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*From Strength to Strength: Reclaiming the Planks and Pillars of St. Ambrose of Milan's
Outlooks on the Virtue of Liberality in Philanthropic Leadership*

by

Regina Henderson Moore

Date: 4/13/2021

Approved:



David Emmanuel Goatley, Second Reader



J. Warren Smith, Supervisor



William H. Willimon, D.Min. Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Dedicated to my loving husband, Napoleon “Nick” Moore.

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I entered into the doctoral program much like philanthropist Mary McLeod Bethune described her approach to life, "I never stop to plan. I take things step by step." Step by step, I have discovered the wonderful witness of St. Ambrose as an exemplar for philanthropic leadership and what the church has yet to learn from his episcopal writing. Stony roads have been trod upon this academic journey—a journey that has been long yet necessary to bridge professional clarity on the subject of philanthropic leadership in the church and my personal quest to live a legacy and leave a legacy through this work.

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Introduction

It is usually in the ninth grade when North American students read the classic book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. With raw cultural dynamics and community nuances, the fictional story takes readers on an ethical and moral exploration about culture, community, family, and justice systems. Placed in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, during the Great Depression, the book focuses on southern-cultured life through the lens of Louise “Scout” Finch, an intelligent though unorthodox girl who ages from six to nine years old over the course of the novel. Scout is reared with her brother, Jeremy “Jem” Atticus, in a single-parent home by their father, Atticus Finch, after their mother’s death.

A prominent lawyer by trade, Atticus forges the virtues of justice and kindness as much in the home as in the courtroom. While teaching his children how to hunt birds, Atticus also takes the opportunity to catch and release lessons of ethics for the common good. With great note, he tells his children that it is “a sin to kill a mockingbird.”¹ The lesson alludes to the fact that this singing species of bird is innocent and harmless—most ecologically beneficial to those who can hear its songs. Therefore, anything or anyone vulnerable should not be intentionally harmed.

When one of the town’s black residents, Tom Robinson, is falsely accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell, Atticus agrees to come to his defense in court serving as his counsel despite threats from the Maycomb community. During the court proceeding, Atticus faces a mob outside the courthouse positioned to lynch his client, but he stands his ground to protect his client. Surprisingly, it is young Scout who unintentionally diffuses the situation. This diffusion brings calm in the moment but does little to impact the trial verdict. Tom is convicted despite Atticus’

¹ Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Chapter 10.

valiant efforts to present a defense that gives a more plausible interpretation of the evidence—that Mayella was attacked by her father, Bob Ewell. Ultimately, Tom’s attempt to escape custody results in his untimely death—the death of an innocent man. The town newspaper editor, Mr. B.B. Underwood compares his death to “the senseless slaughter of songbirds.”²

The court trial parallels with the children’s interactions with their own prejudices and community-funneled superstitions as they have piqued interest and unleashed curiosity in Arthur “Boo” Radley, a reclusive neighbor who is a local, seemingly immortal, legend. Scout and Jem have their own ideas about Boo. The alluring temptation of trespassing on the Radley property to witness the folklores of Boo comes to life and gets the best of them. Does Boo live up to the eerie, monstrous blob of evil that every adult they know has portrayed him to be? Their father and at-home ethics professor, Atticus, quickly reprimands them while redirecting their energies to channel a more sensitive sentiment. Boo makes his presence felt indirectly through a series of almsgiving toward the children carried by a torch of mere kindness. Boo also appears in an act of intervention, perhaps driven by the virtue of justice, when Bob Ewell attacks Jem and Scout. In the end, Boo kills Ewell, but Heck Tate, the sheriff, believes it is better to say that Ewell’s death occurred when he fell on his own knife, sparing the shy and labeled Boo from unwanted attention. The insightful and introspective Scout agrees, noting that to do otherwise would be “sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird.”³

The iconic American novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, made its debut into the sights and sounds of Broadway in November 2018. Playwright Aaron Sorkin seeks to address and perhaps rectify how the characters in the book and movie easily dismiss and excuse injustices. In essence,

² Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Chapter 25.

³ Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Chapter 30.

Sorkin wants the character Atticus to wrestle with the question, “Is there goodness in everybody?”⁴ so that Atticus is left with more questions than answers.⁵

Although many things found in Harper Lee’s book might look familiar to the viewing audience—the usual cast of characters of Scout Finch, Dill, and Atticus Finch; a courtroom scene filled with Atticus Finch’s defense arguments; Tom Robinson’s imagined Mississippi drawl; the fashion of women’s midi-length, bias-cut dresses, puff sleeves, belted waists and large yokes coupled with men’s V-shaped, double-breasted topcoat jackets and high-waisted, wide-leg pants adorned with bow ties and newsboy hats—Sorkin has reframed the narrative to make it more relevant and appealing to a 21st century, racially and culturally diverse, #MeToo Movement audience. Much like Roman playwrights Plautus, Terence, and Seneca, Sorkin recognizes how watching life on stage can influence how one sees and reacts to life in the streets with his cultural facelift on classic American literature. For example, the African American characters have been given voice in the play where historically they had been categorically in the background.⁶ “We

⁴ Sorkin referenced US President Donald J. Trump’s comments after the Charlottesville riot on Saturday, August 12, 2017 when an assortment of alt-right and far-right affiliated groups gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia to protest the removal of Confederate monuments and names from a city square. On Tuesday, August 15, 2017 President Trump reverted to blaming both sides for the deadly violence. “I think there is blame on both sides,” the president said in a combative exchange with reporters at Trump Tower in Manhattan. “You had a group on one side that was bad. You had a group on the other side that was also very violent. Nobody wants to say that. I’ll say it right now.” It is implied by Sorkin that President Trump inferred there is good in everybody.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/trump-press-conference-charlottesville.html>

⁵ 60 Minutes interview. Aired November 18, 2018.

⁶ The play allows Tom Robinson, played by Gbenga Akinnagbe, to do more than just beg for his life. And the part of Calpurnia, Atticus’ long-time cook, maid and surrogate mother to his children, has been expanded as a member of the family.

Aaron Sorkin: *Calpurnia now has agency. That she has an opinion.*

Steve Kroft: *A voice.*

Aaron Sorkin: *Yeah, she has a voice. And uses it. It’s important now that she use it.*

The role is played by LaTanya Richardson Jackson.

LaTanya Richardson Jackson: *He doesn’t think so, but I am totally the servant in charge of Atticus. Trying to infuse his thinking. Trying to make sure that he’s okay.*

Steve Kroft: *That’s the impression you get from the book to a certain extent, you just don’t hear the conversation.*

LaTanya Richardson Jackson: *Exactly. Exactly. You can hear the conversation now.*

Steve Kroft: *Do you think people are really going to notice all of these differences?*

have changed in 58 years,” Sorkin states. In another instance, a major narrative shift takes place on stage when the character, Atticus, turns to exit the courtroom taking note of the blacks in the balcony—the “colored” section—who are standing in silence. The scene has been removed in the play. Sorkin explains in a 2019 “60 Minutes” interview with Steve Kroft:

“That’s probably the most favorite scene of zero people who are not white. And, this is why: Those people in the balcony should be rioting in the streets. They should be chanting ‘No justice; no peace!’ They should be burning the courtroom down. But instead they are standing docile, in respect and gratitude to the white liberal who just lost a case.”⁷

Much like Sorkin’s attempt to reframe the conversation in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, at eye-level it appears St. Ambrose of Milan, the fourth-century bishop, first seeks to reframe how Christians—laity and priests, men and women, citizen and immigrant, the *middling* and the noble, the powerful and the privileged, the rich and not so rich— understand the importance of how to live one’s faith and Christian witness. He endeavors to include a conscious work and unyielding ministry with the impoverished in the face of injustices inside and outside the walls of the church. Christian witness, for Ambrose, is best displayed by living a virtuous life of liberality with grace *and* mercy and no respect of persons. As bishop, he assigns prerequisites and examines pre-existing conditions on what to give, how to give, when to give, where to give and even why to give or why to refrain from giving. His instructions on giving challenge the church of Milan on cultural understandings of almsgiving and altruism as a narcissistic, merciless act. He rejects the cultural giving practices and thereby grants permission to the clergy of the early church to refashion

LaTanya Richardson Jackson: *I think the average theatregoer will notice that it has been opened up to because you know the thing about this book though, it's timely. It's still now.*

Steve Kroft: *Yeah.*

LaTanya Richardson Jackson: *It's still occurring. I mean, Tom's death is still happening. This whole idea of justice and what's right is-- is still a theme that universally is being discussed.*

That relevance resonates throughout the play as Atticus Finch is caught in the middle between small-town friends and blatant racism.

In the book he had all the answers. In the play he grapples with the questions.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WahdeFIdQR0>

theological practices within a hierarchical, imperial social system for the good of all. Consequently, clergy and laity wrestled with the choice of leading with civic duty as citizens or with religious responsibility as believers. Civic duty encompasses a merited act of giving in order to receive public acknowledgement or thorough acts of generosity. In contrast, religious responsibility draws the giver to follow biblical principles as a guidepost for faithful stewardship. While both civic and religious giving approaches are noble and honorable, there rests tension between the two. Theologically, rethinking the ways and means of giving affects one's relationship with possessions and neighbor, God and possessions, and God and neighbor.

More importantly, however, I submit Ambrose uses both content reframing *and* context reframing to see the narrative of liberality differently. Reframing is about changing perception by understanding something in another way. Sorkin used the same characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and changed the perception of the narrative, not the narrative itself. This content reframing brings justice and equality to the forefront of the conversation without changing the story's ending. Context reframing, on the other hand, changes the narrative with a desired outcome by changing the perception of the characters in the narrative in order to change the narrative itself. Using context reframing, Ambrose seeks to reverse practices of selfish generosity and the plight of only aiding those deemed worthy. Highlighting biblical exemplars like Naboth and Joseph works. His care and concern for the poor and the widow shifts his measure of achievement in his sermons and his teachings.

Thesis Summary

Using the virtue of liberality as a blank canvas or backdrop, this thesis will analyze Ambrose's ideals that giving is in all and is expected of all. His work, *On Duties*, documents his

theological and biblical reflections on a liberal Christian life. Using this work, Ambrose teaches church leaders how to be free of a complacent path of giving and bound to a life of joyfully, mindful giving. This thesis will support Ambrose's unwavering mission to instruct church leaders how to live sacrificially *and* joyfully as attendants of the soul and spiritual caregivers. For Ambrose, caring for the poor is caring for the soul. It is gentle, tender work that must not be exploited or abused. For Ambrose, giving—when done in reverence and with passion—glorifies God and blesses God's people. This care and attention to the poor in such a selfless manner reframes the work of almsgiving and a liberal life when compared to the philosophical understanding of liberality in the classical age. A careful examination of the crucial and strategic ways Ambrose's biblical and theological tactics move the focus from the need of the givers or their plight to the receiver to the soul-filled humanity of both. This will become clearer when we compare Ambrose's approach to the clerical duties of liberality to that of Marcus Tullius Cicero's moral duties of liberality.

Chapter 1, "Ambrose's Care for the Poor in the Ancient World," introduces a historical perspective on poverty in an intentionally descriptive manner. I offer a broad sweep of social institutions, mechanisms, and *praxis* that provided for the needs of the poor or lower classes in the Roman world. Here I seek to give clarity to 21st century words like *poor*, *slave* and *freedman* with 4th century meaning. I then move on to identify the social institutions—classes, social orders, and rights—that supported the poor. Some of these institutions helped the poor while other brought harm. The church as an institution, the politician institution, the military institution, and the role of foreign policy all had vested interests in the poor. Next, I seek to peel back the important layers socialization played among the care of the poor and the context that made the socialization productive and just.

In Chapter 2, “Ambrose’s Liberality,” takes a deep dive into *On Duties* and *On Joseph* in the context of his larger theory of virtue, especially his theory on justice. Primarily using Marcia Colish’s *Ambrose’s Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* I exegete Ambrose’s understanding of liberality through the lens of Ambrose’s Joseph in three parts of the narrative: Joseph in the pit, Joseph in the prison, and Joseph in the palace. I will focus on 1. liberality as a moral virtue; 2. Ambrose’s pedagogical practice of liberality; 3. Ambrose’s narration of liberality and intellectual virtue via *De Joseph*, and 4. the traditions of liberality as a necessary moral virtue in the Milanese church.

In Chapter 3, “Helpful and Unhelpful Liberality,” brings Ambrose’s theory and *praxis* of liberality in spaces where “toxic charity” threatens the virtue of liberality. From private Catholic high schoolers befriending California state prison inmates to Madam C. J. Walker’s giving circles and local churches’ habitual and toxic giving practices, I seek to test the tenets of Ambrose’s virtuous principles against those of Robert Lupton’s Oath of Compassionate Service. Where has Western culture thrived in his charitable work, and how can it reframe philanthropy with humility and wisdom?

Volume upon volume—sermon after sermon, hymn after hymn, liturgy within liturgy, epistles written and read—Ambrose, in an intentionally subliminal-to-the-ridiculous yet expedient approach, lifts the veil of the poor and the impoverished to the fourth century church that was, itself, charting a path within the power and privilege of the Roman Empire. His intent was not to bring harm to the emerging Western church or to bring further damage to the spirits of an already vulnerable institution and powerless persons he knew and understood to be as fragile as warbling mockingbirds. His aim was never to kill a “mockingbird”—the most vulnerable and harmless *plebs*—by thought, word, or deed. More important to St. Ambrose than silencing the weak was

his need and desire as a Christian leader *and* noble Roman citizen to use his distinctive influence to give voice to the Christian community with a cohesive force that challenged the noisy gong and clanging cymbal⁸ of the violence and vices of the Roman *populus*. He sought to accomplish this theologically with a renunciation of avarice so that the sights and sounds of the impoverished mockingbird could be heard and appreciated in Milan.

What Did Ambrose Want for the Church?

If there is an image to accompany the reframing Ambrose sought, the abundance and universality of the Roman circus and amphitheater would be ideal. These places of Roman entertainment are where Ambrose received his aspiration to lead a church where all—rich and poor, citizen and non-citizen—were freely welcome with joy and could share in the spirit of worship and a common experience. His comprehensive approach to the topic of liberality is nothing short of masterful. His methodology of liberality—as with all the virtues, in general—takes the reader on a scenic road with many detours. However, I submit each detour leads the reader to a clear destination point—the virtue of liberality is in all and is expected of all. Ambrose’s pathway to the virtue of liberality is clearly more demonstrative in his public pedagogy than in his introspective theatrics. Ambrose gives as not to bring attention to himself but as an exercise of faith.

With the exception of the last few days of his life on earth and the grief poured out in his letter upon the death of his only biological brother, much of Ambrose’s personal life is shrouded despite his voluminous writings. And, while Ambrose was well-known and respected in Milan, and the region in which he governed, his renown was limited. For this reason, Ambrosian scholars

⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:1.

are more likely to highlight the bishop's influence on Augustine of Hippo, his non-traditional candidacy and election to the episcopate, and exegete Ambrose's hymns and pedagogical discourse with the clergy of Milan than to write about Ambrose's personal narratives on giving. Ambrose's work focused more on priestly writing and pastoral wisdom, which rose to greater heights only after Ambrose's mentee, Augustine of Hippo, brought attention to Ambrose through his own theological work. Therefore, without the benefit of reading Ambrose's diary, we are only left to hypothesize the reason and logic of Ambrose's personal life, his moral reasoning, and what virtues led to his decisions.

Ambrose's Writing Style and Approach

Ambrose taught the basic tenets of Christian doctrine and church polity to clergy covering an abundance of topics in the process. Many times his writings read like a modern-day sermon, and at other times his writings read like that of a minister's handbook. Moreover, on a few occasions, his writings read like a biblical commentary. The content of Ambrose's pedagogical work alone would be intriguingly practical to any Christian minister in training. However, his *approach* to the content is equally enthralling in the following ways: 1. Ambrose is elusive in sharing his personal relationships pertaining to his Christian beliefs and practices although his work is deeply relational; 2. Ambrose instructs and coaches pastors in his writings using schematic case studies without referencing his own priestly and pastoral experiences, and, 3. Ambrose's writing mirrors a Pauline style of relevancy and contextualization.

Ambrose is elusive in sharing his personal relationships pertaining to his Christian beliefs and practices although his work is deeply relational. We know, for example, Ambrose never married and remained celibate, yet we have little knowledge of what informed his decision and

even less insight about his thoughts on marriage and male celibacy. We also know Ambrose had a regimented practice of spiritual formation, which included self-prescribed hours of daily prayers, blocked writing periods, and individual and corporate worship. However, the formation of personal relationships within those spiritual disciplines and rituals are elusive and therefore not well documented. His concern for widows, children, and even the clergy are not as elusive in his writings, yet the pursuit and cultivation of these kinds of relationships in his *personal* life are unpenned. Ambrose had no biological children, yet he displayed great attention to the care of children, especially orphans, and the necessity for strong Christian parenting and mentorship. Why is this?

Ambrose grew up in a Christian home. We know he had high regard for the poor and great respect for the virtues of modesty and prudence. However, a comprehensive look at Ambrose's actions in altruistic and liberal giving is void in his composed work. With limited written evidence of Ambrose's giving theories as personal *praxis*, one might be tempted to offer inductive reasoning with illusory correlation. For instance, it would be sheer speculation to consider Ambrose's prefect mind⁹ or his appointment as bishop later in life as supporting evidence for his writing approach. Although his investigative and prosecutorial work as a fourth-century prefect—having been appointed and not elected by Consul Probus as governor of the provinces of Liguria and Emilian in northern Italy in 370—could have driven his propensity to utilize constructivist didactic teaching methods and less experiential learning with the clergy, this is mere subjective reasoning. Speculative yet logical. As a bishop of the Western church, his task to teach, investigate, and enforce biblical “law” (holy writ) combined with his former work with the legal system of ancient

⁹ legal mind

Rome (civil law) likely informed his writing approach whereby the clergy would be equipped to lead with "...humility and a grace for [a] reverence for God."¹⁰

By his own admission, Ambrose is a bishop-in-training who is teaching and learning in tandem. He writes [in third person]:

A Bishop's special office is to teach; St. Ambrose himself, however, has to learn in order that he may teach; or rather has to teach what he has not learnt; at any rate learning and teaching with himself must go on together.¹¹

Nonetheless, his lack of personal narrative does not preclude him from referencing a divine narrative cloaked in personal piety that can only come from a space of deep, spiritual formation. His unwaveringly theocentric writing repeatedly circles the reader back to the divine nature of an omnipresent God bestowing wisdom worthy of reverence.

¹⁰ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.1.1.

¹¹ Schaff, Philip and Wace, Henry, editors. *On the Duties of the Clergy-St. Ambrose* (Savage, MN: Lighthouse Christian Publishing, 2013), p. 33.

Care for the Poor in the Ancient World

Care for the poor during late antiquity created a culture that challenged basic social relations and a balanced scale of justice. Roman citizenship had its privileges and liberties for the rich at the expense of the poor who were part of a social and economic system creating chasmic disenfranchisement and exclusion not of their choosing. The poor living as non-citizens led to injustices around wages and treatment with dignity; however, one who was in poverty in Roman culture was not necessarily destitute.¹ Historian Walter Scheidel suggests examining a greater historical perspective on poverty beyond a community's lament and instead looking at the overall asset and income distribution in a society as a whole. Scheidel also suggests, as an alternative, a focus on the quality of life or human development as an indicator of overall well-being. In this chapter, we will take the approach of both uncovering a focus on the social location of those in poverty through the lens of both an economic and social development. This will require both a macroscopic (public) and a microscopic (private and personal) look at poverty. This work will also require the reader to reframe the notion of poverty. Peter Garnsey cautions against the temptation to mystify the meaning of "poverty" and "the poor" with contemporary presumptions. The goal is to understand the 4th century leaders' interpretation of "the poor" and the implications of poverty in the Imperial period holistically. With an awareness of the ambiguous definition of poverty in classical or post-classical texts², we will proceed with care.

In practical terms, freedmen and slaves were considered lower social class as *plebs*. And, not all those categorized as *plebs* were freedmen or slaves. However, all those in chattel enslavement were *plebs*—treated and exchanged as property. These social practices manifested in

¹ Scheidel, W. (2006). Stratification, deprivation and quality of life. In M. Atkins & R. Osborne (Eds.), *Poverty in the Roman World* (pp. 40-59). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511482700.004, p. 43.

² Humfress, Caroline. Poverty and Roman law. *Poverty in the Roman World*. April 2006.

the wages earned or not earned, few opportunities for land ownership, limited access to food supply, and the limited ability for social mobility.³ These social practices also created social disparities and inferiorities.⁴ Furthermore, while freedmen were permitted to accumulate wealth as voting Roman citizens, the enslaved poor often were prohibited from participating in imperial politics, religious ritual preferences, philosophical exchanges, and economic empowerment based on their social stratification. For the poor to live an unyoked life by escaping or disobeying the commands of a master could mean severe physical punishment or death. For every wealthy person in late antiquity, there were at least eight persons living financially impoverished. Therefore, most people lived with just enough to survive, and most of the poor only escaped from poverty by death or military service. Poor plebeians were granted citizenship with their family so they could pay taxes. Most of the poor lived short, brutal lives.

Slavery, Freedmen, and the Poor

Let your slave worship you rather than dread you. Is that too little for a master which is enough for God, who accepts worship and love? -Seneca

Roman slavery as an economic enterprise required lawful policies. Legal procedures as stated in the Twelve Tables determined whether one was free or enslaved. In the early Republican period, slaves had no legal personhood with ownership going to the first person to “occupy” her or him. However, even with non-citizenship, there were varying degrees of legal protection. A

³ MacMullen, Ramsay. "Social Mobility and the Theodosian Code." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 54 (1964), p. 51.

⁴ Keith Bradley writes about the social disparity between slaves and freedmen: “Social inferiority in turn bred stigma, and the law is full of incidentals that illustrate slavery's stigmatic associations: the manumitting slave owner is to receive *obsequium* from the new freedman, not a *servile ministerium*; the freedman is not to be put in chains, like a slave; the social legislation of Augustus appears to have encouraged freedwomen to bear children but equally restricted the testamentary manumission of slaves.”

Bradley, Keith R. "Roman Slavery and Roman Law." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 15, no. 3 (1988), p. 492.

person's place of origin and the political treaties and orders between the countries could dictate how and where non-citizens were placed in social class rankings, especially slaves and freedmen.

The *ingenui* was born free and remained legally free (i.e., child of a freed-man or freed-woman) and might be citizen, or Latin, or Peregrin. Citizens born free were subject to slavery by the courts due to prolonged, unpaid debt, evading obligatory military duties, and criminal activity.⁵ Enemies' soldiers captured in war and slave children also were enslaved. The manumission of Roman slaves was at the discretion of the Roman slave owners. Some slaves were freed without a price while owners allowed slaves to purchase their own freedom with their *peculium*. This open slavery system allowed slaves to win their freedom and enter general society. Anthropologically, freedmen and freedwomen were accepted into kinship groups and were permitted to intermarry freely and legally.⁶ The prospect of possible freedom through manumission encouraged most slaves with a docile work ethic yoked into obedience.

Formal manumission through the order of a court of law magistrate and initiated by the slave owner gave freedmen full Roman citizenship. In some cases, the judicial activity of the local bishop permitted him "to preside over the manumission of slaves in their churches...."⁷ Formal manumission offered slaves who were essentially socially "dead" the elevated and prized status of Roman citizenship as a freedman but denied and forbade freedmen from holding political or public office.⁸ However, the law gave any children born to freedmen, after formal manumission, full

⁵ Kocourek, Albert. *The Formula Procedure of Roman Law*. Virginia Law Review, Vol. 8, No. 5 (Mar., 1922), p. 349.

⁶ Temin, Peter. "The Labor Market of the Early Roman Empire." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 4 (2004), p. 523.

⁷ Cameron, Averil, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby, eds. In *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 14:i-xx. The Cambridge Ancient History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 273.

⁸ DiBacco, Cory R., "The Position of Freedmen in Roman Society" (2017). MAD-RUSH Undergraduate Research Conference. James Madison University, p. 5.

rights of citizenship, including the right to hold office. Informal manumission gave fewer rights to freed slaves to reserve the elite status of Roman citizenship status to those with limited legal infractions. Slaves who had been branded, tortured, found guilty of a crime, fought in the arena, or imprisoned were considered a high risk to Roman society within the walls of Rome and could not become freedmen.⁹ Slaves who were informally manumitted were unequivocally denied citizenship. Consequently, any property or wealth accumulated by the freedmen reverted to their former owners upon death. Once obtaining freedom, former slaves could work in the same jobs as plebeians in a sundry of trade jobs, skilled labor positions, and domestic work as a member of the lower class as a Roman citizen. While this social status wedged a course to personal economic gain and even wealth for freedmen, they were still constantly challenged by the stigma of their social status as citizens who were once enslaved. Gaius stated, ‘all people are either free or slaves’; however, for the freedmen, the stain of slavery (*macula servitutis*) lingered with a stench of degradation that lasted far beyond the institution of slavery in and of itself.¹⁰ In exceptional circumstances, a freedman could be re-enslaved for showing ingratitude to his patron.

Social Institutions, the Needs of the Poor, and Roman Class Structures during the Imperial Period

The social institutions and the needs of the poor hinge on the Roman class structures during the Imperial period. The social class system was framed, designed, and developed to forge political, economic, religious, and cultural wedges among a diverse region that experienced massive expansion and innovation technologies with aqueducts, construction, and agriculture.¹¹ These infrastructure projects required enormous labor and skilled expertise to include talents in

⁹ DiBacco, p. 12.

¹⁰ Gaius, *The Institutes of Gaius*, 3:9. <http://thelatinlibrary.com/law/gaius1.html>.

¹¹ Scheidel. W, p. 13.

architecture, accounting, agriculture, mechanical engineering, culinary arts, artistry, etc. Some of this work, farming especially, would be tasked to the enslaved who were educated, cultured, and without civic citizenship because it was more profitable to be an owner of slaves than to be a landlord to tenant farmers.¹² Before being enslaved, many non-citizens thrived in their respective places of origin but became prisoners of war or were captured by Roman pirates. Slaves' lack of Roman citizenship did not deprive them from earning money or paying taxes, but it did rob them of creating a legacy for their family as non-citizen taxpayers.

The Roman Empire's social structure was rooted in wealth, property, and heredity. Climbing the social ladder only occurred through patronage or the acquisition of wealth or property or land. The social structure was the foundation upon which the social class system was built in the way legs are the foundation of a table. First, patricians were the wealthy, privileged aristocrats who were well educated and socially refined. Their titles or dignitary status were conferred by the emperor. Second, senators were the political class that functioned as the repository for the executive power, serving as the emperor's council to make legal edicts and laws for the people of Rome. Senators composing the senatorial class were not elected but chosen by the consuls. Third, the senatorial class absorbed the equestrians' class, first composed of the Roman cavalry in the 13th century BC and active in the military frontline, by late antiquity. As historian Arnaldo Marcone explains, this shift came as a result of social mobility to a more localized government structure with an expanded hierarchal expansion.¹³¹⁴ Therefore, the senatorial class also had administrative responsibilities for military supplies and the procurement of military contracts.

¹² Morley, Neville. "'The Emporium of the World': The Economic Impact of Empire". *The Roman Empire: Roots of Imperialism*. Pluto Press (2010), p. 91.

¹³ Cameron and Garnsey, pp. 338-339.

¹⁴ The different composition of the ruling class of the empire necessitated a new internal hierarchy, which became fixed from the reign of Valentinian I onwards.

The aforementioned classes were considered the privileged classes with citizens' rights and citizens' power to own property to include slaves. Plebs, free, tax-paying Roman citizens without political or social power, were artisans, farmers, blacksmiths, etc. Plebs represented the "socially and politically intermediate class" in a social hierarchy where there was unequal treatment before the law.¹⁵ Freedmen, slaves, and women were also part of the social order. Although this structure may seem hierarchal, it is not socially linear. Marcone makes the point that "it would be wrong to derive from this mechanical concept of a 'caste system', implying a rigidly bound society that did not permit any form of internal social mobility."¹⁶

With Roman citizenship came private and public rights. The private rights included the right of legal marriage and the right to acquire and transmit civil property (e.g., become creditor or debtor, be considered in someone's will). A Roman citizen's public rights afforded one the right to serve in the legions, the right to vote, and the right to hold office. One could lose citizenship if the citizen became a slave or if they became a Peregrin or a Latin.¹⁷ Enslaved men who became free were called freedmen. Freedmen were given citizenship one of three ways: 1) being added to the census by his master¹⁸, 2) by the *Vindicta* when the praetor's court sat, and 3) the master chose to emancipate the slave to prevent his heir from inheriting the property.

Here the church had a role to play in the emancipation of slaves:

Emancipation in court followed the usual course of a symbolic fiction, dropping off the imitations of a real procedure of law, until it became a mere declaration in the presence of the magistrate. Under Christianity, emancipation might take place in church before the clergy.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 339.

¹⁶ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 338.

¹⁷ Shumway, Edgar S. "Freedom and Slavery in Roman Law" in *The American Law Register* (1898-1907), Bol. 49. No. 11, Volume 4-0 New Series (Nov. 1901), p. 644.

¹⁸ The census was made up only every fourth or fifth year.

¹⁹ Shumway, Edgar S. "Freedom and Slavery in Roman Law" in *The American Law Register* (1898-1907), Bol. 49. No. 11, Volume 4-0 New Series (Nov. 1901), p. 648.

The Role of the Political Institutions

Historically, the patricians originated from three tribes: Ramnes, Tities, and Luceres in 495 BC. These three Romulean tribes were the first to develop an empire. The Ramnes represented Rome's Latin population; the Tities represented the Sabines; and, the Luceres probably represented the Etruscans. To create a government entity, the three tribes agreed to formulate a council with equal representation. A senate was established, and the first 100 senators were members of the patrician class. Eventually 300 senators—100 from each original tribe—made up the government senate with all political power having a vested interest in the needs of the rich and wealthy. Such a large government entity with so much power threatened the monarchy with patricians dominating the government to include the Senate, the consuls, and priestly leadership.

The plebeians were also Roman citizens; however, they were considered a subservient class of the patricians. Everyone who identified as anything other than the major ethnic groups of Ramnes, Tities, and Luceres were considered “common people.” As a result, the bulk of Roman citizens were plebeians. The lower class of people were excluded from citizenship by virtue of their birthright. In addition, if the lower class were able to buy their freedom or have it gifted to them by the owner, they were free from the pit of slavery but were still owned by the citizens as living under a law of taxation without representation.

The Role of Military Institutions

The Roman army was led by an infantry division on foot, a cavalry division mounted on horses, troop regiments, and all auxiliary support units. These support units included but were not

limited to chefs, blacksmiths, engineers, soldiers' servants (*calones*), and *lixae*.²⁰ The infantry, comprised of the main bulk of a legion, was reserved for Roman citizens as a right and benefit. Having cavalry was to show both military and citizen rank, but the auxiliary units were equally important in supplying the needs in battle. On some occasions, slaves were summoned into battle when needed. Feig Vishnia writes:

[Slaves] were unarmed and...did not constitute part of the fighting personnel. ...It seems that they were under the direct authority of the commanding officer, who could use them for military purposes if he considered it necessary. ...to create the impression of a larger army, thus instilling fear in the enemy, the general in command could order slaves to raise shouts together with the soldiers.²²

Noted in another example, in late 405 AD a swarm of slaves was sent into battle armed and authorized by an edict to serve:

...a large force of barbarians, many of them Ostrogoths, under the leadership of Radagaisus, crossed the Alps from Pannonia. Since Stilicho's army, even reinforced by Alans, by Huns under Uldin, and by Goths under Sarus, was too small to risk in set battle, the invaders were allowed to overrun north Italy unopposed.²³

It is also worth placing an emphasis on private armies as well as state-initiated armies and the roles slaves played. Private armies were a particular interest and phenomenon that emerged in the west with growing patronage in the countryside. Occupied by rich landowners (*patrons*), the explosion of countryside farming did not expand parcel production and farming units "were not cultivated any differently."²⁴ This farming labor was the task of slaves and freedmen who were tenant farmers (*coloni*). Once on the farm, there was no single mode of the slaves and tenant farmers were organized or managed on the estate. Some patrons chose to have a foreman (*custos*) while others

²⁰ Vishnia, Rachel Feig. "The Shadow Army: The Lixae and the Roman Legions." *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 139 (2002), p. 267.

²¹ The *calones* are those whose status is servile and the *lixae* were free men who owned slaves themselves.

²² Vishnia, p. 268.

²³ Cameron, Averil, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby, eds. *In The Cambridge Ancient History*, 14:i-xx. The Cambridge Ancient History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 121.

²⁴ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 305.

were centered around tenant smallholders. As was the practice of countryside customs, tenants paid in either cash or kind as part of the natural economy. Either way, legal guardrails were in place to prevent the exploitation of the poor, but there were no provisions against the exploitation of the patron.²⁵ For this reason, private armies were established in the countryside. *Coloni*, slaves, and fugitive soldiers were recruited. For landowners and patrons, taking matters in their own hands gained ground as ‘warlordism’ came because of a weak central government and the expansive growth of a rich countryside.²⁶

The Role of Foreign Policy and Expansion

Leading up to the fall of the empire in 133 BC, Rome suffered from globalization. Cheap labor coupled with the onslaught of unpaid slave labor left the small *agricolae* bankrupt. These small farmers would collectively pivot in economic crisis to become proletariats in more urban areas. In the meantime, those who had the financial resources, affluent citizenship, and the political influence to buy the abandoned farmland profited mightily by buying out the ruined farmers. These business transactions were oppressive, exploitive, and legal.

The legality of these trade deals ultimately brought political conflict in the 2nd century BCE between the once unified Senate and the people of the Republic. In an effort to seek reconciliation, Tiberius Gracchus and Gaius Gracchus (also known as the Gracchus Brothers)—tribunes of the plebs— proposed that the government seize all grain-farming property purchased and redistribute it to the farmers at a fair, just, and reasonable access of public land to the impoverished peasants. Part of the land reform deal would also include free bread distribution to the poor. Wealthy Roman

²⁵ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 306-307.

²⁶ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 311.

landowners adamantly resisted the idea.²⁷ In revolt to the proposal, members of the Senate had the Gracchus brothers and many of their allies executed. This is just one example of how Rome was paralyzed with war and greed and how the poor were gripped with inescapable trauma and despair as a result.

Amid civil conflict over power, prestige, and prosperity, there is a question of the role of the church and ecclesial leaders. Between the reign of two Christian leaders of the Roman Empire, Constantine the Great and Jovian, the brief 18-month (361AD to 363AD) rule of Julian was the last of a pagan emperor to sit on a Roman throne.

Julian's death has been described as a tragedy of possibilities. The tragedy of his death at the young age of 31 in a military battle pales in comparison to the tragedy of his failed leadership. Julian led with courageous leadership, incorruptibility, and integrity with single-mindedness of ideals, yet he squandered his talents trying to salvage a dying pagan religion. With the violent death of the emperor, Julian, in 363 AD on a Persian battlefield came the death of paganism.

Julian's resistance to Christian religion was based on one of the four virtues of Rome—duty. While Christians were in pursuit of a life disciplined on the qualities of gentleness, meekness, forgiveness, and turning the other cheek, Julian sought to reclaim and restore the duty of pagan revival as the predominate of Roman religious practices.²⁸

After passing through Galatia, for example, and seeing for himself the strength of the church and its network of charitable institutions, Julian addressed a didactic epistle to the high

²⁷ Annett, Anthony and Lipsky, Joshua. "Past as Prologue: Ancient Rome Offers Lessons on the Importance of Sustainable Development", *Finance & Development*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2019), p. 38.

²⁸ Cameron & Garnsey, p. 66.

priest of the province, Arsacius, on ways of furthering the pagan cause: ‘that Hellenism does not yet prosper as it should is the fault of those who profess it’.²⁹

As emperor and chief priest of the state, Julian strongly urges provincial pagan priests like Arsacius and all of his peers to borrow “best practices” from Christian doctrines and tenets by any means necessary in order to compete for the people’s attention and loyalty. As a means of imitating the spiritual disciples of devoted Christians, Julian instructs the prohibition of attending the theatre, drinking in the tavern, and professing action in any illegal activity. Those who followed the emperor’s instructions were to be honored; those who disobeyed were to be expelled from the priesthood.

In his attempt to redirect the people’s loyalty, Julian’s instructions to the pagan priests were specific. His instructions included the pagan priests to erect hostels in every city to extend hospitality to the stranger no matter one’s religion or ability to pay. The pagan priests were to distribute one fifth of the grain and wine supply—essential foods for everyday living—to the poor whose primary role was to serve the pagan priests. The remaining grain and wine supply were to be given to strangers and the beggars as provided by the government leader. These measures were to combat the goodwill of Christians who would support the poor while also caring about well living and promoting sustainable lives. In addition, Julian instructs the pagan priests to review the tenets of Greek religion as espoused by Homer to welcome the stranger, offer benevolence to the poor, and offer kindness to the imprisoned.³⁰

For the 4th century church, charity was viewed a gift of hospitality for Roman citizens and non-citizens—the free and the enslaved. Institutionally, Basil of Caesarea reached beyond the

²⁹ *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, Volume III (1913), Letter 22.

³⁰ Wright, Wilmer Cave. *The Letters of Emperor Julian*, Vol. 3. New York : G. P. Putnam's Sons, p. 69.

walls of the city to establish a ‘new city’ focused on the church’s hospitality, extended to the sick, poor, and marginalized with the establishment of the first hospital.³¹ In addition, while the church was expanding in rural areas with hospitals, orphanages, and hostels for the poor, it was actively erecting ecclesiastical buildings for worship to include charitable activities.³² Citizenship trumped poverty as the main qualification for receipt of benefits in 4th century pagan society, so church giving targeted to the poor emerged in Christian circles.³³ As the church expanded geographically, institutionally, and culturally as the state’s religion, the bishop’s role also shifted to secure financial and human resources to meet the demands to store supplies, collect alms, and care for the poor.³⁴

Mechanisms of Socialization and the Needs of the Poor

Social mobility for the proletariat was offered by Roman general Gaius Marius. He began enrolling the working middle class into the Roman army with the promise of a grant of land in exchange for their military service. A military general’s word of honor to the legions would solidify a level of loyalty while also offering financial stability to the soldiers with military pay, the possibility of land ownership, and eventually a higher rank in social status.

In terms of education, primary education among the poor was taught by their peers. If slaves were emancipated, their patron would guide them through early adulthood education, teaching them life skills and the tenets of law so that they might become better clients. The motive was mutual and reciprocal. Rhetorical education, taught by slaves as private lessons, prepared

³¹ Hospital and hospitality come from the same Latin root word *hospes*, meaning guest or stranger.

³² Cameron and Garnsey, p. 327.

³³ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 331.

³⁴ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 341.

students for oratorical debates and legal agreements. Again, the trainings were to ultimately aid the patron with well-spoken clients.

Communal Contexts for Social Interaction

Diseases are spreading. Time is surely nearing its end. I foresee the massacre of all humanity. This surely is the twilight of the world. -Ambrose

Like most cultural societies, late antiquity had varying degrees of poverty. First, the endemic poor are those unable to work and sustain themselves.³⁵ We can think of the widows and orphaned children in this case. Second, the epidemic poor are those who are unskilled laborers who live a subsistence lifestyle. We can think of those who are severely physically injured or mentally challenged in this case. Third, the episodic poor, as the word suggests, are those whose ability to work has been altered by life-event or world-event circumstances.³⁶ We can think of those impacted by civil conflict, economic devastation, or a temporary injury preventing gainful employment in this case.

It is worth noting the shifts in the care of the poor during military combat. War's negative impact on the impoverished is calculable and assured although not likely highlighted in history. When Alaric I, the first king of the Visigoths, and his army captured Rome in 410 AD, it spelled the doom of the western empire. A remnant of this history unveils the plight of the urban poor in the light of Alaric's three sieges of Rome as written by Australian Catholic historian Geoffrey D. Dunn.³⁷ Political tensions between Alaric, a Gothic leader, and Olympius in 408 AD ignited a

³⁵ Dunn, Geoffrey. "The Care of the Poor in Rome and Alaric's Sieges", *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 5: Poverty and Riches, ed. Geoffrey D. Dunn, David Luckensmeyer and Lawrence Cross (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls), 2009, p. 323.

³⁶ Dunn, Geoffrey. "The Care of the Poor in Rome and Alaric's Sieges", *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 5: Poverty and Riches, ed. Geoffrey D. Dunn, David Luckensmeyer and Lawrence Cross (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls), 2009, p. 323.

³⁷ Dunn, Geoffrey, p. 320.

military siege on the city of Rome by the Goths. The takeover blocked the Tiber River and the imported food supply. As a result, while wealthy people had the privilege to pull from food reservoirs and the capacity to stockpile food and other supplies on their properties, the slaves were left to 1) flee the city with nothing in hand or 2) starve to death. Neither choice fared well for the city. Crowds of slaves who fled joined Alaric's army to take control of the city. Furthermore, a famine city incited with food riots led to severe food rationing, followed by a severe outbreak of infectious diseases because of the massive fatalities with no capacity for burials. It is possible, as Dunn notes from sources, that the poor resorted to cannibalism.³⁸

During this devastation, Dunn notes examples of how Christian and non-Christian rich people cared for the poor in time of war. For example, Laeta, a faithful 4th century Christian and the widow of Emperor Gratian, reportedly shared her food provisions with many in the city, thereby shielding the poor from anthropophagous habits and the snares of starvation. However, Melania the Younger, also noted for her Christian practices of asceticism and almsgiving, fled Rome with her family only in search of safety on her rural properties and to protect the security of her wealth.³⁹ During Alaric's second siege in 410 AD, the widow of Petronius Probus, rich Proba—a converted Christian from pagan worship and influential supporter of Alaric's efforts to overtake the city from the hands of Heraclianus, let Alaric into the city ports. Proba's move—viewed as an unimaginable humanitarian act—ended the current suffering and hunger of those in the city who had been brutally detached and, in effect, reduced to cannibalism. In Alaric's third siege later in 410 AD, he instructed his soldiers to take valuables but to spare lives. Dunn notes:

Sozomen goes as far as to say that Alaric permitted his army to take as much plunder as they were able from home but ordered that the basilica of St. Peter be

³⁸ Dunn, Geoffrey, p. 326.

³⁹ Brown, Peter, p. 298.

spared and be available as a place of sanctuary. In a movie-like moment, inserted to personalize and make comprehensible what is otherwise too epic, he relates the story of how a barbarian soldier's thirst for rape was quenched by the heroic resolve of a Roman wife, such that he ended up conducting her to the safety of St. Peter's and provided six gold coins for her support.⁴⁰

Of the three sieges recorded, the third siege hints to evidence of Alaric's Christian faith realized. Alaric willingly instructs his soldiers to save lives and to spare Christian worship buildings to offer refuge to the poor with no shelter. What Christian values are to be gained to steal and rob but not kill, only to leave people tormented, violated, and unhinged?

Modes of Interpersonal Relations

The political and social context of the Roman patronage system should be considered with the interpersonal relationships among the poor. Rome was one of the longest lasting societies in world history. One of the cornerstones of Roman life is the citizens' love of the city (*amor civicus*).⁴¹ Practicing civic loyalty was more than an act of goodwill for Roman citizens; it was law and order. To be a good citizen was to be a good patron or client. While the relationship was hierarchical, the obligations were mutual. The *clientela* and *patrocinium* is a series of reciprocal relationships between the richer of the state and the poorer masses. These relationships built on an exchange of gifts and favors, of course, were established among Roman citizens only. Slaves were not privileged in this system; however, freedmen could be a client to a patron.

Because the livelihood of the poor depended on the relationship with his patron, much of the daily relationships and personal interactions included the acts of reciprocity. A client would offer a morning *salutatio* in front of the patron's dwelling and then accompany the patron to the

⁴⁰ Dunn, Geoffrey D., "The care of the poor in Rome and Alaric's sieges," p. 328.

⁴¹ Brown, Peter, p. 60.

forum or law courts to demonstrate fidelity and support in the interest of their patron. These daily acts built formidable interpersonal relationships while also honoring the reciprocal relationship.

While there is much to be written about the interpersonal relationships among the rich about patronage, the relationships among the poor are more prominent in this piece than the rich's relationship with the poor. The Roman patronage system often kept their client promoting the interest of the patron. This left limited time and resources to devote to other family and communal relationships. In contrast, loyalty to a patron would yield benefits to the client and his family for generations.

A freed slave and his former master often adopted the patronage model of reciprocity, with the master serving as the patron and the ex-slave becoming a client. There, effects of a freedman's emancipation were deeply relational:

The most important phase of the private law of freedmen is the institution called the Patronate (Patronatus). The former master was called Patronus, patron. The relation existing between him and his freedman resembled in some ways that between parent and child. The patron gave legal personality to his freedman, as the father to his child.... The rights resulting involved family rights and property rights.⁴²

And, although freedmen were not granted access to the public law of holding political office, service in the legions, or no voting rights, the reciprocity allows him to respectfully bring legal action against his patron (former master).⁴³ He could also enter into a contract agreement for paid labor and services, and it allowed the master to offer property in the case of extreme poverty.

These interpersonal relationships were not divided between the rich and the poor exclusively. They were divided by those who could leverage the social mobility and those who

⁴² Shumway, Edgar S. "Freedom and Slavery in Roman Law" in *The American Law Register* (1898-1907), Vol. 49, No. 11, Volume 4-0 New Series (Nov. 1901), p. 649.

⁴³ Brown, Peter, p. 155.

could not. There were many commonalities between Ambrose and his mentee, Augustine, but a clear contrast was societal difference in their understanding of the rich and the poor. Peter Brown writes:

[Augustine's] social world was not divided primarily between rich and poor; it was divided between those who could get ahead and those who could not. The truly rich could afford to think about the poor. As we saw, part of Symmachus's huge wealth was deployed in a ceaseless, anxious dialogue with the plebs of Rome. Ambrose lingered with fierce eloquence on the contrast between the avaricious rich and the victimized poor. But Augustine was no Ambrose, and he was certainly no Symmachus. For him, society was veined from top to bottom by the fact of patronage. As a result, Augustine experienced his social world as a cat's cradle of personal relationships. It was not a world of rich and poor; it was a world of patron and friends.⁴⁴

Again, practicing civic loyalty was more than an act of goodwill for Roman citizens; it was law and order. The ordering of life in the Roman patronage system sometimes cultivated working relationships that flourished into personal relationships where clients would be elevated to personal, intimate friends to their patrons. Clients themselves became friends among themselves in support of the patron, and built solid relationships based on trust and an affinity to the cause.

The relationship among wealthy and poor Roman citizens likely influenced the close relationships Roman citizens had with their slaves and freedmen. Slaves worked on rural farms and in mines, within government, and at the residence of their masters. The labor tasks often dictated the formation of interpersonal relationships. For example, the roles slaves played with wealthy masters often entailed domestic work and family tasks, leaving little privacy. Often, slaves would bathe and dress their masters while other slaves prepared meals, cared for the children and other family members, and laundered clothes. These relationships were social within the residence

⁴⁴ Brown, Peter. *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 154-155.

at times and always transactional. However, there is no need to romanticize the enslavement of human beings. Unlike the patronage system, there was no reciprocity or mutuality. Slaves dined among themselves, living in modest apartments or in shacks in rural farms. Roman slaves—as educated, dignified, skilled, and appreciated as they were in their land of origin—were branded like animals, disposed like trash, and sold like parcels of land. They were whipped, raped, auctioned, demoralized, economically oppressed, and snatched from their families by no choice of their own. Interpersonal relationships that went awry with the master often resulted in death without criminal punishment. Because of these deaths, children of slaves were orphaned, traumatized, and abandoned.

Social Practices, the Needs of the Poor, and the Role of the Church

Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.”-Matthew 26:11

Within the leadership of Constantine as emperor, his commitment and unwavering dedication to the Christian faith reset the societal trajectory of late antiquity. Was Constantine an emperor who was Christian; or, was Constantine a Christian who was an emperor? It is without question Constantine’s faith informed his leadership as emperor. His theological understanding of “one God, one faith, one baptism” spoke to the hierarchal structure of a monarchy where there would presumably be one person with full reign to restore the empire under his leadership. The Code of Theodosius helped with this transition so that a set of new laws reflective of an ideology that aligned with a restored state could be considered as a re-established structured way of living.⁴⁵ While not a Christ-centered text, these codes were influenced by Christian values and virtues.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 341.

⁴⁶ Hermanowicz, Erika T. "Textual Adventures: A Brief History of the Theodosian Code." *The Classical Outlook* 79, no. 3 (2002), p. 99.

The church sought to address the perils of systematic oppression and cultural injustices with the intervention of “charity and poor-relief” which brought social welfare to the neglected and emergency aid in a time of personal and community crisis, respectively.⁴⁷ By late antiquity, charitable almsgiving by the church closed the chasm that Roman culture’s euergetism had always left. As Garnsey and Whittaker explain:

When the church gave cash, clothes and goods for the abject poor (*ptochoi*), estimated by John Chrysostom at 10 per cent of the population of Antioch, it was targeting a class that had been systematically neglected by the political authorities and the social elite in the pre-Christian era.⁴⁸

For example, a Jew was not to buy a Christian slave or acquire one as a gift nor were bread rations to be hoarded.⁴⁹ Moreover, in an inherited structure where Roman citizens worshipped many gods while conquering many lands in the East and West, Emperor Diocletian persecuted Christians in 303 AD and subsequently established a powerful tetrarchy across the territory, rebuilding its wealth and power yet leaving the Church as a threat to the established order.⁵⁰ Constantine’s ability to reclaim and affirm the political laws while also having the capacity to grant privilege to the church as the Empire’s state religion and allowing the practice of the religious laws of paganism proved effective and masterful. His faith informed his leadership as one who held a high political position while also upholding his religious convictions with Christian charity. In this, he was an exemplar of forming covenant Christian relationships alongside contractual civic leadership. Constantine did not insist that all citizens must become Christian; however, his exemplary

⁴⁷ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 341.

⁴⁸ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 332.

⁴⁹ Code of Theodosius, 16.9.4.; Code of Theodosius, 14.17.8.

⁵⁰ Christianity was perceived as a religious cult with a monotheistic belief that directly undermined traditional Roman religion.

leadership as a Christian who was the Roman emperor exposed the empire to charity as philanthropic and how one's faith and citizenship can be sacrificial *and* benevolent.

Examples of charity as philanthropic can be found in the Theodosian Code, Constantine's laws, and the law of Constantius. In February 425, Emperor Theodosius II introduced a new code of law for the purpose of training students on how to study and comprehend law at his new university.⁵¹ As Caroline Humfrees explains, "the *Codex Theodosianus* does not lay down the law; instead it provides its elite, specialist readers with the tools – epistemological and material – to produce their own 'valid' legal knowledge as defined by and through the *Codex* itself."⁵² Book 16, the last book in the text, shows evidence of social justice in the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity. It is an inaugural expression of how religious practices "are to be done and what are to be avoided"; and what was "the True Religion."⁵³

Moreover, when tradesmen are summoned to some legally prescribed tax payment, all clerics shall cease to be affected by such a disturbance; for if they have accumulated anything by thrift, foresight, or trading, but still in accordance with honesty, this must be administered for the use of the poor and needy, and whatever they have been able to acquire and collect from their workshops and stalls they shall regard as having been collected for the profit of religion.⁵⁴

For Constantine's law, the emphasis is placed on justice in a court of law. In his famous *edict ad universos provinciales* from September, 325, Constantine advocates for justice through a fair legal process by which a provincial might report bureaucratic wrongdoing. What makes

⁵¹ Hermanowicz, Erika T. "Textual Adventures: A Brief History of the Theodosian Code." *The Classical Outlook* 79, no. 3 (2002), p. 97.

⁵² Humfrees, Caroline. "Ordering Divine Knowledge in Late Roman Legal Discourse." 20. Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2016, p.164.

⁵³ Salzman, Michele Renee. "The Evidence for the Conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity in Book 16 of the "Theodosian Code"." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 42, no. 3 (1993), p. 362.

⁵⁴ Pharr, Clyde, Theresa Sherrer Davidson, Mary Brown Pharr, and C. Dickerman Williams. *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions: A Translation with Commentary, Glossary, and Bibliography*. 1969, p. 452.

Constantine's work notable is his empathic draw and concern for his subjects, his transparent intentions, and justice as a virtue. He wrote:

The person, moreover, who has revealed and proved the offense I will enrich with honors as well as with material rewards. Thus may the Highest Divinity always be propitious to Me and keep Me unharmed, as I hope, with the State most happy and flourishing.⁵⁵

For Constantius II, social justice was shared rectifying the actions of Emperor Licinius.⁵⁶

In the response of the unjust and tyrannical rule of Licinius, Constantius II sought restorative justice with these words:

We order that all the regulations established by the tyrant and his judges contrary to law shall be invalidated. Possession shall be restored to those persons who were evicted, so that any person who wishes may litigate as from the beginning. But emancipations, manumissions, pacts, and compromises made under the tyrant, must remain valid.⁵⁷

Christian doctrine offers a plethora of ways for believers to embody one's faith. One of those ways is through Christian charity. In fact, the church's economy in the 3rd century AD depended on the charitable contribution and donations of its members. The bishop would distribute those monies with the assistance of the deacons for social impact in order to feed the sick in time of famine and epidemics, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger and imprisoned.⁵⁸ As a religious practice, the church expected Christians to give to the church from their own earnings for the benefit of the poor. The bishop, with full discretion, could then meet the needs of the poor. Without the donations of predominately church parishioners, the bishop as representative of the church could not meet the needs of the poor.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Code of Theodosius, 9.1.4.

⁵⁶ Code of Theodosius, 15.14.1. Emperor Licinius is described as a "tyrant" when he was defeated in his efforts to claim supreme power.

⁵⁷ Code of Theodosius, 15.14.5.

⁵⁸ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 341.

⁵⁹ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 341.

Care of the poor for the 4th century church, therefore, was covenantal and communal. First, the Christian covenant of charity is the act of giving to those in need as a representative or vessel of God for the good of humanity. Charitable work was holy and personal sacrificial work spearheaded by the church. The impoverished and underserved were to be the only benefactors of charitable work. Unlike the civic duty of Roman citizenship, the Christian covenant obligates the believer to works of charity. Roman citizens were expected to honor the state with almsgiving.⁶⁰ Almsgiving was not a covenant work as much as it was a public act for public benefit and display. Almsgiving can be personal, yet it is rarely a private affair. The establishment of public resources for conspicuous consumption with braggadocious appeal reflects almsgiving. Almsgiving is the intersection of a human need met with the human desire to give for mutual benefit.

Roman citizens often offered alms to the state to construct public buildings, produce games in the circus, and/or distribute food and essential items for the sole benefit of gaining prestige and public recognition. These alms might or might not reach the hands of the poor, based on the giver's intent. In other words, the qualitative difference between almsgiving in the pre-Christian era and Christian donations through the bishop to the poor can be measured beyond the realm of duty into an encampment of liberality. Pre-Christian almsgiving is self-selective generosity and optional in nature for wealthy people. On the other hand, Christian charity, viewed as an extension of God's hospitality, is understood as an obligation in response to a covenant relationship nurtured in Christian community with preferential treatment given to the poor.⁶¹ Meaning, charity is the

⁶⁰ Acts of charity by Roman citizens preceded the Church's charitable work noted here. Adeline Belle Hawes writes, "Systematic measures were often taken by the government for the relief of poverty, and one of the best of these was the special effort which was made in times of scarcity to keep prices down. In the time of Tiberius, for instance, when the people were complaining of the cost of living, saying that it was 'fierce', the Emperor limited the price of grain which the seller might demand, but for every measure sold he himself paid the dealer a certain sum in addition." Hawes, Adeline Belle. "Charities and Philanthropies in the Roman Empire", *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 6, No. 23 (Apr. 19, 1913), The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 178.

⁶¹ Cameron and Garnsey, p. 257.

intersection of human need met with human desire to give to the oppressed without reciprocity or political gain. Constantine's leadership guided the Roman world on a path of charity but with resistance:

The situation changes with Constantine and the recognition and protection of the church's social functions by the state. If giving assistance to marginal groups previously excluded from any humanitarian consideration remained highly valued as a motive, then in the cities and significant harmony of aims was realized between classical and Christian acts of philanthropy.⁶²

Charitable work was also communal acts of grace. If grace can be defined as God's unmerited favor, then an offering of goodwill without an expected return within a body of believers makes the work communal. Just as Christ is the mediator to the Father for all of humanity, so the church is the mediator to the poor for acts of charity. This mediation work of the church via the bishop makes the work more about the body of Christ as a communal body and less about the individuals who comprise the membership of the church. The collective offering itself represents a community of faith dedicated to make a sacrificial offering individually for the benefit of the poor collectively.

⁶² Cameron, A., & Garnsey, P. (Eds.). (1997). *The Cambridge Ancient History* (The Cambridge Ancient History). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521302005, p. 342.

Chapter 2: Ambrose's Liberality

In Chapter 1, I explored the landscape of political, economic, and social powers in 4th century Roman citizenship, Roman culture, and the role of the Christian church. Within the framework of these institutional powers are human relationships which shape societal behaviors and the rule of law. For the Christian church, this societal framework tested the theological understanding of justice, redemption, and freedom. How does the church's role of liberality differ from a pagan ritual of almsgiving or the Roman citizen's quest to give to the poor for his own benefit and self-aggrandizement? I will critique Ambrose's leadership approach and technique of teaching *competentes* how to reframe his theory of liberality in the context of his broader theory of virtue, particularly his Christian construct of justice in *On Duties*.

Part of the challenge of reading Ambrose's *On Duties* is remembering just how much Ambrose traced the work of Cicero's *Officiis*, a work of classic ethics intended for his son, Marcus. Even in its plagiaristic state, Ambrose's emphasis on humility stands as his original work. How does Ambrose intend for the *competentes* to understand the Christian ethics of *humilitas*? To humble oneself, for Ambrose, was to live an exemplary life in Christ. However, in deconstructing Ambrose's theological framing of Cicero's *Officiis* through the lens of the patriarch Joseph and his interpretation of Joseph's life, "liberty and justice for all" reclaims its proper place in the Christian sacrament of baptism for the *competentes*.

What is virtue?

Virtues are winning habits of body and soul.¹ The etymology of the word virtue carries the same root word (*vir*) for “man” or “hero”. In Latin, *virtutem* (nominative *virtus*), the word virtue, means "moral strength, high character, goodness; manliness; valor." Virtue is *summum bonum*.² Succinctly, the words “virtue” and “man” come from the same root word. This common denominator means virtue reflects the nature or essence of man.³ Man was created as virtuous beings. To be a man, one must fulfill one’s nature as a man. To be what man was meant or intended to be, man must nurture and cultivate a virtuous life.

The ideals of virtue for many often pit bad behavior against good behavior, good against evil, or justice against injustice. As such, the equilibrium of human behavior rocks on a pendulum of polarities of “either/or” and not necessarily “both/and”. There are two opposing vices for every virtue and two dangers for every soul that seeks to live a life according to his or her nature. On the one hand, one vice, which tends to sway closer to the virtue will draw the person to excess. On the other hand, the other vice tends to sway further away from the virtue to a place of depletion. For example, one who upholds the virtue of prudence needs not to just be concerned about imprudence (depletion), but one must also contend with impatience (excess).

Virtues are challenged or affirmed in everyday living. Life looks for virtues to serve as the equilibrium or place of neutrality on the behavior pendulum. Sometimes humans stiff goodwill and at other times humans overcompensate efforts of goodwill, all in the name of the common good. Either way, destruction is inevitable. Balance matters.

Aristotle defines virtue as the golden mean between two extremes that need to be avoided. As an example, cowardice is having too much fear while foolery is the complete absence of fear.

¹ Austin, Nicholas. "Rational Virtue." In *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading*, 109-29. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017, p. 109.

² “the highest good”

³ Or human

Courage is having the right amount of fear, which tempers our actions even as we stand up against an obstacle. In praxis, a coward may run away from battle while a foolish person may rush headstrong into battle. A courageous person will stand and fight along with her peers and will press forward or take cover as the situation demands.

Virtues are intended to help establish what is best for the common good. Because the definitions, meanings, and implications of the word virtue have shifted over eras and across academic disciplines, the metanarrative MacIntyrean concept of bringing relevant definition to virtues, practices, narratives and traditions gives us formative categories to navigate this broad landscape.⁴ Conversations and dialogues on virtue have an appropriate place in the halls of academia, churches, medical centers, courthouses, and government towers, etc. Each conversation, uniquely couched in virtues, practices, narratives, or traditions, falls into one of four categories: Cardinal Virtues, Theological Virtues, Seven Contrary Virtues, and Seven Heavenly Virtues. Each virtue category shapes and forms nuanced covenants and communities.

Moral virtues and intellectual virtues are good seeds to plant community. The distinction between moral virtues and intellectual virtues was drawn by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* in his argumentation of virtue ethics. In general terms, moral virtues are habits and depositions of goodwill, which govern our actions as humans. Because moral virtues are achieved by natural means, any pagan may obtain them. Intellectual virtue does not depend on moral virtue, and moral virtue can exist without intellectual virtue. Intellectual virtues, however, are the personal qualities of a good thinker or learner. Examples of intellectual virtues include but are not limited to curiosity, intellectual humility, intellectual autonomy, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual thoroughness, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual perseverance.⁵ Intellectual

⁴ Kallenberg, Brad J., "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's 'After Virtue'," p. 34.

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2.8.

virtues are “other” oriented. All virtues are good for individuals and their communities, and the 4th century church is no exception according to Ambrose. In this chapter, I will focus on 1. liberality as a moral virtue; 2. Ambrose’s pedagogical practice of liberality; 3. Ambrose’s narration of liberality and intellectual virtue via *De Joseph*; and, 4. the traditions of liberality as a necessary moral virtue in the Milanese church.

Virtue of Liberality (Excess, Mean, and Deficiency)

This chapter focuses primarily on one of the seven Contrary Virtues: liberality.⁶ The virtue of liberality or generosity is the giving and taking of wealth and/or money. One who upholds the virtue of liberality does so as a noble act for the benefit of the common good. Like all other virtues, liberality without nobility, is no longer virtuous. For Aristotle, the virtue of liberality is measured by one who “will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time” with pleasure or without pain to the purse or the pulse.⁷ The essence of this virtue is suggested by the Latin word *liberalitas* (generosity) and its common synonym *largitas* (bounteous). According to Aquinas, “to be liberal is to be ready to send forth.”⁸ For this reason liberality is sometimes referred to as *largesse*.⁹ *Largesse* also seems to pertain to the word liberality because when someone sends forth from herself, she liberates it from her custody and dominion, showing that her soul is free from attachment to it. Moreover, liberality is a habit of the giver and is not contingent upon the

⁶ The seven Contrary Virtues were derived from the “Battle of the Soul,” an epic poem written by the 5th century philosopher Aurelius Clemens Prudentius. These seven virtues—humility, kindness, abstinence, chastity, patience, liberality, diligence—allegedly counteracts and protects against temptation found in the Seven Deadly Sins. The virtue of humility combats the sin of pride. The virtue of kindness combats against the sin of envy. The virtue of abstinence combats against the sin of gluttony. The virtue of chastity combats against the sin of lust. The virtue of patience combats against the sin of anger. The virtue of liberality combats against the sin of greed. And, the virtue of diligence combats against the sin of sloth.

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, Book 4: Moral Ethics, Chapter 1

⁸ Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, (2.117, ad 2).

⁹ Meaning: for what showers itself forth at large does not hold back, but rather sends.

frequency of the act. A poor person can be liberal in her giving while a wealthy Roman citizen who only seeks to erect buildings in *largitas* with her namesake is not liberal but simply negotiating the art of a deal to make a purchase solely for personal gain. Moreover, while all religions cling to liberality, liberality claims no particular organizational affiliation.

Liberality is good for the soul and good to the soul. It is an act of reciprocity—giving and receiving; gifting and equipping; longing and satisfying—but is not always mutual in nature. Liberality is a communal act and a communal way of being. It is a notion of sacrifice and surrender. Liberality is a virtue designated for those who go beyond the comfort of sharing to giving without taking. Givers, too, are called liberal. However, those who do not take are not praised for liberality but rather for justice. Those who only take are hardly praised at all.¹⁰

Liberty and Justice for All

It is a fallacy to think wealth is intrinsically evil or that poverty is blessed. However, devotion of gathering wealth is incompatible with devotion to God.¹¹ Serving a two-headed master operating with wealth and possessions can lead to commissive temptation. Putting the love of money before care of the soul compromises the depth of love and regard for a virtuous life. How one decides to conduct business, attend to the needs of those in need, or invest in agencies that are misaligned with one's values and morals depletes the virtue of liberality. Ambrose wrote that "in the Gospel,

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, Book 4: Moral Ethics, Chapter 1

¹¹ Luke 16:13

we have received many rules of just liberality."¹²¹³ Likewise, scripture is inculcated with warning and instructions against a life of illiberality:¹⁴

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.¹⁵

Again, all virtues operate on a pendulum of extremes from the excess to the deficiency of the virtue. The excess of liberality is prodigality, and the deficiency of liberality is greed. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas telegraphed greed as sin,¹⁶ and likewise in *On Duties*, Ambrose expressed disdain for the act of one who labors with great toil to amass wealth without care or consideration for allocating the distribution of inheritance to benefit the poor.¹⁷

Ambrose, Priesthood, and Liberality

In general, Ambrose's *On Duties* serves as a priestly work of righteousness. Ambrose's approach is to shift the ethos of the church by not implementing new church laws to longstanding church leaders. Rather, Ambrose sets out to shift the church's culture by teaching incoming baptismal candidates and the clergy the importance of caring for the poor and oppressed. Using biblical laws to lay a solid framework for apostolic succession, Ambrose writes with detailed

¹² *On Duties*, 1.30.143.

¹³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

¹⁴ Proverbs 23:4-5; Matthew 16:26; 1 Timothy 6:9-11; Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁵ Matthew 6:19-21 NIV

¹⁶ "...it is a sin directly against one's neighbor, since one man cannot over-abound in external riches, without another man lacking them... it is a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, inasmuch as man contemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things." Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, (2, 118, ad 1).

¹⁷ "Often and often all that an avaricious man has got together with the greatest care, his spendthrift heir scatters abroad with headlong prodigality. The shameless prodigal, blind to the present, heedless of the future, swallows up as in an abyss what took so long to gather." Ambrose, "On Duties," 1.49.243.

instructions for those who are called to be set apart. Here we will 1) identify dualities of reflection and reason present in Ambrose's priestly role and pedagogy; 2) analyze power dynamics of liberality via Ambrose's sermon *On Joseph*, and then 3) offer annotations of Ambrose's reframing work on justice, humility, and liberality for the Christian life.

In Chapter 22 of Book 1 of *On Duties*, Ambrose sets out the important duality of both reflection and passions for the office of priest. Priests who practice reflection as a spiritual discipline, according to Ambrose, are guided by truth in search of peace and tranquility. Priests who reflect have a consciousness of positive thoughts and goodwill to steer their minds and hearts. On the contrary, priests who lead with passion move into action swiftly, sometimes too swiftly. Passion unabated is a tongue untamed. Impulsive behaviors and knee-jerk reactions yield regrettable temptations.¹⁸ Ambrose warns against the stimulation of passion or desire that may draw the believer from good logic and sensible reasoning. In other words, reason is the variable between that which is said in kindness and that which is uttered in haste. Reason is the difference between a good gesture and a harsh intent. Therefore, Ambrose's need to expound on the value of taming the tongue is more priestly than prophetic in nature because it addresses the appropriate demeanor and temperament of one who represents God.¹⁹ Instructions on how fueling one's language with Holy Scripture and being careful not to offend others with words is the crux of his priestly message. As mediators, priests serve as God's representatives, so that the words utilized and the message conveyed matter both to God and God's people. Later, we will see how Ambrose's temperance in taming the tongue proves beneficial to the church and community during the Easter Crisis of 386.

¹⁸ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.22.99.

¹⁹ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.22.99.

Ambrose instructs *competentes* in the liberality arena exercising priestly attributes. He instructs the *competentes* to put their words into action by giving willingly and in silence. He goes on to instruct them to reflect with reason, and refrain from boastful giving, extortion giving, and gaining money unjustly. He writes:

It is thus a glorious thing to wish well, and to give freely, with the one desire to do good and not to do harm. For if we were to think it our duty to give the means to an extravagant man to live extravagantly, or to an adulterer to pay for his adultery, it would not be an act of kindness, for there would be no good-will in it. We should be doing harm, not good, to another if we gave him money to aid him in plotting against his country, or in attempting to get together at our expense some abandoned men to attack the Church. Nor, again, does it look like liberality to help one who presses very hardly on widows and orphans, or attempts to seize on their property with any show of violence.²⁰

Kind words delivered in a mild tone free of insult or dispute is preferred. Ambrose's word to the believer:

Let there be discussion without wrath, urbanity without bitterness, warning without sharpness, advice without giving offence. And as in every action of our life we ought to take heed to this, in order that no overpowering impulse of our mind may ever shut out reason (let us always keep a place for counsel), so, too, ought we to observe that rule in our language, *so that* neither wrath nor hatred may be aroused, and that we may not show any signs of our *greed* or sloth.²¹

Strategically, Ambrose's priestly work on righteousness marries well with the virtue of liberality. The role and assignment of bishop or overseer is to teach, govern, and sanctify in the power of Jesus Christ those under his authority. His goal of teaching the *competentes* how to lead and conduct themselves takes skill and strategy. The "so that" or impact of the aforementioned quote is his three-fold strategy—to keep hatred, greed, and slothfulness at bay. Hatred. Greed. Slothfulness. The virtue of liberality combats all three; however, we will focus on greed by dissecting the extremes and deficiencies of the virtue of liberality.

²⁰ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.30.144.

²¹ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.22.99. [italics mine]

One end of the pendulum of liberality swings toward greed—the deficiency of liberality. Ambrose writes more about the affect and damaging impact of greed as sin than the warning and temptations of greed. He writes to the *competentes* as though they have full knowledge and understanding of their previous lessons via Ambrose’s sermons. Ambrose’s students had been schooled on greed as a subject matter in a previous exposition and, therefore, had a solid understanding of the sin of greed and its origin. He writes:

God has ordered all things to be produced, so that there should be food in common to all, and that the earth should be a common possession for all. Nature, therefore, has produced a common right for all, but greed has made it a right for a few.²²

Ambrose, thorough in his explanation to be wary of both extremes of liberality, had equally harsh warnings against excessive, wasteful spending that ultimately defames the name of God and corrupts the spiritual nature of humanity. Greed is a sin, and free will is the culprit. To choose a lap of luxury over an act of liberality is detrimental to the soul. For Ambrose, to live extravagantly and to store treasures excessively is to sin exorbitantly. The light of Christ is one’s only hope. He writes of greed:

And why dost thou build up useless heaps of treasures like spiders’ webs? . . . Thou layest aside the likeness of the Eternal King, and raisest in thyself the image of death. Rather cast out of the kingdom of thy soul the likeness of the devil, and raise up the likeness of Christ. Let this shine forth in thee; let this glow brightly in thy kingdom, that is, thy soul, for it destroys the likeness of all vices. David says of this: “O Lord, in Thy kingdom thou bringest their images to nothing.” For when the Lord has adorned Jerusalem according to His own likeness, then every likeness of the adversary is destroyed.²³

²² Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.28.132.

²³ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.49.254.

In contrast, the other end of the pendulum of liberality finds one swinging toward prodigality—the excess of liberality. Aristotle thinks “prodigality exceeds in giving and not taking, while meanness falls short in giving, and exceeds in taking, except in small things.”²⁴ He continues:

The characteristics of prodigality are not often combined; for it is not easy to give to all if you take from none; private persons soon exhaust their substance with giving, and it is to these that the name of prodigals is applied—though a man of this sort would seem to be in no small degree better than a mean man. . . . For he has the characteristics of the liberal man, since he both gives and refrains from taking, though he does neither of these in the right manner or well. Therefore, if he were brought to do so by habituation or in some other way, he would be liberal; for he will then give to the right people, and will not take from the wrong sources. This is why he is thought to have not a bad character; it is not the mark of a wicked or ignoble man to go to excess in giving and not taking, but only of a foolish one. The man who is prodigal in this way is thought much better than the mean man both for the aforesaid reasons and because he benefits many while the other benefits no one, not even himself.²⁵

In summary, as the priest lives out his role to be God’s representative in worship, so must the priest lead and conduct worship that glorifies God. This role has the priest residing between the duality of the holy and the profane. Within that ecclesial space of the holy and profane, Ambrose understands that the tension and dichotomy in worship manifests itself in the mind and spirit. The duality of reflection and passion in the mind and the duality of giving and taking in the spirit presents conflict, corruption, and confusion.²⁶ The duality of words and deeds that the priest brings to his role as God’s representative, especially in the pulpit and in officiating the sacrament of baptism, has the divine power to break every chain of the adversary. For this reason, Ambrose teaches with his words, pointing to deeds found in biblical narratives, particularly in the life of Joseph in the Old Testament. He teaches reason will overcome an untamed tongue. Reflection will bring tranquility. Hoarding and greediness are equally sinful. Giving to the poor with humility is

²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 4: Moral Ethics, Chapter 1.

²⁵ https://www.constitution.org/ari/ethic_04.htm Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 4: Moral Ethics, Chapter 1.

²⁶ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.24.105.

a perceptive mandate—not counsel—and a perfect duty.²⁷ The work of the priest is to tend to the soul—to speak to the soul with words and acts of kindness. Ambrose’s Joseph is in many respects a figure or type of Christ who humbly teaches others how to fight hatred, greed, and slothfulness with love, giving, and purpose, respectfully. This is the soul-tending work of liberality. In his priestly role, Ambrose fully embodies the characteristics, duties, and tasks of a priest with “indefatigable zeal” while living in the duality of a Christ-centered life and teaching church leaders virtuous liberality for the priesthood of *all* believers.²⁸

Land, Labor, and Liberality: Joseph, the Patriarch

The humanitarian work of the saints does not go unnoticed by Ambrose in his preaching or in his teachings to the *competentes*. In fact, the patriarchs’ humanity, flawed yet salvageable only by God’s grace, makes their lifework even more compelling to Ambrose. His affinity and respect for the patriarchs is what drives him to teach and preach on the importance of their work as exemplars. For those preparing to be baptized, he wanted the *competentes* to know and understand the power of biblical tradition and service to others as a guiding Christian principle. Ambrose writes, “For this is the recompense and the life of the saints, that they have also brought about the salvation of others”.²⁹ While his admiration and affinity runs deep for all sermonic work on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it is especially the case for Joseph.

²⁷ Hruschka, Joachim. “Supererogation and Meritorious Duties,” in *Jahrbuch Für Recht Und Ethik / Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 6 (1998): p. 96.

²⁸ Insert “zeal” quote

²⁹ Ambrose, *On Joseph*, 12.71.

Justice, for Ambrose, means alleviating the needs of others as well as rendering to others what is fitting. Interwoven in the narrative of Joseph's life in Genesis 37-50 is the virtue of justice. Joseph manifests the virtue from a young age. He honors the will of his father to seek his brothers and their flocks although Joseph is aware of his brothers' animosity toward him. He serves valiantly at the will of Potiphar, his master, as a slave despite the mistreatment of his brothers that caused his unwarranted enslavement. Ambrose's Joseph rejects the seductress advances with Potiphar's wife at the risk of causing hardship and prison time for the sake of upholding the reputation of his master. His willingness to aid fellow prisoners, particularly the pharaoh's chief butler and baker, with his gift of dream interpretation grabs the pharaoh's attention. Upon his brothers' arrival in Egypt, Ambrose notes how Joseph restrains from requiting injury and offers magnanimous hospitality and fraternal devotion to his estranged siblings. This is a moment of forgiveness, acceptance, and reconciliation that only amplifies actions (*envoi*) of exemplary leadership. This is also a moment of communitive justice. Beyond reconnection with his family rests a deeper lesson of justice for the broader community. As a statesman, Joseph forges with unyielding and strategic commitment to deliver goodwill and social responsibility on the promises of his dreams. His commitment to step into a role to implement public policies with the storage of seven-year-old grain to feed the hungry in a season of famine is both masterful leadership and faithful servanthood.³⁰ Ambrose's Joseph models distributive justice.

Allegory consistently punctuates Ambrose's reading and interpretation of the Joseph narrative. He deciphers deep meaning in the scriptures much like Joseph found deep meaning in his dreams.³¹ For this reason, Ambrose is quicker to read the work of Joseph's brothers and "the

³⁰ Genesis 41:46-57; 47:13-26.

³¹ Malden, p. 515.

Pharaoh as a man of deep human sympathy” with affirmed optimism than with justified pessimism.³² Despite the self-serving ambition, misfortunes, and hardship Joseph’s brothers have inflicted upon Joseph, Ambrose finds a constructive measure of learning from their failed leadership.³³ As a result, Ambrose assigns a virtue, liturgical practice, and New Testament narrative to each of the brothers.³⁴

Ambrose’s interpretation of Joseph’s actions and lack thereof also underscores the restraint and temperance Joseph used to manifest justice in thought, word, and deed. As Marcia Colish explains, Ambrose’s Joseph does not render evil for evil, but returns evil with good.³⁵ Repeatedly, Joseph faces injustice at the hands of others and at the expense of his brothers’ greed. The significance of Joseph for Ambrose cannot be understated for two important reasons: 1. Joseph’s narrative addresses how Joseph models for people of power the prudential use of power; and, 2. Joseph’s narrative addresses people of lower classes as one’s ability to be charitable and virtuous whatever one’s circumstance.

For the bishop and former statesman, Ambrose’s *De Joseph* sermon is addressed to people of power while emphasizing purity and modesty.³⁶ From Joseph’s journey from the pit to the prison and then to the palace, Ambrose directly chronicles the choices and decisions of those in power.

Power in the Pit

³² Colish, Marcia. *Ambrose’s Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man*, p. 143.

³³ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 143.

³⁴ Ambrose, *On Joseph*, 9.26, p. 213.

³⁵ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 145.

³⁶ *Seven Exegetical Works (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 65)*, p. 183.

In Genesis 37, Joseph is at the mercy of Jacob's paternal power and favoring love manifested in the bestowal of an ornate and lavish robe. This public, thriftless gifting—a rebuttal against hierarchal familial powers and systems—sends a strong message of inherited power to the community, especially Joseph's brothers. Such a demonstrative act by Jacob evokes a jealous rage in his other sons as they plot to kill their brother. Ultimately, the brothers' decision to sell Joseph into enslavement is a cowardly attempt to reclaim, not reframe, familial power from a brother who lives an exemplary, virtuous life beyond reproach.

In *De Joseph*, Ambrose's emphasis on actions *and* motives of a father's desire to express love for a virtuous son juxtaposes the siblings' rivalry cast in webbed envy that ensues hate. A wealthy Jacob adorns young Joseph with an ornamented garment which itself represented an expensive planned gift of future inheritances entrusted to Joseph despite his family rank as one of the younger sons. Jacob's motive, as Ambrose writes, is not to evoke envy among the brothers but to invoke honor on his young, virtuous son, Joseph:

To be sure, Jacob loved the more that son in whom he foresaw the greater marks of virtue; thus he would not appear to have shown preference so much as father to son, but rather as prophet to sacred sign. And Jacob was right to make for his son a tunic of many colors, to indicate by it that Joseph was to be preferred to his brothers with his clothing of manifold virtues.³⁷

Ambrose guards against parental powers that create both sibling alienation and a parent's excessive indulgence in caring for one child more than the other(s). Parenting powers with excess liberality teaches a child wasteful tendency while parenting powers with illiberal tendencies fosters a child's stingy behaviors. A parent's ability to strike the balance between excessiveness and deficiency of

³⁷ Seven Exegetical Works (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 65), p. 185.

liberality creates an opportunity of *content reframing* to foster a sibling love more precious than any material possession for Ambrose. He writes:

This is a more splendid manifestation of generosity on the part of the parents and a richer inheritance for the sons.... Love does not know monetary profit, in which there is a loss of love. What wonder if quarrels arise among brothers over an estate or a house, when enmity blazed up among the sons of holy Jacob over a tunic?³⁸

Despite the honor placed on Joseph by his father, the rebellion of Joseph's siblings against both the expensive tunic given to Joseph by their father and the outward expression of preferential treatment symbolizes a polarizing excessiveness of liberality therein. Joseph's brothers' collective power, driven by fear, leads to injudicious acts of greed in a failed attempt to murder their brother. Their subsequent, cheap act of selling Joseph into slavery was both ravenous and deceptive.

The planned transaction of receiving currency in exchange for human life between the wealthy traveling Ishmaelites and Jacob's affluent sons in Dothan only elevates the consequences of illiberality and abusive power in the text. The power dynamics run deeper than the cistern into which Joseph was thrown. Abusive power is pre-meditated in the brothers' plot to kill Joseph and fuels deceit in the staged, fictitious encounter with a ferocious animal.³⁹ Ruben's aim to spare Joseph's life, for example, is only a feeble act of repentance resulting in an immoral yet successful attempt to fake his younger brother's death.⁴⁰ Judah's merciless question, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?", comes from one who possesses a compulsive power in search of profit, yet lacks any level of virtue. Therefore, the brothers intended use of the thirty coins is irrelevant. Illiberality conspires with power in ways that corrupts family systems with malicious behaviors, entangles governments with shameless laws, and burdens cultures with cowardice rituals.

³⁸ Ambrose, "De Joseph", p. 187.

³⁹ Genesis 37:20.

⁴⁰ Genesis 37:21-22.

There is no substantial evidence of divine or spiritual benefit of acquiring material wealth for Ambrose. His *telos* is not the accumulation of wealth as much as the renunciation of sin for the rich and the poor alike. He proports one cannot truly possess wealth; however, wealth has the power to possess humanity. For he wrote, “You are, then, the custodian of your riches, and not their master. You who bury gold in the ground are, indeed, its servant and not its lord.”⁴¹ Whether one hoards his⁴² wealth by hiding it under a bushel or elaborately and excessively adorns oneself with precious gems and trims his abodes with ornate décor, the offense is the same—idol and insatiable worship. Moreover, Ambrose—the former counsel—can find no documentary evidence in the *Holy Writ*, no circumstantial evidence in church doctrine, no *prima facie* evidence in ecclesial polity, nor any testimony evidence in his personal experience⁴³ that unequivocally supports rich people living in a lap of luxury. One exception of obtaining wealth for Ambrose is for the sole purpose of excluding others from access for the benefit of cooperative economics and the pride that accompanies such an accomplishment. Such is the case with Joseph and his brothers.

A point of clarity is appropriate. Ambrose understood money could bring goodwill, especially good toward the poor. Ambrose had no objection to making a decent day’s wage, earning one’s keep, and working hard. Ambrose would embrace and encourage, in theory, the idea of saving—an individual who builds a small nest egg for a rainy day or who stocks up during the harvest season would be acceptable. These ideals of money are biblically based and hold virtuous

⁴¹ St. Ambrose of Milan, *On Naboth*, p. 22.

⁴² The masculine pronouns are intentional here as women were considered property themselves with no ownership rights.

⁴³ In *On Naboth*, Ambrose tells of a personal experience with a rich man, “who, in setting out of the country, was in the habit of counting out the rather small loaves that he had brought from the city, so that from the number of loaves one could estimate how many days he was going to be in the country. He did not want to open his granary, which was sealed up, lest his stores be diminished. One loaf—hardly enough to feed the miser—was assigned for each day. I also found out from trustworthy evidence that, if an egg was added to this, he would complain that a chicken had been killed. I write this so that you may know that God’s justice, which avenges the tears of the poor by your fasting is vindicatory.

attributes. With a constant flow of money, land, food, shelter, and other resources for basic human needs, Ambrose believed collective economics and collective responsibility could be achieved for the poor and marginalized in all communities. However, gray lines begin to appear for Ambrose if those saved funds fuel a self-centeredness, the self-centeredness leads to hoarding, and the hoarding becomes compulsive. Moreover, Ambrose would claim the accumulation of wealth as compulsive behavior. Ambrose understood the rich and wealthy as compulsive and enthralled with one's own power and prestige.⁴⁴

To encourage even persons of little means to give of themselves, Ambrose offers these words of motivation:

Money is easily spent; counsels can never be exhausted. They only grow the stronger by constant use. Money grows less and quickly comes to an end, and has failed even kindness itself; so that the more there are to whom one wants to give, the fewer one can help; and often one has not got what one thinks ought to be given to others. But as regards the offer of advice and active help, the more there are to spend it on, the more there seems to be, and the more it returns to its own source. The rich stream of prudence ever flows back upon itself, and the more it has reached out to, so much the more active becomes all that remains.⁴⁵

Power in the Prison

A second occasion where we see Ambrose addressing his sermon to people of power is in the prison.⁴⁶ Within a hierarchical prison system, the captain of the guard has chosen Joseph. Joseph's virtuous behavior as witnessed by the prison warden has earned him a position of power

⁴⁴ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.5.16

⁴⁵ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.15.75

⁴⁶ Genesis 39-40.

in the king's prison.⁴⁷ In Genesis 39, the Lord granted Joseph favor with the prison warden, and the warden elevated Joseph to a position of being in charge of the prison facility.

Joseph's unwarranted imprisonment came at the hands of Potiphar's wife who wrongly accused Joseph of attempted rape. Power dynamics shaped by gender culture brought an innocent Joseph to a place of punishment. Comparing the Joseph narrative to the Adam narrative, Ambrose notes how Joseph "kept the uncorrupted garments of virtue" where "Adam remained naked...once he had been stripped of the unique clothing of virtue."⁴⁸ In Joseph's virtuous nature, he refused the wife's sexual advances not because of his virtuous life as a just man and not because of physical impotence. Ambrose asserts Joseph did not comply with the wife's sexual advances because Joseph "did not know how to make accusation, and so the impure woman accomplished this with impunity."⁴⁹

Unlike Joseph, two other prisoners—the Egyptian king's butler and baker—were imprisoned at the hands of the king for their offensive and rude nature.⁵⁰ Power dynamics shaped by culture and government brought an innocent Joseph and the other two prisoners, respectively, into the same confined space. However, the persona of Joseph as one who is faithful drives his actions of dream interpretation in prison to bring benefit to his fellow prisoners. Ambrose highlights Joseph's faithfulness as a reminder to the church that virtues will lead to a good end and are pedagogical.

In *De Joseph*, as an example, Ambrose's loose connection between Joseph's virtuous power in the prison and Ambrose's own power struggle with the Arians' basilica takeover are justice matters that lead to a good end. In the sermon, Ambrose alludes to the Easter Crisis of 386

⁴⁷ Genesis 39:20.

⁴⁸ Ambrose, *Seven Exegetical Works* (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 65), p. 200.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁵⁰ Genesis 40:1.

AD—a dispute over the Arian attempt to gain possession of Ambrose’s larger, newer basilica in Milan in 386 AD. In the dispute, Ambrose voluntarily barricaded himself in the church, refusing to “surrender the altars of God” while also leading against the violence and bloodshed that ensued.⁵¹

While Ambrose’s personal leadership decisions are noble, his acts as bishop were in pursuit of justice for the corporate body of the church and the preservation of the basilica. Notably, the illiberality of both physical and economic imprisonment for merchants and congregants during Holy Week led to innocent people being held captive in chains and by purse strings.⁵² However, Ambrose stood as an authority of the church, vested by God, to proclaim secular power had no authority over the Church and those things which belonged to God. Ambrose wrote, “The palaces belong to the Emperor, the churches to the Bishop. Authority is committed to you over public, not over sacred buildings.”⁵³

Ambrose’s virtuous acts of goodwill are lessons for both the church and the emperor. Marcia Colish writes about Ambrose’s Joseph and his manifestation of fortitude as a virtue.⁵⁴ The fortitude of which Ambrose preaches is the fortitude he exhibits six ways during the Easter Crisis of 386. First, Ambrose is willing to sacrifice his own life over the lives of others, both believers and non-believers, for the sake of the Church’s mission.⁵⁵ Second, in the mist of chaos, Ambrose’s temperance also manages to entice the government soldiers into the church as a safe haven.⁵⁶ Third, again, Ambrose is an exemplar of non-violent leadership in the midst of the threat of his own freedom and safety. Fourth, as bishop, Ambrose has the power to call for the attack of government

⁵¹ Ambrose, Epistle 22.16.

⁵² Ambrose, Epistle 22.6.

⁵³ Ambrose, Epistle 22.19.

⁵⁴ Colish, 136.

⁵⁵ Ambrose, Epistle 22, 13.

⁵⁶ Ambrose, Epistle 22.13.

soldiers, yet he called the church to pray. Fifth, despite royal hangings, Ambrose holds strong to the tenet that no one has imperial power over things that belong to God.⁵⁷ (Joseph’s brothers would also learn that the bonds of enslavement would not keep Joseph from the redemptive power of God.) Sixth, of the many threats against Ambrose’s episcopal leadership—the Goths, armed men, the heathen, the fines of the merchants, the sufferings of the Saints—like Joseph, his virtuous nature against powers and principalities of the world never wavered.⁵⁸

As a second example in *De Joseph*, Ambrose also alluded to the eunuch, Calligonus, a Syrian and grand chamberlain to the Emperor Valentinian II, who addressed Ambrose in the attempt to threaten Ambrose’s life after the Easter Crisis of 386.⁵⁹ The power of the eunuch as a high official was for the sole benefit of the emperor, not always for the benefit and goodwill of the people. Calligonus’ life-threatening and emboldened words against Ambrose was an existential threat to the person of Ambrose and the virtues he represented. It was also a hint, as Neil McLynn notes, that “Ambrose could expect repercussions.”⁶⁰ With Ambrose’s victory could have come vengeance, but this was not the case due to Ambrose’s virtuous temperament. However, Calligonus, who was willing, per the emperor’s order, to execute Ambrose as a tyrant to Valentinian would himself later be executed by the order of the emperor for this disloyalty.

Calligonus’ obligation and willingness as a eunuch to fulfill the emperor’s will conjured mistrust for Ambrose. In general, the eunuchs’ intent to turn “the mind of the king towards what

⁵⁷ Ambrose, Epistle 20.19.

⁵⁸ Theologian Neil McLynn describes Ambrose’s valiant leadership efforts as “holding a wolf by the ears.” I agree that his efforts move beyond categories of strategy or agile leadership. Ambrose’s success is contingent upon his faith, the mission at hand, and his willingness to give freely for the goodwill of others.

⁵⁹ In Ambrose’s *Epistle 20.28*, Ambrose explains to his sister that the eunuch Calligonus said to him, ‘Do you despise Valentinian while I am alive? I’m taking away your head!’ Ambrose’s curt reply: “May God allow you to do what you have threatened. May I suffer what is appropriate for a bishop, and may you do what is appropriate for a eunuch.’

⁶⁰ McLynn, Neil B., *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, p. 196.

was in their own interests rather than the public good (*exa.* 5.21.68).”⁶¹ As Keith Hopkins explains, eunuchs in politics in the later Roman Empire had a distinct collective power that was not always communal:

[Eunuchs’] non-assimilability to the aristocracy left them isolated, not as individuals but as a group. And it was as a group that they exercised power. The grand chamberlain and the high officers stole the limelight, but beneath them there must have been a substantial number of chamberlains of all ages gradually progressing upwards through the ranks. Their survival depended upon the emperor’s favour; the price was that they served his interests; the rewards were great wealth and high rank; though the greater the power, the higher the risks of sudden demotio [sic] and execution.⁶²

Nevertheless, unlike the eunuchs’ interests, Ambrose makes it clear to the emperor’s powers that persecution would be met by martyrdom.⁶³ The power dynamics are palpable. In the Easter Crisis of 386, there is the power struggle between 1) the bishop and the emperor, 2) the basilica and the city, 3) the soldiers and the citizens, 4) the merchants and the debtors, 5) the Arianism and Homoousian, 6) violent and non-violent tactics and 7) royal power and ecclesial authority. All of this occurred in the backdrop of the liturgical calendar of Holy Week, when the church wrestled with Jesus’ power struggle between humanity and divinity and the tug-of-war between a grave and an empty tomb.

The power struggle between two Egyptian eunuchs who served in the king’s palace was more internal than external. For the chief butler, he was responsible for providing wine to the king. For the baker, he was responsible for the king’s food. Most biblical scholars think a breach of trust resulted in their imprisonment. Whatever the cause of the prison sentence, Ambrose notes Joseph’s use of his divine power to interpret dreams with truth. Colish notes that although Joseph knows the baker’s deathly fate, he is quick to convey God’s message to him because of his virtuous nature

⁶¹ Moorhead, John. *Ambrose: Church and Society in the Late Roman World (The Medieval World)*, p. 140.

⁶² Hopkins, *Eunuchs in Politics in The Later Roman Empire*

⁶³ Moorhead, p. 155.

to tell the truth.⁶⁴ Ambrose lifts the same point making the added argument of a façade of reality. A human's mind centered in worldly power as a reality not grounded in mysteries of God but in insubstantial pleasures.⁶⁵

The virtue of a statesman or a “new man” signals that Joseph models to those with power and wealth a prudential use of power. Ambrose had a love of humanity—all of humanity. The virtue of love shines through Ambrose's deed of redemption to captives:

This was in the year 378. [The Thrace and Illyria] provinces were invaded by the Goths, who after the defeat and death of Valens at Hadrianople ravaged the whole country, and carried away with them a vast number of captives and afterwards sold them into slavery. St. Ambrose busied himself in redeeming all he could. He tells us himself how his efforts were met by the Arian party.⁶⁶

Ambrose's expression of his love for all humanity by selling the church's gold plates in order to release enslaved captives to freedom is an action of redemption and resurrection. He writes:

To this no answer could be given. For what wouldst thou say: I feared that the temple of God would need its ornaments? He would answer: The sacraments need not gold, nor are they proper to gold only—for they are not bought with gold. *The glory of the sacraments is the redemption of captives.* Truly they are precious vessels, for they redeem men from death. That, indeed, is the true treasure of the Lord which effects what His blood effected. Then, indeed, is the vessel of the Lord's blood recognized, when one sees in either redemption, so that the chalice redeems from the enemy those whom His blood redeemed from sin. How beautifully it is said, when long lines of captives are redeemed by the Church: These Christ has redeemed. Behold the gold that can be tried, behold the useful gold, behold the gold of Christ which frees from death, behold the gold whereby modesty is redeemed and chastity is preserved.⁶⁷

Just as quickly as Ambrose shared the practical and mystical benefits of liberality, Ambrose also warns of the dangers of wasteful almsgiving and liberality (e.g., giving boastfully, giving

⁶⁴ Colish, p. 142.

⁶⁵ Ambrose, *On Joseph*, p. 204.

⁶⁶ Ambrose, *De Fide* (trans. Warren Smith), 102.

⁶⁷ Ambrose, *De off*, 2.28.138 (italics mine).

unkindly, giving in ignorance).⁶⁸ He walks the reader through appropriate guardrails to one's benevolence to prevent malicious destruction and unintended mayhem from destroying the body of Christ.

The conception of liberality as a virtue centered on justice with the poor reflects Ambrose's view of giving freely to all, for all. The capture, enslavement, and sale of humans was both an economic endeavor and a political practice, which produced profit and boosted trade commerce in the ancient world. As William Klingshirn explains the net-profit of systemic human captivity, "the captive could be sold back for a ransom higher than their value on the slave market."⁶⁹ The onus was placed on the captured to find someone (e.g., clients, fellow citizens, patrons, relatives) to pay a ransom for her freedom in the form of a loan or a gift. If loaned, the newly released captive was by law deemed as property and was entrusted to the ransom-holder into debt servitude with labor. Once the debt had been paid with labor, the servant was legally granted *postliminium*. If the enslaved were gifted a ransom, however, this prompted an immediate *ius postliminii* release. The economic enterprise of practicing the exchange of goods by bartering with human life was nothing new to the ancient Roman world, its laws, or practicing Christians. Again, Klingshirn writes:

Cicero describes redemption of those captured by *praedones* as a laudable form of *liberalitas*, along with the recuse of a friend from debt or the completion of his daughter's dowry. Similarly, in relation to early Rome, Dionysius of Halicarnassus mentions redemption from captivity as one of the duties clients had toward their patrons.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Liberality stems from the Latin term *liber*, meaning both "free" and "generous," and *liberalis*, "befitting a free-born person." The noun form corresponding to these two words was *liberalitas*, or "liberality."

⁶⁹ William Klingshirn, "Charity and Power: Caesarius of Arles and the Ransoming of Captives in Sub-Roman Gaul," in *The Journal of Roman Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 184.

⁷⁰ Klingshirn, "Charity and Power: Caesarius of Arles and the Ransoming of Captives in Sub-Roman Gaul," 184.

However, Ambrose introduces *redemption captivorum* as an ecclesial leader who upholds the reception of captives as the highest form of *liberalitas*. Ambrose was not the first bishop to pay ransoms, and he certainly would not be the last. In comparison, Ambrose stakes a higher claim and heavier weight on this variety of liberality. The greatest of liberality, he said:

...is to redeem captives to snatch them from the hands of the enemy; to take people away from death, and especially, to take women away from dishonour; to give children back to parents, parents to children; and to restore citizens to their country.⁷¹

The church Ambrose led as bishop was comprised of rich landowners, businesspersons, and other noblemen and noblewomen who did not need to receive alms but whom Ambrose believed needed to tend to the soul by learning how to give alms. Ambrose stressed to the *competentes* that charity work with the rich served as a worthy evangelist tool that fit the Roman church's demographics. The church did not oppose the civic traditions of charity and its ability for small loan transactions among peers. Nor did the church oppose landowners providing rent rebates as an act of mercy.

The Gospel of John helps to make this point. John's narrative of Jesus' encounter with the man who was born blind includes Jesus' reply to the question about the begging blind man's sinful nature.⁷² What damning thing did he do that caused him blindness? What soul-shattering evil has moved God to a place of wrath on the man's eyes? John's gospel brings the poor into the text as one who proves to be self-sufficient after an encounter with Jesus. The story is then reframed for the rich to recognize the poor as not helpless but as humans in need of support. The rich worship

⁷¹ Off. 2.15.70.

⁷² Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. –John 9:4

in a space where the blind beggar is presented before Jesus. Without the need of the poor and the Christian's need to give alms, the church's mission becomes a privatized, prodigal prison where the profits of evangelism are no longer prophetic.

Power in the Palace

Holy Joseph opened the garners to all; he did not shut them up. He did not try to get the full price of the year's produce, but assigned it for a yearly payment. He took nothing for himself, but, so far as famine could be checked for the future, he made his arrangements with careful foresight.⁷³

Transference of power takes place in a palace at the time of the incoming and outgoing of a new leader. For Joseph, a transference of power takes place with each dream Joseph interprets for the king in the palace. In Genesis 41, Pharaoh dreams about seven fat cows, seven lean cows, seven healthy heads of grain, and seven scorched heads of grain, with the Nile River serving as the backdrop.⁷⁴ After magicians and astrologers are unable to interpret the dream, the chief butler who had experienced Joseph's dream interpretation recalled Joseph's interpretation ability. On the surface, the dreams center on agriculture and harvesting. However, Ambrose's Joseph imparts the virtue of wisdom and humility to help the reader understand the spiritual implications of Pharaoh's dream. Where there is a seesaw of abundance and scarcity, there is need for the virtue of liberality. An overabundance and excess of cows and grains could offer communitive justice in the sharing of resources. Excessiveness could also threaten the community with greed and abhorrence for seven years with no "reverence due God."⁷⁵ In contrast, scarcity of food and a shortage of land to

⁷³ Ambrose, *On Duties*. 3.6.42

⁷⁴ Genesis 41:1-7.

⁷⁵ Ambrose, *On Joseph*, 7.38, p. 208.

grow grain could result in hoarding and economic distress. Joseph's wisdom to stockpile grain not for his personal benefit or benefaction but for the good and well-being of the entire land, which brought benefit to all, is a strong measure of liberality. Joseph is quick to credit God's infinite wisdom and grace for his gift of interpretation.⁷⁶

The theme of liberality is the power in the palace that transfers the focus from Pharaoh to Joseph. Joseph's wisdom transfers his brothers' fears and anger to humility and gratitude. Liberality expands the palace's resources to all classes of people. Liberality reconciles Joseph to his brothers and father. Liberality offers forgiveness where resentment is preferred.

Ambrose's view of Joseph's leadership is especially exemplary and significant for people of lower classes. Joseph's choice not to inflict harm in return for wrong done to him by his brothers for this suffering is noble. Pedestaled by his parents and then tromped by his brothers, Joseph used the palace as a place and space grounded in liberality.

In contrast, Ambrose's commentary *On Naboth* based on 1 Kings 21 focuses more on his theological thoughts on the abhorrent immorality of powerful wealthy persons and the roles they play in their communities than it focuses on his understanding of the plights and strengths of financially poor and impoverished people. More than fluctuating banking markets, moral philosophy, or legal court rulings—in all of which Ambrose is well versed—Ambrose leans upon scripture after scripture to propagate the accumulation of earthly possessions, the aggregation of landed property, and the amassment of luxurious purchases as sins of commission. For the banker, growing assets is acceptable and making money in excess is preferred as long as the transactions are legal and ultimately benefits the bank. For the realtor, profit comes when communities

⁷⁶ Genesis 41:16.

understand and appreciate how land ownership secures possession and power based on where the property is located. Real estate often provides homeland stability for generations based on the economic theory of supply and demand. A shortage in the real estate market, as much as overflooded landholding markets, can create financial losses in an environment lacking quality and quantity. For the ethicist, the moral compass might point to someone in a position of wealth and luxury as good and noble based on a battery of questions: How did the person acquire their wealth? What is the intent of this wealth? If wealth were accumulated as the result of theft or robbery, for example, the ethicist could identify the money as a liability and the person in possession of it as unethical but not sinful. In contrast, if wealth were being created legally to benefit oneself, the ethicist might describe the investor as wise, decent, and even virtuous. In other words, where the banker can find benefit in wealth and the realtor can appreciate the value of investment property and the ethicist can find good in good-hearted, rich people, all Ambrose sees is sin fueled by a compulsive behavior.

In *On Naboth*, Ambrose points to King Ahab's sin of coveting the possessions of a poor neighbor as more egregious than any violent act of the criminal mind. For Ambrose, the king's desire to possess the land of his poor neighbor, Naboth, acquired through the proverbial and generational blood, sweat, and tears of his ancestors is a self-serving, premeditated labor of cruelty with eternal consequences. Every intentional act of personal gain with limited or no considerable regard to relieve the suffering of the poor, for Ambrose, is a stockpiling of moral pillage, rapine, and plunder. Wealth, in general, will come to a person either because of one's labor, inheritance, or a gift; however, it is easy for both the rich and the poor to violate God's law because of human's subjection to sin.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Walter Kaiser, "Ownership and Property in the Old Testament Economy", (September 12, 2012). <https://tifwe.org/resource/ownership-and-property-in-the-old-testament-economy/>, p. 1.

Ambrose, the Church, and Humility

Ambrose's Joseph pushed for unity and cohesion among his brothers from a place of honor and power in the palace.⁷⁸ In the same light, Ambrose pushed for cohesion and unity in the church where the rich, the not-so-rich, and the poor might assemble in the house of prayer for worship. Contextually, it was just as important who worshipped as much as who was to be worshipped. The church needed to combat paganism's prevalence with 1) clarity of purpose and 2) intent in worship. Ambrose instructed the clergy as God's representatives to welcome all, especially the poor. A proponent of cultural inclusion and social justice reform, Ambrose's plea for the church to befriend the poor was also an invitation for the poor to worship God in the church as brothers and sisters in Christ. He writes:

Great, then, is the glory of justice; for she, existing rather for the good of others than of self, is an aid to the bonds of union and fellowship amongst us. She holds so high a place that she has all things laid under her authority, and further can bring help to others and supply money; nor does she refuse her services, but even undergoes dangers for others.⁷⁹

There are two kinds of free-giving, one arising from liberality, the other from wasteful extravagance. It is a mark of liberality to receive the stranger, to clothe the naked, to redeem the captives, to help the needy. It is wasteful to spend money on expensive banquets and much wine. Wherefore one reads: "Wine is wasteful, drunkenness is abusive." It is wasteful to spend one's own wealth merely for the sake of gaining the favour of the people. This they do who spend their inheritance on the games of the circus, or on theatrical pieces and gladiatorial shows, or even a combat of wild beasts, just to surpass the fame of their forefathers for these things. All this that they do is but foolish, for it is not right to be extravagant in spending money even on good works.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ambrose, *De Joseph*, 10.53, p. 217.

⁷⁹ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.28.136.

⁸⁰ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.21.109.

Ambrose's harsh judgment toward self-aggrandizement does not come without distressed warning against an individual's or a nation's acts of injustice. Because God's judgment is heavy-handed, the judgment warrants sharp admonition and fair alarm. There is a balancing scale of poetic justice that Ambrose also wants the *competentes* to consider:

Who would not gladly climb and hold the heights of this virtue [of justice], were it not that greed weakens and lessens the power of such a virtue? For as long as we want to add to our possessions and to heap up money, to take into our possession fresh lands, and to be the richest of all, we have cast aside the form of justice and have lost the blessing of kindness towards all. How can he be just that tries to take from another what he wants for himself?⁸¹

Often Ambrose tiptoes through his arguments on public policy on behalf of the church's care for the poor citizen. However, there are poignant times when he stampedes his way through the halls of justice for social reform pointing out societal flaws and merciless acts of selfishness. Matters of the most socially vulnerable—the virgins, the widows, the imprisoned, and the enslaved—consume his carnal thoughts with compassionate theological reflections. His mission and intent are not so much to change the minds and hearts of the pagan citizens of Rome as it is to guide the church to see a more excellent way. His intent is to shift the church from the institutionalization of *plebs* citizens reaching benefactor status to the important work of following in the ways and instructions of Christ to care for the needs of the poor without reciprocity. Ambrose's intent is for the Christian to find benefit in acts of personal holiness and respect for all humanity. Ambrose gives only broad accounts to the Roman public laws, which foster generational traditions of civic euergetism with the rich and their love for their Roman citizenship. As noted in Chapter 1, civic engagement groomed citizens to give generously for the good and benefit of other citizens but left no time or attention to consider the needs of others beyond selfish gain. Ambrose's

⁸¹ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.28.137.

acknowledgement of the dichotomy between ingrained culture of civic euergetism and his attempt to teach church leaders the ways of charitable works with distributive justice in one hand and compassionate liberality in the other is itself an act of humility.

Richard Finn's article, "The Neglected Virtue," explained the evolution of humility as a virtue. Humility was not only upheld as a virtue in Classical Greek or Roman philosophy; it was viewed as lowly or weak as one suffering evil. In the Ancient world, *humilitas* meant a despicable origin with low social class status. In Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, the question on whether happiness is a freestanding virtue or a virtue in conjunction with good behavior, good luck, etc., prescribes apparent evils, which stifle or afflict humanity such that happiness cannot be achieved or accomplished.⁸² Cicero's list of evils included: "poverty, obscurity, insignificance, loneliness, loss of property, severe physical pain, ruined health, infirmity, blindness, fall of one's country, exile and, to crown all, slavery." "Insignificance," Finn explains, translates to *humilitas* in Latin.⁸³ Therefore, many understood humility to be antithetical to virtue and anyone identified as *humilitas* as insignificant and less than human. This ideal justified all manners of cupidity in the public acceptance of slavery, land ownership, the mistreatment of women, and the lack of almsgiving and charity to the poor for both pagans and practicing Christians.

Just as ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre has trained the reader to ask whose justice one is studying, so Ambrose asks the baptismal candidates whose understanding of humility will they embody. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, born in a lowly manger, challenges classical ethics thinking about humility and, at least for the early Christian community, dispels the notion of humility as punishment and an evil vice. New Testament scriptures point to humility as a

⁸² Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *Tusculan Disputations*, p. 109.

⁸³ Richard Finn, "The Neglected Virtue," *New Blackfriars*, July/August 1996, Vol. 77, No. 906 (July/August 1996), p. 348. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/43249898>.

Christian virtue to which believers in Christ are to pursue as valuable gain (Philippians 2:3), a position in which to bear one another's burden (Ephesians 4:2), and clothe yourself in humility in reverence to God and your elder (1 Peter 5:5-8). Of these three, Ambrose's theological understanding of humility aligns most closely with the goal of avoiding selfish ambition, a lesson he aims for his future ministers to comprehend to advocate for the needs of the poor. He deconstructs the Christian tenets of *humilitas* by impressing upon the *competentes* the importance of charity as a useful and necessary tool to commend one's self to God. For Ambrose, surrendering one's self to God and living a life of humility and compassion for the poor are not mutually exclusive. Where Cicero thinks humility is a sign of weakness and evil affliction and Aquinas thinks humility is a "virtue needed by all", Ambrose understands the virtue of humility as necessary for the Christian life, specifically to tame prideful thoughts and to avoid a lack of ambitiousness. Humility, for Ambrose is the cornerstone of charity.

Charity, for Ambrose, is tangible, freestanding, honorable and necessary work that moves the Christian from a place of self-righteousness and self-aggrandizement to a space of *liberalitas*. Charity is giving freely in community and in silence as a means to a humble end.⁸⁴ Giving to others without the expectation of a returned favor or gift and still understanding one's self no greater than the person in need is an act of humility. Of course, questions of possible exploitation and abuse are fair and reasonable for the skeptic, and Ambrose rebuttals with specific examples with little room for refute:

Even if a slave should utter abuse, the just man is silent; even if a feeble person affronts him, the just man is silent; and even if a poor man makes false accusations, the just man makes no reply. These are the weapons of the just; they conquer by yielding, just as men skilled at the javelin are accustomed to win by given ground and while they flee to wound their pursuer with heavier blows.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.28.68.

⁸⁵ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.5.20.

Ambrose leads with humility. As Richard Finn notes, Ambrose reworks his *On Duties* introduction writings from Cicero's with careful attention to note his own deficiencies as a teacher, presenting himself as a fellow student and as one with a bearing dependency as still a student, not a teacher, of scriptures.⁸⁶ Humility, while it is not a cardinal virtue, *per se*, it is "an appropriate social deference" in the Christian faith that helps one mark her place in relation not with other humans but in relation to her creator.⁸⁷ The act of humility in service to the poor is the Christian's obligation to humble one's self as God has humbled God's self in Jesus Christ. Ambrose wrote:

To those rejected by the Church supplies must be granted if they are in want of food. He, then, that observes method in his giving is hard towards none, but is free towards all. We ought not only to lend our ears to hear the voices of those who plead, but also our eyes to look into their needs. Weakness calls more loudly to the good dispenser than the voice of the poor. It cannot always be that the cries of an importunate beggar will never extort more, but let us not always give way to impudence. He must be seen who does not see thee. He must be sought for who is ashamed to be seen. He also that is in prison must come to thy thoughts; another seized with sickness must present himself to thy mind, as he cannot reach thy ears.⁸⁸

Ambrose's power of restraint with humility is notable. Beyond how little he writes about his personal acts of liberality in the giving of his possessions to the poor upon his election as bishop and his accumulated wealth leading up to his election, Ambrose's humility as a leader emulates inner restraint. This restraint is not only taught to his ministers in training, but it is also in a powerful restraint from political retaliation against Emperor Theodosius in 390 who would eventually cease attack and ask for penance publicly. Rather than utilizing requiting injury, Ambrose's letter writing skills forged just enough restraint to call for a cease-fire, suspend the conflict, and demand an act of public penance. Using King David (2 Samuel 24) as an exemplar,

⁸⁶ Richard Finn, "The Neglected Virtue," p. 351.

⁸⁷ Finn, p. 353.

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.16.77.

Ambrose's tactical approach to demand humility while also managing his own levels of self-control and temperance gave way to no longer neglecting the art of humility as a formidable virtue in the Christian narrative.⁸⁹

Humility as a form of submission for Ambrose was also found in the work of 2nd century martyr St. Lawrence, who famously sold that church's vessels and gave the profits and all the church's treasury to the poor. When the prefect demanded that Lawrence give over the church's assets, Lawrence went through the city of Rome and gathered all the poor and sick people supported by the church. He showed them to the prefect and said: "These people are the Church's treasure."⁹⁰ The furious prefect immediately ordered the killing of Lawrence as an execution by fire so he would suffer more. The saint was tied on top of an iron grill over a slow fire that roasted him. Here, St. Lawrence's offering of the poor as an offering of the church's wealth sends a message to the world that the church's mission includes liberty and justice for all, especially the poor.

The weightiness of justice is necessary to attain the "glory of justice":

Justice, then, has to do with the society of the human race, and the community at large. For that which holds society together is divided into two parts,—justice and good-will, which also is called liberality and kindness. Justice seems to me the loftier, liberality the more pleasing, of the two. The one gives judgment, the other shows goodness.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Theodosius did public penance at the close of the year 390. Ambrose gave him absolution at Christmas. Four years later in January 395 Theodosius was dead. In his funeral sermon the bishop praised the emperor's humility in doing penance and cited the same example of King David from the closing chapter of 2 Samuel.... As David found pardon, so did Theodosius. And each follows, says Ambrose, the example of humility set by Christ. Ambrose returns to David as exemplar of penitential humility yet again in his commentary on Luke's Gospel.

⁹⁰ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.28.140.

⁹¹ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.28.130.

For this reason, Ambrose's immediate actions after being elected bishop included giving all of his possessions to the poor. Clearly, Ambrose sought to enter an ascetic lifestyle. This act alone would qualify Ambrose as a philanthropist, but what kind of philanthropist was he? Because Ambrose's writing is more theocentric than egocentric, I submit Ambrose was a theocentric philanthropist with an eye toward liberty and justice for all.

Again, we must stress Ambrose's disdain for planned giving and legacies. He believed legacies were simply a more palatable and justifiable way to hoard and deny the poor. In Matthew 26:11, Jesus says, "The poor will always be with us." There is always an immediate need to give alms to the poor. To delay and deny this act of compassion and kindness is sinful. Ambrose and Cicero's differing views on legacies is a microcosm of the wider chasm between their ideologies.⁹² In *On Duties*, Ambrose sets out to contextually reframe and rival Cicero's understanding of leadership and public service. As Peter Brown writes:

In writing his own *On Duties*, Ambrose deliberately echoed Cicero point by point. Cicero had written the *On Duties* for his son, Laelius. Ambrose wrote for his "spiritual sons"—primarily for the clergy of Milan and for the circle of like-minded bishops whom he had gathered around him. Like Cicero's Laelius, they must learn to be public men. Like Laelius, Ambrose's "sons"—the clergy—were expected to usher in "a renaissance of sound leadership. This meant, in effect, that Ambrose went out of his way to ensure that his bishops and clergy would not be like the clergy of an earlier, more relaxed generation."⁹³

As much as Ambrose replaced some of Cicero's philosophical and political writing with more theological ideals, he could not unhinge himself from Cicero's theory of cohesion—a desire to cement loyalty for and acceptance of a society where hope could thrive and community and civility could be sustained for the good of all humanity. This audacity of hope is understood as a

⁹² Davidson, Ivor J. "Ambrose's *De Officiis* and the Intellectual Climate of the Late Fourth Century." *Vigiliae Christianae* 49, no. 4 (1995), p. 315.

⁹³ Brown, Peter. *Through the Eye of the Needle*, p. 127.

discipline, not a feeling.⁹⁴ As Brown writes, “Cicero’s *res publica* was an oasis of sanity and order in a relentless world, swept by warfare and numerous civil strife.”⁹⁵

The vile deeds of a violent approach to power, conjoined with the deep desire to find another course of action to bring cohesion and unity in the community, was the catalyst for which Cicero risked his reputations, and in the end, his life. What Cicero saw on display in the Republic, Ambrose addressed in the church centuries later. Applying thin layers of Cicero’s pagan thoughts with his own thoughts and experiences as a Christian theologian, politician, and ecclesial leader, Ambrose emphasized “the peculiarly intense cohesion and militancy of the Catholic Church.”⁹⁶ Ambrose understood the need for a full-armor-of-God approach to disrupt the current pattern and redirect the Catholic Church from its insular habits, discover new ways to find loyalty and commitment to one’s country because of her or his loyalty and commitment to Christ and His Church.

As practical and pragmatic as Cicero was principled, the accumulation of private property and the acquisition of land was as sacred of an act for Cicero than any sacrosanct experience. For Cicero, “justice consisted in preserving the private rights of individuals provided that the republic interest was not weakened.”⁹⁷ However, Ambrose pushed beyond Cicero’s civil justice on possessory interest to a redemptive and restorative justice. Ambrose believed Christians should support a more “heroic and expansive definition of justice.”⁹⁸ To acquire and keep private property was not enough for Ambrose. Property possession was a hindrance to the community’s ability to share openly and freely. The taxes, fees, time, and financial upkeep staggered one’s ability to share

⁹⁴ Jennings, Willie. “Forming Faithful Places,” Geddes W. Hanson Lectureship Addresses Race and Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, October 17, 2018, Miller Chapel, 3:00pm.

⁹⁵ Brown, Peter. *Through the Eye of the Needle*, p. 130

⁹⁶ Brown, Peter. *Through the Eye of the Needle*, p. 130.

⁹⁷ Brown, Peter. *Through the Eye of the Needle*, p. 131.

⁹⁸ Brown, Peter. *Through the Eye of the Needle*, p. 131.

in almsgiving. Property was not there to be owned; as part of God's nature, it was there to be shared.

Next, they considered it consonant with justice that one should treat common, that is, public property as public, and private as private. However, this is not even in accord with nature, for nature has poured forth all things for all humans for common use. God has ordered all things to be produced, so that there should be food in common to all, and that the earth should be a common possession for all. Nature, therefore, has produced a common right for all, but greed has made it a right for a few. Here, too, we are told that the Stoics taught that all things which are produced on the earth are created for the use of humans, but that humans are born for the sake of men, so that mutually one may be of advantage to another.⁹⁹

With penal substitution, Christ satisfied the demands of God's justice by taking on himself the punishment for human sin in our place on the cross. When God created the world, God was after a world where the virtue of justice and the pursuit of righteousness could be obtained. Original sin prohibits humans from living in pursuit of justice except God extends forgiveness to humanity in God's plan for creation so that the demands of justice can be satisfied. Both undeserved forgiveness and genuine justice for all.

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.28.132.

“Weakness calls more loudly to the good dispenser than the voice of the poor.”

Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.16.77

In the 12th century, rabbi and philosopher Moses Maimonides’ “Golden Ladder of Charity” in the Mishneh Torah encapsulated the beliefs and virtues that undergirded many of the ancient giving practices. Based on the biblical image of Jacob’s ladder in Genesis,¹ the “Golden Ladder of Charity” extends higher and higher.² At the bottom of the eight-step ladder, giving unwillingly is the first step to virtuous giving while the top step of giving allows a person to help him or herself in order to prevent the need for charity altogether and thereby promote economic self-reliance.³ In between the first and last steps of the charity ladder are opportunities of giving where one’s *logos* (evidence) and *pathos* (feelings/emotions) are more important than one’s *ethos* (reputation).

The second step of the ladder is to give cheerfully but disproportionately to the distressed who suffer.⁴ As an example, one might give money to one homeless family on one street corner

¹ Genesis 28:10-19. The “Ladder of Charity” is known as the “Ladder of Tzedakah.” Tzedakah [צדקה] is not just about charitable contributions, but about justice and righteousness. To contemporary Jews, the term *tzedakah* connotes giving charitable donations to the poor, but the term originates in another realm. In the Bible, *tzedakah* means “righteous behavior” and is often paired with “justice” (i.e. Deuteronomy 16:20). In Jewish thought and tradition, material support for those in need is not a matter of “charity”—a term that implies generosity beyond what may be expected—but a requirement. As in most areas of life, here too Jewish tradition makes practical demands and specifies expectations.

² The 8-step ladder includes: giving unwillingly; giving willingly but inadequately; giving adequately after being asked; giving before being asked; giving to an unknown recipient; giving anonymously to a known recipient; giving anonymously to an unknown recipient. And the highest level of giving is anticipating charity by preventing poverty.

³ Jewish scholar, James A. Diamond, notes the correlation between Jacob’s revelation in the beauty and freedom of an ascetic life after the ladder dream in Bethel and Maimonides’ ladder imagery to challenge humanity’s priority to see and respond with empathy to the needs of others. He states:

“What is relevant... is that the austere existence signified by bread to eat and clothing to wear is a prerequisite for physical and psychic health in that the more one values corporeal satisfaction the less likely it will ever be satiated for ‘because of the fact that the soul becomes familiarised with, and accustomed to, unnecessary things and consequently acquires the habit of desiring things that are unnecessary... this desire is some thing infinite.’ Such a person becomes a malcontent ‘always sad and despondent because he is not able to achieve the luxury attained by someone else.’ At this early juncture of the Jacob narrative, the vision of the ladder, Jacob presents as an archetype of mental and physical well being whose priorities dictate a near monastic existence consequent to the realisation that beyond survival, physical needs are expendable.”

(James A. Diamond, “Jacob’s Melancholic Descent from the Ladder: A Maimonidean Biblical Construct,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 52:1 (2011): 70.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 9:7.

but may not feel obligated to give to every other homeless family one encounters on the streets that day.

The third step is to give cheerfully and proportionately but not until one is asked for the gift or help. The fourth step is giving before being asked. The fifth step is giving without knowing to whom he or she gives, although the recipient knows the identity of the donor. The sixth step is giving without making one's identity known. The seventh step on the ladder is giving without knowing of whom one gives—unnamed givers and recipients. The recipient does not know from whom he or she receives. The eighth step of giving helps another to become self-supporting by a gift or a loan or by finding employment for the recipient.⁵ This step—the most meritorious of all—anticipates charity by preventing poverty. It assists by teaching the disheartened neighbor by teaching her or him a trade so that she or he may earn a decent wage and avoid the humiliating act of asking for charity. Again, this is the highest step of the Golden Ladder. These steps, from top to bottom, have elevated all manner of giving, illustrated the power of philanthropy, and directly influenced charitable acts throughout the centuries.

While Ambrose's philosophical and theological approach to liberality and altruistic ideals is less methodical than Maimonides', his way is no less meticulous. Because of his comprehensive approach to the topic of liberality, it is nothing short of masterful. His methodology of liberality—as with all the virtues, in general—takes the reader on a scenic road with many detours. However, each detour leads the reader to a clear destination point—the virtue of liberality is in all and is expected of all. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Ambrose's pathway to the virtue of liberality

⁵ Victor M Parachin. 2016. "The 'Golden Ladder of Charity': How to Become a Better Giver." *The Priest* 72 (1): 48–49. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIiGEV171001003980&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

is clearly more demonstrative in his public pedagogy than in his introspective theatrics. Ambrose gives as not to bring attention to himself as a Roman citizen, but he gives as an exercise of faith as a Christian baptized believer.

Ambrose's Liberality for All

While Cicero's *On Duties* distinctively addresses generosity into three categories of financial giving, individual giving, and community giving, Ambrose covers various types of generosity.⁶ Ambrose's types of generosity included 1) kindness and 2) hospitality versus prodigality. Cicero wrote about extending gestures of hospitality for political gain and self-interest;⁷ however, Ambrose saw the communal benefit of extending hospitality as a means of charity to Christian strangers. Referencing Abraham receiving God as his guest in Genesis 18, Ambrose wrote:

In all the duties of hospitality kindly feeling must be shown to all, but greater respect must be given to the upright. For "Whosoever receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward," as the Lord has said. Such is the favour in which hospitality stands with God, that not even the draught of cold water shall fail of getting a reward....And how dost thou know that when thou receivest men, thou dost not receive Christ? Christ may be in the stranger that comes, for Christ is there in the person of the poor, as He himself says: "I was in prison and though camest to Me, I was naked and thou didst clothe Me."⁸

In 380s AD, Vincentius of *clarissimus* rank was an advocate at the court of the prefecture of Portus in the hinterland of Rome and a prefect of the grain supply (*annona*). From his early years Vincentius cast lots from all the virtues with meekness despite his noble birthright.⁹ Sulpicius

⁶ Davidson, Ivor J. *Ambrose De Officiis: Volume Two, Commentary*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 742.

⁷ Davidson, Ivor J., p. 769.

⁸ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.21.107.

⁹ Severus, Sulpicius. *The Complete Works of Sulpicius Severus: With Preface, and Notes* Alexander Roberts (Translator). Waterford, Ireland: CrossReach Publications, 2019, Location 1628.

Severus, a 4th century Christian writer, scripted of Vincentius, “whatever virtue the hope of greater age might promise, he showed extensively through an abundance of excellent deeds.”¹⁰ He was a patron of high power yet of low pretense while presenting himself as being without impudence. Vincentius admired Ambrose as an exemplar emboldened in his role as bishop to entertain consuls and prefects at *his* table with all manner of temperance. Taking from the pages of Ambrose’s life, Vincentius begged Martin of Tours to allow him the humble experience of staying at the monastery as Martin of Tour’s guest.

In addition, Ambrose’s ability to resist the temptations of drunkenness and lewd behavior among government leaders was respected by Vincentius but hated by others, notably Jerome of Stridon.¹¹¹² Ambrose’s affability to engage in respectable, virtuous pleasantries as a public duty is noted by Vincentius in his exchange with Martin to Tours. Here Ambrose struck an equal balance of generous hospitality with gracious liberality. As McLynn writes:

Ambrose participated fully in the exchanges necessary to maintain his social position without compromising his sacerdotal obligations. Moreover, when travelling abroad he did not let his fastidiousness interfere with the need to establish and consolidate contacts with his social peers: his rules applied only inside Milan. At Rome he accepted an invitation from a woman of senatorial rank, and he lodged at Florence with Decemtius, a *vir clarissimus*. An apparently absolute rule thus proves in practice to allow considerable flexibility.¹³

¹⁰ Severus, Sulpicius, Location 1628.

¹¹ Oberhelman, S. M. "Jerome's Earliest Attack on Ambrose: On Ephesians, Prologue (ML 26:469D-70A)." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 121 (1991), p. 392.

¹² Jerome publicly expressed disdain for Ambrose after his expulsion from Rome in the summer of 385 AD as result of sexual misconduct that came after Ambrose refused to intervene on Jerome’s behalf. Jerome went so far as to mock Ambrose’s plagiaristic tendencies. “Jerome blamed Ambrose for a hand in his expulsion from Rome. This then accounts for the deep bitterness that emerges immediately after his return to the east in late 385 or the summer of 386.” (p. 392). In *On Titus* Jerome rails against bishops who have leveraged their positions “by influence and connections” of political influencers and views this approach as discreditable. He points specifically to Ambrose who was reared in political circles and maintained those connections.

Oberhelman, S. M. "Jerome's Earliest Attack on Ambrose: On Ephesians, Prologue (ML 26:469D-70A)." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 121 (1991), pp. 398, 392.

¹³ McLynn, Neil B., p. 257.

Ambrose understood hospitality as a spiritual discipline to be extended to all, especially the visiting Christian and all who worked protecting the needy and the oppressed.¹⁴

Again, when weighing the many kinds of liberality for Ambrose—1) food distribution and food giveaways; 2) sage advice; 3) support to those who live in shame; 4) sharing one’s loss due to another’s theft; or 5) loss of inheritance by “no fault of their own” leaving them impoverished—Ambrose considered the love of all people as an act of liberality.¹⁵ The redemption of captives, the restoration of women from the shame of wearing togas (not stolas), the reunion of children to the parents, reclamation of parents to their children, assuming another’s debt, care for orphans, and “safeguard the chastity of young women who have been orphaned” are cataloged as kinds of liberality for Ambrose.¹⁶ As Ambrose wrote, “Hospitality....serves to recommend many.”¹⁷

The depth and breadth of Ambrose’s liberality touched across all spectrums of Roman cultures, demographics, genders, and social statuses. However, Ambrose’s emphasis and preferences of liberality always leaned toward the need to defend the weak and exercise justice for all while also elevating one’s worth with virtue and not wealth.

For Ambrose, his quest for liberality is a plea for mercy. One example of mercy can be found in Ambrose’s correspondence with a public magistrate, Studius, in 387 AD who posed this liturgical question: Is it necessary for a public official to abstain from the

¹⁴ Davidson, Ivor J., p. 769.

¹⁵ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.15.69.

¹⁶ Davidson, Ivor J., pp. 748-750.

¹⁷ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.21.103.

Eucharist if he had sentenced a criminal to death? Ambrose's response favored mercy over punishment and encouraged any opportunity for repentance.¹⁸

Ambrose's Liberality and Western Culture

Professor and philanthropist Elizabeth Lynn¹⁹ writes about four (4) traditions of philanthropy from a cultural perspective centered on and connected in the United States.²⁰ The four traditions of philanthropy in the United States are 1) Relief; 2) Improvement; 3) Social Reform; and 4) Civic Engagement. Each of the four traditions carries a distinctively nuanced interpretation of philanthropy. In summary, Lynn writes:

Philanthropy understood as *relief* operates on the principle of compassion and seeks to alleviate human suffering. Philanthropy understood as *improvement* operates on the principle of progress and seeks to maximize individual human potential. Philanthropy understood as *reform* operates on the principle of justice and seeks to solve social problems.²¹

Philanthropy understood as *civic engagement*, explains Lynn, is compared to philanthropist Andrew Carnegie's model in the early 20th century:

[Foundations and other philanthropic organizations] are investing resources in strengthening relationships and nurturing conversations among citizens, in order to build, as the President of the Public Education Network, Wendy Puriefoy, put it, "more reflective and resourceful local communities." Study circles, neighborhood

¹⁸ Demacopoulos, George E. "Constantine, Ambrose, and the Morality of War: How Ambrose of Milan Challenged the Imperial Discourse on War and Violence." In *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War*, edited by Hamalis Perry T. and Karras Valerie A., 159-94. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017, p. 178.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Lynn is the founding director at the Center for Civic Reflection (<http://civicreflection.org/about/staff>) at Valparaiso University. The center began with generous support from Lilly Endowment, Inc. Lynn currently directs Valparaiso's Institute for Leadership and Service as well as the Center for Civic Reflection, teaches in the field of philanthropic leadership and service, and conducts research on the role of the humanities in American civic life. I met Dr. Lynn in Columbia, South Carolina when she lectured for the Central Carolina Community Foundation on January 19, 2018.

²⁰ The Four Traditions of Philanthropy is from *The Civically Engaged Reader*, ed. A. Davis and E. Lynn, Great Books Foundation, 2006.

²¹ "Exploring the Four Traditions of Philanthropy" handout, Central Carolina Community Foundation lecture, January 19, 2018 in Columbia, South Carolina, pp. 1, 4.

associations, and the forums sponsored by the Kettering Foundation are examples of this fourth philanthropic response, as is the more ambitious recent initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to “partner” with communities in cultivating local resources for addressing poverty. Ultimately, the goal of these investments may be to relieve, improve, or reform the communities they serve. Yet the focus of the work, and the standard of its success, is building up connections among ordinary citizens.

First, philanthropy of relief concerns the alleviation of human suffering. The African proverb “Give a man a fish, feed him for a day,” is often associated with this philanthropy tradition. Tossing a donation in the Salvation Army kettle, donating clothes to Goodwill, donating blood, and collecting personal hygiene items for the local women’s shelter are a few examples in the tradition of relief. In this tradition, a philanthropist can find herself on any of the first four steps of the Maimonides’ “Golden Ladder of Charity”. Ambrose’s notation of Joseph’s philanthropic aid with grain (Genesis 42:25-28) conveys a need to alleviate human suffering and Ambrose’s Christology:

For Christ is not bought with money but with grace; your payment is faith, and with it are bought God’s mysteries. Moreover, this grain is carried by the ass, that before was unclean according to the law but now is clean in grace.²²

Ambrose’s call for the church to lead efforts to alleviate the suffering of orphans, Danube refugees, and widows with church almsgiving would also fit this category.

Second, philanthropy of improvement refers to the maximization of human resources. The African proverb, “Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime,” is often associated with this philanthropic tradition. Sponsoring a student’s scholarship, underwriting a cultural art event, and supporting educational opportunities are all examples of traditions of *improvements* as investing in microbusinesses. In this tradition, a philanthropist can find herself on any of the first four steps of the Maimonides’ “Golden Ladder of Charity.” In the tradition of philanthropic improvement,

²² Ambrose, *On Joseph*, p. 213.

Ambrose donated his private wealth to the church through almsgiving and for the erection of building projects upon becoming a bishop.²³

Third, philanthropy of social reform concerns societal inequalities. The philanthropy of social reform encourages proactive social change that looks for societal problems that need to be addressed within or beyond a bureaucratic system of government. As Lynn writes:

Exemplary expressions of this tradition can be found in the writings of national commissions established in the early 1970s to study the public role of foundations. Consider, for instance, the following statement from the Peterson Commission in 1970: “Our society . . . is in obvious need of philanthropic institutions standing outside the frame of government but in support of the public interest,” it declared. “[J]ust as scouts move in advance of a body of troops to probe what lies ahead,” so too philanthropic institutions “can spot emergent problems, diagnose them, and test alternative ways to deal with them.”²⁴

In this tradition, a philanthropist can find herself on any of the top four tiers of the Maimonides’ “Golden Ladder of Charity.”

While it is inappropriate, if not impossible, to compare the late Roman antiquity to 21st century culture, the concept of public policy and social reform is the closest linkage of a common denominator. Ambrose, known to advocate for the inclusion and cohesion of the poor as part of the Christian community, “used the church’s case of the poor in arguments on public policy in order to disparage his religious rivals.”²⁵ For example, in 384 AD, Ambrose denied the appeal of Symmachus citing the mission of the church over the ancient pagan priesthood practices:

For her own benefit the Church owns nothing.... These rents and these revenues...the Church gives away. The possessions of the church are expenditures on the poor. Let them [the pagans] count up how many captives the temples have ransomed, what nourishment they have offered to the poor, to how many exiles they have given resources for a livelihood.

²³ Brown, Peter, 127.

²⁴ Lynn, Elizabeth, p. 4.

²⁵ Brown, Peter, p. 129.

Fourth, the idea of philanthropy of civic engagement can be summarized as having concern for the citizen's voice. In a contemporary society divided by the rich and the poor, political lines, and race and cultures, the tensions are deafening. In this tradition, a philanthropist can find herself on any of the eight steps of the Maimonides' "Golden Ladder of Charity" because civic engagement invites all voices to the table. Because this thesis work pulls from work Ambrose wrote and spoke in the preaching context for an audience of one or many where he is inviting them to listen, it is difficult to scrub his work for points of where he is the listener himself. Yet, the evidence of Ambrose extending the art of listening in an authoritative role is there. In Letter XXVI, Ambrose invites the bishop to have ears to listen to the layman and vice versa. While writing about the grief of his brother Sytarus' death, Ambrose recalls the wisdom of the two of them listening to each other while taking walks.²⁶ As bishop, there are countless occasions in Ambrose's sermons and other writings where he invites his listeners to listen to the words of Scripture as another voice at the table.

The need for inclusion as a form of civic engagement was important for Ambrose, especially when caring for the poor. We can consider Ambrose's call for the church to understand the role and added responsibility of the poor in the Christian church of Milan. Because Ambrose believed that all persons were to be seen as brothers and not charged as "other," the poor were to be included seamlessly into the life of the church.²⁷ It can be assumed this meant the poor worshipped, communed, and were baptized alongside all other worshippers.

Surprisingly, the other act of civic engagement came in Ambrose's hymn compositions. After the Easter Crisis of 386 AD, Ambrose set out to heal the church. The ears of the people had been filled with cries of war, turmoil, and death. Knowing the church suffered loss and grief,

²⁶ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 1.23.

²⁷ Brown, Peter, 129.

Ambrose used a measure of *traditioned innovation* in worship. Instead of reading the Psalms in worship, Ambrose introduced a rhythmic, antiphonal chanting with a “call and response” cadence.²⁸ Shortly thereafter, Ambrose continued the tradition of learning scripture through song. Using his own compositions, Ambrose wrote complex theological thoughts that were both easy to memorized and comprehend in thought.²⁹ In Ambrose’s letter to Clementianus, Ambrose was instructing all worshippers, as an evangelist of sorts, on theological matters in a time when the church was battling internal theological conflicts against Arianism and while also introducing Christianity into a long-standing tradition of pagan culture.³⁰ As John Moorhead writes, Ambrose had created “an intellectual community with a wide public to a degree unusual in the ancient world.”³¹

Far beyond the war cries of 386 AD, Ambrose’s methodical and melodic chants continued in the basilicas of Milan as a perpetual stamp of social justice and civic engagement in those who sang the Psalms to proclaim the Good News with a collective voice ringing of unity and justice for all. The work of civic engagement as Lynn describes it excluded no one, and specifically included all people to count ordinary, common non-citizens. This important tenet of philanthropic work marries well with Ambrose’s quest for unity and cohesion. Ambrose would later write about this intentional act of Christian civic engagement in *Explanatio Psalm*:

[A] psalm is a blessing for the people [*plebs*], Praise God, the assembly's acclamation sermon of all, the voices of the church the confession of faith in song, full of his devotion, of authority, of freedom, the joy, the cry of pleasure, of joy ...softens a diligence resigned grief...³²

²⁸ Worshippers would have experienced a similar rhythmic chat in the public theater.

²⁹ Brown, Peter, 126.

³⁰ Ambrose, Letter 75.

³¹ Moorhead, John. *Ambrose: Church and Society in the Late Roman World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), p. 142.

³² Ambrose, *Explanatio Psalm*, 1.9, ed. M. Petschenig, CSEL 64 (Vienna: Tepsky, 1919), 7. Google translation used.

The People's Prisoner: Ambrose, Liberality & the Sacrament of Baptism

The sacrament of Christian baptism is a virtuous act performed by God officiated in Christian community. There are distinctive qualities that make the act of baptism sacred and holy. The gathering of community helps to establish a covenant relationship. The baptismal candidate (or her sponsor) presents a soul in acknowledging the need for resurrection. The baptismal water represents a cleansing and purging to take place. The clergy serves as God's representative. It is God's power that purifies and resurrects the soul to bring forth new life.

A call into baptism waters can be as mysteriously sacred as the waters themselves. Ambrose was called into community to be the bishop *before* being beckoned into a community for his Christian baptism.³³ This peculiar calling was met with a peculiar resistance when Ambrose announced to his supporters his initial rejective plan to become a philosopher. Subsequently, he invited prostitutes to his home. For Ambrose, an asinine calling was followed with an asinine response. However, the Christian community persisted in *their* communal call for him as bishop. McLynn writes:

In presenting his 'sins' for popular judgement Ambrose underwent the first of the transformations that would make him a church man. The next step was to make himself the people's prisoner. Attempting to flee to Pavia by night, he left by the appropriate gate, only to be discovered the next morning at a *different* gate of Milan and taken into custody by his people.³⁴

In *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*, J. Warren Smith's gifted work on Ambrose's term of likeness (*similitudo*) and the sacrament of baptism (and the Eucharist) presents the transformative work of God's divinity and humanity. The word and work of *similitudo* is part of a larger work focused on resurrection and regeneration. The book, as the title suggests, lays the

³³ As governor, Ambrose heard the cry of his name for bishop while he was governor.

³⁴ McLynn, Neil B., p. 46.

foundation for Ambrose's theological understanding of the pre-lapsarian/post-lapsarian human condition and Ambrose's views on baptismal grace. Most notably in Smith's work, for the sake of this chapter, is his notation of Ambrose's *similitudo* of the dove image in the Old and New Testaments. Smith notes:

There is a problem involving the dove as a type and likeness of the Holy Spirit. According to Luke's (3:22) and John's (1:33) accounts of the baptism, the Spirit descended from heaven "in the likeness of a dove." So Ambrose, anticipating the objection of an astute neophyte that Noah's dove is the real thing while the dove at the baptism is the likeness, argues that the difference between likeness and reality corresponds to the categorical difference between Being and becoming.³⁵

Circumstances leading up to Ambrose's own baptism and his understanding of *similitudo* in his theological stance on the baptism image coupled with Ambrose's mission for the church to serve in *similitudo* with the poor serve as a reminder of the human need for resurrection, regeneration, and God's justice. As Smith notes, "humanity's capacity for justice has been compromised by the greed of our first parents."³⁶ Life with God's justice creates a community of cohesion and unity leading to restorative justice. A community without God's justice creates a chasm in the human experience where a death supersedes resurrection and a lack of empathy and humility highjacks liberality.

Ambrose and Healthy Charity

Smith also asks a question toward the end of his book: "How, for Ambrose, does the revelation of Christ's justice inform the Christian vision of the just treatment of people in the

³⁵ Smith, J. Warren. *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose's Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 270.

³⁶ Smith, J. Warren, p. 50.

present age?”³⁷ This question deserves deep reflection and academic study that a private Catholic junior and high school and prison inmates at a correctional facility in Northern California have attempted to address, likely with Smith’s question unbeknownst to them.³⁸ Here is the backdrop on Palma Catholic School:

In its seventh year, Palma School’s Campus Ministry has been collaborating with the Correctional Training Facility (CTF) at Soledad State Prison on a program that unites inmates with students. This collaboration, now called *Exercises in Empathy*, has been symbiotic, as it is difficult to discern who is deriving the greater benefit. Mr. Jim Micheletti, Palma’s Director of Campus Ministry, assisted by Ms. Mia Mirassou, created the program with a focus on compassion, empathy and restorative justice. Teaming men who have been given life sentences with private school students to discuss themes found in literature has led to raw emotions, frank discussions and more than a few surprises. During the average visit, about 25 students, staff members and parents meet with approximately 80 inmates. Breaking into groups of about eight, known as “families,” they explore their personal connections to the assigned literature. Many of the “Brothers in Blue” are filled with a sense of dignity — their opinion mattering and their contribution to the group being valued. For some, this is the first time in their lives that they’ve been granted such an accommodation. An inmate organization inside CTF, the Phoenix Alliance, is populated with many of the men who meet with Palma. The experience fueled a desire to give something to the school which arrived in the form of a scholarship. Despite the little an inmate earns while working behind prison walls, they continually pass the hat and have raised more than \$30,000 to fund a Palma student. It’s their way of allowing a young man to escape the fate of his circumstances.³⁹

Within this eight-week exercise for predominately wealthy youth and imprisoned humans lies a plethora of lessons and best practices on Ambrose’s virtue of liberality. Firstly, the most obvious and also the least likely is the phenomenal notation that incarcerated men leverage collective responsibility and are charitable with their time, money, and discipline to offer a \$30,000

³⁷ Smith, J. Warren, p. 224.

³⁸ Research for Palma Catholic School is limited to the school’s website. I reached out to the school requesting any academic research to no avail. CNN featured Palma School on Lisa Ling’s “This is Life” series that will debut on Sunday, November 29, 2020 at 9 p.m.

³⁹ <https://palmaschool.com/exercises-in-empathy/>. An inmate organization inside CTF, the Phoenix Alliance, is populated with many of the men who meet with Palma. The experience fueled a desire to give something to the school which arrived in the form of a scholarship. Despite the little an inmate earns while working behind prison walls, they continually pass the hat and have raised more than \$30,000 to fund a Palma student. It’s their way of allowing a young man to escape the fate of his circumstances.

scholarship to a high school student already enrolled at a prestigious high school albeit with limited financial resources. This proves Ambrose's point that all should and can be afforded the opportunity and means to give if its society allows. Any equitable opportunity to be charitable reduces unintentional toxic charity.

Secondly, Ambrose as an exemplar to bring community together without categorizing the poor as "other" is evident in the high schoolers and inmates, both neophytes of sort, as they gather weekly for fruitful and intentional conversations centered on a common read of classic literature. Mutual learnings are shared that foster kindred friendships and space for vulnerable conversations to build character, virtue, and better friendships.

Thirdly, there is *similitudo* of the baptismal liturgy flooding this narrative. To borrow from Ambrose's allegorical writing in *On Joseph*, the common read is likened to the common baptismal fount around which everyone assembles. The small group sessions called "family circles" are comprised of life-sentenced inmates who are fathers but never had the opportunity to mentor or actively parent their own child. In this program, they are now able to mentor and prepare other fathers' children in "catechesis" lessons with life instructions. The participants are each other's witnesses. The high school chaplain is the officiant. The classical literature is the *holy writ* and liturgy. The scholarship is the community offering. These are resurrection moments celebrated with hugs, encouragement, and laughter. If "baptism is a likeness of death," so is an inmate's humble confession so that he may arise a new creature in the form of a mentor bearing friendship.⁴⁰⁴¹

⁴⁰ Smith, J. Warren, 153.

⁴¹ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.21.106. "When a good man gives up any of his own rights, it is not only a sign of liberality, but is also accompanied by great advantages.

Fourthly, this narrative speaks to the importance of civic engagement as an act of philanthropic leadership and liberality. While monies were exchanged (philanthropy tradition of *improvement*) with one benefactor and scores of givers, the philanthropic tradition of civic engagement was all-inclusive and all-encompassing emotionally, physically, mentally, and likely spiritually for everyone. All voices were spoken and heard despite a participant's family pathology. Stories of generational cycles were shared. The narratives of brokenness, pain, sin, and disappointment speak to the fall of Adam and Eve as first parents. For Ambrose, Joseph's love by his father as well as his love for his brothers is worth mentioning here as a parent's voice is likely the first voice a child longs to engage.

Fifthly, the likeness and reality of Being and becoming of which Smith writes could be loosely applied in these exchanges between prep schoolboys and incarcerated men. The likeness that can be found in the common read of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* or Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is distinctively different than the stories of a violent past that comes from the lips of a resurrected, gentle soul. And, for the prep schoolboys looking in all directions to find their path, explore their future, and know their place in society while carrying the burdens of others' expectations of "success" and achievement, ironically they have found safety and freedom in a prison surrounded by convicted felons who are unlikely to ever become liberated in body as "returning citizens."⁴² This is the glory of God's justice for "the sake of others' being" and one's own soul of which Ambrose writes.⁴³ Like Lacey and Gaston Warner describe of ZOE students' life plans, one of the young men tells the story of how the inmates challenged him to develop a

⁴² "Returning citizens" are residents in a community who were previously incarcerated.

⁴³ Ambrose, *On Duties*. 1.28.136.

ten-year plan for his life and how they hold him accountable to the plan.⁴⁴ These acts of friendship, mentorship, and giving help the youth enter to a state of “becoming.” Therefore, the toxicity levels of these charities are minuscule. There is a peculiarity of mystery and sacredness—an incorruptible glory—to be found in the virtue of liberality where humanity has the opportunity to be restored in the *imago Dei*—behind prison bars with ordinary people, no less.⁴⁵

Ambrose and Toxic Charity

In the book *Toxic Charity*, Robert Lupton asks his readers to take part in the Oath for Compassionate Service.⁴⁶ It comes from one principle: Above all, do no harm. Ambrose’s position of exercising goodwill stems from the office of justice and a place of thriving for harmless acts at all costs without exception. For he writes, “the Spirit of the Son of Man should be in us, [w]ho came to give grace, not to bring harm.”⁴⁷

Toxic charity is western culture’s harmful attempt to do good through mission trips, service projects, and direct-service volunteerism. In these good-willed efforts is often a lack of reciprocity and fair exchange of ideas and efforts. As a result, an overload of indulged mentality of colonization and self-aggrandizing behaviors bring more hurt than help. Ambrose warns the church against Stoic tenets of goodwill based on acts of retaliatory justice and the possession of private property. He rebukes lofty attempts of the church seeking justice without receiving the grace offered to us in Christ Jesus. To do so, Ambrose instructs, brings harm to the soul and may bring

⁴⁴ Warner, Gaston and Lacey. *From Relief to Empowerment: How Your Church Can Cultivate Sustainable Mission*. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2018.

⁴⁵ Romans 1:23.

⁴⁶ This oath is derived from the Hippocratic Oath – a pledge taken by doctors to establish high ethical standards when practicing medicine.

⁴⁷ Ambrose. On Duties. 2.28.131.

harm to others. Ambrose's examination of the profits gained by farmers during corn shortages is one example of actions contrary to nature itself. Blessing bad harvests and cursing rich ones is contrary to God's nature of good for all. Moreover, Ambrose's creation theology cannot divorce the office of justice from the beauty of God's intent in nature, public or common property, and human enslavement. Referencing the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26 and human authority over earthly creatures in Psalm 8:6, Ambrose is adamant to acknowledge the need for the church to do no harm in one's giving to others, service of community, and worship of God:

Thus, in accordance with the will of God and the union of nature, we ought to be of mutual help one to the other, and to vie with each other in doing duties, to lay all our advantages as it were before all, and (to use the words of Scripture) to bring help one to the other from a feeling of devotion or of duty, by giving money, or by doing something, at any rate in some way or other; so that the charm of human fellowship may ever grow sweeter amongst us, and none may ever be recalled from their duty by the fear of danger, but rather account all things, whether good or evil, as their own concern.⁴⁸

Principle #1

Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.

Personal responsibility is essential for social, emotional and spiritual well-being. To do for others what they have the capacity to do for themselves is to disempower them. The negative outcomes of welfare are no different when religious or charitable organizations provide it. 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.⁴⁹

Being both reactionary and responsive, Ambrose lays a firm foundation and gives delicate attention of caring for the poor while being a good steward of the church's

⁴⁸ Ambrose. *On Duties*. 1.28.135.

⁴⁹ Lupton, Robert. *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011, p. 129.

resources. He asserts “due measure” as a just act when exercising liberality with the poor. He warns against the abuse and misuse of a priest’s empathic nature to care for those in needs while also imploring the clergy to be diligent in their acts of mercy to ensure resources for the poor, especially the widow, are being properly allocated.⁵⁰ Ambrose stresses moderation in giving so that the community perception is that the priest is not viewed as being wasteful, stingy, or greedy. More importantly, Ambrose stresses repeatedly the church’s mission once more: to care for the poor. For he writes, “...money is better laid out in food for the poor than on a purse for the rich.”⁵¹

Lupton’s assertion that churches are not to become a “caretaker” of the poor contradicts Ambrose’s instructions to church leaders. While Ambrose warns against scheming tactics by the poor to secure basic human necessities, he does not pursue a pathway of abandoning the poor and needy. Ambrose understands the role and duty of the church to care for the widows, orphans, and stranger and therefore instructs priests to “take care lest in our money chests we shut up the welfare of the needy, and bury the life of the poor as it were in a sepulchre.”⁵²

Principle #2

Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.

Is the need crisis or chronic? Triage may be the appropriate intervention in an emergency situation, but it is hardly the strategy for a continuing need. The victims of a devastating tsunami need immediate medical attention, shelter, essential supplies, and hoards of volunteers. Over time, however, survivors’ needs shift to expert consultation, a practical plan, and a combination of grants and loans to help them rebuild their destroyed community. Giving that continues beyond the immediate crisis produces diminishing returns.

⁵⁰ Ambrose. *On Duties*. 2.26.78.

⁵¹ Ambrose. *On Duties*. 2.26.78.

⁵² Ambrose. *On Duties*. 2.26.78.

Anyone who has served among the poor for any length of time will recognize the following progression:

- give once and you elicit appreciation;
- give twice and you create anticipation;
- give three times and you create expectation;
- give four times and it becomes entitlement;
- give five times and you establish dependency.

While one-way giving may seem like the “Christian” thing to do, it can undermine the very relationship a helper is attempting to build. Such charity subtly implies that the recipient has nothing of value the giver desires in return. To the extent the poor are enabled to participate in the systems intended to serve them, their self-worth is enhanced.⁵³

In general terms, most nonprofits and charitable organizations could, in theory, operate within this principle. Ambrose would certainly support this tenet. Anything beyond a one-time emergency gift would be considered wasteful extravagance. For Ambrose, wasteful spending included expensive banquets, wasteful wine consumption, grand shopping sprees, excessive circus expenses and other forms of entertainment, and “even on good works.”⁵⁴

One exception to this model is cultural and systematic disparities in the African American community during the era of Jim Crow. As Tyrone McKinley Freeman notes in his new book, *Madam C. J. Walker’s Gospel of Philanthropy during Jim Crow*, white Western philanthropic structures focus on the giving to strangers and often omit acknowledging family support and gifts as noble, charitable giving. “By focusing on the other-directedness of giving, these Western models hoped to distinguish altruistic motivation from legal or familial responsibilities,” writes Freeman.⁵⁵

⁵³ Lupton, Robert, p. 129.

⁵⁴ Ambrose, *On Duties*, 2.21.109.

⁵⁵ Freeman, Tyrone McKinley. *Madam C. J. Walker’s Gospel of Giving: Black Women’s Philanthropy during Jim Crow*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), Location 2824.

Madam C. J. Walker, applauded as America's first black rags-to-riches, self-made millionaire in the 1900's, began her philanthropic endeavors as part of her beauty business in St. Louis. She elevated her community while building her beauty business by formulating a gospel of giving based on these three tenets: 1) give as you can to be helpful to others, 2) spare no useful means that may be helpful to others, and 3) give more as your means increase to help others.⁵⁶ Walker elevated the black community through her beauty business. The character-building qualities of a freshly washed head of hair and crafted personal hygiene products emancipated black women who were (and still are) often criticized and sometimes demonized for our kinky hair texture and skin complexion, both inside and outside of our community. Walker also empowered the black community with all four of Lynn's traditions of philanthropy. Madam Walker knocked on doors in 1912 to help collect food for an elderly man in need to alleviate human suffering,⁵⁷ funded scholarships at Tuskegee Institute as a means of improvement,⁵⁸ and burned the \$15,000 mortgage on the home of statesman and abolitionist Fredrick Douglass in Washington, DC in July 1918 as "an act of protest against negative public representations of black women...on combatting public images and stereotypes...was fundamental to black social welfare reform."⁵⁹ Walker committed her life-work to responsible charitable giving. While these philanthropic works are admirable, they pale in comparison to Walker's philanthropic work known today as civic engagement.

Walker's civic engagement was a part of her master strategy of her business model. Her goals of delivering quality personal hygiene products to black women, increasing vocational education in the beauty industry, creating a franchised beauty culture as a noble career option, and

⁵⁶ Freeman, Location 2827.

⁵⁷ Freeman, Location 896.

⁵⁸ Freeman, Location 2024.

⁵⁹ Freeman, Location 2575.

coaching black women out of poverty and into financial independence also dovetailed well with her goal to promote social bonding and activism.⁶⁰ These efforts resulted in the establishment of Walker Clubs, small-groups of black women business leaders. Although women had no voting rights in the 1900s, they had meeting rights that Walker leveraged well.

Two years before Mary Church Terrell and other black women participated in the national Suffrage Movement in Washington, DC for the right to cast a ballot as a citizen, Madam C. J. Walker stood on a stage in Philadelphia in 1917 to address her black, middle-class working “agents” from across the country whom she supervised in her business. Members of the National Association of Color Women (NACW) who were, in many respects, an extension of Walker’s activism also had a prominent Philadelphia presence. Walker exercised these rights to assemble women together and established Walker Clubs. Walker Clubs members were intentionally and strategically groomed as agents with fortitude as community activist, fund raisers, community organizers, and positive role models. They served as business offspring and tentacles of their exemplar, Madam Walker, and the gospel of giving culture she created. Just as the women earned money from selling Walker’s products as independent beauty consultants, so did Walker encourage the agents to lay stake in their communities—to include faith-based organizations and churches—with financial donations and/or service.⁶¹

Because of this work ethic of collective power and community engagement, there was philanthropic work conducted in the black community led by black women that has not been acknowledged or found in mainstream historical philanthropy documents. When noting Walker’s

⁶⁰ Freeman, Location 291.

⁶¹ Freeman, Location 2238.

charitable act of hiring an attorney in 1911 to secure the pardon of a distant nephew who was serving a life term for killing a white man, Freeman writes:

This particular [familial] gift by Walker, however, demonstrated the fluidity that has historically defined African American philanthropy, where little distinction exists between gifts to family, friends, and others. Such fluidity emerged from its West African derivations, its formation in the crucible of American racism and sexism, and its orientation toward pragmatism. Because of their shared experience of racial oppression based on skin color, African Americans developed a collective consciousness consisting of a common sense of identity and struggle that tied their liberation to collective effort. W. E. B. DuBois called this collective consciousness a “double consciousness,” a “twoness” of simultaneously being American and being black.⁶²⁶³

While Ambrose would likely support Walker’s philanthropic work, I am confident he would not approve of Walker leading the work. Ambrose’s anthropological ideology and understanding of Neoplatonic cosmology and ascetic Christian perceptions of sexuality would strongly support Ambrose’s disapproval. The gendering of the soul, for Ambrose, creates bizarre imagery. As Kim Powers writes, “[Ambrose] describes the soul as a woman slave, freed from captivity by a brave warrior, interpreting Hebrew law allegorically to this end.”⁶⁴ Ambrose believed women were morally inferior to men and therefore were discouraged from cutting their hair or holding office in the church. While this is disappointing, it is not surprising. Nonetheless, Ambrose’s theology on liberality aligns well with Walker’s quest and success to serve the poor and vulnerable in her community

⁶² Freeman, Location 2837.

⁶³ A notably recent example of black women’s family philanthropic work would be 2018 Georgia gubernatorial race Democratic candidate, Stacey Abrams, who came under fire during the campaign for her IRS debt, credit card debt (\$76,000), and student loan debt (\$96,000) from her undergraduate and law programs (Spelman and Yale), respectively. She cited the need to help pay huge family medical bills of her parents’, United Methodist pastors, after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005. Bluestein, Greg. “Democrat’s IRS debt faces scrutiny in Georgia governor’s race.” *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution Newspaper*, March 19, 2018. <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/democrat-irs-debt-faces-scrutiny-georgia-governor-race/GCuJY151XrC4juOubAiZLJ/>

⁶⁴ Power, Kim E. “Ambrose of Milan: Keeper of the Boundaries.” *Theology Today* 55, no. 1 (April 1998): 25. <https://searchbscohostcom.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000992133&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

via economic empowerment and the virtues of justice, temperance, and prudence. Whereas Lupton presents this principle most likely from a seat of privilege, Walker and Ambrose's approaches to liberality begins at a place with neighbors, family, and those in the body of Christ.

Principle #3

Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending, and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements.

Lending to the poor establishes mutually beneficial relationships characterized by responsibility, accountability, and respect. It is a method of legitimate exchange that requires the lender to be responsible for assessing the risk while leaving the dignity of the borrower intact. Lending, done well, builds mutual trust and respect. Investing – making money with the poor – is the ultimate method of sharing resources (including expertise, connections, energy). It economically strengthens the poor through job-creating partnerships. Investing implies an ownership stake. To invest well with those who have limited access to capital requires a sound business plan, reasoned risk/reward ratio, adequate controls and accountability. The investor has a stake in the sustainability and profitability of the venture. Grants are best used for R&D and gap funding to achieve sustainability.⁶⁵

To address this principle, we will assess the following case study applying Ambrose's teachings on the virtue of liberality.

Food for All Case Study

A well-respected food bank, Food for All, receives \$5,000 of operating support each year from the Moberly Family Foundation. Food for All provides food bi-weekly (twice per week) to an urban church pantry which serves 200 families each week, and clients are at 80% of average median income. It has been operating for more than 15 years with church volunteers. The church pantry has been asked to merge with other pantries in the area but the church volunteers don't want to give up ownership of their ministry.

Food for All would like to expand its client base by 30% within the next five years. It has asked the Moberly Foundation for a \$250,000 grant to expand its warehouse facility. The Moberly Foundation has agreed to fund the capital expansion only if a case worker is hired to work at every pantry, a training kitchen is included to help clients know how to prepare the food, and Food for All hosts a quarterly networking meeting of all the pantries.

⁶⁵ Lupton, Robert, pp. 129-130.

God is both just and free. God gives freely, and those who seek God should practice prayer to include giving alms. In *De Tobia*, Ambrose focuses on almsgiving as a means of grace.⁶⁶ Almsgiving is not to leverage one's power over another person. Almsgiving is an act of charity.

Because therefore he entrusted his money and did not put it out at usury, he observed the duty of a just man; for lending by which usury is sought is evil. But that lending is not evil concerning which it is written: "Lend to thy neighbor in the time of his need." For David says also: "The just showeth mercy and lendeth." That lending is different and rightly accursed, to give money for usury, which the law prohibits. But Tobias shunned this, who warned his son not to transgress the precept of the Lord, but of his substance to give alms, not to put out his money at interest, not to turn his face from any poor man. He who advises this condemns usury in lending.

The greater is the evil of lending at interest, the more praiseworthy is he who has avoided it. Give money if you have it; let that money which is idle with you help others. Give as though you were not to receive it back, that it may be reckoned as gain if it be returned.⁶⁷

While Ambrose would likely empower the poor through employment, investing, and using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements, he would look beyond lending to the poor in order to find connectedness and mutuality in other ways. Mutuality, for Ambrose, can be found in the sacrament of Holy Baptism where there is union and communion with Christ.⁶⁸ And we experience baptism as both a sign and a seal of that hope. First, the believer experiences it as a sign of what God desires for us—life and union with God. Second, the believer knows baptism is a seal of that promised life and union with God. God reaches out to humanity with this gift of baptism, both as a sign and seal of God's love. And, when we accept baptism, we claim mutuality and reach forward to God professing the promise and

⁶⁶ Tobia 12:9.

⁶⁷ Zucker, Lois Miles. trans., "S. Ambrosii: On Tobias," *Patristic Studies* 35 (1933), p. 29.

⁶⁸ Romans 6:5.

sharing the life. In baptism, we glimpse that mutuality and reciprocity that is at the heart of community.

In this way, baptism is very much like the moment of the sacrament of Holy Communion when God reaches out to those gathered as they reach out to God to receive that sacrament in outstretched hands. In a moment of prevenient grace, the communion participant reaches out to meet the One who first reached out to humanity. There is a similar kind of reciprocity and mutuality in baptism. A question of mutuality is asked of the baptismal candidate: Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?⁶⁹

Mutuality, for Ambrose, can also be found in the work community engagement and economic empowerment. The Food for All case study offers the opportunity to embody Ambrose's philosophy of employing the poor and offering training skills to equip the vulnerable and marginalized. Ambrose leans upon the Joseph's wisdom to collect all the Egyptians' money, livestock and land and then bought their own freedom from them in return for grain.⁷⁰ Joseph's subsequent seed distribution While Cicero's *On Duties* notes his concern for the imposition of taxation unless absolutely necessary, Ambrose praises Joseph for this public policy leadership tactic of empowering people to help themselves and realize "that the measure was their salvation."⁷¹

Principle #4

⁶⁹ United Methodist Church (U.S.). (1992). *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Nashville, Tenn: United Methodist Pub. House.

⁷⁰ Ambrose. *On Duties*. 2.16.80.

⁷¹ Davidson, Ivor. J. *Ambrose De Officiis*. Volume 2, p. 755.

Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.

Organizational interests can subtly take precedence over the interests of the poor. When the agenda of a church is to create inspiring, enriching, and well-planned mission experience for members, the real needs of the poor (like decent schools or stable employment) may be overlooked and dismissed as too complex or time consuming. Putting the front-burner agendas of those in need ahead of the self-interests of the helping organization may require considerable retooling, but it is a legitimate price for effective service.⁷²

Ambrose's response to the 7,000-person mascara in 390AD in Thessalonica ordered by the Christian Emperor Theodosius in the name of the church was harsh and firm.⁷³ Ambrose called for Theodosius to repent. Initially Theodosius refused, and consequently Ambrose would not give him the sacrament of Holy Communion. Theodosius stayed away from church for a while, but his commitment to the faith made this situation untenable. He reluctantly accepted Ambrose's terms for reconciliation, which included the promotion of a law which required a delay of 30 days before any death sentence passed would be enforced. In front of a crowded congregation, Theodosius took off his imperial robes and asked for forgiveness of his sins. Ambrose initially declined to offer this. However, after Theodosius had repeatedly requested it at a church service on Christmas Day Ambrose gave Theodosius the sacrament. Ambrose said, "When a priest does not talk to a sinner, then the sinner will die in his sin, and the priest will be guilty because he failed to correct him."⁷⁴

Ambrose's words and actions toward Theodosius present leadership with an interest in the whole body of Christ and not just the bishop's interest. On the one hand, it took courage for Ambrose to confront a prominent Roman Emperor and to excommunicate him. Sometimes we

⁷² Lupton, Robert, p. 130.

⁷³ In 390 a charioteer in Thessalonica was accused of homosexual behavior. The governor of the district had him imprisoned, but the people of the area, who enjoyed his charioteering skills, demanded his release. The governor refused, leading to an uprising in which the governor was killed, and the arrested man was released.

⁷⁴ Ambrose. *On Duties*. 2.18.34.

know the most vulnerable to be the poor; and, in this case many innocent people were killed. Theodosius might have been sympathetic to the work of the church, but it was improbable that he would be so sympathetic that he would not react to this challenge to his behavior and authority. On the other hand, Ambrose's action was undoubtedly brave, but was it not also reckless, perhaps even irresponsible? He could have catapulted the church back into an era of persecution and oppression and risked his own life in the process. I submit Ambrose's courageous "retooling" sent a tough message of the redeeming love of Christ through the sacrament of Holy Communion and the authoritative role of the bishop to ex-communicate the emperor so that confessions were spoken, and forgiveness was offered. Confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation are "front-burner agendas" to combat toxic charity and self-interest programming.

Again, because Ambrose understood hymns and psalters to bring cohesion and unity, worship is another "front-burner" agenda item for liberality in the philanthropic arena. Toward the end of her days, the writings of Mary McLeod Bethune—a black Methodist lay women—pointed to a creation theology and a cruciform leadership centered on prayer, hymns, and parental leadership.⁷⁵ However, her philanthropic days began with selling sweet potato pies for a quarter to earn the money to open a school to educate black children in the South in the early 1900s. Her Christian leadership and omnipresence via the statue on the campus of Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Florida today still leads young adults to the virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, and prudence every week they gather for worship. Although the sacraments are not offered during the campus worship service, the preached word and intercessory prayers take center stage, and then students are empowered to serve in their community.

⁷⁵ Bethune, Mary McLeod, "Spiritual Autobiography," p. 186

I think McLeod would agree with Sam Well’s explanation of the sermon as a powerful and important way to prepare the congregation to recognize God’s blessing in their lives⁷⁶ while intercessory prayers educate our desires and shaping the virtues of patience, persistence and prudence.⁷⁷ A strong spiritual foundation is essential for effective Christian leaders seeking to serve in ministry with the poor.

Principle #5

Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said—unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective services.

The poor we serve may be reluctant to reveal “the whole story” to would-be helpers for a host of reasons – intimidation, fear of judgment, fear of losing support, fear of appearing unappreciative. A single mother trying to clothe her children will be hesitant to tell the clothes-closet volunteers that their hours of operation make it difficult for working parents to shop there. But like good physicians whose thorough examination yields an accurate diagnosis and treatment, effective helpers must learn to carefully observe behaviors, ask insightful questions, use their intuition, and hear what is not being said.⁷⁸

Here is a case study to accompany Lupton’s principle:

SantaLand Case Study

SantaLand was started by a prominent businessman and his wife who moved from the suburbs to be one of the first urban pioneer households in downtown Indianapolis. Mr. and Mrs. Jones started the program by buying a few gifts and delivering them to low-income children in their neighborhood on Christmas Eve. The program has grown into a city-wide event providing 1,000 low-income families with a complete Christmas dinner and holiday gifts. During the event, choirs sing, children visit with Santa, and parents select gifts for their children while children select gifts for their parents. More than 200 volunteers from Mr. Jones’s company, TechMount, plan the event, secure donations for the event, help guests shop, and wrap gifts during the event. Volunteers begin planning for SantaLand in July of each year.

St. Anthony Church, which provides the facility for the program, has completed a \$30,000 grant proposal to the Fletcher Foundation to hire a part-time coordinator and recoup some of their overhead costs in administering the program (hours of

⁷⁶ Wells, Samuel, *God’s Companion: Reimagining Christian Ethic*, (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) pp. 165-167.

⁷⁷ Wells, pp.178-183.

⁷⁸ Lupton, Robert, p. 131.

staff time dealing with volunteers, picking up and storing donations, registering guests for the program, utilities). The first question on the grant application was “Describe how this program fulfills a need within our community.” St. Anthony responded to the question with “SantaLand serves more than 1,000 families each year, with 75% of guests returning for assistance each year. This data shows the critical need for Christmas help in our community.”

Leadership questions for consideration:

1. In what ways can we engage in listening sessions with the parents and children we serve?
2. What activities can the volunteers do with the children, not for the children?
3. How much time will be dedicated to the new part-time coordinator for community engagement with neighbors and “guests”?
4. What gifts can we offer that creates fun, active listening in the home?
5. How have our 200 volunteers been training to be active listeners? How can we ask the Fletcher Foundation to support this work?
6. How can we develop our program to create a higher volunteer/guest ratio?
7. How can we learn more about the children’s/parents’ strengths and assets?

In Chapter 2 I wrote about Ambrose’s leadership in active listening. In addition to this strong asset, Ambrose was also persuasive in his conviction for the church to care for the needs of the poor. Ambrose also carried a strong conviction in young girls committing their lives to the church as virgins. As the son of a pious woman and the brother of consecrated virgin, Marcellina, Ambrose attempted to recruit young women into a committed life of serving the church as virgins was rocky. According to McLynn, his lack of theological education left him ill-prepared to write a strong argument while his role as bishop left him no other choice but to claim authority over the virgins.⁷⁹ His high esteem for female asceticism shone a bright light on these virtuous women and led him to showcase these women and their modest and prudent fashions to the church with admiration. He sought to help families understand committing a daughter to a life of asceticism was to “make an investment for the whole family, whose sins would be redeemed by her merits...”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ McLynn. *Ambrose of Milan*. Location 60.

⁸⁰ McLynn. *Ambrose of Milan*. Location 61.

In both the SantaLand case study and Ambrose's understanding of female asceticism, there is a latitudinal process of leadership development. First, a tool of intentional assessment bring clarity. Ambrose assessed his own understanding and experience with female asceticism within his family and then assessed the life of other families in his community. He was also aware of the cultural and social relationships between the Nicene doctrine and the Auxentian majority within church members and church leaders and current protocols of families paying dowries. After observing the emerging leadership of Aquileia to uphold the virtue of female asceticism, Ambrose strategically couched virgin consecration just as noble as the covenant of marriage.

Like Ambrose, Christian leaders seeking to engage in ministry with poor and lead with the virtue of liberality must be willing to assessment the work of the church within and around its community observing the mutual learning opportunities from everyone. Within these observations reside opportunities to deepen the spiritual practices of the church and challenge the work of the church with engaging questions and active listening skills.

Principle #6

Above all, do no harm.

Every change has consequences. Church growth may cause traffic congestion; successful sheep breeding may lead to overgrazing. While we cannot foresee all the potential consequences of our service, we should at least make some attempt to predict its impact. Before we embark on any new service venture, we should conduct an "impact study" to consider how our good deeds might have unintended consequences. Are we luring indigenous ministers away from their pastoral duties to become schedule coordinators for our mission trips? Are we creating dependencies that may ultimately erode self-sufficiency? As Hippocrates admonished: above all, do no harm.⁸¹

⁸¹ Lupton, Robert. pp. 131-132.

Doing good does not always equate to doing no harm. Firstly, the poor must remain paramount in all of our thinking. Secondly, all aid should be stopped or stopped immediately. There will clearly always been a need for emergency relief, for instance, in response to natural disasters or in conflict and post-conflict zones. In addition, there are also good development projects that should continue to be supported and funded. Thirdly, reprioritization needs to take place such that the weight of our energy is no longer spent on relatively small-scale development projects but instead is directed toward the wider issues that keep people in poverty.⁸² This again points to broader conversations centered around civic engagement. As Ambrose wrote:

It is thus a glorious thing to wish well, and to give freely, with the one desire to do good and not to do harm. For if we were to think it our duty to give the means to an extravagant man to live extravagantly, or to an adulterer to pay for his adultery, it would not be an act of kindness, for there would be no good-will in it. We should be doing harm, not good, to another if we gave him money to aid him in plotting against his country, or in attempting to get together at our expense some abandoned men to attack the Church. Nor, again, does it look like liberality to help one who presses very hardly on widows and orphans, or attempts to seize on their property with any show of violence.⁸³

⁸² Thacker, Justin. "From Charity to Justice: Revisited." *Transformation* 32, no. 2 (2015): 112-27. Accessed July 19, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/90010969, p. 118.

⁸³ Ambrose, *On Duties*. 1.26.130.

Conclusion

"The Lord was Baptized, not to be cleansed Himself, but to cleanse the waters, so that those waters, cleansed by the flesh of Christ which knew no sin, might have the power of Baptism."
- St. Ambrose of Milan

"The Christian life for Ambrose is a virtuous life."¹ Ambrose of Milan lived a life of dignity and integrity through his teaching and preaching. This thesis focused on the virtue of liberality as the guidepost for ministry with the poor.

Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* is nonsense literature which depicts a carnivalesque world. Carnavalesque is a kind of literature centered around the work on birth verses death or "new life" verses death. Imagery of an old lady or hag holding a newborn baby as though she has just given birth is often associated with a carnivalesque world. Bakhtin's theory is

linked directly to the traditions of the folk carnival that existed within the Middle Ages. Such carnivals allowed all members of society across the country to celebrate the importance of humor and laughter through the enjoyment of the lavish comic spectacle. These comic spectacles often took place with involvement of the Church and saw the enjoyment of spectacles such as feasts, fairs and the performance of clowns, fools, dwarfs, giants and occasionally animals. By enjoying such spectacles, and being surrounded by the concept of laughter, the audiences of medieval England were intended to be sharply distanced from the controlling serious official, ecclesiastical and political cult forms.²

In Bakhtin's work, the emphasis is one of three points which make the work distinctively carnivalesque. First, the plot must have free and familiar contact between peoples. In essence, all laws and restrictions are lifted. Such a culture would include a reversal of hierarchies where the

¹ Smith, J. Warren. *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose's Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 223.

² Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Rabelais and His World', trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984) p. 5.

low class is upheld with honor while the elite are brought now low. In Renaissance carnivals, kings often adorn themselves as silly clowns while peasants dress up as royalty without offense or judgement. The goal is for everyone to experience joy and freedom in a life turned upside down. Second, the plot must have characters displaying eccentric behavior or the expression of eccentricity. In general, the behavior is not socially acceptable, and the characters are generally outrageous with an over-the-top nature free of authority. Third, carnivalesque stories follows a non-linear plot or the carnivalistic *mésalliances* where the plot is disjointed, or there is the unexpected pairing of the divine and the profane. These stories are intended to be a celebration of freedom, equality, and abundance.³

Peter Brown references Mikhail Bakhtin's work and the free-spirit carnival as a powerful metaphor when thinking about Ambrose of Milan's image of the church and her relationship with the poor.⁴ Ambrose sought to lead a church in Milan which reflected a carnivalesque community with a reversal of hierarchies, eccentric behavior, and non-linear. The church would move beyond the shallow levels of giving to the poor to a contextual reframing of joyful obedience in giving. Instead, the church would be an institution of joy and all. It would bring the same kind of joy Symmachus brought to all citizens who attended the circus and amphitheater in Rome.

Invicta, Rome's motto, represents the strength and valor of the Republic and her people. Her resilience and power have overshadowed time and history with dominant influence and expansion. Her openness to cultural and social diversity fueled an economy and an empire that was unmatched and unbound for centuries. Even when threatened by military siege and famine in the land, Rome managed to lick her wounds and rebound to triumph. She has lived up to her motto

³ Lock, Charles. "Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology." *Literature and Theology* 5, no. 1 (1991): 76.

⁴ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, p. 134.

for the sake of *duty*, utilizing all manner of legal systems and client salutations to extol power and control. Indeed, her virtuous strength has been paid at the price of the poor. Willingly and unwillingly, in Chapter 1 I lied the foundation of how the church played a role in both enabling the abuse and empowering the rescue of the lower class.

In many respects, the poor represented a “conquered” Rome. While there is great reason to laud the innovative economic development and valiant leadership, the Roman Empire failed humanity with their exploitive treatment of the poor. Pride and prestige superseded humility and humbleness. In recognizing this failure, the church’s role took lead, paving a road of justice for the poor with equality, charity, and sacrificial giving. The virtue of liberality through Jesus Christ, the Liberator, offered another way.

Without the social class of freedmen and slaves, the Roman Empire could not function. Without the poor, the Roman Empire’s economy would have crumbled. Yet, with the poor, the church leaders understood the need for renunciation attempts in almost all matters of Roman society. The church, more proactive than reactive, offered a voice to the virgin, the widow, the prostitute, the enslaved, and the orphan. The church attempted to introduce another way of practicing reciprocity and context reframing that was both mutual and just.⁵

Reciprocity. Representation. These are the gifts the Roman Empire has given for the world to understand law and order. The leadership of St. Ambrose demonstrated to the 4th century church and her neighbors how they were to reciprocate God’s love to the poor by introducing a clarifying definition to “the poor” in God’s economy and kingdom.

⁵ Jesus encouraged his disciples to practice laws of reciprocity. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus say, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

In Chapter 2, I explored St. Ambrose's thoughts on how the renunciation of greed gives way to a virtuous life of liberality—the true promise of freedom and power. In assessing the etymology and ideas of virtue in general, I took a deep dive into the virtue of liberality through the lens of Ambrose's perspective as a wealthy Roman citizen who became an ecclesial leader. With a shift in leadership roles, Ambrose's quest for liberty and justice for all evolved over time. Cicero's *On Duties* influenced his leadership, but Ambrose's instructions to the baptismal candidates and church leaders also contributed to his pursuit to advocate for the poor while leading by example. Even while elected to the top of the hierarchical structure of the church, Ambrose sought to reframe the church's understanding of incarnational leadership as a form of liberality. The excess of liberality is prodigality, and the deficiency of liberality is greed. Ambrose's *On Joseph* sermon revealed the threat of both when Joseph is faced with his own leadership power in the pit, in the prison, and in the palace. In the end, I have provided substantial evidence how God's justice and Joseph's leadership grounded in liberality create space for grace and empathy in family relations, a social consciousness among peers and strangers, and economic empowerment in community. I have concluded the manner of these acts of Joseph's liberal actions come as a result of a relationship with a liberal God who freely loves and extends grace through the waters of baptism. Those baptismal waters offer salvation through deep humility, radical hospitality, and embracing one's humanity. Again, Ambrose understood the need for a full-armor-of-God approach to disrupt the current pattern and redirect the church of late antiquity from its insular habits, discover new ways to find loyalty and commitment to one's country because of her or his loyalty and commitment to Christ and His Church.

In Chapter 3, I applied Ambrose's theology of liberality to Moses Maimonides' "Golden Ladder of Charity" and Robert Lupton's six principle to avoid toxic charity and Elizabeth Lynn's

four philanthropy traditions. While it was fascinating to apply Ambrose’s teaching and mutual learning to contemporary philanthropic challenges, many mechanical teachings were not easily transferrable to Western culture and/or nonprofit organizations. However, I found the theological framework of Christian baptism, liberality, and justice for all applicable to the human condition such as Ambrose’s fumbled leadership, the healthy yet disjointed carnivalesque charity story between Correctional Training Facility (CTF) at Soledad State Prison and Palma School’s Campus Ministry, and the philanthropic works of Madam C.J. Walker and Mary McLeod Bethune. These movements of contextual reframing offer the church and her community a virtuous life bathed in baptismal waters with liberality and justice for all.

Epilogue: Present but Silent

When thinking about my travels around the world serving in Christian witness with *The United Methodist Church* in light of Ambrose’s theory and *praxis* of liberality there have been numerous times when I have experienced liberality as humility, hospitality, and humanity.

For three years I travelled to 16 countries for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁶ And from those travels I have been reminded that oppression is oppression is oppression. From the Killing Fields of Cambodia in Southeast Asia to the rice fields in Guyana, South America, I encountered a plethora of exemplars of liberality—many of them were women. Here is my narrative of one trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While on a two-week sojourn throughout the Congo, I encountered Samaritan-like women feverishly laboring for our benefit and comfort. They could be found from the city of Kinshasa in

⁶ I served as the associate general secretary, Justice and Relationships, with Global Ministries.

the west to the rural town of Kindu in the northeast to the villages of Wembo-Nyamba just beyond the Sankuru Nature Reserve to the bustling capital of Lubumbashi. From town to town and city to city, women treated us as though we were long-lost family finally reunited, yet they exercised a “present but silent” approach.⁷ They fed us, cleaned for us, and extended mutuality only achieved in social friendship.⁸ When I think how the Samaritan woman shares her testimony in her community, I particularly think about the Methodist church women in a Likasi village outside of Lubumbashi.⁹ These women reign at embodying the *imitation dei* while evangelizing with little to no verbal proclamation.

I met the Likasi women during the last Saturday of our travels. Two African American lay persons (one male, one female) and I were invited to tour a few communities outside of Lubumbashi where the Methodist church’s presence was strong and vital. Just beyond the gates of one of these communities we were greeted by the sights and sounds of teenage boys playing football (i.e. soccer) adjacent to the district superintendent office. After being greeted by the male district superintendent and the four other male pastors in his company, we circled for prayer before taking a tour throughout the compound-like ministry setting.

We toured a primary school. The small cultural building. A community garden. The parsonage. Our last stop was the largest building in the community, the church. There we entered through the front doors of the bricked edifice. Our entrance was not quiet; we were in continued conversation about the care and creation implications surrounding the community garden. The

⁷ Roberts, Dana L., *Gender Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 20.

⁸ MacIntyre, Kallenberg, “The Master Argument of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*,” *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition, Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, p.19.

⁹ John 4:4–26

sounds of the clicking camera did not cease. At one point we filled the sanctuary with laughter before noticing but never acknowledging the women or the domestic duties in their care.

These six women were quietly cleaning the church on a Saturday morning. As loud as we were, the women kept dusting and cleaning hurriedly in their own silence. They treated us as though we were distant mosquitoes while the male community leaders seemingly regarded the women as invisibly veiled phantoms. As we were touring the village and trekking through the sanctuary, there they were prostrated on their hands and knees scrubbing the dusty floors, polishing the church pews, and dusting the altar in reverence.

Up until our arrival one could hear a pin drop in that sanctuary. The pastor never acknowledging the women's presence; we as invited guests never had an opportunity to greet them. We worked as though they were unimportant. It was yet another serving of Western toxic charity.

We completed our tour of the entire village and made our way back to the church. I wanted to greet the women. I wanted to know their names and hear their stories. I wanted to offer a blessing over their work. I wanted them to know that I acknowledged their presence, all their "heavy lifting," and their faithfulness and service.

So before leaving I asked the district superintendent if we could hear from the women. He said, "Yes, of course!" The pastor called the women together and asked them to sing a song. And when they did, it was as though the heavens opened in song. They sang in their native tongue, so I do not know what they sang. I just remember having to reach for my Kleenex to wipe the tears away.

House Singers: A Theological Reflection on Christian Leadership

It was not until weeks later after returning to my New York office and reflecting upon the journey in DR Congo that I realized how I almost missed the blessing in meeting the Congolese Samaritan women. Christ offered *me* living water through their voices birthed in song. This was also a moment to experience liberality in the ordinary and common life of music, hymns, and song as Ambrose prescribed. The memory of the women’s singing keeps the moment framed in humility and reminds me of the courage I had to muster to respectfully ask the district superintendent and pastor to hear from the women without embarrassing all parties.

As I think about my theology *of* Christian leadership and the virtue of liberality, I am always led to the waters of baptism. God offered these waters of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation to me in eastern North Carolina in a Christian community attempting to share in a “life together” as Bonhoeffer ascribes. Since receiving the grace-filled waters over 39 years ago and being bathed in teaching and leading others into Christian formation, I am burdened by Bonhoeffer’s warning of holding one’s tongue and meekness, “But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either.”¹⁰ I continue to ask others as I ask myself Bonhoeffer’s pointed question, “How, then, is true Christian service performed in the Christian community?”¹¹ However, Ambrose would ask, “How, then, is true liberality lived in Christian community?” “How is the church caring for the needs of the poor?” “Where are opportunities for mutuality and reciprocity in mission and ministry?” Constantly balancing active listening and active helpfulness¹² points the Christian leader into a direction of discernment and theocentric thoughts and deeds.

¹⁰Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. (London: SCM Press, 1954). p. 98.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, p. 97.

¹² Bonhoeffer, p. 98.

Feminist theologian and scholar Mary McClintock Fulkerson taught me as a seminary student the importance of asking the one-word question, “Why?” as a means of challenging patriarch traditions and cultural norms. “May we hear from the women?” was my cordial question to the men leading the tour. This was an *active listening* question. This was also a question led with humility. “Why have we not heard from the women?” That was the *active helpfulness* question floating in my head and heart but was not uttered. While watching the women clean in silence, I quickly realized that although the men had the authority, power, and will to lead the tour, I too held the transforming Joseph-in-the-palace power, righteous obligation, and moral responsibility to acknowledge the women’s presence and self-respect. If the 21st century church can learn anything from a fourth century bishop still relevant today, it is the importance of acknowledging that the virtue of liberality in all and for all. God’s liberality offers prevenient grace at the baptismal fount. And, where and when God’s liberality is at work, there the poor and seen and the voiceless are heard. God’s liberality offers freedom and the courage of “being and becoming” into a transformative power of new life in Christ. As the Congolese women were singing on the church steps, the power rested in a calling and vocation as outwardly expressed with a clergy collar and the public vows taken at my ordination to “take thou authority”.¹³¹⁴ The power rested in the Sankofa cross adorned around my neck.¹⁵ The power rested in the bible packed in the white and blue backpack on my shoulders.

¹³ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/spirit-empowered-church-authorized-united-methodist-ordination>

¹⁴ Marva J. Dawn writes, “We never have to work by our own power or ability, but can serve as channels of God’s mercy and love, as persons conveying the good works “prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph. 2:10) (*The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*, 2006), Location 183.

¹⁵ Sankofa is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The literal translation of the word and the symbol is “it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” (<https://www.berea.edu/cgwc/the-power-of-sankofa>)

Along the journey the pastor stopped by a tree where a dusty statue of a woman was perched under a large tree branch. One of the male pastors introduced us to the statue of Mama Munyangwe with much pride as though it were a person. Leya Munyangwe, as I was told by Global Ministries staff, Mande Muyombo, was the founder of the largest Methodist women's group in DR Congo.¹⁶ She was born in the Likasi village and is well-respected among Methodist men *and* women as a trailblazer for social justice, equality, and peace. So perhaps I was most sensitive about how the women were treated in the sanctuary because of the emphasis the pastor placed on the work and role of Mama Munyangwe.

Because of Leya Munyangwe's valiant efforts beginning in the late 1930s, the women of *The United Methodist Church* in the Democratic Republic of Congo are well respected and admired by local and country leaders. On the statue, Munyangwe looks to be in her early 40s. She stands upright draped in a jade green short-sleeved dress with her head covered with a mustard-colored scarf tied at the rear. Her skin tone is a chalky expresso. She is by no means lean but rather stout. Ironically, she resembles Madam C. J. Walker and Mary McLeod Bethune. She holds in her left hand what appears to be a leather-bound black tome with crimson-edged pages while her right hand upholds her index finger, middle finger, and ring finger in tandem with her thumb and pink fingers in a stone kiss. I was told by the pastor that the book is the bible. In conversations with women in similar attire, I would later learn that the green dress represents the "life" of Jesus Christ and the yellow hue in the scarf represents the "light" of Christ.

The motifs of *life* and *light* shine brightest against oppressive realities in Christian leadership. The oppressed Samaritan woman comes to Jacob's well to fetch water, the life-giving

¹⁶ Mande Muyombo was elected a bishop of The United Methodist Church in 2016 and serves in the North Katanga Episcopal Area. Bishop Muyombo grew up in the Katanga area and is familiar with the history of the Methodist women of DR Congo.

element of creation, when the sun blazes heat and beams of scorching light.¹⁷ Indeed, life and light as two elements of creation sharing center stage in this text with God in Jesus and an unlikely character of an unnamed Samaritan woman could be interpreted as evangelism. As Chapman and Warner explain, “We are *all* God’s creatures—evangelism rightly entails compassion for the earth and all of its many inhabitants.”¹⁸ The Samaritan woman inconveniences herself to escape the other heckling women who gather their vessels of waters at cooler times of the day, and Jesus shows compassion for what is best not only for her soul but for her emotional, physical and mental wellbeing. Like the Old Testament, this act of Jesus approaching a Samaritan woman and the Samaritan woman sharing her encounter with the community are both centripetal and centrifugal movements, respectively.¹⁹

And while Leya Munyangwe’s statue is displayed within the confines of the Likasi Methodist compound, her life and legacy live on across the continent. One can find Methodist women clothed in the jade green and mustard scarves from West Africa coast to Central Africa (and all points in between) fully engaged in a “going forth” and a “gathering in” evangelism. This Joseph-style of evangelism also supports the intentional Christian living practices which require both personal and communal acts of skilled humility and radical hospitality. As both theologians Christina Pohl and Samuel Wells have push Christian witness both within the walls of the church while Dambisa Moyo’s *Dead Aid* focus attention to the ways and means Christians are called to

¹⁷ John 4:6-7.

¹⁸ Chapman, Stephen B. and Warner, Lacey C., “Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament: Jonah and the Imitation of God,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (SPRING, 2008), p. 50.

¹⁹ Chapman, Stephen B. and Warner, Lacey C., “Rethinking Evangelism and the Old Testament: Jonah and the Imitation of God,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (SPRING, 2008), p. 51.

share the gospel beyond those same walls that do not compromise the tenets of the faith with ineffective foreign assistance, “glamour aid,” and tariffs.²⁰

Love of God and Neighbor: “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”

The day following my visit to the Likasi community, I preached at Jerusalem United Methodist Church in Lubumbashi with 900+ worshippers in attendance. One of three all-female choirs wore scores of jade green dresses and mustard scarves. After the worship service and lunch, I attended the women’s monthly meeting within the district. The afternoon was filled with prayers, hugs, laughter, singing, and lots of sage and tender words on marriage, relationships, and sisterhood. After the formal meeting, I as given a tour of the property the women had purchased for the community. It served as a retreat center where homeless women and children resided. There was also lodging for three (3) refugee children whom the women had taken in as infants. The refugees were now working adults living in the transitional housing and taking independent living classes. The afternoon showcased the work of community development and Christian formation established by these women. These women, silent while cleaning the sanctuary of Saturday, are quite vocal and empower each other financially, spiritually, and emotionally in their Walker Clubs and in all other settings. These tasks are completed in addition to rearing the children, working outside of the home, singing in the choir, watering the community garden, and nurturing the family. Even with their limited financial resources, they give so freely of themselves for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They make sacrifices within their own household budgets so that overweight Western guests are well fed and satisfied. There seems to be a healthy balance of Christian leadership for these women. They lead with humility and inner-strength while

²⁰ Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working And How There Is A Better Way For Africa*. Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 2009, p. 26.

leaning on their faith. Like Jesus, they lead incarnationally. Like Ambrose, they lead thinking of the least and lost first. They lead with Mary McLeod Bethune with their mission work bathed in prayer and formidable spiritual experience. They lead like Joseph with selfless dreams and visions for a better tomorrow for all humanity. They lead for the sake of the community and can still find time for self-care and sisterhood. They live with joy, not possessions, as their strength. They live with an inner peace that keeps them humble and grounded. And, having lived in a war-infested country, they likely live in pain and personal sacrifice that most could never comprehend. Yet, they persevere and persist. Christian leaders persevere in hope. We, as cross-bearing followers, live in the inconvenience of life expecting Christ to meet us with life and light. Christ's omnipresence is humanity's salvation against the shadow of sin. Ambrose taught to see this life and light as a symbol of Christ's liberality for all.

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