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Review: Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society

Edward L. Smither

Liberty University, elsmither@liberty.edu

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Chapters Five through Seven turn to ecclesiastical events surrounding the “Robber Synod” of 449, the articulation of Roman Primacy, and ecclesial problems in the wake of Chalcedon. In the final chapter Wessel offers an exposition of Leo’s unique sense of history. Unlike Augustine, he regarded a Christian Rome as an imperfect realization of the city of God, whose providential significance was rooted in Peter’s apostleship (368f.).

The great virtue of this book is its exceptionally detailed treatment of so many facets of Leo’s world and its attempt to link theology and social history. The author manifests mastery of abundant sources, she articulates very fine points of continuity and discontinuity with Leo’s forebears in the Western church, and for these reasons the book will attract specialists in Leo as well as students of the early rise of the papacy. The book’s organization is somewhat uneven. The first four chapters, for instance, take up the first 250 pages, while chapters five through eight occupy the last hundred, and a reader may wish for more sub-sections to make the overall argument more clear. In places the density of detail can compete with the flow and clarity of discussion, and the relationship the author sees between Leo’s Christology and his efforts to centralize ecclesial authority in Rome can be hard to follow. The work witnesses to immense erudition and research, however, and will be a valuable addition to any research library.

Michael C. McCarthy, S.J., Santa Clara University

Susan R. Holman, editor

Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society

Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008

Pp. 320, \$32.99.

An initial product of the Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History series, the volume comprises the work of a group of international scholars who approach the question of wealth and poverty through the lenses of various disciplines, including New Testament, history, papyri studies, and theology. Though the study is limited to the Eastern church—clearly communicated in the preface and introduction but not in the book’s actual title—the work is also organized geographically as wealth and poverty are explored in Jerusalem (Part One), Egypt (Part Two), and Constantinople, Cappadocia, and Byzantium (Parts Three and Four). Chronologically, the volume begins in the New Testament period and stretches well into the middle ages, while a final section (Part Five) is devoted to contemporary application of patristic thought.

What are the weaknesses of *Wealth and Poverty*? Though the volume accommodates the diverse work and training of eighteen scholars, some of the articles—especially Chapters Three and Four—are so brief that their arguments are somewhat underdeveloped. In the final section on “Patristic Studies for Today,” Brian Matz (Chapter Eighteen) succeeds in establishing a coherent connection between

patristic thought and modern Catholic social thought. In contrast, Timothy Patista's effort in Chapter Seventeen to link Basil's philanthropic program with the lending strategies of modern economists Mohamed Yunis and Jane Jacobs is rather disjointed and his treatment of Basil seems to be more of a launching point to discuss modern economic problems. Finally, while the volume is entitled *Wealth and Poverty*, it seems much more concerned with notions of poverty. Though much of the work does deal with the Fathers' teachings on how the wealthy should treat the poor, it is only in part four ("Wealth, Trade, and Profit in Early Byzantium") that the notion of wealth is considered by itself.

Aside from these concerns, this collection of essays has a number of strengths. Clearly, the study is driven by a serious interaction with key patristic texts addressing wealth and poverty. While a number of the contributors make reference to Clement of Alexandria's *Quis dives salvetur?* (*Who is the Rich Saved Person?*), Van den Hoek (Chapter Five) offers an especially insightful overview of this work. All but one article in part three examines John Chrysostom's thought and approach to poverty. Brändle (Chapter Nine), in particular, advances the compelling thesis that Chrysostom's reading of Matt 25.31–46 is what frames John's overall theology. Through his study of the Byzantine liturgy, particularly that of Basil, Constantelos (Chapter Thirteen) offers some helpful insights into the patristic idea of *philanthrōphia*. Also, Laiou (Chapter Sixteen) shows the developing view on merchants and business from the fourth to eleventh centuries by carefully examining hagiographical texts. Finally, arguably the most intriguing source work was done by Serfass (Chapter Seven), who offers a colorful commentary on the Egyptian church's care for widows by analyzing some relevant papyri.

A second area of notable strength in *Wealth and Poverty* is that a concerted effort was made to define poverty in the patristic period. Setting aside modern presuppositions, Buell (Chapter Two) discusses the language of poverty in early Christianity and considers how the poor were treated in texts like the *Didache*, *1 Clement*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Brakke (Chapter Six) begins his article by distinguishing between monastic voluntary poverty—most notably through renunciation of private property—and involuntary poverty. In short, Brakke shows that the cenobitic system actually protected monks from economic vulnerability, something that anchorites like Antony were more likely to face. Brakke concludes by analyzing Evagrius Ponticus's counsel for such poor monks. Mayer's article (Chapter Ten) also raises the question of voluntary and involuntary poverty. By examining the cases of Olympia and Flavian, Mayer shows that these wealthy ascetics who had renounced the world, continued to live comfortably and have access to material resources. Thus, they were distinct from those who were "structurally poor . . . without resources and unable to secure their livelihood through their own labor" (150). While Brakke and Mayer's descriptions of voluntary poverty could perhaps best be termed "simplicity," their studies show that finding a working patristic definition of poverty is difficult. Thus, their discussions are probably the strongest invitations in this volume to further scholarship on this question.

In summary, Susan Holman has done a noteworthy job of editing a volume of diverse essays that address an important question in patristic studies. As an

academic resource, this text might be used in a graduate-level patristics seminar. In the very least, it should be listed as a useful secondary source for early Christian research projects.

Edward Smither, Liberty University

Claire Sotinel and Maurice Sartre, editors
*L'usage du passé entre Antiquité tardive et haut Moyen Âge:
 Hommage à Brigitte Beaujard*
 Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008
 Pp. 145.

The most provocative essay in this collection is also the shortest. In the volume's brief final chapter, Nancy Gauthier tells a cautionary tale of the journey of Saint Expédit from the *Martyrologium hieronymianum* to the roadside shrines of modern Île de Réunion (some five hundred miles east of Madagascar) and the "hit-parade des saints" in contemporary Guadeloupe and Brazil. Together with his evolution from a patron of early modern shop-keepers to a creolized first responder for today's urgent causes (including love affairs and, elsewhere, computer hacking), Expeditus's unlikely migrations highlight the imponderables that surround the diffusion of many saints' cults, disclose the gaps that separate the confident traditions of public memory from the circumspect histories of modern scholars, and offer lessons to all committed to understanding the religious life of late antiquity.

For such reasons, Gauthier's travels along the routes trod by Saint Expédit also best capture the spirit of Brigitte Beaujard's *Le culte des saints en Gaule: Les premiers temps. D'Hilaire de Poitiers à la fin du VIe siècle* (2000), the inspiration for these essays written by Beaujard's colleagues, friends, and students. Otherwise, that thoughtful attention to the interplay of history, memory, and identity that is one hallmark of Beaujard's work is less evident here than the volume's title might suggest. Of the seven other contributors only Claire Sotinel and Valérie Fauvinet-Ranson openly engage such themes. The latter's exploration of the *souvenir* of the old gods in Cassiodorus's *Variae* suggests that by the early sixth century Italy's pagan past had been sufficiently tamed that Cassiodorus could not only gracefully deploy the names of the gods metonymically and analogically (that is, rhetorically) but even—by valorizing the same euhemerist claims that a century before had served in Prudentius's merciless assault on paganism—honor the classical gods, or rather the men behind them, as the inventors of the arts of civilization. Thus Cassiodorus's implicit re-evaluation of the past, which cast former Italic religious practices as erroneous rather than demonic, compares structurally with the manipulations of more recent history that Sotinel identifies in the *Liber Pontificalis*. Sotinel's target is the *Liber's* apparently confused entry on Vigilius, whose years in office (537–55) were deeply troubled by the Three Chapters controversy. Vigilius's *vita*, Sotinel argues, was a partisan effort composed