

On Mercy

Volume 2

By Wilhelm Löhe



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Translated from Wilhelm Löhe. "Von der Barmherzigkeit"
in *Wilhelm Löhe Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, ed Klaus Ganzert,
466-523. Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1962.

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SIXTH CHAPTER

HOW DID THE CHURCH OF ALL AGES FOLLOW HER LORD'S COMMAND TO PRACTICE MERCY?

43. It is clear from the outset that mercy was practiced the most during the time when the purest desires of the congregation and a right measure of divine grace directly corresponded to the purest and most anointed proclamation of the divine Word. The congregation of the apostolic time was one body and one spirit; thus, the members of the body provided the richest assistance to each other and, thereby, also to the great, holy love itself. There is not just one presbyter Gaius (3 JOHN 1), one Philemon (PHILEMON 4), one family of Stephanas (1 COR. 16:15), one Epaphroditus (PHILEMON 2:25; 4:18), and one Onesiphorus (2 TIM. 1:16) that receive the praise of the high apostles regarding mercy. But there the Holy Spirit, as we can read in Acts 2:44–47 and 4:32–37, praises entire congregations, like that in Jerusalem, because of their mercy, which manifests itself in the form of a respectful, brotherly love that is accompanied by pity and compassion. Let us then give an orderly overview of all that the New Testament tells us about the practice of mercy. There we come to:

- (1) the communal breaking of bread and the office of the care of the poor, which first grew out of the apostolic office;
- (2) the oft-discussed communism of the church at Jerusalem;
- (3) the agapes or love feasts of the later apostolic time;
- (4) the collections.

Everything the apostolic Scriptures preserved about the practice of mercy in the first congregations will be included in these four sections.

44. Acts 2:42 attests to the fact that the first congregation's members continually remained in the teaching of the apostles, in Communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer. Two of these items actually relate to our subject matter: the Communion and the breaking of bread. The Communion (κοινωνία, collecta) is nothing but the Communion of the earthly things, a sharing of goods. Thus, it is nothing but the practice of merciful, brotherly love. However, we will discuss this in depth later and in conjunction with the apostolic collection. But first we will look at the breaking of bread.

In the later times of the Church, the expression “breaking of bread” was used simply as a term for the Holy Supper. This took place in such a consistent manner that there arose an opposition to this usage. Indeed, some would assert that the expression had nothing to do with the Holy Supper. As often happens, the truth lies in the middle: the Holy Supper was united with communal eating, the daily meal of the first Christians, so that the bread actually was broken not only for the Sacrament, but also for daily nourishment. Later, the practice of communal eating fell into disuse, and the expression “breaking of bread” was shifted to the Holy Supper itself. This was used to describe the congregational meal that was handed down throughout the history of the Church by virtue of divine ordinances, and in this sense the term was rightly used. At this point, however, we must stay focused on the perished custom of the communal meal.

According to the testimonies of Holy Scripture, the first congregation at Jerusalem gathered in the temple at Solomon's Porch (ACTS 5:12) for the divine services. The services consisted of the teaching of the apostles as well as the commandments of God. The people had all the right to do so because they were mostly Jewish Christians, that is, Jews who could enjoy their share in the temple just as much as others of their nation and who had not yet given up on the temple. The celebration of the Holy Supper

could not take place at the open Porch of Solomon; a different location was needed for it. But the congregation was not lacking such a location for they gathered in groups in the houses of individual members.

Since the first celebration of the Supper had followed another, though also holy, meal, the people believed that it would be most faithful to the institution of the Lord if the holy meal of the New Testament would remain connected with a brotherly meal that was used in the Old Testament. I dare not decide whether the bodily meal preceded or followed the sacramental one, for there are reasons for and against both assumptions. In any case, a bodily meal went with it, and it was hallowed because of its connection with the Holy Supper. As poor and rich ate this meal together and the poor were not able to bring anything for it, the breaking of bread and communal eating became even more necessary because any shortage would be bodily, communally, and spiritually disruptive.

The communal meal awakened the need for holy, merciful, and decent care of the poor, and the office of the holy seven was instituted to meet this need. Initially it was the widows of the Hellenists, that is, of the Greek-speaking Jews, who had been overlooked. But provisions were soon made through the diaconate when the whole congregation, in great wisdom, elected men who belonged to the offended party as deacons. One can assume that all the men were Greek Jews by birth, since all the names of the holy seven are Greek. This election was a very honorable one for the entire first congregation, and the election also spoke of a special guidance from the most high Lord, who put the office of mercy in the hands of the more liberal group in the congregation. Thus, there was then at Jerusalem a table service of seven holy men, who because of their Hellenistic origin were also perhaps equipped with some external education and graceful manner of officiating at the table. Likewise, the Holy Spirit worked in them

and enabled them to do their duties in a special way, specifically with heavenly decorum and according to the mind of the Lord. After this, we do not read of any further complaints of either Greeks or Palestinians. The great, important, and tender business of table service and mercy was being done according to the heart of the One who became the example of table service for all the holy seven by His works at Cana (JOHN 2:1-12) and at the feeding of the five thousand and four thousand.

45. The most striking feature of mercy in the apostolic congregation at Jerusalem — and at the same time verifiable proof of the fact that in that congregation mercy had transfigured itself into brotherly love — is what we know about the common possession of all goods. In Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32, we read in clear words of the Holy Spirit that no one said his goods were strictly his own, but that all things were held in common. Indeed, the people even sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among the others according to their needs. Thus, there was no need among them.

Later, this apostolic communism, emerging simply from the exuberance of the Spirit and brotherly love, is no longer found in a whole congregation; even in Jerusalem itself it was no longer seen because the whole congregation was scattered. Those who gathered there later became a new congregation, which, for example, could be treated by James the Just — as far as his letter is applicable to Jerusalem — in a totally different manner than that first springtime congregation. Also, the additional resources of the congregation at Jerusalem dried up fairly soon, and other congregations had to come to its aid in self-sacrificial love because of the scarcity of goods in AD 44 and even up to fifteen years later.

Although this communism was a transitory phenomenon, in its appearance and disappearance it is and remains a very remarkable thing, and very different opinions were voiced about it from time to time. One group is inclined to see this communism as a confu-

sion of the first congregation; yet who can endorse this opinion, since the apostles did nothing to stop this movement? A man like Barnabas himself set the example (ACTS 4:36), and the mild light of divine goodwill, not a single shadow of reproof, appears in the narration of this incident.

Did the almighty and holy Lord want to protect and defend the course of the congregation by punishing certain members in the episode of Ananias and Sapphira (ACTS 5:1–11)? Others believed that it was necessary to abstain from anything like this in the further governing of the Church, since even in the congregation at Jerusalem, the firstborn in grace and virtues, this movement did not remain totally pure, as Ananias and Sapphira indicate. Yet even if one admits that such fruits rarely grow on earth and no general commandment can be given to produce them — as the Lord Himself opened the way for the rich youth after he had asked, “What do I still lack?” (MAT. 19:20) — one, nevertheless, has to keep the way, which the Lord showed to the rich youth and in which the first congregation walked.

Finally, others in the nineteenth century, the Communists of the day, have tried to cover their damned theories with the divine Word and the example of the first congregation. Yet the mind and intention of the Communists are as far from the famous passages of the Book of Acts as the morning is from midnight. The communism at Jerusalem was an entirely free and by no means commanded matter, which was practiced or left undone by each individual Christian according to his circumstances. If it had been a general matter, based on legislation and systematic implementation, then one cannot understand, for example, why the mother of John Mark could still possess her own house where, according to Acts 12:12, the congregation gathered for prayer. Likewise, one cannot understand why the example of the holy apostle Barnabas is pointed out, who could easily sell his field since he was a Levite and

had his share in the Temple. Also, Peter should have rebuked Ananias and Sapphira for embezzling what was meant for the congregation, not for their hypocrisy. The communism at Jerusalem is like a heavenly, miraculous flaring up of love. It was set at the beginning of the Christian era for everyone to see what great things flow out of love, and for what measure of love and mercy everybody has to pray for himself as well as for others. Never again was there seen such a powerful appearance of loving mercy in the world, and yet it would be of the greatest foolishness to take the rareness of the matter as a proof for its being no good.

46. It might seem odd to include a separate paragraph about the love feasts, especially since I certainly had in mind nothing but the love feasts of the first congregation when previously talking about the breaking of bread in the Jerusalem congregation. Yet also in Jerusalem, the joint eating of the congregation ceased to a degree already discussed. But there were also love feasts elsewhere, and the famous chapter 1 Corinthians 11 clearly bears witness to this.

In Jerusalem the believers ate together daily, and their meals were in fact love feasts. This was chiefly due to the life of love that governed them, and it was a manifestation of the new nature or creation that they ate together. But it was different in Corinth and the remaining congregations. There love feasts were held because one wanted to do it, not because one could not but help it. The meal became a matter of purpose; one intentionally gathered to practice love. While in Jerusalem the joint eating was more a hallowed form of daily life, elsewhere it was a purposeful public testimony of the existing brotherly love. In Jerusalem it was care of the poor; in Corinth and elsewhere it was for public recognition of the principle that the rich members of Christ should care for the poor. One could say that the joint eating and the breaking of bread of the Jerusalem congregation is the most beautiful and unique pearl in the crown of the Lord Jesus, the agapes of the later apostolic time but smaller pearls from secondary water. But

what we know about these agapes of the later apostolic time is derived mostly from the eleventh chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians, even though we find traces of the same matter in other passages of the New Testament. The institutions of the later Christian time are also as useful as a ray of the setting sun reflected by the mountains, which can be used to make inferences about the glory of the sun itself.

William Cave (1637–1713), an author who researched the life of the early Church and wrote valuable books, and others with him hold that the love feasts at Corinth were held before the Holy Supper, since all Christians would probably have been gathered for the Holy Supper. The Corinthians, however, were reprimanded in view of their love feasts, namely, that they did not wait for each other. Cave seems to be quite right, since the apostle closely connects the reproach regarding the way the love feast was held to the doctrine and celebration of the Holy Supper itself. This may have been done so that he who does not mercifully wait and provide for his brother during the love feast goes to the Holy Supper unworthily. However, this by no means implies that the love feast had the same relation to the Sacrament in every congregation. In Corinth it was this way, but elsewhere it was different.

The perversion of the matter in Corinth was doubtlessly very loathsome and punishable, and St. Paul speaks against it. Among the Corinthians, the manner in which they, as pagans, held their primitive meals was obvious. They ate together, but each individually, and there was no thought that here was an opportunity to do good. After Paul's reproach, this Greek sin of eating out of selfishness was supposed to be overcome by the customs of the Semitic congregation. For at the love feast preceding the Holy Supper, a beam of heavenly love was brought out, and it illumined the congregation in Zion during the first days of the apostles more beautifully than the sun rising above the Mount of Olives. One can speculate about whether the admonition of St. Paul awakened the

merciful brotherly love of the Corinthian congregation anew and resulted in the people eating the Supper in a manner worthy of the Lamb, but we do not have any reports about this.

47. Although Christian mercy can be called the firstborn daughter of the new love with which the Spirit of Jesus filled His believers, its limits could not be set more narrowly than love itself permitted. Just as love did not just cover the members of the individual congregation but embraced all who were born out of God, all who were recognized as believers, so mercy also was not content to drive every kind of misery out of the closest proximity, out of the area of the individual congregation, but it wanted to do good and help those who lived afar off. The Spirit of the Lord assisted it so that its manifestation could bring even more honor to Himself and Jesus.

For instance, through the prophet Agabus He prophesied a great scarcity that would, once it started, hit the poor Jewish-Christian congregations particularly hard. Soon the spirit of the congregations awoke, especially in the Pauline congregations, which, as a precaution even before the calamity started, gathered everything that might bring relief (**ACTS 11:28–30**). And when the Palestinian congregations were hit again by scarcity, famine, and calamity about fifteen years later, the old zeal of Paul and the fervent love of his congregations became fresh and new again, and now the aid of the pagans, who had received the spiritual wealth from the Jews, gratefully flowed back into the old native areas through material benefits (**ROM. 15:27**). Those lengthy passages, written by the most faithful hand of Paul (**2 CORINTHIANS 8**) where he urged the Christians with all the power of heart-felt Christian rhetoric to participate in collections for the poor Jewish congregations, are among the most beautiful passages we can possibly read in the apostolic epistles. Rules are given there, not just regarding the ratio between gift and property, but also regarding the time and way of giving. The most diligent and obedient ones are praised

as apostles or delegates of the congregations have to be selected to bring the money to Jerusalem to the elders. In view of an extraordinary contribution, the apostle himself does not consider it an interruption of his apostolic work to personally travel to Jerusalem with the delegates just to deliver the offering of the pagan Christians.

Whoever reads all this cannot but consider the collections that are held for other congregations as sacred and be roused to do likewise, but through simple conclusions he must come to realize also that those first Christians must have been exceedingly rich in their giving. A journey from Macedonia to Jerusalem, done by three or four delegates of the congregations, was expensive to say the least. And think of how big the collections had to be, especially if the needy themselves should immediately deem it worthy of their own delegation after deducing all the travel expenses. Here as always when we compare our situation with that of the early Church, we are moved to beat our chest repentantly and confess our sins unto the Lord.

48. As we set about to make a transition into studying the first post-apostolic centuries and their practice of mercy, we must first put before our eyes the content of our discussion, which is arranged in a clear manner. First, we can examine the persons that were treated with mercy, then the principles of mercy that were followed, then the difference between private and public practices of mercy, and, finally, the zeal of the Christians that can be observed in the practice of mercy.

49. As for the persons who were the objects of mercy, we find at the top of the list some well-known guests at the tables of the congregation, that is, the widows and orphans, the aged, the infirm, the sick, the abandoned children, the virgins, the strangers, the prisoners of war, the slaves, the confessors and their families, and even the dead. This list shows that the objects of mercy started to become more diverse, just as the spread of Christianity brought

with it increasing persecutions, the hatred of the world, and other different circumstances of the different congregations.

The poor widows older than sixty years, possibly also younger ones, who were trusted not to marry again were taken care of by the congregation according to an apostolic precedent, and they practiced works of mercy in the congregation. They began to form a distinct rank, so to speak. To the orphans was applied the principle that the bishop had to vicariously assume the stead of the father for those who had no other caregiver. He had the boys learn a craft and provided them with the necessary tools; the girls were educated until they were either ready to be married or deemed fit to join the ranks of the virgins.

The aged, infirm, and sick were supported by the offerings of the Church according to their needs. Pains were taken to not support those poor who could work. Love was only to compensate for that which a person was unable to earn by himself. Instead, it was considered mercy to instruct somebody to use his own strength and to earn whatever he needed. The bishop handed abandoned children over to the widows and virgins for education; this part of the Christian work of love was seen as missionary work and blessed as such. The virgins, that is, the God-betrothed virgins, who had beforehand renounced marriage, formed their own liturgical rank, which was entitled to take its livelihood from the altar.

The strangers received great care from the earliest times on, and the bishops earnestly urged others not to overlook them in the practice of mercy. Indeed, the institute of letters to pilgrims was begun specifically in the interest of strangers. 2 Prisoners of war or Christians abducted by wild hordes were ransomed with a lot of sacrifice, even if objects such as holy vessels had to be sold. Likewise, all care was given to slaves, although one was not by any means ready to set them free or even ransom them.

Special attention and faithfulness were given to the confessors. Their escape was facilitated. They were received into houses, given food and drink in prison, accompanied before court and

defended, and after becoming martyrs they were buried with all diligence. The families of those gone home, their widows and orphans, were certainly taken care of. The deacons diligently kept records and lists of the poor, and they were carefully listed according to name, age, sex, trade, and circumstances. Thus, no one was overlooked or forgotten. Neither were the dead forgotten. Because the Lord would not forget them but will raise them out of the earth, the Church also could not forget them, but put them reverently and with sacred service into the soil as God's seeds.

Additionally, one did not stop at the fellow believers but also served Jews and the heathen. Splendid examples of this were experienced at Alexandria and Carthage. At different times the plague killed an immense number of people at both places. While the heathen mercilessly threw the sick, the dying, and the dead out of their houses, the Christians, regardless of the dead person's religion and state, carried them into their houses, took care of them, buried them, and in scores fell prey to the disease themselves. At those times the glory of the Christian religion shone so brightly that it was also generally praised by the heathen.

50. As we now have to talk about the principles of mercy, we must first distinguish between principles for giving and principles for the use of the gifts.

There is little doubt that the Christian Church unanimously acknowledged the legitimacy of wealth. Although it was known that the Lord had expected the rich youth to sell all his goods and give the proceeds to the poor, and although the first congregation at Jerusalem had sacrificially followed this word of Jesus, no one saw a firm commandment of the Lord regarding giving, only pastoral advice for certain people and circumstances.

The whole Church realized that a rich person, too, could be a Christian and still remain rich. The question of possessing wealth was separated from the other regarding its use, and it

was left to the individual to act according to his conscience, his circumstances, and his gifts. It was only expected that, regardless of how one managed his property, he use it for the glory of God and his Christ and for the blessing of mankind. It was seen clearly that he who managed his goods according to mercy served the Lord and his neighbor just as much as he who simply donated them to the Church for its poor or to the poor themselves.

The principle of the legitimacy of wealth was connected with a second one, namely, that of the unrestricted freedom of all giving. Although many agreed that all Christians had the obligation to give, they were still far from using any further force beyond that of admonition to instruct people on giving. Irenaeus says that the Jews had the commandment and the obligation to bring sacrifices, but the Christians offer God sacrifices more pleasing; for they bring everything willingly (*Against Heresies* IV 13:2–4; 18:2).

Here the church father noted an important difference between the Old and New Testament that is worthy of recognition. For a third principle is connected to the first two: the poor have no right to demand a gift. If they had the right, the gift would not flow from mercy and the marvelous love of God. But according to God's will, there are the poor and the rich, and the chasm between both is to be covered by merciful love. In recognizing this, the Church did not tolerate any mumbling poor but instead, for example, taught the slaves not to despair while waiting to be ransomed, but to fulfill the commandment of the apostle, who instructs the slaves to serve their masters well. Thus he taught them not only to serve the good and gentle, but also the harsh (1 **PETER 2:18**). One might question whether these principles applied by the Church were to be considered economical. But in any case, passages by the church fathers show a concern for the common good, and based on these texts one could perhaps try to ascertain how much truth is in the so-called economical views, for indeed, some truth is also in them.

51. After the preceding paragraph, we must now list the principles that told how gifts were to be used during the second and third centuries. These will coincide with the previously discussed distinction between public and private mercy. Private charity was not restricted by public charity. Every Christian rejoiced in public charity and supported it and participated in it. But he also insisted on the joy of detecting misery with his own eyes, visiting it on his own feet, and alleviating it with his own hands.

Women especially excelled in this holy calling of private charity. Due to their faith they were not tempted to join in worldly entertainment. Instead, they used their time and strength to visit the shanties of the wretched, all the while fulfilling their calling at home and exhorting themselves and others to make sacrifices and show love, even when their own strength proved to be insufficient. It goes without saying that we cannot give any accurate report regarding private charity, for as there are secret sins that must not come to light, so there are also secret ways and settings of mercy that the Father, who sees in secret (MATT. 6:4), wills to reveal on that Great Day.

Conversely, there is still something to be said about the public charity of Christians. The Christians gave offerings in their Divine Services, which were partly used for the poor, especially for the agape meals. These meals, however, like the celebration of the Sacrament, were no longer offered daily, and not always in connection with the Sacrament anymore. Besides the oblations, the Christians used to deposit special weekly and monthly gifts in the congregation's charity chest. On special occasions, such as on the conversion and reception of heathen or heretics, or on the installation into an ecclesial office and so forth, great gifts were given. Many gave the tithe of the Old Testament voluntarily, and this was publicly approved, yet without making a law out of it. When greater calamities appeared nearby and far away, collections were announced. When one foresaw that there was no way for

the congregation to give the gifts, a fast was scheduled, and the savings from the food of one day were laid on the altar.

Legally the bishop and his lower clergy, specifically the deacons, were the administrators of all public finances and gifts of mercy. Nothing was saved or invested. Whatever the congregation laid on the altar was transformed into a brook or river of love that could not stand still but that looked for its fall to where the misery lived, and that continually had to be of immediate use in the congregation. One did not seek to establish foundations meant to remain operational for centuries, but one practiced mercy immediately and handed down that understanding to the follow generation. One did not donate one's alms in such a way that the bishop was unable to use it right away if a more urgent need emerged. And indeed it goes without saying that lists were made, and that accounts were kept and rendered. A wise man never tolerated management of money without supervision, and he certainly never led his brother into temptation by releasing him from rendering an account. By no means were these gifts, these sacrifices, left unaccounted for.

52. As for the zeal of the Christians in the second and third centuries, one can already conclude from looking at history that it had to be great and extraordinary. Whenever a great calamity arose, the need for mercy spoke powerfully to the congregations of Jesus, and hearts were prepared, willing, and inclined to follow the call to help those in need. Additionally, not only the congregations but also those in the holy ministry were in full bloom back then. There was no lack of faithful, respected bishops and teachers who knew how to pour fresh oil into the lamps of pious mercy.

For wherever the Word of God meets willing hearts, there is no lack of zealous renderings of good works. One could find enough individual examples as proof, but it is hardly necessary to point to the sacrifice of individuals when such principles governed the entire Church. The public and private practice of Christian love

was not only highly recognized among heathen as well as Christians, but it was even turned into an accusation by the former. The sacrifice, the dedication, the love — when it breaks forth with such a force as in both centuries about which we are talking — is too much a stranger in this world to be understood by it. Instead, it is usually misunderstood. In view of those times this has to be even more true, and especially back then, when the world set the abominations of the apostasy from God unabashedly and numerous before everyone's eyes.

53. As we now proceed to the fruits of mercy during the next three centuries, that is, the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, it will be by no means superfluous to consider these centuries and their shape in general. In this period, the gruesome end of the western Roman Empire and the deep decay of the eastern Roman Empire take place. The Roman Empire and the Roman population in general were unable to exist without being ruled by foreign governments. The flow of Germanic nations into both halves of the old Roman Empire occurred. General devastation and destruction were wrought on both countries and cities. Nations lost their populations. There was no peace.

Who can look at these events without thinking that these centuries must have offered huge amounts of work for those wanting to show Christian mercy? And yet these events only mark the general external outline of the time and do not answer the question, “Why is this time period so different than earlier years, and why did it turn out this way?” If the whole Roman Empire is covered by a stream of nameless misfortune and misery, then a terrible guilt must have preceded it, for the Lord is a just God.

But then why were the Romans previously lords over the Nordic nations by whom they were now overcome? Why the weakness? What is the cause of all these terrible punishments? One could certainly give many answers here, none of which has to be wrong in and of itself. One could simply say that the Romans had previously

overcome, robbed, and plundered all nations, and so now it is their turn, and it is done to them according to the Word: “With the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (LUKE 6:38).

The Romans themselves, having become rich and great, were not content with the gifts of a rich and good providence. This is why now all the poor, frugal ones come from the darkness of their woods and prairies and show others how it feels when one comes to experience the bad things he has done to himself. This is why fear from God comes over the beautiful lands of the South, why the inhabitants flee, why the cities become desolate, and why the remains of kindness sink into the dust before the avenging swords of the Germans and later of the Huns. Already this answer would suffice to point out the rich seed of an even richer crop. Yet we want to give one more answer out of the many, as it can be gathered from the research that has been done in recent times.

A general calamity covered the whole territory of the Roman Empire. Rome — from the very outset an agricultural nation and little acquainted with industry and commerce — had come under increasing pressure regarding its fields because of looming warfare. The military duties were incumbent on the masters, and the slaves were supposed to tend the field but were lazy, evil workers. The fields became desolate. Then the small owners sold their land to the bigger ones, and so the individual farms became immeasurably large. So it happened that in that period many a Roman farm’s acreage was equal or even superior to that of a German principality. These immense farms were run by crowds of lazy slaves, and yielded so little that they were eventually abandoned, because of which difficulties of a different kind were experienced everywhere. The complaints were many, for the number of slaves and poor became immense, and the hatred against the masters and rich was growing. So when the field of mercy had already been great, now it was altogether overwhelming.

Additionally, the victory of the church over the Roman Empire

did not bring about a greater zeal but only indifference. Because there was no longer a threat of persecution, the church grew complacent and sought to prosper as much as possible. While its own fire cooled off, the hundreds of thousands — who according to the example and precept of the emperors joined the church — brought little additional strength and were instead a great burden and icy cold. The church fathers now had to struggle with the violent, the impudent, the ostentatious, the greedy, the avaricious, the wasteful, the usurers, and with all kinds of injustice within the church, as they did formerly with the heathen.

When one reads the speeches of the great church fathers of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, everything is just like today. Depraved masses — loving Christians as an exception — knew no better way to keep from being seduced by a so-called Christian state of affairs than to go into the wilderness, the deserts, and the monasteries.

To such a church the task was assigned to alleviate — I do not say to eliminate — this nameless misery. Misery flowed and now covered the land with its waters because of God's just providence and retaliating hand. The disproportion between agriculture and commerce, between slavery and freedom, the terrible consequences of the Roman conquests, oppression and extortion in all countries, and the like, are to be counted among these sources. The church knew that while it was unable to stop the flow of sadness, it ought to drain off the water. Yet it lacked the necessary hands to do the work. All this causes a very bleak view into the centuries about which we are talking. The church did what it could, but did it really reach the goal of making this misery-filled world, which did not want spiritual help, materially happy?

54. When exercising the care of the poor, the church encountered the same persons we listed in the previous period, but in greater diversity and in incomparably larger numbers.

Added to these were some forms of misery we had previously no reason or necessity to note. For example, the church had to work with day laborers and small free landowners, both of which frequently had to languish in the greatest misery. Therefore, the old task was again made more difficult because of the same principles as before. It considered wealth legitimate, the gift voluntary, and the poor by no means being entitled to demand the aid. Yet frequently the call for help from the shepherds or bishops of the congregations became so urgent that one was tempted to forget that love is a matter of freedom.

Yes, the great calamity attributed such a value to the alms that even the greatest church fathers ran the risk of attributing money a value far greater than was legitimate. By taking their starting point from certain passages of Holy Scripture, which have to be seen within the whole picture of salvation or they are easily misunderstood, they come to a point where they frequently emphasize the atoning virtue of the alms and their influence on one's attainment of eternal life. We must not endorse these ideas or use them ourselves, and we must certainly not be like those who attempted to elaborate on these passages and give alms a value, which one cannot do without infringing upon the blood of Jesus. So it is certainly right that the holy Fathers attacked the usurers, assailed the greedy, and challenged the rich and wealthy in their thinking. By wresting the offering from unwilling hearts, they fulfilled a double sacred duty, namely that of Christian care for the poor and for their souls. Yet when the gift is wrested from the rich — not by pointing them to love, not by pointing them to the fact that it will bear witness to faith in eternity, not even by telling them that heaven and eternal blessedness are the gifts they received in return — then such a cry for help might be excused as merely the voice of one despairing. So it comes as no surprise that people have a hard time proving that, in spite of the exaggeration, the church still held the old apostolic teachings regarding wealth,

alms, and the way to eternal life.

55. As for the ways that people showed love to others, many great changes took place in these centuries. The church never wanted to supersede or absorb private charity, not even during these centuries. And so the former remained active alongside the latter for a time, and the public activities continued to be based on the oblations, agapes, and collections, regular and irregular contributions.

But the calamity began to grow bigger and the love colder. The number of those in need made it necessary for the church to be inventive, to assess the means and to think about how to have the greatest success with as little as possible. In the past, every home was used as a poorhouse, a hospital, or a hospice. But as extraordinary as the activity of the church was, only individuals, not groups, were supported. Soon people began to think that perhaps it was cheaper to support ten poor in one house than to give them what they needed individually, and so institutional care emerged and replaced the care for individuals.

The monasteries became the paradigmatic objects of study for this purpose. Christianity was corrupt, perhaps even more corrupt than it is today. People did not know how to protect themselves from the influences of corruption on their souls other than to flee into the wilderness and deserts. The great leaders of the church, far from reproving or hindering such separation of the best members of the orthodox church, protected this idea and personally participated in it as much as possible. They saw this as a good example for the rest of people who had to live in the world. In the settlements of the secluded ones, they saw asylums and places of refuge for all who were tired of the world and sin and longed for the strengthening and restoration of faith.

Wherever the monks settled together, there the principles of frugality and poverty and the interest of others were observed.

Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and the whole pagan world after them deemed bodily work unworthy of a free man. Hence no Roman worked, and slaves did farming and trade. After a time, the words of the apostle Paul finally began to shine fully, where he commands everybody to “labor, and make with his hands something good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (EPH. 4:28). From these words, a different state of public affairs began to emerge, where the spirit of the holy apostles was at work and became influential. This was the case mainly in those monasteries of the Orient and later of the Occident, especially when Benedict of Nursia, the father of all Occidental monks, developed and brought to light his salutary principles of combining prayer, study, and manual labor.

Soon crafts were practiced in the settlements of the monks. In sacred silence and singing praises, one did what only slaves did among the heathen. Through one’s frugality one spared the assets of the settlement, and through one’s work one increased them, both for the good of the poor. This was carried out mostly by those who had been raised in luxury, who had, like all their peers, brought their property as a dowry when they entered the monastery or the settlement, and who had enough to do to get used to the hardships. However, in return, those quiet settlements far from the world and from worldly congregations brought the greatest blessing not just upon the poor and wretched but also upon the whole church. When charity and mercy began to build their institutions — such as those of Basil of Caesarea in Cappadocia, a man most worthy of his title “the Great,” who first fought against but then made the idea of institutional care of the poor his own — then one had nothing better to do than to shape the emerging institutions according to the principles, ways, and manners of the monasteries.

Thus, highly diverse institutions arose. There were hospices (*xenodochia*), institutions for infants (*brephotrophia*), and many

others. In short, one sought to meet each person's every need by gathering those with similar needs together. Some of the church fathers mourned that the offerings and the simple deacony of the first centuries did not prevail anymore, were averse to foundations and endowments, and adhered most fervently to the principle that the church should not store or invest any riches but spread all gifts through charity as soon as possible. These men were by necessity the first, richest, and most powerful, and they lived in the era of institutions that still is not past and in which we also still live, to whose principles we, too, by necessity still have to pay tribute, and which might last until the Lord comes.

56. From the very beginning of the Christian church, the agapes are such a lovely phenomenon that some remarks must be made about their disappearance. Already in the previous period, we find that they are not connected with each consumption of the Supper anymore. In this period, however, they appear more and more rarely, mainly only at the celebration of the consecration of a church, at funerals, and on memorial days of revered blood witnesses of Jesus. Yet this was not the last restriction they experienced. The general corruption of the whole church became visible especially in the celebration of the agapes, whose character became more and more worldly, at which the rich Christian paraded his alms and the poor indulged himself as well as possible. This is why the best teachers of the church began to speak against them. Men like St. Ambrose abolished them in their dioceses, and others like Augustine followed suit. After the fifth century, they are found only here and there as an exception or in a rudimentary form. As honorable as the remains are, as much as there was also reason for sparing and cultivating them, one nonetheless realizes of how little use they can be in a sinking, spiritually decaying church.

57. We must now focus on what kind of institution was found most frequently in earlier times and what kind was endowed with the most money. In our age, when every third house in a city or

village is usually the shop of a greedy innkeeper, one would not expect that long ago ecclesial institutions, such as hospices or houses for pilgrims, began to appear. These usually combined all the other smaller institutions and were themselves most richly endowed.

In one of his letters, St. Jerome speaks beautifully of these hospices. A woman named Paulina had died, and her widower, Pammachius, found the deepest consolation for the death of the deceased in emulating her works of love. He, the noble offspring of the great heathen Camillus, was not content with distributing the immeasurable riches he inherited from his wife among the poor in Rome. As a result, he took off the purple gown of the senators and put on the black rugged garb of the monks and founded a hospice near Rome, just like the widow Fabiola in Rome itself. Then Jerome wrote to him from Bethlehem (ep. 66:11, cf. ep. 77:10): “I understand that you have founded a xenodochium [hospice] and have transplanted an offspring of the hospitable oak of Abraham to the Ausonic shores; just like Aeneas you set up your camp on the banks of the Tiber and build a Bethlehem [a house of bread] for this shore that has been visited by famine for a long time.” That which had been entirely abandoned and that had become the last among us without any good reason had become the best of institutions. Thus, the first has become the last and had patiently waited for becoming the first once more.

Besides this first fruit, I must also list some institutions that the church cherished. These were namely the penitential monasteries for fallen girls, the asylums for women who had become slovenly out of poverty, and the hospitals for incurables.

58. The splintering of the church into different factions, schisms, and sects made a significant influence upon its charity. The church had formerly practiced mercy, though chiefly toward the fellow believers, yet without excluding anybody in the wider circle. The loving hearts, giving hands, and the administration of

the assets of the church and institutions were Christian and only Christian, but the recipients could be Christians, Jews, or pagans without any distinction. The honor of the congregation consisted in not applying any difference of religion and confession to the area of charity, although blameless conduct of the Christian poor was required, and slovenly people were banned from the aid of the church.

Yet as the church disintegrated into different factions, every group went its own way and cared only for its own members. One can regret this difference as much as all schisms, although it is good to note that the works of mercy and zeal actually increased through this. It became a matter of honor for each faction not to fall behind the other but to possibly top it in the practice of love and to prove also by this that they had all the right on their side. Indeed, this is how the Lord knew how to turn the disadvantage into blessing. Yet still the vileness of men brought forth different consequences from this new situation, and they were bad ones.

59. Real help consists in two parts: (1) the removal of the calamity, and (2) the stopping of its sources so that it does not come back. Consequently, it has been said that the care of the poor has a double goal of removing or alleviating existing poverty and then providing for the future so that no calamity might arise again. This double goal of care of the poor may be called praiseworthy and nice, but it is a different question whether it can actually be attained.

If it is attainable, then it is worth all trouble and sacrifice. It may even be that it was once attained here and there in a very limited circle and for a short period of time. But would it be possible to refute someone who asserted that it was, generally speaking, never attained and never will be? Does not the one word of the Lord — “For you always have the poor with you” (MATT. 26:11) — already speak powerfully and forcefully in favor of these assertions?

As there will never be a situation where there is ecclesial unity without purity and ongoing purification, so there will never be general prosperity on earth without calamity and poverty bidding the love and mercy of the children of God to do their old duty. Additionally, we have reasons enough to assert that hunger and poverty and nakedness will be awarded by the Lord of glory as a punishment for great disobedience until the end. This prophecy, this shadow of history pointing forward, shows us what is to come, and history itself as the body will not belie its own shadow. We can, therefore, approve of the double task of the care of the poor mentioned above only insofar as it gives us a goal that is worthwhile. Yet from the outset we have to renounce the hope of ever fulfilling it on earth.

This, however, does not mean that we cannot measure our achievement against this goal. Conversely, the standard is a good one if used rightly. Indeed, it will be vital in pointing out our own shortcomings and will cause humility, for the Church has known for some time that this is its task. When it made a difference between the poor that were supported and those that were not to be supported, when it stimulated the poor to endure evil and the rich to show mercy, when it ransomed the prisoners and thereby returned the workers to their families, when it had the foundlings and orphans reared and instructed them in and made them good at crafts, when it instructed girls in how to manage a household, and so on, what else did it do but to pursue the task of mercy? Who would have ever done more to reach this goal than the Church, giving from its treasure of love?

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the calamity was too abundant and the misery too broad and too deep to think of anything beyond what was at hand, namely, the alleviation of the most crying need. There is a rich stream of love flowing from the cross of Christ through the centuries. Filled with admiration, we see its rich, deep waters. But we also realize that He who caused it to stream out of the hearts of men, only after it had come out of

His own pierced heart, does not bind Himself only to the modern time. Instead, He provides for His people at all times to do the necessary in the simplest way. Thus they help in their own time and place, and at other times they plan and provide for the future of the poor as the Spirit of God exhorts them to do so.

60. So far we have only talked about the ecclesial activities, but an entire mighty realm of life standing beside the Church, that is, the state, has hardly been touched. The alliance into which the Church entered with the state from the days of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, was one of great consequences. When we look at the consequences and take them as a whole, we will find it very difficult to view this association as something at all fortunate for the Church. Yet the overarching spirit of the Church dominated the state in so many ways that one can point to a lot of coincidentally good results.

The ancient Roman legislation was nothing less than Christian. However, one could notice that the pagan emperors could not keep themselves entirely impervious to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, even when persecution raged against the flock of Christ. Everything changed when Constantine fully grasped the cross instead of the scepter. One ancient man holds that the laws of Constantine look as if he had issued them right after hearing a sermon, as if he had been touched by the powers of a world to come, or as if a hero of the desert, like St. Anthony for example, had stood behind and admonished him.

Yet the influence of Christianity emerges even more clearly in the legislation of Justinian. From Constantine onward the mighty victory of the Christian Church over the state becomes visible, and the light of godly wisdom started to be reflected here and there in the emperors' laws and decrees. However, the legislation frequently covered areas of life where it had to be either merciful or merciless. In many cases, merciful care was extended to the debtors, to abandoned children, to the slaves, and so on. The rulers

of the Roman Empire often instituted such merciful laws and even extended certain rights and privileges, which they granted the Church and its charitable institutions in their lands, so that they were of utmost importance toward helping the poor.

Because of this, charitable institutions received important corporation rights, as well as the right to accept endowments and testaments. The churches, and indeed all the surroundings and possessions of the churches, received the right of asylum, and the clergy, specifically the bishops, received the right of intervention. One can see from these examples that the Christian state promoted the Church and its works of mercy. For while the state had not yet thought about founding its own institutions of mercy, it still held to the principle that all mercy is to be placed into the hands of the loving Church. It also believed that the wisdom of the state consists in giving the Church support in its sacred efforts, which are rich in blessing. The Christian emperors even felt free to issue regulations to prevent abuses by unworthy members and servants of the Church. The way in which the legislation was used at that time is important for us all and remains worthy of imitation.

61. We now come to the middle period of the history of the Christian Church to point out how mercy was cultivated during this era. Yet just as one cannot fully comprehend a period of history if he is ignorant of the Christian influence during that time, so one cannot fully comprehend the Christian life apart from secular, external events, which are fruits of this life. And so we call back to our memory the notion that during this period the Christian Orient became estranged from the Occident. God's judgment was over in the Occident. A new era dawned, and new beginnings became visible all over. But in the Orient, the night of the half-moon gruesomely covered the lands, and God's judgment and death were increasing.

We have to remember that all life became paralyzed there because of this. Here, however, the supreme bishop of the Occident

took the place of the pagan worldly rulers. He began reorganizing new states like a pope and unfolded his authority and might for the blessing of the nations. To be sure, the great might and exalted position over the Occident, which God conceded to the Roman bishops in His holy providence, led them to exaggerate their importance. Because of this, battles between the Roman emperors of the German nation and the leaders of the Occident emerged. These reactions could and had to come, because the Lord lets no transgression go unpunished and because the bowls of His just scales always seek and find the balance.

However, even if the papacy developed in an ungodly manner because of the guilt of the popes and their supporters, the reactions evidently did not remain without reproach. He who has an eye to see will also notice that the Lord makes His way right, that His work never ceases, that no one can hinder Him. We ought to recall this time full of battles, full of deadly convulsions, and yet also full of the hope of life. Let us look at all events from the beginning of the Frankish Kingdom up to the Reformation, and try to answer the question, “How did God’s holy mercy, even in the midst of this unrest and travail, still bear its rich fruit? “

62. The number of poor that had to be taken care of during this period was the same, except that there was one more form of misery in the Occident, which we — praise and thanks be to God — do not find in our area anymore. Unfortunately, there were numerous lepers in the Occident, and so one was forced to provide for institutions for lepers nearly everywhere, in every city, in every hamlet. Likewise, the principles regarding the support that was to be given as well as regarding the administration of the endowments and charitable institutions remained the same. One still rightly saw the practice of mercy and the care of the wretched as a churchly matter, and all administration remained under the control of the bishops and their councils. All endowments, regardless of whether they were founded by the laity or the

clergy, were in the hands in the hands of the clergy, and even at a time when mercy began to be provided more independently, no one had the intention to challenge the supervision and direction of the Church or to replace it by something else. However, there were great differences and changes in the ways and means love was shown as compared to previous times, which we will present summarily.

63. In this time, there are no agapes and oblations anymore. Along with this, deacons and deaconesses begin to disappear, first in the Occident and then in the Orient. Therefore, the distinguishing mark of the Christian era — the care of the poor provided by individuals — is now over. Instead of this, the institutional care of the sick and wretched is all that remains. Since there are no congregations left that are able to provide for the poor, believing it to be something to be done by each and every one, and since the care of the poor needs hands and hearts, it becomes absolutely mandatory that like-minded persons associate.

This is why one sees institutions emerging in the bosom of nursehoods. As a rule, for every new institution, some nursehood is formed. These nursehoods are diverse, and one can observe a remarkable development regarding the principles of the same. For at first, these nursehoods are actually monastic orders. Then the chivalric orders emerge and finally the lay brotherhoods. These different organizations of nursehoods follow the same logic as church buildings, where out of the Romanesque style the Gothic evolved and so on. So too, the nursehoods changed through the introduction of more independent, worldly principles.

The longer the monk is a member separated from his congregation, the more he wants to belong to the clergy. The religious knight wants to be a monk and is a monk. But in spite of the vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience, he wants to be a nobleman, and before long he gets bored at the sickbeds. This

is why, after becoming a monk and a nurse, he also wants to be a fighter against the unbelievers with the sword. In this manner, the religious orders of knighthood mingle spirit and flesh and thereby plant the seed of their death, which had to take place at some time.

The lay brotherhoods planted their seed of death in a similar manner. They had every reason to come into being at the time in which they did. In general, they had no intention to withdraw from the Church. For they not only tolerated its oversight but also wanted it. Added to this, they had a strong impulse and desire to grow out of ecclesial oversight, not to dedicate themselves to the truth more than the contemporary Church did, even though it would have been the right thing to do, but to worship their own private opinions. Some of these opinions were mystical, some theosophical, some philosophical. And usually the majority of these opinions were no more compatible with the religion of the Lord Jesus than those of the Gnostics of the earlier times.

Despite all this, time marched on toward the Reformation. Progress was only slightly visible in the institutions, such as nursehoods, about which we are talking. For unfortunately, like always in all good and splendid things, there is a progressive mingling of flesh and spirit, of lie and truth. And so eventually, religious organizations do not simply end by giving way to some temporal things, but they generally end in sin and shame and leave a bad name to posterity, so that no one even remembers their better times.

64. The preeminent orders of knighthood were the two orders of the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem and the Teutonic Knights. Both were originally founded for the care of the sick in Jerusalem, and from there they spread over the Occident. Beginning in AD 1048, merchants from Amalfi in southern Italy had prepared a refuge for pilgrims in Jerusalem and had built a hospice and a chapel, Santa Maria Latina, next to it. Two more hospices were soon erected next to the first and then two more

after that.

The nursehood grew in such a way that they were able to aid Godfrey of Bouillon significantly during the siege of 1099. Because of this, he rewarded them with the Lordship of Montboire in Flanders. Young noblemen from the army of the crusaders joined them. Consequently, the rector of the hospital, Gérard Tonque, decided to sever the ties between the hospital and the abbey of Santa Maria Latina and to form an independent brotherhood in honor of St. John the Baptist. This caused hot, even bloody disputes. The new Hospitallers prevailed, however, and the new order became rich in goods, so that their beneficial activity spread into the Occident.

Under the guidance of Raymond du Puy, who called himself the “Servant of the Poor of Jesus Christ and Warden of the Hospital at Jerusalem,” the order, which had an abundance of means and men at its disposal, added to its works of mercy also the struggle against the unbelievers. In doing so, it took a big step toward gaining worldly power, but it also planted the seed for its estrangement from the original task. Gradually the care of the sick was left to the religious, and the others became more interested in military service.

Around AD 1128, a German man and his wife, living in Jerusalem, founded a xenodochium (*a hospice*) to fulfill the commandment of being hospitable to others. Their goal was to assist fellow Germans who were poor, sick, and ignorant of the local language. Since his venture prospered, the German built a chapel in honor of the Mother of God, and his wife built a second hospital to care for harassed German women. Gradually many forces turned to this noble endeavor and founded the Association of the Brothers of the Hospital of the Holy Virgin Mary at Jerusalem. Before long this association, too, was joined by knights. In this way, here too, people began to want not only to care for the sick but also to fight against the unbelievers.

In 1142, Pope Celestine II placed these Brothers of Mary under the supervision of the Hospitallers, a position that did no damage to their work but, as it is so frequently the case with subordination, upheld the virtue of showing mercy. In lowliness, poverty, and piety, the Brothers of Mary lived for a long time free from pride, greed, and discord. During the siege of Acre in 1199, the Brothers of Mary joined some citizens of Lübeck and Bremen to ease the distress of the sick, and their pious sacrificial work caused Duke Frederick of Swabia to found the Teutonic Order after the pattern of the Templars and Hospitallers, since the members of the Templars and Hospitallers were mostly French and Italian noblemen. Until the fifteenth century, this order of the German knights never totally forgot why it was founded. At that point, their abundance of power and wealth became a cause for impudence and discord, but until then they served faithfully.

There are still Teutonic Knights in Austria, but their possessions became an imperial fief in 1834. In Prussia in 1812, King Frederick William III founded a royal order of St. John, which Frederick William IV tried to resuscitate by designating its entrance and membership fees for the establishment and maintenance of hospitals. But what is all this compared to the old way of doing things? Back then, one would not just simply gather some money, but would make one's body and life, money and goods available to the Lord for His serving of the wretched and poor.

It must be noted that both orders, the Hospitallers and Teutonics, also had female sisterhoods at their side about whose toil and work less can be said, although they might have accomplished more than their male orders. Out of the later nursing associations emerged the Order of the Holy Spirit, which became very active in different lands and still today works for the care of the sick in Austria under the name of Crosiers. Yet this order is different from the two previously mentioned orders of knighthood, and we

mention it here simply because of its many beneficial activities.

65. Besides the knighthoods, more independent communities who cared for the sick began to emerge at the end of the twelfth century, and these deserve to be noted. In the first place, the Beguines and Beghardes are to be mentioned. The whole community borrowed its name from a pious priest at Liège, Lambert le Begue, although many have interpreted it differently.

Upset by the worldly lifestyle of the clergy around him, Lambert desired an association of people who desired a more pious way of living. In a great garden outside the city on the Maas, he erected many individual houses, which were all enclosed by a single wall. This was the first Beguinage, and it became the pattern for the later ones, for fifty years after the death of Lambert, there were already fifteen hundred sisters living on this court. Two to four sisters lived in individual houses, and each took care of her own little household. The individuals lived on the proceeds of their handiwork and teaching, and each had control over her possessions. Some were allowed to live in the city with their relatives, but then they had no permission to wear the dress of the Beguines. For the Beguines wore a distinct dress, which came close to the clerical garb, and they vowed chastity and obedience for their time of residence at the court, but were free to leave and get married at any time.

The center of the court of the Beguines was the hospital, in which the sisterhood practiced the care of the sick for their own members. Yet they also cared for sick people outside the court in private homes. In the course of the rather impure attempts at a reformation before Luther's time, the Beguines were very frequently drawn into heresies and enthusiastic movements, which severely undermined their almost indestructibly good name. In Germany, the word *Beguines* was not well liked, and so the name *Seelschwestern*, meaning soul sisters, was used instead.

Besides the Beguines there were the Beghardes, a brotherhood

of married men that was founded in the Netherlands in 1228. This order originally consisted of poor married weavers, but they later imitated the lifestyle of the Beguines and dug their own grave by affiliating with heretical associations.

Besides the Beguines and Beghardes, one has to mention the Kalands Brethren. Each group was headed by a cleric, and it also had lay members. The actual purpose of this brotherhood was every kind of mutual bodily and spiritual aid. Therefore, they cared for their brothers and sisters in disease, as well as for paying their members the last honors due them and then burying the dead. They gathered on the first day of every month for Mass, and after that for a covenant meal. Gradually these meals became the main thing, and gluttony and lewdness spread. The kaland brothers became known for their excesses, and before the Reformation even took place, the kaland was abolished almost everywhere.

Among the brotherhoods that belong here, we additionally mention the Bridgemakers, which made the crossing of waters easier for pilgrims traveling to Rome and other sites of devotion, as well as erecting hospices at the shores for the pilgrims.

In a time rich in nursehoods, one also notes some associations for the mentally ill. In Germany, one could name the Elizabethians, who bear the name of St. Elizabeth of Thuringia (1207–1231), who, as everybody knows, founded hospitals in Eisenach at the foot of the Wartburg and later at Marburg. This order still exists and usually takes care of female patients only.

Before we proceed to the Reformation era, we note in passing that xenodochia and hospitals were separated from each other in the Occident during the period we have just discussed. The hospitals formed a style of their own and divided into various subcategories, not just according to the nature of the disease, but also according to nationality of the person. Later on, individuality and subjectivity become more prevalent, and the

dividing continued, which was both a blessing and curse, but which was unavoidable.

66. In the Reformation era, we must speak of merciful love differently because the church split. Therefore, we have to focus on the Roman Catholic church by itself, and likewise the Protestant church societies by themselves. In previous time periods, when there were factions within the Roman church, most of the groups had still encouraged the importance of living the Christian life. Indeed, these branches of the Roman church encouraged active love and mercy.

But during the time of the Reformation, one can see that depraved living took hold of the Roman church, its doctrine, and its hierarchy. As a result, the Roman church does not look at all like those earlier communities that separated from it. One can tell right away that there was a confusion between the pure teaching of the old, traditional principles and the restoration of divinely pure doctrine.

To be sure, there are things that are greater than even human life, namely the order of salvation and the way to life eternal. It may well be then that because of the greater good, the smaller recedes into the shadow even if only for a while. Likewise, until the path to the heavenly Jerusalem is cleared, the paths on which the merciful Samaritan is to walk on earth become somewhat rough and dark.

Because of this, the branches of the Roman Catholic church seem to lag behind it, and the untrained eye, which does not understand what the Reformation is all about, has a hard time determining which side has the greater advantage. Yet one must consider that it is not Christian living or works of mercy but the pure Word and the unadulterated Sacraments that are the marks of the true Church. Nevertheless the Reformation took place, unperturbed by the splendor of the Romans in the centuries before and after it, and it carries on with the intention that the pure

doctrine of the true Church may bear fruit. Like the Reformation, we know that when the spring of truth comes, then the earth shall turn green from love, and all trees will bear the fruit of mercy.

67. When focusing on the Roman church in the post-Reformation era, it is undeniable that its zeal for works of mercy has only grown since the Reformation. Generally speaking, the Roman church owes a great deal to the Reformation. It is no mistake to say that the flurry of activity in showing mercy, which began to pop up here and there in its midst, was also caused by the Reformation. Brotherhoods and sisterhoods emerged everywhere in the area of the Roman church, most notably in southern and western Europe. They flourished, and their hopes and ideas for showing mercy have not been exhausted even today.

Among the brotherhoods, the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God ought to be mentioned first. It was founded by the Spaniard John of God at Grenada in 1534. The order's members commit themselves to the care of the suffering. Today they maintain twenty-nine hospitals in Austria alone, and they care for an average of twenty thousand patients each year.

Besides this order, there are many other brotherhoods of Hospitallers. Yet they are surpassed in splendor and activity by the sisterhoods. The order of the Daughters (Sisters) of Charity, founded in 1617 by Vincent de Paul (1580–1660), has to be mentioned, for its different branches spread over all the lands and even into Germany. The most esteemed branch of the Daughters of Charity is that of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Borromeo, founded in 1626 by Pierre de Stainville at Nancy. Besides this, one should mention the Vincentians, who have their motherhouse at Strasbourg. It is not necessary to elaborate on the Daughters of Charity because in our day and age their recognition is exceedingly high even among Protestants, and the famous works by F. J. Buss, Clemens Brentano, Clemens August Droste von Vischering, Johann Hermann Schmidt, Wulf, and so forth are found

everywhere and read by everyone.

68. The church of the Reformation, as sad as its appearance looks when comparing it to institutions and distinguishing works of mercy, nevertheless has shown Christian mercy a great service. It has done this by correctly relating works and faith according to St. Paul's example, by rejecting the foolish idea that human merit is capable of influencing eternal salvation, by holding to the holy doctrine of the merit of grace, and by banishing all erroneous attempts of works righteousness and instead clinging to the scriptural definition of a good work.

It is clear from its church orders that the church had the intention of practicing pure doctrine. In many of these orders, there is a clearly recognizable effort to revive the deaconate, which had ceased to exist in the Roman church. Although the church did not succeed in giving a fresh impetus to mercy, and although neither the deaconate nor the common chests that collected money for the poor amounted to very much, one has to keep in mind that the Reformation era was a period of extreme unrest. The greed of the princes strongly interfered in the movement, and severe sufferings and terrible punishments from God came because of the rejected Word. These sufferings can be seen most clearly in the Thirty Years' War, a war that transformed Germany into a desert. In addition to all this, the church was busy attempting to maintain pure doctrine, and so these reasons justify the fact that the church of the Reformation was doing its best to keep its works of mercy from going down the wrong path.

69. Toward the end of the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, there rose within the Lutheran church a strong reproach against this church itself. This was a result of dead orthodoxy and a great lack of living faith and active love. It was a just reproach, even if the men and the party that raised it did not articulate their reproach in an irreproachable manner, were unable to defend the truth worthily, and failed to recognize

the good that still remained in the church.

At the helm of the party was the noble Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1705) and later A. H. Francke (1663–1727), whose orphanage at Halle was a good example of institutional work in the Lutheran church and whose charitable example was beneficial. It was during the time of A. H. Francke that in Germany, in the Lutheran church, and in all Protestant lands many orphanages and institutions emerged. Some are still partly blooming today, but others, after doing their share, have sunk into the dust again. All charities of the nineteenth century doubtlessly follow the impulse of A. H. Francke. All those who have recently advocated the scriptural idea of deacony, such as Amalie Sieveking at Hamburg (1794–1859), Pastor Fliedner (1800–1864) at Kaiserswerth, and Candidate Wichern (1808–1881), are part of the train and stream that began with Spener and that beneficially permeates the Protestant churches.

One must also remember that the ecclesial associations of the Protestants, and the Protestant imitations of the Catholic brotherhoods and sisterhoods, owe their origin only to the impulse of the Pietist party. Because of this, the Protestant communities are making up for what had been neglected, and the Spirit of the Lord is being seen in abundance. All manner of charity has continually become filled with delight and truth, and we pray that the church not succumb to the errors that, because of the devil's envy, so easily attach themselves to movements founded by God. In light of this, one ought to remember to observe everything that the movement of love in the contemporary church brings about, without loftily turning away from the charity that is found among associations of different parties. Indeed, whoever is wise learns from the enemy. Why not learn from those whom one cannot call enemies, although according to God's Word we are different from them? However, one must also remember that it is our sacred duty to remain watchful in view of the activities of the modern time and guard the hearth

so that there is no profane fire brought to it (LEV. 10:1).

70. One thing the Church must avoid is joining ranks with those who hold the secular view of charity called the economical. We live in a time in which misery grows in tremendous progressions. There seems to never be enough help for those in need, let alone enough to stop the sources of misery all together. This is why the wise men of the time reflect on misery, and the great men study what needs to be done to prevent it. The situation can be likened to one who works systematically, the way one does his math, calculating the consequences of certain measures one wants to take. And because of his studies, one arrives at an impractical experiment, which in addition to being expensive, eventually increases misery instead of doing away with it.

Because of the way the situation ends, such accusations can be rightfully leveled at the book by Chastel, who wrote about the practice of mercy during the first six centuries. Everyone who is guided and driven simply by economical or scientific considerations regarding the existing need for mercy, and not by Christian love, will be the object of the same accusations. When love counsels and reigns over the leaders of the nation, then they will do whatever is possible to eliminate and even prevent misery. And they will do it quickly, and love, an angel of God on earth, will prove itself as the master of economy, even if it does not want to deal with the secular mind and name.

71. One great question remains, namely, “Who is to take the effort of mercy in his hands and govern it — the state or the church?” The judicious recognize that the state can do nothing without the willing spirit of the church, which holds the key to the treasures that the needs of our time require. Those who have studied the matter the most are convinced about this the most.

Therefore, it is time for every person to let the Spirit of the Church of Jesus stream into himself and to assist the tremendous

job that the Lord has given His Church. Although state charity alone is not going to get the job done, we should not entertain the idea of relegating the state to the status of a mere observer of the things that take place under the hands of the church. Even if it is not proper for the hand that holds the sword to bring the oil and wine of the good Samaritan, it nonetheless can make room and defend. Thus, just as one has to award the church the full right and the full duty to do the works the Lord will ask for on the Last Day — the works of mercy — so one has to preach to the lords of the world and the rulers of the states that they are founded and instituted to the glory of God, and are not to hinder His works but to foster them.

SEVENTH CHAPTER

HOW IS A DEACONESS TO PRACTICE MERCY?

72. For the sake of clarity, we must say first that we are strictly talking about the deaconesses of the nineteenth century and not about all deaconesses in general. That being said, the resuscitation of the biblical office of deacony, and of deaconess in particular, is not due to the Roman church or some other church but to the Reformation. Thanks are due to the Reformation era, and we must be grateful that in more recent times the Protestant church has put its old traditions into practice one again.

But on the other hand, we must also acknowledge that the deaconess of the nineteenth century is different from that of the Early Church. She is not a deaconess emerging out of the congregation, but she is a Protestant duplicate of the Roman Catholic sister of charity. Given the current circumstances, she can be nothing but this. Since there are no longer congregations like those in the past, then there can no longer be congregational deaconesses.

Deaconesses in our day and age are not forced to do their work, but they are set apart as a matter of free will and because they voluntary associate with those who are drawn to, and awakened for, this position by God. Because of this, we know that generally speaking, the brotherhoods and sisterhoods are not marks of a dead church, but of a strong and good will. And yet while the desire to show mercy has not changed, the way in which a brotherhood or sisterhood is organized has changed throughout the course of time. Depending on the changes, that organization may be more or less useful. Every era in history has to accept its specific form of organization, and so the deaconess of the nineteenth century must accept the organization of the deacony's existence and gladly embrace it. She must do this, even if she always keeps her eyes upon the more beautiful

perfection of earlier times, grieving after it, longing for it, and, as far as possible, striving for it. In spite of this, she occupies her place in time as well as possible and strives to be better.

73. The deaconess of the nineteenth century lives at a time in which there is a great deal of confusion about everything, especially mercy and charity. She may even be confused as to what is better — congregational care of the poor or institutional care.

She may wonder what is more accurate — to leave the whole sacred matter to the church or to hand it over to the state. More than likely, she has many more questions like these on which, in the end, so much depends.

This is why it befits a deaconess to be a light bearer into this darkness, to implant and advocate sound doctrine wherever she is placed. Yet how can she do this without knowing it for herself? And can she know it without hearing or reading? Out of this emerge the sacred duty of study and the instruction of others who are weaker in intellect and engage less in studying. Every deaconess should know not only the history of mercy, but she should also know and pursue in her studies all the things that are only briefly mentioned in this piece of writing. She should familiarize herself with the charitable systems of different countries and areas, with the organization and reports of the institutions that flourish the most, and with the writings on mercy that have been published back and forth. She also should learn the history of ancient times, of the ancient orders, of the nursehoods, and the biographies of the preeminent male and female champions of mercy. This will help to form her in that branch of human care to which she dedicates her life. But there is more. It is altogether impossible for a deaconess to avoid going into the writings of the confessions, which is why she must be firmly rooted in the divine truth so that she is able to recognize the good of the Church's confessions without being attracted by the errors of others. This will open up an expansive field of knowledge for the deaconess. But above all

else she must not forget that the first and most beneficial study is of the Bible, through which the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is and remains her dearest paradise and the place for holding sacred knowledge. Glancing at what there is to be learned, one sees that there is nothing more miserable than a deaconess who does not want, does not know, does not desire to learn, and who does not somehow find the means to live up to her calling to be a light bearer for others according to her gifts.

74. The formation of a deaconess does not depend solely on knowledge and studies. Commensurate with studying, there must be a formation and sanctification of her heart. Knowledge that does not influence a person's inmost being is nothing more than whitewash on a decaying tomb. If this is the case, she has no roots under herself, and she will bear no fruit. It is then clear that her heart has not been receptive soil.

The Roman church realized this potential problem and instituted a threefold vow for its deacony. But should not this promise instead be made out of a free will and as a result of inner growth? The deaconess should, not because of a vow or law or duress but because of the impulse of the Holy Spirit, be free from and unaffected by sexual matters, not enchanted by earthly possessions, and not subject to any needs that in reality cannot be called needs. In joyous humility and sacrifice of her own will, she ought to dedicate herself to carrying out the sacred thoughts and works that she has come to know and is determined to do. She who desires a strong hand and a faithful, sacrificial will may first of all purify her heart. For she cannot fancy herself to be well-formed for the calling of deaconess as long as her heart and inmost being have not thoroughly and faithfully grasped the goal of learning through will and prayer.

75. When a deaconess has appropriated ideas and knowledge, and when the pure, faithful, strong will to [do] good is there, there is still lacking a third element, which can be called practice

or skill. With her male and female instructors, the true deaconess focuses on every aspect of deaconess work. She studies, evaluates, and tries out her talents for each and every one. She seeks to train herself especially in the areas of her gifts, but she also needs holy discipline and sternness to train herself in those matters that she finds difficult. She strengthens her weak sides through the constant diligence of practice, excuses herself from nothing that the Lord commands, and forgives herself nothing that lacks for her calling.

Yet this work of strengthening and training can become absurd. A deaconess might not have any gifts for a given task of a deaconess, might therefore be released from all diligence, and might nevertheless still stoically direct all her yearnings and her diligence to this task. For this she has male and female guardians and instructors, who, tirelessly and without fear of her displeasure, will resist her and push her into an area where her talents might open a great deal of activities for her. But apart from this ignorant absurdity of untalented people, there remains the indispensable duty and sacred rule of every Christian to take care of the deaconess' weaknesses — unpretentiously and modestly but also faithfully and persistently — so that her formation is as well rounded and perfect as possible.

76. It goes without saying that the skill and knowledge of a normal female is to be expected of every deaconess. There will be exceptions until the end of the ages, but it will always remain as a rule that the formation and skill of the deaconess in the matters of the ordinary household should be exemplary. The deaconess shall be able to easily carry out what every maid can and does. By doing everything nobly and gracefully, she can show others that one can transform the humble duties of his or her calling into priestly works. Thus, it is good for every deaconess to at least know something about barn and field, the washtub and kitchen, the teaching and care of souls, and everything in between.

She may be in the best or worst of occupations, but her attitude ought to never change. In so doing, everyone will realize that this woman is at home everywhere, that she is very knowledgeable, that she has a big heart, that she spends time in the sanctuary, that she has practical intelligence, and that such a girl has not only accomplished more than the well-known poetess or paintress, but that she has done more than the noble nun, who has become accustomed to fly to the eternal home, but who here on earth is unable to bestow the blessing of her inner life on others through work and deed.

77. What if the most competent deaconess, well trained for her calling, went out alone to live out her calling? What would all those gifts profit her? What if, for all her wisdom, she did not realize that a deaconess without community and connections is actually no deaconess at all? It is included in the whole calling of the deaconess that she walks her ways, inwardly and outwardly, together with all those who have set their eyes on the same goal and are driven by the same intention. That is why training for deaconesses concentrates both on the individual soul practicing mercy, as well as the group which appears as a sacred force, focusing on the greatest thing women can possibly choose: serving others in love and helping them to be awakened to the same walk.

The church also looks to the deaconess to help the male office of the Holy Spirit in a female manner, to create, if possible, congregations; to kindle old, existing congregations for the love of Christ; to found congregations better than the existing ones on virgin soil wherever necessary. By doing so, she provides for the highest level of her own calling. For if congregations saw her true value, there would be no lack of deaconesses. Indeed, that most noble office of deaconess would rise up again, and the deaconesses would serve the congregations themselves.

To accomplish this task, it requires many and joint forces, but the deaconess has first another task. She must pass on her office

to posterity. It was not good that historically the office of the deaconess died out. Thus, it is not to be resuscitated now, just to perish yet again. But what the Lord and His holy apostles thought to hand over to the Church as a permanent institution is now to rise again to perish nevermore.

For what good would it do if deaconesses only worked here and there for a short while, and yet the enthusiasm and mighty love would not lift them up and unite them, which alone can cause others to be ignited by the same mindset? The Lutheran church has already known for three hundred years that deacons and deaconesses are scriptural. One might wonder then why it had neither deacons nor deaconesses. It is probably because the ancient deacony had to appear as a new creation, and every start is so hard. But now it is different, for the start has been made, and the little lamp of the wise virgins is finally burning. He who has lit it wants it to be guarded and fueled. Diligence is to be maintained so that the fire and brightness of the good widows and virgins remain on earth until the Lord comes.

Knowing this, one might also remember that not only individual believers in Jesus but also united bands of followers, who practice the work of mercy, are able to pass the ongoing spirit of kindness on to others. Thus, the calling has to be seen in such a way that one does not simply do every work of a deaconess, that one does not simply accomplish what appears to be most necessary and useful. Rather, the idea of service must become clearer and clearer, that the understanding of each individual work is seen in relation to the whole, and that, so to speak, a tradition of sacred ideas and sacred wisdom can be passed on from one generation of deaconesses to the next.

The widows and virgins of the holy deacony are to keep alive a certain kind of human beings that have an active faith and a faith-filled love and know how to cultivate them. This is why a true deaconess will instinctively perceive the concern for her offspring — future generations of deaconesses — as one of the

main purposes of her life. If she does not do it, we know that the Lord will still help His people. But that deaconess will be held accountable for her laxity on His Day. May the Lord grant these deaconesses His Spirit, His power, and His wisdom, to escape judgment on that Day, and to be worthy of standing before the Son of Man.

Amen.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

SIXTH CHAPTER – HOW DID THE CHURCH OF ALL AGES FOLLOW HER LORD’S COMMAND TO PRACTICE MERCY?

1. What is the connection between the “breaking of bread” and the communal meal in the early Church? When did things start to change?
2. Why does Löhe think the early Christians were extremely generous in their giving? Discuss the implications for giving today.
3. Describe how widows became some of the first deaconesses.
4. Why did the deacons keep records?
5. Why don’t the poor have a right to demand a gift?
6. Describe the connection between the declaration of fasts and special offerings in the early church.
7. Why is accountability to be part of the stewardship of gifts given to the church?
8. Löhe states, “When one reads the speeches of the great church fathers of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, everything is just like today.” Discuss what he means, and compare and contrast how things are similar and different today.
9. Describe the beginning of institutional care in the church.
10. Löhe observes, “The longer the monk is a member separated from his congregation, the more he wants to be the clergy.” How does this describe laity and clergy relations in the church?
11. How did Löhe describe the roles of the church and the state in acts of mercy?

SEVENTH CHAPTER – HOW IS A DEACONESS TO PRACTICE MERCY?

1. How was the deaconess of the 19th century different from that of the early church?
2. Why must the deaconess know the Bible, sound doctrine and the Lutheran Confessions?
3. Löhe noted, “For if congregations saw her true value, there would be no lack of deaconesses.” Do congregations today understand the value of deaconesses?

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