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JEWISH AND CATHOLIC TRADITIONS OF CHARITY: COMPARATIVE STUDY

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## Digest of the Thesis

This essay attempts to present a comparative study of the Jewish and Catholic traditions of charity in six aspects: (1) financial aid; (2) administration; (3) sensibilities; (4) imposters; (5) priorities; (6) theological attitude. It seeks to point out those features which they have in common and parallel each other and those which distinguish them.

The most important financial aid for the early Catholic Church was the monthly contribution to the charity box, called by the Church Fathers "Corban." Oblations of natural produce were brought to the Church altar and used in preparation of an evening meal for the poor known by the name Agape, the love feast in which every member of the Church contributed according to his ability. Other financial aids were contributions made by individuals upon their conversion to Christianity, in memory of the dead, and those who fasted in order to use their money for the support of the poor. The tithing of the first fruits was required of every Christian for the support of Church officials and for the care of the indigent. The administration of the charity of the Church was entirely in the hands of the bishop. The deacon assisted the bishop by inquiring into the needs of the poor, but he was strictly bound to do only that which the bishop commanded. The female almoner, the deaconesses, assisted the bishop in distributing charity to the female sex. Very careful

precautions were taken by the bishop and deacons not to upset the sensibilities of the poor, but they were to treat them with high honor and esteem. There was no tolerance for the imposter, and the Church sought to remedy this situation by work and labor. Special priorities were given to the following: the widow, and the orphan, the sick, and the rescue and ransom of captives. The theological attitude was dominated by the idea of the Christ who taught the spirit of love and charity by his life.

The central financial aid for the Jewish community was the "Kuppah", the charity box in which everyone was expected to contribute. The Kuppah was collected by two persons and distributed by three persons. This collection was made every week and the Gabbaim were implicitly trusted and were not required to make a special account of their activities. The rabbis took special care not to humiliate the feelings of the poor by encouraging the giving of alms in secrecy and the giving of gifts in the forms of loans which were never collected. Imposters were treated humanely and with a sense of liberality, but the rabbis also sought means to avoid this condition by encouraging the ideal of a father teaching his son a trade. Special priorities were extended to the ransom of captives and female orphans who sought to marry. The theological attitude of the rabbis toward charity

was modeled upon the ideal of God as the prime mover of fortune, as the continuous enricher and impoverisher of men. Furthermore it was founded upon the idea that charity is a means of performing God's work here on earth.

Charity plays an integral part of each religious tradition. Both the Church and the Jewish community had a regulated system of charity with a charity box as the chief means of financial aids. The functions of the deacon and the Gabbai are similar in many regards, but the Gabbai had greater freedom in his administrative work than the deacon who was under the strict supervision of the bishop. The charitable system of the Church operated along lines of strict monarchical form with a central emphasis upon theology, while the Jewish system followed more democratic procedures with the emphasis upon the practical aspects of charity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. CATHOLIC TRADITION OF CHARITY

II. JEWISH TRADITION OF CHARITY

III. COMPARING THE CATHOLIC AND JEWISH TRADITIONS.

NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

## INTRODUCTION

This essay has for its object a systematic presentation of the Jewish and Catholic traditions of charity, comparing the practices which they have in common and those which distinguish them. The purpose is not only to record factual data, but to understand the nature and spirit of each religious tradition. This understanding can come only from examining the theoretical principles underlying the charitable system of each, as well as in the expression of these principles in the social and religious life of the Church and the Jewish community,

The early Catholic Church was an offspring of the Jewish community. It carried into practice, on the one hand, many of the Jewish conceptions of charity which it adopted from its association with Jewish life; on the other hand, it acquired various traits and ideas from the Greco-Roman civilization, which made it foreign to the Jewish <sup>w</sup>eltanschauung. The present work is designed to trace this growth and development to the first three centuries of the common era, showing those characteristics which made it similar to Jewish customs of benevolence, and those peculiarly Catholic. This task will be limited to six aspects: (1) financial aid; (2) administration; (3) sensibilities; (4) imposters; (5) priorities, and (6) theological attitude. First, we shall present the system and practice of charity of both the Catholic and Jewish traditions in these six classifications. We shall then compare

them, pointing out the features which parallel each other and which distinguish them.

In the field of the comparative study of the Catholic and Jewish traditions of charity, almost nothing has been written, so far as the writer can surmise. In consideration of the lack of secondary material, this essay relies entirely on the original sources. Our primary Catholic source is the Anti-Nicene literature of the Church Fathers, while the Jewish source is the Babylonian Talmud and Aggadic Midrashim.

In dealing with the problem of the comparative study of Catholic and Jewish charity, this short essay cannot make any claim to completeness, but it is hoped by the writer that further and more intensive research will be done in the future, as there is need for this kind of literature.

It is more than a pleasure to express my deep gratitude to the able guidance of my inspiring director, Dr. Abraham Cronbach, Professor of Jewish Social Studies at the Hebrew Union College.

I am also profoundly indebted to Father John Dohenny, C.S.C., professor of Church Law of the University of Notre Dame, who so graciously assisted me in locating the Catholic sources and aided me in the understanding of the nature of the material.

I should also like to thank Rabbi Harry Scheetman, of Sinai Synagogue, South Bend, Indiana, for assisting me in the translation of the Talmudic text and sources.



i: Financial Aid for the Relief of the Poor in the Church.

In the early beginning of Christian life there was no systematic collection of funds for the support of the poor. The opinion expressed by the Church Father Justin was typical of the early Christians, namely: "We communicate everyone who is in need."<sup>1</sup> There was no particular amount that was given, except to provide for the most basic needs. Their attitude in giving was simply: "Give to every one that asketh of thee."<sup>2</sup>

However, when the Christians began to organize themselves into regular communities with Church life as the center of its religious existence, the collection of funds for the relief of the poor played a very prominent role in the life of the Church. Membership in the Church depended upon the individual's contribution of gifts to the life of the Church, which was one of the means by which the individual identified himself as a member of Church activities. The gifts which the individual Christian gave fell into two categories: (1) gifts for the legal support of Church life; (2) gifts for the public worship of God. Every month the member of a Christian Church sent his contribution to the church chest. Tertullian designates there was no required sum demanded, but each was quite free to choose how much he will give.<sup>3</sup> Tertullian states: "On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation, but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able; for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund."<sup>4</sup>

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Similarly, Justin Martyr states that everyone of the Church should leave a voluntary contribution: "They who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who are in want."<sup>5</sup>

However, we find that the Apostolic Constitutions designates it as "Corban".<sup>6</sup> The Apostolic Constitutions regards it the duty of every Christian to put something into the "Corban": "If thou art not able to cast anything considerable into the 'Corban', yet at least bestow upon the strangers one, two, or five mites."<sup>7</sup>

Besides these voluntary contributions made to the church chest, the worshipers brought gifts of natural produce, called oblations, in connection with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. As it is recorded in Acts of the early community of Christian life, each one brought an oblation collected for an evening meal partaken of in common. For Acts states: "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread and in prayers. And continued daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart."<sup>8</sup>

The evening meal was known as the Agape, the love-feast in which every member of the Church contributed according to his ability. The natural products were brought by the members of the Church and were collected by the deacons. Those ritual elements needed for the Holy Supper were placed upon the altar, while the

rest of the produce was used for the support of the Church officers and the relief of the poor. Over these gifts a prayer of thanksgiving was recited: "Let us pray for those that bear fruit in the holy church, and give alms to the needy."<sup>9</sup> After this prayer of thanksgiving, there followed the prayer of consecration and the bishop, presbyters, deacons, etc., partake of the holy bread and wine and distribute it to the people. The Apostolic Constitutions describes the ceremony in this manner: "And let the bishop give the oblation, saying, the body of Christ; and let him that receiveth say, Amen. And let the deacon take the cup; and when he gives it, say, the blood of Christ, the cup of life; and let him that drinketh say, Amen. And let the thirty-third psalm be said, while all the rest are partaking; and when all, both men and women, have partaken, let the deacons carry what remains into the vestry."<sup>10</sup>

From this description we may infer that the oblations offered, by no means consisted merely of the bread and wine for the Lord's supper, but of natural products of all kinds. For, after everyone had partaken of the bread and wine, the deacons carried off the other products to the vestry room of the Church, where they were distributed for the support of the Church officers and the relief of the poor.<sup>11</sup> These oblations, then, formed the chief financial means for the relief of the poor.

Even after the celebration of the Lord's supper was separated from the Agape, and transferred to the morning service, these love feasts of the whole Church continued to be practiced as each con-

tributed according to his means. Tertullian explains the purpose of the feast was not one of extravagant display of foods, but a dignified manner of helping the poor of the Church, and thus making them feel to be a part of Church life. For Tertullian lashes out against the heathen whose banquets are vain and licentious: "with the good things of the beast, we benefit the needy. Not as it is with you, do parasites aspire to the glory of satisfying their licentious propensities, selling themselves for a belly-feast to all disgraceful treatment."<sup>12</sup> But he emphasizes that Christians have the love-feast because the consideration of the poor is highly esteemed by God. Then Tertullian presents a description of the meal, which, though somewhat idealized, still gives us an insight as to the nature of the feast: "As it is an act of religious service, it permits no vileness or immodesty. The participants, before reclining, taste first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the chaste. They say it is enough, as those who remember that even during the night they have to worship God; they talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their auditors. After manual ablution, and the bringing in of lights, each is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, a hymn to God, either one from the holy Scriptures or one of his own composing - a proof of the measure of our drinking. As the feast commenced with prayer, so with prayer it is closed. We go from it, not like troops of mischief-doers, nor bands of vagabonds, nor to break out into licentious acts, but to

have as much care of our modesty and chastity as if we had been a school of virtue rather than a banquet."<sup>13</sup>

However, the spirit of the Agapae must have degenerated to a very low degree as we later find that Tertullian speaks out very bitterly against it. Of it he says derisively, "with you 'love' shows its fervor in sauce-pans, 'faith' its warmth in kitchen, 'hope' its anchorage in waiters."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Clement of Alexandria speaks with vitrolic language against the love-feasts in which they dare to apply the name Agape to pitiful suppers, redolent of savour and sauces."<sup>15</sup> Thus the Agapae ceased to be a common meal for the whole Church, but became instead meals for the poor, prepared by any benevolent member, and only the poor were invited. In the Apostolic Constitutions we discovered that at these meals aged women were invited by the deacons <sup>the deacons?</sup> who were actually in need of assistance.<sup>16</sup>

Another means of supplying the Church funds for the relief of the poor were private oblations which were brought in honor of the dead. <sup>In</sup> The Apostolic Constitutions alms were offered in memory of the deceased, which were taken from his property as a kind of memorial.<sup>17</sup> Tertullian proscribes for a newly married couple the following program: "The sick is visited, the indigent relieved, with freedom. Alms (are given) without (damage of ensuing) torment."<sup>18</sup>

If the ordinary means of offering oblations did not suffice in the relief of the poor, or if some special emergency arose, these were obtained by a special collection. The Apostolic Constitutions

connection

instructs the bishop to make special collections if there is a definite need that has to be met: "If a gift (oblations) be wanting, inform the brethren, and make a collection from them, and then minister to the orphans and widows in righteous."<sup>19</sup> From a letter from Cyprian, we learn the particulars of such a collection. It happened that many Christians were made prisoners of war in Numidia and the bishops of that country needed help to ransom their brethren from captivity. Hence, they applied for help to Cyprian, who appointed officers to make a collection from both laity and clerics. Then Cyprian collected "one hundred thousand sesterces" and submitted a list of those givers who contributed to the fund when he presented the money to the bishops and he specifically requested the bishops to offer up prayers for those who gave so willingly in the rescue of their brethren.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the collections which were made for special occasions, certain wealthy converts of the Church who upon joining turned over their wealth to her treasure. When Cyprian was converted, he sold his lands and gardens so that the funds might go to the Church in their support of the indigents.<sup>21</sup> But this type of funds did not furnish the main supply of resources since the great body of the Christians still belonged to the lower economic strata. By far the greater part was given, not by persons of property, but was, on the contrary, the result of the small gifts of people of low condition, who, as the Apostolical Constitutions state, gave of their labors and their substance.<sup>22</sup> In the writings of Hermas,

the Shepherd teaches his flock how to fast. He instructs them to abstain from drink and food, and devote this money for the help and support of the poor and widow. He states, "And having reckoned up the price of the dishes you intended to have eaten, you will give it to a widow, or to some person in want, and thus you will exhibit humility of mind, so that he who has received benefit from your humility may fill his own soul and pray for you to the Lord. If you observe fasting, as I have commanded, your sacrifice will be acceptable to God and this fasting will be written down, and the service thus performed is noble, and sacred, and acceptable to God."<sup>23</sup> Similarly the Apostolic Constitutions also states the same idea: "If any one has not, let him fast a day, and set apart that, and order it for the saints. But if any one has superfluities, let him minister more to them according to the proportion of his ability."<sup>24</sup> However, it was not the individual alone who employed this means of gaining funds, but the Apostolical Constitutions prescribes that the bishop call a fast for the whole Church, in order to apply what was thus saved to the wants of the needy.<sup>25</sup>

The early Christians were quite conscious of the fact that they, like the Israelites, were obliged to bring their first fruits to the altar. For Isrenaeus states: "We are bound, therefore, to offer God the first-fruits of His creation, as Moses also says, so that man, being accounted as grateful, by those things in which he has shown his gratitude, may receive that honour which flows from Him."<sup>26</sup>

However, Irenaeus maintains the New Testament to be advanced over the Old Testament since the former contains no external command which demands that the Christian give a specific amount. But he holds the opinion that the Christians gave freely more than the Israelites gave by legal prescription.<sup>27</sup> Yet, the very opposite opinion is held by Cyprian who bitterly complains that the Christians actually give less than one tenth of their earnings to the Church fund in the support of the poor. He reminds his fellow Christians that the primitive Church sold their possessions and gave the revenue for the maintenance of the needy.<sup>28</sup> He bemoans the fact that, in his time, less than one-tenth is given to the charity fund of the Church. Although Cyprian does not make specific mention that giving one-tenth is the law of the Church, there is a ring in his words indicating that Cyprian was well inclined to make it a law.<sup>29</sup>

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However, we discover that later the Old Testament commands about bringing the first-fruits and one-tenth of the produce actually became a canon of the Church. In the canons attributed to Hippolytus, the command specifically states that the faithful must bring the first-fruits of the barn-floor and the wine-press, of oil, honey, milk, and wool, which are to be brought to the bishop who then pronounces a blessing upon them, that they may serve for the care of the poor.<sup>30</sup> Also, in the Apostolic Constitutions there is a law which expressly declares Christians, on the ground of the Old Testament law, to be bound to give first-fruits, and tithes: "Where-



fore you ought to love the bishop as your father, and fear him as your king, and honour him as your lord, bringing to him your fruits and the works of your hands, for a blessing upon you, giving to him your first-fruits, and your tithes, and your oblations, and your gifts, as to the priest of God; the first fruits of your wheat, and wine, and oil, and autumnal fruits, and wool, and all things which the Lord God gives thee, and thy offering shall be accepted as a savour of a sweet smell to the Lord thy God; and the Lord will bless the works of thy hands, and will multiply the good things of the land."<sup>31</sup> The law goes on further to state that although the sacrificing of animals for sin-offerings and burnt offerings are no longer binding upon the Christians; nevertheless, the Christian is still duty-bound by the old law to bring his first-fruits to the priests and to give one-tenth of his produce to the poor: "All the first-fruits of thy hot bread, of thy barrels of wine, or oil, or honey, or nuts, or grapes, or the first fruits of other things, shalt thou give to the priests; but those of silver, and of garments, and of all sort of possessions, to the orphan and to the widow - thou shalt give the tenth of thy increase to the orphan, and to the widow, and to the poor, and to the stranger."<sup>32</sup> This is an excellent illustration of how the gifts to the poor and the gifts to the priests merged into one another, showing the needs of the clergy and the poor were considered as one and the same thing.

Administrative Officials for Charity of the Church.

As the collection of funds through the means of oblations were in the hands of the Church, so, likewise, the administration of these funds was entirely in the hands of the officers of the Church. The relief of the poor, like the entire administration of Church affairs, was more and more concentrated in the person of the bishop. From the Epistles of Cyprian we perceive that the bishop exclusively administered the means for the poor, and that the deacons merely occupied a position of service, inquiring by order into the circumstances of the poor.<sup>53</sup> However, the final decision was made only by the consent of the bishop. Only in the time of persecution, when Cyprian was obliged to retire from Carthage for a period, did he divide the existing resources among the deacons, and commission them to deal with them according to their judgment in alleviating the affliction and distress of the poor. Yet, Cyprian did not hereby give this branch of his office entirely out of his hands, but merely left the presbyter Rogatianus to direct the work of the charity.<sup>34</sup> The Apostolic Constitutions compare the bishop to a father, and the deacons to sons: "For as Christ does nothing without His Father, so neither does the deacon do anything without his bishop; and as the Son without His Father is nothing, so is the deacon nothing without his bishop; and as the Son is subject to His Father, so is every deacon subject to his bishop; and as the Son is the messenger and prophet of the Father, so is the deacon the

messenger and prophet of his bishop<sup>35</sup> Thus, a deacon can give nothing to a poor person without the previous knowledge of his bishop.<sup>36</sup> By doing otherwise, he would bring slander upon his bishop and disgrace the office of the bishop.<sup>37</sup> Only the bishop is responsible to God for the management of the relief of the poor. Therefore, Apostolic Constitutions expressly enjoins a sacred duty upon the bishop to be extremely faithful and conscientious in the relief of the poor, giving them this command: "O bishops, be solicitous about their maintenance (the poor), being in nothing wanting to them; exhibiting to the orphans the care of parents; to the widows the care of husbands; to those of suitable age, marriage; to the artificer, work; to the unable, commiseration; to the strangers, a house; to the hungry, food; to the naked, clothing; to the sick, visitation; to the prisoners, assistance."<sup>37-A</sup>

In the Epistles of Polycarp we discover that the presbyters who were ordained by the bishop and were of a higher order than the deacons, also had a specific duty as regards the relief of the poor, besides their other duties towards the Church.<sup>38</sup> Their main duty, as designated by the Polycarp, was the special care of the widows and orphans.<sup>39</sup> However, the real work of caring for the poor fell into the hands of the deacons. They were to be the eye and ear of the bishop, through which he was to learn what was going on in the Church and who was in need of assistance.<sup>40</sup> The deacons had the main task of collecting funds for the poor for the bishop, and distributing these funds, according to the decision

<sup>41</sup>  
of the bishop. Above all, they had to investigate strictly and in detail the circumstances of the poor. They went about from home to home, and whenever they found cases of distress, they immediately notified the bishop of them that he might make the necessary arrangements. But the Apostolic Constitutions specifically warns the deacon not to make any decisions on his own: "For he (the deacon) gives to any one as to a person in distress without the bishop's knowledge he gives it so that it must tend to the reproach of the bishop, and he accuses him as careless of the distressed, but he that casts reproach on his bishop, either by word or deed, opposes God by not harkening to what He says."<sup>42</sup>

However, the deacon is allowed a certain amount of freedom to dispose of small affairs without overburdening the bishop with too many intricate details. The Apostolical Constitutions imposes this command upon the deacon: "Let him (the deacon) order such things as he is able by himself, receiving power from the bishop, as the Lord did from His Father the power of creation and of providence; but the weighty matters let the bishop judge; but let the deacon be the bishop's ear, and eye, and mouth, and heart, and soul, that the bishop may not be distracted with many cares, but with such only as are more considerable, as Jethro did appoint for Moses, and his counsel was received."<sup>43</sup> The services of the deacon are as follows: "to go about"<sup>44</sup> as the eyes of the inquiring into the doings of each member, ascertaining who is about to sin; to learn who are suffering under bodily disease and obtain help; to visit all

those who stand <sup>45</sup> in need of visitation and tell the bishop all those that are in affliction. Thus, the deacon was a kind of patron of the poor, constantly looking after their welfare. From Eusebuis "Ecclesiastical History" we learn that there were seven deacons for each Church.<sup>46</sup> However, the Apostolical Constitutions maintains that the number of deacons is to be regulated by the size of the Church, and that wherever there was need for a greater number of deacons to service the wants of the poor, new deacons were to be ordained for the purpose.<sup>47</sup>

Beside the male diaconate which rendered help to the male indigents, there was also a female ~~diaconate~~ who ministered to the needs of Christian women. In the first centuries they were known as widows. In the homilies of Clementine the institution of widows constitutes a regular part of the offices of the Church.<sup>48</sup> The Apostolic Constitutions designates them as occupying an honorable position in the Church and as being at the same time maintained by the Church.<sup>49</sup> They are at the head of the women in the Church and impart instruction of Church doctrine to the women and children. These women were older widows who had resolved never to remarry and were chosen for their work on account of their exemplary Christian life.<sup>50</sup> Since the widows are always mentioned in connection with orphans, it is very natural that the care of the orphans was entrusted to the hands of these widows. In the Shepherd of Hermas, Grapte, a noted widow, is commissioned to care and instruct widows and the orphans.<sup>51</sup>

Later, however, the institutions of the widows were supplanted by the institutions of the deaconesses. According to the Apostolical Constitutions the deaconesses belonged to the clergy and they received a special ordination with the rank of a sub-deacon.<sup>52</sup>

Besides having a part in the Church offices, the deaconesses were also active in the care of the poor. They occupy, in respect to the female portion of the congregation, exactly the same position which the deacon does in respect to the male. The bishop could not send a deacon to visit the women, because of unbelievers, lest, as the Apostolic Constitutions say, evil reports should arise.<sup>53</sup> That the administration of alms was the function of the deaconess is indicated by the mention of the quarrels between the widow who receives alms and the deaconess who grants alms.<sup>54</sup> Also, when a woman desired to go to the bishop, she should do so only under the escort of a deaconess, for the sake of decorum. The entire ministrations of the diaconate, so far as they relate to women, are very expressly transferred to the deaconesses. After describing the qualities of a deacon, it is said: "And let the deaconess be diligent in taking care of the women; let every one know his proper place, and discharge it diligently with one consent, with one mind, as knowing the reward of their ministration; but let them not be ashamed to minister to those that are in want ..... as even our Lord Jesus Christ came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for

many.<sup>55</sup> So therefore ought they (deacons and deaconesses) be obliged to lay down their life for a brother."

This office of the diaconate made it possible for the bishop to practice individual care of the poor, even to the smallest details. The services of the deacons and deaconesses furnished him, on the one hand, with information of all the distress existing in the Church, and on the other, gave the means of affording to every one who was sick or poor, the just means of assistance. On the one side strict centralization, on the other the utmost individualization:... these were the distinct features of Catholic charity.

Sensibilities

As regards the sensibilities of the poor, the bishops are commanded to minister with great love and care.<sup>56</sup> Their duty is to see that none who are in distress suffer from the lack of what is needed. They are to supply to orphans the care of parents, to widows that of husbands, to arrange marriage for those ready for marriage, to procure work for those out of work, to show compassion to those incapable of work, to provide a shelter for strangers, food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, visits for the sick and help for the prisoners.<sup>57</sup> The poor were to be highly esteemed and honored. It was to be no shame for them to receive alms. To the contrary, they were considered as the altar of God upon which the Church lays its gifts; and if they seek to repay those gifts, bestowed upon them, they can do so by devout prayers and faithful intercessions for their benefactors.<sup>58</sup>

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While the deacons were to deal with the indigents in a very tender and sympathetic fashion, it was especially incumbent upon the poor that they should be contented, humble, and devoted to God.<sup>59</sup> It is impressed upon them with the utmost confidence that they had no right to support, but that it is human love that offers it to them. They are always to regard what they receive as the gift of God, who bestows it upon them by means of His faithful servant. "Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor, and let the poor man bless God, because He hath given him one by whom his need may be supplied", as it is said in the Epistle of Clements.<sup>60</sup>



Thus, love was the motive of giving and a spirit of thankfulness was the sentiment of the recipient.

Although everyone who was in want received the assistance he needed, every effort was made to render the poor capable of work and to put them in a condition to earn their own livelihood.

They were directed where to find work and were furnished with tools.<sup>61</sup> Where there were still connections or relatives, the aid of these was first requested; they were not to cause the Church any unnecessary burden with those whom it was their own first duty to help.

The Church Fathers recognized the position of the widow as one of honor and dignity. In order to alleviate the troubles of widows, the Apostolic Constitutions encouraged them to join the Order of Widows, supported by the bishop.<sup>62</sup> These widows are to be very

grave and obedient to their superiors, the bishop and the deaconess.<sup>63</sup>

When the widows have been clothed by anyone or have received money, food, drink, or shoes, they offer up this prayer upon seeing their sister widow who has received relief: "Thou art blessed, O God, who hast refreshed my fellow-widow. Bless, O Lord, and glorify him that has bestowed these things upon her, and let his good work ascend in truth to Thee, and remember him for good in the day of his visitations. And, as for my bishop, who has ordered such a seasonable alms to be bestowed on my fellow-widow, who was naked, do Thou increase his crown of rejoicing in the day of the revelation of Thy visitation."<sup>64</sup> They are not required to complain about their lot, but accept it graciously. The Apostolic

Constitutions warns against those widows who murmur against their deaconess: "Those widows which will not live according to the command of God, are solicitous and inquisitive what deaconess it is that gives the charity, and what widow receives it ...she murmurs at the deaconess who distributed the charity, saying: 'Dost thou not see that I am in more distress, and want of thy charity? Why, therefore, hast thou preferred her before me?' She says these things foolishly, not understanding that this does not depend on the will of man, but the appointment of God."<sup>65</sup> Thus, the widows had many quarrels with the deaconesses and the distribution of charity did not always meet with their favor.

Orphans, as well as widows, were also under the special guardianship of the bishop.<sup>66</sup> He was to have brought them up at the expense of the Church, and to take care that the girls be given, when of marriageable age, to Christian husbands.<sup>67</sup> Also, the orphan boys were to be taught some art and handicraft, and were then to be provided with tools and placed in a condition to earn their own living, so that they might no longer be a burden to the Church.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the ideal kind of charity was that which ultimately led to self-support and encouraged the recipient, by means of these gifts, to earn a livelihood of his own.

### Imposters

*Synagogue*

The problem of imposters was dealt with by the Church Fathers in a very harsh and severe manner. They had no tolerance for those who received charity on false pretense. The end of an imposter was utter damnation on the day of judgment, as Isaiah 1:7 is interpreted: "Woe to those that have, and receive in hypocrisy; or who are able to support themselves, yet will receive of others; for both of them shall give an account to the Lord God in the day of judgment."<sup>69</sup> A person who could really work, and yet receives alms, robs the poor of his bread, and the Lord will surely punish him.<sup>70</sup>

However, to avoid the spread of imposters in the Church, the deacons were obliged to make a very careful investigation into the needs of everyone who wanted assistance from the Church.<sup>71</sup> If the deacon found there was actual need of help, he reported the matter to his bishop.<sup>72</sup> When this had been done, they received the necessary aid. To this class belonged those who could no longer earn a livelihood, or who, by joining the Church, had lost their means of support because they had followed a trade or business which the Church did not permit.<sup>73</sup> Yet, it was strictly maintained that every one should labor to the extent of his ability. Their point of view was mainly this: "If any one will not work, neither let him eat."<sup>74</sup> (2.Thess.iii.10). In the Didache it is ordained that no Christian wayfarer is to be maintained by any church for more than two or three days. Accordingly, the church had the prerogative of getting rid of such brethren. Yet, work was a vital duty:

"If any brother had 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 (engage in the work which the Church furnishes) he is trafficking with Christ; beware of that man."<sup>75</sup>

From this we can see that a Christian could demand work from the Church, and that the Church had by necessity of its teaching, to furnish him with work. However, to those who had been obliged to relinquish their business, some other occupation was assigned, whenever possible, and they were not permitted to decline this, even if it was inferior to their former occupation.<sup>76</sup> If they were unwilling to work, they received no aid.<sup>77</sup> Conversion to the church was not to be made by idlers and imposters a source of worldly pleasure.<sup>78</sup>

The Church Fathers not only condemned the imposters for receiving charity without want, but was equally adamant against those who gave charity and oblations out of unjust gain and unrighteous wealth. The bishop is specifically warned not to receive the gifts of sinful persons: "Now the bishop ought to know whose oblations he ought to receive, and whose he ought not. For he is to avoid corrupt deals, and not receive their gifts."<sup>79</sup> Thus, the bishop could only take gifts given by Christians of a good conscience and such as led pure Christian lives. Heretics and excommunicated persons could bring no oblation. The Apostolic Constitutions states: "It is better to perish than to receive gifts from the

not under  
caption imposters

enemies of God."<sup>80</sup> If, however, such gifts are received, unwittingly and unintentionally, they should be returned immediately so that the Church might not suffer disgrace thereby.

### Priorities Among Those Receiving Charity

Wherever there is mention in the early Christian writers of poor persons who require support, widows and orphans are invariably mentioned first, and they seem to have priority over any other indigents.<sup>81</sup> "We learn from an admonition by Hermas, in his writing 'Commandment' of the order of precedence and priority in lending support to the poor; (1) helping the widow, (2) looking after orphans and the needy, (3) rescuing the servants of God from necessities, being hospitable, practicing righteousness, being long-suffering".<sup>82</sup> From this statement we can derive a system of priority in Catholic charity.

Besides the widows and orphans who took precedence in receiving charity funds, the sick were the next in line to obtain help from the Church's charitable gifts. It was the duty of the bishop to look after the needs of the sick.<sup>83</sup> The deacons were also obliged to learn of those under bodily disease and bring it to the attention of the multitude that the needs of the sick be supplied.<sup>84</sup>

In the early Church there were no hospitals. The sick were attended in their own homes. The bishops, the presbyters and deacons made special calls on them there. The Canon of Hippolytus states: "Of the bishop's visitation of the sick - if an infirm man had prayed to the Church, and has a house, he should go to him."<sup>85</sup>

The next mentioned in the list of priorities, as given by Hermias, was: "rescuing the servants of God from necessities."<sup>86</sup>

Many Christians were imprisoned because of debt or because of the practice of their faith. Both of these classes had to be reached through means of charity funds. These prisoners were to be visited and consoled, and their plight alleviated by the gifts of food. The Apostolic Constitutions most impressively lays down the sacred duty of the members of the Church in regard to their attitudes toward prisoners: "If any Christian, on account of the name of Christ, and love and faith toward God, be condemned by the ungodly to the games, to the beasts, or to the mines, do not ye overlook him, but send to him from your labor and your very sweat for his sustenance, and for a reward to the soldiers, that he may be eased and taken care of; that, as far as lies in your power, your blessed brother may not be afflicted; for he that is condemned for the name of the Lord God is an holy martyr, a brother of the Lord, the son of the Highest, a receptacle of the Holy Spirit, by whom every one of the faithful has received the illumination of the glory of the holy gospel, by being vouchsafed the incorruptible crown, and the testimony of Christ's sufferings, and the fellowship of His blood, to be made conformable to the death of Christ for the adoration of children. For this cause, do ye, all ye of the faithful by your bishop, minister to the saints of your substance of your labor. But, if any one has not, let him fast a day, and set apart that, and order it for the saints. But if any one has superfluities, let him minister more to them according to the proportion of his ability. But if he can possibly sell all his livelihood, and redeem

them out of prison, he will be blessed, and a friend of Christ. For, if he, who ever gives his goods to the poor, is perfect, how much more will he be perfect who devotes all for the martyrs."<sup>87</sup> Thus, redeeming a prisoner was highly rated by the Church and was likened to a very saintly deed.

Even when Christians were sentenced to the mines for punishment, they were still looked after when there. Their names were carefully noted; attempts were made to try and procure their release, and the Apostolic Constitutions speaks of Christian brethren who were sent to ease the lot of the prisoners, and to hearten them.<sup>88</sup>

However, the most important thing was not merely to alleviate the lot of the prisoners, but to try and ransom them from prison. Ransoming captives was thus regarded as work which was especially noble and well-pleasing to God, and a symbol of being a true imitation of Christ-like qualities. Yet, this was not carried on by the Church directly, but through the private generosity of certain individuals.<sup>89</sup>



### Theological Attitude Toward Charity and Poverty

The central aim of Catholic Charity in the first three centuries was not the healing of social wrong, nor the endeavor to remove poverty, but to awaken the spirit of love and charity, as taught and lived by Christ. Jesus was, for the Christians, the highest incentive and directive of Catholic Charity. "For I was hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me..... inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."<sup>90</sup> This is the supreme ideal of Christian charity - to minister <sup>charitably</sup> charity unto the poor was a practical expression of love to the Savior. Thus, the true way to love the Christ was by emulating his ideals and teachings.

Cyprian states in this matter: "How more could He (Christ) stimulate the works of our righteousness and mercy, than by saying that whatever is given to the needy and the poor is given to Himself, and by saying that He is aggrieved unless the needy and poor be supplied?"<sup>91</sup> The Christian is moved to give charity, first, out of consideration, not of the needs of his brother, but through his contemplation of the Christ. Whosoever despises his brother and refuses to give charity, actually despises and reproves His Lord, who is identified with the poor and lowly. If a Christian gives charity, he is sure to receive a heavenly reward as Cyprian

states: "Let us give to Christ earthly garments, that we may receive heavenly raiment; let us give food and drink of this work, that we may come with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, to the heavenly banquet; that we may not reap little let us sow abundantly; let us, while there is time, take thought for our security and eternal salvation."<sup>92</sup> Thus, by doing works of charity one is definitely assured of an eternal life, and need have no fear of his redemption and salvation in the world to come. The best way to achieve immortal life is through the means of almsgiving, by which one lends to God, so that when one gives alms to the least, he gives them to Christ.

By almsgiving, Cyprian declares that man becomes a partner with God. Through the poor he gives to God his earthly gains and receives from Him in return a portion of the heavenly kingdom: "Divide your returns with the Lord, your God; share your gains with Christ; make Christ a partner with you in your earthly possessions, that He also may make you a fellow-heir with Him in His heavenly kingdom."<sup>93</sup>

Not only does almsgiving prepare one for everlasting life; it is also the means for the atonement of our sins. "Blessed are we", writes St. Clement of Rome, "if we fulfilled the commandments of God in harmony of love, that, through love, our sins were forgiven."<sup>94</sup> In the Epistles of Barabas we read the admonition: "Remember the day of judgment, day and night, and seek each day the company of the saints, working with your hand for the ransom of your sins."<sup>95</sup>

In a unique symbol Hermias presents the blessings brought by almsgiving. He compares the rich to the poles to which the vines are fastened. The pole itself bears no fruits, but so helps the vine that it can bring forth fruits. Thus, if the rich man prays little, his prayer is powerless. But, if he helps the poor, they pray for him, and their prayer is fruitful. Thus, the reason that God gives the rich man his wealth is because of the prayer of the poor.<sup>96</sup>

In pleading with his fellow-Christians to give alms liberally, Cyprian states these rewards which come from giving: "a wholesome guard of our security, a protection of hope, a safeguard of faith, a remedy for sin, a thing placed in the power of the doer, a thing both great and easy, a crown of peace without the risk of persecution, the true and greatest gift of God."<sup>97</sup>

By doing charity, Cyprian explains that we are actually doing God's work, that the only way to become sons of God is: "to imitate by the heavenly law the equity of God, the Father."<sup>98</sup> For just as God gives equally and liberally to all of the human race, so man imitates God when he, likewise, gives of what he produces to those who are in need, and shares his returns and fruits with his fellow-man. This was the way of the first Christians of the Church: "They sold houses and farms, and gladly and liberally presented to the Apostles the proceeds to be dispensed to the poor; selling and alienating their earthly estate, they transferred their lands either where they might receive the fruits of an eternal possession, and there prepared homes where they might begin an eternal habitation."<sup>99</sup>

For Cyprian, almsgiving becomes one of the formal means of receiving grace; indeed, the only one which remains to a Christian after baptism, since baptism takes away only the sins which preceded it. Thus, baptism, according to Cyprian, would be of little avail unless God has given man the means of almsgiving, which cleanses him of the defilement of sin.<sup>100</sup> "Prayers and fasting are unfruitful unless they are accompanied by almsgiving. It is alms which gives power to prayer." "Entreaties alone are of little force to obtain what they seek unless they be made sufficient by the addition of deeds and good works. The angel reveals and manifests and certifies that our petitions become efficacious by almsgiving."<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, almsgiving is a certain guarantee that our life is saved from dangers. The only real manner of appeasing God is through the medium of almsgiving.

quotes?

Poverty is not looked upon by the Church Fathers as an evil, but on the contrary, a means of coming nearer to God. Cyprian regards property as a burden, and the rich are in his eyes fools since they increase their burden by keeping their wealth instead of letting the poor derive help from their riches.<sup>102</sup> He demands that those who have suffered persecution, and are wealthy, should give up their riches and become true children of God. To give away property is, in itself, a good work; voluntary poverty is a higher moral condition than the possession of wealth.<sup>103</sup>

II. Financial Aid for the Relief of the Poor of the Jewish Community

The most important means of financial aid for the system of Jewish relief was the "Kuppah", the charity box. In ancient times the Mishnah relates that in the Temple there was a "chamber of secrets" into which the pious ones deposited their gifts secretly, and the poor families received support from it, in secrecy.<sup>104</sup>

relevancy?

The charity box in the Talmudic period came to be known by the name "Kuppah Shel Zedakah", a charity chest of the community which provided the means for the relief of the poor.<sup>105</sup> So important and essential was this charity box for a community that no disciple of the wise was permitted to reside there unless a charity chest be present.<sup>106</sup>

Everyone in the community was expected to contribute to the Kuppah in the measure of his ability. A three month resident was required to contribute to the Kuppah; a six month resident is obligated to the clothing-fund; and he who lives in a city nine months has to contribute to the burial fund.<sup>107</sup> Each must give according to his financial ability and especially in consideration of the need of the time.<sup>108</sup>

The Levitic tithing system was commonly regarded by the Rabbis as the normal criterion which meant giving ten per cent of one's profit. The maximum amount that was allowed to be given was twenty per cent.<sup>109</sup> However, the rule was to give not less than a third of a shekel per year.<sup>110</sup> Not only was the Levitic system of tith-

ing the rule of giving, but charity as a whole was regarded as a substitute for the Temple and the replacer of sacrifices.<sup>111</sup>

A gift to the poor was looked upon as a substitute of the Shekel given to the Temple for atonement.<sup>112</sup> Thus, the ancient Temple cults served as symbol for the institutionalization of charity.

Another means of obtaining funds for charity was money given in connection with the liturgy and ritual. It was the practice of R/ Eleazer to give a coin to a poor man before beginning the daily prayers, quoting the psalmist: "With charity shall I behold Thy face."<sup>113</sup> This was most likely practiced by many Jewish saints who felt compelled by the liturgy to render aid to the indigents.

Besides the money that was given in connection with the liturgy, financial aid was also extended by means of a loan which, as a matter of course, was never collected. This was done in order to spare the sensibilities of the needy.<sup>114</sup>

Every community had its "Kuppah Shel Zedakah", containing the funds collected for the support of the indigent townsmen, who received every Friday money for the fourteen meals of the whole week. The out-of-town poor had access only to the Tamhuy. For transients, other arrangements were made whereby they received bread and lodging, if so desired.<sup>115</sup> There was also a charity bowl for the victuals needed for immediate relief.<sup>116</sup> The collections for the Kuppah were made weekly, while the collections for the Tamhuy were made daily.<sup>117</sup> This provided for the main

*charity bowl?*

sources of the food needs of the indigents and was always the available means of providing immediate help. However, not everybody was eligible to obtain help from the Tamhuy. That was available only for the poorest of the poor.<sup>118</sup> He who had food for one day may not take aught from the Tamhuy.

*i.e. two meals*

The minimum to be given to a poor man who is on his way from one place to another is a loaf which costs a Pundion when four sheaves of wheat are sold a selah.<sup>119</sup> If he stays overnight he is given his requirements for the night - a bed, pillow, oil, fish and vegetables.

*not sheaves*

In time of emergency, when there was great need, special provisions were made by wealthy individuals, to cope with the situation. We read in the "Antiquities" of Josephus that during a great famine in Palestine, in the first century, Queen Helena of Adiabene bought shiploads of wheat and figs to aid the starving, and her son, Izates, sent great sums of money to the "foremost men of Jerusalem, for distribution among the people."<sup>120</sup> From this we may infer that already, in the first century, there existed in Jerusalem a body of men whose main duty was to distribute charity among the needy and receive special donations from wealthy individuals, such as Queen Helena of Adiabene.

At different times there were special rabbinic committees which traveled from community to community, to collect funds and means for the support of the students of Torah, <sup>and</sup> for other meritorious purposes.<sup>121</sup>

Besides the support of the students of Torah, there had to be special provisions made for the orphans, the seeing of them married and launched in life for themselves, by furnishing homes and providing dowries for them.<sup>122</sup> There were also other provisions made for the redemption of captives, caring for the sick and burying of the dead.<sup>123</sup>

Another source of income for the charity fund was the generous donations made by wealthy persons. We read that Mar Ukba gave half of his wealth to charity before he passed away, with this exclamation: "The provisions are scanty and the road is long."<sup>124</sup> Also, Monobaz, (a king who was converted from heathenism to Judaism) gave away all of his riches to the needy in the time of drought.<sup>125</sup>

half?



Administrative Officers of Charity of the Jewish Community

In the Jewish community the matter of charity and relief for the poor was not merely the concern of the individual, but the responsibility of the entire community, whose obligation it was to care for those in need. Thus, every community appointed for itself collectors, men of excellent character and fine reputation. They were so deeply trusted that they did not have to render an account of the money entrusted to them for charitable purposes.<sup>126</sup> The "Kuppah" (charity fund) was collected by two persons, because any office which gives one authority over the community has to be filled by at least two people.<sup>127</sup> However, three administrators are required for the distribution of charity, since they are regarded as a type of Beth Din, which have to weigh and decide the claims of the indigents and make investigations concerning their actual need. This follows the analogy of monetary cases, since three men only possess judicial authority.<sup>128</sup> Every Friday the collectors go about their rounds to the shops, market places and individual homes, to obtain the weekly collections for charity. They sought to collect money or other necessary things - contribution for which was mandatory only upon the rich.<sup>129</sup> Many times this would naturally lead to very violent quarrels with the collectors, whose position was not always enviable. Yet, the Gabbai had to be careful not to overstep his bounds and become oppressive.<sup>130</sup>

He could be  
reacting toward  
the wealthy, not  
toward others.

Also, the distribution of the "Kuppah" was made on Friday. To provide food for the poor for the coming week, on Friday they were given fourteen meals. Clothing was also furnished to those who needed it. If a new resident, from another city, was out of funds, he could likewise receive aid from this collection.<sup>131</sup>

The position of the Gabbai was not a sinecure. There was entailed a great deal of responsibility and difficulty in distributing charity in an equitable fashion, so as not to offend the delicate feelings of the indigents. R. Jose very clearly expresses this difficulty when he states: "May my lot be of those who collect charity, but not of those who distribute it."<sup>132</sup> Evidently, the job of distribution was one which required such skill and art that very few were actually qualified for the intricate task and most of them suffered such heartache from the position that it was not likely to be relished by many.

Since the distributors endured so many hardships, it is very understandable why many would decline the position. This is the very situation which R. Jose had to deal with in his community. It seems that in the city of Kaphra, he had to face a deeply embarrassing situation, when everyone whom he appointed to the office of Parnass, declined the position. In order to induce the members of his community to accept the office he had to praise the Parnassim as one of great merit, and worthy of being counted the greatest of the generation.<sup>133</sup> R. Haggai employed another technique. He would preach (when appointing Parnassim) that the

appointment is not human, but divine,<sup>134</sup> and thus, perhaps, in this manner he might be able to encourage the members of his community to accept the office in a more gracious manner.

There were a number of regulations to guide the Gabbaim in order to avoid suspicion which would lead to misunderstanding and an erroneous basis for casting shadows upon the character of these noble men. These rules were the following: The Gabbaim, when collecting for charity are not permitted to separate from each other, though one may collect near the city gate while the other collects at the shops near the gate, as they are then still in sight of each other and can check on possible acts of embezzlement.<sup>135</sup>

If one of the collectors, while collecting, found money in the street, he was not permitted to put it into his own purse, as the people might then say that he was misappropriating charity funds. Thus, he is required to put that which he found into the charity box and on coming home he may take it out.<sup>136</sup> If one of the collectors is being paid a debt in the street, he must not put the money collected from his debtor into his own pocket. Thus, in order to avoid suspicion he should put it into the charity box, and remove it only after he has arrived home.<sup>137</sup>

When the time comes that the collectors have money but no applicants to whom to distribute it, they should change the small coins into larger ones.<sup>138</sup> However, the changing should be with other persons and not with the collector's own money. The reason being that people might say that they did not give full value to

the exchange.<sup>139</sup> The very same thing applies to the stewards of the "Tamhuy" soup kitchens who have food left over and no poor to whom to distribute it; they can sell it to others, but never to themselves.

In counting out money collected for charity, the Gabbaim should not count the coins two at a time because people might allege that they are taking money. Therefore, the collector must count only one coin at a time.<sup>140</sup> Still, they are implicitly trusted and are not required to render an account of the money entrusted to them.<sup>141</sup>

Besides the collectors for the "Kuppah", there were also collectors for the "Tamhuy" (victuals) who went to collect from house to house. In contradistinction to the "Kuppah", the "Tamhuy" required three collectors to go about to receive the food stuffs, since it had to be distributed as soon as it was received. While the "Kuppah" was distributed only to the poor of the town, the "Tamhuy" served for all comers.<sup>142</sup>

The administrators made investigations, so that their applicants would not be imposters. The rabbis questioned as to whether the applicants for food or clothing should be exempt from examination.<sup>143</sup> R. Huma holds the opinion that one who is in need of clothing should be exempt from an investigation since his ragged appearance reduced him to a state of degradation.<sup>144</sup> However, Rab Judah is inclined to favor the exemption of the applicant for food who is actually suffering from a physical discomfiture.<sup>145</sup> Thus, the

position of the administrators of charity of the Jewish community had to face difficult situations as regards dealing with the poor and constantly had to contend with the censorship of the community leaders.

Sensibilities

*Has there been an error of binding?*

*See note numbers.*

*English*

In administering charity there was always present a deep regard for the sensibility of the poor. The rabbis were constantly cautious of the fact that the poor must in no way be put to shame. We are told of an incident wherein a rabbi admonished a giver of charity with these words: "It would be better that you did not give anything at all, rather than give in such a way as to put the poor man to shame."<sup>160</sup> Everything was done to guard the feelings of the poor and to avoid all possible embarrassments. "Better had a man thrown himself into a fiery furnace than publicly put his neighbor to shame."<sup>161</sup> The giver of charity in secret was extolled as being greater than Moses.<sup>162</sup>

All possible secrecy was maintained in order not to offend the recipients of charity. Rabba would go to the extent of throwing his gift behind him, wrapped in a scarf, in order to make himself unknown to the recipients.<sup>163</sup> If a man refused to accept charity because of hyper-sensitivity, the rabbis sought to spare his feelings by allowing him to take a gift in the form of a loan, which they did not try to collect.<sup>164</sup> We read of a story of a wealthy man who was reduced to poverty, but, because of his former high status, refused to accept charitable aid; yet, R. Jannai induced him to accept a gift in the form of a loan, since he related to him that he had again become wealthy through the great fortune of a dead relative in a far-off land.<sup>165</sup> Thus, the rabbis used

wisdom and discretion to overcome embarrassing the poverty-stricken, and sought to lend money to the poor before they asked for it.

Besides helping the poor to a means of self-support, the rabbis were very conscious of the delicate modesty of womanhood. When an orphan girl and boy seek assistance, the girl is shown the first consideration because the dignity of woman does not permit her to go about begging.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, when the funds were available, the social position of the orphan girl was seriously considered and she was furnished with a dowry and other provisions, in accord with her dignity.<sup>167</sup> Every attempt to administer aid wisely, and with a sense of dignity, was made - in order that the morale of the dependant be lifted.

The rabbis were very considerate of the sensibilities of the poor in seeing that adequate provision was made for each person. The principle was that he who needs bread is granted bread; he who needs dough is given dough; he who is in need of grain is given grain.<sup>168</sup> Every case had to be judged on its merits. Even the former aristocrat had to be given the type <sup>of</sup> food to which he was ~~accustomed~~ accustomed in the past; the delicate individual was treated according to his standard. We have recorded a very beautiful account of this fact in the Talmud: "Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that the people of Upper Galilee bought for a poor member of a good family of Sepphoris a pound of meat daily. According to the various interpretations, it was a pound of fowl's meat, or ordinary meat for a pound of money; or the place was a small village where there

*fastidious*

are no buyers and no consumers; thus, every day a beast had to be spoiled for his sake."<sup>169</sup>

Another story of Mar Ukba illustrates a certain humor in his consideration for the delicate feelings of the poor. Mar Ukba was accustomed to send four hundred zus to a poor person in his neighborhood. However, when he heard from his son that the poor man was of a delicate nature, he doubled his gift.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, the famous story of Hillel, the Elder, who not only provided an indigent with the very best of food and drink, but also gave him a horse to ride and a slave to run before him. Once Hillel found himself in the position where he could find no slave, and he, himself, ran for three miles before the poor man.<sup>171</sup> It happened once that R. Nehemiah failed to meet on the refined needs of the indigent person and because of this the poor man passed away.<sup>172</sup>

*of elegant tastes*

The ideal personalities, especially noted for their consideration of the sensibilities of the poor, were Abraham and Job.<sup>173</sup> Each had the four doors of his home open to the weary travelers, so that, regardless of what direction they might be going, the door of hospitality and kindness was open to them.<sup>174</sup> It is also asserted that Abraham and Job erected public inns on the high roads, offering food and shelter to the poor wayfarer. In Babylon, Huna bar Hanilai followed this same tradition by maintaining an inn, with its four doors open on four sides, for all passers-by; in addition to this, sixty bakers were kept busy day and night supplying bread to all those in need of sustenance.<sup>175</sup> According to an



enactment made by Ezra, the housewife was required to rise early in the morning to bake the bread, so that there was sufficient bread in time for the poor.<sup>176</sup> All of these traditions and practices of the Talmudic period indicate the deep concern the rabbis had for the sensibilities of the poor, and the length to which they went in order to protect their welfare.

Platter a  
classification  
other than  
sensibilities.

### Imposters

The attitude of the rabbis toward imposters was neither strict nor harsh but one of sympathetic understanding and humane liberality. This is especially exemplified by many rabbinic statements and stories in the Talmud. The story is told that R. Hanina had the habit of giving four suz to a poor man of his neighborhood. One day he sent his wife to deliver the money and she discovered that the indigent was discussing with another person whether to use a gold or silver cloth for dinner. In view of this incident, R. Eleazer made the following statement: "Come, let us be grateful to the rogues (imposters) for were it not for them we would have been sinning every day, for it is said in Scripture, 'and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee.'" <sup>177</sup> Thus, one should be charitable to all persons, whether they are in need, or not. The fact that imposters do exist is no reason for one to be less charitable, since, as R. Joshua B. Korha maintained: "Any one who shuts his eye against charity is like one who worships idols." <sup>178</sup> Therefore, the rabbis held a humane point of view in dealing with all indigents; even if some were deceivers, they urged their people to be liberal at all times - rather than to become stingy because of some imposters. If a man accepts charity without needing it, he will eventually be punished in that he will some day actually be in need of charity. <sup>179</sup>

However, even those who gave liberally were very cautious to whom they gave. When R. Abba bound his money in a scarf before

slinging it behind his back, for the benefit of the poor, he would cautiously look to see if there were any imposters around.<sup>180</sup>

R. Abba held the opinion (in explaining the verse in Jeremiah 18:23) that being tricked into giving to the unworthy is actually punishment for sins committed: "Jeremiah said to the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe, even at the time when they conquer their evil inclinations and seek to do charity before Thee, cause them to stumble through men who are not fitting recipients, so that they should receive no reward for assisting them.'<sup>181</sup> But, if a man really wants to give charity, and is of a pure character, God not only provides him with the means to give, but likewise assures him of fitting recipients who will bring him a true and lasting reward.'<sup>182</sup>"

The ultimate solution to the problem of imposters, according to the rabbis, did not lie in the fact of warning the givers, but seeking preventive means of saving the recipients of charity from falling into such a state. Therefore, they urged every manner of labor, even to the point of hiring oneself out to an uncongenial calling, rather than be in need of the help of one's fellow-creatures. Nothing was looked upon as being too low and undignified.<sup>183</sup>

The rabbis taught that one should endeavor to be frugal, even in the observance of holidays and the Sabbath, with this admonition: "Make thy Sabbath meals as plain as on a week-day, lest thou come to depend for support on others."<sup>184</sup> Thus is the retention

correct this

*There is to be conservation of one's resources.*  
of one's savings to be maintained. Similarly, a control was placed upon the limit of being charitable. At Usaha it was ordained that not more than twenty percent of the benefactor's income be given to charity, lest by extravagant giving one might himself become a recipient.<sup>185</sup>

Another preventive means imposed by the rabbis was the duty of every father to teach his son a trade. According to R. Judah - anyone who does not perform this obligation of teaching his son a trade is as if he were instructing his son in burglary.<sup>186</sup> This was the practical maxim of the rabbis concerning teaching a craft: "A man should always teach his son a cleanly craft, and let him pray to Him to whom riches and possessions belong, for there is no craft wherein there is not both poverty and wealth, for neither poverty comes from one's craft, nor riches from one's craft, but all is according to one's merit."<sup>187</sup>

Although Maimonides held the opinion that the highest degree of benevolence was the making of a loan or gift which sought to reconstruct and restore life to its normal pattern of self-support, we do not find support for this idea in the Talmudic sources. The passages of Talmudic literature do speak of loans, business partnerships, and other such means of financial help whose underlying motive seems to be the desire to avoid humiliating the feelings of the indigent.

Priority of Those Receiving Charity

In the system of Jewish charity, redemption of captives merits priority over every other cause, involving even that of the indigent, inasmuch as the captive is potentially exposed to the most dreadful treatment at the hands of his brutal captor.<sup>146</sup> A very interesting discussion concerning this problem is related in the Gemara: "Whence is it inferred that the redeeming of captives is the greatest act of benevolence?" From the Scriptural passage: "Such as are (destined) to death, to death; such as for the sword; to the sword; and such as for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity."<sup>147</sup> Concerning which, R. Johanan said: "Each instance mentioned in this series is more tragic than the one preceding it. As, for instance, to be killed by the sword is severer than to die a natural death, for to be slain by the sword is to become disfigured. Still worse is famine, which is a slow and prolonging form of life, ebbing away, accompanied by continuous and extreme pangs of hunger; while the sword ends life speedily. But the fate of the captive may even be more horrible than the lot of any other victim, because the form faces the potential danger of unimaginable tortures and death. Therefore, no precept equals in significance the one relating the redemption of captives."<sup>148</sup>

Thus, when funds have been collected for the purpose of building a synagogue, they can be used for the cause of redeeming captives.<sup>449</sup> Moreover, though stones and beams have already been prepared for the building of the house of worship, these also can

be sold for the purpose of freeing the captives. However, if the synagogue had already been built, it shall not be sold, but finished; and collections are to be made from the congregation for the work of redemption.<sup>150</sup>

There is also a definite order of priority wherein sex has precedence in receiving charitable aid. Thus, when both men and women are in captivity, the woman must be released first, because potential<sup>151</sup> of the/assailability of her honor. However, when both stand in danger of perdition, the man must be freed before the woman, because he fills more precepts of the Torah than a woman.<sup>152</sup> An orphaned girl is to be furnished with garments prior to an orphaned boy, because her modesty is greater than his.<sup>153</sup> A woman is to be given food sooner than a man since a man can go about and beg, which is beneath the dignity of a woman.<sup>154</sup> Therefore, if an orphan-boy and an orphan-girl apply for grants to be betrothed, the girl shall be helped by the charity-fund before the boy, because the sensitiveness of a woman is greater.<sup>155</sup>

If there be many captives and not enough funds to redeem them all, this order is recommended: a Kohen is preferred to a Levite; a Levite to an Israelite; and an Israelite to a bastard; a bastard to one of uncertain paternity; one of uncertain paternity to a foundling; a foundling to a mamzer; a mamzer to nathin; and a nathin to a proselyte; a proselyte to a freed Canaanite slave. However, this rule applies only when all the applicants are of equal talents; but if the mamzer is a Talmud Hacham and the High

molestation.  
Look this up.

Priest is an am-Haretz, the learned memzer is preferred to the High Priest.<sup>156</sup> A scholar takes precedence over a King of Israel because, if a scholar passes on, there is none to take his place, while any Israelite can replace a King.<sup>157</sup> Thus, we infer that learning determined also the preference in giving relief and that a scholar was sure of receiving preference when it came to giving charitable aid.

So deep was the love of learning and reverence for the scholar that the redemption of one's teacher was preferred, even over one's own father, the reason being that the teacher brings one into the world to come.<sup>158</sup> However, the law stipulates that if the father is learned in Torah, he gets the first consideration.<sup>159</sup>

However, as regards the priority of the ego in matters of charity, we are unable to locate a passage which would definitely substantiate the ego as a candidate for priority in the receiving of alms. *Though there is such priority for the*

*recovery of lost objects: B. m. II, 11.*

Theological Attitude to Charity and Poverty

"What has God been doing since He created the world?" asked a Roman matron. "The Holy One, praised be He," answered R. Jose, "constructs ladders whereby He elevates one person and lowers another, as it is said, 'He humbleth one and He lifteth up another'".<sup>188</sup>

From this Midrash we can gather a very interesting definition of God as the everlasting prime mover of the cosmic wheel of fortune, as the continuous enricher and impoverisher of men.<sup>189</sup> It is God alone who makes men either to ascend the ladder of monetary success or brings him down in utter poverty. Thus, every man who has attained wealth should feel an obligation to the poor, for tomorrow he has no knowledge of whether he, too, will find himself in the same position. The world was looked upon as the rotating wheel of a well; the earthenware vessels attach to it ascend full from below and descend empty from above.<sup>190</sup> Similarly, the rich may not find himself in the same condition tomorrow, and so the poor man may not find himself in the same straits. If a rich man is greedy and begrudges giving of his wealth, he will find himself later in a state of chaos. God offers to man a means of redemption - charity. Through the giving of charity man obtains his redemption. As R. Judah stated: "Great is charity, in that it brings the redemption nearer."<sup>191</sup> Charity is an intermediary which brings Israel closer to God, for through the works of charity and loving kindness, which Israel performs, there is promoted a feeling of peace and understanding between God and Israel.<sup>192</sup>



But Charity is a means of performing God's work here on earth.<sup>193</sup>

When a poor man complains of his lot and is helped by benefactors they are actually helping to make peace between God and the poor.<sup>194</sup>

By caring for them we become God's creditor, since "he that is gracious unto the poor, lendeth unto the Lord."<sup>195</sup>

"If it had not been for a written text," say the rabbis, "the statement dared not have been uttered; if the expression be permitted, it is usual for a borrower to become the servant of the lender."<sup>196</sup>

By the maintenance of the poor, the doer of charity benefits through the recipient. He places himself in a close position to God and puts Him under obligation: "Since this man comes and snatches up the good deed, the Holy One, blessed be He, says: 'I must pay him recompense.'"<sup>197</sup>

The story is told of Benjamin the Righteous, who supported a widow and seven children out of his own pocket, that when the funds of charity had been completely drained the Almighty rewarded him with an extra twenty-two years of life.<sup>198</sup>

So it is with every man who does charity; he receives twenty-four blessings.<sup>199</sup> Likewise, the doer of charity is delivered from trouble and is assured long life and prosperity;<sup>200</sup> he is also saved from death,<sup>201</sup> like the wood-chopper who bestowed bread upon an old person and thereby was saved from certain death when, without knowing it, he chopped the serpent who was lurking nearby, into pieces.

"Give unto Him what is His" says the Mishnah, "for though and what thou art are His, (as it is written in Scripture) for all things come from Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee."<sup>202</sup> Thus, what

*rewrite this sentence*

the poor man receives is not the rich man's contribution, but God's allotment.<sup>203</sup> Charity then becomes a duty rather than an act of kindness, a kind of debtor's payment for what rightly and divinely belongs to him without even the need of offering thanks for what he receives.

In seeking to replace the Temple cult with its intricate system of atonement, the rabbis viewed charity as the true substitute for the ancient sacrifice with its expiatory function.<sup>204</sup> Charity assumed the importance of a sacrament. He who bestows hospitality upon a student of the Torah is as if he had offered the daily burnt offerings.<sup>205</sup> The coin to the needy is the Temple's "Shekel" - the food to the hungry is the Temple's offering.<sup>206</sup> Therefore, every doer of charity is a priest, every table whereat the poor is fed is an altar, and every gift a sacrifice. Charity offers man the means of making atonement for his past sins.<sup>207</sup> It is actually tantamount to performing all the religious Mizwot enjoined in the Torah: "Charity is equivalent to all the other religious precepts combined."<sup>208</sup> Some rabbis went a step further in the theological merits of charity, by saying that philanthropy is worth more than all of the sacrifices.<sup>209</sup>

Charity is a great virtue because the poverty which it relieves is a great evil. "Nothing is harder to bear than poverty; for he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling and upon whom all the curses of Deuteronomy have descended."<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, the rabbis held the

opinion that if all the troubles of the world were on one side, poverty would outweigh all of them.<sup>211</sup> It is told of Job that when he was given a choice between poverty and the other forms of suffering, he selected the latter, because poverty is worse than fifty plagues.<sup>212</sup> He who is obliged to apply for charity to his fellow-man is as if two judgments of fire and water were passed upon him.<sup>213</sup> Not a single day in the life of the poor is good, including even the Sabbaths and festivals.<sup>214</sup>

On the other hand, we discover that poverty, as such, was not regarded as exclusively evil. We find instances, paradoxically enough, where poverty is praised as the very foundation of sympathy and the means of loving kindness.<sup>215</sup> For it is through poverty that the humaneness of man becomes possible and needful. It is the poor that offer the rich an opportunity to do kindness and to gain the world to come.<sup>216</sup>

From this we can see that poverty was not entirely a curse, according to rabbinic thought. Rabbi Akiba held the opinion that the poor exist in order to enable the better circumstanced to escape hell fire through their benevolences.<sup>217</sup>

III.

Comparing the Catholic and Jewish Traditions of Charity

In our study comparing the early Catholic and Jewish traditions of charity of the first three centuries, we have tried to parallel their practices and usages in six respects: (1) financial aid; (2) administrators; (3) sensibilities; (4) imposters; (5) priorities, and (6) theological attitudes. Generally we have noted that charity plays an integral part of each religious tradition. It formed a very vital role in the life of the Church and the Jewish community. It governed their thinking, molded their religious outlook, and formed the center and core of their religious beliefs and doctrines. The practices and institutions of charity in both religions reflect the spirit and structure of its whole. Those things which make the religious traditions what they are, are definitely and explicitly expressed in their different practices and customs. These we shall note in the following order:

1. Financial Aid

For both the Church Fathers and the Rabbis, charity was one of the chief means by which the individual identified himself with his respective religion. Membership in the Church was dependent upon a Christian's contribution of gifts to the life of the Church, so, for the Jewish community, the Jew, likewise, identified himself with the life of the community by contributing to the Kuppah after three months of residence, and after six months to the Clothing Fund. Both had a special charity box, into which contributions

were made. The Kuppah was found in every Jewish community. Since the Christians called their charity box "Corban" (meaning sacrifice), they probably took over this practice from their Jewish brethren. The Church always considered itself the true heirs of the Temple and sought to institute those things in the Church which were formerly part of the ancient Temple. Collections for the "Kuppah" were made once a week, while the collections for the "Corban" were made once a month. But both the Rabbis and the Church Fathers felt themselves bound to the Levitic system of tithing, and both prescribed the normal criterion for giving charity to be ten per cent of one's income. Charity for Judaism and Catholicism becomes a substitute for the ancient system of sacrifices and replaces the Temple offerings.

In the early Church, bringing gifts and oblations to the poor was part of the ritual of the Church. They brought these things in connection with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The only Jewish parallel known is the practice of R. Eleazer, who gave money to the poor before he began his daily prayers. Other than this example, charity was not brought to the synagogue in connection with the ritual, while in the Church it played a central rôle.

Besides the giving of money in the charity box, food played a central part, as regards both the early Church and the Jewish community. According to the Church Fathers, the early Christians brought oblations of food and partook of a common meal in the evening, called the Agape. The Jewish practice was to collect

victuals every day for the Tamhuy (charity bowl) and to distribute them daily to the hungry indigents, who did not partake of a common meal but were each provided with sufficient food for their subsistence. The difference between the two practices was that the Agape was deeply connected with the ritual and liturgy of the Church, while the Tamhuy was concerned with only meeting the practical needs of the poor.

There are direct parallels in the Catholic and Jewish sources which show that converts to the Church and Synagogue made large contributions to the charitable funds. Upon the conversion of Cyprian to Catholicism and King Monobasz to Judaism, both gave almost all of their financial resources to the relief and help of indigents.

The giving to the poor in the form of a loan is a Jewish practice which has no parallel in Catholic sources. On the other hand, the Catholic practice of fasting in order to use such money for the help of the needy, has, as far as we know, no equal in Jewish tradition. However, when a fast did take place in a Jewish community - the poor were not permitted to suffer as a result of such fast.

## 2. Administrators

The Jewish Community had no ecclesiastical head officially in charge of the administration of charity, as in the early Roman Church; the administration of charity in the Church was done according to strict monarchical form. The bishop was the absolute

administrator of charity in his diocese, and the final authority in all matters of administration. His assistant workers were the presbyters, deacons, sub-deacons and deaconesses, all of whom were under his special jurisdiction. In striking contrast to this system, the administration of charity in the Jewish community moved along more democratic lines. First: the Gabbaim were appointed by the community and were comparatively free to do their work without having to pay deference or obedience to any outside authority. Secondly - the collectors were laymen who did not have to be ordained in the office of the clergy, as was so rigidly observed in the Catholic system.

There are, however, many similarities between the Gabbaim and the deacon. Both had the main duties of collecting and distributing charity; both had a certain set of rules and regulations which they were obligated to follow. The rules governing the deacon were very exacting. He had to be the ear and eye of his bishop and he could do nothing of his own volition - without the consent of a higher authority. The deacon was also required to carefully <sup>English</sup> investigate every case. In comparison to this discipline the Gabbai was relatively free. He was not compelled to submit a list of applicants, but he did make an investigation of indigents, to see that there were no imposters present among them. The Gabbai was deeply trusted in his position and no investigation was ever made of his work, nor did he have to render an account of the money which he handled, as did the deacon. However, he had to put up

with many complaints, which tended, at times, to make his position somewhat unpleasant. However, the deacon and deaconesses of the Church had almost the same problem to contend with. There were seven deacons for every Church while the Jewish community had two collectors and three distributors.

There was never a special office of charity administrator in the Church, as in Jewish life, outside of the official hierarchy, who dogmatically governed all the administration of the Church. The Church also had a special order of deaconesses who dispensed charity to the indigent women, while in contrast to the Jewish milieu, no female almoners are to be found.

### 3. Sensibilities

In dealing with the sensibilities of the poor, the Church Fathers and the Rabbis were deeply attentive to the delicate feelings of their recipients. Both sought means to avoid any kind of embarrassment which would afflict the sensitive nature of the poor. The Jewish practice was that of secret giving, while that of the Catholics was to develop a kind of giving which would bring honor and esteem to the poor and make them feel a sense of importance. The rabbis and the bishops sought to obtain that kind of charity which would adequately and sufficiently meet the wants of the needy.

The bishops tried to secure husbands for the widows and parents for the orphans so that they would no longer have to be dependent upon the Church's fund for further aid, and the same is



true of the Jewish community. Likewise, the rabbis encouraged a gift in the form of a loan, which was never collected, seeking to lend money to the indigent even before he requested it.

*connection?*

#### 4. Imposters.

The Rabbis and the Church Fathers held opposite opinions concerning imposters. For the Church, nothing was so abhorrent as an imposter. He was to be utterly condemned on the Day of Judgment and receive his due punishment. The rabbis, on the contrary, were very liberal and various stories in the Talmud and Midrash indicate their humaneness and sense of humor as regards deceivers. Being inveigled into giving to imposters was a kind of punishment for sins, and thus only if the benefactor is of a pure spirit can he be assured that he is contributing to worthy recipients.

Although the Rabbis and Church Fathers held opposite views in their attitude toward imposters, they were one in seeking to remedy the situation. Both advocated a program of work and labor and had only contempt for the idler. Although the Church made provisions for those who were unable to work, nevertheless, she was very strict in her discipline to see that every one worked and had a trade. Idleness was never tolerated and if there was no work to be found on the outside, the Church itself provided work for the indigents. The very same spirit can be found in the Talmud. The rabbinic ideal man was the one who earned his own livelihood by the sweat of his labor. We do not find the same stress in the literature

of the Church Fathers. There is not the same practical approach and effective sort of giving as we find in rabbinic literature. The Church, on the other hand, sought to give alms<sup>as</sup> a temporary kind of help rather than the permanent form found in the rabbinic ideal. Also, the Church Fathers laid a greater stress upon theology and it is quite evident that there is a wide gap between the theological dogma and the actual practice. At times there is no relationship between the theology of charity and its practice.

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#### 5. Priorities

In the church as well as in the Jewish community there were definite gradations of giving charity, and certain preferences were maintained. According to the Church Fathers the widows and orphans needed priority over any other class of indigents; In the system of Jewish charity it was the redemption of captives; but women were nearly always given special consideration, and because of their modesty, they were the first to receive aid. Redemption of captives also had a place in Catholic charity, but it does not receive the same emphasis as we find in rabbinic literature.

However, in the Catholic system the learned and the scholarly person received no special priority such as we find in Jewish literature. Learning always had a special prerogative in the Jewish community, which we never find in the Church. In the Catholic system it was the hierarchy, the ordained, which received all the honor and consideration, and the learned received no special at-

tention. The contrary was true in the Jewish community, since a learned mamzer had a preference over a High Priest who was an Am-Haretz.

#### 6. Theological Attitudes

As the God of the Fathers was the ideal for the Jewish concept, of charity, so was the Christ for the Catholic conception. In both systems charity was the means of knowing and performing God's will. For the Catholic, charity was a practical expression of the Christian's love of his Savior; for the Jew, the doing of charity was becoming God's helper. Eternal salvation and a place in the heavenly kingdom is promised to Jew and Catholic who perform deeds of loving kindness. According to both religious traditions, God gives heavenly and earthly rewards to those who give alms.

But more than this, charity actually becomes a sacrament in both religious systems. For the Catholic, alms giving is a formal way to receive the grace of Christ; for the Jew it is as if he had observed all the precepts of the Torah. For both, alms giving brings atonement and deliverance from death and sin.

Poverty in the Catholic system is a supreme virtue, while, according to the rabbis, it is a supreme will. However, the rabbis are not all consistent regarding this point, since there are some who extol poverty almost to the same degree as do the Catholics. There are instances in rabbinic literature where poverty becomes a way for man to reach God through his help of the poor. This

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almost identical thought is found in the Church Fathers; poverty is the means of coming nearer unto the Christ.

# NOTES

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7. ibid
8. Acts 2:46 - A.C. Vol. I, p. 485
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18. To His Wife Vol. IV. p. 48
19. Apostolic Constitutions, IV-8. Vol. VII, p.435
20. Epistle 49 - Vol. V., p.355-6
21. Life and Passion of Cyprian 2.-Vol.V, p.268
22. Apostolical Constitutions, Bk 5, Vol. VII, p. 437
23. Similitude - Bk III - V - 3 - Vol. II, p. 34
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29. Ibid
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32. Ibid. Bk. 0-29. Vol. VII. p. 471

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37. "
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38. Epistle of Polycarp, C.6. Vol. I, p.34
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41. Ibid. Vol.VII. III-19-p.432  
II-32-p.412
42. " Vol.VII. II - 31 - p.411
43. " VOL. VII. II-44-p.416
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49. Apostolic Constitutions. Bk. 3,3,4 Vol. VII, p.426-9
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67. "
68. "

IMPOSTERS

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71. Ibid
72. Ibid, Bk. 3, c.19, P. 432
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*Mr. Hov?*

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*Is this complete?*

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