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Daniel Caner, *The Rich and the Pure. Philanthropy and the Making of Christian Society in Early Byzantium*, University of California Press, Oakland, California 2021, 440 pages

The work in question is the product of decades of research and is expected to have a profound influence in its field. Following an introduction to the sources and methodology of the work, the subject of Chapter 1 is the culture of giving gifts in Early Byzantium. The various forms of gifts, the giving of which was motivated by the Christian faith of their providers, are presented through the Holy Land travelogue of the mid-6th century Piacenza Pilgrim, which is followed by the description of the important transition from civic-motivated *philotīmia* to faith-motivated *philanthrōpia* as the main ideal behind giving gifts. The supposed divine order of the world and the concept of Christian stewardship as ideas behind this new model are also introduced, just like the characteristics of monasticism in Early Byzantium, involving the problems created by the dichotomy of personal poverty and communal wealth within the small, yet increasingly important social stratum of monks.

The significance of *philotīmia* is not to be interpreted as if the concept of philanthropy was unknown or shunned in Mediterranean societies before the advent of Christianity. Chapter 2 explores the pre-Christian Greco-Roman concept of *philanthrōpia* and how it was expanded by Christianity. Important examples are provided through analyses of the treatise *On the Rich Man's Salvation* by St. Clement of Alexandria, the sermon *On Loving the Poor* by St. Gregory of Nazianzus, which audaciously challenged the dominant ideas of leprosy being a form divine punishment for sin, and the foundation of the Basiliad by St. Basil of Caesarea, a leprosarium specifically established for sufferers of the disease.

The main subjects of Chapter 3 are the aims and dynamics of regular merciful giving in the Late Antique Eastern Mediterranean. The two aspects of the sources on almsgiving are chosen as the main

focuses of the chapter: first, the enormity of the task of furthering positive interactions between otherwise usually separated segments of society (the rich and the poor, the seriously ill and the healthy), and the insistence on the transformative power of giving alms. Key parts of the argument are provided by discussions of the social teaching of St. John Chrysostom and the charitable activities of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger.

The complicated differentiation of alms and charity is explored by Chapter 4. The problem is analysed through the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and the extant letters of St. Barsanuphius, St. John and St. Dorotheus, then the perceived redemptive potential of almsgiving and the relevance of Christian altruism to the question are addressed. Chapter 5 focuses on the nature, functions, and implications of material blessings in the eastern provinces of the Late Roman Empire. Following the argument that the theological basis for the understanding of ‘material blessings’ in the Roman East of the period was provided by St. Paul the Apostle in Second Corinthians, the institutional and lay sources of such blessings are discussed. It is followed by the exploration of the problems posed by greed, the potential of gifts to influence decisions, the inherent dichotomy between the ideal of asceticism and the accumulation of wealth, the expectation to redistribute a certain amount of the acquired resources. The chapter is closed by a summary of how monastic culture treated monastic wealth.

The subject of Chapter 6 is formed by the encouragement of lay provisions for Christian institutions, clerics and monks in Early Byzantium. After the contemporary concern for the voluntary or involuntary nature of *karpophoriai* (‘fruitbearings’) was discussed, the role of monastic institutions in the agricultural expansion of the era is addressed, the latter in conjunction with the ideal and reality of monastic labour. A case study is provided through the analysis of the *Letter of Cosmas of Panîr*, followed by an exploration of the divine intercessory function in the agricultural sphere played by Christian

professionals, primarily monks, with the powers attributed to St. Symeon Stylites the Elder serving as primary examples. Then, the *Life of St. Barsauma* and the *Life of St. Theodore* are analysed to provide insight into the supposed relationship between the self-affliction of Christian holy men and the prosperity of laypeople connected to them, after which the chapter is closed by a demonstration of how asceticism was understood as a highly valuable, spiritual form of *karpophoria* offered to God.

The concern among lay patrons of Christian institutions for their commemoration is discussed in a broader framework in chapter 7. Following an introduction to the relationship between lay offerings and commemorative rites and the apologetics for church commemorations, *The Loaf of the Departed* by St. Jacob of Serug is analysed as a source of the subject, then the connection between the main subject of the chapter and the spread of private monasteries in the fifth century is explored. After that, the problem of potential conflicts between offers of wealth for commemorative rites and the interest of heirs is discussed, then the chapter is closed by the evaluation of the 'economics' of monastic patronage. It is followed by the Epilogue, the Notes, the Bibliography and the Index.

It is hard to overstate the importance of *The Rich and the Pure* by Caner for the study of Early Byzantine church and society. The work is very meticulous in its analysis of the subject, while well-written and engaging at the same time. It will keep its relevance for a long time.

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