

The Gospel for the Poor:
Reimagining the Church's Engagement with the Poor in Conversation with Clement of
Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen

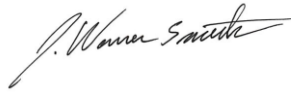
by

J. Shane Comellas

Date: April 21, 2020

Approved:

4/25/2020



Dr. J. Warren Smith, 1st Reader

Dr. Christopher A. Beeley, 2nd Reader



Dr. William Willimon, D.Min. Director

An abstract of a thesis in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2020
ABSTRACT

The Gospel for the Poor:
Reimagining the Church's Engagement with the Poor in Conversation with Clement of
Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen

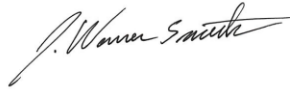
by

J. Shane Comellas

Date: April 21, 2020

Approved:

4/25/2020



Dr. J. Warren Smith, 1st Reader

Dr. Christopher A. Beeley, 2nd Reader



Dr. William Willimon, D.Min. Director

An abstract of a thesis in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2020

Copyright by
J. Shane Comellas
2020

Abstract

This thesis examines the ineffectiveness of the 21st century Church's work among the poor and reimagines this engagement through the lens of sermons given by Clement of Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom. The Church is the most charitable entity on the planet, however, despite giving away hundreds of billions of dollars a year and investing considerable time and effort towards the work of social justice, circumstances for the poor remain largely unchanged. The patristic period in question represents a vital conversation partner because their ministry to the poor catalyzed a movement that yielded exponential growth within their churches and made them significant players in the socio-political landscape in the Greco-Roman world. This study engages three sermons delivered by these pastors as a means of garnering a more granular feel for the common life within the Church. This thesis considers explicitly their use of the gospel as the *modus operandi* for ecclesial and social change and how reimagining our witness through this lens can be a catalyst for renewal.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Table of Contents	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Abbreviations	v
Introduction: Rethinking the Church’s Witness in a Time Where Good Works Have Supplanted the Gospel	1
Chapter One: The Necessity of the Gospel for Societal Reform	6
Forms of Poverty.....	6
Modern Efforts to Address Poverty	7
The Promulgation of the Gospel in Tandem with Works	15
Patristic Pastors’ Sermons on Addressing Poverty: Clement, Nazianzus and Chrysostom	18
Clement of Alexandria: “Who is the Rich Man that is Being Saved”	20
John Chrysostom: “Four Discourses on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus”	21
Gregory Nazianzen: “Oration 14”	23
Chapter Two: The Gospel as the <i>Modus Operandi</i> For Serving the Poor	25
Identifying the Greatest Need Between Wealth and Poverty:	27
Clement of Alexandria: Wealth as a Tool.....	27
John Chrysostom: Poverty Leads to Faith	30
Gregory Nazianzus: All of Humanity is Poor without Christ.....	35
The Theological and Social Aspects of the Gospel:	38
Gregory Nazianzen: Kenosis as Witness	38

Clement of Alexandria: Soteriological Justice	40
John Chrysostom: Ecclesiology and New Creation	43
Chapter Three: Spiritual Formation and the Poor.....	48
Pastoral Call to Action:	49
Clement of Alexandria: The Poor as Trainers in Virtue	49
John Chrysostom: The Poor as the Context for Spiritual Formation.....	55
Gregory Nazianzen: The Hypostatic Nature of Christ Embodied in the Church ..	59
Chapter Four: Eschatology and a Vision for Societal Renewal	65
Teleological Frameworks Towards Transformative Justice:	67
Gregory Nazianzen: Eschatology- Love and Kinship in Cruciform Towards Gods In-Breaking	67
Clement of Alexandria: Eschatology- Retribution, Works and Their Reward in the Hereafter	70
John Chrysostom: Eschatology- Redemptive Suffering, Purgation and a Bridge Called Justice	73
Chapter Five: The Gospel for the Poor and its Prospect for Ecclesial Renewal.....	77
Patristic Vision for Societal Transformation	77
Spiritual Formation as Mission.....	79
A Paradigm for Discipleship.....	84
Conclusion: Lovers of the Poor	90
Postscript: Covid-19 and the New Poor.....	94
Bibliography	96

Acknowledgments

This project has been a collective effort by so many who have made contributions of love, time, wisdom, and mercy towards the completion of this work. I want to thank God for tirelessly believing in me and calling me to my best. Next, I would like to thank my wife Jaimee and our four daughters Jaelyn, Avery, Olivia, and Adeline, without whose love and support I would have never been able to engage in this study. Jaimee, you read all of my work and have been a constant source of love and support, you are such a treasure and my hero! Thank you, Duke Divinity School, for sharing the gift of your amazing faculty through two different programs and especially the Rev. Dr. J. Warren Smith, the past Director of the DMIN program, and my current academic advisor. You are a gift to this university, a wonderful scholar, faithful witness of the gospel, and a trusted confidant. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Christopher Beeley for reading and helping to edit this work. I want to thank the 2016 DMIN cohort who helped me to reimagine the work of my ministry through each of the gifts that you brought to the program. Also, I would like to pass along sincere gratitude to the people of Covenant Life Church who have been the guinea pigs for every new idea I have wanted to try out on you and a constants source of prayer and support. Thank you, mom, for your prayers and the legacy of faith that you have passed along to your children. We miss you! A special thanks to my family and friends, especially my brothers Jerry and Chris, and my great friends and writing partners Russ Lackey and Craig Giera. Thank you all, your influence has colored my work with grace, and I am ever grateful for your investment in my life.

List of Abbreviations

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

Introduction:

Rethinking the Church's Witness in a Time Where Good Works Have Supplanted the Gospel

Christ's stated mission, as it pertains to the poor, was to care for them through the proclamation of the gospel and by addressing their physical needs. Luke records this in a scene where Jesus unrolls the scroll in the synagogue and reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19). The messianic in-breaking prophesied first by Isaiah and embodied in Christ would catalyze a movement through the Church that sought to engender a concern for the poor underpinned by the value that each person has as one formed in God's image. Nevertheless, the poor remain disempowered primarily because the undercurrent of sin that sustains its hold on the poor is addressed with practices that in and of themselves are not transformative. This thesis intends to explore how reclaiming the Church's proclamation of the gospel in tandem with its work with the poor can catalyze ecclesial renewal and societal transformation by situating the locus of its message decidedly on the saving and redeeming work of Christ. To put it differently, though awareness and generosity are essential, the proclamation of the gospel seasons the soul through the Spirit in a way that enacts transformative justice. Additionally, the gospel compels Christians to proclaim good news to the poor and to be formed in the virtues of the gospel message itself (Luke 4:14).

The undertaking of this project has helped to reveal, in a very personal way, the multivalent aspects of poverty. In May of 2018, I lost one of my closest friends, and though his

family is not devoid of resources such as food or shelter, the emotional bankruptcy has left them scrambling for any scrap of healing and hope they can find and daily they are still left wanting. Not long after this, Hurricanes Florence and Michael devastated my home states of North Carolina and Florida. The destruction was beyond words; the storms left in their wake an impoverishment of necessities of food and shelter, along with the courage and will to rebuild. Admittedly, these circumstances are markedly different from those who suffer in impoverished conditions around the world without recourse. Currently, more than 14,000 immigrants are marching towards the US southern border in hopes of finding a better life. However, all of these conditions are indeed a poverty of sorts, and as Saint Gregory Nazianzen states, “the welfare of our own bodies and souls lies in this one thing, loving regard for our fellow man.”¹ Gregory hopes that we would recognize the interconnectedness of the poor, and those with the means to aid them, in a way that understands that the care for others is in its own right care for one’s self. The question is, however, how do we best help those that have been stricken by poverty in all of its forms, and can this be addressed in a way that will establish a different footing for the poor and generate lasting change?

The gospel is the pivot point that both tasks the Church to work towards transformative justice on behalf of the poor while also serving as the *modus operandi* for the poor to overcome the stigmas and conditions of poverty through new modes of empowerment. In this paper, I lean heavily on a particular understanding of transformation and justice. The working concept for these terms is *eudaimonia*, which is achieving the best possible conditions for human flourishing. *Eudaimonia* seeks to do more than meet the requirements of a legal demand or to correct a

¹ Gregory Nazianzus, *The Fathers of the Church; St Gregory of Nazianzus, Select Orations*, “On Love of the Poor, Oration 14,” 44, 8. Trans. Martha Vinson (Washington DC: Catholic University Press).

misgiving. Instead, justice of this sort necessitates a relationship with Christ and the Church, who is His body and concerns flourishing of the whole person: body, mind, and Spirit.² The hope of this pursuit is that it seeks to restore a sense of agency that is modeled after the character and attributes of Christ in whose image humanity was fashioned. Thus, justice of this sort necessarily entails reconciliation with God and walking in the way of the Spirit that characterizes people who participate in Christ's new creation.

Transformative justice, in this sense, does not merely seek to meet a need; instead, it aims to create gospel-inspired practices that reform the poor and their benefactors alike into the character of Christ while subsequently addressing the systems of disempowerment through prophetic witness towards generative processes of reform. To explore this claim, in chapter one, I will survey the primary efforts the Church and other organizations are making to address poverty, explicitly noting their seeming inability to foster an environment of transformative justice on a significant scale. Next, I will briefly highlight the work of Francis E. Willard and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and their social reforms, noting that it was the preaching of the gospel itself that catalyzed their work into the consciousness of America. Finally, I will offer a cursory account of the efforts of the Church in the Patristic period, which experienced exponential growth as an emerging movement in the Greco-Roman world and fostered an environment of social activism that transformed the sociopolitical climate on behalf of the poor through the

² Christopher Beeley, "Christ and Human Flourishing in Patristic Theology," *Pro Ecclesia*, Vol. XXV, No.2 (Spring 2016), 126-153. Human flourishing includes the whole person and as Beeley writes concerns "what it means to live a good life individually and socially, to thrive, to have a sense of purpose, and to know joy in the midst of life's challenges—is, in the mind of the early Fathers, an invitation to see Christ as the source, the definition, and the means of a life worth living" (127).

proclamation of the gospel. I will then demonstrate how the study of three specific sermons given by Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen offers us a unique window into the life of the Church during that epoch and offer a model worth considering as we continue our work among the poor. In chapter two I will highlight how these three pastors envisaged the gospel as the *modus operandi* for the Church's work among the poor and examine how they used it as the essential component for calling the Church, and the world at large, into God's salvation by participating actively in the condescension and redemptive power of Jesus Christ. In chapter three, I will discuss how these pastors understood the relational aspect of the Church's work among the poor as deeply formative for culturing virtue in the Church and within the lives of the poor. The message of the gospel intended to inform the way that the Church was to live within the world. Its work among the poor was the locus of its formation as both the poor and the Church equally benefited from this intentional relationship building. In chapter four, I examine how Clement, Chrysostom, and Gregory have a vision for societal renewal formed by, and in an eschatological hope that understands that one's position in the afterlife was contingent in part by one's effort to improve the conditions for others in this life. They understood that genuine faith was always coupled with the works of righteousness that had an eye towards the afterlife. Furthermore, I will show how their efforts reoriented the way power was brokered in the Greco-Roman world and offered the poor and the Church a new footing as essential players in the socio-political landscape of that period. In the final chapter I will discuss how this particular patristic approach can be a helpful conversation partner as the Church considers its work among the poor. Additionally, I will offer a paradigmatic design of transformative justice

that is rooted in the proclamation of the gospel promulgated by these Early Church Leaders and how reimagining our work among the poor can be more effective.

Chapter 1:

The Necessity of the Gospel for Societal Reform

Currently, there are many organizations and religious movements that aim to address poverty. However, this most often happens in the abstract where resources are given to help improve the conditions of those that suffer without the personalization of relationship or the necessary context that can help to shape both the hope the gift intends and the framework for a sustainable future. The Church's move towards missional practices in the modern era that emphasize the work of justice among the poor while deemphasizing the gospel has been largely ineffective because money and programs devoid of the efficacy of the gospel hope to accomplish reformatory processes without creating the transformational practices by which to achieve them. To explore this claim, I will highlight the current conditions of poverty and current efforts to address them. I will discuss how efforts rooted in the promulgation of the gospel itself in tandem with this work has been effective, and finally, I will explore the work of three pastors from the Patristic era who were catalysts for societal transformation in this era.

Forms of Poverty

The Church possesses, as part of its mission, care for the poor. However, as Susan Holman argues, the term "poor...has always carried a variety of religious meanings, and these meanings are not always associated with fiscal economics."¹ Holman's point is that the Church's conception of the poor included monastics who voluntarily gave up their wealth in pursuit of

¹ Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

holiness, the blessed poor who exuded a beatific poverty that merits the mercy and beneficence of God, those that had become poor because of calamity, the street beggar who lived on the fringes of society and of course the spiritually impoverished who lacked the resource of heavenly wisdom and salvation.² Though this list is nowhere near exhaustive, it highlights a critical understanding of the way that poverty was viewed in its various forms. Throughout most of the Church's history, the spiritually deprived were considered to be in far greater peril than those who struggled for sustenance. However, today, at least in most of the developed world, spiritual poverty is an afterthought, and while billions of dollars are given annually to aid the physical needs of the poor, it has done little to affect the lives of the poor or to improve their situation. There is much that could be said here about the psychology of the poor and how scarcity affects the psyche in ways that reinforce the conditions of poverty. However, this project will aim to focus specifically on the Early Church's approach to addressing the spiritually and physically destitute.³

Modern Efforts to Address Poverty

² Ibid, 3, 5. Holman draws a particular distinction between the Greek terms *penes*, who were the working poor, and those whose economic resources were minimal and *ptochos*, who were the street beggars who lived on the fringe of society or those who had fallen from wealth because of some sort of calamity. The latter case of *ptochos* was seen in some respect as divine retribution for evil committed. The *penes* maintained their status within society and were generally considered better off than the *ptochos* poor. Though she notes that there was no clear and absolute way that these were conceptualized, the manner in which one existed as poor within society had class levels that carried different conceptions within the societal structure itself.

³ Frank Schilbach, Heather Schofield, Mullainathan Sendhil, "The Psychological Lives of the Poor," *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings* 106 (2016): 435-40. In this article Schilbach et al. discuss the effects of poverty on the psyche, noting, "when you are poor, economic challenges are more than economic, they are also cognitive (438)." They quantify this in terms of "bandwidth" that become strained within the mind when the conditions of poverty tax it. Causatively, an impoverished mind reinforces the conditions of poverty under the stress that limits deeper cognitive reasoning that could prompt different outcomes.

The gospel has been the impetus of the Church's activity and the locus of its preaching for millennia. However, in our twenty-first century context, acts of service, social justice, and activism have supplanted the preaching of the Gospel message itself as the *primum movens* of the Church's witness. This assertion is made plain in the National Council of Churches' "21st Century Social Creed," where the gospel morphs into a robust social agenda that seeks the reformation of society in a manner that neglects the soul of the problem's source.⁴ Following this, David Bosch writes that historically the preaching of the gospel, along with relief and aid for the poor, were partners that worked in tandem with greater emphasis being placed upon the gospel; nevertheless, modernity reshaped how soteriology was communicated, placing greater emphasis on science, human ingenuity, and social programs.⁵ These programs were often formed upon the tenets of the gospel but jettisoned preaching as an anachronistic relic of a former age. Thus, while Mainline and Evangelical denominations are active in their engagement with the poor, specifically, the saving message of the gospel is often strangely absent in their efforts of working with the poor.⁶ Consequently, when the gospel is reduced to actions devoid of verbal proclamation and witness, the saving work of the cross is often lost in translation, and our hope for real justice for the poor is vacated. Joel James and Brian Biedebach argue that relocating the emphasis of the Church's message may not have replaced the "cross with a soup kitchen," it has

⁴ National Council of Churches, *A 21st Century Social Creed*, April 15, 2020, <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/a-21st-century-social-creed/>.

⁵ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2011), 404. Bosch contends that in the post Enlightenment era that "the world's needs and solutions are being portrayed in terms which, to an extent, are independent of Jesus Christ", causatively placing salvation in the hands of humans who may follow Christ's example but deemphasize the message of the gospel itself (405, 408). In this sense, salvation is a human enterprise that hopes to accomplish salvation for humanity through a paradigm where "guilt and salvation no longer primarily divide and unite humans to God, but humans among themselves" (407).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 407.

led, "to an unintentional displacement of the gospel itself."⁷ The issue, they note, is that deemphasizing the gospel in favor of social activism often makes the work of justice unsustainable; the conditions on the ground in Malawi Africa where they are engaged in pastoral work remains largely unchanged.⁸ Thus as the Apostle Paul argues: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them" (Romans 10:14)?

Modern aid efforts often do very little to effect change because, while meeting needs can make a difference temporarily, the broader systemic issues that exacerbate the plight of the poor are never considered. Psychologist Robert Lupton in *Toxic Charity* writes that while many people are generous, much of our charitable work harms those that it has targeted to help because our efforts often reinforce an underclass.⁹ Lupton argues that this occurs because the manner in which people aim to help the poor removes their sense of personal responsibility by failing to help them develop the skills and sustainable programs that can help them emerge from the clutches of poverty.¹⁰ Money and gifts alone are not solutions. Furthermore, Lupton posits that

⁷ Brian Biedebach and Joel James, "Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 25, no. 1 (2014): 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35. The evidence that James and Biedbach cite for this assertion was a survey that tracked the missional focus of pastors, teachers and missionaries, measured against statistical conversions, and the net effect that these had upon the people and the living conditions of those in Malawi.⁸ Though they affirm the importance of social justice work, they lament that the conditions of poverty remain ultimately unchanged and, in some cases, the Malawai people were worse off. Furthermore, they note that most of the Christian movements that are primarily focused on social justice ultimately die in part because *they have a tendency to focus on acts of service instead of proclamation of the gospel itself*. Robert D. Lupton also backs their research, *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 36-37. Lupton notes that "decades of free aid from well-meaning benefactors have produced an entitlement mentality and eroded a spirit of entrepreneurship...the reality is aid has helped make the poor poorer and growth slower."

⁹ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 31, 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 129, Lupton, arguing for charitable efforts that reinforce and strengthen a sense of agency, writes, "The struggle for self-sufficiency is, like the butterfly struggling to emerge from its cocoon, an essential strength-building process that should not be short-circuited by 'compassionate' intervention. The effective helper can be an encourager, a coach, a partner, but never a caretaker." This idea is significant because of what we will later see in Clement's work, however for Clement, the poor themselves are also a coach to their benefactors in a way that helps them to both culture virtue and recognize their own need for Christ's saving work in their life.

while more than 90 percent of Americans think it "important to be personally involved in a cause we believe in," these efforts have not helped but have only further exacerbated the issues for the poor because it robs them of their sense of power and agency.¹¹ The reason, of course, is that when there is not a transfer in the relationship of giving, and there is not a clear telos of what the poor and those that aim to help them are being called to, benevolence is brokered in a way that may make the giver feel good about what they are doing while making little impact upon those they aim to reach.

The difficulty is that while giving to the poor may alleviate an immediate need, it does not address the conditions that cause poverty. Thus, the poor receive temporary relief, but their poverty will perpetually place new demands upon their patrons to continually meet their needs. Additionally, this kind of aid harms the poor because it disempowers them by failing to ask them to appropriate their sense of agency in a way that begins the of improving the mindsets, attitudes and conditions that are causing or reinforcing the conditions of poverty. Lupton argues further, much of the real "results" of the aid offered are almost "entirely unexamined" and that the wells that are dug, the food that is distributed and the money that is given, when tallied by those "closest to the ground on the receiving end of generosity... quietly admit that it may be hurting more than helping."¹² The poor are hurt when their sense of agency is weakened, their humanity is stifled by relationships that broker power in ways that reinforce an underclass, and their cries for liberation are stifled when they are pacified by the handouts that attempt to inoculate their

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹² Ibid., 3. Lupton posits that the reason these efforts may be hurting the poor is that it destroys "personal initiative" and ultimately "disempowers" those it aims to help by doing for them what they can often do for themselves.

wound without a remedy to heal. If charity is to be virtuous, it must be held accountable for its results, and this is particularly the case when the aim is to make a difference.

Money is often considered the most essential aid form, what charitable organizations ask their benefactors to give to help the poor and how most in the Western world attempt to aid the poor. However, as Community developer Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, a professor in economics, argue, in the post-WWII era, Western nations have spent trillions of dollars to help the poor yet over "40 percent of the world's population, still live on less than two dollars a day."¹³ The issue then is not that people are unwilling to help, but more so that the aid that is offered has been mostly ineffective at generating real change. Job training programs, Head Start initiatives, and hiring more social services professionals have been staples in our social ecology for some time, yet these efforts have failed to produce long-term results.¹⁴ There are many programs out there that are intentionally designed to help the poor but have failed to make a transformational impact. Most programs address needs while failing to address the fundamental causes of poverty itself. If much of our charitable work is ineffective, then the question must be considered as to why we are investing billions of dollars in continuing to fund a failed paradigm? Inattention to results, as Patrick Lencioni notes, is the doom of any business, which includes the multibillion-dollar charitable industry.¹⁵

¹³ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 141-42.

¹⁴ Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 88-90. Lupton contends that these programs fail because they create dependency rather than empowerment. He proposes a programmatic model rooted in Christian love and strategic partnerships that seek to empower the individual with a bottom-up approach. In this paradigm, the individuals are called to exercise their sense of agency and desire to form a healthier community in partnership with their benefactors. However, because trust and long term success are difficult to develop and sustain, the actions of those that hope to help the poor need to be invested in the long term. Admittedly, he quips that most people do not have the stamina for this kind of engagement.

¹⁵ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage, Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 65. Lencioni notes that one of the greatest hindrances to an organization's success is

Feel good aid is nothing new and is a significant aspect of how charitable contributions are raised for any number of causes. However, benefit concerts, celebrity telethons, and the like do very little to change the conditions for the poverty-stricken.¹⁶ Another issue, as Ken Stern notes is that "much of the charitable industry is driven by marketing conditions" that are intended to pull upon the heartstrings of those wanting to make a difference in a particular area, but in the end, these efforts have little effect because they have not considered the necessary steps to give them staying power.¹⁷ Long term solutions require more than the ability to respond to global needs and creating the market conditions by which to garner the necessary support to meet that specific need. The problems are often more complex and require more energy and effort to solve than most are willing to invest. It is easier for the benefactor to throw money at the problem and personally feel better about making a difference than it is to put in the work to generate a sustainable model of societal transformation. Furthermore, as Lupton argues, much of the charitable contributions that are made, though well-intended, when examined, are often "exposed as large-scale misappropriations of charitable resources."¹⁸ Thus, one must ask why the Church's

its "inattentiveness to results." Without proper metrics, an organization has no idea whether or not they are having any success in achieving their stated objectives. Success in this sense is quantified when conditions on the ground are changing for the better; unfortunately, this is not happening near enough in the current charitable constructs.

¹⁶ Robert Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 136. Rosenthal and Flacks discuss the way "cultural activities" such as concerts and sporting events to promote a particular cause are an embedded aspect of our societal consciousness that are most effective when raising awareness or generating resources for causes rather than being a catalyst for change itself. Transformation requires a different kind of presence within a community that effects change by utilizing the resources and consciousness as tools to fund and recruit the change agents that are doing the work on the ground. Lamentably, the annals of history are replete with examples of ineffectiveness and misappropriation.

¹⁷ Ken Stern, *With Charity for All: Why Charities are Failing, and a Better Way to Give* (New York: Anchor 2013), 26. Stern discusses the importance of considering solutions that do more than tapping into the "market conditions that produce donations" and consider the long term effect of how the money is being spent. Furthermore, he notes that because global poverty problems, such as providing clean drinking water, are so complex, charitable organizations need to consider long term strategies that can generate lasting change.

¹⁸ Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 6, 14. Lupton suggests that misappropriation happens to some extent because those that stand to benefit the most from charitable contributions are afraid to tell the truth, for fear that their income stream could potentially dry up. The example he uses is of a mission team that sent a group of Americans to a school in a developing country to paint a wall. The financial investment for such a trip is sizeable and often removes the

work among the poor is ineffective, and second, how does the Church, who has a scriptural and historical mandate to care for the poor, do so in a faithful way? If money and programs were the problems, then this global quandary would have been eradicated long ago. The substance of the issue is that charitable work continues to move along without a clear telos of what it hopes to accomplish or, at best, an unattainable hope of making a long-term difference in the lives of the poor. Instead, real long-term impact necessitates an approach that seeks to be transformational in ways that, in some sense, are incarnational. This approach is where the impetus of proclaiming the gospel comes into form because it does much more than compel the Church to give to the poor; the poor themselves receive the gospel as the privileged hearers of God's message of reform, freedom, and empowerment and this has the potential to liberate them from the tyranny and oppression inflicted upon them by the power brokers of the age.

The economic systems of the world are often blamed for developing oppressive governments and systems that disempower the poor and exacerbate the conditions that reinforce poverty. Many such as Gustavo Gutierrez cite capitalism as the oppressor of the masses, in an ever greedy grasp for more, yet statisticians note that the United States gives far more to charity than any other world economy.¹⁹ However, it would be naïve to infer that charitable giving alone and/or that capitalism as a system is just, simply because they produce more wealth to give to the

national worker from their vocation altogether. He posits that the money could have given work to those who need it and created a more sustainable long-term plan that would have a larger impact upon that community.

¹⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History Politics and Salvation, 15th anniversary ed.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1988), 174. Gutierrez, citing the religious world's "perennial quest" of liberation, notes that greed itself stifles freedom because it subjugates people with "an over-attachment to material or mental possessions and to one's private self" thus jettisoning ideas of community and solidarity. Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, *The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2017, 63rd Annual Issue*, (Indianapolis, IN: Giving USA Foundation, 2018), 25. The Lilly School of Philanthropy notes that in 2017 the United States gave 410 billion dollars to charity, and the majority of that amount (286.5 billion) was given by individuals, most of which gave to a religious organization. What Gutierrez argues for is a system that promotes the flourishing of the worker, specifically without exploiting the worker for gain and where profits justify the outcomes.

needy. Moreover, as noted above, money is not the answer to the perils of poverty. The poor in the United States are often exploited in ways that, at best, are usurious and, in some cases, tyrannical where the bottom line of profits justify whatever means are necessary to achieve them.²⁰ In Gutierrez's important work, *A Theology of Liberation*, he takes to task the socio-political systems that reinforce the conditions of poverty around the world.

He posits that capitalism in the West is responsible for "man's exploitation of his fellow man...[and] only socialism will promote the advent of the New Humanity." However, socialism, as a sociopolitical system, has also historically disempowered the poor by placing power in the hands of a few while simultaneously stifling the spirit of the worker.²¹ Ivan Szelenyi and Balazs Szelenyi argue charitably for socialism noting its early successes in Eastern Europe; however, they mark its ultimate decline was related to the yearning of individuals to be more than a cog in a system and the effect totalitarian regimes had upon human flourishing as significant players in its ultimate demise.²² Socialist and capitalist economies alike have historically demonstrated that they are at best systems that attempt to address how wealth and resources are managed and utilized to build more just societies. The issue, however, is that these systems are always

²⁰ Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2016), 305. Desmond offers one specific example of the many ways in which the poor are exploited in the United States, citing their struggle to find affordable housing following an eviction, and the subsequent ways that many capitalize on their financial status by charging exorbitant rents or by pushing them towards government-subsidized housing where the owners are essentially slum lords that offer far less than adequate living conditions while exploiting both the poor and taxpayers themselves. Furthermore, he notes that low-income families often have no right to counsel in civil court matters, and this only intensifies the eviction epidemic and diminishing options for affordable housing (310).

²¹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 65. Gutierrez, citing a group of Argentinian priests, notes, "we forthrightly denounce neocolonial capitalism, since it is incapable of solving the acute problems that confront our people..." directing their efforts instead to a socialist economic structure that could promote the welfare of the whole. It would be interesting to hear Gutierrez respond to the current crisis in Venezuela.

²² Ivan Szelenyi and Balazs Szelenyi, "Why Socialism Failed: Toward a Theory of System Breakdown- Causes of Disintegration of East European State Socialism," *Theory and Society* 23, no. 2 (1994): 219, 227-28. Another major point they note as a reason for its decline is the global political pressure itself, specifically from the US and its massive economy that made it impossible to compete in an increasingly globalized market.

influenced by human sin, which, throughout time, has sought to exploit others to advance one's situation. In this sense, economic systems are inert, except insofar as they are influenced by both just and unjust practices that are characteristics of the societies they exist in themselves.

The Promulgation of the Gospel in Tandem with Works

The ineffectiveness of the current paradigms for addressing poverty must be reconsidered based upon their inability to generate real change. Secondly, it is worthwhile to consider, from a historical perspective, those social movements that have been successful at creating an environment of transformative justice. Perhaps 2 of the more effective social movements in the modern era were those led by Frances E. Willard and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. These figureheads utilized the preaching of the gospel as the foundational platform for their initiatives to catalyze movements of social reform. Frances Willard was a household name at the turn of the twentieth century who pushed for the prohibition of alcohol, fought for women's suffrage and rights, and was a preacher who sought to convert the hearts of the masses.²³ Nonetheless, her work was firmly rooted in the gospel that challenged the status quo of the Church, the sociopolitical underpinnings of America, and the persons who had been ravaged by alcoholism and bigoted practices of oppression. Her message inspired her hearers to reimagine the world through the lens and liberation of the gospel.²⁴ Similarly, Dr. King utilized the gospel as the clarion call for civil rights reform in America. Richard Lischer notes, "King's self-proclaimed

²³ Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 95, 99, 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-78. Willard notes that her heart was stirred most while preaching to the crowds and loved proclaiming "the unsearchable riches of Christ" and in Gospel meetings in ways that compelled "wicked men [to] weep" than reform their ways. Willard lists eight objectives for the evangelistic work of the WCTU, and all of these included spiritual reform as a means to change social conditions. See Lacey C. Warner, *Saving Women: Retrieving Evangelistic Theology and Practice*, (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), Kindle Location, 1678-1683.

mission to 'redeem the soul of America' cannot be misunderstood apart from his self-designated identity as a preacher of the gospel."²⁵ The gospel in King's view was the impetus for reform itself that challenged the status quo while also presenting a vision for transformative justice in a way that catalyzed lasting change across America. In this sense, the gospel is more than a philosophical construct of morality. Instead, for King and Willard, it is itself infused with the "power of God for Salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Thus, to remove the message of the gospel, or at a minimum, to reduce our work for justice only as a human enterprise ultimately empties our efforts of their real source of power (1 Cor. 1:17). King and Willard's efforts endure because they were built upon the transformative power of the gospel.

Proclamation of the gospel to and on behalf of the poor was an essential component of Christ's ministry (Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18). Though in our current context, the Church's work among the poor has lost its impetus for preaching, the Church has historically understood its vocational responsibility to care for spiritual and physical poverty through the proclamation of the gospel, acts of service and influencing social reform. Helen Rhee notes in *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich* that in the early Church, care for the poor was a "mandatory obligation of the faithful by virtue of the gospel message and Christian identity."²⁶ Her study of early Christians from the Apostolic period through the fifth century offers a vital conversation partner as to how the Early Church understood its ministry to the poor. This period is also crucial because it

²⁵ Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4. Lischer argues that for King, the gospel was both the basis for reform and the power that gave the civil rights movement the traction that it needed to generate a shift in the socio-political climate of America. Furthermore, Lischer suggests that King succeeded in injecting [the] gospel into the political debate much in the way the Abolitionists had more than a century before. As no preacher in the twentieth century and no politician since Lincoln, he transposed the Judeo-Christian themes of love, suffering, deliverance, and justice from the sacred shelter of the pulpit into the arena of public policy."

²⁶ Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2012), 204.

represents those nearest to Christ's teachings, is framed by the small spiritual and social revolution that had grown exponentially as an embedded religion throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, and serves as the background for the formation of some of the first hospitals and convalescent homes for the poor and infirm. Peter Brown argues that the Church's care for the poor and the formation of hospitals and poor houses that offered relief for the most destitute had a stabilizing effect on the ecology of the 3rd and 4th centuries of the Roman Empire.²⁷ In this sense, the Church's vision for the poor enlivened this neglected class in a way that reoriented the whole manner in which power was brokered throughout the Empire and created a new dignity for the most vulnerable in this society.²⁸ The Early Church's vision for the poor was moved along by the oratory of the pastors, and bishops, who crafted sermons which created a framework by which the Church both understood its relationship with the poor, and how it sought to uplift and provide for their care.

In our current epoch, many Christians internationally and locally have jettisoned evangelical practices that appropriate the spoken message of the gospel, citing negative backlash over accusations of colonialism and respect of cultural pluralism as reasons they focus primarily on works based evangelism. Nevertheless, this assumption fails to consider the indigenous evangelists themselves as those that were often chiefly responsible for the growth of Christianity around the world.²⁹ Though the gospel may have arrived first through the evangelistic efforts of

²⁷ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 98-102. Brown citing Basil's work specifically noted that the Church's care for the poor had a massive effect on the socio-political landscape throughout the Roman Empire. In a real sense, it brokered power in a way that gave significant strength to this fledgling movement.

²⁸ Ibid., 101. Brown argues that while some of these efforts were compelled by earnest care for the marginalized throughout Rome, the bishops also understood that by leveraging the power of the poor, the Church could increase its influence and sway the social and political direction of the Roman Empire.

²⁹ Peggy Brock, Norman Etherington, Gareth Griffiths, Jacqueline Van Gent, "The Indigenous Evangelist in History 1750-1940," *Studies in Christian Mission*, vol. 46 (August 2015 Brill Publishing, Koninklijke Brill NV):1-2. Peggy

missionaries, the substance of its growth was introduced by the everyday life of the indigenous churches that formed within its societal constructs. Missionaries, pastors, and bishops often receive the credit or blame for proselytizing, but the work of evangelism has primarily been carried out by indigenous converts who share the faith with their respective communities.³⁰ These evangelists believed wholeheartedly that Christianity offered the best hope for their communities because it possessed both saving virtue and the characteristics that best lead to societal flourishing. Clement, Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen take a similar approach by inspiring their communities to carry the gospel outside of the local church context and to embody the message of Christ. They were insiders that lived in the communities they served and were imbued with a passion for Christ and the way of life He inspired. These pastors share their faith in much the same way that evangelist and pastors, for generations before and after them, always have to their hearers, as both the call and responsibility of the Church to communicate the message of salvation to their respective communities and to use the gospel as the means for creating the societal conditions most conducive for human flourishing.

Patristic Pastor's Sermons on Addressing Poverty: Clement, Nazianzus, and Chrysostom

Sermons offer a unique window into the life of the Church that help us to understand the way congregations and their communities were challenged by the messages of their pastors and

Brock *et al.* note in their study that the advancement of Christianity globally has been carried out in no small degree by indigenous persons who may have been initially evangelized by a missionary, but ultimately carried their faith to their respective communities. This advancement underscores the enlivening power of the gospel itself that may have aided in colonization because of a shared biblical worldview; however, this may be, in many cases, an unintended consequence rather than imperialism proper. Furthermore, they write that evangelization was a "means to modernization as it introduced such skills as literacy to non-literate societies," subsequently creating a path to a litany of literary resources that influenced various indigenous people groups. Nevertheless, as the authors assert, these efforts were mostly carried out by indigenous converts rather than Western missionaries.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

bishops. Jaroslav Pelikan notes that the sermon, rather than theological treatises, offer a glimpse into the common life of the Church and is a "witness to the truth of the gospel, directed to the faithful on the inside for their edification and to the unbelievers on the outside for their conversion."³¹ Thus, in studying the sermons of those that helped to frame the thought and the context for the Church's work among the poor, we can obtain a granular glimpse into its everyday life in this respect. For the preacher, sermons not only communicate the words of God, but they also create the context for the presence of God to be experienced in ways that comfort our afflictions and challenge the status quo. Preaching the gospel as Geoffrey Wainwright puts it, "allows something of a first-hand contact with the foundational myth, in the sense of the original story of God's decisive action in the world in and through Jesus Christ."³² Studying sermons, particularly those from 200 CE to 400 CE is essential because, in this period, the Church's growth was exponential and its work to promote the care for the poor and underserved produced social programs that continue to serve as models more than 1,600 years later.³³

As noted above, this project will specifically explore Clement of Alexandria's Homily, "Who is the Rich Man Being Saved," Gregory of Nazianzus' Oration 14, "On Love of the Poor" and John Chrysostom's "Four Discourses on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus." I am choosing these texts because they represent an approach to addressing poverty through gospel-

³¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Preaching of John Chrysostom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 38.

³² Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 178. Wainwright discusses sermons as an essential facet of the Church's liturgy noting that the "sermons job is to 'apply' [Christ's] story in such a way that the continuing action of God, according to that paradigm (gospel), may be detected and received in the contemporary world" much as it was for its first hearers (178).

³³ Alan Kreider "They Alone Know the Right Way to Live, The Early Church and Evangelism" in *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future* ed. Mark Husbands, Jeffrey P. Greenman, (Downer's Grove IL, Intervarsity Press, 2008), 169. The Church that began with just a few thousand at Pentecost had grown to more than 6 million "by the time Constantine I ascended to the throne." In 300 years, the Church had come to represent more than 10% of the "imperial populace" due in large part to its distinct witness and care for the poor (172).

inspired discourses that challenge the status quo and seek to generate social change among the poor. Secondly, congregations themselves were the incubator where these preachers used discursive disruptions to help the Church to envisage its work among the poor within the virtues of Christ. These preachers fostered an environment for action through the reorienting power and vision of the gospel that encroached upon the power of the State and helped Christianity emerge as a player in the societal formation of Late Antiquity. Furthermore, they offer a critique of wordless actions that fail to address the soul's poverty apart from God. These particular sermons demonstrate how congregations from this period were formed in a virtue that had a particular concern for the poor and articulate what was at stake for the Church in response to their needs.

Clement of Alexandria: "Who is the Rich Man that is Being Saved"

Clement of Alexandria precedes Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom, who were contemporaries by more than a hundred years, yet his work was notable in that it shaped the thought and ministry of the leaders that would follow. Clement's Sermon "Who is the Rich Man that is Being Saved" offers a treatise on the Rich Young Ruler from Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31, and Luke 18:18-30. Though Clement primarily deals with the Markan account of this story, he tends to oscillate between the three synoptic gospel witnesses to add nuance to particular aspects of his sermon. The question he is wrestling with is whether the rich can be saved. He makes a clear distinction between true heavenly riches and earthly wealth and distinguishes spiritual poverty from physical poverty.³⁴ Thus one can be poor in regards to earthly wealth yet rich in heavenly benefit and virtue. The key for him is that spiritual poverty is

³⁴ Clement of Alexandria, "Who is the Rich Man that is Being Saved," Homily 37, trans. William Wilson, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0207.htm>, 16-17

of far greater concern than physical poverty.³⁵ Furthermore, one may possess wealth and can be saved if the wealth is used to lift the burden of another.³⁶ Clement argues from the perspective of a spiritual reading of the text, noting that the rich man is being asked to shed the vice of riches, rather than the wealth itself because if he gave all he possessed to the poor, he would have no means to satisfy their future needs.³⁷ Moreover, there is nothing virtuous about parting with wealth per se, as even pagans do this, but more importantly, each should, in kind with the Good Samaritan, willingly divest him- or herself on behalf of another.³⁸ Wealth is inert in that it has no special power, except what is assigned to it by others, yet unbridled wanton desire can weigh the soul down.³⁹ Clement's spiritual reading of this text and great concern for eternal riches, and the need to assist others in obtaining this virtue via a coach, demonstrates a solidly evangelical thrust in working with the spiritual and physically impoverished.⁴⁰

John Chrysostom: "Four Discourses on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus"

Chrysostom's "Four Discourses on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus" lays out a strategy for helping the poor that is evangelical as well as practical. Wendy Meyer and Geoffrey Dunn posit that for Chrysostom, one's "mindset...is responsible for moral error."⁴¹ Chrysostom's sermon, in this sense, seeks to employ psychagogic principles that seek to guide the souls of his hearers onwards towards virtue. The occasion of John's message was the

³⁵ Ibid., 37.17-18.

³⁶ Ibid., 19.

³⁷ Ibid., 33.14.

³⁸ Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying*, 51-52.

³⁹ Clement of Alexandria, "Who is the Rich Man Being Saved," 57.31.

⁴⁰ Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying*, 52.

⁴¹ Geoffrey D. Dunn and Wendy M. Mayer, *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 144.

celebration of Saturnalia (Roman festival in honor of the god of Saturn) that was celebrated at the beginning of the year.⁴² John encourages his congregation to be a presence of God's grace and word among the revelers to draw them into a new life in Christ.⁴³ Christians are obligated to bear witness even to those that seem unresponsive because the unseen God is at work in ways that seem imperceptible to the human senses.⁴⁴ Similar to Clement's idea of a trainer who leads people towards virtue, Chrysostom envisages the preached word as a kind of tutor that fashions its hearers in the virtues of Christ.⁴⁵ The poor are reached when the Church is compelled by love to act on their behalf.⁴⁶ Thus, the rich man's failure is that he observes the need of Lazarus but is obtuse and fails to meet the need because his wealth blinds him.⁴⁷ There is an irony in this story for Chrysostom because the one who is apparently rich is spiritually depraved while the poor is an object of virtue, which is exhibited by his endurance of suffering, his welcome into the kingdom, and his persistent presence among the rich man offering an opportunity for reconciliation.⁴⁸ In this sense, Lazarus is sent as a gift to the rich man, who is too foolhardy to recognize the treasure under his nose. Additionally, he understands that our work with the poor has both eschatological benefits, in that we are culturing our soul for heaven, while also functioning as a catalyst for forming habits of virtue for the believers in their present life.⁴⁹ For Chrysostom, Lazarus is an exemplar of Christian virtue and also the face of the poor the Church

⁴² Catherine P. Roth 1984, *On Wealth and Poverty; John Chrysostom*, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary, Press, 1984), 11.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, "Four discourses, chiefly on the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus," accessed December 1, 2017, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chrysostom_four_discourses_01_discourse1.htm. I.1

⁴⁴ Ibid., I.2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., I.2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., I.5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., I.6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., I.7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., I.8

is called to serve. Furthermore, the emaciated and sore-ridden Lazarus reflects the condition of the rich man's heart, who is unmoved by his plight.⁵⁰

Gregory Nazianzen: "Oration 14"

Gregory Nazianzen's Oration 14 was written for the occasion of the opening of Saint Basil's Basilea, which was a group of buildings "intended for the care of the dying, the poor, and weary travelers."⁵¹ Brian Matz notes that this sermon was likely promulgated to help encourage the benevolence of those with means to support the project, however, the intentional connection he makes to general Christian principles of benevolence, use of scripture, and call for Christian virtue would have had a far broader reach than this stated aim.⁵² Gregory's sermon describes the interconnectedness of the poor and the rich in a way that suggests that the care for others is in its own right care for one's self. He notes, "the welfare of our own bodies and souls lies in this one thing, loving regard for our fellow man."⁵³ His rationale for this is that in providing for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of others, one's soul is cultured in the virtue of Christ, whose very nature is compassion.⁵⁴ For Nazianzen, since all things belong to Christ, we are only mere stewards of our possessions and, as such, provision for the poor is held in trust by those who possess the resources.⁵⁵ The poor bear the imprint of the divine image, and thus wealth amassed without a clear *telos* is foolhardy in the sense that it has not rightly considered the eschatological

⁵⁰ Ibid., I.12.

⁵¹ Brian Matz, *Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality Gregory of Nazianzus* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, 2016), 114.

⁵² Ibid., 115.

⁵³ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, *The Fathers of the Church; St Gregory of Nazianzus, Select Orations*, Washington DC: Catholic University Press), 44.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 45

⁵⁵ Ibid., 55.

benefit of such actions.⁵⁶ Moreover, the desire for wealth solely for wealth's sake breeds wanton contempt for others.⁵⁷ Consequently, our work among the poor, which includes for Gregory both the physically and spiritually infirm and those without resources, demonstrates rightly oriented power that points to a different *telos* than amassing wealth for oneself. Gregory's preaching, though aimed at a Christian audience, offers a clear council for those outside of the Church with warnings and exhortations that seem to be calling them to a different life. Additionally, though his sermon does not primarily seek to convert the poor, as his primary audience is the Church, Gregory certainly has their spiritual welfare in view as he makes clear distinctions of how vice imprisons the souls of the poor and how they are lured into entrapments by their folly.⁵⁸ He introduces this idea carefully, however, to ensure that his hearers do not imagine that all poverty is a result of sin.

These three sermons offer distinct yet unified witness on how to work with the poor. Their sermons point out that it is unfaithful to attend to needs without considering the spiritual condition of the poor. Furthermore, there is a strand in all of these sermons that note that the poor also include the wealthy who are spiritually impoverished. The option for the poor, in their reckoning, is that physical needs can never be fully satisfied until the spiritual needs are met. For these preachers, the gospel was the ultimate emancipator, and the poor themselves are a gift that both tests and cultures virtue within the body of Christ. Finally, love is the decisive theme that tethers these sermons together as it best captures the essence of God's benefaction towards us all

⁵⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

and the call for the Christian to undergo acts of divinization that reflect this same character towards others, particularly the poor.

Chapter 2:

The Gospel as the *Modus Operandi* for Serving the Poor

In the last chapter we discussed how modern aid efforts have jettisoned evangelical practices in favor of monetary contributions and good works but these approaches have been largely ineffective. We also discovered the impact of certain movements that utilized the gospel as the impetus for social change. In this chapter we will discover how Clement, John Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen utilized the language of the gospel in their sermons as a call to action for their communities to serve the poor and to care for their souls as a matter of chief importance. However, they understood that a gospel message devoid of the legs of justice was hollow and thus encouraged their communities to address the physical maladies and needs of the poor by drawing parallels with Christ's selfless condescension and salvific character with the work the Church is called to emulate. To help frame this understanding, I will discuss the distinctions and similarities in their approach for distinguishing between wealth and poverty and the logic and aim they used to identify their greatest need. Second, I will show how each frames their sermon to communicate the theological and social aspects of Christ's ministry, and third I will demonstrate how each presents a clear call to action for their respective communities.

Christians have been teaching for over two thousand years that Christ is the hope of the world; thus, the Church's chief mission then is to participate in God's saving activity by both functionally embodying the characteristics of Christ and through the proclamation of the gospel. Unfortunately, though the work of justice continues on behalf of the poor, it often does so devoid of the gospel message itself. Yet the preaching of the gospel is transformational in that it

bespeaks of the virtues that best lead to human flourishing and, secondly, offers the hope and expectation of God's condescension and aid towards personal and societal transformation.

Clement, Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen utilized their platform as pastors to influence their congregations to care for the poor through witness and the kind of work that was a signet of God's salvation of the world. Moreover, since the vast majority of the Empire was comprised of those that struggled for basic sustenance, and wealth of a heavenly sort was construed chiefly as the normative spiritual state of Christians, the Church envisaged itself as the well-spring and best source of help for the spiritually and economically destitute. Rodney Stark notes that the Church during this period was experiencing exponential growth at a rate of more than forty percent per decade, which was in large part due to its intentional outreach to the broader community.⁵⁹ Though Stark's claims are from a sociological perspective and not without their share of controversy, what is certain is that this small fledgling movement grew significantly to become a major player in the social ecology of the Roman Empire in the 3rd and 4th century.⁶⁰ For these pastors, the gospel was foundational for creating a context of transformative justice for the poor because it gave them both the language to communicate God's

⁵⁹ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became The Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Harper Collins 1997), 7. Stark contends that the Church's growth was based in large part on the migration of the influential into the ranks of the Church who were seeking answers to existential questions, which included a series of unfortunate natural disasters (74-75, 149). However, though the growth likely included this population group, there would not seem to be the numbers of this class of people to support this claim entirely. Helen Rhee rightly points out that between 85-90% of the entire population was at or below the mere subsistence level. Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*, 10. Stark, however, does make a compelling argument that Constantine's conversion was more likely "in response to the exponential wave (of conversions) rather than the primary cause for Christianity itself. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 10.

⁶⁰ Willi Braun, Review of *Work: The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* by Rodney Stark, *Review of Religious Research*, 39, no. 1, (1997), 86-88. Braun argues that Stark's attempt to retrofit sociological theory into historical settings far removed from the current era, lend themselves to wide swaths of conjecture. Though no one argues that the Church enjoyed exponential growth, Stark's contention ignores the physical evidence that at times stands in contradistinction to his claims. Though 40% growth per decade may be an overreach, the Church's swelling membership and influence upon the Roman Empire cannot be overstated.

salvation and a participatory framework to orient their behavior. However, the work of evangelism itself was duty-bound to compassion, which could only be achieved by possessing God's heart for the poor. The underprivileged, in this sense, was more than those devoid of resources; instead, it included all those who had not appropriated God's saving work in their lives. Thus one could be poor in the sense that they lacked physical resources and still be exceedingly rich because of their royal status in Christ.

Identifying the Greatest Need Between Wealth and Poverty-

Clement of Alexandria: Wealth as a Tool

Clement of Alexandria's sermon explores the internal disposition that is most conducive to salvation. The textual irritant that provokes his query is who the rich man is that Jesus says can be saved despite the seemingly impossible odds that they are up against.⁶¹ In this passage, the Rich Young Man is ardently in pursuit of the kind of conduct and perfection that merits salvation and asks Jesus what is necessary to inherit eternal life. Jesus recognized the man's internal vice and bids him to sell his possessions to give to the poor. The passage concludes with the disciples asking Jesus "who then can be saved," followed by Jesus retort: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:25-26). Clement takes up the question of whether the rich can be saved while maintaining their monetary status or if wealth itself is a source of evil that must be cast off because it tethers the human soul to that which is

⁶¹ Clement, *Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*, 22.1 Clement utilizes the nuances found in each of the synoptic accounts of Jesus encounter with the rich young man as a singular witness, and though he primarily leans on Mark's telling, his dexterity with the broader gospel witnesses offers important evidence for the early use and formation of these texts as Scripture.

base and unregenerate.⁶² In response, Clement claims that casting off wealth in and of itself is not a virtuous act citing the well-known examples (at least at the time) of Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Crates who did this very thing to "gain leisure" or in "pursuit of dead wisdom."⁶³ He understands that having wealth is a tool that must be used responsibly or for noble purposes and believes that one could maintain their wealth insofar as their disposition towards it was one of detachment. The issue at hand for Clement, however, is that though wealth is adiaphoric, the soul's desire for it can paradoxically cause a person to become indifferent to the needs of others. In this way, wealth is problematic insofar as it becomes the means of fueling the passions. This conundrum is only overcome when a person rejects the pursuit of wealth for its own sake or to gratify the desires and instead is wholly yielded to use it in service to Christ.

Clement draws out a critical distinction in the text noting that Christ did not "bid him, as some take it in an off-hand manner, (to) cast away the property he has and give up his wealth."⁶⁴ Giving this way is haphazard and would not in itself be virtuous because it both misses the point in Jesus' entreaty which was to "banish from his soul" excessive want of wealth, the prideful grasp for status, and the entanglements caused by the pursuit of earthly riches, while also encouraging the man to follow him by taking on a Christly nature.⁶⁵ For Clement, the status of

⁶² Ibid., 1.8. For Clement, it may be difficult for the wealthy to have possessions in a way where they are free of its vice, salvation is accessible to the rich by submitting to the word and Christ as a trainer in a similar way that an athlete seeking to win in the arena would submit and endure strict training in an attempt to win the prize.

⁶³ Ibid., 29.1. Clement discusses these men individually as examples of those who had disposed of their wealth in a manner that was not virtuous because their giving was detached from the virtue and purposes of God. Giving in this way for him was hollow because it was done in the pursuit of "empty reputation and vanity."

⁶⁴ Ibid., 28.2. This idea has significant importance for how money is given to the poor. Without contextualizing why resources are given and helping the poor in developing the virtue of using it in ways that are transformative and virtuous is, in fact, an unfaithful use of resources. Furthermore, giving this way may fuel the endless want of the passions themselves and lead to even greater bondage.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 28.2. The emphasis of casting off is more an internal disposition than it is an external act in that the passions tend to cause us to focus inordinately on the "earthly life" in a manner that "chokes the seed of true life." The point of Jesus' appeal was to help the Rich Young Ruler detect where the vices were within his soul that stymied his pursuit of Christ. Followers of Christ relinquish their claim on the celestial that they may gain the eternal. They use

one's soul is the impetus that drives this text. The root of the rich man's bondage was not found in material wealth, which for Clement, is "indifferent" and is merely a tool that can be used for both good or evil; instead, the wealth that is to be cast asunder is held within the "passions" themselves.⁶⁶ The Rich Young Ruler is called to impoverish his passions because they impede his pursuit of Christ.

Poverty for Clement is not necessarily a monetary condition, though this is a way that he indeed conceives a mode of destitution, rather he understands poverty to be chiefly a spiritual condition of the heart of the rich and poor alike.⁶⁷ However, this condition is not a marginalized societal class, instead citing the beatitude, he notes that the "poor in spirit (are) ready to be heir(s) of the kingdom of God."⁶⁸ He makes a distinction noting that poverty of this particular sort is amiable and that the riches of the man in this text that is to be cast away are the treasures held within the passions of the soul that stymie the pursuit of the disciple. Clement takes a spiritual interpretive approach to the text and notes that those that have impoverished themselves of the riches within the passions and have a "teachable spirit" that exudes an "excellence of the

their material gifts and resources in ways that are a signet of God's virtue and presence in the earth and demonstrate by faith and character what real wealth is.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 35.15. Clement argues that the nature of material wealth is to "serve and not to rule," and thus, how one uses it offers a reflection of the condition of the heart. When the passions are not subdued the use of material wealth will be misguided and produce "unrighteous" outcomes. Nevertheless, material wealth itself can serve charitable purposes "for those who know how (to use) it skillfully" because they have cast off their passions and have determined to use their life and resources to produce that which is "noble and good" (34.14).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 38.17. The most "wretched" for Clement "are the poor...with no share in God, but still less share in human possessions." The poor of this sort are to be pitied because they are primarily suffering on both ends of the spectrum of life and the afterlife.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 36.16. Clement points out that the Lord recognizes two types of wealth: "The good man" has a heart that produces good treasure that is manifest within his works for justice on behalf of humanity, while the wicked man brings forth wicked treasure because he is occupied in superabundant care for this life. The poverty of spirit then is characterized by the one who is possessed by God and yearns to lay hold of God's beauty and the virtue that emanates from this pursuit. In Clement's reckoning, the issue for the rich man is that though he can follow the outward precepts of the law, his internal disposition is bent upon acquiring more earthen treasure and status and is therefore unfit and unwilling to be a devoted Christ-follower.

soul, faith, love, and brotherly affection, knowledge, meekness, humility, and truth of which the qualities of salvation is the reward" are the rich that are being saved.⁶⁹ The decisive focus of these virtues has an outward thrust towards evangelism. Paradoxically this disposition is the poverty that God delights in and simultaneously the source of true riches.⁷⁰ Thus for Clement, both those with financial means and those that lack them have access to salvation through the poverty of spirit that recognizes that in Christ, they possess all that they need. However, just as the Rich Young Ruler was offered the words of salvation, so too the Church is tasked to both live dispassionately towards their resources and to offer them freely to those in need as well as sharing the gospel itself, which possesses the power to loosen the grip of vice. When the Church orients its behavior in this way, the virtues of Christ are manifested, and the wealth of heaven bounds forth to heal, deliver and save both the "Rich Young Rulers" as well as the poor.⁷¹

John Chrysostom: Poverty Leads to Faith

John Chrysostom's four discourses on Lazarus and the Rich Man reveal significant developments in the Church's understanding of the poor and the role that they served in the life of the believer. The beginning of these messages emphasizes the Christian's call strongly to

⁶⁹ 38.18

⁷⁰ 38.19

⁷¹ Clement's commitment to spiritual interpretations of the text can at times cause him to both conflate ideas of wealth and poverty that make his logic challenging to follow and, secondly, this approach seems to give the wealthy a pass on the harder precepts of the gospel because no one can fully know the inward disposition of another, or themselves for that matter. Thus, one can claim a posture of detachment while still inwardly weighed in vice. Moreover, one could argue that this treatise was meant to appeal more to the rich, but a closer analysis seems to reveal that Clement intends to help both the rich and poor alike who are inhibited by vices that slow their pursuit of Christ. It should be noted that it was Jesus' disciples themselves that posed the question in the text under consideration "who then can be saved" (Mk 10:26)? Most of these were not wealthy and understood that they also faced the same conundrum as the Rich Young Ruler.

evangelize those outside of the Church who did not have the privilege of the gospel.⁷² For John, like Clement, the greatest need of the poor was the gospel, because of the eternal state of the soul; without Christ, the poor are doomed to suffer in both lives.⁷³ Yet, John will go further than his predecessor and distinguish the state of poverty itself as a vital disposition for receiving the gospel. Though all are poor without the Christ, those who experience socio-economic poverty are keenly aware of their need and are often more open to the gospel. Furthermore, the good in suffering is that its intent is a form of purgation that can if one is amenable, lead them towards faith. Thus, to offer help to the poor without the gospel is ineffective because it lacks the teeth of justice that the gospel inspires. This revelation is important because it frames the sermon's intended effect upon John's congregation.

The sermon hones in on the parable of "Lazarus and Rich Man" found in Luke 16:19-31. In this account, Jesus discusses a certain rich man that daily saw and yet ignored the plight of a poor man in his company named Lazarus. Lazarus suffered egregiously and was relegated to crumbs for meals and the compassion of dogs that would lick his wounds. In time they both died; Lazarus was carried off to Abraham's side while the rich man suffered without relief in burning judgment in Hades. In death, the rich man begs for mercy but receives none because in life, though he possessed the means to care for the poor, flouted his duty to his fellows in need and lived lavishly to fulfill the appetites of his flesh. For John, the poor play an essential part in his

⁷² John Chrysostom, "Four discourses, chiefly on the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus," http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chrysostom_four_discourses_01_discourse1.htm. *Tertullian*, Accessed 12/1/17. I.2,3. The strength that Chrysostom compels his community towards evangelism in this discourse cannot be overstated. He bids them persist in their efforts to convert those without Christ, despite repeated and hardy rejections, because love demands it, and there is finally no way of knowing whether in time they will be converted.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, III.4-5. Chrysostom argues that it is far worse for the unregenerate poor because "they are punished in both worlds," yet he does believe that suffering in the afterlife is not altogether equal. Moreover, it is important to note that suffering for him is not evil because it can produce good things in one's life, rather "the real evil is sin" because sin leads one further from God, the source of salvation while suffering leads us towards God "and mitigates wrath."

ecclesiology and sense of eschatology, and his reading of the account of Lazarus and the Rich Man frames the scriptural context for the Church's responsibility to the poor.

"Chrysostom...depicted the poor as 'porters,' those who (ought to be) kept busy carrying the wealth of the rich from earth to heaven in order that the rich might enter heaven."⁷⁴ In this sense, the poor function as a means of reformation and as a gift to the Church because works on their behalf culture the heart of the believer after Christ's nature and have a direct corollary to one's status in the afterlife.⁷⁵ There are certainly problems with this if the poor are not ennobled with the principal agency that enables flourishing apart from the client patron relationship. While solidarity is essential, the aim of both the Church and the poor is to pursue holistic flourishing together which includes material self-sufficiency. Thus, when the poor are aided in this way, society as a whole is lifted as new bonds of kinship form, as the gospel becomes the *modus operandi* that loosens the restraints that stifle flourishing.

The context of this sermon is essential because the revelry of the Festival of Saturnalia frames for his hearers both the perils of gluttonous excess as well as a compelling need for evangelism. In this sense, the poor for Chrysostom, as with Clement and Nazianzen, are both the physically poor and the poor who have not experienced the regenerating power of the gospel.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Susan Holman, *The Hungry are Dying*, 19.

⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, "Four discourses, chiefly on the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus," I.3. For John, the works of the believer towards the poor, particularly as they relate to evangelism, have a salvific quality. He notes, "we are commanded only to give the money to the exchangers, that is to speak and to give counsel...Speak therefore and warn thy brother (even if he fails to listen). Still, thou hast thy reward prepared."

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I.5. Chrysostom frames Christian duty in the same vein in which he compels action towards the poor. Those that do not have the gospel are poor in the sense that they have not stored up for themselves heavenly riches by caring for those who are poor and more so by failing to put their trust in God for salvation. Furthermore, he discusses in the second discourse on this subject, "he is not rich who is surrounded by many possessions, but he who does need many possessions and he is not poor who possesses nothing...by the condition of the mind, not by the quantity of our material wealth, should it be our custom to distinguish between poverty and affluence." John Chrysostom, "Four discourses, chiefly on the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus," II.1.

The hearers of this discourse would have drawn parallels with the characters within the parable and would have understood how they play the roles of each of the persons within the narrative.⁷⁷ For Chrysostom, Lazarus is an exemplar for the Christian, because though poor, he with thanksgiving, persistent faith and contentment continues in his mission to bring salvation to the "Rich Man."⁷⁸ Paradoxically, the rich man in the parable is both those that participate in the festival's gluttony, while forsaking the needs of the poor in their midst and also those within the Church itself that withhold the wealth of the gospel from the world at large, including the revelers at the festival.⁷⁹ John's intent was that his hearers within the community of faith would be stricken by his entreaty and heed his call for compassion. Indifference towards the poor has consequences both in this life and in the one to come and if the poor are deprived of the gospel that they are entitled to then the Church has become complicit in the injustice that has caused their suffering.⁸⁰ The Church then is tasked to emulate the character and virtue of Lazarus as they refuse to lay claim to the wealth of the gospel in a manner that would defraud others of their opportunity to share in its superabundance.

⁷⁷ Ibid., I.12. Chrysostom makes plain this truth noting: Taking all this, therefore, into consideration, beloved, think those blessed, not who live in wealth, but in virtue; think those miserable, not those who live in poverty, but in wickedness: let us look not at the present, but at the future; let us examine, not the outward appearance, but the conscience of each man; and following after the virtue and the bliss of right actions, let us, whether we be wealthy or poor, emulate Lazarus." The clear parallels help frame for his hearers the impetus of his aim within this sermon, which was to compel his community and beyond to act on behalf of those who are poor both in a spiritual sense, because they have yet to be converted, and in a social sense because they help to culture the virtue of the believer.

⁷⁸ Ibid., II.3. Lazarus demonstrates these traits as he continues to offer the rich man a means of grace for salvation, which though rebuffed, has demonstrated his love for the rich man and his resolve to make Christ known.

⁷⁹ Ibid., II.4. Chrysostom likens withholding the gospel and care for the poor to "robbery and covetousness and fraud." Citing Malachi 3:10, he makes plain that the plunder of the poor is held within the wealth of our possessions. The believer in this sense is a means and an extension of grace to those in need.

⁸⁰ Ibid., IV.3. Clement notes, "Therefore let us not imagine that our affairs are bounded by the present life; but let us be assured that there will be scrutiny, and a recompense or a retribution for all that has happened here." Further to this point, Jesus proclaims that "the poor have the gospel preached to them" as evidence of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:5, Lk. 7:22).

Clement's "Rich Young Man" and Chrysostom's "Rich Man" with "Lazarus" are similar in that each is called to curate for the soul a dispassionate view of wealth and to pursue the virtues of the kingdom. However, Chrysostom's ideas of wealth were markedly different from those held by Clement. In his view, the wealthy could not maintain their status and still be considered just "because the roots of wealth (itself) lay in some injustice."⁸¹ This assertion stems from the logic that for Chrysostom, wealth and poverty were not categories that were construed at creation but were more mutations of the human heart that had become bound up in the sin of avarice to the degree that exploitation of others and wanton desire forced the poor into a marginalized societal class.⁸² In this sense, the poor were poor because of the injustices that had been perpetrated against them, and while all of creation belongs to the Lord, the rich have neglected their duty by failing to make their wealth available to those in need.⁸³ For Chrysostom, the impetus was that following Christ necessitated more than a dispassionate view of wealth but also the call to lay it down so that the whole of society could flourish.⁸⁴ Though at times his rhetoric takes on a maximalist tone that often wore on his wealthy congregates, he aims to lead them towards reform by reorienting their love of wealth into a love for God, assuming his nature

⁸¹ Susan Holman, *Wealth, and Poverty in the Early Church and Society*, 129.

⁸² John Chrysostom, "Homily on 1 Timothy" 1 Timothy 4:10. Chrysostom argues concerning wealth: "Tell me, then, whence are you rich? From whom did you receive it, and from whom he who transmitted it to you? From his father and his grandfather. But can you, ascending through many generations, show the acquisition just? It cannot be. The root and origin of it must have been injustice. Why? Because God in the beginning made not one man rich, and another poor." While he contends that some could have acquired wealth by some just means, by say digging for it or working in a way that did not exploit others, the wealthy are always dutybound to share their resources, thus divesting themselves of any earthly claim to wealth itself.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1 Timothy 4:10.

⁸⁴ Susan Holman, *Wealth, and Poverty in the Early Church and Society*, 129. Holman contends that Chrysostom sought a "utopian vision of a society of people living in peace and unity" akin to the early days of the Jerusalem Church, where a personal claim on resources and property were relinquished towards the end of the flourishing of the whole.

of benevolence and compassion for the poor in all of its constitution.⁸⁵ Lazarus' virtue was noteworthy in this sense because he offered his heavenly riches with persistence despite his physical poverty in the hope of reforming the rich man. Similarly, the Church is not blessed merely by its function as an organization that teaches who Christ was. Instead, its distinction is in its ability to convert the world into God's way of life, which is actuated through the power of the gospel.

Gregory Nazianzus: All of Humanity is Poor without Christ

Gregory defines who the poor are in his opening remarks by exclaiming that we are all "fellow paupers" in need of God's "grace."⁸⁶ This oratorical move frames for the hearer both the universal duty of the Christian to help the poor and also the common spiritual need shared by all humans. Though the thrust of the sermon is aimed at compelling this faith community to support the opening of this hospital and convalescent center, he hopes to accomplish much more by spurring them towards action in their daily lives towards the poor. When he says poor, he means all of humanity without Christ, but on the occasion of this message, he describes the poor more ardently as those below the level of subsistence, those who have fallen victim to some peril as

⁸⁵ Susan Holman, *Wealth, and Poverty in the Early Church and Society*, 128. Chrysostom's wealthy congregates often grew frustrated with his pleas for them to give alms to the poor. "They asked, 'how long will you not cease from continually introducing poor men and beggars into your sermons, prophesying disaster to us and our future impoverishment, to make beggars of them all.'" However, his aim was not to impoverish anyone; instead, he hoped to form a "society of people living in unity and peace," and where no one lacked any good thing. In this sense, poverty was not his aim but more so putting an end to the injustices that cause it.

⁸⁶ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14", 39. Gregory exclaims, "we are all poor and needy where divine grace is concerned," and though he notes that there are varying degrees of poverty, the difference is "paltry" when compared to the vastness of God and His bounty of heavenly riches.

well as the infirmed.⁸⁷ However, he makes it understandable that the purpose of aiding the poor is not merely to alleviate need but more so to impress upon them or to draw forth the image of God. This purpose is accomplished by restoring both a level of dignity to the frailness of their humanity as well as calling them through these acts to know God.⁸⁸

Gregory Nazianzen's view of how the Church was tasked to address poverty, as with much of his ideas of Christian virtue, was shaped by his functional understanding of baptism. Baptism "committed the believer to a certain way of life," meaning they were dutybound to live into a virtue and ethic that was fashioned after Christ's character.⁸⁹ Thus when he is speaking for the opening of Basil's Basilea, he is imploring the congregation to aid the poor to some extent on the expectation that they have assumed a Christly nature. The sermon intends to compel them to live into the new life they have taken up in Christ by loving the poor and offering them "mercy" and "compassion" as fellow recipients and participants in God's saving work.⁹⁰ For Gregory,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 42, 46, 59. The responsibility to aid those in these conditions is as much for the benefit of the recipient of the kindness and love as it is for those in a condition to offer it. The soul's virtue is cultured as it impresses the image of God upon others while simultaneously being formed to be more like Christ through that image.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 44, 49, 54. All of humanity is poor apart from its relationship with the Creator, and Gregory wants the community to recognize its purpose to do more than merely eliminate the need, rather the greater purpose of the believer is to call forth the image of God in those outside of the faith. The purpose in this is that they would know God and be reformed in virtue that they may live in a way that reflects the Divine impress upon their lives.

⁸⁹ Brian Matz, *Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing 2016), 16. Matz discusses Gregory's theology of baptism as foundational for much of Gregory's pastoral theology because it frames for the believer the kind of life to which they are committing themselves. Furthermore, the strength of his call and conversion experience noted in the poems *De Vita Sua* lines 112-209 and *De Rebus Suis* 307-321, highlight for him both the perils of failing to submit to the waters of baptism and the effect it has upon life. Gregory notes, "Those murderous waters were keeping me away from the purifying waters that divinize us." Gregory uses these experiences at sea as a metaphor for those who delay or the unregenerate non-baptized who are subject to the terrors of death without the hope of Christ and the new life found in Him.

⁹⁰ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14" 42. Gregory discusses various attributes and actions that help to culture Christian character and notes how they are useful for drawing the believer closer to Christ. These virtues include "good works," "faith, hope and love," "contemplation," "solitude," "voluntary poverty" and the like, however the aim of these must be Christ. He likens them in kind to the heavenly "rooms" noted in John 14:2, yet he imagines these "rooms," or virtues, as places that both are prepared for the Christian to enjoy in the "Father's house" and where the Christians are themselves prepared for the work God has in store for them.

mercy and compassion are superior virtues in the sense that they most reflect the character of God, His condescension, and the servant nature He assumed to save humanity. Similarly, when humans love the poor in this way, they are reflecting Godly behavior and perpetuating His salvific work to others. For Gregory, someone cannot lay claim to the life that has been buried with Christ and participate in the fullness of resurrection.

Nazianzen and Chrysostom share similar ideas regarding wealth and poverty in their assertion that they are not categories imposed by God at creation but more so the consequence of sin.⁹¹ However, it is essential to note that though poverty and suffering can be a form of judgment from God, these categories emerge as the "companions of evil" rather than an aspect of the intended creative order.⁹² Thus, while Chrysostom is more cynical towards the possibility of a wealthy just class and Clement imagines a world where the wealthy can maintain their resources in a just way if they are dispassionate towards them, Nazianzen offers more of a *via media* that holds the two points of view in tension.⁹³ These differences may be in part influenced by the socioeconomic environments from which they were formed. Though Chrysostom was born into a household with some measure of privilege, the loss of his father at a young age was formative and offered him unique kindred with the plight of the poor.⁹⁴ Gregory and Clement

⁹¹ Ibid., 52.

⁹² Ibid., 58. In creation all of humanity was rich and could indulge in the "delights of Paradise" and "freedom and wealth meant simply keeping the commandment; true poverty and slavery are its transgression."

⁹³ Ibid., 52. Gregory discusses how "we must share what we have with Christ so that owning possessions may be sanctified in itself by putting them to good use." This thought is akin to Clement's in that wealth can be held in ways that are just, yet he would agree with Chrysostom in that all of these categories are the result of the fall and that the call to live into the New Creation inaugurated in Christ means that our claim on wealth, as a manner of speaking, has been revoked. In baptism, we have relinquished everything to Christ's Lordship. Furthermore, unlike Clement, wealth is not inert but more the spawn of categories that emerged after The Fall of humanity. Clement, "*Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*" 28.2, John Chrysostom, "*Homily on 1 Timothy*" 1 Timothy 4:10.

⁹⁴ Attwater D, *St. John Chrysostom; On Wealth and Poverty* (Crestwood, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 9. Chrysostom was both familiar with suffering, and in his early days in the ministry, he collected and distributed alms for the poor.

appear to have been formed in circumstances where their families possessed wealth, were well educated and influential.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, though there are differences in their nuance and opinions of wealth, these three pastors share a remarkably unified witness to the Church concerning wealth. Wealth is meant to be used to accomplish the purposes of God, which chiefly means the conversion of humanity in both faith and virtue to the character of Christ and to participate in the formation of a New Creation by addressing the physical needs of the poor. Furthermore, though alleviating the suffering of the impoverished is an aspect of their ministry, their primary focus hones in upon poverty of soul as the foremost threat to their subsistence. These pastors recognize that this threat is not exclusively the condition of those outside of the faith community. Instead, their sermons are spoken to congregates that are suffering from a soul sickness, which has grown unresponsive to the plight of those who suffer, and in this sense, their words are meant to compel them to renew their zeal for Christ through acts of gospel centric justice.⁹⁶ This goal is especially the case with Gregory's sermon which focuses an inordinate amount of attention on the disposition of the congregation towards the poor, hoping of course that by calling them to Christ, his saving work and concern for their well-being, that they will be moved towards action and in turn will themselves become more like Christ.

The Theological and Social Aspects of the Gospel-

Gregory Nazianzen: Kenosis as Witness

⁹⁵ Susan Holman, *The Hungry are Dying*, 29,30.

⁹⁶ The nature of these sermons are evangelical in thrust insofar as they are aimed to compel their churches to look beyond the insular community, yet the sword is double-edged in that it also asks them to address the maladies within their souls. Unwavering devotion to Christ is more than an internal disposition and is marked by a life growing in virtue and bounding forth in its good works, particularly towards the poor. Moreover, gospel centric justice would focus as first importance the souls of the afflicted while also meeting functional needs.

The primary objective for Clement, Chrysostom, and Nazianzen in their sermons was to develop a theological and social basis for pushing into the community with the power of the gospel. For these pastors, the gospel was transformative in that it both saves and refines, yet it does so by enjoining the work that is done, both inwardly as a refiner and outwardly as an evangelist, to the person of Christ. Gregory envisages the locus of the Church's work among the poor as kenotic insofar as it is called to emulate Christ's self-emptying nature in order that in "setting everything aside" the gospel may have real purchase both personally and evangelistically.⁹⁷ This gospel centric approach to ministry provided the theological and social framework for the Church's activity among the poor. In Gregory's famous letter to Cleodnius, he writes: "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed."⁹⁸ This theological imperative is the undercurrent in the kind of ministry that Gregory envisages. The poor are liberated not by the receipt of goods, but more so, the expression of Christ's nature on display by witness and action in ways that are directed towards their aid. The objective, he exclaims, is Christ, both the object of worship and the center of duty, which beckons to the saving work of the Church.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor ,Oration 14" 52. Gregory references the kenosis passage in Philippians 2:5-11, yet he routes the passage in a way that the Christian is the one now in a position to empty themselves by laying aside their resources and humbling themselves in a manner so that others may be lifted. However, he understands that such a call may be too difficult for some and so offers them a way into this by imploring those who feel incapable for the first ask to "share what we have with Christ so that owning possessions may be somehow sanctified." If the first two seem too arduous, he implores them to at least seek to share something; otherwise they will give an account for their lack of reciprocity for God's kindness. The key here is that in the Church some are more capable than others to live into the virtue of the Kingdom of God, yet the more one can emulate Christ's self-emptying the more the soul can bound upwards "to the world on high and gain Christ at the cost of everything else."

⁹⁸ Gregory Nazianzus, "Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy," *New Advent, Translated by Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.)* <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3103a.htm>, accessed October 11, 2019. The kenotic features of Gregory's arguments against Apollinarius are important for the work of the Church, as reflected in this sermon because it frames both the context and character of its witness. When Christ, through the Church, empties itself on behalf of the poor in kinship, they can find healing.

⁹⁹ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. by Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oratio 14," 71. Gregory's thrust is that the aim of the Church's work must always be more than providing a service; rather, the point is Christ, who is the

When the poor are fed, clothed, or visited, when the sick are made whole, and the blind are given sight, there is much more at stake because the objective is always transformation. The key to this transformation is love, which serves as the basis for mercy and compassion as the forerunners to salvation.¹⁰⁰ When the body of Christ shares in God's nature in a manner that does more than alleviate a need and instead restores the agency of the poor to the degree that they are able to flourish and reciprocate Christly virtue and benevolence to others, the greater impact of God's salvation is realized. In this sense, the goal is not merely meeting a need, but more so demonstrating the attributes and character of God through benevolence which saves by enveloping the poor in kinship, which in turn fashions souls after Christ's nature. Though Gregory is less specific in his call for evangelism, it is impossible to miss its inference because of how he enjoins work among the poor to producing the kinds of acts that are themselves salvific.¹⁰¹ He calls these works "good and salutary," because through emulating Christ's kenotic nature the Church learns piety, while the poor themselves find healing through the bond of kinship and conversion.

Clement of Alexandria: Soteriological Justice

savior and hope of the Church and world. He cites the parable of The Sheep and Goats (Mt. 25:31-46) to make this point, which claims, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." However, he notes that the work is always more than "food alone" because the endgame is salvation and eternal life.¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 42. Love of the poor is a chief marker of salvation because it most reflects the heart of God, who mercifully bends low to lift fallen humanity. Similarly, when the Church works on behalf of the poor, they are reflecting the image and love of God as participants in His saving work.

¹⁰¹ Gregory's sermon's intent for this occasion was aimed at gaining support for Basil's Basilea, which is likely a primary reason why he is less specific in his call to make converts. Nevertheless, it is clear based on the central themes that focus on the works of salvation, the rewards and the high significance of the afterlife, and the strong emphasis on becoming more like God throughout this sermon that evangelism itself is inferred. He cites how Jesus left the 99 to go after the one as a marker for how Christians should respond to the poor and to those who are also poor in faith. These pastors all seem to know little of a Christian worldview that is devoid of the believer's duty to make converts, which is why this period is marked by such significant growth.

Clement shares a similar theological approach in that he understands that the Church's work among the poor to be primarily a spiritual initiative.¹⁰² Yet, unlike Nazianzen, acts of mercy on behalf of the poor carry a different significance. While for both works are, in a way, salvific and spiritual, they are primarily crucial for Clement in that they are meant to tend to the soul, which is weighed in vice. This view of works may, in part, be the result of the influence of Platonism upon Clement's Christian formation.¹⁰³ In Plato, he can construct the philosophical tether between Christian virtue and the effect it has upon the soul, and this becomes an essential aspect of how he reads scripture.¹⁰⁴ Citing the gospel's account of the Rich Young Ruler, he imagines that the acts performed in the body, the vehicle of the soul, on behalf of the poor are meant to be salvific in that they accomplish something in both the recipient and the giver.¹⁰⁵ The Rich Young Ruler is bound up in the wealth of his passions, and the poor allow him to shed these

¹⁰² Clement, *Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*, 22.1. Clement discusses that no act of the believer is simply for the act itself; rather, the purpose is always something deeper meant to reveal Christ. He writes: "But we must clearly recognize the fact that the Savior teaches His followers nothing in a merely human way, but all things with divine and mystical wisdom, and to not understand His sayings in a fleshly sense, but with due inquiry and understanding search out and learn the meaning hidden in them."

¹⁰³ Albert C. Outler, *The Platonism of Clement of Alexandria*, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July 1940), 217-240, 226. Outler discusses the similarities between the thought of Clement and Plato and particularly their shared thought on the "moral significance of the soul... and although he seems to have, strangely enough, denied the pre-existence of human souls, the nature, capacities, and destiny of the human soul is a central issue in his thought." While Outler claims Clement's denial of the pre-existence of the soul, the issue in my view seems a bit more in flux because, as he notes, it is by the "direct act of God...and assigns the soul to the place it has to occupy." Clement, *Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*, 50.26. As with Plato, Clement notes that the soul's desire for virtue can be hindered by the body's bondage to the passions and thus must be "subordinated as the proper organ of the soul" (234). However, it is important to note that while he uses some of Plato's philosophical constructs, he is baptizing them in ways that are distinctly Christian.

¹⁰⁴ Clement, *Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*, 30.12. Clement can provide the basis for the spiritual nature of the Church's work for which later thinkers and pastors would be beneficiaries. Chrysostom and Nazianzen will both agree that tending to the inner-life is of Chief importance. However, they will also note that the works themselves have value beyond their effect on the disposition of the soul. Perhaps, in the end, this is less a disagreement than it is distinctions in the nuances within their interpretive approach.

¹⁰⁵ Clement, *Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*, 23.6. In the account of the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus is offering the man the good news on how to attain salvation and eternal life. However, as noted above, the acts themselves are salvific only insofar as the soul is impoverished of the passions that weigh it down. Thus it should be stated that it is not only the poor that are being saved, but the Church itself is saved as the fires of its work refine it for justice.

encumbrances in ways that refine and purify his soul. The poor are also lifted by the benevolence given, and experience the saving grace and love of God through new bonds of kinship.¹⁰⁶ The works themselves are not the emphasis, however, but more so how salvation bounds forth to the souls of the rich and poor in a mutual exchange of mercy. The purposes of these works are to "clear one's very soul and one's disposition of the passions that lurk there and cast out from one's mind what is alien to it."¹⁰⁷ In this way, the practical and social aspects of the Church's ministry always have spiritual implications that impact the soul and the world at large. For Clement, aiding the poor is still less about the deeds performed on their behalf and more about the spiritual things that they accomplish.

The theological and social currents that run through Clement's sermon are built upon concepts of soteriology and how this, and the Church's work for justice, go hand and hand.¹⁰⁸ The Rich Young Ruler, who is being saved, is the one who has possessions, but his disposition towards these things is one of detachment, and as such, he can use them in a way that will be the cause of salvation in the lives of others.¹⁰⁹ This call is universal because every believer has something to offer to others, and to withhold aid that you have within your means to provide is to perpetuate injustice.¹¹⁰ Susan Holmon posits for a more limited scope of this appeal, citing that

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 65.37. Clement uses kenotic language to describe the character of Christ, which should also be emulated in winning ways with one another. This kindred bond is a signet of the Lord's work and a means of grace that saves.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 30.12.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 25.8. Clement often substitutes the name of Christ with "Savior," and in this section makes plain that it is not our ability to uphold the law that makes one righteous but rather it is how one is able to live into the virtue of Christ through acts of justice that refine the soul.

¹⁰⁹ 36.16. Clement understands that the wealth we possess should be willingly and readily deployed into the work of God and to bring forth God's salvation for humanity. However, the disposition of a person's spirit in this sense is the critical aspect of what determines whether the rich can divest themselves from wealth and be saved because the salvation of this sort for those with financial means and status is "difficult." The reason is that those with the means to do so can fuel the passions more easily than the poor who may lack the resources to fulfill their desires (41.20).

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 56.31. Citing the parable of the Good Samaritan, Clement argues that all believers are tasked with aiding those in need and making provision for their restoration. However, because a person's greatest needs are spiritual, the helper needs to address these in tandem with meeting physical needs.

Clement wrote (or preached) for an "upper-class" audience and that his sermon was meant to help them grapple with Christ's petition for the "Rich Man to divest himself of his wealth."¹¹¹

The concepts of detachment were more prevalent in various aspects of the social strata within the sanctuaries as well as in some of the philosophical underpinnings that helped to shape the greater Greco-Roman milieu for which he preached. It is difficult to imagine that his aim is simply a petition or an attempt to appease wealthier potential patrons. Instead, he makes plain that the call to cast off the wealth of the passions and to love your neighbor is the claim the gospel makes upon all of its followers. Yet, if Holman is correct and Clement aims to appeal to an "upper-class" audience, and his point is to demonstrate how they can remain wealthy via a form of *apatheia* towards the passions and still be a Christ follower, then the precepts of what the gospel requires of a person could easily be lost. The emphasis of the gospel is more than an indifference towards the passions in that it asks Christians to fix their gaze on loving God and neighbor. Detachment then is not merely a personal disposition; instead, its intent is always soulish, at least to the degree that the locus of its aim is to perform good works that will lead themselves and others to salvation.¹¹² The interchange of gifts that are salvific between the poor and the rich are both saving and quite practical in that they improve the quality of the lives that they live.

¹¹¹ Susan Holman, *Wealth, and Poverty in the Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2008), 11. Holman draws this assumption based on the subject matter of Clement's sermon that is concerned with the question of whether the rich themselves can be saved. Yet, the broader audience inferred to in the sermon itself seems to suggest a more diverse congregation. Clement spends a great deal of his argument focused on the poor who must also divest themselves of the wealth held within their passions, which seems to point to this socio-economic diversity. Furthermore, it should be noted, concepts of detachment and the role the wealthy played in helping the poor were themes found in the broader Graeco-Roman culture, which would seem to suggest a more embedded philosophical construct of patron/poor relationships. Stoics such as Seneca assert that riches should "ideally be regarded as insignificant" and Plutarch, a Middle Platonist claims in *De Cupiditate divitiarum*, that wealth carries many problems and warns his readers of the perils of over-attachment. Reuben Brendenhoff, *Failure and Prospect, Lazarus, and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31) in the Context of Luke Acts* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 139.

¹¹² Clement, "Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved," 15.1 Clement's argument, while focusing on the question of the rich and whether or not they can be saved, understands both the universal call of salvation for all as well as how a believer can play a role in bringing salvation to others. Clement notes that salvation is the Lord's to give, and

John Chrysostom: Ecclesiology and New Creation

Chrysostom, like the other pastors, preaches a message that harkens to the gospel and its themes of salvation, compassion, mercy, and self-denial. The parable he teaches from "Lazarus and the Rich Man" offers him a biblical context to encourage the Church to push into the community to alleviate physical suffering, which in turn sets the stage for sharing the transforming message of the gospel.¹¹³ For Chrysostom, a ministry that fails to encompass the holistic person misses the imperative of what it means to be Christian because there is more at stake than merely meeting a physical need.¹¹⁴ The Church is the visible extension of Christ's work to the world. It, therefore, bears the responsibility of emulating the nature of Christ by performing practices and proclaiming the gospel in a manner that has a salutary effect upon its hearers. He states this plainly, "speak therefore, and warn thy brother. He listens not? Still, thou hast thy reward prepared. Only always act thus, and never give up as long as life lasts, until you succeed in producing conversion."¹¹⁵ For Chrysostom, there can be no work for justice that

a person can live into it by performing the works that God requires. In the case of the rich man, he was asked to rid himself of the wealth of his passions, which were full of avarice by giving to the poor. What is given is more than money; rather, the giving would include the virtues that culture the soul for salvation as well as the saving message of the gospel.

¹¹³ John Chrysostom, "Four discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus," I.9. Gregory cites, "The Feeding of the 5,000" (Mt. 14:13-21) as a framework for evangelism. He notes, "having satisfied their need, he led them to a spiritual feast." For Chrysostom, providing for the physical needs of the poor is essential to create a context for that which is of greater importance, which was the spiritual condition of their souls.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., II.3. Chrysostom likens neglecting one's duty to administer goods and saving words to those who are poor as "robbery." In failing to address the physical maladies of Lazarus, the "Rich Man" misapprehends what has been placed within his trust and meant to be used to alleviate suffering. Suffering here, however, is multifaceted in that the Rich Man's soul wounds could be alleviated if he serves Lazarus, who is also benefitted by the kindness that lessens his physical suffering.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., I.3. This quote is one of many that compel his community to proclaim the gospel relentlessly. He encourages them to persist even through numerous rejections because the love of God demands a witness and an extension of divine grace that can save them from the impending doom that encompasses a soul in this life and the hereafter. I.4, I.5.

excludes the proclamation of the gospel since it is imperative that saves and reforms the whole person.¹¹⁶ However, to ignore the physical need of the poor is to inflict a measure of violence upon them, since the means to help relieve their suffering has been denied.¹¹⁷ John's hope, as Peter Brown puts it, was that in lifting the poor through the gospel and in meeting their needs that "the creation of a new form of urban community would emerge."¹¹⁸ Lazarus, in this sense, is an exemplar who day after day, despite great suffering, anguish, and hunger, persists in offering the rich man the means of grace by which he can be saved. When the new life in Christ is taken up, justice and acts of mercy become participatory in Christ's renewal of creation. Yet when the Rich Man, like many inside and outside of John's Church in Antioch, miss this grace, which is meant to save them, and others for that matter, they are derelict in their duty and judgment follows.¹¹⁹ The work for justice is not an event. Instead, it is a way of life that tirelessly seeks to make a new world in the midst of the old one by converting people into Christ's way of life. This imperative, though echoed by Clement and Nazianzen, is stated more emphatically by Chrysostom because, for him, there is no poverty worse than soul poverty, and those on the margins are peculiarly positioned to receive the gospel while also able to refine the souls of their benefactors.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., I.5. Conversion for Chrysostom helps create a more just society through the subsequent spiritual formation that follows. In this sense, conversion is not an event but more so a process of immersion into the Scriptures and the Church, which helps to culture the soul after Christ's nature.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., II.3. Citing Malachi 3:10, John argues that withholding aid to the poor is a form of "robbery, covetousness, and fraud," since their aid is said to be held in trust in our storehouses.

¹¹⁸ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and sexual renunciation in early Christianity* (West Sussex, NY, Columbia University Press, 2008), 309. Brown argues that Chrysostom hoped that in reforming households that the entirety of society would be lifted. In this sense, John saw himself as an "ambassador" for the poor, who were a gift sent to refine the Church and society at large after Christ's character.

¹¹⁹ John Chrysostom, "Four discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus," I.5. John likens this presumption to the betrayal of Judas and notes that he tirelessly continues to compel him to repent while knowing the outcome. He follows this up with a warning: "what allowance can be made for us, when not knowing the result, we are thus careless about the salvation of our neighbor."

The primary theological current that runs through Chrysostom's sermon is ecclesial. Though one could argue that soteriology and eschatology are the significant themes in these discourses, for John, these strands are derivatives of the Church living into the virtue of Christ. This idea is noted by his extensive use of the pronoun "we," "us" and "our" as he discusses the behaviors and attributes that should become the body of Christ and its attitude towards the poor.¹²⁰ The community of faith bears the responsibility of extending Christ's work of salvation to the world, which in turn helps to form a more just society as well as the eschatological benefit of an eternal reward.¹²¹ This progression is noted in his Second Discourse on Lazarus and the Rich Man, where he states: "that which we possess is not only our own but also (belongs to the poor). If our minds are disposed of per this truth, we shall freely use all our possessions; we shall feed Christ while hungering here, and we shall lay up great treasures there; we shall be enabled to attain future blessedness, by the grace and favor of our Lord."¹²² Each person bears within themselves something of use for others, and when these gifts are not shared, people are defrauded of the benefit that God has placed within them as a trust. However, when the Church engages in an exchange with the poor, something happens sacramentally, where Christ's saving power is revealed as each offers themselves unencumbered towards the mutual flourishing of the

¹²⁰ Ibid., I.1-4. John uses the pronouns "we" and "our" dozens of times as the primary way of discussing their collective responsibility as a community. Though salvation properly belongs to God for John, he imagines the Church as a conduit of and for this process.

¹²¹ Ibid., IV.1. The Church is judged according to John by the just acts they perform or fail to perform during their lives. Raising the standard of living for Lazarus would have helped to form the Rich Man's soul after Christ's nature while simultaneously improving the conditions of society at large who are in need. The exchange, however, is mutual as each has something to offer the other. Lazarus receives relief from his physical afflictions while the Rich Man from those afflictions that vex his soul.

¹²² Ibid., II.6.

whole. In this way, the Church becomes a signet of God's reign through the Divine exchange of love, justice, and mercy.¹²³

The sermons of Chrysostom, Clement, and Nazianzen represent a slice of everyday life within their churches. They reflect a unique perspective on their aim of addressing the needs of the poor. Poverty, however, as noted above, was not considered simply a socio-economic condition. Instead, the poor were those that were primarily spiritually destitute, and in their social milieu, these were predominantly those who were from the lower economic ranks. The reason, of course, is that they represented the most substantial economic class within the Roman Empire. Yet it should be noted that every economic level suffers in soul poverty apart from Christ, and these pastors believed that the Church possessed their best chance of reform as the visible body of Christ actively engaged in their midst. Furthermore, for these pastors, any work for justice that excludes the gospel may have some benefit but lacks the teeth of the kind of transformation that leads to the flourishing of the body, mind and spirit, and the restoration of agency, which ultimately should be its goal. The Church is different than other social organizations in that the locus of its activity should always be Christ, and to miss this imperative is to falter in its mission and fails to achieve any real hope for significant societal transformation. The bastion for evangelism, however, was regularly established within the context of the Church's reach towards those who suffered on the margins, and often these individuals were an active part of the Church itself. Caring for others was an embedded way of life in these churches, and as Helen Rhee writes, the "converts to Christianity came from various social strata...(and)

¹²³ Ibid., I.5. John encourages his congregation to love without finding prejudice in part because there is no way that we can predict an outcome of who may respond to the benevolent kindness of the Church. Furthermore, he argues that if Christ offers his love indiscriminately, then the Church must do the same because otherwise, we become "careless about the salvation of our neighbor."

securing one's salvation and heavenly abode directly entailed sharing one's possessions, sometimes giving them away all together."¹²⁴ Clement, Nazianzen, and Chrysostom made plain through their exhortations that believers of all socio-economic classes were called to use their resources and the gospel to help those who were in need. Furthermore, as Denise Buell points out, this kind of engagement was often reciprocal as the "donor" in one instance was often a "recipient" of generosity in the next.¹²⁵ In this way, each person bore the responsibility to steward their spiritual and monetary wealth in ways that offered the relief and transformation for the poor and in ways that would enliven the community of faith itself.

¹²⁴ Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing, 2012), xvii

¹²⁵ Susan Holman, *Wealth and Poverty in the Early Church and Society*, 39-40. Denise Buell's essay discusses how the distinctions of what constitutes poverty in the ancient world are at best "fuzzy" and that the emphasis should rather be on the distinctive manner in which each person within the Church, no matter their socio-economic class were called to be involved in some form of "redemptive almsgiving."

Chapter Three: Spiritual Formation and the Poor

For Gregory, Clement and Chrysostom the gospel is the *modus operandi* for developing foundations for human flourishing. Moreover, when the Church frames its witness in the theological underpinnings of Christ's ministry it is able to establish a plumb-line to guide its efforts. Clement, Chrysostom, and Nazianzen understood the Church's work among the poor to be essential to its formation because through it the Church is immersed in transformational processes that both participate in God's saving work while simultaneously training it in the virtue and character of Christ through its new bond of kinship with the poor. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how these pastors envisaged the poor as an essential pedagogical player in the Church's formation and will discuss how they utilized the gospel to inform their communities on how to respond to the needs of the poor in a manner befitting the nature of Christ.

Scripture posits that there is one mediator between God and humanity. However, as the "*Lumen Gentium*" reminds the Church, "the Redeemer gives rise to a manifold cooperation, which is but a sharing in this one source (1 Timothy 2:5)."¹ In this sense, the Church is a sacramental grace that is tasked to bring God's salvation into the earth.² Thus, when the Church performs its acts of love, justice, and mercy on behalf of the poor, it is a signet of God's continued work that emanates from and through the body of Christ. However, for Chrysostom, Nazianzen, and Clement, there is a theological imperative that is less explicit in Scripture, yet

¹ *Lumen Gentium, Vatican Council II: Volume 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised ed. (New York: Costello, 2004) III. 63.

² *Ibid.*, I.1. The *Lumen Gentium* uses the language of Sacrament to describe the Church's presence within the world *vis-à-vis* its "very close-knit union with God and of the unity of the entire human race." This relationship implies how it is called to interact with both God and the world in a manner that gives rise to the character and presence of God.

that is, in their view, another essential facet of working with the poor. As mentioned above, the poor are the trainers and coaches that help their benefactors both participate in God's saving work and help culture the soul after Christ's character. In this sense, they are not merely "porters" as Susan Holman notes, which carry the works of the rich heavenward; they are, in fact, God's instructors in virtue.³ This belief is not to assume that what the poor have to say is necessarily virtuous but that the work itself helps aid in their Christian formation because, through it, the Church is participating in a kenotic exercise that hearkens to the gospel's saving way. Thus, in following the Apostle's counsel in Philippians 2, when the Church takes on Christ's persona by emptying itself of the treasure it possesses in pedagogical, monetary, and relational exercises, much more is being exchanged than the aid itself.

Pastoral Call to Action-

Clement of Alexandria: The Poor as the Trainers in Virtue

The task of working with the poor has been a vital part of the Church's ministry practice since its inception. In the New Testament, the poor have the gospel preached to them, collections were often made on their behalf, they are taught the ethics and virtue of the Kingdom of God, and a clear invitation is presented for them to join the Christian movement (Matthew 11:5, Luke

³ Susan Holman, *The Hungry are Dying*, 19. Holman argues that *leitourgia* and the gift economy in Rome played a significant role in how these pastors understood their work with the poor. The concept is essential that patronage and the exchange of gifts were embedded concepts in Rome where the poor received benevolence, and they, in turn, would serve and support the political or societal ends of their patrons. In an ecclesial sense, the rich are benevolent and help the poor with their physical needs while the poor serve as porters who then carry the works of their benefactors heavenward to help them establish status in the afterlife. Nevertheless, there is more here going on than mere gift exchange as the poor themselves, for these pastors, are seen as a gift that helps to refine the souls of their benefactors.

7:22, Acts 6-7, Matthew 5-6, Luke 4:18-19, 14:13-14). Clement, however, contextualizes the rich as those who are tasked with lavishing their wealth, which is chiefly a spiritual enterprise but is manifest in outward expressions, upon others as a type of spiritual formation. In this sense, the rich are also in need of being saved, and the poor are the ideal trainers that can help them unload the vices that bludgeon and weaken the soul and make it difficult to respond to the call of the gospel or to make any real spiritual progress. The poor are a context for ministry practice that demands the rigorous training in the virtue of Christ for the flourishing that the gospel intends to take hold. Furthermore, because poverty for Clement is in another sense an amiable spiritual state ("blessed are the poor in spirit," Matthew 5:3), they can train the rich in a life that recognizes its need only for God. As noted above, true wealth is eternal, while the riches of the world are to be cast off or used in ways that store up heavenly treasure. This treasure is amassed as the poor respond in gratitude with prayers and petitions on behalf of their patrons, and secondly, they serve as trainers that teach the rich how to live in a manner that is detached from wealth and worldly concerns, causatively learning to reflect the nature of Christ.⁴ For Clement, the poor have much to teach and impart, and he implores his congregation, noting: "In actions all these soldiers and guards are reliable, none is idle, none is useless. One is able to obtain thy pardon from God, another to encourage thee when weary, another to weep and grown sympathetically on thy behalf to the Lord of the universe, another to teach thee somethings useful for salvation, another to warn thee with frankness, (and) another to advise with good-

⁴ Clement, "*Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*," 62.35. Clement makes the case that the poor have tremendous gifts to impart to the rich. He implores them to give without casting judgment on which of these is worthy because one cannot finally know what treasure of Christ is hidden within them.

will."⁵ The locus of this argument is that all the poor have something to impart to the rich, and this is one reciprocal benefit for helping them.

The gospel framework that Clement utilizes to stress his point about the nature of the Church's work with the poor is in Christ's telling of the parable of the "Good Samaritan." Clement emphasizes the "go and do likewise" command in the parable and the rule of love that is indicative of Christ's condescension and aid of a broken and lost humanity as the referent for the way the Church should be neighborly and respond to the needs of the poor (Luke 10:37). The Samaritan in the parable casts judgment upon a religious order that is insular. Similarly, Clement jettisons a platonic view of spiritual ascent that is strictly contemplative or individualistic as he spurs his congregation towards embodied works that both reflect and produce divine love.⁶ For Clement embodied works matter because they are the primary method God uses to refine the soul. Furthermore, the Church learns how to love and live like God by caring for the poor.⁷ In this way, working with them is always efficacious because through this interchange, the Church manifests God's salvation for all humanity and is itself refined by what it receives in return.⁸ Clement envisages these efforts as to how the vices are cut away, and the virtues of Christ are imparted because, through this sacramental exchange, something of Christ's divinity is

⁵ Ibid., 62.35.

⁶ Ibid., 64.37. Clement argues that the "fruit of love is love" and that there is no greater reflection of this love than giving oneself for another. This is how one makes spiritual progress. Furthermore, because he prizes spiritual wealth as the truest and greatest treasure, the Church, whether abounding in resource or itself in scarcity, must work tirelessly towards the flourishing of those in physical and spiritual need. This work is the nature of the gospel.

⁷ Ibid., 54.29-55.30. Clement notes that "love causes well-doing to flourish," yet it is also the case that well-doing for the sake of love for God also helps foster Christ-like virtue. For Clement, faith must move beyond confession and cites Mt.7:21, "For not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

⁸ Ibid., 57.32. The task of the Church is not to wait for an opportunity to serve the poor but to seek them out and to make a way of salvation for others so that the "Rich Young Ruler" might also be saved. In this sense, a person is duty-bound to share their material possessions as well as their spiritual possessions.

transferred.⁹ To say this differently, the Church becomes more like God by participating in God's saving work in ministry to the poor and by heralding the good news of the gospel. In this sense, all activities have spiritual outcomes, and the poor are the "training school" for the soul, which reveals the "hidden Father and Son."¹⁰ This happens, of course, when the poor receive the good news of Christ's coming and are themselves lifted through benevolence and reformatory practices that help them to embody the character of the kingdom. When the Church engages the poor in ministries that reflect Christ's nature, namely, proclaiming the good news of the gospel and caring for their physical needs, it becomes the tether that yokes human frailty with God's salvation because the Church itself embodies both of these functional traits. This exchange enlivens a generative process where both the Church and the poor receive mercy through acts of love and are transformed by the work itself because it instructs them in the salvific nature of Christ and imbues them with God's love for the world.¹¹

Love of Christ and others is integral because it rightly orders the efforts and desire for justice and compels the Church towards the right action with the poor.¹² Love refuses to exploit

⁹ Ibid., 58.32. Clement notes how the world bounds forth with the presence and work of God, yet the interchange when working with the poor, uniquely cultures the Church's character and builds heavenly treasure. He states, in the "great reward of fellowship," the kingdom of God bounds forth in "noble commerce" or "divine barter" in ways that yield divine treasure.

¹⁰ Ibid., 61.33. The hidden Father and Son are both the impress of the image of God upon humanity and the Spirit of God that is active in work with the poor. The Church becomes more like God when it behaves like God, by giving of itself perpetually to lift those in need of refreshing. However, because for Clement, spiritual wealth is by far superior to the wealth of this world, it would be foolhardy to think that offering material aid alone is sufficient.

¹¹ Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing, 2011), 100-104. Christ redeems the world by taking on the nature of his creation, which otherwise would have no referent for the wholly otherness of God. Moreover, by taking on human flesh, God extends divine *philanthropia*, which becomes the means of grace that at once enables the Church to participate in and extend this grace to others. This grace sustains creation and also keeps it from drifting towards the nothingness from which it was summoned. Thus, when the Church participates in the divine nature by proclaiming the saving message of the gospel and by extending divine *philanthropia* in its service to the poor, they are drawing creation into the mystery of Christ's divine nature by virtue of the Church's work enacted through human flesh.

¹² Ibid., 65.37. Merciful duty for Clement is the proper response of the Church because it has been given such a lavish gift in Christ. He notes, "for the sake of each of us, he laid down his life worth no less than the universe. He demands of us in return our lives for the sake of each other...He that loveth not his brother is a murderer." Without

another for gain, and, in the case of the "Rich Man" being saved, willingly lavishes its earthly goods on others to improve their situation. However, Clement recognizes that love of this sort can be challenging to attain because of the tendency within the sinful human heart to seek its advantage.¹³ Thus it is incumbent upon the Church to have mentors and "trainers" that can help to form Christ-like habits through instruction.¹⁴ He envisions this process happening through the Church's interconnectedness and kinship with the poor, as noted above, as well as the relationship it shares with the community of faith itself. The Church for Clement is an incubator for discipleship that is tasked with the formation of the body of Christ, in all of its monetary constitutions, into a faithful reflection of God's continued activity in the earth. He notes, however, that it is "absolutely necessary" for individuals within the Church to "set over themselves" those that are godly that can "serve as a trainer" in similar kind to one who endures the rigors of gymnastics school.¹⁵ This rigorous process helps to not only teach what the biblical principles of righteousness and justice are but more so aids in the implementation of the disciplines necessary to fulfill Christ's commission faithfully.

During the concluding chapter of his sermon, Clement offers an oratory twist that at once scandalizes his hearers as well as contextualizes how he imagines the discipleship process to function within the body of Christ. He shares in the form of a story the "Legend of St. John" who delivered up to the Church's trust a convert that had a checkered past and tasked them with his

love, no true justice can be accomplished because, through it, the transformative power of God is manifested in acts which themselves become salvific.

¹³ Ibid., 69.40. Clement is doubtful that a person can completely remove the human tendency for pursuing personal advantage and shutting down want for pleasure. However, he believes that "progress" can be made with "God's strength, man's intercession, brethren's help, and sincere repentance."

¹⁴ Ibid., 69.41. Pedagogical processes within the Church are integral for the Church's formation. Clement imagines that this work will be accomplished both in the Church's work with and among the poor as well as in pedagogical processes that happen within the context of the Church community itself.

¹⁵ Ibid., 69.41.

care.¹⁶The pastor took the man into his home, where he was initiated and instructed in the way of Christ. The convert after a while, however, fell back into his former way of life, left the Church and returned to a life of thievery. When St. John was traveling through the region again, he visited the Church and queried where the man was that he had left under the pastor's charge. When he realized what transpired, he wept and was indignant that the pastor had become lax in his care of the man. He then went on a relentless and sleepless pursuit of the man who had lost his way, and when he found him, the man wept, threw down the armaments of his life of robbery, and St. John comforted him with words and the embrace of reconciliation. They returned to the Church, and John remained by the man's side and joined him in traveling prayers and fasting until his faith was restored and was returned to his former place within the Church. This story serves as a hook that contextualizes much of what he has already been saying about the Church's call: The Church is the trainers and benefactors for the world that hold in trust reconciliation and new life, which are the greatest treasures of heaven. Failing to care for and train the world in the virtue of Christ is a fundamental breakdown of Jesus' mission entrusted to the Church. Similarly, the "Rich Young Ruler" has been schooled in the tenets of the law, and to the best of his ability, followed it, yet was unwilling to sell and give his possessions to the poor because he was weighed down in vice. The story concludes, however, with the hope of visible resurrection that comes through humility and repentance. When one lays down the wealth stored away in vice, they become unencumbered by its weight and can resume in haste their ascent

¹⁶ Ibid.,72.42. This story is almost certainly misplaced devoid of an interpretive move that frames the Church as the wealthiest of all benefactors who are tasked with lavishing the glorious treasures of heaven upon those that do not know the Lord. If St. John was not above the tasks of loving and pursuing the unregenerate poor, then how much more so the Church?

towards God. Furthermore, they can loosen the bonds of tyranny in others as they train them in the way of the Lord.

Faithful "guardians" for Clement, are those who possess the character depicted in St. John's love and care of the wayward convert and the relentless pursuit of his restoration.¹⁷ The Church fails in its missional mandate when any pursuit of human flourishing does not bring with it the transformative power of the gospel in tow. Discipleship in this sense is more than pedagogical instruction but more so embodying and professing what the teaching declares. Those who seek discipleship and those that are tasked to offer it are to tirelessly pursue the virtue and nature of Christ and his love of that which is lost.¹⁸ This commitment engenders a discipleship process that persists in its work among the poor as a vital context for the Church's formation as well as appointing capable people within the community itself that will raise faithful disciples in the virtue and character of Christ.

John Chrysostom: The Poor as the Context for Spiritual Formation

John Chrysostom likewise envisages the poor as a gift to the Church that offers a contextual platform for spiritual formation. In his second discourse, he shares that daily Lazarus

¹⁷ Ibid., 74.42. St John calls out the pastor and the Church for failing in their mandate to provide faithful guardianship for those in their trust. The Church's greatest treasure is its message of reconciliation that is more than shelter and provision. The Church faithfully offered that and still was rebuked for their indifference and resignation towards the lost one's wayward plight because they failed to possess the heart of God who willingly leaves the 99 to save the one.

¹⁸ Ibid., 76.43. Clement is concluding the story that traces St. John's pursuit of the lost man, describes how the Church imagines discipleship as a communal project that partners with the rich who are called to lay down the riches of their vices as well as how the lost are reformed through the proving and training ground of spiritual disciplines. He notes that when St. John finds the man, he does not merely hand him back over to the Church but instead joins him "with abundant prayers...in wrestling with continuous fasts and soothed his mind with various exhortations and did not go away, as they say, until he was restored to the Church." This process is what he imagines as discipleship: "real repentance," "new birth," and "a monument of visible resurrection."

lay at the gate of the Rich Man "that he might be to thee a teacher of virtue, and an opportunity for the exercise of benevolence."¹⁹ John's intentional shift in tense from the third person to the second person masterfully draws the congregation to consider themselves as players in the parable, and each hearer would, by necessity, have to decide which character they are in the narrative.²⁰ Lazarus, in this sense, is placed in the path of the Rich Man, or his congregants, as a "means of salvation" whose purpose is to instruct the ones robed in a façade of wealth, what genuine wealth is.²¹ One cannot hope for salvation by merely looking the part; indeed, the demands of the gospel require that the Church reflect the character of Christ, its archetype. Though the Church can robe itself in the beauty and rhetoric of the gospel's teaching, it persists in unfaithfulness if it simultaneously deprives others of salvation, power, justice, and the hope that the gospel exclaims. This hope is why John implores his congregation to push beyond the comforts of insular living and to engage the marketplace and its beggars with the gospel.

The pedagogical approach that Chrysostom uses to lead his community is a form of psychagogy because, for him, poverty is chiefly a spiritual state that is a result of an errant way of thought.²² He makes a distinction, however, noting that poverty is not necessarily the lack of possessions but more so wanton desire that drives a person in endless pursuits of vanity. The

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, "Four Discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," II.3. Chrysostom imagines work among the poor as both duty and a vital aspect of spiritual formation.

²⁰ Ibid., II.3. Chrysostom makes plain his intent to draw them into the narrative by reminding his hearers: "We learn from this that all those who we have despitefully treated or wronged will then meet us face to face." Though there is a retributive slant to his entreaty, he hopes to awaken his congregants to their duty to those God sent across their path.

²¹ Ibid., II.3.

²² Geoffrey D. Dunn and Wendy M. Mayer 2015, *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium*, 145. Dunn and Mayer argue that Chrysostom is less concerned with forming a systematic theology but instead is a product of the world in which he was immersed, which was "Hellenistic *paideia*." John uses question and investigation as a psychagogue who is chiefly concerned with the souls of his students and utilizes the gospel and community engagement as his main method of spiritual formation.

mind, for Chrysostom, is the inception point for sinful behavior while also its point of reformation. Thus, he writes, "when you see one who does not wish for many things, judge him of all men as most affluent, even if he possesses nothing. For by the condition of our mind, not by the quantity of our material wealth, should it be our custom to distinguish between poverty and affluence."²³ The sermons concerning Lazarus and the Rich Man delineate the principles and describe the desirable behaviors, but John imagines that this only sets the stage for the community of faith to push into the world at large with the gospel.²⁴ The work among the needy is deeply formative and cultures in the heart, both a love of neighbor as well as Christ's virtue.²⁵ However, knowing that these traits are not easily formed he recognizes that each person needs a "guide" to instruct them because the "soul stands in want of those who can conduct it"²⁶ Lazarus in this sense is the psychagogue that guides the Church in how to endure despite numerous rejections from the "Rich Man" and how to suffer in redemptive ways.²⁷ This idea echoes the way Chrysostom implored his community at the beginning of these sermons to share their faith amidst the revelry of the festival, and Lazarus example has demonstrated a glimpse of faithfulness. The Church cannot relinquish its duty in the face of rejection or relent in its call to

²³ John Chrysostom, "Four Discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," II.1. Though John wants to aid those that lack the necessities for subsistence, poverty is chiefly a mindset that the gospel alone can remedy. Furthermore, he envisages his Church engaging in practices that will reform the mind, and these include both the formative process of instruction as well as a practicum that engages the marketplace with the gospel.

²⁴ Ibid., I.9. Chrysostom writes that those who live in excess are "instructed and corrected not by words only but by acts." For John, the work itself is formative because it helps to contextualize the instruction and helps to form habits that curb humanity's propensity for selfish pursuits.

²⁵ Ibid., I.8. Chrysostom draws his hearers to consider the indolence it would take to lie in luxury while others suffer within your reach. The work of the gospel among the poor cultures the heart to love and serve like Christ.

²⁶ Ibid II.2.

²⁷ Ibid., I.11-12. John discusses how suffering is redemptive and sees the Lord at work through hardship asserting: "Let us not say that if God loved such a one, He would not have allowed him to be in poverty. This very thing is the greatest token of love. For 'whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.'" John imagines this suffering redemptive in the sense that it produces something in the sufferer and that the Lord uses these experiences to form virtue. Furthermore, this redemption is complete when Lazarus receives a hardy welcome in the afterlife.

faithfulness when it is difficult to remain so because it recognizes that Christ is using these experiences to train them in virtue.²⁸ Furthermore, when the Church encounters need as they push into the market place, Lazarus' account reminds them of the risks of turning a blind eye to the disadvantaged by failing to offer relief to the suffering.

John's sermon, like Clement's, scandalizes his hearers because he makes understandable that carelessness towards the need of others is the type of behavior that ultimately damns the "Rich Man." Additionally, John is more suspicious of the wealthy than Clement because he recognizes how riches can foster a type of blindness that prevents a person from recognizing their spiritual needs. The sore ridden frail Lazarus, in this sense, is like a mirror that reflects the "Rich Man's" soul and the souls of those who likewise fail to extend Christ's mercy to those in need. The oratorical effect of this sermon was palpable as the usually raucous congregation was pensive and quiet.²⁹ John references this in his Second Discourse noting, "Ye are silent as you listen to these things. Much rather would I have silence than applause. Applause and praises tend to my own glory; but silence tends to make you wiser."³⁰ This introspective moment cauterizes John's point: the Church risks the same fate as the obtuse Rich Man if they fail to share the wealth that they have received in Christ with those in need of it.³¹ However, when his faith

²⁸ Ibid., I.12. Chrysostom writes: "For this cause, therefore, Christ brought them before our notice, in order that whensoever we fall into trouble, seeing in his case the exceeding greatness of his affliction, we may, from his wisdom and patience, gain effectual consolation and comfort; for he is set as a general instructor of the whole world, for all who are suffering any kind of distress; enabling all to look to one who surpassed them all in the exceeding greatness of his woes." The Church in this way is led to consider how hardship itself is formative and to always have an eye towards what these experiences are producing in our lives. Lazarus at once exposes the peril of insular living and teaches the reward and purpose of virtue.

²⁹ Attwater D, *St. John Chrysostom; On Wealth and Poverty*, Attwater asserts that Chrysostom was viewed as the "Golden Mouthed" preacher who's sermons were often "interrupted" by the shouts and "applause" of his congregants.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, "Four Discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," II.3.

³¹ Susan Holman, *Wealth and Poverty in the Early Church and Society*, 129. Holman discusses that for John "it is a sin however, not to share one's riches with the poor" and the gospel represents the greatest form of wealth.

community, and the generations of Churches that would follow, persist in their mission to care for the spiritually and economically destitute, they are in a sense engaging a process of purgation that refines their mind and character in ways that prepare them for the world to come.³² In this way, the intersection of the Church and the world at large yields the excellent opportunity to make the gospel present, and when they love their neighbors well, they perpetually proclaim the in-breaking of God's Kingdom.

Gregory Nazianzen: The Hypostatic Nature of Christ Embodied in the Church

Gregory Nazianzen shares the notion that the Church's work among the poor is essential to its spiritual formation. However, he differs from his colleagues in that he wants the Church to perform its work from a perspective of solidarity.³³ While Chrysostom and Clement possess a desire to reach the poor with the gospel and to alleviate their physical suffering, there are clear distinctions of "us" and "them" that are at play in their sermons.³⁴ Gregory however, makes the case that the Church is called to stand in unity and solidarity with the poor by way of analogy

³² John Chrysostom, "Four Discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," I.9. John imagines Lazarus to be a paragon of virtue who willingly endures the rejections of the Rich Man as a means of refinement. He notes that Lazarus endured these "afflictions, not for punishment, but that he might become more glorious." He is exceptional in that despite facing the perpetual refusal of aid from the one with the means to provide it, and the constancy of the reminder of his poverty, is somehow able to maintain his resolve to offer himself as help for the rich and to persist in his faith in God.

³³ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14," 44. Gregory cites Galatians 3:28 to make the argument that we are all one in Christ, but for him, this particular oneness transcends the idea of insiders and outsiders because of the common humanity shared among all. While Gregory certainly recognizes the need of offering salvation to others, this is functionally accomplished through kenotic exercises akin to Christ's taking on our human condition.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, *Four Discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*, IV.2 Chrysostom makes a distinction between the just and the unjust and while he asserts that sharing the gospel indiscriminately is essential, the just do so from a position of otherness. Clement likewise imagines the regenerate as a beacon of light of sorts who lean back into culture with Christ's saving power to reach the lost. Clement, "*Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*," 69.40. Yet, Nazianzen while maintaining the sense that salvation functionally changes us, fosters an evangelical image of solidarity rather than distinction akin to Christ's saving way of placing his lot and life with that of humanity. Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, *The Fathers of the Church; St Gregory of Nazianzus, Select Orations*, 44.

with perspectives on how one might view their own sinful or ailing body noting: "But now, though confronted with the suffering of others, I have been dwelling on the infirmity of my own flesh...for, even if I have denounced it as my enemy for the distress it causes, still, I embrace it as a friend because of he who joined us together... [Similarly] we must look after the physical needs of our neighbors."³⁵ Broken flesh always intermixes with the spirit and may, at times, stifle its ascent towards God, yet embodied acts that exude Christ's virtue are also how the spirit of a person is carried aloft.³⁶ Thus, as he argues against Apollinarus, Christ's virtue redeems human flesh in a hypostatic union; the Church's relationship with the world is as an integrated redeeming force through the continual work of Christ within it.³⁷ Gregory's call in this sense is more than an ask to help the poor; instead, his invocation is that believers recognize that in standing in solidarity with them that God's manner of saving is perpetually wrought through the work the Church performs. Alternatively, as the *Lumen Gentium* makes plain fifteen hundred years later concerning the work of the Church in the world: "These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world."³⁸ In this sense,

³⁵ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14," 44.

³⁶ Ibid., 43. Gregory discusses the way that the flesh is both a burden, in that at times can be weighed down in vice, but is also the helper because through its "actions" it is also able to "ascend to God." Thus, omitting embodied acts altogether is to deny the soul its essential "helper" needed to achieve noble aims.

³⁷ Gregory Nazianzus, "Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy," *New Advent, Translated by Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3103a.htm>, accessed February 11, 2020. Gregory notes that whatever is "united to His Godhead is also saved." Christ bears human flesh to redeem it and as the Church bears the infirmities of the poor through its care, God's saving power enlivens its activity in ways that can redeem and heal the spiritually and physically infirmed.*

³⁸ *Lumen Gentium, Vatican Council II: Volume, IV.31.*

the hypostatic nature of Christ extends through the work of the Church within the world in ways that redeem the flesh. When the poor are fed and clothed, and the infirmed are loved, cared for and cured, the work of divinizing and calling forth the image of God in humanity happens when the union of the incorporeal nature of the divinity of God bounds forth from the shared corporal flesh we have in Christ. Furthermore, when Gregory speaks of the solidarity shared as fellow humans, he understands that the Church's presence to the poor in all of its constitution is essential to its mission as well as its formation. The Church becomes more like God by sharing in the grace extended through the locus of Christ's saving mission as it pertains to the poor.³⁹

The Church for Nazianzen exists both to redeem creation by extending Christ's salvation to the world and to loosen the tether that stifles the movement of its soul towards God. Though Nazianzen's idea of *epectasy* is not as developed as that of Gregory of Nyssa, there are echoes of his friend's influence within this work.⁴⁰ Nazianzen posits that participating in Christ's virtue helps to strengthen the soul's ascent heavenward by deepening its union with Christ's nature and by way of sanctifying acts accomplished in the body that is in kind with Christ's work.⁴¹ The Church's efforts among the poor in this respect are redemptive both as a refining process towards Christian virtue and salvific in that it extends God's salvation to the poor and the world at large.

³⁹ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14," 59. Gregory implores the congregation to share in the mission of Christ to perpetuate God's salvation in the lives of others by performing acts that are signets of His work.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 55 Gregory discusses that Christ's call to "Rise let us go hence" is perpetual and for "all time" (rather than merely situational) to journey deeper into the nature of God. Following this idea of *epectasy* Natalie Carnes notes that for Nyssa there are two ways in which to "talk about human nature" ...with an emphasis upon "eschatological becoming" and is marked by a "profound discontinuity with human nature (your self must be wounded) and a profound continuity, (your flesh must be healed)." In this sense by living into the virtue of Christ the sinful body is both wounded and healed and becomes more at home in the nature of Christ. Natalie Carnes, *Beauty, A Theological Engagement with Gregory of Nyssa* (Eugene, O, Cascade Books, 2014), 207.

⁴¹ Ibid., 55. Nazianzen notes that by sanctifying acts done in the flesh and "dedicating" them to the work of the spirit that we are being drawn "away for all time from the earth and the things of earth to the heavens and the blessings of heaven." The flesh in this sense is both a servant and hindrance to the soul, however when the Church participates in Christ's work, the flesh itself is lifted and less encumbered by the weight and malady of sin.

Furthermore, by helping the poor, the Church is saved from the excesses that weaken the Church's message and entangle it in vice. For Gregory, the Church serves Christ in its work among the poor, and in its compassion, catalyzes a process of purgation that draws out the image of God within the body of Christ as well as in the poor who have been marred in dehumanizing experiences and relinquished to the margins.⁴² Moreover, the Church's kinship and solidarity with the poor ennoble their status by extending Christ's salvation to the furthest distances of their suffering by reminding them that for "such as these" Christ has come (Matthew 19:14).

There is a functional dilemma between the idealized conduct and the present behaviors within Basil's Church, where Nazianzen delivers this homily. Gregory recognizes this disparity and argues that neglecting the poor is symptomatic of a kind of soul sickness that is noted by its ability to behold need and yet remain capable of turning a blind eye to the peril of others.⁴³ He then posits that being Christian is to take up the way of Christ, who "for our sakes became poor" and "assumed the lump of which we consist."⁴⁴ This rhetorical move at once shames his hearers because of their pursuit of opulence and beckons them to behold the nature of Christ again.⁴⁵

Christ's condescension and salvation are far-reaching and span the vast and diverse condition of

⁴² Ibid., 70,69, 54.

⁴³ Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, 62. Rhee discusses the salvific value and importance of caring for the poor in this social milieu as vital aspects of ecclesial life because in doing so it was thought to relieve the burden of sin by training the soul in what it ought to love and as preparation for the eschatological world to come.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 49. The argument he uses is based primarily in the idea of Christ's assumption of our human condition and the willingness by which he was afflicted with our infirmities. Neglecting the poor is counterintuitive to the missional facets of Christ's ministry.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 50. Gregory's use of hyperbole is masterful as he describes the nature of their pursuits in juxtaposition with the character of Christ. He writes, "Will they then continue to suffer in the open while we lounge within luxurious homes beckoned with a stone of every description, resplendent with gold and silver and inlay of delicate mosaic and varied fresco that charm and beguile the eyes?" Christ, on the other hand, lays the glory of heaven aside to "share in our common weakness, (and) has given compassion the force of law." In showing vast disparities between the vanity of these hollow pursuits in comparison with the humility, Christ assumes to save the world. He can contrast the hypocrisies of the Church's stated mission and ethics with its actual behavior.

humanity without making a distinction. Similarly, the Church must not be put off by human suffering. Instead, their task is to embrace it as a shared malady of the human experience in need of Christ's healing and salvation. In this sense, the Church is the conduit for Christ's activity in the earth, and provision for the care of the poor is held in trust in the resources and love that bound forth from the body of Christ in ways that address their physical and spiritual needs.⁴⁶ However, similar to Chrysostom and Clement, Gregory recognizes that growth in virtue often necessitates the counsel of people within the Church who are "wiser" and "more spiritual" than themselves as well as cultivating the disciplines of piety in relationship with God as a requisite for spiritual formation.⁴⁷ The Church is formed in piety in the fire of its ministry to the poor and learns the nature of Christ's condescension by sharing in their suffering.

The Church is called to move beyond insular living and tasked to carry the gospel to the poor. Chrysostom, Clement, and Nazianzen contend that this vital ministry is deeply formative because it enjoins the Church to the Christ event in ways that uniquely form its virtue. Furthermore, in ministering to the marginalized, they are also offering them access to a new way of life that leads to human flourishing. Through the gospel, each person is compelled to love God and neighbor, and this upends the sociopolitical systems that tend towards disempowerment and stifling of the human spirit. However, when the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the infirmed cared for, and the Kingdom of Heaven is preached, the Body of Christ becomes more itself by extending salvation to the world that Jesus came to save.

Nevertheless, the works are only salvific in the sense that they are accomplishing something spiritual through the conversion and formation of the soul after Christ's nature. The

⁴⁶ Ibid.,66.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 64.

gospel, in this sense, is a discursive disruption to the status quo. Alternatively, attempting to elevate the suffering of others through acts of mercy devoid of the gospel itself is by nature antithetical to the Church's mission and, as discussed in the introduction, ineffective. Moreover, when each person recognizes their stake in the interconnectedness of the body of Christ and the world, they realize that helping others is reciprocal in the way in which the soul is trained in virtue and through the new bonds of kinship that are formed. The Church in all of its socio-economic constitution is tasked to use their resources and the language of the gospel to lift those who suffer, while the poor, in turn, offer those who help them an opportunity to train their soul in the salutary virtue of Christ. The chief end, however, is not the works themselves. Instead, the aim is to make Jesus known through acts that illumine the nature of Christ extended through the Church.

Chapter Four:

Eschatology and a Vision for Societal Renewal

The poor are an integral part of the Church's formation and help hone its virtue after the nature of Christ. Furthermore, when the Church reaches out towards those on the margins it helps to participate in processes of divinization that are transformative for the poor as well as the Faith Community. In this chapter I will demonstrate how for these pastors helping the poor was more than a vocational obligation of the Church, instead they possessed an eschatological vision for societal renewal through God's justice and the expectation that the acts performed in this life would have a corollary impact in God's final judgment. Next, I will show that Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Clement, in part, are trying to form a teleological foundation for the Church's work among the poor by keeping the broader vision in focus. Embodied works matter as do the way they are contributing to the formation of the world at hand and one's status in the one to come. Finally I will discuss how eschatological vision is refined through processes of purgation and redemptive suffering that lead to personal and societal reform.

Throughout history, concepts of the afterlife were readily abundant, and this, of course, was no different in the time of Christ and during the writings of the gospels. This social milieu was replete with concern with what awaited a person after death, and there was a shared sense that one's status in the afterlife was contingent upon how they handled their affairs while alive on earth. However, the gospels are not merely rehashing an inherited understanding of what happens after death from a Hebrew or Greco-Roman perspective but more so are offering corrections of these conceptions through new articulations of hope and consequence. Jeremiah Mutie writes, "In ways similar to Greco-Roman practices for the dying, Christian rites indicate

care and concern for their dying. However, in contrast to them, the Christian concern is governed more by hope than despair."⁴⁸ For Christians, the fear of the afterlife had lost much of its sting because of the promised reward of the faithful. However, retributive emotional responses of fear and despair still loomed large for those who failed to carry out their duty as believers. Christians knew that they were called to love God and neighbor and that each person would give an account for their deeds. Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Clement take up the reward/consequence motif in the gospels and attempt to exhort their communities towards action by demonstrating what is at stake in their work for justice for the poor.

Christ saves by healing the infirmities of the body and soul, renewing the mind and transforming the whole person through baptism, and by continuous sanctifying processes of discipleship that form its virtue. The Church, in turn, is tasked to perpetuate God's salvation through embodying the character of Christ and performing redemptive acts in the world in a manner that extends God's mercy and love to others. These acts from a scriptural perspective always have an eye towards the poor. In the Old Testament, justice for the disadvantaged was vital to the everyday life of Israel, and neglecting their care was considered an affront to their "Maker" (Proverbs 14:31). Israel was tasked to honor the Lord by providing "shelter to the poor wanderer," to offer them "food," clothing, and to loosen "chains of injustice" (Isaiah 58:6-7). However, the gospel also makes plain the retributive effect of failing to appropriate God's charge to care for the poor as Jesus chides the unfaithful, separates them out from his sheep and

⁴⁸ Jeremiah Mutie, "Attitudes Toward Death in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Cultures," *Pakistan Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Emotions, Death and Dying (Winter 2017, Indiana University Press): 89-115, 92,115. Mutie asserts that in contrast to the Jewish "badges" of mourning noted with sackcloth, ashes, and the uncleanness of corpses, Christians instead were emboldened by the hope of their faith in Christ and brought the bodies in prominent places to celebrate the life of the deceased and an eschatological expectation of reward.

declares: "whatever you have not done for the least of these, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45).⁴⁹ Ignoring the reward/consequence motif in the gospel is to fundamentally miss what is at stake for the Church and the world at large if it fails to appropriate Christ's saving work both personally and as a vessel to be shared in the lives of those in need. Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Clement seamlessly carry the themes of reward, retribution, renewal of creation, and the afterlife in their sermons regarding the Church's care of the poor to spur their communities towards faithful living and to help to prepare them for the world to come.

Teleological Frameworks Towards Transformative Justice-

Gregory Nazianzen: Eschatology- Love and Kinship in Cruciform Towards Gods

In-Breaking

Gregory recognizes that the Church's purpose is always much more significant than merely caring for the poor, as its efforts have a corollary effect upon subsequent generations as well as one's position in the world to come. Nevertheless, his manner for prodding them towards the right behavior is framed in compassion rather than fear or duty. Love is the "sum of the law," and this virtue gives rise to the sense of responsibility that one has for the well-being of the poor and orients the Church's conduct towards them.⁵⁰ Nazianzen's sense of this is the Church's call to stand in solidarity with the poor, which is at once an extension of Christ's love and salvation and

⁴⁹ Matthew 25:31-46 discusses the reward/consequence motif specifically as it relates to the poor, noting that inattentiveness to their care is failing to attend to Christ himself. On the other hand, Jesus receives the care for the poor as mercy offered to him personally.

⁵⁰ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. by Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14," 42. Gregory emphasizes charity as the "sum of the law," and the virtue that is most proper to the nature of God, who is loving "mercy" has pitied and rescued humanity. Similarly, when the Church acts mercifully to the poor they demonstrate their capacity for mercy as well as merit "compassionate treatment...at the hands of him who weighs mercy in his scale and balance and gives just recompense."

also a practical way to improve the societal conditions that reinforce their oppression. The Church participates in God's saving way by loosening the bonds of those on the margins through kinship and embodies their brokenness in cruciform by taking up their care in ways that are a visible manifestation of God's in-breaking. Thus, when Nazianzen implores the Church to care for the poor by lifting the burden of their suffering, these acts subsequently aid in building a more loving and humane world and helps to contribute to its healing and renewal.⁵¹ In this sense, the poor are not a population segment merely to be cared for; instead, they are a vital portion of the whole, which can be a signet of God's redemption of creation itself.⁵² However, arriving at this conclusion necessitates a subsequent change in the way that the Church views the disadvantaged.⁵³ The poor are not a burden or nuisance but rather a gift to the Church, its formation, and the optimal place to establish the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3, Luke 6:20). Following this, he attempts to change their perception by elevating their status by reminding the Church that the poor "have the same portion as the image of God just as we do and who perhaps keep it better."⁵⁴ The poor offer a unique reflection of the image of God, and diminishing their

⁵¹ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. by Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14," 42. Gregory emphasizes charity as the "sum of the law," and the virtue that is most proper to the nature of God, who is loving "mercy" has pitied and rescued humanity. Similarly, when the Church acts mercifully to the poor they demonstrate their capacity for mercy as well as merit "compassionate treatment...at the hands of him who weighs mercy in his scale and balance and gives just recompense."

⁵² Ibid., 52. Gregory argues that humanity's placement at the pinnacle of creation comes with the responsibility of rising above an animalistic nature of self-preservation. Christ redeems by uniting God's self to humanity and in a similar way the Church lifts the whole of humanity by placing its lot in with the whole.

⁵³ Ibid., 51. Gregory argues by way of paradox the manifold ways in which people store up and adorn the transience of this life without a remote gaze towards its consequence in the world to come. Lavish living that affects the vulnerable as a collateral consequence is a misapprehension of the call of the Christian to participate in God's redeeming work and to share the grace and benevolence that has been placed in their hands by God as stewards of God's trust.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 49. One's physical maladies or poverty are never disqualifiers for inclusion in the community of faith or the exercise of Christian service. Gregory points out that many of the infirmed and the poor are often more likely to care for others than those who do not suffer in the same way. This may be in part because they know what it is to be in need.

status is to undermine vital aspects of God's revelation of God's self and functionally discredits the faithfulness of the Church's witness.

Gregory's eschatological vision for his community seamlessly weaves between a terrestrial world that is being renewed and a celestial reward prepared for the faithful.⁵⁵ Brian Matz argues that for Nazianzen God is concerned with the care of creation as well as where they spend eternity, however, "the aim is divinization, which not only has eternal benefits, but also earthly implications, including especially imitating the compassion and love of God for every person."⁵⁶ The transforming effect of this process functionally lifts the whole of society by assimilating it into Kingdom virtue and reconciling the wounds of the marginalized by its work for justice in ways that break generational bondage. Moreover, the eschaton for Gregory is both a present reality and a future hope in that it marks the end of suffering and oppression while simultaneously fastening its gaze upon the reward and summing up of all things in God.⁵⁷ The afterlife and its rewards and consequences are fashioned in this sense by one's ability to appropriate God's salvation for themselves and in the lives of others. This eschatological framework recognizes the retributive and corrosive effect of selfish and careless living that always yields painful consequences.⁵⁸ For Nazianzen, an unmerciful world is an excruciating

⁵⁵ Ibid., 52. The faithful are those who place all of their resources in the service of Christ so that His salvation, renewal, and justice will reach those who suffer in the margins. Moreover, this sacrificial way of living lofts high the soul to "buoyantly soar to the world on high and gains Christ at the cost of everything else."

⁵⁶ Brian Matz, *Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality: Gregory of Nazianzus* (Grand Rapids, MI Baker Publishing, 2016), 122.

⁵⁷ Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. by Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14," 55. Gregory notes that the Church must keep its focus on the teleological effect of its works, arguing that they all have a reciprocal bearing here and in the world to come. He encourages his community to "follow the Word, let us seek the repose on high...let us have recourse to only that which serves a good end; let us gain our lives by acts of charity." Life is given both here and beyond when concern for the poor and work for justice are consummated in love.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 50. Nazianzen discusses the corrosive elements of moth and time that eat away at what we attempt to preserve. However, time and property can be redeemed when they are placed in the service of God's work on behalf of the poor.

place to be both in this life and the hereafter, and the Church adds to this suffering by heralding salvation while never extending its hand to save.⁵⁹ The Church is called to live compassionately towards the poor, and consequences always follow when it fails to appropriate this virtue.

Chiding those in the congregation who were indifferent towards the plight of the poor in these ways, Gregory queries, "Do you think that compassion is not an obligation upon you but a choice?... This is what I myself also very much like to think, but I stand in terror of his left hand and the goats and the rebukes leveled against them."⁶⁰ The impetus for the Church is that it must remember that they are serving Christ in the poor and creating a future that is formed through their actions (Matthew 25:45).

Clement of Alexandria: Eschatology- Retribution, Works and Their Reward in the Hereafter

Clement's eschatological vision for serving the poor is primarily focused on the way it fashions the soul specifically for the afterlife. He recognizes, of course, the good in helping those who suffer, but unlike Nazianzen, who has an eye towards both what is to come in the afterlife and alleviating suffering towards a communal flourishing, Clement's teleology is soul care as preparation for the afterlife.⁶¹ In this era, as Helen Rhee writes, "eschatology linked ethical

⁵⁹ Ibid., 45. The poor seek relief from those who, by nature, should show pity (mothers, fathers, brothers, which are allusions to the kinship within the body of Christ) yet refuse. These poor, Gregory argues, are "alive, but dead, disfigured in almost every way" and reach for aid, but none is given by those who, by nature, should be most disposed to their care. This rhetoric seeks to convey the impasse between the Church's stated teleological focus and what is happening within it.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 70. Indifference towards the poor for Gregory is akin to other sins (stealing, "sacrilege, fornication, or some other kind of taboo") that cause a fracture in human relations as well as in their relationships with God.

⁶¹ Clement, *Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*, 31.1, 32.1. Clement argues that soul care, both personal and communal, are the chief reasons for giving to the poor, and if the telos is different, one could give to the poor with virtually no salutary effect. He notes that many have done this very thing but because their purpose was misaligned it proved harmful and writes: "a man, who has got rid of the burden of property, can nonetheless still have the lust

behaviors in this world to the final judgment and salvation of God." ⁶² Thus, the focus of why one helps the poor is more important than the work itself. For Clement, salvation, and preparation for the afterlife require witness and training the soul in virtue by offloading the wealth that is stored up in the passions and acquiring the attributes of Christ.⁶³ Works in this sense are salutary insofar as they aim to become a faithful follower of Jesus. Moreover, this process is progressive in that the soul is refined through acculturation in the virtues, which is often best accomplished in the Church's work among the poor.⁶⁴ When the Church pours itself out for the sake of others, they are an embodied witness of God's salvation in Christ, which also recognizes the value of storing up treasure in the life to come." ⁶⁵ Furthermore, it reveals to onlookers a glimpse of the eschatological world in God's Kingdom. Though Clement is primarily concerned with how faith and discipleship contribute to one's status in the afterlife, the work among the poor has a cumulative effect that helps alleviate their suffering and enjoins the Church with the poor. This eschatological vision is rooted in the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor and also happens to be the virtue that most alludes to the Rich Young Ruler and many law-keepers within the Church.

of, and eagerness for, wealth sunk deep in him as a part of his life." Clement, like most Christians in his era, recognizes the vital importance of helping those in need, but he is primarily concerned with spiritual formation.

⁶² Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, 52.

⁶³ Clement, "Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved," 23.6. Clement discusses Jesus' conversation with the Rich Young Ruler who is bound up in the wanton desire for wealth and the command to sell and give his possessions to the poor as a prerequisite for eternal life. The issue in his view is not wealth, which is an object that itself is indifferent, but more how to detach from desires and behaviors that impede one's progress towards incorruption.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.16. It is important to note again that the meaning of poor for Clement (including Chrysostom and Nazianzen) is somewhat hazy as he conceives of poverty as the spiritually poor as well as the destitute. The spiritually poor, however, for him, are the truly wealthy. Nevertheless, there is a way in which Clement imagines the spiritually poor as a great context of acculturation for the Church and world at large in the virtues as well because of their maturity in *The Faith* (69.41).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.37. Clement notes that we owe our lives to "our brethren" as a means of participation in God's salvation of the world. When the Church withholds aid that it possesses in its trust from those in need, it creates a certain dissonance to the Church's message of salvation. Instead, in serving each other selflessly, the Church can store up heavenly treasure through the virtues it acquires through its work (20.1)

The Rich Young Ruler in Clement's reckoning suffers retribution not merely because he is unconcerned with the plight of the poor, but more his failure to contend with the vices that vex his soul. Clement notes that the man was a law keeper, but when the perfect law of love beckoned to him to lay down his treasure for the poor as a means of purgation for his soul, the man rebuffed his entreaty and left sorrowful.⁶⁶ The vice that gripped the rich man's heart was exposed and put him at odds with his desire for "eternal life" (Luke 18:18). At this moment, a sense of eschatological judgment is handed down; however, Christ is not the source of the man's condemnation. Instead, the verdict is decided when he refuses to lay aside the wealth stored up in his passions in exchange for eternal life.⁶⁷ In this sense, it is a test of his loves, which discerns what he loves more, Christ and eternal life or his present wealth? For Clement, the way one uses the resources that they have been given is a measure of their faith and fitness for the afterlife. Thus, when the Church withholds what is held in its trust for the poor, the results echo the response of the "Rich Young Ruler:" sorrow, loss of purpose, and despair over its future. In this way, the Church becomes untethered from its mission, and there is a sense of despondency that inevitably creeps in that causes it to fracture. However, when it faithfully persists in its pursuit of Christ's virtues and discharges what is held in its trust, something of the Kingdom of God bounds forth for all to see.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., 26.10.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 34.14 Clement argues that the man possesses the "free judgment" to use what he possesses for good or to use it to feed the passions. The issue for him is not the possessions but more the rich man's unwillingness to fully surrender to God's way of life.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 36.15. The Church's purpose is to extend God's salvation in practical ways, such as providing shelter, clothing, opportunity, and all physical aid that contributes to human flourishing as well as the transformational power of the gospel itself. Clement writes, "For he who considers possessions and gold and silver and houses as God's gifts, and by using them to further men's salvation renders service to God who gave them, and knows that he possesses these things for his brethren's sake than his own."

John Chrysostom: Eschatology- Redemptive Suffering, Purgation and a Bridge Called Justice

Chrysostom, like Nazianzen and Clement, forwards the retribution/reward motif in his sermon and recognizes how acts in this life have a corollary effect in the world to come. However, the eschatological vision he puts forth is distinct in that he discusses redemptive suffering and justice, specifically as integral keys for attaining eternal life.⁶⁹ For Chrysostom, suffering is a form of purgation that hones virtue in preparation for the afterlife.⁷⁰ Thus when Lazarus suffers daily at the gate of the Rich Man, or the Christian is caught in the throes of many trials, the astute understand that God intends to redeem their suffering by producing good from it in this life and the afterlife (Rm 8:28).⁷¹ In this sense, suffering is a means of grace that intends to expose where behaviors and experiences are incongruent with God's love and desire for human flourishing with the intent of drawing the sufferer to healing in Christ. However, the righteous are not alone in their suffering as John points out, as the unrighteous are also vexed by their consciences because of their unjust actions, endure alienation from the community as a result of their misdeeds, and live with an impending sense of doom for the hereafter.⁷² This

⁶⁹ For Nazianzen and Clement suffering marks an opportunity for the Church to participate in establishing God's Kingdom and an opportunity to culture virtue respectively, and while Chrysostom would agree with this, he expresses how suffering can be redemptive. This may, in part, be an outcome of the content of his message that has to make sense of the seemingly senseless suffering of Lazarus.

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, "Four Discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus" IV.2 John discusses how suffering produces the virtues of "patience and endurance" based in the Parousia. This teleological view of suffering recognizes that God's providence is producing something of value within it.

⁷¹ Ibid., I.11. John recognizes the questions that are emerging from within his congregation that arise because Lazarus' suffering is pronounced with seemingly no recourse in this life. He challenges this notion, however, noting that Lazarus eschatological hope permeates the present by way of a clean conscience, purity of soul, assurance, and "abiding blessings" that come from resting fully in God's care. For Chrysostom, physical suffering does not necessarily have to affect one's internal disposition of comfort, joy, and hope.

⁷² Ibid., I.11. Chrysostom seeks to reconcile the notion that the wicked prosper while the righteous are in anguish by creating a commonness in shared human suffering. Suffering is not necessarily evil, but more so emerges as a result of evil, that is intended to expose humanity's need for healing in God.

suffering is also redemptive in that it intends to lead them to seek reconciliation and healing through repentance.⁷³ The teleological aim of suffering, however, is to bring forth God's justice. Lazarus extends justice to the soul poverty of the Rich Man, who is steeped in sin by persistently offering him an opportunity of reform. God, in turn, justly rewards Lazarus for his faithfulness while simultaneously allowing the Rich Man's injustice to catch up to him. The Church likewise is tasked to mediate God's justice by addressing human suffering in all its forms and systems of disempowerment that stifle human flourishing in ways that lead them towards God's desired eschatological end.⁷⁴

Redemptive suffering for Chrysostom is also a voluntary expression of the faithful who willingly endure hardship for the sake of extending God's salvation and renewal in the earth. In this sense, Christ is the ultimate redemptive sufferer, and Lazarus is a paragon in His likeness who faithfully extends God's mercy and grace to a rich man that was indifferent towards his plight.⁷⁵ Grace and mercy are extended by God to the rich man by virtue of Lazarus' daily presence at his gate, which presented an opportunity for reform. Lazarus' presence to this man, in this sense, is a harbinger of the eschatological end of the faithful and the unfaithful. The faithful work sacrificially in the hope of producing a better world in this life and for the reward of the

⁷³ Ibid., I.8. Chrysostom notes that tears of repentance can extinguish the "fires of Gehenna." Citing King David's sin and repentance, he recognizes that God's plan for suffering is always to draw people towards mercy, healing, and new life.

⁷⁴ Ibid., I.11. Lazarus is addressing the man's injustice towards him, which is symptomatic of a culture of injustice, by offering him a different way. In this sense, the one in need of mercy is the paradoxically the one extending it. Additionally, he is addressing the injustices in the man's life by suffering sacrificially in hopes of his reform.

⁷⁵ Ibid., I.5,9. Chrysostom notes that Lazarus endured "these nine-fold afflictions, not for punishment, but that he might become more glorious." His affliction required mercy for survival, and it would seem foolhardy to hope for aid from the Rich Man when it had never been given. Chrysostom posits that this was an intentional expression of grace and love that were never realized. Furthermore, it should be noted that at the outset of this sermon, John implored his hearers to press into the marketplace with God's message of salvation, hope, and to willingly endure scorn and rejection, because they could not be sure of the outcome of their witness (I.5).

righteous in the hereafter. However, those who perpetrate injustice through inaction or indifference frustrate flourishing and produce a much more painful eschatological end. In the case of the Rich Man, his injustice formed a chasm too vast to cross and though he could see mercy and the reward of the righteous on the other side, his indolence made it an impossible journey.⁷⁶ The consequences of allowing injustice to flourish are impassible chasms within culture that only God's justice can bridge. The Church's response to the suffering of the poor then is deeply important if it hopes to experience the reward of a different eschatological outcome. Furthermore, the Church is called to live sacrificially on behalf of the poor, which includes all those who do not know Christ, in ways that are redemptive. Chrysostom's discourses remind the Church to work for justice at whatever cost to inaugurate an eschatological vision of hope and renewal.⁷⁷ The Church, in this sense, works for justice despite its cost and willingly suffers alongside those on the margins to bear witness to God's salvation in Christ.

Nazianzen, Clement, and Chrysostom offer an eschatological vision for societal renewal formed in God's justice. However, this hope also has an eye towards God's coming kingdom and as Helen Rhee writes, signifies a time where "material abundance and prosperity point to the communal flourishing and equality wrought by God's reign of both justice and grace that [is] available for and experienced by God's faithful—the rich and the poor together."⁷⁸ In this sense, the poor are both a context where justice is enacted and the nexus point for divinization. The Church's work is meant to bring an eschatological end to injustice and suffering that offers a

⁷⁶ Ibid., IV.4,5. John argues that the intoxicating nature of sin and the perpetual spurning of the Lord's grace and mercy make it exceedingly difficult for a person to begin processes of reform.

⁷⁷ Ibid., II.3. The eschatological hope is twofold in that it encourages actions that form a more just world and recognizes that each person will receive their sure reward in the hereafter.

⁷⁸ Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, 70.

glimpse of the future eschaton in the present. However, the retributive aspects of the eschaton are also cautionary in that they remind us that there are consequences for injustice and indifference towards the poor. The Rich Young Ruler was faithful in abstaining from certain sins yet was challenged because he failed to live righteously by hoarding the gifts that were held in his trust that belonged to the poor. Similarly, the Church is charged to faithfully administer the gospel and all of the resources at its disposal to loosen the bonds of injustice, and when it fails in this, it becomes untethered from its purpose. Chrysostom reminds us of his eschatological vision that suffering is meant to be redemptive. In light of this, it is essential to consider what the suffering is trying to communicate and how it is crying to be redeemed. The work to bring an eschatological end to the suffering of the poor will undoubtedly require many sacrifices and solidarity with them. However, the reward of a more just world in this life and the sure reward in the hereafter are more than worth the investment.

Chapter 5: The Gospel for the Poor and its Prospect for Ecclesial Renewal

In this next section, I will show how their efforts reoriented the way power was brokered in the Greco-Roman world and offered the poor and the Church a new footing as essential players in the socio-political landscape of that period. Furthermore, I will discuss how this particular patristic approach can be a helpful conversation partner as the Church considers its work among the poor. Finally, I will offer a paradigmatic design of transformative justice that is rooted in the proclamation of the gospel promulgated by these Early Church Leaders and how reimagining our work among the poor can be more effective.

Patristic Vision for Societal Transformation

Throughout this thesis, we discovered the way Clement of Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom sought to communicate in their sermons a transformational vision for the Church's work among the poor. They intend to inspire their congregations to serve the poor with the virtue and message of the gospel. However, for them, poverty and wealth are considered chiefly spiritual states, and in this sense, the Church is the wealthiest of benefactors tasked to extend Christ's salvation to the world. However, those on the margins are a particularly important context for the Church's ministry because they are vital to its spiritual formation and offer the best opportunity for societal renewal. Their eschatological hope is to mark the in-breaking of God's kingdom by lifting the poor from the margins and by enacting God's justice in ways that yield divine reward in this life and the hereafter. Though they originally shared these sermons over 1,600 hundred years ago, the echoes of their supplication still beckon to the

Church yearning for renewal in 21st century post-Christendom America. The question then is what import can be gleaned if any from their witness that can help the Church live more faithfully in this setting? For Clement, Chrysostom, and Nazianzen, the Church's call to faithfully bear witness to Christ is timeless, and the poor represent its most significant prospect for relevance, reformation, and bringing injustice to an eschatological end in the reign of God. I will survey this claim by discussing the impact their work had on their Greco-Roman context and how a similar approach can help the Church revitalize its witness. Next, I will show how connecting spiritual formation to mission is integral for disciple-making, and finally, I will offer a paradigmatic design based on this study that can help strengthen the Church's modes of discipleship and its impact on its outreach to the poor with present day examples where these ideas are at work.

The influence of the Church in the U.S. over the last few decades has been waning. Church closures are increasing, and the number of people that attend worship regularly is at an all-time low.⁷⁹ According to The Pew Research Center, only 65% of adults now identify as Christian, which is down 12% in the last decade.⁸⁰ This ominous trend reveals the anemic state of the Church and its struggle for relevance in the socio-political landscape in this modern context. Though there are numerous reasons for this decline, one crucial facet is that the Church has lost its ability to "indigenize" in a missional context in a manner that enables them to reach

⁷⁹ Simon Brauer, How Many Congregations Are There? *Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion*, 56, no.2 (2017): 444. Brauer notes that there was a 30,000 net loss of congregations in America from 2006-2012. However, some of these numbers may not be reliable as the information given is not always accurate based on the loose affiliation of some denominations. What is certain is that though the population in the U.S. has grown significantly, the number of Churches that serve that population is at an all-time low.

⁸⁰ The Pew Research Center, *In U.S. Decline of Christianity, Continues at a Rapid Pace, An Update On America's Changing Religious Landscape*, Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

those in the marketplace and on the margins with the hope of the gospel.⁸¹ Chrysostom, Clement, and Nazianzen's sermons encourage indigenous practices that seek to develop a context for ministry through kinship. This relational ministry model helped them gain acclaim as lovers of the poor that enabled the Church to continue its ascent as a player in the socio-political landscape of the Greco-Roman world. Rodney Stark writes that the success of this "conversionist movement" was its growth "through social networks, through a structure of direct and intimate personal attachments."⁸² Their churches were encouraged to do more than meet the needs of the world; instead, they called their communities to emulate Christ's kenotic, and self-sacrificial nature as an imbedded force within the community. In this sense, their congregations were incubators for traditioned innovation that addressed social problems within the community through the attributes of Christ that had been passed along to them through the gospels.

Spiritual Formation as Mission

The pastors recognized that in following Scripture's lead that they were able to serve Christ in the poor and strengthen the Church's influence by immersing converts in the ethics of the kingdom. This epoch was becoming increasingly Christian because the Church's influence was creating the kind of change that was making a better world.⁸³ They led a movement that

⁸¹ Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Post-Modern Era*, (Nashville, TN, Broadman Publishing, 2003), 26. Stetzer argues that the reason that many churches and whole denominations are in decline is that they have failed to indigenize their missional aspects of the Church. In many cases, churches will do the work of mission without developing the necessary relationships and indigenous infrastructures that can sustain their efforts.

⁸² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became The Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, (Princeton: Harper Collins 1997), 20.

⁸³ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI 1992), 91, 103. Brown argues that the Church rose to power because they were able to address a "social void" in its outreach to the poor, which also happened to represent the largest social class in the Roman Empire, was able to gain influence that finally upended the infrastructure of imperial power. Though Brown is suspicious of the motives and questions the significance of the changes that were implemented, it is hard to ignore

baptized culture in the virtue of Christ. They built hospitals, cared for widows, opened poor houses, were involved in recovery efforts after natural disasters, and impressed upon this disenfranchised sect of the population a dignity by declaring their preferred status in God's Kingdom.⁸⁴ Furthermore, because each person understood their call to love God and neighbor as themselves, communal flourishing happened as poor and rich alike contributed what they had to aid the suffering in mutual exchanges of kinship.⁸⁵ The result of this was the formation of a catalytic movement that functionally reshaped the Empire through transformative justice based on gospel-centric Christian virtue.

The 21st century Church remains tethered to the mission of helping the poor; however, as discussed above, they often attempt to do so detached from the marginal communities and the gospel message itself. Clement reminds us that giving haphazardly is unfaithful and that salvific gospel-centric almsgiving begins with the recognition that our lives and resources are meant to be stewarded in ways that accomplish God's purposes.⁸⁶ The Church, in this sense, must examine its talents and resources to discern how they may be used in service to God on behalf of the poor. This type of service requires more commitment than handing out sandwiches or loose change; instead, when the Church prayerfully considers the use of their assets, the imaginative prospects of Kingdom in-breaking emerge.

the rise of hospitals and the later emergence of Western civilizations that were heavily influenced by the Christian movement.

⁸⁴ Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 66

⁸⁵ Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing, 2012), 13. Rhee writes, "As is often observed, what bound Christian communities together was the great commandment of loving God and one's neighbors. Based on the love of God, the primary obligations of Christian love and fellowship were for fellow Christians and were demonstrated in acts of mercy and justice: common chest, common meals, and hospitality." The seismic effect that this kind of living had upon the community at large cannot be overstated as new synergies emerged that changed the entire social dynamic of the Empire.

⁸⁶ Clement, "Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved," 28.2.

Genuinely serving the poor requires partnership and an empowered sense of agency that arises out of a community formed in the ethics of the gospel.⁸⁷ Thus, if the Church desires to revitalize its witness and reemerge as a relevant player in its social ecology, then it necessitates a shift in ministry practice. Luke Bretherton argues that indigenizing your work for justice through bonds of kinship aids in the formation of shared life and common goals where issues can be addressed in "dense networks of mutual aid and associational life."⁸⁸ The difference in this approach is that it seeks to create outcomes rather than merely meeting a need. Abraham Cronbach writes, "charity seems to signify the relieving of poverty" while social justice seeks to remedy its cause from the source.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, most of the Church's work in our modern context would rightly qualify as charity rather than justice. However, there is no real sense of justice apart from the gospel itself because it grounds its ethics in divine principals rather than human reasoning and rightly equates all injustice to sin. The Church then addresses these issues by extending Christ's presence into the world in teleological prospects with an eye towards divine transformation. Admittedly, the level of commitment necessary to initiate this type of change is significant, which is why many would rather engage in ways that are disassociated from those they aim to help. However, the witness of Clement, Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Dr.

⁸⁷ Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, *The Fathers of the Church; St Gregory of Nazianzus, Select Orations*, 44. Gregory implores his community to recognize the ethics that the gospel inspires and that the empowering the devitalized parts of a community functionally lifts the whole of society.

⁸⁸ Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Politics, and the Politics of a Common Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 24-26. Bretherton makes a distinction between the "settlement houses" run by "elitist" and the "upper middle-class," with Saul Alinsky's approach that sought to create social networks centered around a common life as embedded aspects of the community itself. The "elitist" and "upper middle-class" were outsiders who tried to foster change by holding out "middle-class" ideals as the impetus for change with little effect. Alinsky's embedded approach, however, sought to empower from within and to gain traction for change by intentionally forming partnerships with religious organizations, civic leaders, and by forming a desire for "self-help" from within the community itself. Alinsky's approach proved to be significantly more effective.

⁸⁹ Alan Cronbach, "The Social Ideals of the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 18, (1944): 143.

Martin Luther King Jr, and Frances E. Willard, for that matter, remind us that the results are worth it. Significant and lasting change happens in embedded movements that promote societal flourishing in the hope of the new world inaugurated in the gospel of Christ, which in turn gives rise to the real work of justice. This type of justice however necessarily entails reconciliation with God and a life immersed in the Spirit that actively participates in bringing forth Christ's new creation. In this way, the Church becomes relevant when it can address the significant problems that oppress those on the margins with an approach that is a signet of God's reign.

The anemic state of the Church is far-reaching, and, in many respects, this is most pronounced in its inability to make faithful disciples of Christ. Though there are endless forms of catechesis employed across the faith community, most offer the theology and the words of Scripture without ever contextualizing them within its mission to the world. Unfortunately, this approach produces knowledge that has been emptied of the power that the gospel intends (1 Cor. 4:20). Elaine Heath echoes this understanding noting that the end of Christendom, increasing cultural plurality, diversity, and an overwhelming congregational sentiment that believes that ministry should only be performed by professional clergy has made disciple-making exceedingly difficult in a 21st century U.S. context.⁹⁰ Regrettably, we have misunderstood what the gospel calls us to and have settled for the type of discipleship and outreach programs that do little to change the spiritual formation and missional foci of the Church or the conditions on the ground for the suffering. To be sure, the Church engages in something that it quantifies as mission, but frequently these efforts miss the mark in their hope to make a difference. Often this aid comes in the form of anonymous or wordless charity that leaves it up to the recipient to contextualize its

⁹⁰ Elaine Heath, "Making Disciples in a Post-Christendom USA," in *Making Disciples in a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission & Evangelism*, Paul W. Chilcote, ed. (Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2011), 233-241.

meaning. However, the gospel is the power of God that ushers in salvation and calls the Church to witness in ways that bring forth the transformative justice of the kingdom. Unfortunately, it is often the case that our charity is more concerned about how it makes us feel rather than making a difference. Following this, Robert Lupton asserts, "the money spent by one campus ministry to cover the costs of their Central American mission trip to repaint an orphanage would have been sufficient to hire two local painters and two new full-time teachers and purchase new uniforms for every student in the school."⁹¹ Yet, giving from such distance can dislocate the transformative effect that embodied acts of service can have upon spiritual formation and forming important bonds with a community. The gospel beckons the world to follow after Christ and to model its service after His likeness. Thus, the way the Church thinks about discipleship and engages in mission must be reexamined if it hopes to regain its footing as true ambassadors for Christ (2 Co. 5:20). In this sense, reclaiming mission as a means of pedagogical practicum holds real promise for the reformation of the Church's discipleship paradigms.

Clement, Chrysostom, and Nazianzen posit in their sermons that the Church's work among the poor is vital to its formation because it incubates the virtue of theology and Scripture in ways that enable it to express the nature of Christ faithfully. The impetus of their ministry was to compel their communities to live out the precepts of the gospel promulgated in their sermons in ways that both helped to initiate societal renewal and compel the masses to join the way of Jesus.⁹² They implore their community to embody traits of piety, kenosis, redemptive suffering,

⁹¹ Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 5. Lupton remarks on the multi-billion-dollar religious tourism industry that coaxes people to donate or invest their time in projects that do very little to benefit the people in those communities.

⁹² Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, "On Love of the Poor, Oration 14," 49. What is especially interesting about Gregory's sermon is that it was given for the opening of Basil's Basilea, a hospital and poor house to serve the suffering, yet Gregory never seems concerned with fund-raising, which assumedly would have been

the proclamation of the gospel, as heralds of the hope of God bounding forth through the life of the Church. These virtues create an interconnectedness with those who suffer and initiate transformational processes of divinization. In this sense, the Church functions more as a bastion for reformation than it does as a resource center that simply seeks to meet a need. Moreover, when the Church initiates a discipleship paradigm that engages the poor, it can harness the theological energy garnered from a sermon, classroom, or home study and contextualize its meaning in a manner befitting the community that it hopes to reach. For Clement, the poor are God's trainers in virtue because they at once present the context for ministry practice and are also those who help to refine and instruct us in the better virtue of the Lord.⁹³ In this sense the Church does not learn grace by merely hearing about it; instead, it learns grace in an environment where it is perpetually in need of it to thrive, where it offers it willingly and receives it freely especially in the areas that it atones for the Church's past injustices. It is in such an environment where justice emerges and where the prospects for flourishing arise from the ashes of brokenness towards a new creation.

A Paradigm for Discipleship

The pastoral task then is to develop a paradigmatic design within the Church that asks better questions of their catechumens and themselves in regards to its discipleship programs and outreach ministries. Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and Clement would suggest that these efforts begin with a compelling vision from God formed in the gospel that is intermixed with the cries for

necessary to support this extensive work. Instead, he compels them to live a life modeled after Christ's compassion, which seeks to dignify and strengthen the poor through engagement and the winning nature of the gospel.

⁹³ Clement, *Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved*, 1.8. Kinship with the poor assists in culturing virtue by helping the Church to reckon with its sin and where it learns to live more like Christ.

justice from the poor. Clement's sermon explicitly seeks out the poor who have appropriated the rules of the faith devoid of its aim of love.⁹⁴ The Rich Young Man, like many in our congregations, has a form of godliness, and yet his soul is vexed because of the misappropriation of the gifts that God has given him to steward. Sadly, many within the Church possess the skills and resources necessary to usher in significant change but fail to see how they can make a difference, or worse, like the Rich Man refuse to engage. Chrysostom reminds us, however, that what "we possess is not only our own" as it also belongs to the poor.⁹⁵ Thus, the Church can begin by asking itself how they can cast a compelling vision that encourages each person to contribute their resources and skills into Christ's service? Second, it is essential to clearly articulate what is at stake for the believer and the world at large. Finally, it should discover what resources and talents are present in their community, and the ways that these gifts can function together as a collective witness. Churches spend an inordinate amount of time trying to program for their Sunday worship experiences and give little thought to its potential influence during the rest of the week. If the Church believes that the answer to the world's suffering is their weekly service, then it is highly likely that they will remain mostly irrelevant in post-Christian America.

Discovering the Church's potential reach is vital if it hopes to reconcile its vision with an actionable strategy for developing its mission. Often, Churches attempt to craft missional strategies without a clear understanding of whether their plans are even plausible because they rarely consider the resources and skills that are present within the community. One method for discerning this is by setting up a systematic process that teases out the skills and resources present within the Church as an additional facet of traditional catechetical processes. This can

⁹⁴ Ibid., 15.1.

⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, "Four discourses, Chiefly on the Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus," II.6.

include assessments, conversations, and learning how each person's current vocation fits into the larger stream of the Church's missional strategies.⁹⁶ When the Faith Community understands its unique skillset it can better appreciate its potential impact upon its social ecology. The next phase considers important conversation partners for selecting outreach settings. Chrysostom's sermon considers Lazarus, who suffers in plain sight of the Rich Man or put differently those that suffer within arm's reach or within the Faith community itself. These silent sufferers are begging for love and mercy, and the Church ignores them to its peril. They are a means of grace sent by God to culture virtue. Love and mercy are virtues that are shared when the Church, in conversation with Lazarus, seeks to understand how best to attend to the wounds of those who suffer and then uses the wealth it has within the body of Christ to meet their physical, spiritual, and social needs. The pastoral task then is to intermingle key concepts of Christ's ministry, such as kenosis, redemptive suffering, compassion, mercy, evangelism, and the like with the skills and methodological approach it chooses to employ in their work with the poor towards their recovery. In this sense, the agency of both the Church and Lazarus must be partnered and engaged in this process towards a shared outcome. When catechesis and mission are partnered in this way, the outcomes will be more effective because it enjoins concept with practice.

“Zoe Empowers Ministries” has catalyzed such a social movement; it integrates catechesis and mission in ways that promote *eudaimonia* for tens of thousands of orphans living on the streets in multiple countries in the developing world.⁹⁷ The barriers that the orphans are up

⁹⁶ Gregory Nazianzus, Trans. By Marth Vinson, “On Love of the Poor, Oration 14,” 50. Gregory challenges his congregation to push aside luxury and to use the tools and resources at their disposal in participation with God's plan to alleviate suffering.

⁹⁷ Gaston Warner, “Zoe Empowers, Empower Children to Move Beyond Charity.” Zoe Empowers, Accessed April 18, 2020, <https://zoeempowers.org/>.

against are multifaceted, such as malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, financial insecurity, and the like. Yet, their core value of not doing anything for these orphans drives them towards gospel inspired kinship that seeks to partner with them in ways that lead to empowerment and self-actualization. In this setting, Christian principles guide the practices that lead to a restored sense of agency by attending to the multiple barriers to their flourishing simultaneously. Though much of the mentorship addresses practical concerns, such as teaching the orphans to read, offering access to medical care and vocational training that enables them to earn money, these concerns are addressed in the incubator of Christian formation in ways that are not coerced but are readily experienced in the expression of God's love on display. These orphans that live on the life-threatening precipice of vulnerability, in three years, flourish in ways that allow them to thrive and to reciprocate the gospel inspired modes of empowerment to others. This virtuous cycle has enabled this ministry to aid tens of thousands of orphans and has made a significant impact on the social ecology of the developing world.

The next phase of this paradigmatic process considers Gregory's call to love and help those that suffer beyond the Church's current reach and which typically represent more complex levels of suffering and injustice. Gregory notes that these are the types of problems and people that we avoid because we believe that doing so somehow "assures the wellbeing of our own persons."⁹⁸ For these pastors, the complex issues they hoped to address were different facets of poverty, and they did so by developing hospitals, food distribution networks, addressing injustices of imperial power, and coordinating relief programs to remedy them. The results were

⁹⁸ Ibid., 46. Gregory argues that avoiding these problems infects the soul with a fatal disease. When the Church does not act on behalf of the suffering because they are afraid of the personal cost or the possibility of cross-contamination, there are significant consequences because injustices perpetuate societal decline.

seismic and helped to propel the Church's reach into the culture in significant ways.⁹⁹ These problems in our context might be the same to some degree but would certainly include the need to address systemic racism, and profiteering at the expense of the poor. Though these issues are complex, the Church has an incredible opportunity to regain its footing in the socio-political world by developing strategies that help to remedy some of the sufferings by reclaiming its witness and abiding in the virtue of the gospel. In these instances, the Church should seek to learn from those who suffer and commit to working with them in solidarity towards a shared future. The hope of this endeavor is *eudaimonia*, which promotes the holistic flourishing of body, mind and spirit and the restoration of agency that liberates the poor from the bonds of poverty. This type of transformation is only possible through the power of the gospel which reconfigures the identity of exploitation and victimization often experienced by the poor into the image of God. This manner of flourishing can be accomplished by discerning together what an eschatological end to injustice would mean, how it would look, and then creating and contributing to the environmental conditions that will enable the vision to flourish, which begins, of course, with the question: If the kingdom of God showed up in this injustice, how would it be transformed? However, there is one caution, no single Church can address every significant injustice, so it is incumbent upon the Church to specialize in addressing the area(s) that they are most equipped to handle based on the gifts and resources within the community. Often churches are ineffective in their work for justice because they overextend themselves in ways that limit their potential impact. Here again, the Church learns much from Clement, who says if you give

⁹⁹ It is important to note that the rise to power for the Church did not always have positive outcomes, and as a result, many people suffered because they utilized their influence in ways contrary to the ethics of the gospel. There is, of course, much more to say here, but that is for another occasion and is not the focus of this project.

everything you have away, how then can you keep the Lords command to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and clothe the naked.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, in instances where a faith-community is not large enough to have the kind of influence they desire, then it is integral to develop partnerships with those who share their vision for flourishing. When the Church engages its ministry in this way and mingles practicum with the pedagogy of the gospel, both believers and the poor will flourish.

In the late 1980's, Father Gregory Boyle arrived at the Delores Mission in Los Angeles, California. He was faced immediately with the complex problem of gang violence that was suffocating the city. The gangs were beyond the traditional reach of the Church's ministry. Still, Boyle began to consider how God's *eudaimonia* could transform the wicked problems of racial and cultural violence, generational poverty, familial fracture, and substance abuse in this city. He asked: "what if we were to invest in gang members, rather than just seek to incarcerate our way out of this problem?"¹⁰¹ This question caused him to develop a multilayered approach that utilized the gospel as the underpinning for familial restoration, developing work readiness skills, healing, and improving social connectedness. The aim of this approach, however, was kinship. This relationship was achieved by standing with the unsuccessful and defunct, speaking the words and virtue of Jesus until the hearers learned to stand with Hoyle, and others in the ministry, in ways that gave strength to them all.¹⁰² This model is the basis of "Homeboy Industries," a now multi-national ministry that has worked to heal cities by loving the least of

¹⁰⁰ Clement, "Who is the Rich Man That is Being Saved," 33.13.

¹⁰¹ Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart; The Power of Boundless Compassion*, (Free Press, NY, 2010). 12.

¹⁰² Ibid. 197.

these within them. This ministry has developed a vast network of resources that are both rehabilitative and that enable community flourishing through job creation, decreased violence, and recidivism in the hope the gospel exclaims.

Conclusion: Lovers of the Poor

As a practitioner, church planter, and lead pastor, I recognize first hand that the challenges to engaging in ministries akin to those promulgated by Clement, Chrysostom and Nazianzen, which promote the flourishing of our faith community, as well as the world at large, are significant but worth it. Our members are not dissimilar to many other Churches in the US and tend to focus inordinately on their comforts, often to the neglect of mission and living into the virtue of Christ. Yet, as a leadership team, we have committed to focus inordinately on helping each person within our community recognize their higher purpose in the body of Christ. Seldom is a sermon or spiritual formation class offered that does not carry our members to the nexus point of faith and praxis. This focus has enabled us to develop transitional house ministries for those trying to leave behind a life of incarceration, to address food insecurity issues for families in the greater Raleigh, NC area, and to empower our people to start, or partner with, ministries that promote *eudaimonia*, both nationally and internationally. Our leadership team does not seek to create the outreach programs for our congregates; instead, we work to empower the creation of these ministries within the incubator of workgroups designed to identify the strengths of our members, as well as locating where a desire is already present, in order to address specific issues or complex problems.

Moreover, because these ministries are birthed within the congregates themselves, their sense of ownership and commitment to their success is significantly heightened. Our pastoral task in this way is to focus on developing the theological platforms that shape the teleological hope of their engagement from the perspective of Scripture. We also aim towards working to

culture Christ's virtues within the lives of our workers in ways that can lead to transformation for them personally and in the field of their work.

Success with this approach is certainly not linear; we fail and recalibrate but continue to engage because we have enjoyed enough success to keep moving forward. There is a recent story from our church that helps to encapsulate the nature of this kind of work. Bronson is a member of our community that came to our church through our House of Joseph transitional ministries, which serves those desiring to engage in life after incarceration. This ministry has served as a launching point for rehabilitation and renewal for many over the years. Bronson was ready for a new start after years of incarceration, and we were excited to have him in our program. This ministry is multifaceted and teaches job skills, money management, how to reintegrate socially and overcome the vices and stigmas of addiction and violence through Christian discipleship and the work of the Holy Spirit. Bronson immediately took to these programs and, in short order, found gainful employment, assimilated into our Church community, and was reciprocating what he had received in ministry into a life of service to others. After three years in our program, we helped him acquire a vehicle and, at this point, he felt he was ready for the next phase, which was moving out of the transitional house and stepping into society fully integrated. Yet, like Clement's telling of "Saint John and the Robber," Bronson received his freedom too soon and fell back into a life of addiction and incarceration. This fall was heartbreaking for our community. However, our leadership team was able to learn from this experience and use it to implement new mentoring safeguards, and this occasion became a vital teaching moment. We determined to work collaboratively to pursue our brother in the hope of reconciliation. After

three additional years of engagement, Bronson returned to our community and, once again, is a vital part that is a signet of the power of resurrection.

Bronson's story, like hundreds of others we have ministered to over the eight years of our existence, is one that has yielded mixed results. Though the outcomes are uncertain, in each situation what we have found is that when the transformative power of the gospel takes hold, the results are seismic. Like the parable of the sower declares, we do not get to choose the way that the soil receives the seed; our one task is to cast it about in the hope that somehow it will find its way into the good soil that yields a harvest of thirty, sixty, or a hundred times what was sown (Mark 4: 1-8).

Jesus says in the book of Matthew that the "poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5b NASB). At first glance, this seems to be an unusual way to reconcile the injustices experienced by the impoverished, but perhaps, this is precisely the remedy that is needed to initiate fundamental processes for transformative justice. The gospel exclaims God's saving way in the embodiment of Christ, who for our sakes became poor to save the world (2 Corinthians 8:9). When God saved the world in Jesus, God chose to do so as a fellow pauper preaching to the poor. The poor have the gospel, the good news that inaugurates the coming of God's Kingdom and ushers in an eschatological vision of a new world; a world bounding forth from within the old one Yet, through the millennia since Christ's coming the Church has struggled to understand the peculiar meaning of all of this and how its witness to the poor should look and sound. In a 21st century U.S. context, this has included hundreds of billions of dollars in aid and many other charitable acts in an attempt to alleviate their suffering. Unfortunately, these efforts have been ineffective. However, through the witness of Chrysostom, Clement, and

Nazianzen, perhaps a new, old method for addressing the injustices that bludgeon the poor is a worthy conversation partner for the Church. These pastors envisaged the gospel as the means of salvation, vision for justice, and believed that the poor represented their most significant opportunity for the Church to express God's in-breaking to the world. They were lovers of the poor, who stood with them in solidarity and who learned that the poor held vital keys for the cultivation of virtue within the Church. They served Christ in the poor and then found out in turn that through these bonds of kinship that God was serving them as well.

In the 21st century, the Church has struggled to gain its footing in post-Christian America. The brokenness caused by years of decline and self-inflicted wounds is stacking up in mass. Perhaps it is time to reimagine the Church's engagement with the poor as an opportunity to reclaim our witness. The good news of Jesus coming is what ushers in salvation, and the Church is the conduit of this witness yet, how will they hear unless someone preaches to them (Romans 10:14). The gospel makes a claim on God's plan for human flourishing where all are welcome at the table and where heavy burdens are lifted. This hope, however, is not discovered in the buildings we build or the programs that we produce; instead, this hope for renewal looks all the part of destitution and bearing the stigma of a beggar. The casual request for alms pierces the awkwardness and awakens the heart as the disciple whom Jesus loves cries within us, "It is the Lord" (John 21:7). It is here that the gospel mounts wings as they imagine and then work towards the world that is a signet of God's reign.

Postscript: Covid- 19 and the New Poor

This project has been bookended by calamity. Destructive storms and death were present at the outset and a global pandemic at its conclusion. Covid-19, in many respects, has re-contextualized our understanding of what it means to be poor as this virus has indiscriminately worked fear and death into the world's consciousness. Suddenly the world has become vulnerable and less sure of itself than it has ever been, at least in my lifetime. However, this season also presents an incredible opportunity for the Church to reimagine its work through the lens of the pastoral ministry of Clement, Chrysostom, and Nazianzen. These pastors recognized the incredible gift that the poor offered to the Church for its spiritual formation and the opportunity that it presented to reshape the social ecology in their Greco-Roman world. Similarly, Covid-19 has forced the world into isolation, and the Church has rallied to push into homes via its streaming witness of hope. Resurrection will come, but how we emerge from this experience will be determined in no small degree based upon the way that we are to be present to the world in its time of crisis.

The Church where I serve has given out thousands of meals to those on the margins, provided protective equipment for front line workers, and developed a robust network that is on the ready to address needs that arise within the community. Many churches have also rallied to address the poor in other ways, such as caring for first responders and hospital workers and tending to the fractured places in our world. However, with each of these efforts, the emphasis of our prayers and words is the hope that the scripture exclaims: "The poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5). These were the words Christ shared with John the Baptist when he was suffering in prison. Though seemingly a strange consolation, these words

resounded with the promises that accompany it: “release from captivity,” “comfort for the mourning,” “blind eyes opening,” “release from darkness for those who are in prison,” and “beauty from ashes” (Isaiah 61:1-3). Clement, Gregory, and Nazianzen recognized that the gospel is the primary source of hope for the suffering because in it we find in Christ the kinship of God mingled in our human flesh who suffers with us and brings us forth new through cycles of death and resurrection. The world that we will inherit post-pandemic is being formed now by the Church’s witness within, and our greatest opportunity to flourish will be found when the margins become the epicenter of God’s reign.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

- Chrysostom, John, *Four discourses, chiefly on the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus*, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chrysostom_four_discourses_01_discourse1.htm. Tertullian, Accessed 12/1/17.
- Clement of Alexandria, John, Trans. By William Wilson, *Who is the Rich Man Being Saved*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0207.htm>. New Advent Accessed 12/1/17
- Nazianzus, Gregory, *The Fathers of the Church; St Gregory of Nazianzus, Select Orations*, "On Love of the Poor", Oration 14, Washington DC: Catholic University Press

Secondary Sources:

- Anatolios, Khaled, 2011, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing
- Attwater D, 1984, *St. John Chrysostom; On Wealth and Poverty*, Crestwood, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press
- Beely, Christopher, 2016, *Christ and Human Flourishing in Patristic Theology, Pro Ecclesia*, Vol. XXV, No.2
- Biedebach, Brian, & Joel James. *Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions. The Master's Seminary Journal* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 29-50.
- Bordin, Ruth, 1986, *Frances Willard: A Biography*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press
- Bosch, David, 2011 *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books
- Boyle, Gregory, 2010, *Tattoos on the Heart; The Power of Boundless Compassion*, Free Press, NY
- Braun, Willi, 1997, Review of Work: *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History by Rodney Stark*, *Review of Religious Research*, 39, no. 1
- Brendenhoff,, Reuben, 2018, *Failure and Prospect, Lazarus, and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31) in the Context of Luke Acts*, New York: Bloomsbury
- Bretherton, Luke, 2015, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Politics, and the Politics of a Common Life*, New York: Cambridge University Press
- Brock, Peggy, 2015 ,Norman Etherington, Gareth Griffiths, Jacqueline Van Gent, *The Indigenous Evangelist in History 1750-1940, Studies in Christian Mission*, vol. 46, Brill Publishing, Koninklijke Brill NV
- Brown, Peter, 1992, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press
- Corbett, Steve and Fikkert, Brian, 2009, *When Helping Hurts How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor*, Chicago: Moody Publishers
- Cronbach, Alan, 1944, *The Social Ideals of the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha*, *Hebrew Union College Annual*

- Desmond, Matthew, 2016, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* New York: Crown Publishers
- Dunn, Geoffrey D. Mayer, Wendy M. 2015, *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium*, Boston, MA: Brill Publishing.
- Gutierrez, Gustavo, 1988, *A Theology of Liberation: History Politics and Salvation, 15th anniversary ed.*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis
- Heath, Elaine, 2011 *Making Disciples in a Post-Christendom USA*, in *Making Disciples in a World Parish: Global Perspectives on Mission & Evangelism*, Paul W. Chilcote, ed. Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications
- Holman, Susan, 2008, *Wealth, and Poverty in the Early Church and Society* Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic
- Holman, Susan R., 2001, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Kreider, Alan, 2008, *They Alone Know the Right Way to Live, The Early Church and Evangelism in Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*, Downer's Grove IL, Intervarsity Press
- Lischer, Richard, 1995, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Lencioni, Patrick, 2014, *The Advantage, Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Lumen Gentium: Vatican Council II: Volume 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New York: Costello, 2004
- Lupton, Robert D., 2011 *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It*, New York: Harper Collins
- Matz, Brian, 2016, *Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality Gregory of Nazianzus*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing.
- Mutie, Jeremiah, 2017, *Attitudes Toward Death in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Cultures*, *Pakistan Journal of Historical Studies*, Winter, Indiana University Press
- Nazianzus, Gregory, 1894, *Letters on the Apollinarian Controversy*, Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co.
- Outler, Albert C., 1940, The Platonism of Clement of Alexandria, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 20, No. 3
- Pelikan, Jaroslav, 1967, *The Preaching of John Chrysostom*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.
- The Pew Research Center, 2019 *In U.S. Decline of Christianity, Continues at a Rapid Pace, An Update On America's Changing Religious Landscape*
<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>
- Rhee, Helen, 2012, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing.
- Rosenthal, Robert and Flacks, Richard, 2016, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movement* New York: Routledge
- Roth, Catherine P. 1984, *On Wealth and Poverty; John Chrysostom*, New York, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Schilbach, Frank, Schofield, Heather, Sendhil, Mullainathan, 2016, *The Psychological Lives of the Poor*, *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings*

- Stark, Rodney, 1997, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became The Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, Princeton: Harper Collins
- Stern, Ken, 2013, *With Charity for All: Why Charities are Failing, and a Better Way to Give* New York: Anchor
- Szelenyi, Ivan and Szelenyi, Balazs, 1994, *Why Socialism Failed: Toward a Theory of System Breakdown- Causes of Disintegration of East European State Socialism, Theory and Society* 23, no. 2
- Warner, Gaston, 2020, *Zoe Empowers, Empower Children to Move Beyond Charity*, Zoe Empowers, <https://zoeempowers.org/>
- Warner, Lacey C., 2007, *Saving Women: Retrieving Evangelistic Theology and Practice*, Waco TX: Baylor University Press
- Wainwright, Geoffrey, 1980, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press