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# The Long-Forgotten Relations Between Social Practice and Religion

## Senaizmirstās attiecības starp sociālo praksi un reliģiju

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The concept of caritative social work was born in religious setting long before cultic aspects separated from social dimension in any religion. Charity was known in antiquity, particularly in the Old Testament yet with the birth of the Christian Church they acquired strong social expression. The article describes history of the concept until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when Cappadocian Fathers summarized the known initiatives and accepted secular medicine in the Church *milieu*. Traditional groups of unprotected people (widows, orphans, elderly, strangers, prisoners) were cared for. Religious dimension in social work of the day gave access to spiritual care for clients besides financial support of the needy. Care for the sick was taken up during the reform of Basil the Great when he called hermits from their desert solitude to serve people in his new city Basilea, and that ministry was taken upon as religious duty – for the benefit of salvation. Sharing, mutual support, inclusion was seen as restoration of the original creation of humankind.

**Key words:** Charity, service, inclusion, solidarity, support, sharing, early Christianity, the Cappadocian fathers.

### Introduction

The concept of Caritative social work stems from the essence of Christianity. Whatever was the official policy of the Church as political institution, its ministry always has been that of practical of theology in both diagnosing and curing personal and societal problems. It should be noted that purely religious concept of Christianity reduced to its cult is what we oppose. Indeed, caritative social work benefits from its focus on social work as a means of salvation.

In the context of traditional education of social workers it may seem a new approach. However, the well-renowned philosopher N. Wolterstorff from Yale University, USA, called dating of origins of social work from early 19<sup>th</sup> century “a coarse assault of the secular social work, which is irresponsible and morally condemnable in academic sense” (Wolterstorff, 2006, 139). He calls for honest and full-scaled reconstruction of the history of social welfare that would remind social workers: “They join an old and rich tradition, which has justice as its goal. The tradition that informs, encourages and inspires us.”

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Both Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches have issued several strategic documents that testify to the importance of multi-targeted Christian social ministry (*О перспективах развития церковного социального служения*). Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Cyril right after his introduction in 2008 agreed that “the Church knows how to speak the language of the rich, but now the time has come to speak the language of the poor” (Тантлевский, 2000, 41). Pope Pius XII, addressing the conference of St Vincent of Paul in 1952, emphasized that the Church always has been involved in charity (Pie XII, 1963, 210). It was taken up by the current Pope Franciscus. Theologians have mentioned caritative ministry as an argument in their theological discussions. G. Baluffi argues that caritative ministry is what makes Roman Catholic Church “Divine” (Baluffi, 1885, 4). And, of course, the importance of caritative ministry has been noted by early Communist thinkers, when the caritative spirit of the Early Church was labeled as “protosocialism” by F. Engels. The list could be continued but all opinions have something in common: caritative ministry reveals the essence of the Church from within and for the rest of the world.

Professional caritative social work has been approved as analogue to the traditional social work by Latvian legislation in 2007 (*see* The Law of Social Services and Social Assistance (31.10.2002.), with corresponding Amendments of Law on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007 and May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009). However, legislation marks only the beginning, and recognition of its roots and practical implementation is carried out at Latvian Christian academy since 1993 (Bachelor and Master study programs in Caritative Social Work; *see* online: <http://www.kra.lv/>).

## 1. Initiatives in the Old Testament

British historian E. Hands has written a volume about charity in antiquity (Hands, 1968). T. Frank in his book “Aspects of Social Behavior in Ancient Rome” stated: “Only because Christianity discovered the excellence of altruistic instinct of religion, we shouldn’t say that it wasn’t there before. It was, indeed, but in different forms” (Frank, 1932, 197). We are particularly interested in the concept found in the mother religion of Christianity, Old Testament.

Overall impression is that the Hebrew charity was better organized than that of gentiles, Greeks and Romans. It is of key importance that care for the neighbor was religiously motivated. The main prerequisite for this was theocracy – meaning “society ruled by God”, where God gives His unchangeable Law to follow. Charity was essential part of that system. Consequently, religious practice in the Old Testament Israel was never one-sidedly individualistic, caring only for one’s personal salvation – rather, it was social. The Law of God held together those three – created world, human society, and the community (nation).

“Multiple forms of social assistance and charity are the key traits characterizing elevated human values of the Books of Law,” says I. Tantlevsky (Тантлевский, 2000, 121). The Law of Moses established several charity initiatives in the Sabbatical year and in the year of Jubilees when “the earth takes rest and keeps the Sabbath for The Lord”: it was forbidden to reap harvest, and fruits borne by the earth were put aside for a servant, day laborer and a stranger. The nature itself knows the need, and fruits of the sixth year will provide for three years ahead. When fields were harvested, gleanings were left for strangers, widows and orphans (traditional groups of unprotected) (Deut 14: 28-29 and 26:12). Moneylenders were not permitted to profit from their

Jewish brethren or strangers in their land (Lev 19: 9-10; Deut 24: 19-21). Also it was prescribed that all Jewish slaves had to be released in the year of Jubilees. Attitude towards widows and orphans marked a cornerstone for the Biblical concept of justice, elevated as a Divine principle (e.g., Is 1:17ff.). The meek ones turn to God and He answers them, since the heart of God is shined through by love and care: “They will cry upon Me and I will listen”. Later it was shouted out loud in almost all pretensions of Biblical prophets against arbitrariness of rulers.

The concept of social inclusion was rudimentary known at that time. Widows and orphans as a special group to care for was mentioned in all ancient texts of the Near East, however, care for strangers was something unique. They were treated as people whom their fate had dealt harsh. There were times when Israel was stranger and suffered in Egypt, and this experience stirred empathy.

### *Hesed*

The consolidating power of God was described as *hesed* in Hebrew, usually translated as “charity” or “grace” (Десницкий, 2011). However, “charity” focuses more on emotional attitude, empathy and emotional thrill. Well, there is some truth in this interpretation, and charity usually looks like that. You walk the street, see some beggar sitting there and give him few coins... And this is where it stops – few minutes later you don’t remember the beggar any more, since there is nothing in between you both.

*Hesed* sketches ancient principles of mutuality and solidarity. Above all, God has *hesed* abundantly:

1. *Mutual relationships*. It’s not just few coins thrown and forgotten. That is something what one man gives to another since both are related. And it’s not because they are close relatives or friends. Prophet Zeccharia stresses that intimacy is true foundation of grace: “Let everyone shows his love and grace to his brother” (Zech 7:9).
2. The giver and the receiver are *unequal*. What is the promise God gives to a man who keeps His commandments? – “I, the Lord, do grace until the thousandth generation to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Ex 20:6), i.e., the reward exceeds obedience. Also inequality is shown in the history of Israel: indeed, stubbornness of Israel, her turning away from God could cause anger and wrath, whereas The Lord decides not to leave His nation, consequently, the attitude can be only that of mercy, forgiveness, and undeserved love. This is why in Septuagint (transl. in Greek, ca. 260 BC) the word *eleos* was chosen for *hesed*, whereas Latin Vulgata (4<sup>th</sup> cent. AD) had *miser cordia*. *Hesed* is shown not because a person deserves pity, or because someone’s got lots of money and has nothing to spend it on (ironically exactly how charity often works nowadays), but right because there is love of God that stays close to the suffering person, be it a child, a needy one, relative or “brother”.
3. It is not only cordiality or condition of the soul, but *activity*. This is how God works through history: Psalm 136 reminds what God has done good to His nation: led out from slavery in Egypt, guided through desert, drowned Egyptian chariots in the sea etc. It is not enough to confess that “His mercy stays forever”, you should know how and when, and, indeed, through whom it was shown.

4. This activity of God is *voluntary* and free. It is not prescribed by some law as tithing and sacrifices during the Old Testament period, and it is not set by tradition. Even less it should be done as financial calculation for the following benefit when “you will do to me as I did it to you before”.
5. God’s activity *induces response*, which, however, is not a duty. *Hesed* is not paid back as money for goods in a market. It is motivated by self-sacrifice, commitment and service with joy (Ps 138: 2b, 7-8). (However, traditional translations of the term don’t hint at mutuality: “Translating the word as ‘grace’ or ‘love’, the reversivity is silenced.”) (Glueck, 1967, 86).

### ***Baruk and ashrei***

Furthermore, God’s blessings in the Old Testament are essentially described by use of two Hebrew words that prepare the way for Christian understanding of the concept. Unfortunately in European languages they are no different, since both *baruk* and *ashrei* are related simply as “blessings”. But differences were known and respectively applied in the Old Testament times.

1. *Ashrei*, lit. “made rich”, consequently, “blessings which stay with the man”, giving joy, satisfaction and pleasing. Also first Christians felt themselves as filled with Holy Spirit that gave them “joy” and “delight in Jesus Christ” (e.g., Epistle to Philipians invites the reader to “rejoice in the Lord”).
2. *Baruk* lit. “to get down on my knees (for respect)”, in wider sense “to satisfy needs of other person”. The blessing received as *baruk* is to be shared; consequently God turns people into couriers of His *hesed* (Gen 12: 1-3: “[Because of your obedience] I will make you a big nation, I will bless your name and make it big, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you, and through you all nations of the world will be blessed.” Basically what Abraham receives must be spread further rather than kept for himself. The first Church accepted the concept by calling Abraham “the father of faith” – its increase in numbers was explained by common share of everything they had.

However, the Hebrew charity provision was rather nationally limited and it didn’t care for the needy of other nations, especially at the end of the Old Testament period when the chosen nation moved away from the letter and spirit of the Moses Law (as testified by prophets). Prophet Jeremiah spoke about the need for the “new covenant” when “I will put my law in their minds and write it in their hearts”, rather than on paper (Jer 31: 31-33). Instructions, even the best-meant and written, won’t turn into reality. There was no mechanism how to structure the potential of *hesed* institutionally.

## **2. Social ministry in the Early Church**

Caritative ministry of the early Church had tremendous impact on both its inner formation and its acceptance in society. Julian the Apostate noted in the beginning of the 4th century: “Godless Galileans [i.e., Christians] turned to philanthropy and by its practice they balanced all their bad deeds with diligence.” (Wright, 1913, 337). Their “bad deeds” were refusal to worship gods of the Empire, i.e., “atheism”. Their religion was that of inclusion of the poor etc. right from the beginning, since Julian praised

Christians for their charity: “And these Galileans begin with the so-called love feast or hospitality, or service at the table (..) by this they take many into atheism” (Wright, 1913, 338-339). Indeed, charity even over-shadowed Christian cultic belonging, and many were attracted by it. E. Gibbon concludes that caritative ministry is one of the five elements which essentially worked for fast spread of the Christian Church (Gibbon, 1910, 462-467), but E. Troeltsch argues that the Church was the first who originated programs of social support (Troeltsch, 1956, 134).

Three key arguments for caritative ministry as a means to win respectable position for the Church in society are the following: 1) Lots of financial resources were put into caritative ministry. Little by little enormous help collected and shared by the Church brought it to the foreground of the Roman economical life, 2) Caritative ministry worked for improvement of the organization of Christian congregations, 3) Administration of caritative ministry gave varied opportunities to mature in economic issues. Several emperors praised bishops' skills to administer finances (Case, 1933, 77-93).

History of the early Church is divided in several periods, comprising events from Resurrection of Christ, outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Ascension to persecutions until the Edict of Milan in 313 when Christians in the Roman Empire received equal rights with other citizens. Crystallization of theological doctrine during this period is not our topic. However, the concept of charity was deeply rooted in the basic concept of Christian faith, incarnation of Jesus Christ as the highest act of the Divine love to humanity. On the other hand, Christian faith grew out from basic principles of its mother religion, Biblical Judaism.

## 2.1. Apostolic age (35-120 AD)

Noble principles of love found in the Old Testament were applied to all nations in the Church (Col 3: 11). It made Christians essentially different from nationally limited Judaism of the day. The spirit of community and mutual support promoted help even to those who didn't belong to the community of believers (Rom 12: 14-20; Gal 6:10).

Brotherly love supports equality between all members of the community and a slave is equal to his brethren among landlords and owners (Philem. 16). Indeed, Christians differed by their understanding of work: it was normal state of a man rather than shame (2 Thes. 3:10). Also poverty was treated differently – the rich can be trapped in by temptations because “love of things is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6: 9, 10). Material gifts offered by rich were rewarded by intercessory prayers by receivers (2 Cor. 8:13, 14; 9: 11-12). Even the poor can donate his coin (2 Cor. 8:11, 12). They who are rich give out in the spirit of Christ, because Christ became poor for our sake (2 Cor. 8: 9). The gift should come from the giver's heart “for God loves cheerful giver” (*hesed*) (2 Cor. 9:7) – so said the first Christians.

The truth was made real in life of the first Christian community in Jerusalem, where “all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. There were no needy persons among them” (James 1:27; Acts 4:32, 34). On the other hand, although “religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27), the congregation didn't help those who were supported by relatives (1 Tim. 5:8, 16).

### ***Agape meal***

*Agape* is the “love meal” of ancient Christians that was originally connected with Eucharist (Holy Communion) (1 Cor. 11:17, 34; Judas 1:2; Ep. of Ignatius of Antioch to Smyrnaeans; 2 Pet. 2:13; Hippolytus of Rome; Tertullian). It brought together all members of the congregation: everyone brought some food, and eating was organized in some public room. The Roman historian Pliny the Younger (1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD) in his letter to Trajan says that Christians “in the appointed day early in the morning, after they addressed Christ as their God” use to “gather in order to enjoy common and blameless meal”. The new order at the table reflected changed social orders: in Christian workshops their owners treated servants (or slaves) as brethren rather than “animals”, and workers did their job without pressure, not tied by a rope or chain and whip. Christian masters set their slaves free from work on Sunday and Church holy days, urged to aspire for the highest honor in congregation.

However, in some cases *agape* turned into mere eating and drinking, or rich members of the congregation used it for boast with their wealth. When the rich preferred to eat from their own savings before the needy arrived, Paul rebuked them (1 Cor. 11: 18-22).

Essential connection between *agape* and Eucharist, i.e., social and cultic dimension of brotherhood, practically disappeared in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century when Eucharist was celebrated in the morning while fasting and the *agape* was held in the evening. Even more *agape* separated from the Eucharist after the Council in Laodicea (363-364) when the use of the Church building for *agape* meals was forbidden. Soon after *agape* was forgotten, although it was somewhat kept in transformed way, for example, in the Eastern Orthodox Church as *prospora* to those who didn't participate in Eucharist.

### ***Support executed by the “seven”***

With the increase of the Church members, apostles (i.e., preachers, prayer leaders) said their further involvement in practical charity will be a barrier to their spiritual mission. For this purpose seven deacons were appointed who served Christians at the table and took good care for “widows” (i.e., people without means of existence and dependent on other's mercy). By this event, described in Acts 6: 1-6, caritative mission *per se* was set aside as a self-contained task of the Church.

Administrative structure was a new model without precedent. T. Lindsay compares the “seven” with elders (Acts 11: 30) (Lindsay, 1903, 116). It seems that elders and “the seven” were active in organizing both regular support system and short-time support. In no way it is possible to split between the two in practice.

### ***Support to the needy in Jerusalem famine***

In every congregation there were savings kept to support the needy in emergency case. The famine in Jerusalem promoted development of inter-church relations for charity. Its congregation received help from brethren in Antioch and other places in “pagan” lands (Acts 11: 27-30; Gal. 2:10). Apostle Paul invited Christians to donate for help. However, not all congregations responded positively. Corinthians waited for arrival of Paul himself as a deliverer. Receivers could be divided in two groups: first, receivers of the emergency help and, second, gradually also receivers of regular help (poor members of the congregation, i.e., widows and orphans and whom the congregation supported on daily basis).

Polycarp in his epistle to Philippians urges *presbiteros* to visit the sick, to treat the needy, widows and orphans with care, to provide them with everything they need (The Epistle of Polycarp). Traits of character linked to *caritas* are – don't be greedy, feel compassion to the needy. Importance of alms is mentioned in "Didache", Ch. 4: "You know the One, Who rewards with good. Therefore give and don't doubt, and don't grumble doing this. Don't turn away from the needy! Take delight in everything you have with your brethren and never say: this is mine! Because, if you have a share in imperishable, even more so in perishable" (Didache, 4: 7-8). Probably alms were gathered by private individuals and there was no organized system yet. It seems that in "Didache" there is a spirit of free giving without a special Church organization. Caritative help came from what was left after "prophets" have received their lot.

Finally, in "The Shepherd of Hermas" all three Church offices are mentioned: deacon, presbyter and bishop. Presbyters are they who "are responsible for the Church"; deacon is mentioned as an administrator of caritative ministry; whereas "stones with speckles are these deacons who oversee their duties carelessly and steal food from widows and orphans, and make their own profit from their ministry which has been entrusted to them for overseeing." Bishops "relate friendly to workers of the Church" (who arrive from other countries) and show them hospitality. Also Ignatius in his "Letter to Polycarp" urges "bishop" Polycarp to take care for widows and protect them.

It seems that charity during the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century was entrusted to some specific group within the Church hierarchy. However, there wasn't specific standard set in the Church. Support to non-Christians in the apostolic age is not mentioned. However, staff members of the congregation are found in the list, and widows, orphans, and helpless were equal to them. Many of the Church staff lived from their own labor, or some of them could be rather wealthy, as bishops in the "Shepherd of Hermas".

## 2.2. The age of persecutions (120-313 AD)

Charity during period of persecutions outworked previous achievements in both resources and volume. Excellent skills of Church officials to administrate charity works and variety of sources of means have been noted (Ulhorn, 1883, 206).

Gifts to the poor (usually natural products) were put on the Altar where they were taken from and distributed by a bishop; it was part of the Liturgy. The list of donors was read publicly. Another source of gifts was money from the poor's chest; it was given secretly. Large sums came from wealthy members and those who gave up their property upon baptism. Giving was based on deeper understanding that man is only a distributor of goods which belong to their ultimate owner (*baruk*). Consequently, the needy accepted those gifts as coming from the hand of the Lord Himself. Quite important, it didn't traumatize self-esteem of the needy. Also with their intercessory prayers they gracefully carried out their caritative duty (*hesed*). This practice had twofold consequences: first, the Church didn't feel obliged to announce formal document regarding responsibility to give alms; second, no donations were accepted from well-known sinners, usurers, greedy and brothel keepers. What happened to the congregation was its separation from the world, and ethical principles within the Church were crystallized.

Mutual support helped the Church to survive severe persecutions. Believers were excluded from daily businesses in market, public meetings, in theaters and forums, and fired from better jobs. Persecutions were received with non-resistance. An important

part of this was the concept of self-sacrifice and sufferings which belong to Christian life along with prayers, fasting and chastity. Many paid for their faith by torturous death. Gift giving, and giving abundantly, became a routine part of every member of the congregation, since own needs were fully satisfied.

Receivers of those gifts were clergy, also widows and orphans, elderly, sick, persecuted, prisoners and strangers. “Apostolic Constitution” (early 4<sup>th</sup> cent.) mentions the assigned amount: widows got one part, deacon double and bishop fourth-fold. Although clergy was listed among the first receivers, the Church continued to support only those who couldn’t provide for themselves. Needs of widows and orphans were respected as second to them. Church support was given also to abandoned pagan children. Christian prisoners were visited and comforted, especially they who were condemned to inhuman labor in mines. Help sometimes arrived from far-away distances, even hundreds of miles. Tertullian wrote: “These gifts, as it were, are considered a deposit of piety. Because they are not taken out and used for feasts... but to support and bury people, to support boys and girls left without parents or money, to support elderly who are unable walk, as well as survivors of shipwreck and workers in mines or exiles to islands – as long as they will suffer need because they belong to fellowship of God, and they are children fed by their faith” (Tertullian, Apology). In some cases also non-Christians were supported, as testified by Emperor Julian the Apostate in 4<sup>th</sup> century (Tertullian, Apology). It left strong impact on whole society.

Several theories prevail regarding impact of the caritative ministry on the Church organization. Noteworthy, the most important Church office, that of the bishop, derives its name from the secular finance/ administrative bureaucracy of the time (*epimeletes* or *episcopos*). Right because caritative ministry engaged financial and administrative duties, it was natural for Christians to call an overseer *episkopos*, since he was responsible for charity. On the other hand, G. Ulhorn argues that charity was overseen by presbyters assisted by deacons. His opinion is that bishops took over the office later when monarchic episcopate was created (Ulhorn, 1883, 77). Justin Martyr in his “Apology” says that offerings were collected and distributed by “Chairman of Eucharist” (*proestoos*) (Justin Martyr, 6: 42). Also other sources point to the bishop as responsible for caritative ministry (Lindsay, 1903, 202). Bishop Cyprian from Carthage says that he has special task to oversee caritative ministry, but deacons and presbyters are his assistants (Cyprian). Even after being expelled from Carthage he was still overlooking charity works, assigning one part of assets and asking deacons that they “do the job in my absence”.

### **3. Charity and philanthropy in Cappadocia (4<sup>th</sup> century)**

Cappadocia is a region in mid-Anatolia, modern-day Turkey. In ancient days it was the land of Christian Greeks before it was conquered by Turkish Muslims. Involvement of the three great Cappadocian fathers (Basil of Cesarea, called the Great; his youngest brother Gregory of Nyssa; and Basil’s life-long friend Gregory of Nazianzus) raised the level of charity service in the Church. The most important contribution of the Cappadocians is in theological discussions of the day when the essence of Christianity was separated from Ancient Greek philosophy. Their Trinitarian views were accepted for the final version of the Nicene Creed (381) used by the Church today. Common for all is their interest in integration of theological views into social practice: they occupied high positions in Cesarea, Nyssa, Sessima and even in Constantinople. Basil the Great



was among the first who started organized philanthropic institutions and extended the Church influence over to health care and social welfare (Constantelos, 1981).

Activity of Cappadocian fathers could be best understood against the background of the so-called gift economics in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Known in community with ca 50-200 people gift economics is the most natural way to relate to each other: both capacities and personal characteristics of each member are easy to evaluate, and their needs are clearly exposed to all. Within that system only members of particular community could be helped. Outsiders (strangers, hostages, survivors of shipwreck as well as those who sold their land for debts) received nothing – they were “not seen” by the system. The gap between the rich and poor was growing due to usury, high taxes for poor and unjust business with the land property.

The issue of inclusion was among the first to deal with. True, wealthy citizens sometimes held special “liturgies” (public relief performances): money and food was given out, also theater performances and circus to those who couldn’t afford it; to which citizens responded with public appreciation, honor and praises. Many of them were urged by their public ambitions and a wish to be remembered for it in eternity (Countryman, 1980, 87-94). The goal of the patronage system and gift economics wasn’t primarily to fight poverty, although the needy sometimes benefited from that (Ibid., 34).

Several years in 368-375 in Cappadocia suffered from dry summers and harsh winters which led to food shortage, and in 368-369 famine started. The situation aggravated when rich owners of resources piled up secret savings and sold from them to desperate neighbors for inadequate high prices. Quite many had to decide – either to sell their children in slavery to save others from starving death, or the whole family dies. In this dramatic time Cappadocian Fathers preached their famous sermons on rich and poor: “I will tear down my barns” and “To the rich” (Basil the Great), and “On the love to the poor” (Gregory of Nazianzus).

### 3.1. Key topics in the sermons of the Cappadocians

1. Purposeful efforts *to personalize misery of the poor*. They picture shocking portraits, precise like photographs: starving people made blind from lack of food, weeping father who sells his child to slavery, dogs licking water from the puddle with bloody tongue where lepers have no access, etc. High theology won’t help where urgent need knocks at the door.

Gregory of Nazianzus also reproaches his listeners for distributing food from distance which increases bitter sufferings even more. Exactly as angels are not frightened by human bodies and blood and Jesus became man and was “clothed in this stinking and dirty flesh”, so also care for the sick should be proven by accept and care with one’s own hands. Gregory urges those who are afraid of infections: “Is there any one among you whose health has been injured by contact with the sick, even though they were close by when received medical help? No, it doesn’t happen that way (...) Then why you still refuse to fulfill the commandment of love?” By opposing wealthy and healthy on the one hand and lepers on the other in striking colors, Gregory of Nazianzus urges his listeners to share (“On the love to the poor”). Taking sociologically, it emphasized kinship with rejected. Expelled received their place in the Christian society where “the poor have equal access to justice, empathy and all aspects of the heavenly heritage” (Holman, 2001, 484).

2. Christian message treats the needy as *equal citizens of the Kingdom of God* who have “taken up the God’s face”. For this reason care for them is care for Christ: “Visit Christ, care for Christ, take on Christ and honor Christ”; and *vice versa* – to reject the poor means rejection of Christ. Basil reminds that “the poor minister to our hope, they stand in gates of Heaven, they open it for the just and close for unjust who don’t know what love is.” The Last Judgment will show that giving food with one’s own hands is more important than covering of sins [through Christ], because it restores the original manhood before the Fall.

3. Analysis of the situation in *social terms* rather than individual. Actually it is a part of larger discussion on true meaning of the story on the “rich man” in Mk. 10: 17-31, started in 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Should the rich man refuse his possessions in his *mind* or *practice* (as Desert fathers and Clement of Alexandria, and many others did upon baptism)? Clement of Alexandria (2<sup>nd</sup> century) wrote: “Go and sell everything you have, and give it out to the poor,” and his urge worked as foundation for Christian asceticism. He goes on to explain that the text invites people to purify their souls from the passion of ownership. However, the wealth according to Clement is *adiaforon*, i.e., neither good nor bad; it is an instrument and its quality depends on its use.

Some authors say that Clement actually doesn’t care for the poor (Van den Hoek, 2008, 74). In his view the needy were an integral part of society and both the wealthy and poor complement each other in the Divine household or *economia* (Clark, 2004, 173).

Mandatory obligation to give up possessions has never been accepted as a norm in Christianity, although there have been samples in monastic circles, especially in its early stages (e.g., story about St. Anthony the Great written by St. Athanasius): “Anthony, as if The Lord Himself gave him the mind of a saint, when the text [mentioned above] was read for him, immediately went out and gave all his possessions to the villagers so that it won’t burden neither him nor his sister.” Indeed, the text shows that care for the needy wasn’t an issue; rather it was saving the soul of the wealthy. The interpretation may promote asceticism but has nothing to do with care for the needy (although they benefit from that); there is no “system” of any sort here.

Basil the Great interpreted the story as one about charity in social terms by saying the rich man has disobeyed the law “Love your neighbor as yourself”: “It is clear that you are far from fulfillment of the law and you give false testimony with your soul (..) If it was true that you keep the law of love since early days, and give to your neighbor as much as you gave to yourself, then how come you are so rich?... More you possess, less you love.”

4. *Equality of all people* regardless of their social status or wealth. Cappadocian fathers insisted that God has given enough land and bread for all; but, since these resources are limited, sharing must be just. In literature it is described as “mandate of just distribution” – what you possess beyond your real need should be given to those who have less. Basil used the word *epanisou*, ‘to restore balance’, and this is very practical: “Bread you take away is meant for the hungry, cloth you keep in your wardrobe is meant for the naked, shoes you rot without use is meant for the barefoot, and silver you hide in earth is meant for the needy.” The balance works for sustainable society (see “I will turn down my barns”).

5. They who possess more and don’t share *are to be sued as thieves*. Basil went on: they who refuse to share in difficult times are to be sued as thieves and murderers (“In times of famine and drought”). Consequently, selfishness is abnormality in a

human world, whereas it is not found in nature. He asks: “Tell me, what is yours? What have you brought in this world? Where did you get it from? It is like you go to the show and sit in the first row, and cover the screen with your body what is meant for all” (“I will turn down my barns”).

“Turning down barns” becomes a powerful symbol. The man portrayed in the Gospel says he will turn down the old barn and build a new one for his increasing wealth. Basil uses the story to discuss how people raise the level of their needs after minimum has been satisfied. And this is why they don’t share – right after we’ve got our needs fulfilled, we immediately adjust our understanding about we need. “Is there anything more silly than endless work to build and then to turn it down?” he asks.

Basil uses the word *koinos*, ‘shared to all; common’. By this he emphasized the key premise: the world was created for common good. They who live according to the law of competition and private ownership, are *akoinonetoī* ‘a-social’, ‘not friendly’;. God has called people to be social, to follow the law of solidarity and just relationships with other people.

6. Attitude to the needy *forms virtues within Christian community* (“In times of famine and drought”). Confession of sins (gluttony, selfishness, greed, theft, murder) combined with righteousness would turn away the wrath of God. Gregory of Nazianzus offers detailed explanation why “love to the needy” is so important – the foremost and the highest virtue is “love of people” (*philantrophia*), whereas love of the needy (*philoptochia*) is even higher above that (Constanelos, 1981, 116).

#### 4. Christianity and medicine

Essential for development of Christian charity was its relation to medicine. The Cappadocian view on medicine and philanthropy laid the foundation for hospitals in Byzantine Empire – so important for further development of caritative social work in general (chaplaincy). However, prehistory of this development was not an easy one. Although both Christians and medical doctors share the same attitude to people regardless of their political sympathies, race, gender and wealth, Christian Church had a long way before medicine as healing of the body was accepted.

Early Christians never doubted that charity is the highest virtue above all and care for the sick is its manifestation. Christ Himself emphasized that “the Law and Prophets” is summarized in love of God and neighbor (Mt. 22: 37); He also set an example by healing the sick (Mt. 25: 31-46); followed by ap. Paul (1 Cor. 13:13), etc. However, these texts don’t mention medicine as we know it today – Jesus and apostles healed the sick in the name of God and without medicine; indeed, His power was set against incompetence of doctors for 12 years (the story about the bleeding woman in Mk. 5: 25-34). Consequently, not all agreed that secular means should be used. So, before the first hospitals in the Christian world could be founded, there was a question to solve: is healing of the body supported by the will of God?

The discussion was complicated by vast literature on healing in pagan Greek sources (esp. cult of god Asclepius). No wonder, Christians treated them conspicuously. Well-known Christian convert Tatian from Syria (2<sup>nd</sup> century) was so surprised by interest in “pagan” medicine by his master Justin the Martyr, that he quit all relationships with him and returned back home to Syria. Later he published treatise “Against Greeks” where he attacked all pronouncements of the Greek culture,

including medicine, and preached that reliance on material things is sinful. Both drugs and poison are made from the same substance, and the one who relies upon drugs has not freed him from bonds of the world (27, 6: 845). The same idea was preached by Christian convert Arnobius (3<sup>rd</sup> century) in Africa – God doesn't need human knowledge to give health to the body. Anti-pagan sentiments influenced Christian view all over the Greek-speaking East, especially ascetic circles (St. Macarius the Great). When preaching about faith in Christ as the only true medicine, the renowned theologian Cyril of Jerusalem (4<sup>th</sup> century) pointed: asking doctors is a mistake, actually a sin (Cyril, 1857-1866, Vol. 13, 667-680).

On the other hand, there were strong positive currents – evangelist Luke besides being an author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts was also an icon painter and doctor; Polycarp of Smyrna, disciple of evangelist John, mentioned care for the sick among main duties of the Church. “Instructions to Christian congregations” (Rome, ca. 215) stated that care for the sick is a duty of bishops. There are dramatic stories about Christians serving the sick during plague in mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century Alexandria. Sources mention priests who were also doctors (Dionisius in Rome, 3<sup>rd</sup> cent.; Zenobius in Sidon, early 4<sup>th</sup> cent.; Theodotus in Laodicea, early 4<sup>th</sup> cent.; Gerontius in Nicomædia, late 4<sup>th</sup> cent.). Medicine was supported by well-known Alexandrian theologian Origen (2<sup>nd</sup> cent.). Since God knows weakness of the human body, He gave His *logos* (knowledge) of medicine – how to use drugs (Origen, 1857-1866, Vol. 12, 1369). However, Origen pointed that “regular” believers may look for medicine and it is as natural as marriage, whereas they who want to achieve the spiritual heights, should avoid both marriage and drugs, and rather address God in their need.

Actually, it was Cappadocian teaching that laid solid foundation for acceptance of medicine. First, their roots in ancient Greek philosophy are a well-known. Cappadocians rejected inclusion of Plato's ideas in Christian mindset (propagated by Origen), but they avoided negativism in regards to ancient medicine: doctors have accumulated diverse and penetrating knowledge about minerals and herbs, and medicine shows what God allows to achieve if man follows the law of nature (Gregory of Nyssa). This opinion corresponds to their general conviction that Christianity is the highest point of the human culture.

Basil the Great opposed dualism in theology of the day by reminding that the created world proclaims the Divine wisdom. To those Christians who relied upon supernatural powers of God in their illness Basil answered: “Creator is active through both visible and invisible world. Therefore God's mercy reveals itself through healing powers of medicine in the same extent as in miraculous healing. More than that – natural healing may cause deeper understanding of the omnipresent power of God. Medicine wonderfully coincides with Christian virtues if only the vision of God's kindness is kept high along with spiritual health.”

Eastern theologians used metaphors from medicine to describe what the Church does to people, especially in 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries when linkage between spiritual and physical health was developed further (in Christian West positive attitude towards medicine developed slower; it was taken as a hidden heresy). Eastern Christian thinkers developed theoretical medicine, whereas Christian clergy started the first hospitals in spite of the 4<sup>th</sup> century mutter that medicine decreases the power of *agape*. This development was promoted by extreme poverty; sources point also to highlighted institutionalization of charitable initiatives in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Ulhorn, 1883, 324).

Both John Chrysostom and Basil the Great built their hospitals “in honor of The Lord” and medical doctors ministered to people along with monks; it was looked upon as a religious duty (Miller, 1997, 61). The link between medicine, hospital and Church was kept up for many centuries. Historians even say that it’s impossible to draw sharp line between houses for the sick (*xenodohion*) and monasteries (Ulhorn, 1883, 336). Gregory the Great (6<sup>th</sup> cent.) insisted that hospitals must be overseen by *religiosi*, i.e., monks and nuns, whereas Theodore Studite (9<sup>th</sup> century) required observance of philanthropic principles in his hospital (Ulhorn, 1883, 59).

## 5. New city of Basil

Activity of Basil the Great, bishop of Cæsarea, in the field of charity is not so well-exposed in literature. Nevertheless, he was very active. Some facts from his biography are essential to understand his reforms. He got converted as a young lad after studies at the University of Athens – not typical, since majority got baptized at the end of their lives (to avoid sinning again). He gave up his property to the poor and travelled around Palestine, Egypt and Syria where he met and talked to monks and hermits about the meaning of salvation. Six years in monastery helped to shape his views on charity before he accepted the bishop’s seat in Cæsarea.

On the one hand, he sided monasticism as ideal Christian life where resources are shared in cenobitic communities; on the other he made somewhat paradoxical conclusion – Christian ideals are not attained in monasteries alone; monks should minister to people. His reforms were carried out when the new city Basilea was built in the outskirts of Cæsarea (Kayseri in Turkey today). Gregory of Nazianzus in his funeral sermon “On Basil the Great” describes the city as a “treasure of pious life” (McCauley & Sullivan, et al., 1953, 80).

The new city was described as one of the “wonders of the world” by many witnesses. It was an incarnation of the Basil’s social (and religious) vision. The city administration became a model for involvement of all – described as mutuality, inclusion and solidarity today. Marginalized groups were included in city life (Sterk, 2004, 32).

In the center of the city there was Church; care for the needy was carried out in special hospitals for widows, children, strangers, elderly, etc. (Way, 1951, 210). Workshops were organized for those who wanted to acquire some crafts; newcomers to the city were introduced by special guides. Caretakers were professional doctors and clergy (or monks). Both shelter and food was given for free (Way, 1951, 210-211; 21).

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## **Senaizmirstās attiecības starp sociālo praksi un reliģiju**

### *Kopsavilkums*

Karitatīvā sociālā darba koncepcija ir dzimusi reliģiskā vidē, ilgi pirms kulta aspekti tika nodalīti no sociālās dimensijas ikvienā reliģijā. Žēlsirdības kultūra bija pazīstama jau antīkajā pasaulē, īpaši Vecās Derības laikos, taču ar kristīgās Baznīcas dzimšanu šī kultūra ieguva spēcīgu sociālu izteiksmi. Raksts apraksta karitātes koncepta vēsturi līdz 4. gadsimtam, kad Kapadoķiešu Baznīcas Tēvi apkopoja zināmās iniciatīvas un pieņēma sekulāro medicīnu Baznīcas vidē. Tika izrādītās īpašas rūpes par tradicionālajām neaizsargāto cilvēku grupām (atraitnes, bāreņi, veci cilvēki, svešinieki, cietumnieki). Rūpes par slimajiem tika izvirzītas priekšplānā svētītāja Bazileja Lielā reformu laikā, kad viņš aicināja tuksneša vientuļņiekus iziet no savas garīgās noslēgtības tuksnesī, lai kalpotu cilvēkiem savā jaunajā pilsētā – Bazilejā, un šī kalpošana tika uzlūkota kā reliģisks pienākums – kā ieguvums pie pestīšanas. Dalīšanās, savstarpējs atbalsts, iekļaušana tika uzlūktas kā sākotnēji radītās bezgrēka cilvēces atjaunošana. Reliģiskā dimensija mūsdienu sociālajā darbā ir devusi pieeju klientu garīgajai aprūpei paralēli trūkumcietēju materiālo resursu atbalstam.

**Atslēgvārdi:** karitāte (žēlsirdība), kalpošana, iekļaušana, solidaritāte, atbalsts, dalīšanās, agrīnā kristietība, Kapadoķiešu Baznīcas tēvi.

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