

Mercy in the Early Church

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The Gospel of Love and Charity
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By Adolf von Harnack



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*Preface by Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
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PREFACE

Well, have we finally gone insane? A few of you who have some familiarity with Adolf von Harnack may well think so. To be sure, Harnack is the epitome of everything we in the LCMS reject with respect to doctrine and the interpretation of Holy Scriptures. Harnack (who shares the dates of our own Francis Pieper 1852-1931) was born to a rather faithful Lutheran scholar name Theodosius Harnack. By the time his son had written his monumental *History of Dogma* the father wrote him wondering if in fact his son were still a Christian. Harnack believed that virtually all of what the church regards as doctrine (divinity of Christ, atonement, sacraments, etc.) is simply the result of Greek philosophy sweeping over whatever Jesus caused to come about. He basically reduced Christianity to “The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.” Atonement is rejected in favor of ethics. The Gospel is swallowed by the Law. He believed little of what the gospels attribute to Jesus was actually spoken or done by him, and was instead the result of inventive disciples. It was the quintessential historical critic, Rudolf Bultmann, who resurrected Harnack’s *Essence of Christianity* and had it republished in the early 40’s.

So why publish this chapter from Harnack’s *Mission and Expansion of the Christian Church*? Well, simple: this chapter is chock-full of great historical information about how intensely the church, at its missiological best, was involved in *diakonia* as a corporate task. It is eye-opening and instructive also for the church of today, particularly if we are to regain our missiological zeal. The document has gone through LCMS doctrinal review, and the reviewer rightly pointed out that there is no Gospel present in the treatise! Even the title of this chapter “The Gospel

of Love and Charity” is itself a confusion of Law and Gospel — Harnack no doubt believed that the Gospel is essentially love and charity in the sense of ethics (Law) and not the atoning blood of Jesus (Gospel), which compels us to love (Law). Nevertheless, what Harnack presents for us on the history of *diakonia* at the church’s most expansive missiological era is pure gold.

Confessing the atoning blood of Jesus the God-man, and for the sake of mercy,

Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Today's reader will notice a few peculiar things about this text. The writing dates from 1908, so the terminology and spelling differ somewhat from common usage today. Because this is a reprint, however, the editors chose not to change the original language. Citation styles have also changed over the years — this author typically uses Roman numerals to cite chapters, often in lowercase. Finally, this booklet presents only one chapter of the author's original work. Where internal references cite pages within this booklet, we have corrected them for this printing. Where they cite pages outside the scope of this reprint, we have moved them to the notes and cited the original work.

THE GOSPEL OF LOVE AND CHARITY¹

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. ... As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

These words of Jesus have shone so brilliantly for many generations in his church, and exerted so powerful an influence, that one may further describe the Christian preaching as *the preaching of love and charity*. From this standpoint, in fact, the proclamation of the Savior and of healing would seem to be merely subordinate, inasmuch as the words “I was sick and you visited me” form but one link in the larger chain.

Among the extant words and parables of Jesus, those which inculcate love and charity are especially numerous, and with them we must rank many a story on his life.² Yet, apart altogether from the number of such sayings, it is plain that whenever he had in view the relations of mankind, the gist of his preaching was to enforce brotherliness and ministering love, and the surest part of the impression he left behind him was that in his own life and labours he displayed both of these very qualities. “You have one teacher, and you are all brothers”; “Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” It is in this sense that we are to understand the commandment to love

¹ In his work, *Die christliche Liebestätigkeit in der alten Kirche* (1st ed., 1882; Eng. Trans., *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, Edinburgh), Uhlhorn presents a sketch which is thorough, but unfair to paganism. The Greeks and Romans also were acquainted with philanthropy.

² One recalls particularly the parable of the good Samaritan, with its new definition of “neighbour,” and also the parable of the lost son; among the stories, that of the rich young man. The gospel of the Hebrews tells the latter incident with special impressiveness. “Then said the Lord to him, How canst thou say, ‘I have kept the law and the prophets,’ when it is written in the law, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’? And look, many of thy brethren, sons of Abraham, are lying in dirt and dying of hunger, while thy house is full of many possessions, and never a gift comes from them.”

one's neighbour. How unqualified it is becomes evident from the saying, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"³ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." "Blessed are the merciful" — that is the keynote of all that Jesus proclaimed, and as this merciful spirit is to extend from great things to trifles, from the inward to the outward, the saying which does not pass over even a cup of cold water (MATT. X. 42) lies side by side with that other comprehensive saying, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Brotherliness is love on a footing of equality; ministering love means to *give and to forgive*, and no limit is to be recognized. Besides, *ministering love is the practical expression of love to God*.

While Jesus himself was exhibiting this love, and making it a life and a power, his disciples were learning the highest and holiest thing that can be learned in all religion, namely, to believe in the love of God. To them the Being who had made heaven and earth was "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort," — a point on which there is no longer any dubiety in the testimony of the apostolic and post-apostolic ages. Now, for the first time, that testimony rose among men, which cannot ever be surpassed, the testimony that *God is love*. The first great statement of the new religion, into which the fourth evangelist condensed its central principle, was based entirely and exclusively on love: "We love because he first loved us," "God so loved the world," "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." And the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote is the hymn commencing with the words: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." The new language on the lips of Christians was the language of love.

³ The saying "Fast for them that persecute you" is also traditional (Didache, i).

But it was more than a language, it was a thing of power and action. The Christians really considered themselves brothers and sisters, and their actions corresponded to this belief. On this point we possess two unexceptionable testimonies from pagan writers. Says Lucian of the Christians: "Their original lawgiver had taught them that they were all brethren, one of another. ... They become incredibly alert when anything of this kind occurs, that affects their common interests. On such occasions no expense is grudged." And Tertullian (*Apolog.*, xxxix.) observes: "It is our care for the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!' (they themselves being given to mutual hatred). 'Look how they are prepared to die for one another!' (they themselves being readier to kill each other)."⁴ Thus had this saying become a fact: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The gospel thus became a social message. The preaching which laid hold of the outer man, detaching him from the world, and uniting him to his God, was also a preaching of solidarity and brotherliness. The gospel, it has been truly said, is at bottom both individualistic and socialistic. Its tendency towards mutual association, so far from being an accidental phenomenon in its history, is inherent in its character. It spiritualizes the irresistible impulse which draws one man to another, and it raises the social connection of human beings from the sphere of a convention to that of a moral obligation. In this way it serves to heighten the worth of man, and essays to recast contemporary society, to transform the socialism which involves a conflict of interests into the socialism which rests upon the consciousness of a spiritual unity and a common goal. This was ever present to the mind of the great apostle to the Gentiles. In his little churches, where

⁴ Also Caecilius (in *Minuc. Felix*, ix): "They recognise each other by means of secret marks and signs, and love one another almost before they are acquainted."

each person bore his neighbour's burden, Paul's spirit already saw the dawning of a new humanity, and in the epistle to the Ephesians he has voiced this feeling with a thrill of exultation. Far in the background of these churches — *i.e.*, when they were what they were meant to be — like some unsubstantial semblance, lay the division between Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, great and small, rich and poor. For a new humanity had now appeared, and the apostle viewed it as Christ's body, in which every member served the rest and each was indispensable in his own place. Looking at these churches, with all their troubles and infirmities, he anticipated, in his exalted moments of enthusiasm, what was the development of many centuries.⁵

We cannot undertake to collect from the literature of the first three centuries all the passages where love and charity are enjoined. This would lead us too far afield, although we should come across much valuable material in making such a survey. We would notice the reiteration of the summons to unconditional giving, which occurs among the sayings of Jesus, whilst on the contrary we would be astonished to find that passages enforcing the law of love are not more numerous, and that they are so frequently overshadowed by ascetic counsels; we would also take umbrage at the spirit of a number of passages in which the undisguised desire of being rewarded for benevolence stands out in bold relief.⁶ Still, this craving for reward is not in every case

⁵ Warnings against unmercifulness, and censures of this temper, must have begun, of course, at quite an early period; see the epistle of James (iv.-v.) and several sections in the "Shepherd" of Hermas.

⁶ All these points are illustrated throughout the literature, from the Didache and Hermas downwards. For unconditional giving, see Did. I. 5 f.: παντι τῷ ἀιτουντι σε διδου και μη ἀπαιτει · πασι γάρ θελει διδοσθαι ὁ πατερ ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων χαρισμάτων. Μακαριος ὁ διδους κατὰ τὴν ἐντολὴν · ἀθῶος γάρ ἐστιν · οὐαὶ τῷ λαμβάνοντι · εἰ μὲν γὰρ χρεῖαν ἔχων λαμβάνει τις, ἀθῶος ἐσται · ὁ δὲ μὴ χρεῖαν ἔχων δώσει δίκην, ἵνα τί ἐλαβε και εἰς τί · ἐν συνοχῇ δὲ γινόμενος ἐξελεύσεται ἐκείθεν μέγρις οὐ ἀποδώ τὸν ἔσχατον κοδράντην ("Give to everyone who asks of thee, and ask not back again; for the Father desireth gifts to be given to all men from his own bounties. Blessed is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is guiltless. But woe to him who receives; for if a man receives who is in need, he is guiltless, but if he is not in need he shall give satisfaction as to why and wherefore he received, and being confined he shall be examined upon his deeds, and shall not come out till he has paid the uttermost farthing"). The counsel of unconditional giving, which is frequently repeated, is closely bound up with the question of earthly possessions in the early church, and consequently with the

immoral, and no conclusion can be drawn from the number of times when it occurs. The important thing is to determine what actually took place within the sphere of Christian charity and active love, and this we shall endeavour to ascertain.

Three passages may be brought forward to show the general activities which were afoot.

In the official writing sent by the Roman to the Corinthian church c. 96 A.D., there is a description of the first-rate condition of the latter up till a short time previously (1 CLEM., I., II.), a description which furnishes the pattern of what a Christian church should be, and the approximate realization of this ideal

question of asceticism. Theoretically, from the very outset, there was to be neither property nor wealth at all; such things belong to the world which Christians were to renounce. Consequently, to devote one's means to other people was a proceeding which demanded a fresh point of view; to part with one's property was the authorised and most meritorious course of action, nor did it matter, in the first instance, who was the recipient. In practical life, however, things were very different, and this was constantly the result of the very theory just mentioned, since it never gave up the voluntary principle (even the attempt at communism in Jerusalem, if there even was such an attempt, did not exclude the voluntary principle). It was by means of this principle that Christian love maintained its power. In practical life, complete renunciation of the world was achieved only by a few; these were the saints and heroes. Other people were in precisely the same position, with the same feelings and concern, as serious, devoted Catholics at the present day; they were actuated by motives of asceticism and of love alike. It is needless, therefore, to depict this state of matters in closer detail. The extreme standpoint is represented by Hermas, *Sim.*, I. (see above, pp. 97 f. [in Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of the Christian Church*]).

A great deal has been written upon early Christian "communism," but nothing of the kind ever existed in the great Gentile church – for we need not take any account of an isolated phenomenon like the semi-pagan sect of the Carpocratians and their communism. Monastic "communism" is only called such by a misuse of the term, and, besides, it is irrelevant to our present subject. Even on the soil of Jewish Christianity, no communism flourished, for the example of the Essenes was never followed. Uhlhorn remarks truly (*op. cit.*, p. 68; Eng. trans., 74) that "we cannot more radically misconceive the so-called 'communism' of early Christianity than by conceiving it as an institution similar to those which existed among the Essenes and the Therapeutae. It is far more correct to represent the state of things as an absence of all institutions whatsoever." Directions not infrequently occur (e.g., *Barn.*, xix. 8; Tert., *Apol.*, xxxix.) which have a communistic ring, but they are not to be taken in a communistic sense. The common formula οὐκ ἐρεῖς ἴδια εἶναι ("thou shalt not say these things are thine own") simply enjoins liberality, forbidding a man to use his means merely for his own advantage.

I have already remarked that, upon the whole, the voluntary principle was never abandoned in the matter of Christian giving and the scale of gifts. This statement, however, admits of one qualification. While the West, so far as I can judge, knew nothing as yet of the law of first-fruits and tithes throughout our epoch (for Cyprian, *de Unit.*, xxvi., is not to be understood as implying the law of tithes), in some quarters of the East the law of first-fruits was taken over at a very early period (see *Didache*, xiii.). From the *Didache* it passed, as an apostolic regulation, into all the Oriental apostolic constitutions. Origen, however, does not appear to regard it yet as a law of the church, though even he admits the legitimacy of it (*in Num. Hom.*, xi. I; *in Jos. Nav. Hom.*, xvii.).

at Corinth. “Who that had stayed with you did not approve your most virtuous and steadfast faith? Who did not admire your sober and forbearing Christian piety? Who did not proclaim the splendid style of your *hospitality*? Who did not congratulate you on your perfect and assured knowledge? For you did everything *without respect of persons*; you walked by the ordinances of God, submitting to your rulers and rendering due honour to your senior men. Young persons also you charged to have a modest and grave mind; women you instructed to discharge all their tasks with a blameless, grave, and pure conscience, and to cherish a proper affection for their husbands, teaching them further to look after their households decorously, with perfect discretion. You were all lowly in mind, free from vainglory, yielding rather than claiming submission, *more ready to give than to take*; content with the supplies provided by God and holding by them, you carefully laid up His words in your hearts, and His sufferings were ever present to your minds. Thus a profound and unsullied peace was bestowed on all, with *an insatiable craving for beneficence*. . . . Day and night you agonized for all the brotherhood, that *by means of compassion and care* the number of God’s elect might be saved. You were sincere, guileless, and void of malice among yourselves. Every sedition and every schism was an abomination to you. *You lamented the transgressions of your neighbours and judged their shortcomings to be your own. You never rued an act of kindness, but were ready for every good work.*”

Then Justin concludes the description of Christian worship in his *Apology* (c. lxvii.) thus: “Those who are well-to-do and willing, give as they choose, each as he himself purposes; the collection is then deposited with the president, who succours orphans, widows, those who are in want owing to sickness or any other cause, those who are in prison, and strangers who are on a journey.”

Finally, Tertullian (*Apolog.*, xxxix.) observes: “Even if there does exist a sort of common fund, it is not made up of fees, as

though we contracted for our worship. Each of us puts in a small amount one day a month, or whenever he pleases; but only if he pleases and if he is able, for there is no compulsion in the matter, everyone contributing of his own free will. These monies are, as it were, the deposits of piety. They are expended upon no banquets or drinking-bouts or thankless eating-houses, but on feeding and burying poor people, on behalf of boys and girls who have neither parents nor money, in support of old folk unable now to go about, as well as for people who are shipwrecked, or who may be in the mines or exiled in islands or in prison — so long as their distress is for the sake of God’s fellowship — themselves the nurslings of their confession.”

In what follows we shall discuss, so far as may be relevant to our immediate purpose:

1. Alms in general, and their connection with the cultus and officials of the church.
2. The support of teachers and officials.
3. The support of widows and orphans.
4. The support of the sick, the infirm, and the disabled.
5. The care of prisoners and people languishing in the mines.
6. The care of poor people needing burial, and of the dead in general.
7. The care of slaves.
8. The care of those visited by great calamities.
9. The churches furnishing work, and insisting upon work.
10. The care of brethren on a journey (hospitality), and of churches in poverty or any peril.

1. ALMS IN GENERAL AND IN CONNECTION WITH THE CULTUS.

Liberality was steadily enjoined upon Christians; indeed, the headquarters of this virtue were to lie within the household, and its proof was to be shown in daily life. From the apostolic counsels down to Cyprian's great work *de Opere et Eleemosynis*, there stretches one long line of injunctions, in the course of which ever-increasing stress is laid upon the importance of alms to the religious position of the donor, and upon the prospect of a future recompense. These points are already prominent in *Hermas*, and in 2 *Clem.* we are told that "almsgiving is good as a repentance from sin; fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving is better than either" (Καλὸν ἐλεημοσύνη ὡς μετάνοια ἀμαρτίας, κρείσσων νηστεία προσευχῆς, ἐλεημοσύνη δὲ ἀμφοτέρων). Cyprian develops alms⁷ into a formal means of grace, the only one indeed which remains to a Christian after baptism; in fact he goes still further, representing alms as a spectacle which the Christian offers to God.⁸

⁷ *De Op. et Eleem.*, i.: "Nam cum dominus adveniēns sanasset illa quae Adam portaverat vulnera et venena serpentis antiqui curasset, legem dedit sano et pracepit ne ultra jam peccaret, ne quid peccanti gravius eveniret. Coartati eramus et in angustum innocentiae praescriptione conclusi, nec haberet quid fragilitatis humanae infirmitas atque imbecillitas faceret; nisi iterum pietas divina subveniens iustitiae et misericordiae operibus ostensis viam quandam tuendae salutis aperiret ut sordes postmodum, quascumque contrahimus, *eleemosynis* abluamus" ("For when the Lord had at his advent cured the wounds which Adam brought, and healed the poison of the old serpent, he gave a law to the sound man and bade him sin no more, lest a worse thing should befall the sinner. We were restrained and bound by the commandment of innocence. Nor would human weakness and impotence have any resource left to it, unless the divine mercy should *once more* come to our aid, by pointing out works of righteousness and mercy, and thus opening a way to obtain salvation, so that by means of *alms* we may wash off any stains subsequently contracted").

⁸ *Op. cit.*, xxi.: "Quale munus cuius editio deo spectante celebratur! Si in gentiliū munere grande et gloriosum videtur proconsules vel imperatores habere presentes, et apparatus ac sumptus apud munerarios maior est ut possint placere maioribus – quanto illustrior muneris et maior est gloria deum et Christum spectatores habere, quanto istis et apparatus uberior et sumptus largior exhibendus est, ubi ad spectaculum conveniunt caelorum virtutes, conveniunt angeli omnes, ubi munerario non quadriga vel consulatus petitur sed vita aeterna praestatur, nec captatur inanis et temporarius favor vulgi sed perpetuum praemium regni caelestis accipitur" ("What a gift is it which is set forth for praise in the sight of God! If, when the Gentiles offer gifts, it seems a great and glorious thing to have proconsuls or emperors present, and if their better classes make greater preparations and display in order to please the authorities — how much more illustrious and splendid is the glory of having God and Christ as the spectators of a gift! How much more lavish should be the preparation, how much more liberal the outlay, in such a case, when the powers of heaven muster to the spectacle, when all the angels gather, when the donor seeks no chariot or consulship, but life eternal is the boon; when no fleeting and fickle popularity is craved for, but the lasting reward of the kingdom of heaven is received!").

It is not our business to follow up this aspect of almsgiving, or to discuss the amount of injury thus inflicted on a practice which was meant to flow from a pure love to men. The point is that a great deal, a very great deal, of alms was given away privately throughout the Christian churches.⁹ As we have already seen, this was well known to the heathen world.¹⁰

But so far from being satisfied with private almsgiving,¹¹ early Christianity instituted, apparently from the first, a church fund (Tertullian's *arca*), and associated charity very closely with the cultus and officials of the church. From the ample materials at our disposal, the following outline may be sketched: Every Sunday (CP. ALREADY 1 COR. XVI. 2), or once a month (Tertullian), or whenever one chose, gifts in money or kind (*stips*) were brought to the service and entrusted to the president, by whom they were laid on the Lord's table and so consecrated to God.¹² Hence the

⁹ The pagan in Macarius Magnes (iii. 5) declares that several Christian women had become beggars by their lavish donations. "Not in the far past, but only yesterday, Christians read Matt. xix. 21 to prominent women and persuaded them to share all their possessions and goods among the poor, to reduce themselves to beggary, to ask charity, and then to sink from independence into unseemly pauperism, reducing themselves from their former good position to a woebegone condition, and being finally obliged to knock at the doors of those who were better off."

¹⁰ With Clement of Alexandria, the motive of love to men is steadily kept in the front rank; cp. *Paed.*, iii., and in particular the fine saying in iii. 7. 39: Καθάπερ τῶν φρεάτων ὅσα πεφύκεν βρῦειν ἀπαντλούμενα εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἀναπιδύει μέτρον, οὕτως ἡ μετὰδοσις, ἀγαθὴ φιλανθρωπίας ὑπάρχουσα πηγὴ, κοινωνοῦσα τοῖς διψῶσι ποτοῦ αὐξεται πάλιν καὶ πίμπλαται ("Even as such wells as spring up rise to their former level even after they have been drained, so that kindly spring of love to men, the bestowal of gifts, imparts its drink to the thirsty, and is again increased and replenished"). Cyprian (in *de Unit.*, xxvi.) complains of a lack of benevolence: "Largitas operationis infracta est ... nunc de patrimonio nec decimas damus et cum vendere jubeat dominus, emimus potius et augemus" ("Liberality in benevolence is impaired ... we do not now give even the tithe of our patrimony away. The Lord bids us sell, but we prefer to buy and lay up").

¹¹ One recommendation very frequently made, was to stint oneself by means of fasting in order to give alms. In this way, even the poor could afford something. See Hermas, *Sim.*, v. ; Aristides, *Apol.*, xv. ("And if anyone among them is poor or needy, and they have no food to spare, they fast for two or three days, that they may meet the poor man's need of sustenance"); *Apost. Constit.*, v. 1, etc. The habit also prevailed in pre-Christian ages. Otherwise, whenever the question is raised, how alms are to be provided, one is pointed to work; in fact, this is almost the only point at which work is taken into consideration at all within the sphere of the religious estimate. See Eph. iv. 28 ("Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather work with his hands at honest work, so that he may have something to give the needy"); and Barn. xix. 10: διὰ χειρῶν σοῦ ἐργάσθη εἰς λύτρον ἁμαρτιῶν σου [the reference being to alms]. Cp. my short study (in the "Evangelisch-Sozial" Magazine, 1905, pp. 48 f.) on "The Primitive Christian Conception of the Worth of Labour."

¹² The relation of *stips* and *oblaciones* is a question which has not been cleared up yet, and need not be raised here.

recipient obtained them from the hand of God. “ ‘Tis God’s grace and philanthropy that support you,” wrote bishop Cornelius (Eus., *H.E.*, vi. 43). The president decided who were to be the recipients, and how much was to be allocated to each, a business in which he had the advice of the deacons, who were expected to be as familiar as possible with the circumstances of each member, and who had the further task of distributing the various donations, partly at the close of worship, partly in the homes of the indigent. In addition to the regular voluntary assessments — for, as the principle of liberty of choice was strictly maintained, we cannot otherwise describe these offerings — there were also extraordinary gifts, such as the present of 200,000 sesterces brought by Marcion when, as a Christian from Asia, he entered the Roman church about the year 139.¹³

Among these methods of maintenance we must also include the love-feasts, or *agapae*, with which the Lord’s Supper was originally associated, but which persisted into a later age. The idea of the love-feast was that the poor got food and drink, since a common meal, to which each contributed as he was able, would unite rich and poor alike. Abuses naturally had to be corrected at an early stage (CP. 1 COR. XI. 18 F.), and the whole affair (which was hardly a copy of the pagan feasts at the *Thiasoi*) never seems to have acquired any particular importance upon the whole.¹⁴

¹³ See on this point Book IV. Chap. I. (I). The money was returned.

¹⁴ Cp. also Jude ver. 12; Tert., *Apol.*, xxxix. ; *de Ieiun.*, xvii. ; Clem., *Paed.*, ii. 1. We need not enter into the controversies over the *agapae*; cp. Keating’s *The Agape and the Eucharist* (1901), Batiffol’s *Etudes d’hist. et de theol. positive* (1902), pp. 279 f., and Funk on “L Agape” (*Rev. d’hist. ecclesiastique*, t. iv. 1, 1903). In later days the feasts served to satisfy the poor at the graves of the martyrs. Constantine justified this practice of feasts in honour of the dead against objections which were apparently current; cp. his address to the council (xii.), where he dwells expressly on their charitable uses: *ta sumpno,sia* (for the martyrs, at their graves) *τὰ συμπόσια πρὸς ἔλεον καὶ ἀνάκτησιν τῶν δεομένων ποιούμενα καὶ πρὸς βοήθειαν τῶν ἐκπεσόντων. ἄπερ ἂν τις φορτικὰ εἶναι νομίδη, οὐ κατὰ τὴν θεϊαν καὶ μακαρίαν διδασκαλίαν φρονεῖ* (“These feasts are held for the purpose of helping and restoring the needy, and in aid of the outcast. Anyone who thinks them burdensome, does not judge them by the divine and blessed rule of life”).

From the very first, the president appears to have had practically an absolute control over the donations;¹⁵ but the deacons had also to handle them as executive agents. The responsibility was heavy, as was the temptation to avarice and dishonesty; hence the repeated counsel, that bishops (and deacons) were to be ἀφιλάργυροι, “no lovers of money.” It was not until a later age that certain principles came to be laid down with regard to the distribution of donations as a whole, from which no divergence was permissible.

This system of organized charity in the churches worked side by side with private benevolence — as is quite evident from the letters and writings of Cyprian. But it was inevitable that the former should gradually handicap the latter, since it wore a superior lustre of religious sacredness, and therefore, people were convinced, was more acceptable to God. Yet, in special cases, private liberality was still appealed to. One splendid instance is cited by Cyprian (*Epist.* lxii), who describes how the Carthaginian churches speedily raised 100,000 sesterces (between £850 and £1000).¹⁶

In 250 A.D. the Roman church had to support about 100 clergy and 1500 poor persons. Taking the yearly cost of supporting one man at £7, 10s. (which was approximately the upkeep of one slave), we get an annual sum of £12,000. If, however (like Uhlhorn, *op. cit.*, p. 153; Eng. trans., p. 159), we allow sixty Roman bushels of wheat per head a year at 7s. 6d., we get a total of about £4300. It is safe to say, then, that about 250 A.D. the Roman church had to expend from half a million to a million sesterces (*i.e.*, from £5000 to £10,000) by way of relief.

The demands made upon the church funds were heavy, as will appear in the course of the following classification and discussion.

¹⁵ On the traces of an exception to this rule in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, see *Texte u. Untersuch.*, ii. 5, pp. 12 f., 58.

¹⁶ For special collections ordered by the bishop, see Tertull., *de Jejun.* xiii., and Clem., *Hom.*, iii. 71: ὑπότε χρεία τινὸς πόρου πρὸς τὸ ἀναγκαῖον γένοιτο, ἅμα οἱ πάντες συμβάλλεσθε (“Whenever any funds are needed, club together, all of you”).

2. THE SUPPORT OF TEACHERS AND OFFICIALS.

The Pauline principle¹⁷ that the rule about “The laborer deserves his wages” applied also to missionaries and teachers, was observed without break or hesitation throughout the Christian churches. The conclusion drawn was that teachers could lay claim to a plain livelihood, and that this claim must always have precedence of any other demand upon the funds. When a church had chosen permanent officials for itself, these also assumed the right of being allowed to claim a livelihood, but only so far as their official duties made inroads upon their civil occupations.¹⁸ Here, too, the bishop had discretionary power; he could appropriate and hand over to the presbyters and deacons whatever he thought suitable and fair, but he was bound to provide the teachers (i.e. missionaries and prophets) with enough to live on day by day. Obviously, this could not fail to give rise to abuses. From the *Didache* and

¹⁷ Paul even describes the principle as a direction of Jesus himself; see 1 Cor. ix. 14: ὁ κύριος διέτεξεν τοῖς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καταγγέλλουσιν ἐκ τοῦ εὐγγελίου ζῆν

¹⁸ The circumstances are not quite clear; still, enough is visible to corroborate what has been said above. Church officials were not, in the first instance, obliged to abandon their civil calling, and so far as that provided them with a livelihood they had no claim upon the church's funds. But in the course of time it became more and more difficult, in the larger churches, to combine civil employment with ecclesiastical office. There is one very instructive account in the *Clementine Homilies* (iii. 71) which indicates that some people were sceptical upon the duty of supporting the bishop and clergy. The author writes: Ζακχαῖος [the bishop] μόνος ὑμῖν ὅλος ἑαυτὸν ἀσχολεῖν ἀποδεδωκώς, κοιλίαν ἔχων καὶ ἑαυτῶν μὴ εὐσυχολῶν, πῶς δύναται τὴν ἀναγκάσιαν ποριδεῖν τροφήν; οὐχὶ δὲ εὐλόγον ἔστιν πάντας ὑμᾶς τοῦ ζῆν αὐτοῦ πρόνοιαν ποιεῖν, οὐκ ἀναμένοντας αὐτὸν ὑμᾶς αἰτεῖν, τοῦτο γὰρ πρόσαιτοῦντος ἔστιν · μάλλον δὲ τεθνήξεται λιμῶ ἢ τοῦτο ποιεῖν ὑποσταίη · πῶς δὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς οὐ δίχην ὑφέξετε, μὴ λογισάμενοι ὅτι “ἀξίος ἔστιν ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ”; καὶ μὴ λεγέτω τις · Οὐκοῦν ὁ δωρεὰν παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ λόγος πωλεῖται; μὴ γένοιτο · εἰ τις γὰρ ἔκων πόθεν ζῆν λάβοι, οὗτος πωλεῖ τὸν λόγον – εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔχων τοῦ ζῆν χάριν λαμβάνει τροφήν, ὡς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἔλαβεν ἐν τε δειπνοῖς καὶ φίλοις, οὐδὲν ἔχων ὁ εἰς αὐτὴν πάντα ἔχων, οὐκ ἄμαρτάνει ἀκολουθῶν οὐν τιμᾶτε [by an honorarium] πρεσβυτέρους κατηχητάς, διακόνους χρησίμους, χρήσας εὐ βεβιωκίας, ὄρφανους ὡς ἐκκλησίας τέκνα (“Zacchaeus alone has devoted himself wholly to your interests; he needs food, and yet has no time to provide for himself; how then is he to get the requisite provisions for a livelihood? Is it not reasonable that you should all provide for his support? Do not wait for him to ask you — asking is a beggar's role, and he would rather die than stoop to that. Shall not you also incur punishment for failing to consider that ‘the labourer is worthy of his hire’? Let no one say, ‘Then is the word which was given freely, to be sold?’ God forbid. If any man has means and yet accepts any help, *he* sells the word. But there is no sin in a man without means accepting support in order to live — as the Lord also accepted gifts at supper and among his friends, he who had nothing though he was the Lord of all things. Honour, then, in appropriate fashion the elder catechists, useful deacons, respectable widows, and orphans as children of the church”). A fixed monthly salary, such as that assigned by the church of Theodotus to her bishop Natalis, was felt to be obnoxious. (Cp. the primitive story in Eus., *H.E.*, v. 28).

Lucian we learn that such abuses did arise, and that privileges were misemployed.¹⁹

3. THE SUPPORT OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS.²⁰

Wherever the early Christian records mention poor persons who require support, widows and orphans are invariably in the foreground. This corresponds, on the one hand, with the special distress of their position in the ancient world, and on the other hand with the ethical injunctions which had passed over into Christianity from Judaism. As it was, widows and orphans formed the poor *κατ' ἐξοχήν*. The church had them always with her. "The Roman church," wrote bishop Cornelius, "supports 1500 widows and poor persons" (Eus. *H.E.* vi. 43). Only widows, we note, are mentioned side by side with the general category of recipients of relief. Inside the churches, widows had a special title of honour, viz., "God's altar,"²¹ and even Lucian the pagan was aware that Christians attended first and foremost to orphans and widows (*Peregrin*, xii). The true worship, James had already urged (i. 27), is to visit widows and orphans in their distress, and Hermas (*Mand*, viii. 10) opens his catalogue of virtues with the words: *χήραις ὑπηρετεῖν, ὀρφανούς καὶ ὑστερημένους ἐπισκεπτεσθαι* ("to serve widows and visit the forlorn and orphans").²² It is beyond question that the early church made an important contribution to the amelioration of social conditions

¹⁹ Details will be found below, in the chapter [Book III. Chap. I.] on the mission-agents.

²⁰ In the liturgy, widows and orphans are also placed immediately after the servants of the church.

²¹ See Polycarp, *ad Phil.*, iv.; Terl., *ad Uxor.*, i. 7; pseudo-Ignat., *Tars.*, 9; and *Apos. Constit.*, ii. 26 (where the term is applied also to orphans; cp. iv. 3). I shall not discuss the institution of widows, already visible in the first epistle to Timothy, which also tended to promote their interests. The special attention devoted to widows was also meant to check the undesirable step of re-marriage.

²² *In Vis.*, II, 4. 3, it is remarkable also how prominent are widows and orphans. See Aristides, *Apol.*, xv.: "They do not avert their attention from widows, and they deliver orphans from anyone who oppresses them." Instances of orphans being adopted into private families are not wanting. Origen, for example, was adopted by a Christian woman (Eus., *H.E.*, vi. 2); cp. *Acta Perpet. et Felic.*, xv.; *Apost. Const.*, iv. 1. Lactantius (*Instit.*, vi. 12) adduces yet another special argument for the duty of supporting widows and orphans: "God commands them to be cared for, in order that no one may be hindered from going to his death for righteousness' sake on the plea of regard for his dear children, but that he may promptly and boldly encounter death, knowing that his beloved ones are left in God's care and will never lack protection."

among the lower classes by her support of widows.²³ We need not dwell on the fact, illustrated as early as the epistles to Timothy, that abuses crept into this department. Such abuses are constantly liable to occur wherever human beings are relieved, in whole or in part, of the duty of caring for themselves.²⁴

4. THE SUPPORT OF THE SICK, THE INFIRM, THE POOR, AND THE DISABLED.

Mention has already been made of the cure of sick people; but where a cure was impossible the church was bound to support the patient by consolation (for they were remembered in the prayers of the church from the very first; cp. 1 Clem. lix. 4), visitation,²⁵ and charitable gifts (usually in kind). Next to the sick came those in trouble (ἐν θλίψει) and people sick in soul (κἀμνοντες τῇ ψυχῇ, Herm., *Mand.*, viii. 10) as a rule, then the helpless and disabled (Tertullian singles out expressly *senes domestici*), finally the poor in general. To quote passages would be superfluous, for the duty is repeatedly inculcated; besides, concrete examples are fairly plentiful, although our records only mention such cases incidentally and quite accidentally.²⁶ Deacons,

²³ See, further, Herm., *Simil.* i., v. 3, ix. 26-27, x. 4; Polyc., *Epist.* vi. 1; Barn., xx. 2; Ignat., *Smyrn.*, vi. (a *propos* of heretics: "They care not for love, or for the widow, or for the orphan, or for the afflicted, or for the prisoner or ransomed, or for the hungry or thirsty" – περί ἀγάπης οὐ μέλει αὐτοῖς, οὐ περί χήρας, οὐ περί ὀρφανοῦ, οὐ περί θλιβομένου, οὐ περί δεδεμένου ἢ λελυμένου, ἢ περί πεινῶντος ἢ διψῶντος) ad Polyc., iv.; Justin's *Apol.*, I. lxvii.; Clem., *Ep. ad Jacob.* 8 (τοῖς μὲν ὀρφανοῖς ποιῶντες τὰ γονέων, ταῖς δὲ χήραις τὰ ἀνδρῶν "acting the part of parents to orphans and of husbands to widows"); Tert., *ad Uxor.*, i.7-8; *Apost. Constit.* (Bks. III., IV.); and pseudo-Clem., *de Virgin.*, i. 12 ("pulchrum et utile est visitare pupillos et viduas, imprimis pauperes qui multos habent liberos"). For the indignation roused by the heartlessness of many pagan ladies, who were abandoned to luxury, read the caustic remark of Clement (*Paedag.*, iii. 4. 30): παιδίον δὲ οὐδὲ προσίενται ὀρφανὸν αἱ τοὺς ψιττακοὺς καὶ τοὺς χαραδριοὺς ἐκτρέφουσαι ("They bring up parrots and curlews, but will not take in the orphan child").

²⁴ Scandalmongering, avarice, drunkenness, and arrogance had all to be dealt with in the case of widows who were being maintained by the church. It even happened that some widows put out to usury the funds they had thus received (cp. *Didasc. Apost.*, xv.; *Texte u. Unters.*, xxv. 2. pp. 78, 274 f.) But there were also highly gifted widows. In fact (cp. *Apost Constit.*), it was considered that true widows who persevered in prayer received revelations.

²⁵ See Tert., *ad Uxor.*, ii. 4, on the difficult position of a Christian woman whose husband was a pagan: "Who would be willing to let his wife go though street after street to other men's houses, and indeed to the poorest cottages, in order to visit brethren?"

²⁶ Naturally, neither private nor, for the matter of that, church charity was to step in where a family

“widows,” and deaconesses (though the last-named were apparently confined to the East) were set apart for this work. It is said of deacons in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (see *Texte u. Unters.*, ii. 5. 8 f.): “They are to be doers of good works, exercising a general supervision day and night, neither scorning the poor nor respecting the person of the rich; they must ascertain who are in distress and not exclude them from a share in the church funds, compelling also the well-to-do to put money aside for good works.” Of “widows” it is remarked, in the same passage, that they should render aid to women afflicted by disease, and the trait of φιλόπτωχος (a lover of the poor) is expected among the other qualities of a bishop.²⁷ In an old legend dating from the Decian persecution, there is a story of the deacon Laurentius in Rome, who, when desired to hand over the treasures of the church, indicated the poor as its only treasures. This was audacious, but it was not incorrect; from the very first, any possessions of the church were steadily characterized as poor-funds, and this remained true during the early centuries.²⁸ The excellence of the church’s charitable system, the deep impression made by it, and the numbers that it won over to the faith, find their best voucher in the action of Julian the Apostate, who attempted an exact reproduction of it in that artificial creation of his, the pagan State-church, in order to deprive the Christians of this very weapon. The imitation, of course, had no success.²⁹

was able to support some helpless member; but it is evident, from the sharp remonstrance in 1 Tim. v. 8, that there were attempts made to evade this duty (“If anyone does not provide for his own people, and especially for his own household, he has renounced the faith and is worse than an infidel”).

²⁷ *Apost. Constit.*, in *Texte u. Unters.*, ii. 5. 8 f. In the *Vita Polycarpi* (Pionius) traits of this bishop are described which remind us of St Francis. On the female diaconate, see Uhlhorn (*op. cit.*, 159-171; Eng. trans., 165 f.).

²⁸ It was not possible, of course, to relieve all distress, and Tertullian (*de Idolat.*, xxiii.) mentions Christians who had to borrow money from pagans. This does not seem to have been quite a rare occurrence.

²⁹ We may certainly conclude that a register was kept of those who had to be maintained. This very fact, however, was a moral support to poor people, for it made them sure that they were not being neglected.

Julian attests not only the excellence of the church's system of relief, but its extension to non-Christians. He wrote to Arsacius (Sozom. v. 16): "These godless Galileans feed not only their own poor but ours; our poor lack our care." This testimony is all the more weighty inasmuch as our Christian sources yield no satisfactory data on this point. Cp., however, under (8), and Paul's injunction in Gal. vi. 10: "Let us do good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of the faith." "True charity," says Tertullian (*Apol.*, xlii), "disburses more money in the streets than your religion in the temples." The church-funds were indeed for the use of the brethren alone, but private beneficence did not restrict itself to the household of faith. In a great calamity, as we learn from reliable evidence (see below), Christians did extend their aid to non-Christians, even exciting the admiration of the latter.

5. CARE FOR PRISONERS AND FOR PEOPLE LANGUISHING IN THE MINES.

The third point in the catalogue of virtues given by Hermas is: ἐξ ἀναγκῶν λυτροῦσθαι τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ("Redeem the servants of God from their bonds"). Prisoners might be innocent for various reasons, but above all there were people incarcerated for their faith or imprisoned for debt, and both classes had to be reached by charity. In the first instance, they had to be visited and consoled, and their plight alleviated by gifts of food.³⁰ Visiting prisoners was the regular work of the deacons, who had thus to run frequent risks; but ordinary Christians were also expected to discharge this duty. If the prisoners had been arrested for their

³⁰ Heb. x. 34, τοῖς δεσμίους συνεπαθήσατε; Clem. Rom., lix. 4 (in the church's prayer), λυτρωσαί τοὺς δεσμίους ἡμῶν; (the duty of caring peri. περι δεδεμένου ἢ λελυμένου); Clem., Ep. ad Jacob, 9 (τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ ἐπιφαινόμενοι ὡς δύνασθε βοηθεῖτε); Arist., *Apol.*, xv. ("And if they hear that anyone of their number is imprisoned or in distress for the sake of their Christ's name, they all render aid in his necessity, and if he can be redeemed, they set him free"). Of the young Origen we are told (Eus., *H.E.*, vi. 3) that "not only was he at the side of the holy martyrs in their imprisonment, and until their final condemnation, but when they were led to death he boldly accompanied them into danger." Cp. Tert., *ad Mart.*, i. f. (both the church and charitable individuals supplied prisoners with food), *Acta Pass. Perpet.*, iii.; Petri Alex., Ep. c. 2 (Lagarde's *Reliq. jur. eccles.* p. 64, 14 f.), c. II (*ibid.*, p. 70, 1 f.), c. 12 (*ibid.*, p. 70, 20 f.).

faith, and if they were rather distinguished teachers, there was no hardship in obeying the command; in fact, many moved heaven and earth to get access to prisoners,³¹ since it was considered that there was something sanctifying about intercourse with a confessor. In order to gain admission they would even go the length of bribing the gaolers,³² and thus manage to smuggle in decent meals and crave a blessing from the saints. The records of the martyrs are full of such tales. Even Lucian knew of the practice, and pointed out the improprieties to which it gave rise. Christian records, particularly those of a later date,³³ corroborate this, and as early as the Montanist controversy it was a burning question whether or no any prominent confessor was really an impostor, if, after being imprisoned for misdemeanours, he made out as if he had been imprisoned on account of the Christian faith. Such abuses, however, were inevitable, and upon the whole their number was not large. The keepers, secretly impressed by the behaviour of the Christians, often consented of their own accord to let them communicate with their friends (*Acta Perpet.*, ix.: “Pudens miles optio, praepositus carceris, nos magnificare coepit, intelligens magnam virtutem esse in nobis; qui multos ad nos admittebat, ut et nos et illi invicem refrigeraremus” (“Pudens, a military subordinate in charge of the prison, began to have a high opinion of us, since he recognized there was some great power of God in us. He let many people in to see us, that we and they might refresh one another”).

³¹ Thekla, in the *Acta Theclae*, is one instance, and there are many others; e.g., in Tertull., *ad Uxor.*, ii. 4.

³² As in Thekla's case; see also Lucian's *Peregr.*, xii., and the *Epist. Lugd.*, in Euseb., *H.E.*, v. I. 61.

³³ Cp. Lucian, *Peregr.*, xii., xiii., xvi. (“costly meals”). Tertullian, at the close of his life, when he was filled with bitter hatred towards the Catholic church, wrote thus in *de Jejuni.*, xii.: “Plainly it is your way to furnish restaurants for dubious martyrs in the gaols, lest they miss their wonted fare and so grow weary of their life, taking umbrage at the novel discipline of abstinence! One of your recent martyrs (no Christian he!) was by no means reduced to this hard regime. For after you had stuffed him during a considerable period, availing yourselves of the facilities of free custody, and after he had disported himself in all sorts of baths (as if these were better than the bath of baptism), and in all resorts of pleasure in high life (as if these were the secret retreats of the church), and with all the seductive pursuits of such a life (preferable, forsooth, to life eternal) — and all this, I believe, just in order to prevent any craving for death — then on the last day, the day of his trial, you gave him in broad daylight some medicated wine (in order to stupefy him against the torture)!”

If any Christian brethren were sentenced to the mines, they were still looked after, even there.³⁴ Their names were carefully noted; attempts were made to keep in touch with them; efforts were concocted to procure their release,³⁵ and brethren were sent to ease their lot, to edify and to encourage them.³⁶ The care shown by Christians for prisoners was so notorious that (according to Eusebius, *H.E.*, v. 8) Licinius, the last emperor before Constantine who persecuted the Christians, passed a law to the effect that “no one was to show kindness to sufferers in prison by supplying them with food, and that no one was to show mercy to those who were starving in prison.” “In addition to this,” Eusebius proceeds to relate, “a penalty was attached, to the effect that those who showed compassion were to share the fate of the objects of their charity, and that those who were humane to the unfortunate were to be flung into bonds and imprisonment and endure the same suffering as the others.” This law, which was directly aimed at Christians, shows, more clearly than anything else could do, the care lavished by Christians upon their captive brethren, although much may have crept in in connection with this which the State could not tolerate.

But they did more than try to merely alleviate the lot of prisoners. Their aim was to get them ransomed. Instances of this cannot have been altogether rare, but unfortunately it is difficult for us to form any judgment on this matter, since in a number of

³⁴ Cp. Dionysius of Corinth (in Eus., *H.E.*, iv. 23), who pays a brilliant testimony to the Roman church in this connection.

³⁵ Cp. the story told by Hippolytus (*Philos.*, ix. 12) of the Roman bishop Victor, who kept a list of all Christians sentenced to the mines in Sardinia, and actually procured their liberty through the intercession of Marcia to the Emperor Commodus.

³⁶ Some extremely beautiful examples of this occur in the treatise of Eusebius upon the Palestinian martyrs during the Diocletian persecution. The Christians of Egypt went to the most remote mines, even to Cilicia, to encourage and edify their brethren who were condemned to hard labour in these places. In the mines at Phaeno a regular church was organized. Cp. also *Apost. Constit.*, v. 1: εἰ τις Χριστιανὸς διὰ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ χριστοῦ... κατακριθῆ ὑπὸ ἀσεβῶν εἰς... μέταλλον, μὴ παρίδητε αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ κόπου καὶ τοῦ ἰδρώντος ὑμῶν πέμψατε αὐτῷ εἰς διατροφήν αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς μισθοδοσίαν τῶν στρατιωτῶν (“If any Christian is condemned for Christ’s sake ... to the mines by the ungodly, do not overlook him, but from the proceeds of your toil and sweat send him something to support himself and to reward the soldiers”).

instances, when a ransom is spoken of, we cannot be sure whether prisoners or slaves are meant. Ransoming captives, at any rate, was regarded as a work which was specially noble and well-pleasing to God, but it never appears to have been undertaken by any church. To the last it remained a monopoly of private generosity, and along this line individuals displayed a spirit of real heroism.³⁷

6. CARE OF POOR PEOPLE REQUIRING BURIAL, AND OF THE DEAD IN GENERAL.

We may begin here with the words of Julian, in his letter to Arsacius (*Soz.*, v. 15): “This godlessness (*i.e.*, Christianity) is mainly furthered by its philanthropy towards strangers and its careful attention to the bestowal of the dead.” Tertullian declares that the burial of poor brethren was performed at the expense of the common fund, and Aristides (*Apol.*, xv.) corroborates this, although with him it takes the form of private charity. “Whenever,” says Aristides, “one of their poor passes from the world, one of them looks after him and sees to his burial, according to his means.” We know the great importance attached to an honourable burial in those days, and the pain felt at the prospect of having to forego this privilege. In this respect the Christian

³⁷ *Herm.*, *Sim.*, I : ἀντί ἀργῶν ἀγοράζετε ψυχὰς θλιβομένας, καθὰ τις δυνατός ἐστίν (“Instead of fields buy souls in trouble, as each of you is able”); *Sim.*, X. v. 2 f.; *Clem. Rom.*, iv. 2: ἐπιστάμεθα πολλούς ἐν ἡμῖν παραδεδωκότας ἑαυτοὺς εἰς δεσμὰ, ὅπως ἑτέρους λυτρώσονται· πολλοὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἐξέδωκαν εἰς δουλείαν, καὶ λαβόντες τὰς τιμὰς αὐτῶν ἑτέρους ἐψώμισαν (“We know that many of our own number have given themselves up to be captives, in order to ransom others; many have sold themselves to slavery, and with the price of their own bodies they have fed others”) *Apost. Constit.*, iv. 9: τὰ ἐκ τοῦ δικαίου κόπου ἀθτοιζόμενα χρήματα διατάσσετε διακονούντες εἰς ἀγορασμοὺς τῶν ἁγίων ὑνόμενοι δούλους καὶ αἰχμαλώτους, δεσμίους, ἐπηραζομένους, ἤκοντας ἐκ καταδίκης, κ.τ.λ. (“All monies accruing from honest labour do ye appoint and apportion to the redeeming of the saints, ransoming thereby slaves and captives, prisoners, people who are sore abused or condemned by tyrants,” etc.), cp. v. 1-2. In *Idolol.*, xxiii., Tertullian refers to release from imprisonment for debt, or to the efforts made by charitable brethren to prevent such imprisonment. When the Numidian robbers carried off the local Christians, the Carthaginian church soon gathered the sum of 100,000 sesterces as ransom-money, and declared it was ready to give still ampler aid (*Cypr.*, *Ep.* lxii.). When the Goths captured the Christians in Cappadocia about the year 255, the Roman church sent contributions in aid of their ransom (*Basil.*, *Ep. ad Dam.* lxx.). See below (10) for both of these cases. The ransoming of captives continued even in later days to be reckoned a work of special merit. Le Blant has published a number of Gallic inscriptions dating from the fourth and fifth centuries, in which the dead person is commended because “he ransomed prisoners.”

church was meeting a sentiment which even its opponents felt to be a human duty. Christians, no doubt, were expected to feel themselves superior to any earthly ignominy, but even they felt it was a ghastly thing not to be buried decently. The deacons were specially charged with the task of seeing that everyone was properly interred (*Const. Ap.*, iii. 7),³⁸ and in certain cases they did not restrict themselves to the limits of the brotherhood. “We cannot bear,” says Lactantius (*Instit.*, vi. 12), “that the image and workmanship of God should be exposed as a prey to wild beasts and birds, but we restore it to the earth from which it was taken,³⁹ and do this office of relatives even to the body of a person whom we do not know, since in their room humanity must step in.”⁴⁰ At this point also we must include the care of the dead after burial. These were still regarded in part as destitute and fit to be

³⁸ A certain degree of luxury was even allowed to Christians; cp. Tertull., *Apol.*, xlii. : “If the Arabians complain of us [for giving them no custom], let the Sabaeans be sure that the richer and more expensive of their wares are used as largely in burying Christians as in fumigating the gods.” Another element in a proper burial was that a person should lie among his companions in the faith. Anyone who buried his people beside non-Christians needlessly, incurred severe blame. Yet about the middle of the third century we find a Spanish bishop burying his children among the heathen; cp. Cyprian, *Ep.* lxvii. 6: “Martialis [episcopus] praeter gentiliam turpia et lutulenta conviva in collegio diu frequentata filios in eodem collegio exterarum gentium more apud profana sepulcra deposuit et alienigenis consepelivit” (“Martialis himself frequented for long the shameful and filthy banquets of the heathen in their college, and placed his sons in the same college, after the custom of foreign nations, amid profane sepulchres, burying them along with strangers”). Christian graves have been found now and then in Jewish cemeteries.

³⁹ Christians were therefore opposed to cremation, and tried to gather even the fragments of their brethren who had been martyred in the flames. The belief of the “simplices” about the resurrection of the body wavered a little in view of the burning of the body, but the theologians always silenced any doubts, though even they held that burning was a piece of wickedness. Cp. *Epist. Lugd.* (Eus., *H. E.*, v. 1, towards the close; Tert., *de Anima*, li.: “Nec ignibus funerandum aiunt (i.e., some pagans), parcentes superfluo animae (i.e., because particles of the soul still clung to the body). Alia est autem ratio pietatis istius (i.e., of Christianity), non reliquis animae adulatrix, sed crudelitatis etiam corporis nomine aversatrix, quod et ipsum homo non mereatur poenali exitu impendi”; Tert., *de Resurr.*, i: “Ego magis ridebo vulgus, tum quoque, cum ipsos defunctos atrocissime exurit, quos postmodum gulisissime nutrit. ... O pietatem de crudelitate ludentem!” (“I have greater derision for the crowd, particularly when it inhumanely burns its dead, only to pamper them afterwards with luxurious indulgence. ... Out upon the piety which mocks its victims with cruelty!”). The reasons which seem to have led Christians from the first to repudiate cremation have not been preserved. We can only surmise what they were.

⁴⁰ The question of the relation between the churches and the collegia tenuiorum (collegia funeraticia) may be left aside. Besides, during the past decade it has passed more and more out of notice. No real light has been thrown by such guilds upon the position of the churches, however convincing may be the inference that the rights obtained by these collegia may have been for a time available to Christians as well. Cp. Neumann, *Röm. Staat und Kirche*, i. 102 f.

supported. Oblations were presented in their name and for the welfare of their souls, which served as actual intercessions on their behalf. This primitive custom was undoubtedly of immense significance to the living; it comforted many an anxious relative, and added greatly to the attractive power of Christianity.⁴¹

7. CARE FOR SLAVES.

It is a mistake to suppose that any “slave question” occupied the early church. The primitive Christians looked on slavery with neither a more friendly nor a more hostile eye than they did upon the State and legal ties.⁴² They never dreamt of working for the abolition of the State, nor did it ever occur to them to abolish slavery for humane or other reasons — not even amongst themselves. The New Testament epistles already assume that Christian masters have slaves (not merely that pagan masters have Christian slaves), and they give no directions for any change in this relationship. On the contrary, slaves are earnestly admonished to be faithful and obedient.⁴³

Still, it would not be true to assert that primitive Christianity was indifferent to slaves and their condition. On the contrary, the church did turn her attention to them, and effected some change in their condition. This follows from such considerations as these:

⁴¹ Tertullian is our first witness for this custom. It did not spring up independently of pagan influence, though it may have at least *one* root within the Christian cultus itself. Tertullian attacked the common pagan feasts of the dead and the custom of bringing food to the graves; but this rooted itself as early as the third century, and was never dislodged.

⁴² The Didache (iv. 11) even bids slaves obey their (Christian) masters *ὡς τύπω θεοῦ* (“as a type of God”).

⁴³ The passages in Paul’s epistles are well known; see also 1 Peter. In his letter to Philemon, Paul neither expects nor asks the release of the slave Onesimus. The only possible sense of 1 Cor. vii. 20 f. *ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἣ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω · δοῦλος ἐκλήθης; μὴ σοι μελέτω · ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μᾶλλον χρῆσαι* is that the apostle counsels slaves not even to avail themselves of the chance of freedom. Any alteration of their position would divert their minds to the things of earth — such seems to be the writer’s meaning. It is far from certain whether we may infer from this passage that Christian slaves begged from Christian masters the chance of freedom more often than their pagan fellows. Christian slave-owners often appear in the literature of the second and third centuries. Cp. Athenag., *Suppl.*, xxxv.; *Acta Perpetue*; etc.

- (a) Converted slaves, male or female, were regarded in the full sense of the term as brothers and sisters from the standpoint of religion. Compared to this, their position in the world was reckoned a matter of indifference.⁴⁴
- (b) They shared the rights of church members to the fullest extent. Slaves could even become clergymen, and in fact bishops.⁴⁵
- (c) As personalities (in the moral sense) they were to be just as highly esteemed as freemen. The sex of female slaves had to be respected, nor was their modesty to be outraged. The same virtues were expected from slaves as from freemen, and consequently their virtues earned the same honour.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Paul is followed on this point by others; e.g., Tatian, *Orat.*, xi.; Tertull., *de Corona*, xiii.; and Lactantius, *Instit.*, v. 16, where, in reply to the opponents who cry out, “You too have masters and slaves! Where then is your so-called equality?” the answer is given, “Alia causa nulla est cur nobis invicem fratrum nomen impertiamus nisi quia pares esse nos credimus. Nam cum omnia humana non corpore sed spiritu metiamur, tametsi corporum sit diversa condicio, nobis tamen servi non sunt, sed eos et habemus et dicimus spiritu fratres, religione conservos” (“Our sole reason for giving one another the name of brother is because we believe we are equals. For since all human objects are measured by us after the spirit and not after the body, although there is a diversity of condition among human bodies, yet slaves are not slaves to us; we deem and term them brothers after the spirit, and fellow-servants in religion”). De Rossi (*Boll. di Arch. Christ.*, 1866, p. 24) remarks on the fact that the title “slave” never occurs in the sepulchral inscriptions of Christianity. Whether this is accidental or intentional, is a question which I must leave undecided. On the duty of Christian masters to instruct their slaves in Christianity, cp. Arist., *Apol.*, xv.: “Slaves, male and female, are instructed so that they become Christians, on account of the love felt for them by their masters; and when this takes place, they call them brethren without any distinction whatsoever.”

⁴⁵ The Roman presbyter or bishop, Pius, the brother of Hermas, must have belonged to the class of slaves. Callistus, the Roman bishop, was originally a slave. Cp. the eightieth canon of Elvira: “Prohibendum ut liberti, quorum patroni in saeculo fuerint, ad clerum non promoveantur” (“It is forbidden to hinder freemen from being advanced to the rank of clergy, whose owners may be still alive”).

⁴⁶ Ample material on this point is to be found in the Acts of the Martyrs. Reference may be made in especial to Blandina, the Lyons martyr, and to Felicitas in the Acts of Perpetua. Not a few slaves rank among “the holy martyrs” of the church. Unless it had been set down, who would imagine that Blandina was a slave — Blandina, who is held in high honour by the church, and whose character has such noble traits? In Euseb., *Mart. Pal.* (*Texte u. Unters.*, xxiv. 2. p. 78), we read: “Porphyry passed for a slave of Pamphilus, but in love to God and in amazing confession of his faith he was a brother, nay more, a beloved son, to Pamphilus, and was like his teacher in all things.” — Cp., however, the penitential ordinance appointed for those astute Christian masters who had forced their Christian slaves to offer sacrifice during the Diocletian persecution (canons 6 and 7 of Peter Alex., in Routh’s *Reliq. Sacr.*, iv. 29 f.). The masters are to do penance for three years καὶ ὡς ὑποκρινάμενοι καὶ ὡς καταναγκάσαντες τοὺς ὁμοδούλους θῦσαι, ἅτε δὴ παρακούσαντες τοῦ ἀποστόλου τὰ αὐτὰ θέλοντες ποιεῖν τοὺς δεσπότες τοῖς δούλοις, ἀνέντας τὴν ἀπειλήν, εἰδότες, φησὶν, ὅτι καὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αὐτῶν ὁ κύριός ἐστιν ἐν

- (d) Masters and mistresses were strictly charged to treat all their slaves humanely,⁴⁷ but, on the other hand, to remember that Christian slaves were their own brethren.⁴⁸ Christian slaves, for their part, were told not to disdain their Christian masters, *i.e.*, they were not to regard themselves as their equals.⁴⁹
- (e) To set a slave free was looked upon, probably from the very beginning, as a praiseworthy action;⁵⁰ otherwise, no Christian slave could have had any claim to be emancipated. Although the primitive church did not admit any such claim on their part, least of all any claim of this kind on the funds of the church, there were cases in which slaves had

οὐρανοῖς, καὶ προσωπολή ψια παρ' αὐτῶ οὐκ ἔστιν (Eph. vi. 9; then follows Col. iii. 11) ... σκοπεῖν ὀφειλοῦσιν ὃ κατεργάσαντο θελήσαντες τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν σώσαι, οἱ τοῦς συνδούλους ἡμῶν ἐλκύσαντες ἐπὶ εἰδωλολατρείαν δυναμένους καὶ αὐτοὺς εκφυγεῖν, εἰ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὴν ἰσότητα ἦσαν αὐτοῖς παρασχόντες, ὡς πάλιν ὁ ἀπόστολος λέγει (Col. iv. 1) ("for having played the hypocrite and for having compelled their fellow-servants to sacrifice — in disobedience to the apostle, who enjoins masters and servants to do the same things, and to forbear threatening, knowing, saith he, that you and they have a Lord in heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons. ... They ought to consider this compulsion of theirs, due to their desire to save their own lives, by which they drag our fellow-servants into idolatry, when they could themselves avoid it — that is, if masters treated them justly and equitably, as the apostle once more observes"). Only a single year's penance was imposed on slaves thus seduced. Tertullian, on the contrary (*de Idol.*, xvii.), shows that the same courage and loyalty was expected from Christian slaves and freedmen as from the highly born. The former were not to hand the wine or join in any formula when they attended their pagan lords at sacrifice. Otherwise they were guilty of idolatry. For attempts on the part of pagan masters to seduce their slaves from the faith, cp. *Acta Pionii*, ix., etc.

⁴⁷ A beautiful instance of the esteem and position enjoyed by a Christian female slave in a Christian home, is afforded by Augustine in his description of the old domestic ("famula decrepita") belonging to his maternal grandfather's house, who had nursed his grandfather as a child ("sicut dorso grandiuscularum puellarum parvuli portari solent" = as little children are often carried on the backs of older girls); *i.e.*, she was active as early as the year 300 A.D. "On account of her age and her excellent character, she was highly respected by the heads of that Christian home. Hence the charge of her master's daughters [i.e., including Monica] was given her, and she fulfilled her duty thoroughly [better than the mother did]. When necessary, she was strict in restraining the girls with a holy firmness, and in teaching them with a sober judgment" ("Propter senectam ac mores optimas in domo christiana satis a dominis honorabatur; unde etiam curam filiarum dominicarum commissam diligenter gerebat, et erat in eis coercendis, cum opus esset, sancta severitate vehemens atque in docendis sobria prudentia," *Confess.*, ix. 8. 17). The basis of Augustine's own piety rested on this slave!

⁴⁸ A long series of testimonies, from the Lyons epistle onwards, witnesses to the fact that Christian masters had heathen slaves. Denunciations of their Christian masters by such slaves, and calumnies against Christian worship, cannot have been altogether uncommon.

⁴⁹ As early as 1 Tim. vi. 1 f. It proves that Christianity must have been in many cases "misunderstood" by Christian slaves.

⁵⁰ Authentic illustrations of this are not available, of course.

their ransom paid for out of such funds.⁵¹ The church never condemned the rights of masters over slaves as sinful; it simply saw in them a natural relationship. In this sphere the source of reform lay, not in Christianity, but in general considerations derived from moral philosophy and in economic necessities.

From one of the canons of the Council of Elvira (c. 300 A.D.), as well as from other minor sources, we learn that even in the Christian church, during the third century in particular, cases unfortunately did occur in which slaves were treated with revolting harshness and barbarity.⁵² In general, one has to recollect that even as early as the second century a diminution of the great slave-establishment can be detected — a diminution which, on economic grounds, continued during the third century. The liberation of slaves was frequently a necessity; it must not be regarded, as a rule, in the light of an act prompted by compassion or brotherly feeling.

⁵¹ From the epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp (iv.) two inferences may be drawn: (1) that slaves were ransomed with money taken from the church collections, and (2) that no *claim* to this favour was admitted. Δούλους και δούλας μη υπερηφάνει· ἀλλὰ μηδὲ αὐτοὶ φουσιουσθώσαν [Christian slaves could easily lose their feelings of deference towards Christian owners], ἀλλ' εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ φλέον δουλεύετωσαν, ἵνα κρείττονος ἐλευθερίας ἀπο θεοῦ τύχωσιν· μη ἐράτῳσαν ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινου ἐλευθεροῦσθαι, ἵνα μη δούλοι εὔπεθῶσιν ἐπιθυμίας (“Despise not male or female slaves. Yet let not these again be puffed up, but let them be all the better servants to the glory of God, that they may obtain a better freedom from God. Let them not crave to be freed at the public cost, lest they be found to be slaves of lust”).

⁵² Canon v.: “Si qua femina furore zeli accensa flagris verberaverit ancillam suam, ita ut intra tertium diem animam cum cruciatu. effundat,” etc. (“If any mistress, in a fit of passion, scourges her handmaid, so that the latter expires within three days,” etc.). Canon xli. also treats of masters and slaves. We do not require to discuss the dispensation given by Callistus, bishop of Rome, to matrons for entering into sexual relations with slaves, as the object of this dispensation was to meet the case of high-born ladies who were bent on marriage, and not to admit that slaves had equal rights. Hippol. *Philos.*, ix. 12: και γυναιξιν ἐπέτρεψεν, εἰ ἀνανδροὶ εἶεν και ἡλικία ἢ ἑαυτῶν ἀξίαν μη βούλοιντο καταρεῖν διὰ τὸ νομίμως γαμηθῆναι, ἐκειν ἕνα ὃν ἂν αἰρήσωνται, σύγκοιτον, εἴτε οἰκέτην, εἴτε ἐλευθερον, και τοῦτον κρίνειν ἀντὶ ἀνδρός μη νόμῳ γεγαμημένην (“He even permitted women, if unmarried and inflamed with a passion unworthy of their age, or unwilling to forfeit their position for the sake of a legal marriage, to have anyone they liked as a bedfellow, either slave or free, and to reckon him their husband although he was not legally married to them”).

8. CARE FOR PEOPLE VISITED BY GREAT CALAMITIES.

As early as Hebrews x. 32 f. a church is commended for having nobly stood the test of a great persecution and calamity, thanks to sympathy and solicitous care. From that time onward, we frequently come across counsels to Christian brethren to show themselves specially active and devoted in any emergencies of distress; not counsels merely, but also actual proofs that they bore fruit. We shall not, at present, go into cases in which churches lent aid to sister churches, even at a considerable distance; these fall to be noticed under section 10. But some examples referring to calamities within a church itself may be set down at this stage of our discussion.

When the plague raged in Alexandria (about 259 A.D.), bishop Dionysius wrote (Euseb., *H.E.*, vii. 22): “The most of our brethren did not spare themselves, so great was their brotherly affection. They held fast to each other, visited the sick without fear, ministered to them assiduously, and served them for the sake of Christ. Right gladly did they perish with them. ... Indeed many did die, after caring for the sick and giving health to others, transplanting the death of others, as it were, into themselves. In this way the noblest of our brethren died, including some presbyters and deacons and people of the highest reputation. ... Quite the reverse was it with the heathen. They abandoned those who began to sicken, fled from their dearest friends, threw out the sick when half dead into the streets, and let the dead lie unburied.”

A similar tale is related by Cyprian of the plague at Carthage. He exclaims to the pagan *Demetrianus* (*x.*):

“Pestem et luem criminariis, cum peste ipsa et lue vel detecta sint vel aucta crimina singulorum, dum nec infirmis exhibetur misericordia et defunctis avaritia inhiat ac rapina. Idem ad pietatis obsequium timidi,53

⁵³ Cp. Cyprian, *per Pont.*, ix.: “Jacebant interim tota civitate vicatim non jam corpora, sed cadavera plurimorum” (“Meanwhile all over the city lay, not bodies now, but the carcasses of many”).

ad impia lucra temerarii, fugientes morientium funera et adpetentes spolia mortuorum” (“You blame plague and disease, when plague and disease either swell or disclose the crimes of individuals, no mercy being shown to the weak, and avarice and rapine gaping greedily for the dead. The same people are sluggish in the discharge of the duties of affection, who rashly seek impious gains; they shun the deathbeds of the dying, but make for the spoils of the dead”). Cyprian’s advice is seen in his treatise *de Mortalitate*. His conduct, and the way he inspired other Christians by his example, are narrated by his biographer Pontianus (*Vita*, ix. f.):

“Adgregatam primo in loco plebem de misericordiae bonis instruit. Docet divinae lectionis exemplis ... tunc deinde subiungit non esse mirabile, si nostros tantum debito caritatis obsequio foveremus; cum enim perfectum posse fieri, qui plus aliquid publicano vel ethnico fecerit, qui malum bono vincens et divinae clementiae instar exercens inimicos quoque dilexerit. ... Quid Christiana plebs faceret, cui de fide nomen est? distributa sunt ergo continuo pro qualitate hominum atque ordinum ministeria [organized charity, then]. Multi qui paupertatis beneficio sumptus exhibere non poterant, plus sumptibus exhibebant, compensantes proprio labore mercedem divitiis omnibus cariorum ... fiebat itaque exuberantium operum largitate, quod bonum est ad omnes, non ad solos domesticos fidei” (“The people being assembled together, he first of all urges on them the benefits of mercy. By means of examples drawn from the sacred lessons, he teaches them. ... Then he proceeds to add that there is nothing remarkable in cherishing merely our own people with the due attentions of love, but that one might become perfect who should do something

more than heathen men or publicans, one who, overcoming evil with good, and practising a merciful kindness like to that of God, should love his enemies as well. . . . What should a Christian people do, a people whose very name was derived from faith? The contributions are always distributed then according to the degree of the men and of their respective ranks. Many who, on the score of poverty, could not make any show of wealth, showed far more than wealth, as they made up by personal labour an offering dearer than all the riches in the world. Thus the good done was done to all men, and not merely to the household of faith, so richly did the good works overflow”).

We hear exactly the same story of practical sympathy and self-denying love displayed by Christians even to outsiders, in the great plague which occurred during the reign of Maximinus Daza (Eus., *H.E.*, ix. 8): “Then did they show themselves to the heathen in the clearest light. For the Christians were the only people who amid such terrible ills showed their fellow-feeling and humanity by their actions. Day by day some would busy themselves with attending to the dead and burying them (for there were numbers to whom no one else paid any heed); *others gathered in one spot all who were afflicted by hunger throughout the whole city, and gave bread to them all.* When this became known, people glorified the Christians’ God, and, convinced by the very facts, confessed the Christians alone were truly pious and religious.”

It may be inferred with certainty, as Eusebius himself avows, that cases of this kind made a deep impression upon those who were not Christians, and that they gave a powerful impetus to the propaganda.

9. THE CHURCHES FURNISHING WORK AND INSISTING UPON WORK.

Christianity at the outset spread chiefly among people who had to work hard. The new religion did not teach its votaries “the dignity of labour,” or “the noble pleasure invariably afforded by work.” What it inculcated was just the *duty* of work.⁵⁴ “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 THESS. III. 10). Over and again it was enunciated that the duty of providing for others was conditioned by their incapacity for work. The brethren had soon to face the fact that some of their numbers were falling into restless and lazy habits, as well as the sadder fact that these very people were selfishly trying to trade upon the charity of their neighbours. This was so notorious that even in the brief compass of the Didache there is a note of precautions which are to be taken to checkmate such attempts, while in Lucian’s description of the Christians he singles out, as one of their characteristic traits, a readiness to let cunning impostors take advantage of their brotherly love.⁵⁵

Christianity cannot be charged at any rate with the desire of promoting mendicancy or with underestimating the duty of work.⁵⁶ Even the charge of being “*infructuosi in negotiis*,” (of no use in practical affairs) was repudiated by Tertullian.

“How so?” he asks. “How can that be when such people dwell beside you, sharing your way of life, your dress, your habits, and the same needs of life? We are no Brahmins or Indian gymnosophists, dwelling in woods and exiled from life. . . . We stay beside you in this world, making use of the forum, the provision-market, the bath, the booth, the workshop, the inn, the weekly market, and all

⁵⁴ At the same time there was a quiet undercurrent of feeling expressed by the maxim that absolute devotion to religion was a higher plane of life — “The heavenly Father who feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies will provide for us.” Apostles and prophets (with the heroes of asceticism, of course, from the very outset) did not require to work. The idea was that their activity in preaching demanded their entire life and occupied all their time.

⁵⁵ The pseudo-Clementine *de Virgin.*, i, 11, contains a sharp warning against the “*otiosi*,” or lazy folk, who chatter about religion instead of attending to their business.

⁵⁶ Cp. 2 Thess. iii. 6: παραγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ι.Χ. στέλλεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ παντός ἀδελφοῦ ἀτάκτως περιπατοῦντος cp. ver. 12.

other places of commerce. We sail with you, fight at your side, till the soil with you, and traffic with you; we likewise join our technical skill to that of others, and make our works public property for your use” (*Apol.* xlii.).⁵⁷ Even clerics were not exempted from making a livelihood,⁵⁸ and admirable sayings on the need of labour occur in Clement of Alexandria as well as in other writers. We have already observed (pp. 155 f.) that one incentive to work was found in the consideration that money could thus be gained for the purpose of supporting other people, and this idea was by no means thrown out at random. Its frequent repetition, from the epistle to the Ephesians onwards, shows that people recognized in it a powerful motive for the industrious life. It was also declared in simple and stirring language that the labourer was worthy of his hire, and a fearful judgment was prophesied for those who defrauded workmen of their wages (see especially *Jas.* v. 4 f.). It is indeed surprising that work was spoken of in such a sensible way, and that the duty of work was inculcated so earnestly, in a society which was so liable to fanaticism and indolence.

But we have not yet alluded to what was the really noticeable feature in this connection. We have already come across several passages which would lead us to infer that, together with the recognition that every Christian brother had the right to a bare provision for livelihood, the early Christian church also admitted its obligation to secure this minimum either by furnishing him with work or else by maintaining him. Thus we read in the pseudo-Clementine homilies (cp. *Clem.*, viii.):

⁵⁷ Tertullian at this point is suppressing his personal views; he speaks from the standpoint of the majority of Christians. In reality, as we see from the treatise *de Idololatria*, he was convinced that there was hardly a single occupation or business in which any Christian could engage without soiling his conscience with idolatry.

⁵⁸ The earliest restrictions on this point occur in the canons of the Synod of Elvira (canon xix.). They are very guarded. “*Episcopi, presbyteres et diacones de locis suis [this is the one point of the prohibition] negotiandi causa non discedant ... sane ad victum sibi conquiendum aut filium, aut libertum, aut mercenarium, aut amicum, aut quemlibet mittant; et si voluerint negotiari, intra provinciam negotientur*” (“Let no bishop or presbyter or deacon leave his place for the purpose of trading ... he can, of course, send his son, or his freedman, or his hired servant, or a friend, or anyone else, to procure provisions; but if he wishes to transact business, he must confine himself to his own sphere”).

“For those able to work, provide work; and to those incapable of work, be charitable.”⁵⁹ Cyprian also (*Ep.* ii.) assumes that if the church forbids some teacher of dramatic art to practise his profession, it must look after him, or, in the event of his being unable to do anything else, provide him with the necessities of life.⁶⁰ We were not aware, however, if this was really felt to be a duty by the church at large, till the discovery of the *Didache*. This threw quite a fresh light on the situation. In the *Didache* (xii.) it is ordained that no brother who is able to work is to be maintained by any church for more than two or three days. The church accordingly had the right of getting rid of such brethren. But the reverse side of this right was a duty. “If any brother has a trade, let him follow that trade and earn the bread he eats. If he has no trade, exercise your discretion in *arranging for him to live among you as a Christian, but not in idleness*. If he will not do this (*i.e.*, engage in the work with which you furnish him), he is trafficking with Christ (ΧΡΗΣΤΕΜΠΟΡΟΣ). Beware of men like that.” It is beyond question, therefore, that a Christian brother could demand work from the church, and that the church had to furnish him with work. What bound the members together, then, was not merely the duty of supporting one another — that was simply the *ultima ratio*; it was the fact that they formed a guild of workers, in the sense that the churches had to provide work for a brother whenever he required it. This fact seems to me of great importance, from the social standpoint. The churches were also labour unions. The case attested by Cyprian proves that there is

⁵⁹ Παρέχοντες μετὰ πάσης εὐφροσύνης τὰς τροφάς... τοῖς ἀτέχνοις διὰ τῶν ἐπιτεδευμάτων ἐνούμενοι τὰς προφάσεις τῆς ἀναγκαίας τροφῆς · τεχνίτη ἔργον, ἀνδρανεὶ ἔλεος (‘‘Providing supplies with all kindness ... furnishing those who have no occupation with employment, and thus with the necessary means of livelihood. To the artificer, work; to the incapable, alms’’).

⁶⁰ ‘‘Si paenuriam talis et necessitatem paupertatis obtendit, potest inter ceteros qui ecclesiae alimentis sustententur huius quoque necessitatis adiuvari, si tamen contentus sit frugalioribus et innocentibus cibis nec putet salario se esse redimendum, ut a peccatis cesset’’ (‘‘Should such a person allege penury and the necessities of poverty, his wants may also be met among those of the other people who are maintained by the church’s aliment — provided always that he is satisfied with plain and frugal fare. Nor is he to imagine he must be redeemed by means of an allowance of money, in order to cease from sins’’).

far more here than a merely rhetorical maxim. The Church did prove in this way a refuge for people in distress who were prepared to work. Its attractive power was consequently intensified, and from the economic standpoint we must attach very high value to a union which provided work for those who were able to work, and at the same time kept hunger from those who were unfit for any labour.

10. CARE FOR BRETHREN ON A JOURNEY (HOSPITALITY) AND FOR CHURCHES IN POVERTY OR PERIL.⁶¹

The diaconate went outside the circle of the individual church when it deliberately extended its labours to include the relief of *strangers, i.e.*, in the first instance of Christian brethren on their travels. In our oldest account of Christian worship on Sunday (Justin, *Apol.*, I. lxxvii.; see above, p. 153), strangers on their travels are included in the list of those who receive support from the church-collections. This form of charity was thus considered part of the church's business, instead of merely being left to the goodwill of individuals; though people had recourse in many ways to the private method, while the virtue of hospitality was repeatedly inculcated on the faithful.⁶² In the first epistle of Clement to the

⁶¹ I have based this section on a study of my own which appeared in the *Monatsschrift f. Diakonie und innere Mission* (Dec. 1879, Jan. 1880); but, as the relations of the individual church with Christendom in general fail to be noticed in this section, I have thought it appropriate to treat the subject in greater detail. The ideal background of all this enterprise and activity may be seen in Tertullian's remark (*de Praescr.*, xx.): "Omnes ecclesiae una; probant unitatem ecclesiarum communicatio pacis et appellatio fraternitatis et contesseratio hospitalitatis" ("All churches are one, and the unity of the churches is shown by their peaceful intercommunion, the title of brethren, and the bond of hospitality").

⁶² Rom. xii. 13, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality"; 1 Pet. iv. 9, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling"; Heb. vi. 10, xiii. 2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Individuals are frequently commended by Paul to the hospitality of the church; e.g., Rom. xvi. 1 f., "welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints." See also 3 John 5-8. In the "Shepherd" of Hermas (*Mand.*, viii. 10) hospitality is distinctly mentioned in the catalogue of virtues, with this remarkable comment: ἐν γὰρ τῇ φιλοξενίᾳ εὐρίσκεται ἀγαθοποιήσις ποτε ("for benevolence from time to time is found in hospitality"), while in *Sim.*, viii. 10. 3, praise is assigned to those Christians who εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν ἠδέως ὑπεδέξαντο τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ("gladly welcomed God's servants into their houses"). Aristides, in his *Apology* (xv.), says that if Christians "see any stranger, they take him under their roof and rejoice over him as over a very brother" ξένον ἔαν ἴδωσιν, ὑπὸ στέγην εἰσάγουσι καὶ χαίρουσιν ἐπ' αὐτῷ ὡς ἐπὶ ἀδελφῷ ἀληθινῷ. The exercise of hospitality by private individuals towards Christian brethren is assumed by Tertullian to be a duty

Corinthian church, it is particularly noted, among the distinguishing virtues of the church, that anyone who had stayed there praised their splendid sense of hospitality.⁶³ But during the early centuries of Christianity it was the Roman church more than any other which was distinguished by the generosity with which it practised this virtue. In one document from the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a letter of Dionysius the bishop of Corinth to the Roman church, it is acknowledged that the latter has maintained its *primitive* custom of showing kindness to *foreign* brethren. “Your worthy bishop Soter has not merely kept up this practice, but even extended it, by aiding the saints with rich supplies, which he sends from time to time, and also by addressing blessed words of comfort to brethren coming up to Rome, like a loving father to his children” (Eus., *H.E.*, iv. 23. 10). We shall return to this later on; meanwhile it may be pointed out, in this connection, that

which no one dare evade; for, in writing to his wife (*ad Uxor.*, ii. 4), he warns her against marrying a heathen, should he (Tertullian) predecease her, on the ground that no Christian brother would get a spiritual reception in an alien household. But hospitality was inculcated especially upon officials of the church, such as elders (bishops) and deacons, who practised this virtue in the name of the church at large; cp. 1 Tim. iii. 2, Tit. i. 8 (1 Tim. v. 10). In *Hermas* (*Sim.*, ix. 27. 2) hospitable bishops form a special class among the saints, since “they gladly received God’s servants into their houses at all times, and without hypocrisy.” In the *Didache* a comparatively large amount of space is taken up with directions regarding the care of travellers, and Cyprian’s interest in strangers is attested by his seventh letter, written to his clergy at Carthage from his place of retreat during the Decian persecution. He writes: “I beg you will attend carefully to the widows, and sick people, and all the poor. You may also pay the expenses of any strangers who may be in need, out of my own portion which I left with my fellow-presbyter Rogatianus. In case it should be all used, I hereby forward by the hands of Naricus the acolyte another sum of money, so that the sufferers may be dealt with more promptly and liberally” (“Viduarum et infirmorum et omnium pauperum curam peto diligenter habeatis, sed et peregrinis si qui indigentes fuerint sumptus suggeratis de quantitate mea propria quam apud Rogatianum compresbyterum nostrum dimisi. Quae quantitas ne forte iam erogata sit, misi eidem per Naricum acoluthum aliam portionem, ut largius et promptius circa laborantes fiat operatio”). Cp. also *Apost. Const.*, iii. 3 (p. 98, 9 f., ed. Lagarde), and *Ep. Clem. ad Jacob.* (p. 9, 10 f., ed. Lagarde): τοὺς ξένους μετὰ πάσης προθυμίας εἰς τοὺς ἑαυτῶν οἴκους λαμβάνετε (“Receive strangers into your homes with all readiness”). In his satire on the death of Peregrinus (xvi.), Lucian describes how his hero, on becoming a Christian, was amply provided for on his travels: “Peregrinus thus started out for the second time, and betook himself to travelling; he had an ample allowance from the Christians, who constituted themselves his bodyguard, so that he lived in clover. Thus for some time he provided for himself in this fashion.” From the pseudo-Clementine epistle *de Virginitate* one also learns to appreciate the appeal and exercise of hospitality. Finally, Julian (*Ep. ad Arsac.*) emphasises ἡ περὶ τοῦ ξενου φιλανθρωπία, a among Christians, and wishes that his own party would imitate it (see above, p. 162).

⁶³ 1 Clem. i. 2: τίς γὰρ παρεπιδημήσας πρὸς ὑμᾶς... τοῦ μεγαλοπρεπέος τῆς φιλοξενίας ὑμῶν ἦθος οὐκ ἐκήρυσεν (“What person who has sojourned among you ... has not proclaimed your splendid, hospitable disposition?”); cp. above, p. 152.

the Roman church owed its rapid rise to supremacy in Western Christendom, not simply to its geographical position within the capital of the empire, or to the fact of its having been the seat of apostolic activity throughout the West, but also to the fact that it recognized the special obligation of caring for Christians in general, which fell to it as the church of the imperial capital. A living interest in the collective church of Christ throbbed with peculiar intensity throughout the Roman church, as we shall see, from the very outset, and the practice of hospitality was one of its manifestations. At a time when Christianity was still a homeless religion, the occasional travels of the brethren were frequently the means of bringing churches together which otherwise would have had no common tie; while in an age when Christian captives were being dragged off, and banished to distant spots throughout the empire, and when brethren in distress sought shelter and solace, the practical proof of hospitality must have been specially telling. As early as the second century one bishop of Asia Minor even wrote a book upon this virtue.⁶⁴ So highly was it prized within the churches that it was put next to faith as the genuine proof of faith. "For the sake of his faith and hospitality, Abraham had a son given him in his old age." "For his hospitality and piety was Lot saved from Sodom." "For the sake of her faith and hospitality was Rahab saved." Such are the examples of which, in these very words, the Roman church reminds her sister at Corinth.⁶⁵ Nor was this exercise of hospitality merely an aid in passing. The obligation of work imposed by the Christian church has been already mentioned (cp. pp. 173 f.); if any visitors wished to settle down, they had to take up some work, as is plain from the very provision made for such cases. Along roads running through waste country hospices were erected. The earliest case of this occurs in the *Acta Archelai*⁶⁶ (fourth century).

⁶⁴ Melito of Sardes, according to Eusebius (*H.E.*, iv. 26. 2).

⁶⁵ 1 Clem. x. 7, xi. 1, xii. 1.

⁶⁶ Ch. iv. : "Si quando veluti peregrinans ad hospitium pervenisset, quae quidem diversoria hospital-

It was easy to take advantage of a spirit so obliging and unsparing (e.g., the case of Proteus Peregrinus, and especially the churches' sad experience of so-called prophets and teachers). Heretics could creep in, and so could loafers or impostors. We note, accordingly, that definite precautions were taken against these at quite an early period. The new arrival is to be tested to see whether or not he is a Christian (CP. 2 AND 3 JOHN; DID., XII.). In the case of an itinerant prophet, his words are to be compared with his actions. No brother is to remain idle in any place for more than two days, or three at the very most; after that, he must either leave or labour (Did., xii). Later on, any brother on a journey was required to bring with him a passport from his church at home. Things must have come to a sad pass when (as the Didache informs us) it was decreed that any visitor must be adjudged a false prophet without further ado, if during an ecstasy he ordered a meal and then partook of it, or if in an ecstasy he asked for money. Many a traveller, however, who desired to settle down, did not come with empty hands; such persons did not ask, they gave. Thus we know (see above) that when Marcion came from Pontus and joined the Roman church, he contributed 200,000 sesterces to its funds (Tert., de *Praescr.*, xxx.). Still, such cases were the exception; as a rule, visitors were in need of assistance.

Care lavished on brethren on a journey blossomed naturally into a sympathy and care for any distant churches in poverty or peril. The keen interest shown in a guest could not cease when he left the threshold of one's house or passed beyond the city gates. And more than this, the guest occupied the position of a representative to any church at which he arrived; he was a messenger to them from some distant circle of brethren who were probably entire strangers and were yet related to them. His account of the distress and suffering of his own church, or of its growth and spiritual gifts, was no foreign news. The primitive

issimus Marcellus instruxerat.⁷

churches were sensible that their faith and calling bound them closely together in this world; they felt, as the apostle enjoined, that “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 COR. XII. 26). And there is no doubt whatever that the consciousness of this was most vigorous and vital in the very ages during which no external bond as yet united the various churches, the latter standing side by side in almost entire independence of each other. These were the ages when the primitive article of the common symbol, “I believe in one holy church,” was really nothing more than an *article of faith*. And of course the effect of the inward ties was all the stronger when people were participating in a common faith which found expression ere long in a brief and vigorous confession, or practising the same love and patience and Christian discipline, or turning their hopes in common to that glorious consummation of Christ’s kingdom of which they had each received the earnest and the pledge. These common possessions stimulated brotherly love; they made strangers friends, and brought the distant near. “By secret signs and marks they manage to recognize one another, loving each other almost before they are acquainted”; such is the description of Christians given by the pagan Caecilius (*Min. Felix*, ix. 3). Changes afterwards took place; but this vital sense of belonging to *one brotherhood* never wholly disappeared.

In the great prayers of thanksgiving and supplication offered every Sabbath by the churches, there was a fixed place assigned to intercession for the whole of Christendom throughout the earth. Before very long this kindled the consciousness that every individual member belonged to the holy unity of Christendom, just as it also kept them mindful of the services which they owed to the general body. In the epistles and documents of primitive Christianity, wherever the church-prayers emerge their oecumenical character becomes clear and conspicuous.⁶⁷ Special

⁶⁷ Cp. 1 Clem. lix. 2 f. with my notes *ad loc.* Polyc., *Phil.*, xii. 2 f.

means of intercourse were provided by epistles, circular letters, collections of epistles, the transmission of acts or of official records, or by travellers and special messengers. When matters of importance were at stake, the bishops themselves went forth to settle controversial questions or to arrange a common basis of agreement. It is not our business in these pages to describe all this varied intercourse. We shall confine ourselves to the task of gathering and explaining those passages in which one church comes to the aid of another in any case of need.

Poverty, sickness, persecution, and suffering of all kinds formed one class of troubles which demanded constant help on the part of churches that were better off; while, in a different direction, assistance was required in those internal crises of doctrine and of conduct which might threaten a church and in fact endanger its very existence. Along both of these lines the brotherly love of the churches had to prove its reality.

The first case of one church supporting another occurs at the very beginning of the apostolic age. In Acts xi. 27 f. we read that Agabus in Antioch foretold a famine. On the news of this, the young church at Antioch made a collection on behalf of the poor brethren in Judea, and despatched the proceeds to them by the hands of Barnabas and Paul.⁶⁸ It was a Gentile Christian church which was the first, so far as we are aware, to help a sister church in her distress. Shortly after this, the brotherly love felt by young Christian communities drawn from pagans in Asia and Europe is reported to have approved itself on a still wider scale. Even after the famine had passed, the mother church at Jerusalem continued poor. Why, we do not know. An explanation has been sought in the early attempt by which that church is said to have introduced a voluntary community of goods; it was the failure of this attempt, we are to believe, that left the local church

⁶⁸ No doubt, the account (in Acts) of the Antiochene donation and of the journey of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem does lie open to critical suspicion (see Overbeck, *ad loc.*).

impoverished. This is merely a vague conjecture. Nevertheless, the poverty at Jerusalem remains a fact. At the critical conference in Jerusalem, when the three pillar-apostles definitely recognized Paul's mission to the Gentiles, the latter pledged himself to remember the poor saints at Jerusalem in distant lands; and the epistles to the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Romans, show how widely and faithfully the apostle discharged this obligation. His position in this matter was by no means easy. He had made himself responsible for a collection whose value depended entirely on the *voluntary* devotion of the churches which he founded. But he was sure he could rely on them, and in this he did not deceive himself. Paul's churches made his concerns their own, and money for the brethren far away at Jerusalem was collected in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Even when the apostle had to endure the prospect of all his work in Corinth being endangered by a severe local crisis, he did not fail to remember the business of the collection along with more important matters. The local arrangements for it had almost come to a standstill by the time he wrote, and the aim of his vigorous, affectionate, and graceful words of counsel to the church is to revive the zeal which had been allowed to cool amid their party quarrels (2 COR. VIII. 9). Not long afterwards he is able to tell the Romans that "For Macedonia and Achaia *freely chose* to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings" (ROM. XV. 26 F.). In this collection Paul saw a real duty of charity which rested on the Gentile churches, and one has only to realize the circumstances under which the money was gathered in order to understand the meaning it possessed for the donors themselves. As yet, there was no coming or going between the Gentile and the Judean Christians, though the former had to admit that the latter were one with themselves as brethren and as members of a single church. The

churches in Asia and Europe were imitators of the churches of God in Judea (1 THESS. II. 14), yet they had no fellowship in worship, life, or customs. This collection formed, therefore, the one visible expression of that brotherly unity which otherwise was rooted merely in their common faith. This was what lent it a significance of its own. For a considerable period this devotion of the Gentile Christians to their distressed brethren in Jerusalem was the sole manifestation, even in visible shape, of the consciousness that all Christians shared an inner fellowship. We do not know how long the contributions were kept up. The great catastrophes which occurred in Palestine after 65 A.D. had a disastrous effect at any rate upon the relations between Gentile Christians and their brethren in Jerusalem and Palestine.⁶⁹ — Forty years later the age of persecutions burst upon the churches, though no general persecution occurred until the middle of the third century. When some churches were in distress, their possessions seized⁷⁰ and their existence imperilled, the others could not feel happy in their own undisturbed position. Succour of their persecuted brethren seemed to them a duty, and it was a duty from which they did not shrink. Justin (*loc. cit.*) tells us that the maintenance of imprisoned Christians was one of the regular objects to which the church collections were devoted, a piece of information which is corroborated and enlarged by the statement of Tertullian, that those who languished in the mines or were exiled to desert islands or lay in prison all received monies from the church.⁷¹ Neither statement explains if it was only members of the particular church in question who

⁶⁹ The meaning of Heb. vi. 10 is uncertain. I may observe at this point that more than three centuries later Jerome employed this Pauline collection as an argument to enforce the duty of all Christians throughout the Roman empire to support the monastic settlements at the sacred sites of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In his treatise against Vigilantius (xiii.), who had opposed the squandering of money to maintain monks in Judea, Jerome argues from 2 Cor. viii., etc., without more ado, as a scriptural warrant for such collections.

⁷⁰ Even by the time of Domitian, Christian churches were liable to poverty, owing to the authorities seizing their goods; cp. Heb. x. 34 (if the epistle belongs to this period), and Eus., *H.E.*, iii. 17.

⁷¹ Tert., *Apol.*, xxxix. : “Si qui in metallis et si qui in insulis, vel in custodiis, dumtaxat ex causa dei sectae, alumni suae confessionis fiunt” (cp. p. 153).

were thus supported. This, however, is inherently improbable, and there are express statements to the contrary, including one from a pagan source. Dionysius of Corinth (Eus., *H.E.*, iv. 23. 10) writes thus to the Roman Christians about the year 170: “From the very first you have had this practice of aiding *all* the brethren in various ways and of sending contributions to *many* churches in *every* city, thus in one case relieving the poverty of the needy, or in another providing for brethren in the mines. By these gifts, which you have sent from the very first, you Romans keep up the hereditary customs of the Romans, a practice your bishop Soter has not merely maintained but even extended.” A hundred years later Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, in writing to Stephen the bishop of Rome, has occasion to mention the churches in Syria and Arabia. Whereupon he remarks in passing, “To them you send help regularly, and you have just written them another letter” (Eus., *H.E.*, vii. 5. 2). Basil the Great informs us that under bishop Dionysius (259-269 A.D.) the Roman church sent money to Cappadocia to purchase the freedom of some Christian captives from the barbarians, an act of kindness which was still remembered with gratitude in Cappadocia at the close of the fourth century.⁷² Thus Corinth, Syria, Arabia, and Cappadocia, all of them churches in the East, unite in testifying to the praise of the church at Rome; and we can understand, from the language of Dionysius of Corinth, how Ignatius could describe that church as the *πρωκαθημένη τῆς ἀγάπης* (“the leader of love.”⁷³ Nor were other churches and their bishops behindhand in the matter. Similar stories are told of the church at Carthage and its bishop Cyprian. From a number of letters written shortly before his execution, it is quite clear that Cyprian sent money to provide for the Christians who then lay captive in Numidia (*Ep.* lxxvi.-lxxix.), and elsewhere in his correspondence there

⁷² Basil, *Ep. ad Damasum Papam* (lxx).

⁷³ Ign., *ad Rom.*, proemium. Cp. Zahn, *ad loc.*: “In caritatis operibus semper primum locum sibi vindicavit ecclesia Romana” (“The Roman church always justified her primacy in works of charity”).

is similar evidence of his care for stranger Christians and foreign churches. The most memorable of his letters, in this respect, is that addressed to the bishops of Numidia in 253 A.D. The latter had informed him that wild hordes of robbers had invaded the country and carried off many Christians of both sexes into captivity. Whereupon Cyprian instituted a collection on their behalf and forwarded the proceeds to the bishops along with the following letter (*Ep.* lxii.). It is the most elaborate and important document from the first three centuries bearing upon the support extended to one church by another, and for that reason we may find space for it at this point.

“Cyprian to Januarius, Maximus, Proculus, Victor, Modianus, Nemesianus, Nampulus, and Honoratus, the brethren: greeting.

With sore anguish of soul and many a tear have I read the letter which in your loving solicitude you addressed to me, dear brethren, with regard to the imprisonment of our brothers and sisters. Who would not feel anguish over such misfortunes? Who would not make his brother’s grief his own? For, says the apostle Paul: Should one member suffer, all the others suffer along with it; and should one member rejoice, the others rejoice with it also. And in another place he says: Who is weak, and I am not weak? We must therefore consider the present imprisonment of our brethren as our imprisonment, reckoning the grief of those in peril as our grief. We form a single body in our union, and we ought to be stirred and strengthened by religious duty as well as by love to redeem our members the brethren.

For as the apostle Paul once more declares: Know ye not that ye are God’s temple and that the Holy Spirit dwelleth in you? Though love failed to stir us to succour the brethren, we must in this case consider that it is temples

of God who are imprisoned, nor dare we by our procrastination and neglect of fellow-feeling allow temples of God to remain imprisoned for any length of time, but must put forth all our energies, and with all speed manage by mutual service to deserve the grace of Christ our Lord, our Judge, our God. For since the apostle Paul says: So many of you as are baptized into Christ have put on Christ, we must see Christ in our imprisoned brethren, redeeming from the peril of imprisonment him who redeemed us from the peril of death. He who took us from the jaws of the devil, who bought us with his blood upon the cross, who now abides and dwells in us, he is now to be redeemed by us for a sum of money from the hands of the barbarians. ... Will not the feeling of humanity and the sense of united love incline each father among you to look upon those prisoners as his sons, every husband to feel, with anguish for the marital tie, that his wife languishes in that imprisonment?" Then, after an account of the special dangers incurred by the consecrated "virgins" — "our church, having weighed and sorrowfully examined all those matters in accordance with your letter, has gathered donations for the brethren speedily, freely, and liberally; for while, according to its powers of faith, it is ever ready for any work of God, it has been raised to a special pitch of charity on this occasion by the thought of all this suffering. For since the Lord says in his gospel: I was sick and ye visited me, with what ampler reward for our alms will he now say: I was in prison and ye redeemed me? And since again he says: I was in prison and ye visited me, how much better will it be for us on the day of judgment, when we are to receive the Lord's reward, to hear him say: I was in the dungeon of imprisonment, in bonds and fetters among the barbarians, and ye rescued me from that prison of

slavery! Finally, we thank you heartily for summoning us to share your trouble and your noble and necessary act of love, and for offering us a rich harvest-field wherein to scatter the seeds of our hope, in the expectation of reaping a very plentiful harvest from this heavenly and helpful action. We transmit to you a sum of a hundred thousand sesterces [close upon £1000] collected and contributed by our clergy and people here in the church over which by God's mercy we preside; this you will dispense in the proper quarter at your own discretion.

In conclusion, we trust that nothing like this will occur in future, but that, guarded by the power of God, our brethren may henceforth be quit of all such perils. Still, should the like occur again, for a test of love and faith, do not hesitate to write of it to us; be sure and certain that while our own church and the whole of the church pray fervently that this may not recur, they will gladly and generously contribute even if it does take place once more. In order that you may remember in prayer our brethren and sisters who have taken so prompt and liberal a share in this needful act of love, praying that they may be ever quick to aid, and in order also that by way of return you may present them in your prayers and sacrifices, I add herewith the names of all. Further, I have subjoined the names of my colleagues (the bishops) and fellow-priests, who like myself were present and made such contributions as they could afford in their own name and in the name of their people; I have also noted and forwarded their small sums along with our own total. It is your duty — faith and love alike require it — to remember all these in your prayers and supplications.

“Dearest brethren, we wish you unbroken prosperity in the Lord. Remember us.”

Plainly the Carthaginian church is conscious here of having done something out of the common. But it is intensely conscious also of having thus discharged a *duty* of Christian love, and the religious basis of the duty is laid down in exemplary fashion. It is also obvious that so liberal a grant could not be taken from the proceeds of the ordinary church-collections.

Yet another example of Cyprian's care for a foreign church is extant. In the case (cp. above, p. 175) already mentioned of the teacher of the histrionic art who is to give up his profession and be supported by the church, if he has no other means of livelihood, Cyprian (*Ep.* ii.) writes that the man may come to Carthage and find maintenance in the local church if his own church is too poor to feed him.⁷⁴

Lucian's satire on the death of Peregrinus, in the days of Marcus Aurelius, is a further witness to the alert and energetic temper of the interest taken in churches at the outbreak of persecution or during a period of persecution. The governor of Syria had ordered the arrest of this character, who is discribed by Lucian as a nefarious impostor. Lucian then describes the honour paid him, during his imprisonment, by Christians, and proceeds as follows: "In fact, people actually came from several Asiatic townships, sent by Christians, in the name of their churches, to render aid, to conduct the defence, and to encourage the man. They become incredibly alert when anything of this kind occurs that affects their common interests. On such occasions no expense is grudged. Thus they pour out on Peregrinus, at this time, sums of money which were by no means trifling, and he drew from this source a considerable income."⁷⁵ What Lucian relates in this

⁷⁴ "Si illic ecclesia non sufficit ut laborantibus praestat alimenta, poterit se ad nos transferre (*i.e.*, to Carthage), et hic quod sibi ad victum atque ad vestitum necessarium fuerit accipere" ("If the local church is not able to support those who labour, let it send them on to us to get the needful food and clothing").

⁷⁵ It may be observed at this point that there were no *general collections* in the early church, like those maintained by the Jews in the Imperial age. The organization of the churches would not tend greatly to promote any such undertakings, since Christians had no headquarters such as the Jews possessed in Palestine.

passage cannot, therefore, have been an infrequent occurrence. Brethren arrived from afar in the name of their churches, not merely to bring donations for the support of prisoners, but also to visit them in prison, and to encourage them by evidences of love; they actually endeavoured to stand beside them in the hour of trial. The seven epistles of Ignatius form, as it were, a commentary upon these observations of the pagan writer. In them we find the keen sympathy shown by the churches of Asia Minor as well as by the Roman church in the fortunes of a bishop upon whom they had never set eyes before: we also get a vivid sense of their care for the church at Antioch, which was now orphaned. Ignatius is being taken from Antioch to Rome in order to fight with beasts at the capital, and meanwhile the persecution of Christians at Antioch proceeds apace. On reaching Smyrna, he is greeted by deputies from the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, and Tralles. After several days' intercourse, he entrusts them with letters to their respective churches, in which, among other things, he warmly commends to the brethren of Asia Minor his own forlorn church. "Pray for the church in Syria," he writes to the Ephesians. "Remember the church in Syria when you pray," he writes to the Trallians; "I am not worthy to belong to it, since I am the least of its members." And in the letter to the Magnesians he repeats this request, comparing the church at Antioch to a field scorched by the fiery heat of persecution, which needs some refreshing dew: the love of the brethren is to revive it.⁷⁶ At the same time we find him turning to the Romans also. There appears to have been some brother from Ephesus who was ready to convey a letter to the Roman church, but Ignatius assumes they will learn of his fortunes before the letter reaches them. What he fears is, lest they should exert their influence at court on his behalf, or rob him of his coveted martyrdom by appealing to the Emperor. The whole of the letter is written with the object of

⁷⁶ *Eph.* xxii. 2; *Trall.*, xiii. 1; *Magn.*, xiv.

blocking the Roman church upon this line of action.⁷⁷ But all that concerns us here is the fact that a stranger bishop from abroad could assume that the Roman church would interest itself in him, whether he was thinking of a legal appeal or of the Roman Christians moving in his favour along some special channels open to themselves. A few days afterwards Ignatius found himself at Troas, accompanied by the Ephesian deacon Burrhus, and provided with contributions from the church of Smyrna.⁷⁸ Thence he writes to the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna, with both of which he had become acquainted during the course of his journey, as well as to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna. Messengers from Antioch reached him at Troas with news of the cessation of the persecution at the former city, and with the information that some churches in the vicinity of Antioch had already despatched bishops or presbyters and deacons to congratulate the local church (*Philad.*, x. 2). Whereupon, persuaded that the church of Antioch had been delivered from its persecution through the prayers of the churches in Asia Minor, Ignatius urges the latter also to send envoys to Antioch in order to unite with that church in thanking God for the deliverance. "Since I am informed," he writes to the Philadelphians (x. 1 f.), "that, in answer to your prayers and love in Jesus Christ, the church of Antioch is now at peace, it befits you, as a church of God, to send a deacon as your delegate with a message of God for that church, so that he may congratulate the assembled church and glorify the Name. Blessed in Jesus Christ is he who shall be counted worthy of such a mission; and ye shall yourselves be glorified. Now it is not impossible for you to do this for the name of God, if only you have the desire." The same counsel is given to Smyrna. The church there is also to send a messenger with a pastoral letter to

⁷⁷ Even here Ignatius remembers to commend the church at Antioch to the church of Rome (ix.): "Remember in your prayers the Syrian church, which has God for its shepherd now instead of me. Jesus Christ alone shall be its overseer (bishop) — he and your love together."

⁷⁸ *Philad.*, xi. 2; *Smyrn.*, xii. 1

the church of Antioch (*Smyrn.*, xi.). The unexpected suddenness of his departure from Troas prevented Ignatius from addressing the same request to the other churches of Asia Minor. He therefore begs Polycarp not only himself to despatch a messenger with all speed (*Polyc.*, vii. 2), but to write in his name to the other churches and ask them to share the general joy of the Antiochene Christians either by messenger or by letter (*Polyc.*, viii. 1). A few weeks later the church at Philippi wrote to Polycarp that it also had made the acquaintance of Ignatius during that interval; it requested the bishop of Smyrna, therefore, to forward its letter to the church of Antioch whenever he sent his own messenger. Polycarp undertakes to do so. In fact, he even holds out the prospect of conveying the letter himself. As desired by them, he also transmits to them such letters of Ignatius as had come to hand, and asks for reliable information upon the fate of Ignatius and his companions.⁷⁹

Such, in outline, is the situation as we find it in the seven letters of Ignatius and in Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians. What a wealth of intercourse there is between the churches! What public spirit! What brotherly care for one another! Financial support retires into the background here. The foreground of the picture is filled by proofs of that personal cooperation by means of which whole churches, or again churches and their bishops, could lend mutual aid to one another, consoling and strengthening each other, and sharing their sorrows and their joys. Here we step into a whole world of sympathy and love.

From other sources we also learn that after weathering a persecution the churches would send a detailed report of it to other churches. Two considerable documents of this kind are still extant. One is the letter addressed by the church of Smyrna to the church of Philomelium and to all Christian churches, after the persecution which took place under Antonius Pius. The

⁷⁹ Polyc., ad *Phil.*, xiii.

other is the letter of the churches in Gaul to those in Asia Minor and Phrygia, after the close of the bloody persecution under Marcus Aurelius.⁸⁰ In both letters the persecution is described in great detail, while in the former the death of bishop Polycarp is specially dwelt on, since the glorious end of a bishop who was well known in the East and West alike had to be announced to all Christendom. The events which transpired in Gaul had a special claim upon the sympathy of the Asiatic brethren, for at least a couple of the latter, Attalus of Pergamum and Alexander, a Phrygian, had suffered a glorious martyrdom in the Gallic persecution. The churches also took advantage of the opportunity to communicate to the brethren certain notable experiences of their own during the period of persecution, as well as any truths which they had verified. Thus the Smyrniote church speaks very decidedly against the practice of people delivering themselves up and craving for martyrdom. It gives one melancholy instance of this error (*Mart. Polyc.*, iv.). The churches of Gaul, for their part (in Eus., *H.E.*, v. 2), put in a warning against excessive harshness in the treatment of penitent apostates. They are able also to describe the tender compassion shown by their own confessors. It was otherwise with the church of Rome. She exhorted the church of Carthage to stand fast and firm during the Decian persecution,⁸¹ and at a subsequent period conferred with it upon its mode of dealing with apostates.⁸² Here a special case was under discussion. Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, had fled during the persecution; nevertheless, he had continued to superintend his church from his retreat, since he could say with

⁸⁰ It is preserved, though not in an entirely complete form, by Eusebius (*H.E.*, v. 1 f.). The Smyrniote letter also occurs in an abbreviated form in Eusebius (iv. 15); the complete form, however, is also extant in a special type of text, both in Greek and Latin.

⁸¹ Ep. viii. in Cyprian's correspondence (ed. Hartel).

⁸² Cp. my study (in the volume dedicated to Weizsäcker, 1892) on "The letters of the Roman clergy from the age of the papal vacancy in 250 A.D." There is also an interesting remark of Dionysius of Alexandria in a letter addressed to Germanus which Eusebius has preserved (*H.E.*, VII. xi. 3). Dionysius tells how "one of the brethren who were present from Rome accompanied" him to his examination before AEmilianus the governor (during the Valerian persecution).

quite a good conscience that he was bound to look after his own people. The Romans, who had not been at first informed of the special circumstances of the case, evidently viewed the bishop's flight with serious misgiving; they thought themselves obliged to write and encourage the local church. The fact was, no greater disaster could befall a church in a period of distress than the loss of its clergy or bishop by death or dereliction of duty. In his treatise on "Flight during a Persecution," Tertullian relates how deacons, presbyters, and bishops frequently ran away at the outbreak of a persecution, on the plea of Matt. x. 23: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next." The result was that the church either collapsed or fell a prey to heretics.⁸³ The more dependent the church became upon its clergy, the more serious were the consequences to the church of any failure or even of any change in the ranks of the latter. This was well understood by the ardent persecutors of the church in the third century, by Maximin I., by Decius, by Valerian, and by Diocletian. Even a Cyprian could not retain control of his church from a place of retreat! He had to witness it undergoing shocks of disastrous force. It was for this very reason that the sister churches gave practical proof of their sympathy in such crises, partly by sending letters of comfort during the trial, as the Romans did, partly by addressing congratulations to the church when the trial had been passed. In his church history Eusebius furnishes us with selections from the ample correspondence of Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, and one of these letters, addressed to the church of Athens, is relevant to our present purpose. Eusebius writes as follows (*H.E.*, IV. xxiii. 2 f.): "The epistle exhorts them to the faith and life of the

⁸³ "Sed cum ipsi auctores, id est ipsi diaconi et presbyteri et episcopi fugiunt, quomodo laicus intellegere poterit, qua ratione dictum: Fugite de civitate in civitatem? (Tales) dispersum gregem faciunt et in praedam esse omnibus bestiis agri, dum non est pastor illis. Quod nunquam magis fit, quam cum in persecutione destituitur ecclesia a clero" ("But when the very authorities themselves — deacons, I mean, and presbyters and bishops — take to flight, how can a layman see the real meaning of the saying, 'Flee from city to city'? Such shepherds scatter the flock and leave it a prey to every wild beast of the field, by depriving it of a shepherd. And this is specially the case when a church is forsaken by the clergy during persecution"). — *De Fuga*, xi.

gospel, which Dionysius accuses them of undervaluing. Indeed, he almost says they have fallen away from the faith since the martyrdom of Publius, their bishop, which had occurred during the persecution in those days. He also mentions Quadratus, who was appointed bishop after the martyrdom of Publius, and testifies that by the zeal of Quadratus they were gathered together again and had new zeal imparted to their faith.” The persecution which raged in Antioch during the reign of Septimius Severus claimed as its victim the local bishop of that day, one Serapion. His death must have exposed the church to great peril, for when the episcopate was happily filled up again, the bishop of Cappadocia wrote a letter of his own from prison to congratulate the church of Antioch, in the following terms: “The Lord has lightened and smoothed my bonds in this time of captivity, by letting me hear that, through the providence of God, the bishopric of your holy church has been undertaken by Asclepiades, whose services to the faith qualify him thoroughly for such a position” (Eus., *H.E.*, VI. xi. 5).

Hitherto we have been gleaning from the scanty remains of the primitive Christian literature whatever bore upon the material support extended by one church to another, or upon the mutual assistance forthcoming in a time of persecution. But whenever persecutions brought about internal crisis and perils in a church, as was not infrequently the case, the sympathetic interest of the church extended to this sphere of need as well, and attempts were made to meet the situation. Such cases now fall to be considered — cases in which it was not poverty or persecution, but internal abuses and internal dangers, pure and simple, which drew a word of comfort or of counsel from a sister church or from its bishop.

In this connection we possess one document dating from the very earliest period, viz., the close of the first century, which deserves especial notice. It is the so-called first epistle of Clement, really an official letter sent by the Roman church to the

Corinthian.⁸⁴ Within the pale of the latter church a crisis had arisen, whose consequences were extremely serious. All we know, of course, is what the majority of the church thought of the crisis, but according to their account certain newcomers, of an ambitious and conceited temper, had repudiated the existing authorities and led a number of the younger members of the church astray.⁸⁵ Their intention was to displace the presbyters and deacons, and in general to abolish the growing authority of the officials (xl.-xlviii.). A sharp struggle ensued, in which even the women took some part.⁸⁶ Faith, love, and brotherly feeling were already threatened with extinction (i.-iii.). The scandal became notorious throughout Christendom, and indeed there was a danger of the heathen becoming acquainted with the quarrel, of the name of Christ being blasphemed, and of the church's security being imperiled.⁸⁷ The Roman Church stepped in. It had not been asked by the Corinthian church to interfere in the matter; on the contrary, it spoke out of its own accord.⁸⁸ And it did so with an affection and solicitude equal to its candour and dignity. It felt bound, for conscience' sake, to give a serious and brotherly admonition, conscious that God's voice spoke through its words for peace,⁸⁹ and at the same time for the strict maintenance of respect towards the authority of the officials (cp. xl. f.). Withal it never forgets that its place is merely to point out the right road to the Corinthians, not to lay commands upon them;⁹⁰ over and again it expresses most admirably its firm confidence that the church knows the will of God and will bethink itself once more of the right course.⁹¹ It even clings to the hope that the very

⁸⁴ Cp. the inscription.

⁸⁵ Cp. i. 1, iii. 3, xxxix. 1, xlvii. 6, etc.

⁸⁶ This is probable, from i. 3, xxi. 6.

⁸⁷ Cp. xlvii. 7, i. 1.

⁸⁸ i. 1, xlvii. 6-7.

⁸⁹ Cp. lix. 1, lvi. 1, lxiii. 2.

⁹⁰ Cp. especially lviii. 2: δέξασθε τὴν συμβουλὴν ἡμῶν ("accept our counsel").

⁹¹ Cp. xl. 1, xlv. 2 f., liii. 1, lxii. 3.

agitators will mend their ways (cp. liv.). But in the name of God it asks that a speedy end be put to the scandal. The transmission of the epistle is entrusted to the most honoured men within its membership. “They shall be witnesses between us and you.” And we have done this that you may know we have had and still have every concern for your speedy restoration to peace” (lxiii. 3). The epistle concludes by saying that the Corinthians are to send back the envoys to Rome as soon as possible in joy and peace, so that the Romans may be able to hear of concord regained with as little delay as possible and to rejoice speedily on that account (lxv. 1). There is nothing in early Christian literature to compare with this elaborate and effective piece of writing, lit up with all the brotherly affection and the public spirit of the church. But similar cases are not infrequent. The church at Philippi, for example, sent a letter across the sea to the aged Polycarp at Smyrna, informing him of a sad affair which had occurred in their own midst. One of their presbyters, named Valens, had been convicted of embezzling the funds of the church. In his reply, which is still extant, Polycarp treats this melancholy piece of news (Polyc., *ad Phil.*, xi.). He does not interfere with the jurisdiction of the church, but he exhorts and counsels the Philippians. They are to take warning from this case and avoid avarice themselves. Should the presbyter and his wife repent, the church is not to treat them as enemies, but as ailing and erring members, so that the whole body may be saved. The bishop lets it be seen that the church’s treatment of the case does not appear to him to have been entirely correct. He exhorts them to moderate their passion and to be gentle. But, at same time, in so doing he is perfectly conscious of the length to which he may venture to go in opposing an outside church. When Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, is being conveyed across Asia Minor, he takes the opportunity of writing brief letters to encourage the local churches in any perils to which they may be exposed. He warns them against the machinations of heretics, exhorts them to obey the clergy, urges a prudent

concord and firm unity, and in quite a thorough fashion gives special counsels for any emergency. At the opening of the second century a Roman Christian, the brother of the bishop, desires to lay down the *via media* of proper order and discipline at any crisis in the church, as he himself had found that *via*, between the extremes of laxity and rigour. His aim is directed not merely to the Roman church but to Christendom in general (to the “foreign cities”); he wishes all to learn the counsels which he claims to have personally received from the Holy Spirit through the church (Herm., *Vis.*, ii. 4). In the days of Marcus Aurelius it was bishop Dionysius of Corinth in particular who sought (no doubt in his church’s name as well as in his own) by means of an extensive correspondence to confirm the faith of such churches, even at a great distance, as were in any peril. Two of his letters, those to the Athenians and the Romans, we have already noticed, but Eusebius gives us the contents of several similar writings, which he calls “catholic” epistles. Probably these were meant to be circulated throughout the churches, though they were collected at an early date and also (as the bishop himself is forced indignantly to relate) were interpolated. One letter to the church at Sparta contains an exposition of orthodox doctrine with an admonition to peace and unity. In the epistle to the church of Nicomedia in Bithynia he combats the heresy of Marcion. “He also wrote a letter to the church in Gortyna, together with the other churches in Crete, praising their bishop Philip for the testimony borne to the great piety and steadfastness of his church, and warning them to guard against the aberrations of heretics. He also wrote to the church of Amastris, together with the other churches in Pontus. . . . Here he adds explanations of some passages from Holy Scripture, and mentions Palmas, their bishop, by name. He gives them long advice, too, upon marriage and chastity, enjoining them also to welcome again into their number all who come back after any lapse whatsoever, be it vice or heresy. There is also in his

collection of letters another addressed to the Cnosians (in Crete), in which he exhorts Pinytus, the bishop of the local church, not to lay too heavy and sore a burden on the brethren in the matter of continence, but to consider the weakness of the majority” (Eus., *H.E.*, iv. 23). Such is the variety of contents in these letters. Dionysius seems to have spoken his mind on every question which agitated the churches of his day, nor was any church too remote for him to evince his interest in its inner fortunes.

After the close of the second century a significant change came over these relationships, as the institution of synods began to be adopted. The free and unconventional communications which passed between the churches (or their bishops) yielded to an intercourse conducted upon fixed and regular lines. A new procedure had already come into vogue with the Montanist and Quartodeciman controversies, and this was afterwards developed more highly still in the great Christological controversies and in the dispute with Novatian. Doubtless we still continue to hear of cases in which individual churches or their bishops displayed special interest in other churches at a distance, nor was there any cessation of *voluntary* sympathy with the weal and woe of any sister church. But this gave place more than ever both to an interest in the position taken up by the church at large in view of individual and particular movements, and also to the support of the provincial churches.⁹² Keen interest was shown in the attitude taken up by the churches throughout the empire (or their bishops) upon any critical question. On such matters harmony could be arranged, but otherwise the provincial churches began to form groups of their own. Still, for all this, fresh methods emerged in the course of the third century by which one church supported or rallied another, and these included the custom of inviting the honoured teachers of one church to deliver addresses

⁹² Instances of this occur, *e.g.*, in the correspondence of Cyprian and of Dionysius of Alexandria.

in another, or of securing them, when controversies had arisen, to pronounce an opinion, to instruct the parties, and to give a judgment in the matter. Instances of this are to be found, for example, in the career of the great theologian Origen.⁹³ Even in the fourth and fifth centuries, the material support of poor churches from foreign sources had not ceased; Socrates, in his church history (vii. 25), notes one very brilliant example of the practice.

⁹³ Cp. Eus., *H.E.*, vi. 19. 15; 33. 2; 37: 32. 2.

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