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Poverty and Philanthropy in Ancient Judea, Greece and Rome

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“There Shall Be No Poor Among You” – Charity in the Old Testament

One of the most influential roots of the modern welfare model comes from the Old Testament, and especially from the *Torah*. It has been through the Israel that ancient Semitic ideals, presented above, have filtered to Europe when Christianity adopted them as part of its faith. In this study, it is not so important whether events and practices mentioned in the Bible really existed in reality or not¹. The important point is that the Bible has been a source of inspiration through the European history². Moreover, Ten Commandments form more or less, the basis of Western ethics and legislation.

Context of the emergence of the *Torah* in its present form is in the Exile in Babylon from 587 to 515 BC. The fall of Jerusalem and captivity in Babylon was a shock to Judean people. Their belief that Jerusalem temple is the throne of God, which He would defend, was in ruins. In this situation, Jewish religion anchored on tradition and the *Torah* is a product of this process. Thus, the *Torah* can be seen as a part of the revitalisation of national myth and identity³. Instead of kingship, national boundaries, temple and other normal elements of national identity, Jews combined the Law of Moses as a basis of their identity: from that on they were the people of the Law.

The Old Testament is in a way a dialogue between ideal situation and people's continuous failure to live according to this ideal. An elementary part of this dialogue is the story how a nomadic tribe became, first, an agricultural confederation and, second, a centrally led local superpower. However, even when the twin states, Judah and Israel, became highly urbanised and commercialised, the

¹ In fact, many stories in the Bible have a form of a fairytale, like the Fall story where a serpent speaks. However, this is typical language in fairytales: animals, plants and toys speak. The 'truth' is, then, not in the occurrence of the event but in the teaching. Most people would agree with Winnie the Pooh who has frequently found out that eating too much honey makes your stomach sick.

² Significance of the Bible occurs especially in the time of Reformation, in the time of great revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries, and in the brake of 19th and 20th century when Social Gospel movement draw its inspiration especially from the Old Testament.

³ This does not mean that the *Torah* has been written in the time of Exile. Its material is older but the editing was done in this period.

national identity saw them basically as tribes of herdsmen⁴. In this tradition, the most pious king of Israel, David was also originally a shepherd.

Context

A Short History of Ancient Israel

The history of Israel before the Exile in a nutshell is as follows: The forefather of the tribe, Abraham departs from Mesopotamia and settles into Canaan land. After two generations, his descendants move to the delta area of Egypt where they multiply and become land slaves of Pharaoh. Moses frees them and the group of twelve tribes wander 40 years in desert before entering into the Canaan. Some generations pass in a loose league of tribes but the invasion of Philistines force them to reorganise their league into a kingdom of Israel. After three kings, the kingdom splits into two: northern Israel and southern Judah. Israel was occupied by Assyria in 721 BC and its (middle and upper class) population were carried to Exile where they disappeared. The remaining lower class assimilated with transferred population from other parts of Assyrian kingdom and they together formed people of Samaria. Judah became a vassal of Assyria and survived until Babylon occupied Jerusalem in 587 BC.

The important period in this history was the transformation from tribe society to the kingdom.

Hanson lists the far-reaching consequences of this resolution:

1. The land, formerly apportioned to the clans in perpetuity as inviolable economic trust, became a commodity that could be bought, sold, or even confiscated by the royal house;
2. the populace became a pool for labor corvees and armies;
3. the economy was controlled by an elaborate bureaucracy dependent on whatever taxation was required for court luxuries, building projects, and military operations;
4. the internationalization of trade and the monopolization of farming and industry by an emerging nobility forced commoners into a feudal system as serfs who often amassed huge loans to finance seed and equipment and through foreclosure ended up in bonded slavery.⁵

Like in Babylon, religion was mobilised to sacralise the kingship. And, like in Babylon, the noble class expanded its power and the ideals of equality started to erode. As a consequence of capitalisation, commercialisation and secularisation, land property was centralised to few landlords and this caused a migration to towns. In this process, the new commercial class often ignored their responsibilities to the poor.

⁴ This emphasis can be seen in the origin stories of Patriarchs (Gen 12-50), in Exodus story (Ex 13-20, 24, 32ff.; Num 1f, 10-14, 16f., 20-27, 31, 33; Deut 1-3, 29-34) and numerous metaphors of herds and pasture (best known of them is Ps 23).

⁵ Hanson 1994, 22.

In the time of Jerobeam II (king of Israel 786-746⁶ BC), Jewish prophets started to proclaim their social critique which lasted to the time after the Exile. The proclamation of the prophets centred against four themes: First, they accused that the elite was hypocrite and claimed that no ritual would help if there were no justice and honesty. Second, prophets criticised the unjust land ownership. Third, along with the centralisation of land emerged the corruption of court-system. Especially Amos was strict in his message: “I will not turn away their punishment; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek (Amos 2:6f).” Fourth, prophets spoke for the poor and oppressed and against the rich and those in power. They required justice in everyday life.⁷

Old Testament Religion

The concept of justice – or righteousness (*sedek* or *tsedakah*) in Biblical terms – was a central concept in ancient Israel. Elizabeth R. Achtemeier explains the meaning of *zedakah* as follows:

Righteousness as it is understood in the OT is a thoroughly Hebraic concept, foreign to the Western mind and at variance with the common understanding of the term... righteousness is in the OT the fulfilment of the demands of a relationship, whether that relationship be with men or with God... Generally, the righteous man in Israel was the man who preserved the peace and wholeness of the community. because it was he who fulfilled the demands of communal living... the OT sets over against [the righteous]...the evildoer, the wicked...because he destroys the community itself by failing to fulfil the demands of community relationships.⁸

The whole concept should be understood in the context of a nomadic lifestyle. The main concern was always the survival of the tribe and the family. A righteous act was an act that strengthened unity and helped the tribe to survive.

Another central concept, *hesedh*, loyalty, describes how this righteousness was implemented in practice. Edwin M. Good argues that

In the OT, human society is principally a covenantal society, not only a society which lives under the divine covenant but also a society structured within itself by a multiplicity of covenants, each of which demands the same responsibility from the participants as does the national covenant with Yahweh. Indeed, the covenant between two men can be referred to as producing the [*hesedh YHWH*], the loyalty of Yahweh.⁹

These two concepts were the basis of social life of ancient Israel. Keeping the covenant (with God and neighbour) righteous in Israel was required by God. This made also social care as a religious act

⁶ In the OT research, there is a slight 1-2 year variation in both dates of beginning and end ranging from 786 to 744.

⁷ Sollamo 1991, 18-23.

⁸ Achtemeier 1986, 80f. J. C. Trever (1980, 87), in turn, notes that “In Jewish writings, generally speaking, the word ‘righteousness’ (*zedakah*) came to mean ‘almsgiving’ (so in Aramaic, Syriac, and the Koran).”

⁹ Good 1980, 166.

¹⁰. The basic tone in the Mosaic legislation was that “there shall be no poor among you (Deut 15:4).”

Along righteousness and loyalty, there were three other themes: the idea of a man as an image of God, the divine law that required equal obedience from a king (Deut 17:14-20)¹¹ that it required from a peasant, and hostility to any central government¹².

One does often recognise that even the idea of equality has its roots in the Bible. In the first story of the Genesis, it is told that “God created man in his own image (Gen 1:27). As an image of God, all human beings are equal in front of Him although this idea was never fully implemented in Israel.

On social egalitarianism Paul Hanson argues that

theological monotheism and social egalitarianism set in motion a major revision in social welfare. Injustice and oppression were not treated as threats to the smooth functioning of a hierarchically ordered state but as an attack on the essence of who this people was, on the *nephesh*, that is, their intrinsic being.¹³

Thus, the point of view is not the order of cosmos and the society, like in Babylon and Egypt, but the welfare of an individual. In the *Torah* there is a continuous tendency to underline that God is not neutral - he is always on the side of the ‘strangers, fatherless, and widows’¹⁴.

In addition, the early (idealised) Israeli society was seen as primarily a rural society in which the land was a property of tribes (although it, in principle, belonged to God) which had given it to families. If the land was sold, the idea was that returned back to family in the year of Jubilee¹⁵. In the Jubilee year also all debts should have been cancelled and those, who had sold themselves as slaves¹⁶, became free. It is not known whether this practice was ever implemented. If it was, it would have laid a firm basis for a stable peasantry. Anyway, this idea has been implemented at least in 10th century Byzantium when Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944 AD) ordered to discharge

¹⁰ Loewenberg 1994, 195ff; 1995, 308f. In the *Torah* there is a continuous tendency to underline that God is not neutral - he is always on the side of the ‘strangers, fatherless, and widows’. The other emphasis in the *Torah* was that Israel was in debt to God because of the redemption from Egypt and *tzedakah* was the way God wanted the repayment: “Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”(Deut 10:19)

¹¹ This required obedience for the divine law is one theme through the OT. It was this tradition that gave legitimacy for the prophets from Nathan on when they criticised their Kings.

¹² This hostility is seen especially in 1 Sam 8, where Samuel resists the idea of king.

¹³ Hanson 1994, 19.

¹⁴ Another emphasis in the *Torah* was that Israel was in debt to God because of the redemption from Egypt and *tzedakah* was the way God wanted the repayment: “Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”(Deut 10:19)

¹⁵ On Jubilee legislation, see Lev 25; Deut 15:1-18.

¹⁶ Actually, there was a prohibition to treat him as a slave but as a servant. There was a general rule that an Israelite in Israel could not be a slave but a servant (Lev 25:39-55 and Deut 15:16f.). This did not mean that there were not slaves in Israel but they were from other nations.

This model is evidently behind St. Paul’s advice to Filemon when he send Philemon’s escaped slave Onesimus back to his master: not to treat him as a slave but as a brother (Philem. 16-20). Thus, the Israeli practice was adopted by the ‘New Israel’, Christian Church.

all the debts of the citizens¹⁷. Also the modern 2000 movement for cancellation for debts of third world countries draws its inspiration from this legislation.

Israeli Philanthropy

Social Care

Face-to-face help was the basic model of the social care in this rural society. Since it was part of the religion, it was internalised and social control guarded it. Charity begins with the sense of *tzedakah*, righteousness and *ohab*, which has almost the same meanings as the English word love¹⁸. Gottfried Quell argues that “Love is regarded as the inalienable constituent of humanity, and for this reason it is declared to be the norm of social intercourse and set under the impress and protection of the theonomic law¹⁹.” Thus, *tzedakah* and *hesedh* require an emotional bond between the one who helps and the one who is helped. Apostle Paul expressed the Jewish thinking quite well when he said “And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (1 Cor 13:3).”

Aid for orphans, widows and strangers in a rural context was organised in three ways. First, there was always the duty of charity which included not only direct alms but also a duty to give loans (Deut 15:8) and a prohibition to take an interest on loans (Lev 25:36f.; Deut 15:3) as well. Second, in the *Torah*, there were several rules that a certain part of the harvest belonged to these people who did not have a family to protect their living. This included, for example, that part which was left from the main harvest and the crop of the Sabbath year. (Ex 23:11; Lev 19:9f.; Ruth 2). Third, every third year tithes were meant to be given to local Levites, strangers, orphans and widows. (Deut 14:28f.; 26:12f.). Thus, in this rural society, the social care was organised as face-to-face help. Since it was part of the religion, it was internalised and social control guarded it. Thus, there was no need for social service bureaucracy.

Along with social care, the Mosaic Law had also other elements that have left their footprints in European civilisation and welfare thinking. The most important is the practice of *Sabbath*. It might be the first legislation for the work time. During the *Sabbath*, it was forbidden to work. There were also rules for the treatment of servants and rights of women²⁰.

¹⁷ Kazhdan 1994, 76.

¹⁸ Quell & Stauffer 1983, 21.

¹⁹ Quell & Stauffer 1983, 25.

²⁰ Israelite women, had for example right to inherit the land if a family did not have a son (Num 27). In similar way, an

Communal services emerged, according to Frank M. Loewenberg, during the time of the Second Temple²¹ and philanthropy transformed from individuals, via voluntary organisations, to state. He points out that

At first, the norm called for individual concern for the unfortunate. In time, in most cultures, voluntary organizations were given (or taken upon themselves) the responsibility for providing services that gave concrete expression to these sentiments. At a still later date, communal agencies began to supplement or replace these voluntary organizations.²²

An early attempt was the system of a secret chamber. Pious people left gifts for the poor in a certain room and later the poor ones came to take what they needed. There is no information on how effective this was. The first widely used form was the communal soup kitchen, *tamhu'i*, which delivered bread to the poor²³. The second was the communal charity fund, *kuppah*, which gave weekly grants to the poor. Along with these there were relief projects such as public works. However, it should be noted that the government had no responsibility for the welfare of the poor people - it was the responsibility of the community. In the fund-raising the *tithing* became the main source of revenues for the communal funds although there were campaigns for fund-raising as well.²⁴

Loewenberg distinguishes the concept of *securing funds* from concept of *delivering services*. He identifies two historical trends that were seen when the society changed. Along with urbanisation and increase of the amount of the poor there was a shift from individual, voluntary provision to taxation²⁵. Parallel with this the services transformed from first individual activity to voluntary (often religious) organisations and then to government services. However, Loewenberg points out that these developments were neither linear nor spiral but cumulative. In other words, the old forms existed along with the new ones.²⁶

unmarried woman and a widow had right to do legal actions. Thus, a woman was not just an object but, for some degree, an actor as well. However, this did not concern girls living at home and married women who's father or husband had a *veto* for these actions. (Num 30:4-16).

²¹ Second Temple refers to that temple which was built after the captivity of Babylon in c.a. 515 BC. The period ended when Romans occupied the country in 63 BC.

²² Loewenberg 1994, 193f.

²³ The amount per person was almost the same as what an unskilled labourer could buy with the salary for his six member family (Loewenberg 1995, 316).

²⁴ Loewenberg 1994, 200-203; 1995, 314-318. Although Loewenberg regards Matt 6:1-2 as a misunderstanding, I think that in that passage Jesus was opposing such philanthropy where the names of the givers were published. Anyway, it shows that the concept of modern sponsorship is not anything new but can be found in ancient Judaism.

²⁵ An interesting detail is that taxation (according to Josephus) seemed to start among the Jewish urban sects (Loewenberg 1995, 315).

²⁶ Loewenberg 1994, 199f; 1995, 308.

Health Care

In the case of medicine, R. K. Harrison argues that the significant difference from both Babylon and Egypt was that there was almost no magic in medical treatments although doctors were priests or prophets like in those countries²⁷. This might have been due to Israeli belief that God was the supreme healer. Anyway, magic in any form was strictly forbidden (Ex 22:17; Lev 20:27). The few verses that mention doctors, give hint that they used mainly herbal treatments. The only surgical operation mentioned in the OT is circumcision. Thus, in this, they followed the old Mesopotamian tradition. Another group of medical workers mentioned are the midwives (Gen 38:28; Ex 1:15, 17). The legacy of Israel in the field of medical care, however, is not in medicines or surgeries, but in preventive methods. The Mosaic Law is full of different orders of purity and these can be seen as sanitary orders²⁸. Along with hygiene, they also anticipated mother-leave when a woman was not allowed to work after birth. When a woman had given a birth to a son she was to remain at home for 40 days and after a girl 73 days (Lev 12:2-5). When both offices of doctors and sanitary duties belonged to priests, they can be regarded as part of the public sector.

Legacy of the Old Testament

Legacy of the Old Testament for the research of welfare state and third sector is manifold. We have to remember that the Jewish kingdom was independent only during a short period between 161-63 BC. In spite of this, local towns and villages had certain autonomy in dealing their internal affairs. Thus, until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD after the Jewish revolt the services can be seen organised in public sector. After that, when Jews were not a majority in most of towns where they resided, their institutions grew on third sector basis. Similar developments can be seen among many peoples with a strong ethnic identity but lacking an own state²⁹.

Second, there are two models of philanthropy, namely individual charity and religious institutional activity. The transformation from face-to-face philanthropy occurred along with massive urbanisation and, thus, there is support for the urbanisation argument in the modernisation thesis of

²⁷ Harrison 1980, 331f.

²⁸ For example, all things should be cleaned either with fire (Num 31:22f) or mixture of running water and ash (Num 19:17); touching a dead would cause a seven days quarantine (Num 19:11, 14, 16); all vessels that have no covering bound upon must be regarded as contaminated (Num 19: 15); etc.

²⁹ Even if the political organisations are excluded (PLO, IRA, Sinn Fein and others) there are a great multitude of cultural organisations for the Palestinians, Kurds, Sami, etc. Additionally, immigrants form often their own institutions. The link between minorities and the amount of third sector organisations is focused more deeply in the section of economical theories and international comparative theories.

the welfare state origin³⁰. The society had to react to the flood of people to towns with new arrangements. On the other hand, urbanisation alone does not explain the emergence of communal welfare activities. There must be a special ethos that demanded people to respond to the needs of the poor. Moreover, it might have been, not the urban way of living, but the process of change from rural to urban that required new models. Thus, it was the change where old models did not any more work because town residents did not have similar aid mechanisms as the rural residents had.

Third, it seems that philanthropic organisations in ancient Israel were complementary to individual charity. Philanthropy and poor relief were seen as responsibilities of the Temple and synagogues. They were not exactly state responsibilities except when poverty threatened the stability of the state itself. Neither were they activities of the market. The market came into the picture only when there was a need for fund raising campaigns. Even in that case the responsibility of the services was not on market but on religious institutions.

Fourth, delivering welfare does not automatically require massive bureaucracy to reach its goals. Local face-to-face solutions can give adequate protection for the poor. However, this requires internalisation of the charity principles or mechanisms that ensure that people obey the law.

Without enough social pressure or state coercive power, there is always a danger for too many free riders.

Fifth, Old Testament view on poor relief seems to focus on those groups that did not have security based on the extended family. Among them, there were those who were sacrally landless as Levites, and those who were involuntarily poor, like orphans, strangers and widows. In the intertestament period, this latter group was added with unemployed.

Sixth lesson is that behind philanthropy there often lies an individual religious commitment. Charity begins many times from an individual actor who faces the need and helps because of an inner command that is based on the religion.

One final note on the ancient Israel system must be made: we cannot be sure whether all these rules were followed and to what extend. Anyway, from the point of view of modern welfare models, this is a secondary question. Already in the New Testament time, Judaism had turned to be a legalistic religion where obeying the law was a first priority. And as I said in the beginning of this section, the important point is how it was read during the Reformation and later revivals.

³⁰ Proponents of this tradition have been Gaston Rimlinger (1971), Harold Wilensky (1975), and Fred Pampel and John Williamson (1989).

“ What friends have is common property³¹” – Greco-Roman Charity

Context

Greek town-states were relatively small. They had circa 10,000-20,000 citizens³² Athens being a significant exception. Just before Peloponnesian wars, it had 40,000 citizens and a total population of 300,000.³³ As we can see, the percentage of citizens was just a bit more than 10 percent. The relatively small size of the Greek states had an impact on their development. Elias Bickerman and Morton Smith have argued that the military development, the emergence of hoplites (heavy armed infantry) led to abolishment of kingship since no king had enough resources to afford a hoplite force of his own³⁴. Their argument can be extended to status of different classes in towns as well. Especially in Athens, the growing importance of the navy increased the political power of the lower class citizens³⁵.

In archaic Greece, the elite, the *aristoi*, ran the town administration. The unity of this group was maintained by different collective activities of which political was only one. Among others, there were collective hunting, sacrifice, banquet and funerals. To take part in these activities was to be a citizen and they formed the *koinonia* (unity) of the town. When the new social groups started to claim for citizenry, the old model had to be remodelled.³⁶

In Sparta, the traditional oligarchic system remained almost the whole period of its existence. In this system, there was a clear distinction between the hoplites, *perioikoi* (free inhabitants of occupied surrounding Dorian states) and helots (Dorian aboriginals), who were mainly land-slaves and citizens of occupied areas became automatically helots. Below these groups, there were slaves. At the end of the seventh century BC, after the defeat in Argos and rebellion of Messenians, the Lycurgian reform made Sparta practically a military camp: needs of warfare became the constitutional element in Spartan life. This had profound influence on Spartan life. In principle all hoplites were equal and this was emphasised in the system of *syssition*, daily simple meal of the hoplites and its compulsory military education. This education mostly focused on physical and

³¹ Aristotle NE VIII:9

³² Herodotus estimates that in 480 BC. Sparta had 8000 citizens but that at the end of the century it had shrunk to less than half of this amount (Andrewes 1977, 102).

³³ Harris 2001, 51.

³⁴ Elias Bickerman & Morton Smith 1976, 91f.

³⁵ Harris 2001, 79f.

military skills. Other features of Spartan 'equality' were the idea of equal property for hoplites, neglect of money and disregard of trade. Along with these, women enjoyed relative freedom and rights. They had, for example right to own property and they got physical education.³⁷

In Athens, the development went to another direction. The society was divided into great landowners (*pentakosiomedimnai*) and other knights who could afford themselves a cavalry equipment³⁸, *zeugitai* who served as hoplites, *thetes* (lower class which served as servants in the army and as rowers in the navy), *metoikos* (free non-citizens) and slaves. The town administration was ruled by the *ekklesia* ('out-called' – an assembly of citizens in the *agora*) and administrated by the council of five hundred and strategies. A special feature was that the council of five hundred was yearly elected from hoplites and *thetes* matching the basic qualities by a lot and no one could serve there more than two terms. The time-consuming service was called *leiturgia* (compulsory service for the town). It was traditionally not a paid job and required only from the first group. Perikles, however, started a practice to pay to free Athenians a daily allowance for the days they used for public assemblies and council and, thus, gave the *thetes* a possibility to participate in the political life.³⁹

Greco-Roman Philanthropy

Like in ancient Israel, in Greece the philanthropy was based on the idea of community. This communal union, *koinonia*, was expressed in several levels. In the level of the whole Greece, it was question of similar religious league that Israel had before the time of kings. This union was based on common language, religion and Olympic games⁴⁰. On town level, this unity was manifested through various collective activities. Finally, there were several small groups and associations where citizens learned civil virtues.⁴¹ However, contrary to old Israeli idea of purity of nomadic life, the Greek saw a human as a political creature⁴² – i.e. an inhabitant of a *polis*. Thus, the Greek thinking saw urban life from positive perspective when for Israelis it was a source of evil.

³⁶ Schmitt-Pantel 1991, 200ff.

³⁷ Andrewes 1977, 59f. 63f., 125, 184ff.; Harris 2001, 59; Schmitt-Pantel 1991, 202; Thierfelder 1967, 667f., 675f.; Hands 1968, 116.

³⁸ The difference with two first groups was that the yearly crop of the former should be at least 500 *medimnos* (1 *medimnos* = 52½ liters) while the rank of the latter required only 300-500 *medimnos*. (Thierfelder 1967, 681)

³⁹ Harris 2001, 54f, 78ff.; Andrewes 1977, 186ff.; Thierfelder 1967, 680f, 687f, 721; Hands 1968, 116.

⁴⁰ Thierfelder 1967, 645f.

⁴¹ Schmitt-Pantel 1991.

⁴² Aristotle NE IX:9

The Greek city-state was basically an extended and permanent club or community of free citizens. *Koinonia politikhe* means basically ‘fate unity of the town’⁴³. Thus, the concept of state differs radically also from that of ancient Mesopotamia or Egypt, where the state was a reflection of divine order.

Philanthropy in ancient Greece and Rome has been studied by A. R. Hands. He has applied Marcel Mauss’ theory of gifts⁴⁴ to Antique city-states and Rome⁴⁵. According to Hands, Antique towns were based on exchange of gifts⁴⁶. A gift was an offer of friendship and it was not easily rejected since number of friends guaranteed security and financial stability. And “friendship seems too to hold states together⁴⁷”, as Aristotle described it. To reject a gift or failure to give a return was interpreted as a declaration of enmity. The system also classified ranks among citizens according to the value of gifts. In the case of those who could not pay back, there emerged a status of dependency until the gift or favour was repaid⁴⁸. Actually, according to Hands, money was not the most important currency in Ancient Greece and Rome, but it was only a tool to gain honour and friendships, which must be seen in the context of *koinonia politikhe*.⁴⁹

When the ancient town state was seen as some kind of extended club, as Hands sees them, it was natural that costs and duties were seen as issues that should be taken care together. Town administration was one part of this mutual gift giving system among equals. Wealthy persons donated gifts to town purposes (ranging from building town walls to maintaining gymnasiums and from supporting gladiator shows to distribution of corn and oil), took care of the administration - and received honour. However, both in Greece and Rome, there emerged a time when the economic burden grew over to the value of honour and this changed the public service from *philos* to *leiturgia* (compulsory obligation – *noblesse oblige*)⁵⁰. The growing resistance to accept offices, in turn, led to sharing of responsibilities and ranking of honour. One significant epithesis was the title *aionos*, which made some occupation and the title hereditary. In Rome this led in late imperial period to

⁴³ See chapter 3.1.1.

⁴⁴ Mauss 1967.

⁴⁵ The major problem of the application of Mauss’ theory is that it gives too stable and homogeneous view of Ancient Greece. It does not problematise the basic difference between Athens and Sparta and the class-struggle between different citizen groups. Moreover, there is a lack of historical sensitivity: trends from different periods are sometimes confused. A reader cannot avoid feeling that historical data has been forced into one and only one theoretical frame.

⁴⁶ In Mauss’ theory and Hands’ application, ‘gift’ must be seen in the widest meaning of the word, including all friendly acts and gestures. Perhaps one should speak more of reciprocal interaction than gift exchanging.

⁴⁷ Aristotle NE, VIII:1.

⁴⁸ Hands (1968, 28) notes that, for example, latin word *damnatus* refers to this kind of depended condition. Thus, the English word ‘to be damned’ actually means ‘to lose one’s liberty.’

⁴⁹ Hands 1968, 26-48.

⁵⁰ At this point, Hands, does not recognise the time aspect: *leiturgia* was first required only from the great landlords

system where these families could not move from town (as well as peasants could not move from their farms) but were bound to take care of their obligatory administrative duties, thus, leading to medieval feudalism.⁵¹

According to Hands, philanthropy in both Greece and Rome⁵² was also an act of exchange in friendships where wealthier gave their services and poor people repaid it with honour and political support. The concept that originally meant ‘gods’ love of mankind’ became, as Demetrios J.

Constantelos, says

man’s love for man or mankind in general. But it also meant politeness or courtesy, kindness and generosity, or all kinds of act which befits a civilized and cultured being. Further a citizen’s love toward his equals and a king’s benevolence to his subjects, society’s concern for the orphans and the aged, the sick and strangers, were succinctly described as philanthropia. In addition, a man’s pity for and aid to those in any kind of tribulation, and his anguished concern for those in captivity, were expressions of philanthropia.⁵³

Thus, philanthropy in Greece was seen as divine virtue⁵⁴. In his *Laws*, Plato defined the basis of his ideal state: “But if states are to be named after their rulers, the true state ought to be called by the name of the God who rules over wise men⁵⁵.” In the context of gifts, Hands argues that the king (and later in Rome, the emperor), as the highest among equals had a task to show his friendship towards all other citizens of the town⁵⁶. Thus, he had to be the most generous in his gifts. The reciprocal act of his subjects was loyalty and honour. The extreme honour that was offered was the recognition of the act as divine and philanthropist’s elevation into a god. Augustus was a good example of this.⁵⁷

As one can guess, the institution of gifts included delicate and nuanced habits. The most important rule was that it was not according to good manners from the giver to remind a recipient of the gift. The principle is stated in an Attic comedy: “If you receive a favour, keep it in mind, if you confer a

and it was only Perikles’ time when it was extended to lower citizens to whom it created an economic burden.

⁵¹ Hands 1968, 36ff., 55; Bosl 1968, 597-608.

⁵² In Rome, the patron-client relationship was also based on this idea of mutual exchange.

⁵³ Constantelos 1991, 3f.

⁵⁴ There is a certain apologia among scholars of ancient Greek and Israel philanthropy. In occasions where these two are compared, Loewenberg (1995, 308) downplays the Greek philanthropy and claims that it did not even have a word for alms. Constantelos (1991, 9), in turn, claims that Greek hospitality was more universal than that of Jews. Even the same texts are interpreted in opposite ways. The report of Thucydides on deadly plague of Athens in 431 BC is interpreted as lack of philanthropy in Stark (1996, 84ff.) and as an evidence of charity in Constantelos (1991, 6f.). However, the time aspect must be taken into discussion, since, like in Israel, catastrophes and social need created reforms in the third century Greek towns (Constantelos 1991, 8). Hand’s (1968) argument is that Greek philanthropy was different from Jewish one: it mainly focused on the entire group of citizens while Jewish aid concentrated on those in need.

⁵⁵ Plato *Laws*, IV.

⁵⁶ “The friendship between a king and his subjects depends on an excess of benefits conferred; for he confers benefits on his subjects if being a good man he cares for them with a view to their well-being, as a shepherd does for his sheep (whence Homer called Agamemnon ‘shepherd of the peoples’).” (Aristotle *NE* VIII, 11)

⁵⁷ Hands 1968, 35f, 54ff.

favour, forget it⁵⁸.” This aspect is significant because it gives an impression that some services were given for free although, in fact, some kind of repayment was expected.

In giving, there was one special feature that is worth to mention since it left its footprint both to Mediaeval and British post-Reformation philanthropy. Hands argues that there was a certain hierarchy in supportive gift giving. The basic principle required that only the ‘worthy’ (*idonei*) should be supported. This thinking was evident in distinction between a poor and a beggar. A poor was not actually a poor but a person who had to work for his living. It was commonly seen as a synonym for Greek *demos* and Latin *populus*. In other words, a poor was the one who was not member of the elite. A beggar (Gr. *aergos*, Lat. *iners*), was someone who did not have anything. Basic meaning of both words is revealing: they suppose, “not the lack of opportunity, but the lack of will to work⁵⁹.” Consequently, contrary to Jewish practice, the attitude towards beggars was pitiless and harsh. Hands also note that Homer saw beggars as *pandemios*, plague.⁶⁰

The ‘worthy’ ones were those in the same class and those who supported it somehow. Aristotle said it as follows: “one ought to love best one's best friend, and man's best friend is one who wishes well to the object of his wish for his sake, even if no one is to know of it⁶¹.” The idea between Aristotle’s thinking is that the more intimacy there is in the relation, the more it requires. The hierarchy expands from one’s family, friends, comrades in the battle and travel, fellow citizens, etc.⁶² Hands argues that it is from this perspective, that one must interpret Homer’s dictum that “strangers and beggars are under the protection of Zeus.” He argues that the kindness that Odysseus received, was because of his status as an impoverished noble, not because of general pity towards the poor. The Greek society was a kind of mutual insurance company of the elite that helped each other when the fortune threw them into troubles.⁶³

In the case of ‘worthy’ poor citizens, both the Greek town and Rome had, according to Hands, land distributing as the primary method of poor relief. The land was mostly given in colonies where emigrating citizens got equal share of land. In Rome, according to Hands, there was “little need for state charity until Cato’s last years, since until that time there was plenty of public land available.”⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Hands (1968, 30) refers to Edmonds (1961, 749).

⁵⁹ Hands 1968, 65. Additionally, Hands (1968, 64) notes that “at Romethe poor are described as *leves*, *inquinati*, *improbi*, *scelerati*, etc., terms implying dishonesty.” Thus, in Rome, both poor and beggars were seen as a threat to middle class and elite life.

⁶⁰ Hands 1968. 62-65, 74.

⁶¹ Aristotle NE IX:8.

⁶² Aristotle NE, VIII:9.

⁶³ Hands 1968, 74, 78f.

⁶⁴ Hands 1968, 68.

Social Care

Public gifts, in Greece and Rome, Hands argues, were given on citizenship basis. However, this had some significant effects on poor relief as well. The most important aspects were seen in the fields of nutrition and sanitary. In the field of nutrition, the starting point was that Greek towns normally did not have any reserves. In those situations, the corn rationing system of *sitometria*. This system ensured a fixed amount of corn with a fixed low price (or even free corn) to all without danger of inflationary prices. Along with this, there were funds for permanent support of population. *Theorikon*⁶⁵, theatre-money, emerged in fourth century BC Athens when Eubulus and the 'peace party', wanted to discourage war adventures that had potential advantages to lower class but disastrous to town economy. It was cheaper to pay to the unemployed than to build war ships. In Rome, the system of fixed corn price emerged in 123 BC and free distribution of corn to citizens in 58 BC. In his reign, Caesar reduced the number of those permitted to receive the corn. However, there were not any means tests but the distribution was limited to citizens who constituted only 1/5 of town population. Augustus, in turn, introduced a system of *tesserae*, tokens or coupons, with which citizens could buy food at first but which later became mere ration-cards to show the right for the amount. Finally, Trajan extended the group for children as well.⁶⁶

Education

Education in ancient Greece and Rome was not seen as a public service (except in Sparta, where it was related to military service). In Sparta, as we have seen, the basic education was a state affair and it revolved around military skills. It was given to all male citizens from age of six to twenty. The earlier ideal of citizen-soldier with skills of warfare, music and dance, gave way to focus only on military education. The education was organised in different age levels and it was given in 'boarding schools' where boys were separated from their parents.⁶⁷ In Athens, this military aspect was reduced but the basic teaching remained on the basis of physical education in *gymnasion*⁶⁸. Hands tells that, while *gymnasion* as semi-public institutions got donations from wealthy citizens, most of them went to free oil needed in athletics⁶⁹. Along with

⁶⁵ In the case of *diobelía*, it is not sure whether this was the same as *theorikon*, juryman's pay or some kind of poor relief. (Hands 1968, 99f.)

⁶⁶ Hands 1968, 98-114.

⁶⁷ Marrou & Boven 1994, 7.

⁶⁸ Gymnasion education included riding on horseback, chariot riding, foot racing, the long jump, throwing the discus and javelin, wrestling, boxing and the pankration (Marrou 1984, 187).

⁶⁹ Hands 1968, 118.

physical education, boys got training from private teachers, *grammatistes*, who charged such a small sum from parents that practically all male citizens were able to calculate, read and write⁷⁰. Secondary education was given by *grammatikos* who taught poets, playwrights and historians. Along with this, boys continued in *gymnasion*. The third subject that boys learned was given by *kitharistes*, who taught (choral) singing, dancing and playing lyre. In the first century BC Dionysios Trax wrote the first manual for schools which included the seven liberal arts: the three grammatical (grammar, rhetoric and dialect) and four mathematical (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and harmonics). The importance of these is that they remained as the basis of European education almost to our times.⁷¹

Higher education was based on the system of *ephebia*. At first it was a compulsory two-year national service in the age of 18-20 and it focused mostly on physical and military education. In this time, the state provided a subsidy of 40 talents to pupils to enable even *thetes* to participate. Later, in the oligarchic period, the number of *ephebes* was reduced, the compulsory character was lifted and the education was cut to one year⁷². When the state withdrew its support, *ephebia*'s income turned to wealthy citizens. From this on, schools were either on private or nonprofit basis.

'University education' was given in religious brotherhoods. Medicine was taught in the altar of Asklepios. The medical skill was a mixture of miraculous healing⁷³ and empirical knowledge. Hippocrates was from the temple of Asklepios in Kos.

For Romans, education was a private matter and it was a custom until the first century A.D that parents educated their children. After that, nobles hired/bought private teachers or sent them to Athenian type schools.

In the case of sanitary, the emphasis on public baths had a significant impact on personal hygiene – and prevention of diseases, which were fatal in overcrowded ancient towns – as well as in army⁷⁴. Thus, free entrance to public baths was a relatively cheap way to avoid diseases.⁷⁵

Along with these basic institutions, there were *xenones* (public guest-chambers) for strangers and needy foreigners where they received shelter and food⁷⁶. These were organised by *xenoi* (guest-friend brotherhoods). For permanent poor residents, temples had *katagogia* (hospices and/or

⁷⁰ Harris 2001, 62; Hands 1968, 120.

⁷¹ Marrou & Bowen 1994, 7, 9; Marrou, 1984, 186ff., 190ff. 200; Harris 2001, 62.

⁷² An interesting parallel to modern West is that, first, an ultra-conservative government of aristocrats (411-403 BC) cut the costs of public education. Then, when that government has been overthrown, a democratic government continues cuttings.

⁷³ Harris (2001, 107) tells that one of the most popular ways was to sleep in the halls of the temple and wait for vision.

⁷⁴ Rodney Stark (1996, 77) notes that in the third century Alexandria, a disease killed two thirds of the town population.

⁷⁵ Hands 1968, 141-144.

clinics). As general in the ancient world, health care was attached to the temples because of the belief that demons lie behind all sicknesses and doctors regarded themselves as worshippers of the god of medicine. Thus, along with medical care, it was understood that the deity could force the evil spirit out and heal the sick⁷⁷. It is questionable if there was universal free medical treatment in these temples⁷⁸ or were the *katagogia* only places where all could *wait* for the miracle.⁷⁹

The Legacy of Greece to Social Welfare

Compared to Israel, Greece had not similar emphasis on poor relief that focuses especially on the needs of the poor. Hands argues that “we may safely generalize that the poorest class of society was never singled out for special favourable treatment⁸⁰.” If we compare Greek ethics to the Old Testament ethics, there are some basic differences. When the poor in Israel were the pious ones, in Greece this role was reserved for the wealthy and powerful. In Greece and Rome, the very poor did not receive similar pity that the *Tora* required from Israelites. On the contrary, they were often classified as criminals that were a threat to the aristocracy and middle class.

If Israel presented the model of poor relief, the Greek-Roman society practised the model of equal distribution of welfare services to all citizens. However, one must remember that ‘citizens’ constituted only 10-20 percent of population.

⁷⁶ A stranger was under the protection of Zeus.

⁷⁷ The idea of evil spirits may have its roots in two different sets of sicknesses. First, it may be supposed that the empirical findings had shown that some invisible beings cause sicknesses. When ancient people did not know bacteria and viruses, they spoke about evil spirits. Second, evil spirits may refer to mental diseases or addictions. Even today we speak about Devil of the spirits.

⁷⁸ An example is a maxim in Hippocrate’s Maxims where he requires that a doctor must not regard a payment as a primary reason for curing a patient. Hands (1968, 131) notes that the stress should be on the word ‘primary’ which meant the honour of the doctor of his skill. In the case of public doctors paid by the town, Hands (1968, 136f.) notes that the payment from the town was an ensurance that there existed a doctor in a town. In Kos and Athens (where there is no lack of them) the status of the public doctor meant the a public qualification. The status did not meant that he could not receive return gifts for his services. It was again, question of giving and receiving gifts.

⁷⁹ Hands 1968, 131-140; Constantelos 1991, 5f. In general, Constantelos paints more positive view of the ancient Greece than Hands, who has quite skeptical attitude towards the ancient poor relief.

⁸⁰ Hands 1968, 89.

“Greatest is the Love” – Early Christian Charity

“When the time was ripe” – Context of the Emerging Christianity

Christianity emerged in Jewish culture but was soon transported to Europe. This cross-cultural leap influenced Christianity in many ways. Perhaps the two most important aspects of this cultural interaction were the translation of terminology and acceptance of habits of the Greek culture. In the previous case, the Church had to find equivalencies to Hebrew terms and here the classical understanding of *philanthropia* was combined with the Hebrew concept of *tsedakah*. However, the major concept in the New Testament⁸¹ is *agape* (love or charity), which was a translation of the Hebrew *ohev*⁸². The centrality of the concept is expressed with two maxims: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31)” and “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Cor 13:13)”.

However, there were surely a great variety among congregations how they implemented this love. In Judea, Christians mainly followed Jewish practices and Christianity was long seen only as one string inside Judaism. The major break in tradition occurred when Christianity moved from Palestine to Greek and Rome. In this transformation, the law was re-interpreted and Christianity adopted many elements from Greece and Rome⁸³.

“Enemies of the Humankind” – Emerging Christian Religion

The emphasis on charity is presented especially in the Gospel of Luke, which can also be called the gospel of the poor. Nobody emphasises so much option for the poor than Luke. It is in Luke where we find Jesus proclaiming the purpose of his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to

⁸¹ The New Testament is a product of the Christian church ca. 60-100 AD. Although the Gospels give information of the life of Jesus, they were not merely intended to be biographies of him. Instead they were textbooks of the Christian belief and life. Thus, they do not tell so much about Jesus but what the Early church valued in his example and teachings. This can be seen in the structure of so called ‘Synoptic Gospels’, Mark, Matthew and Luke. Their outline is (except childhood stories) made according one year period that follows the early liturgical progression.

Additionally, some 1/3 of them concentrates on Passover events.

⁸² Quell & Stauffer 1983, 21.

⁸³ The major change was that the Mosaic law lost its significance in the sense it has in Jewish community. Not the law, but its ethical principles became the major elements of the Christian life. Especially the Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, proclaimed salvation without law. In this sense, Christianity can be seen as a counter movement to

preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised (Luke 4:18).” Thus, Luke presents here the social program of Jesus and Christian church: aiding the poor, freeing the imprisoned, healing the sick and empowering the oppressed.

It is in Luke where we find stories of Good Samaritan (10:25-37), rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), sharing of property in Jerusalem congregation⁸⁴ (Acts 2:44f.; 4:32). However, also other gospels had similar tunes. Perhaps one of the most influential has been the parable of the Last Judgement.

The core message of this pericope reads as follows:

Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me food: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came to me.... Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.(Matt 25:34ff., 40)

While these texts show that Christianity adopted much of the ethos of Judaism, there is one significant difference. While the *Tora* restricted the covenant between God and Israel and between different Israeli groups, Christianity expanded it to the whole mankind. The Christian Church expanded its charity actions beyond its own group as can be seen in Jesus’ words “love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you (Luke 6:27).” This aid to non-Christians was done in so large measure that emperor Julian (361-363 AD) wrote to Arsacius, a Greek religion High Priest of Galatia, that

Why then do we ... not observe how the kindness of Christians to strangers, their care for the burial of their dead, and the sobriety of their lifestyle has done the most to advance their cause? ...For it is disgraceful when no Jew is a beggar and the impious Galileans support our poor in addition to their own; everyone is able to see that our coreligionists are in want of aid from us.⁸⁵

Julian claimed that Christians did this for egoistic reasons. In fact, philanthropy helped to expand Christianity. Rodney Stark has argued that especially during diseases mortality among Christians was lower than among pagan population. According to Stark, this was due to the basic care that Christians directed to each other. Adequate nutrition and basic nursing reduced mortality in a

Phariseanism, which aimed to the literal obedience for the Mosaic law.

⁸⁴ Uro (2002, 23) and Sakari Häkkinen (2002, 47) regard this story as idealised and exaggerated views from half a century later perspective. However, it is possible that the ‘poor of Jerusalem’ in Pauline letters would refer to a group within the congregation which had adopted poverty model from Qumran Essenes. In this case, there would have been a group that submitted their property to the community when joining it (on this theme, see Keck 1965; 1966; Mealand 1975a,b; 1980; Häkkinen 1999). This might then have been a model for the later Christian tradition of donating one’s property to the monastery when joining it. Another possible explanation is that early Christians waited Jesus’ return in a near future and thus, property would not be needed. A third explanation is that it was just a temporary period during the Judean famine in AD 46-48, when it was question of the survival of all.

⁸⁵ Julian the Apostate, c.360.

degree that seemed as a miracle among other segments of population. Moreover, as it has always been, philanthropy was also a means of a mission strategy.⁸⁶

The Christian church adopted these early Biblical models but they were interpreted differently according to local cultures. Moreover, after few centuries Europe turned to a period of disorder when the epoch of invasions started. During this period, both the Church and the European culture changed.

Legacy of the Antique

Legacy of the antique has influenced later eras in two ways. First, during the archaic period, the urbanisation forced to develop models for handling the problem of poverty and economic cycles. These models of the early times became models for the future. These models were routinised and they were taken for granted. Thus, as we will see, the Medieval charity and welfare was an application of the previous models and there is a clear continuum in practices. However, this routinisation is not the only legacy of the antique. Another way of Antique's influence is through holy and respected texts. The European civilisation is a combination of Semitic religion, Greek philosophy and Roman law. All these were in a literate form and they were studied through centuries. As we will see, these texts influenced directly to individual thinkers of the latter centuries and millennia. Perhaps most important for the welfare and charity models are the utilisation of Aristotle by Thomas Aquinas and Reformers' interpretations of the Bible. However, one should not forget that Plato, Aristotle, Bible and other Ancient text were the basis of the upper class education up to 20th century.

From ancient Mesopotamia, we have inherited the idea of protection the needs of widows, orphans and other most needy people. This has been transmitted to us by the Old Testament legislation. The difference to Mesopotamia was that when the motivation behind the thinking of the land of Two rivers was a divine harmony that the king must guard, in Israel the focus was on individual people as images of God.

It is also from Mesopotamia that the institutional setting of welfare and philanthropy comes from. Poor relief is basically a duty of religious organisations. Additionally, as in ancient Israel, it has also been seen as an individual act of piety.

The legacy of Greece is the idea of democracy. Contrary to the Semitic world, Greeks emphasised the mutuality of citizens. All citizens had to take part in the welfare of the city and all citizens

⁸⁶ Stark 1996, 73-77.

shared the benefits alike. The difference to Israel was that there was almost no focus on the welfare of the lowest ranks of the society, slaves, beggars, orphans, etc. The unity of the Greek town was the unity of the elite and middle class, not the unity of the entire population.

The institutional legacy of Greece and Rome lies in the fact that – along private benefactors - the state was the major source of the welfare of citizens. It was a duty of the king and the emperor to distribute gifts to his subjects.

Christianity was based on the Semitic model. Its major change to the ethics of Israel was in its claim of universality. The ‘neighbour’ was not any more the other countryman but ‘there was no Greek nor Jew, no slave nor free or no man nor woman but everyone were one in Christ.’ Another radical aspect of early Christianity was the call for individual action. Thus, the charity was again a question of individual piety.

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