

Wealth and Poverty in Christian Tradition

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Wealth and poverty are elements of social stratification that substantively contribute to people's definition and experience of "good life." Wealth is a multivalent concept loaded with multiple ideological complex meanings. It evokes difficult to disengage attitudes of prosperity, power, social status, security and personal success. It decisively contributes to people's assumption of self-worth. Poverty on the other hand is a concept that refers to "pronounced deprivation in well being."¹ In simple terms, to be poor is to be hungry, homeless, sick, illiterate, voiceless, powerless and generally unprotected from adverse and potentially oppressive and unjust social realities. Poverty is a global problem of huge proportions with explosive social consequences for peace and stability. According to the World Bank, of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion live on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion on less than \$1 a day.² Generally, wealth and poverty are asymmetrical social realities that reflect unjust distribution of material resources, knowledge and power in local and worldwide scale.

Wealth and Poverty are inextricable notions measuring particular standards of living in diverse societies. For instance, someone is wealthy compared to other(s) in particular social setting(s). It takes, for example, much less to be rich in Ethiopia than in Manhattan. The notions of wealth and poverty, even if they are understood from a strictly economic perspective, are often loaded with value-loaded connotations. To be wealthy is often identified with power and happiness. In the same way, to be poor is identified with powerlessness, unhappiness. These qualitative aspects creep into our language even when we are consciously aware that there are some people who are voluntary poor but seem to be happy, people who are involuntary poor who claim to be content, and people who have lots of money and wealth who desire to commit suicide. We must also remember the relativity of these notions since there are different degrees of wealth and poverty: "wealthy, affluent, and opulent;" and "deprived, needy, destitute."

In Christian tradition wealth and poverty are mostly embodied notions. The Church in its biblical and patristic tradition addresses rich people, who often in their avarice have accumulated excessive wealth at the expense of the poor, and also poor people, who in their destitute are homeless, starving, sick, illiterate and suffering. Her discourse is rather contextual, responding or commenting on concrete social conditions,

¹ The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *World Development Report 2000/2001* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.15.

² *Ibid.* p. VI.

urging God's people to be charitable to one another as faithful expression of their communion with God.³

My presentation leaves behind the conventional approach that seeks to delineate in the Christian tradition clear and unambiguous statements about wealth and poverty for the purpose of checking whether Christian attitudes and behavior are consonant with these moral precepts. The fullness of the Christian tradition compels us to acknowledge that in Scripture as well as in the patristic tradition, we have multiple contextually conditioned statements about wealth and poverty that cannot provide us with clear, concise and unequivocal understanding of the value and the proper use of material possessions.⁴ Thus for the proper understanding of the Christian teachings on wealth and poverty, we need to step back from these notions and find out whether they fit into a larger view – a view and way of life that does not put wealth at the center, but instead uses wealth as one resources to foster 'good life.'

The Anthropological Matrix of Possessions

In Christian tradition, human beings are portrayed as symbolic creatures whose attitudes and convictions are expressed in the language of the body. The human body is a symbolic manifestation of human existence. It externalizes the inner emotional state and attitudes of a human being, and at the same time, it affects what it signifies. Human identity is partly crafted in the tensive and reflexive relationship of being and having. It is in the continuum of being and having that human identity dynamically evolves as it relates to God, the world and other communities of people. Christian anthropology while it views human beings as somatic/spiritual entities, also recognizes that human identity is crafted in a wider context of social symbols; a context that provides a system of communication and meaning that structures and rationalizes life in the world.

Wealth and poverty can be conceived as symbolic extensions of the human body in the world. What we do with wealth and how we cope with poverty reveals, and at the same time shapes, the particularity of our human identity. The way that human beings use, own, acquire, and dispense material resources symbolizes, expresses, and at the same time influences people's notion of good life. Origen traces the passion of acquisition of wealth to people's inner desires. He states: "...what a man loves with all

³ For a historical overview and substantiation of the Church's active concern in Byzantium for the poor and needy as well as its influence upon the civil authorities of the Empire see: Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1968) ; Angeliki E. Laiou, "The Church, Economic Thought and Economic Practice," in *The Christian East, Its Institutions and Its Thought: A Critical Reflection*, edit. Robert F. Taft, (Roma: Pontificio Instituto Orientale, 1996), pp. 435-464; Justo L. Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth, A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990); Carter Lindberg, "Through A Glass Darkly: A History of the Church's Vision of the Poor and Poverty," *Ecumenical Review* 33/1(1981), pp. 37-52.

⁴ See on this matter the insightful biblical scholarship of Luke Timothy Johnson in his book that I extensively use in this paper: *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981); J. A. McGuckin, "The Vine and the Elm Tree: The Patristic Interpretation of Jesus' Teaching on Wealth," in *The Church and Wealth*, edits W.J. Sheilss and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Sondra Ely Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1995).

his heart and with all his soul and with all his might – this is for him God."⁵ People may confess faith in God through the creeds of the Church but, who they are in relation to God is revealed in what they love the most and in what they worship (serve). In this context, possessions and the value that people attribute to them reveal their ultimate and passionate attachments either to God or to the world.

Faith and Idolatry

Human beings have received from God, the ultimate source and ground of existence, the gift of life. The biblical witness insists that the gift and the goal of human existence in the world can only be understood, experienced and appreciated if we ground our lives upon the unshakeable foundation of faith in God's creative, sustaining, redeeming, and saving grace. The response of faith in God's benevolent presence in the life of the world should have a primacy over all other relationships that people develop either with other human beings, communities of people or the creation at large. If we do not have the right relationship with God, the rest of the relationships that we have in the world are distorted. If the truth about the origins, the worth, and the destination of human life in the world is not grasped accurately, then the significance and the meaning of life in the world are also perverted. The tragedy of the human condition is reflected in the substitution of the primacy of the faith and trust in God with the adoration of idols, created beings or entities that are valued as of utmost significance for good life in the world.

How is it possible for human beings to substitute the primacy of their relationship with God with elements or beings of the created world? What is the biblical meaning of idolatry? In the book of Wisdom, it is written that the minds of idolaters have been seduced by the beauty of creation, although the shape of the world should have led them to the knowledge of the Creator (13:5). "They trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful" (13:7). The idolaters are "miserable, with hopes set on dead things, are men who give the name 'gods' to the work of men's hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill" (13:10). Idolatry involves the misplacement of hope and trust. The folly of idolatry lies in seeking life where it cannot be found; in the works of human hands. This, according to the book of Wisdom, is "the beginning and cause and end of every evil" (14:27), for it leads, in addition to all forms of corruption and human hostility, to "confusion over what is good". In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul attributes idolatry to a human choice not to acknowledge the claim of the creator upon his creatures: "although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him." (1:21). St. Paul sees the perverted relations between men and women and the hostile attitude and actions of people toward one another as stemming from this basic darkening of the mind, which comes when people "exchange the truth about God for a lie, worshiped, and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). Idolatry, in simple terms, is a choice of treating as ultimate and absolute, that which is neither absolute nor ultimate.

Faith leads us to recognize that God is the Cause that underlies all causing, the power of Being who calls into being, the infinite horizon against which the world is

⁵ *Homily on the Book of Judges 2.3*, in R. B. Tollington, *Selections from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen* (London, 1929), pp. 257-258.

measured. Whatever power is claimed for idols is literally nothing compared to the power of God; for, whatever natural or human force lies behind the idol itself comes from God. Faith in God breeds freedom. As people whose life ultimately depends on God's grace, we are free to use material creation without being possessed by it. If the logic of idolatry leads us to attempt to grasp life by what can be possessed, the logic of belief in God leads to the refusal to identify of what can be possessed with life. This liberating freedom from the determinism of material possession is eloquently expressed by St. Paul:

Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what is to have little, and I know what is to have plenty. In nay and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well fed, of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me...and my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philip. 4:11-14,19).

Jesus in the parable of rich man (Luke 12:15-21) explicitly and emphatically rejects the identification of good life with an "abundance of possessions." The rich man in the story is not a fool because he is rich; he is a fool because he identifies his very existence with the security he thinks comes from having grain stored in barns. The attempt to win life from possessions is folly. However, this in no way suggests that things themselves are either illusory or evil, or, for that matter, the use of any part of is wicked (Gen. 1:31; Wisd 1:14). The First Epistle to Timothy refutes false asceticism by affirming: "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (I Tim 4:4). Nor is wealth a wicked thing in itself. Luke calls wealth an "unrighteous mammon" in that sentence in which Jesus tells his disciples to use wealth to make friends for the age to come (Lk 16:9). In 1 Timothy a popular Hellenistic proverb is cited: "the love of money is the root cause of all evils" (6:10). The problem, here, is not the "money" but the "love of money." St. John Chrysostom makes abundantly clear that what is morally wrong is not wealth itself but its misuse. He states:

I am often reproached for continually attacking the rich. Yes, because the rich are continually attacking the poor. But those I attack are not the rich as such, only those who misuse their wealth. I point out constantly that those I accuse are not the rich but the rapacious. Wealth is one thing, covetousness another. Learn to distinguish.⁶

Generally, wealth in the biblical and patristic tradition is not in itself a wicked thing, or necessarily either the result or sign of an idolatrous pattern of living. This is particularly important given the tendency that we have to shift imperceptibly from the concept "rich" to the concept "rich oppressor." Generally wealth is good (Eccles 13:24) as long as it does not result from the oppression of the needy (Prov. 10:2; 11:16-18; 14; 31) or become a false source of security or hope (Pss. 33:16; 49:6-8).

In Wisdom, we also find the perception that wealth and poverty are each in their fashion a testing of faith from God:

Two things I ask of thee; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food that is needful to me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, "who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God (Prov. 30:7-9; cf. Lev.19: 11-12).

⁶ *Homily on the Fall of Eutropios, 2.3*

Job when destitute declared: "the Lord gave to me, and the Lord has taken away; blessed is the name of the Lord". Job did not get his wealth by oppression (31:13-22), nor did he confuse his great wealth with the true center of his being (Job 31:24-28). This refutes the haste and misguided judgment that the suffering of the poor, the needy, and the sick is generally a punishment from God and the wealth and prosperity of the rich is blessing, a reward for virtue. Gregory of Nazianzus with strong language denounces such a belief. He stated:

There are some even among our own people, a thing that makes one weep, who, far from helping or having compassion on these poor sick, will reproach them bitterly, insult them, make up empty, foolish speculations about them; and truly, out of the ground they mutter speeches, and voices are heard in the air; not in the ears that used to and understand holy teachings. And they have the audacity to go further, and to say: 'their affliction is from God; and our good health comes from God. And who am I to undo the decree of God, and put myself forward as more kind than God? They are sick. Let them be sick! Let them be afflicted! Let them suffer misfortune! This is the will of God!⁷

Gregory ends his refutation of such idle, insensitive and groundless speech with a personal view and a theological statement of extreme importance: " I for my part, shall not presume to say that someone's affliction is due wholly to wickedness, or their happiness to piety...but the outward appearance of the things in this life is one thing, their ruling another; though all concur in this: that what is just before God, may appear to us contradictory."⁸

God and the Other

It has been argued that faith in God or idolatry, affect in the most pervasive fashion the way we are and relate to the world. The deployment of possessions, as the extensions of our bodies, reveals and at the same time shapes our being - who we are in relation to God and the created world. Let us now turn our attention to how the others, especially the needy and the poor, fit in the framework of the primary relationship that we have or don't have with God, as it is attested in the Scripture.

The people of Israel because they recognize Yahweh as their God, the one who brought them into being, were able to perceive one another as brethren. The fact that the Israelites either used their possessions, to hurt or to help their fellows, indicated in a concrete manner whether they clung to Yahweh as the source of their life or to idols. The marginal groups in society – the poor, the widows, the orphans, the aliens – become the scale on which the justice of the whole society is weighed. When the marginalized ones are exploited or forgotten that is a definite sign that God is forgotten and/or is not authentically worshipped. God expects from His chosen people to be faithful to their covenantal relationship with Him. It is the primacy of their relationship with God that shapes the web of their relationships with the others. In Deut. 15:4-5 the promise is given that: "there will be no poor among you (for the Lord will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess), if only you will obey

⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. 43 De Pauperum Amore*, PG 35.857-909. English transl. M. F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol. 4 (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963), p. 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*

the voice of the Lord your God..." The hard reality is also noted, "the poor will never cease out of the land" (Deut. 15:11). Israel received the mandate: "therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hands to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (Deut. 15:11). In the context of this mandate, the perversion of justice and oppression of the most vulnerable could be primarily an offense against the neighbor, but Lev. 6:2 calls all manner of oppression and deception a "breach of faith against the Lord." In Lev. 19:1-37 we find the heart of the covenant principle: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And why? Because "I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:18). The laws of the Pentateuch dealing with possessions express this incontrovertible truth that we respond to God through our neighbors. The prophetic critique against the oppressors of the poor and those who pervert justice in Israel is expressive of this truth. The prophets consistently maintained that breaking with Yahweh leads to the oppression of the poor and the needy, aliens and laborers, orphans and widows. Conversion back to Yahweh meant coming back to the covenant with Him by shattering the idols which had been the cause of apostasy (Mic.5: 13: Isa: 2:20-22...) but also by "doing justice" to and for those designated by the law of the covenant as needy, preeminently orphans and widows. Those who choose to close their ears to the cry of the poor will find God's ear closed to their own pleas (Prov 21:13; cf Eccl. 4:8).

In the book of Proverbs we find the remarkable assertion, "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him to his deeds" (19:17). The people of God, in Ecclesiastes, are expected to share their possessions with the poor through almsgiving. God rewards and blesses those who practice almsgiving (17:22; 7:32). It provides the best security for life (40:24); it endures forever (40:17), for it is an act of worship to God: "He who gives alms offers thank-offering" (35:2). Faith demands an active love towards the poor and the needy (James 2:15-17). The underlying assumption for this active concern for those who are suffering is the belief that all people created by God constitute an inextricable unity and salvation depends on whether we "love and show humanity" to the suffering brethren. St. Gregory of Nazianzus unequivocally states that salvation depends on loving and showing humanity to the suffering poor:

For we are all one in the Lord, rich and poor, bond or free, sound or sick; and one is the Head of all, He from Whom are all things, namely Christ. And what our members, are to each other, this each one of us is to the other, and to all... We should fix in our minds the thought that the salvation of our bodies and souls depend on this: that we should love and show humanity to these (the suffering poor).⁹

Charity and compassion are not virtues that only the wealthy must practice. St. Basil exhorts that even the poor to practice charity and compassion sharing even the minimal gifts that they may have from God.

Are you poor? There is someone much poorer than you are. You have enough bread for ten days; another has enough for one. As a good and kindhearted person, make your surplus equal by distributing it to the needy. Do not shrink from giving of the little you have; do not treat your own calamity as if it is worse than the common suffering. Even if you possess only one loaf of bread, and the beggar stands at the door bring one loaf out of the storeroom and, presenting it to the hands lifted up towards heaven, offer this merciful and considered prayer.

⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. 43, De Pauperum Amore*, PG 35 857-909. English Translation, M.F.Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963) vol. 4, p. 56.

One loaf of which you see, O Lord, and the problem is evident, but as for me, I prefer you commandment to myself and I give of the little I have to the starving brother; for you also give to Your servant in trouble. I know Your great goodness and I also confidently believe in your power, for you do not defer Your grace for another time, but dispense Your gifts when you wish.

And if you were to speak and act in this way, the bread that you should give out of your scarcity would become seed for planting: it would bear rich fruit, a pledge of sustenance, a patron of mercy...o poor one, led to the rich God. Believe in the one who is at all times taking up the cause of the afflicted in his own person and supplying grace from his own store.¹⁰

This kind of cheerful compassion and giving is grounded upon belief that "in nothing do we draw so close to God as in doing good to man." Jesus Christ in his teaching ministry had juxtaposed, as it can be found in Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31, the demand of loving God with all one's heart (Deut. 6:5) with the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18). By placing these two commands in immediate juxtaposition, Jesus asks us to understand each in light of the other. This is a consistent trend in the gospels and even in St. Paul who writes to Galatians: "Through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Gal 5:13-14). The ways we love our neighbor reveal the authenticity of our faith in God, in the most concrete terms:

By this we know love that he laid his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

The pastoral nature of the church's faith did not allow the issue of poverty in situations of famine, homelessness, and sickness to be simply an issue of theological speculation. The patristic homilies had a sense of urgency and invitation to move from call to action. The Fathers exhorted the faithful to be compassionate now, to use their resources as manifestation of their faith in God. St. Basil asks: "What keeps you from giving now?... The hungry are dying before your face. The naked are stiff with cold. The men in debt are held by the throat. And you, you put off your alms, till another day?"¹¹ With the same fervor St. Gregory of Nazianus implored his audience: "Let nothing come between your will and the deed. This alone must suffer not delay: kindness to another person...a kindness done promptly is a kindness twice done. A favor done in a sour spirit, and because you must, is unlovely and without grace. We should be cheerful, not grieving when we give mercy."¹²

How are we to love in specific situations is difficult to be spelled out. Love requires the same faithful attentiveness, the same sharp hearing of God's truth in the complexity of here and now. As with the response of faith, so with the response of love, discernment is the link between attitude and action. The mandate of faith in God is

¹⁰ Basil, *Tempore Famis et Citatis*, PG 31.320-321.

¹¹ Basil, *Homilia in illud: Destruam Horrea Mea*. English translation M.F.Troal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (Chicago: Henry Regney, 1959), vol. 3, p.331.

¹² Gregory of Nanzianus, Or. 43 (*De Pauperum Amore*), PG 35. 857-909. English trans. M. F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1963), vol. 4, p. 63.

clear: we must, in some fashion, share that which has been given to us by God as a gift. To refuse to share what we have is to act idolatrously. From a Patristic perspective, the significance of sharing possessions lies not in the social arrangement but in the way in which the disposition of wealth and possessions expresses our disposition toward God and the world.

Identification of Christ with the Poor

Our unity and communion with God is primarily an act of faith realized by the work of God's Spirit. This communion is sustained, nourished, and actualized in history through the hearing and proclaiming of God's word; the celebration of the Holy Eucharist; and a life of active compassion and care towards the poor and the needy. These three sacramental modes of being in communion with God, as interdependent notions, cannot be separated from one another without distorting the ethos and the identity of Christian Church. Orthodoxy, for historical reasons, seems to have emphasized in recent years the centrality of the Holy Eucharist as the symbolic but real manifestation and actualization of the Church's being in the world. In the context of the ongoing ecumenical dialogue, we developed the notion of "liturgy after liturgy" for the purpose of defining the vocation and the witness of the Church in history.¹³ If in the Eucharist the world through the prayers of the church is sanctified and becomes the manifestation of God's reign, then it is the Church's mission to be the living memory and active presence of God's kingdom as much as this is possible within the constraints of history. I am uncertain whether the concept of "liturgy after liturgy" has been helpful to protect the ethos of Orthodoxy from collapsing into a kind of sacramentalism that disconnects eschatology from history; and, I share the concern of those who express fears that this notion gives preeminence to the ethical implications of the Eucharist at the expense of its ontological and doxological character. Perhaps, it would be much more prudent to affirm that the ethos of the Church is simultaneously shaped through the celebration of the Eucharist, the proclamation of the Word of God and the mystery of the poor brethren. None of them should be considered as a substitute for the other or that in itself and apart from the other can communicate the fullness of the church's ethos. St. Justin in First Apology for the Christian Faith gives us a second century description of the Sunday Eucharist as a communal action that reflects these three equally important and inseparable elements of the Church's ethos. He writes:

And on the day named after the sun all, whether they live in the city or the country side, are gathered together in unity. Then the records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as there is time. When the reader has concluded, the presider in a discourse admonishes and invites us into the pattern of these good things. Then we all stand together and offer prayer. And, as we said before, when we have concluded our prayer, bread is set out to eat, together with wine and water. The presider likewise, offers up prayer and thanksgiving, as much as he can, and the people sing out their assent saying the amen. There is a distribution of the things over which thanks have been said and each person participates, and these things are sent by the deacons to those who are not present. Those who are prosperous and who desire to do so give what they wish, according to each one's choice, and the collection is deposited with the presider. He aids orphans and widows, those who are in want through disease or through another

¹³ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996)

cause, those who are in prison, and foreigners who are sojourning here. In short, the presider is a guardian to all those who are in need.¹⁴

Christians, based on Matthew 25:31-46, believe that Christ is sacramentally present in the poor and the needy. Cyprian in an address to the bishops of Numidia after raising money as a ransom for the release of Numidia Christians from their barbarian captors writes:

The captivity of our brethren must be reckoned as our captivity, and the grief of those who are endangered is to be esteemed as our grief, since indeed there is one body of our union...It was the temples of God which were taken captive, and ...we ought not by long inactivity and neglect of their suffering to allow the temples of God to be long captive...Christ is to be contemplated in our captive brethren...¹⁵

Gregory of Nyssa reminds the rich that they must recognize the true identity of the poor and acknowledge their special dignity and role in Christian community.

Do not despise these men in their abjection; do not think them of no account. Reflect what they are and you will understand their dignity; they have taken upon them the person of our Savior. For he, the compassionate, has lent them his own person wherewith to abash the unmerciful and the haters of the poor... The poor are the treasures of the good things that we look for, the keepers of the gates of the Kingdom, opening them to the merciful and shutting them on the harsh and uncharitable. They are strongest of accusers, the best of defenders – not that they accuse in or defend them in words, but that the Lord beholds what is done toward them, and every deed cries louder than a herald to his who searches all hearts.¹⁶

John Chrysostom draws a similar conclusion from the identification of Christ with the poor. He writes:

"You eat in excess; Christ eats not even what he needs. You eat a variety of cakes; he eats not even a piece of dried bread. You drink fine Thracian wine; but on him you have not bestowed so much as a cup of cold water. You lie on a soft and embroidered bed; but he is perishing in the cold... You live in luxury on things that properly belong to him... At the moment, you have taken possessions of the resources that belong to Christ and you consume them aimlessly. Don't you realize that you are going to be held accountable?"¹⁷

In his reflections about wealthy bequests for Church decorations, Chrysostom further develops the principle that the poor represent Christ. The poor for Chrysostom are not only the "temples of God" but their identification with God makes them bearers of salvation.¹⁸ The poor in St. John Chrysostom become the liturgical images of the most holy elements in all of Christian worship: the altar and the body of Christ. He identifies explicitly the poor as altar, both divine and divinely constituted.

Do you wish to see his altar?... This altar is composed of the very members of Christ, and the body of the Lord becomes your altar... venerable because it is itself Christ's body... This altar

¹⁴ I. *Apology* 67

¹⁵ *Letter 59; Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (Edinburgh, 1868 ff.), Vol. 8, pp. 199-202.

¹⁶ *Love of the Poor*; Walter Shewring, *Rich and Poor in Christian Tradition* (London, 1948), p. 65.

¹⁷ *On Matthew: Homily* 48:8

¹⁸ For the biblical origins of the redemptive notion of almsgiving in early Christianity see: Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993)

you can see lying everywhere, in the alleys and in the agoras and you can sacrifice upon it anytime... invoke the spirit not with words, but with deeds.¹⁹

Based on this sacramental identification of Christ with the poor, Chrysostom suggests specific ways to express the recognition that Christ lives and is actively present in the poor and needy people:

Do you really wish to pay homage to Christ's body? Then do not neglect him when he is naked. At the same time that you honor him here [in Church] with hangings made of silk, do not ignore him outside when he perishes from cold and nakedness. For the One who said "This is my body"...also said "When I was hungry you gave me nothing to eat."...For is there any point in his table being laden with golden cups while he himself is perishing from hunger? First fill him when he is hungry and then set his table with lavish ornaments. Are you making a golden cup for him at the very moment when you refuse to give him a cup of cold water? Do you decorate his table with cloths flecked with gold, while at the same time you neglect to give him what is necessary for him to cover himself? ...I'm saying all this not to forbid your gifts of munificence, but to admonish you to perform those other duties at the same time, or rather before, you do these. No one was ever condemned for neglecting to be munificent: for the neglect of others hell itself is threatened, as well as unquenchable fire...The conclusion is: Don't neglect you brother in his distress while you decorate His house. Your brother is more truly his temple than any Church building.²⁰

So convinced is Chrysostom of Christ's identity with the poor that he does not hesitate to put words in the mouth of Christ:

It is such a slight thing I beg...nothing very expensive...bread, a roof, words of comfort. [If the rewards I promised hold no appeal for you] then show at least a natural compassion when you see me naked, and remember the nakedness I endured for you on the cross...I fasted for you then, and I suffer hunger for you now; I was thirsty when I hung on the cross, and I thirst still in the poor, in both ways to draw you to myself and to make you humane for your own salvation.²¹

Augustine in similar manner taught that the risen Christ is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us, but he is also present in his followers on earth:

Hold in awe the Christ who is above; but recognize him here below. Have Christ above granting his bountiful gifts, but recognize him here in his need. Down here is poor; up there he is rich.²²

What I am suggesting is that in Christian tradition we have three distinct but equally important and inseparable sacramental ways of being in communion in God: the Word of God, the Divine Liturgy, and the mystery of the poor brethren. These three ways of communicating with God through the work of the Holy Spirit in their inseparable unity shape the ethos of the Christian Church. Whenever one of these constitutive aspects of the Christian ethos is not adequately acknowledged and emphasized in its importance, the life and the witness of the Christian Church suffers. These three distinct but inseparable manners of being in communion with God provide to those who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior the symbolic world of meaning that gives

¹⁹ *Epistulam 2 ad Corinthios, Homilia 20:3.*

²⁰ *On Matthew; Homily 50:4*

²¹ Quoted by W. J. Burghardt, "The Body of Christ: Patristic Insights," in R. S. Pelton, ed., *The Church as the Body of Christ* (South Bend, Ind., 1963), p. 97.

²² *Sermon 73. 4.*

structure, meaning and a sense of direction to the web of relationships by which they live and experience their humanity.

Start by marking "Wealth and Poverty in Jewish Tradition" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving... Want to Read. Within this framework, the fourteen authors who contributed to *Wealth and Poverty in Jewish Tradition* bring a formidable array of experience and insight to uncover interconnected threads of conversation and activities that characterize Jewish thought and action. Among the questions raised, for which there are frequently multiple responses: Is the giving of tzedakah (generally, although imprecisely, translated as charity) a command or an impulse? Does the Jewish tradition give priority to the donor or to the recipient? To what degree is charity a communal responsibility? Is there something in the Religion, Wealth and Poverty. aim of numerous ecclesiastics. But this view runs directly counter to the traditional Catholic notion of subsidiarity, according to which "while government was indeed legitimate and necessary, there ought to be very large areas of economic, cultural, religious, educational, and even political independence and autonomy." Religion, Wealth and Poverty. they fail to carry through on their obligation to make sure that the money they give for peace is not used for violence; that funds donated for religious purposes are not diverted to the promulgation of marxism. (chapter 11)

Shoplifting. Burglaries are commonly seen as a natural phenomenon. (b) Christianity and socialist traditions, the West and Russia in comparison, XVIth- XIXth century. READING LIST: Required readings: Week 1 (a) Religion, confession, state and society in Europe and beyond: Max Weber's legacy. Week 2: (a) From patristics to politics? Impact of two Christian normative traditions upon "political mind" in the West and in the East of Europe. Agapetus' "Exposition of Heads of Advice and Counsel" to emperor Justinian // Social and Political Thought in Byzantium. From Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus. Christian teachings include that wealth is not bad but the desire for wealth is. In Timothy, it states: "...for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. What are the Christian teachings on poverty? In Genesis, God gives human beings special responsibility for creation - man is to cultivate it, guard it and use it wisely and justly. God gives Adam, the first man to be created, the responsibility of looking after the garden he created for Adam to live in. In Genesis 9:3, God tells humanity: Everything that lives and moves about, will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants