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# *Models of Gift Giving in the Preaching of Leo the Great*

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BRONWEN NEIL

Rabbinic literature on almsgiving centers on four themes—anonymous indirect giving, indiscriminate giving, justice for the poor, and the redemptive power of alms—which make up a comprehensive rationale for giving that was picked up by late antique advocates of Christian charity. Using the ninety-seven extant homilies of Leo I, bishop of Rome (440–461), I contrast the evidence for the Greco-Roman and Jewish models of gift-giving in the preaching and charitable activities of western bishops. First, I examine the four themes as they appear in rabbinic literature and in Leo’s homilies. Second, I establish why one model of giving remained dominant in Rome in this period: that of redemptive almsgiving (i.e. giving alms in order to attain one’s own salvation), a model that had become standard in western Christian texts on almsgiving by the end of the fourth century.<sup>1</sup> The dominance of this model in the West, as evident in the homilies of bishops like Leo the Great, poses a significant challenge to the thesis posed by Patlagean and adopted by Brown, namely, that the rise of the virtue of charitable giving in the fourth and fifth centuries had a significant impact on social and economic relations between rich and poor. Evidence from hagiography, law codes, inscriptions, sermons, and letters presents rather a different picture, one of bishops upholding the *status quo* while preaching an impossible ideal of justice for the poor. The Derridean concept of the “impossibility of the gift” helps to illuminate how the Greco-Roman patronage model inhibited the emergence of a new way of thinking about and acting towards the poor in these centuries.

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1. Boniface Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church: The Late Fourth and Fifth Centuries,” *TS* 43 (1982): 226–59, at 226.

*There is nothing harder than poverty.  
It is the hardest of all the afflictions in the world.*

*Exod. Rabbah, Mishpaṭim, 31.12<sup>2</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

From the first centuries of Christianity, Christian charity was shaped by Greco-Roman and Jewish models of giving to the less fortunate.<sup>3</sup> Several models emerged for giving to the poor: the Pauline ideal of a community which held its goods in common; the wealthy patron who gave a portion of his or her surplus wealth to worthy causes; and the property-renouncing monk or bishop who directed resources from the flock to those in most need. These competing models of charitable giving found some resolution in the fifth century, with the establishment of ascetics—the voluntary poor—as a conduit for direct and indirect giving to the involuntary poor. The models of monasticism that emerged in the East in the third and fourth centuries, however, were slow to take hold in the West. The majority of ascetics in Rome in this period were wealthy aristocrats who embraced an ideal of voluntary poverty through charitable giving to the poor. Some monks claimed material support from the faithful, while others sought to be self-sufficient.<sup>4</sup> The clergy constituted another class of voluntary poor who claimed material support from their congregations. Bishops in particular had the potential to use their status as leaders in the community to collect and redistribute the resources of their flocks to those in need.

2. *A Rabbinic Anthology*, ed. and trans. C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, foreword by R. Loewe (New York: Schocken, 1974) [= ML], 1243, 446 (item number is followed by page number).

3. These have been explored by, amongst others, Anneliese Parkin, “‘You Do Him No Service’: An Exploration of Pagan Almsgiving,” in *Poverty and the Roman World*, ed. Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60–82; Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Cappadocia*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids, MI and Carlisle Cumbria: Eerdmans, 1994); Peter Garnsey and Greg Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor in the Roman World,” in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London: Routledge, 1989), 153–70.

4. See the important recent work on this subject of Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Caner, “Towards a Miraculous Economy: Christian Gifts and Material ‘Blessings’ in Late Antiquity,” *J ECS* 14 (2006): 329–77.

In recent scholarship on poverty in the late antiquity, the bishop has emerged as the hero of the poor. We need look no further than the sweeping influence of Peter Brown's Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures, published as *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*.<sup>5</sup> However, the late nineteenth-century German scholar Gerhard Uhlhorn was the first to present the rise of redemptive almsgiving, which was by definition self-interested giving, as the reason for the *decline* of selfless Christian giving in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Since then, self-interest and the related notion of reciprocity have become salient features of most anthropological and theological discussions of gift-giving. By considering late antique patron-client relations as a subset of giver-receiver relations in Christian, Jewish, and non-Christian contexts, we will be able to see the similarities and differences between their models of charitable giving more clearly. In Part One, I present a summary of rabbinic teachings on almsgiving, comparing them with the arguments for giving adduced in sermons of Leo the Great. Part Two deals with the adaptation of the Greco-Roman models of giving, especially personal patronage and euergetism (public giving) in the Christian West in the time of Leo. This leads us to ask whether the status of the poor actually changed for the better in late antiquity, as suggested by scholars such as Patlagean, Brown, and Holman. I suggest that real change in the status of the poor, or in relations between rich and poor, was inhibited by the dominance of redemptive almsgiving as a framework for charity in the fifth-century West.

It will be seen that, although the poor's right to justice remained an ideal in the Christian adoption of the Jewish framework, this principle was in fact damaged by the competing Greco-Roman patronage model. While the Greco-Roman system of patronage involved two agents—patron and client in a relationship of reciprocal obligation—the Christian model of charity sought to introduce God as an *Über*-patron. Within this christianized system, the bishop functioned as both patron and client, just as the poor person played dual roles of giver and receiver. The commercial language of debt and credit was put to the service of this new rhetoric of generosity. The implications of this adaptation for Christian almsgiving and euergetism were significant and far-reaching, as we shall see. It is in Christian

5. P. R. L. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures (Hanover, NJ and London: University Press of New England, 2002).

6. Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Die christliche Liebestätigkeit in der alten Kirche* (Stuttgart: D. Gundert, 1882), the first volume in a three-part series on Christian charity that extended beyond the Reformation.

treatment of the poor that we should see most clearly the transformation of Greco-Roman society taking place during the fifth century, and yet Christian charity remains largely at the level of rhetoric, precisely because the hold of traditional ties of obligation was so strong. This rather stark conclusion is tested against the evidence of contemporary legal sources, as well as the philanthropic activities of particular western Christian elites who adopted voluntary poverty.

#### PART ONE: THE PROBLEM OF THE GIFT IN LATE ANTIQUITY

The act of giving to the poor was (and remains today) fraught with moral dangers. In her 2001 study of Cappadocian homilies on the poor, *The Hungry are Dying*, Susan Holman proved the enduring relevance of French sociologist Marcel Mauss's essay on gift-exchange economies in ancient societies to an understanding of Christian aid to the poor, especially in the fourth century.<sup>7</sup> Mauss highlighted that gift-giving in such economies was not voluntary but obligatory, and carried with it an obligation for the recipient both to receive and to repay the gift.<sup>8</sup> Their gift-giving was a competitive exercise by which the giver sought to achieve status, even at the expense of eventual exhaustion of precious resources.<sup>9</sup> Parallels with classical *leitourgiai* (the voluntary provision of municipal services such as games, public buildings, banquets for religious festivals, etc.) are obvious.<sup>10</sup> However, Roman Christian society, like Islamic and Jewish societies, was deemed by Mauss to be more "advanced" than the primitive societies of the potlatch, as indicated by early Christian almsgiving in the name of justice.

According to Mauss, alms were the product of legal and religious evolution in society. The first phase in the metamorphosis of the gift that characterized religious giving in the three monotheistic religions, according to

7. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying*, 23–25. Mauss's well-known study presented the gift as an important social signifier that functioned to create webs of belonging and obligation in "simple" societies, both ancient and contemporary; see Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don*, Sociologie et anthropologie (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1924); English translation by Ian Cunnison, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Gift Exchange in Archaic Societies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1954).

8. Mauss, *The Gift*, 37–41.

9. "The rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige" (Mauss, *The Gift*, 35).

10. Such acts of excessive generosity as a requirement of public office in the Roman Empire are discussed by Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses. Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Penguin Press, 1990), 143–49.

Mauss, was the adoption of a moral conception of gifts and wealth—that they should be distributed equitably among all people—and of a conception of just sacrifice.<sup>11</sup> The second phase was the shift from a principle of justice to a principle of charity.<sup>12</sup> Mauss drew parallels between the Jewish and Islamic evolution of the term *sadaka/ṣadaqah*, noting that both the Arabic and Hebrew terms originally meant exclusively justice, and only later came to mean alms.<sup>13</sup>

More recently, in his 1991 work *Donner le Temps 1. Fausse Monnaie*, Jacques Derrida introduced the notion of the impossibility of the gift, arguing that the condition of the possibility of the gift is also, at the same time, the condition of its impossibility: this is the *aporia* or irresolvable paradox of the gift.<sup>14</sup> A genuine gift must not actually appear or be recognized as a gift, either by the giver or the receiver, so as to avoid accruing benefit for the giver or obligation for the recipient. Such an accrual of benefit or obligation reduces the giver and the recipient to participation in the circle of exchange.<sup>15</sup> “To reduce the [gift] to exchange is quite simply to annul the possibility of the gift.”<sup>16</sup> For a gift to be truly genuine it must reside beyond any mere self-interest or calculative reasoning and outside of the oppositional demands of giving and taking.<sup>17</sup> The problem of the gift is

11. “It is the old gift morality raised to the position of a principle of justice” (Mauss, *The Gift*, 15).

12. For a stimulating discussion of these two phases in religious giving in the rabbinic tradition see Ilana Friedrich Silber, “Beyond Purity and Danger: Gift-Giving in the Monotheistic Traditions,” in *Gifts and Interests*, ed. A. Vandeveld (Peeters: Leuven, 2000), 115–32, at 117–29.

13. “We can say that the Mishnic era, the time of the victory of the Paupers at Jerusalem, begot the doctrine of charity and alms which later went round the world with Christianity and Islam. It was at this time that the word *zedaga* changed its meaning, since it does not mean alms in *The Bible*” (Mauss, *The Gift*, 16).

14. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6–31.

15. “To tell the truth, the gift must not even appear or signify, consciously or unconsciously, as gift for the donors, whether individual or collective subjects. From the moment the gift would appear as gift, as such, as what it is, in its phenomenon, its sense, and its essence, it would be engaged in a symbolic, sacrificial, or economic structure that would annul the gift in the ritual circle of the debt” (Derrida, *Given Time*, 23).

16. Derrida, *Given Time*, 76.

17. Derrida, *Given Time*, 24. “The simple intention to give, insofar as it carries the intentional meaning of the gift, suffices to make a return payment to oneself. The simple consciousness of the gift right away sends itself back the gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude” (Derrida, *Given Time*, 23).

self-interest. One could argue that this radical ideal is implicit in many of Jesus' teachings on giving to the poor. The Gospels offer two contrasting messages on giving: one was the ideal that Derrida calls "impossible," that of selfless giving. Jesus challenged some of the practices of public piety that had arisen in Jewish society by his commands to give to those who have no hope of returning the favor, as in the Parable of the Banquet (Luke 14.12–14); and to give in secret, so that even your left hand does not know what the right is doing (Matt 6.4). "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matt 6.1). The other, conflicting message was that of spiritual self-interest. Jesus' parables like the Division of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25.31–46) and the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18.23–34) convey such a message to the hearers: give generously in this life and you will receive an eternal reward; if you do not, God will not show mercy to you. This doctrine also had precedents in Jewish scriptures, as we shall see. Paradoxically, the givers in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats gave to the poor, the hungry, the naked, etc. without any thought of spiritual reward.

The notion of purity of intention is crucial to the Derridean analysis. Indeed, intention to give itself compromises the purity of the gift. Any gift that provokes thanks or gratitude has had its status as a genuine gift annulled. Even if thanks are not returned, the purity of the gift can be annulled simply by the giver's knowledge of having given something that *would* incur a feeling of gratitude or obligation if the recipient knew of it. It is nearly impossible to create the circumstances for such a genuine gift so conceived. While many would not agree with Derrida's absolutist conception of the gift and its inherent impossibility, nevertheless Derrida is useful in that he clearly presents the problems or *aporiai* associated with the gift-giving ideal. "Real" societies have tried to deal with the paradox of the gift in various ways, and some anthropologists have argued that the "pure gift" has emerged in contemporary societies, alongside other less selfless modes of exchange.<sup>18</sup> Let us now consider how late antique

18. The emergence of the "pure gift" has been the focus of recent socio-anthropological research on societies in the developing world: see especially *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, ed. M. Bloch and J. Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22–31, and the discussion of its applicability to late antiquity by A. B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992). Philosophical-theological approaches to the possibility of the gift include recent works of Jean-Luc Marion and Kevin Hart. For a useful overview of the history of gift theory, see Ilana Friedrich Silber, "Prologue: Sortilèges et paradoxes du don," *Revue du M. A. U. S. S.* 27 (2006): 39–56.

Christians and Jews sought to deal with this conundrum, which I will argue informed fifth-century teachings on charity, as found in the sermons of Leo the Great.

### *Jewish Giving to the Poor*

Almsgiving was compulsory for all Jews in late antiquity, as for all Christians. The Jewish practice of almsgiving has to be reconstructed from the rabbinic sources, especially the *Talmud*, *Tosefta*, *Mishnah*, *Midrash* (on Proverbs and Psalms), and *Sifre* (on Numbers and Deuteronomy). These works comment on key passages and books in the Torah that have to do with alms, charity, and poverty, especially Gen 18.1–8, Psalms (Ps 33.7, 40.2, 111.9, 112.7), the Septuagint book of Tobit, the Prophets (Isa 58.6) and Wisdom literature, including Proverbs (Prov 11.7, 19.17, 22.22–23) and Sirach (Sir 29.12). The *Jerusalem Talmud* (= *JT*) of c. 200–500 C.E. and the later, more authoritative *Babylonian Talmud* (= *BT*) contain collections of rabbinic ethical commentaries of this kind. Although there has been little systematic analysis to date of these sources on Jewish almsgiving,<sup>19</sup> the mandate to give alms was paramount among the commandments, as *BT Baba Batra* 9a illustrates: “Almsgiving weighs as much as all the other commandments.”<sup>20</sup>

The ideal of Jewish giving to the poor was similar to the Christian ideal as expressed in the New Testament: anonymous, indirect giving that was indiscriminate, depending not on the merit of the recipient but on the righteousness of the giver. This ideal was based on the principle that the poor deserved justice. Alongside the ideal of justice for the poor was a later teaching that giving to the poor could obtain salvation from sin for the giver, the doctrine known as “redemptive almsgiving.” These four themes—anonymous indirect giving, indiscriminate giving, justice for the poor, and the redemptive power of alms—make up a comprehensive rationale for giving that was picked up by late antique advocates of Christian charity. The Talmudic texts, as Holman notes, depict the poor

19. The need for such analysis was made explicit in two recent studies of almsgiving, Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 266, and Caner, “Miraculous Economy,” 334 n. 11.

20. ML 1138, 412. The study of Leonard V. Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Antique Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 193 and 195, shows that the rare incidences of *philopenēs*, “lover of the poor,” and *philentolos*, “lover of the commandments,” in late antique Jewish grave inscriptions in Rome, were neologisms that did not occur in pagan or Christian inscriptions of the same period.

as passive recipients of alms, food, and donations from community poor chests. However, they also describe the poor as social agents in a protected economic group. Most importantly, they acknowledge the poor person's right to be treated with human dignity.<sup>21</sup>

In the following, I consider how the Jewish recognition of social agency and respect for human dignity played out in rabbinic texts in relation to these four important themes. We will then compare the Jewish response with the arguments for almsgiving adduced by Leo the Great in Rome between 440 and 461 C.E.<sup>22</sup> In each aspect of this four-fold rationale we will see how the impossibility of the gift compromised the ideal.

### *Anonymous Indirect Giving*

Due to the paradox of the gift, almsgiving quickly becomes patronage unless it is anonymous and indirect, i.e. performed via the rabbi or bishop as the agent of the community of faith. Anonymous giving was considered higher than direct giving because it protected the beneficiary from feelings of shame or a sense of indebtedness, whilst eschewing accrued benefit for the giver. According to rabbinic teaching, the intention of the giver was of secondary importance to the feelings of the recipient, and the psychological, social, or moral burdens imposed on him or her. According to Rabbi Hillel, c. 10 B.C.E., "He who gives alms in secret is greater than Moses."<sup>23</sup> Anonymous giving was made a high priority in rabbinic Judaism, with the provision in every city of a "vestry of secret givers" like the Vestry of Secret Ones in the Temple in Jerusalem, where "sin-fearing men used to put their gifts secretly and the poor of gentle birth were supported from them secretly."<sup>24</sup> This secrecy stemmed from a concern to protect from shame those who had come down in life.<sup>25</sup> Giving publicly to the poor could even be considered evil, as a midrash on Eccl 12.14 shows: "For R. Yannai once saw a man give money to a poor man publicly. He said, 'It had been better that you had given him nothing than that you should have given him and put him to shame.'<sup>26</sup>

21. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying*, 43.

22. The Leonine material on almsgiving is presented in a different context by Bronwen Neil, "Blessed are the Rich? Leo the Great and the Roman Poor," *SP*, forthcoming.

23. *BT Baba Batra* 9b (ML 1137, 412).

24. *Sheqalim* 5.6 (ML 1166, 420), and *Tosefta Sheqalim* 2.16 (ML 1167, 420).

25. *JT Pe'ah* 8–9 (trans. Moïse Schwab, *Le Talmud de Jérusalem* [Paris: Maison-neuve, 1972], 1:114–17), cited by Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 60 n. 65. Brown (60) notes that these texts described "cases of déclassé persons" and "emphasized the need to spare such persons the shame of appearing to beg for alms."

26. *Eccl. Rabbah* 12.14.1 on Eccl 12.14 (31b) (ML 1141, 413).

Late antique bishops seem to have cared little for the feelings of those on the receiving end of charity unless they were aristocratic clients who found themselves impoverished. Leo stresses the need for generosity especially to those who are ashamed to ask for help.<sup>27</sup> Given that public begging by the destitute was a normal feature of Roman social life, Leo surely had in mind those who had come down significantly in the world, rather than the destitute. We find the same emphasis on the impoverished rich attributed to Gregory the Great.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly Leo, like most Christian preachers with the exception of Augustine,<sup>29</sup> does not take up the gospel verses on discreet giving (Matt 6.1–4 and Luke 14.12–14) in his exhortations to almsgiving, perhaps out of respect for the Greco-Roman tradition of civic giving which required public recognition of the giver. Leo advocates direct giving on only one occasion, in *serm.* 9.3, to which we will return in the next section. Usually Leo exhorted his audience to give indirectly, that is, to give to the church, which could then distribute alms to the poor at its discretion through the agency of deacons (*praesides*).<sup>30</sup> Leo was the first bishop of Rome to appoint deacons to oversee this task. The Roman church's charitable works were funded by the Collects, a collection was undertaken over several days in November throughout the churches of the seven regions of the city. Donations of "goods" (*bona*)<sup>31</sup> probably included

27. Leo, *serm.* 9.3 (CCL 138:36): "Dearly beloved, you should take care to consider him with attentive kindness, so that we can discover those whom modesty hides and shame holds back. For there are those who blush to demand openly what they need, and prefer to suffer their wretched poverty in silence rather than be turned upside down by a public appeal" (*Ad quem intellegendum, dilectissimi, sollicita benignitate uigilandum est, ut quem modestia tegit et uerecundia praepedit, inuenire possimus. Sunt enim qui palam poscere ea quibus indigent erubescunt, et malunt miseria tacitae egestatis affligi quam publica petitione confundi*).

28. See Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 60 n. 64, on the ninth-century *Life of Gregory* 2.28 (PL 75:97C).

29. Augustine, *sermo Domini in monte*, 2.2.8 (Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana [= NBA] 10/2:192) and *serm.* 149.14.15 (NBA 31/1:436–38), interprets the injunction broadly to refer to all the divine commandments, not just almsgiving. See Ramsey, "Almsgiving," 249 n. 121.

30. Leo, *serm.* 11.2 (CCL 138:46): ". . . a holy collection from the resources of many, which would provide the necessary expenses through the care of the deacons" (*sancta collectio, quae per praesidentium curam necessariis seruiret expensis*). On indirect giving, see the other seven homilies on the Collects: Leo, *serm.* 6 (CCL 138:27–28), *serm.* 7 (CCL 138:29), *serm.* 8 (CCL 138:31), and *serm.* 9.3 (CCL 138:35–36). Cf. *serm.* 10.4 (CCL 138:44), where Leo's call to give generously to the Collects ends with an assurance that the alms themselves and their beneficiaries would intercede for the giver in heaven, implying that the identity of the giver was known to the recipient.

31. Leo, *serm.* 9.3 (CCL 138:35–36).

food and clothing, as well as money. Augustine, whose church at Hippo had a “poor roll” (*matricula pauperum*), a register of those considered eligible for support by the church,<sup>32</sup> was ambivalent on the subject of direct giving. Others were completely against it—it is sufficient to recall Jerome’s famous example of the belligerent matron who showed up the hypocrisy of those who gave in public by punching a beggar woman outside the church of St. Peter’s when she lined up for a second coin.<sup>33</sup>

Daniel Caner has highlighted the self-interest underlying early Christian almsgiving, even while it was sometimes promoted as an emulation of God’s mercy.<sup>34</sup> Some recognition of the moral dangers posed by direct giving is evident in the emergence of a “new gift ideal” in monastic circles during this period.<sup>35</sup> Gifts could be transformed in the process of passing from the almsgiver through the hands of an agent, usually a bishop or a monk, to the recipient. Such re-gifted distributions were termed “blessings” (Gk. *eulogiai*/Lat. *benedictiones*), in allusion to 2 Cor 9.6. Unlike alms, blessings were not supposed to be given out of self-interest in the quest for personal gain: though they were passed on through human hands, they were believed to come from God. Mostly they were used to support a special class of the poor, namely religious professionals such as monks or clergy. Thus, Caner maintained, blessings challenged the late Roman concept of the gift in a way that almsgiving did not.

### *Indiscriminate Giving*

Giving to God’s creatures is counted as giving to God in rabbinic literature, as we read in an early interpretation of Num 28.2:<sup>36</sup> “God says to Israel, ‘My sons, whenever you give sustenance to the poor, I impute it as

32. Augustine, *ep.* 20\*.2 (NBA 23a:160).

33. Jerome, *ep.* 22.32.1–2 (CSEL 54:193–94), as discussed by Richard Finn, “Portraying the Poor: Descriptions of Poverty in Christian Texts from the Late Roman Empire,” in *Poverty in the Roman World*, ed. Atkins and Osborne, 130–44, at 138–39.

34. Caner, “Miraculous Economy,” 331–34.

35. Caner, “Miraculous Economy,” 334. This new gift ideal entailed, Caner continues, “a new concept of a gift, one that was believed to originate with God, that made no demands on its receiver, and that could be used to support holy people, or to confer holiness when given. The result was what anthropologists call a ‘pure’ gift—a gift in the modern sense, expecting no reciprocal favors in return . . . For we are quite possibly dealing here with the first attested instance of a pure, disinterested gift—deliberately defined as such—in Western history.”

36. “Command the Israelites, and say to them: ‘My offering, the food for my offerings by fire, my pleasing odor, you shall take care to offer to me at its appointed time.’”

though you gave sustenance to me, for it says: *My bread.*”<sup>37</sup> Thus there was no basis for discrimination in Jewish almsgiving, as long as it was to Jews. Rabbinic teachers were concerned that charity should be given to all who ask for it, even if they were deceivers. Several texts convey the message that deceivers allow us daily to avoid the sin of not giving charity to someone in genuine need.<sup>38</sup> Rich and poor are said to be blessed through each other’s very existence:

R. Tanḥum, needing only one pound of meat for himself, was wont to buy two, one for himself and one for the poor; two bundles of vegetables, one for himself and one for the poor. *God has set the one over against the other* (Eccl 7.14), namely the rich and the poor, that each may gain a blessing through the other.<sup>39</sup>

The poor had a special role to play for the rich, by bringing them into contact with Torah: “Be heedful of the children of the poor, for from them Torah proceeds.”<sup>40</sup>

The ideal of indiscriminate giving that was promulgated in the rabbinic texts did not always triumph in Christian rhetoric. The *Didascalia* rules out those who are dissolute, drunken, or idle as worthy of alms.<sup>41</sup> When the author directs third-century bishops to be unmoved by social position and not to disregard or neglect the poor,<sup>42</sup> he speaks directly against the dictates of social custom. Basil of Caesarea famously likened the beggar who begs from avarice to a troublesome dog.<sup>43</sup> Leo the Great interpreted

37. *Midrash Tanna'im*, 83 (ML [no number], 414), a ninth-century midrash on the whole Pentateuch (cf. Matt 25.40).

38. *Ketubbot* 68a (ML 1160, 418); also *JT Pe'ah* 8.9 (ML 1157 and 1158, 418).

39. *Eccles. Rabbah* 7.14.2 on Eccl 7.14 (20b) (ML 1159, 418); cf. Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitude* 2, the parable of the vine and the elm, which need each other to bear fruit, are like the rich and poor: the rich need the intercessions of the poor before God and the poor need the material support of the rich.

40. *Nedarim* 81a (ML 1242, 446).

41. *Didascalia* 2.4.3 (ed. F. X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* [Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1905; repr. Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1979], 36): *Si quis autem edax est vel crapulae deditus vel otiosus et in rebus ad vitam necessariis premitur, non est dignus eleemosyna, immo nec ecclesia.*

42. *Didascalia* 4.5.4 (Funk 224; trans. R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum* 17 [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929], 34): “And let the bishop be also without respect of persons, and let him not defer to the rich nor favour them unduly; and let him not disregard or neglect the poor, nor be lifted up against them” (*Sin autem episcopi socordes sunt neque in has res operam navant propter personarum acceptionem vel ob divitias immundas vel quia eas neglegunt neque indagant, rationem non simplicem reddent*).

43. Basil, *ep.* 150.3 to Amphilocheus (ed. Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile, Correspondance*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003], 2:75; trans. Roy Deferrari,

Ps 40.2a (“Blessed is he who considers the needy and the poor”) to mean that one should be discerning when it came to the needy and the poor, and ferret out those whose sense of shame and modesty prevented them from making a public appeal.<sup>44</sup> Like the Jewish commentators, too, Christians showed a distinct preference for those of their own faith when it came to charity. Along with Jerome, Leo found justification for this in Gal 6.10 (“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”).<sup>45</sup> Despite the fact that most modern readers assume that Christians gave indiscriminately, as Julian the Apostate would have us believe in his letter on Jewish and Christian almsgiving, discriminate giving was in fact the norm.<sup>46</sup> Thus the poor were not recognized as deserving of charity by virtue of their need, but remained subject to discrimination on the basis of their orthodoxy and moral caliber. With very few exceptions, bishops upheld the *status quo*. Basil of Caesarea, for instance, was one of very few bishops to extend charity to “children of the Jews,” during the famine of 368 c.e.<sup>47</sup> Rabbinic teaching on indiscriminate giving came closer to the pure gift ideal than the preaching of western clergy.

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LCL 215:369). “And while he who gives to the afflicted has given to the Lord, and will receive his reward from Him, yet he who gives to every wanderer casts it to a dog that is troublesome on account of his shamelessness, but not pitiable because of his need.” Rather, the potential monk should give to the hospitals and poorhouses that had been established by the church. Basil here interprets Acts 2.45 as meaning that the experience of a bishop was necessary for distinguishing between those who are truly in need and those who beg out of avarice, another argument for indirect giving.

44. Leo, *serm.* 9.3 (CCL 138:36): “Therefore they are the ones to be considered and to be relieved of their secret need, so that they might rejoice more in this matter since their poverty and their modesty were taken into account” (*Intellegendi ergo isti sunt et ab occulta necessitate releuandi, ut hoc ipso amplius gaudeant cum et paupertati eorum consultum fuerit et pudori*).

45. Leo, *serm.* 10.4 (CCL 138:43): *Dum ergo tempus habemus, sic ait Apostolus, operemur quod bonum est ad omnes maxime autem ad domesticos fidei*.

46. Julian, *ep.* 22.429C–D (ed. and trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, LCL 157/3:70): “I order that one-fifth of this be used for the poor who serve the priests, and the remainder be distributed by us to strangers and beggars. For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.” More evidence for this can be found in Basil’s monastic and lay rules: see Daniel Caner, “Wealth, Stewardship, and Charitable Blessings in Early Byzantine Monasticism,” in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan Holman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 221–42.

47. At least according to his brother Gregory of Nyssa, *In Basilium fratrem* 17 (ed. O. Lendle, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 10.1 [Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990], 124, lines 20–21).

*Justice for the Poor*

Justice for the poor is a strong theme in rabbinic texts. Injunctions to act justly towards the poor are evident in the earliest books of Jewish law. They illustrate what Bolkestein called the “Near Eastern model” of social relations, whereby the weak who described themselves as “poor” could call upon the mercy and protection of a powerful protector,<sup>48</sup> a model which is evident in Hebrew Scriptures but can be traced back much earlier to Canaanite literature. A key feature of this model was the encoding of the rights of the poor in written law codes. Early examples cited by Brown are the laws of Urukagina of Lagish (2400 B.C.E.) and the Hammurabi law code of 1729–1680 B.C.E.<sup>49</sup> In this ancient model of society, the “poor” were a judicial category rather than an economic one.<sup>50</sup>

The principle of justice was grounded in a notion of the dignity of the human person as a creature of God. The one who supports the poor is in some sense equal to God the Creator: “He who sustains God’s creatures is as though he had created them.”<sup>51</sup> Rabbinic commentaries stress the importance of gleaning rights for the poor, often all that stood between them and death by starvation. To deprive the poor of gleaning rights was tantamount to robbing or even murdering them, as indicated by a late midrash of the Mishnaic tract ‘*Abot* on Prov 22.22–23 (“Rob not the poor, oppress not the afflicted . . . for the Lord will despoil of life them that despoil them”).<sup>52</sup> Even putting a basket under the vine to catch the fruit that drops during the harvest is understood as robbing the poor of their due gleanings.<sup>53</sup> The Jewish Scriptures and especially Psalms were

48. Hendrick Bolkestein, *Wöbltigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1939). According to Bolkestein this model came to the fore in the third century C.E. with the rise of Christianity and with the disastrous collapse of the Roman economy; see Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 7 n. 18, 68–73, 80–84.

49. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 69.

50. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 69.

51. *Tanḥuma*, *Noah* 16a (ML 1148, 416).

52. “There was once a widow who lived near a man who owned land, and her two children went to glean the ears of corn. But the landowner did not allow them to do so. Their mother said, ‘When will my children return? Perhaps they will bring something to eat.’ And the children said, ‘Let us return to our mother; perhaps we shall find with her something to eat.’ She got nothing from them, and they found nothing with her, and they put their heads between the knees of their mother, and they died all three on one day. And God said, ‘You have taken their lives; surely I will exact your lives from you’” (*Abot de Rabbi Nathan* [rec. A], 38,57a [ML 1150, 416]). This late exposition dates from 700–900 C.E.

53. *Sifra* 88a (ML1156, 417); cf. *Sifra* 88c (ML 1155, 417), referring to Lev 19.10: “You shall leave them for the poor and the alien.”

replete with images of the poor man seeking justice from the person of power and influence.

Fifth-century bishops turned to the biblical language of the poor man's claim to justice from the powerful, as a means of challenging the old non-Christian system and justifying their new place within it as the mediator of civic euergetism to the poor.<sup>54</sup> In Christel Freu's study of fourth-century homiletic representations of the poor in Italy, she makes the important observation that Christians simplified the act of giving when they reduced its form to the single "gift to the poor."<sup>55</sup> A gift to the church was now automatically conceived as a gift to the poor, whether it went to maintain the clergy who were always described as *pauperes*, regardless of their actual wealth, or to support those on the bishop's lists of widows and orphans, or to build new churches, or repair or adorn existing churches.<sup>56</sup> The civic *magnificus* now had to direct his largesse where it was needed most, to feed the poor, to care for the sick, to redeem captives, to help the traveler and the exile. Leo the Great denies the rich the possibility of God's mercy if their largesse was useless or unfair:

Although it is praiseworthy to flee intemperance and to avoid the ruins of wicked pleasures, and many *magnifici* scorn to hide their riches and shrink from vile and filthy meanness while they abound in wealth, there is not however any happy abundance among them, or any frugality that we can approve of, if their wealth serves only themselves, if no poor people are helped by their means, if the sick are not nourished, if from the abundance of their great resources no captive is redeemed, no traveler receives comfort,

54. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 89, himself acknowledges the weakness of such biblical language to effect change: "But we must remember that, for all the success of the Christian church in establishing itself at certain levels of late Roman society, its representatives still had to fight an uphill battle to maintain their own position as spokesman of 'the poor' in a world where powerful groups (local notables and imperial servants) were little affected by such language." This is one domain in which Grig's assessment that "in many respects the bishop slotted into this hierarchy in highly traditional fashion," is not valid (Lucy Grig, "Throwing Parties for the Poor: Poverty and Splendour in the Late Antique Church," in *Poverty in the Roman World*, ed. Atkins and Osborne, 145–61, at 159 n. 67). This is a minor criticism of an otherwise excellent study.

55. Christel Freu, *Les figures du pauvre dans les sources italiennes de l'antiquité tardive*, Études d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne (Paris: de Boccard, 2007), 160.

56. Claire Sotinel, "Le don chrétien et ses retombées sur l'économie dans l'Antiquité Tardive," in *Économie et religion dans l'antiquité tardive*, *Antiquité Tardive* 14 (2006): 105–16, concludes that the economic impact of all such gifts in the fourth and fifth centuries, while difficult to measure, was not significant.

no exile receives aid. Such rich men are poorer than all the poor. . . . They feast on no food of justice, no sweetness of mercy.<sup>57</sup>

The language of justice and mercy is reminiscent of the appeals of the Psalmist. As Freu points out, this sent a somewhat confused message to civic patrons: "On the one hand, [bishops of Italy] refused the patron the exchange of benefits and gifts. On the other, they refused, in the name of the utility principle, grandiose euergetical acts."<sup>58</sup>

Even if bishops harbored a genuine wish to help the poor, as Augustine of Hippo apparently did,<sup>59</sup> they were often hampered by imperial legal and administrative structures. We see this clearly in the case of Augustine's attempts to help those captured by Numidian slave traders.<sup>60</sup> Augustine's power to intervene on behalf of the destitute was limited by structures that relegated bishops to the role of petitioner of the powerful, "even though they had no real power to help," as Lepelley put it.<sup>61</sup> This was especially true in regard to the injustices imposed in the course of tax collection. In his role as judge in the episcopal court, Augustine was sometimes accused by the wealthy of being biased towards the poor.<sup>62</sup> This is not surprising given that the poor had nowhere else to lodge complaints against abuse and exploitation. The Roman legal system was absolutely saturated with such cases to the point where such secular appeals seemed useless. The episcopal court (*audientia episcopalis*) was the one place where the poor could hope to find justice.<sup>63</sup> Penitents, who were not supposed to undertake

57. Leo, *serm.* 10.2 (CCL 138:40–41): *Quamuis autem laudabile sit intemperantiam fugere et turpium uoluptatum damna uitare, multique magnifici facultates suas dedignentur occulere et in copia affluentes uilem atque sordentem horreant parcitatem, non est tamen talium aut felix abundantia, aut probanda frugalitas, si ipsis tantum propriae opes seruiunt, si eorum bonis nulli iuuantur pauperes, nulli fouentur infirmi, si de magnarum abundantia facultatum non captiuus redemptionem, non peregrinus solatium, non exul sentit auxilium. Huiusmodi diuites egentiores omnibus sunt egenis . . . nullo iustitiae cibo, nulla misericordiae suauitate pascuntur.*

58. Freu, *Les figures*, 161 (my trans.).

59. E.g. Augustine, *serm.* 25.8 (NBA 29:484), *serm.* 41.7 (NBA 29:738–42), *serm.* Dolbeau 5.11 (NBA 35/1:110–12), and *serm.* Dolbeau 11.14 (NBA 35/1:224–26).

60. See the newly discovered letter of c. 420 C.E., *ep.* 22\*.3–4 (NBA 23a:194).

61. Claude Lepelley, "Facing Wealth and Poverty: Defining Augustine's Social Doctrine," Saint Augustine Lecture 2006, *AugSt* 38.1 (2007): 1–17, at 6.

62. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 72.12 (NBA 26:836), cited by Lepelley, "Facing Wealth and Poverty," 10.

63. On the bishop's court, which took over much of the business of secular law courts towards the end of the fourth century, see Kevin Uhalde, *Expectations of Justice in the Age of Augustine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 29–32.

legal suits, were not excluded from the episcopal courts, as Leo pointed out in a letter to Rusticus of Narbonne.<sup>64</sup>

The bishop's court was also a place where the fiscal abuses of the clergy could be concealed: Leo's *ep.* 137 to Emperor Marcian concerns charges of corruption brought against church stewards or financial administrators (*oeconomici*) of the church of Constantinople in the civil courts. Leo requested that the financial accounts of such officers should be audited by clergy, not by laypersons; that is to say, church stewards should be tried in ecclesiastical courts.<sup>65</sup>

### *Redemptive Almsgiving*

The roots of the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving are found in Jewish Scriptures including Psalms, Proverbs, Tobit, and Isaiah, as they were interpreted by rabbinic commentators from the first century B.C.E. onwards. While in the Torah the cultic system of temple sacrifice provided the means of atonement, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. almsgiving came to replace cultic sacrifice as a means of atonement. It is in this period that the transition in the meaning of *ṣedāqah* from "righteousness" to "almsgiving" occurred. This shift in thinking was already evident in the Septuagint book of Tobit, which attributes redemptive power to almsgiving (Tob 4.7–11; 12.8–9), and in the Greek translations of Dan 4.27 and Prov 15.27a.<sup>66</sup> The doctrine of redemptive almsgiving was directly mediated to the early church through its adoption of the Septuagint as its preferred version of the Jewish Scriptures.<sup>67</sup> Rabbinic teaching was strong on the redemptive value of almsgiving, which made the next life the place of punishment or reward, depending on whether one gave poorly or well to those in need. In an anonymous early midrash on Deuteronomy, a rabbi wrote:

Moses said to the Israelites, "If you keep the Law, not only upon yourselves do you confer a benefit (*ṣedāqah*), but also upon God," as it is said, *And it shall be a benefit for us* (Deut 6.25).<sup>68</sup>

Here *ṣedāqah* is taken to mean "benefit" rather than its earlier meaning of "righteousness." This understanding laid the ground for its later sig-

64. Leo, *ep.* 167.10 (PL 54:1206A–B).

65. Leo, *ep.* 137 to Emperor Marcian, May 29, 454 (ACO 2.4:89). Trans. Bronwen Neil, *Leo the Great, The Early Church Fathers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 138.

66. Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in the Early Church*, JSNT Suppl. Ser. 77 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 52–53.

67. Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, 52.

68. *Deut. Rabbah, Niṣṣabim*, 8.5 (ML 449, 168).

nification of “alms.”<sup>69</sup> The semantic link made between righteousness, benefit, and alms, all possible meanings of *ṣedaqah*, indicates the close intertwining of moral distinctions, applying at once to the intention, the act of giving, and its outcome. Later rabbinic sources from 150 c.e. consistently interpret *ṣedaqah* to mean almsgiving.<sup>70</sup> However early the doctrine first appeared, it remains true that its acceptance was accelerated by the destruction of the Temple.

Poverty and riches also had a strong eschatological dimension in the later rabbinic teachings, although the possibility of an afterlife was not (and still is not) accepted by all orthodox Jews. According to some teachers, riches themselves could deprive one of the next life.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, taking interest from another Jew was considered to diminish one’s chances in the next life.<sup>72</sup> The Talmud forbade lending on interest even to a Gentile, referring to Ps 15.1.<sup>73</sup> However, non-interest loans were considered better than almsgiving. This teaching and practice constituted a real challenge to the *status quo*, and the major consideration was to preserve the poor person’s self-respect. In the *Tosefta Pe’ah*, for instance, we find a range of opinions on how this should be achieved: as a gift, as a gift that became a loan, or as a loan that the recipient should pledge to repay.<sup>74</sup> As Silber puts it: “It is this kind of concern for the recipient’s dignity in fact, rather than the

69. Mauss, *Gift*, 16.

70. Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, 59. Garrison maintains (51) that the shift in meaning of *ṣedaqah* from “righteousness” to “almsgiving” took place between 200 b.c.e. and 150 c.e.

71. “Gold and silver take a man out of this world and the world to come, but the Torah brings a man to the life of the world to come” (*Sifre Num.*, *Kóorah*, 119, f. 39b [ML 1239, 445]).

72. “For, in this world, the wicked are rich and are at ease, and the righteous are poor, but in the world to come, when God shall open the treasures of Paradise to the righteous, the wicked, who had eaten of usury shall bite their flesh with their teeth” (*Exod. Rabbah*, *Mishpatim*, 31.5 [ML 1254, 450]).

73. *Makkot* 24a (ML 1255, 450).

74. “If a [poor] man says: ‘I ought not to be supported by others,’ then one should watch over him, and support him, giving him help as a loan, and then letting him regard the loan as a gift. This was R. Me’ir’s opinion. But the sages held that the help should first be given as a gift, and then that he should be told that it could be regarded as a loan. R. Simeon said that he should be asked for a pledge, so as to preserve his self-respect” (*Tosefta Pe’ah* 4.12 [ML 1194, 429]). See also *Sabbath* 63a (ML 1184, 425), attributed to Resh Lakish, born c. 200 c.e.: “He who lends is greater than he who gives alms; and he who provides capital for a useful enterprise is greatest of all.” *‘Abot de Rabbi Nathan* (rec. A), 41, 66a (ML 1183, 425), suggests that he who gives a poor man money to trade with and becomes a partner with him at half profits is better than either the one who gives alms or the one who lends.

precise amount of disinterested intention on the donor's part, that forms the backbone of any attempt at establishing a hierarchy of giving in the Jewish tradition."<sup>75</sup> Self-interest was taken for granted in rabbinic commentaries: either the "impossibility of the gift" was not a moral problem for their authors, or it was subsumed under the benefit provided to the poor by enacting God's just commandment to give.

Of even greater spiritual value than almsgiving were deeds of loving-kindness. Gifts of alms in the form of money were an *ad hoc* response to an individual need, whereas deeds of loving-kindness addressed the cause of that need, for instance, by feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, giving work to the unemployed, or taking an orphan into one's own family. The performance of loving deeds offered a free passage to the future world.<sup>76</sup> Both deeds of loving-kindness and almsgiving were considered better than ritual sacrifice.<sup>77</sup> Alms and good deeds could advocate for the giver before God, as *BT Baba Batra* 10a indicates:<sup>78</sup>

All the almsgiving and loving deeds which the Israelites do in this world are great advocates between them and their Father in heaven. Great is almsgiving, for it brings the Redemption nearer.

Likewise, the redemptive power of alms is made explicit in a midrash on Prov 29.13 ("The poor and the man of means meet together; the Lord lightens the eyes of both"):

[T]he poor is he who is poor in possessions, and the man of means is he who is in work. If the first comes to the second and says, "Give me alms," and he gives it him, then of them it is said, *The Lord lightens both their eyes*; that is, the poor man has won the life of today, and the other has won the life of the world to come.<sup>79</sup>

Tithing for the poor was limited by pragmatic considerations. R. Ilai taught that, however generous a man wanted to be, he should not give away more than a fifth of his fortune. This guaranteed the protection of the family's interests and assured the continuation of giving in the future. This stipulation did not apply to bequests, as indicated by the action of Mar Ukba, who took care to provide well for his journey after death by leaving alms for the poor. As he was dying, he decided to review the amount on his charity list, some seven thousand *dinarim*. Observing that "The

75. Silber, "Beyond Purity and Danger," 127.

76. *Midrash Psalms* on Ps 118.19 (ML 1206, 433); cf. Ps 118.20.

77. *Sukkah* 49b (ML 1197, 430), attributed to R. Elazar b. Pedat.

78. ML 1142, 413.

79. ML 1244, 446–47.

provision is scanty; the journey is long," he changed his will to bequeath half of his fortune to charity.<sup>80</sup>

Let us compare this then with what Leo the Great had to say on the subject of redemptive almsgiving. Like Augustine, the Cappadocians, and John Chrysostom, Leo recognized implicitly that pure gifts are impossible and that the mere appearance of a gift as gift placed it in the inexorable circle of exchange.<sup>81</sup> Instead, he chose to cast alms not as a gift but as a debt owed to God, whose gift of Christ to humanity created an enormous debt that could never be repaid, leaving the almsgiver unable ever to give enough to satisfy the creditor: a poisonous legacy indeed.<sup>82</sup> Leo described the almsgiver as a creditor in respect to God, who would repay money given to the poor with interest after death. "Long for the just profit of mercy, and pursue trade for a gain that lasts forever."<sup>83</sup> Debt, investment with interest, credit: these were concepts with which Roman audiences were very familiar from the New Testament (e.g. Matt 6.12; Matt 18.23–34, Luke 19.12–27).<sup>84</sup> The law allowed creditors to seize the children of those who could not repay their debts, and sell them into slavery.<sup>85</sup> While Leo echoed a common homiletic trope in disavowing the practice of usury,<sup>86</sup>

80. *Ketubbot* 67b (ML 1162, 419).

81. On the "circle of exchange," see Derrida, *Given Time* (as in n. 14 above).

82. Derrida played on the meaning of the German noun *das Gift*, meaning "poison," to suggest that all gifts were in some sense poisonous legacies (*Given Time*, 69 n. 21, and 81).

83. Leo, *serm.* 17.2 (CCL 138:69): *Concupisce iustum misericordiae lucrum, et aeterni quaestus sectare commercium*. For an excellent discussion see Jonathan Mark Armitage, *A Twofold Solidarity. Leo the Great's Theology of Redemption*, *Early Christian Studies* 9 (Strathfield: St. Paul's, 2005), 178–81. See also *serm.* 87.4 (CCL 138A:545).

84. The prevalence of such economic language in Greek Christian texts from the fourth century to the middle ages has been examined by Angeliki E. Laiou, "The Church, Economic Thought and Economic Practice," in *The Christian East, Its Institutions and Its Thought: A Critical Reflection*, ed. Robert F. Taft, OCA 251 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1996), 435–64, esp. 441–51.

85. Holman, *Hungry are Dying*, 115 n. 51, cites papyrological evidence for this practice from fourth-century Egypt.

86. *ep.* 4.3 (PL 54:613): "Nor did we consider this a matter to be passed over, that certain people, having been seized by desire for filthy profit, are charging excessive interest, and want to grow rich by it. We grieve that this is happening, not among those who are established in the office of the clergy, but even among lay people who wish themselves to be known as Christians!" (*Nec hoc quoque praetereundum esse duximus, quosdam lucri turpis cupiditate captos, usurarium exercere pecuniam, et fenore velle ditescere. Quod nos, non dicam in eos qui sunt in clericali officio constituti, sed et in laicos cadere, qui Christianos se dici cupiunt, condolemus*). Angelo Di Berardino, "La défense du pauvre: Saint Augustin et l'usure," in *Augustinus Afer*,

the Theodosian Code allowed lenders to charge a rate of interest of one percent per month as late as 386 c.e. (*De usuris* 2.33.1–4).<sup>87</sup>

Within this “economic” framework, Christian preachers like Leo devised strategies for symbolic repayment of alms, e.g., prayers of intercession by the recipient on behalf of the donor. Like the rabbinic commentators, Leo ascribed to alms powers of advocacy, promising that not only would God know of the almsgiver’s good works but the alms themselves and their beneficiaries would intercede for the giver in heaven (cf. Sir 29.15).<sup>88</sup> Both the rabbinic and Christian acceptance of self-interest as a valid motivation for charitable giving can be read as a pragmatic response to human moral limitations. The language of debt and credit made almsgiving a transaction in a spiritual economy.

We have seen echoes in Leo’s preaching of the Jewish ideal of anonymous, indirect, and indiscriminate giving that was based on recognition of human dignity and the right of all to justice from the powerful. However, redemptive almsgiving remained the most important theme in Leo’s homilies. Self-interest outweighed the other aspects of the ideal. I would suggest that self-interested giving remained dominant in western Christianity because the doctrine was consonant with a competing model of giving: that of patronage, whether personal or public.

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*saint Augustin, Africanité et Universalité*, ed. P.-Y. Fux, J.-M. Roesli, and O. Wermelinger, Paradosis 45 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 2003), 257–62, discusses other patristic sources condemning usury, including Basil, *hom. 2 in Psalmum 14* and *Contra feneratoros*; Ambrose, *De Tobia*; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra usurarios*; Augustine, *Contra Iulianum, serm. 239*, and *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 36.s.3.6. Some fourth-century eastern bishops, however, allowed a degree of usury for laypersons, even while castigating usury (Laiou, “Church,” 440–43). The eastern church did not adopt the same canonical prohibition of lending at interest for both laypersons and ecclesiastics as did the western church, following the lead of Leo. The concern of Byzantine and Syrian church fathers was rather to limit extravagant rates of interest, which had drastic consequences for the poor most of all (Laiou, “Church,” 450).

87. See Holman, *Hungry are Dying*, 115 n. 53: this rate was sanctioned in 325 c.e. by Constantine: *Cod. Theod.* 2.33.1b (Mommsen and Meyer, 124), and in 386 c.e. by Valentinian II, Theodosius, and Arcadius: *Cod. Theod.* 2.33.2 (Mommsen and Meyer, 124).

88. *serm.* 10.4 (CCL 138:44).

## PART TWO: CHRISTIAN ADAPTATION OF GRECO-ROMAN MODELS OF GIFT GIVING

Pre-Christian Rome was another ancient society in which gift exchange was socially cohesive, both within the patronage system and occasionally outside it in the form of alms for the poor (Gk. *eleēmosynē*; Lat. *beneficentia*). Though seldom discussed in the scholarly literature on Christian almsgiving, pagan almsgiving was a strong theme particularly in Stoic tracts on beneficence. In this section we consider how Christian preachers, and especially Leo, adapted ideas from three Greco-Roman models of gift giving: almsgiving, personal patronage, and civic euergetism.

### *Pagan Almsgiving*

The Stoic rationale for almsgiving was quite distinct from that of patronage or civic euergetism, and was based on the dignity of all human beings. Parkin sketches an outline of pagan almsgiving in the classical period, using Seneca as her main source for an often-overlooked Stoic doctrine of showing mercy to the beggar.<sup>89</sup> The Jewish and Christian notion that charity or mercy to the poor is an imitation of God's mercy towards all human beings echoes the sentiment expressed by Seneca in *De clementia*, where he poses the rhetorical question: "Have I, of all mortals, found favor with the gods and been chosen to act on earth in their stead?"<sup>90</sup> Parkin discusses the Stoic disapproval of pity (*miser cordia*) as a "passion" which distracts from *apatheia*, while conceding that the Stoics occasionally admit that mercy (*clementia*), understood as giving practical aid to the poor, is allowable.<sup>91</sup> For example, Seneca states that the ideal Stoic would not hesitate to give a copper coin to an anonymous beggar, not as a gift to the man but as a gift to humanity (*De beneficiis* 4.29.2–3). Elsewhere Seneca recommends that the most fitting way to provide help to the shipwrecked

89. Parkin, "You Do Him No Service," 60–82. For a more detailed discussion see Parkin, "Poverty in the Early Roman Empire: Ancient and Modern Conceptions and Constructs," Ph.D. Diss. (Cambridge, 2001), 115–55, where she argues that there was more interaction between the elite and the structural poor than appears in a casual reading of the classical literary sources.

90. Seneca, *De clementia* 1.1.2 (trans. J. M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé, *Seneca. Moral and Political Essays*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 128). Cf. Susan Holman, "The Entitled Poor. Human Rights Language in the Cappadocians," *Doctores Ecclesiae in Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 476–89, at 478–79: "Even Stoics' writings, in which many scholars have seen a particular concern for the needy, considered justice, not mercy, to be the most important criterion for assisting those in need."

91. Parkin, "You Do Him No Service," 64–65.

traveler, hospitality to the exile, and alms to the needy, is out of recognition of their common humanity: “. . . not throwing them down in the insulting way that most of those who would like to seem full of pity do, disdaining those whom they help and fearing to come into contact with them, but as one man giving to another man from the common store.”<sup>92</sup>

This idea was taken up in the Christian West, as we see in Ambrose’s frequent use of the term *consortium naturae* to refer to the common nature shared by all human beings, whether male or female, poor or rich, slave or free.<sup>93</sup> However, this universal nature, according to Ambrose, was not only common to all humanity but also to God, an allusion to 2 Pet 1.4 (“[God] has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature. . .”). In Leo’s homilies we find the related idea that the poor share the humanity of Christ; thus, giving to the poor is equivalent to giving to Christ. Christ, who voluntarily made lowly human nature his own, rewards those who give to the poor as if they gave to him (*serm.* 9.2). Christ, who *considers the needy and poor* (Ps 41.1), is the face of the poor: “Rightly in the needy and poor do we recognize the person of Jesus Christ our Lord himself.”<sup>94</sup> This was an argument also used by eastern preachers, including Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>95</sup>

### *Personal Patronage Networks*

Other more formalized giving to the poor occurred through the operation of patronage networks. Garnsey and Woolf have made a vital contribution to the understanding of how traditional Greco-Roman patronage offered protection against violence and hunger, especially among the rural poor.<sup>96</sup> They define personal patronage as “an enduring bond between two persons of unequal social and economic status, which implies and is main-

92. *De clementia* 2.6.2 (trans. Cooper and Procopé 162–63).

93. For more detail on Ambrose’s use of this phrase and a bibliography of secondary sources, see Adam Serfass, “Slavery and Pope Gregory the Great,” *J ECS* 14 (2006): 77–103, at 83–84.

94. Leo, *serm.* 9.3 (CCL 138:36): *Recte autem in egeno et paupere ipsius Jesu Christi Domini nostri persona sentitur.*

95. Basil, *ep.* 150.3 (Courtonne 75, lines 27–29); Gregory of Nazianzus, *De pauperum amore* (PG 35:909B). Anthony Meredith, “The Three Cappadocians on Beneficence: A Key to Their Audiences,” in *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Pauline Allen, *A New History of the Sermon 1* (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 1998), 89–104, at 97–98, comments that this idea is absent from the two homilies on the poor by Gregory of Nyssa.

96. Garnsey and Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor,” 153–70, at 154.

tained by periodic exchanges of goods and services, and also has social and affective dimensions.”<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, such patronage was “voluntary and reciprocal, and it offered the client, at the least, basic subsistence and physical protection.”<sup>98</sup> Personal patronage was only one model of social relations among many, co-existing alongside almsgiving, euergetism, and family and other local networks within a village or town. These different systems of patronage continued to compete in the late empire.<sup>99</sup> Libanius of Antioch offers a description, albeit idealized, of rural social relations when he describes how interpersonal patronage used to operate between his family and Jewish tenants who had farmed their land for four generations (*Oratio* 47.19–22).

Patronage was the Roman solution to the impossibility of the gift, and it worked, by formalizing vertical relationships of obligation between the wealthy and the needy. Those who were morally deserving, who shared common social ties with noble families, and who had already rendered services in their interest, were naturally considered more worthy of aristocratic acts of benevolence than those outside the social circle of the donor, as Cicero makes clear in *De officiis*.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, personal patronage was problematic in that it could weaken horizontal bonds of association, working against the ties that bound those of equal social status together in a coherent whole. For this reason, several Roman laws were promulgated against patronage from 360 C.E.<sup>101</sup>

Personal patronage was in many ways contrary to the Jewish and Christian ideal of indirect, anonymous giving. However, the traditional social ties of patronage were not easily broken or given up. The personal patronage

97. Garnsey and Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor,” 154.

98. Garnsey and Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor,” 166.

99. Garnsey and Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor,” 162.

100. Cicero, *De officiis* 1.14.45 (ed. and trans. W. Miller, LCL 30:48–49); “The third rule laid down was that in acts of kindness we should weigh with discrimination the worthiness of the object of our benevolence; we should take into consideration his moral character, his attitude toward us, the intimacy of his relation to us, and our common social ties, as well as the services he has hitherto rendered in our interest” (*Tertium est propositum, ut in beneficentia dilectus esset dignitatis; in quo et mores eius erunt spectandi, in quem beneficium conferetur, et animus erga nos et communitas ac societas vitae et ad nostras utilitates officia ante collata*).

101. E.g. *Cod. Theod.* 11.24.1 in 360 C.E. (Mommsen and Meyer 613); *Cod. Theod.* 11.24.2 in 368 or 370 C.E. (Mommsen and Meyer 613); *Cod. Theod.* 11.24.3 in 395 C.E. (Mommsen and Meyer 613–14); *Cod. Theod.* 11.24.4–5 in 399 C.E. (Mommsen and Meyer 614); *Cod. Theod.* 11.24.6 in 415 C.E. (Mommsen and Meyer 614–15). These laws, probably of Egyptian provenance, are cited by Daniel Sperber, “Patronage in Amoraic Palestine (c. 220–400): Causes and Effects,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 14 (1971): 227–52, at 231 n. 2.

model continued to appeal to wealthy Christians, and we find it operating especially between bishops and elite ascetics who had adopted voluntary poverty to a certain extent, but still had plenty left to give from their inherited estates. Bishops themselves were meant to be members of the voluntary poor, but they could make use of the patronage system of social relations to gain power and economic resources, according to Garnsey and Woolf, “and were able to lead their communities against, or in default of, the secular authorities.”<sup>102</sup> The bishop acted both as a megapatron of his community, to quote De Vinne’s term,<sup>103</sup> and as a megaclient, begging on behalf of the poor, the hungry, the sick, and prisoners for whom he paid ransoms, all ideally with no strings attached. We can also read the occasional incitement to direct giving, as in Leo’s *serm.* 9.3, discussed above, as operating within this model of social relations. Some bishops were very concerned to avoid becoming subject to patronage by the wealthy, as we see in Augustine’s problematic relationship with the “radical” ascetics Melania and Pinianus,<sup>104</sup> but the ties between bishops and elite Christians allowed the bishop to facilitate public euergetism. In the next section we will see how Leo facilitated such public giving through his relationship with the wealthy virgin Demetrias Anicia.

#### *Public Patronage: Euergetism*

Alongside the personal patronage model there operated euergetism or public patronage, whereby wealthy citizens performed services, or *leitourgiai*, for their city in return for public honor and recognition. *Leitourgiai* included the provision of spectacles such as games and festivals, the funding of public facilities such as baths, and the occasional handout of food or money in times of food shortage. Financing *leitourgiai* was the role of those in local government: *curiales*, or in Rome the senatorial class. Such philanthropy was a simple social transaction: money for glory. It was blatantly self-interested but that did not preclude generosity.<sup>105</sup> The need of

102. Garnsey and Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor,” 165.

103. Michael J. De Vinne, “The Advocacy of Empty Bellies: Episcopal Representation of the Poor in the Late Roman Empire” (Ph.D. diss. University of Michigan, 1999), 116.

104. The embarrassing incident that occurred at Hippo, where Augustine’s congregation attempted to ordain the wealthy ascetic Pinianus against his will, is discussed by Geoffrey D. Dunn, “The Poverty of Melania the Younger and Pinianus,” (forthcoming). Dunn demonstrates that the asceticism embraced by Melania and Pinianus was neither as radical nor as thorough-going as contemporary hagiographers made out.

105. Cicero, *De officiis* 1.8.25 (ed. and trans Miller, LCL 30:24–25): “Again, men seek riches partly to supply the needs of life, partly to secure the enjoyment of pleasure. With those who cherish higher ambitions, the desire for wealth is entertained

the recipients was immaterial; the display of largesse or *liberalitas* was a virtue in itself. Brown, after Patlagean, calls this the “classical” or “civic” model of euergetism.<sup>106</sup> Patlagean was the first to posit the emergence in Byzantium in the fourth to seventh centuries of an economic model of society that laid bare the divisions between rich and poor, divisions which had been disguised or muted by the previous civic model in which only citizens counted. The new economic model of social relations was meant to expose the obligations of rich to poor.<sup>107</sup> This theory, while superficially attractive, has certain short-comings, as we shall see.

Towards the end of the fourth century, as public institutions became more populated by Christians, and church leaders came to play an increasingly important role in civic benefaction, the poor gradually overtook the citizen as the most deserving objects of public benevolence, at least at the level of rhetoric. This change in attitude can be seen in the extension of the Greek term for “benevolence” (*philanthrōpia*) to include the non-citizen poor, in the homilies of the Cappadocians. Susan Holman believes that the extension of benevolence to include aid to the poor was already present in the East in the late fourth century. Citing as evidence Themistius’s panegyric for Theodosius I, Holman claims, “Only in his praise of Theodosius, who ruled *a time when the poor had clearly gained social power in public rhetoric*, does Themistius refer to poverty even briefly in defining ideal ‘philanthropy.’”<sup>108</sup> However, it is impossible to tell whether such philanthropy was envisaged as being directed only to those poor who were also citizens. By contrast, in fourth-century Italy concern for the poor was

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with a view to power and influence and the means of bestowing favors” (*Expetuntur autem divitiae cum ad usus vitae necessarios, tum ad perfruendas voluptates. In quibus autem maior est animus, in iis pecuniae cupiditas spectat ad opes et ad gratificandi facultatem*).

106. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*; Evelyn Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4<sup>e</sup>-7<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1977).

107. Patlagean revisits the problem in “The Poor,” in *The Byzantines*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 15–42, describing the terms used to identify the poor in texts from the mid-fourth century onwards as creating “a social definition of the poor: uprooted, alone, unstable, without resources, often physically stricken” (19).

108. Holman, “Entitled Poor,” 479 and n. 10, citing Themistius, *Oratio 19, Epi tēi philanthrōiai tou autokratoros Theodosiou*, eds. H. Schenkl and G. Downey, *Themistii orationes quae supersunt* 1 (Berlin: Teubner, 1965), 328–39, an oration delivered before the Senate in 386. Holman, “The Hungry Body: Famine, Poverty, and Identity in Basil’s *Hom. 8*,” *J ECS* 7 (1999): 337–63, described the poor in Basil’s *hom. 8* similarly: “They warrant traditional civic philanthropy,” being “rightful dependents of their patrons in the ideal civic order” (362).

definitely still seen as a non-civic gesture.<sup>109</sup> For example Ambrose, writing to Valentinian II to defend the tax privileges extended to Christian clergy, protests that “the property of the Church is the support of the poor. Let them [i.e. pagan critics] take account of how many captives the temples have brought back, what food they have provided for the poor, which exiles they have furnished with the means of a livelihood.”<sup>110</sup>

The change in definition of civic largesse was however effected in Rome by the mid-fifth century by the bishop’s adoption of many civic responsibilities that had formerly been the province of imperial largesse.<sup>111</sup> The poor were now legitimate recipients of civic giving, but could not be expected to provide anything in return, such as public honor to the giver.<sup>112</sup> At the same time in Gaul, successful and resource-rich bishops like Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of the Averni at Clermont Ferrand, and Caesarius of Arles, used the rhetoric of charity to legitimize their bestowing of largesse upon the poor.<sup>113</sup> This development in the terms of exchange, with its dissolution of a personal bond between giver and recipient, should have resulted—if in fact rhetoric had reflected reality—in a seismic shift in the *status quo*, not just in how giving to the poor was to be envisaged and justified in the sphere of public discourse.

However, the main problem with Patlagean’s theory of a shift from a

109. Richard Lim, “People as Power: Games, Munificence, and Contested Topography,” in *The Transformations of Urbs Roma in Late Antiquity*, ed. W. V. Harris, The Proceedings of a Conference held at the University of Rome “La Sapienza” and at the American Academy in Rome, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 33 (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 265–81, at 275.

110. *ep.* 18.16 (CSEL 82:3.43–44, lines 186–89; trans. Mary M. Beyenka, FOTC 26:44); *Possessio ecclesiae sumptus est egenorum. Numerent quos redemerint templa captivos, quae contulerint alimenta pauperibus, quibus exulibus vivendi subsidia ministraverint.*

111. Bronwen Neil, “Imperial Benefactions to the Fifth-Century Roman Church,” in *Legitimising the Emperor*, ed. Geoffrey Nathan and Lynda Garland (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, forthcoming). One can see in the *Liber pontificalis* a decisive shift in the ascription of such activities between the pontificates of Sixtus III (432–440 c.e.) and his successor Leo I.

112. Cf. the example cited by Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 72, of Stratonikeia in Asia Minor “where the classical tradition remained strong.” There an honorary inscription was set up by the town council and the poor of the city acknowledging the public benefaction of a Christian named Maximus, in the form of alms: *Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien* 22,1: *Die Inschriften von Stratonikeia* II, 1, ed. M. Çetin Şahin (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 1982), 166–67, no. 1204.

113. Garnsey and Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor,” 165, are right to qualify their judgment that Sidonius was “a kind of universal patron, in a loose sense,” with this remark: “But to the extent that his activities are to be seen as charitable, his disbursements come perhaps into a different category [from those of secular patrons].”

civic to an economic model of social relations is that the social obligations between givers and receivers that were envisaged in the economic model and expressed in the “language of claims” did not and could not exist without the sort of judicial framework that underpinned Hebrew Scriptures (especially Psalms), in which the poor were recognized as a body with rights to protection. This judicial framework was weakened to the point of obliteration by the strong resistance of the Greco-Roman models of both personal and public patronage. This is evident from the gap between rhetoric and praxis in the philanthropic activities of bishops—especially Leo and Augustine—and from the euergetism practiced by elite ascetics, as we will see. My argument will be further substantiated below by the imperial legislation preserved in the *Theodosian Code*. While the Jewish model of almsgiving rested upon a precept of equal human dignity, regardless of wealth, the Christianization of the personal patronage model was ruthlessly hierarchical. Over the vertical relationship between the worldly patron and his or her client, it introduced a third agent, God, the ultimate patron, who constituted the highest level of the social/spiritual hierarchy and to whom the debt of the Christian *homo salvandus* could never be repaid. This is the root of the *aporia* of the gift in Christian terms. Late antique Christian charity in fact had four agents: the giver, the passive receiver, God, and the conduit/steward (bishop or ascetic) who mediated wealth, goods, and services. There was no simple inversion of the patronage model, where the poor acted as intercessors before God on behalf of the rich.<sup>114</sup> All took turns to play the roles of creditor and debtor, giver and receiver. The model of indirect, anonymous giving via the church threatened to break the ties of personal obligation between giver and receiver, a bond which had held Greco-Roman society together for centuries. As Leo puts it in a homily on the September fast,

Don't despair of the interest; don't distrust the one who receives from you. *What you did for one of these, you did for me* (Matt 25.40). Understand who it is that speaks; and recognize with certainty, using the perceptive eyes of faith, the one in whom you invest your wealth. Anyone who is owed a debt by Christ should have no doubt about its repayment.<sup>115</sup>

114. Cf. De Vinne, “The Advocacy of Empty Bellies,” 104–5: “Construed as a patron-client dyad, the ideal relationship between the better-off and the destitute shares features common to all patronage relationships: it binds two unequals in a personal enduring friendship that obliges them reciprocally to exchange goods and services commensurate with their different statuses.”

115. Leo, *serm.* 87.4 (CCL 138A:545): *Non dubitet de receptione, cui Christus est debitor. Non sit anxia liberalitas, nec triste ieiunium. Hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus, qui fidelis est in uerbis suis, et abundanter largita retribuet, quae benigne*

*Intersection of Jewish and Greco-Roman Models*

Interplay between the Jewish model of assisting the poor and Greco-Roman models was of course inevitable also in Hellenistic Judaism. The rabbinical homiletic tradition of the third and fourth centuries, for example, highlighted the injustices perpetrated by violent landowners, warning Jewish peasant farmers against trusting in local patrons, the “strong arms,” instead of God, Israel’s only proper patron. The rabbis emphasized the precariousness of the rural patrons’ wealth and power, and their shortcomings as protectors, but in doing so indicated just how widespread the phenomenon of patronage was in rural villages of Palestine throughout this period.<sup>116</sup> Such interplay between the Greco-Roman models and the “Near Eastern” model is proof, I think, that we must look for more than a simple overwriting of the existing classical civic model with Hebrew notions of the “just judge” and “powerful protector” in late antique Christianity. These images were, as Brown notes, very easily adapted to the cult of the emperor as the ultimate benefactor, and to the bishop as judge in his community through the bishop’s court (*audientia episcopalis*).<sup>117</sup> The biblical “language of claims” was used to characterize the just demands of the poor in late antique Christian society as well.<sup>118</sup> Emphasizing the role of bishop in this putative transformation of the social imagination, from a civic to an economic model of social relations, Brown claimed, “All over the empire, Christian bishops, clergymen, and monks fostered a non-classical image of society by the simple process of speaking as if society were, indeed, divided primarily between the rich and the poor, the weak and the powerful, according to a Biblical, Near Eastern model.”<sup>119</sup> However, the transformation of Greco-Roman society that one would expect to see most plainly at work in Christian charity towards the poor during this period remained largely at the level of rhetorical imagery. The hold of traditional ties of obligation was simply too strong to resist, in spite of the ideals of preachers such as Leo the Great.

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*largienda donavit*. On the poor as creditworthy debtors, see also John Chrysostom, *hom. 5.5 in Matt.* (PG 57:61–62). On the destitute as bankers, see Salvian of Marseilles, *Ad ecclesiam* 3.3–4 (CSEL 8:269–70). On almsgiving as an investment in the next life, see Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 38.12 (NBA 25:908).

116. Sperber, “Patronage in Amoraic Palestine,” 234–36, and Garnsey and Woolf, “Patronage of the Rural Poor,” 165.

117. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 70 and 80–83.

118. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 80. The phrase “language of claims” comes from Sandra Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy. Benefactors and their Motives in Turin, 1541–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 257.

119. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 80.

The persistence of traditional ties of obligation is evident in the philanthropic activities of particular western Christian elites who adopted voluntary poverty. A prime example of the role of the new class of “voluntary poor” in fifth-century Rome is Demetrias, who had the good fortune to be born into the ultra-wealthy Anician *gens*. Demetrias can be seen as acting as a traditional personal patron in relation to various significant figures in the western church. Surviving letters to Demetrias include those of Jerome, Pelagius, Augustine, and the anonymous author of *De vera humilitate* (which has been attributed to Leo and to Prosper of Aquitaine). Poverty in this context was an attitude of mind, or what we might today call a “lifestyle choice.” The letters addressed to Demetrias show that many vestiges of classical *philotimia* survived in the genre of ascetic spiritual counsel. Jerome, for instance, appealed to her pride in her family lineage: her fame and that of her family would live forever if she defied expectation and remained a virgin. As it happened, her name was preserved in only one inscription celebrating her construction of a shrine for St. Stephen in the time of Leo.<sup>120</sup> Although we know that Demetrias built the shrine on her estate on *via Latina*, and fulfilled a vow to Leo by doing so, we do not know whether the foundation was held in her name or that of the Roman church.<sup>121</sup> Demetrias was carrying on a well-established family tradition: Pope Celestine in a letter of 432 praised Demetrias’s grandmother Anicia Faltonia Proba for her endowment of incomes from her estates in Asia to support “the clergy, the poor, and the monasteries.”<sup>122</sup>

Demetrias’s legacy is a good example, and one of few documented ones, of how competing models of euergetism found some resolution in the fifth

120. *ILCV* 1:343, no. 1765: “When the virgin Demetrias Amnia, leaving the world, closed her final day, though she was not about to die, she consecrated to you, Pope Leo, the last of her vows, that she would build the hall for a sacred house” (*cum mundum linquens Demetrias Amnia virgo clauderet extremum non moritura diem, haec tibi, papa Leo, votorum extrema suorum tradidit, ut sacrae surgeret aula domus*).

121. The problems associated with any attempt to profile aristocratic patronage in Rome in this period are well illuminated in a recent chapter on Christian heiresses of the senatorial class in fifth-century Rome by Kate Cooper, “Poverty, Obligation, and Inheritance: Roman Heiresses and the Varieties of Senatorial Christianity in Fifth-Century Rome,” in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900*, ed. Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165–89. Cooper, “Poverty, Obligation,” 172, admits that the evidence for ownership is slim in the case of Italian private foundations, which included churches, *xenodocheia*, and monasteries.

122. Celestine, *ep.* 23 to Theodosius II (*ACO* 1, pt. 2, 90). Cooper, “Poverty, Obligation,” 169, comments that although such instruments existed for the very rich to make the kind of regular, recurring donations that bishops hoped for, they were not used as frequently as they might have been.

century, with the establishment of the aristocratic ascetic as a conduit for direct and indirect giving to the poor. Here again, most Christian texts of this period conceived of the recipients of such generosity, the involuntary poor, as objects of charity without any corporeal reality or thoughts and feelings of their own. This tendency to dehumanize the poor was a hang-over from the classical model. It was not the recipient that really mattered but the giver and his/her salvation. The Pelagian treatise *De divitiis* is one of the few Christian texts to treat the bodies and minds of the involuntary poor.<sup>123</sup> It is striking that one has to go beyond the parameters of orthodoxy to find such recognition of the humanity of the ordinary poor.

### *Legal Evidence for the Maintenance of Existing Social Relations*

The maintenance of the *status quo* in social relations between rich and poor in the late fourth and fifth centuries is also reflected in imperial law codes of this period. Grodzynski made a major study of all socio-juridical terms referring to the poor in the Theodosian Code, looking for a shift in terminology that would reflect Patlagean's distinction between the civic identification of need (which was based on the binary classification of *humiliores/honestiores*), and the economic identification of the poor that characterized—according to Patlagean—the fourth to seventh centuries. The language of low civic status included *vilis*, *inferior*, *plebs*, *populus*, *humilis*, and its comparative *humilior*. Within the second category, that of economic terminology, Grodzynski identified the following shades of meaning: *inopia* and the substantive *inops* were the most common terms for the poorest of the poor, usually those who became poor as the result of some accident or disaster; *egestas* and the nominal participle *egens* designated the poorest of the poor, an artificially created poverty imposed by state penalty; *tenuis*, and the comparative *tenuior* were vague terms for the relative poor; and *pauper* and *paupertas* were generic terms including all the other kinds of poverty: accidental, penal, temporary, or permanent.<sup>124</sup>

123. Anonymus, *De divitiis* 20.6 (trans. B. R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and His Followers* [Woodridge and Rochester, NY: Boynton Press, 1991], 210), cited by Holman, *Hungry are Dying*, 51 n. 98. Peter Garnsey, "The Originality and Origins of Anonymus, *De divitiis*," in *From Rome to Constantinople. Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, ed. Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), 29–45, discusses possible antecedents to the condemnation of the ownership of private property expressed in *De divitiis*, and concludes (45), "Anonymus, *De divitiis* is to be seen as a product of the kind of cross-fertilization that took place routinely as the educated classes of the Empire came to embrace Christianity."

124. Denise Grodzynski "Pauvres et indigents, vils et plebeians (une étude terminologique sur le vocabulaire des petites gens dans le code théodosien)," *Studia et documenta historiae et iuris* 53 (1987): 140–218, at 146–52, 154–57, and 160–68.

Grodzynski's findings demonstrated that, although a bold new start was made by Constantine, who implemented two laws specifically aimed at helping those in need,<sup>125</sup> imperial disdain for the *plebs* grew stronger in the fifth century. While some laws purported to offer help to the needy, such as those governing the *annona*, in fact such distributions of grain and meat were still linked to citizenship and property ownership. Tax relief for plebeians was limited to certain provinces and did not entail the widespread movement of the poor into cities that Patlagean nominated as "the demographic motor that drove the replacement of a classical by a medieval, Byzantine notion of society."<sup>126</sup> Patlagean based her demographic theory on her reading of *Cod. Theod.* 13.10.2.<sup>127</sup> As Grodzynski points out, however, this law only exempted citizens of the eastern provinces from the *captatio plebeia*, and from 313 C.E. onwards, only citizens of Lycia and Pamphilia. Thus it would not have prompted the kind of rural exodus and demographic increase in cities posited by Patlagean as a root cause for a massive shift in social relations.<sup>128</sup> Far from being obviated by a new economic understanding of poverty, in the fifth century distinctions between social classes became more clearly defined, and the gap between rich and poor more entrenched, with the revocation of social status used as a punishment for misdemeanors by those who had escaped their lowly origins.<sup>129</sup> Social honors were made available only to those above plebeian rank and they could be easily revoked in the event of criminal activity. The *defensores plebis* who were appointed to look after the needs of the poor in cities had to be restrained by law from abuses against them.<sup>130</sup>

The other startling result of Grodzynski's study is the dearth of new legislation aimed at relieving the economic difficulties faced by the plebeian

125. The first law, *Cod. Theod.* 11.27.1 (Mommsen and Meyer 616), promulgated in 315 and 329 C.E., was aimed at parents of newborns in Italy who were to be provided with food immediately upon request by the imperial officer, in order "that the hands of parents may be restrained from parricide" (trans. C. Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and Sirmondian Constitutions*, Corpus of Roman Law 1 [New York: Greenwood, 1969], 318). The second law, *Cod. Theod.* 11.27.2 (Mommsen and Meyer 616–17) aimed to prevent indigent parents in Africa from having to sell their children into slavery by providing grain from the state stores. This law was promulgated by Constantine in 322 C.E.

126. As Brown described Patlagean's theory, *Poverty and Leadership*, 10. Grodzynski, "Pauvres," 196 and n. 107.

127. Mommsen and Meyer 763.

128. Patlagean's thesis is challenged by Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, 10 and 75–76, who points out that a huge influx of immigrants into urban centers had occurred periodically throughout the empire in the centuries before the fourth.

129. Grodzynski, "Pauvres," 202.

130. Grodzynski, "Pauvres," 199.

class. In Rome only two laws relating to the *plebs* were passed in this period and both were punitive: the first, issued in 390 C.E. mandated the removal of pederasts of this class from the city.<sup>131</sup> The second was issued by Emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III in 425 C.E., as the result of an ecclesiastical schism that had developed in Rome over the incumbent of the papal throne, Celestine (422–432 C.E.).<sup>132</sup> According to this edict, all *plebs* who had removed themselves from communion with the pope were to be punished by the Prefect of the City. Grodzynski expressed disappointment that there was so little disjunction between the pre-Christian Roman imperial period and the later Roman Empire of the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>133</sup> Social governance in the later Roman Empire, at least as reflected in the Theodosian Code, depended on the maintenance of a strict hierarchy of social-juridical categories that were property-dependent and reversible. The poor did not come off very well at all under this schema.

The Justinian Code presents a similar picture. A law of unknown date condemns clerics, bishops, or *chorepiscopi* for exacting “gifts” (*munera* or *primitiae*) from laypersons as a kind of tax, and for withholding baptism and communion from those who would not pay.<sup>134</sup> In the sixth century, begging was once again made illegal in Constantinople, at around the same time as able-bodied unemployed males were banned from the city,<sup>135</sup> indications that the legal status of the poor had not improved much since the pontificate of Leo.

## CONCLUSION

Western Christian texts of this period do not show any recognition of the poor as a protected economic group or as social agents; rather, their poor are anonymous, passive recipients of alms and donations of food and clothing. They rarely acknowledge the poor person’s need for human dignity or human rights, unlike eastern texts of the fourth century, especially the homilies of the Cappadocians.<sup>136</sup> The poor may have gained “social power

131. *Cod. Theod.* 9.7.6 (Mommsen and Meyer 448); Grodzynski, “Pauvres,” 199.

132. *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.62 (Mommsen and Meyer 877); Grodzynski, “Pauvres,” 200.

133. Grodzynski, “Pauvres,” 214: “Or le statut juridique des personnes et des groupes ne change guère encore qu’il soit plus nuancé.”

134. *CI* 1.3.38.2 (*CIC* 2, ed. Paul Krueger, 11th ed. [Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1989], 24). Cited by Patlagean, *Pauvreté*, 276.

135. Patlagean, “Poor,” 21.

136. E.g. Basil, *hom.* 6 (*Homilia in illud: Destruam horrea mea*) (ed. and trans. Yves Courtonne, *Saint Basile, Homélie sur la richesse: Édition critique et exégétique*

in public rhetoric” in the fourth century, as Holman maintains,<sup>137</sup> but they had failed to take any real power in the fifth century, at least in the West. Self-interest remained the dominant motive for charitable giving in both the private and public spheres. This was encouraged by Christian preachers such as Augustine, Chrysostom, and Leo, as they sought to use a language of debt and repayment that their audiences could understand. The much older biblical language of claims simply failed to make an impact against the language of commerce and appeals to the wealthy giver’s need for social recognition. Leo’s rhetoric against the useless largesse of the *magnifici* shows that the worthy purpose of the gift mattered more in his era than it had in the heady days of classical euergetism. The needy now registered as legitimate recipients of such civic generosity, but the tight-fisted demands of classical patronage constrained the degree to which this new rhetorical conception could take hold, and the benefits of such public giving were still framed in terms of personal social capital. While no one expected the poor to repay their debts in this life, some benefit had to be found for giving, even if it was (only) divine reward in the *eschaton*. Genuine charity, the true gift, which expected nothing in return and respected the recipients’ right to anonymity, as well as their legal right to protection from exploitation by the wealthy, remained elusive. To put it another way, fifth-century giving remained stuck in the circle of exchange.

How successful were fifth-century bishops as champions of the poor? We have seen that their power to bring about social change, even if they wanted to, was constrained by the imperial administration’s reluctance to reform a tax system that exploited the powerless, and especially those without property. Even those bishops who advocated on behalf of the poor had to work within an imperial framework which accorded them no real power. Bishops co-opted the Psalmist’s and Hebrew prophets’ appeals for justice and mercy as images of their own generosity and the generosity they hoped to inspire in their audience. In this way, they sought to model giving to the poor according to much older Jewish traditions, especially in their role as judges in the episcopal court. Their homilies were usually directed towards people whose means to give were much greater than

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[Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1935], 15–37); *hom. 7 (Homilia in divites)* (Courtonne 39–71); and *hom. 8 (Homilia dicta tempore famis et siccitatis)* (PG 31:304–28). *Homs. 6 and 8* have recently been translated by Anna Silvas, “The Emergence of Basil’s Social Doctrine: A Chronological Enquiry,” in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church 5: Poverty and Riches*, ed. Geoffrey Dunn, David Luckensmeyer, and Lawrence Cross (Strathfield: St Pauls Press, 2009), 133–76.

137. See n. 108 above.

their own, the aristocratic converts who were faced with various models of withdrawal from society. As we have seen in relation to Demetrias Anicia, the model favored by the majority in the west involved minimal self-sacrifice, and respected the traditional need of donors for positive publicity for acts of euergetism.

One might ask how things had changed from the perspective of the needy. If you were in need of charity in the fifth century, would you be better off under a Christian emperor and bishop than you would have been in pre-Christian Rome? Unless you could get onto the bishop's poor roll, as a widow or orphan,<sup>138</sup> or into the retinue of a wealthy ascetic on a private estate, probably not. There are only a few literary references to hospitals for the sick and hostels for poor travelers in the West in this period—the senator Pammachius's private funding of a hostel for travelers is one of few such institutions recorded in the West.<sup>139</sup> There is even less archeological evidence for this kind of foundation. Such late antique Christian institutions sought to fill the gaps between ties of patronage, and in doing so weakened existing patronage networks. The poor were increasingly described by Christian bishops—both western and eastern—as vehicles for the salvation of the rich, and they lacked social agency and legal autonomy. This was a departure from the rabbinic attitude to poverty and the poor, which advocated respect for the anonymity of the recipient, and an approach to giving that favored loans and practical aid over alms. The doctrine of redemptive almsgiving, as we have seen, flourished in rabbinic texts from the first century C.E. onwards as an alternative route to atonement, and was eagerly embraced by Christian bishops, who found it consistent with the self-interested model of euergetism practiced by Greco-Roman aristocrats. Therefore we cannot interpret an emphasis in homi-

138. The first evidence for the poor roll (*matricula pauperum*) in Africa occurs in Hippo: see Augustine, *ep.* 20\*.2 (NBA 23a:160).

139. Pammachius was also famous for giving a funeral banquet for the poor in the narthex of St. Peter's basilica after the death of his wife (on which see Grig, "Throwing Parties," 146–50), thereby illustrating how a wealthy individual might engage in both direct and indirect giving to the poor. Compare Augustine's complaint, in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 102.12 (NBA 27/1:608–10), that wealthy donors would rather fund public spectacles than give to the poor. The eastern church seems to have been better at funding such institutions. John Chrysostom founded hospitals (*nosokomeia*) in Constantinople, c. 400 C.E. (Palladius, *Dialogus de vita Iohannis Chrysostomi* 5.130–39 [SC 341:122]), and a *xenodocheion* in which the church of Constantinople provided care for poor travelers to the city (John Chrysostom, *In acta apostolorum homilia* 45 [PG 90:319.10–320.29]). Basil's hospice for the poor (*ptōchotropheion*) was established by 372 or 373 C.E. (Basil, *ep.* 150.3 [Courtonne 74]) and continued to provide for the poor in the fifth century (Sozomen, *b. e.* 6.34.9 [SC 495:432]).

letic texts on this sort of giving as evidence of a change of heart towards the poor or of a great upheaval in social relations, such as was posited by Patlagean, Holman, Finn, and Brown. The legal evidence concurs that citizens continued to be favored as recipients of imperial largesse and that the status of the *plebs* sank even lower in the fifth century. The poor as a social-juridical category continued to be discriminated against, and, within religious frameworks, to be judged according to their orthodoxy (whether Jewish or Christian) and moral worthiness. Thus we should interpret the preaching of redemptive almsgiving in fifth-century Christian texts, such as the homilies of Leo the Great, as signaling social stagnation rather than indicating the advent of a new era of generosity to the poor.

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