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We are to consider in this paper the subject of The Benevolence of the Early Church. We cannot include that greatest of all benevolences which is expressed in the life and infinite love of the Saviour, but will begin with the founding of the Church at Pentecost, and carry our thought through the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic periods ending about the year 325 A.D.

Our three-fold source of information will be the writings of the Fathers, Esebius' Ecclesiastical History, and the Acts and Epistles of the Apostles. It is not wholly from the statement of facts in these three sources that we shall be able to determine concerning the benevolence of the Early Church, but often from the related statements we are able to get an adequate conception.

In the first place St. Luke in the Acts will give us the external view, and going from these to the Epistles we get the internal view or the motives as expressed by the Apostles for their benevolence. Eusebius and the Fathers give much that corroborates the Scriptures concerning the Apostolic age, and give us the only original facts concerning the Post-Apostolic time.

If one would enquire as to the utility of the study of this question, we would reply that it is just as essential to go to the Apostles of Pentecost and subsequent times to learn how the Church was augmented by her giving as well as by her receiving. If those early days of Christian Endeavor and success in marvellous accomplishments are suggestive to the present time; in fact if the early believer can show the Church that is to follow him how it is possible for the Holy Spirit to come and set the world on fire for Godliness, so we can go to the same believers, and they by their unselfish devotion and munificent expressions of love can show us how to make the cause of God to prosper in temporal as well as spiritual matters, and likewise give us a practical idea of what Christ likeness is. As those in touch with the Saviour set up a right standard of spirituality so we believe they have given us the true standard of pecuniary liberality.

The one general principle that ruled in the benevolence of the Early Church was that it was purely voluntary. Christianity could not claim support of any State or temporal power, but was dependent upon the conditions of heart, conscience, and beneficence of her belivers.

If there is help from being under the inspiration of / the Apostles, we can claim for those who undertook the care of the Christian Church in its primitive forms, a special inspiration . They had no precedent for systematic benevolence or charity, and what they did was the expression of hearts in sympathy with the great heart of the Master.

While the impressions of Pentecost were still upon the people, "and they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' teaching and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers, and fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need". Acts II. 42-46.

We take another statement from the Acts that "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul. and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common, and with great power gave the Apostles their witness of the ressurection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the Apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto each according as any one had need." Acts IV. 32-35.

These quotations leave no question as to the fact of the early Christians having a communistic system of life, but it is not sufficient to say that the early Church illustrates the general system of communism, nor further to say that it was any part of the Christian system. Theirs was a purely voluntary expression of heart which is easily seen by noticing the fact that dividends in this company were declared not in proportion to the amounts invested but in proportion to their individual needs. Again we can show it was a voluntary matter from the account given of Ananias and Sapphira . "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to deceive the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, did it not remain thine own? and after it was sold was it not in thy power?" Acts V. 3.4. This gives us to understand that Ananias had a right to keep his property, or to keep the money after it was sold, and his condemnation was not on account of his with-holding his substance, but wholly from the fact of the deception practised.

A suggestion of communism is given by Eusebius in reporting what Philo has to say concerning the Ascetics in Egypt. Through Philo he gives credit to the statement that a large number especially all over Egypt was actuated by the benevolent spirit so that they made the same sacrifice of property as did the Apostles and their earlier followers. Whether or no Eusebius has here confused the Christians and the Ascetics, we cannot say. At any rate it suggests that / the communistic system and thought were largely prevalent by the year 40 A.D.

An evident importance is to be attached to the fact that Eusebius makes a great deal out of the statement that the Evangelists "Fulfilled the Savior's precept by distributing their substance to the needy". He likewise interprets

Origen as believing that the evangelical precepts of our Savior should be taken literally, and that men should not have two coats or wear shoes &c. Origen is also given as an example from the fact that he strenuously practiced this teaching.

If more is needed to give us a correct impression of this primitive view of benevolence or if corroboration is necessary we may quote from Justin Martyr, where he describes the worship of the Christians, "And they who are well to do and willing give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is laid up with the President, who helps the orphans and widows, and those who through sickness, or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and, in a word takes care of all who are in need". LXVII.

From these different sources we learn that the first great effort on the part of the Christian Church was to care for all the needy. The attraction of such a system must be apparent. The world then, as in every stage of its history, was needy, and "The poor always ye have with you", was not the expression of a sentiment but a fact. A system among men who had had but little knowledge of the sympathy of brotherhood or claims of assistance from the State, could but receive attention, especially if such a system could benefit the very needy. Therefore this new system of life affords men facility in elevating themselves by the profession of a religion which must improve their conditions in all ways offering them especially assistance and sympathy.

The Church in becoming a helping organization took upon itself necessarily that other phase which made it a protective body, and all the weak anxiously sought its protection.

The causes for the developement of such a system we believe are found in several general facts. First, the Church began on the basis of a family, and in its early history it was not only in name an enlarged family circle, but in fact and life. With this interpretation of the Church itself there is little difficulty in accounting for the system of help and protection we have already described. Each one as a member of this family contributed of his means for the common maintenance, and the needy one would be left uncared for in this company no more than would a child in the house of a true Christian in this day. They were not counselled to surrended their property as we have before noticed, neither were they to persevere in it by any decree of the Church. It was not then a fixed institution more than could be said of any family and whenever this family tie is broken the system is broken.

Secondly we learn from the Epistles that there was a general expectation of the speedy return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and until they were given occasion for hesitation by the lengthening period since the Lord's Ascension there

was no thought of anything but a preparation for this return and the benefits of retaining their property was not considered. It was not until the second or third Century that work could be said to be done for posterity. At first simply the present day needs were met.

When the mistaken idea of the Lord's speedy return became more apparent the difficulties of this system of general benevolence began to appear. From the Acts, the sixth chapter and first verse we read, "Now in these days when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations", and on account of this complaint comes the first attempt at organization by which the systematic work of benevolence might be carried on. Before this time the matter of reception and distribution of funds was entirely with the Apostles, and from the quotation given the accusation made by the Grecian Jews was not against the Church on account of any lack of support, but that their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations, and this neglect was occasioned by the growth of the Church making it impossible for the Apostles to care for the work, and at the instigation of the twelve the multitude of disciples was called unto them and they said, "It is not fit or pleasing that we should forsake the word of God and minister to tables. Look ye out, therefore, brethren from among you, seven men of good report, full of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word, and the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon and Parmenas, and Nichlas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the Apostles: and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them. Acts VI. 2-7.

It is not our purpose to enter into the discussion as to what office is here established any more than to assist us in determining what bearing the office may have upon the work of benevolence. We have no evidence in the quotation just given that this class of men was called deacons or that it established the diaconate. Eusebius assumes as much when he writes of, "One of those deacons, who with Stephen were appointed by the Apostles to minister unto the poor". Bk. III, Chap. 29.

The Apostle's description of what a deacon ought to be will not give any definite suggestion, but the general description would be such a condition of life as would be consonant with the office as fixed by the Apostles. Their requirements as given in I Timothy III, 8 ff, would answer to the "good report and full of wisdom" as desired by the twelve. If the financial work of the Church was at first

left with a class called deacons it afterwards changed and became the work of the elders, as we learn from the fact that the Antioch collection was delivered to the Elders. Acts XI. 30.

In the beginning at least the seven had a special office which may have been enlarged until it came to be the office of the Elders; but Paul's letter to the Philippians I.1, indicates at the time of writing that these offices were distinct or at least receive separate mention.

The needs and the desire to help were such that the diaconate was continually increased, and women were added whether under the title of deaconess or not, we cannot show. We find it possible to include in the list of those who have official relations in matters of benevolence, the Sisters or Deaconesses, as mentioned by St. Paul in Romans XVI, 1.16. - Widows are given a place in this work where their qualifications are such as to make it possible to accept them. These conditions the Apostle Paul enumerates in I Tim. V. 9-11, and she is admitted "if she hath used hospitality to strangers, if she hath relieved the afflicted, if she hath diligently followed every good work". One of the suggestions from these conditions mentioned is the fact that men and women must have shown by their spirit and life that they are competent to care for this great work of the Church. If the Early Church could succeed only on the condition of men and women being selected who had some adaptability; and above all an inclination for such work, so it is just as true in the modern Church. The place of the benevolence has no minor part in the great work of Christianity, but rather must be given its real place of importance alongside the preaching of the Gospel. The importance, the necessity, and the practical benefits of one, must be the legitimate outcome of the other, and the real purpose of Christianity cannot be accomplished until her basis of benevolence is upon the same plane, and has the same importance given it as is given to the preaching of the Gospel. As one is the legitimate outcome of the other, so one cannot succeed without the other. We may well quote an expression from Renan in this connection. Writing concerning the diaconate he says, "This institution elevated the care of the poor to an equality with religious service. It was a proclamation of the truth that social questions should be the first to occupy the attention of man. It was the introduction of political economy into religious affairs".

With official charity there has always been the system of private charity. In fact, the first arrangements for the relief of the poor were so fluctuating that it is difficult to obtain anything like a correct view of their workings. No institutions or houses of hospitality were needed where every house was an asylum. Although in the Apostolic age the Churches managed their charity through officials, such as Elders, and subordinate officers as deacons, deaconesses.

widows or other qualified persons, yet "helps" or private charity was predominant. This fact is partly accounted for as we have suggested in the family spirit of the time, and furthermore because the Churches were small.

When persecutions arose both public and private charity found it necessary to do their utmost to care for the needy. Self sacrifice was a principle in the early Church, and it was especially found in early times in every Church. People gave not according to, but beyond their means.

The very purpose of giving was a vital principle of Christian life. Their gifts, according to St. Paul were to unite their hearts and to glorify God, "That ye being enriched in everything unto all liberality, which worketh through us thanksgiving to God. For the ministration of their service not only filleth up the measure of the wants of the Saints, but aboundeth also through many thanksgivings unto God" II Cor. IX, 12-13.

As the Apostle Paul was the chief promoter of the all inclusive principles which were for the special benefit of Christ's Church, it is significant to notice his relation to one Church - that of the Macedonians in its noted benevolent spirit. The willingness of this Church to give was not on account of great wealth, because they were very poor, and made poorer by the persecutions which they had to endure after Paul left them, and in Paul's words, "How that in much proof of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of thier liberality". II Cor. VIII. 2.

It is evident that they were not giving according to their power, but beyond it. They supplied the bodily wants of the missionaries when they were among them, and in the care of the Apostle sent gifts to meet his necessities while in other places. When he was in Rome they sent Epaphroditus, one of their teachers to carry gifts to him and to act as his attendant. It is worthy of notice that the Apostle accepted the generosity of this people but would not accept similar favors from other people. This is to be accounted for from the fact that the Apostle knew the spirit of this people and that no evil influences would arise from his receiving help from them. One of Paul's definite teachings was that "They which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel". I Cor. IX, 14. But his example in his total self-abnegation or disinterestedness was typical of the leaders of the early Church. Paul was an enigma to those to whom he came. Those who were filled with greed and avarice were soon shown that there was no occasion of offence in the Apostle, because it was not for money, self, or any worldly motive, but wholly for their good that he came. The Macedonian Church had long before been convinced of this fact, and consequently there was no evil result in receiving from them.

Their gifts were significant for another reason. It was the purpose of the Apostle and had been a hope cherished

for a year II Cor. IX,2. that he might bind the Jewish and Gentile people together and cause them to feel the true bonds of brotherhood in Jesus Christ. It was therefore a stroke of a Master hand, and a final effort was made to bind these Churches in a closer alliance against non-believing Gentiles and persecuting Jews. The possibility of the accomplishment of such an end was sufficient in the thought of the Apostle to tempt him to give his life for its consummation. Acts XX 23-24; XXI, 13. and it is his special desire that the brethren of Rome will pray for the accomplishment of this purpose. Rom. XVI 30-33. To him there is no more acceptable or possible way of making this alliance than by causing the Gentile Christians to raise money and send by representatives with him to Jerusalem, and there show the realpractical sympathy of the Gentile with the Jewish believer. By this means the murmuring of the Pharasic Christians were stopped forever. They no longer thought of the extra-freedom which they before claimed the Gentile Church were enjoying. The greatest unifying power expressed in the world and the most universally accepted credence of the power of Christianity in the world of the past or present has been the practical expression of Macedonian peoples throughout the history of the Church.

A review of the facts shows us that the unifying principle of giving was recognized by the leaders of the Church. It was shown at first in connection with the Church at Antioch. In this Church were a number of teachers, among whom were Paul and Barnabas. When Agabus predicted the famine which was to affect the people of Jerusalem, "Paul and Barnabas were delegated to proceed to the relief of the necessities of these brethren". (Eusebius Bk. II, Chap. 3).

St. Luke gives the account as follows, "And there stood up one of them named Agabus and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples <u>every man according to his ability</u>, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent it to the Elders by the hands of Banabas and Saul". (Acts II, 28-30). Eusebius mentions this famine, and tells how Helen, Queen of the Osrhoenians purchased grain from Egypt with large sums and gave it to the needy. The principle involved in benevolence seems to have been a part of the Divine economy and plan in saving the world.

We turn now to some more general considerations with St. Paul as the authority.

St. Paul makes no commands as to giving. He gives the importance, the privilege and the exhortation to give. As a matter of worship and true service to God we must consider that giving as taught by the Apostles was distinctively from / choice as implied in II Cor. IX,7; VIII,11; Rom. XII,8.

However much the system of tithing may have been expected to influence the Apostle Paul as a Jew, we still hold

that the spirit of his teaching is more in accord with the judgment as to how much a man has left as a criteria for his gifts than is expressed by a tenth or any other amount he might actually give.

We are not ignorant of the fact that many will question our introductory statement that St. Paul makes no commands as to giving, and we will have cited the expression, "Now concerning the collection for the Saints, as I gave order to the Churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as he may prosper that no collection be made when I come". I Cor. XVI, 1-2. The importance of this quotation cannot be questioned, but its significance lies more in the relative value of its connection than in any possibility of its mandatory spirit. If we consider the logical turn of the Apostle's mind we must not think it astray to say this quotation in thought follows the exhortation to abound in the work of the Lord. I Cor. XVI, 58., and it becomes applicable to those who are risen in Christ because of the privilege of doing His will. The suggestion is to follow the plan that has been given the Church at Galatia which to the Apostle is the best and most reasonable way of meeting the necessities of the Saints and carrying on the work of the Gospel. If the gift is made through the free will of the giver, and because of the Christ Spirit in the contributor, it becomes a means of true worship to those who worship in the spirit of liberty. Therefore as a method by which work may be accomplished, and secondly as a means of spiritual life and glorifying God, this suggestion of the Apostle on systematic beneficence is not beneath the inspired thought of the sacred text.

Our study of this period has suggested to us the following benevolent interests that have been promoted.

First, those who were needy, or the brethren at Jerusalem(Acts XI, 29-30),should be helped.

Secondly, a ministry to the saints at Jerusalem through the contributions of the Macedonian and Achaian people, Rom. XV, 25-26; Acts XXIV, 17.

Third, it could have been no part of the benevolent plan that idlers should be helped from the Church treasury. II Thess. III, 10.

Fourth - men of necessity must provide for their own family. If a man will not, "He hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever". I Tim. V,9.

Fifth, they that work in the interest of the Gospel have th right to be maintained by the Gospel. I Cor. IX, 7-14.

Sixth, through the benevolence of the believer the great missionary enterprises of the Church were to be carried on. Titus III, 13-14.

In carrying the work of benevolence from the Apostolic to the Post-Apostolic period we must not forget that the subjects of charity have been greatly increased; the increase

is much larger in proportion than the increase of the believers.

Christianity in making its way westward and becoming identified with the Roman Empire has opportunity and necessity placed upon her; the opportunity of using poverty and want as the subjects for her beneficence and necessity in proving her claim to be equal to care for suffering humanity and help in bearing the burdens of a sin cursed world. Nothing less than the mastery of this situation ever enabled Christianity to obtain its triumphant and glorious place in its early endeavors.

If we take Rome when six needed support to one who did not need aid as an index of what Christianity had to do, we can see that a system that had been established at Pentecost and had been developed with so much enthusiasm through these years was somewhat prepared for the important and more inclusive work that has now been assumed. While the Apostolic period was given wholly to looking after the needs of the "Saints" and "brethren", the post-Apostolic has the enlarged prospect of caring for humanity.

During this period the official benevolence of the Church reaches a good degree of perfection. We have noticed how the work was transferred from the Apostles to the Elders and deacons, and Eusebius we learn there was still greater division of labor made and preparation likewise for more extended work. . Cornelius informing Fabius of the character of Novatus, writes, "This assertor of the Gospel then did not know that there should be but one Bishop in a Catholic Church- in which however, he well knew that there were forty six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two clerks exorcists, readers and janitors, in all fifty-two: widows with the afflicted and needy, more than fifteen hundred; all which the goodness and love of God doth support and nourish". Eusebius Bk. VI Chap. 43.

This statement shows us that by the middle of the third Century a number of offices had been added to the original list, as well also had there been a change in the relation of several offices which had to do in their principle function with the work of benevolences.

Other suggestions are found in Eusebius in this same connection. Of Novatus it is said that "He denied he was a presbyter, through cowardice and love of life, in the time of persecution. For when requested and exhorted by the deacons that he should go forth from his retreat in which he had imprisoned himself, and should come to the relief of the brethren, as far as was proper and in the power of a presbyter and assist brethren requiring relief, he was so far from yielding to any exhortation of the deacons that he went away offended and left them".

It seems difficult to determine which class is to be considered at the head of the benevolent work. From the quotation given the presbyters are expected to help and the

deacons are here given the place of exhorters to faithfulness but we also learn that the deacons never handled independently the relief funds of the poor, but were dependent upon presbyters and afterwards upon the Bishops. The Epistles of Polycarp and Hermas give the care of widows and orphans to the presbyter, and not to the deacons; on the other hand the deacons were used by the Bishops in collecting and distributing funds. They investigated in detail the needs of the poor and their care came to be very largely under their direction.

We have intimated the more universal character of the benevolent work of the post-apostolic period. This was seen not alone in the enlarged work of the Church, but the influence of the work of the Church was felt, and shows itself in the general public. So marked does this become that Tertullian says, "Our compassion gives more in the streets than your religion does in the temples". We do not take this as any reflection on the work the Church was doing, but rather individual charity had been so stimulated that a really great work was now being accomplished by private benevolence.

Not only were there more general and larger gifts but as would naturally follow the recipients were more inclusive. Justin states that "We communicate to all and give to every one who is in need". (Apol. 1-14). In the Epistle of Barnabas the exhortation is given, "Hesitate not to give, and give without grudging, but consider who will be the good repayer of the reward". A still more inclusive statement is made by Pastor Hermas when he says, "Give simply to all without asking doubtfully to whom thou givest, but give to all. For God desires thee to give to all of that which thou hast. They who will receive will give account to God why and for what they receive. They who take anything under an appearance of pretended need will have to give account of it to God, but they who give will be blameless". (Mand. II).

There were abuses practiced in the work of benevolence. Eusebius gives an account of these abuses when he has Apollonius describe the life of Montanus and his followers. Apollonius states that they "Established exactors of money, and under the name of offerings devised the artifice to procure presents: who provided salaries for those that preached his doctrines that it might grow strong by gormandizing and gluttony". Those who claimed to be martyrs and prophets derived gain, not only from the wealthy, but from the poor, the widows and the orphans. Eusebius Bk. V, C. XVIII.

The amounts given by any peoples will be difficult to determine but the general spirit of their giving can be seen from a few illustrations.

We have already stated that fifteen hundred widows and indigent persons were supported by the Church in Rome. This would be for their own people. The case of Cyprian is somewhat different. He collected a sum that would equal between four and five thousand dollars of our money for the Numidian

prisoners. This amount was collected from his Carthiginian Church, and as he claimed to know every member it could not be a very large Church, and furthermore the amount raised was for a definite object and for a foreign people, and accomplished in less than two hundred years after the Giver of all gifts established His Church upon the earth.

The benevolence in this early day was probably equal to or greater than at any other time in the history of the Church, and the only adequate explanation seems to be in the fact that individual energy is more noticable at this time than at any other - a significant suggestion for the present work of the Church.

The collections in themselves were gifts of two kinds. One is considered to answer the Church life on its legal side while the other answers to the public worship of God. Many quotations might be given from the Fathers which would give us the idea they had of the meritorious value of alms and gifts of benevolences. It is not too much to say that wherein they may have attributed a positive merit to the gift which would not be warranted yet we may well emphasize the fact that it is the most powerful and adequate expression of our day to consecrated life, and more indicative of real piety and genuine holiness than can be manifested by or in any other manner. Its being a purely voluntary expression it includes all conditions and reaches all classes of men. It is not necessarily how much was given but the willingness expressed in the amount given. Tertullian has expressed the early Christian idea in these words,"Every one deposits a moderate contribution monthly if he chooses and if he can, for no one is forced, but each contributes voluntarily. ------- It is so to speak a depositum of piety. For it is not applied to feasts or drinking bouts, but to the support or the interment of the poor, the bringing up of boys and girls who have neither property nor parents, the relief of the aged, the shipwrecked, and those who are in mines, in prison or in exile". Apol. C.-39. Justin Martyr makes a still more inclusive list of those receiving help from the Church, adding to the list given by Tertullian, the widows, the sick, and the strangers.

The emphasis put upon regular giving for the glory of God is not of modern origin. Cyprian and others did not hesitate to reprove those who attended public worship and disregarded the offering, and the Apostolic constitution regarded it a christian duty to put something into the Corban every Sunday.

The whole tenor of the early teaching of the Christian Church was to emphasize the importance of giving a man's substance with the heart in order that all might be saved unto eternal life, and putting the treasures of this world into the hands of the Church to be used for God's glory is in truth laying them up in heaven. And thus the Apostolic and post-Apostolic Church leaves us the exhortation,"To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifice God is well pleased".