of fortunes in this world and in the belief that death ends all. Jesus tells the parable to warn men (who resemble the brothers of the rich man) of the impending danger. As such, the parable is not commentary on a social problem or a teaching on the afterlife but a warning to those for whom everything is at stake to make the right decision.


7. Bultmann (1963:210) divided the parable into two distinct parts, with a distinctive message expressed in each part. Luke 16:19–26 is a story based on a folkloric account of the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife and Luke 16:27–31 constitutes a polemic against the need for signs to augment the Torah and prophets for revealing the will of God. In following Bultmann, Smith (1937:135–141) argued that Jesus shifts the meaning of the traditional materials about the afterlife (Luke 16:19–26) to focus on the adequacy of the Torah (Luke 19:27–31). Oesterley (1936:208–210) was of the opinion that Luke 16:19–25 is addressed to the Pharisees, while Luke 16:27–31 was addressed to the Sadducees, or, rather, to Sadianus because, in his word and in the belief that death ends all, Jesus tells the parable to warn the men (who resemble the brothers of the rich man) of the impending danger. As such, the parable is not commentary on a social problem or a teaching on the afterlife but a warning to those for whom everything is at stake to make the right decision.

8. This idea was first championed by Gressmann (1918), who identified the Egyptian folk-tale of the journey of Si-Choris, the son of Ser-Toth, to the underworld as a parallel for Luke 16:19–26. Jeremiah (1972:182–183) and Bultmann (1963; see also Smith 1937:54), however, saw a Jewish legend (a folk-tale about a rich and godless married couple) as a parallel for Luke 16:19–20. According to Jeremiah (in following the work of Salm; Jeremiah 1972:178), Jesus used a Jewish version of the story of Gressmann's Egyptian story of Setne. Alexandrian Jews brought this story to Palestine, where it became popular as the story of the rich tax collector Bar Ma'jan and a poor scholar, a story that found its way into the (Aramaic) Palestinian Talmud (Talbert 1982:156–159), Samuel (J. Haggadah 1890:69), and a Jewish legend (Hock 1987:447) that served as the key to understanding the parable in the Palestinian Haggadah.
rather for the universal liberation of people to be made a reality. Snodgrass, who defines the parables as expanded analogies used to convince and persuade (stories with intent; Snodgrass 2008:9) and interprets the parables in terms of their narrative contexts in the canonical gospels (Snodgrass 2008:20), comes to the same conclusion. The parable has two equally important themes: judgement on the use of wealth and the sufficiency of the Scriptures. The parable expresses God’s identification with the poor. The error of the rich man (who is a child of Abraham) is the neglect of the poor need, including Lazarus (who is also a child of Abraham). The children of Abraham are those who obey Moses and the prophets and who share their wealth with the poor. This is also the result of the analysis of the parable by Leonhardt-Balzer (2007:647–660): the main focus of the parable is the rich man and the name ‘Lazarus’ is a symbol for all poor people. The Torah and the prophets emphasise the social responsibility of the rich to care for the poor (Leonhardt-Balzer 2007:657) and the hearer of the parable is called either to identify or not to identify with the rich man (Leonhardt-Balzer 2007:651).

Scholars like Smith (1937), Stein (1981), Herzog (1994) and Hock (1987) who, like Jülicher (1910) (and Jeremias 1972), attributed both parts of the parable to Jesus (with either Lk 16:19–26 or Lk 16:19–31 stemming from Jesus) formulated the main point of the parable in a similar vein as did Jülicher (cf. Schweizer 1984:262). According to Smith, in the parable, Jesus equates poverty with piety and wealth with ungodliness and he states that the measure of a person’s fitness to enter the kingdom is his readiness to do without the things of this world. Steins defines the parable as a story parable (a parable that refers to a singular event) and as an example of those teachings of Jesus that involve the generous use of possessions. More specifically, the parable says that love is manifested by the wise use of one’s possessions to perform acts of love. Although the rich man did not actively harm Lazarus, his sin was that he did Lazarus no positive good (Stein 1981:97, 111, 135). Herzog (1994:128–129) sees the central contrast of the parable as the great class disparity between the urban élites (the rich man) and the desperate dependables (Lazarus). As such, the parable codifies the relationship between rich and poor in first-century Palestine and is representative of Jesus’ pastoral attitude towards the poor. The parable is good news for people like Lazarus but bad news for the rich: in the afterlife, the situation of this life will be reversed; Lazarus will take part in the eschatological banquet simply because he was poor (see also Segundo 1985:114). Hock (1975:447–463), who suggests that Graeco-Roman intellectual traditions (especially Cynic views on wealth and property) should be seen as the cultural bedrock of the parable, understands the parable as a harsh charge against the rich (especially against hedonism), while Lazarus is judged innocent because of his poverty (Hock 1987:462).

12 Snodgrass (2008:20) saw the context given by the Evangelists as the proper contexts in the canonical gospels (Snodgrass 2008:20), and interprets the parables in terms of their narrative while Lazarus is judged innocent because of his poverty (Hock 1987:462).

13 The process of parabolic transmission, Smith (1937) argues, makes it possible that the majority of the parables in the synoptic Gospels represent authentic parables of Jesus. Also, since Jesus ‘teaching on poverty and wealth was a fundamental part of his eschatological gospel, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus most probably goes back to Jesus himself’ (Smith 1937:38–39).

14 Stein (1981:38–39) bases his contention that most of the Synoptic parables go back to Jesus on two arguments. Firstly, the parables meet the criterion of dissimilarity or distinctiveness (the parables of Jesus do not derive from the Judaism of Jesus’ day or from the Jewish scriptures). Secondly, the context and language of the parables agree with what is found in other sayings of Jesus’.


16 One exception in this regard is the interpretation of Crossan, Crossan (1973:33–35) identified three basic categories of parables that Jesus tells: parables of advent, reversal and action. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–26) falls under the category of reversal. In the parable, the rich man becomes ‘poor’ and the poor Lazarus becomes ‘rich’. As such, the kingdom shallows and reverses everything that seems certain and firm. Jesus is not simply making a moral instruction about riches – the parable is about the reversal that comes with the kingdom’s advent.

17 In his structuralist reading of the parables, Via (1972) distinguishes between the story and the discourse of a parable (the identified story in the text that is to be interpreted), then analyses the parable from an actantial point of view (which enables the reader to understand the story) and, finally, translates the vehicle of the parable (that which is well-known) into the tenor, which makes the parable a parable of the kingdom of God.
It is the contention of this essay that a choice, with regard to the above possibilities on the integrity and authenticity of the parable, has to be made before an own interpretation (using a social-scientific approach) can be made. In the two sections that follow, arguments are put forward first for the parable ending in Luke 16:26 (§3.1) and then for the possible authenticity of Luke 16:19–26 (§3.2).

Where does the parable end?

Scholars who defend the integrity of the parable are, inter alia, Hughes (1993:127–131, note 10), Perkins (1981), Schottroff (2006), Stein (1981), Talbert (1982), Hock (1987), Herzog (1994), Leonhardt-Balzer (2007) and Snodgrass (2008). If Luke 16:19–31 is seen as a Lukan composition (Hultgren 2000; Perkins 1981; Schottroff 2006) and as part of Luke 16, a well-knit literary composition in itself (see especially Schottroff), the parable’s integrity is above suspicion. From this point of view, Luke 16:19–31 and Luke 16 would obviously be a cohesive unit. This, of course, is also true of the whole of Luke-Acts; Luke is known for the careful way in which he structured his narrative as a double act. What if, however, the parable is taken from its Lukan context and a possible historical Jesus setting for the parable is proposed? Does the literary unity of Luke 16 not suggest that the parable was appended or reworked to fit into its literary context? Put differently, is the unity of Luke 16 not in and of itself propose Luke 16:27–31 as an addition? If, however, one argues (like Leonhardt-Balzer) that the two parts of the parable, as opposite poles, need one another, one could also argue that all the opposites in the parable already occur in the first part and that the second part introduces a new theme (the validity of the prophets and the Torah) that is not necessary for the first part to function as a cohesive unit on its own. And, if one sees the unity of the parable in the conviction that both parts stem from Jesus (Talbert), this automatically means that Jesus must have told these two parts as one parable. Have we any evidence to support this point of view? As we have seen, Jülicher’s, Jeremias’, Bulmann’s, Oesterley’s and Codax’s points of view on the integrity of the parable contradict this possibility.

The strongest arguments against the integrity of the parable have come from Funk et al. (1993:362), Crossan (1973:67) and Scott (1989:144–146). Funk et al. (1993:362) argue that Luke 16:27–31 has, as content, the early Christian theme of the Judean lack of belief in the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Lk 16:31, a clear reference to Jesus). Moreover, the testimony of Moses and the prophets, appealed to in verses 29 and 31, resonates with the resurrection stories in Luke 24:13–35 and 24:36–49 (especially Lk 24:27 and 44). The ending of the parable is therefore most probably a Lukan creation (Funk et al. 1993:362).

Crossan (1973:67) and Scott (1989:144–146) also doubted the possibility of Luke 16:27–31 being part of the parable, viewing it as an added piece of tradition from the early church, reworked by Luke to fit his interests. According to Crossan, the conclusion of the parable fits the style and programme of Luke-Acts, and a clear parallel between Luke 16:27–31 and Luke’s account of the resurrection in Luke 24:44–47 can be indicated. Crossan notes the following parallels: the theme of disbelief (Lk 16:29, 31 and Lk 24:12, 25, 41); the use of Moses and the prophets (Lk 16:29, 31 and Lk 24:27, 44); the use of εὐρέσωμαι in Luke 16:31 and 24:46 (the verb ‘to rise up’ is used with ‘from the death’ only in these two occurrences in Luke); and the use of the theme of repentance (Luke 16:30 and Ac 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20).

In support of Crossan, Scott (1989:145) also noted the parallel between διασκέδασμος (Lk 16:28) and διασκέδασμος (Lk 16:31) in the parable’s conclusion, words that are frequently used in Acts (see Ac 18:4–5; 28:23). All this, according to Crossan and Scott, indicates a Lukan hand in the conclusion of the parable in order for the parable to fit his apologetic needs. The conclusion was therefore most probably not part of the original parable and either was appended to relate the parable to Jewish disbelief in Jesus’ messiahship (Scott 1989:146) or has, as content, the early Christian theme of the Judean lack of belief in the resurrection of Jesus (Funk et al. 1993:362).

The arguments of Funk, Crossan and Scott seem compelling enough to conclude that the parable most probably ended in...
Luke 16:26: ‘Once Abraham pronounces the chasm, the great dividing line, the story has reached its conclusion’ (Scott 1989:146).

The authenticity of Luke 16:19–26
Most scholars who question the authenticity of Luke 16:19–21 base their arguments on the possibility of the parable being paralleled in folktale stories/legends of the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife (Beare 1962; Bultmann 1963; Donahue 1988; Gressman 1918; Hughes 1993; Jeremias 1972, 25; Mealand 1980; Montefiore 1909). Some argue for a parallel in the Enoch literature (Aalen 1967), while others see the whole parable as being a Lukan composition (Hultgren 2000; Perkins 1981; Schottroff 2006; Talbert 1982) or as stemming from the early church tradition (Horn 1983).

The Jesus Seminar was divided about whether the story is traceable to Jesus and voted the parable grey (Funk, Scott & Butts 1988:64; Funk et al. 1993:361). The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, who questioned the authenticity of the parable, supported the argument that folk-tales about the reversal of fates in the afterlife were widespread in the ancient Near East. They also noted the following features of the parable that most probably make it a Lukan composition (Funk et al. 1988:64; Funk et al. 1993:361): the parable is the only parable that gives characters proper names (cf. Scott 1989:141); attention to the poor is a special characteristic of Luke, and the bosom of Abraham (Lk 16:22) is most probably an allusion to Luke 3:8 (Scott 1989:141) also doubts the authenticity of the parable, since it is the only parable that depicts a scene from the afterlife.

Scholars who argue the opposite note that there were ‘dozens of stories in various cultures over thousands of years that tell of trips to the realm of the dead, often castigating the rich’ and that ‘the use of preexisting materials is evident in other parables and would not be surprising’ (Snodgrass 2008:426, 427). The parable does differ in many respects from its Egyptian and Jewish counterparts: the folk-tales in the ancient Near East normally include a judgement scene, which this parable does not (Funk et al. 1993:361), and, in the parable, the fates of the rich man and Lazarus are simply reversed, reminiscent of Jesus’ technique of storytelling27 (Funk et al. 1988:64). Moreover, known folk-tales about rich and poor understand rich and poor mostly in economic terms. This is not the case in Luke. The relationship parallels between the parable and the available folk-tales are, in any case, only indirect and ‘neither as compelling nor as explanatory as these claims suggest’ (Bauckham 1998:97–118; Hock 1987:452). To do that these tales do exist only briefly but on the point that Luke wants to make (Funk et al. 1993:361). And if a popular tale does, in fact, lie behind the parable, this does not automatically mean that the parable could not have been told by Jesus (Hock 1987:452; Hultgren 2000:111; Snodgrass 2008:427). While it is related to common folklore, it is a creation in its own right’ (Hultgren 2000:111). With regard to the proper names in the parable, scholars argue that the name ‘Lazarus’ is not accidental but essential to the meaning of the parable (Funk et al. 1988; Funk et al. 1993; Herzog 1994; Hultgren 2000; Scott 1989; Talbert 1982). The same holds true for Abraham. The introduction of Abraham in Luke 16:22 is not because of Luke 3:8 but because of the theme of hospitality in the parable. In this regard, Abraham is a suitable figure for heavenly reward, as he was rich but also well known for his hospitality (Funk et al. 1988:64). The rich man is not pictured negatively for being rich but rather for his indifference and lack of hospitality (Funk et al. 1988:64). The contrast between rich and poor in the parable is therefore most probably not a creation of Luke’s – Luke would have condemned the rich man simply because he was rich. The parable also parallels Luke 11:5–13, another parable of Jesus’ that has hospitality as theme, together with the crossing of accepted cultural boundaries (an obvious theme in Luke 16:19–21). It also parallels Luke 16:25, which also depicts the indifference of a rich man (one that has) to a poor man (one that does not have) in a wrenchingly pathetic situation (Funk et al. 1993:361). Finally, the reversal of fortunes in the parable echoes Q 6:20/GThom 54, a saying that most probably goes back to Jesus.

Can the parable be traced back to the historical Jesus or is it a pre-Lukan or Lukan composition? The arguments for and against its authenticity do not seem to outweigh one another. Can one also argue that the parable goes back at least to a nucleus of Jesus’ teaching on patronage, topics that is inappropriate to poor and wealthy, class, status and the economic exploitation of the peasantry by the élite? Moreover, can a social-scientific interpretation of the parable help in answering these questions? This possibility will now be explored.

A SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETATION OF LUKE 16:19–26
Social-scientific criticism: A short definition
‘Social-scientific criticism . . . studies the text as both a reflection of and a response to the social and cultural settings in which the text was produced’ to determine ‘the meaning(s) explicit and implicit in the text, meanings made possible and shaped by the social and cultural systems inhabited by both authors and intended audiences’28 (Elliott 1993:38). Social-scientific criticism approaches texts as units of meaningful discourse that express (because of their ideological dimension) certain ideas and beliefs (cultural perceptions, values and world views), that describe social relations, behaviour and institutions and that serve to motivate and direct social behaviour. As such, texts either legitimate social institutions or serve as vehicles of social change (Elliott 1993:49–51). Social-scientific criticism, as an interpretative method, analyses social contexts and situations. The situation of a text refers to the social circumstances in which the text was produced (Elliott 1993:54–55) and the text’s strategy refers to its pragmatic and rhetorical dimension (its structure – EvE), the manner in which the text in its totality of form and content (syntactic and semantic dimensions) is designed to have a specific effect upon . . . [its] . . . receptor(s).

(Elliott 1993:55)

Interpretations of the parable employing aspects of a social-scientific reading
The interpretation history of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus indicates that not much has been done in terms of a social-scientific analysis of the parable, except for the interpretations of Scott (1989:141–151), Hultgren (2000:110–118) and Herzog (1994:114–131). These readings of the parable, 28 Elliott (1993:36–59) lists the following salient features of the social-scientific approach: it considers all knowledge as socially conditioned and perspectival in nature; it distinguishes and clarifies the differences between the social location of the interpreter and the social location of the authors and objects to be interpreted and asks for the logical process that can be characterised as abduction; it considers the social and cultural models constructed on the basis of research and data pertaining to the geographical, social and cultural region inhabited by the biblical communities, that is the area of the circum-Mediterranean and ancient Near East. It presumes that this method is different from but complementary to a historical orientation; it holds the presupposition that the text is the product of religious and its environment requires a study of social structures and relations; it draws on the full range of social-scientific theory, methods and research; and it is concerned not only with the original meanings of the biblical texts but also with the aggregations of meanings down through the centuries.
I.

**Luke 16:19–26: A social-scientific reading**

The strategy of the parable: Not only opposites but one important similarity

**Emics**

Almost all interpretations of the strategy (structure) of the parable focus on the opposites in the parable and describe them in detail. The first three verses of the parable introduce the first two characters of the parable: one inside the gate (the one to whom the rich man belongs) and one outside the gate (the one to whom the poor man belongs), and inside the gate the name has no name, as described in verse 22. The person outside the gate does not have a name – Lazarus' – as described is poor, is dressed in sores and does not feast at all. The rich man has food and friends in abundance, while Lazarus is hungry (longing to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table)

29. In his analysis of the parable, Scott (1989:146) typifies the parable as a story of boundaries and opposite parallels and understands the different locations of the rich man (inside the gate) and Lazarus (outside the gate) as reflecting the limited-goods society of the first-century Mediterranean world, where the social status of the poor and the rich are fixed (Scott 1989:151). He also opines that the relationship between the rich man and Lazarus implies a relationship of patron and client (Scott 1989:150). In his analysis of the parable, he does not, however, explore this third character, except to note that there is a need to move toward the question, “Who rich man use the gate to come to Lazarus aid?” (Scott 1989:150). Hultgren states that “the parable presupposes an ancient agrarian economy in which a person like Lazarus is rare and an outcast” (Hultgren 2000:115–116). The implications of this statement, namely that being poor in first-century Palestine was not simply a case of being economically poor to people who could not refer to their inherited statuses due to debt, to the exploitative practices of the elite (like the rich man) and to sickness (Malina 1981:85), are not further explored by Hultgren.

Herzog (1995:143) opines that the parable assumes the social structure of the city and countryside and that, in the rich man and Lazarus, it brings together the two extremes of that social structure (class disparity and the difference between city and countryside). The city of Jerusalem is depicted as either the second or third son of a peasant farmer who has lost his land because of the systematic exploitation of the poor (through taxes, the oppressive foreclosure of mortgages by the urban elite and the twisting of the Torah), who then becomes a day labourer and, finally, who drifts to the city to become a beggar. During his descent from former landowner or excess child of a peasant household to day labourer and, finally, to beggar, Lazarus most probably seeks patronage but fails. He probably does not find work, becomes too proud and cannot anymore compete for work. He becomes vulnerable to disease, which later makes even begging impossible. This reading of the parable shows much potential, especially if one takes into consideration that Hultgren sees the parable as stemming from the historical Jesus. Herzog, however, reads the parable as pedagogy of the oppressed. The possibility of Jesus telling the parable to address the barriers erected by class and privilege through the method of criticising the principle of patronage and the wealth accumulated by the systematic exploitation of the poor in first-century Palestine is not considered.

10. According to Marshall (1978:635), this gate was most probably ‘a large ornamental gateway to a city or mansion’. Oesterley (1936:203) opines that the gate indicated a ‘noble built mansion’. If this is the case, then even the gate to the rich man’s house exemplifies his wealth.

12. In an attempt to remedy this seeming anomaly in the parable, various names have been attached to the rich man. Third-century Alexander, given him the name of Neuvill and the ancient writer Priscillian (died 385 CE) named him Finesse. The Vulgate (fourth century, Western) opens with the words ‘homum guidum erat divis’, that is, ‘a certain man was rich’. This phrase popularly came to be understood as ‘there was a certain man, Dives’. This is why the parable is sometimes named the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Hultgren 2000:111; Leonhardt-Balzer 2007:651).

13. The man’s riches is exemplified by the clothing that he wore and by his eating habits (see note 34). Purple clothing and fine linen were rare and very expensive because of the difficult process of obtaining the best dye from marine snails (Smith 1937:135; Snodgrass 2008:425). 12 000 purple snails produced only one gram of purple dye. Luteus (Luk 12:19; cf. Luke 16:25). Purple and fine linen and feasts sumptuously every day (φορμα λατρείας, ‘making merry’). The person outside the gate does not have a name – Lazarus’ – as described is poor, is dressed in sores and does not feast at all. The rich man has food and friends in abundance, while Lazarus is hungry (longing to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table)

30. See especially the very good analysis by Scott (1989:146–155). Because of the limitation of space, not all the opposites and parallels in the parable are noted and/or discussed here. The focus of this essay is not the opposites in the parable either but the one important similarity (see below).

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34. The expression ‘to make merry’ (εὐφρονία) is also used in the parables of the rich fool (Lk 12:19) and the prodigal son (Lk 15:23; 24 and 32) and means ‘to make a feast’. It entails a feast well beyond those occasional celebrations that enlivened the otherwise boring and monotonous existence of Mediterranean peasants (Scott 1989:144). For Oesterley and Nida (1983:305, 202–201, 25, 131), who translated εὐφρονία as ‘to make glad, to cheer up, to cause to be happy’.
and perceptions) that construed ‘reality’ in the first-century Mediterranean world (Elliott 1993:39; Herzog 1994; Hultgren 2000). In their analyses of the parable, correctly identified some of the salient cultural scripts of the world that Jesus lived in and that are implied in the parable. The parable assumes the social structure of an advanced agrarian society, in which the rich man and Abraham exemplify the class disparity of that social structure, the big difference that existed between city and countryside and the oppressive system that it incorporated (Herzog 1994:150–153). It also implies patronage and clientism (one of the most important relationships in aristocratic societies) and the first-century Mediterranean world as a limited-goods society where the social status of the poor and the rich was fixed (Hultgren 2000:115–116; Scott 1989:150–151). To this we can add the lavish meals of the rich man, which functioned as ceremonies to confirm the values and structures of that society, and the pivotal values of honour and shame. Very important also is the figure of Abraham, which evokes the important principle of hospitality. Finally, the physical state of Lazarus relates to the important principle of being socially (and ritually) pure or impure.

Not all the above cultural scripts can be attended to in the analysis that follows. As a discriminating principle that focuses on the strategy of the parable, the unwillingness of both the rich man and Abraham to help those who are in need will be attended to. Attention will therefore be given to patronage and clientism in the first-century Mediterranean world, the social status of being rich or poor and the figure of Abraham, which evokes the principle of hospitality.

The situation of the parable
The backdrop of the parable: An advanced agrarian (aristocratic) society
First-century Palestine was an advanced agrarian (aristocratic) society, divided into the ‘haves’ (the elite rulers) and the ‘have-nots’ (the ruled peasantry). The ruling class (the élite) comprised only one to two per cent of the population and lived in the cities while the rest of the population, the peasants (the ruled), lived in the countryside (Fiensy 2007:39; Oakman 2008:58; 2008:51, 133). No middle class existed. Although comprising only one to two per cent of the population, the élite controlled most of the wealth (from one half up to two thirds) by controlling the land,42 its produce43 and the peasants, whose labour44 contributed to the production, distribution and consumption of goods. The peasantry was thus exposed to three levels of tribute taking (Oakman 1986:65). The Roman tribute (land tax) and the tributum soli (land tax) and the tributum capitis (poll tax). Next in line, in Galilee, was Herod with the Herodian aristocracy, centred in Sepphoris. Finally, the temple aristocracy took its share in the form of the temple aristocrats, where the elite look only to gain from the relationship as their dependants (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:388). Patron-client relationships benefited the élite (the patrons) in terms of the accumulation of honour and status and, from the side of the poor, the day labourers and the peasantry, enabled them to survive (or secure something more than just subsistence living45). The élite, always seeking to aggrandise their honour and status, competed to add dependent clients (as having only a few clients was considered shameful). ‘Clients competed for patrons just as patrons competed for clients in an often desperate struggle to gain economic or political advantage’ (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:388). Another aspect of patronage should be noted here, since it has an important bearing on the meaning of the parable. Part of patronage was the hospitium, the relations of host and guest (who were social equals). These relationships, according to Malina & Rohrbaugh (2003:389), were often formalised in contractual agreements for mutual aid, legal assistance, lodging, medical assistance, burial and protection for as long as a party remained in the city of the host.

Rich and poor
In the eastern Mediterranean in New Testament times, "rich" or "wealthy" as a rule meant "avaricious, greedy," while "poor" referred to persons scarcely able to maintain their honor or dignity' (Malina 1987:355). Traditional peasant societies (like those of the first-century Mediterranean) perceived all resources in terms of 'limited goods' and therefore saw wealthy people as 'thieves', who had benefited at the expense of the poor (Malina 1981:71–93; 1987:563). A poor person was therefore someone who could not maintain his inherited status due to circumstances that befell him and his family (like debt, being in a foreign land, sickness or some personal physical accident; those who hungered or thirst, the blind, the ill, the lame, lepers and the deaf [Malina 1981:85]). At the same time, the rich person was one who was able to maintain his status. According to Holloway (2004:249) anddorf 2004:245 continues...

In aristocratic societies (consisting of 'haves' and 'have-nots'), 'patronage and clientism is a relationship in which, as a special favor, a patron provides for his client access to scarce resources that are not universally accessible' (Moses 1991:243). By entering into a patron-client arrangement, clients relate to their patrons as to superior and more powerful kinsmen, while patrons see to their clients as their dependants (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:388). Patron-client relationships thus describe the vertical dimension of exchange between higher and lower-status people (Newby 2004:249).

In the economic sphere, this led to an extensive and extractive relationship between patron and client (elite and peasant): leadership was concerned with plundering and negative (the unsocial extreme; seeking self-interest at the expense of the other). The last-mentioned type of reciprocity is clearly applicable in the case of patron-client relationships, where the elite look only to gain from the relationship (e.g. to aggrandise honour or to add dependants in the process of gaining power).
patron. Nothing could be gained by making Lazarus a client, since he was placed there every day (Fitzmyer 1985:1131), he had created. Lazarus was no longer of any use to the rich man. He was expendables of the society that the rich man and the other élite Lazarus, spends his days. Lazarus had become one of the At the rich man’s gate, one of the products of his exploitation, who stood with him in patron-client relationships. Being part ‘merry’ (feasted) every day, most probably with other élites that he wears (rare and expensive Egyptian linen underwear) are also a status marker: purple is the colour of kings and honourable men, a mark of luxurious living and a sign of official power worn by those who were proud of their wealth. Since he was able to maintain his wealth, he was a man of honour. To enhance his honour and status, he ‘made merry’ (feasted) every day, most probably with other élites who stood with him in patron-client relationships. Being part of the élite, he also competed for clients among the poor and the peasantry. These patron-client relationships put him in a position to control more and more land, produce and labour.

Lazarus represents the exploited peasant, the poor and the destitute. The reason why Lazarus ended up at the gate of the rich man can only be speculated upon. He may have been the second or third son of a peasant farmer who had only enough land for the eldest son to inherit, he may have had to leave the family plot and seek work elsewhere because there were too many mouths to feed in a household living below or just at the level of subsistence or his father may have lost his land because of rising indebtedness and eventual foreclosure on his mortgage by one of the exploiting urban élite (Herzog 1994:119). He may have even been a smallholder of inherited land who lost his land because of, inter alia, the excessive tax burden imposed by the ruling élite. Whatever the case may have been, the road that leads to the gate of the rich man is a one-way street: first tenant; then day labourer; eventually, drifting to the city, where he has no connections. He did not find work and became a beggar. The parable describes the final stretch of the road that he travels: he becomes malnutritioned and covered with sores, not even able to beg anymore. Lazarus has no honour left: he is economically poor (Hollenbach 1987:58); poor in the sense that he cannot maintain his status as a peasant smallholder (Malina 1987:555); he has no family ties left; and, above all, he is socially and ritually impure. His name says it all: only God can help. In the parable, the name ‘Lazarus’ is not accidental. It typifies the way in which Jesus sided with the poor, the expendables and the socially impure during his day. In a situation where Jesus knew very well that the exploiting rich were only becoming richer and the poor poorer, Jesus’ concern for the poor is not surprising. He congratulated the poor and the hungry, dammed the rich and those who were well fed at the cost of the poor and exalted the rich to sell their possessions and give to the poor. He also criticised patronage and clientism based on the principle of negative reciprocity by modelling all personal relations on those of closed kin, that is generalised reciprocity (Oakman 2008:103–107). He encouraged hosts to invite the poor, crippled, lame and blind who could not repay them (exemplified by the parable of the dinner party/wedding feast, which refers to élite hosts,55) to love their enemies,56 to do good and to pray for their abusers,57 to lend to others, expecting nothing in return (a sequence of sayings confirmed by the summary statement in Lk 6:35; see Funk et al. 1993:291), to treat people in the same way as they would want to be treated58 and to forgive the debt of others59 (paralleled in the parable of the unforgiving slave). Jesus even tried to turn the hearts of the powerful to the powerless and dishonoured poor60 (Oakman 2008:161) and criticised those patrons who were constantly looking for new ways to enhance their honour by means of salutations of their clients.61 Moreover, he ate indiscriminately with the so-called ‘sinners’62 and healed the sick.63 From this, it becomes clear that Jesus’ sympathies indeed lie with the poor.64 There is help, after all, for Lazarus – especially in a kingdom where God is the patron and not the ruling aristocratic élite.65 Where God is

51. Jesus’ concern for the poor can be inferred from several sayings in the New Testament that most probably – in terms of the criteria of independent, early and multiple attestation and the criteria of coherence – can be traced back to the historical Jesus. For a definition and discussion of the criteria, see Funk (1993:19–33), Thissen and Metz (1998), Tatsum (1999:102–107) and Wallace (2006:68–69).
53. Although this saying is attested only in Luke 6:24–25, it is most probably, in terms of the criterion of coherence, goes back to Jesus.
54. According to Fiemsy (2007:115–118), all the call stories in the gospels (e.g. Mk 1:16–18, 19:20; 2:14; Mt 9:9–13//Lk 10:17–22 and their synoptic parallels) indicate that discipleship and the renunciation of possessions go hand in hand. This is also the case in the parables of the treasures in the field (Mt 13:44//GThom 109:1–3) and the pearl (Mt 13:44–46//GThom 76:1–2), where everything is sold to gain the kingdom.
57. Q 6:28 (Lk 6:27c–e//Mt 5:44b).
58. Q 6:30 (Lk 6:30//Mt 5:42)//GThom 95:2–2/Did 14b, 5a.
64. Almost all historical Jesus scholars agree that Jesus practiced an open table and healed the sick (including conducting exorcisms).
65. Jesus’ concern for the poor thus stands clearly in line with the priestly, Deuteronomic wisdom and prophetic traditions in the Old Testament to protect the poor from the exploitative practices and systemic violence of the rich (e.g. Ex 22:25; Lv 19:10; Dt 15:4–11; Pr 14:31; 22:9; 22:3//Am 2:6–7; see Fiemsy 2007:96, 132).
66. Many Graeco-Roman philosophers also criticised many patron-client relationships of their day. They saw virtue (moral goodness and propriety) as more important than benefaction, the ideal being generalised reciprocity (e.g. Seneca, Benfiori 2003:295).

49. Maybe the only honour that Lazarus has left is that he does not beg, as can be deduced from Sirach 40:18–30 (in Scott 2001:80). ‘Child, do not lead the life of a beggar; it is better to die than to beg. When one looks to the table of another, one’s way of life cannot be considered a life. One loses sense of food, but one who is intelligent and well instructed guards against that. In the mouth of the shameless begging is sweet, but it kindles a fire inside him.’
When patrons are not patrons: A social-scientific reading of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–26)

When the rich man dies, he has the opportunity of viewing the way that things are from the other side of the gate. He is confronted with the kind of patronage and of solidarity with the poor and the destitute that Jesus advocates. Abraham, the example par excellence of hospitality in the Old Testament, clearly embodies Jesus’ attitude towards the poor. Lazarus is sitting at the table (bosom) of Abraham, where hospitalitas has been extended to him. But the rich man, although being in torment and thirsty, is not worried: Abraham is his father too and, in line with what is known of Abraham’s hospitality, it will be extended to him as well. Now, he is the one who is in need and, just as in the case of Lazarus, those who are in need are looked upon favourably by Abraham. He just has to ask.

But then the surprise in Jesus’ parable. Abraham is not willing to help. Abraham does not even offer one drop of water to be licked from Lazarus’ finger. Even the dogs that licked Lazarus’ sores were better off. This is indeed an oxymoron – Abraham not being hospitable? How is this possible? This simply cannot happen when Abraham is involved. The only thing that does happen. The unthinkable happens: Abraham does not show hospitality. And then the big and final shock: this gate cannot be opened. It cannot be passed through. It has been closed forever.

This is the gist of the parable. When patrons who have in abundance do not pass through the gate to the poor, a society is created wherein a chasm so great is brought into existence between rich (the élite) and poor (the peasantry) that it cannot be crossed. The worlds of the urban élite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be closed. Pass through the gate while you can. Just as unthinkable happens when Abraham is involved, it cannot happen where Abraham is involved. But it does happen. The worlds of the urban élite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be crossed. The worlds of the urban élite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be closed. Pass through the gate while you can. Just as unthinkable happens when Abraham is involved, it cannot happen where Abraham is involved. But it does happen. The worlds of the urban élite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be crossed. The worlds of the urban élite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be closed. Pass through the gate while you can. Just as unthinkable happens when Abraham is involved, it cannot happen where Abraham is involved. But it does happen. The worlds of the urban élite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be crossed. The worlds of the urban élite and the peasantry drift so far apart that the gap between them eventually cannot be closed. Pass through the gate while you can. Just as unthinkable happens when Abraham is involved, it cannot happen where Abraham is involved. But it does happen.

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4.2.4: ‘The bestowal of . . . a benefit . . . is a mark of virtue, and to bestow it for any other reason other than merely the bestowing of it is a most shameful act’ (Seneca, Benefits 4.11.3). ‘Give to the one who, though poor, is good; for he will be grateful in the midst of adversity’ (Seneca, Benefits 4.11.3). ‘And kindly; by one who, though he was my superior when he gave them, did not wear the countenance of a human being, all gentle and kindly; by one who, though he was my superior when he gave them, did not exalt himself above me, but, with all the generosity in his power, descended to take the initiative, you may be sure, will be the one that is agreeable and suitable to the sick’ (Seneca, Benefits 4.11.3). ‘That takes the initiative, you may be sure, will be the one that is agreeable and suitable to the sick’ (Seneca, Benefits 4.11.3). ‘All gentle and kindly; by one who, though he was my superior when he gave them, did not wear the countenance of a human being, all gentle and kindly; by one who, though he was my superior when he gave them, did not exalt himself above me, but, with all the generosity in his power, descended to take the initiative; you may be sure, will be the one that is agreeable and suitable to the sick’ (Seneca, Benefits 4.11.3).

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When patrons are not patrons: A social-scientific reading of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19–26)
