

Article

# Clemency, A Neglected Aspect of Early Christian Philanthropy

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**Abstract:** In classical and early Christian usage the concept of *philanthropia* (philanthropy) rarely just meant “love for one’s fellow human beings” or generosity towards people whom one did not personally know. Classicists have pointed out that in both of these ancient traditions it was most synonymous with the Latin term *clementia*. As such, it had a concessive facet and a universalizing force: showing kindness to humans, even if doing so went against one’s natural or justified reluctance; being merciful, despite the fact that beneficiaries might not seem worthy of it. These observations have not informed prior scholarship on early Christian philanthropy. Based on a comprehensive survey of how the word *philanthropia* is used in church histories, hagiographies, monastic literature and church sermons written in the Greek language from the fourth to seventh centuries, this paper argues that the classical notion of philanthropy as clemency prevailed among Christian authors throughout late antiquity, and was fundamentally important in the early Christian promotion of universal almsgiving.

**Keywords:** philanthropy; almsgiving; mercy; clemency; early Christianity

## 1. Introduction

**philanthropy:** love to mankind; practical benevolence towards men in general; the disposition or active effort to promote the happiness and well being of one’s fellow men

*The Oxford English Dictionary*

**φιλανθρωπία:** humanity, benevolence, kind-heartedness, humane feeling, kindness, courtesy I . . . clemency; [divine] love of men II. mildness III. concession, privilege

Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*

**φιλανθρωπία:** A. love towards men B. divine love towards humanity C. clemency, mercy in interpreting law, towards those committing impieties

G.W.H. Lampe, *A Greek Patristic Dictionary*

We are in danger of losing the original sense and significance of philanthropy. Our modern word derives from the ancient Greek *philanthropia*. It is hardly a calque, since both denote practicing generosity towards individuals not personally known to the benefactor. Yet, as the definitions cited above indicate, the modern concept has lost its ancient associations with clemency, i.e., with a willingness to show benevolence towards others, despite conscious suspicion, belief or knowledge that they do not deserve it. To us, this ancient aspect of philanthropy may seem patronizing, contradictory or disingenuous. How can one claim to “love humanity” (the literal meaning of the word) if he or she also deems the humanity in question unworthy of their love? Yet this deliberate

fusion of benevolence with clemency was intrinsic to the ancient ideal. It made philanthropy not just an attribute of emperors and gods (as well as a genuine challenge for lesser mortals), but a key justification for extending mercy to the anonymous poor in early Christianity.

Much of this is already known to classicists. The broadest historical survey of the ideal, published by Herbert Hunger in 1963, shows that after starting as an attribute of certain unusual gods (e.g., Prometheus, Hermes, Asclepius), animals (dogs, dolphins, horses) and climates—all of which were consistently benevolent towards human beings, despite the behavior expected of most gods, animals and climates—philanthropia became identified with certain semi-divine human rulers (e.g., Cyrus the Great), aristocrats who acted graciously toward fellow citizens, judges and jurors who applied the law leniently, and Hellenistic kings who offered amnesties on taxes or prisoners. Eventually the word was used to translate the Latin word *clementia* in connection to Roman emperors who proved willing to hear petitions, grant appeals or forgive citizens accused of crimes (Hunger 1963; cf. Tromp de Roiter 1932; Bell 1949; De Romilly 1979). Hunger briefly noted the influence of Greco-Roman tradition on later Roman law and early Christian literature. Yet scholars of Christian philanthropy have not explored the relevance of clemency to their subject. Nothing like it is mentioned in three standard English treatments (Constantelos 1991; Davis 1996; Daley 1999). A recent survey of almsgiving sermons and practices in the Christian Roman Empire categorically asserts that “*philanthropia*, [meaning] the [royal] exercise of clemency towards the defeated and guilty . . . [was] far removed from the [Christian] care of beggars” (Finn 2006, p. 216).

My purpose here is to show that this was not so. A survey of Greek Christian literature from the second to the seventh century reveals that the classical association of clemency with philanthropy was intrinsic not only to the Christian notion of divine philanthropy from the start, but also to the ideal espoused by religious authorities for ordinary Christians as well. It is true that the classical and early Christian traditions on philanthropy were not exactly the same. Having evolved primarily out of the circumstances of a democratic Greek polis (viz., fifth- and fourth-century Athens), the classical notion of philanthropy was circumscribed by a concern for harmonious relations between citizens within that city-state and a desire to maintain civility between richer, more powerful members and poorer, less powerful members of the community. While this did not exclude anonymous beggars, it did not emphasize or prioritize them either: within the classical context, the overriding concern was to ensure that aristocratic citizens treated all other citizens with respectful generosity (Christ 2013; Martin 1962). Only with Christianity (and only after Emperor Constantine’s conversion in the early fourth century) do abject strangers regularly appear as subjects of philanthropy (Hamel 1990, pp. 218–19; Brown 2002; Horden 2012, p. 723). But this reflected the new universality that Christianity introduced and proclaimed, both on the level of a monotheistic god that had created all humans, both rich and poor, and on the level of church leaders who sought authority over all members of society within the newly Christianized empire. It was, in other words, the size and scope of the imagined community that had expanded and changed, not the fundamental concept of philanthropy itself.

One reason why this conceptual continuity between classical and Christian philanthropy has not been appreciated is that prior studies of the early Christian tradition have not focused on specific uses of the word *philanthropia* itself to define their subject. Instead, their discussions include all evidence of almsgiving—as well as of charity and the foundation of institutions to serve sick and poor people—with the tacit assumption that all express the early Christian ideal. While this may be consistent with certain modern notions of philanthropy, it does not help us understand the particular features, or particular force, of early Christian philanthropy. In fact, early Christian authorities most often present almsgiving as a method of obtaining humility or performing penance for the sake of

salvation or self-improvement, neither of which had much to do with philanthropy, whether ancient or modern.<sup>1</sup>

My discussion is therefore based on a survey, conducted with the *Thesaurus linguae graecae* search engine, of the word *philanthropia* in a wide array of Greek Christian texts.<sup>2</sup> In date, these texts extend over the late Roman, post-Constantinian period from the fourth to the seventh century; in genre, they range from sermons of famous preachers like Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom to church histories by Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Evagrius Scholasticus, to pastoral letters of the monks Barsanuphius and John, to nearly all extent hagiographies, apothegms and edifying tales. I devised this sample to yield the highest possible variety of theoretical and practical examples of what Christian authors meant by the word *philanthropia*. My intention is to produce a comprehensive if not exhaustive word-study that provides sufficient evidence to establish that a notion of clemency informed most early Christian references to philanthropy, even when it came to the care of beggars. Of course, as in classical tradition, not every early Christian reference to philanthropy explicitly expresses a concern for clemency. This is especially true for cases in which acts of material generosity are described. Here the emphasis is more often simply on giving indiscriminately without questioning. My aim is to show that enough examples articulate a “concessive dimension”—a willingness to act generously despite one’s reluctance or reservations—to warrant us to assume that a notion of clemency was relevant and underlying nonetheless. What both traditions emphasize was a willingness, both human and divine, to hear petitions and respond with aid to anyone who requested it, whether political prisoners or abject beggars, despite the knowledge or belief that the petitioners in question might not actually deserve it.

As initially stated, I think we are at danger of losing this ancient sense and significance of philanthropy. After discussing the findings of my survey, I will briefly state why I think this is so. To anticipate, the danger lies in our losing a dimension that elevates the concept of philanthropy, whether ancient or modern, from an elitist and possibly patronizing ethical virtue to a provocative and possibly uncomfortable ethical challenge. Let us begin, however, by revisiting an episode in fourth-century history that has caused many to think that early Christian tradition differed markedly from classical tradition in its understanding of the ideal.

## 2. Philanthropy Contested? The Testimony of Julian the Apostate

In early 363, just before launching his disastrous invasion of Persia, the Roman Emperor known today as Julian the Apostate (360–363) wrote to the new pagan priesthood he had created in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), explaining what traits and practices he thought they should promote in their cities and shrines. Foremost among these was philanthropy. In one of the two letters that survive, Julian ordered Arsacius, his High Priest of the region of Galatia, to build in each city,

frequent hostels in order that strangers may profit by our philanthropy; I do not mean for our own people only, but for others also who are in need of money . . . . For it is disgraceful

<sup>1</sup> It is equally crucial not to confuse the classical notion of *philanthropia* with the classical notion of *philotimia*. Literally meaning, “love of honor,” *philotimia* referred to civic benefactions that citizens (usually aristocrats) bestowed publicly in return for civic honors. Usually called *euergetism* in modern scholarship, this is the ancient phenomenon that bears closest resemblance to modern philanthropy. It did not, however, refer to benevolent actions undertaken privately by individuals on behalf of needy individuals, as was intrinsic to ancient philanthropy. An exact distinction between the two is drawn by the fourth-century CE orator Libanius, *Declamation*, 49.2.11; cf. John Lydus, *On Offices*, 1.19, where *philanthropia* is exemplified not by publically giving to the community as a whole, but by privately welcoming whatever stranger had arrived in town and opening one’s door to any individual in need.

<sup>2</sup> *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*® Digital Library. Ed. Maria C. Pantelia. University of California, Irvine. <http://www.tlg.uci.edu> (Accessed 12 February–25 April 2018). Readers who wish to pursue my citations or inspect the original Greek must consult the editions in TLG. Where possible I have cited standard translations, but in each case I have substituted “philanthropy” or “philanthropic” for the words or phrases used by translators (“love of mankind,” “clemency,” “loving-kindness,” “mercy,” etc.). Any translation not attributed to another translator is my own.

that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see our people lack aid from us.<sup>3</sup>

Julian wanted to reconstitute the traditional cults around Christian institutions and practices, including “philanthropy to strangers,” that he thought accounted for Christianity’s post-Constantinian popularity. His *Letter to Arsacius*, if genuine (cf. Van Nuffelen 2002; Bouffartigue 2005), represents the follow-up of specific directions he promised in an earlier letter he had written to another priest named Theodore. This letter is more philosophic than the Letter to Arsacius, expounding conceptual fundamentals rather than proposing specific practices. “Philanthropy admits of many divisions and many kinds,” Julian observes. It could be exemplified not only by punishing people leniently for their improvement (“as schoolteachers punish children”), but by ministering to their needs. As the gods minister to us by bestowing the blessings of the earth, so must we share our blessings with everyone, including the poor. In fact, Julian says, we should consider it “a pious act to share our food and clothing even with the wicked,” since it was their humanity that we would be supporting, not their moral character. After all, he reasons, whenever many have been imprisoned before going on trial, it is likely that some will be proven innocent. It would be wrong to treat these harshly on account of the guilty: far better to treat everyone gently, lest we punish the innocent.<sup>4</sup>

It has become de rigueur to discuss these letters in modern studies of early Christian philanthropy. They are usually invoked to demonstrate the extent to which Christians had institutionalized philanthropy by the last half of the fourth century, as well as the positive impression this had made even on hostile critics like Julian. The letters are often cited to illustrate how the new Christian philanthropy differed from old classical philanthropy: a monograph devoted to philanthropic ideals in Julian’s letters has declared that the portions describing clement treatment of prisoners derived from classical tradition, while those describing aid to needy strangers showed the innovation and influence of Christianity (Kabiersch 1960, pp. 66–81).

This distinction is too simplistic. As noted above, classical tradition may offer far fewer instances than early Christian tradition of providing material aid to the needy as expressions of philanthropy, but it does offer some: suffice to note that the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens*, written in the fourth century CE, illustrates the tyrant Pisistratus’ philanthropy by stating that “he was not only gentle and forgiving *even* to those who had committed an offense”—i.e., he treated criminals with clemency—“but he also advanced money *even* to those without means, so that they could make a living as farmers.”<sup>5</sup> This Aristotelian passage, like Julian’s Letter to Theodore written nearly seven hundred years later, offers examples of legal leniency and material giving to illustrate human philanthropy; both examples illustrate extending benevolence to those to whom an Athenian aristocrat might not normally give it, whether criminal offenders or unpropertied farmers. If this classical description differs from early Christian descriptions of philanthropy, it does so only because of the limited size of the community in question (a small agrarian city-state), not because of a more restricted conception of philanthropy itself.

What must be stressed, however, is not only that pre-Constantinian Christian authors similarly emphasized clemency as intrinsic to philanthropy, but also that they themselves emphasized it specifically in connection to aiding people who did not seem to deserve it. Striking evidence of this is a fictional dialogue cast between the apostle Peter and Clement, a future bishop of Rome, found in the third- or fourth-century *Ps.-Clementine Homilies*. One evening while sailing off the Levantine coast, Clement described how his mother, after being saved from a shipwreck by an ailing widow, showed her great philanthropy by arranging for her to receive a charismatic healing. No, Peter retorted, Clement’s mother had shown the widow no such thing. In fact, neither what the widow had done for

<sup>3</sup> Julian, *Letter 22*; (Wright 1923).

<sup>4</sup> Julian, *Letter to a Priest*, (Wright 1913). This letter is now considered a fragment of Julian’s *Letter to Theodore*, which Wright identified as *Letter 16*.

<sup>5</sup> *Constitution of Athens* 16.2: φιλόανθρωπος ἦν καὶ πρὸς καὶ τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσι συγγνωμονικός, καὶ δὴ καὶ τοῖς ἀ[πό]ροις προεδάνειε χρήματα...ὥστε διατρέφεσθαι γεωργοῦντας. Note the emphatic *kai* in both examples.

his mother nor what his mother had done for her counted as philanthropy. The widow's rescue of his mother had been an act of mercy (*eleos*) prompted by pity, since the widow herself had once been shipwrecked; as for the healing his mother had arranged, it was not philanthropy either, but a friendly act (*philia*) done to repay the widow's prior kindness: "there is much difference," Peter notes, "between friendship and philanthropy, because friendship springs from [a desire to make] requital."<sup>6</sup> Only if they had extended such generosity to people who had done them wrong, he insists, would it have qualified as *philanthropia*. For "he is philanthropic," he continues, "who does good even to his enemies:"

The good and the bad, the friend and the enemy, are alike [human]. It behooves, therefore, him who practices philanthropy to be an imitator of God, doing good to the righteous and unrighteous, as God himself vouchsafes His sun and His heaven to all in the present world [cf. Mt 5: 45]. But if you will do good to the good, but not to the evil, or even will punish them, you undertake to do the work of a judge, you do not strive to hold by philanthropy.<sup>7</sup>

Like all the Ps-Clementine literature, this dialogue defies easy dating: it may have originated in a third-century Syrian milieu and only received its present form in the 340s (Van Kooten 2010). Nevertheless, it shows Christian authorities adamantly propounding a conception of philanthropy that emphasized clemency as its sine qua non, just as Emperor Julian later would do in his letters of 363. Thus, philanthropy's concessive dimension was by no means exclusive to classical tradition. Moreover, the dialogue posits a divine model for universal indulgence and material benevolence, alluding to Mt 5:45, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous," to illustrate what Christian philanthropy truly meant in practice. Similarly, Julian supports his contention that his priests should minister to the poor by noting how the gods had scattered their various blessings over the earth, alluding to a divine model of indiscriminate beneficence that went back to Xenophon (who designated as *philanthropa*, "indulgences," all the natural blessings like the sun, moon, stars, fire, and other provisions that gods had shed on humans).<sup>8</sup> Thus, neither was early Christian tradition devoid of the classical tradition's notion of philanthropy as clemency, nor was classical tradition devoid of divine, philanthropic models for extending material benevolence to all humans in general, no matter what their claim.

Presumably, Christian authors in the Roman Empire would have derived an understanding of the classical ideal from the legal pronouncements and propaganda broadcast by their imperial overlords. (Indeed, the Septuagint uses *philanthropia* almost exclusively to denote acts of clemency bestowed by Hellenistic kings: see (Cavallero 2000–2001).) But the main reason that clemency became so central to early Christian philanthropy was because Christian scriptures made it so. The word only appears three times in canonical texts of the New Testament. In the Book of Acts it appears twice in relation to unexpected kindnesses that the Apostle Paul received from outsiders—when a Roman guard permits him to leave prison to see some friends (Acts 27:3), and when barbarians help him after he is shipwrecked on Malta (28: 2).<sup>9</sup> Both episodes present philanthropy as an action undertaken to help someone outside one's group, a kindness that would normally not be expected of the people in question. More important for later tradition, however, is the third reference to philanthropy in Christian scriptures, found in the Pauline Letter to Titus 3:4. In order to convince readers to show "every courtesy to every person," it cites the philanthropic example that God provided when he deigned to save humanity, despite their multifold sins and bad behavior:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when

<sup>6</sup> Ps.-Clementine Homily, 12.25.7–8; trans. T. Smith in (Roberts and Donaldson 1978, p.298).

<sup>7</sup> Ps.-Clementine Homily, 12.26.5–8; trans. T. Smith, in (Roberts and Donaldson 1978, pp. 297–98).

<sup>8</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*. 4.3.3–7.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 27: 3: φιλανθρωπῶπως τε ὁ Ἰούλιος τῷ Παύλῳ χρησάμενος ἐπιτρέψεν πρὸς τοὺς φίλους πορευθέντι ἐπιμελείας τυχεῖν . . . 28: 2: βάρβαροι παρεῖχον οὐ τὴν τυχοῦσαν φιλανθρωπίαν ἡμῖν.

the goodness and *philanthropia* of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy.<sup>10</sup>

This letter, the *locus classicus Christianus* for the early Christian understanding of philanthropy, presents divine philanthropy as an inclination towards clement indulgence in the manner associated with classical gods, Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors. To my knowledge, this portrayal of philanthropy in the Letter to Titus has never been emphasized in modern studies of early Christian philanthropy. Together with the two passages from Acts, it shows that the classical notion of philanthropy was not merely peripheral to Christian tradition but at its center from the very start.

It is clear that philanthropy, like much else in the classical world, became an issue of contention between Christians and pagans in the decades following Constantine's conversion. Rivalry over who was truly philanthropic is evinced in the contrast that the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) drew between the *philanthropia* of Emperor Constantine and the *misanthropia* of his pagan rival, Licinius;<sup>11</sup> that it continued after Emperor Julian's death is evident in Basil of Caesarea's complaint, ca. 369, that "the stories that pagans tell about *philanthropia* are putting us to shame," due to the refusal of wealthy Christians to share grain with the poor during a famine.<sup>12</sup> Arguably the only novelty that Julian attests (or added to the classical tradition he espoused) was in his proposal that sharing food and clothing "even with the wicked" should be considered a sacred act (a *hosion*). This sacralization of classical philanthropy—recasting a formerly civic virtue as a gesture of religious piety—seems to have been based on Christian precedents. Be that as it may, to extend aid to others despite one's suspicion, belief or knowledge that they did not deserve it remained central to the ideal of philanthropy espoused by pagans and Christians alike to the end of antiquity.

I shall now substantiate that point by surveying Christian texts ranging from the fourth to the seventh century. To avoid "cherry-picking," I consider every use of the word philanthropia (or its cognates philanthropos, philanthropa) found in three basic genres: history, hagiography and pastoral literature. To frame the Christian texts, however, I begin by describing all instances presented by three secular (more accurately known as "classicizing") historians of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries (excluding Agathias and Menander Protector, since the former never mentions philanthropy and the latter exists only in fragments). I then turn to church histories and hagiographical narratives, followed by pastoral literature composed for monastic and lay audiences.

### 3. Philanthropia in Fifth- to Seventh-Century Secular Historians

The classicizing historians Zosimus (fifth century), Procopius of Caesarea (sixth century), and Theophylact Simocatta (seventh century) refer to philanthropia or its cognates eight, twenty and eighteen times, respectively, for a total of forty-six times. The vast majority (forty-three) attribute the virtue to human beings. Almost all, explicitly or implicitly, pertain to clemency. Of these, three simply present such philanthropy as a virtue expected of a king or emperor (to counterbalance anger, in one example),<sup>13</sup> and three as a distinctive characteristic of the Roman Empire itself. As a Roman ambassador informed an Avar Chagan,

<sup>10</sup> Titus 3.2–4; trans. New Standard Revised Version: πᾶσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραύτητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους. Ἥμεν γὰρ ποτε καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνόητοι...μισοῦντες ἀλλήλους. ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ, οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἀ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἔσωσεν.

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, 10.8–9.

<sup>12</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Homily Given in a Time of Dearth and Famine (Homily 8)*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Theophylact, *History*, 1.1.19, 3.16.4., 4.7.8. In 4.16.16, Theophylact has a Christian priest pray that, due to the Roman-Persian declaration of peace, the rough waters of the Tigris River might turn from ferocity to *philanthropia*—i.e., forgiving to the surrounding humanity.



The Romans ignore your previous outrages, have become forgetful of your many crimes and, since they are distinguished from all nations by their *philanthropia*, they have not mobilized arms in a desire for retaliation.<sup>14</sup>

The historians offer eleven examples of such philanthropy exhibited by individual emperors, generals, or magistrates towards vanquished “barbarian” enemies or condemned criminals. For instance, Zosimus describes how Emperor Julian showed philanthropy to trespassing Frankish warriors by refusing to kill them because they had been driven into Roman territory by the Saxons, while Theophylact describes how Emperor Maurice responded to a popular petition, chanted in the hippodrome of Constantinople, that he release a criminal condemned to be thrown to the lions:

Upon the acclamations of the people, the emperor displayed philanthropy . . . [the prisoner] was separated from the beasts and reaped unforeseen salvation, while the spectators magnified the philanthropy of the emperor’s unexpected pity.<sup>15</sup>

Only Theophylact Simocatta, the most overtly Christian of the three historians, relates such human philanthropy to divine philanthropy. Defending Emperor Maurice’s decision to pity rather than destroy the capital of Persia (“fulfill[ing] the second covenant which enjoined on the spiritual Israel not to measure out repayment for evil”), Theophylact compared it to Christ’s merciful decision to become incarnate and suffer crucifixion out of desire for humanity’s salvation.<sup>16</sup>

As these examples indicate, Zosimus, Procopius and Theophylact considered philanthropy central to their *Kaiserkritik*. Just as Zosimus and Theophylact were inclined to attribute it regularly to their heroes Emperor Julian and Emperor Maurice, so too was Procopius reluctant to attribute it to Emperor Justinian, whom he despised. Instead, Procopius prefers to identify it with Justinian’s main general, Belisarius, who displays the virtue by restraining Roman troops from carrying out pillage and rapine in order to win the hearts and minds of defeated Vandal and Gothic “inferiors.”<sup>17</sup> Such philanthropy, however, is even more often (15 times) attributed to various barbarians in their conduct towards defeated Romans, as exemplified by instances where barbarian leaders prevent their troops from raping Roman women,<sup>18</sup> prohibit the execution or enslavement of Roman captives,<sup>19</sup> decide not to invade Roman territory or destroy a conquered Roman city,<sup>20</sup> or undertake to save Roman troops from starvation by sending them food during a siege or famine.<sup>21</sup> We are told that, after recapturing Naples, the Gothic King Totila relieved its famished Roman defenders through a “display of philanthropy to his captives such as which was not to be expected either from an enemy or from a barbarian,”<sup>22</sup> similarly, an Avar Chagan sent food to starving Roman troops during Easter, providing an “instance of barbarian philanthropy that has remained established right up to the miraculous tales of the present day.”<sup>23</sup>

It must be noted that most of these acts of philanthropy, including the last two instances of material generosity, are precipitated by petitions made by or for suffering adversaries and criminals; in this way they offer parallels to Christian examples of religious philanthropy discussed below. The remaining three occurrences of philanthropia in these texts refer to material generosity that members of the

<sup>14</sup> Theophylact, *History*, 1.5.3 (Whitby and Whitby 1986, p. 26); cf. 1.5.12, 6.2.14.

<sup>15</sup> Theophylact, *History*, 3.8.8 (Whitby and Whitby 1986, p. 84); cf. 4.10.7, 4.13.5; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.6.3, 4.39.5, 4.58.6, 5.2.4, 5.45.3.

<sup>16</sup> Theophylact, *History*, 4.16.15 (Whitby and Whitby 1986, p. 129). Cf. Zosimus, *New History*, 5.51.1.

<sup>17</sup> Procopius, *Wars* 3.17.6 and 5.10.30. In 2.15.7, he reports that Justinian showed great philanthropy to an enslaved barbarian child by allowing him to receive advanced schooling; however, in the two other times that Procopius relates the virtue to Justinian, he is either being ironic (indicating that his return of highly taxable confiscated property was not, in fact, an act of philanthropy, but a means of generating taxes, *Secret History*, 12.12.9) or disassociating Justinian from the virtue completely (13.10). I am inclined to interpret his attribution of philanthropy to Empress Theodora as ironic (*Secret History*, 5.20.8).

<sup>18</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 7.6.4 (cf. 7.8.17); Theophylact, *History*, 4.10.7.

<sup>19</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 1.7.34, 7.14.12, 7.21.17; Theophylact, *History*, 2.16.9.

<sup>20</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 2.5.28, 2.8.31, 2.26.32, 7.16.31 (an ironic example), and 7.22.14; Theophylact, *History*, 1.15.9, 6.6.1.

<sup>21</sup> Zosimus, *New History*, 4.32.2 (an ironic example).

<sup>22</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 7.8.1 (Dewing 1924).

<sup>23</sup> Theophylact, *History*, 7.13.5 (Whitby and Whitby 1986, p. 196).

imperial elite extend to ordinary people in need: in one example, the emperor's family gives supplies from its banquet table to people starving during Alaric's fifth-century siege of Rome;<sup>24</sup> in another, Pope Pelagius spends his fortune to supply all the Romans starving during Totila's siege a century later.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps most interesting is Theophylact's claim that Emperor Maurice, in hope of receiving a divine sign before embarking on a military campaign, traveled around various Christian shrines until he encountered a crowd of beggars who asked for gifts. "So the emperor enclosed the massed throngs in the palace there, judged them worthy of philanthropy, and, by dividing up a quantity of silver, beguiled the affliction of poverty for the assembled multitude."<sup>26</sup> Such conditional philanthropy—explicitly dispensed only after the petitioners are judged worthy of it—is strikingly rare in classical tradition, and might at first seem contradictory to the ideal as I have described it above. It is, however, found in many examples of divine philanthropy discussed below, and perhaps reflects a Christian theodicy that promised forgiveness to anyone who demonstrated himself sufficiently penitent or humble.

#### 4. Philanthropia in Fifth- and Sixth-Century Church Historians

Together the church historians Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret (all mid-fifth century) and Evagrius (late sixth century) refer to philanthropia or its cognates a total of eighty-four times. As with their secular counterparts, human philanthropy and the notion of clemency predominate, with emperors and kings serving as the main exemplars. For example, after hearing a petition from a defeated usurper, Emperor Constantius (d. 361) "treated him with the greatest philanthropy," allowing him to live on a government stipend; after hearing an orator declaim on philanthropy, Emperor Valens (d. 378) meted out less fearsome punishments; after listening to their bishop, Theodosius the Great (d. 395) opted for philanthropy and did not punish the rebellious citizens of Antioch; having heard that it would lead to bloodshed, Emperor Anastasius (d. 518) philanthropically declined to eject two condemned bishops from their sees, and so forth.<sup>27</sup> Julian the Apostate and a persecuting Persian King are credited with philanthropic treatment of various Christians.<sup>28</sup> But the fifth-century church historians save their highest praise for the philanthropy of Emperor Theodosius the Younger (d. 450), under whom each wrote his history. "In *philanthropia* he far surpassed all others," writes Socrates, claiming that under this emperor, no condemned prisoner ever reached an executioner at Constantinople before receiving a *philanthropon*, a pardon.<sup>29</sup> Sozomen goes farther; addressing Theodosius in his preface to his work, he invokes the image of divine generosity from the Gospel of Matthew to describe the extraordinary extent of the emperor's philanthropy:

Thou art philanthropic . . . both to those near and to all, since thou doest imitate the Heavenly King who is thy pattern in that He loves to send rain and causes the sun to rise on the just and unjust (Mt 5: 45), as well as to furnish other blessings ungrudgingly.<sup>30</sup>

Such was Theodosius's reputation for philanthropy, Sozomen reports, that even the Huns decided to stop fighting and submit to Roman rule.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Zosimus, *New History*, 5.39.4.

<sup>25</sup> Procopius, *Wars*, 7.16.7.

<sup>26</sup> Theophylact, *History*, 5.16.10 (Whitby and Whitby 1986, p. 156).

<sup>27</sup> Socrates, *Church History*, 2.28, trans. A.C. Zenos in (Schaff and Wace 1989, vol. 2, p. 55); (cf. 1.4); Sozomen, *Church History*, 6.37, 7.23; Evagrius, *Church History*, 3.34; Theodoret, *Church History*, 4.22.10. Because these historians quote extensively from imperial and conciliar documents, their references to philanthropy often pertain to the arrangements, proceedings and judgments of church councils: e.g., Socrates, *Church History*, 1.14, 2.23, 3.8; Theodoret, *Church History*, 1.20.11.

<sup>28</sup> Sozomen, *Church History* 5.56–57; Theodoret, *Church History*, 5.39.15. Both Sozomen (2.15) and Theodoret (1.25.11) describe Constantine's appeal that the Persian King, Shapur I, be philanthropic towards, and refrain from persecuting, Christians in Persia. Only Emperor Valens is described by these historians as devoid of philanthropy: Theodoret, 4.22.12, 21, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Socrates, *Church History*, 7.22, trans. Zenos, 164; cf. Theodoret, *Church History*, 5.36.5. It appears that bishops often addressed the emperor as "Your Philanthropy" when they sought something from him through their petitions: Socrates, *Church History*, 2.37; Theodoret, *Church History*, 2.28.3, 4.3.1.

<sup>30</sup> Sozomen, *Church History*, preface 1.9; trans. C.D. Hartranft in (Schaff and Wace 1989, vol. 2, p. 237); cf. preface, 1.5.

<sup>31</sup> Sozomen, *Church History*, 9.5.4.



Sozomen's allusion to Mt 5: 45, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous," is significant, because he uses it to highlight the universal scope not only of Theodosius's judicial clemency but also, it appears, of his material generosity. We will see other repeated references to that scriptural passage to promote "ungrudging" philanthropic giving by Christians below. Otherwise, it is the historian Evagrius who offers the most expansive description of an emperor's material philanthropy (excluding Julian's letter to Arsacius, which Sozomen preserves). According to Evagrius,

In spirit he [viz., Emperor Tiberius II, d. 582] was both gentle and philanthropic, welcoming everyone at first sight . . . . He did not consider what those in need ought to receive, but what it befits a Roman emperor to give.<sup>32</sup>

The examples Evagrius cites to illustrate Tiberius's philanthropy are quite conventional (e.g., forgiveness of taxes). But his point is that Tiberius's generosity could be so universal and abundant precisely because it was completely uncalculated. Such an uncalculating, i.e., "imperial," approach was advocated in Christian preaching on philanthropy to the poor as well, as we shall see.

Church historians differ from their secular counterparts by attributing philanthropy to people outside imperial or regal circles, especially to bishops. That is not surprising: indeed, Theodoret quotes Emperor Constantine as listing philanthropy, alongside orthodoxy and purity, as chief virtues of an ideal priest.<sup>33</sup> What is notable, however, is that all their references to episcopal philanthropy pertain to clemency. Sozomen cites three letters from Constantine requesting that bishops treat their colleagues with philanthropy at councils when examining them for heresy;<sup>34</sup> Socrates cites a synodic letter explaining how those who had deposed Meletius, a former bishop of Alexandria, exhibited great philanthropy by allowing him to remain in that city, "although, strictly speaking, he was wholly undeserving of favor;"<sup>35</sup> while Theodoret describes how Emperor Theodosius, at the entrance to the Milan cathedral, petitioned Bishop Ambrose to "take into account the philanthropy of our common Lord, and not shut against me a door which our Master has opened for all them that repent."<sup>36</sup>

As that quotation indicates, the representation of divine philanthropy is more complex in church history than in secular history. Theodoret and Evagrius offer many instances in which God expresses his cosmic philanthropy by helping humans achieve prosperity and salvation after the Fall, ranging from the incarnation and crucifixion (Evagrius even claims that God sought to spread his message of salvation to pagans through their oracles), to his slaying of Julian the Apostate in response to a holy man's prayers, to his requirement that Christians provide spiritual sacrifices so that they need not sacrifice to him the material things they needed to survive, to his protection of all the churches in Constantinople during a conflagration, including even those of the heretical Goths.<sup>37</sup> Yet both present an equal number of episodes in which God's philanthropy is expressed by punishing humans less severely than they deserved. Despite a holy man's curse, God afflicted Persian invaders with a "kind and philanthropic chastisement" of swarming mosquitoes that made their horses bolt; after sending an earthquake to level Antioch and crush its patriarch, God tempered his wrath with philanthropy by appointing a layman known for his almsgiving to replace him; after loss of the important fortress of Daras to the Persians drove Emperor Justin II (d. 578) insane, God granted him time to confess his

<sup>32</sup> Evagrius, *Church History*, 5.13, (Whitby 2000, p. 273). In 2.1, Evagrius writes that Emperor Marcian (d. 457) was so philanthropic that he once buried the corpse of a person he did not know, implying that his generosity was universal. Socrates, *Church History*, 1.9, and Theodoret, *Church History*, 1.16.6, both cite a letter in which Emperor Constantine promises the deacons of Eusebius of Caesarea great philanthropy once they arrived to collect copies of bibles in Constantinople. Sozomen, *Church History*, 5.16, preserves Julian's Letter to Arsacius.

<sup>33</sup> Theodoret, *Church History*, 1.20.10; cf. 5.35.2. This anticipates Julian, orthodoxy aside.

<sup>34</sup> Sozomen, *Church History*, 1.17, 2.16 and 27.

<sup>35</sup> Socrates, *Church History*, 1.9, trans. Zenos, p. 12; cf. Theodoret, *Church History*, 1.9.7 and Evagrius, *Church History*, 2.18, on the deposition of Dioscorus at the Council of Chalcedon.

<sup>36</sup> Theodoret, *Church History*, 5.18.14, trans. B. Jackson, in (Schaff and Wace 1989, vol. 3, p. 144).

<sup>37</sup> Evagrius, *Church History*, preface and 6.21 (cf. 1.11); Theodoret, *Church History*, 1.24.4 (cf. 2.30.14, 3.24.2, 4.30.5, 5.21.12, 5.34.8).

sins and do good for the state before he died; after destroying Antioch with another earthquake and killing 60,000 of its citizen as a punishment for slandering their bishop, God displayed philanthropy by preventing an even more destructive conflagration arising out of all the fires burning in the city.<sup>38</sup>

These church historians differed from secular historians in having to explain how all such afflictions fit into God's benevolent cosmic plan. Here too the notion of philanthropy as clemency provided a solution. As Theodoret explains,

The philanthropic God uses mercy and justice like weights and scales; whenever He sees anyone by the greatness of his errors overstepping the bounds of philanthropy, by just punishment He hinders him from being carried to further extremes.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, even if God's philanthropy had limits, its extent was such that sinners could still be restored by practicing penance. Constantine's first lesson on Christianity reportedly focused on this logic. According to Sozomen, when he consulted Christian priests on the morning before the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge outside Rome, he was informed that Christ's crucifixion ushered in a new dispensation by which all could be saved if they purified themselves through baptism and abstained from sins thereafter. But since few people were capable of abstaining from sin forever,

Another method of purification is set forth, namely penance, for God, in his philanthropy, bestows forgiveness on those who have fallen into sin, on their penance, and the confirmation of their penance by good works.<sup>40</sup>

This held true for the most wayward sinners: to deny otherwise was to deny the existence of divine philanthropy itself.<sup>41</sup>

This exhausts references to philanthropy in these four church historians. Only Sozomen attributes it to humans who were not emperors or bishops. In addition to describing both the reputed founder of Egyptian anchoretic monasticism, Antony the Great (described as friendly in debating, even when others used the occasion to sow strife) and the reputed founder of Egyptian cenobitic monasticism, Pachomius, as philanthropic, he attributes the virtue to an aristocratic laywoman in Constantinople named Nicarete. Calling her the most humble of all zealous Christians he had known, Sozomen explains that she had dedicated her fortune to supporting others, adding that, "being possessed of philanthropic yearning, this virtuous woman even prepared all sorts of medicines for the needs of the sick poor, curing many who had obtained nothing from the usual skills of doctors."<sup>42</sup> Although what Sozomen meant by "philanthropic yearning" is unclear, it seems to signify Nicarete's unusual desire to extend her generosity far outside her circle, reaching even to destitute poor people who were sick. As a group that tended to neglected throughout antiquity, these were precisely the people who benefited from the expanded scope of philanthropic sentiments among the Christianized Roman aristocracy.

## 5. Philanthropia in Fourth- to Seventh-Century Hagiography and Edifying Tales

Hagiographies were biographical narratives meant to describe and commemorate ways in which a Christian individual was holy, while edifying tales were anecdotal narratives that conveyed spiritual lessons. The 127 texts surveyed here date from the fourth to the seventh century,<sup>43</sup> yielding 162 references to *philanthropia*. The overwhelming majority refers to philanthropy as a divine attribute.

<sup>38</sup> Theodoret, *Church History*, 4.22.6 (cf. 1.23.7, 5.9.5); Evagrius, *Church History*, 4.6, 5.13, 6.8.

<sup>39</sup> Theodoret, *Church History*, 5.1.1, trans. Jackson, p. 132. For a sixth-century Christian "scientific" work that similarly emphasizes links between providential punishments and divine philanthropy, see Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*, 2.41, 3.3, 5.70, 80, 8.6, 10.10.

<sup>40</sup> Sozomen, *Church History*, 1.3.6, trans. (slightly adapted) Zenos, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup> Socrates, *Church History*, 6.22 (cf. 7.28); Sozomen, *Church History*, 8.1.14.

<sup>42</sup> Sozomen, *Church History*, 8.23.14. For Antony and Pachomius, see 1.13.6, 3.14.16.

<sup>43</sup> For the edifying tales I used Daniel of Scetis' narratives, John Moschus' *Spiritual Meadow*, Paphnutius' *On Onuphrius* and the alphabetical and anonymous systematic collections of the *Sayings and Stories of the Desert Fathers* (i.e., the *paterica* or *apophthegmata patrum*, cited here as *Desert Fathers*). I excluded Anastasius of Sinai's narratives because they are still

Its divine manifestations are described in greater variety and depth than in the church histories, but what hagiographers emphasize that we have not seen is the role of the Christian holy person in successfully petitioning God on humanity's behalf.

In these narratives, philanthropy is expressed most fundamentally by God's ceaseless efforts to prevent humanity's eternal damnation despite its continuing sins and blasphemies. In terms of divine economy, these efforts began with Christ's Incarnation, fraternization with publicans and prostitutes, and subsequent death on the cross.<sup>44</sup> Even abominable sinners like murderers, grave robbers or magicians could take comfort in these acts of divine condescension and sacrifice, because they demonstrated that their creator was mercifully committed to saving even the lowliest human beings.<sup>45</sup> Of course, all earthly blessings were also products of God's philanthropy. Yet most people remained unappreciative, unless they suffered unexpected calamities and were then restored to prosperity or health (sinful behavior notwithstanding, miraculous cures being a common manifestation of divine philanthropy).<sup>46</sup> Out of philanthropy, God continually sent signs to remind and instruct all humans—neglecting not a single soul—of Judgment Day.<sup>47</sup> Such instruction often mysteriously came in the form of afflictions, but these gave everyone opportunities to notice and repent before it was too late: one could trust that, for the present, God did not chasten humans out of wrath, but out of philanthropy, and did not remember wrongs for long.<sup>48</sup> It was said that the Virgin once cut off the feet and hands of a mime who repeatedly insulted her on stage despite her requests that he stop. Yet even this was done “on account of philanthropy,” for human edification: the mime was carted around thereafter as an edifying spectacle, confessing the cause of his condition to all.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, sinners could directly appeal to divine philanthropy by confessing their transgressions, performing penance and treating people philanthropically themselves.<sup>50</sup> The next best approach was to ask someone to appeal on his or her behalf. Praying on behalf of sinners before God became one of the most important “functions” of early Christian holy people (Brown 1971). It must be stressed, however, that this role was premised on an early Christian understanding that God was a clement and cooperative judge, willing to hear petitions made by righteous people on behalf of others who might be guilty—an assumption anticipated not only by classical notions of clement rulers but also by the Old Testament's depiction of God's willingness to spare certain citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah due

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incompletely published. TLG does not categorize hagiography consistently, so there are omissions in my survey (e.g., Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*; Sophronius, *Life of Mary of Egypt*) that prevent it from being exhaustive. Nonetheless, the number is sufficient to be representative of Greek examples of the genre. In more or less chronological order, these are: Athanasius, *Life of Antony*; Palladius, *Lausiac History*, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*; anon., *History of the Monks of Egypt*; Theodoret, *Religious History*; Callinicus, *Life of Hypatius*; Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger*; anon., *Life of Pachomius*; *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*; *Life of Marcellus the Sleepless*; *Life of Auxentius*; *Life of Daniel the Stylite*; Theodore of Petra, *Life of Theodosius the Cenobiarch*, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, *Life of Sabas*, *Life of John the Hesychast*, *Life of Cyriacus*, *Life of Theodosius the Cenobiarch*, *Life of Theognis*, *Life of Abraamius*; anon., *Life of Nicolas of Sion*; *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*; *Life of Martha*; Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of Symeon the Holy Fool*, *Life of John the Almsgiver*; George of Syceon, *Life Theodore of Syceon*; Antony of Chozeba, *Life of George of Chozeba*.

<sup>44</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 14, 74; *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 12; *Life of Marcellus the Sleepless*, 37; *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 90; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, 1; *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, 27; *Life of Martha*, 21, 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Desert Fathers*, alphabetical collection, Paul 1, systematic collection, 15.118; Daniel of Scetis, *On the Homicide*, p. 37; John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow*, 78; Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of John the Almsgiver*, 44. God would even forgive monks who lost hope—itsself a grievous sin, since it implied lack of faith that God was truly philanthropic: *History of the Monks of Egypt*, 1.36 (cf. Theodoret, *Religious History*, 31, and Theodore of Petra, *Life of Theodore the Cenobiarch*, p. 29).

<sup>46</sup> *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 59; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, 23, 25, 50; *Life of Martha*, 72; Antony of Chozeba, *Life of George of Chozeba*, 2.8; Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of John the Almsgiver*, 25, 43; the *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 11, attributes such forbearance to pagan gods as well.

<sup>47</sup> Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 2.55; Antony of Chozeba, *Life of George of Chozeba*, 8.32.

<sup>48</sup> *Desert Fathers*, systematic collection, 3.38, 4.27, 15.119, 18.45, 46; *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 21; Theodoret, *Religious History*, 26; *Life of Daniel the Stylite* 81; Theodore of Petra, *Life of Theodore the Cenobiarch*, p. 93; Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of Symeon the Holy Fool* 1701B, *Life of John the Almsgiver*, 1; John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow* 49. The only people the tradition specifically states would not receive philanthropy if they did not repent were heretics: Theodoret, *Religious History*, 1.10.

<sup>49</sup> John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow*, 47.

<sup>50</sup> *Desert Fathers*, systematic collection, 5.46, 14.46, 15.199; *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 12; *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, 78, 164; *Life of Martha*, 3, 73; Antony of Chozeba, *Life of George of Chozeba*, 7.30; John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow*, 186; Paphnutius, *On Onuphrius*, 8.

to Abraham's intercessions (Gen 18: 16–33). Such consideration was especially extended to monks, not only because of their worldly renunciations but also because of their efforts, as “slaves of God,” to obey, broadcast and carry out his will.<sup>51</sup> Most hagiographical references to divine philanthropy relate to benefits lay people obtained through tearful monastic intercessions, ranging from release from diseases, demons and sins,<sup>52</sup> to fertility for women and farmlands,<sup>53</sup> the mitigation of divine wrath,<sup>54</sup> improvement of weather,<sup>55</sup> or succor in general.<sup>56</sup> As one hagiographer observed, “no one receives remedies for their ailments unless from the Lord alone, who is made philanthropic towards all people through the prayers of his saints.”<sup>57</sup>

Monks in hagiography are depicted as philanthropic themselves: most references to human philanthropy in this literature pertain to monastic activities (15 out of a total of 28). While sometimes it is displayed towards other monks,<sup>58</sup> more often it is towards lay people. Several episodes illustrate how a monk emulated divine philanthropy by hearing petitions from and pardoning lay people who insulted or betrayed him.<sup>59</sup> James of Nisibis reportedly imitated God's philanthropy by making a stone explode near a judge's tribunal, frightening him to reverse an unjust verdict:

Here too James emulated his own Master, who, to show that he submitted to his passion freely and could have chastised the miscreants if he had wished to, did not inflict punishment on them but demonstrated his power by causing with a word the lifeless fig-tree to wither up [Mt 21:19]. James too imitated his philanthropy when he did not chastise the unjust judge but by striking a stone taught him justice.<sup>60</sup>

Another monk, Abraham, imitated God's philanthropic crucifixion by agreeing to pay off all the taxes of people who had maligned him.<sup>61</sup> Others taught philanthropy by persuading landlords to exact rent less severely and barbarians to behave more gently.<sup>62</sup> Antony reminded emperors Constantine and Constantius that they should be philanthropic and take concern for the righteous and the poor.<sup>63</sup> Monks also demonstrated philanthropy by ungrudgingly providing material goods and service to others in need, ranging from bishops to blind beggars. Limnaeus displayed his by building shelters for the blind so they could sing hymns all day without having to wander around asking anyone for money;<sup>64</sup> Isaac displayed his by building a hospice for sick monks and strangers who came to visit monks on the edge of the Egyptian desert;<sup>65</sup> yet another displayed his by putting off his reading to wander church porticoes at night, attending all he found who were sick, whether rich or poor.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, 22.522; *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 1, 26, 29, 43; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, 73; *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, 95, 123; George of Syceon, *Life of Theodore of Syceon*, 32; Paphnutius, *On Onuphrius*, 2, 3 (cf. Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of John the Almsgiver*, 41). Due to God's philanthropy and the intercession of the martyrs, some monks upon their death were welcomed directly into heaven: Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, 35; *Life of Nicolas of Sion*, 80; *Life of Martha*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> *Desert Fathers*, systematic collection, 3.38; Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 58, 84; *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 53; *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 20, 59; *Life of Auxentius*, 66; Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 2.60, 2.62; *Life of Nicolas of Sion*, 15, 21, 61, 62; *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, proem. And 177; George of Syceon, *Life of Theodore of Syceon*, 33.

<sup>53</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius* 23, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 41; *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 45; *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, 104; *Life of Martha*, 21; John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow*, 132.

<sup>55</sup> Theodoret, *Religious History*, 8.14; *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 47, 53; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, 67.

<sup>56</sup> *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 53, 85; Theodore of Petra, *Life of Theodore the Cenobiarch*, p. 61; Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of John the Almsgiver*, 25.

<sup>57</sup> Callinicus, *Life of Hypatius*, 44.39 (cf. *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, 52).

<sup>58</sup> *Desert Fathers*, systematic collection, 1.7; Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 4; Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 32.1.

<sup>59</sup> Theodoret, *Religious History*, 1.8, 6.14; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, 49; *Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger*, 221.

<sup>60</sup> Theodoret, *Religious History*, 1.6, (Price 1985, p. 15).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.3.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.4; cf. *Life of Marcellus the Sleepless*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 81.6.

<sup>64</sup> Theodoret, *Religious History*, 22.1 and 7.

<sup>65</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, 17.110.

<sup>66</sup> Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 68.1.4; cf. *Life of Marcellus the Sleepless*, 15.

Monks are not the sole human exemplars of philanthropy in hagiographical literature. Emperor Zeno reportedly pleased God by treating all who sinned against him with philanthropy.<sup>67</sup> Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria are said to have exhibited their philanthropy by bowing down before and publicly begging forgiveness from clerics who had slandered or cheated them.<sup>68</sup> Alexander, Patriarch of Antioch, philanthropically ransomed a kidnapped cleric who had embezzled gold from his church, allegedly prompting the remark, “There is nothing more profitable or advantageous for me than to sin against Alexander;”<sup>69</sup> likewise a guest master for the Church of Alexandria was reportedly so philanthropic that even pagans worshiped his very shadow.<sup>70</sup> In a patent allusion to the unexpected kindness that the apostle Paul received from Maltese natives in Acts 28:2, nomad “barbarians” showed “unusual philanthropy” to a monk named Alexander the Sleepless by bringing him food in the desert outside Palmyra;<sup>71</sup> in a possible allusion to the philanthropic treatment Paul received from a Roman guard in Acts 27: 3, one who conducted Bishop John Chrysostom into exile is said to have secretly shown him “a little philanthropy” after being ordered to treat him so harshly that he might die en route.<sup>72</sup> Sailors showed the monk Nicolas of Sion “God’s philanthropy” by agreeing to transport him to Jerusalem;<sup>73</sup> finding her dying, neighbors of Symeon Stylites the Younger’s mother performed a philanthropic deed by putting her on a donkey to carry her to town;<sup>74</sup> for helping so many needy people with money, Deaconess Olympias was compared to the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 30–39), whose displayed philanthropy by loading the stranger he found beaten at the roadside onto a donkey and taking him to an inn.<sup>75</sup>

That exhausts references to philanthropy in hagiographies and edifying tales I have surveyed. In them there is a remarkable consistency in depicting philanthropy as an act of clemency extended ungrudgingly to all human beings, whether sinners or saints, despite one’s possible inclination against them. Even in the relatively few instances that relate to material generosity or generous service, the point usually seems to be that the philanthropist was extending generosity to strangers against the norm. Hence the parable of the Good Samaritan became a basic example of Early Christian philanthropy.

## 6. Philanthropia in Sixth- and Seventh-Century Monastic Pastoral Literature

Philanthropy generally resembles what we have seen in hagiographical literature in the advice given to monks, monastic communities and their ecclesiastical or lay admirers by the monks Barsanuphius and John of Gaza in their sixth-century *Letters* and by John Climacus in his seventh-century treatise, the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. The following survey (based on a total of 67 references) of this monastic “pastoral” literature is mainly useful to demonstrate that hagiography reflected understandings current in or around monastic cloisters, that emphasized the universality and dependability of God’s generous mercy. The main difference is the urgency it conveys and the personal role that spiritual mentors played in assuring distressed monks and lay readers that they would in deed obtain divine mercy, due to God’s philanthropy.

“All who are children of God are ... also heirs to his goodness, long-suffering, tolerance, philanthropy, and love,” Barsanuphius assured a young monk.<sup>76</sup> This meant not only that God provided all good things in the present life but that he also protected humans against calamities or

<sup>67</sup> *Life of Daniel the Stylite*, 91.

<sup>68</sup> Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of John the Almsgiver*, 12; John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow*, p. 34 (Wortley 1992 p. 24).

<sup>70</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 1.2.

<sup>71</sup> *Life of Alexander the Sleepless*, 35.

<sup>72</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, 11.106.

<sup>73</sup> *Life of Nicolas of Sion*, 8.

<sup>74</sup> *Life of Martha*, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, 17.129.

<sup>76</sup> Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 484 (Chryssavagis 2006–2007, vol. 2, p. 91).



mitigated their impact.<sup>77</sup> First and foremost, however, it meant that readers could trust that it was possible to be forgiven no matter what they had done. As spiritual mentors to the monastery of Seridus near Gaza, Barsanuphius and his colleague John emphasized that God would listen and provide mercy to all who were humble, remorseful and asked frequently.<sup>78</sup> God might philanthropically send afflictions to humble, educate and improve us,<sup>79</sup> but since he was philanthropic, he would extend a merciful hand to every sinner till his or her last breath.<sup>80</sup> His reluctance to treat sinners strictly, i.e., according to their sins, reflected the magnitude of his majesty,<sup>81</sup> while the scope of his philanthropy was manifest in Christ's willingness to wash even the feet of Judas.<sup>82</sup> In fact, Christ's voluntary death to save sinners showed that he desired mercy above all else, removing all grounds for human doubt or despair.<sup>83</sup> Hence, no one should become overly preoccupied by past or future sins, but should focus instead on giving God ample thanks in advance, even if it was impossible to thank him for his philanthropy enough.<sup>84</sup>

This collection shows how anxiously pious sixth-century Christians thought about personal sin and damnation, and how comforting they found the notion of divine philanthropy, precisely because it suggested that they would receive attention and forgiveness even if they knew that they did not deserve it. This view is corroborated in John Climacus's *Divine Ladder*. It is a striking feature of this ascetic work that it warns monastic readers in no less than five places not to let comforting notions of divine philanthropy make them go slack. Demons falsely represent God's philanthropy in order to make us stop mourning and more inclined to sin; so too did the heretic Origen (whose cosmic theory of the *apokatastasis* envisioned the restoration of even the arch-sinner, Satan); demons plotted to assure us of God's philanthropy before we sinned but to doubt its existence afterwards so we might fall into irreparable disconsolation; monks must never forget the philanthropy that God had already shown them for their past sins, meaning that they should not test his patience.<sup>85</sup> Otherwise, John's references show how the pursuit of divine philanthropy shaped monastic life. He devotes significant portions of his treatise to describing a community near Alexandria called the "Repentance Monastery." One of its salient practices was to enact dramas of heavenly judgment in the monastery itself. These were staged to remind monks of their sins and need for repentance (Caner 2013). In one such drama, a former bandit who hoped to join the monastery is made to grovel for mercy on a church floor as the "philanthropic" abbot and the rest of the monks looked on, implicitly representing God and his angelic court; in another, monks sent to a monastic prison occupy themselves by begging for mercy as if they were already in hell, extravagantly assuming mournful postures of supplication which, John says, were calculated to win God's philanthropy.<sup>86</sup> He advises overly self-assured novices to seek spiritual masters who were tough and unyielding—not gentle or philanthropic—lest they fail to advance.<sup>87</sup>

These depictions in John Climacus' treatise help us understand the intense role assumed by Barsanuphius and John in the lives of their own monastic and lay correspondents. Many of the exchanges preserved in their letters can be viewed as small-scale dramas in which disciples desperate for divine sympathy and forgiveness would petition these two for personal assurances and vigorous petitions on their behalf. This was a cooperative relationship: as Barsanuphius told one correspondent, "I fall down before the kind and philanthropic God with unceasing supplications, that he might grant both to me and to you forgiveness of sins;" in response, another replied, "I will not cease offering

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 62, 347, 420, 667.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 67, 125, 227, 231, 486, 615, 624.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 62, 102, 118, 170, 388, 390.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 65, 70, 106, 363, 412, 544, 569, 662, 703, a 704.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 229, 404.

<sup>85</sup> John Climacus, *Divine Ladder*, 5 (three times), 6, 7.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 4, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 4.

thanks to our philanthropic God who counts me worthy of all good things through you.”<sup>88</sup> These could take comfort in the belief that God listened to Barsanuphius and John. They could obtain more direct assurance, however, by appealing to the philanthropy of these highly accessible mentors themselves. “For the Lord’s sake forgive me . . . philanthropic father,” wrote one, “because I am greatly afflicted.”<sup>89</sup> For this correspondent, obtaining forgiveness from Barsanuphius was tantamount to obtaining the forgiveness of divine philanthropy itself.

References to philanthropy in these letters rarely appear outside the context of such master–disciple exchanges. In virtually all that remain, however, the idea of clemency prevails. In one instance, Barsanuphius assures a layperson that the nomination of a corrupt candidate for an episcopal election should not throw the entire system in doubt. After all,

For the sake of the worthy, God also shows mercy on the unworthy. For “he sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” [Mt 5:45]. Indeed, he revealed this to us through sacred Scripture, saying to Abraham, “If I find ten righteous people in the city, then for the sake of the ten I shall not destroy the place” [Gen 18: 32]. Now, if for the sake of ten righteous people he does not destroy the city, how much more so will he show philanthropy even to the others for the sake of so many!<sup>90</sup>

Here Barsanuphius quotes the Gospel of Matthew about the operation of divine philanthropy to confirm a dubious episcopal election. Perhaps more striking, however, is that he uses the same passage to persuade a Christian to be similarly indiscriminate by letting a Jew use his winepress.

If, when God sends rain, it rains in your field but not in that of the Jew, then do not press his wine. If, however, God is kind and philanthropic to all and sends rain upon the just as well as upon the unjust [cf. Mt 5: 45], then why do you prefer to be inhumane rather than compassionate; for he says, “Be merciful, even as your Father in heaven is merciful” (Mt. 8: 12, Mk 9:48).<sup>91</sup>

Aside from this letter, only two others in this entire collection relate philanthropy to material generosity. In the first, Barsanuphius refers to a hypothetical situation in which a philanthropic benefactor agrees to lend money to an afflicted debtor to help him pay off another loan;<sup>92</sup> in the other, he advocates giving something to the type of poor person who came begging door to door: “Simply offer whatever you do without affliction, according to godly fear, for the kind and philanthropic God is glorified in this.”<sup>93</sup> Although it is hard to judge on the basis of these two examples alone, the reference in both to alleviation or prevention of “affliction” (*thlipsis*) seems significant: both imply that eliminating human affliction should override any reluctance one might feel to give to someone either completely unknown (a wandering beggar) or known to have already defaulted on a debt. Certainly an exhortation to respond generously to petitions without questioning them is implicit in both.

## 7. Philanthropia in Fourth-Century Christian Preaching

I now return to the fourth century and references to philanthropy found in pastoral literature addressed to lay Christians in the decades after the death of Julian the Apostate. Because this literature is voluminous, I have limited my survey to a few sermons by Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390) and by John Chrysostom (d. 407). These suffice to demonstrate that the ancient notion of clemency informed

<sup>88</sup> Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, 125; (Chryssavgis 2006–2007, vol. 1, pp. 146–47); *Letters*, 497; trans. 2: p. 101; cf. 517, 532, 370, 390, 659.

<sup>89</sup> *Letters*, 606; trans. Chryssavgis, 1: p. 190; cf. pp. 259, 260.

<sup>90</sup> *Letters*, 798; trans. Chryssavgis, 2: p. 296.

<sup>91</sup> *Letters*, 686; trans. Chryssavgis, 2: p. 244.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 616.

<sup>93</sup> *Letters*, 635; trans. Chryssavgis, 2: p. 217.

the discourse on philanthropy presented in early Christian preaching on material generosity towards beggars, as might be expected by now from the preceding survey.

No Greek sermon or treatise that has survived from this era uses the word *philanthropia* more often (22 times) than Gregory's lengthy sermon-turned-treatise known as *On Love of the Poor*. The reason, I believe, is the nature of its subject. The title obscures the fact that this sermon, written in Cappadocia in the late 360s or 370s, is almost entirely about the plight and treatment of lepers (Holman 2001, pp. 135–67; Wessel 2016, pp. 32–60). Among the sick and destitute, these were probably the most aggressively ostracized and abhorred in antiquity: as Gregory remarks, "these unfortunates . . . we avoid at all costs . . . hardly abiding the thought that in fact we share the same air as them."<sup>94</sup> After describing the shame they suffered as they crawled from the countryside into the cities to beg, Gregory turns to the theme of philanthropy, reminding his audience of the responsibilities that came with Christian wealth:

Who endowed you with all the things that exult humanity above the rest of creation? Is it not he who now in return and exchange for all asks that you show philanthropy? Can we not be ashamed if we, after all we have received from him and hope yet to receive, will not grant him even this one thing, philanthropy?<sup>95</sup>

Gregory clearly aimed to promote material generosity towards these sad figures: "let us put into practice the supreme and first law of God, 'who sends rain on the just' and on the sinners and makes his 'sun rise' [cf. Mt 5: 45] upon on all alike,"<sup>96</sup> he asks. Yet his main purpose was to challenge his congregation to adopt a generous attitude despite the habitual revulsion and fear that lepers provoked. "To them a philanthropic benefactor is not someone who has supplied their need," he notes, "but anyone who has not cruelly sent them away."<sup>97</sup>

Gregory repeatedly invokes the concept of *philanthropia* to persuade Christians to hear the pathetic petitions of lepers and show them mercy despite their suspicions and inclinations. It is this that makes his sermon one of the clearest articulations of the ideal to survive from antiquity. Gregory knew that there would be strong objections. Were lepers counted among the righteous poor in the Old Testament? No, he concedes, but that did not sanction treating them harshly; rather, he argues, it should incite his listeners to be "all the more to be philanthropic," considering the gratitude they would receive for generosity so unexpected.<sup>98</sup> Was it not true that their torments had been divinely imposed on them to punish past wickedness? No, Gregory insisted. Comparing this to pagan beliefs that gods liked human sacrifice, he laments that it even caused some Christians to actively abuse them.<sup>99</sup>

Gregory counters that leprosy was simply a condition of the flesh, one that could afflict any human. God had made all humans vulnerable, he says, so that they would not become overly inflated by the special dignity he had given them as bearers of his divine image (cf. Gen 1: 26–27).<sup>100</sup> In fact, Gregory maintains that this vulnerability was the fundamental basis for common philanthropy between humans:

We [call ourselves] disciples of Christ, the gentle and philanthropic, who has borne our infirmities, who humbled himself so as to assume the lump of which we consisted, who for our sakes became poor in this flesh and earthly tabernacle of ours, who experiences pain and was bruised for us that we might become rich in divinity? Yes, what of ourselves, who have been given so great a model of sympathy and compassion? What will our attitude

<sup>94</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 10; (Vinson 2003, p. 46).

<sup>95</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 23; (Vinson 2003, p. 56).

<sup>96</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 25; (Vinson 2003, p. 58).

<sup>97</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 12; (Vinson 2003, p. 47).

<sup>98</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 36; (Vinson 2003, p. 68).

<sup>99</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 29–35.

<sup>100</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 7, 35.

towards these people be? What shall we do? Shall we neglect them? Walk by? Look the other way? Just pass by? . . . Human nature . . . learning piety and philanthropy from our common weakness, has given compassion the force of law.<sup>101</sup>

Healthy or not, each person was essentially the separate limb of a single body (cf. Gal 3: 28; 1 Cor 12: 12), so that each had to learn to cooperate with the other. “This is why we must not overlook or neglect those who have fallen victim to our common infirmity . . . It is incumbent upon us to believe that the welfare of our own bodies and souls lies in this one thing, philanthropy.”<sup>102</sup>

Thus, the notion of philanthropy as a willingness to hear petitions and extend clemency towards those who did not seem to deserve it underlies Gregory’s entire sermon. Certainly lepers represented one of the greatest tests of the ancient ideal. The sermons that John Chrysostom delivered in Antioch and Constantinople at the end of the fourth century presumed larger populations and a greater range of suspect poor people. Called “John of Alms” in later Orthodox tradition, his sermons have been preserved in greater quantity than those of any other ancient Christian preacher, and his references to philanthropy run in the thousands. To my knowledge, no scholarship has focused on Chrysostom’s references to, and conceptualization of, philanthropia per se: the standard survey of Chrysostom on almsgiving simply equates it with compassion and almsgiving (Plassmann 1961, pp. 80–82; for context see Brändle 1979; Cardman 2008 and Mayer 2008). I have limited my survey to those sermons that are frequently cited in relation to almsgiving and may be considered reasonably representative of Chrysostom’s notion of philanthropy. These are his seven sermons *On Lazarus* and his single grand sermon *On Almsgiving*. Although both were presumably given in Antioch, we know little about their audience or context. They do, however, refer to philanthropy thirty-seven times (thirty-one in *On Lazarus* and six in *On Almsgiving*).

Chrysostom’s sermons *On Lazarus* represent a series of homilies, delivered over several days, on the parable in Luke 16: 19–31 about the sick beggar Lazarus and how he was ignored while lying outside the gates of a Rich Man’s house; after both Lazarus and the Rich Man die, the former goes to heaven and the latter goes to hell, regretful that he had missed his opportunity to show mercy. Chrysostom accordingly emphasizes the connection between human philanthropy and divine judgment, yet most of his references relate God’s philanthropy to God’s method of instruction, punishment and judgment. Our Master is philanthropic, Chrysostom maintains, because he is willing to forgive human sins if we confess and repent, and has given us multiple opportunities to do so before we die.<sup>103</sup> Calamities like earthquakes are sent out of philanthropy, to rouse us from our casual callousness towards one another; yet we should be grateful that, because of God’s philanthropy, such calamities are not more destructive, allowing most of us to survive.<sup>104</sup> It was a testament to divine philanthropy, he explained, that people suffer chastisements and grief in the present so as to escape more grievous punishments later.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, God also shows philanthropy by making others suffer, so as to startle us out of sinful complacency with their spectacle.<sup>106</sup> Due to his philanthropic crucifixion, humans are now to be justified through their good works alone.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, God philanthropically ordained that we be instructed by the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man.<sup>108</sup> Unlike most poor people, Lazarus humbly accepted his sufferings without questioning the mysterious operations of God’s philanthropy.<sup>109</sup> Placed in front of the Rich Man’s gate, he provided an easy opportunity for the

<sup>101</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 36; (Vinson 2003, pp. 49–50).

<sup>102</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *On the Love of the Poor*, 32; (Vinson 2003, p. 44).

<sup>103</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 4 (Patrologia Graeca [= PG] 48: col. 1012), 7 (cols. 1046, 1047, 1051).

<sup>104</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 6 (PG 48: cols. 1027, 1030, 1037).

<sup>105</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 4 (PG 48: col. 1016), 6 (1030).

<sup>106</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 3 (PG 48: col. 996).

<sup>107</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 4 (PG 48: col. 1007).

<sup>108</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 1 (PG 48: col. 963).

<sup>109</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 6 (PG 48: col. 1034).

latter to show philanthropy.<sup>110</sup> But the Rich Man only became philanthropic after going to hell, where he reflected on Lazarus too late.<sup>111</sup> Even the dogs that had stopped to lick Lazarus's wounds had been more philanthropic.<sup>112</sup> Accordingly, we must not neglect the poor person when he appears to rouse us from apathy to philanthropy.<sup>113</sup> Christ himself had provided a model of philanthropy by healing lepers, casting out demons, and comforting the sick.<sup>114</sup> Your mother may be philanthropic in giving alms, Chrysostom notes at one point, but that will not help you unless you do likewise.<sup>115</sup> "Do this, I beg you," Chrysostom implores, "without making any inquiry more than is necessary."

Need alone is the poor man's worthiness; if anyone at all ever comes to us with this recommendation, let us not meddle any further. We do not provide for the manners but for the man. We show mercy on him not because of his virtue but because of his misfortune, that we ourselves may receive from the Master his great mercy, that we ourselves, unworthy as we are, may enjoy his philanthropy.

"If we seek to require an accounting from our fellow servants, we ourselves will lose the philanthropy from above."<sup>116</sup>

Omitting the formulaic remarks on divine philanthropy that conclude each of these sermons, this exhausts Chrysostom's references to philanthropy in these sermons. They express an attitude of clemency in nearly every case, several of which patently describe a willingness (or unwillingness) to listen and show mercy to people who do not seem worthy of attention or redemption. Regarding material generosity, the parallels with Emperor Julian's *Letter to Theodore* are striking: like Julian, Chrysostom cites the Stoic commonplace, "We do not provide for the manners but the man," to epitomize his argument for giving to anonymous beggars (Kabiersch 1960, p. 70). This indicates that Christian and classical discourse on philanthropic giving drew on the same roots. Chrysostom used this argument to support universal generosity. According to him, Christian philanthropy was to be exemplified by a willingness to extend money to all petitioners, despite the strongest suspicion that they did not deserve it.

Corroboration that this was his view comes from the six references Chrysostom makes to philanthropy in his famous sermon *On Almsgiving*. This sermon, for all its rationales for almsgiving, only refers to philanthropy in its closing paragraphs. Chrysostom begins by reminding his audience that God "orders us to be philanthropic continually in all quarters, through words, money, and deeds."<sup>117</sup> But his subsequent references indicate that by "philanthropic," Chrysostom meant being willing to give even if it meant giving to people who were almost patently undeserving. We too, like God, needed to be clement in our judgment.

And if God should examine minutely each of our issues as we investigate about the poor, we would not bring to pass for ourselves one single pardon or mercy . . . . Therefore, become a philanthropist and [be] gentle toward our fellow slave and remit his many sins and have mercy upon him, so that you too may become worthy of the same favorable verdict from God.<sup>118</sup>

Chrysostom then quotes the Gospel of Matthew, recommending that Christians give like their heavenly Father, "who makes his sun rise on the wicked and the good," a passage to which he even alludes while paraphrasing the Pauline Letter to Titus:

<sup>110</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 2 (PG 48: col. 987).

<sup>111</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 4 (PG 48: col. 1009).

<sup>112</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 6 (PG. 48: col. 1039).

<sup>113</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 1 (PG 48: col. 971).

<sup>114</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 1 (PG 48: col. 968).

<sup>115</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 6 (PG 48: col. 1036).

<sup>116</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 1 (PG 48: col. 990); trans. C. P. Roth in (Chrysostom 1981, p. 53).

<sup>117</sup> John Chrysostom, *On Almsgiving* 5 (p. 22); trans. G.G. Christo, (Chrysostom 1998, p. 146).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.



Although countless [humans] blaspheme your Master, and thousands upon thousands commit prostitution, steal, plunder, dig up and open graves, perform myriad of evils [cf. Titus 3:4], he, nevertheless, does not withdraw his benefits from them; rather, he extends to all the ray of the sun and the rains and the crops of the earth to be shared in common by all [cf. Mt 5:45] You do likewise by demonstrating his philanthropy.<sup>119</sup>

His congregation can start, he reiterates, by not questioning beggars about their reason for begging, for “if we are going to examine lives, we will never have mercy on any human being.” Instead, they should “banish far from us this ill-timed curiosity” and give abundantly to all, so that they might “obtain much mercy and the philanthropy of God” on Judgment Day.<sup>120</sup>

## 8. The Importance of the Ancient Conception of Philanthropy

“*Philanthropia* implies an active and generous solidarity exercised regardless of circumstances,” writes Jacqueline de Romilly, immediately adding, “the birth of such a word represents, in truth, a most remarkable initiative” (De Romilly 1979, p. 44). Ancient Greeks, Romans and Jews were neither utterly callous nor ungenerous toward poor strangers on an individual basis (Parkin 2006; Cecchet 2014). The dominant public moralities, however, were largely aristocratic and tribal, so that moral obligations tended to be limited to members of one’s own family, class, civic or religious group (Hamel 1990, pp. 216–17; Holman 2001, pp. 31–48; Lieu 2007). Justifications were rarely voiced, at least on a universal level, for generosity to people who fell outside those groups. An exception to this fact of ancient Mediterranean ethics was the development and spread of the ideal of *philanthropia*. Thanks to David Konstan’s work on emotions in the classical Greek polis, it is possible to be more precise about what early Christianity contributed to the history of this term. As Konstan points out, in classical discourse, *eleos* (mercy) was usually distinguished from *philanthropia* (clemency): while the former was usually restricted to an impulse to help members of one’s own circles, the latter described the rarer impulse that people felt to help others outside those circles (Konstan 2006, pp. 215–16, 218). What Christianity added, through the formulation of Titus 3: 4, was a much closer coordination between these two concepts, making *eleos* an expression of *philanthropia*, the former now being extended universally in service of the latter. Of course most early Christians, like most modern readers, would have considered such distinctions purely academic. Yet as we have repeatedly seen in the survey above, Christian authors from the fourth to seventh centuries regularly saved the word *philanthropia* to describe the precondition a person needed to possess before he or she would perform an act of mercy. This precondition was a willingness to listen and show people mercy—through pardon for treason, forgiveness of taxes, eternal salvation, or a gift of alms—despite the firmest suspicion, belief or knowledge that they did not deserve it; even, in fact, if they presumed them guilty of all possible wrongs and deceptions.

The foregoing hopefully suffices to demonstrate that this conception of philanthropy informed early Christian tradition and practice (at least within its Near Eastern, Greek matrix) as much as it did classical tradition and practice. I conclude by suggesting three reasons why this ancient understanding of philanthropy was particularly important then and may remain so today.

First and foremost, as already noted, it provided a rationale for extending generosity universally to all people, offering a theoretical basis for the universal provision of human welfare. While it did not explain how such universal welfare might be provided in detail, it did present classical authors and Christian preachers alike with a word and concept to justify why individuals should show generosity to others despite their strong reservations.

Second, the notion of clemency refines what we mean by personal kindness or generosity. To propose that a kind or generous act must be defined and premised by a conscious presumption

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

that its recipients are unworthy may seem unsavory to modern sensibilities, but it also may serve to override the reservations or excuses that prevent us from acting generously.

Third, recognizing that clemency was an essential aspect of ancient philanthropy might contribute to the revitalization of modern philanthropy. Philanthropy in modern parlance is a largely institutionalized, abstract word, bereft of personal meaning or emotional force. How can any individual be moved by such an impersonal concept as “universal kindness” or “love of humanity”? Michael Ignatieff notes a similar problem in modern discourse on human rights:

The language of human needs is a basic way of speaking about this idea of a natural human identity. We want to know what we have in common with each other beneath the infinity of our differences. What distinguishes the language of needs is its claim that human beings actually feel a common and shared identity in the basic fraternity of hunger, thirst, cold, exhaustion, loneliness or sexual passion. The possibility of human solidarity rests on this idea of natural human identity. A society in which strangers would feel common belonging and mutual responsibility to each other depends in trust, and trust reposes in turn on the idea that beneath difference there is identity.

Yet when one thinks about it, this is a puzzling idea. For who has ever met a pure and natural human being? . . . . My obligations are defined by what it means to be a citizen, a father, a husband, a son, in this culture, in this time and place. The role of pure human duty seems obscure. It is difference which seems to rule my duties, not identity.

“Woe betide any man who depends on the abstract humanity of another for his food and protection,” Ignatieff observes, after discussing the case of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (Ignatieff 1985, pp. 28, 52). The modern concept of philanthropy arguably shares a similar problem with that of human rights: even when not a matter of corporatized institutional philanthropy, it is hard for individuals to understand why they should show kindness to unknown strangers simply by virtue of membership in the same species, let alone common descent from a distant African progenitor. What gave ancient philanthropy its provocative force was its recognition that this difficulty actually existed, and subsequent recognition that philanthropy represented a genuine challenge. To be philanthropic was, quite simply, to be something almost superhuman: it was to go against ordinary human tribalist nature and behave much more instead like an emperor or god.

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