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**The Re-Definition of the Fatherless
Family in the Early Christian
Church**

**by
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2017**

I, Kathryn B. Westbrook have composed this PhD thesis. It is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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ABSTRACT

Widows and their fatherless children are commonly perceived to be the most deserving category amongst the poor. The frequent exhortations in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament clearly and constantly reminded the early Christian Church of the divine expectations God had enjoined upon them in this matter. There appears to be no obstacle, theological or moral, to perceiving them as worthy recipients of Christian charity and pastoral care. Yet the results of this study show that in the early centuries of the church the fatherless family was invisible to its leadership. They were not perceived as needy people deserving support but were regarded as a problem, rather than real human beings. Ambiguous material in the Gospels and in the other writings of the New Testament, where references to them are sparse and sometimes unsympathetic, allowed creativity of interpretation to occur permitting evasion of the giving of straightforward support, and instead facilitated greater management and control by the clergy. Their informal self-organisation and methods of mutual self-help were increasingly eroded.

The only extensive study of the support of the fatherless family in Roman society and the Church is the four volume habilitation thesis of Jens-Uwe Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich*, published between 1994-1995. This large study deals with the long period 200 BCE – 600 CE diachronically. Apart from the 2009 collection of essays edited by Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan, *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity*, which deals mainly with elite, political, and literary figures rather than the poor, little else has been written on the fatherless child in antiquity. The issue of whether 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and similar later material are referring to an 'Order' of widows, typified by Bonnie Thurston's 1989 book, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*, has proved a major diversion. Recent work by Steven Friesen and Bruce Longenecker reinforce the conception of the composition of the early church as being primarily that of the poor. My focus is on the neglected area of pastoral care of the poor fatherless family within the earliest church, concentrating on the first 300 years CE.

The existence of the poor fatherless family created financial, social and moral difficulties for the church leadership, which forced them to devise novel ways to deal with the duties encumbering them. How could they control these sexually experienced, but vulnerable and dependent, women with their young children? One way was to re-define them as something else.

The first method, and the most successful, was to split them up into two distinct groups, old people and full orphans, each requiring a different approach. Another strategy was to make widows represent someone or something other than themselves. Their *alter egos* will be shown to be human, literary or theological. The third trend observed was an effort towards extinguishing the voice of women. If women and fatherless children were to epitomise something else other than themselves, then their own self-perceived reality had to be kept well hidden. They could not be allowed to speak or socialise. If they did speak their words had to be rendered unheard or to be of no effect. Finally, the young fatherless children of widows have no voice and consequently have been rendered invisible. They do not appear in the Gospels. In the rest of the New Testament and the writings of the early church fathers, they receive little more than a cursory mention as part of a literary trope, or are transformed into barely mentioned full orphans.

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THE RE-DEFINITION OF THE FATHERLESS FAMILY IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

PART I: INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

But refuse to put younger widows on the list [for support]; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. For some have already turned away to follow Satan (1 Tim. 5:11-15 NRSV).¹

My startled response to reading 1 Timothy 5:3-16, which discusses church financial provision for widows, gave me the impetus to investigate the social reality behind this advice. Why are the young widows being condemned for wanting to remarry (because it “distances them from Christ”) and then two sentences later being encouraged to remarry (in order to prevent them “turning away to follow Satan”)? There is an inherent contradiction here which provoked two further questions, “Why is the writer insulting the young widows?”, and “Where in this passage are their children?”

There are many unanswered questions. What is this “first pledge” that they have violated? How is it that their “sensual desires” are alienating them from Christ if marriage is considered to be honourable in all?² What does this expression actually mean in the original Greek of the New Testament? Why is social interaction considered to be idleness? What is wrong with their conversation? What does “turning away to follow Satan” involve? These questions will receive a definite answer in Chapter 9.

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV). BibleWorks, ver. 9,* (New York: Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989). 52-73.

² Let marriage be held in honour by all. (Heb. 13:4 NRSV)

The realisation that the writer appears to be excluding young widows and their children from material provision and support within the early Christian church stimulated a desire to enquire further into whether this relinquishment of responsibility was indeed its policy. In the first place, it must be asked if the church ought to have a particular obligation to care for the widows and children of Christian men. From this follows other questions—did the church in reality undertake this duty? Were fatherless children visible in the ancient church? Were there any alternative provisions available in the Roman Empire for the support of the involuntary fatherless family, which negated the intervention of the church? If so, did these provisions apply to all levels of society? In an attempt to grapple with these questions I focus critically on the church's attitude towards the poor fatherless family as a single unit within the earliest church, concentrating on the first 300 years CE. To demonstrate any continuing influence, developments and changes, or to underline an issue by means of contrast, some material from the fourth century will be presented.

1.2 AIM OF THE THESIS

The aim of this thesis is to examine the evidence of how the poor fatherless family was regarded, theologised and depicted in the New Testament and early Christian literature with a view to discovering whether a genuine practical concern for their needs can be discerned behind the rhetoric.

1.3 PREVIOUS STUDIES

The only extensive study to date which includes the support of the fatherless family as a single unit in Roman society and the Church is the four volume habilitation thesis of Jens-Uwe Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich*, published in 1994-1995.³ This large study of more than 1000 pages deals descriptively with the long period 200 BCE – 600 CE diachronically and is rich in data. He draws attention to the large numbers of women who lived as widows in the Roman Empire, approaching one third of all women. Volume four concentrates on early Christianity and is divided into four main parts, of which the first and most extensive has as its

³ Jens-Uwe Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich*, 4 vols., Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien, Bd. 16-19 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1994-1995).

subject “Charitable measures for the benefit of widows and orphans”.⁴ By means of statistical estimates of the numbers Krause comes to the conclusion that the Church was only in some cases able to contribute to the alleviation of the material needs of widows and orphans. Many widows remained in need or were dependent on private alms. The Church was not able to create a “network of charitable associations” which could have solved the support problem.⁵ Elderly widows were preferred to the younger widows, the latter being redirected to the labour market, which itself was very limited. Due to this preference for the elderly, the Christian authors overlooked probing the financial problems of the poor young widows and their children. Overall, their actions would have rather exacerbated the social problems of the widows, especially by their discouragement of remarriage.⁶ Widows dependent on alms often became embittered; and naturally the acceptance of alms was not easy for most. With regard to the efficiency of private alms in the alleviation of the misery of widows and orphans, a pessimistic assessment is appropriate because the structural problems of widows’ poverty were not addressed. This also applied to post-Constantine Christian-inspired government measures. “There was still a lack of systematic ‘social policy’. Here, too, the implementation of Christianity brought about no fundamental change”.⁷

The second section deals with "Widows as Office-bearers" and comes to the conclusion that they were “to be defined” as ascetics and cannot be proved to have been Office-bearers.⁸ Christianity was incapable of “defining an independent role in the Church” for women, and also for widows.⁹ Being a widow did not bring about a status increase. “The sources scarcely permit any perception of development over time. Standard duties for widows, such as prayer for the community, cannot be detected even in the early period”.¹⁰ By his results, Krause explicitly opposes

⁴ Jens-Uwe Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich 4: Witwen und Waisen im frühen Christentum*, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien; 19 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995). 5-51.

⁵ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 4*: 49.

⁶ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 4*: 51.

⁷ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 4*: 50.

⁸ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 4*: 52-73.

⁹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 4*: 112.

¹⁰ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 4*: 65-66.

research positions which attempt to prove the progressive suppression of women in the Church.

Apart from the 2009 collection of essays edited by Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan, *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity*, which deals on the whole with individual elite, political, and literary figures rather than the poor, little else has been written specifically on the fatherless child in antiquity.¹¹ However several of the papers contained in it are relevant to this study. Walter Scheidel in his essay *The Demographic Background* concludes that between 28 and 37 per cent of all Roman children in the western Empire would have lost their fathers by age fifteen. He also highlights that children born to older men were at risk of having no male relatives of the appropriate age to assume guardianship.¹² Sabine Hübner discusses remarriage and the positive role of stepfathers from Classical Athens to Egypt in late antiquity in her essay *Remarriage and Stepfathers in the Greco-Roman East*.¹³ Marcus Sigismund is well aware of a “conspicuous gap in the otherwise well-studied field of the ancient family”. In his essay entitled *Fatherlessness in the Old and New Testaments* he appreciates that the problem for today’s church is that God is understood as its “Father”, underlining the biblical origin of the Christian family-based model of community. Teaching literature for the guidance of pastors and others contains no mention of children growing up fatherless. He claims that the ostensible scarcity of scriptural references to fatherlessness presents a real theological difficulty for the church. He then surveys the topic as it appears in the Old and New Testaments.¹⁴ Myrto Malouta in her essay *Fatherlessness and formal identification in Roman Egypt* examines the special case of illegitimacy.¹⁵ Ann-Cathrin Harders investigates Octavian’s motives for his guardianship of the younger children of the dead Marcus Antonius by Fulvia and Cleopatra in *Augustus as surrogate Father*.¹⁶ In the final chapter Geoffrey Nathan looks at *Christian ideals*

¹¹ Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan, eds., *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹² Hübner and Ratzan, *Growing Up Fatherless*, 31-40.

¹³ Hübner and Ratzan, *Growing Up Fatherless*, 61-82.

¹⁴ Hübner and Ratzan, *Growing Up Fatherless*, 83-102.

¹⁵ Hübner and Ratzan, *Growing Up Fatherless*, 120-138.

¹⁶ Hübner and Ratzan, *Growing Up Fatherless*, 217-240.

and the obligations of stepfathers in late antiquity, which is beyond the timeframe of this study.¹⁷

Books on wealth and poverty in Roman Society and on Roman and church attitudes to almsgiving contain material relevant to this study. The most comprehensive examination of wealth and poverty in early Christianity is that of Helen Rhee in her book, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*.¹⁸ In seven richly documented chapters she considers wealth and poverty as far as the reign of Constantine in conjunction with Theology, Eschatology, Salvation, Koinonia, Ecclesiastical Control, Christian Identity, and in the Contemporary Society of today. However she devotes only four summary pages to widows and interprets 1 Timothy 5:3-16 as referring to an 'Office' of widows. Based on her repetition of the unpersuasive sparse evidence she perpetuates the misconception that there existed an 'Office' of widows even at the early period. Recent statistical work by Steven Friesen¹⁹ embraced by Bruce Longenecker²⁰ reinforce the conception of the composition of the early church as being almost entirely made up of varying levels of the poor.

In 1968 A. R. Hands published *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome*. This deals with the provision of foodstuffs, of education and of medical attention and has the extreme chronological limit of 250 CE. Hands was concerned with the ideas and charitable practices of the elite. He discusses such concepts as *philotimia*, the love of honour and *philodoxia*, the love of glory.²¹ Other books include Peter Brown's *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*,²² and his later book on redemptive almsgiving, *The Ransom of the Soul*, which outlines the development of Christian Latin views of the afterlife and wealth between 200 and 700 CE, and includes the outlooks of

¹⁷ Hübner and Ratzan, *Growing Up Fatherless*, 273-292.

¹⁸ Helen Rhee, *Loving the poor, saving the rich: wealth, poverty, and early Christian formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

¹⁹ Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline studies: beyond the so-called new consensus," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (2004): 323-361.

²⁰ Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the poor: Paul, poverty, and the Greco-Roman world* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010).

²¹ A. R. Hands, *Charities and social aid in Greece and Rome* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968).

²² Peter Brown, *Through the eye of a needle: wealth, the fall of Rome, and the making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Peter Brown, *The ransom of the soul: afterlife and wealth in early western Christianity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

Cyprian and Tertullian. The most detailed examination of redemptive almsgiving, its foundation in the scriptures of the Greek Septuagint, and its presence in early church writings up to the second century, is that of David J. Downs in his 2016 book *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity*.²³

Ivoni Richter Reimer's book, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, is written from the perspective of a feminist theology of liberation from oppression. Its particular value for this study is that she presents women and men (Lydia, Priscilla and Aquila, and Paul) working together both to earn a living by a trade and at the same time on behalf of the Christian proclamation of the Gospel.²⁴ Additionally, some women worked in education or as scribes. Raffaella Cribiore examines the evidence for this in the papyri in Chapter 3 of her book *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Evidence from epigraphical sources, terracottas and sarcophagi confirm the evidence in the papyri of a genuine advance in female literacy. Some women became elementary teachers. Others worked teaching manual skills to young people, some of whom were slaves, who were apprenticed to learn a skill such as shorthand-writing or weaving. Women's correspondence in the Roman period demonstrates increasing literary competence.²⁵ Burial evidence shows that some women may have been scribes. Kim Haines-Eitzen has picked out eleven Latin and two Greek inscriptions that identify women as "scribes". Of these thirteen, six were slaves and two were freedwomen, the status of the rest being uncertain.²⁶

Peter Oakes, in *Reading Romans in Pompeii*, utilises archaeological evidence from four homes in Pompeii to construct social profiles of the listeners to Paul's letter in the urban house churches in Rome. He paints an imaginative picture of the diverse social groups represented within the church and demonstrates how each person's social situation would affect their hearing of Paul's rhetoric in Romans. He exposes

²³ David J. Downs, *Alms: charity, reward, and atonement in early Christianity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016).

²⁴ Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles: a feminist liberation perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

²⁵ Raffaella Cribiore, "Women and Education," in *Gymnastics of the mind: Greek education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 74-101.

²⁶ Kim Haines-Eitzen, "'Girls Trained in Beautiful Writing': Female Scribes in Roman Antiquity and Early Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 4 (1998): 629-646.

the limitations of modern commentators, who tend to focus on universalising exegesis.²⁷

Kenneth E. Bailey's two books, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes* and *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, prove illuminating for their insight into the parables, particularly for the Parable of the Widow and the Judge in Luke 18:1-8.²⁸ Bailey's acceptance of the 'framing' of the parable as being original to Jesus, therefore designating it as being concerned with persistent prayer, allies with the tendency of the early Christian writers to use it as justification to impose a prayerful and passive role upon widows.

The issue of whether 1 Timothy 5:3-16 and similar later material are referring to an 'Office' of widows, typified by Bonnie Thurston's 1989 book, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* has proved a major distraction from the 'meat' of that passage's content.²⁹ Evidence is sparse. In his discussion of whether there was a specific widow's Office in the early Christian communities Christian Back in his 2015 book suggests that "a widow's Office existed, but was limited regionally and temporally". Additionally, he concludes that the testimonies of the ancient church offer a wide range of "not firmly defined" roles for widows, established in the second and third centuries. They were entrusted community duties, especially vicarious prayer and fasting, and pastoral care and support to women. The widow's Office finally arrived "in emerging female monasticism", which has remained as the only religious institution that has retained offices for women through the centuries.³⁰

Valuable also is Joseph Hellerman's book, *The Ancient Church as Family*, which observes that one of the most significant characteristics of the early church was "the metaphor of the church as a surrogate kinship group" with one divine Father, as demonstrated by its use of brother-sister terminology.³¹

²⁷ Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's letter at ground level* (Minneapolis; London: Fortress Press; SPCK, 2009).

²⁸ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and peasant: a literary-cultural approach to the parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes: cultural studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008).

²⁹ Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The widows: a women's ministry in the early church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

³⁰ Christian Back, *Die Witwen in der frühen Kirche* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015). 281-283.

³¹ Joseph H. Hellerman, *The ancient church as family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

Jens Uwe Krause's four volume habilitation thesis excels in data collection and the amassing of bibliographical material. His work contains valuable data useful as a point of departure for deeper investigation, and for the critical analysis and evaluation of specific documents and areas of practice associated with the early church, as well as that of wider Roman society.

In the relevant NT passages, side-tracking by most academics of the crucial welfare issues by focussing on other concerns has diverted attention away from their core content. This thesis aims to address and rectify this evasion and expose the methods by which the fatherless family was marginalised.

1.4 SOURCES

The major primary sources are the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament in its Greek Septuagint version and the Greek scriptures of the New Testament.³² To supplement the guidance of the Old and New Testaments which influenced the clergy of the early church in their preaching and in the pastoral care of widows and fatherless children, it will be useful to look beyond the church for other sources of background information on the social environment of the fatherless and the widows in the wider Roman Empire. These might include non-Christian writings found in various forms, for example, letters and histories, legal materials, and online and printed databases of papyri and inscriptions. Archaeological evidence can provide an indication of the material culture of Roman society. As well as from the New Testament, information on church attitudes to the fatherless and the widows can be gathered from post-New Testament writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the apologists, accounts of martyrdoms, and the sermons and treatises of the early Church Fathers. Into the category known as the Apostolic Fathers falls a letter written to the Corinthian churches known as *First Clement*.³³ It may be the oldest Christian writing outside of the New Testament, and is generally dated to 95-96 CE. It sets the precedent for many subsequent references to Isaiah 1:16-20 in the context of the fatherless and the widows. Amongst other writings of the Apostolic Fathers the *Shepherd of Hermas* is notable for six references to widow(s) and five to orphan(s),

³² E.g. Exo. 22:22-24; Isa. 1:16-17; Jer. 7:6-7; Zec. 7:10; Sir. 4:10.

³³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols., Loeb classical library, 24-25 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). I, 18-151.

five of the instances to both in combination.³⁴ The *Didache*³⁵ contains a ban on the corruption of children as does the *Epistle of Barnabas*.³⁶ *Ignatius' Letter to the Smyrnaeans* contains two references to the widows or the fatherless, one of them the influential reference to “the virgins who are called widows”.³⁷ The *Letter of Polycarp to the Church of the Philippians* has the first appearance of a metaphor describing widows as “God’s altar”, found later elsewhere.³⁸

Of the six works attributed to the apologist Justin Martyr, the fatherless or the widows are mentioned in two of them; the *First Apology* dated at about 154 CE and the *Dialogue with Trypho*, dated between 155-161 CE.³⁹ The *Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* advocates active protection of vulnerable fatherless children.⁴⁰

The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* touches on the fate of two nameless fatherless children after the martyrdoms of their mothers.⁴¹

Sermons and treatises of the early Church Fathers include Tertullian’s three writings concerning remarriage, *To His Wife*, *An Exhortation to Chastity*, and *Monogamy*.⁴² Clement of Alexandria’s work *Quis dives salvetur*,⁴³ and Cyprian’s 26 section treatise entitled *On Works and Alms* are relevant to the developing doctrine of redemptive almsgiving.⁴⁴

³⁴ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 162-473.

³⁵ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 405-443.

³⁶ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 3-83.

³⁷ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 294-309.

³⁸ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 324-353.

³⁹ Justin, *Saint Justin Martyr*, edited and translated by Thomas B. Falls, *Fathers of the Church*, 6 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ J. Rendel Harris and J. Armitage Robinson, *Texts and studies: contributions to biblical and patristic literature. Vol. 1. The apology of Aristides; The passion of S. Perpetua; The Lord's prayer in the early church; The fragments of Heracleon* (Cambridge: University Press, 1891).

⁴¹ Thomas J. Heffernan, *The passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴² Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage and remarriage: To his wife, An exhortation to chastity, Monogamy*, trans. William P. Le Saint, *Ancient Christian Writers*, 13 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1951).

⁴³ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks; The Rich man's salvation; To the newly baptized*, trans. G. W. Butterworth, *Loeb classical library*, 92 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919).

⁴⁴ Cyprian, *De opere et elemosynis: a translation with an introduction and a commentary*, edited and translated by Edward V. Rebenack (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1962).

The final category of source materials are church orders, notably the late third century Syrian church order the *Didascalia Apostolorum*⁴⁵ and its fourth century parallel and expansion the *Apostolic Constitutions*.⁴⁶

Particularly useful were volume four and ten of the ten volumes of the *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* series, produced by the Ancient History Documentary Research Centre at Macquarie University, Australia. Volume four contains evidence that ὀρφανός generally meant ‘fatherless’. A letter in volume ten contains a new instance of the word στρῆνος which confirms its meaning as ‘extravagance’ or indulgence in luxurious living.⁴⁷

1.5 SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

In order to properly evaluate the practical and social reality behind the texts on the fatherless and the widows, my major goal will be assessing the extent of the deliverance of their support requirements. What would be the bare necessities for survival of the combined family unit, that of a young widow endeavouring to bring up her fatherless children without the support of a husband? How were these needs to be met in the absence of a breadwinner?

1.5.1 SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS OF WIDOWED MOTHERS

A major modern survey which investigated the support needs of widows and how these were met in various parts of the world in recent years has provided this study with general basic categories for analysis, which will be shown to be equally valid for ancient Roman society. Helena Znaniecka Lopata and her colleagues surveyed the situation of widows in many countries of the world in their two-volume work, entitled *Widows*, and devised a cross-cultural sociological model.⁴⁸ To facilitate their

⁴⁵ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia apostolorum: an English version* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2009).

⁴⁶ Marcel Clement Metzger, *Les constitutions apostoliques*, 3 vols., Sources Chrétiennes, 320, 329, 336 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985-87).

⁴⁷ G. H. R. Horsley, *New documents illustrating early Christianity vol. 4: a review of the Greek inscriptions and papyri published in 1979* (Macquarie University, N.S.W.: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1987); S. R. Llewelyn and J. R. Harrison, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: Volume 10: Greek and Other Inscriptions and Papyri Published 1988-1992* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁴⁸ Helena Znaniecka Lopata, *Widows Vol 1: the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific*. (Durham: Duke Univ. Pr., 1987). 4-11.

research they developed a framework of basic support requirements of widows to allow comparison between the different geographical areas. They evolved four sets of criteria that could be used to analyse the adequacy of widow support systems—economic, service, social, and emotional. *Economic* support, for the provision of basic material resources, such as money, shelter, food, and clothing, can include barter, gifts, paid work, inheritance, family support, voluntary associations, church support, pensions, and government programmes. *Service* support can include help with household maintenance, transport, child care, and financial and legal advice, which is usually provided by men. *Social* support can include invitations from others to attend social events, theatres, sports, meals, recreational activities, and the celebration of birthdays and major festivals. It was found difficult to find criteria for the assessment of *emotional* support. The researchers endeavoured to identify those people who alleviated social isolation and made the widow feel important, respected, useful, independent, accepted, self-sufficient, and secure. This was most often her adult son, but in North America it tended to be her adult daughter. In this respect, work and work relationships, friends, and the activities of voluntary associations (such as churches) also played a role.

Spiritual support is not considered separately by Lopata, but is subsumed under the other categories of support. F. Scott Spencer suggests that there exists in addition a *theological* system set forth in the Hebrew Scriptures presenting the God of Israel entering into the deficiency of economic, service, social, or emotional assistance created by absent husbands.⁴⁹ This care was demonstrated in the assurances of Hebrew Scriptures read in the Septuagint Greek translation, e.g.:

who is the father of orphans and vindicator of widows; God is in his holy place (Psa. 67(68):5 NETS)⁵⁰

—in biblical narratives endorsing good practices, such as the remarriage of Ruth,

—in reminders of the duty of all Israelites to care for needy widows:

Learn to do good; seek judgment; rescue the one who is wronged; defend the orphan, and do justice to the widow. (Isa. 1:17 NETS)

⁴⁹ F. Scott Spencer, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1-7," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1994): 721.

⁵⁰ Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A new English translation of the Septuagint*. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. [reprinted 2009 with corrections]).

—and in practical interventions by the prophets, such as Elijah in 1 Kings 17:8-24, who provided food for a widow and healed her dead son, and Elisha in 2 Kings 4:1-7, who provided an income for a widow by helping her produce and sell oil to pay off her debts.

1.5.2 SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS OF FATHERLESS CHILDREN

The standard work on the role of the father in child development is that edited by Michael E. Lamb, *The role of the father in child development*, now in its fifth edition.⁵¹ He is the writer of its first chapter which describes the ways in which fathers influence children's development. Historical views on the father's role are reviewed, beginning with the "all-powerful patriarch", passing through the "moral teacher" who installs an appropriate sense of values, to "breadwinning and economic support" of the family at the time of industrialisation. There next appeared fathers as "sex role models", followed in the 20th century by the "involved" father and ending up with the "new nurturing father" in the 1970s, who emerged following critiques of the differentiation of male and female role models. He concluded that the simplistic belief that fathers fulfil a one-dimensional and standard role in the eyes of children is mistaken. Acknowledgment of the father's multiple roles as breadwinner, parent, and emotional partner is essential for understanding how fathers influence children's development.

Recognize that fathers play a number of significant roles—companions, care providers, spouses, protectors, playmate, models, moral guides, teachers, and breadwinners—whose relative importance varies across historical epochs and subcultural groups.⁵²

Focussing pre-eminently on one paternal role at a time has proven to be an inadequate strategy to quantify the attributes of good fatherhood. The evidence suggests that the absence of a male sex role model is relatively unimportant. In fact it has been discovered that a sensitive father responds to his children in very much the same ways as their mother does.

Furthermore, he surveyed the research on the consequences of "Father Absence". He observes a wide variation in children as to whether or not they suffer harmful

⁵¹ Michael E. Lamb, ed. *The role of the father in child development*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2010).

⁵² Lamb, *Role of the father*, 3.

consequences. He suggests some factors which may explain the difference. Firstly, in the case of divorce, marital conflict; secondly, the absence of a co-parent to share the daily burden of child care; thirdly the economic stress that frequently accompanies single parenthood; and lastly, when the great financial stress experienced by single mothers is accompanied by the emotional stress caused by social isolation. Paternal non-residence may be harmful, not because a sex role model is absent—

rather that it may be harmful because many paternal roles—economic, social, emotional—are inadequately filled in these families.⁵³

Consequently, my attention has not been entirely devoted to material provision, but I have also considered the social and affective dimension of the lives of fatherless children. I have chosen to concentrate on a minimal selection from amongst these roles. I have selected provision, protection and presence as the basic requirements and expectations of a child from fatherhood.

1.5.3 APPLICABLE IN ANTIQUITY?

One might question whether the needs of widows and fatherless children described above are transferable to ancient times. The need for food and shelter is basic to all human beings. Protection would be necessary against thieves and robbers, opportunists, sexual predators, and wild animals. Men were required to represent women in a court of law and to deal with officials. The presence of a father above all ensured the social status of his family and was essential to the preservation of the identity of its members. For widows remarriage was the obvious solution. However, as will be shown, there was little chance of remarriage for most poor widows. The ground-breaking 1958 survey *Widows and their Families* made by Peter Marris of seventy-two working class London widows demonstrates ample continuity with ancient times in the need for financial provision and help in dealing with officialdom. Poverty was an issue because the widows could not earn “a man’s wage” owing to young children, and levels of National Assistance were inadequate. Only thirteen remarried; and a high proportion of these were childless widows, or were under forty at bereavement, or had the lowest incomes.⁵⁴ Human nature, it seems, does not change over the centuries.

⁵³ Lamb, *Role of the father*, 5-11.

⁵⁴ Peter Marris, *Widows and their families* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1958).

1.6 METHODOLOGY

In these postmodern days it is recognised that no historical study can be written or read purely objectively. It is the reader, its proponents argue, who holds interpretive power, and not the author of the text. Within the category of ‘reader’, I include also the ‘hearer’ of the written text. Each reader or hearer (or writer) of a text is influenced by their own background and experiences, and the experience of fatherlessness and poverty must be openly acknowledged for this investigation. In parts of this study in addition to more traditional historical methods I have read and interpreted the literary material ‘against the grain’ in order to give a voice to the silent unnamed fatherless children and young widows of the early church.

1.6.1 A HISTORICAL JESUS APPROACH TO BIBLICAL MATERIAL?

A ‘Historical Jesus’ orientation is not appropriate for this investigation because the importance of the sources lies in the way they were read, understood and implemented. For most of Christian history the approach to the New Testament by preachers and writers, by hearers and readers, has been that of unhesitating acceptance. Few believers questioned whether Jesus and his disciples *really* said or did this or that, or if Paul *really* wrote all the letters attributed to him. The issue never occurred to them.

Similarly, questions about the birth and family of Jesus are considered to fall under the aegis or into the mental compartment of historical Jesus enquiry and the speculation of some scholars about whether or not Jesus was a fatherless child or even illegitimate is considered irrelevant.⁵⁵ However, the portrayal of Mary, (whose parents are given the names of Joachim and Anna), as the second wife of Joseph, who was a widower with existing children, found in *Protoevangelium of James*, was widely popular and remains today the basis of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Justin Martyr in Chapter 78:5 of *Dialogue with Trypho* knows of Jesus’ birth in a “cave”.⁵⁶ The tradition was also known and discussed by Origen in his Commentary on Matthew in 10:17, under the

⁵⁵ Andrew T Lincoln, *Born of a virgin?: reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, tradition and theology* (London: SPCK, 2013); Jane Schaberg, *The illegitimacy of Jesus: a feminist theological interpretation of the infancy narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Andries G. Van Aarde, *Fatherless in Galilee: Jesus as a child of God* (Harrisburg: Trinity Pr Intl, 2001).

⁵⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, rev. ed., *Fathers of the church*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003). 121.

heading “The Brethren of Jesus” which demonstrates that *Protoevangelium of James* is as old as the second century.⁵⁷

But some say, basing it on a tradition in the Gospel according to Peter, as it is entitled, or “The Book of James,” that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary.

Materials which never entered the biblical canon and which today shock us with their simplicity and their extreme supernatural content, such as The *Protoevangelium of James* and the *Apocryphal Acts*, were popular with some groups, and some were accorded authority. Further speculation about Jesus’ family such as that of Richard Bauckham in his book *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, which draws attention to the possible significance for Christian mission of the brothers of Jesus—James, Joseph, Simon and Judas—who are listed in Matthew 13:55, gives no insight into the situation of the widows and the fatherless in the early church.⁵⁸

1.6.2 FILLING IN THE GAPS

It is well-known that texts can be ambiguous. *Polyvalence* is defined as the multiplicity of potential meaning that is found to be present in any communication event.⁵⁹ For my understanding of polyvalence I am indebted to Mark Allan Powell’s book *Chasing the Eastern Star*.⁶⁰ Powell acknowledges that a multitude of interpretations of literary material is inevitable. He states that one of the reasons for polyvalence is that all stories contain ‘gaps’ which remain to be filled in by their readers, (as Wolfgang Iser recognised).⁶¹

For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby

⁵⁷ Origen's Commentary on Matthew 10.17 in Ante-Nicene fathers Volume IX. Retrieved 21 Oct 2016. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf09/Page_424.html

⁵⁸ Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the relatives of Jesus in the early church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

⁵⁹ Mark Allan Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star: adventures in Biblical reader-response criticism* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

⁶⁰ Powell, *Chasing*: 13-15.

⁶¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The implied reader: patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). 280-283.

excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled.⁶²

Marcus Sigismund claims that the subject of fatherlessness “presents a conspicuous ‘gap’ on the otherwise well-studied field of the ancient family”.⁶³ He tends to agree with Hasler that its absence as an issue from the New Testament was an effect of the early Christians’ eager expectancy of the *Parousia*, which led them to be less concerned with the social problems of this world, and which in turn led to an absence of relevant biblical guidelines or the emergence of a biblical theology of fatherlessness.⁶⁴ Sigismund critiques current discussion of the issue as being “unable to represent fatherlessness in a fully defined manner” resulting in its omission from existing teaching literature on Christian family values.⁶⁵

Another excellent example of a ‘gap’ occurs in the incident in Luke 4:30 where Jesus is about to be thrown over the edge of a cliff at Nazareth by a hostile mob and in a fashion withheld from the reader mysteriously passes through the crowd and escapes.⁶⁶ For this study, a striking example of a gap is the absence of consideration for the welfare of under-age children from the discussion of support for young widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.⁶⁷

... with a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination.⁶⁸

⁶² Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 285.

⁶³ Marcus Sigismund, "'Without father, without mother, without genealogy': fatherlessness in the Old and New Testaments," in *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity*, ed. Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 83.

⁶⁴ V. Hasler, "Waise," in *Biblich-historisches Handwörterbuch vol. 3*, ed. B. Reicke and L. Rost (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1966), 2133.

⁶⁵ Sigismund, "Without father," 84.

⁶⁶ Bruce W. Longenecker, *Hearing the silence: Jesus on the edge and God in the gap. Luke 4 in narrative perspective* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2012).

⁶⁷ Eryl W. Davies, *Biblical Criticism: a guide for the perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013). 31-32.

⁶⁸ Iser, "Reading Process," 288.

1.6.3 READING THE TEXT 'AGAINST THE GRAIN'

Reader-response criticism includes a diverse range of methodological strategies. This study employs a reading method known as 'Reading against the Grain'; also known as 'Resistant Reading'. It is part of 'a hermeneutic of suspicion'. This method is a reading strategy taught by educationalists and used by critics working in widely different spheres of knowledge, including biblical criticism. It can be found present as a constituent of literary criticism, feminist criticism, ideological criticism and post-colonial criticism. Researchers aim to improve their ability to read critically by its use as an element in their textual analysis.⁶⁹ When a text is read against the grain, the foregrounding and privileging of a dominant point of view is resisted. This approach inserts the experiences of less represented individuals and groups into the written discourse.

This method came to prominence when Judith Fetterley published her monograph *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* in 1978.⁷⁰ She argued that classic American fiction was irremediably androcentric and misogynist and that women were indoctrinated to identify as male—a process she labelled as “immascultation”. She encouraged her literature students to become “resisting readers”, to use oppositional criticism by intentionally ‘reading against the grain’.⁷¹ Such a way of reading resists focusing on the dominant voice in the text and aims to articulate the concerns of those spoken about or those who are given no voice or whose presence is unnoticed.

One might for example read the parable of the Good Samaritan against the grain. Prosperous Westerners tend to identify with the people travelling down the road, who might seem to be being exhorted to look after the afflicted; whereas those living in third-world countries might choose the viewpoint of the voiceless person who has been beaten, robbed and left for dead, who is being commanded to love anyone who has helped them.⁷² The standard reading strategy remains to read the text from the point of view of the provider of pastoral care, whose voice is dominant in the

⁶⁹ George Aichele, *The postmodern Bible*, ed. The Bible and Culture Collective (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). 36-38.

⁷⁰ Judith Fetterley, *The resisting reader: a feminist approach to American fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

⁷¹ Davies, *Biblical Criticism*: 49-51.

⁷² Powell, *Chasing*: 21-22.

writings of the NT and the early church, instead of that of the disadvantaged recipient.

The point of view taken in this thesis is that of the members of the fatherless family, and in particular that of the fatherless child who does not remember a father but has a conception of what might be the indispensable attributes of an ideal father. The formation of this hypothesis in the child's mind would have been constructed from deficiency or privation—an awareness of deficit of the most essential requirements of childhood fathering. These I have defined as provision, protection and presence.

1.6.4 A LINGUISTIC METHODOLOGICAL ISSUE: fatherless or orphans?

A further methodological issue was encountered in this study. It is often uncertain for linguistic reasons in documents written in Greek and Latin whether full or half orphans are under discussion. Even in the foundational documents of the Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint version, the word used for 'fatherless' is also used for 'orphans', which makes the reference unclear. However, the frequent bracketing together of these two groups in the Old Testament cannot be regarded as insignificant.⁷³ To clarify this difficulty, a search was made using BibleWorks version 9 in the Greek Rahlfs's version of the Septuagint for all cases of the word 'orphan' (ὁ ὀρφανός).⁷⁴ In 41 out of the 53 retrieved instances of a form of the word standing for 'orphan', a form of the word for 'widow' (ἡ χήρα) was discovered within the same verse. In the majority of cases, the usage was 'orphans and widows', (occasionally 'widows and orphans'), with or without the article. Identically, when the Hebrew Scriptures are examined, it is found that the Hebrew language has only one word for children who have lost a parent or parents, which is יתום / yātôm, plural yetômîm. In view of this fact, J. Renkema argues that, although there is strong contextual evidence that it means 'fatherless', as demonstrated in Lamentations 5:3, Job 24:9, and Exodus 22:23, there is surely an argument from silence that it must in some contexts mean 'orphan'.⁷⁵ However, by raising the question he demonstrates

⁷³ E.g. Exod 22:21, Deut 10:18, 14:29, 16:11-14, 24:17-21, 26:12-13, 27:19, Ps 145:9, Sir 35:14, Isa 9:16, Jer 5:28, Jer 7:6, Ezek 22:7, Zech 7:10. (LXX)

⁷⁴ Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, *Septuaginta: id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006). BibleWorks, v.9.

⁷⁵ Johan Renkema, "Does Hebrew ytwm really mean "fatherless"," *Vetus testamentum* 45, no. 1 (1995).

that the default position at his time of writing in 1995 was to regard these OT references as referring to fatherless families.

Renkema is not the only person to display strong resistance to accepting that the Old Testament must be advocating support for fatherless families. Modern translations generally substitute ‘orphan’ for ‘fatherless’. To demonstrate this with a particular example, there is a very noticeable shift between the Revised Standard Version of the Bible published in 1971 and the New Revised Standard Version, published in 1989. In the former, the word ‘fatherless’ is used 42 times; in the NRSV it is employed only *once*.

Here are some examples:

^{NRSV} **Psalm 10:18 (9:39)** to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

^{RSV} **Psalm 10:18 (9:39)** to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

^{NRSV} **Psalm 82:3 (81:3)** Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.

^{RSV} **Psalm 82:3 (81:3)** Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.

^{NRSV} **Psalm 109:12** May there be no one to do him a kindness, nor anyone to pity his orphaned children.

^{RSV} **Psalm 109:12** Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children!

The one exception is found in the verse:

We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows.
(Lamentations 5:3 NRSV)

ὀρφανοὶ ἐγενήθημεν οὐχ ὑπάρχει πατήρ μητέρες ἡμῶν ὡς αἱ χῆραι
(LXX Rahlfs)

:אָב אִמְתִּינִי כְּאַלְמָנוֹת: [אִין] (אִין) הֲיִנִּי (Leningrad Hebrew OT)
yəṭômîm hāyînû (ʿên) [wəʿên] ʿāb ʿimmōtînû kəʾalmānōt
(Transliterated Hebrew OT)

In this instance, as the Greek has no word for ‘fatherless’ (although it does have a word for illegitimate)—the phrase ‘a father does not exist’ is used instead; and the Hebrew simply says ‘no father’.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ All quotations from the NRSV and the RSV are taken from BibleWorks, v.9.

The same reluctance is observed when these passages are read or preached in recent times, as a result of our current understanding of an orphan as being a child who has lost both parents. There is a noticeable tendency to split the subjects of this phrase into two isolated components, i.e. orphans, then widows, requiring unrelated consideration. This is also evidenced in NT commentaries. Ralph P Martin on James 1:27 in his Word commentary on the letter of James in the New Testament, for example, states:⁷⁷

Orphans and widows are joined because they represent two social classes open to exploitation and affliction in Israel.

The unique use in the New Testament of the conjoined phrase, “fatherless and the widows” is found in James 1:27. I think he is wrong to understand two distinct groups here.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress (Jam. 1:27 NRSV)

θρησκεία καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὕτη ἐστίν, ἐπισκέπτεσθαι ὀρφανοὺς καὶ χήρας ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν (Jam. 1:27 N-A 28)⁷⁸

Here the Greek word ὀρφανός is used. However, the employment of the typical conjunction and word order of the two words seems to reflect consciously Old Testament practice. It appears likely that the Jewish author of James considers the word ὀρφανός as at least including, and more likely intending, a reference to a fatherless family. The question to be answered is: are fatherless children invisible in the NT, or have they been made to be invisible by a narrow linguistic definition, stemming from the resemblance of the Biblical Greek word to our modern definition of the word ‘orphan’?

There is a Greek word found only once in the New Testament which does have the sense of ‘fatherless’, but with a slightly different slant. It is used in Hebrews 7:3, where Melchizedek is described as:

without father, without mother, without genealogy (NRSV)

ἀπάτωρ ἀμήτωρ ἀγενεαλόγητος (N-A 28)

⁷⁷ Ralph P. Martin, *Word biblical commentary: James* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1988). 52.

⁷⁸ *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

The word ἀπάτωρ when used in this context appears to have a different connotation to that of ὀρφανός. Melchizedek is a person with no genealogy. It is not that he lost his father, but that he had never possessed a legal father or a mother. It is also used of Greek gods, sometimes in the form αὐτοπάτωρ, i.e. self-generated.⁷⁹ However, Moulton and Milligan make it clear from the evidence from papyri of the second and third century C.E. that its common usage carried the implication of illegitimacy. In the case of Melchizedek that does not apply. It is contradicted by M&M by drawing attention to the adjoining use of ‘motherless’.⁸⁰

That a word meaning “father unknown” should be available for use in a passage where the thought is so far from the beaten track, is quite natural; the ἀμήτωρ following, which by association shares its special sense, protected ἀπάτωρ from its common implication.

Myrto Malouta, in her book chapter ‘Fatherlessness and Formal Identification in Roman Egypt’ surveyed 590 fatherless individuals designed *apatōr*, or *chrēmatiszōn mētros* (officially described by the name of the mother) in the papyri and ostraca of Roman Egypt.⁸¹ They included men and women, adults and a few children. We do not know the family situation of these children. She concluded that despite the fact that there was a legal obligation for the fatherless to designate themselves clearly as such, it did not seem to taint them in any way, as according to their professions and trades they were socially positioned as a ‘middling’ group. Slaves by definition did not have fathers, but owners.

The French language also possesses no word for ‘fatherless’—it uses ‘sans père’ ‘privé de père’ or ‘orphelin de père’. German does have a word ‘vaterlos’, but Krause in his *magnum opus* uses ‘Waisen’, orphans, occasionally ‘Halbwaisen’, despite the fact that almost all of the time he is referring to half-orphans, i.e. fatherless minor children. He unambiguously recognises that ‘orphan’ generally meant ‘fatherless’ in ancient times.⁸² In the Latin writings of the later church fathers, an orphan is ‘orbus (-a)’, which has a similar dichotomous meaning, and ‘pupillus

⁷⁹ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English lexicon: completed 1940, with a rev. suppl. 1996*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, [1930] repr.1997). 54-55.

⁸¹ Myrto Malouta, "Fatherlessness and formal identification in Roman Egypt," in *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity*, ed. Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120-138.

⁸² Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich*.

(-a)' is also used, which means a fatherless minor or a ward. 'Orphanus' derived from the Greek is also used. A widow in Latin is a 'vidua'.

Fortunately, we do have some objective evidence from Greek inscriptions and papyri on how the word ὀρφανός was used in practice. In *New documents illustrating early Christianity vol. 4*, published in 1979, in section B, Minor Philological Note no.71 ὀρφανός, Horsley describes six materials which show that⁸³

... the way it is employed in various texts indicates that it need not always carry the narrower, modern sense of a minor *both* of whose parents are dead.

Five of these refer to a fatherless 'orphan' and the sixth documents a motherless 'orphan'.

Horsley selects one document, (whose significance there for the question under consideration had been to that point unremarked), already included in Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, (which was completed in 1930 after three decades of assembling of data from Egyptian papyri regarding particular New Testament words), and to that one Horsley adds five newer materials discovered since their time.⁸⁴

This document, known as *P. Tebt 2* (1907) 326 (from Tebtynis, on the southern edge of the Fayum, c.266 CE) contains a petition presented by a woman on behalf of her daughter who is described as an orphan and a minor.⁸⁵

ὑπὲρ θυγατρὸς ὀρφανῆς καὶ καταδεοῦς τὴν ἡλικίαν ...

On behalf of my orphan daughter who is under age ...

The word must mean fatherless since the mother is acting on behalf of the dead father. Here is a further example from Horsley.

IG XIV Suppl. 2437 (Massilia, Imperial Period) contains a funerary epigram for a man that concludes with the couplet:⁸⁶

⁸³ Horsley, *New documents vol. 4*: 162-164.

⁸⁴ Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*: 459.

⁸⁵ Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Tebtunis papyri. 2* (London: Henry Frowde, 1907).

⁸⁶ George Kaibel, J. Albert Lebègue, and Al. N. Oikonomides, *Inscriptiones Graecae, Galliae, Hispaniae, Britanniae, Germaniae. Berlin, 1890 reprinted with a supplement.* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1978).

... μητρὶ μὲν ἐν γήρᾳ δάκρυ φήκατο τῇ δὲ γυναικὶ χηρίαν δυστήνου
παιδὸς ἅμ' ὀρφανίῃ

... given tears to your mother in her old age, widowhood to your wife
as well as making an orphan of your poor child.

Horsley also supplies five examples where the word is used as we use it today—to indicate the loss of both parents.

I conclude that the Old Testament texts and that one New Testament text which collocate “the fatherless and the widows” are referring to the support of minor fatherless children living with their fairly young widowed mother. Splitting them up into two discrete groups is an error resulting from thoughtless current translation practice or possibly even deliberate manipulation of the text to exclude single parent families.

As a consequence, two distinct and separate issues may well have been brought to the attention of the early church by way of the NT recommendations. The first issue taken under consideration was the church’s responsibility for elderly widows, i.e. the question of geriatric support. Secondly, full orphans are to be provided for. However, this group fares as badly in the NT as fatherless children, since no recommendations are furnished as to how this was to be done.

When reading texts employing the word ὀρφανός, both groups may be under consideration. A child who had lost his/her father was regarded as equivalent to one who had lost both parents; such was the devastating loss of identity and status.

1.6.5 PROCEDURE

I shall first survey the position of the fatherless and the widows in wider Roman society and discover what formal or informal provisions were made for them there. Then my focus will turn to the early church to find out how they incorporated and integrated the poor fatherless family. The ethical value system of the early Christian church originates in traditions found in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. Most important are the parables, teachings and activities of Jesus, and any instructions found in the epistles and other writings of the New Testament. Did these instructions really respond to the actual needs of the fatherless and the widows, as they arise out of my study of wider Roman society?

1.7 CHAPTER OUTLINES

This thesis is arranged in three parts and twelve chapters, as follows. Part I contains 1 chapter containing introductory material. Part II contains 3 chapters on the Roman background. Part III contains 7 chapters on the church context. The final chapter 12 is the conclusion.

In the current chapter, Part I: Chapter 1 the initial question for investigation is proposed: whether the writings of the NT and the history of the early church match the needs of the fatherless family of Roman society of the period. Although in general a standard historical approach is adopted, in addition the reading strategy of reading against the grain is adopted.

In Part II: Chapter 2 the general legal and financial position of widows in the Roman Empire is outlined. The limited extent to which the Roman system of guardianship and the returned dowry provided support is explored. For those poor widows with no guardian or dowry there were restricted means of earning a living. In the Roman Empire as many as 30% of women were widows and they had few opportunities for remarriage after the age of 30. Many still had minor children to bring up.

In Part II: Chapter 3 it is estimated that nearly 50% of children in the Roman Empire had lost their father by the age of 15 and that the majority of these still resided with the mother. The mother's main responsibilities were to feed and clothe her children; to secure adequate education or arrange apprenticeships for her sons; and to provide dowries and arrange suitable marriages for her daughters.

Part II: Chapter 4 investigates social structure and poverty levels of Roman society and what means existed in Roman society to alleviate poverty. Patronage, almsgiving, the corn dole and the *alimenta* are surveyed.

Part III: Chapter 5 examine the poverty levels of the church. It shows that the majority of the church assembly consisted of those living just above subsistence level, with the widows and the fatherless below subsistence level. The Roman system of patronage regarding widows operated within the church to an unknown extent. The developing role of almsgiving is investigated, as well as the recurrent metaphor of the widows as 'altars' for the receipt of alms.

Part III: Chapter 6 explores the portrayal of the fatherless family in the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament. The Septuagint was the most important

religious text for the church clergy and was their authority for belief and ethical conduct.

Part III: Chapter 7 examines important references to children in the Gospels of the New Testament. Jesus' interactions with widows are examined, especially in the Gospel of Luke.

Part III: Chapter 8. Two incidents involving widows in the *Acts of the Apostles* are assessed. The *Letter of James* is particularly significant in that it contains the second of only two references in the New Testament to 'orphans'. His may be the only letter of the NT which expresses genuine empathy with the poor and with the plight of poor fatherless families. The chapter draws attention to the employment of the 'fictive' family metaphor in the earliest church, later followed by increasing support for the patriarchal family structure, not applicable to fatherless families. The advice given to parents and children in the "household codes" is assessed for relevance.

Part III: Chapter 9 responds to the most extensive passage in the NT regarding widows, 1 Timothy 5:3-16, which forbids church support to widows under sixty. The various rationalisations offered for this are explored. It highlights the deficiency of provision for the minor children of widows, and the likely dire consequences of its absence. It examines the possibility of remarriage for widows and the restrictions of choice imposed on widows.

Part III: Chapter 10 reflects on a genuine letter of Paul and a pseudonymous letter of Paul which together served to contribute to the silencing of women in the early church with obvious consequences for fatherless families. It examines accusations of 'gossip' against women, whereas talking and association function as a means of vocalisation of their needs.

Part III: Chapter 11 attempts to trace moments in time when real instances of the fatherless and the widows impinge on the consciousness of outsiders or that of the clergy of the early Christian church. The authorities quoted in their standard rhetoric were Septuagint based and excluded the important verses James 1:27 and 1 Timothy 5:8.

Part III: Chapter 12, the conclusion, draws all this evidence together and evaluates it.

PART II: THE ROMAN BACKGROUND

2. PROVISION FOR WIDOWS AND WIDOWED MOTHERS IN ROMAN SOCIETY

2.1 WHO ARE THE WIDOWS?

Widows were highly visible in elite Roman society. The legal system of the Roman Empire did not ignore the situation in which propertied women and minor children were placed after the death of a husband and father and demonstrated commendable attempts to ensure their rights. It is pertinent to enquire what means of financial, social or emotional support were available for the young widowed mother in Roman society as she tried to cope with the new responsibilities laid heavily upon her shoulders. However, apart from the legal and financial provisions which were available for women in the more affluent strata of society, there is much less information available about the situation of poorer widows, including freed women and slave women.

2.2 THE LEGAL AND FINANCIAL POSITION OF WIDOWS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In 2002 Judith Evans Grubbs produced a collation of legal and other material on marriage, divorce and widowhood in the Roman Empire.⁸⁷ The dates of her sources ranged from 31 BCE, the beginning of the reign of Augustus, until 476 CE, the end of the Roman Empire in the West. The sources of Roman law include several different kinds of legal text: constitutions of Roman emperors (both general laws and responses to individual cases), and writings of legal experts called jurists, such as Papinian, Ulpian, Modestinus, and Paulus (between 193–235 CE). Most prominent among her sources are the Digest of Justinian I (530-533 CE) which spans 50 volumes, and represented a reduction and codification of all Roman laws up to that time), the Institutes of Gaius, a jurist (c.160 CE), the Theodosian Code (438 CE),⁸⁸ and the Code of Justinian (529-534 CE) as well as inscriptions, historical papyri and

⁸⁷ Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the law in the Roman Empire: a sourcebook on marriage, divorce and widowhood* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002). xi-xiv.

⁸⁸ Clyde Pharr, Theresa Sherrer Davidson, and Mary Brown Pharr, eds., *The Theodosian code and novels, and the Sirmondian constitutions* (Union, N.J.: Lawbook Exchange, 2012).

historical commentary on laws, and some Christian writers. She also includes the Babatha archive found in the “Cave of Letters” on the Dead Sea, dating from the early second century, and the Lex Irnitana. The Lex Irnitana is a collection of six bronze tablets, dated 91 CE, found in 1981 in Spain containing fragments of Roman municipal laws. The tablets provide the only surviving copy of large parts of the Flavian municipal law. Grubbs’ sourcebook concentrates on the legal aspects of the lives of Roman imperial women, as does that of Antti Arjava;⁸⁹ in contrast to other sourcebooks on women’s lives which have a wider scope, such as those by Jane Gardner⁹⁰ and Lefkowitz and Fant.⁹¹

A major advantage the legal sources possess over the literary sources is that women’s lives can be portrayed more realistically. The picture is not obscured by the conventions of genre, (e.g. drama, poetry, satire, novel).

2.3 ‘WOMANLY WEAKNESS’

Part of the reason for the concern for the widow in Roman society was a general perception of womanhood as fragile. Suzanne Dixon has analysed the process by which the idea of female ineptitude passed into conventional wisdom, then into juridical commentaries before achieving the status of written law.⁹² Women were alleged to be inherently weaker than men. This condition was known as *infirmitas sexus* in Latin. After their father died, they were placed in permanent tutelage, the life-long protection of a guardian to manage their affairs, known as the *tutela mulierum perpetua*.

In the Institutes of Gaius (c.160 CE), the jurist attributes the ancients’ imposition of the *tutela* to the ‘lightmindedness’ of women (*animi levitas*) but later he expresses his scepticism that adult women needed to be in *tutela*, or that they would be deceived because of their ‘lightmindedness’, which he regarded as “specious rather

⁸⁹ Antti Arjava, *Women and law in late antiquity* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁹⁰ Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman law and society* (London: Routledge, 1996 [1986]).

⁹¹ Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's life in Greece and Rome: a source book in translation* (London: Duckworth, 2009).

⁹² Suzanne Dixon, "Infirmitas Sexus: Womanly Weakness in Roman Law," *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis/Legal History Review* 52, no. 4 (1984): 343-372.

than true". He notes that the *tutor's* assent was often merely a matter of form, and that in certain cases he was forced by the praetor to give his consent against his will.

(190) There is, to be sure, no very good reason for adult women being in tutelage. The reason that is commonly given, namely that since they are frequently deceived through their weak judgment (*levitas animi*), they are rightly controlled by the authority of *tutores*, seems more specious than true, since adult women handle their business matters for themselves, and in certain situations the *tutor* grants his authorization (merely) as a matter of form. Often he is compelled by the praetor to give authorization even against his will.⁹³

Despite this shrewd assessment, sometime before 223 CE, Ulpian's Rules still continues to give this as one reason, combined with their ignorance of legal affairs, which required women to have a guardian after puberty, unlike men.⁹⁴ Women were quite capable of making use of this estimation to their own advantage. There can be found in the Egyptian papyri several examples of women using the idea of 'womanly weakness' to attract sympathy from officials, by claiming that they are liable to deception. For example, a wealthy widow named Aurelia, whose children are abroad with the army, appeals to the prefect of Egypt, Clodius Culcianus, in 303 CE, for help against those who are mismanaging her estates, while referring to the 'weakness of the nature of women'.⁹⁵

Allowances were made for women's ignorance of the law by the jurists and in the Justinian and Theodosian Codes.⁹⁶ Other legal stereotypes used to describe the nature of women, as well as *infirmitas sexus*, were modesty (*pudor*), chastity (*pudicitia*), and their sense of shame, (*verecundia*). These attributes were used to prevent women from bringing a prosecution on behalf of another person.⁹⁷

The authors of 1 Timothy and 1 Peter both appeal to similar feminine frailty, showing their observance of societal stereotypes.

Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Tim. 2:14 NRSV)

⁹³ Gaius, William M. Gordon, and O. F. Robinson, *The Institutes of Gaius*, Texts in Roman law (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988). I, 144; I 190.

⁹⁴ Ulpian, "Regulae Ulpiani (Tituli ex corpore Ulpiani)," in *Fontes iuris Romani antejustiniani: 2 Autores*, ed. J. Baviera (Florence: Barbera, 1968), 11.11.

⁹⁵ P.Oxy. I.71, 303 CE.

⁹⁶ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 46-48.

⁹⁷ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 48-50.

Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honour to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life (1 Pet. 3:7 NRSV)

The Greek word for ‘weak’ is defined in this way in BDAG.⁹⁸

ἀσθενής, ἑς adj., of that which lacks strength: ‘weak, powerless’

1. pertaining to suffering from a debilitating illness, *sick*
2. pertaining to experiencing some incapacity or limitation, *weak*
 - a. of physical weakness
 - b. of relative ineffectiveness, whether external or inward *weak, feeble, ineffectual*
 - c. of the inner life. *helpless* in a moral sense

It is worthwhile questioning whether behind this opinion lies a genuine desire to protect vulnerable women, depending on whether by ‘weaker’ they really mean intellectually inferior. Obviously, a woman is constitutionally less physically strong and less aggressive than a man, (though there are always exceptions), and less able to resist brute force. In that sense she is indeed ‘weaker’. However, if she receives only limited education, she has no way of becoming knowledgeable about the law. If she is never allowed to make a decision, then she does not learn good judgment. If her father or husband shields her from money matters, she will not learn financial management. If she never appears in court, she will not know how to plead for her rights. If she is kept innocent, she will not know how to protect herself from sexual predators or sexual exploitation. Such a belief in female incompetence would be largely self-fulfilling and would provide the rationale for her father or her husband to take control of her life.

2.4 FORMS OF LEGAL AUTHORITY: PATRIA POTESTAS, MANUS AND TUTELA MULIERUM

Nearly all ‘free’ Roman women lived their lives under one of the following three types of legal authority: *patria potestas* (the power of the father), *manus* (subordination to a husband’s legal power); or *tutela mulierum* (guardianship of an adult woman), for those not under *patria potestas* (if the father had died), or *manus*. A woman would continue to be under *tutela mulierum* after she married, unless she

⁹⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. BibleWorks*, v.9, ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

had entered her husband's *manus*, rare by the time of Augustus. Women (and men) whose *paterfamilias* was dead were *sui iuris*, i.e. legally independent, and could own and inherit property in their own right. Slave women were under the control of their master or mistress.

Children under *patria potestas* could not own property. Everything given or bequeathed to them legally belonged to their *paterfamilias*. If a *paterfamilias* died without a will, all his children, male and female, were his heirs in equal shares, as was his wife if she had come under his *manus* upon marriage (if he made a will, however, he might apportion his estate less equally). The *paterfamilias*' consent was also required in order for his children's legal transactions, including their marriages, to be valid.

The best source for information about *tutela mulierum* is the Institutes of Gaius written about 160 CE.⁹⁹ He was named by Theodosius II in the *Law of Citations*, along with Papinian, Ulpian, Modestinus and Paulus, as one of the five jurists whose opinions were to be followed by judicial officers in deciding cases. The role's original purpose was thought to be directed at securing a woman's paternal inheritance in the interests of her father's relatives, who would inherit when she died. If her closest male relative held the office he was called a *tutor legitimus*. A freedwoman (*liberta*) had her former master as a *tutor legitimus*. In 45 CE the emperor Claudius abolished the *tutor legitimus* for most women which meant they could have a *tutor* disinterested in their financial or legal affairs.

In practice, there was little intrusion in her private life. The *tutor* was only called upon to give his permission for her to undertake certain legal and business activities, such as making a will (though he need not know or approve of its contents), manumitting her slaves, or selling certain types of property. Under Roman law women were able to initiate legal action and appear in court, but there were restrictions on the situations in which they could act both in civil and criminal law. If they were under *tutela mulierum*, they could not start legal action without their tutor's authorization. However, she did not need his assent to marry, nor to appoint a procurator to represent her in court, although it was needed to establish a dowry involving property. Women could not represent others, only themselves.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Gaius, Gordon, and Robinson, *Institutes of Gaius*.

¹⁰⁰ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 60.

By the reign of Augustus, *manus* had practically disappeared, and Augustus himself moderated *tutela mulierum* by granting freedom from *tutela* to freeborn women with three children and freedwomen with four, who were over twenty-five years old. If they were below that age, they still had to have a *curator minorum*. With the *ius liberorum* women who were Roman citizens could conduct all their legal and business affairs without a *tutor*. After the Edict of Carcalla in 212 CE, which granted Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Roman Empire, it became more widespread. Women who held it were proud of the fact because it is mentioned on tombstones, and stated in papyri, as Grubbs records.¹⁰¹ By the time of Constantine, the *tutela mulierum* scarcely existed. The *patria potestas*, (paternal power) however, survived until the end of antiquity, though weakened by late imperial legislation.¹⁰²

In theory, from the second century BCE onwards children had their estates managed for them, and women managed their own, with major transfers of property subject to the agreement of the *tutor legitimus*. Women customarily took their wealth, or part of it, in the form of a dowry to a different family, and this was presumably a factor in the desire to limit their freedom. However when actual examples of real women's actions are examined, in practice women enjoyed a great deal of freedom in deploying their assets. Even in Cicero's time (106–43 BCE) Sassia, Clodia and Terentia, his wife, are observed conducting their substantial business affairs independently.

Dixon summarizes:

Tutela mulierum perpetua was left to dwindle away from desuetude. It remains a legal curiosity that its decline should coincide with the growing juridic respectability of a notion of feminine frailty.¹⁰³

2.5 MARRIAGE

There were two types of legal marriage available to Roman citizens in the Roman imperial era.

The first is the *cum manu* (with *manus*) marriage. In this type of marriage the wife becomes part of the husband's family. She assumes the legal status of being his child,

¹⁰¹ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 37-43.

¹⁰² Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 24.

¹⁰³ Dixon, "Infirmitas Sexus," 371.

and her dowry passes into the husband's charge, but by the reign of Augustus, *manus* had all but disappeared.

The second is the *sine manu* (without *manus*) marriage. This type of marriage is what is usually encountered in the first three centuries CE. In this kind the wife remains a member of her birth family and the birth family retains the interest in her dowry. If divorce or death occurs, it must be repaid. In this case the wife and the children belong to different families, a situation which has consequences for the inheritance of assets.

Legitimate marriage (*iustum matrimonium*) in Roman law was a partnership designed to provide legitimate descendants to pass on property, status, and family values. Although there was not a particular legal ceremony with documentation required, the consent of both partners was imperative, and also of their parents if they were under paternal power.¹⁰⁴

Augustus enacted three laws to encourage marriage and child-bearing among Roman citizens. These were: the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* (Julian law regulating the marriages of the social orders of 18 BCE; the *lex Julia de adulteriis* of 18 BCE; and the *lex Papia Poppaea* (Papian Poppaeian law) of 9 CE. In these ways widows were affected: they were to remarry within 2 or 3 years of their husband's death. If they did not do so they were penalized in the inheritance laws. From the time of Constantine onwards these laws were gradually relaxed.¹⁰⁵

The main mechanism devised by the Romans to legalise marriage with non-citizens, known as *peregrini*, was *conubium* or *ius conubii*, which denotes the legal right or privilege to conclude a marriage. Non-citizens included Latin and Italian allies and others. The existence of *conubium* was important because of its implications for inheritance law. If a marriage was not concluded legally, any children would not be recognised and therefore would not be the automatic heirs of the parents. Equally Roman citizens could have *conubium* with Roman citizens, but with Latins and *peregrini* only if it had been granted. There was no *conubium* with slaves. In *conubium*, the children always followed the status of the father. If *conubium* was not granted, the offspring adopt the mother's status. However a child born from a male

¹⁰⁴ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 81-83.

¹⁰⁵ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 84.

non-citizen and a female Roman citizen became a *peregrinus*, because the *Lex Minicia* (pre 90 BCE) ordered that a child born with one parent a *peregrinus* should take the status of the inferior parent.¹⁰⁶ Concubinage (*concubinatus*) served as an alternative to legal marriage for freed persons. A Roman man could not have both a wife and a concubine (*concubina*). Although not illegal, the resulting children had no rights of inheritance. This category provided a way to escape the marriage limitations placed on senators and their families. Ulpian stated that the only difference between a wife and a concubine was her social rank.¹⁰⁷ It was her rank which placed her in one of the two categories.¹⁰⁸

Slaves could not have legal marriages, and were not acknowledged as having a family. Freed slaves could marry. Unions between a slave and a free person were a legal impossibility, but did occur. Long-lasting relationships of this kind were called *contubernium*. This term was also applied to long-standing relationships between slaves. Children born of these unions were not legitimate and took the legal status of their mother. If she was a slave then her children were added to the household of her owner. Freeborn men not of senatorial rank could legally marry freedwomen other than prostitutes, procuresses or condemned adulteresses. Marriage between freeborn people and former slaves (*libertini* and *libertinae*) was legal, and was only forbidden to members of senatorial families, i.e. the senator himself, his child, or grandchild. Marriage between a *liberta* and her former master (*patronus*) is found not infrequently on funerary epitaphs but concubinage was thought by some to be more appropriate. Marriage between a female patron (*patrona*) and her male former slave (*libertus*) did occur but was considered unsuitable and was illegal unless the *patrona* was herself of slave birth or low status.¹⁰⁹

Augustus forbade soldiers to be married while in service, which led to great hardship for illegitimate children. (Officers could marry, but not to a provincial). However, Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE) allowed illegitimate children and their mother to be

¹⁰⁶ Saskia T Roselaar, "The Concept of Conubium in the Roman Republic," in *New frontiers: law and society in the roman world*, ed. Paul J. du Plessis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Justinian, *The digest of Justinian [Latin/English]*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). D.32.49.4

¹⁰⁸ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 150-154.

¹⁰⁹ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 143-150.

named as heirs in a soldier's will. Finally Septimus Severus (193-211 CE) allowed soldiers to marry in service.¹¹⁰

2.6 THE DOWRY

A woman's dowry on her marriage gave her some financial security. Dowry arrangements were generally documented, since property was involved, even when no formal contract of marriage was prepared. The women could expect to inherit further assets on top of this sum on her father's death. The contract was made before the marriage and agreed by both fathers. If her father was dead a woman needed the acquiescence of her *tutor*. In this case she might provide the dowry herself, if she had property, or her mother or other relatives or friends might contribute. An example of such generosity is Pliny the Younger (61-112 CE) who gifted the sum of 100,000 sesterces for the dowry of Calvina, a relative by marriage, whose father had died in debt. He also gave 50,000 sesterces to his friend Quintilian for his daughter's dowry.¹¹¹ Sometimes even when the father was still alive he might gift her a *peculium*, an allowance of extra money intended for her own use during his lifetime. If the marriage was illegal, i.e. not *iustum matrimonium*, then no dowry was paid. During the marriage, the dowry was administered by the husband and he could invest it and use the resulting profits. Social expectation, however, considered it to be the wife's property and if the marriage ended the wife could bring a legal action to have her dowry returned to her. Unless she was in the legal power of her husband in a *manus* marriage, which was uncommon by the early Empire, the wife kept control over the rest of her own inherited property, only excluding the dowry.

The Roman legal system aimed to keep separate the property of husband and wife, and they were not allowed to gift gifts to one another. Each one owned their own slaves. However, in the non-elite groups, a craftsman, for example, who had used the dowry to equip his workshop, might be unable to return it. In the lower strata of society, men and women ran businesses jointly, and the wife might have such a stake in the joint business that it would not be possible to end the marriage.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 158-159.

¹¹¹ Caius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Letters and Panegyricus*, trans. Betty Radice, 2 vols., Loeb classical library, 55, 59 (London; Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). 88-91, 474-477.

¹¹² Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 91-102.

2.7 WIDOWHOOD AND DEATH OF THE HUSBAND

Most marriages ended by the death of the husband rather than by divorce, owing to the age disparity between the partners and the lesser life expectancy of the times. Most of the younger widows remarried; encouraged by the Augustan marriage legislation, or by the necessity for support. However, the legitimate children from the first marriage remained part of their father's family and would inherit if he died intestate. Their mother, likewise, continued part of her father's family, assuming the typical *sine manu* marriage. Oddly, there were no automatic rights for mothers and children to inherit from each other. To make a will she required the permission of the *tutor mulierum* and this involved a complicated legal ritual called the *coemptio fiduciaria*. Even having made a will, if she died before her husband, when the children were still young, her property would go to her husband, and he could decide whether or not to pass on the *bona materna* to her children at adulthood or his death. The property of adult children who predeceased their mother would go to their father, or if he had already died, to the nearest agnate relative.

This began to change in the second century under Hadrian who was emperor from 117 to 138 CE. Two laws were passed, giving mothers who had the *ius liberorum* the right to inherit from children who predeceased them and the right to make a will without the *coemptio fiduciaria* ritual. Finally in 178 CE, the Senate gave a woman's children, legitimate or illegitimate, first claim to inherit from her upon intestacy. These rights were extended further in late antiquity giving the father only the right of usufruct of the children's property. Lastly Theodosius I, emperor from 379 to 395 CE, officially granted widowed mothers who vowed not to remarry the legal right to serve as their children's guardian. The opinion in Roman society that the property which a wife had inherited from her husband ought to go to the children which she had by him, and not be given to the husband or children of a second marriage, became embodied in law by the fourth century.¹¹³

2.8 WAYS OF EARNING A LIVING

Not all widows inherited property from their fathers or husbands, or were returned a sufficiently large dowry with which to permanently maintain themselves, and

¹¹³ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 219-224.

possibly minor children. What then were the avenues open to them for financial provision?

For the few fortunate enough to have received an education there was work in teaching or as scribes. Raffaella Cribiore examines the evidence for this in the papyri in Chapter 3 of her book *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Some women became elementary teachers. Others worked teaching manual skills to young people, some of whom were slaves, who were apprenticed to learn a skill such as shorthand-writing or weaving.¹¹⁴ Burial evidence shows that some women may have been scribes. Kim Haines-Eitzen has picked out eleven Latin and two Greek inscriptions that identify women as “scribes”. Of these thirteen, six were slaves and two were freedwomen, the status of the rest being uncertain.¹¹⁵

However, the inscriptions leave no doubt about the fact that the scope for activity for women was very limited. Greek grave epigrams (Hellenistic / Empire), were evaluated by VÉrilhac from the two collections of W. Peck, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* (Berlin, 1955), and *Griechische Grabgedichte* (Berlin, 1960), and supplemented by later texts published in the *Epigraphic Bulletin* of J. and L. Robert. In these there are very few mentions of work by women, only a few wet-nurses, midwives, healers, and a slave hairdresser.¹¹⁶

Treggiari compared the work of men and women in Roman inscriptions. She excluded upper-class women with business interests, small “professionals” such as doctors and midwives, entertainers, and domestic slaves. However, she included women who worked with their husbands, and did not segregate out widows.¹¹⁷ Her comparison group was of male urban workers. Despite the expense of a monument, a fraction of them did manage to put up inscriptions detailed enough to mention their work. Others are known because they belonged to a guild.

¹¹⁴ Cribiore, "Gymnastics of the mind," 74-101.

¹¹⁵ Haines-Eitzen, "'Girls Trained in Beautiful Writing': Female Scribes in Roman Antiquity and Early Christianity," 629-646.

¹¹⁶ A. -M. VÉrilhac, "L'image de la femme dans les épigrammes funéraires grecques," in *La femme dans le monde méditerranéen. 1:Antiquité*, ed. A. -M. VÉrilhac (Lyon-Paris: G.S., Maison de l'Orient, 1985), 105.

¹¹⁷ S. Treggiari, "Lower class women in the Roman economy," *Florilegium* no. 1 (1979): 65-85.

Treggiari concludes that on the basis of the inscriptions the most accurate statements can be made about the tasks of slaves. They reduce essentially to textile work and domestic work, such as the personal servant of a lady; for example, as a hairdresser. Slave women scarcely appear at all in activities outside the home. The scope of a free woman, who was a widow, was not much greater. She could spin and weave or hire herself out as a domestic servant.

There are over 225 names in western Latin inscriptions for such city jobs, ranging from silversmiths, goldsmiths of various types, garland-makers, jewellers, fruit sellers, butchers, bakers, cobblers, all of whom are relatively well attested, to dealers who specialised in cheese or honey, or *salumeria*, or honey-cakes, or heavy cloaks or silk; men who made nails, ivory furniture or the eyes for statues. Then there are porters, dockers, muleteers, horse breakers, bath attendants, warehousemen, undertakers, auctioneers, debt-collectors, itinerant salesmen.

However, the attested range of women's work is much narrower than that of men, about 35 categories of work compared with her rough estimate of 225 for men in the Latin West. Women appear to be concentrated in “service” work (catering, prostitution); market trading, particularly in foodstuffs; serving in shops; in certain crafts, particularly the textile industry in the production of cloth and clothes,¹¹⁸ and detailed work, such as working in gold-leaf or hairdressing and certain luxury trades such as perfumery.¹¹⁹

The only female artisans or wage workers listed in Diocletian's Price Edict of 301 CE are female weavers, whose pay is shown to be much lower than that of men. As well as listing the maximum prices for each type of goods, it contains a very significant amount of data on wages. The day's wages for female weavers for rough fabrics was 12 denarii (that of the male linen weavers for small pieces of work is 20 denarii), for finer fabrics 16 denarii; (the wages of male linen weavers for finer fabrics 40 denarii) It is questionable whether it was possible for a woman alone to make ends meet with this wage (with possibly small children).¹²⁰ Frézouls based his calculations on a daily

¹¹⁸ Jens-Uwe Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich 2: Wirtschaftliche und gesellschaftliche Stellung von Witwen*, Heidelberg althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien; 17 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994). 130-144.

¹¹⁹ Treggiari, "Lower class women," 65-85.

¹²⁰ Marta Giaccherio, *Edictum Diocletiani et Collegarum de pretiis rerum venalium in integrum fere restitutum e Latinis Graecisque fragmentis* (Genova: Istituto di storia antica e scienze ausiliarie, 1974). Columns XX and XXI.

wage of 25 denarii, which was about twice as much as a textile worker could expect to earn. Even when paid to a man, such a wage was scarcely enough to cover living expenses.¹²¹ More recently, Scheidel calculated that price and wage data from Roman Egypt in the first three centuries CE indicated levels of real income for unskilled workers that were comparable to those inferred from price and wage data in Diocletian's Price Edict of 301 CE, and came to the similar conclusion that consumption was largely limited to goods that were essential for survival. Living standards must have been very modest because, with a few exceptions, the real incomes of unskilled labourers tended to be very low.¹²²

In special cases, she could practise midwifery. The running of a craft business was the very rare exception. Almost all the other ways of earning a living listed (seller, restaurant servant or restaurant owner) were associated with a significant loss of social standing. Wives concentrated on the household, whose direction was their foremost responsibility. They left the business outside the home to the husband. For a widow, it cannot have been easy to adjust to the new situation after the death of her husband. Housewives continuously complained that they had to reside withdrawn in the household to preserve their reputation. It would arouse suspicion if a widow worked in public. If the mother was compelled to work she might be reproached by her sons. Working signified a fault, similar to immoral lifestyle. However, often poverty and hardship forced them into work, which also made appearing in public necessary.¹²³

Elderly widows, if they were fortunate, might be supported by an adult son and taken into his home, or else might receive regular cash payments from him. Many widows had no sons, or perhaps only a married daughter who was also of limited means. Many older widows must therefore have sought alternative sources of revenue, particularly by working. For elderly widows there was no longer the danger that they would offend in the sexual arena. Nevertheless, the reputation of the working older women was not much better than that of the younger women: in particular, among other vices, they were assumed to be involved in procuration. These women were

¹²¹ E. Frézouls, "Prix, salaires et niveaux de vie: quelques enseignements de l'Edit du Maximum," *Ktèma*, no. 2 and 3 (1977/78): 2: 253-268, 253: 289-300.

¹²² Walter Scheidel, "Real Wages in Early Economies: Evidence for Living Standards from 1800 BCE to 1300 CE," *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 3 (2010): 425.

¹²³ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 2: 124.

also of very limited use due to diminishing bodily strength (being most likely still working in the service sector). In general older women ran a particularly high risk of becoming incapable of work due to illness or physical infirmities. Frequently older women were forced to give up their work due to physical weakness.

Some farmer's wives had a limited role in gardening, and caring for calves, pigs and fowl, but on the death of the husband were unable to run the whole enterprise by themselves. Many remarried.¹²⁴

Work remained an emergency solution for women, for the range of eligible ways of earning a living was extremely narrow. The widow secured at best a meagre livelihood through her work and for potentially existing minor children her wage will often not have been enough. The living costs for half-orphans have to be estimated as being not much less than that for a widow. Women were worse paid for the same work as men, as we have seen above, i.e. the Diocletian Prices Edict. Accordingly the situation was bleak for lone women who had to rely on work to maintain herself and her family. Even if a widow found work, usually she lived close to the edge of subsistence, especially when she had to take care of minor children.

2.9 VICTIMS OF CRIME

Krause reports that in ancient literature the vulnerability of widows and orphans is often mentioned. In speeches given in court during murder trials it was often stressed how much the accused's wife and children would suffer in the event of a conviction. If the litigant herself was a woman or an orphan, it was found helpful to highlight this fact in pleading.

The increasing complaints about the plight of the widows militate against the assumption that the death of the husband was liberation from the yoke of marriage.¹²⁵ The opposite was the case: widows were exposed to various hazards: among them, theft of heritable property including land, violence and robbery, and sexually motivated violence. Here are some examples.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 2: 126-127.

¹²⁵ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 2: 232-234.

¹²⁶ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 2: 234-243.

The wealthy widow named Aurelia, whose children were abroad with the army, appealed to the prefect of Egypt, Clodius Culcianus, in 303 CE, for help against the two men whom she had employed to manage her estates, claiming that

But they turned out to be crooked and robbed me, and taking away from me the possessions which came into their hands, they never brought to me the customary accounts, perhaps recognizing their error in the things which they did, having snatched away from me also two cows from those which I have.¹²⁷

A widow's petition dating from the beginning of the third century, who explicitly describes herself as weak, claims that a certain Eudaemon had done wrong to her son-in-law Polydeuces; but he was not held accountable because of the influence he enjoyed. Furthermore, the *curator* Thonis had abducted a slave from her house by force.¹²⁸ Widows were also objects of sexually motivated violence because they were defenceless. According to Paulus, the jurist, a husband could not bring an action in his own name for *injuria*, if his wife had been attacked and the accused had taken her for a *vidua*!¹²⁹

There are many more examples of injustice to be found in the literary and inscriptional evidence, but these three will suffice to show that the institution of guardianship in a violent society may have had some advantages for widows.

2.10 OF MARGINAL INTEREST?

The vulnerability of widows is not regarded as an issue for us today. In view of the invisibility of young widows in today's society, it might be considered that this topic can only be regarded to be of marginal interest. However, in Roman society, the sheer numbers of young widows, which does not exist today, demanded extensive legal provisions to prevent their exploitation. Nowadays in Western European society a young widow cannot turn to any legally appointed support. If a widowed mother cannot cope, it may not be noticed. Ultimately the children may be removed and taken into care. The consequences are apparent in today's sexual exploitation and trafficking of young girls who do not have a father's protection. Fatherless children

¹²⁷ P.Oxy. I.71, 303 CE.

¹²⁸ P.Oxy. VIII 1120

¹²⁹ Justinian, *Digest of Justinian*: Dig. 47.10.18.44 (Paulus)

have no one legally appointed to be responsible for their welfare if the mother fails. It was very different in the Roman Empire for those who possessed some assets.

Jens-Uwe Krause tried to answer the question of the extent of the ‘problem’ throughout the Empire in volume one, *Verwitwung und Wiederverheiratung*, of his habilitation thesis *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich* published in four volumes between 1994-1995.¹³⁰ As his is the most intensive and detailed body of research performed so far on this topic, his opinions are to be taken extremely seriously. Krause asserts that the study of so-called marginal groups such as widows and orphans should not be regarded as a “side issue” in socio-historical research. On the contrary, their situation provoked a reaction on the part of the family, from the Roman state and in Roman society. He observes with surprise, (speaking in 1994) despite these indicators, that “Widows are in fact not present in social history research”.¹³¹

Against the background of his results, which show that there were a large number of widows in the Roman Empire, Krause emphasizes that his research on the situation of the fatherless and the widows in the Roman Empire can justifiably make the claim for itself of being of current relevance. He stresses that the fate of widows and orphans is by no means a peripheral issue—it not only includes the analysis of many aspects of family and kinship, but also makes an important contribution to the study of the social position of women in general, of poverty, of Christianisation, and thus belongs to the heart of the economic and social history of the Roman Empire. One difficulty that Krause’s work presents for the writer is that he attempted to cover the whole period 200 BCE – 600 CE diachronically, and therefore his conclusions summarize that whole spread of time. I have focused my discussion on the first three hundred years of the Common Era, occasionally referring to later authors, such as Chrysostom, for confirmation of developments begun in the earlier period.

2.11 HOW MANY WERE THERE?

Krause regarded it as a pre-requisite in volume one to have some clarity about the numeric strength of this group of people. He was concerned with the demographic

¹³⁰ Jens-Uwe Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich 1: Verwitwung und Wiederverheiratung*, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien; 16 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994).

¹³¹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1: 2*.

and economic position of widows rather than with ancient outlooks and views on widowhood. He used very wide-ranging and varied source material. His sources were literature, papyri, and inscriptions and each individual item is listed in great detail in the seven appendices of volume one:

1. Age difference of spouses in Egypt
2. Generation interval in Egypt
3. Evaluated Census declarations
4. Widows and wives in the Census Submissions
5. Women guardianships in Egypt
6. Young Widows (according to literary sources)
7. Remarriages in Egypt

The body of volume one edits the source material contained in the seven appendices from different viewpoints. Statistically these sources have their limitations and the author is aware of it. He frequently refers specifically to the resulting difficulties. One issue encountered frequently in research studies is the extent to which the Egyptian statistics can be relied upon to reflect the entire Roman Empire. The papyri, which form the core of his evidence, might seem to allow conclusions only for Egypt. Nevertheless, Bagnall and Frier, authors of *The Demography of Roman Egypt* are able to claim:

Nonetheless, the basic demographic attributes of Roman Egypt are, at the least, thoroughly at home in the Mediterranean; they tend to recur in historical Mediterranean populations with considerable regularity. Nor is there any strong *a priori* reason why most of these attributes should be regarded as unique to Egypt among Roman provinces.

On many occasions one can only gain impressions from the copious individual examples which Krause provides.

To arrive at reasonably meaningful results, Krause resorts to a simple mathematical model through which “by approximation of a few parameters, should allow the number of widows to be estimated”.¹³² His model is based on Bruce Frier’s 1982 calculation of Roman life expectancy from the Ulpianic annuities table, used in conjunction with epigraphic, papyri, and literary sources.¹³³

¹³² Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 5.

¹³³ Bruce Frier, "Roman Life Expectancy: Ulpian's evidence," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 86(1982): 213-251.

Krause has calculated that in the Roman Empire,¹³⁴ on average women married at 15-18 years of age, compared with men who were on average older by about 7-8 years. Girls had to be at least twelve years old. These values cover the enormous actual spread of age at marriage, and age differences between spouses, which very often led to the early widowhood of young women—unlike today. Women had a higher life expectancy than men, despite the health risks posed by many births. J.-U. Krause starts from the premise of a surplus of women and not from a male surplus, as do others such as Rodney Stark.¹³⁵ That fact in itself would have already greatly diminished the chances of many widows to remarry, Krause claims. The typical Roman widow was a woman in her mid-thirties with one or more young children to support and little chance of remarriage, though individual cases might deviate from the average. She was not the stereotype of the elderly woman we find today.

After analyzing the sources, and assessing modern research, J.-U. Krause makes it seem plausible that the widows (and orphans) in antiquity were by no means treated like a marginal group of people, although much remains uncertain. He claims that such an impression can arise when one draws on only the literary sources. Firstly ancient writers of the empire lacked a “thematic orientation”¹³⁶ to the widows and secondly they refer, with very few exceptions, to the “upper class” and the imperial family. For such women their widowhood was short because they were involved in the re-marriage politics of their families. That picture changes when the numerous, though often unproductive inscriptions and papyri are used because they provide an admittedly limited insight into the conditions of the “lower classes”.

Krause concludes that the number of widows who remained for a long time or permanently in the status of widowhood must have been considerable in town and country, which according to the estimates of the author lay between 25-30%, probably nearer the upper figure, including widows who were elderly.¹³⁷ He estimates that the average age of a widow in the Roman Empire would have been in the mid-30s. The calculations leading to this conclusion are extremely complex, and are beyond the scope of this study. In addition, some poor widows over thirty had to

¹³⁴ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 7-46.

¹³⁵ Rodney Stark, *The rise of Christianity: a sociologist reconsiders history* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). Ch.5.

¹³⁶ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 195.

¹³⁷ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 47-73.

cope with minor children.¹³⁸ Dominic Rathbone agreed with Krause's important finding that whereas women were less likely to remarry after the age of thirty-five, men normally remarried well into their forties. That means that remarriage continued the general pattern of an age-gap in marriage. Only older widows or divorcees who had passed child-bearing age tended not to remarry.¹³⁹

One of the great advantages of volume one is that J.-U. Krause differentiated by social groups and compares the antique ratios repeatedly with those from the Middle Ages up to and including the 1982 German census results. This is not a defect, as far as my thesis is concerned, as it draws attention to the lesser numbers, and one of the reasons for the inconspicuousness of fatherless children and young widows today and the consequent lack of interest in their fate.

2.11.1 STATISTICAL CONCERNS

Krause's calculations stem from an attempt to establish a statistical basis in Ulpian's Table for his contention that in the Roman Empire there were a great number of young widows, weighed down by the support needs of young children in the Roman Empire, which is not the case today. These results cannot be accepted uncritically without examining the validity for the basis for Krause's calculations in Ulpian's Table.

Bruce Frier, in his 1982 article, *Roman Life Expectancy: Ulpian's Evidence*, makes the claim:

It is my own belief that Ulpian's life table does have a *prima facie* claim to represent with some accuracy the mortality experience of the Roman Empire, and that this life table probably constitutes (at least for the time being) our most adequate benchmark for assessing other demographic evidence, especially funerary inscriptions.¹⁴⁰

The rest of his article contains complex statistical arguments in support of this assertion, which are beyond the scope of this study.

Ulpian was a jurist, someone who studied and taught the theory of law. He was murdered in 223 CE. His table appears to provide a rough outline of life expectancy

¹³⁸ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 114-132.

¹³⁹ Dominic Rathbone, "Poverty and population in Roman Egypt," in *Poverty in the Roman world*, ed. E. M. Atkins and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 102.

¹⁴⁰ Frier, "Roman Life Expectancy: Ulpian's evidence," 251.

in the early third century CE. According to this mortality table life expectancy at the age of 15 years approximately was a further 31.12 years.¹⁴¹ Ulpian's schedule was used in computing tax for *alimenta* and also for usufructs. Significantly, in a subsequent article, published a year later in 1983, Frier found that evidence from 120 adult skeletons, buried between 340-374 CE in a cemetery in western Hungary (Roman Pannonia), provided "considerable" additional support for his Life Table. The grave goods were not lavish, suggesting a community of traders and artisans. He applies various standard statistical tests to the data to confirm his results, e.g. standard deviation, linear regression, chi-square and the Weiss test. He suggests that even better results would be obtained if the estimated 2000 skeletons preserved in Pompeii could be utilised to reconstruct the age-sex and other patterns of a Roman population.

Frier claims that this forensic evidence has the value of helping to warn researchers that the epigraphic data on mortality, despite their vast quantity, are of negligible use to historical demographers. Analysis of the ages given in funerary inscriptions has not proved satisfactory. The funerary data over-represent the number of very old people, by exaggerating their age, with an associated propensity to include the dead person's age on the gravestone if he or she was unusually old at death. The second reason Frier provides, is that the age of death of young adults was more frequently recorded, no doubt owing to the sentiment that they had died "far too young".¹⁴²

Further reasons why epigraphic data on mortality are of little use are given in K. Hopkins' article, *On the Probable Age Structure of the Roman Population*.¹⁴³ He revealed that the particular issue which shows up the inadequacies of the epigraphic data is the pattern of age distribution. He tested the reliability of the Roman data against a sample of comparative data, the U.N. model life tables. He concludes:

I have found that the pattern of ages at death, derived from Roman tombstones, even between the ages of 10 and 60, is mostly demographically impossible and always highly improbable.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 19.

¹⁴² Bruce Frier, "Roman Life Expectancy: The Pannonian Evidence," *Phoenix* 37, no. 4 (1983): 328-344.

¹⁴³ Keith Hopkins, "On the Probable Age Structure of the Roman Population," *Population Studies* 20, no. 2 (1966): 245-264.

¹⁴⁴ Hopkins, "On the Probable Age Structure," 246.

One observation Hopkins made is of particular relevance. It has been generally accepted that Roman women died relatively young. Hopkins, in contrast, argues that young wives were memorialized disproportionately often, because the younger they died, the more often surviving husbands were available to commemorate them. Furthermore, husbands were inclined to put the age at death of their wives on the tombstone, whereas children commemorating their parents did so only rarely.¹⁴⁵

2.11.2 THE IMPACT OF FEMALE CHILD INFANTICIDE AND EXPOSURE, AND DEATH IN CHILDBIRTH

Krause's demographic model is speculative and conclusions based on it should be used with caution. Some reviewers have criticised him because he dismisses as negligible the effects on female mortality rates of female infanticide and exposure, and death in childbirth.¹⁴⁶

Figures for death of mothers in childbirth can only be calculated through comparison. Maternal mortality in Rome is thought to be comparable with figures for similar societies for which records have been retained, such as eighteenth-century rural England, where maternal mortality averaged 25 per 1000 births. Todman is of the opinion that there is little evidence that death in childbirth contributed significantly to any demographic difference in male and female life expectancy.¹⁴⁷

Nor do statistics appear to be readily available from the Egyptian sources for the number of women who died in childbirth. Although one can readily find individual examples in the literary sources and sources of inscriptions, it is difficult to deduce valid statistics from them.

For example, Pliny records the death in 104/5 CE of the two Helvidiae sisters in childbirth, leaving their father with only one surviving child.:

To Velius Cerealis. This premature death of Helvidius's daughters is tragic—both sisters giving birth to girls and dying in labour. I am deeply distressed, and not unduly, for these were noble young women

¹⁴⁵ Hopkins, "On the Probable Age Structure," 246.

¹⁴⁶ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 48-49.

¹⁴⁷ Donald Todman, "Childbirth in ancient Rome: From traditional folklore to obstetrics," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 47, no. 2 (April 2007): 82-85.

in the flower of their youth and I must mourn to see them the victims of their motherhood. *Letters* 4.21¹⁴⁸

According to Krause, these events do not noticeably reduce the surplus of marriageable women caused by the difference in age between husband and wife. Thomas A. J. McGinn¹⁴⁹ takes him to task over this, and refers to W. V. Harris' "balanced assessment" of the phenomenon which concludes that it is reasonable to assume a gender imbalance in early childhood.¹⁵⁰ The more recent assessment of the evidence by Grubbs points out that what is missing, regrettably, is what we would most like to know: the actual demographic impact of exposure in the Roman Empire. The 1980s debate, centred on the theoretical possibility of female infanticide, resulted in the conclusion that, from a demographic standpoint, it was *possible*. However, Grubbs believes that the case for widespread exposure of females has been overstated, fuelled by a few often repeated pieces of evidence and a belief that in the ancient world sons were preferred to daughters and therefore that female infants were less likely to be raised. In fact, most of the legal, literary, and documentary references to exposure do not mention the child's gender, and when they do, as frequently it is a boy as a girl.¹⁵¹ These facts have been obscured by focus on sources such as the infamous letter from a certain Hilarion to his wife Alis in early Roman Egypt, which contains the injunction to raise the child that is to be born if it is a boy and "throw it out" if it is a girl.¹⁵²

The letter is dated 29th year of the Emperor Augustus, 23rd day of the Egyptian month Pauni (17th June 1 B.C.E.).

Hilarion to his sister Alis, many greetings, also to my lady Berous and Apollonarian. Know that I am still in Alexandria; and do not worry if they wholly set out, I am staying in Alexandria. I ask you and entreat you, take care of the child, and if I receive my pay soon, I will send it up to you. Above all, [*Pollapollon*] if you bear a child and it is male,

¹⁴⁸ Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Letters*: 300-301.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas A. J. McGinn, "Review: Widows, orphans, and social history: [review of: Krause, Jens-Uwe. *Witwen Und Waisen Im Römischen Reich*. 4 vols]," *Journal of Roman archaeology* 12(1999): 619.

¹⁵⁰ W. V. Harris, "Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 84(1994): 1-22.

¹⁵¹ Judith Evans Grubbs, "Infant Exposure and Infanticide," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83-107.

¹⁵² P.Oxy.4.744.

let it be; if it is female, cast it out. You have told Aphrodisias, "Do not forget me." But how can I forget you? Thus I'm asking you not to worry. The 29th year of Caesar, Pauni 23. (verso) Hilarion to Alis, deliver.¹⁵³

The word here for 'cast it out' (ἐκβαλε) is the same word used in the Gospels to describe Jesus casting out demons.

Stephanie West has suggested that the obscure words *pollapollon*, translated here as "above all" may refer back to Apollonarian, in fact, might be the nickname of a slave, whose child is to be born, the father of whom is not acknowledged.¹⁵⁴ It was when there was no father in the picture that the baby was least likely to be raised.

Grubbs explains that exposure allowed the possibility of the infant's survival and rescue by a third party, which may have been the hope of the parent. She discusses the possible fates of a child who survived: i.e. substitution for a stillborn child, replacement of a child who died in infancy, the sex trade, or as a foster child.

Usually, those who survived abandonment would be reared as slaves. For the cost of two years' wet-nursing wages, the rescuer of a baby could get a slave who could later be sold at a profit, should they survive to adulthood.¹⁵⁵

2.12 CHANCES OF REMARRIAGE

The demographic structures specific to antiquity, i.e., on the one hand, early marriage of girls, on average at least five years earlier than in Western and Central Europe in the early modern period, and on the other hand, high mortality, had an impact on the remarriage opportunities for widows.

High male mortality and the consequent short duration of marriage meant that many of the very young widows in the ancient world might have a good chance of remarriage. However, it must not be overlooked that many women did not lose their husbands until they themselves had already reached an advanced age. The literary sources focus on the upper classes in which widows probably remarried more often than in the lower classes (for dynastic and political reasons). Women were generally only noticed when they were involved in the family (i.e. married women). Widowed

¹⁵³ Downloaded from Papyri.info. <http://idp.atlantides.org/ddbdp/p.oxy;4;744>

¹⁵⁴ Stephanie West, "Whose Baby? A Note on P. Oxy. 4.744," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 121(1998): 167-172.

¹⁵⁵ Grubbs, "Infant Exposure," 90.

or unmarried women had no independent role in society and therefore the ancient authors had no reason to write about them. The Egyptian papyri which testify to a large number of widow-led households, (not only in the census declarations) provide a major correction to their absence from the writings of the ancients. The Egyptian data reveal that women often did not remarry after divorce or widowhood, with the result that about 50% of the women in their later thirties were no longer married.¹⁵⁶ The demographic conditions with a large number of available widows made remarriages *possible*, if not necessary to maintain the population equilibrium, but however, left a great many of them without any chance of finding a second husband.¹⁵⁷

They were forced to make the attempt—as in previous centuries—mainly for support reasons¹⁵⁸ apart from the fact that widowhood had no social prestige.¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately, for a large proportion of widows the attempt failed owing to age, lost virginity, poverty and under-age children.¹⁶⁰ Krause demonstrates with examples from literary sources that the criteria for remarriage seemed to be wealth, noble descent and youth. Younger widows of noble descent were able to bring a large dowry into a remarriage. Both the studies by Krause, and Bagnall and Frier conclude that women from the non-elite strata of society had little chance of finding a husband when aged more than 30 years of age.¹⁶¹ Saller's study also confirms this finding of Krause.¹⁶² The non-existence in the literary sources of the early imperial period of poor and old widows should not lead to conclusions of their non-existence in reality at that time. Divorce, although simple under *sine manus*, was met with general disapproval, but re-marriage afterwards was acceptable.

¹⁵⁶ Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, property and death in the Roman family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 68.

¹⁵⁷ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen I*: 101.

¹⁵⁸ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen I*: 108-113.

¹⁵⁹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen I*: 102-107.

¹⁶⁰ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen I*: 114-132.

¹⁶¹ Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, *The demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 126-127.

¹⁶² Saller, *Patriarchy*: 68.

2.12.1 UNIVIRAE

Arjava rejects the idea that the *univira* (interpreted as meaning a living widow who chooses not to remarry), was held up as an ideal in the pagan early Empire, and that their example would have dissuaded women from considering remarriage. She is of the opinion that the term at that time referred to a woman who had been married only once in her lifetime and had *predeceased* her husband, and not to a woman who disdained a second marriage.¹⁶³ Certainly the inscriptional evidence supports this view. In contrast to earlier centuries, when *univira* designated women eligible to participate in certain religious rites, (e.g. the *flamines* of Jupiter had to have wives who were *univirae*); the epithet became available to every woman, even a freedwoman, who married only once and predeceased her husband. The Christians created a new form of their own when they re-assigned *univira* to living widows, by the time of Tertullian, at the beginning of the third century.¹⁶⁴ Up to this point, the fact that the Romans respected a dead woman who had been married only once in her lifetime, was of little consequence in providing a reason for an increase in the number of widows who chose not to remarry.

2.13 A REAL WIDOW UNDER ROMAN LAW

Unfortunately we have no detailed biographical information about any real widow belonging to a Christian community of the earliest years, but fortuitously we do have some legal material pertaining to a Jewish widow of the 'middling group' in the second century, which shows how the Roman guardianship system might operate for a twice-married woman who possessed a little property.

Her name was Babatha and she lived in Nabathaea which lay between the Sinai Peninsula and the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁶⁵ In 106 CE, during the reign of Roman emperor Trajan, it was officially annexed to the Roman Empire. One of the most unexpected things revealed by the Babatha archive is the degree to which Roman administration and law had already become embedded in the new province of Arabia, only twenty years after its founding. Babatha used Roman legal system to pursue her

¹⁶³ Arjava, *Women and law*: 167.

¹⁶⁴ Marjorie Lightman and William Zeisel, "Univira: an example of continuity and change in Roman society," *Church History* 46, no. 1 (1977): 19-32.

¹⁶⁵ Hannah Cotton, "The Guardianship of Jesus Son of Babatha: Roman and Local Law in the Province of Arabia," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 83(1993): 94-108.

son's guardians. Her son by her first marriage, Jesus, had two male guardians, Abdobdas son of Illouthas and John Eglas, who had been appointed by the town council of Petra. In 124 CE, she went to court against her son's guardians, alleging that they were not giving him a maintenance allowance (out of his own estate) appropriate for his lifestyle. The language used in the legal document P.Yadin 14 is Greek. However, several of the witnesses to these signed in local languages, either Nabatean or Aramaic. Babatha herself was illiterate, and so had someone sign on her behalf. She presented her summons through her own guardian, (called in Judaea and Arabia an *epitropos*) who was her second husband, Judah son of Khthousion. In the Greek papyri from the Judaean Desert the term *epitropos* is used—even in a single document—both for the guardian of a woman and for the guardian of a minor. A second document P.Yadin 15 details the charges.

I, Babatha, have summoned the afore-mentioned John, one of the guardians of the *orphan*, concerning the refusal of rendering of maintenance. If not, this will be a statement on oath for the purpose of supporting documentation of (your) profiting from the money of the orphan ...

The final document P.Yadin 27 contains a receipt from Babatha for the sum of six denarii for a three-month period from Simon hunchback son of John Eglas.¹⁶⁶

Later Babatha's second husband Judah died and she was widowed for a second time. Judah and Babatha had no children together, but Judah had a daughter, Shelamzion, from a previous marriage. However, the sons of Judah's deceased brother were his legal heirs. A guardian named Besas undertook legal processes on their behalf which suggests that they were minors at the time.¹⁶⁷ Besas demanded that Babatha divulge what right she had to the orchards that are registered in her name. In P.Yadin 21–22 Babatha explained her right to sell the crops as being based on her dowry and a debt, presumably recorded on the marriage contract, but a clear explanation is not given.¹⁶⁸

The example of Babatha demonstrates that Roman law extended to all parts of the Roman Empire and applied to all ethnicities.

¹⁶⁶ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 250-254.

¹⁶⁷ Jacobine G. Oudshoorn, *The relationship between Roman and local law in the Babatha and Salome Komaise archives: general analysis and three case studies on law of succession, guardianship, and marriage*, *Studies on the texts of the desert of Judah*, v. 69 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007). 346-354.

¹⁶⁸ Oudshoorn, *Relationship*: 391-393.

2.14 SUMMARY

In the Roman Empire widows were highly conspicuous by their presence. Krause calculates that there were approaching 30% of women widowed at any one time. Legal sources show that most childless widows returned to their father's control on the death of a spouse. If he had already died, which was a frequent occurrence, guardians were appointed, both individually for her and for any minor children, as women were regarded as inadequate at managing business affairs owing to constitutional weakness. The property of the children and the widow were kept separate. Her dowry would be returned to her and she might also have received property by inheritance from her father. The children normally remained with their mother.

If she had only the asset of a dowry, or dependent minor children, then remarriage might prove to be the only solution to her predicament. This was not always easy to accomplish, because of the surplus of women. The chances of remarriage for a woman more than 30 years of age were small, owing to age, loss of attractiveness, poverty, loss of virginity, or dependent children.

Little information is available about widows who did not qualify for support under the system of legal guardianship existing under Roman law. If she had no assets, nor any supportive relatives, then self-support by working was her only option. Unfortunately opportunities for work were extremely limited, restricted mostly to the textile industry.

3. PROVISION FOR FATHERLESS CHILDREN IN ROMAN SOCIETY

It has been established that a non-elite widow aged more than thirty with dependent minor children might find herself in a difficult financial situation following the death of her husband. The focus of attention now turns to her children. What was the attitude of Roman society and the Roman legal system towards children bereft of a father?

As has been stressed previously, it is often uncertain in documents written in Greek and Latin for linguistic reasons whether full or half orphans are under discussion. Fortunately, we do have objective evidence from Greek inscriptions and papyri on how the word ὀρφανός was used in practice. *New documents illustrating early Christianity vol. 4*, published in 1979, as discussed previously in Chapter One makes it clear that the correct word to use for the fatherless child of a widow is ὀρφανός.¹⁶⁹ When reading texts employing the word ὀρφανός, both groups may be under consideration. A child who had lost his/her father was regarded as equivalent to one who had lost both parents; such was the devastating loss of identity and status.

3.1 HOW MANY WERE THERE?

Both the Greeks and the Romans until into the Byzantine Era defined an ‘orphan’ as someone whose father had died.¹⁷⁰ As the Christian emperors gradually freed women from the stipulations of the guardianship laws, so gradually ‘orphan’ acquired the meaning it has today. Krause’s third volume deals with the social and legal fate of orphans—or rather ‘half-orphans’ as he sometimes calls them—children whose father has died.¹⁷¹ He estimates that nearly 50% of children have lost their father by the age of 15, a larger figure than that given by Walter Scheidel in his essay *The Demographic Background*.¹⁷² In that essay he estimated that between 28 and 37

¹⁶⁹ Horsley, *New documents vol. 4*: 162-164.

¹⁷⁰ Timothy S. Miller, *The orphans of Byzantium: child welfare in the Christian empire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003). 16-17.

¹⁷¹ Jens-Uwe Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich 3: Rechtliche und soziale Stellung von Waisen*, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien; 18 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995). III, 4-5.

¹⁷² Walter Scheidel, "The demographic background," in *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity*, ed. Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31-40.

percent of all individuals would have lost their fathers by age fifteen, and between 49 and 61 percent by age twenty-five. Therefore about one-third of all Romans would have lost their fathers before they attained maturity (for men) or were married (for women). These high numbers, one surmises, surely would have led to half-orphans being extremely visible in Roman society.

Krause provides some examples from the ruling Julio-Claudian dynasty—doubtless orphans from poor families fared far worse.

NAME	AGE AT DEATH OF FATHER
Augustus	4
Tiberius	9
Gaius and Lucius	8 and 5
Postumus	0
Germanicus	6
Caligula	7
Claudius	1
Nero	3
Britannicus	13

With the help of a computer model P. Laslett calculated age-linked probabilities for the loss of a father as follows: 0 = 2%, 11 = 34%, 22 = 68%.¹⁷³ Using the same premises as Laslett, R. P. Saller calculated the probability of still having a living father at various ages.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Peter Laslett, "La parenté en chiffres," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 43, no. 1 (1988): 13.

¹⁷⁴ Richard P. Saller, "Men's Age at Marriage and Its Consequences in the Roman Family," *Classical Philology* 82, no. 1 (1987): 33.

AGE	SENATORIAL ORDER	ORDINARY ROMANS
5	85%	84%
10	69%	68%
15	55%	54%
20	43%	41%
25	32%	30%
30	20%	19%
35	12%	12%
40	6%	6%

3.2 THE AUTHORITY OF THE FATHER

Children under *patria potestas* could not own property. Everything given or bequeathed to them legally belonged to their *paterfamilias*. The *paterfamilias*' consent was also required in order for his children's legal transactions, including their marriages, to be valid. If a *paterfamilias* died without a will, all his children, male and female, were his heirs in equal shares, as was his wife if she had come under his *manus* upon marriage—(if he made a will, however, he might dispose of his estate less equally). Fatherless minor children were placed under guardianship, except those of the poor who possessed no property.¹⁷⁵

A woman did not have *patria potestas* and could never be *paterfamilias*. And though mothers had considerable responsibility and socially approved authority over their children¹⁷⁶ they could never have *potestas* as fathers could, and could not serve as their child's guardian (*tutor*) after their husband's death.

According to the Institutes of Gaius, agnate relatives became *tutors* to those fatherless children to whom a *tutor* was not given by will. They were called legitimate tutors.¹⁷⁷ The *tutor legitimus* was a male on the agnate (paternal) side of

¹⁷⁵ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 20-21.

¹⁷⁶ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman mother* (London: Routledge, 1988). 41-44.

¹⁷⁷ Gaius, Gordon, and Robinson, *Institutes of Gaius*: I, 155.

the family, who would probably be the next in line to inherit if the person in *tutela* died without a will. In the mid-first century, the emperor Claudius abolished agnate *tutela* for women. After that, only fatherless children below puberty (male and female) would have an agnate relative as a *tutor legitimus*.¹⁷⁸

3.3 GUARDIANSHIP AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

The power of *patria potestas* lasted throughout the *paterfamilias*' life. At the father's death his adult children, both male and female, would become legally independent (*sui iuris*) and his married sons would have *patria potestas* over their own children. Those who had not yet reached sexual maturity (14 for boys, 12 for girls) would be placed under *tutela impuberum*. The ward would be called a *pupillus* or *pupilla*. The guardian, called a *tutor*, would be chosen by the father in his will, failing that, the role would pass to the nearest male relative on the father's side, normally the paternal uncle. The law's only concern was to protect the property left to children by their fathers, in the interest of the agnates, the father's relatives. Uncles and adult brothers served as guardians more frequently than other relatives. However Saller warns:

In the majority of cases the loss of a father could not have been offset by the appointment of a paternal uncle or grandfather as guardian simply because no such relatives were still alive and able to serve in this capacity.¹⁷⁹

If there were no agnate relatives suitable the mother would normally apply to the authorities to have a guardian appointed. If she did not comply, she would only escape loss of inheritance rights from deceased children if the children were completely destitute. The guardians did not live with their wards.

The mother was usually assigned the rearing of the children and their physical welfare. The duties of the guardian were in practice confined to safeguarding property. A mother was considered too 'weak' to act as a guardian, although it appears to have happened, especially in the provinces, usually in deference to the will of the deceased father. There were things she was not permitted to do, such as appointing an advocate, selling property or releasing debtors. She would have to give account when the child reached adulthood. The mother was also responsible for ensuring that the guardian carried out his tasks responsibly and honourably. If the

¹⁷⁸ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 25.

¹⁷⁹ Scheidel, "Demographic background," 36.

father died intestate and the orphans had no living paternal male relative the *praetor urbanus*, together with the ten tribunes, appointed a guardian called the *tutela dativa*. Marcus Aurelius (160-180 CE) created a special magistrate to deal solely with guardianship issues called the *praetor tutelarius*. He was enjoined to make all the appointments in the case of *tutela dativa* and to investigate accusations of misconduct against guardians. Before his appointment as Emperor, Galba (68-69 CE), crucified a guardian who had poisoned his ward.¹⁸⁰ Subsequently Emperor Severus (193-211 CE) recommended in a rescript that the praetor should examine carefully any appointment where the guardian was in line to inherit if the children died.¹⁸¹

When the sons reached sexual maturity fatherless male children became free of any legal authority. Fatherless female children however changed from *tutela impuberum* to *tutela mulierum* at 12 years of age. To protect these young (male) teenagers, a further type of (optional) guardianship developed called the *cura minorum* (care of minors), which could last until they reached the legal age of twenty-five, although release sooner might be granted for good behaviour. This type of guardianship was frequent by the reign of Septimus Severus (193-211 CE).¹⁸²

A law banning marriage between a fatherless minor girl (*pupilla*) and her guardian (*tutor* or *curator*) or his son, unless the girl's father had stipulated he wanted the marriage before his death, was passed during the dual reign of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus (177-180 CE). This was to prevent female wards from being defrauded of the family property.¹⁸³

Finally Theodosius I, emperor from 379 to 395 CE, in 390 officially granted widowed mothers who undertook not to remarry the legal right to serve as their children's guardian. This would be allowed only when a *tutor legitimus* is either lacking, excused, untrustworthy or in ill health.¹⁸⁴ In Egypt mothers were allowed to be guardians (called there *epitropoi*) of their minor children, but not every mother

¹⁸⁰ Miller, *Orphans*: 32-36.

¹⁸¹ H. F. Jolowicz, "The Wicked Guardian," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 37(1947): 82-90.

¹⁸² Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 23, 236-246.

¹⁸³ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 156.

¹⁸⁴ Theodosius, *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes* (Berolini: Weidmann, 1905). 3.17.14.

chose to.¹⁸⁵ The general attitude in Roman society, that the property which a wife had inherited from her husband ought to go to the children which she had by him, and not be given to the husband or children of a second marriage, became embodied in law by the fourth century. Sometimes a husband might leave his wife a legacy on condition that she did not remarry after his death. This was regarded as invalid by the jurists and against the Augustan marriage legislation, unless his will specified that she should not marry while the children were below puberty, which was acceptable.¹⁸⁶

Constantine also demonstrated distrust of stepfathers, *tutors* and *curators*. He extended a law of 195 CE in 326 or 329 CE which forbade guardians to sell or mortgage the estates of their charges, which included any items of value within the urban properties. He was concerned also about the interests of minors in case their mothers, as guardians, might surrender their children's property to their new husbands.¹⁸⁷ Finally by 392 CE Theodosius deprived remarried mothers of even the lifetime use (usufruct) of all the property they had received from their first marriage, which they were to give to the children of their first marriage as soon as they remarried.¹⁸⁸ These late Roman laws were concerned with the consequences of remarriage for the children of the first marriage. Widows without children were unaffected, as long as they observed a ten-month delay before remarrying.

Providing a dowry for a daughter in the poorer groups was a major difficulty.¹⁸⁹ Often no guardian was officially appointed in these groups. The mother alone was responsible for the children's upbringing and she would have to finance their maintenance if the children's inheritance was insufficient for this purpose. Even if a guardian had been appointed, he was not obliged to supplement their maintenance from his own resources. In contrast, in the elite groups, the estates of widows and orphans were always separated cleanly on the husband's death. The frequent remarriages, consequently, could lead to the separation of widows and orphans, who might be adopted by her previous husband's relatives. She herself was only loosely

¹⁸⁵ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 248.

¹⁸⁶ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 227.

¹⁸⁷ Justinian, *Corpus iuris civilis. Volume 2, Codex Iustinianus [1877]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). 5.37.22.35.

¹⁸⁸ Justinian, *Codex Iustinianus*: 5.10.11.

¹⁸⁹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 3*: 146-177.

connected with her late husband's family. In terms of the legal basis of the Roman marriage, (at least from the late republic, *sine manu* marriage), the wife was entitled to take no gifts from her husband. She had no intestate inheritance and only a limited testamentary inheritance.

3.4 WHO BROUGHT THEM UP?

Krause reports that after the death of their father, most orphans would have lived with their mother, who would continue to fulfil essentially the same task of raising children as before, with addition of financial management.¹⁹⁰

Sometimes this role became too difficult to cope with and the mother might then choose to re-marry which could lead to problems between a child and a step-father. Even when they grew up in the household of the step-father, only in the rarest cases were they integrated in the family. The stepfather was generally little involved in the upbringing of his stepchildren or the covering of the associated costs. In late antiquity widows became increasingly reluctant to find a step-father for their children.¹⁹¹

The extended family (e.g. older brothers and sisters; grandparents, uncles and aunts from both sides of the family) come numerically second to the mother and often played a decisive role by adopting the orphans, especially when the mother could not undertake the upbringing of the orphans.¹⁹² The Egyptian Census Declarations show quite a few orphans in the household of an elder brother, which Krause details in Volume 3, Appendix One, *Orphan children in the Egyptian papyri*.¹⁹³

Although some widows tried to maintain their authority as head of the family against an adult son, as a rule, as soon as the son had reached the age of majority, the widowed mother became dependent on him. The administration of the estate inherited from the father often passed to a guardian. If the amount was not large, sometimes the mother undertook that role. Only in a few cases did the assets of the husband fall directly to the widow. They received access to it only indirectly through its management for minor children.

¹⁹⁰ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 16-32.

¹⁹¹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 33-48.

¹⁹² Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 49-77.

¹⁹³ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 255-258.

In the elite groups, a widow often financed the education of her sons from her own assets, or endowed her daughter on marriage with a dowry, even if they were being brought up in the family of her late husband.¹⁹⁴

3.4.4 ADOPTION

The desire to make an adoption in the society of today springs mainly from a childless couple's desire to give a young orphan or unwanted child a secure home. In contrast, in Roman society, problems of inheritance and succession were the main instigators of a decision to commence an adoption process. A *paterfamilias* would require a male heir to pass on the family name, with wealth and land. A Roman man would most frequently adopt an adult rather than a child. A child, if he lived to adulthood, might grow up to prove unsuitable, whereas the mettle of an adult would be already proven. Unmarried men could adopt to pass on the family name and assets. A man could even adopt an heir after his death by means of the practice of testamentary adoptions. A woman could not legally adopt children, since this involved placing the adoptee under the *potestas* of the adopter, which she could not possess.¹⁹⁵

There were two forms of legal adoption: *adoptatio* (or *adoptio*) and *adrogatio* (or *arrogatio*). In *adoptio* the child is transferred from the power of one father to that of another by means of a three-times repeated form of words by the donor father and its acceptance in front of a Roman official by the adopting father. In *adrogatio* (probably uncommon) a person who is *sui iuris* chooses the authority of a new father. An assembly called a *comitia curiata*, which is a committee comprising representatives of the main tribes and families in Rome, endorsed the transaction under the auspices of the *pontifices*. Sons still under the control of a *paterfamilias* were not eligible to make an adoption. To circumvent that problem a grandfather could set up an heir on behalf of his childless son by adopting a grandson, if the son agrees to this. The adopter was required to be eighteen years older than the person to be adopted. The adopted son became the legal sibling of the other children of the family.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 78-84.

¹⁹⁵ Gardner, *Women*: 144.

¹⁹⁶ Hugh Lindsay, *Adoption in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). 62-78.

It was legally possible to adopt a child who was under the father's *potestas* at any age because the authority of the *paterfamilias* guaranteed that the adoptee's interests were being sufficiently considered. But what of the case of fatherless children where the child was a minor and *sui iuris* and therefore subject to a tutor? According to Aulus Gellius it was not possible for a tutor to represent his charge in the *comitia curiata* because his role was restricted to managing the property of his charge and did not extend to questions of rank.¹⁹⁷ However Antoninus Pius authorised adrogations of those under age under strict rules, such as the existence of a blood relationship. The main concern was to prevent the adopter attempting to take advantage of his charge financially.

Are there any cases of widows benefitting through adoption of their sons? One we know about through Polybius 31.26.6–7 is the adoption of Scipio Aemilianus. When Aemilia, the widow of Scipio Africanus Maior died in 162 BCE she left her grandson by adoption a large fortune. By this time his adoptive father was dead and Aemilianus could therefore control the disposal of her resources. He immediately donated all her fine clothes, jewellery and carriages to his birth mother Papiria, who was living at this time in comparatively reduced circumstances, for which act of filial piety he was much admired.¹⁹⁸

The most frequent instance of adoption was that of a close relative, either by blood or by marriage. Unfortunately, most of what we know of adoption in Roman society focusses on the elite groups and we know little of the informal arrangements that must have taken place in the poorer groups.

3.5 THE IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE FATHERLESS

The death of the father often meant a loss of security and protection for children. Generally speaking, his death often led to a marked impoverishment of fatherless children. There were many reasons why orphans could be at risk of poverty: the debts of the father; the cost of his burial; difficulties in the disbursement of legacies as well as the dowry to the widow; division of the inheritance among several siblings; and income decline due to lack of expertise of the orphans as well as their

¹⁹⁷ Gellius, *Attic Nights, Volume 1: Books 1-5*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb classical library, 195 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927). Book5:19 436-441.

¹⁹⁸ Suzanne Dixon, "Polybius on Roman Women and Property," *American Journal of Philology* 106, no. 2 (1985): 147-170.

representatives in the management of their father's possessions. Impoverishment had diverse consequences: reduced marriage chances for orphan girls; late marriage; marriage below their social status; impaired educational opportunities for orphans; and the need for boys and girls alike to work from a very young age; even slipping into prostitution. Frequently their only source of help was the widowed mother, who was in turn often overwhelmed by the self-management of the household. At best, the children in this situation received adequate help and support from their mother. The interdependence of widows and orphans was much greater in the lower strata of the population than in the upper classes. This state seriously undermined the important tasks incumbent henceforth on the mother, i.e. the education of the sons and the marriage of the daughters.¹⁹⁹

3.6 VULNERABILITY OF THE FATHERLESS

In the Roman Empire minors were exposed to many dangers and threats by the death of the father. Poverty made orphans susceptible to theft, abuse and violence. Krause in *Witwen und Waisen im Römischen Reich* provides many examples of injustice towards fatherless children and orphans.²⁰⁰ His sources for these examples are listed in full in the appendices of volume three, *Rechtliche und Soziale Stellung von Waisen*. These include details of orphans in the Egyptian papyri, apprentice contracts in the papyri, debts stemming from inheritance from the father in the papyri, and inheritance disputes in the papyri.

Many of the legal processes that came before the courts concerned inheritance disputes. The death of the head of the family and the defenselessness of the heirs encouraged the greed of relatives. Orphans were given their inheritance mostly by relatives, and more rarely by strangers (neighbours, friends and business associates of the deceased).

From Krause's catalogue of examples I have made a small selection of those from the earlier period. Wills were forged or even disregarded. Fowler describes how a wife rescued her father's will from an attack made on its validity by her relations which is recorded on a well-known inscription.²⁰¹ Victims were mainly the minor

¹⁹⁹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 194-195.

²⁰⁰ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 194-208.

²⁰¹ W. Warde Fowler, "On the New Fragment of the So-Called *Laudatio Turiae* (CIL VI 1527)," *The Classical Review* 19, no. 5 (1905): 261-266.

children of the deceased. There were a wide range of problems for the orphans in recovering the property of the deceased father. For example, dating from 146 CE, a papyrus document records the petition of Stotoetis to the *Strategos*, the military governor. His eponymous father had lent two brothers the sum of 1,500 drachmas in the year 134 CE. Meanwhile, one of the debtors had died and the other brother refused the petitioner the repayment of the loan, “contemptuous of his young age”.²⁰²

The papyri convey some of the difficult situations of minors who wanted to partake of their father's legacy; for example the houses of the recently deceased could be looted by neighbours and others when no one was there who could resist. The petition of the widow Sarapus to the prefect Titus Haterius Nepos (119/24 CE) relates to the legacy of her late husband. He had left his two minor children home ownership, furniture, and grain stocks, which were claimed by the brother of the deceased. He broke into the house at night and stole from it.²⁰³

In Egypt disputes between siblings over the inheritance were not uncommon. Minors were discriminated against by older siblings in the division of the inheritance.²⁰⁴

Officers and soldiers took advantage of the weak position of orphans to enrich themselves at their expense. A mother or guardians were often unable to protect the children in their care from the greed of officials. By the late republic, it is primarily the parent (more than the guardian) who represents the interests of orphans. Gaius Verres (120-43 BCE) was a Roman magistrate, notorious for his misgovernment of Sicily. While praetor, for a bribe, he cheated the daughter of P. Annius Asellus, the legally appointed heiress of her father, out of her inheritance, in favour of a more distant relative, after he had failed to bribe her guardians, by passing an edict to alter the law.²⁰⁵

Orphans could be victims of violent actions and robbery of their land. About 17 BCE, an uncle made a petition to the officials on behalf of his nephews. After his brother's death an irrigation system for a vineyard had been rendered useless by an employee of the owner of the water reservoir, where the deceased also had rights.

²⁰² P. Gen. I 6 (= Mitteis, Chr. 120)

²⁰³ P. Mich. IX 525

²⁰⁴ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 194-198, 268-272.

²⁰⁵ Frank Hewitt Cowles, *Gaius Verres: an historical study*, Cornell studies in classical philology, no. 20 ([New York]: for the University, by Longmans, Green & Co., 1917). 16-18.

The vineyard had suffered much damage through drought. The employee had taken advantage because he had seen that the minor children of the deceased, the nephews of the petitioner, could not defend themselves or assert their property rights.²⁰⁶

Around 135 CE, Sarapion and his orphan nephew Dionysius jointly owned land. While Sarapion was abroad, and Dionysios was still a minor, neighbours ousted them from the property.²⁰⁷ In 155 CE, Valeria Neilus, daughter and heiress of the deceased Gaius Valerius Maximus, on behalf of herself and her minor sister, made a petition to the acting military governors, the *Strategoï*, supported by their *phrontistes* Serenos, their estate manager. A neighbour had appropriated the land of the sisters and used it for private profit.²⁰⁸

Finally, virgins without a father to protect them were particularly vulnerable to seduction and rape. Krause provides many examples of sexual violence over a long time span.²⁰⁹ A selection from the earlier period will be described here. The raped girls came mostly from the lower classes and often had no male support. The penalty for raping or seducing a well-born girl under the age of marriage by the time of the late 2nd century was either condemnation to the mines, or relegation or exile, depending on the seducer's social status. For seducing a slave the owner might sue under the *lex Aquilia*. The *lex Aquilia* was an action for damages and loss of virginity is particularly specified.²¹⁰ Ancient authors consider that a major duty of the father is to preserve the virginity of the daughter. At his death this task was transferred to the guardians, relatives or the mother.

Abduction was also a possibility.²¹¹ While Verres (120-43 BCE) was lodging at the house of Janitor in Lampsacus in the Hellespont, when he was the legate of Dolabella, he heard of the beauty and virtue of the daughter of Philodamus. He sent Rubrius his friend to abduct the young girl. Her father and brother tried to protect her

²⁰⁶ SB XVI 12524

²⁰⁷ P. Flor. III 319

²⁰⁸ P. Mich. IX 526

²⁰⁹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 201-206.

²¹⁰ Gardner, *Women*: 118-121.

²¹¹ Judith Evans Grubbs, "Abduction Marriage in Antiquity: A Law of Constantine and Its Social Context," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 79(1989): 59-83.

and succeeded but were ultimately executed because Cornelius, the lictor of Verres, was killed in the uproar.²¹²

The fear that orphan girls would lose their virginity before marriage became reflected in the legislation. It was the obligation of the guardian to ensure that the orphan girl did not lose her virginity which would have reduced her value in the marriage market. According to the Theodosian Code at section 9,8,1 (326 CE?), with each marriage application proof of virginity of the orphan girl was required. If the guardian failed he was threatened with deportation and the confiscation of assets. (The Theodosian Code was a compilation of the laws of Rome issued by the Emperors from 313 to 348.)²¹³

According to the *Lex Julia de vi* (223 CE?) anyone who had raped a foreign woman, whether unmarried or married, was threatened with the death penalty. The father was seen as the one who had to pursue the crime in the first place. If the father was dead, the raped girls themselves made the accusation in conjunction with their curator.²¹⁴

3.7 EDUCATION, WORK AND MARRIAGE

In the upbringing of the fatherless the same problems arise over and over again in the sources; in particular the education and training of the son and the selection of a husband for the daughter.

Education was associated with high costs, which would have to be covered from the assets inherited from his father, depending on the legal situation. The income from these was often not enough, however, to ensure a fitting education for the half-orphans, and many were less fortunate in their education than their peers. Pointed comments reveal that the mother had borne the costs of tuition (at least partly) out her own assets. She was not obliged to do so. That she took over the costs, however, implies strong ties between the widowed mother and her adolescent children. The mother guaranteed family continuity even after the death of her husband.²¹⁵

Most boys did not receive higher education and had to start working at a young age. This was true in particular for orphans. The mother had to undertake the task of

²¹² Cowles, *Gaius Verres*: 8-11.

²¹³ Pharr, Davidson, and Pharr, *Theodosian code*.

²¹⁴ Pharr, Davidson, and Pharr, *Theodosian code*, 9,9,7, 223 CE.

²¹⁵ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 188.

finding work usually performed by the father. We can find some information about their work by examination of the apprentice contracts stemming from Egypt.²¹⁶ There some single mothers (mostly widows) have taken over responsibility for the vocational training of their children. There are fifteen apprenticeship contracts witnessed by the father of the apprentice and six cases by the mother. In one case, the apprentice himself completed it, with the assistance of the mother. Other relatives (brothers, uncles, grandmother, aunt) and guardians are responsible for the conclusion of the contract in five cases. In other words: the father had already died in a little less than half of the recovered training contracts and around a quarter of the contracts were signed by the mother. Whether the five boys (roughly one-fifth of the total), which were entered by other relatives into training were orphans or if the relatives have signed in preference to their mother, cannot definitely be decided. There is to be expected a significant proportion of children who do not grow up in the mother's household after the death of the father—perhaps the mother had also died or she had remarried and a third party had adopted the orphans. The mother did not act in all cases as the father substitute.²¹⁷

P. Oxy. 2875 is an example is dating from the early third century from Oxyrhynchus where the young man (probably around the age of fourteen) has signed the contract himself, with the mother in attendance.²¹⁸

Aurelius Zoilos, known as the son of his mother Zoilous the daughter of Ptolemaios, from the city of Oxyrhynchus, and Aurelius Apollonios, son of Doras and Apollonia, from the same city, a builder, acknowledge to one another:

Zoilos, that he has handed himself over to Apollonios to learn the craft of building, for a period of three years from the first of the present month Choiak in the present . . .th year, for which time Zoilos will provide himself remaining with the overseer Apollonios, being absent neither by night nor by day from the house of the said overseer, learning and carrying out all instructions in the craft furnished him by the overseer; Zoilos to be fed and clothed by the overseer for the said time and also to be provided by the same overseer with . . .-six

²¹⁶ Keith R. Bradley, "Child Labour in the Roman World," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 12, no. 2 (1985): 311-330.

²¹⁷ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 183-184.

²¹⁸ Roger Bagnall, "Three Papyri From Oxyrhynchus," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 5, no. 4 (1968): 135-150.

(drachmas?) per month as pay, with Zoilos paying the taxes for himself.

In case (may it not be) he should happen to be sick during the said period, he will stay with the said overseer, being cared for by him, and for as many days as he is off work with sickness he shall remain an equal number with the overseer after his term, without pay, because he is taking the aforementioned pay for time which he did not work. Apollonios will give Zoilos, when he has finished his term of three years with the overseer and departs, clothes worth sixty drachmas, in return for those which he brings with him worth also sixty drachmas, and also tools of the builder's craft without cost. Aurelia Zoilous, daughter of Ptolemaios and of her mother, ... the mother of Zoilos, from the same city, being present approves of (this contract). And Apollonios...

Male and female slaves were also entered into apprenticeships as well as freeborn boys, but not freeborn girls, who were prepared for marriage instead. Usually no salary for the apprentice is provided at the beginning of the apprenticeship. In the case of weaver a wage begins to be paid half-way through the third year. The trainer assumes the costs for food and clothing. Since the boys started training by about 12/13, from about 15 years onwards a boy was capable of contributing their own funds to support the family.²¹⁹ It is likely that in the lower classes very young half-orphans in large numbers had to pursue wage labour in order to contribute to the maintenance of the family. Children were employed as workers in agriculture, at a very young age.²²⁰ There is an intriguing reference in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, book 6 chapter 23, where he states that Ambrose of Alexandria provided help to Origen for the writing of his commentaries in the form of "seven shorthand writers, ... many copyists, as well as girls skilled in penmanship".²²¹

Hardly any sources are available which allow reliable statements to be made on the work opportunities of orphans, except papyri. There is grave inscription of a young man who died aged 19 in Lyon who had been trained by his stepfather in the skill of metalwork. The new family relationships had ensured the path taken. Sons often took

²¹⁹ W. L. Westermann, "Apprentice Contracts and the Apprentice System in Roman Egypt," *Classical Philology* 9, no. 3 (1914): 295-315.

²²⁰ Bradley, "Child Labour," 311-330.

²²¹ Eusebius, *The ecclesiastical history. Vol.1 Books 1-5 Vol. 2 Books 6-10*, trans. Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton, Loeb classical library, 153, 265 (London; New York: W. Heinemann; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1926, 1932). 69.

over their father's trade, and this stepson had succeeded the stepfather in his business.²²²

However, orphans had more freedom to autonomously decide on their future, whether this concerned the choice of a wife or work. Libanios (314-393 CE) said that it felt almost as a blessing that his father had passed away at an early stage. Although he would have liked him to reach old age, he probably would have had to enter politics. Instead he had discovered rhetoric.²²³

As the loss of the father was generally accompanied by impoverishment, lack of a dowry was a major difficulty for orphan girls when they reached marriageable age. It was very difficult to find a husband without a dowry. For that reason many *indotata* sought work. This was most readily found in the textile industry, in the spinning and weaving of wool. Some young girls by working may have succeeded in saving enough, but the low wages for women make it appear doubtful whether young girls could put aside enough money with 'respectable work'. Many orphaned girls either had to marry beneath their social status, or else found no husband at all.²²⁴

However, since opportunities for work for freeborn women in the Roman Empire was very limited, for many orphans the only alternative to abject poverty was prostitution. Amongst prostitutes there were many of the freeborn, as well as slaves, especially women who lacked the protection of the family. Many prostitutes were descended from poor but entirely respectable artisans. The early death of the father and the resulting poverty were the trigger that made the mother exert pressure on the daughter to resort to prostitution.

Krause illustrates these occurrences with many examples. Some are from the comedies of Plautus (254-184 BCE) and Terence (c.195/185-c.159 BCE). Although these are fictional sources, which I would prefer not to use, it seems likely that these plays reflect real societal conditions. Other material is found in legal documents. For example, in papyrus BGU IV 1024, which is part of a papyrus codex of mixed contents, in sections VI-VIII there are some legal cases, which conclude with the judge's decision. The seventh case concerns a certain Diodemos, an

²²² CIL XIII 2036 (= ILS 7723)

²²³ Libanios, *Autobiography and selected letters*, trans. A. F. Norman, 2 vols., Loeb classical library, 478-479 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). Vol. 1, I.6.

²²⁴ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 3*: 188-189.

Alexandrian senator, who had become enamoured of a public prostitute. For motives unknown, he killed her and was arrested and jailed. At the hearing the prisoner admits to the murder. The victim's mother, who is described as penniless and decrepit, petitions that Diodemos be compelled to contribute to her support. She is reported as saying, "For this reason I handed my daughter over to the procurer, that I myself might have food. Since therefore I have, by my daughter's death, been deprived of my support, I petition that I be given a moderate woman's portion for my sustenance." The magistrate's judgment follows: Theodora, the victim's mother, is to inherit 1/10 of Diodemos' estate. This is a rule dating to the 12th regnal year of Antoninus Pius, 148/49 CE, by which 1/10 of a murderer's estate was to be turned over to the victim's children.²²⁵

The poet Martial, who was born between 38 and 41 CE and died between 102 and 104 CE, praises Emperor Domitian in Book 9 of his Epigrams for putting an end to child prostitution. He alludes to prostitution through the destitute mother.²²⁶

VI. TO DOMITIAN. To you, chaste prince, mighty conqueror of the Rhine, and father of the world, cities present their thanks: they will henceforth have population; it is now no longer a crime to bring infants into the world. The boy is no longer mutilated by the art of the greedy dealer, to mourn the loss of his manly rights; nor does the wretched mother give to her prostituted child the price paid by a contemptuous pander. That modesty, which, before your reign, did not prevail even on the marriage couch, begins, by your influence, to be felt even in the haunts of licentiousness.

VIII. TO DOMITIAN. As if it were but a trifling crime for our sex to bargain away our male children to public lust, the very cradle had become the prey of the pander, so that the child, snatched from its mother's bosom, seemed to demand by its wailing, the disgraceful pay. Infants born but yesterday suffered scandalous outrage. The father of Italy, who but recently brought help to tender adolescence, to prevent savage lust from condemning it to a manhood of sterility, could not endure such horrors. Before this, Caesar, you were loved by boys, and youths, and old men; now infants also love you. (Translated by Roger Pearse).

²²⁵ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 178-193.

²²⁶ Martial, Epigrams. Book 9. Bohn's Classical Library (1897) Sections 6 and 8. Downloaded from http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/martial_epigrams_book09.htm

3.8 SUMMARY

Krause estimates that up to 50% of children have lost their father by the age of 15. If a *paterfamilias* died without a will, all his children, male and female, were his heirs in equal shares. Fatherless minor children were placed under guardianship, but not those of the poor who possessed no property. Extreme poverty was often the consequence of the death of the breadwinner in the non-elite groups. Provision of a dowry for a daughter, and the education of a son were major difficulties. Marriage was almost impossible for girls without a dowry. Apprenticeships may have been available for some fatherless boys. However opportunities for work in Roman society were severely limited for freeborn or freed women and girls and those that existed were associated with a loss of social status. Some were forced by poverty into prostitution. Poverty made orphans susceptible to theft, abuse and violence. Virgins without a father to protect them were particularly vulnerable to seduction and rape.

APPRENTICESHIP SUMMARY: Status and Trades					
FROM: Bradley, Keith R. "Child Labour in the Roman World." <i>Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques</i> 12, no. 2 (1985): p.316.					
No.	Status	Trade	Duration	Origin	Date
1	Free male	Nail making	6 mths	Alexandria	18 BC
2	Male slave	Flute Playing	1 yr	Alexandria	13 BC
3	Female slave	Weaving	2 ½ yrs	Tebtunis	13
4	Free male	Building	6 yrs	Tebtunis	16
5	Free male	Weaving	2 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	36
6	Free male	Weaving	5 yrs	Tebtunis	42
7	Free male	Weaving		Oxyrhynchus	49
8	Free male	Weaving		Karanis	50
9	Free male	Weaving	1 yr	Oxyrhynchus	53
10	Free male	Weaving		Oxyrhynchus	58
11	Free male	Mat weaving		Talei	61
12	Free male	Weaving		Oxyrhynchus	62
13	Free male	Copper smithing		Oxyrhynchus	66
14	Free male	Weaving	1 yr	Oxyrhynchus	66
15	Free male	Weaving	2 ½ yrs	Oxyrhynchus	66
16	Free male	Weaving	2/3 yrs	Tebtunis	113

17	Free male	Weaving	2 yrs	Tebtunis	117
18	Female slave	Weaving	1 yr 2 mths	Soknopaiou Nesos	150
19	Male slave	Shorthand	2 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	155
20	Free male	Weaving	3 yrs	Tebtunis	170
21	Free male	Weaving	5 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	183
22	Male slave	Weaving	1 yr 8 mths	Soknopaiou Nesos	189
23	Female slave	Weaving	4 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	c.2nd
24	Female slave	Weaving	1 yr	Antinoopolis	c.2/3rd
25	Male slave	Wool carding	5 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	239
26	Free male	Linen weaving	4 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	253
27	Female slave	Weaving	1 yr	Karanis	270
28	Free male	Building	3 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	c.3rd
29	Male slave	Wool carding	3 yrs	Oxyrhynchus	c.3rd

4. POVERTY AND SOCIAL AID IN ROMAN SOCIETY

This chapter investigates the levels of poverty in the society of the early Roman Empire and the ways customary in society to ameliorate its effects. These provisions might emanate from the state, from social institutions such as patronage, from associations created to benefit particular groups, or from individual almsgiving.

4.1 DEFINITION OF POVERTY

How might poverty be defined? One might adopt the definition of ‘the poor’ given by Peter Garnsey and Greg Woolf in their essay, “*Patronage of the Rural Poor in the Roman World*”.²²⁷

Those living at or near subsistence level, whose prime concern is to obtain the minimum food, shelter and clothing necessary to sustain life, whose lives are dominated by the struggle for physical survival.

Peter Oakes in his critique of Steven J. Friesen's Poverty Scale, (to be discussed subsequently), considers that subsistence is an awkward basis for such a scale because it is in practice difficult to define and even harder to quantify.²²⁸ There are things that a person might prioritise above food and shelter, such as rents, taxes, debts, protection money and bribes, and religious or status-related duties. Oakes prefers Peter Townsend's sociological definition.

Poverty ... is the lack of the resources necessary to permit participation in the activities, customs and diets commonly approved by society.²²⁹

This kind of definition is viewed as a ‘relative poverty’ type. The resources required to live a life in society, not in poverty, can only be calculated by the norms of the society under discussion. Slaves, for example, as workers within a household, were certainly poor, but were protected from the struggle to obtain the minimum food and shelter. In actual fact, for human beings there can be no such thing as absolute poverty. There exists only relative poverty.

²²⁷ Peter D. A. Garnsey and Greg Woolf, "Patronage of the Rural Poor in the Roman World," in *Patronage in ancient society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 153.

²²⁸ Peter Oakes, "Constructing Poverty Scales for Graeco-Roman Society: A Response to Steven Friesen's 'Poverty in Pauline Studies'," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (2004): 367-371.

²²⁹ Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: a survey of household resources and standards of living* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979). 31.

Neville Morley differentiates between structural and conjunctural poverty. Living in structural poverty encompasses who are born poor and remain poor until they die, unless they are particularly gifted or lucky, whereas living in conjunctural poverty involves those who fall into that state as a result of accident or misfortune.²³⁰

4.2 WHO WERE THE 'POOR'?

There are two words for 'poor' in Greek. Bauer et al. differentiate between them thus:

πένης, ητος pertaining to being obliged to work for a living, but not being reduced to begging, for the latter aspect πτωχός, ή, όν.

Another word also used is ένδεής, ές, needy, used in Acts 4:3.²³¹ Bruce W.

Longenecker in his book, *Remember the Poor*, shows from the extant literature "how relative and imprecise both the terminology and the conceptualisation of poverty were" and he consequently advises reading each reference to poverty and the poor "in its particular case-specific context".²³² A. R. Hands also refers to the "devaluation of words" in his useful 1968 survey *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome*.²³³

The Roman Republic that came before the Empire was an oligarchy of propertied classes. The main source of power in the Empire was property in the form of land, as it was the single reliable basis of wealth. The state operated as an instrument of land seizure by conquest. It amassed and then safeguarded land as private property. There was a great gulf between those who owned property and the vast majority who did not. The word 'poor' was applied to this 'vast majority' who had no income from a large estate and therefore little leisure or independence. Quintus Horatius Flaccus, known as Horace, was the leading Roman lyric poet during the time of Augustus. His father was described as poor; however he owned a plot of ground and one or two slaves.²³⁴ Juvenal the Satirist's sceptical definition of the poor in the 1st-2nd century CE are of those who have "just enough to keep going in leisured indigence and their

²³⁰ Neville Morley, "The poor in the city of Rome," in *Poverty in the Roman world*, ed. E. M. Atkins and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 28-29.

²³¹ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

²³² Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 39.

²³³ Hands, *Charities*: 63.

²³⁴ Hands, *Charities*: 62.

chief struggle is not to keep from starving, but to avoid the degradation of having to work".²³⁵ Hands maintains that 'the poor' is synonymous with the people, the *demos/populous*. He considers that when 'the poor' are mentioned as receivers of benefits, that this does not necessarily refer to those living in abject poverty.²³⁶ Therefore the view must be taken that poverty was in the eye of the beholder, and meant different things to different Roman writers.

Hands contrasts the attitudes of the Romans to the working poor with the way the poor are portrayed in Jewish texts as "the pious and deserving who are destined for happiness in the next world". The Romans, on the other hand, use such words as "*leves, inquinati, improbi, scelerati*, (slippery, corrupt, wicked, defiled) etc., terms implying dishonesty". Beggars received even less sympathy. Both the Greek *aergos* (non-working) and the Latin *iners* (without skill) suggest a lack of will to work. Hands quotes an opinion of Plutarch (46 –120 CE):

But if I gave to you, you would proceed to beg all the more; it was the man who gave to you in the first place who made you idle and so is responsible for your disgraceful state.²³⁷

This tendency to believe that poverty must involve responsibility on the part of the sufferer may make compassion difficult. That such a dichotomy of attitude to the poor existed in Roman times was observed by Anneliese Parkin, in her book chapter on pagan almsgiving, *You do him no service*.²³⁸ The elite did not extend their organised relief to marginal groups such as women, slaves, foreigners, and only to a limited extent to children.

Hands notes an inclination towards the selection of recipients by their 'worth' (*dignitas*) by giving to the 'good' rather than to the penniless. He quotes Seneca the Younger (c.4 – 65 CE) who was a Roman Stoic philosopher.

Give to the most deserving—to the 'good' or to those who are capable of being made 'good'. It is a mistake if anyone thinks that it is an easy

²³⁵ Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal the satirist: a study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962). 68.

²³⁶ Hands, *Charities*: 63.

²³⁷ Hands, *Charities*: 64-65.

²³⁸ Anneliese Parkin, "'You do him no service': an exploration of pagan almsgiving," in *Poverty in the Roman world*, ed. E. M. Atkins and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60-82.

thing to give. ... To certain people I will not give, even though there is a need, because there will still be a need, even if I do give.²³⁹

‘Good’, however, was defined by the abilities of mind or qualities of character which might serve for some advantage to the elite, or be appreciated by them as attributes which they themselves also possessed. Between an educated slave or educated freedman and a member of the elite ‘friendship’ might arise, but was unlikely to occur with a freeman.

4.2.1 THE FATHERLESS AND THE WIDOWS

If charity depended on worth, what worth were accorded to the fatherless and the widows? Neville Morley’s differentiation between structural and conjunctural poverty is not helpful, because the poverty of orphans and widows might be described as the result both of misfortune and a societal structure that makes their situation particularly hazardous.²⁴⁰

Dominic Rathbone’s largely unsympathetic essay entitled *Poverty and population in Roman Egypt* includes an examination of ‘single’ widows, i.e. of those without children. He admits that the statistics show that women were less likely to remarry after the age of thirty-five, but does not consider the possibility of the presence of minor children. He is suspicious that all sorts of informal co-habitation took place despite admitting that “direct evidence is predictably scarce”. He quotes as his authority Peter Brown but omits to record that Brown is talking about late antiquity when he himself is discussing the first to third centuries.²⁴¹ He calls into question the single widow’s ‘worth’.

Peter Brown has suggested that church support of widows was not part of general relief of the destitute so much as a reward and ‘protection from the danger of impoverishment’ targeted at this group of loyal and respectable churchgoers. I leave the question open to the ‘widow-watchers’ of late antiquity.

[Peter Brown] Rather as widows they belonged to the category that we would call ‘Distressed Gentlefolk’.²⁴²

²³⁹ Hands, *Charities*: 74.

²⁴⁰ Morley, "The poor," 28-29.

²⁴¹ Rathbone, "Poverty and population," 104.

²⁴² Peter Brown, *Poverty and leadership in the later Roman Empire*, Menahem Stern Jerusalem lectures (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002). 59.

4.3 FRIESEN'S "POVERTY SCALE"

To clarify the confusion on the nature of poverty, Longenecker sees much merit in Steven J Friesen's effort to craft a "Poverty Scale" for Graeco-Roman urbanism, as this is the milieu in which the early churches founded by Paul were situated.²⁴³

Friesen helpfully does not perceive poor people as a homogenous group but differentiates between levels of poverty. However, in his Poverty Scale, its first four categories out of the seven include both three elite categories (PS1-3) and another with moderate surplus resources—the 'middling group' of 7 per cent. (PS4).



One of the panels of the frieze at the villa of Junia Felix in Pompeii, which illustrates a lively street scene, shows a non-elite woman accompanied by a child giving money to a beggar with a dog.

<http://erenow.com/ancient/pompeii-the-life-of-a-roman-town/3.html>

²⁴³ Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline studies," 323-361.

Steven J Friesen. Poverty Scale for the Roman empire

FROM: Friesen, Steven J. "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 3 (2004): 323-361

SCALE	DESCRIPTION	INCLUDES	%
PS1	Imperial elites	imperial dynasty, Roman senatorial families, a few retainers, local royalty, a few freed persons	0.04
PS2	Regional or provincial elites	equestrian families, provincial officials, some retainers, some decurial families, some freed persons, some retired military officers	1
PS3	Municipal elites	most decurial families, wealthy men and women who do not hold office, some freed persons, some retainers, some veterans, some merchants	1.76
PS4	Moderate surplus resources [The 'middling' group]	some merchants, some traders, some freed persons, some artisans (especially those who employ others), and military veterans	7(?)
PS5	Stable near subsistence level (with reasonable hope of remaining above the minimum level to sustain life)	many merchants and traders, regular wage earners, artisans, large shop owners, freed persons, some farm families	22
PS6	At subsistence level (and often below minimum level to sustain life)	small farm families, labourers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (esp. those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and traders, small shop/tavern owners	40
PS7	Below subsistence level	some farm families, unattached widows, orphans , beggars, disabled, unskilled day labourers, prisoners	28

The 'real' poor are divided into three categories—near subsistence, at subsistence, and below subsistence (PS5-7).²⁴⁴ Unattached widows, orphans, and beggars are placed in the lowest category. Longenecker prefers to label the table more appropriately as an "Economy Scale", (as it includes elites), and renames the categories with corresponding ES levels. In early 2009, influenced by Walter

²⁴⁴ Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline studies," 341.

Scheidel, he reassessed Friesen's model and increased the size of the middling group (ES4) from 7% to 17%.²⁴⁵

However, an important development occurred in late 2009. Walter Scheidel and Steven Friesen in collaboration produced an article entitled *The Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire*²⁴⁶ which estimated the Gross Domestic Product of the Roman Empire at its zenith in the mid-second century CE to be between 17-19 billion sesterces, with a margin of error of 20%. The middling groups were small in number, between 6% and 12% of the population.

Longenecker maintains that this article

... evidenced a ground-breaking erudition from start to finish, enabling even further refinement in the discussion of economic distribution.

However, for his and my purposes greater refinement at the upper end is unnecessary, and the lack of data for reconstructing the economic profile of the early church makes Friesen's earlier 2004 model more useful, especially in view of the fact that it was targeted at the *urban* population where the majority of Christians were to be located, rather than the entire Roman Empire. After appraising Scheidel and Friesen's arguments, Longenecker agrees with them that the middling classes (ES4) were more likely to be based in an urban context, but he adjusts their estimates slightly, and with many caveats, produces a table with a final set of figures. I will use Longenecker's table as the best that is currently available to reflect the economic stratification of the Roman Empire in the second century, with 82% of the urban population near, at, or below subsistence level, and with 15% in a 'middling' group.²⁴⁷

	Friesen's 2004 Urban Percentages	Longenecker's 2009 Urban Percentages	Longenecker's Revised Urban Percentages
ES1-3	3	3	3
ES4	7	17	15
ES5	22	25	27
ES6	40	30	30
ES7	28	25	25

²⁴⁵ Bruce W. Longenecker, "Exposing the Economic Middle: A Revised Economy Scale for the Study of Early Urban Christianity," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31, no. 3 (2009): 243-278.

²⁴⁶ Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen, "The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 99(2009): 61-91.

²⁴⁷ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 44-53.

Some caveats were discussed by Longenecker.²⁴⁸ ES4 does not represent a ‘middle class’ since the Roman Empire was not a class-based society but was founded on the principles of patronage, not class stratification. There was no middle class, but there were ‘middling’ groups. There was not a void between the rich and the poor. He describes ES4 as an “elongated” group, which might even be split into two categories, (a and b) since some of the upper levels had significant wealth, more than merely a surplus.

There is a massive difference between those in ES5 and those in ES7, which Longenecker describes as the chasm between “vulnerable life” and “impending death”. In view of the fact that, based on Longenecker’s figures, 82% of the population were ‘poor’ by Friesen’s definition given above, it is clear that the early church could not have been exempt from the realities of poverty amongst them.

4.4 TYPES OF BENEFACTION

A useful source of information on benefaction in the early Roman Empire covering the period up to 250 CE is *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome*, by A. R. Hands. He admits that he is “almost exclusively concerned with the ideas and practice of a comparatively narrow and wealthy upper class ... for there exists little or no evidence relating to the lower classes”. He chooses to concentrate on “the provision of foodstuffs, of education and of medical attention”.²⁴⁹

In the ancient world to give a gift was never a disinterested action, in fact, its whole purpose was an expected concrete and material return, usually on the terms of the giver. It was this attitude that underlay such institutions as the client-patron relationship, the *liturgy* system (i.e. the voluntary undertaking of municipal duties), the hospitality relationship, and others. Hands distinguishes between gifts as a declaration of ‘worth’ and gifts made in return for undertaking public office.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 55-56.

²⁴⁹ Hands, *Charities*: 14-15.

²⁵⁰ Hands, *Charities*: 26-61.

4.4.1 FRIENDSHIP AND HOSPITALITY

In the ancient world, there are two streams of thought regarding the nature of friendship. One stream argued that true *amicitia* arose from the yearning of all human beings for companionship. An appreciation of one another's personal qualities was the foundation of that relationship. The second stream held the view that one sought friends because of the usefulness that might arise from the connection.²⁵¹ Today the dominant scholarly view is that "*amicitia* was expected basically to entail reciprocal exchange of *officia* (favours, debts, obligations) and *beneficia* (benefits, kindnesses)".²⁵² "Friends supplied services analogous to those provided by bankers, lawyers, hotel owners, insurers and others today". Future reciprocation and gratitude (*gratia*) was expected and this might acceptably be in the form of public praise to enhance the giver's reputation. Such a constraint indicates that this type of friendship could only exist between men of equal status.²⁵³

The extent to which mutual affection (*amor*) was involved is debated. Verboven believes that there can be made a distinction between friendships that were more affectionate from ones that were more instrumental, but he recognises that Roman friendships were complex arrangements.²⁵⁴

The practice of hospitality (*hospitium*) was appreciated in Roman society. In general, *hospitium* allowed outsiders to gain protection, support, lodging, guidance, and friendship in an unfamiliar community. *Hospitium* was obtainable by a formal invitation, either by a decree of the local senate, or by a private individual, who offered food and accommodation. *Hospites* might be individuals or collectives. Usually, the *hospites* belonged to different communities. It was embedded in these relationships that the two parties, even though from different communities, were approximately social equals and could reciprocate if required.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Koenraad Verboven, "Friendship among the Romans," in *Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 404-405.

²⁵² Richard P. Saller, *Personal patronage under the early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 13.

²⁵³ Hands, *Charities*: 33.

²⁵⁴ Verboven, "Friendship," 411.

²⁵⁵ Nicols, "Hospitality among the Romans," in *Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 422-437.

The evidence is consistent that the Romans and their counterparts in the provinces did not see hospitality and patronage as mutually exclusive, An individual could thus simultaneously be both a *hospes* and a *cliens/patronus*, even though the former sort of bond could be seen as assuming equality between the parties involved, and the latter inequality.²⁵⁶

4.4.2 PATRONAGE

Richard Saller has argued that asymmetrical friendships should more correctly be called patron-client relationships.²⁵⁷

Jeremy Boissevain defines patronage thus:

Patronage is founded on the reciprocal relations between patrons and clients. By 'patron' I mean a person who uses his influence to assist and protect some other person, who becomes his 'client', and in return provides certain services to his patron. The relationship is asymmetrical, and the nature of the services exchanged may differ considerably.²⁵⁸

Although little attention has been paid to the patronage of women in the Greco-Roman world, Carolyn Osiek has collected considerable material available on women's involvement in both public and private patronage to women and to men, by both elites and sub-elites.²⁵⁹ In a useful article she performs a quick survey of patronage and how it functioned followed by examples of women's exercise of patronage in the Roman world. She then considers the role of patronage in early Christian life and the role of Christian women within this system.

She identifies the main characteristics of patronage: there is reciprocal exchange of goods and services, the relationship is personal and enduring, the relationship is unequal, and it is voluntary and not legally enforceable. The client could expect to receive economic and political benefits, for example, gifts of food and money, invitations to dinner, property, accommodation, employment opportunities or

²⁵⁶ Nicols, "Hospitality," 432-433.

²⁵⁷ Saller, *Personal patronage*: 1.

²⁵⁸ Jeremy Boissevain, "Patronage in Sicily," *Man* 1, no. 1 (1966): 18.

²⁵⁹ Carolyn Osiek, "Diakonos and prostatis: Women's patronage in Early Christianity," *HTS Theologise Studies / Theological Studies* 61, no. 1/2 (2009): 348-349.

testamentary bequests. The patron in return could expect loyalty, votes, help in times of need and, above all, public praise.²⁶⁰

She found that in the elite groups, women often served as patrons for other women. For example, Cratia, the wife of M. Cornelius Fronto, tutor of Marcus Aurelius, in one of his letters to the emperor is called a *clienta* of Domitia Lucilla, the emperor's mother. Non-elite women who had accumulated even a modest amount of wealth and connections could be active in patronage. Many were involved in the provision of building works, such as Tation, who either built or remodelled at her own expense the building and the surrounding precinct of a synagogue.²⁶¹ Several women took part in alimentary programmes for poor children, such as Crispia Restituta in Beneventum, Caelia Macrina in Tarracina, and Fabia Agrippina in Ostia—the last two projects involving girls as well as boys. Junia Theodora of first-century Corinth, originally from Lycia, provided hospitality in her own house for Lycians visiting on business, cultivating the friendship of the Roman authorities in their favour. Osiek provides many other examples, and shows that female patronage was not infrequent, but it does not include the poor widows of ES6 and below.²⁶²

Garnsey and Woolf suspect that patronage played a role in the survival of the rural poor, but the sources have little evidence to show of it. Patronage was an important type of aid, but those who profited from this practice would not have included those in groups ES6 and ES7, because they had nothing to offer in return.²⁶³

Despite this, Garnsey and Woolf consider that “both lateral and vertical support systems” must have been necessary for the poor, but their existence cannot be substantiated.²⁶⁴ Other survival strategies involved resorting to kinsfolk and neighbours, or investing in the raising of children. Reciprocal exchanges of labour or food may have alleviated recurrent crises.

²⁶⁰ Osiek, "Diakonos," 349.

²⁶¹ Jean-Baptiste Frey, *Corpus inscriptionum iudaicarum*, 2 vols. (Città del Vaticano, Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1936; 1952). 2.738.

²⁶² Osiek, "Diakonos," 352-359.

²⁶³ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 67-73.

²⁶⁴ Garnsey and Woolf, "Patronage," 154-157.

4.4.3 ASSOCIATIONS

Associations seem to have been formed on the basis of a common purpose, although in practically all cases cultic activity played an important role in their activities. John Scheid claims that every community in the Graeco-Roman world was a ritual community.²⁶⁵ Beyond the family, and beyond the local district, individuals frequently belonged also to organized associations (*collegia*) or societies (*thiasoi*). A large proportion of associations were trade guilds known as *collegia opificum*. Their objective was to defend their trade, to provide resources for regular banquets, and to encourage and honour wealthy benefactors by appointing them as officials.

Philip Harland lists and illustrates the following types in his web-based associations inscriptions database.²⁶⁶ It is interesting that the site does not have a category “funerary association” (*collegia funeraticia*) as the authors reject the idea that there existed associations devoted exclusively to burial of the dead.

Domestic (household) associations

Neighbourhood groups (e.g. Settlers on the Acropolis)

Ethnic / immigrant associations (e.g. Alexandrian businessmen)

Groups with a deity in its name (e.g. Demetriasts, Asklepios-devotees)

Associations of Jesus-followers or Christians (e.g. a guild of Christian fullers)

Occupational guilds (e.g. butchers, gravediggers, silversmiths, purple-dyers, barbers, shippers, donkey drivers, dock workers, marble workers, fishermen, leather workers, garland makers, dough makers, merchants, masons, etc.)

Educated professional groups (e.g. physicians, philosophers, teachers)

Groups of performers, athletes, or gladiators

Groups of soldiers

Gymnastic age-based groups

The site does not give the total number of inscriptions. There are many hundreds listed. More commonly attested than solely female groups were associations that included both male and female members. Forty of the inscriptions listed by Harland contain female names as well as male names. Some groups devoted to the god

²⁶⁵ John Scheid, "Graeco-Roman Cultic Societies," in *Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 535-547.

²⁶⁶ <http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/>

Dionysos (*maenads*) consisted solely of women. No associations of widows are listed.

The use of the word ‘*χήρα*’ as a search term produced two inscriptions. Both of them concerned a wealthy widow, Atalante. e.g.

The artisans (*technitai*) honoured Atalante, widow. ... She was their benefactor in so far as she supplied to all the masses an abundance of grain during a food shortage.²⁶⁷

Unlike the early church, pagan voluntary associations were mostly composed from groups ES4 and possibly ES5; those of ‘middling’ affluence and standing. The associations also did occasionally provide economic assistance for their members in cases of temporary financial need or might allow a short-term stay of contributions. However those of ES6 and below would never have become members in the first place.²⁶⁸ Their officials were often rewarded for the faithful execution of their duties by a monetary *honorarium* or a quantity of wine.²⁶⁹

4.4.4 EUERGETISM

Another type of benefaction is known as *euergetism*, which is donating one’s money to build roads, monuments, baths, temples, theatres, or to finance games or banquets. The poor benefited indirectly. The openly admitted motive of the donors was the love of honour and glory, of *philotimia* and *philodoxia*.

Kathryn Lomas considers that the construction of public buildings

falls into a grey area between euergetism in the strictest sense, undertaken at private cost and by private initiative; and activities which formed part of the responsibilities of the civic magistrates.²⁷⁰

The aim of her paper was to review the structure and form of the Italian city as it evolved in the first century BCE and first century CE – what public buildings were being constructed, who was undertaking the construction, and why. She noted a

²⁶⁷ Termessos (Pisidia, Asia Minor). TAM III 62 = PHI 280167 = ID# 9847 2nd. century CE

²⁶⁸ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 68-70.

²⁶⁹ Richard S. Ascough, Philip A. Harland, and John S. Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman world: a sourcebook* (Waco, Tex.; Berlin: Baylor University Press; De Gruyter, 2012). 208-209.

²⁷⁰ Kathryn Lomas, "Public Building, Urban Renewal and Euergetism in Early Imperial Italy," in *Bread and circuses: euergetism and municipal patronage in Roman Italy* (London: Routledge, 2003), 28.

change in the pattern of public building in the early Empire. Constructions of new defences and rebuilding of surviving ones were much less predominant, but the construction and decoration of temples was still common, stimulated by the development of the imperial cult. The major alteration was the upsurge in the building of leisure and entertainment venues. This was accompanied by a change from construction undertaken by magistrates to private initiatives, and from publicly-funded projects to private benefactions. She suggests that it

was a conscious attempt to corral public entertainment into a building in which the populace could be systematised into a physical map of the Augustan social hierarchy.²⁷¹

The main originators of public building projects were the local elites, in their role as magistrates or acting in a private capacity. During the second century CE Lomas notes a lower level of elite benefaction, and an increase by non-elite associations, by wealthy freedmen, or by individuals.²⁷²

The public entertainments, which took place in circuses, theatres, and amphitheatres, honoured the patrons who had provided them for the community by means of dedicatory inscriptions. These entertainment spaces were used as a primary tool for establishing a status hierarchy within the community. The most frequent performances were gladiatorial displays (*munera*) and animal hunts (*venationes*).²⁷³ The audience replicated Roman society as a whole, since segregated seating allowed for a wider cross section of the community to be present. After having received tickets from the sponsors, it is thought that patrons controlled access to the games by handing out tickets to their clients.²⁷⁴

4.4.5 ALMSGIVING

By the time of the early imperial period, as evidenced in the Gospels, beggars were common in urban life. Because the sources of information stem from elite writers, uninterested in the survival of the poorest, it is not known who gave alms to them, or what their motives were. The fact that beggars existed is evidence that almsgiving

²⁷¹ Lomas, "Public Building," 36.

²⁷² Lomas, "Public Building," 41.

²⁷³ Kathleen M Coleman, "Public Entertainments," in *Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 335-357.

²⁷⁴ Claire Holleran, "The Development of Public Entertainment Venues in Rome and Italy," in *Bread and circuses: euergetism and municipal patronage in Roman Italy* (London: Routledge, 2003), 46-60.

must have taken place. One of the panels of the frieze at the villa of Junia Felix in Pompeii, which illustrates a lively street scene, shows a non-elite woman accompanied by a child giving money to a beggar with a dog.²⁷⁵

Anneliese Parkin maintains, in her book chapter on pagan almsgiving, *You do him no service*, that before the expansion of Christianity, is hard to envisage how private almsgiving worked.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, there may have been no consistency of attitude across the different levels of society.

Parkin considers Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Seneca the Younger (4 BCE–65 CE) to be the most informative sources concerning private pagan charity. Although most of their thought about giving concentrates on gauging a good possibility for a return of honour, they give some consideration to ‘humanity’ (*humanitas*), (which involved generosity, doing good works and mercy), however ‘pity’ (*miser cordia*) was considered by the Stoics to be a negative emotion. Cicero regards pity more favourably, but Seneca believes that to feel it is a weakness; nevertheless one should be as charitable to the street poor as someone who *does* feel pity.²⁷⁷ Conversely, Pliny the Younger, (61-113 CE) shows himself conscious of the desperate conditions into which the poor could fall (for example, tenant farmers in *Letter 3.19.6*).²⁷⁸ Elite attitudes to giving are variable from an apparent revulsion or indifference—to compassion.

Parkin suggests that the practice of falsifying wounds, injuries, or disabilities, of which there is some evidence, implies that such defects induced compassion in the beholder. Near the end of his life Seneca the Elder (54 BCE–c. 39 CE) wrote ten books of *Controversiae* (imaginary legal cases) in which seventy-four themes were discussed, the opinions of the rhetoricians upon each case being given from different points of view In no. 10.4 he presents the horrifying case of a beggar who adopts exposed children and deliberately mutilates them to arouse pity, so that by begging they can provide him with an income.

²⁷⁵ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 74-77.

²⁷⁶ Parkin, "You do him no service," 60-82.

²⁷⁷ Parkin, "You do him no service," 61-63.

²⁷⁸ Pliny, *Pliny the Younger: complete letters*, edited and translated by P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 78-79.

A woman hands alms to a beggar when she is asked—particularly if she has had a child, and exposed it. How wretched the thought as she hands the money over: “Maybe this is my son”!²⁷⁹

To what extent this legal example is based on any actual instances cannot be known, but Parkin refers to similar cases from more recent times.

Parkin concludes that most gifts to the poor must have come from non-elites, but she acknowledges that primary source confirmation for this inference is unsurprisingly scarce.²⁸⁰ Non-elite people, who were the majority living in urban society, had to worry about obtaining a level of subsistence and were terrified of slipping into destitution and this fear may have maintained a degree of fellow-feeling for beggars. Furthermore, non-elite people come across more beggars. In particular, people who worked in public places, or moved about on foot unaccompanied, were easy to approach.²⁸¹

Among the impoverished the structural poor, unable to work, were the preferred objects of charity. Parkin’s sources suggested that unsupported sick or disabled people and the very young tended to be more likely to arouse the compassion that was expressed in almsgiving. In telling comments Parkin cautions:

Elite self-representation and lack of interest in our sources mask a reality of desultory, but habitual, giving.²⁸²

We can fight too hard to argue away every possible reference to almsgiving. The admission of casual almsgiving need not pull down the monolith of theory surrounding *euergetism* and *beneficentia*.²⁸³

4.5 OTHER INITIATIVES

Two initiatives in Roman society may have benefitted some of the fatherless and the widows to an unknown extent.

²⁷⁹ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Declamations. Controversiae, books 7-10, Suasoriae 2 2*, edited and translated by Michael Winterbottom, Loeb Classical Library, 464 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974). 421-449.

²⁸⁰ Parkin, "You do him no service," 69.

²⁸¹ Parkin, "You do him no service," 74.

²⁸² Parkin, "You do him no service," 81.

²⁸³ Parkin, "You do him no service," 65.

4.5.1 THE GRAIN DOLE

Although grain supply was an issue from 300 BCE, it was only under Julius Caesar that the first full-time magistrates to supervise the grain supply were appointed. After serious famines, in 23/2 BCE and again in 5 CE, Augustus created the office of *praefectus annonae*, 'prefect of the grain supply'. Their duties involved acting as a specialised customs official designed to combat fraud. They had agents positioned in the main grain-producing lands. They were also charged with distributing the grain.

From the earliest days rulers were aware of the possible political implications of the grain supply as an instrument of power, and a way of granting privileges. The *frumentatio* was only given in the early Empire to freeborn citizens of Rome domiciled in the city, rich and poor alike. The numbers of recipients fluctuated, from 150,000 under Julius Caesar to 320,000 under Augustus. The system was continued by his successors. As a general rule, the grain was sold at a low price, as had been the case at an earlier period; and that it was only to the penniless that the grain was given free of charge. The destitute were furnished with tickets, called *tesserae nummariae* or *frumentariae* which entitled them to grain without payment.²⁸⁴

This distribution, however, was restricted to Roman citizens living in Rome which meant that provincials and other immigrants had no rights to it. Greg Woolf observes that the recipients were frequently drawn from near the top of the 'middling' group.²⁸⁵ However, the fact that the destitute could obtain grain free of charge means that some fatherless families could benefit from it.

4.5.2 ALIMENTARY SCHEMES

The alimentary schemes initiated by elite private individuals and emperors, beginning with Nerva (96-98 CE) and Trajan (98-117 CE) were the second provision, which lasted for a further century.²⁸⁶ Nearly everything that is known about the alimentary schemes derives from sixty or seventy inscriptions, discovered dispersed throughout Italy. Many of the schemes were intended solely for children. These measures became common in imperial Italy of the late first and early second century

²⁸⁴ Geoffrey Rickman, *The corn supply of ancient Rome* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). 188-199.

²⁸⁵ Greg Woolf, "Food, Poverty and Patronage: The Significance of the Epigraphy of the Roman Alimentary Schemes in Early Imperial Italy," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 58(1990): 205.

²⁸⁶ Woolf, "Food," 197-228.

CE. The income from a private estate was donated to the city for the support of children. In the case of the emperor, the interest from loans given by him to landowners was to be paid to the city. Regional oversight of the *alimenta* was performed by senatorial and equestrian officials. Pliny the Younger set up such a scheme at Comum to benefit 175 boys and girls.²⁸⁷ One of Woolf's two aims in his influential paper was to show how little evidence there is to link these schemes with poverty.²⁸⁸ The inscriptions define criteria of eligibility based on age, gender, legitimacy, free birth and sometimes local citizenship. Poverty or need is not mentioned. No information is given about the economic status of their envisioned beneficiaries. Woolf concludes that despite the possibility that the recipients belonged to an elite group, it would be wisest to categorise them as a random selection of the citizenry, including some poor people certainly, but not biased in their favour.²⁸⁹

4.5.3 RECIPROCAL EXCHANGES

Several authors have studied the question of whether economic assistance to the most deprived groups was restricted to intragroup aid within these groups themselves. Again the problem of scarce evidence arises. Parkin concludes from the primary evidence that most donations to beggars must have come from the non-elite.

On balance, from the primary evidence available for almsgiving among the lower strata, it appears to have been common, normal, although not compulsory, to give to the destitute when they presented themselves.²⁹⁰

4.6 SUMMARY

Eighty-two per cent of urban dwellers in Roman Society were poor. However, there were varying levels of need within poverty. For those of the elite or of equal status aid was provided to those experiencing temporary difficulties through friendship and hospitality. For those considered of 'worth', the institution of patronage provided support, with a return of public praise and honour expected. Associations tended to

²⁸⁷ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 88-96.

²⁸⁸ Woolf, "Food," 197.

²⁸⁹ Woolf, "Food," 209-211.

²⁹⁰ Parkin, "You do him no service," 73.

require regular financial contributions on the part of members, which excluded all the poor except the 'middling' group of 15%. The few women's associations were almost entirely cultic groups. There were no associations of poor widows. Euergetism indirectly aided the poor. State schemes (generally restricted to citizens) such as the grain dole and private alimentary schemes may have benefited some of the fatherless and the widows.

PART III: THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

5. POVERTY AND ALMSGIVING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In view of the fact that based on Longenecker's figures 82% of the population were poor, it is clear that the early church could not have been exempt from the realities of poverty amongst them and surrounding them.²⁹¹ Alleviation of abject poverty was recognised as a major Christian responsibility from the beginning.

5.1 THE CHURCH UNDER ROMAN LAW

In Part II, the legal structure which circumscribed women who were Roman citizens, women who were slaves, and women who had been freed was explained. All of the women and children who belonged to the Christian assembly lived under Roman law and under the provisions of these laws.

Neither Jesus nor Paul supported civil disobedience. Both are shown advocating adherence to the ruling administrative and legal system. For example, when asked whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, Jesus replies that taxes should be paid.

Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Mark 12:17 NRSV)

Paul also, both in his own life, and in his recommendations to the churches with which he was associated, supported the rule of law. When he was tried before Porcius Festus at Caesarea, who was procurator of Judaea from about 59 to 62 CE,

Paul said in his defence, "I have in no way committed an offence against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor." (Acts 25:8 NRSV)

In his genuine letter to the church at Rome, he advised:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. (Rom. 13:1 NRSV)

For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to

²⁹¹ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 53-59.

whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due. (Rom. 13:6-7
NRSV)

Consciousness of living under the laws of the Roman Empire would permeate every hour of the lives of members of the earliest Christian communities. Their leaders were appreciative of the benefits of the Roman rule of law, which had brought peace and stability to the regions. For widows who had some assets, the system of guardianship would have brought them some protection against exploitation of their vulnerability. In addition, the charitable provisions of Judaism inherited by Christianity, such as the emphasis on almsgiving and regular collections for the poor, would have protected some of the poorer widows from starvation.

5.2 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF MEMBERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Bruce Longenecker in *Remember the Poor* attempts to place the economic status of the early church membership within the various models of economic stratification. He rejects simple binary models of society consisting of the elite on the one hand and everyone else poor on the other as being unhelpful.²⁹²

In Chapter 10 he has surveyed meticulously the development of ideas about the socio-economic status of the first Christian communities since the publication of Wayne Meeks landmark study *The First Urban Christians* in 1983.²⁹³ Meeks was interested in discussing what factors might have attracted urban dwellers to early Christian communities. He recognised that the economic dimension was only one factor in determining a person's social status. Meeks proposed that such people were "status-inconsistent middling urbanites" and that the Christian groups offered such people a way of resolving the anxiety and loneliness of status inconsistency, by the offer of a promise of change, a caring, personal God, and the acquisition of new family bonds. His thesis was derived mainly from the Pauline letters. Meeks concludes his book with the claim that "the most active and prominent members of Paul's circle are people of high status inconsistency".²⁹⁴

²⁹² Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 40-44.

²⁹³ Wayne A. Meeks, *The first urban Christians: the social world of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

²⁹⁴ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 220-225.

Prior to Meeks, Adolf Deissmann in 1910²⁹⁵ was misunderstood to suggest that the early Christian groups were a movement of and for the destitute. He, John Gager in 1975 and Justin Meggitt in 1998 are considered members of the “old consensus”, who depicted the early church as belonging to the dispossessed and the under-privileged, such as slaves, workers, and peasants.²⁹⁶ Meggitt was subjected to a convincing evidentially-based rebuttal in a book review by Margaret Williams regarding his claim that Roman society had but two strata—a rich, exploitative elite comprising around 1% of the population and a vast, virtually undifferentiated underclass, its members' brief lives marked by insecurity, grinding poverty, and disease.²⁹⁷

Even before Meeks there were those who took a different view. In 1960 Edwin Judge published a short book in which he portrayed church groups consisting predominantly of “socially pretentious” bourgeois householders and their dependents (now reprinted elsewhere).²⁹⁸ These dependents might include extended family, slaves, and those linked in commercial relationships. In the early 1970s other scholars made similar claims, followed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by those such as Gerd Theissen,²⁹⁹ Abraham Malherbe³⁰⁰, and Meeks himself in 1983. The “new consensus” had emerged. Both old and new consensuses recognise a spread of means and status amongst the members of the early church; the difference between them being in the proportion of middling groups in comparison to those who are destitute.³⁰¹

²⁹⁵ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the ancient east*, 2nd ed. (New York; London: Hodder, 1910). 290-292.

²⁹⁶ John G. Gager, *Kingdom and community: the social world of early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975); Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, poverty and survival* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

²⁹⁷ Margaret H. Williams, "Review of: Paul, poverty and survival, by Justin J. Meggitt," *The Classical Review, New Series* 50, no. 1 (2000): 137-138.

²⁹⁸ E. A. Judge, *Social distinctives of the Christians in the first century: pivotal essays* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). 1-56.

²⁹⁹ Gerd Theissen, *The social setting of Pauline Christianity: essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

³⁰⁰ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social aspects of early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

³⁰¹ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 225-235.

Some scholars raised the question of whether the early church included only the truly destitute among their members. There is some NT evidence of variety in the form of verses such as 1 Cor. 1:26 and 1 Cor. 11:22.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, **not many were of noble birth**. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor. 1:26-29 NRSV)

NOTE: not “not *any*” BUT “not many”.

Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? (1 Cor. 11:22 NRSV)

On top of that there is the fact that Paul advocated the establishment of collective funds for the poor within the communities with which he was connected, which implies both a giver and a receiver. Additionally Peter Lampe, speaking of the Roman Christian groups, pointed out that the Trastevere district of Rome where many lived was a workers’ quarter, the quarter of the lowest strata of the population.³⁰² Moreover Robert Jewett suggests an alternative meeting place for the churches in Rome—in the giant tenement blocks of the *insulae* with their numerous small rooms situated above shops and workshops.³⁰³ However Longenecker concludes that tenement scenarios do not fit the biblical evidence, (i.e. of ‘house churches’), as aptly as the model in which some community members have accumulated resources that can be put to the service of the community, i.e. with perhaps a few belonging to ES5, and some other households belonging to ES4, the ‘middling’ group.³⁰⁴

Longenecker produces an interesting speculative appraisal of the economic status of certain prominent people of higher standing mentioned in the NT, but none are placed in ES1-ES3. If the Erastus mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:23, ὁ οἰκονόμος τῆς πόλεως (an official of the city), was the same one who donated a pavement in Corinth in thanks for being made an aedile, as recorded on a first or second century

³⁰² Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the first two centuries* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). 49-55.

³⁰³ Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, *Romans: a commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). 65.

³⁰⁴ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 234.

CE inscription, then he might have been placed in ES3 or higher. However the inscription is damaged and it is not certain that the name was not another name such as Eperastus. A reading of Friesen’s chapter ‘The Wrong Erastus’ in *Corinth in Context* will make it very difficult to claim any link between Paul’s Erastus and the Erastus of the Corinthian inscription.³⁰⁵ One of the main props for the idea that there were wealthy, elite members of the Corinthian Christian community now looks highly improbable.

ES5 or ES6	Prisca and Aquila	?
ES4 or ES5	Stephanos, Philemon, Crispus	?
ES4	Erastus, Gaius, Phoebe, Lydia	?

Is there any way we can know more about the nameless majority of the Pauline congregations? Some indications can be discovered from Paul’s letters. When Paul addresses his congregations, in his rhetoric he appears to target his appeals between levels ES5 and ES6.³⁰⁶ In 1 Cor. 16:1-2, for example, he advises the Corinthian Christians to put a little aside *each week* in preparation for the collection. He praises the Macedonian church for their generosity despite their “extreme poverty”. (2 Cor. 8:1-3 NRSV)

Those in ES7, such as unsupported widows, would have nothing spare to put aside. Further evidence of economic status is seen in his use of the phrase “work with your own hands” or similar, four times in 1 Cor. 4:11-13, 1 Thess. 4:11-12, Eph. 4:28 and Acts 20:34-35. This fits well with ES5 and ES6. That there were some in the ES7 category is evident from his use of “those who have nothing” in relation to provisions for the Lord’s Supper in 1 Cor. 11:22. Longenecker, after extensive analysis, finally concluded that the urban Pauline Christian Churches were composed primarily of people belonging to ES5; or rather that was the position where Paul generally “mentally averaged” the economic status of his churches in his rhetoric.³⁰⁷

ES5	Stable near subsistence level (with reasonable hope of remaining above the minimum level to sustain life)	many merchants and traders, regular wage earners, artisans, large shop owners, freed persons, some farm families	22%
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³⁰⁵ Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter, and James C. Walters, *Corinth in context: comparative studies on religion and society*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 134 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010). 231-256.

³⁰⁶ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 253-254.

³⁰⁷ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 254-258.

Those with which this thesis deals fall into the lowest category.

ES7	Below subsistence level	some farm families, unattached widows, orphans , beggars, disabled, unskilled day labourers, prisoners	28%
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Not much textual evidence of social status is extant for the early days of the church. Apart from what the New Testament itself provides, there is only scattered documentary material until the fourth century. When Pliny was governor of Bythynia he had to try Christians for the first time and did not know how to proceed. He enquired by letter c.112 CE of the emperor Trajan describing the Christians and their practices and in it remarked that they were of all ages and classes—*omnis aetatis, omnis ordinis*:³⁰⁸

The question seems to me to be worthy of your consideration, especially in view of the number of persons endangered; for a great many individuals *of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this is likely to continue*

There are some references from Celsus of the membership around the year 200, which Origen reports, which in Celsus's eyes seemed to consist of artisans.³⁰⁹

In private houses also we see wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, who would not dare to say anything at all in front of their elders and more intelligent masters. But whenever they get hold of children in private and some stupid women with them, they let out some astounding statements as, for example, that they must not pay any attention to their father and school-teachers, but must obey *them* ... Book III, 55.

Tertullian in his *Apology*, written around 197 CE, also notes the diversity of status amongst Christians.³¹⁰

Men proclaim aloud that the state is beset with us; in countryside, in villages, in islands, Christians; every sex, age, condition, yes! and rank going over to this name.

Nevertheless, it is observable to the reader that the point of view found present in the New Testament on the issue of poverty in the early church is predominantly that of those above subsistence level. It is pervasive in the NT writings, where those who

³⁰⁸ Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Letters*: Book X,96.

³⁰⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). 165-166.

³¹⁰ Tertullian, *Apology; De spectaculis*, Loeb classical library, 250 (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard Univ. Press; Heinemann, 1931). 5.

have more than sufficient are continually reminded to 'remember the poor'. As long ago as 1956 Edwin Judge had noted that New Testament evidence contradicted the contemporary assessment of Christianity as exclusively a movement of the poor, although in terms of today, we would indubitably regard the majority as being 'poor'.³¹¹ It is apparent that the empathy of the writers does not lie with the abject poor, but with the leaders and with those who had enough to get by on a daily basis. In the New Testament we learn nothing of the administration of the funds collected for the poor. Who was in charge of the monies? How were the anticipated recipients identified? In cases of need how was a request made for aid? Was the process publicly humiliating or performed with discretion?

5.3 THE PAULINE CHURCHES

The earliest churches we can know anything about are those to whom the apostle Paul wrote letters. We can gauge something of the economic level of the members of Paul's churches from these letters. Whereas the Letter of James puts care and respect for the poor, especially the fatherless and the widows, at the centre of Christian practice, the issue of poverty does not dominate Paul's writings. Paul legitimately had a different primary focus, as a consequence of his conviction of his calling by Jesus to preach the Gospel of "Christ crucified" to the Gentiles.

Paul showed some awareness of the poor but never specifically highlighted the fatherless and the widows within that broad category, no, not even once, in the seven undisputed letters. This is unfortunate from the point of view of the fatherless and the widows, as it would be easy to make the assumption that this group were invisible to Paul, who is the most important authority in Christianity, after Jesus. This may very well have been the case, as the evidence of his educational attainment, (e.g. linguistic ability; studied "at the feet of Gamaliel"), points to the fact that Paul came from a comparatively secure and prosperous background. This means that as his genuine letters have been read and studied through the ages, they have contributed to maintaining the invisibility of the fatherless and the widows in church society. But Paul certainly believed in the equality of all members of the body of Christ.

³¹¹ Edwin A. Judge, "The penetration of Graeco-Roman society by Christianity," *Tyndale House Bulletin*, no. 1 (1956): 5-6.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28 NRSV)

In Paul's evocative image of the church as the body of Christ 1 Cor. 12:12-27 he shows how all parts of the church are interdependent. One part is not more 'worthy' than another. All are required for the body to function as a whole.

The most detailed study of Paul's attitude to poverty is to be found in Bruce W. Longenecker's book, *Remember the Poor*.³¹² Longenecker claims that Paul was much more concerned with care for the poor than is often admitted by modern critics. The cornerstone of Longenecker's thesis is the phrase 'remember the poor', which supplies the title for his book. He argues that this phrase is *not* used as a technical term referring to the 'collection' which Paul organised for the poor of the Jerusalem church, as presumed by many commentators, but rather was intended to refer to poor people in general in the largely Gentile Christian communities which Paul founded or visited.

They [the pillars of the Jerusalem church] asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do. (Gal. 2:10 NRSV)

It was through the agency of the Gentile-welcoming part of the early church that Judaism's concern for the poor was maintained and persisted as an essential part of the Christian message.³¹³

Nonetheless Paul did not appear to show awareness of one of the groups of the poor, i.e. fatherless children and poor widows, as did James, when he suggests that widows might be better off if they remained unmarried. However, he does make this recommendation in the context of the prosperous Corinthian church, where perhaps he was able to assume that widows were adequately financially supported. Perhaps he had wealthy widows chiefly in mind.

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But *in my judgment* she is more blessed if she remains as she is. (1 Cor. 7:39-40 NRSV)

³¹² Longenecker, *Remember the poor*.

³¹³ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 298-300.

Longenecker finds proof of Paul's positive attitude in four data sets: letters written by Paul for communities founded by him (1 Thessalonians, Galatians, and 1&2 Corinthians); a letter written by Paul for communities founded by others (Romans); the earliest reminiscences about Paul from the 1st century CE (Acts of the Apostles); and a challenge by Paul to a financial matter arising in one of his churches affecting the conduct of Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).³¹⁴

Paul does not describe a permanently top-down attitude to charitable giving from the better-off to the poor, but envisages future reciprocity.

At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, (2 Cor. 8:14 NIV)

A text from the *Acts of the Apostles* gives permission to interpret Paul's use of 'the weak' as a synonym for 'the poor'.

You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support 'the weak', remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:34-35 NRSV)

Paul discovered that poor people were being disadvantaged in the quantity of food and wine served at the Lord's Supper. Paul sees this material offence as one which damages the spiritual bonds of the community. He responds with indignation.³¹⁵

What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and *humiliate those who have nothing?* What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! (1 Cor. 11:22 NRSV)

When making his estimate of the economic levels of Paul's churches Longenecker restricts his analysis to the named individuals found in Paul's undisputed letters. Using Longenecker's terms, based on the analyses of Steven Friesen, as has been explained in Part II, Paul's communities consisted of one well-to-do family which had a property big enough to accommodate about 50 people for meetings (ES4 'middling' level, so not in the top strata of ES1-ES3). A large proportion of the

³¹⁴ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 135-156.

³¹⁵ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 232, 256.

assembly were poor, but able to work (ES5 some of ES6). And the remaining part was made up of people who were in abject or almost abject poverty (ES6-ES7).³¹⁶

How then did the church come to create a community in which the poor and the not-so-poor deliberately associated on equal terms and even shared communal meals?

The explanation lies in the message of Christ contained in the Gospels.

5.4 HOSPITALITY

Some of Jesus' words in the Gospels turn upside down the Roman idea of giving in expectation of a return. Jesus' rules for hospitality include invitations to the needy to dine.

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:12-14 NRSV)

This was put into practice in the *agapē* fellowship meal, where the whole church met together apart from formal worship for a communal meal. Tertullian writing around 197-8 CE makes it clear that effort was made to have both a charitable and disciplined meal, without ostentatious extravagance and gluttony, where the poor could feel comfortable.³¹⁷ It appears that private individuals could also host an *agapē* meal and invite widows, and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* suggests inviting more frequently those widows who are known to be in greater need.³¹⁸ The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome, which may be early third century, contains the following verse at section 30. Protection of the reputation of both parties is ensured by the age of the widows and the daylight meal time.

Whenever someone wishes to invite older widows to a meal, he shall send them away before sunset. If he cannot receive them in his own home due to his ecclesiastical office, he shall give them food and wine and send them away. Then they may eat it at home as they please.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 249-253.

³¹⁷ Tertullian, *Apology*; *De spectaculis*: 39:16-19.

³¹⁸ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 152.

³¹⁹ Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson et al., *The apostolic tradition: a commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002). 162.

Helen Rhee in *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich* demonstrated that Christian hospitality was displayed in the early church in five major ways. Visiting ministers and missionary preachers, and even Christian strangers, were invited into their homes for short periods of time. The richer members paid for the burial places of the poorer members of the church. Those who suffered for their faith such as confessors, martyrs, prisoners, and those sent into exile were provided for. When possible, Christians ransomed captive Christians and confessors with bribes, usually of money. Christians visited and took care of the sick, especially during epidemics.³²⁰ The first four of those ways are mentioned in the *Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* at section XV, which also mentions orphans and widows.

In the early second century there emerged along with increasing persecution, writers known as apologists, who defended Christianity in its relationship with the Roman state. Some of these apologies were addressed to Emperors. The full Syriac version of the *Apology of Aristides* was found in the library of St. Catherine's in the Sinai in 1889. According to Eusebius, Aristides delivered the *Apology* around the year 125 CE, when Hadrian visited Athens in the eighth year of his reign and took part in the Eleusinian mysteries.³²¹ It paints an impressive picture of the kinds of provision the early Christians may have made for one another.

Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from *widows* they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the *orphan* from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the Spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food.

³²⁰ Rhee, *Loving the poor*: 137.

³²¹ Harris and Robinson, *Texts and studies: contributions to biblical and patristic literature. Vol. 1. The apology of Aristides; The passion of S. Perpetua; The Lord's prayer in the early church; The fragments of Heracleon*: XV.

It appears that two separate categories of need are in view here, rather than a widow with her fatherless minor children.

5.5 PATRONAGE

In the literature of the period, the love of honour and praise (*philotimia*) is the primary motive for benefactions. Since patronage nearly always presupposes an unequal relationship, because the whole point of it is access to influence that the client would not otherwise have, where does that fit with Paul's statement that all are equal?:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28 NRSV)

Longenecker suggests that hospitality, the hosting of Christian gatherings, and most relationships people maintained with other people and to groups within the churches appear to have been performed under the assumptions of the patronage system. Paul can be viewed as having some relationships in which he may be patron or client, with for example Phoebe, a deacon, the representative of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1 NRSV), or with the household of Stephanas at Corinth, who "devoted themselves to the service of the saints" (1 Cor. 16:15-16), or when he received financial gifts from individual churches.³²²

In the Gospel of Luke some of the patrons of Jesus and his disciples are named:

Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. (Luke 8:2-3 NRSV)

Women as well as men are shown hosting house churches in the New Testament, such as Mary mother of John Mark in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), Nympha (Col. 4:15), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40), and Prisca along with Aquila (Rom. 16:5). The main difference between patronage performed by the church and that of the outside world was that it was not dependent on political connection or anticipation of return but on a shared religious ideology.³²³ Unfortunately we have little knowledge of how the system worked in practice within the earliest church, and of the process of development whereby by the time of Augustine and Chrysostom it became centred

³²² Osiek, "Diakonos," 360-362.

³²³ Osiek, "Diakonos," 363-366.

on the person of the bishop. But it is certain that between wealthy women and poor widows many informal support arrangements, of which we know nothing, must have existed. Hints of disapproval of these are detectable in the *The Didascalia Apostolorum*, where gifts are now distributed openly as part of the Eucharist so that the bishop might be seen to be the agent through which charity is given. This restriction would prevent individuals creating a large body of clients and thus achieving the honour status known as *philotimia*.³²⁴

5.6 ASSOCIATIONS

The Graeco-Roman associations, other than the church, did provide economic benefits for their members. The structure and organization of Christian groups have similarities to that of associations. Ascough argues that churches are indeed associations and ought to be investigated as such, but much research remains to be done into this question.³²⁵ John S Kloppenborg agrees that the category provides a useful heuristic tool to investigate membership practices.³²⁶

Analogy with these associations might help to illuminate the motivation of the 'middling group'. Social honour could be obtained by establishing oneself as benefactor of an association. In this way adhering to a Christian assembly might provide some resolution for the status-inconsistency proposed by Meeks. After analysing this argument and finding difficulty with the premise that belonging to a Christian group would enhance the social prestige of the 'middling groups', Longenecker concludes that it is more likely that people inclined towards benefaction might prefer to invest their charitable assets in "salvific" capital with "an all-powerful deity" who rewarded those who cared for the destitute.³²⁷

The church of Corinth may have been the most prosperous amongst those to whom the apostle Paul wrote and visited. Richard Last has examined in detail whether or not the Corinthian Church could be considered to be an association in his book *The Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklesia*. He concludes that Roman associations

³²⁴ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 58.

³²⁵ Richard S. Ascough, "What Are They Now Saying about Christ Groups and Associations?," *Currents in Biblical Research* 13, no. 2 (2015): 207-244.

³²⁶ John S. Kloppenborg, "Membership Practices in Pauline Christ Groups," *Early Christianity* 4, no. 2 (2013): 183-215.

³²⁷ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 263-278.

varied amongst themselves. He considers that it would be “methodologically flawed or irrelevant” to determine from his book’s final summary that the Corinthian group was an association. Associations were not homogeneous. The Christian group was similar to some associations and different from many others. Simply classifying the Corinthian group as similar to associations adds little information; and classifying them as unique from associations divorces them from their first century context.³²⁸

After close analysis of many examples of associations, the activities undertaken by the Corinthian Church, and the theories of others, such as Lampe, Barclay and Theissen, Last comes to the conclusion that it is difficult to explain how the Corinthian Church could have funded the Eucharist, the communal meals, or any of the other activities it implemented without collecting contributions from each member. Church adherents came from economic strata for which club membership was affordable. He is correct in saying that members made contributions; however, it is just as clear that some members were exempt from making contributions. Still, the Corinthian church must have predominantly included those of ES4 and ES5. Perhaps that is why the fatherless family is only detectable in the church of the Book of James, which appears to be written to a much more ‘mixed’ assembly.³²⁹

5.7 THE ECONOMIC ATTRACTIONS OF THE PAULINE CHURCHES

The reason for first joining a Christian assembly in the early days would have varied with the individual concerned. To attribute primarily materialistic motives would be unfair, in view of the deviation from the societal norm of association which it would entail. It is probable that the primary motivation was ideological. This is certainly the premise adopted by Peter Oakes in his analysis of the motivation of four imaginary inhabitants of Rome, based on archaeological evidence.³³⁰ Certainly some members from the ES6 to 7 groups would have been attached to a household, but it is possible that others made an independent choice. In the case of women, however, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it will have to be assumed that the classic widow would be unlikely to decide to attach herself to a Christian group independently; rather she is most likely to have been the widow of an existing

³²⁸ Richard Last, *The Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklēsia: Greco-Roman Associations in Comparative Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). 214-215.

³²⁹ Last, *Pauline Church*: 147.

³³⁰ Oakes, *Reading Romans*: 123-160.

member. For those outside the security of a household, communal collections for the poor and community shared meals would be attractive, but not for these in groups ES 1 to 3, the provision of whose social needs were guaranteed by their elite status.³³¹

5.8 ALMSGIVING WITHIN THE EARLY CHURCH

That the fatherless and the widows were the principal church recipients of alms in the mid-third century is suggested by Cyprian's comment in section 15 of *On Work and Alms*, further referred to below.³³²

And since all things that are given are conferred upon orphans and widows

Cumque universa quae dantur pupillis et viduis conferantur

Note the word used here translated as "orphans" is not *orbus* (-a), which means parentless, but *pupillus* (-a), which means a ward. Cyprian had personal experience of being a guardian. On his death-bed his friend and spiritual father the presbyter Caecilius left his wife and children to the care of Cyprian.³³³

The Greek word used for alms, ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη, is found in the New Testament, e.g. in Matthew 6:4, and means charitable giving. The apostle Paul makes it abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 13 that 'love' should be the foundation of all charitable actions.

If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor. 13:3 NRSV)

My interest lies in the motivation which the preachers and treatise writers of the early church enjoined on their followers. The question is whether or not almsgiving and the receipt of alms occurred within the early church as an altruistic expression of Christian love towards needy fellow believers, and whether this occurred in a 'top-down' fashion or with reciprocity. Certainly the evidence of 1 Corinthians confirms that poverty was no barrier to giving as it shows that the Macedonian church demonstrated their generosity by contributing to the relief fund for Jerusalem in spite of their own material deprivation:

³³¹ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 259-262.

³³² Cyprian, *Treatises*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Fathers of the Church, 36 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958). 241.

³³³ George Ayliffe Poole, *The life and times of Saint Cyprian* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1840). 31.

... during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means. (2 Cor. 8:2-3 NRSV)

5.8.1 RECIPROCAL SUPPORT

Denise Kimber Buell addresses the invisibility of the poor in ancient texts. Accepting that most early Christians lived “economically marginal lives”, by drawing on early material from the *Didache*, *1 Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* she argues that almsgiving functioned more like mutual assistance, when at sometimes a person might be a recipient and at other times a donor.³³⁴ She considers that the poor have a special “insider status” in the early church, based on the Beatitudes of Luke 6:20. She notes how the rhetoric of the writers of these earlier works always assumes that their hearers were in a position to be able to give alms.³³⁵ This does not mean that there were many prosperous amongst them, but rather that shared sacrificial giving was practised.

Many Christians of the first and second centuries would have moved in and out of states of what has been termed ‘episodic’ poverty, caused by occasions of bereavement, famine, illness, or unemployment. They were liable to become one of the abject poor at any time owing to the vagaries of fortune.³³⁶ The knowledge of this possibility for oneself would encourage help for others in temporary or permanent need.

Denise Kimber Buell notes that the *Shepherd of Hermas* gives instructions for performing a fast specifically to raise funds for the fatherless and the widows in *Herm. Sim 5.3.7*. *First Clement* at 55.2 describes those “amongst ourselves” who have sold themselves into slavery to buy food for others. The *Didache* portrays two-way traffic of giving and receiving at 4.5-8. The giving is direct giving from one individual to another, not via any clergy intermediary. It also condemns those who take unnecessarily and advocates that a donor know the person provided for at 1.5-6.

³³⁴ Denise Kimber Buell, “When both donors and recipients are poor,” in *Wealth and poverty in early church and society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Brookline, Mass.: Baker Academic; Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2008), 47.

³³⁵ Buell, “When both donors and recipients are poor,” 39.

³³⁶ E. M. Atkins and Robin Osborne, eds., *Poverty in the Roman world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5, 142-143.

David J. Downs notes that the explicit connection between “love” (ἀγάπη) and “almsgiving” (ἐλεημοσύνη) in 2 *Clem.* 16.4³³⁷ raises the possibility that the practice of Christian love motivated mutual material assistance within the particular church community which is being addressed in 2 *Clement*, rather than merit accumulation or absolution from sin.³³⁸

Another form of reciprocity began to appear in the form of effective prayer for the donor.

5.8.2 ALMSGIVING, SACRIFICE, AND POWERFUL PRAYER

Almsgiving and prayer became associated with the metaphors of sacrifice, altars, and incense, which may have had its origin in the NT *Book of Revelation*.

Through [Jesus], then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. (Heb. 13:15 NRSV)

Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. (Rev. 8:3-4 NRSV)

The altar became associated with atoning sacrifice, and incense signified the prayers of the faithful. Ultimately the two images were combined in the person of the widow, who became perceived as a sacrificial altar from which prevailing prayers ascended to God. The belief grew that poor Christians had potent influence with God through their prayers and thanksgivings for offerings.³³⁹ This is exemplified in some of the early writings.

5.8.2.1 THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

The *Shepherd of Hermas* was written in Rome, composed probably by one unknown author in two stages, with an estimated range of dating of between 100-160 CE. It consists of five visions, twelve commandments and ten parables and has two main

³³⁷ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 190.

³³⁸ David J. Downs, "Redemptive Almsgiving and Economic Stratification in 2 Clement," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19, no. 4 (2011): 511.

³³⁹ L. W. Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the church of the early empire: contradictions and accommodations* (E. Mellen Press, 1980). 110-111.

themes: concern over post–baptismal sins; and the conduct of the rich and their relationship to the poor within the church. Both of these issues are connected, although the *Shepherd* does not explicitly connect almsgiving with the forgiveness of sins.

Parables 2: The Elm and the Vine. The vine needs the elm to support it.

“Explain it to me.” “Listen,” he said. “The rich person has money, but is poor towards the Lord, since he is distracted by his wealth. The prayer and confession he makes to the Lord are very small—weak, small, and of no real effect. And so, when the rich person depends upon the one who is poor and supplies him with what he needs, he believes that by helping the one who is poor he will find his recompense before God. For the poor person is rich in his petition and confession, and his petition has a great effect before God.”³⁴⁰

5.8.2.2 CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

By the end of the second century, this ability is made explicit in Clement of Alexandria’s work *Quis dives salvetur*, (Who is the rich man to be saved?), chapters 31-32, and chapter 35, written between 182-202 CE, where the prayers of the grateful poor for the donor can gain them entrance to heaven. Almsgiving makes spiritual friends who have influence with Christ through their powerful prayers³⁴¹.

Enlist on your behalf an army without weapons, without war, without bloodshed, without anger, without stain, an army of God-fearing old men, of God-beloved orphans, of widows armed with gentleness, of men adorned with love. Obtain with your wealth, as guards for your body and your soul, such men as these, whose commander is God.

5.8.2.3 CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

One of the most extensive treatments of almsgiving in the early church occurs in a 26 section treatise entitled *On Works and Alms*, by Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, thought to be written about 254 CE.³⁴² Cyprian claims that grateful prayer can bring recompense to the giver.

³⁴⁰ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 309-315.

³⁴¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks; The Rich man's salvation; To the newly baptized*: 334-339, 342-343.

³⁴² Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol 5 Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL)), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.html>.

... while thanks are directed to God for our almsgivings and labours, by the prayer of the poor, the wealth of the doer is increased by the retribution of God.³⁴³

5.8.2.4 THE DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM

The late third century Syrian church order the *Didascalia Apostolorum* contains in Chapter 17:

... since he diligently and frequently prayed for those who gave to him as far as he was able, and this prayer he offered as his payment.

As the church becomes more prosperous almsgiving develops in importance and becomes regarded as the remedy for post-baptismal sin. It becomes the means by which the rich obtain eternal life in the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving, which is demonstrable in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian.

5.8.3 WIDOWS AS ALTARS

At least seven times in the literature of the early church is found reference to “widows as altars”, where a widow is compared to a sacred object. She remains a recipient of charity but now also takes on an unusual religious symbolism. Giving to her is seen as an equivalent to the sacrificial offering of Second Temple Judaism for the remission of sins. She no longer represents herself, but is transformed from a needy human being into an inanimate object and a vehicle for atonement. Polycarp’s *Letter to the Philippians* (4:3) is perhaps the earliest source we possess for this expression. Unfortunately, he does not explain what he means by his use of this metaphor.

We should teach the widows to be self-controlled with respect to faith in the Lord, to pray without ceasing for everyone, and to be distant from all libel, slander, false witness, love of money, and all evil, knowing that they are God’s altar and that each offering is inspected for a blemish and that nothing escapes his notice, whether thoughts, ideas, or any of the things hidden in the heart.³⁴⁴

One might speculate in this fashion: an altar is the place on which one places a sacrifice for the remission of sins, or makes an offering, or partakes of communion. The altar is a holy place set apart for God. The altar and its surrounding area convey

³⁴³ Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol 5 Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix.* 1101.

³⁴⁴ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers: I*, 338-339.

a sense of sanctity. Only those items that are perfect and flawless are allowed to be placed on the altar. This metaphor might be interpreted in this way: the altar/offering is the widow herself. She needs to be holy and set apart for God, free from the four sins listed above—notably three of them sins of the tongue. The alms which she accepts are also the offering, an acceptable sacrifice without blemish, and in recompense for which she prays continually for all.³⁴⁵ Alternatively, the symbol may stem from a metaphor of Paul:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom 12:1 NRSV)

The second instance appears in Tertullian's treatise *To his Wife. Book 1* when he implies that a widow who marries again is "impure".

Nor is it permissible for a widow to be chosen unless she was the wife of but one man. The altar of God must be an altar of manifest purity and all the glory which surrounds the church is the glory of sanctity.³⁴⁶

According to Jerome, Methodius of Olympos was Bishop of Olympos in Lycia. He died about 311 CE. The third appearance of a widow as altar appears in his *Symposium*, or *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* translated into English in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 6.³⁴⁷ Chapter 8 Talks about the two altars in the Temple/Tabernacle. In the Old Testament the bronze altar of sacrifice stood outside of the Temple in the outer court. However the "unbloodied" incense altar in the holy place in the Tabernacle was made of gold (see Rev. 8:3-4 above), which Methodius maintains is the altar of the virgins, who are like pure gold, whereas the bloody altar of the widows is outside the holy place, but is once again, as in Polycarp, a place for sacrifice, and the sanctification of the offering.

... the Tabernacle being taken for a type of the Church, as I said, it is fitting that the altars should signify some of the things in the Church. And we have already compared the brazen altar to the company and circuit of widows; for they are a living altar of God, to which they bring calves and tithes, and free-will offerings, as a sacrifice to the Lord ...

³⁴⁵ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 338-339.

³⁴⁶ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 20.

³⁴⁷ <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers2/ANF-06/TOC.htm>

Gregory Nazianzen in his funeral oration early in 374 *On his Father* compared his widowed mother Nonna to an unhewn altar, natural and free from artificial ornament. This meaning appears different from that of Polycarp and Methodius, unless one equates simplicity with purity.³⁴⁸

It was once counted a glory for the altar that no axe had been lifted upon it, no stone-cutter's tool seen or heard, with the higher meaning that whatever was consecrated to God should be natural and free from artifice.

Pseudo-Ignatius, an unknown author of the late fourth century, expanded the genuine letters of Ignatius and also composed the letter to the *Tarsians*, which has the words:

Reverence those in virginity as priestesses of Christ, those widows who are upright as the altar of God.³⁴⁹

This comparison assigns the holiness pertaining to the altar to the widow.

Some of these references hint that the widow performs some active role in the receipt of alms.³⁵⁰

5.8.4 THE DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM

Finally, the late third century Syrian church order the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and its fourth century parallel and expansion the *Apostolic Constitutions*, contain quite a few references to the 'widow as altar' in these combined documents, in conjunction with other correspondences, i.e. (God = the bishop, the Holy Spirit = the deaconess, the presbyters = the apostles).³⁵¹ In what follows I am quoting from the English translation made by Alistair Stewart-Sykes.³⁵²

The most significant passage is found in 4.3.3 of the DA which makes it unequivocally clear that the altar symbolism is concerned with the receipt of alms, whether by a widow or by anyone else. The person who receives alms is portrayed as honourable and worthy of respect. The recipient reciprocates the generosity received

³⁴⁸ Gregory Nazianzen and Ambrose Bishop of Milan, *Funeral orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*, trans. Leo P. McCauley, Fathers of the Church, 22 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1968). 126.

³⁴⁹ <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-28.htm>

³⁵⁰ Bonnie Bowman Thurston, "The widows as the "altar of God"," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, no. 24 (1985): 285.

³⁵¹ Thurston, "Widows as the altar," 284.

³⁵² Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*.

by praying for the donor. Widows were perceived as offering powerful intercessory prayer. Bonnie Thurston records that those who prayed were known as ‘altars’ and notes the connection with sacrifice.³⁵³ In Chapter 17 the connection with alms is made explicit.

If anyone receives on account of an orphaned childhood, or poverty in old age, or sickness or weakness or for bringing up a large number of children, he shall indeed be praised, considered as the altar of God, and honoured of God, because he did not receive in vain since he diligently and frequently prayed for those who gave to him as far as he was able, and this prayer he offered as his payment.

Subsequently in Chapter 18 this definition is repeated

Be constant, you bishops and deacons, in the ministry of the altar of Christ, that is to say the widows and the orphans, with all care ... for the support of, we say again, the altar.³⁵⁴

Previously the DA was generally supposed to have had a single third century author but Alistair Stewart-Sykes proposed a fresh hypothesis of composite composition in his new English translation published in 2009. His proposal that “the document speaks with a variety of voices from a span of history”³⁵⁵ has helped to highlight the chronological confusion of the material on widows making it much more amenable to analysis. He also claims that it includes some earlier material. This earlier material is of relevance to the topic of widows.

Stewart-Sykes speculates that there were two redactors, one responsible for the final redaction, whom he terms the *apostolic* redactor, and a second called the *deuterotic* redactor, whose exclusive interest is advising Christians against keeping the Jewish Law. The sources, possibly two, combining a catechetical manual and a set of instructions for bishops, were already combined by the first quarter of the third century by a uniting redactor before the work of the *deuterotic* redactor. Sometimes the apostolic redactor resorts to pseudonymity as, for example, when he pretends to be Matthew in DA 2.39, or when the apostles are made to state that they had written the DA in Jerusalem in DA 6.13. The earlier material attempts to restrict the receipt

³⁵³ Thurston, "Widows as the altar," 285.

³⁵⁴ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 196-198.

³⁵⁵ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 89.

of charity by widows and may lie within the constraints of this study. The later material is concerned with regulating the authority of women.³⁵⁶

Stewart-Sykes' assertions influence the discussion of the ministry of widows. He concludes that the receipt of charity by widows is a principal concern of the redactor. The largest section of the discussion concerns the method by which widows should receive the financial support of the church, and their behaviour.

Stewart-Sykes considers that the issue in the original source is not episcopal control of people in itself but control of funds through the control of people, both wealthy donors and recipients. He rejects the proposal of Charlotte Methuen that the control of widows might be a reaction to charismatic authority exercised by the widows in opposition to the bureaucratic authority of the bishops, on the basis of lack of evidence. He finds more convincing her suggestion that it might be connected with the polemic against Jewish Christianity, in particular concerning the position of wealthy women as patrons of the synagogue, and I too find this proposition more plausible.³⁵⁷

The 14th Chapter deals with the appointment of widows and Stewart-Sykes maintains that this chapter comes direct from one of the sources. It is clear that by the time of writing there is a group of elderly widows, which some such as Thurston have termed an 'office', although it appears more akin to an aged person's support group. The minimum age for enrolment stipulated here is fifty. However, the case of young widows who do not wish to remarry is considered and it is recommended that they should be assisted and financially supported, (but not appointed to the 'office' of widows), to prevent them from being forced to marry a second time, "which is damaging"! Donors (or patrons) are then forbidden from giving gifts to widows directly. They must bring them to the bishop who will distribute them, giving the donor's name to the recipient who will then pray for them.

Chapter 15 is an attack upon the character of widows, accusing them of greed and aggressive begging, their minds occupied with money matters. It lays down more rules for the widow, most aimed at her speech, i.e. "not talkative, or loud, or garrulous". Her only duty is to pray. In this chapter the apostolic redactor takes upon

³⁵⁶ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 22-49.

³⁵⁷ Charlotte Methuen, "Widows, Bishops and the Struggle for Authority in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no. 02 (1995): 197-213.

himself the identity and authority of the apostles. If anyone asks a widow questions about her Christian faith, any replies beyond the basics of faith in Christ, must be referred to the leader, because their ignorance of doctrine might lead the gentiles to “sneer and scoff” at the word of an “old” woman. These restrictions on her speech are followed by a degraded use of the ‘widow as altar’ symbol.

Thus the widow should know that she is the altar of God, and she should sit constantly at home, not wandering or going to the houses of the faithful to receive, for the altar of God does not wander or go anywhere, but is fixed in a single place.

A widow, therefore, should not wander or go from house to house. Those who roam and have no shame cannot be still even within their own houses. They are not widows; they are begging bags and have no care other than being ready to receive. And because they are gossips, garrulous and complaining, they cause quarrels.³⁵⁸

The author goes so far as to accuse them of usury—running money-lending schemes for profit.

Such a widow is contrasted with one who stays at home, in continual prayer, meditating night and day. She works at her wool, so that she may provide for those in distress, or make return for what she has received. While she remains at home the bishop can control what she receives. The justification given is that if a lay person directly supports a widow, this dishonors the bishop by implying that the bishop is not protecting the widows and despises the poor.

The widows are forbidden to do anything on their own authority, without the advice or command of the bishop. They must not accept hospitality, or accept gifts, or lay a hand on anyone in prayer. They must not compare what they receive with what another receives, but be free from envy. They must not reveal the name of a donor, as this would attack the bishop’s role as agent by giving public acknowledgment to a donor. They may be recipients of charity only through the agency of the bishop. They are forbidden to teach (3.5) and to baptise (3.9) which suggests that they had previously performed these functions in the Syrian churches.

Chapter 16, which immediately follows this tirade against the behaviour of widows, and deals with the appointment of deacons and deaconesses, significantly begins thus:

³⁵⁸ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 185-186. This is a pun (χήρα –widow, and πήρα –begging bag)

So, Bishop, appoint for yourself fellow-workers in almsgiving, assistants who may *cooperate* with you ...

It is possible that deaconesses were created to replace a ministry previously executed by widows as means of bringing women's ministry under episcopal control.³⁵⁹ The issue of episcopal control can be traced at least as far back as Ignatius in the early second century where he instructs in his letter *To the Smyrneans* that no baptism or *agapē* (fellowship meal) should take place without the agreement of the bishop.³⁶⁰

Although it appears from the DA that the office of widow was ultimately superseded by the office of deaconess, it is startling to find that the document nowhere discusses the existence of an order of virgins. This might be because of a possible early date of the material or because of the relative poverty of the church at that time. To remain voluntarily celibate would have been a luxury only enjoyed by women of independent means or supported by a wealthy Christian father. Perhaps such women, at that juncture not recognised as a distinct group by the church, were the undisclosed patrons of the widows. The bishop would be unable to control their donations. Another possibility might be the early emergence of separate communities of celibate women, such as that to which Egeria belonged around 381-384 CE, beyond the control of the bishop.³⁶¹

Stewart-Sykes draws this conclusion from his examination of the DA:

The principal reason for the control of widows... is the control of widows' patrons, and the concentration of patronage in the hands of the bishop.³⁶²

5.9 SUMMARY

The majority of the church assembly consisted of those living just above subsistence level. The leadership comprised these of a slightly higher status. It is unlikely that at first there were many members from the elite classes, (or even any at all). Some followers in the 'middling' group possessed a house large enough to accommodate for worship the rest of the church assembly.

³⁵⁹ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 182-195.

³⁶⁰ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: Vol. 1, 304-305.

³⁶¹ Egeria, *Egeria's travels*, trans. John Wilkinson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 2006).

³⁶² Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 67.

The letters of Paul give evidence that some amongst the believers may have been destitute and these would have included unsupported widows and their children. A widow would be unlikely to decide to attach herself to a Christian group independently; rather she is most likely to have been the widow of an existing member.

The church had some of the characteristics of a Roman association. It also displayed hospitality and accepted patronage, but extended these privileges to all ranks of society, the one criterion being faith in Christ.

Charitable giving formed a large part of expected ethical behaviour in the early church. Initially it was motivated by Christian fellowship, not requiring reciprocation other than prayer for the donor. Increasingly, the prayer of the poor for a donor came to be seen as highly influential with God.

The metaphor 'altars' became attached to widows, as they were the direct recipients of charitable giving. As time passed control of alms became centred on the person of the bishop and his assistants, superseding direct giving or private patronage.

6. THE FATHERLESS FAMILY IN THE SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

It was established in the Introduction that this thesis is concerned with assessing the rhetoric, theological interpretations and practical applications made by the early Christian writers and preachers from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Old Testament and New Testament scriptures which discuss fatherless children and widows.

F. Scott Spencer suggested that there is a *theological* system set forth in the Hebrew Scriptures presenting the God of Israel entering into the deficiency of economic, service, social, or emotional assistance for widows created by absent husbands.³⁶³ It will be useful to examine if this is the case and see in later chapters if the system extends onwards into the Greek Scriptures of the New Testament.

On the other hand, Marcus Sigismund is well aware of a “conspicuous gap in the otherwise well-studied field of the ancient family”. In his essay entitled *Fatherlessness in the Old and New Testaments* he maintains that the perceived scarcity of scriptural references to fatherlessness in both testaments presents a real *theological* difficulty for the church. A theology of fatherlessness is lacking.³⁶⁴

6.1 THE GREEK SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

From the beginning of Christianity, the Hebrew Scriptures in the form of the Greek Septuagint translation were authoritative for the early church.³⁶⁵ The Septuagint, whose name is often shortened to LXX, contains the Greek text of what we now know as the ‘Old Testament’ (OT), but also includes a number of writings not in the Christian canon. An attempt will be made to use the text in the form nearest to that read by the early Christians, which may or may not be exactly the text we read today. Fundamental to the succeeding analyses are the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity.

³⁶³ Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 721.

³⁶⁴ Sigismund, "Without father," 83-102.

³⁶⁵ Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Baker Academic; Paternoster, 2000). 23-26.

I have chosen to use the Greek Septuagint instead of the Hebrew Masoretic text as the source for some of the OT biblical quotations because Christian teachings, at least as far as Augustine, were based firmly on the Greek Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. Only since the Vulgate of Jerome has the Roman Catholic Church of the West based its OT translations on the Hebrew Masoretic text. The early Christian OT must be correctly perceived as being the Septuagint.

As a result of the discovery of pre-Christian manuscripts of the Greek OT writings in the Judean desert, it has been shown that in the earlier period there was textual diversity and fluidity among the Greek OT manuscripts.³⁶⁶ We cannot assume that early Christians had only one version of particular books of the Septuagint. The authors of the New Testament based their citations from the Old Testament (as many as three hundred) more on the Septuagint versions than on the Hebrew or Aramaic text, although some scholars, such as Paul, could use both.³⁶⁷ Since the actual Greek manuscript used cannot be known, I shall use Rahlfs' version of the Septuagint for Greek quotations. It was revised by Robert Hanhart in 2006.³⁶⁸ For the English translations, I will use *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS), produced in 2007 and reprinted in 2009 with corrections, some of which is based on the up-to-date Göttingen critical editions, which are gradually being produced.³⁶⁹

The early church governance accepted that this textual storehouse encapsulated the instructions given by God and formed the basis of their pastoral policies. As will be demonstrated in the course of this thesis, the writings of the Old Testament scriptures proved to be more influential in the deliberations of the church leadership on conduct towards widows, fatherless children and orphans in the early church, than those of the NT. While the Septuagint was accepted as 'scripture', some of the writings of the NT had achieved that status—increasingly as time passed.

Reading against the grain of the text from the point of view of the recipient of pastoral care and material support, rather than that of the giver of charity, raises some perplexing questions of interpretation, as will be demonstrated in what follows.

³⁶⁶ Emanuel Tov, *Textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis; Assen/Maastricht: Fortress Press; Van Gorcum, 1992). 143-148.

³⁶⁷ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*: 24.

³⁶⁸ Rahlfs and Hanhart, *Septuaginta*.

³⁶⁹ Pietersma and Wright, *New English*.

6.2 THE FATHERLESS FAMILY IN THE GREEK SEPTUAGINT

Within the books of the Greek Septuagint, the fatherless, the widow, and the alien are grouped together as those most requiring care and support. This support is promised by God and enjoined upon the community of Israel. Their prominence in these books presents a contrast with the absence of similar clear divine directive for the fatherless and the widow in the New Testament. A realisation of this 'gap' raises the question whether their non-appearance was, in regular practice, compensated for by the unambiguous prophetic utterances in the Old. We must assess whether the divine directives of the Old Testament continued to be accepted as pertinent guides to conduct. The Hebrew Scriptures in the form of the Greek Septuagint were authoritative for the early church from its foundation, albeit selectively. It is apparent that only some, and not all, directives from the OT were accepted as valid for Gentile Christians; for example, circumcision, food rules and purity rituals ceased to be observed. Therefore it is legitimate to contend that some of these particular OT injunctions of God regarding the fatherless and the widow may have been disregarded also.

Wesley J. Bergen points out that the OT varies in its approach to poverty:

In some passages, wealth is viewed as a reward for hard work or righteousness ... In other passages, wealth and poverty are both from God, as is everything. The solution, therefore, is also from God, whether repentance or justice. In this case, the response of the reader is open-ended. The reader could conclude that because God cares for the poor, the reader should also. On the other hand, the reader could just as logically conclude that since it is God's task to care for the poor, no particular effort on our part is necessary.³⁷⁰

If this second attitude was maintained, and communicated to the church body by sermon, or directly to those in poverty, teaching such as this might be a possible explanation for the relative absence of injunctions to care for the fatherless family as a single unit in the NT, and for possible pastoral neglect.

6.2.1 GOD'S ROLE FOR THE CARE OF THE FATHERLESS FAMILY

To reinforce this possibility, in some Septuagint verses, such as those which follow, Almighty God himself through the prophets is shown making undertakings to take

³⁷⁰ Wesley J Bergen, "The Lectionary as a Guide to Thinking about Poverty," *Theology Today* 70, no. 4 (2014): 419.

the initiative regarding the plight of the fatherless family, by himself acting as a substitute father and husband.

As a consequence, it would be valid to assume responsibility could be transferred with impunity on to God's shoulders. As Jan Bremmer remarks, "The fact that Jahweh especially was held responsible for the care of widows strongly suggests that human care was rather deficient".³⁷¹

Direct intervention by God is suggested in the following passages.

David (regarded as a prophet by Jews and Christians alike) asserts that abandoned children will be taken up by God.

because my father and my mother abandoned me, but the Lord took me to himself (Psa. 27:10 NETS)³⁷²

ὅτι ὁ πατήρ μου καὶ ἡ μήτηρ μου ἐγκατέλιπόν με, ὁ δὲ κύριος προσελάβετό με. (Psa. 26:10 Rahlfs)

God is shown providing support.

The Lord watches over the guests;³⁷³ orphan and widow he will pick up, and a way of sinners he will wipe out (Psa. 145(146):9 NETS)

κύριος φυλάσσει τοὺς προσηλύτους, ὀρφανὸν καὶ χήραν ἀναλήμψεται καὶ ὁδὸν ἀμαρτωλῶν ἀφανιεῖ. (Psa. 145:9 Rahlfs)

God is shown as a just administrator of justice:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and fear-inspiring, who does not marvel at a person, neither will he take a bribe, doing justice to the guest and orphan and widow and loving the guest, to give him food and clothing (Deu. 10:17-18 NETS)

ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν, οὗτος θεὸς τῶν θεῶν καὶ κύριος τῶν κυρίων, ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας καὶ ἰσχυρὸς καὶ ὁ φοβερός, ὅστις οὐ θαυμάζει πρόσωπον οὐδ' οὐ μὴ λάβῃ δῶρον, ποιῶν κρίσιν προσηλύτῳ καὶ ὀρφανῷ καὶ χήρᾳ καὶ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν προσήλυτον δοῦναι αὐτῷ ἄρτον καὶ ἱμάτιον. (Deu. 10:17-18 Rahlfs)

God is presented as providing the normal protection of a father and possibly that of a husband.

³⁷¹ Jan N. Bremmer, "Pauper or patroness: the widow in the early Christian church," in *Between poverty and the pyre: moments in the history of widowhood*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Lourens van den Bosch (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 31-32.

³⁷² NRSV.

³⁷³ The NETS version uses the polite 'guest' where other translations use 'stranger' or 'alien'.

who is the father of orphans and vindicator of widows; God is in his holy place (Psa. 67(68):5 NETS)

τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν ὀρφανῶν καὶ κριτοῦ τῶν χηρῶν· ὁ θεὸς ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ αὐτοῦ. (Psa. 67:6 Rahlfs)

God is shown as the spouse of the bereft widow in some versions. The following verses demonstrate clearly how the Septuagint can differ significantly from the Hebrew Masoretic text. The New Revised Standard version and all major English translations choose to follow the Hebrew, where the prophet claims that the ‘widow’ Israel shall have God for her ‘husband’. But the Septuagint omits this.

Septuagint

... καὶ ὄνειδος τῆς χηρείας σου οὐ μὴ μνησθήσῃ. ὅτι κύριος ὁ ποιῶν σε, κύριος σαβαωθ ὄνομα αὐτῶ· καὶ ὁ ῥυσάμενός σε αὐτὸς θεὸς Ἰσραηλ, πάσῃ τῇ γῆ κληθήσεται. (Isa. 54:4-5 Rahlfs)

and the reproach of your widowhood you will not remember, because the Lord is the one who makes you the Lord Sabaoth is his name, and the one who delivered you is the very^f God of Israel; he shall be called thus^g in all the earth (Isa. 54:4-5 NETS)

^f holy= Ziegler³⁷⁴

^g lacking in Greek³⁷⁵

Hebrew

The Great Isaiah Scroll dates from ca. 125 BCE. It is one of the oldest of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some one thousand years older than the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible known to us before the scrolls’ discovery. In it verse 5 is translated by Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich thus:

For he who made you will espouse you; his name is LORD of hosts. The Holy one of Israel will redeem you; he is called God of all the earth.³⁷⁶

The NRSV agrees with the GI Scroll and translates the Hebrew in this way:

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name (Isa. 54:5 NRSV)

³⁷⁴ J Ziegler, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum XIV: Isaías* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967).

³⁷⁵ Pietersma and Wright, *New English*. <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/> This electronic edition contains the masters of the second printing of *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, as published by Oxford University Press in 2009, including corrections and emendations.

³⁷⁶ http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/chapters_pg

It is valid to question if a portrayal of God as husband of ‘widow’ Israel can be stretched to include the widows of the Christian Church. There is no doubt that most Christians saw themselves as the continuance of Israel. However, it is probable that the Septuagint version was the one known to the early Christians, and therefore this verse in the Hebrew may be irrelevant in portraying God in the evocative image of the substitute husband.

6.2.2 FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Nevertheless, above and beyond these astonishing prophetic promises of God’s direct intervention, the Jewish male worshipping community was left in no doubt as to their responsibility for this vulnerable group, as the following verses demonstrate.

Above all, they are commanded to refrain from oppressing the fatherless and the widow, and threatened with dreadful consequences for disobedience:

Every widow and orphan you shall not harm. But if you harm them with harm, and crying out, they call out to me, I will by paying attention listen to their voice, and I will be enraged with anger and will kill you with the dagger, and your wives shall be widows, and your children orphans. (Exo. 22:22-24 NETS)

πᾶσαν χήραν καὶ ὀρφανὸν οὐ κακώσετε. ἐὰν δὲ κακίᾳ κακώσητε αὐτοὺς καὶ κεκράξαντες καταβοήσωσι πρὸς με, ἀκοῇ εἰσακούσομαι τῆς φωνῆς αὐτῶν καὶ ὀργισθήσομαι θυμῷ καὶ ἀποκτενῶ ὑμᾶς μαχαίρᾳ, καὶ ἔσονται αἱ γυναῖκες ὑμῶν χῆραι καὶ τὰ παιδιά ὑμῶν ὀρφανά. (Exo. 22:21-23 Rahlfs)

The community should intercede on their behalf and become advocates for them.

Learn to do good; seek judgment; rescue the one who is wronged; defend the orphan, and do justice to the widow. (Isa. 1:17 NETS)

μάθετε καλὸν ποιεῖν, ἐκζητήσατε κρίσιν, ῥύσασθε ἀδικούμενον, κρίνατε ὀρφανῶ καὶ δικαίωσατε χήραν (Isa. 1:17 Rahlfs)

Their remaining in the Land of Israel is dependent on just living.

... and do not oppress guest and orphan and widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place and do not go after foreign gods to your own hurt, I will also cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers and forever (Jer. 7:6-7 NETS)

καὶ προσήλυτον καὶ ὀρφανὸν καὶ χήραν μὴ καταδυναστεύσητε καὶ αἷμα ἀθῶνον μὴ ἐκχέητε ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ καὶ ὀπίσω θεῶν ἀλλοτρίων μὴ πορεύησθε εἰς κακὸν ὑμῖν, καὶ κατοικιῶ ὑμᾶς ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ ἐν γῆ, ἣ ἔδωκα τοῖς πατράσιν ὑμῶν ἐξ αἰῶνος καὶ ἕως αἰῶνος. (Jer. 7:6-7 Rahlfs)

Perhaps as a consequence of knowledge of these verses, Job is made to insist that his righteousness before God has been demonstrated outstandingly in the care of the widow and the orphan.

And the orphan, who had no helper, I helped, and the widow's mouth blessed me. (Job 29:12-13 NETS)

διέσωσα γὰρ πτωχὸν ἐκ χειρὸς δυνάστου καὶ ὀρφανῶ, ὃ οὐκ ἦν βοηθός, ἐβοήθησα· εὐλογία ἀπολλυμένου ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἔλθοι, στόμα δὲ χήρας με εὐλόγησεν. (Job 29:12-13 Rahlfs)

... and the eye of the widow I did not let waste away. And if too I ate my morsel alone and did not share with the orphan—for from my youth I reared the orphan like a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow ... and if I raised a hand against an orphan, confident that I have much help at my disposal, then may my shoulder separate from its socket ... (Job 31:16-17, 21-22 NETS)

... ἀδύνατοι δὲ χρείαν, ἦν ποτ' εἶχον, οὐκ ἀπέτυχον, χήρας δὲ τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν οὐκ ἐξέτηξα. εἰ δὲ καὶ τὸν ψωμὸν μου ἔφαγον μόνος καὶ οὐχὶ ὀρφανῶ μετέδωκα ... εἰ ἐπῆρα ὀρφανῶ χεῖρα πεποιθῶς ὅτι πολλή μοι βοήθεια περίεστιν, ἀποσταίη ἄρα ὁ ὄμῳς μου ἀπὸ τῆς κλειδός, ὃ δὲ βραχίον μου ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγκῶνός μου συντριβεῖ. (Job 31:16-17, 21-22 Rahlfs).

Pre-exile commands also add violence to the lists of behaviours to avoid.

And do not oppress and do not act impiously against guest and orphan and widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place. (Jer. 22:3 NETS)

καὶ προσήλυτον καὶ ὀρφανὸν καὶ χήραν μὴ καταδυναστεύετε καὶ μὴ ἀσεβεῖτε καὶ αἷμα ἀθῶον μὴ ἐκχέητε ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ (Jer. 22:3 Rahlfs)

Post-exile the injunctions do not change.

And do not oppress the widow and the orphan and the guest and the needy, and let not each one of you bear a grudge in your hearts against his brother for an evil deed. (Zec. 7:10 NETS)

καὶ χήραν καὶ ὀρφανὸν καὶ προσήλυτον καὶ πένητα μὴ καταδυναστεύετε, καὶ κακίαν ἕκαστος τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ μὴ μνησικακεῖτω ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν. (Zec. 7:10 Rahlfs)

This emphasis continues into (what are known as by some churches) the non-canonical books of the Septuagint, some originally written in Greek.

Be a father to orphans, and be like a husband to their mother; you will then be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than does your mother. (Sir. 4:10 NRSV)

It is fundamental to the Hebrew and Greek scriptures that fatherless families are watched over by God, who will avenge any offence against them. This is the reason for the continual warnings that they must not be made subject to oppression.

6.3 NARRATIVES CONCERNING THE FATHERLESS AND THE WIDOWS IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

There are several prominent narratives concerning widows in the Hebrew Scriptures—knowledge of which it is anticipated may have influenced the early Christian writers and preachers in their pastoral policies. The stories of Tamar and Ruth illustrate two methods by which widows might regain their former social status. One of these, Levirate marriage, is referred to in all three Synoptic Gospels when the disciples question Jesus regarding such a woman's final allegiance in the resurrection.³⁷⁷

6.3.1 HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

The story of Hagar and her son by Abraham, Ishmael, can be read in Genesis chapters 16, 17, and 21. Although barren Sarah is portrayed as endeavouring to create an heir for Abraham by surrogacy using her Egyptian slave Hagar, and thereby thwarting the timing of the plan of God; throughout the story God is presented caring for and protecting both Hagar and her son Ishmael. The first time occurs when Hagar, pregnant, flees from Sarah's cruelty and God intervenes to persuade her to go back. God promises her regarding her son:

I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. (Gen. 17:20 NRSV)

When Ishmael is thirteen Sarah cannot bear to see Ishmael treated equally with her own son Isaac, and demands that Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael. God intervenes and tells Abraham to accede to her request, because

As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." (Gen. 21:13 NRSV)

They both nearly die of thirst in the desert, but again God intervenes and shows Hagar a well.

³⁷⁷ Matt. 22:24-32; Mark 12:19-27; Luke 20:28-38

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. (Gen. 21:19-20 NRSV)

As the boy grows up God is portrayed providing his continual protection for this instance of a fatherless child.

6.3.2 TAMAR AND HER SONS PEREZ AND ZERAH

When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. (Deu. 25:5-6 NRSV)

One way a widow might ensure her security in old age within her husband's tribe would be to produce an heir to perpetuate his family's line. It was a tragedy if the eldest son died childless. The dead son's brother was required impregnate the widow, to continue the name of his dead brother, and the widow was obliged to 'marry' her deceased husband's brother. This was known as Levirate marriage. It must be noted that to equate it with normal marriage is incorrect. The word often used is not **γαμέω** but **ἐπγαμβρεύω** which is defined in BDAG as

marry *as next of kin*, usually brother-in-law, of levirate marriage³⁷⁸

Tamar exemplifies Levirate marriage. The tale of her pregnancy is contained in entirety in Genesis chapter 38. In his function as a *paterfamilias* her father-in-law Judah gives his firstborn son Er in marriage to Tamar in verse 6. The following verse, however, relates the early death of her husband, which makes Tamar a childless widow as a young woman. Judah is now legally obliged to procure descendants for his deceased son by the widow Tamar. He therefore surrenders to Tamar his next oldest son Onan. Onan refuses to carry out the Levirate, and, through repeatedly practised *coitus interruptus* prevents the procreation of a descendant with Tamar for which he is punished with death by God. This is not punishment for a sexual offense, but for the disenfranchisement of Tamar and disregard for the

³⁷⁸ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

deceased brother Er, which means that his memory and his tribe would be eradicated for lack of successors.

After Onan's death, Tamar is sent back home to her father's house by her father-in-law, Judah, under a pretext.

Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"-- for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers. (Gen. 38:11 NRSV)

In the meantime Judah had become a widower. Even when Shelah is already old enough to fulfill his Levirate, Tamar sees that "she had not been given to him in marriage". She learns that Judah is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep. She decides to lay aside her widow's clothing, and sits hidden under a veil at the entrance to the village of Enaim, on the way to Timnah. Judah takes her for a prostitute and negotiates with her a price for intercourse, and, as he cannot pay the price of the kid of a goat, leaves his insignia and his staff with her as a pledge. She returns home, resuming her widow's garments. When Judah sends his friend to repay the debt she cannot be found. When her pregnancy is discovered after three months Tamar is sentenced to be burned. She sends the tokens to Judah who realizes that he is the one responsible for her condition.

Then Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah". And he did not lie with her again (Gen. 38:26 NRSV)

She gives birth subsequently to twins, Perez and Zerah. In this way the widow Tamar takes her destiny into her own hands, so as to provide for the descendants of her deceased husband through Judah and thus to continue the line and the name of the tribe. In the process she has restored her status as the mother of the heir, her place in her deceased husband's house, and the entitlement to support in old age.

6.3.3 RUTH, NAOMI AND OBED

An example of a form of marriage similar to the Levirate can be found in the book of Ruth. In this case, both partners in the relationship are of a distant connection. The case of Ruth resembles more the institution of the Go'el. The "Go'el ha-dam", (the Avenger of Blood), came to denote the kinsman whose duty it was to redeem the property and person of a relative who, having fallen into debt, was compelled to sell either his land or himself as a slave to satisfy his creditors (compare Lev. 25:25, 47-

49). The Go'el had the right to the refusal of such property before it was put up for public sale, and also the right to redeem it after it had been sold. (Jer. 32:8-12)

Following a famine, the Israelite Naomi, with her husband and her sons, moved from Bethlehem in Judah to Moab, where her two sons Mahlon and Chilion married two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, after the death of their father Elimelech. After ten years Naomi's two sons die. She thus becomes the embodiment of total abandonment in a patriarchal society in which all family members are defined by the men, and both legal representation and property ownership rights lie exclusively in the hands of men. She is too old to have any more children. She decides to return to Bethlehem at the time of the barley and wheat harvests because she has heard that there is food available. She tells the widowed Ruth and Orpah to return to their mothers' houses, where they might find another husband, but Ruth pleads to stay with Naomi.

Elimelech Naomi's husband had a kinsman whose name was Boaz, who was a prominent rich man. Ruth gleanes in the fields belonging to Boaz and impresses him with her hard work and her comportment. He protects her from sexual harassment and makes sure that she gathers enough food to feed both herself and Naomi.

On becoming aware of his interest, Naomi instructs Ruth on how to encourage Boaz further. He offers to claim his rights of redemption of the fields originally belonging to Elimelech, but informs Ruth that there is a nearer kinsman than him. He negotiates with the other kinsman at the gate. To prevent loss of inheritance for his own children, the other kinsman gives up his right to the fields. Ruth marries Boaz and has a son, Obed. Naomi becomes the child's nurse and sees the line of her own son Mahlon perpetuated in Obed through Ruth.

The return of Orpah to her mother's house in the hope of future remarriage is likely to have been the most usual solution for a young childless widow. Ruth's chances of remarriage must have been less because of her status as a foreigner. Since Naomi becomes the childminder or adoptive mother of Obed, not only is her childlessness removed, but also provided is a realistic hope of support in old age.

6.3.4 THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

In this story in 1 Kings chapter 17 God is shown intervening miraculously to help a widow and her child. The prophet Elijah the Tishbite is sent by God out of Israel to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, to live there. God tells Elijah that he has

commanded a foreign widow there to feed him. When he arrives he discovers that she has little left to eat. God promises her through Elijah that her jar of meal will not be emptied and her jug of oil will not fail until the rain falls again. Elijah and her household ate for many days. Then the widow's son dies. The future importance of the son to the widow is obvious to Elijah. Elijah heals the boy and restores him to his mother.

6.3.5 THE PROPHET'S WIDOW

God is shown intervening miraculously in a similar fashion to help a widow and her two fatherless children. In 2 Kings 4:1 a member of the company of prophets has died, leaving a wife and two children. She begs Elisha the prophet for help because she cannot afford to pay off her husband's debts and the creditor has arrived to take her two children away to become slaves. She has nothing left in the house except a jar of oil. Elisha asks her to borrow many empty containers from her neighbours and she is able to fill all of them up with oil from the endless original jar. She sells the containers for enough money to pay off the creditors and for immediate living expenses. (2 Kings 4:1-7 NRSV)

6.3.6 THE POST-EXILIC FOREIGN WIVES

A situation developed post-exile in Jerusalem which is recorded in the OT books of *Ezra* the scribe, chapters 9 and 10, and of *Nehemiah* the governor, chapter 13. During the celebrations following the completion of the restored wall and gates of Jerusalem, readings with commentary were given to the people of Israel from a book of Moses. In it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. However the people of Israel, the officials and leaders, the priests, and the Levites had not separated themselves from the peoples of the land, for they had taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Under pressure from Ezra the people swore a covenant to God that they would send away all these wives and their children. Only four courageous people opposed this procedure and so it was carried out, with the list of those involved given in Ezra 10. Nehemiah reports:

In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not

give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? (Neh. 13:23-26 NRSV)

One can only imagine the suffering caused to these abandoned wives and children! It is suspected that the book of Ruth, thought to be post-exilic, which involves a marriage with a Moabite woman, was written in response to the harshness of this judgment. How different this pronouncement is from Paul's approval in 1 Cor. 7:12-15 for the unconverted spouse to remain in the marriage if he or she wishes!

6.3.7 THE SLAVE CHILD OF ARAM

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and held in high favour by his master, because of his victories over Israel. However, he suffered from leprosy. On one of their raids the Arameans had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy". So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. (2 Kings 5:3-4 NRSV)

His king gave him a letter and gifts for the king of Israel, and Naaman travelled to Israel with his horses and chariots. Elisha sent a message to the king of Israel.

Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." (2 Kings 5:8 NRSV)

On Elisha's instructions Naaman washed in the Jordan seven times, and his skin was restored as new. (2 Kings 5:1-19 NRSV)

6.3.8 THE PROMINENCE OF CHILDREN

In many of these Old Testament narrative accounts fatherless children play parts. They are accorded great value by their widowed mothers, as an investment for the future. Even slave children have a part to play, as can be seen in the story of Ishmael, and the charming story of the healing of Naaman the Aramean who had leprosy. The importance of children in the Hebrew Scriptures presents a stark contrast to their invisibility in the New Testament.

6.4 WIDOWS IN OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES

6.4.1 DAUGHTERS OF PRIESTS

Lev. 22:13 confirms the return to the paternal house of the childless, divorced, or widowed daughters of priests. They were able to enjoy benefit of the priest's part of the sacrificial food.

But if a priest's daughter is widowed or divorced, without offspring, and returns to her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No lay person shall eat of it. (Lev. 22:13 NRSV)

6.4.2 REMARRIAGE WITH PRIESTS

In the case of the High Priest marriage with a widow is forbidden because she was regarded as a marriage of lesser rank.

A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, a prostitute, these he shall not marry. He shall marry a virgin of his own kin, that he may not profane his offspring among his kin. (Lev. 21:14-15 NRSV)

The ordinary priests may, according to Lev. 21:7, marry a widow, but

They shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled; neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God. (Lev. 21:7 NRSV)

In Eze. 44:22, on the other hand, the prohibition of marrying a widow or a divorcee is addressed to all priests. An exception is the “priestly widow”, a widow whose husband—a priest—had died.

²² They shall not marry a widow, or a divorced woman, but only a virgin of the stock of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest. (Eze. 44:22 NRSV)

Interestingly, the widow is mentioned in the same breath as the “whore,” the “disgraced” (Lev. 21:14), and the “divorcee” (Eze. 44:22, Lev. 21:14). It cannot be ruled out that these roles equate in the minds of a large part of ancient and modern society.

6.4.3 WIDOWS WITH ADULT SONS

A widowed woman with at least one son could also hope to settle in the house of one of her adult sons. 2 Sam. 14:4-11 (the Woman of Tekoa) and 1 Kings 17:20 (the Widow of Zarephath) illustrate how dreadful it was for a widow to lose her sons.

6.4.4 WAR WIDOWS

To prosperous women it is prophesied in Isa. 4:1-40 that after the death of their husbands through war and violence, they will see remarriage as the only way out.

Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, "We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes; just let us be called by your name; take away our disgrace." (Isa. 4:1 NRSV)

Willy Schottroff emphasizes that in their desperation these women will not even claim their right of an adequate supply of food and clothing to which they are entitled as married women,³⁷⁹ as stated in Exodus 21:10-11.³⁸⁰

And if he takes another to him, he shall not withhold her necessities and clothing and marital rights. (Exo. 21:10 NETS)

ἐὰν δὲ ἄλλην λάβῃ ἑαυτῷ τὰ δέοντα καὶ τὸν ἱματισμὸν καὶ τὴν ὀμιλίαν αὐτῆς οὐκ ἀποστερήσει (Exo. 21:10 Rahlfs)

In addition they will even accept the sharing of one husband to no longer be at the mercy of the vulnerability and little respected existence of a widow.

6.5 PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

There is little direct information in the Old Testament about property ownership for women. Only in the narrative texts of the books of Ruth, Judith, and 1 Samuel are indications that widows like Naomi, the prosperous Judith, and the rich widow Abigail (1 Sam. 25:40), can inherit or own property.

Her [Judith's] husband Manasseh had left her gold and silver, men and women slaves, livestock, and fields; and she maintained this estate. (Jdt. 8:7 NRSV)

Abigail got up hurriedly and rode away on a donkey; her five maids attended her. (1 Sam. 25:42 NRSV)

It appears that on the condition that they are without a brother-in-law and children, they can claim the paternal inheritance after the death of the older brother. It must be assumed that these women were exceptional cases which do not reflect the situation of the majority of widows of the Old Testament

³⁷⁹ Willy Schottroff, "Die Armut der Witwen," in *Schuld und Schulden: Biblische Traditionen in gegenwärtigen Konflikten*, ed. Marlene Crüsemann and Willy Schottroff (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1992), 54-89.

³⁸⁰ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and remarriage in the Bible: the social and literary context* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002). 99-110.

A widow's impoverishment could also result from the fact that she became a victim of a conflict over property. The warnings in the Old Testament to those who covet the land of a widow or cheat her in civil matters, attest indirectly to the fact that a non-remarried widow may own property and conduct financial transactions.

The LORD tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries. (Pro. 15:25 NRSV)

The wicked remove landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the orphan; they take the widow's ox for a pledge. (Job 24:2-3 NRSV)

But every vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall be binding upon her. (Num. 30:9 NRSV)

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. (Deu. 24:17 NRSV)

There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast, and take as a pledge the infant of the poor. (Job 24:9 NRSV)

6.6 SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support was provided to fatherless families and elderly widows within the community by various ways and means.

6.6.1 EXHORTATIONS

Supremely the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, aimed at adults, (*not* young children) commands honour and respect towards an elderly parent.

¹² Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Exo. 20:12 NRSV)

However, it can be deduced indirectly that this ethical requirement was not always observed, from

He who holds his father in no honour and thrusts away his mother will be dishonoured and be a reproach. (Pro. 19:26 My translation)

ὁ ἀτιμάζων πατέρα καὶ ἀπωθούμενος μητέρα αὐτοῦ καταισχυνήσεται καὶ ἐπονείδιστος ἔσται (Pro. 19:26 Rahlfs)

He who disgraces his father and drives away his mother will be put to shame and become rebuked. (Pro. 19:26 NETS)

When he thinks he is dying, Tobit, the blind father of Tobias, tries to guarantee the support of his widow through his son.

Honour your mother and do not abandon her all the days of her life. Do whatever pleases her, and do not grieve her in anything. Remember her, my son, because she faced many dangers for you while you were in her womb. And when she dies, bury her beside me in the same grave. (Tob. 4:3-4 NRSV)

6.6.2 PRACTICAL MEASURES

Much more concrete measures to protect widows are ultimately found in the social legislation of the book of Deuteronomy.

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. (Deu. 24:19-21 NRSV)

There were restrictions, however, to check outright theft.

If you go into your neighbour's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in a container. If you go into your neighbour's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbour's standing grain. (Deu. 23:24-25 NRSV)

In addition, the disadvantaged social groups, including the widows, are to take part in the sacrificial meals on feast days, such as the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, which was the harvest festival. (see Deu. 16:11,14).

Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. (Deu. 16:14 NRSV)

Every third year a tenth of the local produce was placed in a storehouse for the free use of needy groups.

Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake. (Deu. 14:28-29 NRSV)

The fact that no one could accept the means of grinding corn, or the clothes of a widow as a pledge, meant that widows should never lose the utensils necessary to prepare their minimal food requirements, or lack clothing to keep them warm.

No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for that would be taking a life in pledge. (Deu. 24:6 NRSV)

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. (Deu. 24:17 NRSV)

There is information in 2 Maccabees that suggests that widows and orphans might sometimes benefit from war booty, as happened after the defeat of Nicanor by Judas Maccabeus.

After the sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans, and distributed the rest among themselves and their children. (2 Mac. 8:28 NRSV)

Almsgiving, (and possibly begging or prostitution), may have been a factor in the lives of these women, but there is little evidence of the extent to which these would contribute to the living expenses of these families. Such activities would have been an unreliable and fluctuating source of income. The words 'beggars' or 'begging' are rarely found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Living on alms may have been regarded as a socially unacceptable way of life for the people of Israel, as Psalm 37 and Sirach 40 suggest.

I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are ever giving liberally and lending, and their children become a blessing. (Psa. 37:25-26 NRSV)

My child, do not lead the life of a beggar; it is better to die than to beg. (Sir. 40:28 NRSV)

The recommendation of almsgiving only becomes prominent in the later Greek books of the Septuagint, Tobit and Sirach.³⁸¹ These two books are the main source of references supporting the early Christian writers' development of the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving.

³⁸¹ Tob. 4:7, 16; 12:8-9; 14:2, 8, 10; Sir. 7:10; 12:3; 29:8; 35:4

6.6.3 THE REALITY

To what extent were all these practical measures implemented? It is impossible to know. The pronouncements of the prophets raise doubts. For example, the influential chapter 1 of Isaiah states that the leaders of the people of Jerusalem enrich themselves, are corrupt, collude with criminals and no longer advocate or claim the rights of the socially disadvantaged. It is particularly emphasized that they do not promote the rights of the orphans and do not give a hearing to widows' legal disputes.

How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her—but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them. (Isa. 1:21-23 NRSV)

The justice system is further criticised in Isaiah chapter 10 where widows and orphans become its plunder.

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! (Isa. 10:1-2 NRSV)

Ultimately God is portrayed as fearing that all his exhortations will fail and all that will be left will be the pronouncement of judgment.

Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. (Mal. 3:5 NRSV)

6.7 SUMMARY

The fatherless and the widows were highly visible in the Hebrew Scriptures. Almighty God himself through the prophets is shown making undertakings to take the initiative regarding the plight of the fatherless family, by himself acting as a substitute father and husband. The Jewish male worshipping community was left in no doubt as to their responsibility for this vulnerable group. They are threatened with dreadful consequences for oppression of the fatherless and the widow. However, since there was a lack of a fully functioning secular judiciary and legal executive, the

widow could not enforce the necessary protective measures and regulations of the Old Testament.

The witness of the Hebrew Scriptures leads to the following conclusion. A fatherless family's survival in ancient Israel depended heavily on the following factors: the age of the widow, her financial or economic situation, the number of her children or male descendants, and the behaviour and attitude of her family. While it was still possible for young widows without a child to find husbands for remarriage, this was not a realistic option for a widow with small children or for an elderly widow.

The importance of children to their mothers and in the Jewish community in the Hebrew Scriptures presents a stark contrast to their invisibility in the New Testament. They are accorded great value by their widowed mothers, as an investment for the future.

7. THE FATHERLESS FAMILY IN THE GOSPELS

There are only two uses of the word “orphan” found in the New Testament. Only one real case of a fatherless family is illustrated, and only one use of the phrase “orphans and widows” can be found anywhere in the New Testament. This discontinuity with the Old Testament is unexpected.³⁸²

Significantly, there is one crucial difference between the Old and the New Testaments. In a striking divergence from the Hebrew Scriptures, in the Greek Scriptures of the New Testament there exists no prophetic representation of clear divine directive regarding the fatherless family. We are presented with a stark contrast. Instead of divine involvement—there seems to be divine indifference; instead of a concerned community, either obliviousness or insensitivity. In the main, what we find in the New Testament are human responses to specific problematic situations as they arose.

The paucity of statements concerning the fatherless family is noted by Krause, who remarks that it would be difficult to explain the distinctive position of widows in the early Christian communities from the Gospels alone.³⁸³

7.1 THE GOSPELS AND JESUS

It would be important for the fragile identity of a fatherless child if Jesus too had been brought up in a fatherless household. However, there is no scholarly basis for making the claim that Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as having any personal experience of being raised in a one-parent family. It appears that Jesus’ bodily requirements for food, clothing and shelter, and his psychological needs for safety, security and significance were met adequately in a two-parent family. Richard Bauckham’s research on the traditions about Jesus’ family in *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* tends to reinforce the information given in the Gospels that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters and was raised in a two-parent family.³⁸⁴

³⁸² John 14:18, Luke 7:11-15, James 1:27.

³⁸³ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 4: 5.

³⁸⁴ Bauckham, *Jude and the relatives of Jesus*.

Jane Schaberg explains the social penalties which might attach themselves to a child known to be illegitimate in her book, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*.³⁸⁵ I find the strongest argument for the case that he was not regarded in the Gospels as the product of an illegitimate union is the fact of the social acceptance of Jesus in all circles.³⁸⁶

Matthew's Gospel shows that he taught and healed in the synagogue, (4.23, 9.35, 13.54), and disputed with the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the Temple, (21.43-24.1), thus demonstrating that he was of similar social status.

Despite the convincing arguments of Andrew T. Lincoln in *Born of a Virgin* that Joseph was Jesus' biological father, there are dissenting voices.³⁸⁷ The most important of these is Andries van Aarde, in his book published in 2001, *Fatherless in Galilee: Jesus as a Child of God*.³⁸⁸ I find van Aarde's reasoning unpersuasive in the light of Jesus' overall portrayal in the four gospels. The Gospels show Jesus being brought up within the stability of a normal two-parent family with the protection and support of a father named Joseph. He is shown there to be socially acceptable in all company, whether at table or in the Temple. If the Gospel accounts of his background are accurate, Jesus' background may have restricted his knowledge and experience of alternative family structures.

7.2 JESUS AND CHILDREN IN THE GOSPELS

Jesus himself is presented nowhere in the Gospels talking about the situation of children who are full or half orphans. His only recorded use of the word ὀρφανός occurs in the Gospel of John 14:18, used as a metaphor, when he announces to his disciples that he about to depart this life, but promises his continuing presence with them through the Holy Spirit.

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (John 14:18-20 NRSV)

Ὁὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς, ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς. (John 14:18 N-A28)

³⁸⁵ Schaberg, *Illegitimacy of Jesus*: 51-62.

³⁸⁶ Lincoln, *Born of a virgin?*: 81-82.

³⁸⁷ Lincoln, *Born of a virgin?*

³⁸⁸ Van Aarde, *Fatherless*.

As Marcus Sigismund points out, this context is dominated by theological concerns, however Marcus states rather optimistically:

the very fact that fatherlessness is employed so naturally as a metaphor clearly suggests that the early Christians were well aware of the phenomenon and the difficult situation of orphans.³⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Jesus is shown rarely with children. One of the claims van Aarde makes for the historical Jesus is that:³⁹⁰

He defended fatherless children, patriarchless women, and other outcasts.

I cannot find anywhere in the gospels where Jesus is shown defending fatherless children. However in Chapter 6, 'Defending the Fatherless', van Aarde devotes 20 pages in an attempt to justify this statement. He chooses to perceive the children referred to in Mark 10:13 as "street children", because it uses the word 'they' and not the word 'parents'.

People [they] were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16 NRSV)

This seems to me to be highly improbable. If they were street children this fact would have been stated. No one else would want to present children to Jesus apart from parents. The argument of the rest of Chapter 6 of van Aarde's book seems to me to be largely irrelevant, but contains interesting background information on abandoned children.

7.2.1 CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Instead, the reality of child exploitation, neglect and abuse is shown to disturb Jesus. There is a significant incident shown in all three Gospels where Jesus invites a child to stand among the disciples. The most contextually connected passage is Matthew 18:1-14, in which there are three references to 'little ones'.

³⁸⁹ Sigismund, "Without father," 84-85.

³⁹⁰ Van Aarde, *Fatherless*: 77, 135-154.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these *little ones* who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone [Gk: the millstone of an ass] were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matt. 18:1-6 NRSV)

“Take care that you do not despise one of these *little ones*; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.” (Matt. 18:10 NRSV)

“So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these *little ones* should be lost.” (Matt. 18:14 NRSV)

There is a briefer version in Mark, less contextualised:

Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:36-37 NRSV)

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these *little ones* who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone [Gk: the millstone of an ass] were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.” (Mark 9:42 NRSV)

In the case of Luke, there is no child present.

“It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these *little ones* to stumble. (Luke 17:2 NRSV)”

Who the ‘little ones’ are is not clear in these passages — they may be immature Christians. However, because it occurs in a context where a child is present, Chapter 18 in Matthew may be referring to children in these striking verses. When they hear these verses read, children might find the idea of the presence of a guardian angel comforting, until they realise that the angel is not actually with them, but is located ‘continually’ in the throne room of the Father. Then the realisation emerges that God the Father is not promising to protect children from harm; but rather punish the offenders—when it is too late. Therefore this unique verse cannot be used to argue that God is fulfilling one of the basic roles of a father, that of protection.

John W Martens in a book chapter entitled “‘Do not sexually abuse children’: the language of early Christian sexual abuse’, suggests that it is just possible that both Jesus and Paul referred to the sexual abuse of children—Jesus in the “stumbling block” of Mark 9:42 and Matthew 18:6, and Paul in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 in his list of sexual sins when he uses the term *μαλακός*.³⁹¹ This word means soft or effeminate,³⁹² and might refer to ‘rent boys’. As above, Jesus is not promising to protect children from sexual abuse, but rather to punish the offenders subsequently.

Provision fares little better than protection. Matthew 25:31-46 contains the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. This section of this chapter of eschatological judgment describes the second coming of Jesus in his glory for judgment of the nations (Mat. 25:31 NRSV). The basis of that judgment is whether or not the participants have fulfilled the needs of “the least of these who are members of my family” (Mat. 25:40 NRSV) for food and drink, clothing, shelter, medical care, and visits in imprisonment. Those labelled the “goats” have not done so and are punished. Once again it is clear that these essentials would not be supplied at the point of need and the unfortunate child or adult would have to do without.

The following verses are not specifically aimed at children, but at all disciples.

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:31-33 NRSV)

Here the heavenly Father is acknowledged as knowing the needs of disciples, and guaranteeing that they will have enough to eat, drink and wear, if they seek the kingdom of God. Church reliance on this statement of Jesus could lead to an abrogation of any responsibility for child welfare on the part of church leaders, and deprivation the result for children. If the needs of children are met generally by adults, what was the position of children, today and yesterday, who were followers, but whose parents were not? How were their needs met by the church?

³⁹¹ John W Martens, "Do not sexually abuse children: the language of early Christian sexual ethics," in *Children in late ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 227-230.

³⁹² Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

What is even more startling is that we do not have a single example anywhere in the four Gospels of Jesus interacting with a fatherless child or an orphan. There might be more than one reason for this. Child mortality would have been high in that society and investment in children often fruitless. Perhaps Jesus' stable family background desensitised him from awareness of such issues. However, in assessing Jesus' attitude towards the fatherless family, it is clear that we have available for analysis only those incidents and interactions with people which the four evangelists chose to record. As it is extremely likely that these four Gospels writers were male, it is inevitable that they recorded what interested them from a masculine point of view. Their primary interest was the person of Jesus Christ and his identity, and therefore Jesus is not shown giving any direct teaching on the pastoral care of the fatherless family. David Instone-Brewer notes the protection of the fatherless (in the context of divorce) as one of two issues which Jesus does not discuss—the other being monotheism.³⁹³ Unfortunately, silence can make invisible a despairing group of people.

7.2.2 THE KINGDOM AND THE CHILDREN

It is interesting to realise that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children as well as to the poor. Compare these two verses—

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it (Mark 10:14-15 NRSV)

And

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20 NRSV)

One might surmise that being *poor* and a *child* makes such a one doubly qualified to enter the kingdom of God!

ὅς ἂν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν. (Mark 10:15 N-A28)

What childlike qualities Jesus meant by “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God *as a little child* will never enter it” are obscure. Suggestions have included helplessness, humility, and simple trust.

³⁹³ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and remarriage*: 286.

However, there is a second way of interpreting the verse—

δέχομαι can mean the following, according to BDAG:³⁹⁴

1. to receive someth. offered or transmitted by another, *take, receive*
2. to take someth. in hand, *grasp*
3. to be receptive of someone, *receive, welcome*
4. to overcome obstacles in being receptive, *put up with, tolerate*
5. to indicate approval or conviction by accepting, *be receptive of, be open to, approve, accept*

Meaning number three would seem to be the most correct, because it is used of children in all three Gospels.

3. to be receptive of someone, receive, welcome Esp. of hospitality ... *welcome someone into one's house* **Lk 16:4**, ... Of welcoming children **Mt 18:5; Mk 9:37; Lk 9:48**.

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (Mat. 18:5 NRSV)

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me. (Mark 9:37 NRSV)

Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. (Luke 9:48 NRSV)

The focus shifts from the adults' necessity to become childlike in order to enter the kingdom, to the adults' necessity to welcome the kingdom of God like they would welcome a defenceless child, on the basis of the name of Christ.

One other verse may be of significance, if the "little ones" referred to are children.

Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward. (Mat. 10:42 NRSV)

For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. (Mark 9:41 NRSV)

7.2.3 SUMMARY

In the Greek Scriptures of the New Testament there exists no clear divine directive regarding the fatherless family. Jesus in the Gospels voices no particular concern for fatherless children, although children in general were welcomed and encouraged to

³⁹⁴ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

approach him on a least one occasion, despite the security arrangements of the disciple bodyguards. He teaches that children, especially poor ones, gain easy entry into the kingdom of God. He threatens dire punishment for those who offend against child believers. Adults who welcome children, especially child believers, will enter the kingdom of God in the same way that they welcome children.

7.3 JESUS AND WIDOWS IN THE GOSPELS

In contrast to the presentation of his minimal dealings with children, Jesus is portrayed both meeting with widows and talking about their struggles in the Gospels. However, with the possible exception of the Widow of Nain, none are accompanied by minor fatherless children.

7.3.1 WIDOWS IN LUKE-ACTS

Robert M. Price has made a book length study of widows in Luke-Acts and drawn attention to the fact that its author has a marked interest in women, in particular stories and sayings concerned with widows.³⁹⁵ Others have pointed out the existence of male-female pairings, such as Simeon and Anna, Aeneas and Dorcas, and Peter at the Tomb and the Women at the Tomb. Some authors have suggested that such parallel material in Luke-Acts is deliberately aimed at establishing a complementary gender pattern, and others that such pairings promote distance and differentiation.³⁹⁶ Widows who read stories which include widows, at least initially, will be glad to be shown as visible to Jesus and to the Church. Whether these portrayals are friendly or hostile to widows remains to be seen.

7.3.2 THE EXPLOITATION OF WIDOWS

Aside from his interactions with several individual widows, Jesus is shown to be aware of the vulnerability of widows in general to exploitation and neglect. In his outburst against the scribes recorded in Matthew's Gospel he includes:

They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." (Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47 NRSV)

³⁹⁵ Robert M. Price, *The widow traditions in Luke-Acts: a feminist-critical scrutiny*, Dissertation series (Society of Biblical Literature) (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997). xiii.

³⁹⁶ Turid Karlsen Seim, *The double message: patterns of gender in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). 11-24.

[This verse appears in Matthew 23:14 in later manuscripts but is omitted from the Nestlé-Aland 28th edition 2012].

J.D.M. Derrett in his article 'Eating up the Houses of Widows: Jesus' Comment on Lawyers?' produces some case evidence which tends to support the idea that some scribes cheated widows of their rightful inheritance, while acting as executors of a husband's will.³⁹⁷ More recently, papyri from the Cave of Letters illustrate the legal affairs of a twice-widowed Jewish woman called Babatha up to the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-135 CE. The Cave of Letters is located in the desert near the border of Israel and Judea, in a ravine called the Nahal Hever. When Babatha's second husband dies, her co-wife, her husband's brother and his sons, and various guardians clash over his estate.³⁹⁸

7.3.3 ASSERTIVENESS ADVOCATED

7.3.3.1 THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE

The aim of the Parable of the Unjust Judge escapes most commentators. It is noticeable, however, that none of them take it at face value, which is an expression of Jesus' admiration for a self-reliant woman. From the evangelist himself onwards, they make attempts at spiritualising the meaning, or forcing the widow to represent something other than herself.

Furthermore, the parable, also known disparagingly as the Parable of the Importunate Widow, which appears only in Luke 18:1-8, demonstrates Jesus' awareness that widows were dependent on the honesty of local officials. A parable is a figure of speech, an extended metaphor, a story using common actions or circumstances designed to illustrate a spiritual truth, a principle or a moral lesson. The word parable comes from the Greek word *παραβολή*, which means according to BDAG—

a narrative or saying of varying length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile.³⁹⁹

A parable can usually be identified by the use of the word "like." This was the method of teaching Jesus used most often. Importunate means persistent, demanding,

³⁹⁷ J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Eating up the houses of widows: Jesus' comment on lawyers?," *Novum testamentum* 14, no. 1 (1972): 1-9.

³⁹⁸ Naphtali Lewis, Yigael Yadin, and Jonas C. Greenfield, *The documents from the Bar Kokhba period in the cave of letters: greek papyri* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989).

³⁹⁹ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

continuous, harassing, unremitting or unrelenting. It is exceptional in that an explanation or meaning of this parable is given by the evangelist first (to prevent alternative unwelcome interpretations, no doubt), followed by the story.

Strenuous denial is found in the literature of this parable that the Unjust Judge could be a portrayal of God. I believe that it is a possibility, if unlikely, that Jesus could fittingly portray God as seemingly unresponsive to injustice, matching the everyday experience of many human beings. Much injustice continues unabated in this world despite continuous prayer. Commentators often note that the introduction (v.1) and the conclusion of that parable (v.7-8) do not appear to fit with the subject matter of its body, in which a persistent widow eventually persuades a reluctant and unsympathetic judge to give her justice against her opponent.⁴⁰⁰ These framing annotations must be set aside, and attention focussed on the core parable to discover Jesus' intended meaning.

¹ Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³ In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸ I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:1-8 NRSV)

The introduction in verse one proposes that the moral of the tale is that persistent prayer is efficacious. This contradicts:

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matt. 6:7-8 NRSV)

Verses seven and eight of Luke 18:1-8, as given, are not concerned at all with prayer, but instead with vindication. There is an inherent contradiction within them. If God is listening to his "chosen ones who cry to him day and night", i.e. incessantly, how

⁴⁰⁰ Wendy J. Cotter, "The parable of the feisty widow and the threatened judge (Luke 18.1-8)," *New Testament Studies* 51, no. 3 (2005): 328-343.

then is God fulfilling his undertaking to “quickly grant justice to them” (Luke 18:7-8 NRSV)? This inconsistency has been noted by Joseph Fitzmyer in his commentary on Luke, and he suggests that the parable might belong to the preceding eschatological instruction about the day(s) of the Son of Man, when there will be no more waiting for God’s implementation of justice. He also suggests that verses 1, and 7-8 may have nothing whatsoever to do with the parable, and may be a Lukan redaction. I agree that this is very likely the case.⁴⁰¹ This suggestion is highly credible for the convincing reason that if the parable was understood as looking forward to the end times, the consequence would be utter despair for any such widow. Its meaning for her would be that she cannot expect justice in this world but must await the final resolution of all things. I find untenable the proposition that Jesus would expect a powerless widow to find this explanation of the parable acceptable, yet commentators such as John Hicks⁴⁰² and Kenneth Bailey,⁴⁰³ who maintain that the parable is about persistent prayer, have insufficient empathy to perceive the implausibility of the cruelty of their conclusions. Robert Price rightly points out that the widow has become an abstraction, “neutered and diffused” into a collective type for the whole Christian church, while in reality she stands exclusively for the community of widows.⁴⁰⁴

As an alternative to these suggestions I propose stripping these three interpretive verses from the parable and looking at it instead as a story concerning the genuine predicament of someone who could be a real widow. I submit that Jesus is teaching widows how to be assertive in a patriarchal society. Robert Price agrees that this parable is a message of self-reliance for widows. Jesus is instructing widows on how to demand to have their requirements taken on board by using the “slow, incremental terrorism of nuisance”.⁴⁰⁵ The reluctant judge is not God, but the agents of civil or political society, (or possibly even the church). Passivity and prayer alone is bound to be ineffective in obtaining immediate justice—but action may bring results. Jesus is looking at the situation from the point of view of the powerless and teaching them

⁴⁰¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: introduction, translation, and notes (X-XXIV)*. Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985). 1175-1176.

⁴⁰² John Mark Hicks, "The parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8)," *Restoration Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1991): 209-223.

⁴⁰³ Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes*: 263.

⁴⁰⁴ Price, *Widow traditions*: 200-201.

⁴⁰⁵ Price, *Widow traditions*: 195, 198-199.

how to survive and surmount poverty and oppression. Bailey emphasizes that the widow has no other means of recourse open to her except that of making a nuisance of herself. The judge has no fear of God and feels “no shame before people”.⁴⁰⁶ Bailey explains that one of the sharpest criticisms possible of an adult in the Middle Eastern village today is to say, “He does not feel shame”.⁴⁰⁷ Pride and politeness must therefore be laid aside. Wendy Cotter maintains that the reason the judge gives for giving in to the widow must be taken literally, when he worries:

ἵνα μὴ εἰς τέλος ἐρχομένη ὑπωπιάζῃ με. (Luke 18:5 N-A)

Lest in the end, coming, she might blacken my eye.

[My translation]

He is motivated by fear of public ridicule and shaming if he appeared in public with a black eye.⁴⁰⁸ Additionally Jesus teaches widows by this parable that a legal injustice perpetrated against them should not be kept ‘confidential’; instead they should threaten exposure to the scrutiny of the community.

Barbara Reid points out that Luke's redaction acts to ‘tame’ this story of an exceptional woman. By adding v. 1, he alters her role to be docile and conventional—that of a widow who prays all day long—in place of a powerful depiction of a courageous widow in pursuit of justice.⁴⁰⁹

7.3.3.2 THE PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT FRIEND

I further offer the interpretation that the Parable of the Persistent Friend in Luke 11 extends beyond verses 5-8 as far as verse 10 and in it Jesus teaches precisely the same lesson, i.e. speak up, take assertive action, and get your needs met in the community.

⁵ And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he will

⁴⁰⁶ Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes*: 263.

⁴⁰⁷ Bailey, *Poet and peasant*: 132.

⁴⁰⁸ Cotter, "Parable of the feisty widow," 342.

⁴⁰⁹ Barbara E. Reid, "Beyond petty pursuits and wearisome widows: three Lukan parables," *Interpretation* 56, no. 3 (2002): 293.

not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs". (Luke 11:5-8 NRSV)

Fitzmyer notes that Luke's Greek word for 'persistence' actually means 'shamelessness'.⁴¹⁰ A widow or a fatherless child has no social position to lose. The BDAG defines it thus:⁴¹¹

ἀναίδεα, ας, ἡ lack of sensitivity to what is proper, carelessness about the good opinion of others, *shamelessness, impertinence, impudence, ignoring of convention.*

7.3.3.3 THE PARABLE OF THE DISHONEST STEWARD

Elsewhere Jesus is depicted as showing admiration for those who take responsibility for their own security and welfare, even if that involves using ethically dubious methods, for example in the Parable of the Dishonest Steward in Luke 16:1-15. In this parable a steward about to be dismissed for profligacy reduces the sum owing on the invoices of his master's debtors, so that when he becomes unemployed, he will have friends who will support him. Jesus comments:

And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. (Luke 16:8 NRSV)

Jesus appears here to be condemning religious people concerning their passive behaviour in the event of unexpected unfortunate circumstances. They show a lack of initiative when compared to 'worldly' people in making material provision for themselves.

7.3.3.4 THE SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN

In other places in the gospel narratives Jesus is portrayed showing appreciation and admiration for forceful women who speak up vigorously, who take initiatives or argue with him without inhibition to obtain fulfilment of their valid requests. The most striking example of a woman arguing with Jesus is the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter was demon-possessed. While shouting out loud, she followed after

⁴¹⁰ Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke 10-24*: 910.

⁴¹¹ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

Jesus and the disciples. Even when Jesus was silent and then seemingly insulting—she persevered.

But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly. (Mat. 15:23-28 NRSV)

Faith in this episode is equated with persistence. To persist in asking, seeking, knocking at the door of those who can meet a need, despite initial rejection, demonstrates faith that a solution will be found.

7.3.3.5 DIVINE PASSIVES

Furthermore, the so-called “divine passives” of verses 9 and 10 of Luke 11 are surely misunderstood when they are interpreted to mean that God will give you what you want or need on request.

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10 NRSV)

On the contrary, Jesus is instructing the disadvantaged person to ask assertively, to search, and to be proactive in obtaining help from *those whose are able to give it*. These instructions are *not* concerned with prayer, as neither God nor prayer is mentioned, but rather advocate an active and voluble communication of requirements to the oblivious others of the community.

7.3.4 ASSERTIVENESS SILENCED

7.3.4.1. PROPHETESSES

We meet with other attempts by Luke to control women’s speech or to portray women or widows as ideally passive and silent. In Luke 2:36, the Temple-based elderly widow Anna is described as a prophetess. When Jesus is brought to be dedicated in the Temple at eight days old, the prophetic words of the fortuitous

Temple visitor Simeon (who is not described as a prophet) are noted in extensive detail, but not a word of Anna's prophecy over Jesus is recorded.

In Acts 21:8-14, Paul's company, while on the way to Jerusalem, stay for several days at the home of Philip the evangelist who has four daughters who were actively prophesying. However, similar to Anna's case, not one iota of what they said is documented—whereas the warning words of Agabus, who comes visiting from Judaea, are recorded, and in Paul's response his prophecy is shown to be taken seriously.

The treatment of these paired male and female prophets presents a subtle implication that the words of male prophets are of significance, whereas those of female prophets are considered to be inconsequential.⁴¹²

7.3.4.2 HOUSEHOLD MANAGERS

There is a simple message to be taken from the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 which Schüssler Fiorenza spots and Price highlights.⁴¹³ Fiorenza considers that Martha functions as a warning for women not to be over-anxious about service or ministry, i.e. *περὶ πολλὴν διακονίαν* (v.40), but to prefer listening in silence. Luke attempts to restrict women to a passive role and also tries to subordinate the ministry of the table to the ministry of the word.⁴¹⁴

7.3.5 JESUS' INTERACTION WITH INDIVIDUAL WIDOWS.

In the Gospels Jesus is described observing and interacting with several widows, among them, his mother. These descriptions occur most frequently in the Gospel of Luke.

7.3.5.1 MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus gave his mother into the care of the 'Beloved Disciple' as he was dying on the cross.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he

⁴¹² Seim, *Double message*: 164-184.

⁴¹³ Price, *Widow traditions*: 186-187.

⁴¹⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "A feminist critical interpretation for liberation: Martha and Mary: Lk 10:38-42," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 3, no. 2 (1986): 31.

said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. (Joh 19:26-27 NRSV)

James D. Tabor recently argued plausibly on his 'blog' that the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' was his younger brother James, who went on to lead the Jerusalem church after Jesus' death. His reminder to James would have been entirely appropriate and demonstrates Jesus' consciousness of the duty of adult children towards their widowed mothers.⁴¹⁵

7.3.5.2 ANNA THE PROPHETESS

When Jesus' parents brought Jesus as a baby to present him in the Temple, as required by the Law, they met there a widow of eighty-four years of age, who spoke about Jesus' destiny. Her husband had died after only seven years of marriage. Luke tells that:

She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. (Luke 2:37 NRSV)

The narrative concerning Anna the prophetess might be regarded on the surface as an example of an elderly widow conforming to the societal norms of prayer and passivity. But observe how she has chosen to make herself highly visible. She has not hidden herself in her dwelling out of sight and out of mind. Her penury is displayed and made obvious to all. The result would be that she will benefit from the almsgiving to the poor of visitors to the Temple.

7.3.5.3 THE WIDOW OF NAIN

The most striking illustration recorded in the Gospels of Jesus' demonstrating compassion for widows is that of the raising from the dead of the son of the widow of Nain. It is especially memorable for its uniqueness. There is no other example of the restoration of a widow's support system in the Gospels on the death of the breadwinner.

Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to

⁴¹⁵ James Tabor, "Who was the Mysterious "Disciple Whom Jesus Loved?," <http://jamestabor.com/2012/08/20/who-was-the-mysterious-disciple-whom-jesus-loved/>.

her, “Do not weep.” Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!” The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother (Luke 7:11-15 NRSV)

It is clear that the essential focus of this story is the plight of the widow, deprived of her support, not that of the healing of the young man. Jesus saw her tears and realized her situation. The phrase “and Jesus gave him back to his mother” paints a touching picture of Jesus leading the young man by the hand into his mother’s arms. This episode is written by Luke as a straightforward demonstration by Jesus of God’s compassion towards widows and provides an example to follow.

7.3.5.4 THE WIDOW ‘S OFFERING

Much more controversial is making an interpretation of the story of the widow’s offering. How would a widow with fatherless children regard this episode? It is recorded in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4. The Lukan version is derived from the Markan version, and is virtually identical, but omits some details.

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:41-44 NRSV)

These *two small copper coins* were lepta (sing. “lepton”), the smallest and least valuable coins in circulation in Palestine, worth one-half of a quadrans, or one four-hundredth of a shekel, or about six minutes of an average daily wage. It was practically worthless.⁴¹⁶

Who are the audience that the narrator has in mind? It is certain that the account is aimed at those who possess accumulated wealth. He cannot be criticising the wealthy



The Widow's Mite by Harold Copping

for meanness at this juncture, because they are shown generously donating “large sums”. Rather, he is highlighting the contrast between those who give out of deficit and those who give out of surplus. Jesus is portrayed drawing the attention of the insensitive wealthy to the harsh reality of poverty for widows. It must not be assumed that Jesus is praising the poor widow’s action—rather he is lamenting over the social pressures which force her to conform in a humiliating display of giving, when she is the one who ought to be given to.

⁴¹⁶ Mary Healy and Peter S. Williamson, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008). 253.

Fitzmyer astutely notes the proximity of the narrative to Luke 20:27 where the scribes who “devour widows’ houses” are reproved. He recalls Jesus’ words about ‘Corban’ in Mark 7:10-13, where Jesus establishes that human needs take priority over religious obligations, when they clash.⁴¹⁷

One final point on this incident—neither of the two accounts mentions that the widow was elderly. It is significant that the assumption is always made that she was of advanced years. If she had young children to support, Jesus’ disapproval is all the more conceivable. This possibility occurred to the artist Harold Copping in his Bible illustration of the scene.

7.3.6 INDEPENDENT WOMEN

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and **provided for him** when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15:40-41 N-A 28)

καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ (Mar 15:41 BGT)

The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, **who provided for them out of their resources**. (Luke 8:1-3 NRSV)

διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς. (Luke 8:3 N-A 28)

When they were ‘on the road’ in Galilee, Jesus and his disciples were supported by wealthy women who followed them. Cyprian gives a hint in *On Works and Alms*, at section 6, when he was asked for help by the widows after the death of the clothes-maker Tabitha, (Acts 9:36-43) that these accompanying wealthy women may have been widows, who provided Jesus’ clothing as part of their support.⁴¹⁸

Peter felt that what was asked in such a way might be obtained, and that Christ’s aid would not be wanting to the petitioners, since He Himself was clothed in the clothing of the widows.

⁴¹⁷ Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke 10-24*: 1321.

⁴¹⁸ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iv.v.viii.html>

His tunic, woven knitted in the round, might have been homemade. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier.

They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." (John 19:23-24 NRSV)

Perhaps because of trepidation that they might have been women of ill-repute, these independent women are not often discussed by most male authors. Do they really fear, I wonder, that the campaigns of Jesus were financed from immoral earnings? Mary Magdalene, in particular, without any justification whatsoever, has been regarded as a prostitute in the past. Karen King⁴¹⁹ regards this belief as "a piece of theological fiction", still promulgated by the media in films such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, based on a historical novel written by Nikos Kazantzakis. Some or all of them may have been wealthy widows, others may have been professionally active women, similar to Lydia (Acts 16:14), or Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3). Roman law at this period allowed adult women to inherit and to own and manage their own property, as has been discussed. Perhaps the real reason behind male authors' neglect of the reality of the bankrolling of Jesus' campaigns by women is chagrin that they cannot take the credit for it.

7.4 JESUS AS THE BRIDEGROOM, THE CHURCH AS THE BRIDE

In a few places in the Gospels Jesus is shown to be referring to himself as the 'Bridegroom'. In most of these references his intention is to give a reason to John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees for his disciples' feasting rather than fasting, by providing a metaphor. In the extended 'Wise and the Foolish Bridesmaids' parable of Matthew 25 he is warning his disciples to be always ready for his return as the 'Bridegroom' of the Church.⁴²⁰ Neither of these two uses of the metaphor in these circumstances would give warrant to a widow to regard Jesus as her substitute 'husband'.

Similarly the few references to the church as a 'bride' do not seem to imply that God or Jesus will undertake any marital role towards individuals within her, or that an

⁴¹⁹ Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the first woman apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003). 3.

⁴²⁰ Matt. 9:15, Matt. 25:1, 5-6, 10, Mk. 2:19-20, Lk. 5:34-35, Jn. 3:29

individual woman could regard herself as a 'bride of Christ'. Both Revelation 21 and 22 refer to the bride as the 'the holy city of Jerusalem', a representation of the new community of believers. In John 3:29, John the Baptist appears to be referring to Israel, which could be extended to embrace the church. Revelation 19:7 is the only clear reference to the church, once again collectively, in that passage called the 'saints'.⁴²¹ Carolyn Osiek describes its use in Ephesians 5:22-33 in the household codes as "a beautiful but dangerous text" because it taps into human sexuality and the confusion between "the desire for connection and the desire to control".⁴²²

Therefore the Roman Catholic Church in the latest version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 923, is mistakenly individualising when it promulgates a mystical betrothal of young women to Christ.

Virgins who, committed to the holy plan of following Christ more closely, are consecrated to God by the diocesan bishop according to approved liturgical rite, are betrothed mystically to Christ, the Son of God, and are dedicated to the service of the Church. By this solemn rite (Consecratio Virginum), the virgin is constituted ... a sacred person, a transcendent sign of the Church's love for Christ, and an eschatological image of this heavenly Bride of Christ and of the life to come.

In the latest edition there were changes to the previous two paragraphs as follows:

The title which appears between paragraph 921 and paragraph 922 was changed to read: **Consecrated virgins and widows**. In 922 the paragraph was changed to read:

From apostolic times Christian virgins and widows, called by the Lord to cling only to him with greater freedom of heart, body and spirit, have decided with the Church's approval to live in the respective states of virginity or perpetual chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven".⁴²³

⁴²¹ Jn. 3:29, Rev. 19:7, Rev. 21:2, 9, Rev. 22:17.

⁴²² Carolyn Osiek, "The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33): a problematic wedding," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, no. 1 (2002): 29-39.

⁴²³ Roman Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: with modifications from the editio typica* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

7.5 THE GOSPELS AND POVERTY AND WEALTH

7.5.1 JESUS AND THE POOR

In the synagogue of Nazareth at the commencement of his ministry, using the words of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus announced his purpose. This proclamation was recorded in the Gospel of Luke and it began with:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. (Luke 4:18 NRSV)

πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ οὗ ἔνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς
(Isa. 61:1 Rahlfs)

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, he has sent me to bring good news to the poor. (Isa. 61:1 NETS)

Exemplified in the Gospels we find instances of beggars, poor widows, dead sons, paralysed men, sick women and children, blind and deaf men, epileptics, lepers, mentally ill people, as well as rich young rulers. Jesus proceeds to make radical statements concerning poverty, the poor, and the correct stewardship of money.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20 NRSV)

Astonishingly, poor people were regarded as being of equal ‘worth’ to the wealthy. Jesus transformed the Roman attitude to the poor as being of little ‘worth’ into a vision of their future attainment of the kingdom of heaven.

Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?
(Jam. 2:5 NRSV)

The attitude to poor people in the early church was markedly different from that of the surrounding Roman society. The reason for the change lies in the reported teachings of Jesus and his “preferential option for the poor”.⁴²⁴

7.5.2 JESUS ON MONEY

Jesus is presented as teaching that as a first priority material possessions are to be used to meet essential family needs.

For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.” But you say that if

⁴²⁴ The phrase “preferential option for the poor” was first used in 1968 by the superior general of the Jesuits, Father Pedro Arrupe, in a letter to his order.

anyone tells father or mother, “Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban” (that is, an offering to God)—then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. (Mark 7:10-13 NRSV)

He is also shown advocating responsible use of money. Money should not be hoarded but put to good use. That use could include giving some of it away.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Mat. 6:19-20 NRSV)

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. (Luke 16:9 NRSV) If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? (Luke 16:11-12 NRSV)

Again in the *Parable of the Talents* Jesus is illustrated recommending that money should be put to productive use.

The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ... Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, “Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave”. (Mat. 25:16, 20-21 NRSV)

7.5.3 JESUS AND THE RICH

Jesus interactions with rich people who gained riches by dishonest means are not shown as hostile, such as with Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector, in Luke 9:2-10.

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” (Luke 2 19:8 NRSV)

In the case of the upright rich young ruler, it is recorded that Jesus “loved” him.

A man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ... Jesus said, “You know the commandments” ... He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said ... “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor ... (Mark 10:17-22 NRSV)

Whether the rich young ruler was required to sell *all* that he owned is a question which much exercised Clement of Alexandria in *Quis dives salvetur?* (Who is the rich man to be saved?). He asked whether this meant that all future rich Christians must entirely surrender their wealth in order to inherit eternal life. He concluded that the rich could be saved, while remaining rich. It was attachment to riches that caused the difficulty. The same person could become both poor and wealthy by inner detachment from possessions, and outward simplicity of life. Secondly, Clement maintained that almsgiving with love done to the Christian poor is love for Jesus himself.⁴²⁵ Helen Rhee sums up his thought as connecting the true, pious rich with the genuine spiritual poor.⁴²⁶

7.6 SUMMARY

In the Gospels Jesus neither meets nor talks about children who are full or half orphans. He does, however, highly value children in general, and encourages children to approach him on one occasion. In Mark 10:14-15 the focus can be shifted from the adults' necessity to become childlike in order to enter the kingdom, to the adults' necessity to welcome the kingdom of God like they would welcome a defenceless child, on the basis of the name of Christ. Anyone who offends against a child is threatened with dire punishment.

Jesus is shown to be aware of the vulnerability of widows to exploitation and shows compassion concerning their often precarious economic situation. When freed from its suffocating surrounding commentary by Luke, the *Parable of the Unjust Judge* is inspiring, liberating, and empowering for the widow. Jesus shows his approval of her employing assertive behaviour to obtain justice in an uncaring world. The stranglehold of the parable's association with prayer and passivity must be removed. Jesus reinforces this lesson in the *Parable of the Persistent Friend*. Furthermore, he commends initiative in the *Parable of the Dishonest Steward*, and rewards persistence in his dealings with the Syro-Phoenician woman.

The Gospel of Luke sends mixed messages to its readers and hearers on the activities of women. It reports Jesus' seeming approval of verbal assertion and tenacity in seeking help, and yet simultaneously gives the impression that such behaviour may

⁴²⁵ Countryman, *Rich Christian in the church*: 47-63.

⁴²⁶ Rhee, *Loving the poor*: 80.

be considered 'shameless'. It is disappointing that Luke is able to report that women perform as prophetesses in Luke-Acts, yet fails to record their actual words. Reading against the grain, none of the parables or incidents depicting widows would seem to praise or advocate passivity in the face of the storms of life, with the possible exception of the story of Martha and Mary.

The metaphors used to describe God or Jesus as Father, Husband, and Bridegroom do not mean that in any way either of these two persons of the Godhead will undertake any of the basic functions of these roles, even though fatherless children and widows would not be unreasonable in making such an interpretation from the scriptural use of such metaphors. The use of the metaphor 'Bride' for the Church as a whole does not legitimize consecrated virginity or the celibacy of widows being viewed as a mystical betrothal to Christ.

The young widow must not be encouraged by wrong scriptural interpretation pointlessly to seek emotional satisfaction in a virtual relationship with God or Jesus. Instead, she should be advised to seek, pursue and expect to receive practical support from the body of the Church.

In the eyes of Jesus poor people were regarded as being of equal 'worth' to the wealthy. They will inherit the kingdom of God.

8. THE FATHERLESS FAMILY IN THE EARLIEST CHURCH

It has been established that the Old Testament portrays both the God and the People of Israel concerned with the welfare of the fatherless family. Named orphans and widows are found within narratives of fatherless families. However, only once in the New Testament (in the Gospel of Luke) do we encounter an actual fatherless family, when the compassion of Jesus for the predicament of a widow is demonstrated in the raising of her son from death. Most of the New Testament letter writers appear unaware of their difficulties.

The history of the earliest days of the Christian church begins in documents included in the canonical New Testament. By examination of these later writings we can attempt to discover how conscious the developing leadership was of the condition of the fatherless and the widows in their midst. Most prominent among them was Paul of Tarsus, who conducted a peripatetic ministry to the Jewish Diaspora and to the Gentiles. There are also unknown additional leaders who wrote letters in the name of Paul, claiming his authority, during the second half of the first century and into the second.

8.1 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The earliest *quasi*-historical account of the earliest church which we now possess is that written as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke, by the same author. The *Acts of the Apostles* begins with the ascension of Jesus to God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, and ends with Paul, under guard, preaching freely in Rome. In this treatise widows do not feature extensively and the fatherless—not at all.

Not long after the death of Jesus, an incident involving Christian widows is recorded in Acts 6:1-7. Representatives of the resident Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem complained to the resident Hebrew-speaking Jews that their indigent widows were being omitted from daily charitable support.

8.1.1 SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE WIDOWS AND THE FATHERLESS

The focus in this episode is to gauge how widows and the fatherless were treated by the leadership in these early days. For nearly all of Christian history, the story of the incident was taken at face value as having happened just as was recorded by Luke.

The problem for the widowed reader lies in the fact that many modern commentators look upon Hellenist widow neglect as an explanation too trivial to explain the disunity which they conjecture. Why, if there really was conflict between two factions of Christianity, did Luke not choose a theological example with which to illustrate it? It is the affront of regarding widows' poverty as 'trivial', and the search for a better explanation by many commentators which may distress any widow who might read explanations of the passage. Scott Spencer reminds us in his literary-cultural reading of Acts that, against the background of aforementioned biblical and Lukan traditions, overlooking widows is a very grave fault.⁴²⁷ Either Luke comes off badly from the passage, by his creation of an 'artificial conflict' camouflaging a real conflict,⁴²⁸ or the apostles do, by their administrative neglect. The subject of the passage is the pastoral care of widows. What can be learned about that issue from it should not appear to be being ignored or side-lined.

8.1.2 THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT?

The passage's significance for some scholars of early Christianity is based in what they consider to be the disclosure of a theological conflict, (rather than merely an administrative oversight), between two kinds of Jewish Christian believers in ancient Jerusalem—Hebrew speaking Jerusalem residents, and Greek speaking Diaspora Jewish incomers. The passage comprises, in their opinion, a rather unconvincing explanation for the rise to prominence of Stephen, the first Christian to be martyred, and the subsequent persecutions which resulted in the wider dispersion of the Gospel from its launch in Jerusalem. This approach argues that Luke minimised the tradition of Hebrew-Hellenist division, by using the example of an inconsequential pastoral issue, in order to uphold a faultless representation of the theological unity of the primitive church. Although Luke acknowledged the rupture, he is argued to have diminished its extent and understated its consequences. The idea was first developed by Ferdinand Christian Baur in 1831⁴²⁹ and adopted by the majority of interpreters, the most influential one today being Martin Hengel, in his essay *Between Jesus and*

⁴²⁷ F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying through Acts: a literary-cultural reading* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004). 75.

⁴²⁸ Gerd Lüdemann, *The Acts of the Apostles: what really happened in the earliest days of the church* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2005). 93.

⁴²⁹ Ferdinand Christian Baur, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde / The Christ Party in the Corinthian Church," *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie*, no. 4 (1831).

Paul.⁴³⁰ As F Scott Spencer reports, such an explanation is “plausible historically, but negligible ideologically”,⁴³¹ and tells more about church leadership values than about the pastoral care of poor widows. The arguments for and against the idea of theological division in the Jewish Christian church were extensively examined by Craig C. Hill in his well-argued book *Hellenists and Hebrews* published in 1992. He concluded that the existence of a schism was a dubious assumption.⁴³² He applies six tests to Acts 6:1-7 to judge its historical credibility and concludes that on balance the passage stands up to these tests.⁴³³ Witherington agrees with him and provides good reasons for his conclusion that it is “time to dismiss the old radical dichotomy of F. C. Baur”.⁴³⁴ But there are still those who demur, such as Dunn, who thinks that the language difference may have caused greater problems than Hill admits, especially if the Hellenists could speak *only* Greek and consequently worshipped in separate buildings. He claims that Hill ... “simply ignores or suppresses the clear implications of the terminology”.⁴³⁵ Tannehill notes that Acts does not avoid the existence of internal church problems but tends to exaggerate “the ease with which they were solved”.⁴³⁶

8.1.3 THE HELLENISTIC WIDOWS

The twelve apostles intervene to put forward a solution to permit efficient administration of the charitable funds which we are told elsewhere in Acts had been collected from the sale of surplus property (2:44-45; 4:34-35, 36-37; 5:1-10).

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of *food*.² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is

⁴³⁰ Martin Hengel, "Between Jesus and Paul," in *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 1-29, 133-156.

⁴³¹ Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 716.

⁴³² Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: reappraising division within the earliest church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). 193-197.

⁴³³ Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews*: 24-28.

⁴³⁴ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, U.K.: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1998). 243-247.

⁴³⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009). 251-254.

⁴³⁶ Robert C. Tannehill, *The narrative unity of Luke-Acts: v.2 The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). 81.

not right that we should neglect the word of God in order *to wait on tables*.³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task,⁴ while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." (Acts 6:1-4 NRSV)

In verse one, the words “of food” are not found in the Greek. The word for “distribution” is ‘service’ in Greek, ἡ διακονία, which has a wide range of applications. Similarly “to wait on tables” in verse two, διακονεῖν τραπέζαις is only one possible use of several of the verb ‘to serve’ or to ‘minister’ διακονέω, which are listed in BDAG as follows

1. to function as an intermediary, act as go-between/agent, be at one’s service
2. to perform obligations, without focus on intermediary function. (a) of unspecified services, perform duties, render assistance, serve someone. (b) of attention at meals, wait on someone at table
3. to meet an immediate need, help
4. to carry out official duties, minister, in cultic context

BDAG admits that Acts 6:2 poses a special problem since *look after tables* can be understood of serving food at tables, but argues that it is improbable that some widows would be deprived of food at a communal meal. It considers that the term διακονία more probably refers to administrative responsibility, one of whose aspects is concern for widows, without specifying the kind of assistance that is allotted. Verse 2 may contain wordplay involving the phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, with λόγος designating a *ledger entry*, in which case τράπεζα, which is also a banker’s term, may here denote *accounts*. This interpretation, that Stephen and his companions were actually appointed to be accountants or bankers supervising charitable distributions, seems far more plausible than the assumption that they were serving at soup-kitchens or other meal services, and makes sense of the high character requirements.⁴³⁷ The problem of the passage is that those appointed as community accountants in practice proceed to perform as prophetic evangelists, notes L. T. Johnson.⁴³⁸ Barrett recalls that many elderly Diaspora Jews moved to Jerusalem to die and be buried there, leaving behind widows who had no friends or relatives to care for them. In this

⁴³⁷ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁴³⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992). 111.

instance, the majority of the widows were of advanced years. In the context of “daily distribution” he mentions the later Jewish custom, mentioned in the Mishnah,⁴³⁹ of the *tamhuy* and the *quppah*.⁴⁴⁰ The Jews had a weekly dole for resident needy, called the *quppah*. It was given out every Friday and consisted of enough money for fourteen meals. There was also a daily distribution, known as the *tamhuy*. It was for non-residents and transients and consisted of food and drink, which were delivered from house to house where known needy were dwelling. However, in his scrutiny of the literary data, David Seccombe discovers no positive evidence of the existence of organized charity such as the Mishnah describes in Jerusalem in the prior NT period. He also provides four plausible arguments against this proposition—the demonstrable prevalence of begging; accounts of formerly rich Jewish women reduced to scavenging; in the Temple list of officials there is no mention of charity organisers; and in neither of the two known cases when emergency food was distributed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, was there any indication of an established system of poor relief. It must be concluded that the system did not originate until later.⁴⁴¹

It seems much more likely, if the Seven were indeed financial administrators, that the “daily distribution” consisted of a sum of money to buy food.

Spencer sees here a collapse of the church’s maintenance provision. Even though the Christian leaders waste no time in taking action, their solution still shows troubling suggestions of trivializing widows’ anxieties. The apostles are more concerned with their desire to preach, teach and pray, than with the widows’ necessity to have enough to eat—more concerned with the ‘spiritual’ forms of service than the humbler forms, such as caring for widows.⁴⁴² This is what Acts 6:1-7 tells widows about the priorities of the leadership of the earliest Church.

⁴³⁹ M. Ket. 13. 1-2; M. Pes. 10. 1; M. Shek. 5. 6.

⁴⁴⁰ C. K. Barrett, *Acts: a shorter commentary* (London; New York: T. & T. Clark; Continuum, 2002). 87.

⁴⁴¹ David Seccombe, "Was there organized charity in Jerusalem before the Christians?," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29, no. 1 (1978): 140.

⁴⁴² Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 718-720.

8.1.4 PETER AND DORCAS

The ultimate incident concerning widows involves Peter, who is amongst the leadership of the apostles at that point. He undergoes a radical transformation in attitude towards different groups as Acts progresses, notably concerning eating with Gentiles. In Acts 9:36-42 two male messengers are sent to Peter in Lydda requesting that he come to Joppa. Tabitha, in Greek Dorcas, who was devoted to good works and acts of charity, had died.

So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. (Acts 9:39 NRSV)

The words used to describe the clothing indicate that both underwear and outerwear were included.⁴⁴³ However, there is no indication that children's garments were among those shown to Peter. Peter prays and heals her and presents her to the widows alive. It seems that the elderly widows of Joppa had already set up an informal support system amongst themselves and had relied on Tabitha for practical economic provision. Spencer concludes that in the final incident involving widows, Peter

... redeems, as it were, his, and his fellow apostles' miscalculation in Acts 6 by praying and then lifting his hand (9:41), to reunite the widows at Joppa with their beloved matron. Peter ultimately removes all appearance of complicity in neglecting widows. Interpreters of Acts 6:1-7 need to make the same move.⁴⁴⁴

8.1.5 INDEPENDENT WOMEN IN ACTS

The Acts of the Apostles, similar to the Gospel of Luke, portrays several women who appear self-supporting or engaged in economic activity with a partner, such as Tabitha of Joppa above, who is described as a (female) disciple. We do not know if Tabitha is married, or a rich widow skilled as a seamstress, or if she earns her living by employing several women as dressmakers in a home workshop. Her story is confirmation that women could be employed in textile production. The text does not specifically say that Tabitha gave away the clothing she made free of charge as an act of almsgiving. She certainly appears to be part of a group of widows.

⁴⁴³ Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*: 43.

⁴⁴⁴ Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 733.

Another example of such an independent woman is Lydia, who is the head of a household. In Acts 16:14-15 she is shown encountered by Paul and his companions amongst a women's gathering for prayer by the river outside the city of Philippi. Ivoni Reimer points out that the other biblical uses of the verb συνέρχομαι, to assemble together, indicate "a deliberate, purposeful gathering that also implies community".⁴⁴⁵ Lydia is described as a "Godfearer". Luke uses five expressions to designate them (φοβούμενοι τον θεον (Acts 10:1-2; 10:22; 13:16; 13:26), σεβομενοι τον θεον (Acts 13:50; 16:14; 18:6-7), σεβομενοι προσηλυτοι (13:43), and σεβομενοι Ἑλληνες (17:17)). This category of people, described only in Acts, are generally considered to be Gentiles attracted to Judaism, but they are not full proselytes. As a consequence of Paul's conversation, she is converted and baptised. We do not know if she was a widow. As head of a household she is able to invite Paul and his companions to reside with her. Reimer conjectures that Lydia's household may have consisted entirely of women. She provides information about Lydia's profession, a dealer in purple cloth, and the guilds and industries attested in Thyatira, Lydia's home town. Reimer lists from inscriptional evidence bakers, potters, tanners, leather workers and shoemakers, blacksmiths, linen weavers, wool spinners, tailors, and especially dyers. How purple dye was produced in the ancient world from plant and animal sources is explained in detail. In the eyes of the elite such artisan work was looked down upon as "filthy", "undignified" and "ignoble". Lydia's occupation is evidence that the work of women was not confined to the household.⁴⁴⁶

Priscilla is half of an artisan couple with her husband Aquila and therefore cannot be widow. In Acts 18:3 her employment as a "tentmaker" in business in conjunction with Aquila and Paul is emphasized by Reimer. Through text-critical study Reimer reveals the attempts of later biblical texts to diminish her activity and influence.⁴⁴⁷ The trade of "tentmaker" appears to be that of a leather worker. Reimer demonstrates this fact from the witness of the early church fathers such as Origen, Chrysostom and Theodoret. Leather work (like the dye trade) was not held in high esteem.⁴⁴⁸ Furthermore, both Priscilla and Aquila were competent in knowledge of the Scriptures, instruction and teaching and both were able to extend further Apollos'

⁴⁴⁵ Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*: 74.

⁴⁴⁶ Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*: 98-112.

⁴⁴⁷ Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*: 197-199.

⁴⁴⁸ Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*: 200-205.

understanding of the Gospel message (Acts 18:26). Paul describes them as “my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus”. (Rom. 16:3)

Several other women mentioned by name or anonymously in the Acts of the Apostles were, or may have been widows, e.g. Mary, Jesus’ mother in Acts 1:14. Some like Priscilla (1 Cor. 16:19) were the hosts of house churches, such as Mary the mother of John Mark in Acts 12:12. There were also “the devout women of high standing” of Antioch in Acts 13:50, the “leading women” of Thessalonika in Acts 17:4, the “women of high standing” in Beroea in Acts 17:12, and Damaris of Athens in Acts 17:34. These examples from Acts of the Apostles reinforce the inscriptional evidence demonstrating that economically independent women existed in Roman society.

8.2 THE PRACTICAL LETTER OF JAMES

The disappointing attitude of the apostles in Acts 6:1-7 to widows is moderated by the outlook of the author of the letter of James. We discover here, primarily in Chapter 2, a more practical and sensitive approach by one church leader to the problem of poverty in the church. Exceptionally, the letter of James, at the end of Chapter 1, contains the one and only linked exhortation concerning fatherless children and their widowed mothers in the whole of the New Testament. It contains the unique verse which shows awareness that unseen and unheard fatherless children have any actuality. This solitary verse is the entirety of that which is present in the NT to give the fatherless child any hope that God or the church leadership might wish to involve themselves in their predicament.

As I have argued previously, the phrase translated in the OT as ‘orphans and widows’ in modern versions, should have been translated as ‘fatherless and widows’. This single NT instance ought to be treated in the same fashion. The separation of the expression into two distinct groups is unjustifiable. What is under discussion here is a young widow together with her fatherless children.

²⁶ If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (Jam. 1:26-27 NRSV)

²⁶ Εἴ τις δοκεῖ θρησκὸς εἶναι μὴ χαλιναγωγῶν γλῶσσαν αὐτοῦ ἀλλ’ ἀπατῶν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ, τούτου μάταιος ἡ θρησκεία. ²⁷ θρησκεία καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτῆ ἐστίν,

ἐπισκέπτεσθαι ὀρφανούς καὶ χήρας ἐν τῇ θλίψει αὐτῶν, ἄσπιλον
ἑαυτὸν τηρεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου. (Jam. 1:26-27 N-A 28)

Dale Allison states boldly that the application of v.27 extends into the outside world beyond that of church fatherless families, because there is nothing about the passage that is “explicitly Christian”.⁴⁴⁹ I demur. For a start, there is use of the word, “Father”, which is “explicitly Christian”. The whole book of James is focussed on the internal behaviour of a Christian community. Making these visits would be an expression of the Father’s love and support, and the limited funds available likely would have restricted the giving of any required material help to members of the Christian community. Visits to strangers would have been socially unacceptable. James H. Ropes points out that verse 27 was not intended as ...

a definition of religion, but as a statement (by an oxymoron) of what is better than external acts of worship.⁴⁵⁰

The verses connect well with the following 2:1-13, reproving showing preference to the rich and humiliating the poor, and with 2:14-17, condemning those who fail to help these in immediate need, surely based on the witnessing of actual incidents that have occurred in a church assembly.

True worship is defined as social action, as opposed to public performance. I put the question: what if the statement is literally true? What if those who are most competent to make judgments of the sincerity or hypocrisy of anyone’s Christian faith are fatherless children and widowed mothers? What if the fatherless family is the yardstick, the measure, the criterion of religious authenticity?

There has been much scholarly discussion whether the whole book teaches salvation by works rather than by faith alone. This is a digression, and tends towards the promotion of the individualisation of the contents and diversion of attention from the implementation of this overt expression of the love of the Father among the Christian community.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Dale C. Allison, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle of James.*, International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 2013). 350.

⁴⁵⁰ James Hardy Ropes, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1916). 180.

⁴⁵¹ Allison, *Epistle of James*: 350-360.

8.2.1. AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

L T Johnson concludes that the letter of James is a very early writing from a Palestinian Jewish Christian source in the 60s CE, possibly by James the brother of Jesus,⁴⁵² as does Ralph P Martin.⁴⁵³ In his commentary Dale Allison after an extensive review of the arguments from pages 3 to 32 puts the date of James at 100-120 CE.⁴⁵⁴ Dibelius assesses the date as being between 80-130 CE “which could be substantially reduced if it was possible to prove that 1 Clement is dependent on James.”⁴⁵⁵ This early date makes plausible that it may have influenced the Christian writers and preachers of the earliest church, and might have been written by James, the brother of Jesus, who was executed in 62 CE by the High Priest Ananus in the hiatus between the departure of Festus and the arrival of the procurator Albinus.⁴⁵⁶ Even if the letter is pseudonymous, the author has no doubt designed the letter to represent the recognized concerns of James, Jesus’ brother. Along with the Gospels, this letter shows profound sympathy with the plight of the poor and with the slights and humiliations they may have had to endure, even as a member of a Christian community. The author reminds his prosperous readers of Jesus’ promise of the kingdom to the poor.

Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?
(Jam. 2:5 NRS)

Faith and social action are seen as inseparable, and are targeted on poor people on three occasions, in 1:27 (above), 2:5 and 2:14-17. Church people who show favouritism to the rich and condescend to the poor, let them knowingly remain hungry or badly clothed, or who defrauded the wages of their agricultural labourers, are condemned in James 2:3, 2:15-16 and 5:1-6.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵² Luke Timothy Johnson, *The letter of James: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1995). 118-121.

⁴⁵³ Martin, *Word biblical commentary: James*: xxxii-xxxiii.

⁴⁵⁴ Allison, *Epistle of James*: 29.

⁴⁵⁵ Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James: a commentary on the Epistle of James.*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). 46.

⁴⁵⁶ Eusebius, *The ecclesiastical history. 2 vols.:* I, 170-179.

⁴⁵⁷ Longenecker, *Remember the poor*: 128-129.

8.2.2 “BEING WITH” THE POOR

In the content of verse 27 it is important to notice that the fatherless family is not the focus of this verse. They are not being instructed to partake of the hospitality of others—rather, the members of the Christian assembly are urged to take the initiative to seek out and regularly visit the family to “oversee” their condition, and confront their situation. They are enjoined to come alongside them, come face to face with their distress, with their affliction, with their grief, and with their continuing deprivation.

Happily Scot McKnight in his commentary does not ignore or transform the reference in James 1:27 to the fatherless family into something else. He perceives early Christian visitation as rooted in the goodness of God, and on Jesus’ practice of “ministering to the marginalized and hurting”. He does not metamorphose their “distress” (θλιψις) into eschatological woes, as some commentators do, and finds no favour with that interpretation, but connects it with poverty and bereavement, asserting that James is describing the socio-economic and emotional condition of these families.⁴⁵⁸

The word used for ‘visit’, ἐπισκέπτεσθαι, is a verb in the infinitive, a present middle or passive deponent from the infinitive ἐπισκέπτομαι. BDAG defines it in three ways.⁴⁵⁹

to make a careful inspection, *look at, examine, inspect*

to go to see a person with helpful intent, *visit*

to exercise oversight in behalf of, *look after, make an appearance to help*

It has the connotation of continuance, i.e. not confined to a ‘duty call’ post interment. It is the same word used in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats of Matthew 25:36 and 43, where the presence of Jesus is embodied in the suffering person, i.e.

I was sick and you took care of me (v36)

sick and in prison and you did not visit me. (v.43)

In the *Acts of the Apostles*, the reader is given an account of the spoken words of James, at the Council of Jerusalem, as he gives the decision of the Jerusalem church,

⁴⁵⁸ Scot McKnight, *The letter of James* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011). 167-171.

⁴⁵⁹ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

on the requirements for faith for the Gentiles. It may or may not be significant that James is depicted using the same word ἐπισκέπτομαι here in the indicative aorist middle 3rd person singular.⁴⁶⁰

After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. (Acts 15:13-14 RSV)

Μετὰ δὲ τὸ σιγήσαι αὐτοὺς ἀπεκρίθη Ἰάκωβος λέγων· ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ἀκούσατέ μου. Συμεὼν ἐξηγήσατο καθὼς πρῶτον ὁ θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ. (Acts 15:13-14 N-A 28)

8.2.3 PURITY ISSUES

Who is to be responsible for this supervision is not defined. We do not know if the author has in mind visits by the clergy or members of the assembly, be they unaccompanied males or females, the extended family, or married couples. It is significant that this verse is concerned with purity, seen in the phrase 'pure and undefiled', καθαρά καὶ ἀμίαντος. The Greek word used for 'religion' in v.27 θρησκεία is associated with the cultic, i.e. the worship, aspects of religious practice, of the same derivation as the word for 'religious' θρησκὸς in v.26. This raises the question as to whether it has been suggested that to visit the homes of the fatherless and the widows is in some way inconsistent with Christian cultic purity—a suggestion which the author of James unequivocally refutes. Visiting the fatherless and the widows is not to be considered contamination, but part of worship. Later there were recommendations against young men visiting women alone, to prevent damaging their reputation. This attitude is not helpful for a fatherless family. Here is an example from Ambrose.

There is no reason for younger men to go near the houses of widows and virgins, unless they are on an official visit. Even this should be done in the company of older men—namely, the bishop, or, if the situation is that serious, with the priests. Why should we give worldly people occasion to criticize us? Why should such visits take on some significance by their frequency? What if one of these women were by chance to fall? Why should you come under reproach because someone else has fallen? Think how many men there are, strong men, too, who have been taken in by charms like these! Think how many

⁴⁶⁰ McKnight, *Letter of James*: 24.

there are who have given no occasion for any kind of transgression,
but have given plenty of occasion for suspicion!⁴⁶¹

It is sad that such warnings were considered necessary by the fourth century; male sexuality preventing the expression of genuine compassion emanating from men to women and fatherless children.

Certain churches still teach today that all women are to be feared as ‘temptresses’, and that men should never be alone with a woman, apart from their wives. This was not helped by the opinion of the esteemed theologian and academic C. S. Lewis that it was not possible for men and women to be friends.

When two people are of different sexes, the friendship which arises between them will very easily pass—may pass in the first half-hour—into erotic love.⁴⁶²

Male/female friendship has been considered by some churches to be impossible. Many men today have been taught by their church to regard women as sexual temptations, and not as real people. They have not learned how to be friends with a woman, or how to talk to a woman as a fellow human being. Child Protection must continue to be provided for all fatherless children, yet equally male role models are necessary to male and female fatherless children. Furthermore, it would be unfortunate if the presence of their mother is preventing Christian men from any interaction with fatherless children.

Dan J Brennan has written a ground-breaking book on the possibility of cross-gender friendships within a Christian context, challenging the *status quo* that is standing in the way of the supply of emotional support for the fatherless family. With many examples from the past, he perceives a way forward in the metaphor of the brother-sister community of the NT.⁴⁶³

... speak to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity. (1 Tim. 5:1-2 NRSV)

⁴⁶¹ Ambrose, *De officiis. Vol. 1: Introduction, text and translation*, trans. Ivor J. Davidson, Oxford Early Christian Studies. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 1.20.87.

⁴⁶² C. S. Lewis, *The four loves* (London and Glasgow: Collins Fontana, 1960). 63.

⁴⁶³ Dan Brennan, *Sacred unions, sacred passions: engaging the mystery of friendship between men and women* (Elgin, Ill.: Faith Dance Pub., 2010). 56-59.

8.2.4 A NON-LITERAL INTERPRETATION

L T Johnson contests that there is any suggestion of impurity in his book *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God*. He finds no indication in James that Christians are to observe ritual separation from any class of people. However, he observes that:

As we can see everywhere in the Law and Prophets, effective care for orphans, widows, and sojourners is *shorthand language* for meeting covenantal obligations. It is also a sign of conversion to the covenant after apostasy.⁴⁶⁴

In this comment, notice, however, how he sidesteps the obligation by generalising it. To crown it all, he devotes a whole chapter of twelve pages to these two verses, yet succeeds in making their topic, “Taciturnity and True Religion”!⁴⁶⁵

Johnson is not alone in his blindness. Dale Allison has provided a list in his commentary on how commentators interpret the phrase, ‘the fatherless and the widows’. Diodati says it stands for “all the duties of Christian charity”; Baumgarten wrote “*synecdochen speciei*”; and Calvin wrote “by this single instance he is commending the general range of charity”. Allison in footnote 18 lists fourteen other examples of this kind of circumlocution.⁴⁶⁶ He also notes the trend in some, such as Moo⁴⁶⁷ (immigrants, third-world dwellers, the handicapped, or the homeless) and Church⁴⁶⁸ (the HIV positive, abused children, undocumented aliens, minimum wage-workers, impoverished elderly) to replace this group by (to them) the more visible and voluble needy. Similarly, in his four page discussion of verses 26-27 in his ‘Word’ commentary, Ralph P. Martin devotes exactly four lines and a biblical quotation to fatherless families, splitting them into the two distinct categories, orphans/widows, as is the current fashion.⁴⁶⁹ The rest of the space is spent discussing the meaning of the word ‘religion’. These interpretive practices give the impression that the fatherless family was non-existent in Roman Society, and extinct today. I do

⁴⁶⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, friend of God: studies in the letter of James* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004). 213.

⁴⁶⁵ Johnson, *Brother of Jesus*: 155-167.

⁴⁶⁶ Allison, *Epistle of James*: 348.

⁴⁶⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The letter of James: an introduction and commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Eerdmans, 1985). 97.

⁴⁶⁸ Christopher Lee Church, "A Forschungsgeschichte on the literary character of the Epistle of James" (UMI, 1993), 349.

⁴⁶⁹ Martin, *Word biblical commentary: James*: 51-54.

not think this was the meaning James intended to convey, because chapter 2 leads on from 1:27 into vivid living examples of how the rich Christians humiliated their poor brothers and sisters in James' assembly.

8.2.5 A LITERARY TROPE

The implication is created that the phrase has developed into a trope, a literary and rhetorical device, a cliché, or formula signifying the 'poor', consequently turning real people into abstract concepts. Have current day negative attitudes to voluntary one-parent families swung how we want to read this passage, or are few people today aware of any fatherless children and widows in their midst?

In the eyes of many biblical commentators this non-literal figurative representational trope is being used as shorthand in the letter of James for the 'poor', just as the homeless person is the stereotype for us currently. In today's society, the homeless person is visible whereas the fatherless child and the widow are generally not. Nevertheless, today in the UK disquieting levels of child poverty persist. 27% of children – 3.5 million – live in families whose income is 60% below the UK average, the indicator accepted internationally and by the government of the UK.⁴⁷⁰ Among these children are the fatherless children of widows.

8.2.6 AN APT TEXTUAL VARIANT

All commentators attempt to make a connection between v.26 and v.27, although one is difficult to see. The most common interpretation is that the link concerns hypocrisy, "formal religious platitudes that have no substance evidenced by practical deeds", to quote Ralph P. Martin.⁴⁷¹

In the Word Biblical Commentary Martin points out an interesting textual variant found in P⁷⁴ which translates as 'to protect them', i.e. the fatherless and the widows, from the world. Instead of ἄσπιλον ἑαυτὸν τηρεῖν, 'to keep oneself unstained', there is found, 'to protect them', ὑπερασπίξειν αὐτούς, 'from the world', ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου.⁴⁷² The verb in P⁷⁴, ὑπερασπίζω, is found nowhere else in the NT, although it

⁴⁷⁰ Priya Kothari, Graham Whitham, and Thomas Quinn, *A Fair Start for Every Child* (London: Save the Children Fund, 2014). 1-2.

⁴⁷¹ Martin, *Word biblical commentary: James*: 52.

⁴⁷² Martin, *Word biblical commentary: James*: 44.

occurs 22 times in total in the LXX, including the non-canonical writings, and 14 times in what are now the canonical books of the OT. Despite its late 7th century date the Bodmer Papyrus P⁷⁴ has been placed in category 1 by Kurt and Barbara Aland, “because of its textual quality”.⁴⁷³ It appropriately shifts the attention from the giver to the recipient and makes more sense in the context, although it has little text critical support because it is a singular reading. The Chester Beatty Papyrus (P⁴⁶) which dates from about the year 200 significantly does not include the Pastoral Epistles.⁴⁷⁴

8.2.7 READING ‘AGAINST THE GRAIN’

A fatherless child and a young widow who heard or read this verse would have taken it literally. The verse would be perceived to be about them. They would not receive the words as ‘a literary trope’. Such a callous intellectual explanation would not have occurred to them. Instead, expectation would be aroused in them that they would be supported and cared for. For example, perhaps a church committee might be set up to discuss their support needs, or the church might oversee the setting up of regular extended family councils, so that the family is not isolated. As a minimum they would expect to be regularly visited by those able to give practical help or with the knowledge to supply legal and financial advice.

8.2.8 THE INFLUENCE OF THE LETTER OF JAMES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Some scholars are of the opinion that they can detect the influence of *Letter of James* in *1 Clement*. This claim is based on the similarity of certain themes, but I find the evidence too vague to rely on. *1 Clement* quotes extensively from the OT, but much less from the writings of the NT. He mentions orphans and widows once, but only as part of a long quotation from Isaiah 1:16-20, not from James.⁴⁷⁵

... render a decision for the orphan and do what is right for the widow.

The *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions orphans and widows five or six times. However, one of these uses mentions “visiting”, using the same verb, ἐπισκέπτομαι, in the

⁴⁷³ Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The text of the New Testament: an introduction to the critical editions and to the theory and practice of modern textual criticism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leiden: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; E.J. Brill, 1987). 95.

⁴⁷⁴ Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*: 57.

⁴⁷⁵ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 48-49.

same form, ἐπισκέπτεσθαι, in the infinitive. This seems to me to be much closer to James and there could be a possibility that the writer indeed knew the letter.⁴⁷⁶

Commandments 38(VIII)10. Listen then to what follows from these:
ministering to widows, visiting orphans and those in need ...

If James 1:27 was being alluded to in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, one could surmise that the letter was known and used in the early church in the west by the early second century and could have been read and heard by the fatherless family.

8.3 FROM 'FICTIVE FAMILY' TO HIERARCHICAL HOUSEHOLD

8.3.1 FICTIVE FAMILY

Hellerman in his book *The Ancient Church as Family* observes that one of the most significant characteristics of the early church was “the metaphor of the church as a surrogate kinship group”.⁴⁷⁷ He states that the “most obvious evidence for a surrogate family relationship between God, Jesus, and his followers” is Jesus referring “to God using ‘Father’ terminology”.⁴⁷⁸

Hellerman found two attributes at the heart of the ancient Mediterranean family. The first was its highly corporate nature, and the second was the priority of the sibling bond. Modern Western societies tend to be individualistic cultures, whereas the ancient Mediterranean society valued the group over the individual, and had a more collectivist worldview. This resulted in concern for family survival, the obligation to help family members in difficulty, extreme loyalty to family members, and a desire to preserve the family’s reputation. Sibling betrayal represented totally unacceptable behaviour.⁴⁷⁹

Hellerman illustrates how family was defined in the ancient world, not in terms of *relationship*, but of *consanguinity*, a blood connection with a common male ancestor.⁴⁸⁰ The patrilineal kinship group (PKG) of the ancient Mediterranean society had at its heart sibling solidarity. Sibling support supplied the emotional

⁴⁷⁶ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 272-273.

⁴⁷⁷ Hellerman, *Ancient church as family*: 21.

⁴⁷⁸ Hellerman, *Ancient church as family*: 67.

⁴⁷⁹ Hellerman, *Ancient church as family*: 214-215.

⁴⁸⁰ Hellerman, *Ancient church as family*: 29.

support that we nowadays expect from marriage.⁴⁸¹ Therefore a woman, on the death of a husband would tend to turn to her own brothers and sisters.

8.3.1.1 JESUS AND SURROGATE KINSHIP

The foundational passage for maintaining that Jesus envisaged a community based on surrogate kinship is Mark 3:31-35. Such a community would prioritise allegiance to God over commitment to one's blood family.

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35 NRSV)

There is a significant omission in verse 30 of Mark 10. There is no *father*.

There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields. (Mark 10:29-30 NRSV)

Jesus' surrogate PKG had no human father. Appreciating this makes sense of that puzzling verse:

And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father-- the one in heaven. (Mat. 23:9 NRSV)

The early Christian writers employed an effective linguistic tool—brother-sister terminology—to integrate members within the community. Such language tended to strengthen social cohesion. The sibling bond was appropriated by the followers of Jesus and the PKG family model can be traced through the letters of Paul onwards into the second and third century. For example,

Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity. (1 Tim. 5:1-2 NRSV)

⁴⁸¹ Hellerman, *Ancient church as family*: 35.

8.3.1.2 SECOND AND THIRD CENTURY WRITERS

The brother-sister terminology is remarked upon in the *Apology of Aristides the Philosopher*, delivered around the year 125 CE, at section XV, which also mentions orphans and widows. It paints an impressive picture of the kinds of provision the early Christians may have made for one another.⁴⁸²

Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from *widows* they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the *orphan* from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food.

Hellerman found similar thinking in the works of other second century writers. He noted an observation by Lucian the satirist (125 CE – after 180 CE) in *Peregrinus* section 13 who had detected this aspect of Christian behaviour:

Their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another.⁴⁸³

He discovered this family concept embedded particularly strongly in the works of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin Martyr, and it persisted in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus through the second century. Next he traced its incidence in the writings of the North African Christians, Tertullian and Cyprian, and concluded that in Carthage in the third century the dominant social model for Christian community continued to be the patrilineal kinship group.

Tertullian, for example, in his *Apology*, said this:⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² Harris and Robinson, *Texts and studies: contributions to biblical and patristic literature. Vol. 1. The apology of Aristides; The passion of S. Perpetua; The Lord's prayer in the early church; The fragments of Heracleon*: 49.

⁴⁸³ Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus. Lucian Volume V*, trans. A. M. Harmon, Loeb classical library, 302 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936). 14-15.

⁴⁸⁴ Tertullian, *Apology; De spectaculis*: 176-179.

“Look,” they say, “how they love one another” (for themselves hate one another); “and how they are ready to die for each other” (for themselves will be readier to kill each other) ... But how much more fittingly are those both called brothers and treated as brothers who have come to know one Father God, who have drunk of one Spirit of holiness ... So we, who are united in mind and soul, have no hesitation about sharing property. All is common among us—except our wives.

Hellerman perceptively comments:⁴⁸⁵

Those who had the most to gain from the image of the church as a family were the poor, the hungry, the enslaved, the imprisoned, the orphans, and the widows.

8.3.2 THE HOUSEHOLD CODES

Initially the Christian community saw itself as a fictive family of unrelated brothers and sisters who were also sons and daughters of God the Father. As the end of the first century approached and second-generation Christians took over church leadership, the church structure in some churches leaned towards an association of families of related siblings headed by patriarchal fathers, based on the Graeco-Roman model.

More can be discovered about the social structure of the early church in certain of the pseudonymous letters of the NT written using the names of the apostles. These are significant for their insight into the development of family life in the early church in the second half of the first century, filling in the ‘gap’ between Paul’s writings and that of the Apostolic Fathers, (or perhaps overlapping with some of them) because they contain what are known as “household codes”. Among them are the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians, which are two disputed letters of Paul. Margaret Y. MacDonald, in *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* examines these so-called “household codes”: Colossians 3:18–4:1; Ephesians 5:21–6:9; 1 Peter 2:18–3: 7; passages in the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 3:4–5; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10; 3:1 and the associated Ign. *Poly.* 4.1–5.1; Pol. *Phil.* 4.1–6.1. Macdonald defines household codes as:

... prime assertions and defences of masculinity that involve reinforcement of paternity and male control of household dependents.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁵ Hellerman, *Ancient church as family*: 221.

The title of the book is a misnomer—she reinforces the realisation that children have absolutely no power whatsoever. What she does highlight as remarkable about these passages is that children are actually shown to exist and are spoken to directly in the letters. Real children scarcely appear in the Gospels, and not at all in Acts, nor in the genuine letters of Paul. Macdonald enjoins upon the reader a feeling of optimism that the church truly acknowledged the existence of groups not generally addressed in documents, i.e. the slaves and the children, including slave parents and slave children. (However full orphans, fatherless children and street children are not distinguished from the rest).⁴⁸⁷

The household codes refer to three pairs of hierarchical relationships: wives-husbands, slaves-masters, and children-parents. It is possible that they were also intended for *adult* children. These codes served the function of forming a firm family identity and integrating and assimilating the family units within the Christian community, at the same time disregarding the widows and their children.

The instructions for wives are not relevant to widows, but there are instructions for children.⁴⁸⁸

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. (Col. 3:20-21 NRSV)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honour your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:1-4 NRSV)

The letters were being read aloud in the Christian assembly. Present might be parentless children, children belonging to a household, slave children, perhaps street children, fatherless or motherless children with their widowed mother or father, sexually abused and neglected children, and children whose parents were not Christians. Adolescents might be also there to receive these exhortations, with some married girls as young as twelve, making the definition of childhood broad. Some of

⁴⁸⁶ Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The power of children: the construction of Christian families in the Greco-Roman world* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014). 30.

⁴⁸⁷ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 3-4.

⁴⁸⁸ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 4-7.

the children might be the illegitimate slave offspring of the householder. Others of the children would be from slave marriages, not *iustum matrimonium*.⁴⁸⁹ The presence of the children of mixed marriages in the church must also be assumed, as a consequence of 1 Cor. 7:14, where Paul advises such couples to remain together. (However, in the case of divorce, the husband would take custody of the children). Evidence of a varied marital state is further found in the first letter of Peter.

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the Word, they may be won over *without a word* by their wives' conduct, (1 Pet. 3:1 NRSV)

(Note once again, the silent woman). The use of the imagination is required to discover and empathize with the particular circumstances of each child and not assume two free Christian parents. The necessity for 'obedience' could very well be unacceptable, irrelevant, damaging and even dangerous for certain children.⁴⁹⁰ The requirement to "honour" as well as to "obey" parents, based on the Ten Commandments of Moses in Exodus 20:12, would tend to silence and side-line children who were aware of being neglected or abused, who might otherwise have 'spoken up' about their situation, even though this commandment was originally intended for adults.

Macdonald traces a progressive development from Colossians through Ephesians to the Pastoral Epistles where she perceives that concern for the socialisation of children brings with it an emphasis on education, with particular roles assigned to male and female leaders.⁴⁹¹ She draws attention to Titus 2:3-5:

Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behaviour, not to be *slanderers*⁴⁹² or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.

She points out that the older women are here being encouraged to teach younger women to uphold and maintain the developing leadership structures for men and the hierarchical household structure of Graeco-Roman society, headed by a human

⁴⁸⁹ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 18-24.

⁴⁹⁰ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 25-27.

⁴⁹¹ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 67-147.

⁴⁹² διάβολος, ον

‘father’. This is a development from the “fictive family” emphasis of the Gospels and the genuine letters of Paul, which would result in increasing marginalisation and social isolation of widows and their minor children, who could not fit into this patriarchal structure.⁴⁹³

8.3.3 WORSHIP SEGREGATION OF WIDOWS

By the early third century the *Didascalia Apostolorum* recommends that women and men are to be seated apart at church worship. The deacons were given the task of policing this policy. The very young children are told to sit together and not get up. Older children either stand at the side or remain with their parents. Young unmarried women should have separate seating, or if there is no room, stand behind the women. Married mothers with children should stand separately. Elderly women and widows were to sit together.⁴⁹⁴ These placings would diminish the ‘fictive family’ metaphor, and would tend to isolate widows. No sensible reason is given for the separation. Later, Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313 – 386 CE) reinforces this pattern in his *Procatechesis*. He makes it clear that men and women are seated separately to prevent distraction.⁴⁹⁵

To prevent a means of salvation turning into an occasion for damnation ... to keep the passions at a distance.

By the time of Chrysostom (c. 349 – 407 CE) perhaps because of the denigration of normal expressions of sexuality and the rise of asceticism, physical barriers were necessary to separate men and women at church.

What are you doing, O man? Are you being overly attentive concerning the women’s beauty, and you do not shudder at thus outraging the temple of God? Does the church seem to you to be a brothel, and less honourable than the marketplace? ... It would be better for such men to be blind, for it is better for it is better to be diseased than to use the eyes for such purposes

It would be best if you had within yourself the wall to part you from the women. But since you do not desire this to be so, our fathers thought it necessary by these boards to wall you off. I hear from the elders that in the early times there was nothing like these partitions,

⁴⁹³ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 127-128.

⁴⁹⁴ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 176.

⁴⁹⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, edited and translated by Edward Yarnold, *The early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2000). 84.

“for in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female” [Galatians 3:28]. And in the Apostle Paul’s time also both men and women were together, because the men were truly men, and the women were truly women. But now it is altogether to the contrary: the women have urged themselves into the manners of courtesans, and the men are in no better state than frenzied horses. (Homily LXXIII on St. Matthew.⁴⁹⁶

8.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has looked at the attitude of the earliest church to the fatherless and the widows, as recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Letter of James*. It explains the views of some unknown later NT letter writers towards church and family organisation in the Epistles of *Ephesians* and *Colossians*.

In the very early days, consequent to their neglect by the Jerusalem apostles, provision for the Jerusalem Hellenistic widows was established.⁴⁹⁷ In the resurrection of Dorcas, Peter was shown to be aware of groups of widows and their need for clothing by the restoration of their deceased provider.

The letter of James restores hope that some of the leaders of the earliest church were well aware of how it felt to be poor, and to have to endure the slights and humiliations heaped on them by those more fortunate. If the letter was indeed written by James the brother of Jesus, or with the intention to reproduce the outlook of James, who led the Jerusalem church in the early days before his execution under Ananus in 62 CE,⁴⁹⁸ we may expect that it reflected the attitudes of early Judaism to the poor and possibly even those of Jesus himself.

From the beginning the Christian community saw itself as a fictive family of brothers and sisters who were also sons and daughters of God the Father. Later, the household codes re-established the hierarchical family model headed by the *paterfamilias*. The unique direct address to children in the household codes of *Ephesians* and *Colossians* reminds us to reflect on the complex life circumstances endured by some church

⁴⁹⁶ Philip Schaff, NPNF 1-10 St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL)), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf110.html>. Homily 73, p.771.

⁴⁹⁷ Witherington, *Acts*: 381-390.

⁴⁹⁸ Flavius Josephus, *Jewish antiquities. Book XX*, trans. Louis H. Feldman, Loeb classical library, 456 (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1998). 106-109.

children who existed in “overlapping categories of identity”.⁴⁹⁹ The silence of the New Testament on the sexual use of slave children in the light of extensive examples in contemporary literature is discouraging. Elderly widows were isolated from families in separate seating and young men and women were kept apart. The ‘fictive’ family was no more.

⁴⁹⁹ Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Reading the New Testament Household Codes in Light of New Research on Children and Childhood in the Roman World," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 41, no. 3 (2012): 378-380.

9. 1 TIMOTHY 5:3-16: WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

9.1 THE ENDURING INFLUENCE OF 1 TIMOTHY 5:3-16

Certain passages in 1 Timothy which discuss the demeanour of women in general have had a malign influence on the treatment of women by men and provided the justification for the imposition of strict male controls on their deportment over the centuries.

Why should this be a matter of concern for the fatherless family? Significantly 1 Timothy 5:3-16 contains the only passage in the NT specifically concerned with the management of the 'problem' of widows. In the modern day commentaries on the exegesis of this passage, its author's attitude towards the younger widows in verses 11-15 has been largely ignored, minimised, or explained away. Various attempts have been made to imagine, explore or invent church situations which may provide justifiable vindication of the author's harsh conjecture of their likely future behaviour.

3. Honour widows who are really widows. 4. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight. 5. The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; 6. but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7. Give these commands as well, so that they may be above reproach. 8. And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 9. Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once; 10. she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.

11. But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, 12. and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. 13. Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. 14. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. 15. For some have already turned away to follow Satan. 16. If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows. (1Tim. 5:3-16 NRSV)

9.2 AUTHORSHIP

The most prominent leader in the history of the earliest days of the Christian church was Paul, who conducted a peripatetic ministry to the Jewish Diaspora and the Gentiles. It is the force of Paul's influence and authority that fuels the enduring influence of this passage, with which I introduced this study of the fatherless family in the early church. The first letter to Timothy is one of three letters together called the Pastoral Epistles, which self-identify as having as their source the apostle Paul. They comprise 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. The 'Pauline' epistles are the thirteen New Testament books which have the name Paul (Παῦλος) as the first word, hence claiming authorship by Paul the Apostle, but today only seven of these are considered authentic by scholars. The current dominant scholarly consensus regarding the authorship of the first letter to Timothy is to deny that it was written by Paul and consider it to be pseudonymous.

The letter of 1 Timothy purports to be addressed to Timothy, apparently appointed as the leader of the church at Ephesus. It is less clear that the same church is adduced in 2 Timothy. The letter addressed to Titus concerns a church located in Crete. These designations may be invented, or they may represent knowledge of the state of affairs in a real church by an authoritative individual who wishes to influence the circumstances of that particular church. Without exception, commentators consider that all three letters were written by the same person and each one can be used to illuminate the content of the others.

What is at stake here is the important question of authorial authority. When a letter is believed to have been written by Paul, it inherently possesses apostolic authority. The early Christian writers under discussion appear to accept unquestionably Paul's authorship of this book, which means that they assign a heavy weight to the author's opinions and recommendations. That a church father as early as bishop Polycarp of Smyrna knew of the existence of 1 Timothy by the middle of the second century is confirmed by his combined quotation of 1 Tim 6:10 and 1 Tim 6:7 in Section 4.1 of his *Letter to the Philippians*.⁵⁰⁰

The love of money is the beginning of all difficulties. And so, since we know that we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out of it ...

⁵⁰⁰ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 337.

All the Christian fathers from Irenaeus (who died in 202 CE) onwards know of 1 Timothy, although P⁴⁶, the earliest collection of Paul's letters, dated from around the same time, does not contain the Pastoral Epistles. That the early Christian writers viewed Paul as the author of these three letters is confirmed by their listing in the Muratorian fragment, generally dated to the close of the second century CE, making it feasibly the oldest known list of the books of the New Testament.⁵⁰¹

The Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy was first questioned by Schleiermacher only as late as 1807.⁵⁰² The verdict of 'pseudonymous' was settled by Holtzmann in *Die Pastoralbriefe kritisch und exegetisch Untersucht*, published in 1880 and has been supported by most authors since.⁵⁰³ Yet even so, today, despite the mainstream verdict of scholarship, nearly all of those who write the large comprehensive commentaries on 1 Timothy tend to favour the view that the author of the letter is indeed the apostle Paul as it claims, as did the early Christian writers, and is not pseudonymous. This is understandable, since they stem from the more conservative side of Christian belief. Believing as they do that the Bible is the inspired work of God, every word of the New Testament scripture is authoritative, influential and worthy of intense analysis. Consequently even today, as in the early church and up to as late as 1807, some church preaching will assume Paul's authority for the writer's opinion on widows and the recommendations which the clergy should adopt.

Accordingly, major commentators in English such as William D. Mounce fill many pages presenting the arguments for and against Paul's authorship.⁵⁰⁴ In Mounce's *Introduction*, between pages lxxxiii and cxxix, (83 to 129), he explores the main critical issues concerned with authorship raised by scholars. These fall into historical, theological and literary categories. The other major commentators, such as Knight,⁵⁰⁵ Marshall,⁵⁰⁶ and Towner⁵⁰⁷ perform the same examination. Mounce concludes

⁵⁰¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The canon of the New Testament: its origin, development, and significance* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1997). viii.

⁵⁰² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über den sogenannten ersten Brief des Paulus an den Timotheus: ein kritisches Sendschreiben an J.C. Gass* (Berlin: Realbuchhandlung, 1807).

⁵⁰³ Mark Harding, *What are they saying about the Pastoral Epistles?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001). 10-27.

⁵⁰⁴ William D Mounce and Bruce M Metzger, *Word biblical commentary: Pastoral Epistles* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 2000). lxxxiii-cxxix.

⁵⁰⁵ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992). 21-52.

on page cxxix (129) that the amanuensis hypothesis best explains the internal and external evidence, and that Luke is “the most likely person” to have performed this task. He is referring to the suggestions commonly made that the writer (or possibly amanuensis) of 1 Timothy might be the author of the Gospel of Luke, made based on philological considerations, and 2 Tim. 4:11 (“Only Luke is with me”). Towner finds attractive the idea of ‘allonymity’, suggested by Marshall, that either the student or disciple of Paul edits the notes of the recently departed apostle and carries his legacy forward in conformity.⁵⁰⁸ All these commentators desire that even if the author is not Paul, it was written by someone contemporaneous to Paul who would reflect his opinions. Thus Paul’s authority would remain integral to the letter and give it its potency. His presumed authority influenced the policy of pastoral care of widows in the early church, and continues into the present day.

Because I am convinced that 1 Timothy is pseudonymous, Acts 6:1-7 on the Hellenistic widows, and 1 Timothy 5:3-16 on the support of widows, must speak of different groups of widows, deal with different issues, and take place at different times. This may be the first two quarters of the second century, according to the scholarly consensus, but nothing is certain.

9.3 SUBJECT MATTER

9.3.1. MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS

There are two major interpretations made as to the subject matter of 1 Timothy 5:3-16. The first is that it concerns the financial administration of an organised group, an ‘Office’, a formal ‘Order’ of mature Christian widowed women ‘Elders’ who had played a recognised role in the church in the past and would continue to do so during their church supported widowhood. It would be a major digression to list all those scholars holding this opinion and re-analyse their various arguments, but Bonnie Thurston has been influential.⁵⁰⁹ The second interpretation is that it is concerned with the pastoral problem of supporting women in the church who have lost their husband

⁵⁰⁶ I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999). 57-92.

⁵⁰⁷ Philip H. Towner, *The letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006). 9-26.

⁵⁰⁸ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*: 25-26.

⁵⁰⁹ Thurston, *Widows*.

and thus their means of financial support. Which of these is correct? Close reading of the passage is required to be certain, but a consensus has emerged among the major commentators that it is the second option, and I find their arguments convincing. Let us take Mounce's commentary as an example.⁵¹⁰ Out of the passage itself Mounce imposes on the reader a compelling list of reasons why the passage is discussing pastoral support. For example, he asserts that v.12 does not list duties to be undertaken but suggests signs of a widow's "Christian maturity" which indicate whether the widow should be enrolled for church financial upkeep. Verses 4, 8, and 10 state three times that the widow must not have any family support. The list of good deeds in v.10 is not a list of duties, but would provide evidence of the widow's "godly character".

J. M Holmes agrees that the issue is the pastoral care of widows and gives four concise reasons why.⁵¹¹ The τιμή/τιμάω word group in the Pastoral Epistles delivers the idea of respect rather than remuneration. Official duties are not mentioned anywhere and should not be confused with qualifications. In v.9 καταλεγέσθω refers to classification within a sphere, not membership of an official order. Similarities between qualifications for officials and widows reflect standards required of all Christian believers, not comparable groups. Holmes recognises, as others do, that two factors in the passage render the identity of the widows problematic. First, v. 9, ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή, does not make plain whether the enrolled widow must be only married once, or to have been faithful to her husband during his life-time. Opposition to the prohibition of marriage by the false preachers at 4:3 and the recommendation of 5:14 that the younger widows remarry, suggest that faithfulness within marriage is the more likely connotation. This passage shows that the late second-century idea that monogamous widowhood is spiritually superior to remarriage (evidenced in Tertullian) has not yet evolved.

I will proceed on the basis of majority commentator endorsement with the conviction that in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 what is under discussion is the financial support of church widows who are living in poverty.

⁵¹⁰ Mounce and Metzger, *Pastoral Epistles*: 274.

⁵¹¹ J. M. Holmes, *Text in a whirlwind: a critique of four exegetical devices at 1 Timothy 2.9-15* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). 145-150.

9.3.2 FOUR ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Many scholars have speculated about the background to the author's remarks about widows in this passage. Four have been chosen for closer examination. All four accept the scholarly consensus that the author of the Pastoral letters is not Paul, that all three epistles date to the early second century, that all three letters have the same author, and that each letter serves to illuminate the others. Dennis R. MacDonald sees points of contact with the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Margaret MacDonald proposes that it concerns an enrolled 'Office' of widows whose members exhibit strong ascetic tendencies causing tensions for an honour-shame society.⁵¹² Lone Fatum believes that the author wishes to re-impose a family structure on the church based on the *paterfamilias* pattern and patronage to legitimize the church in the eyes of wider society.⁵¹³ Jouette Bassler interprets the passage from the perspective of equality and freedom from patriarchal subordination through celibacy.⁵¹⁴ All four emphasize the fact that the author is very concerned about the reputation of the church in Greco-Roman society. None of them, however, centre their discussions on the economic and social predicament of poor widows and their fatherless children.

9.3.2.1 DENNIS R. MACDONALD

Dennis R. MacDonald perceives a relationship between the Pastoral Epistles and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*—documents that probably originated also in early second-century Asia Minor. D. R. Macdonald believes that Paul of the genuine epistles lives in tension with Paul of the Pastoral Epistles which reflects that of the Graeco-Roman society in which each was produced. He claims that "the Pastoral Epistles were written to contradict the image of Paul in popular legends". MacDonald focusses on the aspect of the false teaching that involves injunctions against marriage in 1 Timothy 4:3.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian women and pagan opinion: the power of the hysterical woman* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 155-182.

⁵¹³ Lone Fatum, "Christ domesticated: the household theology of the Pastorals as political strategy," in *The formation of the early church*, ed. Jostein Ådna (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 175-207.

⁵¹⁴ Jouette M. Bassler, "The widows' tale: a fresh look at 1 Tim 5:3-16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 1 (1984): 23-41.

⁵¹⁵ Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The legend and the Apostle: the battle for Paul in story and canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). 95-96.

In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the heroine, Thecla, is drawn to Pauline teaching on celibacy where any expression of sexuality is seen as not in conformity with Christianity. MacDonald surmises that the young widows of 1 Timothy 11 were not widows at all, but rather were *virgins*, seeking escape from the role of wife and mother in asceticism and celibacy. He bases his contention on the virgin-widows mentioned by Ignatius in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*⁵¹⁶ and Tertullian's unique virgin-widow chimera.⁵¹⁷ He points out that the text says, "They want to marry, γαμεῖν θέλουσιν", not to *re-marry*. His evidence is sparse indeed. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* knows nothing of groups of virgins at an early date. If they were virgins, the author of 1 Timothy would have named them thus.

D. R. MacDonald considers that as they went from house to house the young widows were passing on a variant of Christianity that was based on a distortion of Paul's views in 1 Corinthians 7 about the superiority of celibacy.⁵¹⁸ My contention is that the issue in 1 Timothy is the necessity of poor young widows to marry unbelievers to ensure financial security, whereas Thecla's story is concerned with the enmity created when wealthy young women choose to remain unmarried or who dissolve engagements and marriages to nonbelievers.

9.3.2.2 MARGARET MACDONALD

M. MacDonald notes that the language of the concepts of honour and shame are plentiful in 1 Timothy. She perceives less church isolationism and greater engagement with the world and notes the close association of church offices and traditional household roles with "the male role as protector of honour both in the household and the house-church".⁵¹⁹ To her, under discussion in 1 Timothy 3:5-16 is an enrolled 'Office' of widows, some of whose members are reneging on their initial vow of celibacy with the intention of remarrying. Initially she seems to accept the author's claim that the young widows are idle gossips and busybodies, "gadabouts" who are possibly spreading rumours shaming the church in the eyes of outsiders.

⁵¹⁶ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 308-309.

⁵¹⁷ Tertullian, "On the Veiling of Virgins," in *Ante-Nicene fathers Volume 4. Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Philip Schaff, 27-37.

⁵¹⁸ MacDonald, *The legend and the Apostle*: 76-77.

⁵¹⁹ MacDonald, *Early Christian women*: 157.

However she recognises that this may be a false perception on the part of the author and that the women might not see their behaviour in the same way. She also links their behaviour to “false teaching”.

Surprisingly M. MacDonald concludes that 1 Tim. 5:11-15 reveals “strong ascetic tendencies” among women. This seems a rather unexpected deduction to reach from the contents of this passage, where women are being chastised for their so-called “sensual desires”. Additionally such a judgment does not accord with the poverty level of the church, as discussed previously, as few women had the leisure and wealth necessary to maintain an ascetic life at so early a date. It did not accord with the state legal requirements for widows to remarry quickly, or with their own likely desire for financial security. Margaret MacDonald claims along with Dennis R. MacDonald that in the Pastorals there are points of contact with the *Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, even if the *Acts* were circulating a generation later. She goes so far as to advocate that the *Acts* should be used as a tool for interpreting the Pastoral Epistles, in particular in understanding an honour-shame society.

9.3.2.3 LONE FATUM

Fanum designates the Paul of the Pastoral Epistles as “a politically corrected version of [real] Paul”. Pastoral Paul thinks that the church is now in need of methods to legitimize itself as socially accountable, honourable, and respectable, to avoid becoming the object of slander or defaming gossip. The author fears the breakup of the households and families of his church community. His aim is to establish a household order for the whole church based on the *paterfamilias* pattern and of the patronage system to which it is linked. This will be done by reorienting women of childbearing age as wives and mothers in the patriarchal household under male control. By assuming the authority of the apostle Paul he can urge his recipients to accept and conform to the present-day conditions of their social and political world. He hopes to achieve order, coherence and external acceptance. Pastoral Paul contradicts the ‘real’ Paul of the undisputed authentic letters such as Galatians and 1 Corinthians, where Paul expresses himself quite differently on issues of marriage, childbearing and household organisation.

Indeed, Fanum observes that the ‘real’ Paul advocated living according to an ideal of spiritualized, fictive kinship and eschatological family formation. According to Gal 3:27-28, baptism into Christ constituted the union of all believers (related or not) into

one spiritual Christ-identity with the effect that ethnic, social, and gender status boundaries were abolished. Women were able to do mission work, to travel, and to play active roles in community leadership as Paul's co-workers (Rom. 16: 1-2). In contrast the Pastoral Paul's letters take patriarchal kinship family and household organization for granted. Thus, to reconstruct "women as gendered bodies and sexualized functionality",⁵²⁰ he adds in 1 Tim. 5:11-15, that young widows, still in their childbearing years, should be required to remarry. In this way, they may be placed firmly under household control and the conventions of family duties and social restrictions. Whereas real Paul in 1 Thess. 4:3-8 and 1 Cor. 7:1-9 sees marriage as a remedy against the dangers of sexual passion, Pastoral Paul in 1 Tim 5:11-15 sees marriage and sexuality as the remedy against the idleness, gossip, and the spatial mobility of young widows to preclude the possible dangers of social offence caused by their unregulated behaviour.

9.3.2.4 JOUETTE BASSLER

Bassler's article attempts to interpret 1 Tim 5:3-16 from the perspective of equality and freedom. She points out that in the past the focus has been on issues such as the unity of the passage, the responsibilities and official status of the widows, and the possible link between the widows and the "false teaching" threatening the church. She prefers to concentrate on the sociological advantages gained by the widows from membership of their group. Bassler is interested in the "pattern of freedom through celibacy". She claims that the attraction of celibate equality for women in early Christianity is a useful key to explore the discussion of widows in 1 Tim. 5:3-16.

Bassler demonstrates that in the centuries immediately preceding the arrival of Christianity, a gradual liberation of women transpired in the Greco-Roman world, notably in legal, economic, and educational fields. In areas formerly reserved for men, such as the philosophical schools, there was an increased involvement of women. The message of Christian freedom, especially as it was framed in the baptismal formula of Gal. 3:28 spoke to these egalitarian hopes.

In Christ ... there is neither male nor female

From the beginning women were attracted to the new movement in large numbers. However, Bassler observes that the church's reaction to this egalitarian fervour was

⁵²⁰ Fatum, "Christ domesticated," 197.

increasingly one of limitation. Even though the household codes of Ephesians and Colossians retain the concept of intrinsic equality, nevertheless the emphasis is rather more on the obedience and submission of the subordinate members of the community, calling them to conformity with the expectations of society. The original “fictive family” model contained in Paul's letters, a model based on equal standing and equal acceptance of all members, was soon being eroded as the church community conformed with the dominant-submissive pattern of Roman society. This movement reached a culmination with the Pastoral Epistles.

Bassler, like M. MacDonald and Fatum, believes that the author is concerned with the reputation of the church. Additionally, this church is being endangered by a heresy problem promoted by an ascetic and gnosticising group, possibly attractive to women. As resistance against the heresy and a response to outside disapproval, the church's hierarchical organisation was reinforced and traditional hierarchical ranks were emphasised, eliminating the earlier equalising statements of the Ephesians and Colossians household codes.

Bassler recognises (more than the other two authors) that the author is genuinely concerned for the welfare of elderly widows, who should be supported by their relatives. She describes his endorsement of the church not supporting younger widows as “repugnant” and understands how as a consequence “many scholars refuse to equate the *enrolled* with the *real* widows”.⁵²¹ Financial strain had been placed on the church because the number of widows had grown to an unacceptable size. Her explanation for this expansion is that unmarried young women, perhaps also converted and subsequently divorced women, had joined the widows' group, attracted by the life of freedom from patriarchal subordination which celibacy permitted. The author was trying to reduce the size of the group and to coerce the remainder into affirmation of contemporary social norms.

All things considered, these four different explanations seem inadequate to explain the ambiguities of the passage. A better explanation might be found by attending more closely to its content.

⁵²¹ Bassler, "Widows' tale," 34.

9.4 THE OLDER WIDOWS

As I explained in a previous chapter, there were two recognised types of Roman marriage, none of which required a ceremony or a certificate to legitimize them. Couples were considered to be married if they considered that they were. Legitimate marriage (*iustum matrimonium*) in Roman law was a partnership agreed upon by both families designed to provide legitimate descendants to pass on property, status, and family values. Not many of the church would fall into that category. Freeborn men not of senatorial rank could legally marry freedwomen other than prostitutes, procuresses or condemned adulteresses. Marriage between freeborn people and former slaves (*libertini* and *libertinae*) therefore was legal. Concubinage (*concubinatus*) served as an alternative to legal marriage for free or freed persons. A Roman man could not have both a wife and a concubine (*concubina*). Although not illegal, the resulting children had no rights of inheritance. The only difference between a wife and a concubine was her social rank. It was her rank which placed her in one of the two categories.

Slave women were under the control of their master or mistress. Slaves could not have legal marriages, and were not acknowledged as having a family. Freed slaves could marry. Unions between a slave and a free person were a legal impossibility, but did occur. Long-lasting relationships of this kind were called *contubernium*. This term was also applied to long-standing relationships between slaves. Children born of these unions were not legitimate and took the legal status of their mother. If she was a slave then her children were added to the household of her owner.⁵²²

The older widows under discussion will have survived their partners from three different types of long-standing relationships, (it has to be assumed socially recognised within the Christian community, given the lack of evidence), which normally would have included the raising of children. One of the qualifications for support was "... as one who has brought up children". It is doubtful if any of those requiring support were under *tutela mulierum*. Any of them who had married and had produced three children would have been rewarded with the *ius (trium) liberorum* which freed women from the need for a *tutor* for legal and business transactions, but owing to the poverty level of the church they probably did not have one anyway.⁵²³

⁵²² Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 81-186.

⁵²³ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 23-45.

The author is clearly very angry with the adult children, adult grandchildren and extended family of these elderly widows, who have not been financially supporting them. He describes them as denying the faith, and being “worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8 NRSV). The responsibility for care is extended to other female family relatives. “If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them” (1 Tim. 5:16 NRSV). He is anxious that the church finances should not be over-stretched by the tightfistedness of unscrupulous relatives. He defines “a real widow” as one who has no relatives left to support her. Her only recourse is to prayer to God for sustenance.

The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. (1 Tim. 5:5 NRSV)

9.4.1 THE AGE LIMIT

The arbitrary age limit of sixty for support in v.9 makes it quite clear that the issue is the support of old people. This is the only explicitly specified age limit for any church group in the New Testament. As today, women survived longer than men into old age. Wives were generally 7/8 years younger than their husbands, which would exacerbate the situation. Krause concluded that the number lay between 25-30% of the population, probably nearer the upper figure, including widows who were elderly.⁵²⁴

The sheer number of elderly widows led to problems of management and support. Krause estimates that perhaps a third to a quarter of Roman widows may have been older than sixty years.⁵²⁵ How high the proportion of widows was among the Christians is beyond our knowledge. Evidently, from early on, there was dissent in the church over this age limit. The *Didascalia Apostolorum*⁵²⁶ sets the limit at fifty, but the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* returns to the age of sixty, probably a correction to agree with scripture.⁵²⁷ Why the age was not set at fifty to accord with the Augustan legislation of 9 CE is not clear. The reason may have been that women under sixty years of age were considered capable of working.

⁵²⁴ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 47-73.

⁵²⁵ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: I, 67.

⁵²⁶ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 182.

⁵²⁷ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.ix.iv.i.html>

There seems to have been the occasional exception made. Tertullian c. 204 CE erupts with indignation that a young virgin (unveiled) has exceptionally been placed among the financially supported widows, which he feels she does not deserve on account of her youth and lack of experience.

I know plainly, that in a certain place a *virgin* of less than twenty years of age has been placed in the order of *widows*! whereas if the bishop had been bound to accord her any relief, he might, of course, have done it in some other way without detriment to the respect due to discipline; that such a miracle, not to say monster, should not be pointed at in the church, a *virgin-widow*! the more portentous indeed, that not even as a *widow* did she veil her head; denying herself either way; both as *virgin*, in that she is counted a *widow*, and as *widow*, in that she is styled a *virgin*.⁵²⁸

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* also shows that exceptions were made. Chapter 14 states that elderly widows are ‘enrolled’ in an ‘office’. If a young widow (presumably without young children, as they are not mentioned) without support remains in the state of widowhood for some considerable time, and wishes not to remarry then the DA recommends she should be “assisted and supported”, but not appointed to the office of widows. The aim of this support is to prevent her being forced into remarriage, which would be “damaging”.⁵²⁹

9.4.2 LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Basil the Great was born c. 330 CE at Caesarea in Cappadocia into a Christian family. He studied at Constantinople and Athens for several years with Gregory of Nazianzus and was influenced by Origen. Ordained a presbyter in 365, in 370 he succeeded Eusebius in the archbishopric of Caesarea, which included authority over all Pontus. He died in 379. In an obvious reference to 1 Tim. 5:9-10, he gives the following ruling in Letter 199, section 24:⁵³⁰

XXIV. The Apostle judged that a widow who is enrolled among the widows, that is, who is supported by the Church, if she marries, is to be condemned. No law, however, is imposed on a widower, but for such a person the penalty for digamists is sufficient. But if a widow who is sixty years old chooses to live again with a man, she will not

⁵²⁸ Tertullian, "On the Veiling," 33.

⁵²⁹ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 182-183.

⁵³⁰ Basil, *Basil: Letters. Volume 3. Letters 186-248*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library, 243 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930). 116-117.

be deemed worthy of the Communion of the Good until she ceases from the passion of impurity. If, however, we have enrolled her before her sixtieth year, ours is the fault, not the woman's.

His ruling demonstrates how a second marriage had come to be regarded as sinful, despite Paul's opinion in 1 Cor. 7:8-9, 36.

By the time of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, the age for the appointment of deaconesses (who appear by then to have replaced any role the widows might have had in church ministry) was set at a minimum of forty years in Canon 15.

Diaconissam mulierem ante quadragesimum annum non ordinari, et eam cum accurata probatione.⁵³¹

9.5 THE YOUNGER WIDOWS

More disconcerting is the author's irritable and exasperated attack on the behaviour of young widows, which gives him the pretext to exclude them from support.

9.5.1 "ONLY IN THE LORD"

He condemns first of all their desire for remarriage, and in the next breath recommends that they remarry. This seems illogical. Some factor is not being taken into account.

¹¹ But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry,

¹² and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge.

¹⁴ So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us.

¹⁵ For some have already turned away to follow Satan. (1Tim. 5:11-15 NRSV)

He considers that their motivation for remarriage is because of what the NRSV mistranslates as "sensual desires". He clearly does not understand that women have many important reasons for desiring to remarry, not the least of these, financial security for herself and/or minor children. Freedom from the humiliation of begging might be another.

⁵³¹ Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus / Patrologia Latina: sive bibliotheca universalis ... omnium ss. patrum, doctorum scriptorum que ecclesiasticorum qui ab aevo apostolico ad usque Innocentii III tempora floruerunt*. 67 (Parisiis: Migne, 1865). v.67, col. 0090.

What is this “first pledge” or “first faith” (πρώτην πίστιν) which they have violated? The author considers that somehow desiring to remarry alienates the young widows from Christ. It seems apparent to me, and so obvious to the author that he fails to make it absolutely explicit, that they are planning to marry outside the Church to a non-Christian. They are breaking Paul’s command that they should remarry, “Only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). “Turned away to follow Satan” must surely mean returning to the idol worship of the Roman gods in a pagan household, the difficulties of which Tertullian so graphically describes in *To his Wife* Book 2.⁵³² So when the author says, “So I would have younger widows marry”, implicit in that statement is the obligation to marry a fellow-Christian.⁵³³

9.5.2 A CLUE TO THE PUZZLE?

There is a hint elsewhere in the passage; as far as I am aware unremarked by anyone other than myself, that marriage to a pagan might indeed be the issue with widow support which is so excessively troubling the mind of the author, i.e.

... is worse than [*marrying*] an unbeliever.

And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8 NRSV)

εἰ δέ τις τῶν ἰδίων καὶ μάλιστα οἰκείων οὐ προνοεῖ, τὴν πίστιν ἥρνηται καὶ ἔστιν ἀπίστου χείρων. (1 Tim. 5:8 N-A 28)

Obviously the author is referring to the general care for widows found in Roman pagan families. Is the author saying that a pagan who takes pity on a Christian widow and marries her is better than an uncaring believer; indeed, a follower of Christ who does not support a related Christian widow is an apostate who does not believe that he will be subject to the judgment of God? As Gordon Fee remarks:

It fits with the concern expressed throughout the letter (see 2:2; 3:1-7; 5:14; 6:1) that Christian behaviour be circumspect before the outsider and therefore at least be ethically equal to theirs—although obviously more is expected as well.⁵³⁴

⁵³² Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 31-32.

⁵³³ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*: 352.

⁵³⁴ Gordon D Fee and W. Ward Gasque, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988). 118.

In view of the church's poverty, in his desperation to find support for poor widows is the author giving in to the reality that the young widows must go ahead and marry unbelievers to survive? Does this account for the ambiguity noted in the Introduction where I asked the question,

Why are the young widows being condemned for wanting to remarry (because it “distances them from Christ”) and then two sentences later being encouraged to remarry (in order to prevent them “turning away to follow Satan”)?

9.5.3 ANY REALISTIC CHANCE OF REMARRIAGE?

So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. (1 Tim. 5:14 NRSV)

The writer expects to find the solution to the problem of young widows in their remarriage.⁵³⁵ How realistic would be the prospect of remarriage in the early empire period? Krause suggests that 25-30% of the female population at any given time were widows. The large number of widows looking for remarriage, combined with the few unmarried men available, meant that remarriage was difficult, especially if the choice was narrowed down to Christians. Remarriage appears to have been commoner for men than for women. The need for support was the obvious reason for a widow to remarry, but Krause discusses other motives: loneliness, health, desire for children. A widow's chance of remarriage decreased sharply with age, or if she already had children.⁵³⁶ Legislation increased the protection of the children of the first marriage, but was not intended to deter remarriage. She might need to offer a higher dowry than a woman marrying for the first time (thus prejudicing the interests of the children of her first marriage), or might be obliged to marry ‘downwards’. Tertullian in *To his Wife*, in Book 2, recommends that a wealthy widow should not hesitate to remarry and give her dowry to someone in more moderate circumstances, who is a Christian brother, because “the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor”.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁵ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 580.

⁵³⁶ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen I*: 114-132.

⁵³⁷ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 34.

9.5.4 JESUS, PAUL AND TERTULLIAN ON REMARRIAGE

As the numbers of Christians in the first three centuries CE gradually increased, it might be expected that the teachings of Christ and Paul on marriage and divorce became of greater influence. Although we do not have any biographical information about real Christian widows of the first three centuries of the Christian Era, it has to be recognised that the church would undeniably have attempted to abide by the teachings found in the Gospels and the letters of Paul, so great were their authority.

9.5.4.1 JESUS

Jesus speaks nowhere against marriage or remarriage, although he disapproved of casual divorce.⁵³⁸ He himself appears not to have been married, perhaps because of having had to support his widowed mother and younger siblings until they were of age, or because of the demands of his peripatetic mission.

9.5.4.2 PAUL

There were no strictures against remarriage, as such, for widows in the mind of the apostle Paul, although his words are often misunderstood.⁵³⁹ His recommendations for remaining unmarried were influenced by his personal circumstances of a peripatetic lifestyle and the disturbances which he was anticipating were about to shake the foundations of Roman society. He states with regret in his letter to the Corinthian Church:

Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? (1 Cor. 9:5-6 NRSV)

There may be a hint here that he could not afford to support a wife and family.

There is a clue in the passage that he may in fact have been a widower.

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. (1 Cor. 7:8 NRSV)

The adjective used here as a noun designating “the unmarried” is ἄγαμος, ὁ and ἡ, meaning an unmarried man or woman. This is apparently different from a virgin, a

⁵³⁸ Matt 5:31-32, 19:3-9, Mark 10:9-12, Luke 16:18

⁵³⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000). 521-525, 540-543.

παρθένος, both ἡ and ὁ, male and female. That word can be applied to both men and women, and for men see Revelation 14:4. Paul begins to talk about παρθένοι in a separate section beginning at 1 Cor. 7:25, and he clearly differentiates between them and the ἄγαμοι. Because the Greek word translated “the unmarried” has a masculine ending here, it can only refer to men. This matches the accompanying “widows” (which has a feminine ending, since it refers to women whose husbands have died). It makes sense that Paul would deal with widowers and widows together. There exists no word in koine Greek for a bereaved husband, a widower. In all the other uses of the word in verses 8 bis, 11, 32 and 34 it is used as an adjective i.e. it describes the general state of being unmarried.

Paul repeated and endorsed Jesus’ condemnation of divorce.

To the married I give this command—*not I* but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. (1 Cor. 7:10-11 NRSV)

Paul believed that marriage was better than living in an immoral state or continually needing to fight sexual temptation. Paul's advice against marriage is not based on the assumption that the expression of human sexuality within marriage is sinful.

But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. (1 Cor. 7:28 NRSV)

But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (1 Cor. 7:2 NRSV)

But if they are not practising self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. (1 Cor. 7:9 NRSV)

Two things connected to marriage concerned Paul in his first letter to Corinth—‘mixed’ marriages, where one marriage partner had become a Christian while the other remained pagan, in combination with the sense of urgency he was experiencing about an impending crisis, possibly the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul’s young churches of the early 50’s CE consisted of ‘first generation’ Christians. They were all converts, either from a Jewish or a Gentile background. Often one of a couple was converted to Christianity while the other continued in adherence to Roman religion. In this situation Paul recommended continuation of the existing marriage if the unconverted partner, male or female, was willing to do so, but if not, he or she should be allowed to divorce amicably. This concession is known as ‘the Pauline Exception’, an interesting expansion of the teachings of Jesus.

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. (1 Cor. 7:15 NRSV)

Grubbs and Treggiari show that divorce was subject to very few restrictions until the fourth century CE.⁵⁴⁰ Women in a *sine manu* marriage could divorce their husbands unilaterally (as well as mutually), just as their husbands could. Formulas of oral repudiation, such as “Attend to your own affairs” or “have your own things for yourself”, were not necessary for a unilateral divorce, nor was a written notice of divorce, known as a *repudium*, necessary. When a marriage ended by divorce the wife or her father could bring an action for the return of dowry. In cases of adultery involving the wife, however, publically attested divorce was recommended to prevent accusations of *lenocinium* by the husband. At this time in the mid first century, divorce within the church would have been easy, lacking later obstacles.⁵⁴¹ Many of the church would have lived in forms of non-legal marriage rather than *iustum matrimonium*, such as *contubernium* or *concubinatus*. If a woman in this situation was abandoned by her partner while she still had minor children, she would have been left in severe difficulties.

In Paul’s case, he was driven by a revelation of Jesus Christ that his calling was to preach to the Gentiles.⁵⁴² Paul believed that his single state was an advantage in this work, which involved dangerous, lengthy journeys throughout Asia Minor and Greece. He also applied this judgement to his converts, believing that marriage would serve as a distraction from their calling to serve Christ.

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; (1 Cor. 7:29 NRSV)

For the present form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:31 NRSV)

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. (1 Cor. 7:8 NRSV)

Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give *my opinion* as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that, in view of *the impending crisis*, it is well for you to remain as

⁵⁴⁰ S. Treggiari, "Divorce Roman style: how easy and how frequent was it?," in *Marriage, divorce, and children in ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 30-46.

⁵⁴¹ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 187-191.

⁵⁴² Acts 9:15, 22:21, 26:17.

you are. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. (1 Cor. 7:25-28 NRSV)

Paul makes it perfectly clear that it is his own opinion and not that of Jesus, that the Christian unmarried should remain unmarried, at this particular point in time. We do not know the nature of “the impending crisis” to which he refers. Most commentators consider that he is referring to the eschatological hope of the ultimate resolution of all things with the return of Jesus Christ in glory. On the other hand, he may well be referring to a local crisis which was intense but short-lived.

His celibate state made him suitable for this particular task of peripatetic preaching to the Gentiles. Will Deming has examined the possible reasons behind Paul’s attitude that marriage is a “distraction” and maintains that Paul’s discussion of marriage and celibacy is best understood against the background of Stoic and Cynic dialogue on these subjects. These philosophers adopted two opposite positions. The Stoic view espoused the traditional order of society, whereas the Cynic view promoted individualism and self-sufficiency. The Cynic position was embraced by some of the Stoics to the extent that they discussed certain circumstances in which it was expedient not to marry.⁵⁴³ Deming perceives Paul’s attitude as the beginning of a trajectory leading to the asceticism of the later church. He claims that Paul merges these Stoic-Cynic perspectives with his Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic convictions in 1 Corinthians 7:1-40.⁵⁴⁴ I find Deming’s ideas plausible, but would consider such philosophic theories to be only a minor influence (if any at all) on Paul the fanatical Pharisee, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, who boasted this of himself:

I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. (Gal. 1:14 NRSV)

Paul was clear in his view that a widow, if she remarries, must remarry *in the Lord*.

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. (1 Cor. 7:39 NRSV)

It may be assumed that this means she must marry a fellow Christian. This would surely describe an ideal situation. If a young widow had the chance to remarry,

⁵⁴³ Will Deming, *Paul on marriage and celibacy: the hellenistic background of 1 Corinthians 7*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2004). 47-104.

⁵⁴⁴ Deming, *Paul on marriage and celibacy*: 105-206.

especially one with young children to support, surely she would have to jump at the chance of marriage with any acceptable person. The restrictions imposed on the options available to unsupported widows with young children by this demand may have been considerable and painfully difficult for them to accept and adhere to.

For Paul sexual abstinence was not an ambition in itself. Even if Paul's view was that marriage is a 'distraction' from service to God, and that his advice to remain celibate has its origin neither in a supposed theology of sexual asceticism nor the expediency of the moment, but instead in Stoic-Cynic ideas; it is easy to perceive that Paul's instruction must have influenced, and may possibly even have to some extent produced, the sexual asceticism of the church of the late Empire.

Lastly, here follows Paul's final word on widows—just his personal opinion, not based on any personal experience of marriage, widowhood, or being a woman—which unfortunately may have provided the ammunition needed to bolster Tertullian's vehement opposition to second marriage for widows.

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But *in my judgment* she is more blessed if she remains as she is. (1 Cor. 7:39-40 NRSV)

9.5.4.3 TERTULLIAN ON REMARRIAGE

Tertullian wrote about marriage and remarriage to his Christian wife in two treatises or letters, called *Ad uxorem (To my wife)*, generally dated to between 200 and 206 CE.⁵⁴⁵ Each consists of 8 short chapters. In Book 1 he discusses why remarriage is less than ideal. At the start of Book 1 he makes it clear that he has already made provision in his will for her financial security in the event of his death. We are unquestionably informed that we are discussing a woman who has a *choice*, not someone who will become a penniless widow.⁵⁴⁶ Tertullian espouses Paul's opinions in 1 Corinthians 7 as his authority. He quotes them continually, omits to recall that some things are only Paul's personal opinion, and makes them applicable to all time rather than the limited time of approaching distress in the mind of Paul. He twists them to establish that marriage is merely tolerated as a remedy for temptation but

⁵⁴⁵ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 8.

⁵⁴⁶ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 10.

celibacy is preferable. “Nothing is good just because it is not bad”.⁵⁴⁷ The desire for remarriage has two reasons, he claims: “concupiscence” of the flesh and “concupiscence of the world”, both described as “weaknesses”. The first arises because of the sensual desires which stem from “youth and beauty”. The second stems from the inability to cope with life alone. He describes the wifely task of running “another man’s” household, with financial security and desire for fine clothes and jewellery, as “extravagance” at another’s expense. The longing to have children, whom he calls “burdens”, he considers to be “danger to the faith”, because at the last trump their mothers will be encumbered by a “heaving baggage of marriage in their wombs or at their breasts”. Tertullian expresses his admiration for those who swear celibacy at baptism or exist in celibate marriages.⁵⁴⁸ The ‘altar’ metaphor for a widow (discussed elsewhere) appears here with the variant meaning of purity and sanctity.⁵⁴⁹ Finally the common attack on women’s speech found regularly in these early writings makes its appearance. Condemned are:

Chattering ... scandalmongering ... loquaciousness ... prurient gossip.

In Book 2, Tertullian demonstrates the problems of remarriage outside of Christianity. He would prefer that his wife did not remarry, but if she did then it must be to another Christian. He stresses that this is a command of Paul, not merely a recommendation. Book 2 is a completely different matter to the previous book and should not be judged harshly, as it contains some useful practical advice.

Tertullian claims that when a Christian woman marries a heathen her behaviour may change:

She will display the beauty of her body, make a show of elaborate coiffures, worldly elegance, seductive charms, ... openly flaunt the sordid secrets of marital intimacies.⁵⁵⁰

More important, she may also cease to fulfil her obligations towards the Christian community. Apart from the insight the next passage gives into the regular pattern of the Christian life around 200 CE, this contains sensible advice embodying wisdom and good judgment for a widow considering remarriage who wishes to maintain her

⁵⁴⁷ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 13.

⁵⁴⁸ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 15-18.

⁵⁴⁹ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 20-22.

⁵⁵⁰ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 24-28.

Christian faith and practice. There follows a long list of what her pagan husband would not allow her to do.⁵⁵¹

Permit a day of fasting and prayer
Perform an urgent action of charity
Visit the meagre homes of poor Christians (See James 1:27)
Be present at evening devotions
Stay awake all night at the Easter Vigil
Assist at the Lord's Supper
Visit martyrs in prison
Greet other Christian women with a kiss
Wash the feet of the saints
Provide food and drink
Offer hospitality

Tertullian warns that even if a husband can be found who will tolerate this way of life, it may be that the price of his silence before the law is the dowry of his wife, since the husband cannot fail to observe or even misinterpret the distinctive religious observances of Christianity. For example, he may believe, as was rumoured, that the bread dipped in wine taken before a meal is bread dipped in the blood of a murdered baby. Furthermore, the Christian wife may be required to participate in idolatrous rites.⁵⁵² Tertullian finishes his letter with a beautiful picture of a couple united in devotion to Christ.⁵⁵³

Next, in *De exhortatione castitatis* (*An exhortation to chastity*), written between 204 and 211 CE to a friend whose wife has died, Tertullian continues with his misinterpretation of the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 7 and argues against remarriage.⁵⁵⁴ He also increasingly turns against remarriage generally as "legalised fornication".⁵⁵⁵ He appears to dislike children intensely, which he expresses in this troubling way, which I sincerely hope is not actually representative of the feelings of all men. It may, however, explain the invisibility of fatherless children in the writings of the NT and beyond.

⁵⁵¹ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 29.

⁵⁵² Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 30-32.

⁵⁵³ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 35-36.

⁵⁵⁴ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 47-50.

⁵⁵⁵ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 56-57.

Men have to be forced by law to father a family, because no man in his right senses would ever care to have children.⁵⁵⁶

A later work, *De monogamia (On marrying only once)*, was written about 217 CE when Tertullian was firmly under the influence of Montanism at Carthage. Le Saint describes his language as “fierce and fanatical”. Tertullian now regards remarriage as adultery. By the time of writing Tertullian’s views on second marriage had been condemned as heretical, with his opponents similarly appealing to the authority of the writings of Paul in 1 Cor.7. Tertullian reargues his case once again in response to his challengers, not very convincingly, from the same passage, as well as from Romans 7:2-6.⁵⁵⁷

It is quite clear that Tertullian did not reflect the ideas of the mainstream church in the matter of remarriage. He must be seen as a side-track, a pathway off the main route. However, his ideas on remaining unmarried in the light of current circumstances were of influence. I prefer to believe, however, that some of the more prosperous women had shrewd reasons of their own to prefer the single life to the married state.

9.6 PRAYER AND PASSIVITY AGAIN

Once again in this passage is found the connection of ‘real’ widows with constant prayer, as with Anna in the Gospel of Luke.

The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. (1 Tim. 5:5 NRSV)

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* in Chapter 15 also emphasizes that the principal role of the widow is to pray.

For a widow should have no other concern except to pray for those who give and for the entire church. ... For you women are not appointed to teach but solely to pray and beseech the Lord God ... A widow who wishes to please God sits within her house and meditates night and day, offering prayer and intercession with purity of heart before the Lord.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 61.

⁵⁵⁷ Tertullian, *Treatises on marriage*: 94-98.

⁵⁵⁸ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 184-185, 187.

9.7 PROMISCUOUS WOMEN?

Verses 6 and 11 tend to be interpreted as implying sexual indiscretions.

The ambiguity of the Greek of verse 11 has led to much disparagement of young widows over the centuries. How should the words “sensual desires” be interpreted?

But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, (1 Tim. 5:11 NRSV)

... For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. (NIV)

... For when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry (RSV)

... ὅταν γὰρ καταστρηνιάσωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γαμεῖν θέλουσιν (N-A 28)⁵⁵⁹

Bruce Winter claimed in a 2000 article that in around 44 BCE a ‘new’ type of wife had emerged in certain circles in Rome.⁵⁶⁰ He found in this development lay the explanation for Paul’s recommendations on the deportment of Christian women in 1 Timothy 2:9-15. He was greatly influenced in making this claim by an *excursus* in *Women in the Classical World*, edited by E. Fantham, from which he quotes:⁵⁶¹

Both in ostensibly factual texts and in imaginative writing a new kind of woman appears precisely at the time of Cicero and Caesar: a woman in high position, who nevertheless claims for herself the indulgence in sexuality of a woman of pleasure.

From these ‘ostensibly factual texts’, however, she points to a very few real women who were historical figures. Named by Cicero and Sallust were Clodia and Sempronia, yet she acknowledges that “male prejudice has surely distorted the record of their lives”. In the case of Clodia, in order to win his case Cicero diverts the jury away from Caelius’ probable guilt by attributing the bringing of the prosecution to Clodia as the revenge act of a jilted lover. In addition Sempronia is made out by Sallust to be the dissolute wife of one of Catiline conspirators. Fantham describes Julia, the daughter of Augustus, and his granddaughter Julia, as examples of real

⁵⁵⁹ New Revised Standard Version; New International Version, Revised Standard Version, Nestle-Aland Version 28.

⁵⁶⁰ Bruce W. Winter, "The 'new' Roman wife and 1 Timothy 2:9-15: The search for a Sitz im Leben," *Tyndale Bulletin* 51, no. 2 (2000): 285-294.

⁵⁶¹ Elaine Fantham, "Excursus. The 'new woman': representation and reality," in *Women in the classical world: image and text*, ed. Elaine Fantham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 280.

women who were seen as promiscuous. However, the bulk of her examples stem from the fictional females of love poetry.⁵⁶²

Winter fails to notice that the women discussed by Fantham were all elite women who had brought to their marriage the vital dowry and could hold property in their own name. It was also possible for them to terminate their marriages, and receive back a large portion of, or their entire dowry. None of this applied to the poor widows of the earliest church under discussion in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

Winter's unsympathetic attitude to widows is already unmistakably apparent in the tone of an article written in 1988. The first paragraph begins:⁵⁶³

It was not only in Acts 6:1-5 that providing for the widows *caused problems* for the newly established Christian *ἐκκλησία*. Similar *problems* were encountered in another congregation where they were 'a disruptive force' ... *Sorting out* widows was not only a *pastoral headache* in the early church ...

In his argument in this article he maintains that most previously married women in the church had been given a dowry and that those responsible for the administration of their dowry were not performing their duty. This would have been normally the *paterfamilias*, if he was still alive. If he had died, it did not necessarily pass to her brothers or her eldest son—as Winter mistakenly pronounces—rather it was the task of the *tutor mulierum* (guardian of an adult woman).⁵⁶⁴ The role's original purpose was thought to be directed at securing a woman's paternal inheritance in the interests of her father's relatives, who would inherit on her death. If her closest male relative held the office he was called a *tutor legitimus*. Significantly, already by 45 CE the emperor Claudius had abolished the *tutor legitimus* for most women which meant they might have had a *tutor* disinterested in their financial or legal affairs.⁵⁶⁵

However, Winter's reasoning is largely irrelevant, because the provision of a dowry applied only to those women from families with property, who had been married in *iustum matrimonium*. This condition would not apply to the majority of the early church widows. Furthermore, he assumes that all the "flighty young widows", as he

⁵⁶² Fantham, "Excursus. The 'new woman'," 281-293.

⁵⁶³ Bruce W. Winter, "Providentia for the widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16," *Tyndale Bulletin* 39(1988): 83-99.

⁵⁶⁴ Winter, "Providentia," 84.

⁵⁶⁵ Grubbs, *Women and the law*: 23-30.

miscalls them, still of child-bearing age, i.e. under fifty, would be able to remarry, after a ten month period of bereavement, according to the legislation of Augustus in the *Lex Papia Poppaea* of 9 CE in which the period during which she could remain a widow was set at two years. Krause, on the other hand, has demonstrated that remarriage was frequently not possible.⁵⁶⁶ Winter does however recognise that some women would “slip through the net”, as he puts it, especially those at the lowest end of the economic scale. The church, says Winter, needed to separate out those who were unable to support themselves financially, and he regrets the absence of a “means test”.⁵⁶⁷ Those between fifty and sixty he unrealistically expected to work. How would widows aged between fifty and sixty, or those over thirty with minor children, survive with little hope of remarriage? He then introduces the stereotype of the ‘merry’ widow to slight the young widows of v.13.

Winter’s over-confident and anachronistic statements concerning Roman history and Roman law are of concern, as are his inexperience of the effects of poverty on human well-being. He does not appear to have fully assimilated the conclusions of Krause’s research despite his listing of his work in the bibliography.

In his 2000 book, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, Winter repeats and expands on his 1988 article, this time broadening his scope to look at the appearance and behaviour of other categories of Roman women.⁵⁶⁸ His primary aim is to imagine a *Sitz im Leben*, perhaps the same one in all cases, for certain passages in the NT letters to the Pauline churches. These are the unveiled wives in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; the married woman’s appearance in 1 Timothy 2:9-15; the young widows (under discussion) of 1 Timothy 5:11-15 in his Chapter 7⁵⁶⁹, and the young wives in Titus 2:3-5.

On the first page of Chapter 7 Winter betrays his belief that Paul is the author of 1 Timothy, which reveals and explains the motivation underlying his anxiety to find a vindication for the author’s impatience and lack of compassion. To accomplish that aim he must establish that the fault lies with the widows, in order not to attribute callousness to the apostle Paul. Winter does this by directly accusing them of

⁵⁶⁶ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 1*: 101.

⁵⁶⁷ Winter, "Providentia," 86-90.

⁵⁶⁸ Bruce W. Winter, *Roman wives, Roman widows: the appearance of new women and the Pauline communities* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵⁶⁹ Winter, *Roman wives, Roman widows*: 123-140.

“behaving promiscuously”, thus making his slanderous allegation absolutely explicit.⁵⁷⁰ He then describes in detail salacious anecdotes from Polybius, Cicero, Petronius, Eumolpus and Pliny, one assumes with the implication that the young widows might have also engaged in such behaviour. He refers once again to the theory of the ‘new woman’ who, “still married, copied the sexual patterns of young men”.⁵⁷¹ Yet, in this case, surely, one would think that wanting to remarry is the opposite of behaving promiscuously?

But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry (1 Tim. 5:11 NRSV)

νεωτέρας δὲ χήρας παραιτοῦ· ὅταν γὰρ καταστρηνιάσωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γαμεῖν θέλουσιν (1 Tim 5:11 N-A 28)

This verse has aroused a great deal of speculation about the possible insinuation of sexual misdemeanour being made here by the author. There is no justification for this given in the passage. Young widows had little alternative to remarriage for financial maintenance and the support of their (here ignored) minor children. Marrying a non-believer might be their only option, called here “turning away to follow Satan”; especially as the church appeared to be refusing support.

9.7.1 INACCURATE TRANSLATION

Winter pointed out that at the time of writing there was no other instance of the use of any form of this verb to be found to date in the TLG, or non-literary sources.⁵⁷²

We still do not know what this phrase means, but a new occurrence of an allied word has since been documented.

The Greek phrase which permits Winter to make this accusation is very brief. The verb used is not found anywhere else and its meaning must be determined from the context. Allied word forms may provide some hints.

ὅταν γὰρ καταστρηνιάσωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ = literally “For whenever they might “ ? ” of Christ”. (1 Tim. 5:11 N-A 28)

καταστρηνιάω be governed by strong physical desire (in BDAG)

Here are some examples of allied word forms, in NRSV and N-A 28 versions.

⁵⁷⁰ Winter, *Roman wives, Roman widows*: 128-129.

⁵⁷¹ Winter, *Roman wives, Roman widows*: 131.

⁵⁷² Winter, *Roman wives, Roman widows*: 132-133.

στρηνιάω to live in luxury; (Rev. 18:7 BDAG)⁵⁷³

As she [Rome] glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief.

ὄσα ἐδόξασεν αὐτήν καὶ ἐστρηνίασεν

τό στρηῆνος, ους, sensuality, luxury; (Rev. 18:3 BDAG)

and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.

καὶ οἱ ἔμποροι τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ στρηῆνους αὐτῆς ἐπλούτησαν.

There is also one Septuagint usage, used of the Assyrian king

τό στρηῆνος wantonness, luxury; 2 Kings 19:28 (M-M)⁵⁷⁴

Because you have raged against me and your arrogance has come to my ears

διὰ τὸ ὀργισθῆναί σε ἐπ' ἐμέ καὶ τὸ στρηῆνός σου ἀνέβη ἐν τοῖς ὠσίν μου (Rahlfs)

	τεθάρρηκα. τὸ δὲ παῖδα αὐτὸν ὄντα δέεσθαι	I have confidence. With him being a child, it is essential
5	τοῦ μὴ εἶς [ἀ]ταξείαν τρέπεσθαι, καὶ περὶ τού- του πιστεύω ὅτι ἐντολὰς λήψετε παρὰ σοῦ ὃ Ἐπάγαθος ὥστε αὐτῷ προσκαρτε- ρῆν. εἰ δὲ καὶ αἱ [ca. 10] `περὶ τὴν Ἀδωρᾶν' ἐκείναι ἐπι- μένοιεν τῷ αὐτῷ στρηῆνι, ἀνακοπτέ- 10 στωσαν διὰ τῆς σῆς, τοῦ ἐμοῦ κυρίου,	that he not be directed towards ill- discipline, and I believe, in relation to this, that Epagathus will receive orders from you to stay with him. And if those women, [[c.10]] `the group around Adora', carry on in the same brazenness, let them be checked, my lord,

In *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: Volume 10: Greek and Other Inscriptions and Papyri Published 1988-1992*, published in 2014, another occurrence of the word **τό στρηῆνος** has been identified.⁵⁷⁵ Eusebius, a father, replies in response to his older son Apollonius' letter concerning his younger brother Sabinus, who is still a child. A group of women centred around one called Adora is behaving towards

⁵⁷³ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁵⁷⁴ Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*.

⁵⁷⁵ Llewelyn and Harrison, *New Documents Vol. 10*: 119-122.

Sabinus in a way which causes Apollonius concern. Eusebius instructs Apollonius to order Epagathus to stay with the child and if the women carry on with the same **στρῆνος** they are to be checked. The word is translated as “brazenness” here. It might mean that they are ‘spoiling’ the child, or being very indulgent towards him. It is highly unlikely that a group of women would have any sexual intentions towards a child. The word has implications of extravagance. In view of this new evidence and the translation of the related words above, it would not be unreasonable to consider that this phrase is concerned with riches, rather than morality. A better translation of the phrase might be:

For whenever they reject the wealth that is in Christ ...

The widows are opting for financial security and comfortable living by marrying a prosperous non-believer outside of the church.

Of the four major commentators, Marshall, Towner, Knight and Mounce, gratifyingly only one is entirely persuaded by Winter’s depiction of the young widows’ behaviour. Mounce⁵⁷⁶ concedes that “καταστρηνιάω does not necessarily contain any idea of sexual promiscuity” and thinks that remarriage to a non-Christian is the most likely explanation, as Marshall also does.⁵⁷⁷ Knight sees no reference to promiscuity but, like Margaret MacDonald, thinks the reprehensible action is breaking a vow or pledge of a life of celibacy which the young widow made when she was enrolled as a widow.⁵⁷⁸ However a vow of chastity for young women is explicitly witnessed only for the 3rd century.⁵⁷⁹

On the other hand, Towner in his own commentary refers to Winter’s article and to his book and reiterates Winter’s lack of understanding of the dowry provision, not realising its inapplicability to most church widows, and incorporates Winter’s idea of the ‘new woman’, claiming that the young widows were adopting a “free-wheeling promiscuous lifestyle”.⁵⁸⁰ He agrees also that marriage to unbelievers is what is being contemplated, and thus he interprets it in a contradictory fashion.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁶ Mounce and Metzger, *Pastoral Epistles*: 290-291.

⁵⁷⁷ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 599-601.

⁵⁷⁸ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*: 225-226.

⁵⁷⁹ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 4: 53.

⁵⁸⁰ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*: 334-336, 355.

⁵⁸¹ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*: 352.

The author of 1 Timothy, Towner, and Winter are not the only men who believe in the male fantasy of the sexually voracious widow. Indeed, perhaps it is being perpetuated within the Christian Church by interpretations such as these of this very passage. Peter Walcot demonstrates by literary examples that, as well as in antiquity, the danger thought to be posed by the sexually experienced widow is a threat still strongly felt today through the general region of the Mediterranean countries.⁵⁸²

The concept of the virtuous widow was balanced by that of the widow as predator, and both concepts persisted throughout antiquity.

9.7.2 CHRYSOSTOM'S INTERPRETATION

Chrysostom taught on 1 Timothy 5:3-16 in Homilies 13, 14 and 15.⁵⁸³ Homily 15 discusses the young widows. He nowhere mentions anything about participation in heresies, promiscuity, or a desire for ascetic living. On the contrary, when he quotes the verse whose verb's meaning is in contention, [usually translated as “wax wanton”] his interpretation follows it, so we are able to see the reading made by a native Greek speaker—

“The younger widows refuse, for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry”; that is, **when they have become scornful and luxurious**. [trans. Schaff]

ὅταν ἀκκίσθωσιν, ὅταν θρύπτωνται⁵⁸⁴
Cum enim luxuriatae fuerint in Christo

The first Greek word conveys treating Christ with indifference and disrespect. The second, in the passive voice, conveys giving oneself airs, pretending to be better than one is, considering oneself superior to others and displaying arrogance. Later in the homily he confirms his interpretation that a desire for luxury will be the future motive of the young widows by further elucidation of Paul's words:

“I will therefore that the younger widows”—do what? live in luxury and pleasure? By no means; but—“marry, bear children, guide the house.” That he may not be supposed to encourage them to live luxuriously, he [Paul] adds, that they give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. They ought indeed to have been

⁵⁸² Peter Walcot, "On widows and their reputation in antiquity," *Symbolae Osloenses* 66, no. 1 (1991): 5-26.

⁵⁸³ Chrysostom, NPNF 1-13 St. Chrysostom: Homilies on Timothy, Titus, and Philemon [PG62], (Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL)), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf113.html>. 783-802.

⁵⁸⁴ J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graecae vol. 62: John Chrysostom* (Paris: Migne, 1862). Col.579.

superior to the things of this world, but since they are not, let them abide in them at least upright.

No mention of a desire for independent ascetic living, and no accusation of promiscuity are found in Chrysostom's homily.⁵⁸⁵

Similarly in Homily 13 Chrysostom interprets "living for pleasure" in verse six to refer to an extravagant lifestyle.

whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. (1 Tim. 5:6 NIV)

whereas she who lives self-indulgently is dead. (My translation).

ἡ δὲ σπαταλῶσα ζῶσα τέθνηκεν. (N-A 28)

Homily 13 contains a lurid description of the physical consequences of gluttony and drunkenness applied to men and women alike. Towards the end he comments:

Therefore in obedience to Paul, let us command the luxurious widow not to have place in the list of widows.⁵⁸⁶

9.8 THE FALSE TEACHING

9.8.1 WHAT WAS THE FALSE TEACHING?

That the young widows supported false teachers is sometimes put forward as a valid reason for their denunciation. Most attempts at dating first Timothy are performed in conjunction with the attempts at identification of the incorrect teaching which the author attacks in 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-10; 6:3-5 [20f] 1:6-20; and perhaps 1:19, 20. In the first chapter one is given the impression that what is under consideration is a return to Judaism, as "The Law" is what is being falsely interpreted. Assuming the author is attacking the same heterodoxy in all cases then the heresy may involve prohibition of marriage, abstinence from certain foods, and false teaching of knowledge of some kind. The only factor in opposition to a Jewish orientation is the 'forbidding to marry' in 1 Tim. 4:3, which is contrary to ancient Judaism. The author opposes that by requiring that all church leaders marry. That phrase, however, might be intended as a prophecy of the future, rather than a present reality.

⁵⁸⁵ Chrysostom, *NPNF 1-13 St. Chrysostom: Homilies on Timothy, Titus, and Philemon [PG62]*. 800-802.

⁵⁸⁶ Chrysostom, *NPNF 1-13 St. Chrysostom: Homilies on Timothy, Titus, and Philemon [PG62]*. 789.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in *later times* ... they forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Tim. 4:1-3 NRSV)

The lack of specificity in the attack means that no identification can be made. There may have been more than one variety of false teaching in vogue. Marshall suggests that the author was more concerned with the practical effects of the foolish teaching on Christian living than its limited intellectual content.⁵⁸⁷

Instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations (1 Tim. 1:3-4 NRSV)

Some people have ... turned to meaningless talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. (1 Tim. 1:6-8 NRSV)

Later in the letter the author tells the recipient:

Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. (1 Tim. 4:7 NRSV)

τοὺς δὲ βεβήλους καὶ γραώδεις μύθους παραιτοῦ. (1 Tim. 4:7 N-A 28)

“γραώδεις” means *characteristic of an elderly woman*.⁵⁸⁸ This use of this adjective permits some commentators on v.13 to link the false teaching with the widows, in conjunction with the statement that the *young* widows are “saying what is not necessary” (1Tim. 5:13 NRSV).

Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. (1 Tim. 5:13 NRSV)

ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἀργαὶ μανθάνουσιν περιερχόμεναι τὰς οἰκίας, οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀργαὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ φλύαροι καὶ περίεργοι, λαλοῦσαι τὰ μὴ δέοντα. (1 Tim. 5:13 N-A 28)

Mounce thinks that the young widows are merely indulging in “lazy idleness, except perhaps to spread the false teaching”. He interprets “things not necessary” as “things that ought not to be discussed”. He links v.13 with 2 Tim. 3:6, where the opponents are successfully recruiting women. This may or may not be a reference to the same heresy. The “turning away to follow Satan” in v.15 may be euphemism for

⁵⁸⁷ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 31.

⁵⁸⁸ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

acceptance of the false teaching, according to Mounce.⁵⁸⁹ The general meaning of τὰ μὴ δέοντα appears to me to mean “trivial, unimportant things” but most commentators insert a moral imperative, adding an “ought not” or a “should not”.

Marshall finds the similar reference in Titus 1:11 ἃ μὴ δεῖ decisive for the meaning. He concludes that the young widows’ talk is promoting false teaching in an informal but insidious manner.⁵⁹⁰ Mounce agrees that their talk was endorsing the heresy.⁵⁹¹ Towner thinks that it is going too far to link the young widows with the heresy⁵⁹² and Knight does not discuss a connection at all.

The primary target of the author of 1 Timothy in verse 13 is the speech of the young widows. Both the NRSV and the RSV translate the word φλύαροι as “gossips”. The NIV more accurately translates it as those “who talk nonsense”. Doubt arises concerning the content of their conversations, because gossip is talking about people, which is not the same as “talking nonsense”. Why are translators and interpreters of this passage so anxious to make the translation “gossip”? This topic will be elaborated in a subsequent chapter.

9.8.2 RICHES AND THE FALSE TEACHING

Marshall is of the opinion that the problem is not with the rich as such, but with the false teachers in the church who *want* to be rich, influencing the widows.⁵⁹³

The first half of 6:3-10, verses 3-5, describes the false teachers who disagree with sound teaching and are deceived by the desire to profit financially from religion. In verses 6-10 the author argues that those who desire riches are in danger of spiritual destruction. He suggests that adequate food and clothing is sufficient for life, and that “there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment”. (1 Tim. 6:6 NRSV)⁵⁹⁴

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Tim. 6:9 NRSV)

⁵⁸⁹ Mounce and Metzger, *Pastoral Epistles*: 293, 295-297.

⁵⁹⁰ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 196-198.

⁵⁹¹ Mounce and Metzger, *Pastoral Epistles*: 295.

⁵⁹² Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*: 357.

⁵⁹³ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 29.

⁵⁹⁴ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 634-636.

Marshall comments:

The false teachers thought that being religious would make them rich, and/or they promised their followers that their new teaching would help them to become rich—an ancient parallel to the contemporary ‘Prosperity Gospel’.⁵⁹⁵

This association of the false teaching with the desire for wealth supports the conclusion that the young widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16 are seeking financial security in marriage with an unbeliever. The presence of some rich people in the church and false teachers, who would like to become rich by deceiving others into paying for their teaching, may have influenced their thinking.

The evidence is not firm enough to permit a strong connection of the young widows with false teaching. The clinching argument against this theory is—if the author really thinks the young widows are spreading false teaching, why did he not say so outright and overtly? Such activity is far more likely to originate in a masculine bid for control and authority in the church.

9.8.3 EMERGING ASCETICISM?

Some scholars, such as Gail P. C. Streete, consider that the *gynaikaria* of the Pastoral Epistles are modelling independent ascetic behaviour and choosing celibacy, thus rejecting the male-directed order of the household.⁵⁹⁶ Similar conclusions were reached by Jouette Bassler, Margaret MacDonald and Dennis R. MacDonald.

How has it come to pass that a passage such as this one, quite obviously about young widows wanting to remarry for financial security, has been transformed into one showing the opposite situation? Elizabeth A. Clark describes the progress towards asceticism in her fascinating book on patristic exegesis, *Reading Renunciation*. As an example she shows Jerome in 409 CE in his *Epistle 123* to a Gallic widow, Geruchia, skilfully twisting the texts of 1 Timothy 5, Noah’s Ark and the Parable of the Sower, to make them support female asceticism.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁵ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 642.

⁵⁹⁶ Gail P. C. Streete, "Bad Girls or Good Ascetics? The Gynaikaria of the Pastoral Epistles," in *Women in the biblical world: a survey of Old and New Testament perspectives, vol. 1*, ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2009), 155-164.

⁵⁹⁷ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading renunciation: asceticism and Scripture in early Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999). 169.

9.9 STATIONARY WOMEN

A further accusation made against the young widows is that they spend too much time visiting their friends.

Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house (1 Tim. 5:13 NRSV)

ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἀργαὶ μανθάνουσιν, περιερχόμεναι τὰς οἰκίας (1 Tim. 5:13 N-A 28)

“Gadding” is an unnecessarily frivolous translation. The writer of this letter is anxious that young widows should not socialise. He appears to find some kind of threat in female association, and is determined to undermine any informal support mechanisms which the young widows are forming independently. The author seems afraid of a loss of control over their activities and their contacts, possibly in relation to the Roman patronage system. It is not clear what is meant by “idle people, they learn”, translating the Greek literally. Could it mean they *form the habit* of going round the houses?

This theme of ‘wandering women’ reoccurs in later writings. In the disputed longer version of his *Letter to the Philadelphians*, written in the second quarter of the 2nd century, Ignatius writes in Chapter 4:

Let not the widows be wanderers about, nor fond of dainties, nor gadders from house to house; but let them be like Judith, noted for her seriousness; and like Anna, eminent for her sobriety.⁵⁹⁸

Likewise in *De Baptismo* Chapter 18, Tertullian’s Homily on baptism written around 200 CE, in the context of delaying baptism, is found the idea that widows regularly ‘wander about’.⁵⁹⁹

With no less reason ought the unmarried also to be delayed until they either marry or are firmly established in continence: until then, temptation lies in wait for them, for virgins because they are ripe for it, and for widows because of their wandering about.

[Note: Or perhaps, by the alteration of one letter, 'because they have too little to do'.]

The author of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* in Chapter 15 (regarding the older widows) is convinced that the “going around the houses” is connected with begging.

⁵⁹⁸ Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol 1 *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL)), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.html>. 215.

⁵⁹⁹ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Homily on baptism*, edited and translated by Ernest Evans (London: S.P.C.K., 1964). 38-39.

There is absolutely no suggestion of this in 1 Timothy 5:3-16, as regards the young widows. We cannot be sure if his opinion is correct, but the author of the DA is determined to stamp out this practice. Even if it is true, it would be a disgrace if widows had been forced into this position by the neglect of their relatives or the oversight of the clergy. If the church was refusing to support them, then what alternatives did they have?

Thus the widow should know that she is the altar of God and that she should sit constantly at home, not wandering or going to the houses of the faithful to receive, for the altar of God does not wander or go anywhere but is fixed in a single place ... Those who roam and who have no shame cannot be still even within their own houses. They are not widows, they are begging bags.

The author claims that there are some widows who have set themselves up as moneylenders who demand interest.

There are some widows who act improperly, begging for gain. They think of this as a trade and are greedy in receipt ... they let it out at bitter usury ...

He would prefer that they gave the surplus resulting from their begging to the bishop, who would know best where to allocate the money. This charge may not be true. Probably the widow herself was freely giving away the surplus money she collected from her patrons to those she knew of in need. This accusation may be a flagrant attempt of the bishop to gain control of the monies.⁶⁰⁰

The desirability for women to remain at home extends itself into the forbidding of shopping excursions, especially for virgins, by the time of John Chrysostom in the fourth century. He recommends that

The virgin should be completely immured, and must leave her house only a few times a year, when urgent necessity compels her.

Chrysostom complains about widows.

For it has become unremarkable for widows to gossip and to vilify each other and to flatter and to lose their self-respect to be seen everywhere and to loiter about the market-place.

⁶⁰⁰ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 185-186.

He forgets that a poor widow will not possess a servant to shop for her. Some of the poor widows will have been involved in market trading, as a way of earning a living. Poverty needs no pride.⁶⁰¹

9.10 WIDOW'S CHILDREN

The most shocking element in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 is the obliviousness of the writer to the possibility that the young widows might be the mothers of still-minor children. Almost as deplorable is the realisation that not one of the four major commentators on the Pastoral Epistles has recorded this fact—neither Mounce, Marshall, Towner nor Knight. None of them speculate concerning their destiny.

Perhaps they are making the assumption that the children have been adopted by the husband's family? Krause's researches based on Roman Egyptian census returns and other material establish that this was not the situation in the majority of cases. Adoption was for the purpose of preventing the extinction of noble families. It would have been frowned upon if someone adopted who already had a son, especially if the adopter was of an age when he could father children himself. This factor significantly impeded the adoption of orphans by a close relative. Possibly the adoption of half-orphans was actually much more frequent than the legal sources indicate. In the lower classes (about which we are little informed by the literary and legal sources) adoptions or the giving away of children are likely to have served as support solutions.⁶⁰² The Egyptian census declarations make it clear that most half-orphans grew up with their mother (especially if she had not remarried), but show minors in other family configurations. The proportion of full orphans must not be overestimated because it was at most only 40% of the proportion of children who had lost their father. The census declarations do not allow exact statements about how great the proportion was of orphans who grew up with the mother in comparison with other relatives. These returns particularly give us information about those who lived with a widowed mother. The fatherless orphans whose mother had remarried, and who were taken on by relatives, are much more difficult to identify. Krause

⁶⁰¹ Chrysostom, *Six books on the priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984). 98.

⁶⁰² Krause, *Witwen und Waisen 3*: 78-80.

estimates that almost as many orphans grew up in Egypt in the home of a relative (brother, uncle, grandfather) as in that of the mother.⁶⁰³

It is clear that fatherless children are not represented anywhere in the canonical scriptures of the New Testament. What happened to the young children of these widows is unknown. Perhaps they *were* taken in by the husband's family. But for all we know perhaps they were abandoned, exposed if young, sold into slavery or prostitution or murdered. They are completely invisible. So too, is the young widow left alone with minor children to bring up.

Their situation is not important to the leaders of the Christian church of yesterday or of today, for that matter. Why this is so is a mystery, given the fierce exhortations of the Old Testament. Perhaps they are seen as a bottomless pit of need, too much once again for the church to cope with. Today, instead of extricating the now rare Christian fatherless family and focussing on them, they are conflated with secular 'one-parent' families, and are painted once again with a moral smear to permit their social exclusion, as in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

9.11 A LATER CLERGY VIEWPOINT

Not all church leaders display such irritability and insensitivity as does the writer of 1 Timothy. Chrysostom claimed to support over 3000 widows and virgins at the Great Church at Antioch, and his empathetic approach offers a striking contrast to that of 1 Timothy 5:3-16.⁶⁰⁴ In the "Particular Duties and Problems" section of *Six books on the Priesthood*, written c.391 CE, he explains to Basil his friend the reasons why he is rejecting joining the priesthood. Among these, is a sense of lacking the qualities of character necessary and the tactful approach required towards those widows subject to the humiliation of acceptance of church charity. He explains that the priest's role is not only financial support. Great care must be taken to ensure that only those who have no other resort, and only those of good character, should be enrolled on the list for support. He emphasizes that there should be no irregularity of provision. Honesty of character is the first qualification of the administrator, but as important as that is patience to bear with "inopportune fussing or unreasonable complaints", which he attributes to the widows' age, (once again discussion is

⁶⁰³ Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 3: 76-77.

⁶⁰⁴ In *Matt. Hom.* 66.3 (PG 58:630; NPNF 1.10:548-49)

confined to elderly widows), their gender, and poverty itself which he describes as “an insatiable evil”. Poverty, he says

... debases the most generous soul, and often teaches it to lose all shame in such matters” ... For even if they are compelled by sheer hunger to be all too brazen, they are still hurt by this necessity. So when they are forced to beg by fear of starvation, and to be brazen by their begging, and are insulted because of their brazenness, the force of despondency which attacks them comes subtly and casts a deep gloom over them.

The administrator should not “add to the pain of their poverty the pain of insult”. He should not be irritable or exasperated with them. Despite continual entreaty he should always listen in meekness, and reply peaceably. He should soothe away most of their despondency by his sympathy. “The gift is doubled by the very manner of giving”. They will “brighten up and be happy”. If someone else would like to aid an individual they should use “kind looks and gentle words” before making the gift.⁶⁰⁵

9.12 SUMMARY

The first letter to Timothy is a pseudonymous letter written many years after the death of Paul the apostle, accepted by the early church as genuine, and consequently possessing authority. The subject matter of 1 Timothy 5:3-16 is the financial support of poor widows. The resources of the church in question are over-stretched and the author is seeking ways to reduce the financial burden on the church, by supporting only those who have no other recourse. He reminds the relatives of the elderly women over sixty of their duty in this regard, and orders cessation of church support for those under sixty. He recommends that the younger widows remarry, which would not have been easy for those over thirty. He is angry that some of the younger widows are contemplating marrying non-Christians to obtain financial security. Their speech causes him concern, for reasons which cannot be ascertained, but may be concerned with the association of wealth with the ‘false teaching’. The author is determined to silence them, to prevent them from talking ‘nonsense’, and to prevent their association by confining them to their homes, working with wool and praying. The author wishes to assert his authority over the Christian community by promoting generally accepted stereotypes about gossip as a female fault, to dissuade others from listening to alternative viewpoints.

⁶⁰⁵ Chrysostom, *Six books on the priesthood*: 94-97.

By focusing entirely on the women's behaviour, the needs of any minor children have been lost sight of completely. If the author's advice was obeyed without qualification, the consequence would have been that minor children were never supported in the church. This could very well have meant a death sentence for some children.

10. THE DISPARAGEMENT OF FEMALE SPEECH

In epitaphs to wives and in literary sources, the ideal woman in Greek and Roman society was described as modest, silent, pious, domestic, home orientated, hard-working, devoted, bearer of children, nurturing and virtuous.⁶⁰⁶ These qualities are endorsed in the Pastoral Epistles in 1 Timothy 2:9-12 (modest, decently dressed, pious, silent, obedient), 5:10-14 (nurturing, hospitable, domestic, a housekeeper, home oriented); Titus 2:3-5 (reverent, abstinent, quiet, affectionate towards husband and children, self-controlled, chaste, competent household managers, good, obedient); and also in 1 Peter 3:1-6 (obedient, silent, reverent, chaste, modest, gentle, quiet, good). The author of the Pastorals sees remarriage and the control and supervision of a husband as the solution to his perceived problems caused by the speech and activities of the young widows.

In particular it will have been noted that a common criticism of the women encountered throughout this investigation concerns the quality of their speech. As we read the later texts of the NT and those of the early Christian writers, an increasing trend requiring that women remain silent in worship and restrained in conversation is identified.

10.1 'PAUL' AND THE SILENCING OF WOMEN

Words attributed to Paul the Apostle contribute to the worsening of this situation. There are two sets of verses, ostensibly written by Paul, which appear to forbid women, including widows, from taking an active speaking part in church activities.

As in all the churches of the saints,³⁴ women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak ... For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Cor. 14:33-36 NRSV)

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. (1 Tim. 2:11-12 NRSV)

If they have read Paul's glorious prose of Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 13, treasured the warmth of the epistle to the Philippians, appreciated the list of female fellow-workers greeted in Romans 16, observed Paul's appreciative acceptance of service by women followers of Christ such as Lydia, Phoebe, Junia and Priscilla—when

⁶⁰⁶ Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's life*: 16-23.

most informed Christian women encounter several verses attributed to Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, and in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, where women are absolutely forbidden to speak in church groups, there is stimulated in them a reaction of the kind—

I don't believe Paul could have said that!

This is not simply an intuitive reaction but knowledgeable recognition of inconsistency based on familiarity with the style and content of the seven undisputed epistles. Paul is transformed by these verses from a fellow companion in Gospel outreach into the sponsor of a movement to suppress and silence women.

This situation was intensified for fatherless children and widows because they may not have possessed a male supporter who could speak on their behalf to have their point of view recognised.

10.1.1 FIRST CORINTHIANS 14:33-36: AN INTERPOLATION?

As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached? (1 Cor. 14:33-36 NRSV)

BDAG defines the Greek word translated as 'shameful' thus, making silence a moral issue:

αἰσχρός, ἄ, ὄν is term especially significant in honour-shame oriented society; generally in reference to that which fails to meet expected moral and cultural standards [opp. καλός] pertaining to being socially or morally unacceptable, *shameful, base*.⁶⁰⁷

The most exhaustive study of this controversial passage has been performed by Philip B Payne in his 2008 book, *Man and woman, one in Christ: an exegetical and theological study of Paul's Letters*. His research involved recourse to several of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament, in particular Vaticanus (known as 'B'), and M88 where he observed important markings in the text, which signified an interpolation. I find his arguments totally persuasive, and I believe he has settled the matter once and for all.

⁶⁰⁷ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

Payne's conclusion that these verses were an interpolation caused a furore between the egalitarians (men and women can perform equal roles in the church and home) and the complementarians (each gender has a defined complementary role). The more conservative Biblical Scholars, especially the inerrantists, could not accept that God would permit such an error to occur. The issue was discussed at the annual Society for Biblical Literature Conferences in 2008 and 2009. Notable Blogs, such as Evangelical Textual Criticism⁶⁰⁸ were subsequently filled with pages of analysis, comments and responses. Payne himself created a Web Site⁶⁰⁹ for his book with extra scholarly information, and there impressively refuted negative reviews,⁶¹⁰ such as that made by Schreiner.⁶¹¹

10.1.2 1 TIMOTHY 2:11-12: MISUNDERSTOOD OR PSEUDONYMOUS?

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. (1 Tim. 2:11-12 NRSV)

11 Γυνή ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μανθανέτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ· 12 διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ ἀθροεῖν ἀνδρός, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. (1 Tim. 2:11-12 N-A 28)

Payne eagerly advocates the position that accidental or deliberate interpolation occurred in the case of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, but is unwilling to accept the scholarly consensus that 1 Timothy is pseudonymous. Instead he attempts to prove with increasing subtlety of argument, that to implement the apparent plain meaning of these two verses would be a mistake. His argument is a linguistic one, centred on the verb 'ἐπιτρέπω', and a rare verb for "to have authority over", ἀθροεῖν.

He looks first at the verb 'ἐπιτρέπω' in the first person singular, present active indicative, which is translated as the preemptory "I do not permit" but which instead could be translated as "I am not permitting". He reports that every occurrence of 'ἐπιτρέπω' in the Greek OT and the majority of the NT occurrences refers to a specific situation, never to a universally applicable prohibition. He notes that in these cases when Paul clearly intends to make one, he adds a "universalising qualifier",

⁶⁰⁸ <http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.co.uk/search?q=Payne>

⁶⁰⁹ <http://www.pbpayne.com/>

⁶¹⁰ <http://www.pbpayne.com/?p=456>

⁶¹¹ Schreiner's review was originally published in *Themelios* 35-1 (2010): 115. *Themelios* is the online theological journal of The Gospel Coalition. <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/>

such as “to every one of you” or “in every place”.⁶¹² Payne then points out instances of women teaching in other parts of the New Testament, e.g. Priscilla (Acts 18:26) and Lois and Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5) Timothy’s grandmother and mother who taught the scriptures to him from infancy (2 Tim. 3:15). He also applies the same argument to women giving prophecy (which obviously requires speech). In 1 Cor. 14:26, Paul writes,

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. (1 Cor. 14:26 NRSV)

“Each one”—ἕκαστος—is inclusive and encompasses both men and women. Payne notes that teaching appeared to have a reciprocal element in the Pauline churches. Women are also shown prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:15 and in Acts 21:9, (Philip’s four daughters).⁶¹³

What then was the specific situation which prompted such a dictatorial response from Paul, according to Payne? Payne blames it on the ‘false teaching’ which is now being propagated by women, who have been deceived by the ‘false teachers’, who were forbidden to teach by Paul in 1 Timothy 1:3.⁶¹⁴

Payne next looks at the second verb, ἀθηντεῖν, defined in BDAG as, “to assume a stance of independent authority”, found in the phrase, οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ ἀθηντεῖν ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’, in the infinitive. He asks whether Paul intends the conjunction to separate two different commands—(1) to teach, and (2) to assume authority over a man—or to fuse these into a single prohibition. After very detailed analysis, demonstrated with extensive examples, Payne concludes that:

Paul typically uses οὐδέ to convey a single idea. In the overwhelming majority of the uses of οὐδέ, and the NT’s οὐκ + οὐδέ + ἀλλά’ syntactical constructions, οὐδέ joins two expressions to convey a single idea in sharp contrast to the statement following ἀλλά.

Interestingly, Payne also notes that Origen in the earliest known commentary on 1 Tim. 2:12 treats it as a single prohibition.’ i.e. to ‘teach *and* assume authority over a man’.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² Philip Barton Payne, *Man and woman, one in Christ: an exegetical and theological study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009). 321-323.

⁶¹³ Payne, *Man and woman*: 325-335.

⁶¹⁴ Payne, *Man and woman*: 323.

⁶¹⁵ Payne, *Man and woman*: 337-359.

Finally, the meaning of the rare verb ἀθεντεῖν is subjected to an intense and lengthy analysis by Payne, occupying 36 pages of print. He notes that the verb has an object, i.e. ‘a man’, in the singular genitive and it is therefore not being used intransitively. He examines all four possible instances of its use in other literature found between the last century BCE and the end of the first century CE. The etymology carries the meaning, “self-achieving”. The ἀθέντ- root words began to be used for power and control, sometimes with oppressive connotations, such as domination. Supported by an unpublished letter sent by John R. Werner to George W. Knight III, ultimately Payne claims that the verb means neither ‘to have authority’ nor ‘to domineer’, but rather ‘to assume authority to oneself’, i.e. taking upon oneself authority without that authority having been appropriately given, earned, or recognised by others.

The verb ἀθεντεῖν is not found anywhere else in the 13 Pauline epistles. Paul uses ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν seven times (Rom. 9:21; 1 Cor. 7:37; 9:4,5,6; 11:10; 2 Thess. 3:9), ἐξουσία in four other composite verbal forms, (1 Cor. 9:12,18; 2 Cor. 13:10; Titus 3:1) and fifteen times as a noun (Rom. 13:1(twice),2,3; 1 Cor. 8:9, 15:24; 2 Cor. 10:8; Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:13,16; 2:10,15). These usages confirm that Paul used ἐξουσία as his standard vocabulary for authority. Payne affirms that in order to limit the teaching of false doctrine that threatens the life of the church in Ephesus, in 1 Tim. 2:12 Paul is restricting the group most affected by that teaching.

Payne finishes his analysis by concluding that these two verses must be interpreted as a single specific constraint perfectly appropriate to limit the danger from false teaching by women in Ephesus; in particular those women who under the influence of false teaching are assuming for themselves the authority to teach a man.⁶¹⁶

Unlike his substantial use of physical evidence in support of his interpolation theory, Payne has to argue very hard to make his argument about ἀθεντεῖν, which I have only briefly summarized here. His evidence is supported by examples of later uses of the verb, and in the end, by the amount of convincing data, he persuades. However, even if this interpretation is valid, these verses leave feeling of disquiet. I find it unlikely that women should be deceived by false teaching any more than men would be, and see no reason why they have been singled out for silencing. Similarly the author’s explanation in 1 Timothy 2:14, that women are more easily deceived than

⁶¹⁶ Payne, *Man and woman*: 361-397.

men, based on the episode in the Garden of Eden, is not only inaccurate, but smacks of stereotyping.

Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Tim. 2:14 NRSV)

Furthermore, Payne's over-emphasis on the heresy, which he makes out to be a huge problem in the church at the time, does not fit the vagueness of the references to it in 1 Timothy.

It is not just the word ἀθηνεῖν that requires rebuttal; the whole of verse eleven does also—"Let a woman learn in silence with full submission". Would it not be simpler for Payne and others to admit that the writer is not Paul, but it is someone who thinks that women should be quiet in the church? Espousing conviction of the inerrancy of scripture restricts many in considering alternative interpretations.

Payne points out that the dominant social perspective throughout Hellenistic, Roman, and Jewish culture discouraged assertiveness in women. Editorial patterns in the Western text of Acts, for example, the omission of Damaris of Athens from Acts 17:34, show that side-lining women could occur in the church as well as in society.⁶¹⁷

Abraham J. Malherbe in his study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 seeks to situate the passage in its Graeco-Roman intellectual context. He notes that this passage is bracketed by two uses of *sophrosyne*, in verses 9 and 15. Popular philosophical discussions of *sophrosyne*, (σωφροσύνη), suggest that the passage could be viewed within that designation.⁶¹⁸ Malherbe maintains that *sophrosyne* was the principal virtue of women in antiquity. It was commonly found on their tombstones.⁶¹⁹

It is defined in BDAG in this way:

one of the four cardinal virtues ... soundness of mind, reasonableness, rationality ... practice of prudence, good judgment, moderation, self-control as exercise of care and intelligence appropriate to circumstances ... especially as a woman's virtue, decency, chastity.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁷ Ben III Witherington, "The anti-feminist tendencies of the "Western" text in Acts," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 1 (1984): 82-84.

⁶¹⁸ Abraham J. Malherbe, "The Virtus Feminarum in 1 Timothy 2:9-15," in *Renewing tradition: studies in texts and contexts in honor of James W. Thompson*, ed. Mark W. Hamilton, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Jeffrey Peterson (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 45-65.

⁶¹⁹ VÉrilhac, "L'image," 91-92, 102-103.

⁶²⁰ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

It only occurs in one other place in the NT, in Acts 26:25

But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. (Acts 26:25 NRSV)

The word-group appears 16 times in the NT and 10 of the occurrences are in the Pastoral Epistles.⁶²¹ The adjective σόφρων appears in 1 Tim. 3:2 (bishop), Tit. 1:8 (bishop), Tit. 2:2 (older men), Tit. 2:5 (married women); and therefore its use is not confined to women. The dress and behaviour described in verses 9-10 are “philosophic commonplaces”, according to Malherbe. A woman should demonstrate her godliness by being clothed with good works. Verses 11-12 have as an *inclusio* the words ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. The entire section can be viewed as a demonstration of how women might practise *sophrosyne*, moderation or prudence, demonstrating θεοσέβεια and ἡσυχία, piety and silence.⁶²²

That the prohibition against women teaching continued to be influential into late antiquity is demonstrated in the letter of Jerome to Principia, about the life of the ascetic widow Marcella. She had acquired an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures but she was reluctant to pass on her acquired knowledge as her own, because she knew of the commandment of “the apostle” that women should not teach in 1 Timothy 2:12.

Therefore, even when her answers to questions were her own, she said they came not from her but from me or someone else, admitting herself to be a pupil even when she was teaching—for she knew that the apostle said: ‘I do not allow a woman to teach’—so that she might not seem to do a wrong to the male sex, and sometimes even to priests, when they asked questions on obscure and doubtful points.⁶²³

This verse is only one problematic verse from a letter which is challenging for women and for widows because of the strictures placed upon their appearance, their speech, their actions, and their general behaviour.

10.1.3 MAKING A DUAL APPEARANCE?

In 1 Cor. 14:34-35, some of the vocabulary of verses 34-35 appears to copy that of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 or employ synonyms, for example:

⁶²¹ Marshall and Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*: 182-184.

⁶²² Malherbe, "Virtus Feminarum," 45-50.

⁶²³ Jerome, *Select letters of St. Jerome*, trans. F. A. Wright, Loeb classical library, 262 (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press; W. Heinemann, 1933). 455.

1 Timothy 2:11-15	1 Cor. 14:34-35	COMMENT
ἐπιτρέπω	ἐπιτρέπεται	Both uses govern more than 1 verb
ὑποταγῇ	ὑποτασσέσθωσαν	In obedience or submission
μανθανέτω	μαθεῖν	Parts of verb to learn
εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ	σιγάτωσαν	Synonyms

Some scholars see these parallels as evidence that there is a connection between 1 Timothy 2:12 and the interpolation in 1 Cor. 14:34-35.⁶²⁴ These verbal correspondences suggest an interpolation date *after* the writing of 1 Timothy. In accepting that Paul did not write either the interpolation of 1 Cor. 14:34-35 or 1 Timothy, in view of these similarities of theme, language and tone, is it possible that another person could be responsible for both of them? If that was the case the interpolation could equally well have been made *before* the writing of 1 Timothy. Finding a suitable candidate with extant writing at a very early date will require close examination of the earliest of the post-NT writings. Polycarp may be a possibility.

The same sentiment can be found in other late books of the New Testament.

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the Word, they may be won over *without a word* by their wives' conduct, (1 Pet. 3:1 NRSV)

10.1.4 MUTED GROUP THEORY AND GENDER LINGUISTICS

In the light of these two important New Testament verses, what is it about the way women communicate vocally that could lead some men to decide that they must be silenced—to the extent that they dare to impose their will by altering or forging the writings of an apostle?

Kramarae's muted group theory may provide some answers to this question. Some of the masculine outlooks described in this material from the 1970s and 1980s may seem dated but they do reflect attitudes which have persisted through the millennia, exist within living memory, and can be still found in some churches today, validated by the authority of the scriptures.

⁶²⁴ Richard I. Pervo, "Social and religious aspects of the Western Text," in *The Living text*, ed. Dennis E Groh and Robert Jewett (New York: University Press of America, 1985), 229-241.

My understanding of this concept was facilitated by the standard work on communication theory, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, by Emory Griffin, who explains the conclusions of Cheri Kramarae.⁶²⁵

To Cheri Kramarae, language is a *man-made* construction.⁶²⁶ *Man-made* language aids in defining, discounting, and excluding women. Men control public language and have decreed that women shall be confined to domestic language. Women are less articulate in public because the words, and the norms for their use, have been devised by men. Kramarae suggests that women are often silenced by not having a publicly recognized vocabulary through which to express their experience.⁶²⁷

The explanation which she gives is centered in the idea that men have the power to name and label experience. Because of their political dominance, men's system of perception is dominant, impeding the free expression of women's alternative models of the world. Mainstream communication is "malestream" expression. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (which claims that language shapes our perception of reality)⁶²⁸ suggests that muted women may come to doubt the validity of their experience and the legitimacy of their feelings.⁶²⁹

Kramarae notes that men's control of the dominant mode of expression has produced a vast stock of derogatory, gender-specific terms to refer to women's talking— *catty*, *bitchy*, *shrill*, *cackling*, *gossipy*, *chitchat*, *sharp-tongued*, and so forth. There is no corresponding vocabulary to disparage men's conversation.⁶³⁰

Kramarae believes that in order to participate in society, women must transform their own speech models in terms of the received male system of expression. This translation process requires constant effort and leaves women wondering if they expressed themselves correctly.⁶³¹

⁶²⁵ Emory A. Griffin, *A first look at communication theory*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012). 460-471.

⁶²⁶ Cheri Kramarae, *Women and men speaking: frameworks for analysis* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, 1981). 33, 37-38.

⁶²⁷ Griffin, *First look at communication theory*: 461.

⁶²⁸ John J. Gumperz and Stephen C. Levinson, *Rethinking linguistic relativity* (Cambridge; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 6-7, 23-27.

⁶²⁹ Griffin, *First look at communication theory*: 463.

⁶³⁰ Griffin, *First look at communication theory*: 462.

⁶³¹ Griffin, *First look at communication theory*: 464.

Women have had to learn the language structure of the dominant group, whereas men have no reason nor opportunity nor desire to learn the women's model of the world.⁶³² Dale Spender hypothesizes that men realize that listening to women would involve a renunciation of their privileged position.⁶³³

It was discovered that women's adoption of male rhetoric was ineffectual as it was not perceived as carrying the same authority and importance as when used by males. The ultimate goal of muted group theory became to change the *man*-made linguistic system that oppresses women. There was recognition of the need for alternative modes of self-expression.⁶³⁴ One way is by coining new terms to label female experience, which was successfully achieved in the creation of the new expression 'sexual harassment', for example. Such reform includes challenging sexist dictionaries. Kramarae and Paula Treichler compiled a feminist dictionary. Two entries are of relevance to this study:

Gossip: A way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting; a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation. (Deborah Jones)

Silence: Is not golden. "There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you." (Zora Neale Hurston)
"In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppressive, is violence." (Adrienne Rich)⁶³⁵

Kramarae believes that as women cease to be muted, men will no longer maintain their position of dominance and control in society.

One can critique the theory in several ways—not all men behave like this—and despite these two sets of verses women now have leadership in the church. Nevertheless it cannot be emphasised too strongly that for most of the past 2000 years, (until the appointment of Libby Lane as a bishop on 26 January 2015), because of the authority of these two scriptures in particular, women have been

⁶³² Kramarae, *Women and men*: 8-12.

⁶³³ Griffin, *First look at communication theory*: 469-470.

⁶³⁴ Kramarae, *Women and men*: 21-29.

⁶³⁵ Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *A feminist dictionary* (London; Boston: Pandora Press, 1985).

silenced and excluded from the leadership of the church, leadership which the apostle Paul accepted and welcomed. His views have been misrepresented and diminished.

This theory affords one possible explanation for the apparently deceitful behaviour of certain men from among the early clergy, all the more despicable because they were ‘usurping the authority of a man’, the supreme communicator of early Christianity, the apostle Paul.

Female fatherless children and widows may well have asked how their needs were to be met when their voices were forced into silence in the church. The whole of their lives were being defined by men’s false perception of their character and abilities.

10.2 WOMEN TALKING

I now return to look in more detail at the criticism of the speech of the young widows in 1 Timothy 5:13.

Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. (1 Tim. 5:13 NRSV)

ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἀργαὶ μανθάνουσιν περιερχόμεναι τὰς οἰκίας, οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀργαὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ φλύαροι καὶ περιέργοι, λαλοῦσαι τὰ μὴ δέοντα. (1 Tim. 5:13 N-A 28)

The primary target of the author of is the speech of the young widows. Both the NRSV and the RSV translate the word φλύαροι as “gossips”. The NIV more accurately translates it as those “who talk nonsense”. Doubt arises concerning the content of their conversations, because gossip is talking about people, which is not the same as “talking nonsense”. Why are translators and interpreters of this passage so anxious to make the translation “gossip”?

10.2.1 WHAT IS GOSSIP?

What is gossip? Over the centuries, gossip has been regarded as a vice. Even today in Jewish and Christian communities, it is discouraged as a character flaw. However, over the last fifty years it has come to be seen in a more positive light. Gossip studies have advanced to become a recognised area of research. Nick Emler, Emeritus Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Surrey, believes that it is important to define gossip in a fashion that is “neutral and non-judgmental”, because

of the “dismal reputation” of gossip through the ages. His definition makes no claims as to the persons involved, the validity of the exchanges, or their consequences.⁶³⁶

Informally exchanging information or opinion among two or more persons about named third parties.

This exchange of personal information often occurs in unscheduled, informal, one-to-one, face-to-face conversations between acquaintances.⁶³⁷

The universal activity of gossiping appears to be fundamental to being human, maintained Robin Dunbar, Professor of Evolutionary Psychology at Oxford University. In his book, *Grooming, gossip, and the evolution of language*, he explains how mutual grooming creates bonds between primates.⁶³⁸ Language is our equivalent of grooming. Gossip forms bonds and then allows us to reinforce them and strengthen those ties. It holds society together. Emler, however, thinks that there are additional factors beyond social grooming. These are *prediction* and *social influence*. Gossip provides the knowledge of people and their relationships which allows prediction of the behaviour of our social environment. Gossip provides an instrument for indirect social influence. It can also secure us support for our own aspirations and well-being and protect us from those who wish to exploit us.⁶³⁹

Gossip is social information exchange. Gossip keeps a community informed about what is happening in the lives of its members. When they are in trouble and difficulties, it allows the provision of support. Therefore the widows of verse 13 are to be congratulated in their efforts to provide mutual support, in the face of the controlling behaviour of their Christian leaders.

10.2.2 GOSSIP AND WOMEN

Historically gossip has been seen as an essentially female activity. “Women chatter, tattle, gab, rabbit, prattle, nag, whine, and bitch. Men discourse, debate, philosophize, exchange ideas, conduct business, or engage in politics”. Nick Emler refutes the idea

⁶³⁶ N. Emler, "Gossiping," in *The new handbook of language and social psychology*, ed. William Peter Robinson and Howard Giles (Chichester: J. Wiley, 2001), 318.

⁶³⁷ N. Emler, "Gossip, reputation and social adaptation," in *Good gossip*, ed. Robert F. Goodman and Aharon Ben-Ze'ev (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 135-137.

⁶³⁸ R. I. M. Dunbar, *Grooming, gossip, and the evolution of language* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁶³⁹ Emler, "Gossiping," 331-332.

that gossip is an inconsequential and shallow activity that appeals only to superficial and lazy minds, and maintains instead that it is “an intelligent action”.⁶⁴⁰

The most thorough study of gossip in the Pastoral Letters is *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles*, by Marianne Kartzow.⁶⁴¹ Kartzow explains that gossip is part of the stereotype of feminine behaviour and therefore gossip must be studied in conjunction with its genderedness. She agrees with Økland that the NT texts are unusable as sources for ‘real’ early Christian women.⁶⁴² Mary Jacobus names it “textual harassment” when women are only there to make a point or as an illustration, or are silenced or eliminated completely.⁶⁴³

Alexander Rysman claims in his influential article, ‘How the “Gossip” Became a Woman’, that “the major sin of gossip is to develop ties outside the institutions of male dominance”. Men use the negative characterisation of women as gossipers “as a way of controlling female solidarity”. Women in some societies dare not be seen together, in case they are accused of gossiping and their solidarity is thereby threatened.⁶⁴⁴

Kartzow studied female gossipers in three categories of texts, Classical Greek, Greco-Roman and Jewish. She read them in parallel with other groups classified as gossipers in ancient texts and provides 19 examples. Among her conclusions were that female gossipers were blurring the distinction between the traditional discrete private and public spheres of women and men. Public talk of a wife’s husband’s activities flowed back to the household. Although most talk was about love and sexuality, some were of public matters. Sometimes the information gained could be useful. Female gossip became a stereotype of ‘women’s speech’ and a gendered *topos*, a traditional theme, motif or formula in literature, a literary convention. Despite this smokescreen, these texts provided glimpses into women’s networks

⁶⁴⁰ Emler, "Gossip, reputation," 118-119.

⁶⁴¹ Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and gender: othering of speech in the Pastoral Epistles* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

⁶⁴² Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 20-24.

⁶⁴³ Mary Jacobus, "Is There a Woman in This Text?," *New Literary History* 14, no. 1 (1982): 119.

⁶⁴⁴ Alexander Rysman, "How the “Gossip” Became a Woman," *Journal of Communication* 27, no. 1 (1977): 176-180.

which may be perceived as a ‘counter-discourse’; a powerful system which the dominant system wanted to eradicate by means of the stereotype.⁶⁴⁵

Kartzow read the description of the ‘gossipy’ widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 in conjunction with the other negative depictions of female speech in the Pastoral Epistles, and concluded they were an element in the Pastoral authors’ scheme of ‘othering’ the heretics. She also noted in her examination of these texts that masculine dialogue perceives gossip as a display of effeminate behaviour.

10.2.3 GOSSIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND LATER

Not all interpreters of the NT perceive gossip as solely the prerogative of women. John W. Daniels in his 2013 book, *Gossiping Jesus: The Oral Processing of Jesus in John's Gospel*, looked at the text of John’s Gospel through the lens of gossip. Readers of the Gospels are characteristically focussed on Jesus’ own words about himself, while paying comparatively little attention to what other characters in the narratives say about him. Focusing instead on talk *about* Jesus in John, the author analyses the complicated relationship between gossip and various social forces at work in Jesus’ world, demonstrating how they conspire to build up a picture of Jesus’ identity, in order to answer the question, “Who is Jesus?”⁶⁴⁶

In addition to his thesis-based book on John’s Gospel, Daniels in a 2012 article has surveyed the use of gossip in public discourse throughout the New Testament and concluded that it is pervasive, and has power, along with many other social processes, to construct, maintain, and sometimes re-imagine the world.⁶⁴⁷

Richard Rohrbaugh sees in the New Testament:

Texts about gossip (e.g., 1 Tim 5:13); they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say.

Texts reporting gossip (e.g., John 6:52) The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

And texts that are themselves gossip (e.g.).

⁶⁴⁵ Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 67-116.

⁶⁴⁶ John William Daniels, *Gossiping Jesus: the oral processing of Jesus in John's gospel* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

⁶⁴⁷ John W. Daniels, "Gossip in the New Testament," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 42, no. 4 (2012): 204-213.

e.g. Jesus. He said to them, "Go and tell that fox [Herod] for me ... (Luke 13:32 NRSV)

e.g. Paul. When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned. (Galatians 2:11–14)⁶⁴⁸

Because the text of the New Testament reproduces the fairly widespread negative Graeco-Roman disapproval of gossip, it is rather ironic that the most important characters in the text, including Jesus and Paul, participate in gossip, and in rather censorious ways. Thus, the appraisal of gossip in the New Testament can be described as somewhat inconsistent, or perhaps realistic, in its representation of ancient ways of speaking.⁶⁴⁹

First of all to notice is that only one of the three possible references *about* gossip in the NT is specifically concerned with a group of women, the one under discussion.

13. Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. (1 Tim. 5:13 NRSV) (*Prefer* 'things not necessary')

ἄμα δὲ καὶ ἀργαὶ μανθάνουσιν περιερχόμεναι τὰς οἰκίας, οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀργαὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ φλύαροι καὶ περιέργοι, λαλοῦσαι τὰ μὴ δέοντα. (1 Tim. 5:13 N-A 28)

Expressions which may mean 'gossip' are rare in the NT. Two words are used to convey this meaning, definitions from Bauer et al.:

φλύαρος, ον (cp. φλύω 'to babble') *gossipy*, or the verb—

φλυαρέω to indulge in utterance that makes no sense, *talk nonsense (about), disparage*.

A form of that word is also found in one other place in the NT, in 3 John 1:10.

If I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. ... (3 John 1:10 NRSV)

ἐὰν ἔλθω, ὑπομνήσω αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ποιεῖ λόγοις πονηροῖς φλυαρῶν ἡμᾶς, (3 John 1:10 N-A 28)⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *The New Testament in cross-cultural perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007). 144-146.

⁶⁴⁹ Daniels, "Gossip," 207-208.

⁶⁵⁰ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

Also rare is ‘Gossip’ listed among the faults of the congregations in the New Testament. It is only found once elsewhere.

... I fear that there may perhaps be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. (2 Cor. 12:20 NRSV)

... μή πως ἔρις, ζῆλος, θυμοί, ἐριθείαι, καταλαλιάι, ψιθυρισμοί, φουσιώσεις, ἀκαταστασίαι. (2 Cor. 12:20 N-A 28)

A different word ὁ ψιθυρισμός, οὖν, is used in the verse above—(also paired with καταλαλιά in. 1 Clem. 30:3, 1 Clem. 35:5 and in 2 Cor. 12:20).

They are defined by BDAG thus:

ὁ ψιθυρισμός, οὖν, derogatory information about someone that is offered in a tone of confidentiality, (*secret*) *gossip, tale-bearing*, in our literature only in a bad sense.

ἡ καταλαλιά, ἄς, the act of speaking ill of another, *evil speech, slander, defamation*, also found in 1 Pet 2:1.⁶⁵¹

Φλόαρος is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT. It has a different nuance to the others. It suggests speech without understanding, talking nonsense, incoherent babbling, stupidity—not necessarily malicious. Kartzow performed a search on all instances of the root *FLUAR-* in the *Perseus Tuft Digital Library* connected to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG)* in the first century BCE and the first century CE and found 144 instances. She found that most frequent user of the word was Plutarch, with a score of 47 times. He used it almost exclusively for activities that he rated negatively and referred nearly always to men’s actions. The other instances Kartzow describes confirm that it means nonsense or foolishness, is applied to both men and women and definitely *does not mean* gossip. She is of the opinion that dictionaries require to be updated. She suspects that the translation made in 1 Timothy 5:13 has been made on the basis of the stereotype that a gossip is mostly a woman.⁶⁵²

10.2.4 GOSSIP IN 1 TIMOTHY 5:13?

... they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. (1 Tim. 5:13 NRSV)

⁶⁵¹ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁶⁵² Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 50-66.

Kartzow assesses how three alternative interpreters (discussed in chapter nine) analyse the issue of gossip in verse 13. She notes that Bassler does not discuss why the younger women are called gossipers, assuming some fault on their part.⁶⁵³

MacDonald believes that these women were being gossiped *about*, but may also have been disseminating information which should have remained within the church.⁶⁵⁴ In contrast to the previous two writers Fanum believes that the uncontrolled behaviour of the young widows is causing gossip and destructive slander by those outside the community.⁶⁵⁵

Kartzow concludes that the author of the Pastoral Epistles is influenced by his own immediate social milieu in classifying gossip as 'female' speech. The author is trying to preserve and uphold his own authority and understanding of the evolving Christian tradition. As a weapon in his quarrel with his opponents, he argues that his male opponents are using 'female' speech. Kartzow points out that the characterisation of the author's opponents in 1 Timothy is often formulated through their (feminine-like) speech. It is described as "meaningless talk" (1 Tim. 1:6), "profane myths", "old wives tales" (1 Tim. 4:7), and "profane chatter", (1 Tim. 6:20).⁶⁵⁶

Kartzow further speculates that those being criticized as 'gossipers' (not necessarily only the widows and females) in the Pastoral Epistles may be part of a countermovement that is conserving and spreading some element of the communal memory of Jesus that might be unacceptable to the author of the Pastorals. The Christian community, according to the author, must accept his leadership and avoid all kinds of false teaching and casual talk or gossip. By promoting generally accepted stereotypes about gossip, the author of the Pastoral Epistles seeks to dissuade others from listening to this alternative information. This suggestion makes sense of Kartzow's conclusion that the word used in the passage did not mean 'gossip', but meant 'talking nonsense'. The author was characterising the widows' talk as 'hot air'.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵³ Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 118-119.

⁶⁵⁴ Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 120-121.

⁶⁵⁵ Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 121-126.

⁶⁵⁶ Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 200-201.

⁶⁵⁷ Kartzow, *Gossip and gender*: 208-210.

Whether or not there was subversive content in the widows' conversations, the reality exists that the passage is normally translated as concerning 'gossip', and therefore perpetuates the notion of 'gossip' as a female attribute. The author's negative portrayal of female speech may have served to silence women in early second century Christian communities. Kartzow's opinion is plausible in light of the widespread negative appraisal of gossip as subversive discourse, which tends to marginalise those participating in gossip. As in the deutero-Pauline letters, the author of 1 Timothy promotes the Graeco-Roman household as the template for the communities of faith he was writing to. Sociologist Alexander Rysman argues that women's gossip generates fear amongst the ruling male classes and claims that the major threat of gossip is the developing of social ties such as patronage outside the institutions of male dominance. Men use the negative characterisation of women as gossipers as "a way of controlling female solidarity".⁶⁵⁸

10.2.5 PROPHETESSES

There is evidence in the genuine letter of Paul that women in the Corinthian church were permitted to pray and prophesy during church worship.

Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head (1 Cor. 11:4-5 NRSV)

However, Luke tends to portray women or widows as ideally passive and silent. In Luke 2:36, the Temple-based elderly widow Anna is described as a prophetess. When Jesus is brought to be dedicated in the Temple at eight days old, not a word of Anna's prophecy over Jesus is recorded. In Acts 21:8-14, Paul's company, while on the way to Jerusalem, stay for several days at the home of Philip the evangelist who has four daughters who were actively prophesying. Not one word of what they said is documented.

10.3 LATER INSTANCES

10.3.1 THE LETTER OF FIRST CLEMENT

The *Letter of First Clement* is customarily dated to the end of the reign of Domitian (95 or 96 C.E.). Appropriate female behaviour is centred on the speech of the wives.

⁶⁵⁸ Rysman, "How the "Gossip" Became a Woman," 179.

... we should set our wives along the straight path that leads to the good. 7. Let them display a character of purity, worthy of love; let them exhibit the innocent will of their meekness; let them manifest the gentleness [τό ἐπιεικέες] of their tongues through how they speak ...⁶⁵⁹

10.3.2 THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

Various considerations suggest that The *Shepherd of Hermas* was written by a single author, possibly over a stretch of time, during the early part of the second century, perhaps 110–140 CE.⁶⁶⁰ Hermas was married unhappily because of faults on both sides of the partnership. His wife's fault was specified as 'evil-speaking'. Hermas was chastised because of his neglect of his family.

For she also does not restrain her tongue, but uses it to perpetrate evil.

But you, Hermas, have experienced great afflictions of your own because of your family's transgressions, since you paid no attention to them. You neglected them and became enmeshed in your own evil deeds [Or: business dealings].⁶⁶¹

10.3.3 LETTER OF POLYCARP TO THE CHURCH OF THE PHILIPPIANS

One work only of Polycarp exists, and that is the *Letter of Polycarp to the Church of the Philippians*, in which he shows knowledge of the death of Ignatius. It is generally dated to circa 135 CE.⁶⁶²

He instructs that widows should avoid slander, libel and lies. Widows are being painted with a tendency to become defamatory, malicious liars. Polycarp's focus on slander and evil speech has parallels encountered also in 1st Timothy.

4.3 We should teach the widows to be self-controlled with respect to faith in the Lord, to pray without ceasing for everyone, and to be distant from all libel, slander, false witness [διαβολῆς, καταλαλιᾶς, ψευδομαρτυρίας], love of money, and all evil ...⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁹ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 76-77.

⁶⁶⁰ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 169.

⁶⁶¹ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 186-190.

⁶⁶² Sara Parvis, "The Martyrdom of Polycarp," in *The writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Paul Foster (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 127-132.

⁶⁶³ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 338-339.

10.3.4 TERTULLIAN

Tertullian quotes 1 Cor. 14:34-35 in *On Baptism* in his discussion of the author of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, where he states that Paul would not even allow a woman to speak in worship, never mind baptise.⁶⁶⁴

10.3.5 CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

Both of the authoritative verses on the silencing of women are found endorsed by Cyprian in *Testimonies Against the Jews, Book Three*, under the ‘heading’:⁶⁶⁵

46. *That a woman ought to be silent in the church.*

Book Three is an epitome of scriptural verses containing the essence of Christian ethics and behaviour, conveniently written for his son.

Let women be silent in the church. But if any wish to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. (1 Cor. 14:34)

Let a woman learn with silence, in all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to be set over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not seduced, but the woman was seduced. (1 Tim. 2:11–14)

10.3.6 THE DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM

Finally, the late third century Syrian church order the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and its fourth century parallel and expansion the *Apostolic Constitutions* contain references to the speech of widows. Chapter 15 lays down rules for the widow, most aimed at her speech, i.e. not “talkative, or loud, or garrulous”. If anyone asks a widow questions about her Christian faith, any replies beyond the basics of faith in Christ, must be referred to the leader, because their ignorance of doctrine might lead the Gentiles to “sneer and scoff” at the word of an “old” woman.

They are not widows; they are ‘begging bags’ and have no care other than being ready to receive. And because they are gossips, garrulous and complaining, they cause quarrels.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁴ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Homily*: 37.

⁶⁶⁵ Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol 5 Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*. p.1298.

⁶⁶⁶ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 185-186. This is a pun (χήρα –widow, and πήρα –begging bag).

10.3.7 CHRYSOSTOM

In the fourth century, Chrysostom's discussion was confined to church supported elderly widows, and the difficulties they made for a parish priest. In an otherwise sympathetic passage he complained:⁶⁶⁷

Widows as a class ... use an unbridled freedom of speech—to call it no worse! They scold out of season and find unnecessary fault and lament what they ought to be thankful for and criticise what they ought to welcome.

10.4 A CONTINUING NEGATIVE INFLUENCE

The esteemed theologian and academic C.S. Lewis has been, and continues to be, influential in this regard. He had a poor opinion of women's abilities. Speaking in 1960, as a man of his time, he spends five pages graphically describing the trivial quality of women's conversations, and the destructiveness of female attempts at friendship between men and women. He would be considered insulting if he voiced these remarks nowadays.

... the men have had a much more serious education; they have become doctors, lawyers, clergymen, architects, engineers, or men of letters. The women are to them as children to adults.

A woman who has had merely school lessons and has abandoned soon after marriage whatever tinge of culture they gave her, whose reading is the Women's Magazines ...

In the only world they know, an endless prattling "Jolly" replaces the intercourse of minds.⁶⁶⁸

He has done a great disservice to widows and to the church by these statements.

10.5 SUMMARY

As time passes male church leaders display an increasing intolerance of female speech. An interpolation has been inserted into the genuine first letter of Paul to the Corinthians at 14:33-36 to command that women will remain silent during church worship. Similarly in the pseudonymous letter 1 Timothy at 2:11-12, falsely attributed to Paul, women are forbidden to ask questions in the assembly but must learn in silence.

⁶⁶⁷ Chrysostom, *Six books on the priesthood*: 95.

⁶⁶⁸ Lewis, *Four loves*: 68-72.

Talking with and about other people, even when it is caring and aimed at mutual support, begins to be branded as gossip and defined as gendered speech. For reasons which cannot be ascertained the behaviour of the young widows causes the author of 1 Timothy concern in chapter 5:13, but he is determined to silence them, to prevent them from talking 'nonsense', and to prevent their association by confining them to their homes, working with wool and praying.

The author wishes to assert his authority over the Christian community by promoting generally accepted stereotypes about gossip as a female fault, to dissuade others from listening to alternative viewpoints. These stereotypes can be observed in some of the other writings of the early church. Widows begin to be seated apart from other women at church worship.

The Pauline authority of these verses has provided ammunition through the ages, and continues to do so today, for the refusal of certain churches to permit female preachers and teachers, and the masculine tendency to disregard female verbal communication.

11. THE HISTORY AND RHETORIC OF THE FATHERLESS FAMILY IN THE POST-NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

This chapter attempts to trace moments in time when real instances of the fatherless and the widows impinge on the consciousness of outsiders, or that of the clergy of the early Christian church. It must be admitted that they usually appear only as a side-issue in the surviving documentation. Something different is exercising the mind of the writer, whether it is martyrdom, Christian charlatans, apologetics, child exposure, abortion, almsgiving, the self-indulgence of the rich, female speech and behaviour, or the reputation of the church. There are three encouraging accounts among these: the care of the fatherless families by Grapte of the church of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the weekly collection for the poor of the church of Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, and the monthly "chest" collection of Tertullian's church described in his *Apology*, which included orphan support. The first section of this chapter points out some instances of fatherless children found in the literature. The second section surveys widows, some of whom may have had minor children, and the final section explores the rhetoric of the written deliberations.

11.1 FATHERLESS CHILDREN IN THE POST-NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

In the surviving documentation of the first century there exist absolutely no guidelines on the pastoral care of fatherless children by authoritative leaders such as Paul. James' brief advice in 1:27 consists only of recommending regular visiting and oversight. How that is to be done, and what that might entail is not elaborated.

Why might this be so? There are several possible reasons. It might be that over-investment in the lives of children was considered futile in view of the number who did not survive early childhood; however the number of affectionate funerary inscriptions negate that explanation. There may have existed societal assumptions of responsibility by the father's family. It might be that support did in fact occur, but for some reason it has not been recorded. Certainly, continually attested in the writings were efforts to keep women silent and to keep widows stationary at home and their fatherless children nowhere to be seen, as has been demonstrated.

The over-arching power of the *paterfamilias* appears to be a more likely explanation. It was considered his responsibility to look after his needy relatives. In the event of

his death Roman law would appoint guardians. However, it may be questioned whether the purpose of these appointments was to support the children. Their role was more likely to protect the family assets from exploitation or dissipation until the children reached their majority. Those such as poor children, slave children, or illegitimate children, because they had no assets, had no guardian to oversee their welfare.

In view of the societal makeup of the church, as largely those from the lower strata of society, there would have been present in the assembly the children of artisans, small merchants, shopkeepers and beggars, whose father's assets would be insufficient to require the appointment of a guardian in law, on the event of his death. There would also be the children of non-legal marriages, *concubinatus*, and marriages between a free person and a slave, known as *contubernium*. Slave marriages were not recognised, but long-term relationships which produced children did occur, and these children became the property of the slave owner. Roman guardianship law was not applied to them, and the early writings of the church do not acknowledge their existence.

Fatherless children are mentioned only once in the canonical NT in James 1:27. Elsewhere in the early Christian writings they are only represented as recipients of charity within the phrase “the fatherless and the widows” in the ubiquitous cliché form. Some provision was made for aged widows, as is demonstrated in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

11.1.1 FATHERLESS CHILDREN IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

As a side issue in discussions of other matters occasional glimpses of fatherless children are seen.

In Lucian of Samosata's (125 – 180 CE) work the *Passing of Peregrinus* he describes aged widows and orphans standing outside of the prison hoping to receive alms through the generosity of the Christians and their clergy who are visiting the imprisoned charlatan Peregrinus, bringing him elaborate meals, money and attempting to rescue him.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁹ Lucian, *Passing*: 13.

Tertullian in his *Apology* (197 CE) reports on the institution of the “chest” in which donations can be made for the support of the needy, including orphans.⁶⁷⁰

Every man once a month brings some modest coin—or whenever he wishes, and only if he does wish, and if he can; for nobody is compelled; it is a voluntary offering. You might call them the trust funds of piety. For they are not spent upon banquets nor drinking-parties nor thankless eating-houses; but to feed the poor and to bury them, for boys and girls who lack property and parents, and then for slaves grown old and shipwrecked mariners; and any who may be in mines islands or prisons.

The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas gives an account of the martyrdom of three catechumens Saturus, Saturninus and Revocatus, and two young women, Vibia Perpetua, a mother of a son under two years old, and her slave Felicitas, who gave birth to a baby girl shortly before her death in the arena. They were martyred on March 7, 202, at Carthage. Perpetua’s son was taken by her father, as the *paterfamilias*.⁶⁷¹ It is recorded that the slave Felicity’s baby girl was brought up by a fellow-Christian woman as her daughter.⁶⁷²

Eusebius recounts in his *Ecclesiastical History*, book 6, that Origen’s father was martyred in 202 CE when Origen was not yet seventeen, leaving his mother destitute with himself and six younger brothers, as his father’s property was confiscated for the Imperial Treasury. He was taken in by a very rich lady and continued his literary studies, until at the age of eighteen he came to preside over the catechetical school at Alexandria.⁶⁷³ There is an intriguing reference in book 6 chapter 23, where Eusebius states that Ambrose of Alexandria, a well-educated wealthy nobleman, provided help to Origen for the writing of his commentaries in the form of “seven shorthand writers, ... many copyists, as well as girls skilled in penmanship”. Were these girls educated and supported by the church? We do not know.⁶⁷⁴

In the 17th Chapter of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* is found the rare mention of full orphans. These unique and remarkable paragraphs demonstrate that perhaps there

⁶⁷⁰ Tertullian, *Apology; De spectaculis*: 174-177.

⁶⁷¹ Heffernan, *Passion of Perpetua*: 205-207.

⁶⁷² Heffernan, *Passion of Perpetua*: 132.

⁶⁷³ Eusebius, *The ecclesiastical history. 2 vols.*: Vol .2, 6.2.

⁶⁷⁴ Eusebius, *The ecclesiastical history. 2 vols.*: Vol. 2, 6.69.

were procedures for dealing with fully orphaned children with no relatives, in the earlier period of church history, about which nothing else is known. It states that:

If any of the Christians' children are orphaned, boy or girl, it is good that any of the brothers who has no child should take the child as his own child. If anyone who has a son, he should adopt a girl, so that in due time his son may take her as his wife. ... Should anyone be unwilling to do this, seeking to please people, and ashamed of orphans as a result of their wealth ... [veiled threat of eternal punishment follows]

Thus, bishops you should be careful about their upbringing, so that they lack nothing. And when a girl wishes to marry, give her to one of the brothers. And when a boy is being raised he should learn a trade so that when he is of age he can receive a wage fitting to his trade, so that he may make the tools necessary for his trade, and no longer be a burden on the love which he has received without guile or partiality from the brothers.⁶⁷⁵

11.1.2 FATHERLESS CHILDREN IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

Only by the fourth century did the writings of the church leaders show awareness of the need to make provision for the education of full orphans. Basil of Caesarea, (330-379 CE) laid out specific rules for the education of homeless children, as well as those with living parents, in his *Long Rules* for monks. In *Interrogatio 15 of Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, he dealt with school discipline as well as teaching methods. His recommendations were influential for many centuries with the bishops and monks of Constantinople and the Eastern Empire.⁶⁷⁶

11.1.3 ABORTION AND INFANTICIDE

The number of unwanted and abandoned fatherless children may have been increased by the church's strong disapproval of abortion and infanticide. Despite that censure no instructions are given on what to do with the resulting unwanted children. Blanket injunctions against these practices are recorded in several documents.

Didache do not abort a foetus or kill a child that is born.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*: 195-196.

⁶⁷⁶ Basil of Caesarea, *Basil of Caesarea: ascetical works*, trans. Sister M. Monica Wagner, *Fathers of the Church*, 9 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1970). 264-268.

⁶⁷⁷ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: Vol. I, 419.

Epistle of Barnabas Do not abort a foetus or kill a child that is already born.⁶⁷⁸

Justin Martyr. The First Apology ... we have been taught that it is wicked to expose even newly born children.⁶⁷⁹

Tertullian speaks out against abortion, infanticide, incest and wife-swopping in his *Apology*, although he nowhere refers to concern for the fatherless, orphans, or widows. He forbids abortion, “even the child in the womb, while yet the mother’s blood is still being drawn on to form the human being, it is not lawful for us to destroy”. He condemns those who cruelly of children born to them “choke out the breath in water, or expose to cold, starvation and the dogs”.⁶⁸⁰ He denounces exposure as that may lead later to involuntary incest, if the child is rescued. For the same reason he censures those who put their child up for adoption with “better” parents.⁶⁸¹

How could a bereaved, abandoned or unsupported woman raise a child? The fact must be faced that in a society such as this, exposure may have been a comparatively humane way of disposing of children whom no one would ever want, rather than subjecting them to a life of misery and exploitation, or an early death of malnutrition. Christian slaves pregnant as a result of sexual use by their non-Christian masters must have suffered great anguish. Were these children exposed at birth against the wishes of their mother, or did she think this was the best way out of her problem? Were they allowed to be raised by the slave mother? We do not know. The church appears to have closed its eyes to this dilemma.

11.1.4 THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Child sexual abuse has been rife since the beginning of time in the church and in society, but at last today we know the full horror of what has been endured for generations, and we are able finally to speak about it. It is unfortunate that those most in need of a father substitute were those most vulnerable to exploitation by male opportunists.

⁶⁷⁸ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: Vol. II, 77.

⁶⁷⁹ Justin, *Saint Justin Martyr*: 63-65.

⁶⁸⁰ Tertullian, *Apology; De spectaculis*: 48-49.

⁶⁸¹ Tertullian, *Apology; De spectaculis*: 52-53.

Among the earlier writings known collectively as the Apostolic Fathers is the *Didache*. Niederwimmer states that its origins ‘probably’ lie in the first century CE in Syria and posits a ‘hypothetical’ final form around 110 or 120 CE.⁶⁸² It contains no mention of the fatherless and the widows. However it does have a ban on the corruption of children, which would include fatherless children, slave children or free children.⁶⁸³ Christians were proactive in decrying the sexual use of children, and created a new word, *paidophthoreo*, to describe the crime, to be discussed more fully below.

2.2 οὐ φονεύσεις, οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις ...

The Epistle of Barnabas has an early date of around 80-120 CE. The relevant section appears in the “Two Ways” section of the work; the one of light (19:1-12) and the one of darkness (20:1-2), which appears also in the *Didache*, and may have its origin in a common ancestor of both.

20:2 ... murderers of children and corruptors of what God has fashioned; they turn their backs on the needy, oppress the afflicted, and support the wealthy.⁶⁸⁴

“Murderers of children and corruptors of what God has fashioned” is likely to refer to child abortion, and child exposure and abuse. *Barnabas* also has injunctions in 11.6 against being a *paidophoros*, a child-corrupter, and in 19.4 against the sexual corruption of children by adults, concerning the sexual use of slave children.

19.4 οὐ πορνεύσεις, οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις ...⁶⁸⁵

Justin Martyr details the fate of some exposed children.

Justin Martyr. The First Apology ... we have been taught that it is wicked to expose even newly born children, first because we see that almost all of those who are exposed (not only girls, but boys), are raised in prostitution. ... you now raise children only for this same disgraceful purpose, for in every country there is a throng of females, hermaphrodites, and degenerates, ready for this evil purpose. ... anyone who consorts with them ... may by some chance be guilty of intercourse with his own child. Still [another reason against exposure]

⁶⁸² Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache: a commentary*, trans. Linda M Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). 52-53.

⁶⁸³ Martens, "Do not sexually abuse children," 227-254.

⁶⁸⁴ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 80-81.

⁶⁸⁵ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 76.

lest some of them would not be [discovered and] taken home, but die, and we would then be murderers.⁶⁸⁶

The Council of Elvira, ca. 306 CE, in Canon 12, denied communion permanently to mothers who gave over their children into prostitution and if they do so or sell their own bodies, they shall not receive communion even at death.

XII. De mulieribus quae lenocinium fecerint.

Mater vel parens vel quaelibet fidelis, si lenocinium exercuerit, eo quod alienum vendiderit corpus vel potius suum, placuit eam nec in finem accipere communionem.⁶⁸⁷

According to an African Church Council of 397 CE, the bishops and priests should take on young women who are deprived of parents and entrust them to venerable women so that they are dwelling together, mutually guarded, and not wandering around everywhere to damage the reputation of the Church.⁶⁸⁸ Although this is a rather late example, the “not wandering around” feature is of interest.

There was also plenty of scope for male prostitution in antiquity. Destitute and desperate orphans must have fallen frequently into this state. In Palladius’ *Life of John Chrysostom* he tells how the priest Isodore was scandalously accused by his bishop of sodomy with a young man. This man received 15 gold pieces for his false testimony, which he evidently handed to his widowed mother, but she revealed the plot to Isodore.⁶⁸⁹

11.1.5 SLAVE CHILDREN

Jennifer A. Glancy in *Slavery in Early Christianity* describes

a social context in which slaveholders treated slaves as bodies—available bodies, vulnerable bodies, compliant bodies, surrogate bodies.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁶ Justin, *Saint Justin Martyr*: 63-65.

⁶⁸⁷ A. W. W. Dale, *The synod of Elvira and Christian life in the fourth century: a historical essay* (London: Macmillan, 1882).

⁶⁸⁸ *Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanæ* Canon 44.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.xv.iv.ii.html>

⁶⁸⁹ Palladius, *Dialogue sur la vie de Jean Chrysostome*, trans. Anne Marie Malingrey, Sources Chrétiennes, 341-342 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988). 91.

⁶⁹⁰ Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in early Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). 156.

After the Jewish War, many Jewish prisoners brought back by military personnel entered the slave markets of the Empire. Some of them must have been followers of the Christian religion. Margaret Y. MacDonald in the *Power of Children*, does not evade the issue of the sexual use of slave children.⁶⁹¹ Slave children, i.e. pet children who were maintained for their good looks and charm, were known as *delica*. Not all were for sexual use.

Delicia can be natural children, substitute children, foster children, pampered pets, entertaining little jesters, objects for erotic pleasure.⁶⁹²

The NT does not discuss this practice. Does this mean that it was accepted as part of life in the early church communities? The institution of slavery itself was so much the basis of the Roman economy that for the church to challenge its existence would have been revolutionary and futile at that period in antiquity. Macdonald proposes that the NT silence on the issue may mean acceptance of the practice, or conversely might mean that the issue caused contention.⁶⁹³

Macdonald points out that children are told to “obey their parents in everything” (κατὰ πάντα) in Col. 3:20, and the command is repeated as regards slaves and masters in Col. 3:22.⁶⁹⁴ Obedience to one’s master might mean slave parents giving their own child over to a master as a *delicia*. However, wrongdoers are threatened with divine judgment with no respect of persons (προσωπολημψία) in Col. 3:25 and so these words might equally well be referring to masters as to slaves.

Christian Laes in his book chapter “Desperately Different” finds that epigraphical evidence for Christian *delica* children scarcely exists. However in literary use early Christian writers use the word as much as their pagan colleagues.⁶⁹⁵ There is a word in the New Testament meaning ‘to corrupt’. Φθείρω is used in 1 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 7:2; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 4:22; 2 Pet. 2:12; Jude 10; and Rev. 19:2. It has the general meaning of to *destroy, to ruin, to corrupt, or to spoil*, and it is

⁶⁹¹ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 43-48.

⁶⁹² Christian Laes, "Desperately Different: Delica children in the Roman Household," in *Early Christian families in context: an interdisciplinary dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003), 324.

⁶⁹³ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 49.

⁶⁹⁴ MacDonald, *Power of children*: 49-50.

⁶⁹⁵ Laes, "Desperately Different," 322-323.

sometimes used with sexual nuances, as in Eph.4:22.⁶⁹⁶ Καταφθείρω is used in 2 Tim. 3:8 and has a similar broad meaning.

John W. Martens has noticed that some of the early Christian writers developed a new word which was clearly explicit in its meaning. The verb was παιδοφθορέω (paidophthoreo), which:

describes sexual practices between children and adults as practices which are destructive and corrupting.⁶⁹⁷

Mark Golden pointed out that the terms “child” and “slave”, (παῖς) were transposable and that a slave no matter his age was often considered a child.⁶⁹⁸ The verb παιδοφθορέω emerged in the late first or early second century CE. The earliest two undisputedly Christian uses of it are found in the *Didache* 2.2⁶⁹⁹ and the *Epistle of Barnabas* 19.4⁷⁰⁰

2.2 οὐ φονεύσεις, οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις ...

19.4 οὐ πορνεύσεις, οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις ...

It is also found in works by Tatian, Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius, Gregory of Nazianzen and in later works by others of the fourth and fifth centuries. The term was devised by the early Christians to demonstrate that such practices ruined and destroyed children.⁷⁰¹ Overall, from the textual evidence it appears that the church increasingly openly opposed Roman attitudes to the sexual use of slave children and expected a higher standard of behaviour in Christian circles.

We now turn from the disturbing destiny of some fatherless children to see if any widowed mothers can be detected in the post-New Testament church.

11.2 WIDOWS IN THE POST-NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

We have little information on the numbers of widows supported in the initial years of the church. Some provision was made for elderly widows, as is demonstrated in 1

⁶⁹⁶ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁶⁹⁷ Martens, "Do not sexually abuse children," 227.

⁶⁹⁸ Mark Golden, "Pais, child and slave," *L'Antiquité Classique* 54(1985): 91-104.

⁶⁹⁹ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 418.

⁷⁰⁰ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 76.

⁷⁰¹ Martens, "Do not sexually abuse children," 243-251.

Timothy 5:3-16. Lampe reports that by around 200 CE more women of high status than comparable men had been attracted to the church with the ensuing difficulty of finding a suitable partner. A Christian woman who wanted to keep the title “*clarissima*” had two choices—to marry a non-Christian of the same status, or to live in *concubinatus* with a socially inferior Christian. Catullus, who was bishop of Rome from c.217-22 CE recognised these marriages, in order to prevent ‘mixed marriages’. He also accepted the sexual unions of free Roman Christian women with Christian slaves as long as they were of the same household.⁷⁰² If single women had difficulty in finding a partner, it is not surprising that it was problematic for widows over thirty.

We also know from a letter of Cornelius, bishop of Rome, to Fabius, bishop of Antioch, recorded in Eusebius, that by 251CE the Roman church supported fifteen hundred widows and distressed persons.⁷⁰³ A century beyond that date, the Great Church of Antioch supported three thousand widows and virgins.⁷⁰⁴ It appears that that these widows are elderly and are not the mothers of minor children. No figures are given for the number of fatherless families supported, (if there were any), nor for the numbers of full orphans maintained.

It was explained in Part II that there were several forms of marriage or of long-lasting relationships in the early Roman Empire. The term *contubernium* was applied to long-standing relationships between slaves. Children born of these unions were not legitimate and took the legal status of their mother. If she was a slave then her children were added to the household of her owner. It appears, in the absence of any information to the contrary, that all forms of faithful long-term relationship, in particular those in which the children were raised and not exposed, were accepted as ‘marriage’ by the early church.

The *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome*, of uncertain date and author, but probably 3rd century, discusses in chapters 15 and 16 the life situations of those who come forward for instruction leading to baptism. After rejecting some on the grounds of their occupation—actor, charioteer, gladiator, slave, soldier, prostitute, magician, city official—there is registered this concession for a female slave:

⁷⁰² Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*: 117-122.

⁷⁰³ Eusebius, *The ecclesiastical history*. 2 vols.: VI,18 118-119.

⁷⁰⁴ Chrysostom. *Homily on Matthew*. 66,3

If someone's concubine is a slave, as long as she has raised her children and has clung only to him, let her hear. Otherwise, she shall be rejected. The man who has a concubine must cease and take a wife according to the law. If he will not, he shall be rejected.⁷⁰⁵

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (c.340–397), when instructing catechumens, warned them not to copy Abraham who had a child by his slave, Hagar, because such children cannot be legitimate heirs.⁷⁰⁶ Jerome writing c.400 CE recommended that Christians originally too poor to marry who had become rich should apply to the Emperor and pay for a rescript to permit their ineligible slave women to be recognised as legal wives, and their children as legitimate.⁷⁰⁷

11.2.1 SECOND CENTURY WITNESSES

11.2.1.1 THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

The major witness to the early second century as regards the widows and the fatherless in the early church is the *Shepherd of Hermes*.

Various considerations suggest that The *Shepherd of Hermes* was written by a single author, possibly over a stretch of time, during the early part of the second century, perhaps 110–140 CE.⁷⁰⁸ Christine Trevett in her book, *Christian Women and the Time of the Apostolic Fathers (AD C. 80-160): Corinth, Rome and Asia Minor*, describes the freedman Hermas, abandoned as a child and brought up as a slave, and those close to him as “ordinary people” and regards the book as a manifestation of “the syncretistic and practical religion in Rome at the end of the first century”.⁷⁰⁹

The *Shepherd of Hermes* is notable amongst the Apostolic Fathers because of the greater number of references to women in its text. There are six references to

⁷⁰⁵ Hippolytus, *La Tradition Apostolique: d'après les anciennes versions*, trans. Bernard Botte, Sources Chrétiennes, 11 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1946). 46.

⁷⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Sancti Ambrosii Opera Pars Prima: Hexameron, De paradiso, De Cain, De Noe, De Abraham, De Isaac, De bono mortis*; ed. by Carolus Schenkl, vol. 32/1, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Pragae; Vindobonae; Lipsiae: F. Tempsky; G. Freytag, 1896). De Abraham 1.3.19.

⁷⁰⁷ Jerome, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi [Jerome] Pars I: Epistulae 1-70 (editio altera supplementis aucta 1996)*, vol. 54, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vindobonae; Lipsiae: F. Tempsky; G. Freytag, 1910/1918). Epistle 69.65.

⁷⁰⁸ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers: II*, 169.

⁷⁰⁹ Christine Trevett, *Christian women and the time of the Apostolic Fathers (AD c. 80-160): Corinth, Rome and Asia Minor* (Cardiff, U.K.: University of Wales Press, 2006). 112.

widow(s) and five to orphan(s), five of the instances to both in combination. As Grapte is one of three teachers in Hermas, two of them named, it is clear that at this time in Rome there was no ban on women teachers.⁷¹⁰ Hermas was married unhappily because of faults on both sides of the partnership, but the wife's fault is specified as 'evil-speaking'.⁷¹¹

For she also does not restrain her tongue, but uses it to perpetrate evil.
Visions 2.2.3-4

The Church was pictured first as an old and later as a young woman who was a bearer of revelation in the form of a book. She gave Hermas these instructions:⁷¹²

3. And so, you will write two little books, sending one to Clement and the other to Grapte. Clement will send his to the foreign cities, for that is his commission. But Grapte will admonish the widows and orphans. And you will read yours in this city, with the presbyters who lead the church.

Γραπτῆ δὲ νοουθετήσῃ τὰς χήρας καὶ τοὺς ὀρφανούς

Who Grapte might be is open to speculation. Various suggestions have been made. Leutsch suggests a deacon.⁷¹³ Trevett suggests a female elder.⁷¹⁴ Perhaps there were women within the church who because of their education and skills were responsible for the moral and religious instruction of the younger women. Osiek reports that the name Grapte is frequently found in Rome: of fifty-four occurrences in four centuries, sixteen are slaves or a freedwomen, five probably freedwomen, and thirty-three uncertain.⁷¹⁵

7397 dis manib. | Grapte, | Egnatiae Ma|ximillae¹ | a manu, | con-
iugi karis|simae, C. Egn|atius Arogus.
Romae (V1 9540 vidit Henzen). — 1) Cf. Tac. ann. 15, 71.

Kim Haines-Eitzen describes the epigraphic evidence for female scribes in her book, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian*

⁷¹⁰ Martin Leutsch, *Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Wirklichkeit im Hirten des Hermas*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 150 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989). 172.

⁷¹¹ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 186-187.

⁷¹² Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 192-193.

⁷¹³ Leutsch, *Wahrnehmung*: 161.

⁷¹⁴ Trevett, *Christian women*: 157.

⁷¹⁵ Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas: a commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). 59.

*Literature.*⁷¹⁶ One of the women in the inscriptions is known from other sources. A certain Grapte is identified as the amanuensis of Egnatia Maximilla. According to Tacitus,⁷¹⁷ she accompanied her husband, Glitius Gallus, when he was exiled by Nero, who was Emperor from 54 to 68. Egnatia Maximilla was very rich and therefore could afford a personal amanuensis. If *Shepherd of Hermas* was written earlier than is generally supposed, or if the first part was written earlier than the rest, as is surmised, then it is just possible that this woman, perhaps even in her old age, and widowed, was a member of the early Roman church. This is the text of the Latin inscription.⁷¹⁸ The “dis manibus” formula is found on some early Christian epitaphs and does not rule out ILS 7397.⁷¹⁹

Origen, in his turn, allegorized them. He claimed that Grapte stood for the “letter of scripture”. The orphans stood for “childlike souls” who do not yet deserve to call God “Father”. The “widows” stood for those who have left their husband Satan but have not made sufficient progress to be joined to the “heavenly bridegroom”.⁷²⁰ More reasonably, Trevett asserts either that she was a real person, or that she represented a category of real people.⁷²¹ Significantly then, there appeared to exist in Rome at this time a feasibly combined group of widows and orphans. It may even be possible that this is a group of fatherless families, given maintenance by the church and able to provide each other with mutual support.

Furthermore there is an interesting section in Parable 5.3 v.5-8 where instructions are given by the Shepherd for a complete and acceptable fast. Performance of the recommended action will require interaction with an individual needy person. This action will give him/her identity, rather than remaining a member of that anonymous category, the ‘fatherless and the widows’.

... taste nothing but bread and water on the day you fast. Then estimate the cost of the food you would have eaten on that day and

⁷¹⁶ Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of letters: literacy, power, and the transmitters of early Christian literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷¹⁷ Tacitus *Ann.* 15.71

⁷¹⁸ ILS 7397 = CIL 6.9549

⁷¹⁹ Alison Cooley, *The Cambridge manual of Latin epigraphy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 64.

⁷²⁰ Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and selected writings*, trans. Rowan A. Greer, *Classics of Western spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). 182-183.

⁷²¹ Trevett, *Christian women*: 158.

give that amount to a widow or orphan or someone in need. Be humble in this way, that the one who receives something because of your humility may fill his own soul and pray to the Lord for you.⁷²²

There is one instance of a reference to widows not in combination with orphans.

Parable 9.27.2 seems to suggest that the church overseers provided accommodation for homeless widows.

2. they are bishops and those who are hospitable, who always gladly welcomed the slaves of God into their homes without hypocrisy. And through their ministry, the bishops always provided constant shelter for those in need and for the widows, and they always conducted themselves in a holy way.⁷²³

These bishops are contrasted in Parable 9.26.2 with ministers who exploited the vulnerability of widows and orphans.

2. the stones that are stained are ministers who have ministered badly, snatching away the livelihood of widows and orphans and providing a living for themselves out of the ministry they have received.⁷²⁴

Finally, in Parable 1.8 the rich are advised to use their wealth to redeem the souls of the poor, rather than invest in property they must leave behind.

8. Instead of fields, then, purchase souls that have been afflicted, insofar as you can, and take care of widows and orphans and do not neglect them; spend your wealth and all your furnishings for such fields and houses as you have received from God.⁷²⁵

The general impression is given of an early Christian church where the widows and orphans are given visibility and support.

11.2.1.2 IGNATIUS' LETTERS

Ignatius' Letter to the Smyrnaeans, possibly written in the 130s CE (later than used to be thought) contains two references to the widows or the fatherless.

6.2. But take note of those who spout false opinions about the gracious gift of Jesus Christ that has come to us, and see how they are opposed to the mind of God. They have no interest in love, in the widow, the

⁷²² Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 326-329.

⁷²³ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 452-453.

⁷²⁴ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 448-449.

⁷²⁵ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 308-309.

orphan, the oppressed, the one who is in chains or the one set free, the one who is hungry or the one who thirsts.⁷²⁶

Ignatius knew 1 Corinthians well, and it appears that he also knew Ephesians and 1 and 2 Timothy, but he shows no influence of that in these two passages.⁷²⁷

13.1 I greet the households of my brothers, along with their wives and children, and the virgins who are called widows. I wish you farewell in the power of the Father.⁷²⁸

The first quotation echoes Matthew 25, instead of the Old Testament, and appears less formulaic than those in the previous category. Much has been made of the phrase where Ignatius greets “the houses of my brothers and wives/women and the virgins who are called widows”. This has led many people to surmise an order of consecrated virgins, dwelling together in a household. There is scant evidence for such a phenomenon this early in the church. He is probably referring to what some would call “old maids”, aged spinsters, surplus women, perhaps unattractive, disabled or without a dowry.

Ignatius’ concern for widows is demonstrated again in his *Letter to Polycarp*. At section 4.1 he advises Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who must be junior in rank or age to him:

Do not allow the widows to be neglected. After the Lord, it is you who must be mindful of them. Let nothing be done apart from your consent, and do nothing apart from God. You are already acting in this way. Be imperturbable.

Here the verb to neglect is ἀμελέω. Polycarp is reminded of his responsibilities by Ignatius. This advice appears based on a genuine church situation and widows known to Ignatius. In Acts 6:1 the verb is παραθεωρέω, but there is no difference in meaning. It is not unlikely that Ignatius might also have widows in mind in the following 3rd and 4th sentence. The adjective ‘imperturbable’ in English comes from the Greek noun εὐστάθεια, which means stability. It implies that Polycarp must be settled in mind and stable in action and emotion. Self-help and independence of

⁷²⁶ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 302-303.

⁷²⁷ Paul Foster, "The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch and the writings that later formed the New Testament," in *The reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic fathers*, ed. Andrew F. Gregory and C. M. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 185.

⁷²⁸ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: II, 308-309.

action on the part of the widows is not being encouraged. Control must rest in the hands of the bishop.⁷²⁹

11.2.1.3 LETTER OF POLYCARP TO THE CHURCH OF THE PHILIPPIANS

One work only of Polycarp himself exists, and that is *the Letter of Polycarp to the Church of the Philippians*, in which he shows knowledge of the death of Ignatius. The letter is generally dated to circa 135 CE. The scholarly consensus dates the martyrdom of Polycarp to either of the years 155/156 at the age of 86, therefore the letter certainly must have been written before that date.⁷³⁰

There are two places where widows or orphans are mentioned.

4.3 We should teach the widows to be self-controlled with respect to faith in the Lord, to pray without ceasing for everyone, and to be distant from all libel, slander, false witness, love of money, and all evil, knowing that they are God's altar and that each offering is inspected for a blemish and that nothing escapes his notice, whether thoughts, ideas, or any of the things hidden in the heart.

6.1 The presbyters also should be compassionate, merciful to all, turning back those who have gone astray, caring for all who are sick, not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always taking thought for what is good before both God and others.⁷³¹

In 4.3 once again the widows' function of keeping busy with presumably silent continual prayer is stressed. This is followed immediately by a recommendation to avoid slander, libel and lies. Female speech is being targeted afresh by a male church leader and women are being painted with a tendency to become defamatory, malicious liars. Polycarp's focus on slander and evil speech has parallels encountered in 1st Timothy. They are also to avoid greed, which is a theme in chapter 15 of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. What the metaphor "altar of God" implies, making its first appearance here, varies with the context. In six more church documents from the 2nd to the 5th century there is reference to the widow as an altar, upon which gifts are placed, which is consequently expected to remain pure and holy, according to Carolyn Osiek.⁷³² Bonnie Thurston connects the phrase with prayer. The widows'

⁷²⁹ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 315.

⁷³⁰ Parvis, "Martyrdom," 127-132.

⁷³¹ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 338-341.

⁷³² Carolyn Osiek, "The widow as altar: the rise and fall of a symbol," *Second Century* 3, no. 3 (1983): 159-169.

prayers sanctified the gifts brought to her. Secondly, the example of her sacrificial living provided the community with a living reminder of Christ's sacrifice.⁷³³

In Section 6.1 Polycarp reverses the sequence of the normal stereotypical reference to fatherless and the widows, separates widows and orphans into two groups, and links them with the poor, rather than with the usual 'stranger'. The presbyters are encouraged not to 'neglect' them. Here, once again, the verb 'to neglect' is ἀμελέω. Methods of implementation of the recommended attention are not enlarged upon, and once again, the exhortation sounds like a platitude.

11.2.1.4 JUSTIN MARTYR

Of the six works attributed to Justin Martyr, the fatherless or the widows are mentioned only in two of them; the *First Apology* dated at about 154 CE and the *Dialogue with Trypho*, dated between 155-161 CE.⁷³⁴

In an instance *not* linked to a quotation from the OT, the widows are mentioned with children in the context of almsgiving after the Eucharist on Sundays, in the *First Apology* in Chapter 67. This paragraph is important because it provides a rare insight into the Sunday worship of the second century, and the part that a weekly alms collection played within it. Not everyone was required to give an offering. It was restricted to those that were "well-off" οἱ εὐποροῦντες. It is possible because of the close collocation and typical word order that fatherless families are in mind here, but it is impossible to be sure. Certainly making provision for a wide range of possible circumstances of need seems to be left to the discretion of the president of the meeting.⁷³⁵

67.6. But those who are well-off and are willing give—each what he wishes according to his own choice—and what is gathered together is deposited with the president. **67.7.** And he assists orphans and widows and those who are in need because of illness or some other cause, and those who are in chains, and the foreigners who are staying with us. And he is the protector of all in general who are in need.

⁷³³ Thurston, "Widows as the altar," 279-289.

⁷³⁴ Justin, *Saint Justin Martyr*.

⁷³⁵ Justin, *Justin, philosopher and martyr: Apologies*, trans. Denis Minns and P. M Parvis, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). 259-263.

This appears to be a description of actual church worship setting, where the participants were known to each other. It is not used here as a literary trope. This passage gives hope that fatherless families were recognised and visible in at least some of the early church assemblies.

11.2.1.5 THE PASSING OF PEREGRINUS

In Lucian of Samosata's (c.125 – 180 CE) satirical work *The Passing of Peregrinus* he describes aged widows and orphans standing outside of the prison hoping to receive alms through the generosity of the Christians and their clergy who are visiting the imprisoned charlatan Peregrinus, bringing him elaborate meals, money and attempting to rescue him.⁷³⁶

Margaret MacDonald in *Early Christian women and pagan opinion* notes that the phrase γράϊδια χήρας (from γράϊδιον, τό, Dim. of γράϊς, old hag,) better captures the derogatory tone if translated “old hags called widows”!⁷³⁷ She posits that the very old women perhaps provided prisoners with resources or prayer, or served as look-outs. If old women were usually ignored in public, they might have been the logical choice for such activities. Perhaps they and the orphans were opportunistically begging. However, she thinks Lucian mentions very old widows in this role to ridicule the Christians, so that they became “a graphic image of credulity, shamelessness, and transgression”.⁷³⁸ Again, this does not prove there were more old widows in the movement than those with young children, but their prominence is revealing. Lucian thinks that the Christians were gullible, but it demonstrates the generosity of which they were capable to those imprisoned for the faith.

Well, when he had been imprisoned, the Christians, regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown him, not in any casual way but with assiduity; and from the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud, and excellent Peregrinus—for he still went by that name—was called by them ‘the new Socrates.’ ... Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their

⁷³⁶ Lucian, *Passing*: 13.

⁷³⁷ MacDonald, *Early Christian women*: 74.

⁷³⁸ MacDonald, *Early Christian women*: 82.

common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. So it was then in the case of Peregrinus; much money came to him from them by reason of his imprisonment, and he procured not a little revenue from it.⁷³⁹

11.2.2 THIRD CENTURY WITNESSES

11.2.2.1 CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA. (c.150 – c. 215)

At the turn of the second century, Clement in Book three of *The Instructor*, also known as *Paedagogus*, describes the self-indulgence and moral laxity of rich women in graphic terms. He abhors their purchase of exotic animals to amuse themselves, while they ignore the suffering of the widows, the orphans and the old. In chapter 4: *With Whom We Are To Associate* we find this description—

But those who are more refined than these keep Indian birds and Median pea-fowls, and recline with peak-headed creatures; playing with satyrs, delighting in monsters. They laugh when they hear Thersites;⁷⁴⁰ and these women, purchasing Thersiteses highly valued, pride themselves not in their husbands, but in those wretches which are a burden on the earth, and overlook the **chaste widow**, who is of far higher value than a Melitaeon pup, and look askance at a **just old man**, who is lovelier in my estimation than a monster purchased for money. And though maintaining parrots and curlews, they do not receive the **orphan child**; but they expose children that are born at home, and take up the young of birds, and prefer irrational to rational creatures; although they ought to undertake the maintenance of old people with a character for sobriety, who are fairer in my mind than apes, and capable of uttering something better than nightingales; and to set before them that saying, “He that pitieth the poor lendeth to the LORD;” and this, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it to Me”.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁹ Lucian, *Passing*: 13-14.

⁷⁴⁰ Thersites was the lowest of the Greek heroes, who heckled Agamemnon in the *Iliad*.

⁷⁴¹ Philip Schaff, Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol 2 Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL)), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.html>. 593-594.

11.2.2.2 CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

Finally, that the fatherless and the widows were the principal church recipients of alms in the mid-third century is suggested by Cyprian's comment in section 15 of *On Work and Alms*.

And since all things that are given are conferred upon orphans and widows

Cumque universa quae dantur pupillis et viduis conferantur

Note that the word used for 'orphan' here is the word usually translated as a 'ward'. Did the church financially help those who took in fatherless children?

11.2.3 FOURTH CENTURY WITNESSES

Some children of wealthy widows begin to appear in the fourth century as leaders of the church. These exceptional mothers produced exceptional children, who, because of their own childhood experiences were comfortable with women, and were sensitized to the needs of widows and their children. Among these women were Anthousa the mother of John Chrysostom (c.349-407 CE) who lived in the prosperous city of Antioch.

In *On the Priesthood*, John recounts her memories of that time when she had to cope with careless and badly behaved servants, scheming relatives, and insulting officials making tax demands. She bemoans the cost of the education of her son, yet she boasts she did not reduce his patrimony as she paid for his upbringing and education from her own purse and her dowry.⁷⁴²

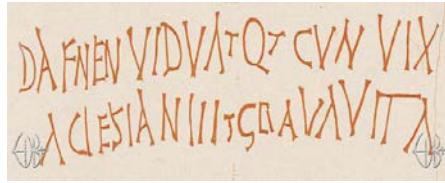
11.3 RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT ALMS

Young Christian widows naturally wanted to return to the security of a family unit. Remarriage was both desired by them and legally encouraged by the state.

Dependency on the church was a last resort for the majority. Those whose family circumstances allowed them to escape humiliation and remain independent of the church were proud of the fact and this was occasionally found recorded on their memorial inscriptions. Krause mentions two inscriptions e.g. a widow Dafne who *gravavit aclesia nih(il)* in *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*.⁷⁴³

⁷⁴² Chrysostom, *Six books on the priesthood*: 38-39.

⁷⁴³ ICUR NS I 1582 (= ILCV 1581adn.).



It is said similarly in *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* of the widow Regina, who died at the age of 80 years and had lived for 60 years as a widow.⁷⁴⁴

RIGINE VENEMERENTI FILIA SUA FECIT VENE, RIGINE
MATRI VIDUAE QUE SEDIT VIDUA ANNOS LX ET ECLESA
NUMQUA GRAVAVIT, UNIBYRA QUE VIXIT ANNOS LXXX,
MESIS V DIES XXVI

To well-deserving Rigina her daughter nicely made this stone. Rigina, mother, widow, who remained a widow sixty years and never burdened the Church; an *univira* who lived eighty years, five months, twenty-six days.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁴ ILCV 1581. See also ICUR NS I 3958.

⁷⁴⁵ Lightman and Zeisel, "Univira," 27.

11.4 RHETORICAL USE OF 'FATHERLESS' AND/OR 'WIDOWS'.

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITIES QUOTED WHEN THE FATHERLESS FAMILY IS MENTIONED IN FIRST TO THIRD CENTURIES.

QUOTATION	DOCUMENT IN WHICH QUOTE FOUND	TOTAL
Exodus 22:22–24.	Cyprian: <i>Testimonies</i> : Book 3	1
Job 29:12-13	Cyprian: <i>Testimonies</i> : Book 3	1
Isaiah 1:16-20	Clement of Rome: <i>First Clement</i> Irenaeus: <i>Against Heresies</i> Book 4 (x2) Justin Martyr: <i>First Apology</i> (x2) Theophilus of Antioch: <i>Ad Autolycum</i> Clement of Alexandria: <i>The Instructor</i> Book 3 Tertullian: <i>Against Marcion</i> Book 4 Tertullian: <i>To his Wife</i> Book 1 Origen: <i>Homilies on Leviticus</i> Hippolytus: <i>Discourse on the Holy Theophany</i> Cyprian: <i>Testimonies</i> : Book 3 <i>Didascalia Apostolorum</i> (x2)	14
Isaiah 1:23	Irenaeus: <i>Against Heresies</i> Book 4 Justin Martyr: <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>	2
Isaiah 58:7	Irenaeus: <i>Against Heresies</i> Book 4 Theophilus of Antioch: <i>Ad Autolycum</i>	2
Zechariah 7:9-10	Irenaeus: <i>Against Heresies</i> Book 4 (x2) Theophilus of Antioch: <i>Ad Autolycum</i>	3
Zechariah 8:17	Irenaeus: <i>Against Heresies</i> Book 4 (x2)	2
Psalms 68:5	Cyprian: <i>Testimonies</i> : Book 3	1
Psalms 82:3	Justin Martyr: <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> Tertullian: <i>Against Marcion</i> Book 4	2
Sirach 4:10	Cyprian: <i>Testimonies</i> : Book 3	1

QUOTATION	DOCUMENT IN WHICH QUOTE FOUND	TOTAL
James 1:27	NONE	
1 Timothy 5:6	Origen: <i>Homilies on Leviticus</i>	1
1 Timothy 5:8	NONE	

When the fatherless or the widows are mentioned in the writings of the clergy of the early church, it is always the context of the person writing the letter, homily, or treatise which is in focus. There are no names given, nor description or elaboration of the living conditions of those mentioned, nor specific instructions on how to alleviate their suffering. The use of the phrase, ‘the fatherless and the widows’ is purely rhetorical.

Even when there is a corresponding quotation from the New Testament available, it is not used. This is clearly seen in the complete absence of James 1:27. Similarly, 1 Timothy 5:8 is passed over in favour of Isaiah 58:7, “and not to hide yourself from your own kin”.

It has been noticed that whenever the widows and the fatherless are briefly mentioned there tends to be an accompanying OT quotation. The clear favourite is Isaiah 1:16-20.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa. 1:16-20 NRSV)

Here are some examples.

11.4.1 CLEMENT OF ROME

The Letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (known as *1 Clement*) is customarily dated to the end of the reign of Domitian (95 or 96 C.E.) In section 8:4 a reference to ‘orphan’ and ‘widow’ appears within a five verse section on the gift of repentance from God, which Clement feels is required of the Corinthian rebels by

God, who have deposed their appointed leaders. Clement conveys the invitation of God by quoting the ubiquitous Isaiah 1:16-20 in its entirety.⁷⁴⁶

This is the only mention of orphans or widows in the letter, and it serves here as a 'literary trope' representing charitable behaviour towards sufferers of injustice.

11.4.2 IRENAEUS OF LYONS

Irenaeus of Lyons wrote his *Against Heresies* in five books circa 175-185 CE. He argued against the Gnostic teachings of the second century. In Book 4, in which he disputes with the heretics using the words of Jesus as ammunition, he follows the usual quotation pattern of the repertoire of most treatise writers, when they give examples of good works.

He quotes the recurrent Isaiah 1:16-20 in section 17:1 and Isaiah 1:23 in section 2:7:

Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them. (Isa. 1:23 NRSV)

He also quotes Zechariah 7:9-10 in section 17:3, (as did Theophilus of Antioch, in Book 3 of *Ad Autolyicum*), combined with Zechariah 8:17.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. (Zec. 7:9-10 NRSV) do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the LORD. (Zec. 8:17 NRSV)

Also in 17:3 Irenaeus quotes from Isaiah 58:7, as did Theophilus of Antioch in Book 3: of *Ad Autolyicum*.

... and not to hide yourself from your own kin. (Isa. 58:7 NRSV)

One wonders why instead he did not quote

And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8 NRSV)

That he knew of the letter of 1 Timothy is evident from his quotation of 1 Timothy 1:4 in his preface to *Book 1* of *Against Heresies*. He also quotes 2 Tim. 2:23 in the preface to *Book 4* at section 3.

⁷⁴⁶ Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*: I, 48-49.

Finally, in section 36:2 Irenaeus repeats the combined Zechariah quotation and joins it together with Isaiah 1:16-18 which he had already quoted earlier.⁷⁴⁷ It is clear that these verses that the phrase serves here as a ‘literary trope’ representing charitable behaviour towards those in need.

11.4.3 JUSTIN MARTYR

Of the six works attributed to Justin Martyr, the fatherless or the widows are mentioned only in two of them; the *First Apology* dated at about 154 CE and the *Dialogue with Trypho*, dated between 155-161 CE.

The fatherless are mentioned in total 5 times, 4 of them in combination with their widowed mother. The exception links them with the needy. Again 4 out of 5 are contained within quotes from the OT, which demonstrates the influence of the scriptures of the OT on the early church at this time, but also tends to confirm the notion that the juxtaposition has become a ‘literary trope’.

First Apology Ch. 44 Isa. 1:16-20 Judge for the fatherless and defend the widow.

First Apology Ch. 61 Isa. 1:16-20 Judge for the fatherless and defend the widow.

Dialogue with Trypho Ch. 27 Isa. 1:23 Judging not for the fatherless, nor suffering the cause of the widow to come unto you.

Dialogue with Trypho Ch. 124 Psa. 82:3 Judge for the needy and the fatherless.⁷⁴⁸

11.4.4 THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH

Theophilus of Antioch was a second-century Syrian bishop who sought to promote in three books, collectively known as *Ad Autolycum*, a moralistic form of Christianity. He wrote c. 180-185 CE. *Book 3* contrasts the legends of the Greek gods with the ancient writings of the OT. Amongst many references to the OT, in the paragraph *On Righteousness* is found the ever-present quote from Isaiah 1:16-20 “judge the fatherless, plead for the widow;” a quote from Zechariah 7:9-10 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another”; and a quote from Isaiah 58:7, “and not to hide

⁷⁴⁷ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.ii.html>

⁷⁴⁸ Justin, *Saint Justin Martyr*: 80,100,188,341.

yourself from your own kin” (καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν οἰκείων τοῦ σπέρματός σου οὐχ ὑπερόψη).⁷⁴⁹ This verse, already found quoted once before in Irenaeus of Lyons, aimed at reminding the extended family of their responsibilities towards the fatherless family.

11.4.5 TERTULLIAN

Because he writes extensively against remarriage Tertullian usually obtains his authorities from the teachings of the apostle Paul. However, in *To his Wife* Book 1 and *Against Marcion* Book 4 can be found the overall favourite quotation, Isaiah 1:16-20.

11.4.6 ORIGEN

Origen quotes the apostle Paul in Homily 3 of *Homilies on Leviticus* from 1 Cor. 5.9-11 when he is making the argument that Christians should not make themselves “unclean” by associating with immoral people.

However, I now am writing to you that you should not associate with any brother denominated a fornicator, or covetous, or serving idols, or slanderous, or a drunkard, or a thief. With this kind, do not take food.

Origen vilifies the young widows of 1 Timothy 5:6 as being human cadavers.

So also that widow, about whom the Apostle says, “who in her pleasures is dead while she lives”, can be said to be a human “corpse”.

Once again, a member of the clergy disparages helpless young widows and appears to propagate the opinion that they were immoral.⁷⁵⁰

11.4.7 CYPRIAN: THE CULMINATION

It is appropriate to finish this survey of authorities used by the early Christian writers with Cyprian, whose repertoire of verses establishes the virtual ‘canon’ of scriptural authorities to be used in preaching and teaching on the topic of charitable activity including the fatherless and the widows.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁹ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>

⁷⁵⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus: 1-16*, edited and translated by Gary Wayne Barkley, Fathers of the church, 83 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990). 57.

⁷⁵¹ Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol 5 Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*.

These are conveniently organised on page 1368 of volume 5 of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers in Testimonies Against the Jews, Book Three*, under the 'heading':

113. That the widow and orphans ought to be protected.

The title gives the impression that all three books are pejorative material against the Jews. In fact, the story of the Jews is delineated by means of scriptural quotes, and they are discussed only in Book 1. Book 2 describes the Christian message by scriptural verses. Book Three is an epitome of scriptural verses containing the essence of Christian ethics and behaviour, usefully written for his son.

Cyprian is dissimilar to the others in that he includes the stern verse Exodus 22:22–24 and three other verses not quoted by them.

Ye shall not afflict any widow and orphan. But if ye afflict them, and they cry out and call unto me, I will hear their cryings, and will be angry in mind against you; and I will destroy you with the sword, and your wives shall be widows, and your children orphans.

followed by the ubiquitous quote from Isaiah 1:16-20.

Judge for the fatherless, and justify the widow; and come let us reason, saith the Lord.

Next is Job's claim to righteousness in Job 29:12-13.

I have preserved the poor man from the hand of the mighty, and I have helped the fatherless who had no helper: the mouth of the widow hath blessed me.

Then Psalm 68:5

The Father of the orphans, and the Judge of the widows.

and lastly Sirach or Ecclesiasticus 4:10

Be merciful to the orphans as a father, and as a husband to their mother; and thou shalt be the son of the Highest if thou shalt obey.

It is clear that the OT texts possess an authority for the early church as least great that of the Gospels and the writings of Paul.

11.5 SUMMARY

From the first to the third century, Christian widows are nearly always portrayed without accompanying minor children. There is not enough evidence provided in the historical sources to make any generalised statement about what happened to these almost invisible fatherless minor children of widows.

Exposure was a common method of disposal of unwanted children. Abortion was also practised. Slavery, prostitution, or begging may have been the destiny of many. Some children may have been rescued but the fate of others is terrible to contemplate. As the church did not support young widows with children, they may have been forced to dispose of their children in some of these ways.

There are only three plausible references to ‘real’ groups of known people; the group of widows and orphans in Rome headed by Grapte, the Sunday Eucharist worship service with a collection described by Justin Martyr, and the monthly collection for poor parentless orphans and others made in Tertullian’s church. These churches may have maintained some fatherless families. Otherwise, there is apparently, once again, very little personal knowledge shown by the writers of the deprivations of fatherless families. There is no reference to any named widow or individual child.

The rhetoric of the homilies, treatises and letters of the early church writers is surprisingly repetitive and employs a stock range of OT quotations to make their point. They scarcely ever allude to the New Testament in the context of orphans or widows, with no mention of that most significant NT verse, James 1:27, or of 1 Timothy 5:8, where those who do not care for their kin are described as “worse than an unbeliever”!

Krause’s conclusion that the OT scriptures must have been the determining influence to account for the late antiquity interest in widows has validity in view of the repetitive collection of OT quotations contained in the works of the earlier church under consideration. But sceptically, I suspect the widows’ wealth might be more to the point, since suddenly named individual widows appear who are rich, and some have retained their fatherless children whom they can afford to support.⁷⁵²

⁷⁵² Krause, *Witwen und Waisen* 4: 5-6.

12. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

12.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

At any one time in the Roman Empire there were approaching 30% of women who were widows. The chances of remarriage for a woman more than 30 years of age were small, owing to age, loss of attractiveness, poverty, loss of virginity, and especially if she had dependent minor children. If she had no assets, nor any supportive relatives, then self-support by working was her best option, but opportunities were extremely limited. Up to 50% of children had lost their father by the age of fifteen. A child who had lost his/her father was regarded as equivalent to one who had lost both parents; such was the devastating loss of identity and status. When reading texts which use the ambiguous word ὀρφανός, both 'fatherless' and 'orphan' must be assumed, unless the context makes the situation clear.

Extreme poverty was often the consequence of the death of the breadwinner in the non-elite groups. Poverty made orphans susceptible to theft, sexual abuse and violence. Eighty-two per cent of urban dwellers in Roman Society were poor. There were varying levels of need within poverty, but most widows and orphans existed below subsistence level. The majority of the church assembly consisted of those living just above subsistence level. One family in the 'middling' economic group might possess a house large enough to accommodate for worship the rest of the church assembly.

The charitable giving which occurred as part of worship formed a large part of expected ethical behaviour in the early church. Initially reciprocation was not required. Increasingly, in the second century, the prayer of the poor for a donor came to be seen as highly influential with God. The metaphor 'altars' became attached to widows, as they were the direct recipients of charitable giving. As more time passed control of alms became centred on the person of the bishop and his assistants, superseding direct giving or private patronage.

The fatherless and the widows were highly visible in the Hebrew Scriptures. By the directives of the God of Israel, the Jewish male worshipping community was left in no doubt as to their responsibilities towards this vulnerable group. The importance of children to their mothers and to the Jewish community in the Hebrew Scriptures presents a stark contrast to their invisibility in the New Testament.

In the Greek Scriptures of the New Testament there exists no clear divine directive regarding the fatherless family. Jesus in the Gospels voices no particular concern for fatherless children, although children in general were welcomed and encouraged to approach him on a least one occasion. He taught that children, especially poor ones, gain easy entry into the kingdom of God. He threatens dire punishment for those who offend against child believers. Jesus is shown to be aware of the vulnerability of widows to exploitation and shows compassion concerning their often precarious economic situation. The *Parable of the Unjust Judge* is inspiring, liberating, and empowering for the widow. Jesus shows approval of assertive behaviour, persistence, verbal assertion and tenacity in women.

Neglect of provision by the Jerusalem church for the Jerusalem Hellenistic widows is disclosed in the earliest days of the church. Private patronage supplies a group of widows at Joppa with clothing. Exceptionally, the letter of James at 1:27 contains the one and only linked exhortation concerning fatherless children and their widowed mothers in the whole of the New Testament. It recommends that fatherless families should be visited and their welfare overseen. One of the most significant characteristics of the early church was the metaphor of the church as a surrogate kinship group of unrelated brothers and sisters, headed by one heavenly Father. This pattern was superseded by that of the Greco-Roman hierarchical household. Uniquely in the household codes of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians children are addressed directly.

The subject matter of 1 Timothy 5:3-16 is the financial support of poor widows. Priority was given to the older women, who had no other option. The church leader reminds the relatives of the elderly women over sixty of their duty in this regard, but he refuses to support widows who are less than sixty, some of whom may still be raising minor children, who are not discussed. He recommends that the younger widows should remarry, which would not have been easy for those over thirty. He is angry because some of the younger widows with little alternative are contemplating marrying non-Christians and he accuses them of materialism and extravagance. Their speech and behaviour causes him disquiet and he is determined to silence them, to prevent them from talking 'nonsense', and to prevent their association by confining them to their homes, working with wool and praying.

Male church leaders display an increasing intolerance of female speech. This is demonstrated by an interpolation into the genuine first letter of Paul to the

Corinthians at 14:33-36 to command that women will remain silent during church worship. Similarly in the pseudonymous letter 1 Timothy at 2:11-12, falsely attributed to Paul, women are forbidden to ask questions in the assembly but must learn in silence. In 1 Timothy 5:3-16 the widows' conversation is classified as "nonsense" or "gossip". The writer seeks to find reasons to find fault with the young widows to obtain an excuse to deprive them of support.

From the first to the third century, Christian widows are nearly always portrayed without accompanying minor children. There is not enough evidence provided in the historical sources to make any generalised statement about what happened to these almost invisible fatherless minor children of widows. There are only three possible references to 'real' groups of known fatherless and widows.

The rhetoric of the homilies, treatises and letters of the early church writers is surprisingly repetitive and employs a limited stock of OT quotations to make their point. They scarcely ever allude to the New Testament in the context of orphans or widows, with no mention of that most significant NT verse, James 1:27,

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for [visit, oversee] orphans [fatherless] and widows in their distress [affliction, oppression, suffering], and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (Jam. 1:27 NRSV)

or of 1 Timothy 5:8, where those who do not care for their own kin are described as "worse than an unbeliever".

12.2 CONCLUSIONS

The initial hypothesis at the commencement of this study was expectation of confirmation of the invisibility of fatherless children in the New Testament. I did not expect to discover in addition that the whole involuntary fatherless family as a unit was scarcely visible in the early church. Widows without accompanying children appear to be dealt with always in the context of something else. There are no widows with accompanying minor children. There is circumvention and avoidance of their issues in favour of whatever else is preoccupying the writer.

The only place in the NT where the church's problems with widowhood are dealt with directly, but unsympathetically, is in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 where the younger widows created numerical, financial, social and moral difficulties for the church. Several scholars have suggested explanations to account for the author's harsh

treatment of young widows, usually involving their support for a putative heresy or a desire for an ascetic life. A simpler and better supported explanation, taking into consideration the poverty level of the church, and Paul's and (later) Tertullian's known opposition to the practise, is that they are contemplating marriage for financial security with a well-off non-Christian. This objective would satisfactorily explain the inconsistencies of that passage. However, eligible partners may have been scarce, in view of Krause's revelation of the difficulties of remarriage after the age of thirty.

12.2.1 DISPENSING WITH THE FATHERLESS FAMILY

Such problems led the leadership to invent creative ways to control and manage them. The stratagem of evasion which evolved was that of re-definition—a transformation, a metamorphosis into someone or something else.

The first method, and the most successful, was to split up the family into two distinct groups, women and full orphans with no connection between them. By separating them from one another, each group could be dealt with individually. This was aided by the linguistic ambiguity of the word ὀρφανός, which could mean full orphan or fatherless. These, it must be assumed, were taken in by their father's family, or sold into slavery, in the absence of any alternative information. Only in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* are found details of suggested provision for full orphans. The next stage was splitting the widows into two groups, old and young, by the arbitrary age of sixty. Those below sixty were required to remarry or find support by working or other means. Those above sixty, on condition that they had no other relatives living to support them, and had a history of good works, would be supported by the church. In this way fatherless families were eliminated from the church consciousness.

12.2.2 TRANSFORMING WIDOWS

An alternative strategy was to make widows become some stereotyped group of people other than their needy selves.

Their *alter egos* might be human. They were often transformed into elderly ascetics. For them remarriage was unlikely and celibacy became the ideal state. These ascetics were relegated to the role of continuous silent prayer. The younger widows might be reclassified as heretics, or extravagant self-indulgent women, or gossips, or even virgin celibates. Misinterpretation of the Greek led to them being slandered as

promiscuous women. This is most clearly demonstrated by current interpretations made of 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

Their *alter egos* could also be literary or metaphorical. The phrase “the fatherless and the widows” became a ‘literary trope’, a shorthand way of referring to the poor and needy in general. The phrase is rarely expanded beyond these words to delineate any real group of widows. Surprisingly frequent is the metaphoric reference to groups of widows as the “altar” on which almsgiving is deposited. They were also called “begging-bags” or “wallets”. This practice added to their dehumanisation and reduced them to inanimate objects.

They might also be converted into becoming the origins of theological schisms or theological innovations. Their neglect is portrayed as the cause of a theological rift between the Jerusalem Palestinian and the Hellenistic Jews. In the view of some, the young widows of 1 Timothy 5:11 were not ‘real’ widows but instead were virgins representative of a theological shift against marriage, moving towards celibacy and asceticism, while enjoying church support. As the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving took hold widows were given the role of purveyors of salvation for the rich. It was taught that their response of grateful prayer for their benefactors could have the power to ransom post-baptismal sin.

12.2.3 EXTINGUISHING THE VOICE OF WIDOWS

The third trend observed was an effort towards extinguishing the voice of widows. They were not to be allowed to speak or socialise, and were seated apart in church. If they did speak, their words had to be rendered unheard or of no effect by the denigration of their abilities and opinions, or by the slanderous destruction of their reputations. Contempt for female speech permeates the readings.

12.2.4 MAKING FATHERLESS CHILDREN INVISIBLE

Finally, the young fatherless children of widows have been given no voice or presence in the texts and consequently have been rendered invisible. Despite Jesus’ claims that poor children would be double inheritors of the kingdom, there is no evidence that fatherless children were valued in the early church.

12.3 WHY?

There could be many reasons for the leadership wishing to remain uninvolved. These might include avoiding discomfort, maintaining disinterestedness, having insufficient resources (both financial and emotional) to be able to cope, misogyny, fear of their own sexuality, and dislike of children, who were regarded as an encumbrance.

The church's attitude to remarriage, resulting from a misinterpretation of the words of Paul, became ever darker. As sexuality even within marriage became looked down upon, remarriage became regarded as "impure" and the ascetic ideal took hold.

Women, who in these days were allowed no other role in life but to become a wife and mother, became regarded as a problem for men, and as an occasion for sin.

Women were reconstructed entirely "as gendered bodies with (only) sexualized functionality".⁷⁵³ Great strictures were imposed on their appearance, their speech, their public activities and their association together. By the late 4th century, in the church of Chrysostom, men and women had to be physically separated by a wall to prevent distraction.

The writer of 1 Timothy (and also Tertullian) despised women who sought the financial security of remarriage and child-bearing with an unbeliever rather than the humiliation and uncertainty of church support. The young widows of 1 Timothy were cast off from church provision for contemplating marriage to a pagan. Preference for support was given to the elderly women who had no other option. If they were supported then they had to be useful. The most useful thing it was considered they could do was to pray silently, and any expression of their true personhood was suppressed by imposed silence. The widows' attempts to provide a counter-discourse or to make their requirements known were eroded by continual attacks on the quality of their speech. There can be found nowhere in the Christian writings of the first 250 years a concrete example of church support of a nameable poor widow with her fatherless children.

12.4 WHAT NEXT?

In the Christian church of today the involuntary Christian fatherless family is not to be found. The general attitude today is that the "state" exists to provide for them. However the "state" does not supply all that is needed for young widow support,

⁷⁵³ Fatum, "Christ domesticated," 197.

social inclusion, or healthy child development. Daily work and the difficulty in attending evening church meetings because of the cost of child supervision make socialisation impossible. James' recommendation that fatherless families be "visited" regularly becomes extremely relevant. On the other hand, in anticipation of a legacy, aged widows are well-supported in practically every church.

Is 1 Timothy 5:3-16 providing the church with the authority to silently socially exclude young Christian widows and their fatherless children? Are blameless young widows perceived solely as sexual temptations, not real human beings? Are fatherless children being left open to abuse by paedophiles? Or is it that the church leadership really doesn't know what to do with them? These verses seem to be saying, as pointed out in the letter of James, "Good luck to you".

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? (Jam. 2:15-16 NRSV)

What can be done? Here are some suggestions. Bereavement counselling might be enabled for both the mother and the children through charitable organisations such as Cruse. It should be made sure that the mother receives enough social and emotional support that the children are not over-burdened with her issues to the exclusion of their own. Ensure that both mother and children are not socially isolated and left vulnerable to opportunists and paedophiles but are integrated into the church community. There should be consistent and regular monitoring of teenagers in youth clubs and awareness of their issues by encouragement for them to make friendships and talk with adults about their different experience of life. Private patronage might be re-instated whereby gifted children, for example, might be supported through their education. Church meetings might be held in the fatherless home with participants bringing food or contributing to heating costs. Fatherless children are allowed to be present where they can safely make friends of adults of the same and the opposite sex. Financial help and encouragement for the family might be given so that they join in group holidays or weekends away with the rest of the church families. Perhaps in these ways the invisible fatherless children of the Christian church might be made visible.

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