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## THE GREEK CHRISTIAN FATHERS\*

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### 1. *Introduction*

This chapter sets out to present and discuss the writings of the Christian Fathers, as they relate to economic matters. In order to facilitate the reader's appreciation and comprehension of these important works, the chapter will open with an introductory section describing who the Fathers were, why they wrote, what socio-economic conditions prevailed during their lifetimes, and who were their major philosophical progenitors.

Following upon this general introduction, the chapter organises the economic writings of the Greek Christian Fathers under seven main

- "Oikonomia" and Economic Behaviour
- The Production Side of the Economy
- Value and Prices
- Money and Interest
- Wealth: Accumulation, Distribution and Retention
- The Social Structure of The Economy
- Economic Policy

### 2. *Social, Economic and Philosophical Environment*

The very earliest (recognised) writings of the nascent Christian were to form the canon of the New Testament. The perception of the Church was that this canon had been created either by participants in and witnesses to the Jesus Movement and the Apostolic Missionary Campaign like St. Paul, or by their successors like St. Mark. Their successors in the late first and early second

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century were seen to be pupils and direct inheritors of these original founding apostles. This second-generation of Christian literature included important community books, like the Didache, and the Didache-calia, as well as a significant number of Gnostic gospels. The first Apostolic Fathers, such as Ignatius and Polycarp, writing in the early second century, are also categorised as falling within the second generation of Christian writing. The defining characteristic of these works is the aim of bearing first-, or second-hand, witness to the life and works of Jesus and the Apostles. The books are letters, gospels, catechisms, and discussions of Apostolic mission which expound, sometimes for the first time, teachings of Christ and the leading apostles.

Writing mainly from the late second to the fifth century, the Church Fathers differ significantly from these earlier writers. Their focus of discussion moves away from simple presentation and exegesis of the stories of Jesus and the Apostles. Rather, their aim is broadly to reflect upon the first- and second-generation Church literature to provide assistance in dealing with the new and baffling range of problems with which the Church of their day was confronted. Of considerable importance amongst the issues which the Fathers faced was the problem of acutely unequal distribution of wealth, and similar related economic issues. They also leaned increasingly heavily on the work of classical Greek philosophers, and this syncretism was a particularly innovative aspect of their work.

The Church Fathers were categorised fairly tightly by their successors, and especially

by the Medieval Church. The twentieth century has seen a relaxation of these rules of definition, and it is now customary to include within the grouping of the Fathers such great writers as Clement of Alexandria (185-253 A.D.)<sup>1</sup> and Origen (185-254 A.D.)<sup>2</sup> whom traditionalists and purists would note were not

<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria was born in Athens, and studied in Alexandria. Ordained at the end of the second century, Clement was president of the Catechetical school in Alexandria. His works is especially noted for their intellectual proximity to Stoicism, illustrated by his use of the concept of the neutrality of goods. Given this somewhat unsystematic use of Stoicism, Clement is considered to be the first Christian philosopher, and his innovation and originality on taking this step has been described as an "Audacious attempt... of a significance scarcely to be exaggerated, for with it the philosophic spirit enters frankly into the service of Christian doctrine" Campbell, 1929, p. 36).

<sup>2</sup> Origen, probably a native of Alexandria, was selected whilst still a teenager to follow Clement as President of the catechetical school in Alexandria. Origen was technically awarded the title of Father. This chapter will follow the more open approach in describing the Fathers of the Church.

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There is also some scope for debate as to which Fathers should be termed Greek, or Eastern, and which should be classified as Latin, or Western. For the purposes of this chapter, Greek Fathers are defined as those who wrote in Greek, and whose work was carried out in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, predominantly in Alexandria and Asia Minor. It is also worth noting at this point that, although the very greatest of the Eastern Fathers significantly influenced the development of theological and economic thinking in the West, their greatest influence has always been exerted upon the Orthodox countries:

In Graeco-Slavic Europe they have ever dominated theology and their greater names are written large across Graeco-Slavic literature (Campbell, 1929, p. 148).

The definitive collection of the writings of the Greek Christian Fathers runs to some eighty folio volumes (Migne). This chapter thus necessarily represents a selection of these works, and will concentrate on the leading figures of the age.

The majority of the Eastern Fathers found themselves serving the congregations of Graeco-Roman cities in the Eastern Mediterranean region, such as Alexandria (Clement and Origen), Antioch (Chrysostom), Constantinople (Chrysostom), and the cities of Cappadocia (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus). These cities—with the exceptions of Nyssa and Nazianzus—were very important administrative and commercial centers.

Clearly, the major motivation which spurred to Eastern Fathers to write and speak was their role as teachers and pastors of the Christian people. Thus, the spiritual and theological tenor of their work is an *a prwri* given. More specifically, the Greek Christian Fathers devoted their spiritual activity to three major subjects:

expelled from Alexandria after his ordination in about 230, and thereafter traveled widely in Asia Minor and the Eastern Mediterranean, He was tortured whilst incarcerated during the Decian persecution, dying soon after his release in 254 A.D. Origen wrote copiously throughout his lifetime, and the quality of his scholarship, intellect and erudition is particularly noteworthy. As von Campenhausen notes, "he was responsible for the change from an occasional and superficial interest in philosophy to

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- (a) Propagation of the "orthodox" teachings of the New Covenant;
  - (b) Confrontation with the various unorthodox sects which emerged in the bosom of the church; and
  - (c) Recommendation of some behavioural norms in order to diminish social malfunctions.

Before the Christian religion wins acceptance and prevalence in the newly established Byzantine empire, the Fathers' writings centre mainly on the first and second subjects listed above. From the fourth to fifth centuries a large part of their work also addressed the third subject. Of particular interest to the Fathers was the huge discrepancy between rich and poor, and the injustices which they believed this caused (Hengel, 1974, p. 1; Harries, 1992, p. 40; McGuckin, 1987, p. 12).

The rich of the day were primarily large landowners, although in the Empire's commercial capital of Alexandria, merchants should also probably (and exceptionally) be included in this group. Rather than actual wealth *per se*, this class-based society placed emphasis on the social status which one enjoyed, as represented either by membership of certain formal societal groupings, or by the standard of visible external trappings (house, slaves, and conspicuous consumption).<sup>3</sup> The pinnacle of the social ladder was occupied by the gentleman-farmer, whose properties were tended and managed by others. As with the Ancient Greeks, actual participation, personally and directly, in trade carried a rather negative social cachet (Countryman, 1980, p. 24).

There were many more poor than rich people, and, as Countryman explains (*Ibid.*, p. 25), both Latin and Greek differentiated between two subgroups of the poor. Firstly, he describes the *ptochoi* (Gk.), or *indigentes* (Ltn.), as being "people utterly without resources . . . dependent on day-labour or begging" (*Ibid.*). The *indigentes* were truly poverty-stricken, dependent for their survival on the exigencies of seasonal agricultural work, and particularly vulnerable in time of economic hardship and famine. The second category of the poor were the *penetai* (Gk.), or *pauperes* (Ltn.), namely, "small shop keepers, artisans and farmers, people who owned property and the tools of the trade and could expect a reliable income from their own labour" (*Ibid.*). Moreover, the mobility of labour among different employments

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Gordon (1989a, p. 110); Countryman (1980, p. 23); Avila 1983, p. 26).

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were strictly restricted. As Gordon mentions (1989a, p. 109), "agricultural workers and their children were bound to the land they tended. Craftsmen, and their children, were confined to their particular trades. Workers in the state manufacturing industries were similarly constrained".

Given the enormous significance of land and property for the wealthy and powerful of the day, the great importance of ownership, *dominium*, as a paradigmatic concept in Roman law is to be anticipated. Avila (1983, p. 20) goes so far as to claim that "*Dominium* was the ultimate right. . . the right which legitimated all others".

These structures were a severely inhibiting factor in the development of entrepreneurship, which was thus not a major feature of the economic situation of the day.<sup>4</sup> Both Viner (1978, p. 23) and Gordon (1989a, p. 119) have commented upon the

fact that the Fathers' teachings on wealth never encouraged the use of capital in productive investments which might supply steady and equitably remunerated employment for the poor. Given the constraints which effectively prevented entrepreneurship, and the tendency of the rich to expend their income and capital upon conspicuous consumption, one is not surprised to discover that the Golden Age of the Church Fathers was far from being an economic Golden Age.

After the Constantinian turning point (313 A.D.), and the donation of gifts and bequests of increasing value, the Church steadily became a major landowner.<sup>5</sup> The social significance of this is clear, and it placed the Church on equal terms with the small group of elite aristocrats. The temptation to adopt wholesale the values of this group, with its paramount belief in ownership, must have been a considerable temptation for a Church which had until so recently been vilified and persecuted. Thus the attitudes of the Fathers to the ownership and retention of wealth, as well as to indulgence in luxurious living, concern not only the actions of their flocks, but also reflect internal ecclesiastical disputes.

<sup>4</sup> For a thorough discussion of the development of a theology of enterprise, see Dodd and Scott (1994), Drakopoulou (1995).

<sup>5</sup> Kee (1982, p. 140) has argued persuasively that the so-called Constantinian turning-point had highly significant ramifications for Christianity. He maintains that Constantine's pragmatic approach to religion led him to adopt Christianity as the state religion, without ever embracing its tenets himself. Indeed, he demonstrates that the accommodation was exclusively one-sided, with the Church increasingly glorifying the emperor's traits and values over against those of the historical Jesus.

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This, then, is the socio-economic situation within which the work of the Greek Christian Fathers was developed and promulgated. It is essentially characterised by a large gap between the rich and the poor, rigid social structures, and economic crisis. Before progressing to discuss in detail the content of their thinking in economic areas, a brief review of the major influences upon the Fathers is required, to complete this account of the context of their thinking.

Not surprisingly, given their role as the third generation of Christian writers, the Fathers are first and foremost teachers and theologians serving the early Church. As such, their major philosophical heritage naturally flows from the Gospel stories, and the Pauline canon, as well as the Old Testament. The Eastern Fathers' discussion of economic matters is shaped primarily by this frame of reference, as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate. Illustrative examples of these influences might include the following:

(1) Several of the Fathers' condemnations of private property refer to statements in the Creation stories that the gift of the land and its contents was intended to be held in common. This is a strong theme of many Pentateuchal Law writings, including the Deuteronomistic Code (Deuteronomy, 12-26), and the Jubilee Laws (Leviticus, 17-26).<sup>6</sup>

(2) Similarly, there are demands that rich Christians treat the poor with charitable generosity, and that the rights of the weak should be protected. These are an integral part of the message of the Jesus Movement, which in turn has taken them from the Old Testament prophets and Law.

(3) It is equally possible to identify Pauline trends in some of the less radical of the Fathers' writings, which insist upon the responsibility of men to provide for



themselves, and promote autarky.

Nonetheless, we would be doing the Greek Fathers a considerable disservice if we were to suggest that their learning and study were limited to the earliest Christian canon. Rather, the unique contribution of the Church Fathers, and the Eastern Fathers in particular, is their successful introduction to Christian thought of the philosophers of ancient Greece. A significant divergence between the earliest Greek Fathers and

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Pentateuchal teaching in this area, see Patrick (1985), von Rad (1966).

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their later successors, is to be found in their attitudes to ancient Greek philosophical works. In the first two centuries A.D. the majority of the Fathers expressed some degree of opposition to the study of these works. The hostile attitude of those Fathers to the writings of Greek classical antiquity resulted in a purely religious approach to their spiritual and material subjects, without any philosophical and/or ethical bases beyond those promulgated by Christian teaching.

From the third century some of the Fathers, such as Origen, engaged in the study of ancient Greek philosophy. In the 4th and 5th centuries such study received widespread recognition among the Eastern Christian Fathers.<sup>7</sup>

Those Fathers such as Basil the Great (330-379 A.D.),<sup>8</sup> John Chrysostom (356-407 A.D.),<sup>9</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390 A.D.)<sup>10</sup> and Gregory of Nyssa (333-394 A.D.),<sup>11</sup> who engaged with particular force in the various social and economic issues of their time, had received a Greek education. And Basil the Great, especially in his homily *To The Youths* (3-4) advised the young to study ancient Greek literature and to choose those ideas and arguments which reinforced their Christian beliefs.

<sup>7</sup> The Emperor Constantine (324-337) collected the writings of the ancient Greeks and established the famous library in Constantinople. His task was continued by Emperor Julian (361-363) and also by the Empress Eudoxia in the times of Emperor Theodosius II. For a detailed analysis of the way that the ancient Greek literature formed the basis of the educational system of the Byzantine empire see Lemerle (1971, ch. 3).

<sup>8</sup> Basil benefited from a particularly splendid education, as befitted a young nobleman from an exceptionally wealthy family. He studied in Cappadocian Caesarea, and also in the Imperial Capital Constantinople, as well as in Athens.

<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom was born in Syria, in Antioch, and studied there under the renowned pagan teacher Libanius. He attempted the monastic life, but was physically unable to endure the rigours it demanded. In 398 John was appointed as Bishop of Constantinople, but shocked the inhabitants and clergy of the wealthy imperial capital by launching a campaign of preaching against the city's worst excesses and luxuries. Twice banished, in essence for injudicious brave attacks upon the empress and her entourage, Chrysostom died as imperial edicts hounded him from town to town. "Chrysostom" is a Greek honorific meaning the golden-mouthed, and it is as a preacher that the reputation of John was made (Jones, 1976, p. 1009).

<sup>10</sup> Another exceptionally well-educated theologian, Gregory of Nazianzus studied in Palestinian Caesarea, Alexandria, and Athens, where he encountered Basil as a fellow-student. Their ecclesiastical careers were linked ever after, and Gregory was made bishop of Nazianzus, a small town in Cappadocia.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory of Nyssa was Basil's younger brother. He was able to dedicate his life to

scholarship, and the sophistication of his theology and philosophy testifies to this. In 371, Gregory was made Bishop of Nyssa.

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As they became exposed to the writings of Greek antiquity, the Fathers adopted the ancients' practice of carrying out analysis which examined an admixture of metaphysical, physical and social phenomena. From the beginnings of this quasi-syncretism, and especially after the establishment of the Constantinian Church State to about the end of the fifth century, the Greek Christian Fathers offered a range of social advice and explanation, dealing with a whole variety of human actions. These economic and social exhortations and elucidations will be presented in the following pages. However, from the outset it must be made clear that the economic and social ideas of the Greek Fathers have a mainly normative character; while their economic and social recommendations take their justification from Christian teachings, as well as the works of the ancient Greeks.

After the end of the 5th century, the involvement of bishops and theologians in contemporary and practical economic problems declined dramatically. Instead, the immediate successors to the Eastern Fathers either engaged in fulsome praise of the monastic ideal, adopted the luxurious living of the Byzantine court, or dedicated themselves to purely religious problems.

### 3. "Oikonomia" and Economic Behaviour

The Eastern Christian Fathers give the term *oikonomia* in their writings a different meaning to that utilised by the Ancient Greeks. In only a very few passages do they use the term to describe "economizing" activity.<sup>12</sup> In general, they imbue *oikonomia* with a metaphysical meaning, to indicate divine actions which transformed a spiritual activity and/or a situation of low value into one of high value, or, similarly for the (rearrangement through divine actions of a situation.<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom, following the parabolic style of the New Testament, uses many examples of economic behaviour to illustrate similar situations in spiritual and ethical subjects. His main argument is that as man has a strong incentive to acquire the material means for his support, the same incentive must follow in order to acquire "spir-

<sup>12</sup> See for example Chrysostom (vol. 79, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, homily 48, 4).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Basil (vol. 1, letter 8), Gregory of Nazianzus (vol. 5, homily 8), Chrysostom (vol. 63, *Homilies on Matthew*, 108C).

itual means", that is to live according to Christian teachings in order to gain eternal life (vol. 34, *On Uzziah*, 141).

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Man as the only "logical being" in the world, according to Athanasius (295-373 A.D.),<sup>14</sup> has the power to remember the past, to imagine the future and to choose according to his judgment the most useful path for himself, avoiding the injurious (*Homily to the Greeks*, vol. 1, 31).

According to Chrysostom, individuals operate under two forces: self-interest and altruism. Self-interest is expressed through man's economic activity in accumulating material goods for self-support (*Homilies on Matthew*, vol. 65, 402B). However, this kind of activity for the majority of the Fathers—as for the ancient Greek philosophers— results in non-rational and illogical avaricious behaviour. Behaviour motivated solely by self-interest leads to a social and economic life which deviates

from the norms of Christian society. Therefore the Eastern Christian Fathers turned strongly against avaricious behaviour, mostly associated with the upper economic and social class. John Chrysostom (vol. 46, *Homilies on Genesis*, 295D; vol. 47, 380B) considers the everlasting desire to accumulate goods, in excess of what is needed for self-support, to be the source of all human evils. He also recognised that the self-interest motive may be the cause of the emergence of injustice, as Plato had previously stressed (see Kara-yiannis, 1990, p. 6). He attempted to use ethical recommendations to persuade men to put a limit on the extent and intensity of its operation. Chrysostom is the most outspoken and vociferous of the Greek Fathers in his condemnation of the evils of wealth. Indeed, both his theological position, and the passionate nature of his protestations remind the reader of Old Testament prophecy in general, and of that of Isaiah in particular.

The Fathers placed considerable emphasis on other additional human motives which are more or less acquired characteristics. Such motives include the pursuit of justice, of love, and of ethical perfection. All these motives may be summarised under the general motivational heading of altruistic behaviour. The Fathers seem to describe the altruistic motive in a weak (rather than strong) meaning of the term, as described recently by Simon. According to Simon (1983, p. 58):

<sup>14</sup>A native of Alexandria, Athanasius was its bishop for approaching 50 years. His major contribution to the developing Christian theology of wealth was the authorship of a life of St. Anthony, the great monastic leader.

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We speak of weak altruism when an individual sacrifices fitness in the short run but receives indirect long-run rewards that more than compensate for the immediate sacrifice.

The Fathers propagate the altruistic motive following the argument of philanthropy as it is presented by the ancient Greek philosophers (see Constantellos, 1968, pp. 4-10) and the argument of brotherhood as it is taught in the New Testament (see e.g. *John*, 13, 34-6-*Luke*, 6, 27-30). The Fathers developed the compensation principle which accompanies weak altruism by following the pronouncement of Jesus that if somebody behaves altruistically he will reap gains not only in this life but also after death (see *Matthew*, 15, 34-46; 16, 1-5). They recognised that altruistic behaviour is not inbuilt, but requires instruction for man to adhere to it. Moreover, they were aware that for a majority of individuals, the motive of self-interest is stronger than that of altruism. They therefore strove to enforce altruistic feelings in human beings, through ethical recommendations.

#### 4. *The Production Side of the Economy*

##### 4-1. *Labour*

The Pauline churches, which grew up in cities around the Mediterranean, were mainly composed of the *petit bourgeoisie*, and as the "parousia" (second coming) became increasingly delayed, the need for them to work in order to feed themselves while they awaited the second coming became clear. These larger and disparate communities would also have required far greater organisation if the "love communism of Jerusalem" were to be established throughout Asia Minor (Hengel, 1979, p. 183).<sup>15</sup> Allowing excessive possession of property to stand in the way of bringing in the Kingdom was still strongly condemned, but there was no shame in working amongst the manual workers and craftsmen, small businessmen and workers on the land, all of



whom had a great respect for honest labour.

<sup>15</sup> The so-called "love communism of Jerusalem" was a spontaneous reflection of the teachings of the Jesus Movement, and involved the richer members of the community selling their property to take care of all. Work, and "making a living" was abandoned for prayer in the hope of an imminent coming of the kingdom (Coun-xyman, 1980, p. 7). The Love Community was later to take on a symbolic importance

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The Fathers thus broadly adopted the needs of the time and followed the principle of compensation as introduced by St. Paul, who stated baldly: "if a man shall not work, he shall not eat" (*Epistle to the Thessalonians* 2, 3, 10-11; *To the Philippians*, 3, 1-5). In particular, Chrysostom (vol. 35, *To Aquila and Priscilla*, 178D; 180B) stressed that labour is a human duty for man himself, and for society, because thereby production is increased, and injustice and sinfulness decreased.<sup>16</sup> In his *Homilies on the Priesthood* (ed. 1939, Homily II, 158) he specifies that workers have a much higher social reputation than the idle. However, Chrysostom distinguished between the labour of free man and that of slaves with words which reminds us those of Plato: "It is not appropriate... for the free man to devote himself to such works, and to neglect those that are proper to free men (*On vainglory and the education of children*, ed. 1940, 70)."

Chrysostom considers that the division of labour is caused by scarcity and the existence of poverty, while an abundance of goods will diminish it (vol. 31, *To Anna*, 744A-B). It seems that Chrysostom justifies inversely the relationship between the volume of production and the extent of the division of labour. Adam Smith, as we know, reversed this order, maintaining that production is increased by the division of labour.

Chrysostom also recognised two other effects of the division of labour, one personal and one social. In regard to the first, Chrysostom mentions that the division of labour presupposes the existence of specific specialised knowledge, which results in a diminution of labour mobility among different production processes (vol. 66, *Homilies on Matthew*, 508E-509A). He stresses that lack of experience is a cause of ineffective production (vol. 6, *On the Priesthood*, 406B-C). Thus he suggests in his homily *On vainglory and the education of children*, (ed. 1940, 89) that the young man must be educated to a specific job for which he has some kind of natural inclination and preference, and should be taught not to pursue profit through unfair activities.

as a model—e.g. by Chrysostom as we will see later—for other forms of communal ownership of property, and has always had a metaphorical importance for the Church.

<sup>16</sup> Viner (1978, p. 23) considers that Chrysostom is introducing the argument of *calling* as it was later on developed by Calvinists.

<sup>17</sup> Authors' translation of the quoted statements of the Fathers except where otherwise noted.

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Chrysostom also emphasised that for most production, collaboration between different stages of the production process is necessary. Thus every production stage is a prerequisite for the completion of products, and there is an interconnection between the various stages (vol. 67, *Homilies on Matthew*, 534C). This economic relationship between different crafts, and the various stages in a production process, was seen to

reinforce economic and social harmony. However the Father did not extend his argument to relate the self-interest motive to economic harmony, as Smith was to do in his development of the invisible hand principle.

For Basil, labour was not only necessary for physical exercise, but also to provide for material needs as well as for almsgiving. He argued for the necessity of the division of labour in the same tone used by Plato, that is, because nobody is self-sufficient (see Savopoulos, 1958, pp. 41-2). He argued that the division of labour is produced by the scarcity of goods (vol. 3, Letter 94, *To Elias*, 35-45). He also recognised that through exercise and practice the productivity of labour is increased (*To The Youths*, VIII).

Of the other Fathers, Nemesius of Emesa in his *De Natura Hominis* ( 520-1, 19-26) stressed that the division of labour is produced by the different natural inclinations of men. This division in turn produces exchanges, and thus is the formation of social life accomplished.<sup>18</sup> Nemesius' arguments in this area are close to those presented earlier by Plato (see Karayiannis, 1990, pp. 18-9).<sup>19</sup>

In regard to the direct and indirect consequences of labour, the arguments of Chrysostom are interesting. He emphasises that labour produces a direct utility to the labourer as he becomes a creator (vol. 16, *On the Statues*, 32E-33A; vol. 73, *Homilies on John*, homily 36, b).<sup>20</sup> Thus work permits man to echo the creativity of God, by joining in the act of shaping the created world and its resources. This argument was to lead in the late middle ages to the *Beruf*, or

<sup>18</sup> Nemesius of Emesa wrote during the last decades of the fourth century. He was deeply influenced by the works of the Ancient Greek philosophers, as well as by Neo-Hatonism.

<sup>19</sup> On the subject of the division of labour St. Augustine (354—430 A.D.) developed interesting ideas. He believed that the division of labour is produced from the different natural inclinations of men and from the capability to learn a specific job better. The main effect of the division of labour was recognized by the Father to be time-saving in die production process (*De Caritate Dei*, book 7, ch. 4).

<sup>20</sup> Maximus die Confessor in the 7th century stressed the argument that man becomes a creator Uirough his work (Mastroyiannopoulos, 1979, p. 315).

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vocational, theology of Luther, and was eventually to form the bedrock of what has become known as the Protestant work ethic.

On the other hand, as Chrysostom observes, labour produces a disservice to the labourer, since it involves toil and effort (vol. 58, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 354B). Thus, parents are often unwilling for their children to follow them into their occupations (vol. 71, *Homilies on John*, homily 2). Also, Chrysostom considers that labour, or hard work, increases the moral and social esteem held by the labourer. Idleness, on the other hand, is a cause of sin and injustice (vol. 35, *To Aquila and Priscilla*, 175B, 178B, 179B-E). He praises labour as a morally valuable condition, because we learn from the scriptures that God worked also for the creation of the world (vol. 33, 382). Furthermore, labour has been given by God in order to diminish the sins and injustice produced by idleness. As he noted:

I wish every one to work. Because idleness teaches every evil (vol. 65, *Homilies on Matthew*, 402E).

That is why God created us with the necessity for work, because by indolence everything is damaged (vol. 78, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, homily 35.3).

God tied man to labour, not for the purpose of punishing or chastising, but for

amendment and education (vol. 16, *On the Statues*, 32D; traris. ed. Oxford, 1842, p. 50).

With regard to the wages paid for labour, Basil indicates that in this era they covered only the barest costs of living, in that he shortens his homily so as to minimise the loss of time to workers and to enable them to earn enough for the necessities of life (*Hexaemeron*, 1, 3).

#### 4.2. *Productive Sectors and Trade*

With regard to the productive sectors, Chrysostom placed most emphasis on agriculture, which was then the main sector of production. Following in the steps of the ancient Greek writers (Hesiod, Democritus, Xenophon, etc.) Chrysostom regarded agriculture to be the paramount, and most noble, of production processes (vol. 10, 348D-E).<sup>21</sup> Stressing that the productive power of the earth is a gift

<sup>21</sup>Chrysostom uses many parables from agriculture production in order to show the way that the Lord rewards the activities of individuals. This same rhetorical technique was also used extensively in the New Testament (e.g. *Matthew*, 20, 2-8, 21, 33-7, *Mark*, 12, 1-4).

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from God to all humanity, he noted that its productive rate is determined by the effort of men (vol. 41, *Homilies on Genesis*, 36B, 44C; vol. 58, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 354B).<sup>22</sup>

Moreover Chrysostom noticed that God had created lands with differences in fertility, and in their richness in precious metals and other minerals, so that each part of the world can be useful to other parts, and a world-wide exchange economy developed (vol. 54, *Homilies on Psalms*, 95A; vol. 66, *Homilies on Matthew*, 472D).

Agricultural production, in those times, was based upon slavery and dependent tenant fanners called *coloni* (see Mango, 1980, p. 57, Avila, 1983, pp. 27-28) and its structure was characterised by the following: i) a feudal proprietorship (Ostrogorsky, 1963, p. 87; Stevens, 1966, p. 115); ii) slavery and peasantry, (Houmanidis, 1990); iii) a low wage-rate for the free man engaged in agricultural labour; and iv) low investment activity by the feudal lords (Stevens, 1966, p. 122).

Chrysostom, recognising the causes and consequences of such a structure of agricultural production, depicted it blackly in an interesting and evocative statement, which merits presentation at length:

Let us ... come to those who are considered more just, namely, those who possess the land and accumulate its wealth. But who could be more unfair than these people? If one investigates the way that they treat the miserable and ground-down farmers, one will find that they are harsher than the barbarians. Indeed, they impose heavy and constant taxes on those who are consumed by hunger and work all their lives. They set them painful tasks, they use their bodies like oxen and mules. Worse, like stones! They do not allow them to rest, and generally they oppress them without showing any sympathy.

What could be worse than when the people who have toiled all winter, and used themselves up in the cold, the rain, and the lack of sleep, depart with empty hands? Or even depart in debt, and more afraid of the foreman's torture, violent arrest, demands, abduction and slavery, than of the alternative, starvation and shipwreck.... In addition, they devise new ways of raising interest, which even pagans abjure, and they write loan contracts which are full of threats of damnation. Indeed, they do not ask just for one per cent of the capital, but for half of the total, even when the borrower has a wife

and children to feed, and even when the borrower's work fills their land and their wine-presses. Yet even so, they do not reflect on any of the above (vol. 67, *Homilies on Matthew*, 614A-C).

<sup>22</sup> The same argument was also advanced by Asterius of Amasia, who in the 4th century indicated that the production and accumulation of material goods were made possible through the help of God (Bougatsos, 1982, p. 25).

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Thus, he calculated that the feudal structure of agricultural production led to the following detrimental economic results: a) a low rate of reward to small farmers and peasants; b) a high rate of land rent; and c) an absolute economic dependence created by the loans made by landlords to the peasants.

However, Chrysostom did not develop any suggestion which involved the transformation of the existing structure of the economy. He simply tried to persuade the landlords to increase their altruistic behaviour, so as to reduce the poverty of their tenants. Indeed, this insistence upon changes in individual economic behaviour rather than a proposal for structural socio-economic changes is a hallmark of the work of the Fathers.

Basil, following Aristotle (*Eudemian Ethics*, 1215a, 35-49, *Metaphysics*, 1025b) categorised the various arts (or crafts) as: theoretical, practical, and productive. Basil postulated that an increase of non-productive arts/crafts would increase scarcity, much as Smith was later to maintain (Gordon, 1989a, p. 114). In his *Hexaameron* (1, 16) Basil writes:

The purpose of the theoretical arts lies in the activity of the mind, for the practical arts it is the motion of the body itself which when it ceases, nothing remains, nor even for spectators, that is, there is no reason for dance and music but the activity itself which is also the highest aim of its own being... when energy ceases in the productive arts, the work lies before us like the works of the construction art and architecture (quoted in Gordon, *ibid.*, p. 114).

With regard to productive activities and arts, Basil stressed that they were invented by human beings for the fulfilment of material needs (*Hexaameron*, 2, 8-9). Chrysostom noted that the various arts were discovered by men with the help of God, after the exile from paradise (vol. 45, *Homilies on Genesis*, 233D).<sup>23</sup> Chrysostom stressed that only the arts which produce necessary goods are useful to mankind while those producing luxury goods are detrimental and bring dishonour to the producer (vol. 66, *Homilies on Matthew*, 511A-512A). Regarding the economic effects of trade, the arguments of the Fathers are similar to those developed by the Greek philosophers. The majority of the Fathers follow the example of Jesus' opposition

<sup>23</sup> The argument that the various arts have been offered by God, but developed by men, we find in the Old Testament (*Genesis*, 3, 2) and in Plato who stressed the role of Prometheus (see Karayiannis, 1990, p. 8). Plato particularly emphasized that the arts were given by the Gods when they stopped being the shepherds of man, and he was obliged to live by his own power (Karayiannis, 1990, p. 14, ft. 13).

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to the retail trade, and particularly that which takes place in holy places (see *Matthew*, 21, 13-4; *Mark*, 11, 17-8). Clement of Alexandria in his *Paedagogus*, (book 3, ch. XI, 15-25) warned merchants not to discriminate in their pricing, following their own

economic interest, neither to ascribe false qualities to products. In the subsequent centuries the attitude of the Fathers towards retail trading did not seriously change, with Chrysostom also following the road which identified retail trade with injustice. However, in regard to wholesale activity, and especially trans-regional trade, the attitude of some Fathers were very different. Libanius (314-393 A.D.) was a pagan writer and a master of rhetoric in Antioch, who taught Basil, Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus. He stressed that via the wholesale sea trade, the variety of goods produced in different places can be exchanged and also, different communities of men are thereby able to communicate (Viner, 1978, p. 37). In the same tone Basil stressed that through wholesale sea trade, local product surpluses can be redistributed to where they are needed, according to the dictates of demand (*Hexaemeron*, 3, 36). Given their general antipathy towards the creation of wealth, the positive moral value which the Fathers ascribe to this type of trade is especially noteworthy.<sup>24</sup>

### 5. Value and Prices

Chrysostom examined the relationship between the value of goods and the consumption preference of the consumer, utilising a metaphor similar to the well-known "paradox of diamond and water." He stressed that it is erroneous, or contradictory, behaviour to regard gold as more valuable than iron, in a situation where the second has more value in use. Thus, he concludes that the value of goods is not related to their nature, but rather to the preferences, and consumption behaviour, of individuals: "The value of a given thing does not depend on its nature but on our state of mind" (vol. 10, *On the fall of Eutropius*, 241 A).

<sup>24</sup> Gordon describes how some Fathers heap praise upon international mercantile trade, as a tool in the equitable distribution of the earth's bounty, which was itself subject to geographic non-uniformity: "The Fathers contended that the non-uniformity was providential, and this involved them in strong support for inter-regional trade, especially sea trade, as an integral part of God's plan" (Gordon 1989b, p. 103).

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Chrysostom based his argument about this false relationship between value in use and value in exchange, on the philosophical principle that human beings were not created for consumption, but rather that consumption was created to enable human beings to live, viz.:

They (goods) were not given to us in the first instance, so as to live for the sake of eating, but rather to eat for the sake of living (vol. 14, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, 719D, brackets added).<sup>25</sup>

Chrysostom recognised the diminishing utility of goods, repeatedly emphasising that the value (mainly in use) of goods is a decreasing function of their quantity. Conversely, the value of goods increases with rarity, and in proportion to the urgency of the consumption need that they fulfil. As he wrote:

Pleasure occurs when it is preceded by desire and followed by enjoyment; if there is no enjoyment then there is no desire to be found and pleasure disappears (vol. 25, *To the self not to be unfair*, 453D).

For we have a great desire for what we are deprived of because desire arises from want. Because where there is satiation, there can be no desire (vol. 68, *Homilies on Matthew*, 772C).

Chrysostom maintains that those goods which are necessary for living, bring more



utility to persons on low incomes than luxury goods bring to persons with high incomes. Here Chrysostom proceeds to an interpersonal comparison of utility on the basis of the notion that the value in use of goods is directly related to their scarcity, and to the needs which they fulfil. Chrysostom also referred to the decreasing utility of income and wealth, when providing an economic justification for almsgiving. Specifically, he recommended that the poor citizen give less than the rich citizen, in order for their degree of loss to be the same (vol. 10, *Catechisms*, 240E; vol. 25, *To the self not to be unfair*, 450B-C). Chrysostom in conducting the above interpersonal comparison of utility takes the following suppositions for granted:

(a) He recognised the different degrees of utility which men derive from income, mentioning that if a poor man finds a copper coin, he will derive more utility than a rich man finding a gold coin (vol. 75, *Homilies on John*, homily 81, 3).

<sup>25</sup> Justin following the Stoic philosophy stressed the same argument that food is for living and not for enjoyment (*Epistle to Zfna and Sirines*, 5). Justin was born to pagan parents in Palestine in the opening years of the 2nd century, and died in 165 A.D. When young, he studied ancient philosophy, and was influenced by Platonic ideas, although he was a firm believer in Christianity.

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(b) There is such a thing as satiation in consumption, and thus the utility derived from consumption is a diminishing one (vol. 31, *Homilies to Anna*, 745C).<sup>26</sup>

(c) The urgency of need is the main factor which determines the rate of utility, and not a good's special characteristics and qualities:

Because it is not the nature of those things (i.e. food, water, etc.) but the need to use them that makes each thing pleasurable to us. And one does not take as much delight from drinking sweet and fragrant wine as being thirsty and drinking water (vol. 31, *Homilies to Anna*, 745C; brackets added; see also vol. 34, *On Uzzjah*, 112B).

Yea oftentimes have many of the poor, when wearied, and distressed, and parched with thirst, partaken of such streams even with such pleasure as I have said. But the rich, whilst drinking wine that is sweet, and has the odour of flowers, and every perfection that wine can have, experience no such enjoyment (vol. 16, *On the Statues*, 32A; trans. ed. Oxford, 1842, p. 49).

Chrysostom thus categorises goods as absolute necessities, and luxuries, depending upon the urgency of consumption needs and its correlated rate of utility.

Chrysostom considers that the price of a good denotes its exchange power. Whilst not explaining the functions which determine its inherent value, it seems, given the above discussion, that he regarded the value in use of the commodity as the main determinant of price (vol. 55, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 154E-155A). Of the other Fathers, Basil (see vol. 11, *Homily to the Rich*, 46B-C) and Gregory of Nazianzus (vol. 5, *On the Father remaining silent on the plague of hail*, 19, 5-10) mentions that prices can be determined by the actions of merchants who disguise the quantity produced in times of production shortages. That is, they recognised the volume of production to be a main determinant of the price of goods.

It has already been noted that the Fathers strongly condemned retail traders who provided false information about their products, and otherwise unfairly raised the prices charged. These criticisms of merchants, as well as Aristotelian and Patristic discussions of the nature of value, were to play a significant role in medieval scholastic debates about the "Just Price".

<sup>26</sup> Titus of Bostra writing in the last decades of the 4th century in his *Against the Manichaeans* (II, 8), stressed that as the rich consumers are closer to the satiety point they have a lower level of utility compared with the poor who are far away from that point.

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## 6. Money and Interest

The Greek Fathers do not adopt the Aristotelian word for money, *nomisma*, that is a good which, under general agreement and approval, is used as a medium of exchange (see Karaviannis, 1991, p. 311). In the Fathers' texts, and particularly in Chrysostom, we find the new word *chremata*, (meaning money), used to denote a useful thing for the measurement and medium of exchange.

The majority of the Greek Fathers considered money to take the form of precious metals.<sup>27</sup> Chrysostom moreover regarded that the use of precious metals as money is part of an evolutionary process, since in the first stages of humanity precious metals did not represent money (vol. 75, *Homilies on John*, homily 74, 3). The majority of the Greek Fathers also recognised the two main functions of money as a measure of value and as medium of exchange.<sup>28</sup> As Chrysostom wrote: "We often sell our slaves and receive gold or silver in exchange for a sale" (vol. 55, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 155 A).

The Greek Fathers considered the third function of money—that of a store of value—as morally detrimental and economically unsound. They stressed that *chremata* is something to be used in the purchasing of consumer goods and in almsgiving and not to be idly hoarded. As Chrysostom states:

That is why it is called *chremata* (i.e. money) so that it can be used in the service of one's fellow beings, not to be hoarded, unused.. .. You acquire money not to hide it but to share it (vol. 72, *Homilies on John*, homily 17, 3, brackets added; see also vol. 66, *Homilies on Matthew*, 508E; vol. 67, *Homilies on Matthew*, 634A).

For Chrysostom, the precious metals, and particularly gold, have value only when they are circulating. Chrysostom's position on this matter is similar to Basil's, and both can be postulated to emanate from their daily experience. The 4th century A.D. was characterised by a high inflation rate caused by the devaluation of money after the edict of Diocletian of 301 A.D. This devaluation, following Gresham's Law, resulted in the increased hoarding of older and better quality coins,

<sup>27</sup> See for example Basil (vol. 3, Letter 88, *For a tax collector*, 5-10); Chrysostom (vol. 55, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 155A; vol. 63, *Homilies on Matthew*, 138E).

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. Basil (vol. 3, Letter 88, *For a tax collector*, 5-10; vol. 11, *Homily on the Rich*, 55A, 59E); Chrysostom (vol. 6, *On the Priesthood*, 372A; vol. 54, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 119B; vol. 73, *Homilies on John*, homily 46, 4; vol. 74, *Homilies on John*, homily 59, 4; vol. 76, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, homily 11, 3).

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with a resultant profit for rich citizens.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, labourers and daily workers received their wages in the newer, lower-value coins. This resulted in a further widening of the maldistribution of wealth, which must have been observed by highly active bishops like Chrysostom and Basil.

On the determination of the value of money, only Basil offered an explanation of its fall in times of famine. In the case of a reduction on the supply of goods, combined

with increased demand, the value of coins diminished, giving way to a barter economy (vol. 11, *Letter on the Consequences of Famine and Drought*, 66B-C).

The majority of the Greek Fathers following the unanimous teachings of the Old and New Testament, as well as the ancient Greek philosophers, turn against the existence and practice of usury. Clement of Alexandria, for example, followed this line (*Stromata*, ch. XVIII), and Cyril of Jerusalem (312-387 A.D.) also relates usury to greed (*Catechisms*, IV, 130). Basil (vol. 11, *Letter on the Consequences of Famine and Drought*, 66A) and his brother Gregory of Nyssa (Spentzas, 1969, p. 117) turned against usury following the doctrine of the sterility of money, which had been put forward by Aristotle (see Karayiannis, 1990, p. 26). Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus wrote:

And another man poisoned the land with interest and usury, generating income from where had not sown and reaping where he had not spread seed, (vol. 5, homily 16, *On the Father remaining silent on the plague of hail*, 18, 1-5).

Chrysostom also objected strongly to usury, particularly loans taken put for consumption, for two reasons. Firstly, the poverty of borrower is increased, and secondly the wealth and sins of the lender are increased (vol. 47, 413B). He believed that the unequal distribution of wealth is increased through usury, as well as misery for the masses. For that reason he tried to persuade the individuals to abstain from the charging of interest on consumer loans (vol. 9, *Homilies on repentance*, 337C-D; vol. 64, *Homilies on Matthew*, 239B). In answering to the objections that interest rewards the temporary transfer of property, he observes that the gain of heaven is much more precious than the small financial gain from interest (vol. 63, *Homilies on Matthew*, 83A).

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed analysis of the causes of the inflation in the 3rd-4th centuries A.D. see Jones (1974, ch. 9). In those times, as Levy (1967, p. 90) comments: "Credit fell to the very lowest level, with its corollary, the growth of usury. The Church

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## 7. *Wealth: Accumulation, Distribution and Retention*

### 7.1. *Accumulation of Wealth*

The Greek Fathers consider wealth to be a means of satisfying necessary wants. They consider wealth to be the sum of material goods at the disposal of man and society. For Chrysostom, wealth consists of useful goods and of precious metals which have an exchange value (vol. 49, *Homilies on Genesis*, 487E, 506B-C).<sup>30</sup>

The Fathers also stress that the amount of wealth has nothing to do with the social significance of man. They take stands in three main areas regarding wealth: its accumulation through fair economic actions; its rational use in the purchase of necessary goods and in almsgiving; and its continued ownership.

The Greek Fathers adopted a similar position toward the accumulation of wealth through unfair activities as the ancient philosophers. Plato (see Karayiannis, 1990, pp. 7, 27-8), Aristotle, in his position regarding the chrematistic actions of individuals (see *Politics*, 1257b, 20-1258a, 10), and the Stoics (see *Cebes Table*, 40; Epictetus, **XXIV**, 2), as well as the Greek Fathers regarded the unlimited accumulation of wealth (and its use to purchase luxurious goods) as the main cause of unjust and unfair economic actions. During the first centuries A.D. there was a widespread view that the unequal distribution of wealth was caused by the unfairness of the rich. Origen

(*Homilies on Matthew*, 15-18) described the passion for accumulation of wealth as unnatural and considers this accumulation to take place mainly through unjust actions. In the 4th century Asterius of Amasia stressed that it is not possible to accumulate vast riches through fair actions (Bougatsos, 1982, p. 57).<sup>31</sup>

The unlimited struggle for wealth accumulation is also seen by the Fathers to be a cause of war, injustice, and slavery (see Gregory of Nazianzus, vol. 5, homily 14, *On benevolence*). For Chrysostom, the

Fathers denounced incessantly the scourge (whirlpool) of usury, against which ecclesiastical and civil legislators fought with difficulty".

<sup>30</sup> The same holds also for Clement of Alexandria (*The Rich Man's Salvation*, pp. 359, 10-20) while Saint Augustine specified wealth as the amount of money (i.e. precious metals) disposed of (see *De Civitate Dei*, book 7, ch. 12, p. 61; book 12, ch. 8, p. 350).

<sup>31</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem (312-387 A.D.) (*Catechisms*, 8, 234), however, discriminates between wealth earned with fair and unfair economic transactions.

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motive for wealth accumulation is not only one cause of unfair economic transactions, but also drives men to pursue and attain false goals (vol. 14, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, 727B-D). Moreover Chrysostom noticed that an uncontrolled pursuit of wealth will create economic and social struggles, leading to the destruction of *homonia* (i.e. social peace) (vol. 13, *Against the opponents of the Monastic Life*, 92A-B; vol. 46, *Homilies on Genesis*, 336A; vol. 64, 264C).

Chrysostom, adopting a negative attitude toward the avaricious behaviour of men, distinguished it from economizing behaviour. He understood economizing activity to be the expenditure of wealth for necessary goods and almsgiving, whilst avaricious behaviour was seen to do away with the rational expenditure of wealth.

Economy itself is good in the sense that the perfect economist would spend according to need and not stupidly and wastefully. But avarice is not the same. Because the one (i.e. the economist) always spends in a proper fashion while the other (i.e. the avaricious man) will not touch his money, even when need unavoidably demands he do so (vol. 79, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, homily 48, 4, brackets added).<sup>32</sup>

The Greek Fathers by adopting the position of the ancient Greek philosophers and following the scriptures, categorised a similar order of human values. They stressed that spiritual and psychic satisfaction must be considered more important than material satisfaction. Also, they regarded the highest attainment of human beings to be virtue, rather than material wealth.<sup>33</sup>

Chrysostom, however, was not hostile toward fair commercial activity which lead to wealth accumulation, stressing that the wealthy individual must try to use these gains rationally, that is, sparing a part of them to necessary goods and the rest to almsgiving (vol. 10, *Catechisms*, 388C; vol. 66, *Homilies on Matthew*, 509A). And as he states:

wealth is not forbidden if it be used for that which is necessary.... A covetous man is one thing, and a rich man is another thing. The covetous man is not rich; he is in want of many things, and while he needs many things, he can never be rich. The covetous man is a keeper, not a master, of wealth; a slave not a lord. For he would sooner give any one a portion of his flesh, than his buried gold (vol. 16, *On the Statues*, 26D-E; trans. ed. Oxford, 1842, p. 41).

<sup>32</sup> Basil also makes this distinction: "Wealth is not about enjoyment, but about iconomics" (Letter, 236, 7, quoted in Bougatsos, 1982, p. 187, ft. 141).

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus*, 3, ch. VI); Nemesius of Emesa *De Natura Hominis*, 800-1); Chrysostom (vol. 13, *To Those Opposing the Monastic life*, 15-7; vol. 25, *To the self not to be unfair*, 447 A; vol. 75, *Homilies on John*, homily 74).

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The avarice which the Fathers believed accompanied unjust accumulation of wealth came in for pronounced criticism. This attack by Chrysostom is typical:

I am often reprov'd for always attacking the rich. Of course I do, for they are always attacking the poor—and anyhow, I never attack the rich as such but only those who misuse their wealth. I keep on pointing out that I accuse not the rich but the rapacious: wealth is one thing, covetousness quite another. Learn to distinguish things and not to confuse together what ought not to be confused (vol. 10, *On the fall of Eutropius*, 389A-B; emphasis added, trans. in Attwater, 1959, p. 66).

On the other hand, the Fathers also opposed poverty which they considered to be an obstacle to the independent development of man as a person. Clement of Alexandria comments that:

For neither great nor worthy to be desired is the state of one so lacking in possessions that he does not have wherewith to live; for if it were, then that whole swarm of proletarians, derelicts and beggars who live from hand in mouth, all those wretched cast out upon the streets, though they live in ignorance of God and of his justice, would be the most blessed and the most religious and the only candidates for eternal life simply because they are penniless and find it hard to live, lacking the most modest means (*The Rich Man's Salvation*, XI, quoted in Gordon, 1989b, p. 86).

The Fathers stressed the artificial source of the co-existence of wealth and poverty among people. Polycarp in the 2nd century, (*Parables*, II), Chrysostom (vol. 63, *Homilies on Matthew*, 69B), and Gregory of Nazianzus (vol. 5, *To Julian the Apostate*, 11) consider that inequality of wealth is unavoidable, given the volume of production, because the wealth of some men will inevitably cause the poverty of others. Basil observes that if men consumed only necessary goods, and their surplus was voluntarily distributed to others, the problem of the scarcity of goods would be solved (vol. 11, *Homily on the saying of the Gospel of Luke*, 49E).

Thus, the scarcity problem for the Fathers stems mainly from the wrong-headed motive to accumulate wealth, which drives individuals. When production levels are constant, a greater share for a few means a smaller share for others. The Fathers do not pay much attention to the productive power caused by the wealth accumulation motive, perhaps because the structure of production (mainly of agricultural goods) was by and large determined not by human energy and innovative activity but by the "willingness of nature".

The Greek Fathers therefore, strongly believed that the problem

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of scarcity is caused by human beings inappropriately following the motive of self-interest, particularly in terms of distribution of goods. God's creation is seen to be naturally bounteous and more than adequate in its provision of the necessities for all. Thus, if all are not provided for, the fault must lie within man's behaviour (see Gordon, 1989a, p. 112; 1989b, pp. 104-6; 1991, p. 2; Avila, 1983, pp. 52-3).

### 7.2. *The Solution of the Scarcity Problem: Almsgiving and Chanty*

From the middle of the third century, until the end of the reign of Justinian (527-565 A.D.) a severe economic crisis affected the Byzantine empire (see Walbank, 1952, p.



107; Levy, 1967, p. 84). The polarisation of wealth so prevalent in the fourth and fifth centuries had furthermore resulted in a huge amount of poverty (Mango, 1980, p. 53). The Fathers not only observed that an unequal distribution of material things is detrimental to society, but also recognised some of the causes which produce such a situation. They did not carry out a scientific, "objective" analysis as to how distribution could be made more equitable, offering instead a normative schedule to reduce unequal distribution. In their view, the main mechanism for the elimination of extreme distributive inequality is the altruistic behaviour of individuals, and particularly of the rich.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of a prelapsarian Golden Age, in which all was held in common, and poverty was unknown, was shaped by the Fathers using their understanding of Christian salvation history, and the expulsion from Eden. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, ascribed to the Fall "poverty and superfluity, so-called freedom and slavery" (Hengel, 1974, p. 3). Nonetheless, as Hengel (*Ibid.*, p. 7) explained, this retrospective Utopian philosophy is by no means restricted to Christian works, and can also be found in Plato, Aristophanes, Euhemerus, Seneca and Virgil amongst others.

The solution to the economic problem of scarcity altered during the first centuries of Christianity. In the very beginning, church leaders and writers asked the Lord to give the necessary goods to the poor (see e.g. Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, 1, LIX, p. 37).

<sup>34</sup> For a more extensive analysis on the causes and remedy of the maldistribution of wealth according to Eastern Fathers see Karayiannis (1994).

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However from the 4th century, this emphasis shifted from the divine to the mundane, as the Fathers began increasingly to emphasise the altruistic behaviour of the rich, and their consumption patterns, as the main instrument for the solution of the scarcity problem and the relief of poverty.

The charity of the rich was thus for the Fathers the optimum endogenous mechanism available for the redistribution of wealth in favour of the poor. For the Fathers, the difference in living standards between the rich and the poor could be diminished by following the Christian teaching of universal brotherhood and the exhortation to "love each other as you love yourself" (The Gospel of Luke, 3, 11-2). Love, in the end, can be expressed through almsgiving.<sup>35</sup>

The Fathers seems to recognise the difficulty in changing the attitude and the behaviour of rich, that is, to replace the self-interest motive (by which they accumulate wealth) with the altruistic motive (by which they will consume their wealth without any direct personal economic benefit).<sup>36</sup> Thus the Fathers tried mainly by exhortations and commandment, and in some cases with the threat of punishment and damnation in the afterlife, to persuade the rich to distribute their wealth through almsgiving to their poor fellow citizens. There are many examples of the Fathers attempting to persuade the rich to share their wealth with the poor by promising them reciprocation from God, through his forgiveness, eternal life, etc.

The Fathers, and especially bishops like Chrysostom, Basil and Gregory, tried also through their own charity to set an example for others and to persuade them to follow their actions (see Amantos, 1923, p. 134; ConstanteUos, 1968, pp. 71, 154-6).<sup>37</sup> Basil was the leading figure in this endeavour, which was given an added irony since "in a period of outwardly brilliant material and cultural progress

<sup>35</sup> Anstotle considered friendship to be the basis of altruistic behaviour among the citizens (*Rhetoric*, 1385a, 15-25). Clement of Alexandria (*Protrepticus*, IX, 30-5) characterized philanthropy as an action similar to one of father and son.

<sup>36</sup> Jesus shows the difficulty for the rich man in dramatically changing his behaviour towards wealth (see *The Gospels of Matthew*, 19, 23-6; Luke, 18, 24-27; Mark, 10, 24—6).

<sup>37</sup> However, philanthropic activity was not promulgated only by the Christian pnestrs and Fathers. The pagan emperor Julian in his letters to pagan bishops (*To Theodarus*, 289-292) advises them to show philanthropic activity and to persuade the rich pagans to increase their almsgiving as do the Christians. Julian justifies charitable activity on the following grounds, which have common characteristics with that of the Fathers: (1) goods are offered by Gods in order to use them for living and for almsgiving; (2) all men are brothers as they are born of the Gods.

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the Church was direatened with decline and die loss of its conscience" (von Campenhausen, 1963, p. 84; brackets added). Basil rose to this challenge with vigour and commitment. Although recalled from his monastery to serve as priest and dien bishop in Caesarea, he remained a strong supporter of monasticism. Basil wrote the first rules for a communal monastery, which demanded shared lodgings, shared food, mutual support and interdependence. Essentially, his monastic rules were an expression of an alternative economic ordering of human society, albeit in microcosm, which was in considerable contrast to the prevailing socio-economic structures.<sup>38</sup> This communitarian spirit was also expressed in his episcopal work, widi the creation of shelters, food kitchens, schools and hospitals. Indeed, his building work was so extensive, that it has been described as a small town! He also tried to persuade otiiar bishops and prefects (see e.g. vol. 2, *To Bishop Eusebona*, 31) to follow his example in establishing various institutions for die relief of poverty. Basil's attacks on the polarisation of riches, and die extreme poverty in which most of his flock was condemned to languish, were notable for their frequency and strength.

The creation, and glorification, of die ascetic alternative to mainstream economic life, was to play a major role in the Christian debate on issues such as wealth, poverty, distribution, ownership and labour. The contrast between the self denial and charitable giving of the monks, and the luxurious lives of die Imperial clerics was sharp indeed. The importance of the communitarian monastic orders, with their adherence to a common life of austere poverty outwith die secular world, was to be significant diroughout Christian history. It should lot, for example, be overlooked diat die majority of die great scho-lastic writers, who added so much to die doctrines of die fair price, and of die ethics of business, were monks first and teachers second.

Chrysostom, whom Attwater (1959, p. 63) describes as a fighter for social justice, engaged widi social and economic issues not as a lemagogue, but rather as a teacher of Christian moral doctrine. For Chrysostom, only when die motive of altruism proved at least equal to that of self-interest would die solution to die scarcity problem be achieved. He defines almsgiving as die "heart of virtue" (vol. 66, *Homilies on Matthew*, 492A) and as die cornerstone of Christian leadiings (vol. 52, *Homilies on Genesis*, 690E). He advised diat die surplus:

<sup>38</sup> For more detail on the significance of this new model of social and economi community life, see Gordon (1989a, pp. 10-11, 18; 1989b, pp. 100-102; 1991, p. 2).

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beyond the consumption for necessities must be distributed to the poor through almsgiving. He justified his position by arguing that such an action has no direct negative consequences for the rich. On the other hand, without charity and philanthropy, the present life would be inhuman and without meaning:

If, however, charity is removed, everything disappears and vanishes.... It is not possible for life to exist if there is no charity, no forgiveness, and no philanthropy (vol. 67, *Homilies on Matthew*, 535E).

Chrysostom gives the following justifications for almsgiving:

First: When the rich give their surpluses to the poor, this neither creates any problems for them, nor diminishes their consumption of necessities:

"Because tell me where is the strain when you enjoy what you have and spend the excess on the needs of the poor" (vol. 37, *On Almsgiving*, 267D). And, "I do not want to stop you from enjoying your wealth, but from covetousness and rapacity. I do not call on you to get rid of all your money, but to give according to your means to those in need" (vol. 77, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, homily 23, 3, trans. in Attwater, 1959, p. 67). "That is why you have money, to free others from poverty, not to exploit poverty" (vol. 67, *Homilies on Matthew*, 573C); thus, "Give the poor the benefit of your goods and be a good manager of what God has given you" (vol. 68, *Homilies on Matthew*, 658E-659A).

Second: Through almsgiving, the sins perpetrated by the rich in gathering their wealth are forgiven by God [vol. 37, *On Almsgiving*, 266E-267A, 267D-E, 279A; vol. 46, *Homilies on Genesis*, 342E].<sup>39</sup> Chrysostom, however, recommended that where wealth has been generated through unfair activities, almsgiving is not sufficient for forgiveness, but must be supplemented by cessation of this immoral behaviour (vol. 37, *On Almsgiving*, 288E-289A; vol. 75, *Homilies on John*, homily 73, 3]—a similar view was also put forward by St. Augustine [*De Civitate Dei*, XXI, 26].<sup>40</sup>

The Fathers hold a range of views with regard to the distribution of alms. For example, Chrysostom recognised the argument that the

<sup>39</sup> Clement of Rome (*To the Corinthians*, 2, XVII, p. 46) stressed that by almsgiving one's sins will be forgiven.

<sup>40</sup> Chrysostom was not above more pragmatic arguments, and as Jones (1964, p- 901) comments: "John Chrysostom, who found the great landowners of Constantinople backward in doing their duty, urged them to built churches and endow priests on their estates, if not for Christian zeal, for prudential reasons; the priest would preach obedience to the peasants and prevent unrest".

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sloth and idleness of the poor could be increased by charity, a view later to be much emphasised by some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mercantilists (see Karayiannis, 1989, pp. 768, 770, 773-4). He turned against those beggars who are able to work, but prefer instead to live through charity (vol. 37, *On Almsgiving*, 267B).<sup>41</sup>

Chrysostom, however, at the end, does not approve any discriminatory activity toward giving alms to the poor, noting:

The poor man has a lawyer to plead his case; poverty and need. Therefore, do not ask for anything else from him, no matter if he is the most cunning of all. But if he is striving to gather the wherewithal to eat, we must rather relieve him of his hunger (vol. 14, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, 734C; see also vol. 37, *On Almsgiving*, 276D-

277A; vol. 65, *Homilies on Matthew*, 403A).

For this reason:

And if, then, when you see that a man has fallen into the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge him, nor search for reasons, but relieve his sufferings (vol. 14, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, 734D).

Therefore,

We do not bless men for their goodness, but for their sufferings (*Ibid.*, 735B).

Gregory of Nazianzus similarly was in favour of nondiscriminatory almsgiving (vol. 11, homily 14, *On benevolence*, 6).

On the other hand, Basil confronts the problem with a degree of scepticism. He mentions the advice of a bishop on behalf of the non-discriminatory activity of almsgiving:

He added that it was not necessary for anyone to take upon himself the distribution of his goods, but only to commit this task to him to whom the management of the alms of the poor had been entrusted ... he said that experience was necessary for distinguishing between the man who is truly in need and the man who begs through avarice (vol. 4, Letter 150, *To Amphilochius*, 3, trans. by Deferrari, 1926, vol. II).

It seems that Basil was not directly in support of indiscriminate almsgiving because he asked for the funds intended for such activity to be passed into the hands of the bishops to enable suitable distribution.

<sup>41</sup> Some of the western Fathers also argued on behalf of discriminatory almsgiving, according to the need and physical strength of the poor (see Viner, 1978, p. 24). For example Clement of Rome (*Commands of the Saints and Apostles*, IV, 4) suggested he giving of alms only to those unable to work.

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### 7.3. *Proper Use of Wealth: Autarky vs. Luxury*

The majority of the Fathers spoke for a state of autarky, or the modest self-sufficiency of man, characterised by the consumption only of necessary goods. Let us see how the Fathers denounced this state of autarky, which had been described earlier by the stoic Epictetus (XXXIII, 7) who wrote:

Take only what is absolutely necessary for your body, that is food, drink, clothes, a house and slaves. Anything else, which is for show or for pleasure, you should relinquish.

The remarkably consistent, but little known, writings of the Fathers on this subject, deserve examination at some length. For example, Clement of Alexandria in his *Paedagogus* (2, I, 132) denounced this state by saying:

Just as the measure for the shoe is the foot, so is property related to the needs of the body. God created the world in order for us to use it, however, we earn material goods so as to achieve autarky. Autarky breeds good men for society, especially when it is accompanied by love (see also *Stromata*, iv, 5).

Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechisms* (501, p. 79) stressed that men must take care of their living by consuming only the necessary goods. Basil, also defined autarky by saying:

The immediate need for direct use is the measure of the use, while what exceeds immediate usage brings sadness, or greed, or pleasure-loving, or vanity (quoted in Bougatsos, 1982, p. 180).

And,

The word autarky means that one does need anything and also that one has nothing to spare. Autarky, however, differs from man to man. It has to do with bodily needs, and with specific needs (*Ibid.*, p. 182).

Chrysostom defines autarky by saying:

By autarky we mean the usage of things without which we cannot survive (*Ibid.*, p. 174). And, God... made physical necessity the limit, so that it should not be necessary to maniacally chase wealth (*Ibid.*, p. 180).

Beyond autarky and in a state of wealth, its possessors, according to the Fathers, must spend it properly. The proper or rational use of wealth for the Fathers is its spending in necessary consumption goods and almsgiving.

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Clement of Alexandria considers that wealth was given by God to the rich in order to be distributed to their poor fellow citizens. He sees in its use, rather than its quantity, the determinant of its benefit to men (*Stromata*, III, 6, 55).

Similarly Cyril of Jerusalem, in his *Catechisms* (632~3) writes:

Wealth, gold and silver are not the works of the devil as some people believe, because the whole world of money is intended for the faithful. For the unfaithful, however, there should not be a single penny. It was all given by God in order to put to charitable usage, and that is why it is wrong to call it the devil's money (quoted in Bougatsos, 1982, p. 189).

On the same issue Basil argued by borrowing ideas and comments from the ancient Greek philosophers, such as Solon and Socrates. Basil adopted Solon's pronouncement that virtue is more secure and permanent than wealth (*To The Youths*, 1958, V). He also follows Socrates in commenting that what is significant with regard to wealth is not its rate of growth, but its proper usage (*Ibid.*, 1958, IX). Basil justified the subjective use of wealth, considering that the amount of consumption desired, not the actual amount of material goods, determines the value of wealth, ironically commenting that "the unsatiated desire for wealth make you (i.e. the rich) feel poor" (vol. 11, *Homily to the Rich*, 56C; brackets added). Basil echoed the position of Chrysostom, Clement and many other of the Fathers in noting that,

Those who think logically and wisely will see that wealth is not to be used for pleasure, but for proper management and to assist those in need (vol. 11, *Homily to the Rich*, 54E).<sup>42</sup>

The majority of the Fathers turned against the avaricious behaviour of rich men (see Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, book 2, ch. IV; Titus of Bostra, *Against the Manichaeans*, 3, IX; Basil, vol. 2, Letter 2, *To bishops*, 53). Basil, in addition to his generally negative attitude toward avaricious behaviour, also recognised its negative economic effects. He stressed that by the idle accumulation of wealth an amount of exchange value is withdrawn from economy and its consequence is an increase in the value of money. As he wrote:

Stationary wealth is useless, but money which circulates and is transferred between people becomes a productive public benefit (vol. 11, *Homily on the saying of the Gospel of Luke*, 48A; see also Gould, 1987 p. 16).

<sup>42</sup> Basil also rejects the accumulation of wealth for inheritance reasons (see Viner, 978, p. 22).

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Chrysostom also criticised wealth accumulation because it brings risks and problems



to the accumulator, and he notes that there are some aspects of loving wealth which lead to nothing but trouble (vol. 63, *Homilies on Matthew*, 138B). He concluded that "When one thinks only about money. . . interest, loans, profit and base commerce then he will betray human nobility and freedom" (vol. 64, *Homilies on Matthew*, 263A-B). With regard to the consumption of wealth, the majority of the Fathers attacked the consumption of luxury goods. Clement of Alexandria, with a satirical tone, questioned whether a silver plough is more useful for ploughing than an iron one, and extended this line of argument to cover other everyday items like spoons and chairs. He considers that the usefulness of such things is not a function of the luxury—or otherwise—of their material construction, but of their necessity (*Paedagogus*, 2, III, 37). Basil also denounced luxury consumption, since it decreases the level of almsgiving, whilst only increasing imaginary satisfaction (see vol. 11, *Homily to the Rich*, 52D-53B, 53D, 56B).<sup>43</sup> On the same issue John Chrysostom stressed the subjective estimation of wealth, based upon levels of consumption wants, rather than its objective estimation based upon exchange power.

Chrysostom also rejected the expenditure of wealth on luxury goods, as this reduced the amount of wealth available for almsgiving (vol. 47, *Homilies on Genesis*, 382A; vol. 55, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 146C).<sup>44</sup> In his *On vainglory and the education of children* (ed. 1940, 14) he observed that conspicuous consumption is frequently the cause of the shortage of necessary goods in a family. He distinguished between necessary goods (such as food, clothes, a house) and luxuries (like slaves or silver ornaments) and stressed that the shortage of the second type of goods does not influence the future of humanity. As he put it:

There are necessary things without which life becomes unbearable. For example the goods of the land are necessary; and if the land stops providing fruits, it is impossible for us to survive. The clothes that cover us, the roof and the walls (of the house), shoes; all these are necessary

<sup>43</sup>The majority of the Fathers as e.g. Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus*, 2, ch. III, pp. 147; 15-25), Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechisms*, IV, 118), Gregory of Nazianzus (vol. 5, homily 14, *On benevolence*, 16, 5-10) as also the Latin Fathers (see Viner, 1978, p. 21) turned against the consumption of luxury goods and services from the Point of view that they will cause an ethical corruption of individuals.

<sup>44</sup>Titus of Bostra in his *Against the Manichaeans* (II, 8) stated that the unequal distribution of wealth would facilitate philanthropic behaviour by the rich, and endurance in the poor. On the other side, the Manichaeans regarded this to be the result of a disordered society.

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things. Everything else is unnecessary. If everything else besides food, clothes and shelter were necessary, and it were impossible for man to live without a servant, the majority of humanity would have been destroyed, since most people do not have servants. If it were so necessary to use silver dishes that we could not live without them, once again, most people not possessing silver would have perished (*On vainglory and the education of children*, ed. 1940, 13).

He also turned against luxury consumption because he regarded it as the main cause of the extreme inequality in the living standards between rich and poor men. He came into conflict with the empress Eudoxia because of her luxurious living. Eventually, Chrysostom's public criticism of the Empress was to lead to his death in exile (Adeney, 1908, p. 92).<sup>45</sup> Chrysostom describes fairly well the motive for conspicuous

consumption:

The poor man also always tries to wear exceptional clothes, simply so as to be admired and glorified by others. Although he is capable of serving himself, he gets a servant not through any real need, but so as not to appear so poor that he is forced to serve himself (*On vainglory and the education of children*, ed. 1940, 13).

He maintained that the consumption of luxury goods, which drives both the rich and their poorer imitators, is detrimental because the money spent on such things could have been given to the poor. Thus, he attacked the state, which spent much money on various entertainments, instead of on charitable works (*On vainglory and the education of children*, 12-13). John Chrysostom, also turned against the consumption of luxury goods and services for the following reasons; firstly because it is an example of unnecessary human vanity (vol. 16, *On the Statues*, 26B), and secondly because some luxury consumption is in the area of immorality, for example prostitution (vol. 73, *Homilies on John*, homily 42). For these reasons, he recommends that individuals expend their income and wealth only upon necessary goods. Chrysostom, and the other Fathers, did not recognise the potentially positive economic effects accrued by the conspicuous consumption of the rich, such as increasing employment and production, which was emphasised by many writers of the 18th century, including Mandeville, Montesquieu, Hume, Sir James Steuart, and Smith.

<sup>45</sup> As von Campenhausen notes: "If it had been possible for him to remain what he essentially *-was*, the indefatigable preacher and interpreter of the word of God, the teacher and true admonisher of his congregation, the friend and helper of the

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#### 7.4. *Ownership of Wealth*

Chrysostom strongly believed that because the earth had been created by God, man's ownership of it was inherently contingent, and thus, in his more vociferous attacks upon the rich, he characterized continued ownership of unnecessary riches as theft. His main position on property and ownership can be summarised thus:

To him, the notion of an absolute and exclusive right of ownership was a caricature of its true nature, which was essentially that of a means of serving to deepen genuine human relationships among fellow pilgrims and fellow servants of the same Lord. Chrysostom conceived the nature of ownership essentially as that of a dynamic function of sharing the world's wealth to meet the requirements of a life of dignity for all (Avila, 1983, p. 103).

According to Chrysostom, human welfare depends upon an abundance of goods, the general peace, and a reasonably equitable distribution of wealth. If these three conditions are satisfied, then one can commence the quest for an approximation of a welfare state (vol. 58, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 34IB). Chrysostom in his *Homilies On the Priesthood* (ed. 1939, I, 1) stressed that *homonía* and friendship among men increase when there are no extreme inequalities in the distribution of possessions. In regard to the elimination of extreme inequalities of wealth, where poverty is the condition in which the majority of men languish, Chrysostom, as previously mentioned, put much emphasis on the function of charity and almsgiving. He recommended this endogenously determined factor for the amelioration of widespread poverty, and polarisation of wealth-distribution, on the following religious and spiritual grounds:

Can't you see that God gave us all things in common? Because though he permitted

the existence of those poor in money he did this for the sake of those who acquire wealth, so that they can wash away their sins by means of charity to the poor (vol. 75, *Homilies on John*, homily, 77, 4).

And,

God wants us to have everything in common, both bodies and money, both the poor and the greedy (vol. 64, *Homilies on Matthew.*, 237C, brackets added).

Poor, oppressed, and needy perhaps his life would have ended peacefully" (von Campenhausen, 1963, p. 140).

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For that reason,

tell me, did the lack of property come from love or love from the lack of property? I believe that the lack of property came from love (vol. 76, *Homilies on the Acts of Apostles*, 11, 1).

It should be noted that the first rationale for redistribution of wealth through almsgiving represents a major theme of the Old Testament, where the divine gift of the Land, and all that is in it, places demands relating to its ethical usage upon the people of Israel. Chrysostom does not seem to suggest the elimination of private property, in terms of the means of production, although he admires the communal ownership and distribution of goods as prevailed in the first years of the Jerusalem Love Community.<sup>46</sup> In an often quoted passage, Chrysostom notes:

Grace was among them, because none suffered lack, for the reason that they gave so generously that none remained poor. For they did not give one part and retain another part for themselves; nor did they give everything as if it were their own property. They abolished inequality and lived in great abundance; and they did this in the most praiseworthy manner. They did not dare to place alms into the hands of the needy, nor did they give largesse with arrogant condescension, but they laid them at the feet of the apostles and made them the masters and distributors of the gifts. Each man took his needs then from the supply of the community, not from the private property of individuals. This prevented the giver from acquiring a vain self-complacency (vol. 76, *Homilies on the Acts of Apostles*, homily 11, 2~3, quoted in Kautsky, 1925, p. 332).

Chrysostom continues to wish that his idealised image of the earliest Church at Jerusalem could exist in his time:

If we should do this today, we should live much more happily, rich as well as poor (*Ibid.*).<sup>\*1</sup>

On the other hand, as noted above, Chrysostom accepts the possession of wealth accumulated by fair means and recognises that private property guarantees the increase and improvement of production. As he says:

<sup>46</sup> Zeses (1971, p. 162) comments that Chrysostom advanced both a communism where the spirit of love and charity would prevail, and a capitalistic society where ascetism would dominate.

<sup>47</sup> It is untypically disingenuous of Chrysostom to disregard the fact that the Jerusalem community eventually encountered huge communal poverty, to the extent of starvation, and required enormous fund-raising efforts on the part of St. Paul to save it.

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In this respect the shepherd differs from the salaried worker in that he (i.e. the salaried worker) is thinking of his own personal salvation at all times, neglecting the sheep,

while the other (i.e. the shepherd) is always concerned with his sheep's salvation, neglecting his own (vol. 74, *Homilies on John*, homily 60, 1, brackets added).

The hesitation of Chrysostom to actively and fully promote a general communitarian state would seem to derive at least in part from his position as a leader of the recognised state religion, and a concomitant reluctance to advocate revolutionary action. Nonetheless, whilst not wholly endorsing common ownership of property, Chrysostom clearly recommends the distribution of the fruits of private production in a way which expects the rich to act as though ownership were communal. On this subject of communal distribution of goods, other Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Basil propound rather clearer arguments. Clement noticed that all goods have given to humanity by God and thus can be used by everybody, viz:

It is strange that while most people are starving, one man can enjoy great pleasures. This not a human quality, nor decent social behaviour. ... The Christian knows that God did not give us power over the use of material goods, but only power over the usage of essential goods. Furthermore, he wants this usage to be in common (*Paedagogus*, 2, XII).

Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* distinguished between the ownership and the use of capital, and as Gordon (1989b, p. 85) says this distinction "is grounded in a stewardship theory of property". In Clement's words:

But we say that the goods of this earth are the property of another, not as an absurdity, or as if they were not things of God, the Lord of all, but since we do not remain in them for all eternity. By possession they are other peoples, and become theirs by possession; by use they are the property of each one of us, through whom they come into being, but only in so far as it is necessary to be one with us (*Stromata*, iv, 13, quoted in Gordon, 1989b, p. 85).

Basil observes that the unequal possession of goods, and the unequal opportunity for their possession, shows the ethical decline of humanity. Only through voluntary distribution by charity could this situation be changed:

So you (i.e. the rich) are not greedy? So you are not a depriver? Since what you received for common sharing you made into your own?.... The bread you possess was for a person who is hungry. The clothes you have in your chests are for an unclothed person.... The money

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you bury in the ground is for those who need (vol. 11, *Homily on the saying of the Gospel of Luke*, 50B-C, brackets added).

The last sentence of the above quotation shows a macro-economic approach to the subject of the accumulation and use of wealth. According to Basil a Christian community must have the following characteristics:

Since the welfare and the needs of the poor are paid for by the rich each one receiving a little for his necessary maintenance and care, then everyone will share their goods and spend them on themselves. So if you love your neighbour as yourself, you should not have more than he does (vol. 11, *Homily on the Rich*, 52B).

Nonetheless, it should not be thought that all of the Fathers were opposed to the ownership and possession of wealth per se. Clement of Alexandria's position in his *The Rich Man's Salvation* (XTV) is, however, unique in the strength of its defense of wealth:

We must not cast away riches which can benefit our neighbour. Possessions were made to be possessed; goods are called goods because they do good, and they have been provided by God for the good of men: they are at hand and serve as the material,

the instruments for a good use in the hand of him who knows how to use them. If you use them with skill you reap the benefit from them (quoted in Gordon, 1989b, p. 77).<sup>48</sup>

Clement's position is echoed by other Fathers. Eusebius of Alexandria argues on behalf of the use of wealth, rather than against its accumulation, saying:

Let us not blame wealth, since wealth does not govern man, but man governs wealth, and makes it useful. Wealth is good to those who manage it well (quoted in Bougatsos, 1982, p. 189).

Chrysostom wrote, with regard to his attacks on rich men, and the riches they possess: Wealth is not evil because it is possible for it to be used where a need exists, when it is spend on the needy ones, but greed is evil. Greed brings with it unceasing punishment (vol. 74, *Homilies on John*, homily 64, 4).

<sup>48</sup> Gordon (1989b, p. 87) mentions for the above statement that "Here, Clement seems to have grasped the fact that concerned entrepreneurs with capital may be able to do much more for the poor in economic terms than if those same entrepreneurs are themselves living from hand to mouth... . Clement's insights concerning the potential roles of capital and entrepreneurship in Christian economic order were not taken up by later Fathers".

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## 8. *The Social Structure of the Economy*

### 8.1. *Slavery and Dependence*

The Fathers were living in an intensely structured class-based society. Chrysostom differentiates between three kind of people in relation to their economic power: the poor, the middle class and the rich. He is absolutely certain that the rich citizens, although they are a minority, are able to sustain the poor citizens by almsgiving (vol. 68, *Homilies on Matthew*, 657E-658A). Thus he used statistical data to persuade the citizens of Antioch and Constantinople that the rich citizens possess the economic surplus to feed the poor (vol. 69, *Homilies on Matthew*, 810A; vol. 76, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, homily 11.3; see also Viner, 1978, p. 25).<sup>49</sup>

Another social difference that Chrysostom mentioned is that between free men and slaves. Slavery was a permanent, almost a defining, characteristic of the ancient world. The Father considers that slavery is a product of the sins of a part of the human race. At the beginning of the creation of the world, all men were free but after the Fall, came "the necessity of slavery caused by sin" (vol. 52, *Homilies on Genesis*, 662B; vol. 15, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, 782C-D; see also Spentzas, 1969, p. 118, ft. 3). Chrysostom considers three kind of slavery:

(a) that of women to man (vol. 52, *Homilies on Genesis*, 659);

(b) of brother to brother, that is the normal slavery (vol. 52, *Homilies on Genesis*, 660D); and

(c) that of the lords which is the most heavy (vol. 52, *Homilies on Genesis*, 661B).

With regard to the dependence of women to man, Jesus and the apostles taught a tempered equality between the two genders (see for example *Matthew* 19, 5-6, *Corinthians* 1, 7, 5-9, and *Ephesians* 5, 23-30).<sup>50</sup> Although Chrysostom is supportive of a spiritual equality

<sup>49</sup> Kautsky (1925, p. 334) noticed that here Chrysostom shows "the uniformly communistic character of the first stage of Christian congregation".



<sup>50</sup>Ignatius of Antioch in his *To philadelfeis* (IV, p. 308) advises his fellow citizens to consider their wives as equal to them and as the same children of God. He was bishop of the Antioch at the end of the first, beginning of the second, century. During the reign of the Emperor Trajan, in about 110 A.D., a persecution of Chris-took place in Antioch, during which Ignatius was thrown to the lions.

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between man and woman, he advocates a natural discrimination between them which results in a division of labour. The woman is to work in the house, whilst a man should work in order to feed his family (Attwater, 1959, p. 61).

In regard to the second kind of slavery—the normal one "of brother to brother"—Chrysostom believes that when men are living according to the teachings of Jesus, and adopt philanthropic behaviour, the burden of slavery will be abolished (vol. 52, *Homilies on Genesis*, 666A-B; vol. 76, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, homily 11, 3). However, there is no evidence that the Fathers pursued the abolition of slavery by force or legislation, although they did not regard such a state as undesirable. In one of his works, Chrysostom, however, advises the free men who have slaves at their disposal to teach them a trade and then to release them (Christou, 1975, pp. 122-3; Gordon, 1989b, p. 108).

In regard to the third kind of slavery, that which pertained between a statesman and the citizens, Chrysostom regards that under the existence of the law and the fair behaviour of citizens such a dependence is not necessary (vol. 52, *Homilies on Genesis*, 662A). And here he makes a comment to politicians which still has relevance today:

If you choose to ask someone who engages in politics, and thoughtlessly spends his money, what is the point of all this irrational expenditure, you will be informed that it is exclusively for the pleasure of the masses. If again you ask him who are the masses, he will answer that the mob is full of noise, and mostly senseless, moving purposelessly like ocean waves, unstable and aggressive. Nobody is more a fool, than the man who has such a master (vol. 71, *Homilies on John*, homily 2, 5).

Regarding the cause of slavery, the explanations of Basil were somewhat different to those of Chrysostom. Basil also believed slavery to be an unnatural state. However he considers it to be a world-wide practice which was caused by the following: (a) the difference in spiritual and economic power among men; and (b) the benefits which it had sometimes brought to less effective and able men. As he comments:

At least amongst men, none is a slave by nature. This is because they were led into slavery after defeat, as in the case of prisoners of war, or became slaves because of poverty, like Pharaoh's Egyptians, or because of some wise and incomprehensible plan of God. Some of the worst

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offspring are even sentenced to be slaves to good men by their fathers' command. Yet one should not call this a sentence, but a benefit, if one wishes give a fair assessment. It is indeed better that he who is not able to manage become the possession of someone else. Thus, since he will be led by the mind of his possessor, at least he will be like a carriage who has a driver, or a ship with its captain at the wheel (vol. 10, *On the Holy Spirit*, 20, 50-1).

Although Chrysostom was a clear-sighted man when surveying economic and other social relations amongst men, he did not recognise the voluntary interdependence between the different economic classes of society, which takes place in the market

through demand and supply of goods and services. He recognised a social dependency among men, and particularly of the poor upon the rich, mentioning that the latter, having social power and authority at their disposal, are able to keep their poor fellows under control (vol. 54, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 121A; vol. 56, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 205B-C). On the other hand, the only economic dependence that Chrysostom recognised among the different classes of men is that created by almsgiving from the rich to their poorer fellow citizens.

## 8.2. Authority and Government

In the 4th century, a change took place in the way that the leaders of the church viewed state leadership. In primitive Christianity, the first Fathers advised that citizens should obey their kings. For example, Ignatius of Antioch recommended his fellow citizens to obey their lords in order for the unity of the society to be sustained (*To the Philadelphians*, IV, pp. 308-9; see also Clement of Rome, (*Commands of the Saints and Apostles*, 7, XVI, p. 122.)). These early days were marked by persecution and martyrdom. However, following the "conversion" of Constantine, Christianity was established as the state religion of the (Eastern) Roman Empire. The Fathers lost their fear of violence at the hands of the rulers lords and kings, whilst also gaining a first hand perspective on court life, with all its faults. These factors contributed to an increase in criticism of the state, and its rulers, which would cost some of the Fathers dear, as the tale of Chrysostom's end illustrates.

Marsilius of Padua (between 1275 and 1280-ca. 1342) in his *The Defender of Peace*, (ch. IV, in A. Hyman, J. Walsh, 1973, pp. 691-2) quotes Chrysostom as saying:

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The rulers of the world exist in order to lord it over their subjects, to cast them into slavery and to despoil them (namely, if they deserve it) and to use them even unto death for their (that is, the rulers') own advantage and glory. But the rulers (that is, prelates) of the church are appointed in order to serve their subjects and to minister to them whatever they have received from Christ, so that they neglect their own advantage and seek to benefit their subjects, and do not refuse to die for their salvation.

Another development which the fourth century ushered in was the very real local economic power wielded by the Bishops as administrators of charitable funds (Mango, 1980, p. 49). And through this charity, which expressed itself in a whole range of philanthropic activities, the Church functioned as an external mechanism for the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (Mango, 1980, p. 52).<sup>51</sup> The Greek Fathers were not apologists for the economic ruling class. On the contrary, much in the style of the Old Testament prophets, they wrote in defense of the rights of the poor, attacking the unfairness and inhumanity of rich. In other words, they were advocates and staunch defenders of the lower class.

## 9. Economic Policy

The economy of the period from the early fourth century onwards was increasingly controlled by the famously labyrinthine Byzantine bureaucracy. The Fathers, however, did not believe that the state was able to redistribute wealth in favour of the poor, emphasising its functional incapacity and ethical corruption. However, they recognised that the statesmen possessed an instrument through which they could produce social justice, namely the taxation system. The Fathers, and especially

Chrysostom, believed that the role of taxation was mainly the redistribution of income and wealth. He was in favour of progressive taxation, condemning the equal fiscal treatment of rich and poor (vol. 11, *Comparison between the King and the Monk*, 119C).

<sup>51</sup> As Kautsky (1925, p. 448) comments "The bishop now became the master, tiling the empire by the side of emperor.... Simultaneously, the Church now attained the rights of a legal personage capable of holding and inheriting property (321 A.D.). Its proverbial appetite was thus enormously stimulated, church property grew apace". Thus they sought collaboration, and not confrontation, with the prevailing state of affairs, especially since the churches received huge wealth and property from the emperors.

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In the 4th-5th centuries the levying of taxation had dramatically increased. Chrysostom mentions that taxation was heavy for the poor in his time (see *Homilies on the Priesthood*, ed. 1939, I, 2).<sup>52</sup> Also, Basil recognising that the burden of taxation is much heavier for the poor tenants and small producers, suggested its reformation by the following measures:

(1) The amount of taxes which the tenants and small producers are obliged to pay to the prefect and the central government to be diminished. He justified such a decrease in the rate of taxes to these occupations because heavy taxation would eventually force them to leave their employment. Basil wrote to Modestus, Valens' praetorian prefect, urging him to reduce the rate of taxation in small farms and industries (vol. 4, Letter 110, *To the Prefect Modestus*, 110, 10-20). Gregory of Nazianzus also made the same suggestion (vol. 5, *To Julian the Apostate*, 9, 1-5).<sup>53</sup>

(2) The practice of levying four-fold fines for delayed taxes to be abolished (vol. 1, Letter 21, *To the Sophist Leontius*, 5-10).

(3) The abolition of the illegal tax rate, which tax collectors levied on poor farmers, tenants and small producers (vol. 1, Letter 21, *To the Sophist Leontius*, 5-10).<sup>54</sup>

(4) The exception from tax liability of various philanthropic institutions (vol. 4, Letter 142, *To Numerarius*).

(5) Small farmers and tenants not be obliged to give an oath declaring their tax liability, as such an oath is against Christian teachings (vol. 3, Letter, 85).

#### 10. Conclusions

The Fathers suggested that redistributive justice be brought about by both endogenous and exogenous instruments: the first being the

<sup>52</sup> There was heavy taxation in the 4th-5th centuries particularly on agriculture which was the prime production sector (see, Stevens, 1966, pp. 113-4; Mango, 1980, P- 58; Alföldy, 1984, p. 352). The majority of tenants (*coloniae*) were subject to particularly heavy taxation, thus they lived in high poverty (Alföldy, 1984, p. 347). In Antioch (387) and Nazianzus (382) citizens rebelled because of heavy taxation (see Alföldy, 1984, p. 361).

<sup>53</sup> As Jones (1974, pp. 86-8) has shown, the Fathers were quite right in this argument, since heavy taxation has been demonstrated to be one of the causes for the decline of production in the first centuries of the Byzantine empire.

<sup>54</sup> As Jones (1964, p. 119) comments "Tax collecting was a profitable occupation for those who were in a position to bring undue pressure on the taxpayers".

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increase in charitable altruistic behaviour of men, and particularly of the rich, and the second being the diminution of the rate of taxation that the poor were obliged to pay, combined with the offering of some funds to the poor through the establishment of various institutions on the part of the church. They justify these propositions not only on religious but also on economic grounds. Specifically, they stressed the diminishing utility of goods, thus if the rich shared part of their surplus with the poor their utility derived from non-luxury goods would be increased. Furthermore, at the same time they will receive the forgiveness of God and their chances of entrance to God's Kingdom will be increased. We have also noted their attacks on the unfair and unethical accumulation of wealth, and on the dangers of avarice resulting in the garnering of wealth which then lay idle.

The Fathers in their religious writings and homilies do not attempt only to develop exhortations and normative propositions for the economic behaviour of the citizens. In addition, they try to create an hierarchy of values. They believed that by developing such an hierarchy, based on Christian doctrines like love of each other, and the brotherhood of men, economic injustice and poverty would be abolished. That this attempt was highly reasonable is indicated in the work of modern writers like Weiskopf (1971, p. 44) who notes:

Men have to believe in values which guide their actions, and Men cannot live without values and they cannot embrace values without believing that they have validity.

It seems as though the Fathers recognised that by altering the social and ethical system, one can also change the elements that have alienated man. This is why, drawing upon Christian ethics, and the philosophy of ancient Greece, they attempted to delineate the parameters of a new ethical system. Their new socio-ethical system was intended to promote the alienated parts of human lives, and especially human spirituality. Moral rules, as a part of human existence, permit the allocation of value judgement to individual achievements, and thus have a canonical dimension. The canonical aspect of the Fathers' work is particularly strongly expressed in their opposition of unfettered wealth accumulation.

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