

Leitourgia and the Poor in the Early Christian World

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 . . .

Julian to Arsacius, high priest of Galatia

That which the Hellenes call philanthropy puts us to shame!

Basil, Homily 8.8

One morning in the sixth century, in a cave near the Jordan River, as Sisinnius the monk was singing the liturgical office for “the third hour,” a Saracen Christian woman entered his cave, took off her clothes, and lay down on the floor. John Moschos, who tells the story, says that Sisinnius, “not distracted,” went on singing. When his worship was complete he said to the woman, “Don’t you know that those who play the harlot go to [perdition]?” She acknowledged that she knew this. He asked, “Then why do you prostitute yourself?” She answered, *ὄτι πτωῶ*, “because I am hungry.” This Greek phrase is the text’s only direct quote of the woman’s side of the conversation. Sisinnius—who “had abandoned his own bishopric for the sake of God”¹—responded directly. Instructing her to stop her prostitution and come instead each day to his cave, he said, “I began giving her some of the food that God provided for me to eat, until I left those parts.”²

The story of Sisinnius and the impoverished, hungry woman illustrates the central dynamic with which this chapter is concerned: the relationship of the poor in the ancient world to the leitourgia of religious and civic practice. While a special re-

lationship took shape in the fourth century C.E. between those who practiced leitourgia and the poor around them³—in this case both those who chose religious poverty and those who did not—certain social dynamics between social liturgies and the needy may be identified much earlier.

Leitourgia and Graeco-Roman Euergetism

Leitourgia and the (Absent) Poor

Peter Brown, Paul Veyne, and others have illustrated how food doles, communal religious feasts, public works, or subsidized public entertainment prior to the Christianization of Graeco-Roman culture did not function out of any concern to alleviate poverty per se. The leitourgia of the gymnasiarch funded the education of those boys eligible for such training, either by their noble birth or their ability to finance the public obligations that would be expected of them as trained ephebes.⁴ Those whose leitourgia funded performances and feasts had similar stated aims: to assert social power and do one’s honorable duty. The donor fulfilled civic obligations while the recipients, by participating, were implicitly expected to show their gratitude by granting the benefactor praise, honor, and loyalty. Social inequality was not only understood, but essential for the system to work. Aristotle operates on this premise in his distinction between leitourgia and friendship, when he says that friendship expects an *equal* exchange of goods or value between the parties. If the recipients could not give as much as they received, then the act was a leitourgia, a “public service.”⁵ In Latin the various acts of euergetism involved in a leitourgia were called *beneficentiae*.

Much of the ancient world lived “hand-to-mouth,” often quite literally. Economics in the ancient world operated within a “gift economy” in which reciprocal obligations maintained social stability between friends as well as between benefactor and recipient. Patronage provided both a social and economic buffer, linking intangible networks of interactive debts in a world that had no monetary “federal reserve” as such. The patron by his leitourgia funded projects—baths, gymnasia, theaters, monuments, fountains, feasts, and so on—which provided tangible securities and rewards. By this process the funding of public events was effectively an investment in the human body, as that body was trained, entertained, and fed within the larger context of benefits to the entire community.

Thus, while poverty was certainly a reality in the ancient world, the poor did not comprise a discrete social or political category, and poverty was *not* a criteria for assistance. Those at the receiving end of social benefits were eligible solely by nature of their membership in the community, either because they were citizens of the city

1. John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale* 93 (PG 87:292), ed. and trans. John Wortley, *John Moschos, The Spiritual Meadow (Pratum Spirituale)*, Cistercian Studies Series 139 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Press, 1992), 75.

2. *Prat. Spir.* 136 (PG 87:3000), trans. Wortley, 11–12. The phrase “until I left those parts” is ambiguous, since it is possible he did not leave his cave until his death. The woman visits him in his “cave near the holy Jordan” (*Prat. Spir.* 136), and Moschos’s story about Sisinnius’s death (*Prat. Spir.* 93) describes his solitary life with a disciple “near the village called Bethabara, about 6 miles away from the holy Jordan.”

3. For a parallel account of a holy man defying monastic appearances to feed a starving prostitute, see the account of Symeon the holy fool in Evagrius Scholasticus’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4.34; for discussion see Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leonitis’ ‘Life’ and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 33.

4. See Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 118–19 and 199–201 (inscriptions D54–D57).

5. Arist., *Nicomachian Ethics* 10.31 = 1163a29.

or because of some socially recognized dependence (as kin, clients, or friends) to a particular patron. For example, the Egyptian, Petosiris, is clearly appealing to such a person when, in the third century B.C.E., he scribbles on a piece of papyrus: "... Also I have nothing to wear and we are living in the open. Will you kindly then order them to give me 4 drachmai, that I may buy at least an old cloak...?"⁶ Petosiris's request is not directly for alms, but he asks the recipient to exercise some recognized power to pull strings for him. True, he happens to be homeless and ragged but, more importantly, he has a social identity that allows him to appeal as a friend to someone with influence.

The language of many inscriptions emphasizes the communal rather than individual nature of Greek leitourgia and its relationship to piety. An inscription from Pegae around 60 B.C.E. praises the patron who "gave a dinner to *all the citizens and residents* [*paioikoi*] and to the Romans residing with us and to the slaves of all these and their sons and the slaves' children. In order then that others also may emulate such deeds for *the advantage of the city*... the people of Pegae [honor] Soteles... for his goodwill and *reverent spirit towards the gods*..."⁷

This emphasis on both religious piety and generosity to the population as a group is seen as well in another inscription from the first century C.E., praising the benefactor Euphrosynus and his wife Epigone. This couple "rebuilt the temples which had been in utter ruins and they added dining rooms... and provided the [religious] societies with treasures, extending their piety not only to the gods but to the places themselves... [and Epigone further provided] all men alike with a festive banquet."⁸ Euergeteis were also praised when they provided food free or at subsidized prices during times of shortage. An inscription from Camerinum (central Italy) in the late second century C.E. remembers that "his man's father often met the burden of the corn supply when corn was dear and frequently he gave a feast."⁹

These food gifts were usually consumed at the site of the feast, but there might sometimes be provisions for carryout meals, or "doggie bags." An inscription from Stratonicea (Asia Minor) from the late first or early second century C.E. praises a short-term voluntary priest and priestess for "opening the sacred refectory of the god to every class and age and to the out-of-town visitors with the most ready goodwill and lavish generosity; [they] entertained also the body of elders in the city with food to be carried away."¹⁰ These inscriptions suggest that in the Greek and Roman model the needs of the individual were addressed most often under the general umbrella of communal provisions for the entire community. Basil praises precisely this Greek philanthropy in his famine sermon when he refers specifically to the feasts cooked at one hearth for the entire Greek *dēmos* (Hom. 8.8). Although the early inscriptions

6. P. Mich. inv. 3098 (C. C. Edgar, ed., *PMich* I [1921], 90), trans. the University of Michigan Papyrus Collection APIS (Advanced Papyrological Information System), www.hi.umd.edu/bn/apis-idx.
7. IG 8.190 (IOAI 1907, 17ff.; Laum, No. 22) cited in Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 181 (D10); my emphasis.

8. IG 5.2.168 (BCH 20.126, Laum, No. 5); cited in Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 183 (D13).

9. H. Dessau, ed., *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (1892–1916), 6640; cited in Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 187 (D26).

10. BCH 1891.184f., No. 29; cf. BCH 1927.57ff.; cited in Hands, *Charity and Social Aid*, 190 (D33).

34. The Hungry Are Dying

do not exclude the possibility of individual assistance on the basis of individual need, they do not mention it. While poverty as such certainly existed among those who witnessed these feasts, the "poor" themselves—as a discrete social group—are encompassed under the umbrella of other social categories or else excluded from the feasts because they fit no acceptable category.

Greco-Roman Perceptions of the Poor

Although "the poor" in the ancient Greek and Roman texts does not carry the modern sense of a categorical noun often implying a subject with moral rights to aid or pity, it is used in the ancient world as a descriptive noun in many texts, denoting some group with certain identifiable characteristics. The following passing remarks reveal a variety of views.

The comic playwrights sometimes mentioned beggars, although usually as a joke or satire. Aristophanes supplies a particularly lively description of the very poor in his *Ploutos*. Here Chremylos, a seeker of wealth, is waylaid by Penia, poverty personified as a woman, who argues her positive attributes. Chremylos angrily attacks her praise of poverty with a long harangue worth quoting in full for what it reveals about one ancient Greek perception of the destitute. Chremylos says,

Why, what good could you provide except a crowd of blisters on coming from the bath, of starveling urchins, and old crones? The number of lice and mosquitoes and fleas I don't even mention to you, it is so multitudinous, and they buzz around the head and worry one, raising one up from his bed and telling him, "You will starve, but get up!" And, in addition to these things you give him rags to wear for a cloak, and instead of a couch, a rush mattress alive with bugs—a thing that awakens the sleeper. And you give him a rotten mat to keep instead of a carpet; and instead of a pillow, a stone of goodly size for the head; and to feed not on loaves but on mallow-shoots, and instead of a barley-cake dry radish-tops; and instead of a bench, the head of a broken jar; and instead of a kneading-rough the side of a cask, and even that cask-side broken. Now tell me, do I show you to be the cause of many blessings to all men?¹¹

Penia responds to Chremylos by objecting that what he describes is not *penia* but *ptōcheia*, "beggary," to which Chremylos replies, "*Penia*, *ptōcheia*, what's the difference?"¹² The Greeks clearly perceived the poor in terms of an undesirable way of life. The description (nearly half of it preoccupied with bugs) is successfully comic only if it touches a chord with the audience.

Aristophanes' *Ploutos* refers to the destitute in two other intriguing but brief references to the religious role of the Greek leitourgia. One is the monthly *Hekate delphnōn*, a banquet delivered on the thirtieth of each month to the crossroad shrines of Hecate. Chremylos argues that poverty is hardly noble since the poor are temple

11. Ar., *Plutus* 535–47, trans. M. T. Quinn, *The Plutus of Aristophanes* (London: George Bell, 1921), 19.

12. *Ibid.*, 549; lit., "Well, anyway, we call them sisters, *ptōcheia* and *penia*."

thieves, regularly robbing the goddess of her offering by snatching it as soon as it reaches the shrine.¹³ The other feast is that of Theseus; the slave Cario speaks to the chorus (representing “aged men”) as to those who at the “feast of Theseus” have often “sopped up much soup with very little bread.”¹⁴ Here again the context mocks the social practice: Cario’s reference implies that this beggar’s meal¹⁵ was regarded as insufficient by those who participated; his audience might expect better times now that wealth is blind no longer. There is no further reference to this meal in the play, but these two passing comments suggest that the destitute in ancient Greece were able to benefit from religious festivals, either by “theft” or by explicit opportunities for the needy to obtain free food in a religious context. Citizens—and comic playwrights—might consider the beggar a dishonorable sponger, but even this image implies that beggars were tolerated at the fringe of community life, including religious feasts.

Most discussion of poverty in the ancient world is less entertaining than Aristophanes. Plautus, for example, may be either ironic or caustic when he implies that pity might be a valid reason to let a beggar starve: “He does the beggar a bad service who gives him meat and drink, for what he gives is lost, and the lives of the poor are merely prolonged to their own misery.”¹⁶ The moralists and philosophers usually referred to the poor (if they referred to them at all) in terms of their “moral worthiness” (or lack thereof). Plato, for example, argued that alms ought only to go to beggars whose lives were worthy: “It is not the starving as such or the similarly afflicted who deserve sympathy, but the man who, in spite of his moderation or some other virtue or progress toward it, nevertheless experiences some misfortune.”¹⁷ This implies that individual private charity was considered acceptable and also presumes a prior acquaintance with the man who begs, in order to determine whether he is—or has been—virtuous enough to help. Aristotle, too, argues for giving only to those who are worthy,¹⁸ but emphasizes that the most excellent and “honorable” expenditures are “expenses for the gods—dedications, temples, sacrifices and so on for everything divine—and expenses that provoke a good competition for honor, to the benefit of the community, as for example if some city thinks a splendid chorus or warship or a feast for the city must be provided.”¹⁹ When reproached for giving to a “bad” man, Aristotle replied, “It is the man I pitied [ἠλάνησα], not his character [ἥθος].”²⁰ Aristotle’s comment evidences the common classical and early Hellenistic view that one only gave to beggars out of regard for the particular individual—and that this took

13. *Ibid.*, 594–97.

14. *Ibid.*, 627–28.

15. “In token of the unity [Theseus] introduced into the Athenian commonwealth, the poorer classes were entertained at a meal, apparently not of very sumptuous character, provided at the public cost . . . workhouse meals, as we may almost deem them.” B. B. Rogers, *Aristophanes*, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1924), 342z, note a.

16. Plautus, *Trinummus* 339, trans. Hands, *Charity and Social Aid*, 65.

17. Pl., *Leg.* 1.1936.90, trans. Trevor J. Saunders, *Plato: The Laws* (New York: Penguin, 1970), 484.

18. E.g., *Eth. Nic.* 4.32–47 = 1120a25ff.

19. Arist., *Eth. Nic.* 4.45 = 1122b30, trans. Terence Irwin, *Aristotle: Nichomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 95.

20. Diog. Laert. 5.17, trans. R. D. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925), 1.460–61.

into account the individual’s place in the network of civic relationships. Although Aristotle’s systematic philosophy had little following for centuries, his comment here—and the purported occasion for it—suggest a preoccupation with moral “worth” in individual acts of “charity” by both Greeks and Romans.

The importance of civic identity in public assistance is illustrated in Dio Chrysostom’s account of social responses to a second-century famine. In *Oratio* 50, he talks about “pitying” “the commons” (*demoi*), and easing their burdens. Yet Dio emphasizes that this obligation assumes social inequity: “We attend to the feet of a body if they are worse off than the eyes.”²¹ Feet, Dio here implies, have value only insofar as they promote the effective progress of the corporate system. It benefits the city if one restores to a citizen the assets that have been unjustly lost; these “worthy” members of society would then be re-enabled to participate in the social order of the *polis*. Cicero and Seneca both discuss in Stoic terms the poor person who may approach them for legal representation. Cicero emphasizes both the role of social inequality and the importance of moral “worth” in granting beneficence to a client. In the *De officiis* he asserts:

It is bitter as death for [the wealthy] to have accepted a patron or to be called clients. Your man of slender means, on the other hand, feels that whatever is done for him is done out of regard for himself and not for his outward circumstances. . . . If one defends a man who is poor [*inopem*] but honest and upright, all the lowly [*humiles*] who are not dishonest—and there is a large population of that sort among the people—look upon such an advocate as a tower of defense raised up for them. . . . but in conferring favors our decision should depend entirely upon a man’s character.²²

In contrast, Seneca in his treatise *De clementia*, argues against all emotive factors, particularly mercy (*misericordia*), which causes irrational pathos and is thus a mental defect in those who seek self-control over the passions. The Stoic position on the passions was clearly contrary to much common opinion in the Roman world. Seneca’s argument opposes pathos strictly in order to benefit justice: the good leader and judge “will not avert his countenance or his sympathy from anyone because he has a withered leg, or is emaciated and in rags, and is old and leans upon a staff, but all the *work he will aid and will, like a god, look graciously upon the unfortunate*.”²³ The emotions that the good judge denies are those of revulsion, here treated as an unnatural *pathos* that would tempt him to treat the suppliant unjustly. The Stoics rejected action that was based in violent *pathos* but argued for action when it was motivated by ideals of piety and justice. Within Seneca’s text, the role of the good judge is intrinsically religious: he imitates the gods’ divine justice who treats “the worthy” poor fairly. These texts clearly imply that some Greeks and Romans did give to beggars. Al-

21. Dio Chrys., *Or.* 50.3–4, trans. H. Lamar Crosby, *Dio Chrysostom*, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), 434–15.

22. Cic., *Off.* 2.20, trans. Walter Miller, in *Cicero XXI: De Officiis*, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1913), 21.244–47.

23. Sen., *Clem.* 2.6.3, trans. J. W. Basore, in *Seneca I: Moral Essays*, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 1.442–43; my emphasis.

though much of this evidence — brief, passing references in literature, philosophy and Greek comedy — is at best allusive, the poor were at least visible enough to be scorned and to survive, perhaps barely, in Classical and Hellenistic culture. The very existence of Cynic philosophers, who lived by begging, presumed that beggars might successfully survive on alms. One of the few beggars still visible against the walls of the ancient city — only because he was painted onto it — may represent a Cynic beggar. This is the image preserved on a fresco from Pompeii; the context is too fragmentary to provide a substantial commentary on alms in the Roman city.²⁴

Yet these beggars remained conceptually peripheral to the community itself. Peter Brown argues, in discussing the fourth century C.E., that “the homeless and destitute were excluded” from “the self-image of the traditional city.”²⁵ Thus, he goes on, “in the opinion of Libanius, . . . outcasts without home or city could never be considered members of a citizen body. . . . The Christian bishop . . . erected his claim to authority over a social void. The poor were defined as those who belonged to no social grouping.”²⁶

To be excluded from a civic self-image, however, does not require that the poor were excluded from the ancient city itself, nor from all civic activities. After all, while the poor as such may be absent from the texts, destitute individuals were not necessarily absent from the feasts. The feast at Pégae, cited earlier, welcomed anyone who happened to show up: citizens, regional residents, Romans, slaves, and everyone’s children. The way in which the playwrights construct beggars appeals to images undoubtedly familiar to the audience. The moralists and philosophers also recognized beggars and qualified alms in moral terms. These are not texts that exclude the poor. Rather, as Brown suggests, they exclude them very literally from the civic image. The problem of absence and exclusion, as Michael DeVinnie has recently explored it,²⁷ was a problem of select visibility. The destitute who roamed about the city constituted no discrete, conceptualized group and few considered them worth discussing except to criticize their plight or when numbers posed a political threat. *Prochoi* and *pentēs*, as Aristophanes suggests, were terms with particular meanings, but this meaning was of an ideological category only; it did not imply a social group. One might use these terms as labels, but those so labeled in any particular reference were more generally perceived (if they were perceived at all) in terms of other aspects of civic identity.²⁸

24. For this image, which appears to depict a noble lady and subordinate female companion giving a coin to a bent, slung figure in rags who leans on a cane and is accompanied by a dog, see Robert Étienne, *Pompeii: The Day a City Died*, trans. Caroline Palmer (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 74. The presence of what appears to be a dog may further suggest the Cynic allusion.

25. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 84.

26. *Ibid.*, 91, citing Libanius, *Or.* 411 (3300).

27. Discussed in the Introduction and chapter 2.

28. It would be interesting to compare this evolving categorization of poverty, as it influenced particular body-identity, with recent studies exploring body-identity in late antiquity as it was defined in terms of gender (by which I mean physical state) or sexuality (by which I mean behavior). I think, however, that such a comparison cannot be done properly without a clear sense of body-identity as it relates to poverty. This latter emphasis must remain my chief concern for the present study.

Food Gifts: Annona and Alimenta

The distribution of free grain to Roman citizens (the *annona*) and to select children in certain Roman cities (the *alimenta*) functioned within this system of selective patronage which was concerned more with civic identity than with individual poverty. While the dole and the *alimenta* undoubtedly had an economic effect on the cities in which they took place, poverty was not an explicitly articulated motivation for these activities. The grain dole was an act of imperial *euergetism* under the special jurisdiction of the emperor, and he granted it only to certain cities.²⁹ It is important to understand how the grain doles worked, since they were the largest available model for what eventually became poverty relief under the supervision of Christian bishops, the religious and civic patrons of late antiquity.

Although the Roman grain allotment was not in itself a poverty-relief program, later Jewish and Christian assistance to the poor usually used a similar form of doling out food and sometimes clothing. When the poor *qua* poor enter the civic leiturgia in the fourth century C.E., as beneficiaries eligible because of their poverty, this assistance to a newly particularized population was practiced in the forms familiar to the patronage system: handouts of food and other benefices, often regulated by administrative paperwork. Patronage as a concept implied feeding; the patron was sometimes referred to as the *trophæus*, one who nurtured with food. Understanding the Roman system, therefore, helps us to see how the administration of later religious charity did not create itself *de novo* but built on ancient traditions of civic practice.

The *alimenta* was an allotment to meet the needs of select Roman children in various cities throughout the empire, probably with the motive of increasing the “worthy” population. It began under Hadrian in the second century and provided for children from birth until age 14 (for girls) or 18 (for boys).³⁰ Inscriptions describe the administration, but the selection process is unclear. There is often a marked gender bias in the enrollment and even when equal numbers of boys and girls were enrolled, girls received a smaller portion for a shorter time.³¹ These children probably lived with their own families. The scheme was not linked (in the inscriptions) to poverty, though redistribution within a recipient’s family might have occurred if food was short. The *alimenta* no longer existed as such by Constantine’s time; his order

29. See Gordon, “The Veil of Power: Emperors, Sacrificers, and Benefactors,” in Beard and North, eds., *Pagan Priests*, 199–255. For a more complete discussion of the *alimenta* and doles, see Richard Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); *idem*, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Geoffrey Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and Bondewijn Stijts, *Food for Rome* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1991, and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1994).

30. Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale*, 288.

31. Duncan-Jones (*ibid.*, 294) notes that at Veleia between 102 and 113 C.E. the scheme supported 246 boys and 35 girls. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply*, 67) also notes a sharp distinction in Miletus, where 118 boys and 28 girls received aid.

that provisions be supplied to families whose children were otherwise at risk of being sold suggests an attention to poverty absent from the earlier *alimenta* records.³²

The grain dole was much broader in scope than the *alimenta*. The early Romans had collected grain as tax in the late fourth century B.C.E., and the term *annona* originally meant the “yearly return” from land over which Rome held power.³³ The *frumentationes*, allotments of free or subsidized grain, became incorporated into the *annona* in 123 B.C.E. when G. Sempronius Gracchus passed it as one piece of legislation among several otherwise short-lived political reforms.³⁴ The *frumentationes* were a distribution of grain made to select Roman citizens, usually plebs.³⁵ Free grain distribution quickly became an effective campaign promise in the realm of political competition; by the time Augustus rose to power, one-third of the citizens of Rome were receiving a free grain allotment. Augustus reduced the number to one-seventh of the population, took the *cura annonae* (task of supplying provisions) as his personal responsibility, and established the office of the *praefectus annonae* to oversee its administration. Grain remained an essential element in the emperor’s identity as *trophaeus*, particularly in his patronage of Rome and later Constantinople, although other cities also benefited.³⁶ It was never at any time a universal program throughout the empire, nor did entitlement ever extend to all the citizens in any city. While it was linked to citizenship rather than poverty, the common upper-class fear of riots if the shipment failed suggests an element of genuine need among the recipients.³⁷ Those who might riot were, after all, the lowest rung of society. The *frumentationes* continued as an imperial benefice until they were finally abolished in Constantinople in 618.³⁸

The grain came to Rome by ship from Egypt and North Africa, requiring a tightly controlled and extensive system of officials, warehouses, shipping arrangements, and distribution. Even with careful administration, success depended ultimately on the weather, the harvest, and the sea. The extraordinarily extensive number of surviving written records and legislation on the dole suggests just how vital collection and distribution was to Rome.³⁹

Eligible recipients in Rome or Constantinople had to be Roman citizens, meet a minimum age requirement,⁴⁰ and own the home in which they actually resided in

32. For Constantine’s law providing food, see CT II.27.1, discussed further on p. 56. For laws controlling the sale and redemption of freedom children, see CJ 4.43.2, 5.10.1, and 5.9.1. See also John Boswell’s discussion in his *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Random House, 1988), 70–72.

33. Sirkis, *Food for Rome*, 10.

34. These reforms concerned redistribution of land but not relief of poverty per se.

35. Sirkis, *Food for Rome*, 12.

36. *Ibid.*, 12–13; see also R. J. Rowland, “The ‘Very Poor’ and the Grain Dole at Rome and Oxyrhynchus,” *ZPE* 21 (1976): 69–72.

37. Notwithstanding Dio Chrysostom’s comment in *Or.* 46.41 that “need [for food] develops self-control.”

38. Sirkis, *Food for Rome*, 12 fn 13.

39. For a detailed study, see Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome*.

40. For the occasional exception of children receiving the *annona*, see *ibid.*, 184.

the city.⁴¹ The dole was issued monthly and some evidence suggests an average ration of 5 modii, that is, a supply of between 3,000 and 4,000 calories a day.⁴² While this would sufficiently feed one active man who ate nothing but grain, the pottion in fact supplemented the diet of entire households, which presumably included pulses, vegetables, fruit, wine, oil, cheese, and occasionally fish or meat.⁴³ During Augustus’s reign recipients were issued *tesserae*, tickets entitling the bearer to the grain ration.⁴⁴ Recipients were frequently referred to as *inisci*, “those engraved,” suggesting further public records. During the Empire one might buy or give away a *tessera frumentaria*, and by the third century there are wills granting heirs a lifelong right to the deceased’s *tessera frumentaria*. Household slaves would presumably benefit from the augmented household food supply, or they might be given their freedom to relieve impoverished or greedy owners from the obligation to feed them adequately. Slaves are, in fact, never included in either Roman or Cappadocian concepts of “the poor,” presumably because, as possessions, they were guaranteed food and clothing, however suboptimal, precisely because of their dependent identity.

Through the second century, distribution in Rome took place at or around the Porticus Minucia. Commodus reorganized the grain shipments, building huge granaries; many of these were in Ostia.⁴⁵ Septimius Severus added oil to the grain distribution and added a tax on the oil from Tripolitania to cover this cost. Aurelian added pork and wine. These products are all low-maintenance, requiring government laborers only at the point of distribution. Oil, wine, and grain can be stored passively for some time with minimal manpower. Pigs must be slaughtered fresh but until slaughter require minimal care and can be fed almost anything.

The form of the distribution changed radically in the third century, from whole grain to baked bread, setting into motion the need for a new level of state-funded labor: baking. This significantly altered the entire government structure. The *collegia* of Roman bakers was never quite the same again.

The bakers of Rome became functionally enslaved to state control. The state took over the *collegia* and the lives of bakers and their children, forbidding any to change their occupation and even enforcing marriages within the *collegia*.⁴⁶ Even so, there was a chronic shortage of bakers. By Theodosius’s day stories circulated of Roman bars and brothels where one might be forcibly kidnapped to labor in the underground bakeries.⁴⁷ African governors were obligated to help fill this gap by peri-

41. CT II.17.1 (A.D. 364): “The right to the bread rations shall follow the houses,” trans. Clyde Pharr, in *The Theodosian Code* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 418.

42. Rickman, *The Corn Supply*, 173.

43. For the diet of antiquity, see, e.g., Andrew Dalby, *Siren Feasts: A History of Food and Gastronomy in Greece* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Emily Gowers, *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and John Wilkins, David Harvey, and Mike Dobson, eds., *Food in Antiquity* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995).

44. Rickman, *The Corn Supply*, 186 and n. 107.

45. For details see G. E. Rickman, *Roman Granaries and Store Buildings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

46. CT II.3.2 and II.3.14.

47. Socrates in *HE* 5.18.

odically shipping breadmakers to Rome in addition to the usual shipments of wheat.⁴⁸ In 364 and 365 Valentinian and Valens ruled that bakers were forbidden to escape their lot by joining the clergy, any who attempted “can and must be recalled after any length of time to the association of breadmakers.”⁴⁹ The bread of the imperial city was, to even these Christian emperors, a far more urgent priority than the bread of any heavenly city.

Bakers purchased grain from the granaries and prepared the bread in their own bakeries. They could not sell or distribute state grain or bread from their own bakery. Instead, it was distributed from *gradus*, steps at various points throughout the city. Thus public bread was sometimes called *panis gradilis*. Distribution took place on different days in different parts of the city and recipients were on lists for their neighborhood’s *gradus*. Late-fourth-century legislation suggests that the allotment at that time varied according to household size, which was kept on record.

The office of the *praefectus annonae*, established and maintained through Constantine’s reign as a position accorded equestrian status, gained senatorial status by 328. By the mid fourth century, the *praefectus annonae* in both Rome and Constantinople was under the authority of the respective *praefectus urbi* and responsible not only for the procurement of supplies but also for the entire distribution network.

Grain for the dole came into the city from the land and revenue of state-owned properties, or else from supplies purchased with state funds. Most grain came from Egypt and North Africa, but grain might also be levied from towns in Italy, Spain, and Gaul.⁵⁰ The emperor himself determined the size of the city’s grain supply. In Africa in the mid fourth century, the proconsul and vicar of Africa were responsible for seeing that the grain was delivered to coastal granaries and for protecting it from theft and loss. One-third of the amount fixed by the emperor was shipped as early as possible when the seas “opened” in April. Shipping ended in October.

Poverty and the Grain Distributions

Beyond this basic imperial *leitourgia*, the grain dole did not concern itself with relieving unusual or unqualified destitution. Although recipients of the *annona* and *alimenta* undoubtedly included citizens who were poor, their poverty was at worst that of the *penitēs*, not the *ptōchoi*. The food supply remained at all times a state of delicate equilibrium which could be upset at any moment by fire, drought, storms at sea, or political crisis. There was tremendous public anxiety lest provision and distribution fail.

In any gift economy, the gift is one form of the market. The power of the poor in Rome to influence public liturgists existed only insofar as they belonged, by blood or fictive kinship, to either the patron, the community, or both. In the year 51, when the wheat dole was late, the mob pelted Claudius with dry breadcrumbs in the

Forum.⁵¹ Yet the fact that they had uneaten scraps and the energy and willingness to throw them suggests a distress following anxiety rather than acute starvation.

In summary, although the emperor Julian asserted that poverty assistance was practiced “of old” among the Greeks, one looks in vain for any evidence of structured poverty relief *as such* prior to the fourth century C.E. All Greeks who participated in religious feasts benefited from the community meals, but they were not limited to those within the community in need. Among Roman attempts at social redistribution, the Gracchi were concerned only with land reforms. Caesar’s fiscal reforms permitted accumulated interest on old debts but did not affect or forgive the debtors’ obligations to pay off the principal.⁵² The imperial food programs reveal the same focus on social equilibrium rather than equality or poverty assistance programs. The *annona* and the dole undoubtedly had some “trickle-down” effect that benefited the very poor within the households eligible for these benefits, but the goal in both plans was to strengthen the city, not support the weak within it. Thus the poor *qua* poor could neither compete with nor enter into the Graeco-Roman *leitourgia*.

Leitourgia and the (Present) Poor: Judaism

Greek-speaking Jews generally used the word *leitourgia* to refer to liturgy in the terms of Temple ritual. The Septuagint uses it in this way,⁵³ as do Philo⁵⁴ and Josephus.⁵⁵ Yet as with pagans and Christians, the Jews practiced piety not only by ritual but also in very specific social behaviors directed at supporting the needs of the community and strengthening civic or kinship ties. Rabbinic prescriptions for these behaviors illustrate a link similar to that found in the Greek texts between religious practice and communal or civic patronage.⁵⁶ *Leitourgia*, a Greek word, does not of course occur in the rabbinic texts, although it does occur in the Septuagint (see introduction).

There is little inscriptional evidence for Jewish communities in Cappadocia apart from what Christians called “Judaizers,” such as the cult of Theos Hypsistos from which Gregory of Nazianzus’s father had been converted.⁵⁷ Further, Christians throughout the Roman Empire had been reading the Old Testament for three centuries in ways that expressly distanced themselves from their Jewish contemporaries. There is no evidence that the formative ideals of rabbinic Judaism influenced the Cappadocian sermons, although, as mentioned, Nyssen writes that Basil’s assistance

51. Suetonius, *Claudius* 18.

52. See, e.g., M. W. Frederiksen, “Caesar, Cicero and the Problem of Debt,” *JRS* 56 (1966): 128–41.

53. Ex. 37:19; Num. 8:22, 16:9, 18:4; 2 Chron. 31:2; Joel 1:9, 13.

54. E.g., Philo, *Mos.* 2:152; *Spec. Leg.* 1:82; *Vit.* 54.

55. E.g., Josephus, *BJ* 1:26; *AJ* 3:107.

56. For a collection of rabbinic texts on alms, charity, and poverty, which most probably took written form between the fourth and seventh centuries, see C. G. Montehiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 42–50.

57. See, e.g., Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); also Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land of Men and Gods in Asia Minor*, vol. 2: *The Rise of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 31–37.

48. *CT* 14.3.12 and 14.3.17; see also Rickman, *The Corn Supply*, 205.

49. *CT* 14.3.11, trans. Pharr, in *The Theodosian Code*, 407.

50. Rickman, *The Corn Supply*, 201 and n.17.

during the famine of 368 included Jewish youths. This means Basil fed them; it does not mean he listened to them, nor that they necessarily held any of the rabbinic views that may have attained codification during this period.

However, the emergence of various rabbinic texts that came together into the Talmudim in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries suggests a background of animated discussion among Jewish communities over certain issues, whether or not the ideas yet took written form and whether or not a community accepted them when they did. Even when they did emerge, the rabbinic opinions are prescriptive and ideal. In any historical exploration of this material, one must ever keep in mind its chronological ambiguity and imaginative, even utopian, nature.

Although an in-depth exploration of rabbinic texts on poverty and the poor is far beyond the limits of this study, several texts are worth considering briefly as representing social attitudes of some communities contemporary with the process of Christian influence on Hellenistic practice. The rabbinic texts about poverty and poverty relief suggest that, regardless of identity issues, there existed Jews and Christians who held a very similar range of views about poverty, the poor, and poverty relief, values Julian was eager to instill in his pagan priests. The poor are present in these texts on Jewish poverty relief in three ways.

First, they are recognized as a distinctly protected economic group by biblical legislation, which acknowledged them as active social agents. Inter alia these laws graded the required sacrifices according to the donors' means,⁵⁸ restricted the time a lender could hold a poor man's clothing as a pledge,⁵⁹ and forbade interest on loans to "the poor among you."⁶⁰ The legislation on *Pe'ah*⁶¹ discussed briefly in what follows, permitting the poor to harvest from the fallen grain in any Jewish field in Israel, illustrates the detailed concern for this aspect of empowering the poor to act on their own behalf. Later Jewish texts preserved in Greek, such as the book of *Tobit*, emphasize the supreme value of almsgiving and care for the poor as fundamental to the righteous life of the pious Jew. *Tobit* was an important text for later Christian discourse on poverty and alms.⁶²

Second, the poor were eligible as passive recipients of alms and social assistance on the basis of their identity within this special group. This assistance took several forms but particularly included donations from community poor chests administered and distributed by community religious leaders, and by food distribution as in the example of the "soup kitchen" at Aphrodisias, discussed later.

Third, the Jewish texts on the poor recognize their need for human dignity. Donations and the right to receive special protection should (ideally) always also protect recipients from experiencing public shame.

58. E.g., Lev. 14:21-22.

59. Deut. 24:12-13.

60. Ex. 22:25.

61. Lev. 19:9-10, discussed at length in the Mishnah and Talmudic material; outlined briefly below.

62. For a brief discussion see Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in the Early Church*, JSNT Suppl. Ser. 77 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 53-54. Polycarp used *Tobit* 4:10 (or 12:9) as a proof text (*Ep. ad Philonem* 10:2). For a summary of the influence of *Tobit* on early Christianity, see L. Vanyó, "Tobias," in *Encyclopaedia of the Early Church*, vol. 2. See also Ambrose's *De Tobia*, discussed briefly in chapter 3.

44 The Hungry Are Dying

The Fields: *Pe'ah*

The Mishnah's *Tractate Pe'ah*, traditionally dated around 200 C.E., preserves one formative rabbinic interpretation of the injunction to the Israelites to leave the fallen grain at the edges of their fields for the poor. *Tractate Pe'ah* defines the ideal Jewish community's practice of the Torah's injunction, concerned only with "God's land," that is, within a utopian society of Jews farming in Israel, and assumes a Jewish concern for the poor of their own community. It explores the ideal religious rights of those poor persons to enable themselves to survive as self-employed laborers in their neighbors' fields.

In his study on the *Tractate Pe'ah*,⁶³ Roger Brooks observed that God, not the householder, was obliged to provide for the poor, and thus it had to be God, not the active intent of the harvesters, who designated the portion of harvest to be allocated for the poor. In other words, precisely the random, forgotten, "accidental" nature of the discarded harvest made it into *pe'ah*. This is remarkable in light of what has been said so far about rights and patronage. According to Brooks, the farmer has a religious but not a social obligation to provide for the poor because "the poor perform no service on behalf of the householder and so have no direct claim upon him."⁶⁴ This is in direct contrast to the priests' rations, which must be explicitly allotted by reason of the essential nature of the priests' service for the Jewish householder. Rights are here directly related to interdependence and power. If the householder becomes actively involved in deciding what is *pe'ah* (rather than simply designating it after the fact), he would not only be interfering with God but would be inappropriately claiming responsibility to care for the poor. The "poor" in this tractate consist of any who cannot support themselves throughout the year. A concern for justice drives these guidelines.

Tractate Pe'ah attends with great detail to the behavior of the householder, the donor: how he harvests the field and how he determines who of the poor may reap from it. Must they be fellow Jews? It is not explicit in the legislation itself, as *Sifre Deut.* 110:E notes: "Perhaps [. . . poor man's tithing must be given] to members of the covenant and to [those who are] not governed by the covenant [i.e., to both Israelites and gentiles alike]." Not every authority agreed; *Sifre Deut.* 110:F argues that only members of the covenant are eligible recipients.⁶⁵ Greeks, Romans, and Christians were not alone in their anxiety about sharing outside the group.

Food Donations and Soup Kitchens

Although the *pe'ah* texts argue that it was God's responsibility to feed the poor, Jews were nonetheless enjoined to actively imitate God's justice by contributing alms and administering their distribution to the needy within the community. Rabbinic examples abound. Almsgiving is considered a sacred activity that is believed to effect

63. Roger Brooks, *Support for the Poor in the Mishnaic Law of Agriculture: Tractate Pe'ah* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983).

64. *Ibid.*, 19.

65. *Ibid.*, 168.

purity. Certain texts advise that Jewish alms collectors in some cities "for the sake of peace" should collect from and give aid to Jews and Gentiles alike.⁶⁶ Schürer⁶⁷ suggested that the funds might be administered either from a weekly money chest or the "plate," a fund for daily food money. The individual's economic straits determined the source from which assistance might come: alms from the "plate" could be offered to the very poor, those who had less than a two-day supply of food. Assistance from the money chest could be open to those with less than a two-week supply (but who had enough for two days). Two people were prescribed for collection, and three for distribution. These texts, though late and not necessarily known to many Jews or any Christians, illustrate a continuity in the general Jewish concern for the poor which Julian noted in the mid fourth century.

The rabbinic texts did not recommend self-improvement, although they do, like the Christian texts, identify the poor with God. A passage in *Midrash Tannaim* says, "God says to Israel, 'My sons, whenever you give sustenance to the poor, I impute it as though you gave sustenance to me. . . ? Does then God eat and drink? No, but whenever you give food to the poor, God accounts it to you as if you gave food to Him.'⁶⁸ And a midrash on Psalm 118 says: "In the future world man will be asked, 'What was your occupation?' If he reply, 'I fed the hungry,' then they reply, 'This is the gate of the Lord; he who feeds the hungry, let him enter.' (Ps. 118:20). So with giving drink to the thirsty, clothing for the naked, with those who look after orphans and with those, generally, who do deeds of lovingkindness."⁶⁹

While rabbinic material is prescriptive and anecdotal by nature, one piece of "hard evidence"⁷⁰ of Jewish food assistance in late antiquity is in a Greek inscription on a stone found at Aphrodisias, dated to the third century. This inscription attests to a Jewish "food kitchen" erected to assist the poor in the community. This large block of marble was found lying loose, nearly 9 feet long with each side approximately 18 inches wide; it was inscribed on two adjacent sides with lists of donors' names. The names on face *a* are stated to be those who helped in the construction of a *πάρελλα*.⁷⁰ Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum's study of the stone has evoked much debate regarding the Jewish nature of the text and the controversial significance of the term *godfearers* to describe donors.⁷¹ This discussion has almost excluded any consideration of the significance of the *patella*, which Reynolds and Tannenbaum translate "soup-kitchen." The relevant section is the first eight lines of the inscription on face *a*: "God our help. Givers to the soup kitchen. Below are listed the members of

the decency of the students of the law, also known as those who fervently praise God, who erected, for the relief of suffering in the community, at their personal expense, this memorial."⁷²

As the stone was not found in situ, the identity of the building as a "soup kitchen" depends entirely on the word *patella*. Although the meaning of this word is open to some debate, all possible meanings function wholly within the cultural perception of food as leitourgia in its several senses.

Patella is a Latin loanword that was well integrated into Greek by the first century c.e. The first (Latin) meaning is "dish, plate, pan" as used in the kitchen or at table, but it also has the sense of an "offering dish" (as in the cult of the Lares); in one rare use it refers to an object presented as a military decoration. In the Greek papyri it means "dish or plate used for food purposes" and seems to have passed, transliterated, into Hebrew where it means a "cooking pot or a basket," commonly for dates. On this evidence, Reynolds and Tannenbaum argue that its use on the Aphrodisias block is a Hebrew transliteration (into Greek) of the Latin loanword, denoting "plate" as a specific connotation of food alms for the very poor. This interpretation perfectly fits the context of the building as it is described in lines 6-7: "for the relief of suffering in the community." In the context of the double meaning of all ancient leitourgia, as both civic and ritual, and because food was a fundamental liturgical element in both Greek and Roman culture, the multiple nuances of the meaning of *patella* here may be intentional. Nonetheless, all scholars to date have accepted the interpretation "soup kitchen," and the Jewish nature of the inscription on face *a*. If all this is correct, then we find here within a Jewish community an organized food charity motivated by Jewish piety, in Asia Minor sometime during the rabbinic period.

Although the original site of the stone in the city of Aphrodisias (if indeed that is where it first belonged) cannot be identified, it can be dated with some confidence. Marianne Palmer Bonz has argued convincingly that the adjacent inscriptions on the stone belong, with "virtual certainty," to entirely different centuries. On epigraphical grounds, she dates the "godfearers" inscription of face *b* to the third century c.e. and the "soup kitchen" inscription of face *a* much later, between the fourth and sixth centuries.⁷³ While the general trend has been to try to date the inscriptions as early as possible, this later date for the *patella* inscription in fact increases its interest and relevance to the present discussion. If Bonz is correct, then it attests to a Jewish presence in organizational poverty relief immediately contemporary with the rise of the Christian *ptochotropheion*. It provides a valuable rare glimpse into Jewish charity in late antiquity outside of the ambiguity of the prescriptive texts (but also possibly contemporary with them).

Bonz argues that the use of *θεός βοηθός* in the inscription is probably "Jewish usage developed in imitation and adaptation of the prevailing Christian stylistic

66. Jerusalem Talmud, *Demai* IV 61a, line 67 cited in Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 424.

67. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: A New English Edition*, ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 2:437. For more on the rabbinic material as it relates to early Christianity, see Johnson, *Sharing Possessions* 133-39, 146-48.

68. Cited in Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 414.

69. Cited in *ibid.*, 433.

70. Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987).

71. See review of *ibid.* by M. Goodman, *JRS* 78 (1988): 261-62.

72. Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers*, 41.

73. Marianne Palmer Bonz, "The Jewish Donor Inscriptions from Aphrodisias: Are They Third-Century, and Who Are the 'Theosebeis'?" *HSCP* 96 (1994): 281-99. For another argument that the line containing the word *πάρελλα* is fifth-century, see SEG 43:700.

norm,"⁷⁴ but we cannot be sure whether this is true also of the soup kitchen itself. It is also unfortunate, but characteristic of all *energeticist* remains, that the inscription describes the donors in some detail but says nothing substantive about the presumed identity of those "suffering in the community" who were the intended recipients. Despite these uncertainties, the Aphrodisias inscription remains important for identifying Jewish charity relief in the Graeco-Roman community of late antiquity.

Rabbinic Injunctions: Charity with Dignity

Finally, rabbinic texts about the poor often depict them as human beings worthy of dignity and protection from public shame, especially protection from the need to beg in public. Some rabbis advised that alms be deposited in secret,⁷⁵ with even the donor (ideally) pretending not to notice. Others suggested that loans were preferable to alms because they gave the recipient the dignity of reciprocating the donation and could easily and quietly be converted into "gifts" if repayment was or became impossible.⁷⁶ Poverty is sometimes perceived as a test from God for both poor (testing their responses) and rich (testing their generosity). Although it was believed that God uses poverty, one rabbinic text argued that "there is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty — the most grievous of all sufferings."⁷⁷ Jews were reminded of the high level of religious benefit they might gain from these loans: "He who lends without interest is regarded by God as if he had fulfilled all the commandments."⁷⁸

Redemptive almsgiving prescribed in various Old Testament passages from the Psalms, Proverbs, and moral texts like *Tobit* was also an important theme in various rabbinic texts: "Charity delivers the soul from death and Gehinnom,"⁷⁹ and "if a man busies himself in the study of Torah and in acts of charity all his sins are forgiven him."⁸⁰

In summary, this very brief sampling of Jewish texts about assisting the poor represents views taught in certain Jewish communities within a century of the rise of the Christian *ptochotropheion*. These Jewish texts consistently view this aid as a particular social leitourgia, a moral responsibility to provide for the material needs of those in the community who cannot provide for themselves. While their understanding of aid is rooted in the perceived nature of God, these rabbinic texts, unlike Christian texts, generally do not identify social aid directly with sacrifice in any explicit way. Instead, social aid in the Jewish community of late antiquity was an intrinsic part of religious life because good deeds pleased God. These texts also differ from the

74. Bonz, "The Jewish Donor Inscriptions from Aphrodisias," 290.

75. "Just as there was a 'vestry of secret givers' in the Temple, so there was one in every city for the sake of respectable people who had come down in life, so they might be helped in secret." Tosefta, *Shekalim* II.6, as cited in Montefiore and Lowe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 420.

76. E.g., *Ket. 67b* [161]; *Shék. V.6* [166]; Jerusalem Talmud, *Pé'ah* 8.9 [187]; Tosefta *Pé'ah* 4.12 [194]; numbers in brackets note the entry in Montefiore and Lowe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*.

77. *Exodus Rabbah*, Mishpatim 31.12.

78. *Exodus Rabbah*, Mishpatim 31.13.

79. Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbath* 156b; *Rosh Hashanah* 16b; *Gittin* 7a, b.

80. Babylonian Talmud, *Berakoth* 5b.

Graeco-Roman view of community leitourgia in that within the Judaisms of late antiquity, the poor were entitled to assistance *qua* poor. Even impostors deserved aid, God would punish them for anything they requested that they did not actually need. The poor, *qua* poor, were visible and explicit social entities who bore positive religious meaning, through which God was believed to take note of good deeds.

Leitourgia and the (Present) Poor: Early Christianity

Early Christian use of leitourgia reflects both ritual and common civic meaning. The Septuagint's view of leitourgia as religious ritual is found again in the New Testament⁸¹ as well as in early patristic texts, such as 1 Clement,⁸² and others implying Christian use of Jewish ideas. The *Testament of Levi* refers to the leitourgia of the angels in that they also serve God in ritual context, offering "proprietary sacrifices . . . a rational and bloodless leitourgia."⁸³

Many New Testament and early patristic texts use the word *leitourgia* to refer either to early Christian worship or, in its more general meaning, to the obligation to meet material needs of the community. The Pauline texts use *leitourgia* as a metaphor for ritual sacrifice, but always in the context of specific, physical provisions. Paul describes his collection of money for Jerusalem (2 Cor. 9:12) as a leitourgia that "not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God." In Philippians 2:7 Paul refers to himself as "poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and leitourgia of your faith . . .," and in Philippians 2:30 he praises Epaphroditus for risking his life "to make up for those leitourgia you would not give me." Romans 15:27, again referring to the collection for Jerusalem, links spiritual blessing with *serv* leitourgia: the Gentile converts to Christianity, Paul says, owe this money to the "poor among the saints at Jerusalem" because, "if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in the *leitourgia that pertains to the flesh* [ἐν τοῖς σαρκικοίς λειτουργίαις]."

Other early Christian texts speak of leitourgia as explicit ritual. In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Paul while the Christians were "worshipping [λατρουροῦντων] and fasting."⁸⁴ 1 Clement notes that by means of the ark Noah "proclaimed a second birth to the world by his leitourgia, and through him the Master saved the living creatures that entered the ark in harmony."⁸⁵ Later Christian exegesis commonly interpreted the salvation imagery of Noah's ark in the liturgical imagery of baptism.

Hennas similarly refers to leitourgia as a religious ritual for both body and soul. *Mandate* 5.1–2 describes the leitourgia of the Holy Spirit as it dwells within the "spacious room" of the believer who is pure and at peace. If the believer becomes angry, however, the Holy Spirit "does not have a clean place, and it seeks to leave" because

81. E.g., Luke 12:3; Heb. 9:21; Tit. 1:9.

82. 1 *Clem.* 40.2; 40.5.

83. Test. Lev. 3.5; trans. R. H. Charles, *The Greek Version of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908, reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1960), 34.

84. 1 *Clem.* 9.4; trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, and rev. Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 39.

there is insufficient room for proper leitourgia.⁸⁵ Hermas's *Similitudes* 5.3.3 speaks of leitourgia as doing "anything good beyond God's commandment," resulting in "greater glory" and "more honor in God's sight," as for example fasting on bread and water with a pure heart: "Your sacrifice will be acceptable in God's sight and this fast will be recorded, and the leitourgia performed in this way is beautiful and joyous and acceptable to the Lord."⁸⁶

1 Clement also refers to leitourgia as a function that benefits both God and humankind. Even the winds, *Clement* says, "from different quarters fulfill their leitourgia in the proper season without disturbance," created by God for the benefit of creation.⁸⁷ Others who specifically offer leitourgia to God include the angels⁸⁸ and human beings who play a variety of (undefined) roles in the church.⁸⁹

Although *leitourgia* in the Septuagint and early Christian texts usually refers to formal worship ritual, in the Greek-speaking public sphere it continued for centuries to bear the other connotations of civic duties, always simultaneously understood to refer to acts of piety to the gods. In the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea includes among the Dioctletian martyrs the bishop Phileas of Thmuis, "a man esteemed for his patriotic activities and public services [leitourgia], and for his work as a philosopher."⁹⁰ Eusebius uses *leitourgia* in the same sense in describing the martyred Vettius Epagathus, a man of high social status in Gaul, who was "unfiting in leitourgia to his neighbor, utterly devoted to God, and fervent in spirit."⁹¹ The use of *leitourgia* does not always carry all possible connotations, but it usually bears a general meaning complementary to both images of social action and devotion to the god(s).

Leitourgia and the Voice of the Poor in Early Christian Texts

Early Christian texts speak at best only generally about the poor, although gospel stories exalt both voluntary and involuntary poverty. Both Matthew's and Luke's versions of the beatitudes identify "poverty" (whether taken literally as in Luke or "spiritually" as in Matthew) with the "kingdom of heaven." The stories of Jesus feeding the thousands are marked by references to the poverty and hunger of both the disciples who distribute the miraculous provisions and the recipient crowds. The gospel injunction, "Sell all you have and give it to the poor, and come follow Me," orders voluntary poverty as a prerequisite to a life following Jesus, a life interpreted as service or worship to God as defined by the Christian texts.

While the poor in gospel texts are (with the exception of lepers) usually found hanging around the temple or other "holy" sites (like the pool of Bethesda) where

50 *The Hungry Are Dying*

they expect aid from all who come for religious purposes, the Gospels do not emphasize this natural identification of social leitourgia with the liturgy of the Jewish cult, probably because of the close relationship that evolved between Christian self-definition and the abolition of the Temple cult. Yet this link between religious liturgy and the social leitourgia that cares for the poor body is part of the Christian liturgy from the very earliest texts, even New Testament texts where the "liturgy" of Jesus's disciples actually occurs in the Temple precincts (e.g., Acts 3:1–5ff.). According to Justin Martyr, a collection for the poor was taken as part of the weekly worship service and the funds enabled the leader of the congregation to care for orphans, widows, the sick, the prisoners, strangers, and "all those in need."⁹² The *Didache* also advocated a regular collection of food as part of worship and, "if you have no prophet give them to the poor."⁹³ The Christian ideal of voluntary poverty was usually associated with a piety that took special care of the involuntary poor. For example, *1 Clement* suggested that "many have sold themselves to slavery and, receiving the price paid for themselves, have fed others."⁹⁴ Early bishops, too, were expected to live poorly and to provide for the poor around them.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the person who did not will to be poor was often assumed to be implicitly inferior, a victim of the passions and desires that engender need and create the dependence that precludes true self-mastery. *Clement of Alexandria* admits this when he says, "For not riches only, but also honour and marriage and poverty have ten thousand cares for him who is unfit for them."⁹⁶

Few early Christian texts on poverty recognize this moral distinction, and indeed few seem to see the involuntary poor as bodies with minds at all, but rather as images of static ideals. Occasionally, however, glimpses reflect the mind and soul of the poor person, as an individual with moral options. One is found in Origen's treatise "On Prayer," another is a passing reference in a fifth-century Pelagian treatise, "On Riches." A third, more extensive, is found in *Clement of Alexandria's* treatise *Quis dives salvetur?* "Who Is the Rich Man Who May Be Saved?" These texts illustrate ways in which the Christian view of involuntary poverty was nuanced by certain assumptions about the involuntary poor.

Origen, in what sounds like an afterthought, argues that the poor, too, have a need to practice prayer:

Since I have not said much about the poor man, if someone disdains the poor man's temptation as no temptation at all, let him know that the Plotter plots to bring down the poor and needy (Ps. 37:14) especially since, according to Solomon, 'the poor man does not stand up to threatening' (Prov. 13:8, LXX) . . . How many have fallen away from the heavenly hope by bearing their poverty basely and living more slavishly and more lowly than is fitting among saints?⁹⁷

92. Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1.67, trans. Cyril C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, LCC (New York: MacMillan, 1970), 287.

93. *Did.* 13.4–5, trans. Lightfoot and Harner, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 266–67.

94. *1 Clem.*, *Ep. Cor.* 55.2, trans. Lightfoot and Harner, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 88–89.

95. See, e.g., *Didascalia* 4.2.3–5.

96. *Clem.*, *Stromatis* 4.6, trans. W. Wilson, ANF 2.414.

97. Origen, *On Prayer*, 29 in Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles*; Book 11, *De . . .*

85. Hermas, *Mand.* 5.1–2, trans. Lightfoot and Harner, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 386–87.

86. Hermas, *Sim.* 5.3.3, trans. Lightfoot and Harner, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 432–33.

87. *1 Clem.* 20.10, trans. Lightfoot and Harner, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 52–53.

88. *1 Clem.* 34.5.

89. *Ibid.* 41.1: 44.2, 3, 6.

90. 94. Euseb., *HE* 8.9.7, trans. G. A. Williamson, *The History of the Church* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 338.

91. Euseb., *HE* 5.1.9, trans. Williamson, 194.

The poor man in this text is not one who has chosen poverty but one with choices nonetheless about how to bear it. The text suggests that Origen here speaks of believers ("saints") who face the same risk of temptations as do their wealthy counterparts. Yet their vulnerability is a direct consequence of their material poverty. Self-mastery is again the key to righteousness for all those who have choices within the state in which they find themselves.

A passing comment in the fifth-century Pelagian letter "On Riches," further affirms involuntary poverty as a state in which holy feelings and actions may not be natural for all but may be possible for some who will it. This treatise explicitly advocates complete divestment of personal wealth and the writer argues with his ideological opponents: "But' you will say, 'folly and knavery are to be found among the poor as well.' Yes, but no one covets poverty, and it is easier for the poor man to divest himself of such feelings than it is for the rich man, since poverty not only does not provide the raw materials for sin but in most cases renders it impossible."⁹⁸

On one level, this text seems to simply reflect the biblical claim that heaven is easier for the poor to attain than it is for the rich. Yet, in this radical interpretation of the economic route to holiness the author refers to the capacity of the involuntary poor to divest themselves of their covetous "feelings." Thus, as with Origen, the poor are here understood as those who retained the ability to make spiritual choices even when they had no material choices. The ideal choice here is one of internal self-mastery over desires rather than (simply) the choice to do without material goods, although the Pelagian text considers ownership entirely sinful and complete divestment as essential. Nonetheless both texts assume a fundamentally negative view of the common poor: as weak, susceptible to folly, knavery, living "basely," "slavishly," and "lowly."

A more extensive image contrasting the involuntary nature and moral implications of both poverty and wealth is found in one of the earliest systematic Christian treatises on this moral dilemma, Clement of Alexandria's *Quis Dives Salvetur*.⁹⁹ Clement explicitly discourages wholesale divestment by spiritualizing the biblical injunctions, arguing that "the renunciation and sale of all possessions is to be understood as spoken of the passions of the soul."¹⁰⁰ Pagans, after all, have given up wealth to a variety of imperfect ends: "It was no new thing to renounce wealth and give it freely to the poor [πρωτοῖς] or to one's fatherland [ἢ πατρίδι] since many have done this before the coming of the Savior: some in order to gain the leisure of the word and on account of dead wisdom, others for empty fame and vainglory, as the Anaxagorases, the Democriti, and Crateses."¹⁰¹ According to Clement here, it is

not beneficial to lack the means of either survival or assisting the needy: "Riches which also benefit our neighbor should not be thrown away."¹⁰² Clement considered nothing intrinsically sinful in wealth: "If because of his involuntary birth a man is vanished from [eternal] life, he is wronged by God who created him."¹⁰³

This attitude influences Clement's comments on the involuntary poor. Since Clement is most concerned with the importance of mastering internal desire rather than divesting himself of external goods, the poor may be viewed as facing the same difficulties as the rich. The person who chooses *voluntary* poverty may actually be dominated more by his passions when he is poor than when he was rich, simply because of basic human need, "being at once destitute of and desiring what he spent, he may doubly grieve both. . . . For it is impossible and inconceivable that those in want of the necessities of life should not be harassed in mind and hindered from better things in the endeavor to provide [sustenance] somehow and from some source."¹⁰⁴

The voluntary poor thus may face double anguish if they have given away so much that they are no longer able to provide for their own needs. Although they may seem to live like the involuntary poor, they are, Clement suggests, not better off but worse for their internal anguish. This argument against total divestment, mild as it is, did not become the prevailing view in the written texts that survive, and few later texts echo Clement's systematic caution against ascetic poverty. However, the fact that liberal donations and Christian wealth in late antiquity did not necessarily mark one as a new convert suggests that the majority of Christians actually practiced a positive view of wealth more like Clement's.

Clement also acknowledges a distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor, although he does not wholly accept it: "Wretched are the . . . poor who have no part in God and still less in human property, and have not tasted the righteousness of God."¹⁰⁵ One must also assist these ignorant poor, he argues, for two reasons. First, the donors may be in error in judging the moral state of the beggar.¹⁰⁶ Second, the donors ought to give to "the carnal poor, who are destitute of [heaven],¹⁰⁷ because alms buy salvation for the donor. Although Clement advises general retention of wealth, he holds that redemptive almsgiving is achieved by divesting oneself of *superfluous* possessions that may benefit the "carnal poor."¹⁰⁸ By this trade both the rich and the poor gain a desired end.

Clement clearly considers destitution — voluntary or involuntary — a hindrance to spiritual growth. One ought not to emulate poverty but rather emulate God's spe-

Anaxagoras and Crates. For some of the sayings on civic duty and the poor attributed to Democritus, see, e.g., Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 277 (4.1.42–46), 281 (4.3.23–24), and 283 (4.4.20–21).

102. Clem., *Q.d.s.* 14, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.595.

103. *Ibid.* 26, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.598.

104. *Ibid.* 12, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.594.

105. *Ibid.* 17, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.596.

106. *Ibid.* 32, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.600.

107. *Ibid.* 17, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.596.

108. *Ibid.*

98. "On Riches" 20.6, trans. B. R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and His Followers* (Woodbridge and Rochester, New York: Boynton Press, 1991), 210; my emphasis. I am grateful to Tim Samuel Shah for directing me to this text. For a more detailed discussion of Pelagius's *De divitiis*, see Carlo Scaglioni, "'Gnita a voi ricchi!' Pelagio e gli scritti pelagiani," in *Per fortuna acuta: Il cristianesimo antico di fronte alla pericope evangelica del 'giornate ricco'*, Studia Patristica Mediolanensia 14 (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1986), 365–98.

99. For the Greek, see *Clementis Alexandrini* III, GCS 17² (1970), 159–91. Unless otherwise noted, I follow the translation of W. Wilson, ANF 2.591–604.

100. Clem., *Q.d.s.* 14, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.595.

101. *Ibid.* 11.7–1, adapted from Wilson, ANF 2.591, who does not translate the phrase ἢ πατρίδι.

cial compassion for the poor. Although poverty is an unenviable affliction, Clement assumes that God dwells within the poor: "Do not look contemptuously to personal appearance nor the penniless nor ragged nor ugly nor feeble. . . . This form is cast from without. . . . But within dwells the hidden father and his child who died for us and rose with us."¹⁰⁹ The destitute are "blessed and most dear to God" regardless of their awareness of God:

Those who have nothing at all, but are destitute [ἐρημον] and beggars [περιαιτῶν] for their daily bread, the poor [πτωχοί] dispersed on the streets, who know not God and God's righteousness, simply on account of their extreme want and destitution of subsistence, and lack of even the smallest things, were most blessed and most dear to God, and sole possessors of everlasting life.¹¹⁰

Thus, for Clement, involuntary poverty carries a spiritual value in which voluntary destitution cannot participate. While the involuntary poor belong to the leitourgia — with internal desires that can prevent them from attaining a perfect knowledge of God. Clement's views suggest a teetering duality of attitudes about the involuntary

poor: They are in the kingdom unconditionally — unless they are undeserving or unrighteous (although they should still receive assistance). Their state is holy — although it is sinful to put oneself in their shoes and be similarly in need.¹¹¹ The destitute who struggle with passions are not by this necessarily excluded from the kingdom — although, he suggests, the "wretched" and "carnal" poor may be, after all. This same sort of "waffling" occurs, to varying degrees, in all interactions with involuntary poverty in the ancient world, but few authors seem this comfortable expressing diverse views simultaneously. Clement's ardent if ambiguous defense of beggars around him suggests a real awareness of them, their diversity, and their human misery.

In advocating that wealth is necessary to effectively serve one's neighbor and community, Clement echoes the ideals of the Graeco-Roman leitourgia, although he does not generally express his attitude toward the poor in civic terms. Rather, his argument is usually biblical, consonant particularly with the views of poverty found in the synoptic gospels. It is not surprising, therefore, that Clement uses the term *leitourgia* throughout his works to consistently reflect an emphasis on Christian "ministry" rather than on public service and civic obligation. He refers to leitourgia thirteen times in the *Stromateis*, with several nuances: the divine service of celibacy,¹¹² celestial servants such as angels, demons, and natural forces,¹¹³ Paul's ministry,¹¹⁴

the Hungry Are Dying
of purification ritual,¹¹⁵ hierarchies of divine service attaining to salvation,¹¹⁶ or good deeds of the perfect gnostic.¹¹⁷ This last reference is the only one which implies community activities but it is still general. His use of leitourgia outside *Stromateis* reflects a similar and similarly general focus on Christian ministry although certainly within the broader framework of Graeco-Roman culture and civic obligation in which Clement lived.

Redemptive Almsgiving

Just early Christian texts, the poor exist primarily as a passive tool for redemptive giving, a signifier by which the Christian donor may gain honor and divine reward. Relieving destitution is not usually defined in terms which recognize the results as fellow bodies in a divinely created material world of equals in the sight of God, as Gregory of Nyssa would later suggest.

Almsgiving is regarded early as a redemptive leitourgia.¹¹⁹ Through this image social value of the destitute poor is defined largely in terms of the afterlife. Of Christian texts, this is particularly evident in Cyprian's essay *De opere elemosinae*, which is entirely about redemptive alms. Although the treatise was delivered as a plague and acute destitution in Carthage around 252–254, Cyprian attends fully to the donor and the salvation of the donor. The recipients of alms are essentially symbols, their bodies representing holy containers by which the donor may be lifted up to God. The poor are thus rendered with a profound, if inert, liturgical utility.

By the fourth century this liturgical imagery rules virtually all Christian texts on charity, voluntary or involuntary, including monastic texts. The life of Pachomius illustrates the developing distinction — and dependent interaction — between the voluntary and involuntary poor in civic and religious life.

Pachomius's conversion was prompted by an act of Christian charity. Around 340, when he was 20, Pachomius was press-ganged into Constantine's army. The recruits were imprisoned to keep them from running away, and their state was pitiable. One day "some merciful Christians" brought the prisoners food, drink, and physical necessities. When Pachomius, the pagan, asked who Christians were, he was told of their worship and that "Christians were merciful to everyone, including strangers."¹²⁰ His experience induced his conversion, and alms became a regular part of Pachomius's cenobitic asceticism. He and his teacher, Palamon, "toiled not for themselves

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 7.9.56.4 and 7.10.57.2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 4.6.37.1–2 and 7.2.10.2.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 7.3.13.2.

¹¹² Clem., *Ped* 2.44.4; *Exc. Theod.* 11.4 and 27.2; *Q.d.s.* 16.3.

¹¹³ For a detailed study, see Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in the Early Church*; also Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire*.

¹¹⁴ *Vita Prima Graeca* 4, trans. and ed. Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Life of Pachomius (Vita Prima Graeca)*, Texts and Translations 7, Early Christian Literature Series 2 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholar's Press, 1975), 7. See also Armand Viellevu, ed. and trans., *Pachomian Koinonía I: The Life of Saint Pachomius*, Cistercian Studies Series 45 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980).

109

Clem., *Q.d.s.* 33, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.600–601.

110. Ibid. 11, trans. Wilson, ANF 2.594. *ἡμεῖς ποιεῖν οὐκ ἐθέλομεν ἵνα ἴδωμεν τὸ πρόσωπον σου*

111. Reminiscent of a similar view about eunuchs in early Christianity, whose degendered state was acceptable only if it was either a natural debility or had been done to them by forces over which they had no control. While voluntary poverty quickly became a monastic ideal, voluntary castration was consistently proscribed.

112. Clem., *Str.* 3.12.79.5; 3.12.82.6.

113. Ibid. 5.6.36.4; 6.3.31.5; 6.17.157.4; 7.3.17.2–3; 8.9.33.3–4.

114. Ibid. 7.17.106.4.

but they remembered the poor, as the apostle says,¹²¹ even to the extent of furthering their own destitution.

On one occasion, “because they gave whatever they had to charities it once happened that they had no bread.”¹²² While Pachomius planned to sell two bed mats for grain, a stranger with a shipload of wheat knocked at the door and told them:

“I had promised for my salvation to give wheat to those working in the mines,¹²³ but I was instructed in my sleep that you needed it and to bring it to you since you are men of God.” Pachomius answered, “We do need the wheat, but give us a fixed date to return it.” The wheat was then taken from the boat and the brothers marveled at how, all of a sudden, God had helped them because of his servant.¹²⁴

This is a story about redemptive almsgiving; the donor had intended to give it to the destitute in the mines “for my salvation.” The monk — the voluntary poor, and in severe need — is unwilling to take it as a gift, but will accept it as a loan to be repaid at a set date. Pachomius thus establishes himself as a social equal with the donor, becoming an active participant in any subsequent choice the donor may make to give the (returned) wheat to those for whom it was originally intended.

The involuntary poor in this story, as in the larger cultural setting, begin outside the liturgical community. The donor must first choose between giving the wheat to those who are “men of God” or to those involuntary poor who, by implication, are not “men of God.” Through Pachomius’s insistence that the gift be merely a loan to the monastery, there is the possibility of meeting both needs — monastic hunger and involuntary destitution. Even if the returned wheat was not given away again, it remains a symbol of the reward and blessing that follow when one gives generously with consideration to one’s salvation and to those “of God.” The monastic repayment of the wheat would transform it into an image of justice, whether it returns to the original donor or is “returned” to those for whom it was originally vowed. Either way the donation functions “liturgically” as a means of salvation for both of the donors and as leitourgia in terms of the social effects it may have on the community.

The (Present) Poor in the Imperial and Episcopal Leitourgia of Late Antiquity

Fourth-century food patronage to the poor — as leitourgia — is especially illustrated by two laws of Constantine, the examples of Julian and Valentinian, and the acts of various bishops faced with social and environmental crises. Several of these examples help to depict in a general way the broader context for the Cappadocian poverty sermons.

121. *Vita Prima Graeca* 1.6, trans. Veilleux, 1.302.

122. *Ibid.* 1.39, trans. Veilleux, 1.324.

123. Athanassakis translates this, “When I was in the mines I made a vow of wheat for my salvation. . . .” The full phrase is, *Ἦτον ἐταρρεῖς Ἀδάμενος εἰς τὰ μέτραλα ὑπέσπε τῆς σωματικῆς μού* . . . (Athanassakis, *The Life of Pachomius*, 56–57).

124. *Vita Prima Graeca* 1.39, trans. Veilleux, 1.324–25.

Imperial relief of civic destitution generally operated only in times of crisis, such as earthquakes, and granted assistance to collective groups, such as entire cities, usually in terms of tax remission or subsidized grain. Two laws of Constantine¹²⁵ seem to be the earliest Roman laws that assure food to individuals as individuals simply on the basis of their need. The first, dated 315 and 329 c.e.,¹²⁶ ruled that an imperial officer issue provisions immediately to all parents throughout all the municipalities of Italy who would, without adequate food assistance for their newborns, kill them. Assistance must be provided immediately upon request “since the rearing of a newborn infant will not allow any delay.” Assistance was to come from “Our Fisc and Our Privy purse . . . without distinction.” This law seems to be intended to prevent infanticide in Italy; it does not mention exposure. A second law, dated July 6, 322, aims to stop the sale of children of indigent provincials in Africa, possibly a natural consequence of exposure: “The proconsuls and governors and fiscal representatives throughout all Africa . . . shall bestow freely the necessary support on all persons whom *they observe* to be placed in dire need and from the State storehouses they shall immediately assign adequate sustenance.”¹²⁷

The first law left it up to the parents to make formal appeal for assistance. In the law for Africa, however, it is the government’s responsibility to identify the needy families. This distinction may reflect the difference between the private and public nature of the children’s fate: infanticide, being a private act in the ancient world, would come to a legislator’s attention only if the parents sought an alternative. Sale into slavery, on the other hand, was by nature a public participation in the market economy, permitting public investigation and intervention.

It is not clear from the legal text why Constantine chose to intervene in what were essentially “normative” practices in the ancient world. Neither law explicitly identifies religious or moral motivation to prevent poverty, infanticide, or child abandonment. Nor does either law suggest any particular environmental or political crisis behind each imperial fiat. The only motive that the two laws seem to share is a particular compassion for those at risk in the social order. The goal of the Italian law is that “the hands of parents may be restrained from parricide and their hopes turned to the better.” The African law similarly assumes a moral commitment to justice and the prevention of “a shameful deed”: “For it is at variance with Our character that We should allow any person to be destroyed by hunger or to break forth to the commission of a shameful deed.” In these two laws one may see the leitourgia of imperial patronage here adopting a new form and new means to further public order and maintain certain moral standards. Whatever his reasons, with Constantine’s legislation the poor — *qua* poor — enter the legal leitourgia of the state for the first time.

The emperor Julian may be the first pagan to explicitly argue that physical care for the poor — as an act of piety — was really an ancient pagan ideal. He does this in his often-cited admonitions to Arsacius, the high priest of Galatia. Although the passage is well known, it is important enough to be quoted here in full:

125. *CT* 11.27.1–2, discussed below.

126. *CT* 11.27.1, trans. Pharr, *Theodosian Code*, 318.

127. *CT* 11.27.2, trans. Pharr, *Theodosian Code*, 318; my emphasis.

Teach those of the Hellenic faith to contribute to public service [ἡετροπυρίαι] of this sort, and the Hellenic villages to offer their first fruits to the gods; and accustom those who love the Hellenic religion to these good works [εὐνομίαι] by teaching them that this was our practice of old. Let us not, by allowing others to outdo us in good works, disgrace or utterly abandon the reverence [εὐλάβεια] due to the gods. At any rate, Homer makes Eumaeus say, 'Stranger, it is not lawful for me, / Not even though a baser man than you should come, / To dishonor a stranger [ξένων δέουσαν] / For from Zeus come all strangers and beggars [ξένοι τε πτωχοὶ τε] / A gift, though small, is precious [φιλοία].'¹²⁸

The Odyssean text was important to Julian; he quotes the last two lines again in another letter to a priest, also in the context of advocating philanthropy for the poor.¹²⁹

In his understanding of leitourgia, Julian here returns to the ancient pagan image in which there is an inseparable coupling of social and religious meaning: to perform leitourgia was simultaneously to care for the bodily needs of the community and to reverence the gods. However, as the history of Graeco-Roman views of the poor suggests, Julian's interpretation of leitourgia practiced as philanthropy to the poor¹³⁰ is, despite his Homeric argument, not typical of the classical use of the word or its application.¹³¹ The fact remains that even in the fourth century, the Graeco-Roman concept of philanthropy as such did not readily consider poverty as a special category. For example, in the three treatises on "philanthropy" by the pagan philosopher Themistius, whose works profoundly influenced Julian, there is virtually no discussion of material poverty at all. Only in his oration to Theodosius I, the most adamantly "Christianizing" of the emperors he addressed, does Themistius even mention the word *penās*, once in connection with famine (227b) and once in contrast with wealth (229b).¹³²

Although leitourgia in the ancient Greek temple might consider the god's concern for those who were physically destitute,¹³³ and certainly the Greeks appealed to the gods for help in times of material or natural disasters, there is no doubt that Christianity, not paganism, formed Julian's earliest concepts of the poor and relief efforts. His injunction to religious almsgiving seems to be directly influenced by his Christian background, albeit reformulated using Greek texts to which he now gave new and special emphasis.

128. Julian, *Ep.* 22; 430D–31B, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, ed. and trans. W. C. Wright, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1913–23), 3.70–71, citing *Odyssey* 14.56.

129. Julian, *Fragn.* *Ep.* 291B, trans. Wright, 2.304–5.

130. For his extensive discussion of this, see Julian, *Fragn.* *Ep.* 286A–92D.

131. For the argument that Julian's philanthropic ideals were substantially modeled on non-Christian philosophers, see Jürgen Kabisersch, *Untersuchungen zum Begriff der Philantropia bei dem Kaiser Julian*, Klassisch-Philologische Studien, 21 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960).

132. For the Greek of Themistius's *Or.* 16 and 19, see H. Schenkl and G. Downey, eds., *Themistii Orationes Quae Supersunt I*, Academia Scientiarum Germanica Berolinensis (Leipzig: Teubner, 1965), 1.3–26, 105–26, and 327–39.

133. Athenaeus, for example, refers to an ancient Spartan riddle that is solved only by acquaintance with a certain temple to Apollo in which there was "beside Apollo's throne, . . . A painted representation (ὑποθήκη ἀρούραμπυλέως) of Famine in the likeness of a woman" (*Ath.* 10.452b, trans. Charles Burton Gulick, *Athenaeus*, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 4.548–49.

The Hungry Are Dying

Imperial provision of food to those who were starving usually occurred only in context of famine, i.e., widespread crisis threatening the social order. The usual imperial response to famine was tax remission and subsidized grain prices, which e granted to all the citizens of the suffering cities. Julian supplied Antioch with subsidized wheat during a famine in the winter of 361–62, when he found the rich riding grain. The price of wheat varied by city, depending in part on access to the (the cheapest method of transport) and on local supplies.¹³⁴ Julian indicates that the usual price of grain in Antioch was 10 modii of wheat for a silver piece; the market price Julian found at Antioch during the famine was at least double, though his suggests that grain was hard to get at any price. Julian cut the cost 66 percent, chasing Egyptian grain at 15 *modii* per silver piece, and made a point of his generosity in his letter to the Antiochenes: "Even in prosperity you don't get 15 measures [even] a gold piece!"¹³⁵

Africa also suffered acutely from food shortage in 368 c.e., the year of the Caploeian famine. Hymetius, the proconsul at Carthage, was responsible that year for grain shipment to Rome. Ammianus describes Hymetius as a just man of "distinguished character," and the story of his downfall illustrates how imperial power, in his case that of Valentinian, might use the public provision of grain to political ends unrelated to immediate human need.

Faced with the acute starvation of the populace, Hymetius opened the Roman *rea*, the storehouses of North African wheat designed specifically for Rome, and added Roman grain stores to the Carthaginians at famine prices. Ammianus gives the ce: a gold piece (*solidus*) bought 10 *modii* of wheat.¹³⁶ When the famine was over, metius bought wheat to replace the Roman stores at the price of 30 *modii* per gold ce: and sent the emperor his (significant) profits.

Hymetius's action was not illegal. Constantine's law of 322 was presumably still effect, permitting that food and provisions be supplied to populations in Africa who were suffering from hunger.¹³⁷ Hymetius's choice to sell rather than donate would only benefit the imperial coffers. But Valentinian, "suspecting that he had sent

134. For variations in the price of grain, see, e.g., *Digesta* 13.4.3; Cic., *Verr.* 2.3; Plin., *HN* 33.164; zero illustrates the range in prices that could exist in even the same city at different times of a non-nine year: in Sicily one could buy a modius of wheat for 20 sesterces before the harvest, but after the rest the price dropped to 2–3 sesterces (Cic., *Verr.* 2.3.214). In describing the late first century c.e. famine at Prusa, Dio Chrysostom notes that his city's grain prices were normally lower than those of other ies (*Or.* 46.10). For further discussion on grain prices, see Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 50–51, 145–46, 352–53, 345–47. Duncan-Jones's data are limited to Italy and Egypt and extend through the mid third century. A modius of wheat was a bushel measure that weighed approximately 0.7 kg, or 20 lb (Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 370). By the time of Diocletian, e price of wheat was 67 times what it had been under Augustus.

135. Julian, *Misopogon* 309D, trans. Wright, 2.506–7.

136. It is difficult to compare this rate with Julian's subsidies to Antioch six years earlier. Julian's ices are in silver and his one reference to a gold coin is an indignant exclamation. Even if this comment dicates "real" prices, one would expect wheat to be significantly cheaper in Africa, Rome's "breadbasket" both the best and the worst of times.

137. *CT* 11.27, discussed earlier. See also Eimin Tengström, *Bread for the People: Studies of the Com-apply of Rome During the Late Empire* (Stockholm: Paul ströms, 1974), 26.

less than he should have sent as the result of his trafficking, punished him with a fine of a part of his property."¹³⁸ Further enraged at hearing that Hymetius went to a soothsayer for secret divine appeal to soften the emperor's wrath, Valentinian arrested Hymetius and sought to have him legally executed; the Senate saved his life by exiling him to Britain.

The story of Hymetius illustrates a civic official directly representing the imperial patronage of the emperor, yet in this case without that emperor's approval. While the emperor was the supreme patron of his own city, and Valentinian thus the ultimate *trophæus* for Rome, there is no suggestion that the Roman shipments suffered by Hymetius's action. Nor does the text in any way censure Hymetius for exploiting the physical distress of the "indigent" famine victims to make a profit from the grain. Indeed, Ammianus defends Hymetius and tells the story to illustrate Valentinian's cruelty and paranoia.

Unconcerned with these political nuances, the poor for whom Hymetius put grain on the market participated in this leitourgia at famine prices. Their participation, however, did not lead to civic order but rather enabled ongoing political corruption at the imperial level. The destitute may have "entered" this leitourgia (if they could afford it) out of extreme need, but they were ultimately the losers for it.

Despite Valentinian's official loyalty to Christianity, the story of Hymetius fits the ancient Roman model — of patronage and liturgy motivated by public honor and profit for the patron, in this case the emperor — rather than the emerging Christian model. This incident occurred at the same time that Basil was relieving the indigent victims of famine in Cappadocia with free grain, medical care, and sermons that ardently advocated mercy and justice. The entrance of the poor into the leitourgia of the church did not necessarily follow nor immediately reform the state of affairs in public politics. While Hymetius practiced what his culture recognized as pious *euergetism* — making grain available in crisis — he did it as a fiscally profitable transaction, while Christians such as Pachomius, Ephrem, and Basil did not. The law, however, was not above using clerical differences to fund poverty assistance. In North Africa in 369, the bishop Chronopius was deposed by 70 bishops for some now-unknown offense. His legal appeal to the proconsul, Claudius, was denied and he was fined 50 pounds of silver, all of which was to go to the poor (*CT* 11.36.20).

As the poor entered the civic leitourgia in the Christian era, they also entered the rhetoric relating to it. The poor, laborers, and illiterate had, up until now, been beneath the notice of the elite, who prided themselves on their eminence in rhetoric. The different aims of Christian rhetoric mandated different topics. Scriptural exegesis, for example, might be delivered according to rhetorical convention but it now demanded attention to new social details. Social crises might push Christian homilists and rhetors to scour the classical texts for relevant models for their new material, but these must now be revised in light of the different social emphases of the later age. The Cappadocians, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine are among those who began to use classical rhetoric to approach social issues in particular Christian ways.

The entrance of the poor into Christian leitourgia is evident in many fourth- and early-fifth-century accounts of bishops responding to crises: Spyridon, bishop of Trimythun in Cyprus early in the fourth century, made a storehouse available to the poor on the honor system: those in need took at will and returned their loans unsupervised. If the system failed — and Spyridon could attest when it did — God inevitably found the sinners out: the storehouse appeared empty on their second visit for grain.¹³⁹ In the late 360s, Ephrem became the steward of funds to provide for victims of famine in Edessa. As soon as the rich gave him their supply, he "had about three hundred beds fitted up in the public porches and here he tended those that were ill and suffering from the effects of the famine, whether they were foreigners or natives of the surrounding country."¹⁴⁰ Around the same time Marathonius, an antihomonoisian deacon at Constantinople, was "zealous superintendent of the poor of the monastical dwellings inhabited by men and women."¹⁴¹ One of Cyril's several depositions from the see of Jerusalem in the fourth century was delivered apparently because he had sold "the veil and sacred ornaments of the church" to buy food for famine victims. He was found out only when a Christian donor recognized the fabric of his donation to the altar as part of an actress's costume.¹⁴²

This sale of church plate, jewels, and altar cloths to benefit the poor became a standard, if controversial, practice in the fifth and sixth centuries, usually with the opposition coming from original donors or clerics and bishop-aspirants who wished to keep the church's fiscal wealth on the altars. The poor thus competed with the traditional image of the altar, the symbolic instrument for and place of Christian liturgical practice. Early in the fifth century, Acacius, bishop of Amida, convinced his clergy to sell the altar vessels to redeem seven thousand Persian prisoners who had been taken by the Romans in their attack on Azazene. The prisoners were dying of starvation. Acacius not only ransomed the prisoners but also then fed them "for some time" and eventually sent them back to Persia.¹⁴³ In the West, Ambrose, too, sold church plate to relieve human misery of captives.¹⁴⁴ The life of Rabbula of Edessa in fifth-century Syria characterizes on a monumental scale this episcopal commitment to adorn the church with the poor by stripping it of its material ornaments.¹⁴⁵

139. *Soz.*, *HE* 1.11.

140. *Soz.*, *HE* 3.6; Unless otherwise noted, translations from Sozomen and Socrates are those of NPNF². 2. Palladius tells a similar story about Ephrem in *H. Laus*. 40. Palladius is alone in depicting Ephrem as solitary and living in a monastic cell; the rest of the tradition about him roots him firmly in the midst of active church administration; see Sidney H. Griffith, "Images of Ephraem: The Syrian Holy Man and His Church," *Traditio* 45 (1989–90): 7–33 and *idem*, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*, ed. Thomas Halton and Joseph P. Williams (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 22–52. None of Ephrem's surviving texts to my knowledge supplies any further evidence of his activities in famine relief.

141. *Soz.*, *HE* 4.20, English trans. C. D. Harranff, NPNF² 2.315.

142. *Soz.*, *HE* 4.25, trans. Harranff, NPNF² 2.321. Presumably by attending her performance?

143. *Soz.*, *HE* 7.21, trans. A. C. Zenos, NPNF² 2.164.

144. *Ambr.*, *Off.* 2.70; *Budé* 2.40–41; cf. *Off.* 2.136–39.

145. P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, (1894; reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 4.410–11; for discussion see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Holy and the Poor: Models from Early Syriac Christianity" in *Through the Eye of a Needle: Judeo-Christian Roots of Social Welfare*, ed. Emily Abu Hananwall and Carter Lindberg (Kirkville, Mo.: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1994), 43–66.

Not only did some clergy boldly strip church altars to reconstruct the poor as holy vessels, Palladius's story of Macarius and the rich virgin suggests that they were not above boldly deceiving church members as well. There was in Alexandria, he says, a rich and miserly virgin who, despite ecclesiastic rebukes, gave nothing to anyone. The priest Macarius, in order "to tap a vein . . . to alleviate her greed," offered to sell her "some precious stones, emeralds, and hyacinths" at a bargain price of five hundred coins, with surplus profit guaranteed. She fell for it and paid him eagerly. Macarius, a former gem engraver who now supervised "the poorhouse for cripples," spent the money on the needs of these poor. When the miser¹⁴⁶ begged to see what she had bought, "[h]e took her to the upper floor [of the hospital], pointed out the crippled and inflamed women, and said 'Look, here are your hyacinths!' And he led her [to the men housed on the ground floor and said] 'Behold your emeralds! If they do not please you, take your money back!'"¹⁴⁷ Palladius says that, although the miser immediately took off in huff, then became ill from grief, she later "gave thanks to God."

The poor here spiritually benefit the miser, whether she wishes it or not. However, they function in this way not merely because they are poor, valuable to God, who are here receiving Christian mercy, but rather as they have become liturgical ornaments, "precious stones" used by the priest as part of the duties of his office. The interaction of all three parties — priest, miser, and crippled poor — works together to profit the entire community of believers.

John Chrysostom's role in giving liturgical meaning to the involuntary poor can be outlined here only very briefly. Since Chrysostom and Basil were both influenced by Antiochene and Armenian monasticism, Chrysostom's views may suggest the Cappadocian model as well.

Chrysostom, whose episcopal role was always secondary to his monastic concerns, mentions the indigent poor constantly in his sermons, and this focus is found as well in the writings of Palladius, his biographer. In fact, Palladius suggests that the trouble between Theophilus and Chrysostom, which eventually led to Chrysostom's exile from Constantinople and indirectly to his death, really began with Bishop Theophilus's lack of concern for the poor in Alexandria. It is no surprise that Palladius, faithful to Chrysostom, might depict Theophilus as unflatteringly as possible, but his details nonetheless reflect the liturgical concern for the poor.

The trouble began, Palladius recounts, with an octogenarian priest, Isidore, who used a pious noblewoman's designated donation to the church in the manner she wished it to be used — but without Theophilus's knowledge. The woman wished that her money be used to buy clothing for the poor women of Alexandria. Isidore complied; both Isidore and the woman "knew" that Theophilus would have directed the funds instead to "stones," adorning the church with inanimate treasure, architectural modifications and additions, and decorations. When Theophilus learned what Isidore had done, he sought to expel him from the church. Isidore fled to the monks at

Nitria. Theophilus's subsequent attack on these monks, accusing them of Origenist heresy, was, Palladius suggests, fueled wholly by this rage at their support for Isidore.¹⁴⁸ Isidore justified his use of the alms, saying "it was better to restore the bodies of the sick which are more properly temples of God than to build walls."¹⁴⁹ The bodies of the poor had by this time entered the Christian leitourgia, but they competed fiercely with liturgical forms, in this case quite literally: the form of women's clothing (and possibly medical care) competed with the form of church architecture.

Chrysostom's sermons also suggest the economic exchange of church treasure for poverty relief at a deep symbolic level. In this exchange the poor became identified not only as "temples of God" but in fact became church treasure itself, instruments by which divine body and salvation might be carried between God and members of the church, reminiscent of their redemptive role in Cyprian's treatise but far more visible, with a much greater nuance to their presence. Their image is now, two centuries after Cyprian, strengthened in part by the vivid liturgical symbols of the altar in late antiquity. The poor become the liturgical image for these most holy elements in all of Christian worship: the altar and the body of Christ.

Chrysostom in fact explicitly identifies the poor as *altar*, both divine and divinely constituted, in his *Homilia* 20.3 in *Epistulam 2 ad Corinthios*. This passage vividly suggests the traditional Graeco-Roman sacrifice involved in civic leitourgia:

Do you wish to see his altar? . . . This altar is composed of the very members of Christ, and the body of the Lord becomes your altar . . . venerable because it is itself Christ's body. . . . This altar you can see lying everywhere, in the alleys and in the agoras and you can sacrifice upon it anytime . . . invoke the spirit not with words, but with deeds. Nothing kindles and sustains the fire of the Spirit as effectively as this oil poured out with liberality.¹⁵⁰ . . . When you see a poor believer, believe that you are looking at an altar; when you see this one as a beggar, don't simply refrain from insulting him but actually give him honor; and if you witness someone else insulting him, stop them, prevent it. Thus God himself will be good to you, and you will obtain the promised good things.¹⁵¹

The divine altar of the poor body is here, like the civic duty, out in public, "in alleys" and "in the agoras." By the sacrifice of good deeds upon this altar, God's body, the early Christian texts argued, is served in the community, with the usual honor and glory expected from civic energetism. In the Graeco-Roman world prior to Christianity, the destitute and homeless had been outside the leitourgia, perhaps not deliberately excluded but certainly conceptually unrelated to it, visible only at the fringes. Through the reworking of civic imagery into Christian discourse, the poor have become a discrete group who have entered, become, and now symbolize the liturgy in all its nuances in the Christian world of late antiquity.

148. Pall., *Dial* 6.

149. Soz., *HE* 8.12, trans. Hartmann, NPNF² 2:176–77, and fn. 233.

150. Chrys., *Hom.* 20.3 in *Ep 2 ad Cor.*, trans. M. J. De Vinne, "The Advocacy of Empty Bellies," (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1995), 82–83, and n.108. For the complete text of this sermon in an earlier translation, see NPNF¹ 12:372–74.

151. Chrys., *Hom.* 20.3 in *Ep 2 ad Cor.*, my trans.

146. Although it is probably assumed, there is no clear evidence in the text that the woman's virginity was a religious choice. Therefore I refer to her in the discussion simply as a miser.

147. Palladius, *H. Latius* 6.9, trans. Robert T. Meyer, *Palladius: The Lausiac History*, Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Newman Press, 1964), 37–40.

Conclusion

Let us now return to the story of Sisinius and the hungry woman with which this chapter began. When the story opens, Sisinius is practicing his monastic service, or office of chanting, singing, and prayers, acts commonly viewed, then and now, as Christian "liturgy." The woman's appearance in the cave is depicted as potential competition to the monk's ritual discipline and a challenge to his religious celibacy. The woman competes with his liturgy as she appeals to him for material aid, offering him her only marketable asset: her body.

While she fails to disturb Sisinius's liturgy, that is, his prayer ritual, she succeeds in entering into his letourgia, his moral obligation as a religious leader to provide civic, community, or public service at his own expense. Sisinius, the bishop who had left his see to become an anchoritic monk, subsequently fulfills this letourgia in the same way that he performs his liturgy: regularly. His subsequent practice of feeding this woman daily from his own supply of food becomes an act of service or worship to God and the community: a letourgia.

In this way the woman by her need, by her very embodiedness, by her potential to call Sisinius to account should he fail her (which perhaps in the end he does), becomes a liturgical image for those who transmit the story: Abba John who hears it from Sisinius and tells John Moschos, who passes it on to his readers. The woman represents the need for justice and points to God by her participation in the monk's material expression of piety. Sisinius's response to this moral dilemma is not the usual response expected of the godly monk: the woman, who enters the text as a sexual temptation, is not expelled as a demon but is rather invited back. Indeed, the moral dilemma in this story is not sexual but civic, as the woman's body represents — to Sisinius — the physical needs of the community to which he has a moral duty. The end of the story, "I fed her until I left those parts," emphasizes his faithfulness in performing this letourgia. However, the monk is sufficiently a liturgist of the living God that he is neither distracted from his worship by the woman nor tied to her material needs when called away, and the woman's daily need for food seems, like the reader's curiosity about her, suddenly unsatisfied at the end of the story. Nevertheless, her model, as a type by which bishops and even impoverished monks may serve God, stands as a moral injunction to the reader precisely because of the essential participation of her poverty in the liturgical image of the Christian text.

Source: Susan R. Holman,

The Hungry are Dying: Beggars + Bishops

in Rome-Capetocoe (NY: Oxford UP,

2001)