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Yurong Zhao

Early Christian Widows: A Study in Their Social-economic Situation, Support, and Contribution to the Church

Abstract

This research focuses on the subject of early Christian widows mainly in the first two centuries (up to Tertullian) and seeks to explore the questions regarding their social-economic situation, means of support, and their contributions (if any) to the church. Through literary analyses of three different genres of early Christian texts – narrative, instruction, and apologetic texts – which exhibit similar patterns concerning the above questions, some tentative historical conclusions can be drawn, especially in light of the situation of widows in the Roman world and ancient Judaism (which provided a historical and cultural background to Christianity). In terms of the social-economic situation of early Christian widows, this study suggests that the majority of them were poor and vulnerable economically, socially and legally, although there were also well-to-do widows. As for their support, there were mainly three means of support for them – family support from children or other relatives; individual support from friends, benefactors, or patrons; and collective support from the church. The collective support additionally indicates the existence of centralised church funds through pooling of resources from the whole Christian community. Despite their poverty and vulnerability, widows in the early church should not be stereotyped as merely passive recipients of support. They played an active role in church ministry and contributed to the Christian community in various ways, such as prayer and intercession, hospitality, charity, patronage, nursing children (i.e., orphans), looking after the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. In addition, their purity and celibacy represented the peak of Christian commitment, as indicated by people's reference to them as the 'altar' of God. And the establishment of the 'order' of widows further highlights their particular status in the early church.

Early Christian Widows: A Study in Their Social-economic Situation, Support, and Contribution to the Church

Yurong Zhao

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion
Durham University

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Abbreviations

All abbreviations follow those in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (2014) and the online *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/3993). Those that differ from, or are not found in, either of the above are listed below (for information on papyrological sources with multiple volumes, only those volumes cited are provided):

AAA	Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles
APt	Acts of Peter
ATh	Acts of Thomas
BGU	*Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen* (later *Staatlichen*) *Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden*. Edited by Emil Seckel and Wilhelm Schubart (founding eds). Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung. Volume I, Nos. 1—361 (1895). Volume II, Nos. 362—696 (1898). Volume III, Nos. 697—1012 (1903). Volume IV, Nos. 1013—1209 (1912).
Epigr.	Martial, *Epigrams*
Epist.	Gregory the Great, *Epistulae*
I. Métr.	*Inscriptions métriques de l'Egyptegréco-romaine.* Annales littéraires de l'Université de Becanscon 98. Edited by E. Bernard. Paris: Les Belles Lettres (1969).
OGIS	*Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum sylloges inscriptionum graecarum* I–II. Edited by W. Dittenberger. Leipzig: Hirzel (1903-5).
Or.	Libanius, *Orationes*
P.Coll.Youtie	*Collectanea Papyrologica: Texts Published in Honor of H.C. Youtie*. Edited by A. E. Hanson. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag GMBH (1976).
P.Gen.	*Les Papyrus de Genève* Volume I, Nos. 1—81. Edited by Jules Nicole. Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert (1896). Volume II, Nos. 82—117. Edited by Claude Wehrli. Geneva: Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire (1986).

P.Lips.	*Griechische Urkunden der Papyrussammlung zu Leipzig*. Volume I. Edited by Ludwig Mitteis. Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B.G. Tuebner (1906).
P.Lond.	*Greek Papyri in the British Museum*. Volume III, Nos. 485—1331. Edited by F. G. Kenyon and H. I. Bell. London: British Museum (1907).
P.Mich.	*Michigan Papyri* (each volume has a subtitle of its own) *Papyri from Tebtunis*. Volume V, Part II. Edited by E. M. Husselman, A. E. R. Boak and W. F. Edgerton. Michigan: Ann Arbor (1944).
P.Oxy.	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. London: Egypt Exploration Society. Volume I, Nos. 1—207. Edited by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt (1898). Volume II, Nos. 208—400. Edited by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt (1899). Volume III, Nos. 401—653. Edited by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt (1903). Volume VI, Nos. 845—1006. Edited by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt (1908). Volume VIII, Nos. 1073—1165. Edited by A. S. Hunt (1911). Volume XVI, Nos. 1829—2063. Edited by B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt, and H. I. Bell (1924). Volume L, Nos. 3522—3600. Edited by various editors (1983).
P.Sakaon	*The Archive of Aurelius Sakaon: Papers of an Egyptian Farmer in the last Century of Theadelphia*. Nos. 1—98. Edited by G. M. Parássoglou. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag GMBH (1978).
P.Stras.	*Papyrus grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg*. Volume IV, Nos. 169—300. Edited by J. Schwartz et ses élèves. Strasbourg: Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg (1962).
P.Yadin	*The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri*. Edited by N. Lewis. Jerusalem: Jewish Exploration Society (1989). *The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaci and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri*. Edited by Y. Yadin, Jonas C. Greenfield, Ada Yardeni, and Baruch A. Levine. Jerusalem: Jewish Exploration Society (2002).
Vit. Cypr.	Pontius the Deacon, *Vita Cypriani*

Declaration

This thesis is my own work. No part of it has previously been submitted for a degree in Durham University or any other institution.

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The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Questions concerning this topic

The subject of widows in the early church has been a contentious issue due to the variety and ambiguity of the materials on this topic, together with preconceptions regarding the role of women in the early church. Scholars have discussed this topic from various perspectives (see section 2 below). However, the social-economic situation of widows in the early church, their means of support, and their role in the church have not been sufficiently studied. Many scholars interested in the subject of women usually focus on women in general or prominent female characters,[1] rather than specifically on widows; and those whose primary interests lie in the social and economic aspects of antiquity often discuss the poor in general,[2] but rarely the special place accorded to widows among them. In many Jewish and early Christian texts, however, widows are mentioned frequently and the call to care for them often made. To some extent, how widows were treated in the early church reflects not only how the poor were treated but also, in the eyes of some, whether one was a true Christian. Therefore, what is lacking in the previous scholarship is an analysis of how support for widows became an iconic practice in early Christianity, and paradigmatic of the multiple forms in which early Christian communities committed themselves to supporting the poor. However, widows in the early church should not be stereotyped as merely passive recipients of support simply because of their poverty and vulnerability. As Luke 21.1-4 indicates, even out of her poverty a widow can still contribute to the community. In addition, we should not assume that all widows in the ancient world were poor. As this thesis will show, there were

[1] E.g., LaPorte 1982; Gardner 1986; Witherington 1988; Reimer 1995; Bach 1999.
[2] E.g., Meggitt 1998; Longenecker 2010; Schellenberg 2018; Barclay 2019.

wealthy widows in the early church who made various contributions to the church. Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore three questions: (1) what was the social-economic situation of widows in the early church? (2) How were they supported? And (3) what contributions did they make to the church?

To answer the above questions, we first need to know how 'widow' was defined in the ancient world. In our contemporary society, 'widow' refers to a married woman whose husband has died. Ancient people had a different understanding of 'widow', however. The Hebrew word for 'widow' is אַלְמָנָה which means 'silent one'[3], with its root אִלֵּם meaning 'dumb, unable to speak'.[4] The term for 'widowhood' is אַלְמָנוּת which means 'silence'.[5] אַלְמָנָה is used especially to refer to a widow who is helpless and exposed to oppression and harsh treatment.[6] Although it describes the marital status of a woman bereft of her husband, the focus is often her social-economic vulnerability.[7] The Greek term for 'widow' is χήρα (derived from the Indo-European root *ghē* – 'forsaken', 'left empty') whose original meaning is 'a woman left without husband'.[8] Hence χήρα can refer to not only a widow whose husband has died but also a woman who lives without a man or who has chosen a celibate life.[9] Χήρα also has a 'strong social and financial overtone' when it describes a widow – a 'person without a source of support'.[10] The Latin word for 'widow' is *vidua* which means a 'widow' or an 'unmarried woman'.[11] Its adjective *viduus* means 'deprived, bereaved, destitute',[12] which again implies the social- economic difficulty of a person. In this thesis, 'widow' is used primarily to refer to a woman who has not remarried after the demise of her

[3] Young 1939:1053.
[4] BDB 1972:48. See also *HALOT* I.58.
[5] Young 1939:1053.
[6] BDB 1972:48. See also Thurston 1989:9.
[7] *TLOT* I.128; *TDOT* I.288. See also Wagener 1994:128.
[8] Stählin 1974:440. See also Thurston 1989:9; Wagener 1994:127-28.
[9] Methuen 1997:287; Barclay 2020:271.
[10] Hurley 1981:137-38. See also Thurston 1989:10.
[11] Lewis 1879:1989; Simpson 1968:642.
[12] Lewis 1879:1989; Simpson 1968:642.

husband, without excluding its more general reference to a woman living without a man (e.g., a divorcee, or a virgin), depending on the context.

2. Survey of scholarship

2.1. General studies

As mentioned earlier, compared with the study of women and the poor in general, the subject of widows in antiquity has not received as much attention in scholarship. Since the 80s of the last century, Thurston's *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* remains the only English monograph focusing particularly on widows in the early church. In this book, Thurston first explains the definition of 'widow' in antiquity, i.e., 'a woman living without a husband',[13] briefly describes the general situation of widows in the ancient world (chap 1), and then discusses the ministry of widows throughout the first three centuries, from the NT to *Didascalia Apostolorum* (chaps 2-6), with a final comment on the reference to widows as altar (chap 7).

Thurston's research helps us see the very positive and significant role widows played in the early church. For example, in her analysis of widows in the NT (chap 2), Thurston considers Anna as not only 'the prototype for what later became the "consecrated widows" and for the early Christian community in general' but also 'the first evangelist' who proclaims Jesus' advent.[14] In addition, based on the general definition of 'widow' in the ancient world, Thurston includes Tabitha (Acts 9.36), Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12.12), Lydia (Acts 16.14), Phoebe (Rom 16.1), Mary (Rom 16.6), and Chloe (1 Cor 1.11) as widows, and thus suggests that 'widows served the early church as founders and sustainers of house churches, as deaconesses, and as assistants of Paul'.[15] In her discussion of widows in

[13] Thurston 1989:9.
[14] Thurston 1989:25.
[15] Thurston 1989:34-35.

the apostolic period (chap 4), Thurston stresses that they 'were not simply objects of the church's benevolence'.[16] She additionally points out the significance of widows as the 'altar of God' (Pol. *Phil*. 4.3), which not only indicates the widows' 'moral and personal integrity' and suggests 'a marked responsibility for intercessory prayer' but also points to their 'focal position in public worship'.[17] And Thurston further points out the pastoral duties of the official widows and the special seating granted to them in the congregation of the Carthaginian church during Tertullian's time (chap 5).[18] These observations provide us with a better understanding of the widows' ministry and their importance in the early church.

To emphasise the prominent status of widows in the early church, Thurston argues for an early establishment of the 'order' of widows, which seems to be controversial, however. She suggests the probability of 'a society of widows outside Jerusalem as early as A.D. 43', based on the mention of widows together with the saints in Acts 9.41.[19] She further argues for the existence of a widows' 'order' in 1 Timothy 5.3-16, based on the terms τίμα (5.3), καταλεγέσθω (5.9), τὴν πρώτην πίστιν (5.12), and βούλομαι (5.14), all of which Thurston understands as technical terms in official usage.[20] She then illustrates two duties of the 'enrolled widows', although she admits that they are speculation. The first is prayer and intercession (5.5). The second is charitable and pastoral visits and the teaching of other women, suggested by the younger widows' 'gadding about from house to house' (5.13).[21] After arguing for the establishment of a widows' 'order' in 1 Timothy 5.3-16, and on the basis of that, Thurston interprets the relevant works of the Apostolic Fathers (e.g., Ign. *Smyrn*. 13.1; Pol. *Phil*. 4.3) and extrapolates the presence of an order in the apostolic period. In her analysis of Tertullian's works, Thurston regards the widows as 'an order in the same

[16] Thurston 1989:73.
[17] Thurston 1989:71.
[18] Thurston 1989:81.
[19] Thurston 1989:32.
[20] Thurston 1989:44-46.
[21] Thurston 1989:50-53.

category as those who preside over churches', whose 'clerical status' is indicated by the fact that they are seated with the clergy.[22] However, could the above texts be interpreted differently? Is Thurston's understanding of the Greek terms mentioned above (1 Tim 5.3, 9, 12, 14) as technical and official right? Is the mention of 'intercessions and prayers' in 1 Timothy 5.5 necessarily an indication of the widows' official duty, or of their desperate condition? Can the younger widows' 'gadding about from house to house' (1 Tim 5.13) be interpreted differently? If all these questions can be answered differently from Thurston, is Thurston's argument for an 'order' of widows in 1 Timothy 5.3-16 still valid? If not, can we still assume the existence of the widows' order in the apostolic period? In addition, even if the widows are seated with the clergy in Tertullian's church, does it mean that they are granted a 'clerical status', especially in consideration of Tertullian's prohibition of women from teaching, baptising, or claiming any sacerdotal office (*Virg*. 9.2)? All the above questions need further examination and thus we should leave Thurston's position as an open question for now.

The German scholar Krause has devoted four volumes to a social-historical study on widows and orphans in the Roman Empire from 200 BCE to 600 CE. His first volume, relying heavily on demographic studies, focuses on widowhood and the remarriage of widows in the Roman society. Krause concludes that the 'early female (17/8) and late male (25)' marriage (with an average age gap of 7-8 years),[23] in addition to a high mortality rate, left a large number of widows in ancient Rome, about 30% in the total number of adult women.[24] Although remarriage was common due to the need for provision, the desire for bearing children, and other reasons, many widows were unable to remarry precisely because of poverty and (minor) children. Krause's second volume addresses the economic and social

[22] Thurston 1989:89-90.
[23] Krause 1994a:34.
[24] Krause 1994a:73.

position of widows in the Roman world.[25] According to Krause, poverty and defencelessness threatened the majority of widows. The provision through the dowry and the will of the husband (oftentimes not applicable to the lower classes) was usually insufficient, and the gender-specific division of labour in antiquity made it extremely difficult for widows to find suitable gainful jobs. Hence, elderly widows had to rely on their children (especially sons) for support, but those without children or young widows with minor children would suffer particularly from poverty, even to the extent of beggary. Although there were wealthy widows who owned land and slaves and practised various economic activities, they often fell victim to fraudulent administrators and unruly slaves without the protection and assistance of a husband. What was worse, widows often suffered from the assaults and injustices of tax collectors and public officials, and from the attacks of thieves and robbers, and young widows from sexually motivated violence. Although widows enjoyed certain privileges in court, in practice they were at a disadvantage because of their gender. Therefore, in Krause's opinion, the status of widowhood did not bring women in the Roman Empire an increase in autonomy and room for manoeuvre. The third volume focuses solely on orphans, their legal and social status in relation to their rearing and the fate of their patrimony.[26] The fourth volume examines the impact of Christianity on widows and orphans.[27] In terms of widows, Krause examines not only the scope and effectiveness of material support for them by the church but also the institutional role widows played in the church. He argues that only a privileged minority of widows could enjoy regular church assistance; many other widows had to rely on individual alms to alleviate their suffering and misery. And widows in general played a passive role in the church. Therefore, Krause concludes, in the church widowhood did not bring women any increase in status. The Christian widows were never more than

[25] Krause 1994b.
[26] Krause 1995a.
[27] Krause 1995b.

ascetics whose functions consisted essentially in prayer for the church and who were supported in this by the church, although in individual cases they might enjoy a certain authority over other women because of their age.

Krause's research is a great contribution to the understanding of the social history of widows in the Roman Empire. He has not only included demographic studies in his examination of widowhood and widows in Roman society but also drawn from a variety of sources for evidence, including inscriptions, papyri, literary texts, and Christian sources, all of which enhance the force of his arguments. However, his work is not without weaknesses and at least two areas may be observed. The first is 'the author's failure to recognise consistently that a different demographic operated for the upper classes', as stated by McGinn.[28] For example, the age gap in the first marriage between spouses was smaller in the upper classes and the remarriage rate of widows was also higher, both of which resulted in a smaller proportion of widows among the upper-class women and hence generally reduced the percentage of unmarried widows. Another weakness of Krause is that he is too pessimistic concerning the church's support of widows and the role they played in the church. The Christian sources he cites are mostly from late antiquity after the institutionalisation of Christianity, which tend to place more restrictions on women in general and widows in particular. But as will be shown in this thesis, in the very early period of Christianity, women, especially widows, played a more active role in the Christian community and their contributions went beyond the tasks of the official widows developed later in the form of an 'order'.

Another German scholar, Christian Back, has written a monograph particularly on Christian widows from the very beginning of Christianity till the end of the fifth century, focusing on the role widows played in the church, how needy widows were treated and to

[28] McGinn 1999:618.

what extent there were specific changes in the way widows were cared for in the early church.[29] Back first examines widows in the OT and in the Roman Empire, concluding that the majority of widows lived in poverty. He then surveys the evidence chronologically through the texts on widows from the NT to the fifth century to discuss the provision for needy widows and the widows' office in the early church. He holds a positive view on both issues, emphasising the institutionalisation of widows' pensions under the impact of monepiscopacy from the second century and the early establishment of a widows' office (as indicated in 1 Timothy 5.3-16 or even earlier possibly in Acts 6.1-7).

Back's work is helpful and informative in many respects for the study of widows in the early church, such as the poverty of the majority of widows in antiquity, the church's collective support for widows, and the widows' important role in the church. However, as Guttenberger points out, the consistent weaknesses of the work are the almost method-free handling of biblical texts and the theory-free handling of socio-economic categories. In addition, there is no differentiation between the literary context and socio-economic reality throughout the work.[30] Moreover, Back shows a considerable sympathy for feminist theological approaches, sometimes leading to implausible positions. For example, when dealing with Acts 6.1-7, Back proposes that the cause of the conflict might have to do with the restriction or rejection of widows who were actively involved, or wanted to be actively involved, in preaching or organising in the Jerusalem church. But this position has neither contextual nor textual evidence: based on the description of the text, the conflict happens in a meal, rather than in a cultic context, and only the twelve disciples are mentioned as desiring to devote themselves to preaching. There is no suggestion in the text that widows are involved in preaching or any leadership. And as mentioned earlier, whether 1 Timothy speaks

[29] Back 2015:18.
[30] Guttenberger 2016:303.

of a widows' office or the support of widows is controversial, which will be further dealt with in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

2.2. Text-specific studies

Apart from the above scholars who have done a general study of widows in the early church,[31] some other scholars have discussed early Christian widows in relation to specific texts.

Luke-Acts

Price has discussed the widow traditions in Luke-Acts from a feminist-critical approach. He builds on the works of Ross S. Kraemer, Stevan L. Davies, Dennis Ronald MacDonald, and Virginia Burrus, who argue that the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (AAA) incorporate stories of celibate women which stem from circles of the charismatic widows of the early church. Price intends to show that the various widow traditions in Luke-Acts stem from the same milieu. However, in Price's opinion, the author of Luke-Acts has redacted the widow traditions in order to confine women to the conventional roles in a patriarchal society. He further contends that Luke-Acts shares the same author with the Pastoral Epistles and places Luke-Acts in the early to mid-second century,[32] without providing any evidence.

In the main chapters Price first presents the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the widow traditions (chap 1), where he looks into the issues about widows' support by the church, the conditions of their enrolment, and their relationship with itinerants and bishops, etc. He then turns to the episodes on widows in Luke-Acts which he thinks peculiarly Lucan, such as Anna and the daughters of Philip (chap 2), the widow of Zarephath (chap 3), the widow of Nain and Dorcas

[31] There are other scholars who write on widows in the early church, such as Sand (1971:186-97), Stählin (1974:440-65), Bremmer (1995:31-57), and Standhartinger (2007:141-54). However, their discussions are relatively brief and mostly covered by the monographic works mentioned above.
[32] Price 1997:1.

(chap 4), the sinner in Simon's house (chap 5), Joanna (chap 6), the daughters of Jerusalem and Mary of Cleopas (chap 7), Martha and Mary (chap 8), the persistent widow (chap 9), the Hellenist widows and Sapphira (chap 10), and Lydia and the Pythoness (chap 11). And the last chapter (chap 12) discusses Graeco-Roman religion and its impact on early Christianity and the widow traditions.

Price's reconstruction of the widow traditions in Luke-Acts is interesting and creative. However, his argumentation in general is not persuasive, as Reid states,

> He has simply created too much out of too little evidence. At times P. builds elaborate scenarios from single verses. And there are instances when P. makes questionable connections that collapse distinct persons and stories into one. For example, Lydia becomes identified not only as the anonymous slave girl with the Pythian spirit in Acts 16, but also as the Jezebel of Rev 2.20. The book is peppered with expressions such as 'I suspect', 'my guess is', and 'what makes sense is'. While speculation is an important part of scholarly work, it must be substantiated by investigations and analyses that prove or disprove such hunches. P. does not successfully do that.[33]

Another scholar, Finger, has discussed in her book *Of Widows and Meals* the communal meals in the Book of Acts. Her primary purpose is to explore the cultural and economic reality of the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem. To this end she applies social-scientific criticism in her exploration of the social world of Acts 2.41-47 and 6.1-6 and the social context of meals in these two passages, and concludes that Luke's description here is a 'plausibly accurate historical description of the daily communal meal practices of the early Jerusalem community'.[34] She thus rejects the position that views the daily distribution of food in Acts 6.1-6 as poor relief for the widows; instead, she regards it as common meals and the widows as organisers of the daily common tables – 'the honorable female role of *serving* food' in Graeco-Roman and Jewish culture.[35] And she even suggests the existence of 'an established order of widows' in the Jerusalem church.[36]

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[33] Reid 1999:165. 'P.' refers to Price the author.
[34] Finger 2007:280.
[35] Finger 2007:167.
[36] Finger 2007:96.

Finger's investigation of the social world of Acts 2.41-47 and 6.1-6 informs us of the survival strategies of the Jerusalem Christians who supported one another through establishing fictive kin groups and sharing their possessions reciprocally. As Finger points out, some of the Christians in the Jerusalem community might go there from other places and thus were cut off from their kin groups. There might also be disabled and chronically sick people who were without family support. As Christians, they were all brothers and sisters now and hence fictive kin groups were established. However, it seems difficult to view Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-37 as a literally accurate and historical description. It is unlikely for them to have everything in common and for everyone to sell their lands and houses. The story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.4) suggests that the selling of properties and the sharing of the proceeds among the Christians were voluntary. And even Finger assumes that those who had houses big enough for worship gathering did not sell them but made them available for other believers. It is therefore more likely that Luke describes a general and idealized, or at most partially historical, picture of the Jerusalem church in Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-37.[37]

Finger's study on the social context of meals in Acts 2.42-47 and 6.1-6 additionally informs us about the central role women played in preparation and serving of meals in the ancient Graeco-Roman world and in Jewish society. However, Finger's suggestion that the neglected widows in Acts 6.1-6 were losing out on the honourable female role of serving at the communal meals is dubious as it raises several questions. If the issue was one of gender, why then were only widows neglected, and not other women? If it was due to the Hellenist widows' ethnicity or language, why were they the only target and not other Hellenists? In addition, it is also doubtful that the Jerusalem church had already established an order of

[37] See Pilgrim 1981:148-52; Richardson 2018:109-12; Witherington 1998:162, 207-08; Peterson 2009:162-63; Bock 2007:152-53; Gray 2022:301-02.

widows at such an early stage. Therefore, further studies need to be done concerning the widows in Acts 6.1-6.[38]

In contrast to Finger, Spencer in his article 'Neglected Widows in Acts 6.1-7' views the widows as recipients of support. To understand the social role of widows within the Lucan narrative, Spencer makes use of a cross-cultural sociological model developed by Helena Lopata for the interpretation of widows' experiences. Based on this model, Spencer studies the widows in Luke-Acts in view of four distinct, though interconnected, support systems that cover the economic, practical, social, and emotional aspects of widows, to which Spencer adds a *theological* system represented by the God of Israel. Spencer then examines the situation of the widows in Luke-Acts, including Anna (Luke 2.36-38), the widow at Nain (Luke 7.11-17), the persistent widow (Luke 18.1-8), the poor widow (Luke 21.1-4), the neglected Hellenist widows (Acts 6.1-7), and the widows supported by Tabitha (Acts 9.36-43). According to Spencer, each case indicates the vulnerability and need of widows in one or more of the above aspects, but 'in contrast to their lowly and lonely position in society, widows play an important role in relation to other characters in the Lucan story', by which Spencer means 'other characters are defined and judged by their treatment of widows'.[39]

Spencer is right in pointing out that widows in Luke-Acts are generally portrayed as vulnerable and in need of assistance from others. However, not all of his interpretations are satisfactory. For example, his view of Anna as a lowly and dependent widow and the temple system as an exploitative establishment is too speculative. The text neither mentions the economic situation of Anna nor criticises the temple system in Anna's case. Rather, Anna is emphasised as a prophetess, which suggests her respectable position among her people. And

[38] Reid (2004:71-88) argues along the same line with Finger in her article on the widows in Luke-Acts. She takes a feminist approach and argues that Luke is trying to restrict the ministry of widows through portraying them as playing silent and passive roles in the text. Unfortunately, her analyses of the relevant episodes are rather brief, sometimes with one or two short paragraphs.
[39] Spencer 1994:732.

the fact that Anna could survive in the temple for so many years speaks against the view that regards the temple system as exploitative. In addition, Spencer's reading of the story of the poor widow as a criticism of the corrupt temple system is not persuasive either, since Jesus only comments on the poor widow's action but does not mention the temple at all, and his criticism of the scribes in Luke 20.47 does not indicate any relation to the temple but only the scribes as a particular group of people.[40]

Some scholars focus specifically on the parable of the widow and the judge in Luke 18.1-8, such as Freed,[41] Cotter,[42] Spencer,[43] and Dickerson,[44] all from different perspectives and approaches. For example, while Freed argues that this parable is a thoroughly Lucan composition, Cotter thinks Luke has done some redactional additions to the pre-Lucan parable core of Luke 18.2-5. And while Spencer tries a feminist biblical interpretation on this parable, Dickerson explores a womanist reading of the scripture in the context of African American women and men. Despite their different approaches and methodologies, they all recognise the capability of the widow, whether by her persistence, feistiness, or savviness.[45]

The Pastoral Letters (1 Tim 5.3-16)

Plenty of studies have been done on 1 Timothy 5.3-16, so it is impossible to cover all of them here. Nevertheless, they can be generally categorised into two groups: one group argue for the existence of a widows' 'order', whereas the other view the text as concerning provision for widows.

[40] There are other scholars who have worked on Acts 6.1-7, such as Pao (2011:127-44), Lienhard (1975:228-36), and Tyson (1983:145-61), but they focus on other aspects of the passage rather than the widows.
[41] Freed 1987:38-60.
[42] Cotter 2005:328-43.
[43] Spencer 2012:264-314.
[44] Dickerson 2019.
[45] There are also scholars who focus on other widow episodes in Luke-Acts, but comparatively speaking, the episodes of Acts 6.1-7 and Luke 18.1-8 are more controversial and thus attract more attention. Although the story of Tabitha (Acts 9.36-43) has also aroused great interest among scholars, most of their studies focus on Peter and Tabitha rather than the widows.

Among those who argue for the existence of a widows' 'order', Bassler views this passage as a restriction on the 'equality and freedom' of women (particularly those from the office) obtained through celibacy as the church moved away from the initial 'egalitarian, *communitas* structure' to the 'hierarchical, patriarchal pattern favoured by the contemporary society'.[46] Thurston argues that this passage indicates not only the existence of an 'order' of widows but also the large size and active status of this office which required regulation and limitation, and thus the text seeks to limit this 'particular leadership ministry for women in the church'.[47] Tsuji posits that the author of 1 Timothy aims to limit the group of 'real' widows to single old women in order to exclude young unmarried women from the group of official widows through contrasting the *ideal image* of the widow (which corresponds to the traditional image of a widow) and her *status quo*.[48] Verner views the text as trying to restrict two groups of widows: one group are those 'who are dependent upon the church for support', as reflected in 1 Timothy 5.3-8 and 5.16; and the other those who enter into 'the ranks of the official widows', as reflected in 5.9-15.[49] Wagener proposes a literary-critical hypothesis which regards verses 3, 5, 9, 11-12 as belonging to the ascetically oriented widow tradition, verses 4, 6-8, 10, 13-15 as the redaction of the author of 1 Timothy, and verse 16 as an afterthought gloss (or a subsequent interpolation). She additionally posits that the author intends to reconstruct some features of the current situation of the widows' office by authoritatively securing his ecclesiology and ethics based on the model of οἶκος, which she views as a fundamental subordination of women.[50] Kidson studies this passage in light of medical theories, seeking to explain why the author is opposed to the young women in 1 Timothy 5.11-15 (whom Kidson regards as virgins who have never been married) entering

[46] Bassler 1984:23-41; also 2003:122-46.
[47] Thurston 2003:159-74.
[48] Tsuji 2001:92-104.
[49] Verner 1983:161-66.
[50] Wagener 1994:115-233.

into the order of widows. She suggests that these women were influenced by 'an ascetic program' (cf. 4.3) that taught people how to maintain sexual continence through diet so as to control their desire for marriage; but the author, based on the contemporary medical knowledge, was not convinced by such teaching and believed that sexual continence was dangerous for the health of young women, hence his instruction for them to marry.[51]

Many scholars do not support the position of the existence of a widows' 'order' in 1 Timothy 5.3-16, however. Instead, they read this passage as concerning the provision for widows, although their approaches and focuses are different. For example, Thornton examines the younger widows in 5.11-15 and posits that their problem lies in their connection with the opponents in Ephesus who believed in a 'realised eschatology and resurrection'; thus the church was indirectly funding false teaching by financially supporting the younger widows.[52] While focusing on the same group of women in chapter 7 of his book *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, Winter thinks their problem has to do with them being influenced by the values of the 'new' woman and adopting a lax lifestyle, which was in conflict with their Christian profession; and the reason that they could afford to be idle and promiscuous was because of the church's financial support.[53] In another two of his studies, however, Winter discusses the *providentia* for the widows in 1 Timothy 5.3-16 within a legal and social context, proposing that this passage deals primarily with 'the abuse of the well-attested legal benefactions guaranteed by the dowry' (e.g., some householders did not fulfil their legal responsibilities to support the widows while holding their dowries) and 'the rejection of legal stipulations to remarry by some widows'.[54] Butzer discusses the widows in 1 Timothy 5.3-16 in light of the model of the household and states that the emphasis on the household in the text is not only an example of the well-established and well-organised church but also a

[51] Kidson 2020:191-205.
[52] Thornton 2016:119-29.
[53] Winter 2003:123-40.
[54] Winter 1988:83-99; also 1994:61-78.

combative concept in confrontation with opponents.[55] Horrell, drawing from anthropology and geography, suggests that the author's sense of 'ecclesial space' is deeply formed by a 'household ideology', and this household model serves as the basis for the author's instructions to widows (and other groups, including elders and slaves; 5.1-6.2) in disciplining their 'role-performance' in the church.[56] Murray argues that the problem of confusion (or abuse) with regard to the support of widows in the church lies in the community's self-perception as a 'fictive family' (or an *oikos*), and the author sought to solve the problem by emphasising the importance of familial reciprocity within one's natural *oikos*.[57] Sommer reads this passage from a social-historical standpoint and associates the widows in 1 Timothy 5.3-16 with specific ideals, stereotypes and clichés in Greco-Roman culture. In his opinion, the author seeks to reinforce the image of ideal widows within the context of conventional household structure and does this by granting privilege to such widows and criticising those who adopt a non-household model and live an extravagant life.[58] And Barclay, employing a social-economic approach, proposes that 'the author conceives of the church as a network of Christian households connected by mutual economic support'.[59] And the purpose of the author's regulations concerning the financial support of widows was to establish 'stable and active Christian households' which the author regarded as 'essential building blocks of the church', so as to promote a certain lifestyle represented by the household model.[60] Despite the different approaches in their studies, Butzer, Horrell, Murray, Sommer, and Barclay all recognise the importance of the household model in the text, which the author seeks to

[55] Butzer 1998:35-52.
[56] Horrell 2008:109-34.
[57] Murray 2018:196-222.
[58] Sommer 2018:576-97; also 2015:287-307 (especially pages 305-06), although the latter mainly discusses widows in 1 Timothy 5 in light of the scriptures of Israel and their impact on early Christianity.
[59] Barclay 2020:268.
[60] Barclay 2020:268-87.

promote, and also the author's effort in distinguishing the believers' actual households from the church – the household of God (1 Tim 3.15).

This thesis holds the same view with the second group, that is, 1 Timothy 5.3-16 concerns the support of widows rather than the existence of a widows' office. But this view faces a few difficulties which many scholars regard as indications or evidence of the existence of a widows' order, such as 5.9 and 5.12. These difficulties will be dealt with in detail below (Chapter 5).

Non-canonical texts

Davies has investigated the social world of the AAA in his book *The Revolt of the Widows* and proposes a female authorship of the texts for communities of continent women in early Christianity. He covers the five best-known Acts (i.e., Acts of John, Peter, Paul, Andrew, and Thomas) in his discussion, to which he adds the Acts of Xanthippe. He dates all of them between 160 CE and 225 CE, with the Acts of Thomas originating in Roman Syria and the rest in the region of Asia Minor and Greece.[61] Davies suggests that the Apocryphal Acts likely reflect a phase when the church was becoming both institutional and patriarchal from a charismatic form of structure and leadership, which diminished women's opportunity for leadership and ministry. Consequently, Christian women started female-directed communities and ministries.[62] According to him, behind the texts of the AAA stand the ascetic communities of women who were not only the audience but also the authors of these texts. He observes that the Apocryphal Acts have an extraordinary emphasis on sexual continence and exhibit great concern for women, who often identify themselves as 'widows', be they widows, virgins, or wives who separate from their husbands. He additionally points out the contrast between the positive portrayal of women and the negative description of men

[61] Davies 2012:8-11.
[62] Davies 2012:100.

in the AAA: female Christians are often featured as role models, whereas male Christians are easily tempted and often shaken in their faith. He further contends that the sexually continent women of the early Christian church had not only the opportunity to compose documents like the AAA in the course of a female ministry, but also the means and the motive to educate other Christian women since 'educated and literate women were not rare in the ancient world'.[63] He therefore proposes that the Apocryphal Acts were composed by literate and continent 'widows' for other women in their communities for educational and edificatory purposes.

Although Davies' hypothesis about the authorship of the AAA lacks hard evidence and is thus unproven, the social world he conjectures about continent women in the early church is informative. In addition, his observation about the contrast between men and women in the texts is very provocative. He perceptively notes how the Apocryphal Acts describe males as 'ethically dangerous, liable to temptation, and confused about their faith – the very tendencies most patristic writers ascribed to women',[64] whereas women are portrayed as 'superior to men in virtue, courage, and determination, sometimes even outshining the apostle himself'.[65] Moreover, as Osiek states, Davies' social investigation of the AAA 'opens up whole new vistas on the self-understanding of women in the early church'.[66]

In 'Tertullian on Widows', Wilhite analyses the economic aspect of Tertullian's attitude towards the remarriage of widows in *To His Wife*. He perceptively points out that Tertullian's illustrations about the motives for remarriage (especially that of 'worldly lusts'; *Ux.* 1.4.6) suggest that the intended audience were wealthy women. He thus proposes that the reason for Tertullian to forbid widows from remarrying has to do with the widows' wealth

[63] Davies 2012:102-03.
[64] Clark 1982:336.
[65] Osiek 1982:319.
[66] Osiek 1982:319.

which will go to their new husbands (in the form of dowries) rather than the church if they remarry. Although Tertullian allows second marriages of widows in the second book, he does so very reluctantly and even grudgingly and insists that the husband must be a Christian so the woman can still do the services of widows together with her husband. Wilhite additionally notes Tertullian's selective citation of the Pastoral Epistles (*Ux*. 1.7.4; cf. 1 Tim 5.9; vs. 5.14) to ban second marriages of widows and explains that both authors share the same concern about the financial risk to the church, but that their respective contexts result in opposite injunctions.[67]

Wilhite's observation about the economic condition of the intended audience is very perceptive, and his hypothesis and explanation about the reason for Tertullian to ban second marriages of widows in opposition to the Pastoral Epistles are plausible. However, Wilhite's study about Tertullian on widows is insufficient, since he focuses on only one particular text of Tertullian – *To His Wife* – which does not cover other aspects of widows other than their remarriage.

2.3. Topic-specific studies

There are also scholars who have studied widows in the early church in relation to specific topics, such as the reference of widows as altar, and the phenomenon of virgin widows. Among those who have worked on the reference of widows as altar, Osiek has investigated the usage of this symbol in various Christian texts and documents from the second to the fifth century. She posits that the development of this religious symbolism throughout the centuries is also a process of social repression of the freedom and leadership of Christian women in general and of widows in particular.[68] Thurston discusses this topic

[67] Wilhite 2009:222-42.
[68] Osiek 1983b:159-69.

against both the biblical and the patristic background and concludes that 'the widow was an effective agent in a spiritual transaction within the Christian community', as indicated by their prayers of intercession and the example of their sacrificial living.[69] Butterfield focuses particularly on four texts which use the image of widows as altar – Polycarp's *To the Philippians* (4.3), Tertullian's *To His Wife* (1.7.4), Methodius' *Symposium* (e.g., 5.8), and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (e.g., 15). Applying a feminist rhetorical critical reading of these texts, she reconstructs the sacerdotal importance of historical widows in some early Christian communities.[70]

The above studies on the reference to widows as altar help us to know more about the possible historical situation of widows in the early church, especially their contributions to the Christian communities. However, the image of widows as altar reveals only certain features of early Christian widows, and so the above scholarship is not sufficient for a general knowledge of the social-economic situation of widows in early Christianity.

Methuen has inspected the phenomenon of 'virgin widow' in the early church. She notes the interchangeable usage of the terms 'virgin' and 'widow' to refer to the same group of women by some early Christian authors. According to Methuen, the term 'virgin widow' could denote any woman who was pursuing a life of sexual continence, whether an unmarried woman, a wife who had chosen to live apart from her husband, or a widow or a divorcee who had decided not to remarry. Methuen additionally highlights the active role the virgin widows played in the church during the first two centuries and their disappearance from the third century 'as the order of widows gradually declined, and virginity and asceticism gained importance in the church'.[71]

[69] Thurston 1985:279-89.
[70] Butterfield 2017.
[71] Methuen 1997:285-98.

Methuen's research informs us about the complex concept and social role of widows in the early church. But again, the social role of the 'virgin widow' represents only certain aspects of widows in the early church; more studies will need to be done for a fuller picture of their social and economic conditions.

The above survey of scholarship shows that very few scholars have done a comprehensive study on the social-economic situation of widows and their ministry in the early church. And those who focus on specific texts or topics have covered only certain aspects and features of early Christian widows within particular contexts. Therefore, much remains to be done for a more comprehensive study of the social-economic situation of widows in the early church, their means of support, and their contributions to the church.

3. Thesis approach

This thesis will adopt a literary analysis for the study of the social-economic aspects of widows depicted in different genres of early Christian literature mainly of the first two centuries (from the NT to Tertullian), which shed light on the general situation of the poor, particularly widows, in the early church, including their means of support and their contributions to the Christian community. Three genres of texts will be discussed in this thesis – narrative, instruction, and apology. The narrative texts include Luke-Acts, the Acts of Peter (APt), and the Acts of Thomas (ATh). The instruction texts include 1 Timothy 5.3-16, the Shepherd of Hermas, the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp, and the treatises of Tertullian. And the apologetic texts include mainly the Apologies of Aristides, Justin, and Tertullian.

There are mainly two reasons for the selection of the above texts.[72] First, these texts not only mention widows more frequently compared with other early Christian writings but

[72] Although there are other early Christian works which mention widows as well, they are not substantial enough compared with the above selected texts and so are mentioned only in passing.

also contain significant details concerning widows in the early church. For example, Luke-Acts not only expresses more concern for widows compared with other biblical narrative texts but also records the collective support of widows in the Jerusalem church at its earliest stage (Acts 6.1-6). 1 Timothy 5.3-16 is not only the lengthiest and most complicated passage on widows among biblical texts but also the first text that regulates the church's support for widows through an enrolment (5.9). The social role of 'virgin widows' was first introduced by Ignatius (*Smyrn*. 13.1) and addressed again by Tertullian (*Virg*. 9.5). Widows were first referred to as the 'altar' of God by Polycarp (*Phil*. 4.3), followed by Tertullian decades later (*Ux*. 1.7.4);[73] and the 'order' of widows was first mentioned explicitly in Tertullian's treatises (*Ux.* 1.7.4; *Virg.* 9.5). And a detailed description of the regular collection of church funds for the support of the needy first appeared in Justin's (*1 Apol*. 67.6-7) and then in Tertullian's apologetic works (*Apol*. 39.5-6). All these examples manifest the importance of these texts for the study of widows in the early church. Second, these texts cover Christianity from the late first century CE to the early third century CE, and reflect the church life in various places, including possibly Jerusalem, Asia Minor, Syria, Ephesus, Rome, Smyrna, Philippi, and Carthage. Although each of these texts may reflect only certain aspects or features of early Christian widows in a specific place or church during a particular time, they together can provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the Christian life in the first two centuries (up to Tertullian, beyond whom the church increasingly became institutionalised and the 'order' of widows gradually declined)[74] and a better grasp of the social-economic situation of widows in the early church.

[73] For a chronological order of the appearance of this metaphor in Christian literature, see Osiek 1983b:161-65.
[74] Methuen 1997:298.

4. Chapter outline

The shape of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 will investigate the social-economic situation of widows in the Roman world, such as their economic conditions, remarriage, and survival strategies. The chapter will provide a historical background for the studies of widows in the early church, since the formative period of early Christianity happened within the context of the Roman world. Chapter 3 will examine widows in ancient Judaism, including their vulnerability, the mechanisms for their support, and other ways of maintenance for them. This chapter plays an important role for the support of widows in the early church, for Christianity not only originated from Judaism but also inherited its ethos of caring for the poor, especially the most vulnerable group of people – widows. Chapter 4 will analyse widows in early Christian narrative texts, particularly the relevant passages in Luke-Acts, APt, and ATh. This chapter will mainly explore the vulnerability of widows in general, their means of support, and their agency in the church. Chapter 5 will study widows in the instruction texts of 1 Timothy, the Shepherd of Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Tertullian. Apart from the support of widows, this chapter will also discuss the social role of 'virgin widows', the image of widows as altar, the remarriage of widows, and the 'order' of widows. Chapter 6 will look into widows in the apologetic texts mainly of Aristides, Justin, and Tertullian, especially the collection of church funds for the support of widows and the needy. Up to this point, the thesis will have given only a literary analysis of the relevant texts. In the concluding chapter, after summarising the earlier chapters, we will draw some tentative historical conclusions concerning the social-economic situation of early Christian widows, their means of support, and their contributions to the church.

Chapter 2

Widows in the Roman World

1. Introduction

In recent years, the social-economic structure of the Roman world has been intensively studied with close analysis of the social and economic realities of the household. Some scholars focus broadly on the Roman family, including marriage, children, death, and property;[1] many others are interested specifically in research on Roman women – their roles in relation to other family members, their socio-economic activities within and outside the household, or their different life experiences due to unequal social statuses.[2] Moreover, as a result of high mortality, low life expectancy, and the 'early female and late male' marriage in the Roman world, many women would have been widowed within the first five to ten years of their first marriage. However, very few scholars (e.g., Krause) have focused on the life of Roman widows in their research. Several questions arise regarding this topic: at what age were women likely to be widowed in the Roman world? What happened to them economically when they were widowed? What difficulties confronted them as widowed women? And how did they maintain their lives? Through exploring these questions, this chapter will develop and deepen our understanding of widows in the Roman world[3] (mostly in the first two to three centuries CE, with some examples beyond this period) and meanwhile provide a general historical background for the study of Christian widows in the early church.

To answer the above questions, this chapter will first set up an age profile of widows, that is, the age at which women were likely to be widowed. The next section will examine the economic conditions of widows which usually depended on the type of marriage before

[1] E.g., Bradley 1991; Dixon 1992; Saller 1994; Huebner 2013.
[2] E.g., Dixon 1988; Gardner 1986; Hobson 1983; 1984; Kampen 1981; MacMullen 1980; Treggiari 1979.
[3] It should be noted that in Roman society much of the social-economic situation of widows was also relevant to divorcees and other single adult women.

widowhood – marriage *cum manu* or *sine manu*. I will then explore the options widows had in order to survive, among which remarriage was the most common. For those without the option of remarriage, they could face vulnerable circumstances. Hence, a discussion of the vulnerability of widows will follow. However, there were wealthy widows who could manage their own properties and sought independence instead of remarriage. These widows are thus the focus of the last section.

2. Age profile

When discussing the topic of widowhood in today's context, old age tends to be assumed. In the ancient world, however, a woman could be widowed in her twenties and thirties.[4] As mentioned, this was caused by high mortality and low life expectancy in antiquity, which was also the reason for early marriage and high fertility.

2.1. Mortality

The vast territory and long history of the Roman empire make it difficult to pinpoint a precise and conclusive data about the mortality of the Roman people. Scholars either propose general views about the entire population or focus on specific regions; they seek evidence either from the epitaphs on ancient tombstones or from other written documents such as census returns, letters, contracts, legal regulations, and literature, etc.

Many scholars have studied Roman Egypt because of the massive quantity of papyri excavated there. Bagnall-Frier have done a comprehensive study on the demography of Roman Egypt based on the census returns from the first two and a half centuries CE. Before making a general assessment, they first reconstruct female and male life expectancy respectively. For female life expectancy, they suggest an age range of 20 to 25 years at birth,

[4] Huebner 2013:92; 2019a:75; Gray 2022:299.

and 34.5 to 37.5 years at age 10.[5] For male life expectancy, they recognise greater difficulty drawing an explicit conclusion and thus suggest an age range between 22.5 and 25 years at birth. Although they do not provide male life expectancy at age 10, they indicate that male and female mortality and sex ratio differed very little from birth up to age 60.[6] Their research shows that the life expectancy of male and female in Roman Egypt was similar – around early to mid-twenties at birth, and mid- to late thirties at age 10.

Saller refers to different sources in his reconstruction of the mortality of ancient Romans, including funerary inscriptions, skeletal evidence, and Egyptian household census data. He accepts 'the standard view of an average life expectancy at birth between twenty and thirty years'[7] and takes the position of 'Coale-Demeny Model Life Table Level 3 West' which indicates an average female life expectancy at birth of 25 years.[8] Although scholars differ on the specific age of life expectancy, the majority agree with a model of high mortality and low life expectancy in the Roman world, and most of their research results fall into the range of 20-30 years.[9] Together with low life expectancy was high infant mortality. Some experts indicate that about one-third of the newborns died before one year old, and nearly half before age 10.[10] This extremely high infant mortality, together with 'a high risk of mortality over the entire life course', means many were childless in old age.[11] Thus women

[5] Bagnall-Frier 1994:90.
[6] Bagnall-Frier 1994:108. Scheidel (2001:24) indicates, however, the impossibility of arriving at the 'average' age structure based on the extant Roman Egypt census returns.
[7] Saller 1994:20.
[8] Saller 1994:23. Based on this Model Life Table (Coale-Demeny 1983:43), the average life expectancy of females is 25 at birth, 47.5 at age 10, 51 at age 20, and 56 at age 30; and that of males is 23 at birth, 46 at age 10, 49 at age 20, and 54 at age 30. Notably, however, Saller uses this table 'not because it is certain to represent *the* Roman experience, but because it provides a general-purpose table that is unlikely to be grossly misleading'. See Scheidel (2001:1-26) who critically analyses the problems of applying model life tables in the study of Roman age structure.
[9] Treggiari (1991b:398) also adopts the hypothesis of a life expectancy of 25. Rowlandson (1998:84) again suggests a model of low life expectancy at birth which was 'on average perhaps twenty-five years for males and twenty-two years for females'.
[10] Saller 1994:25; Treggiari 1991b:398; Gardner and Wiedemann 1991:88; Rowlandson 1998:84; Huebner 2013:64, 164; 2019a:73.
[11] Huebner 2013:162-64.

would bear more children in order to secure one or two survivors.[12] Hence the age of first marriage was crucial.

2.2. Age at first marriage

In their demographic studies of Roman Egypt, Bagnall-Frier observe that the percentage of married women increases sharply during their later teens, and by age 20 three-fifths or more of women have married. By their late twenties, virtually all free women have married at least once.[13] Huebner additionally indicates that the Roman Egyptian documents yield 'a pattern of early and pervasive marriage for women' who usually married in their mid- to later teens.[14] Males seemed to marry at a much later age, however. Bagnall-Frier propose that 'the median male age at first marriage' may be 'slightly later than 25'.[15] Huebner similarly suggests 'an average age at marriage of about 25 for men in Roman Egypt'.[16] Bagnall-Frier further analyse the male marriage age in the western Roman empire 'where males seem generally to delay marriage until their mid- or late twenties'.[17] As for females, Shaw suggests that they 'tended to marry in their late teens'.[18] These analyses indicate an age gap of 5-10 or more years between husband and wife in the Roman empire.[19]

Saller analyses the epitaphs distributed in different areas of the Roman empire and reveals an early, intermediate, and late marriage pattern respectively for both male and female.[20] He favours a pattern of 'late male and early female marriage' due to the fact that

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[12] Rowlandson (1998:85) estimates that a woman 'would need to have given birth to about six live children in order to leave behind two surviving offspring' before reaching menopause. See also Bagnall-Frier (1994:139) and Huebner (2013:58) who suggest a similar fertility rate (in Roman Egypt).
[13] Bagnall-Frier 1994:113.
[14] Huebner 2013:48-49.
[15] Bagnall-Frier 1994:116.
[16] Huebner 2013:50.
[17] Bagnall-Frier 1994:116. See also Shaw 1987:43.
[18] Shaw 1987:43; *contra* Hopkins (1965:319) who suggests the female marriage age in early teens (12-15).
[19] Bagnall-Frier (1994:118), Hanson (2000:151; 2005:86) and Rathbone (2006:102) suggest a mean age gap of 7.5 years between spouses; Krause (1994a:29, 36) proposes an average difference of 7-8 years; and Pudsey (2012:158) 7.8 years.
[20] For the detailed analyses of different areas, see Saller 1994:27-36.

'women from age twenty are most often commemorated as wives' and men under twenty-five years are seldom commemorated by their wives.[21] The mean ages at first marriage that he uses for men and women are thirty and twenty years respectively (with the senatorial elites marrying about five years earlier).[22] He additionally illustrates that 'among first marriages between a twenty-year-old woman and a thirty-year-old man in Rome, one in six would have ended by the death of a spouse within five years, one in three within ten years, nearly one in two within fifteen years, and three in five within twenty years'.[23] Therefore, as Weaver observes, this twenty/thirty framework implies 'a lower fertility rate and a higher probability of widowhood (and of remarriage)'.[24] Along with widowhood come their economic concerns.

3. The economic conditions of widows

In Roman society the transfer of patrimony to children was made primarily through inheritance and dowry,[25] which considerably affected the economic conditions of widows. Hence it is necessary to have some general understanding of inheritance and dowry before discussing widows' economic conditions.

The Roman system of *patria potestas* granted the father (*paterfamilias*) unique legal and financial power over his household – the father could decide the inheritance of his patrimony through a will.[26] If the father did not leave a will, a succession order must be followed, in which the widow was placed in a very disadvantaged position.[27] Furthermore,

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[21] Saller 1994:41. Saller (36) defines the early marriage pattern for women as 'one in which women begin to marry in their early or middle teens, with half married by their late teens and most married in their early twenties' and the late marriage pattern for men as one in which 'men begin to marry in significant numbers in their mid or late twenties, with a median age at first marriage around thirty and many postponing marriage until after thirty'.
[22] Saller 1994:41; similarly, Treggiari (1991a:32) and Weaver (1991:176).
[23] Saller 1994:219.
[24] Weaver 1991:176.
[25] Saller 1994:155-56.
[26] Grubbs 2002:20-21. The *paterfamilias* who practised the *patria potestas* must be a Roman citizen (his wife and children were presumably Roman citizens too), but not necessarily those under his *potestas*, such as the slaves, freedmen and freedwomen in his household.
[27] Saller 1994:114-30.

'inheritance between husband and wife, though common, was not seen as an obvious or obligatory form of inheritance'.[28] Roman fathers usually transferred the patrimony to their sons through inheritance and to their daughters through dowry.[29] The amount of dowry varied greatly due to people's different social and economic statuses. The dowry was 'perhaps roughly a year's income for a propertied family',[30] whose purpose was 'to help offset the burdens of marriage', 'to support the woman after the end of the marriage by divorce or husband's death', or 'to facilitate her remarriage'.[31] The Roman law stipulates that the dowry legally belonged to the husband or his *pater*.[32] In reality, however, the purpose of the dowry actually restricted the husband's liberty in disposing of it during marriage.[33] As will be discussed later, the dowry was to be returned to the wife or her *pater* (if alive) at the end of the marriage. It is noteworthy, however, that the two forms of marriage – *cum manu* and *sine manu* – had different impacts upon the economic situation of widows.

3.1. *Cum manu*

In early Rome the normal marital form was marriage *cum manu*. Upon her marriage a woman was transferred from her father's *potestas* to that of her husband or his *paterfamilias*, which means she was in the position of 'an adopted daughter in relation to the *paterfamilias*' of her husband; as a result, she had neither legal nor financial independence within marriage. And her dowry was also 'passed into the *dominium* of her husband or his *paterfamilias*' and 'added to the family's single pool of property'.[34] Therefore, in a marriage *cum manu* the wife

[28] Dixon 1992:62.
[29] It did not exclude the possibility that daughters could still inherit a smaller part of the patrimony or receive a legacy at their fathers' death.
[30] Saller 1994:224; 1984:201.
[31] Saller 1994:211; 1984:202. See also Gardner 1986:97, 102, 107.
[32] Grubbs 2002:95; Gardner 1986:97, 102.
[33] Grubbs 2002:96.
[34] Saller 1994:207; 1984:196. See also Gardner 1986:67; Krause 1994a:87.

'had no property of her own, and anything given or bequeathed to her was absorbed in her husband's property'.[35]

In this form of marriage, 'the dowry effectively served to satisfy the daughter's claim to the paternal estate'.[36] After that she would have lost her right to inherit the patrimony of her father and become 'one of her husband's *sui heredes*', in which case she would inherit her husband's property together with their children upon his death.[37]

3.2. *Sine manu*

Since the end of the Republic, marriage *sine manu* had become the norm.[38] If a woman married *sine manu*, she remained under the *potestas* of her father and was thus legally and financially independent of her husband.[39] Under this form of marriage, 'dowries continued to be customary and to come under the *dominium* of the husband or his *paterfamilias*'.[40] Apart from the dowry, however, 'the wife's property was totally separate from her husband's'.[41] As long as her father was still alive, she could have no property ownership.[42] When her father died or emancipated her, 'she became *sui iuris* with an independent right to own property, which in law was entirely separate from her husband's'.[43]

At the husband's death, the dowry was recoverable to the wife or her father (if still alive), and the children could retain none of it. This would not happen automatically, however; the wife or her father had to claim the dowry through legal action – *actio rei uxoriae*.[44] Moreover, with the development of marriage *sine manu*, divorce and remarriage

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[35] Gardner 1986:71. See also Grubbs 2002:21.
[36] Saller 1994:207; 1984:196.
[37] Saller 1994:207; 1984:196; Gardner 1986:190; Krause 1994a:87.
[38] Saller 1994:128, 207; 1984:196.
[39] Saller 1994:207; Gardner 1986:67.
[40] Saller 1994:207; 1984:197.
[41] Gardner 1986:114.
[42] Gardner 1986:114.
[43] Saller 1994:207; 1984:196; Gardner 1986:71.
[44] Saller 1994:208; Gardner 1986:107; 1985:449-50.

became very common. The high mortality and large age gap in marriage additionally brought many women into widowhood and remarriage. Therefore, there existed marriage contracts[45] which indicated not only the items of the dowry and their current value but also the return of the dowry at the end of a marriage, so that the woman could remarry, or maintain herself if she remained widowed, or preserve her family resources if she returned to her natal home.[46]

If there were young children in a marriage who needed their mother's care, the husband would usually leave more than the dowry to his widow for the sake of their children. There were different approaches available to the husband. Because in a marriage *sine manu* the wife was not in the *potestas* of her husband and thus could not inherit his patrimony, the husband could 'disinherit the children and make the mother heir' through a *fideicommissum*. The mother then handed over the estate to the children when they reached a specified age. In this case, the patrimony became the mother's property which she could administer independently, till the children reached a legally mature age.[47] The husband could also make his widow and children co-heirs who then co-owned his property.[48] But if the husband wanted to safeguard the interests of his children, he could make them heirs but give his widow (together with the children) '*usufructus* (profit) and *usus* (use) of the property'.[49] The support of the widow could be for a few years, up to a certain age of the children, or till she remarried.[50] Alternatively, a husband could require his heirs to pay his widow a lifelong pension in kind and cash through a will.[51]

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[45] E.g., *P.Oxy*. 3.496 (127 CE); *P.Coll.Youtie* 2.67 (260/61 CE). Cf. Hanson 2000:154-55.
[46] Gardner 1986:97; Saller 1994:220; 1984:199; Grubbs 2002:91-92, 97; Hanson 2005:96.
[47] Gardner 1986:153; Gardner and Wiedemann 1991:140-41; Saller 1994:173; Grubbs 2002:244; Saavedra 2002:303.
[48] Saller 1994:174.
[49] Saller 1994:174. See also Gardner 1986:154, 163; Hobson 1983:320.
[50] Gardner 1986:154; Huebner 2013:98. According to Huebner (101-06) and Pudsey (2012:158), if a woman had lived with her husband's family (especially in a multiple family household), she would usually return to her natal home after the death of her husband and, if possible, remarry, leaving her children (if any) to her husband's family.
[51] Huebner 2013:136. E.g., *BGU* 1.86 (155 CE); *P.Lond*. 3.932 (211 CE).

Sometimes a widow might receive a legacy from her husband on the condition that she not remarry, for the husband's concern was for the wellbeing of the children.[52] The legacy could include 'household goods (*supellex*) and provisions (*penus*)' to maintain the ordinary standard of living of the widow. *Supellex* 'included the basic furniture, pots and pans, crockery and household textiles belonging to the *pater* and intended for general household use'. *Penus* included not only 'a fixed amount or an annual allowance' but also provisions used by the household such as grain, vegetables, oil and wine, etc.[53] Moreover, 'sometimes the husband preferred to leave the dowry to his wife as a legacy, either directly or through a *fideicommissum*' to save his wife from the trouble of *actio rei uxoriae*.[54] Therefore, as Gardner summarises, 'widows commonly received, not only personal effects provided for them by their husbands, but also legacies of maintenance, either directly (*penus*) or as the usufruct of part of the estate, either for life or for a specified period, and the details of such bequests afford us glimpses of the style and standard of living of the parties involved'.[55]

If the husband died without making a testamentary provision, however, his widow would be placed in a very disadvantaged position, because priority was given to children and the agnates whereas spouses (in this case, wives) ranked low in the order of succession.[56] Gardner presents the succession scheme introduced by the praetor at the very end of the Republic, in which husband or wife was the last in the order. Before them were (1) *liberi* (children; including *sui heredes*, emancipated children, grandchildren through sons, and adopted children); (2) *legitimi* (legitimate heirs; mainly the agnates); (3) cognates; and (4)

[52] Grubbs 2002:227; Gardner 1986:54.
[53] Gardner 1986:70-71. See also Gardner and Wiedemann 1991:140-42.
[54] Gardner 1986:107.
[55] Gardner 1986:181.
[56] Huebner 2013:98; Gardner 1986:194, 165. E.g., 117-Ar-5 (the 10-year-old son rather than his widowed mother is the owner of the house). The household numbers (e.g., 117-Ar-5 [Ar=nome/province Arsinoe]; 131-He-2 [He=Herakleopolis]; 173-Pr-14 [Pr=Prosopite]; 215-Hm-3 [Hm=Hermopolis]) consist of 'the digits of the first julian year of the regnal year of the census, two letters designating the nome, and a [largely arbitrary] serial number within the group; they are organised in order of these household numbers, i.e., first by census, then by nome, then by household'; Bagnall-Frier 1994:179. All the cited census declarations are taken from Bagnall-Frier 1994:181-325.

patron's family.[57] In addition, if a widow was childless and under fifty, she was not qualified to succession even without any claimants in all the above categories due to the limitations of the *lex Julia et Papia*.[58] Saller further illustrates that

> If a Roman *paterfamilias* died without a valid will, the order of succession was (1) *sui heredes* or 'his own heirs' (those who became independent of paternal authority on his death, usually his children and possibly grandchildren by sons, but also a wife married *cum manu*), (2) *proximus agnatus* or 'closest agnate' (nearest relative linked by males, most commonly brothers, sisters, or paternal uncles), (3) *gentiles* or clansmen of the same nomen. This was a system based on agnatic ties, giving no recognition to kinship links through women.[59]

As can be seen, a woman married *sine manu* was not included at all in the order of succession at the death of her husband. Although in the later first century BCE, as Saller additionally points out, 'cognates were formally recognized in the residual rules of succession', the wife still ranked the lowest in the order of succession, with 'children, *legitimi* (closest agnates as recognised in earlier law), *cognati*' before her.[60]

As mentioned earlier, a woman married *sine manu* was legally independent of her husband and could have her own property after becoming *sui iuris* which remained hers at the end of marriage. Aside from dowry, a widow could obtain additional property 'in the form of a *peculium* or a legacy or a share of her father's *hereditas*'.[61] Different from marriage *cum manu*, the dowry for a marriage *sine manu* was separate from the daughter's inheritance, and so 'prior receipt of a dowry by a *filiafamilias* was not counted against her share of the *hereditas* unless she took action to upset the will'.[62] However, only wealthy widows from the

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[57] Gardner 1986:192-93.
[58] Gardner 1986:193-94. The Augustan *leges Juliae et Papiae* (Gardner 1986:178-79; Rawson 1986b:9-10, 31) used restrictions on succession as a method to encourage childless women under fifty to marry/remarry for reproductive purpose. But this was applied mostly to the wealthy women in the upper classes. The result seemed to be ineffective, however. For a discussion on family and inheritance in the Augustan marriage laws, see Wallace-Hadrill 1981:58-80.
[59] Saller 1994:163.
[60] Saller 1994:165.
[61] Saller 1994:218. *Peculium* refers to pocket money or allowance given to the children for their own management. *Hereditas* refers to the father's patrimony. A woman *sui iuris* could receive legacies not only from her father, but also her other kin and friends.
[62] Saller 1994:210. See also Gardner 1985:451-52; Huebner 2013:123.

upper classes could secure their standard of living with their dowries and other properties received from their fathers or husbands. For the majority of widows, the dowry was not sufficient for their maintenance, and few husbands had enough resources to support their children (and widows) long-term. In general, therefore, widows in the Roman world did not have sufficient financial resources to maintain themselves and the situation was worse if they had minors, which drove many widows to remarriage.

4. Remarriage

Remarriage of widows seemed to be a controversial issue in Roman society. On the one hand, remarriage of widows was frequent and common.[63] On the other hand, the society idealised the woman who married only once[64] and considered it more admirable for a widow not to remarry.[65] The expectation towards upper-class widows seemed to be different, however. As Treggiari notes, young women in the upper classes were discouraged from remaining widowed, and the norm was for them to remarry as long as they could bear children.[66] Remarriage of upper-class widows within child-bearing age was even imposed by Roman law. The Augustan marriage legislation (the *Lex Papia Poppaea*) required childless widows between ages 20 and 50 to remarry within a period of two years. The consequences of non-compliance included penalties such as the loss of financial rights (e.g., the capacity to inherit and to receive legacies).[67]

If the primary function/purpose of marriage in antiquity was to bear children, the motives for remarriage of widows were quite different. While the desire to bear children

[63] Krause 1994a:87, 100; Dixon 1992:32, 77; Saller 1994:194.
[64] According to Huebner (2013:92-93), in Rome the *univira* 'was praised as the paradigm of female virtue and marital faithfulness', although in reality many widows were forced to remarry out of economic need.
[65] Dixon 1992:32-33; Rawson 1986b:31; Gray 2022:299.
[66] Treggiari 1991b:500-501. See also Bradley 1991:156-76.
[67] Rawson 1986b:9, 31; Dixon 1992:120; Corbier 1991:56; Grubbs 2002:83-87; 2019:105-24; Huebner 2013:94; 2019:38; Gray 2022:299.

remained among the motives of remarriage, many widows did not remarry for the purpose of childbearing but out of material need. In the ancient world where the majority of people lived at subsistence level, widowhood made a woman's situation worse. Moreover, a widow's standard of living was lower than that of wives, because the social status of a woman was usually attached to that of her husband. Without the legal protection and financial provision of a husband, a woman could find herself in a very vulnerable and defenceless position. Hence, the need of provision and protection drove many widows to remarriage.[68] There were also widows who remarried because of loneliness and health issues. If a widow in Roman society wished to remain in widowhood and maintain her reputation and respectability, she had to subject herself to strict self-control in order to avoid the gossip of neighbours, which reduced her social contacts to a minimum. The long periods of loneliness and sexual abstinence would consequently lead to poor health and even mental illness.[69] The strict gender-specific division of labour in antiquity was another reason for widows to remarry.[70] The wife was usually responsible for the management within the household, while the husband the work/business outside. Although slaves/freedmen could help manage the work/business after the death of the husband, many widows were too poor to own slaves. Those widows who had their properties managed by slaves/freedmen were easily suspected of being too intimate or even of having affairs with their slaves/freedmen.[71] Thus, remarriage appeared to be one of the best ways to overcome the inconvenience brought about by the death of the husband and to regain or maintain respectability.

Many widows had no chance of remarriage, however, especially those over 30 years of age.[72] As Krause illustrates,

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[68] Krause 1994a:108-10.
[69] Krause 1994a:110-12; Hanson 2000:149-50, 156-57.
[70] Pomeroy 1981:309; Krause 1994a:113.
[71] Krause 1994a:113.
[72] Hanson 2000:159; Grubbs 2002:219; Huebner 2019b:44, 49.

> Das 30. Lebensjahr ist die Scheidelinie, jenseits derer in größerer Zahl Witwen (die offenbar in ihrer Mehrzahl nicht wieder heirateten) auftreten. Der Anteil der unverheirateten, zumeist verwitweten Frauen, steigt in den Altersgruppen über 30/39 Jahren kontinuierlich an: Bereits im Alter über 50 ist lediglich die Minderzahl unter den Frauen (noch) verheiratet.[73]

Krause further points out that in the age group of 30-50, more than 40% of the women were likely widowed; and widows constituted 30% of the total number of adult women.[74] Bagnall-Frier obtain a similar result in their demographic study of Roman Egypt during the first two centuries:

> the percentage of women still married drops from a peak around 80 percent in the late twenties, to between 30 and 40 percent by age 50; by contrast, the percentage of men still married climbs to about 70 percent in their forties. To a large extent, this results from men aggressively continuing to marry or remarry into their forties, while, for one reason or another, women do not consistently remarry after age 35.[75]

There were various factors that hindered widows from remarriage. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, some widows received legacies from their husbands or even inherited the patrimony. But this usually happened on the condition that the widow not remarry (until her minor/s reached a certain age), as the interests of the child were the husband's main concern.[76] Moreover, the reason for dividing the custodial and proprietary functions of the mother and the tutor respectively was to protect the child's patrimony from any transfer to the widowed mother's new family through remarriage.[77] Even 'in the late empire, when the formal law was changed to permit mothers to be *tutores*', as Saller states, 'the condition was that they not remarry until their children came of age'.[78] Secondly, even if a widow was free

[73] Krause 1994a:69.
[74] Krause 1994a:73. It should be noted that McGinn (1999:617-32) views Krause's estimate of the percentage of unmarried widows a little too high for the upper classes due to a smaller age gap between husband and wife and a higher remarriage rate of widows. But McGinn (625) agrees with Krause that 'sub-élite Roman society had a vast number of unmarried, and quite unmarriageable, widows, many of them young and burdened with minor-age children'.
[75] Bagnall-Frier 1994:126-27. See also Hanson 2000:151; Rathbone 2006:102; Pudsey 2012:158-59.
[76] Gardner 1986:54; Saller 1994:175. Obviously, this would only apply to the minority who had very good financial settlements when they were widowed, as most widows were barely scraping by even with a legacy/patrimony (see the end of section 3).
[77] Saller 1994:193-94.
[78] Saller 1994:194.

to remarry, she still had to bring a dowry to her second marriage. According to Gardner, a wife who married *sine manu* 'had no legal claim to maintenance by her husband'; she would need to bring along a dowry into the new marriage as a contribution to the expenses of her husband's household.[79] Moreover, since a widow was usually older than women at their first marriage, she had to provide a bigger dowry in order to make herself attractive.[80] This was because along with her age, her level of fertility was also in decline, which was problematic in a society where the primary purpose of marriage was reproduction. If a widow could no longer attract a man with her youthfulness and fertility, a big dowry might offer certain advantages in the remarriage. Apart from those of the upper classes, however, the majority of widows were unlikely to be able to provide large dowries. Thirdly, as Krause suggests, the fact of having children from the first marriage could serve as the greatest hindrance to remarriage for widows. The reason is that minors normally lived with their widowed mother, which would inevitably bring extra financial burden to her new family if she remarried.[81] For example, a certain pregnant widow Dionysarion obtained the freedom to expose the infant and to remarry (i.e., without receiving any litigation from her late husband's family) by renouncing litigation about the dowry which she had recovered from her mother-in-law and about expenses for the delivery of her baby.[82] According to Rowlandson, 'the coupling of these provisions might suggest that Dionysarion's remarriageability would be impaired by having a young infant by her deceased husband'.[83]

The above survey shows that advanced age, poverty, and having minors were the main hindrances to widows' remarriage. Consequently, only a limited number of widows –

[79] Gardner 1986:68, 97.
[80] Treggiari 1991b:346-47.
[81] Krause 1994a:126-29. See also Saller 1994:192-93. It is noteworthy that rearing children in the upper classes represented a lesser burden, hence the hindrance for remarriage brought about by children from the previous marriage might not be as great as that in the lower classes.
[82] *BGU* 4.1104 (8 BCE). Cf. Rowlandson 1998:171-72; Krause 1994a:127; Hanson 2000:155; 2005:97; Grubbs 2002:267-68.
[83] Rowlandson 1998:171. See also Krause 1994a:127.

primarily from the wealthy upper classes – could remarry. Many widows in the lower classes were unable to remarry due to various obstacles and thus placed in a very vulnerable position.

5. The vulnerability of single widows

Since the majority of Roman people lived on the edge of subsistence, the household head usually had little or no property to pass on to his children and widow. As mentioned, poverty was both the reason and the obstacle to remarriage for most widows; it was especially difficult for widows with underage children and those of an advanced age to remarry. As will be seen, these single widows were extremely vulnerable economically, legally, and socially.

5.1. Economic vulnerability

The head of a household normally left a patrimony to his children for their survival upon his death. Among the lower classes who mostly did not own large properties, however, the patrimony was insufficient to support the children. Hence the mother had to take the responsibility of raising the children; the tutor/guardian had no obligation to care for the children out of his own financial resources.[84] As mentioned before, it was often difficult for widows to support themselves, let alone the whole family. Although some Roman emperors (e.g., Trajan and Antonius Pius) established 'child endowment schemes' such as *alimenta*[85] and *puellae Faustinianae*[86] to support humble families with children, they were limited to

[84] Saller 1994:192-93; Rawson 1986:18; Grubbs 2002:236.
[85] According to Veyne (1976:367), *alimenta* refers to the family allowances 'which the Emperor caused to be paid to Italian citizens so that they could bring up more children'. Rawson (1986b:10, and also n21) additionally states that it used the interest paid by farmers on state loans to support children in Italian country towns.
[86] According to Rawson (1986b:10), this was a special fund for girls of poor families. It was created by Antonius Pius to honour his wife Faustina senior (SHA, *Ant. Pius* 8.1), and later expanded by Marcus Aurelius in honour of his wife Faustina junior upon her death (SHA, *Marc.* 26.4-7).

legitimate children mainly in Italy.[87] Moreover, the primary purpose of *alimenta* was not to help the needy but to promote childbearing, and it is doubtful that the scheme was ever successful.[88] In addition, if the children were still minors and left with a patrimony at the death of their father, the widowed mother was entitled to maintenance payment from the children's tutor. However, the tutor was legally allowed to support the mother with the children's patrimony only if she was really needy, even if the children were left with large assets. And the amount was restricted to cover only the subsistence minimum.[89]

Since in most cases neither a widow's dowry nor what was left by her husband was sufficient to provide for her need, the adult children's support was of utmost importance.[90] Saller observes that 'ageing, propertyless parents were highly vulnerable and dependent on their children's goodwill and their success in inculcating the virtue of *pietas*'.[91] Dixon additionally notes that 'children in the ancient world were expected to repay the care spent on them in their early dependence by looking after parents and other family members when the children reached their prime',[92] and that the expectation of providing for their aged parents with support and for proper commemoration at death was deep-seated in Roman society.[93] In the lower classes, children were often the only source of support; hence widows who lost their children lost simultaneously their old-age provision.[94] In most cases, a widowed mother

[87] Rawson 1986a:171. Huebner (2013: 79-80) also mentions help for poor parents from private charities and public officials/emperors, but he similarly indicates that such support 'reached only a fragment of the entire population'.
[88] Rawson 1986b:10; Veyne 1976:371.
[89] Krause 1994b:109; Saller 1994:199.
[90] Hanson (2000:152) and Pudsey (2012:158, 161-65, 172) further note that there were also cases in which widows lived with other relatives such as siblings or ex-husbands (especially in brother-sister marriages which were widespread in Roman Egypt). But adult children remain the most important and reliable source of support. For a discussion on brother-sister marriage in Roman Egypt, see Huebner 2013:187-96; Scheidel 1996:9-51.
[91] Saller 1994:126-27. Saller (105-14) views *pietas* as a virtue that describes the reciprocal relationship between parents and children in Roman families, which encompassed both compassion and duty.
[92] Dixon 1992:25.
[93] Dixon 1992:108, 138.
[94] Krause 1994b:106, 113; Dixon 1988:213; 1992:111. E.g., *I.Métr*. 83 which records a couple's lament over their unmarried daughter's death; see Rowlandson 1998:347.

would live with her married son/s.[95] Sometimes if the widow was not living with the son, the latter could support his mother with regular maintenance payments, although such support was often inadequate and unreliable, especially when the son's presence was needed (e.g., in times of illness or other crisis).[96] The support of widows from daughters seemed limited and co-residence with daughters was rare, since daughters usually married out at an early age.[97] What they could do included paying regular visits to the widowed mother or sending her gifts via a courier.[98] However, the maintenance of the elderly mother could be a heavy financial burden to the family, which many adult children tried to remove.[99] Therefore, as Dixon states, 'the stereotypic laments of the aged reflect the near-universal anxiety that this stage of life would be characterised by neglect and want'.[100] Indeed, old widows could be a burden to the lower-class families, which was a cause of neglect and even contempt by their children. For example, a letter from a certain Sempronius to his brother Maximus reveals that their widowed mother was mistreated like a slave by some of her children.[101] In another letter, a widowed mother begged her son who was away from home to write to her, because she had been sick for thirteen months but not heard from her son at all.[102] Therefore, in order to acquire the right to maintenance by her children, a widowed mother would sometimes give up her right to the dowry or designate the inheritance (in whole or in part) to her children during her lifetime.[103] For instance, a fifty-year-old Tamystha gave her half-share of a house

[95] Huebner 2013:111; 2019a:83-85; Rathbone 2006:104; Hanson 2000:152; Krause 1994b:110. E.g., 11-Ar-1; 117-Ar-6; 159-Ar-10; 215-Ar-5.
[96] E.g., *P.Oxy.* 1.71 (303 CE) which records a widow's petition to the prefect that she had been robbed by her estate manager while her sons were in the army. Cf. Huebner 2013:165; Hanson 2000:156.
[97] Krause 1994b:108; Huebner 2013:117-18. For exceptions, see 131-He-2 (a widow with her 20-year-old daughter, 28-year-old son-in-law, and 3-year-old grandson); 173-Pr-14 (a 60-year-old woman with her 20-year-old daughter).
[98] Huebner 2013:121; Dixon 1988:210-32.
[99] Krause 1994b:117; Dixon 1992:153; Mueller 2004:104-05. E.g., *P.Lond*. 3.932 (211 CE) which records a certain Isidorus who gave up his share of the parents' patrimony to his brothers in order to avoid paying their father's debt and maintaining their widowed mother.
[100] Dixon 1992:155.
[101] *SB* 3.6263; see Winter 1933:48-49; Huebner 2013:119-21.
[102] *BGU* 3.948; see Bagnall and Cribiore 2006:224-25. It should be noted, however, that this widowed mother was not living alone, but with other family members, as suggested by the greetings.
[103] Krause 1994b:110, 117.

to her daughter in exchange for a proper burial upon her death.[104] In another case, a certain Hermione bestowed on her daughter her property on condition that her daughter pay her a regular pension until her death.[105] However, having little or no financial resources to fall back on now placed her in a more vulnerable position. Moreover, a widow without a contractual right to maintenance could claim the support of her children only after a certain age, before which she had to fend for herself. It was the same with other widows who had minors or no children at all; they all had to find other sources of income, which were mostly gainful employment.[106]

The gender-specific division of labour in Roman society severely limited women's engagement in gainful employment, however. In her study of lower-class women in the Roman economy, Treggiari reveals that based on the epitaphs in Italy and the western provinces from the late Republic down to about the time of Constantine, 'the attested range of women's jobs is much narrower than that of men', about 35 for women compared with 225 for men.[107] Since women in antiquity were generally restricted to the domestic sphere, it was better for them to find gainful employments that did not require public appearance, among which textile work was the most popular and common among widows. Firstly, textile work (e.g., spinning, weaving) was one of the main domestic duties of wives,[108] so most women would have already mastered the skill when they were widowed. Secondly, textile work could be done in one's own household or that of the employer/client. Thus public appearance was not necessary. Thirdly, although many households made their own textile fabrics at home and could be self-sufficient, there was still a market for textile products. Nevertheless, the remuneration for women in textile work was meagre and the social status associated with

[104] *SB* 8.9642 (*c.*112 CE); see Rowlandson 1998:198-200.
[105] *P.Oxy.* 3.472 (*c.*130 CE); cf. Huebner 2013:137.
[106] Krause 1994b:123.
[107] Treggiari 1979:66, 78. See also Kampen 1981:135; Krause 1994b:123-29.
[108] Gardner and Wiedemann 1991:72; Kampen 1981:133-34.

such work was low (it was held mostly by slaves and freedwomen).[109] Sometimes a widow with minors could hardly survive but had to give up the children for adoption[110] or sold the daughter into prostitution when she was old enough.[111] Apart from the textile trade, single women (mostly widows) had few opportunities to earn a respectable living. The opportunities for widows to engage in agricultural work as wage labourers were very limited, because the competition from men (such as small-scale farmers and tenants, or landless people) was too strong; only when no alternative was available would a widow consider an occupation in agriculture.[112] Some freeborn, poor women earned their keep as wet nurses, which was widespread in Egypt;[113] some supported themselves as garment-makers, hairdressers, food dealers (e.g., bread, beans, and vegetables), purple-sellers and so on, although most of these occupations were done by slaves or freedwomen;[114] while some older widows might work as midwives.[115] Despite the disreputableness of some jobs such as catering (e.g., waitresses in cookshops and eating-houses where prostitution was expected) and prostitution (older widows could only engage in procuring), some desperate widows might have turned to these activities,[116] which shows how tight the labour market was for widowed freeborn women to earn a living. The situation for old widows who were sick and whose physical strength had diminished could be so miserable that they had no other choice but to beg.[117] It was the same with some single mothers with minors, who had to beg as well or send their children off to beg.[118]

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[109] Treggiari 1979:68-70; Gardner 1986:237-38; Krause 1994b:130-44.
[110] E.g., *P.Lips*. 1.28 (381 CE); cf. Huebner 2013:178; *P.Oxy*. 16.1895 (also in Hunt-Edgar 1.11) (554 CE); cf. Krause 1994b:142. For adoption of children by childless people as old-age support in antiquity, see Huebner 2013:175-87.
[111] E.g., *BGU* 4.1024 (Seiten 6-8); cf. Keenan 1989:19-20; Bagnall 1993:197-98; Huebner 2013:116-17.
[112] Krause 1994b:154-57.
[113] Bradley 1980:321-25; 1986:201-29; 1991:13-36; Hobson 1984:378-79, 382-83, 387, 389; Gardner 1986:241-45; Krause 1994b:144; Sparreboom 2014:145-58; Parca 2017:203-26.
[114] Treggiari 1979:65-86; Kampen 1981:133-34; Gardner 1986:239, 241; Krause 1994b:146-48.
[115] Gardner 1986:240; Krause 1994b:145.
[116] Treggiari 1979:73, 78; Gardner 1986:248-53; Krause 1994b:148.
[117] Krause 1994b:162. E.g., Libanius, *Or*. 33.30; 45.9.
[118] Krause 1994b:166. E.g., Juvenal, *Sat*. 6.542ff.; Martial, *Epigr*. 12.57.13.

5.2. Legal vulnerability

Women did not have many legal rights in the Roman world, as the head of the household – the *paterfamilias* – was the legal representative of the whole family.[119] After the death of her husband, a widow did not become the legal head of the family; instead she was required by law to have a tutor who could consent or object to certain of her actions, such as 'alienation (including manumission of slaves), undertaking contractual obligations, promising a dowry, marrying with entry into *manus*, accepting an inheritance (since that could involve liabilities) and making a will'.[120] Widowed mothers might keep their children and have physical charge over them in practice, but they had no *potestas* over the children in a legal sense, nor could they administer the children's property independently as it fell within the responsibility of the children's tutor.[121] Therefore, as Gardner summarises, 'over her children, whether legitimate or illegitimate, the Roman woman had, throughout the classical period, no legal rights at all, except, eventually, a very limited right to intestate succession'.[122] This means that the widowed mothers' need of support from their adult children had no legal foundation but depended on 'convention and moral force'.[123] Dixon additionally indicates that 'the authority of a mother, whether widow, divorcee or *univira* still living with her son's father, was based on an amalgam of custom and individual strength of character as well as family habits of affection and material considerations such as her disposition of a part of the

[119] Grubbs 2002:20; Krause 1994b:250.
[120] Gardner 1986:14, 18. Gardner (20) additionally states that 'by the provisions of the *lex Julia* (18 BC) and the *lex Papia Popppaea* (AD 9) women were released from the necessity of having a tutor if they had three children (four, for a freedwoman). The richer and more influential could, by imperial dispensation, obtain the relief without the children'. See also Gardner and Wiedemann 1991:117n1; Grubbs 2002:20; Hallett 2012:373.
[121] Gardner 1986:137, 147; Grubbs 2002:21, 236. Upon the death of the *paterfamilias*, the children became *sui iuris* and were required to have a tutor. Gardner (149) further notes that there was no clear evidence for women being allowed to act as tutors until 390 CE. Before that, if a dying father wished his wife to manage their children's patrimony, 'it could be arranged only through some legal device such as a fideicommissary legacy' (137). See also Grubbs 2002:231.
[122] Gardner 1986:261.
[123] Dixon 1988:180.

family fortune'.[124] As mentioned earlier, some adult children indeed tried to shed the responsibility of maintaining their elderly mothers.

Because a woman could not assume the position of legal head of a household, nor represent her family in court, women could neither sit on criminal juries nor initiate legal suits in a law court except in cases in which their own basic rights or those of their close relatives were involved, such as the murder of a child.[125] In civil courts, women could not act for others either, be it the plaintiff or the defendant; they were only allowed to initiate suits for themselves, for which they had to obtain consent from their tutors (presumably because they could lose the case, and thus lose money).[126] According to Krause, widows and orphans did enjoy certain privileges in court, and the proconsul or *praeses* was responsible for arranging a legal representative (e.g., advocate) for women, orphans or others who were needy. In practice, however, the fact of their gender placed women at a disadvantage in court; and they were sometimes considered to be ignorant of the law.[127] Moreover, after becoming widowed women lacked the same confidence in a law court as their male counterparts, as they were normally represented by their *paterfamilias*. Consequently, it was extremely difficult for widows to conduct a lawsuit; at most, an adult son might stand in, for it was

[124] Dixon 1988:202. See also Huebner 2013:205-06.
[125] Gardner 1986:262. E.g., *BGU* 4.1024 (Seiten 6-8) which records an old and poor mother Theodora's charge against a city councillor Diodemos who killed her daughter – her only source of support. Cf. Keenan 1989:19-20; Bagnall 1993:197-98; Huebner 2013:116-17. See also Grubbs (2002:60-71) for the restrictions and rights of women in court.
[126] Gardner 1986:262. Grubbs (2002:66) shows that exceptions were made in the case of family members, especially when no male relative was available or competent to do so, such as widowed mothers' fight for their children's rights. E.g., Babatha's lawsuit against her son's guardians for not providing sufficient maintenance to her son (although Babatha was a Jewish woman, she resorted to the Roman law to defend her son's rights; *P.Yadin* 12-15, 27; cf. Grubbs 2002:250-54; Hanson 2005:85-103; Chiusi 2005:105-32); Petronilla's fight for her son's rights as heir to the patrimony of her deceased husband (Petronilla was pregnant when her husband died and her husband's family did not admit the boy as heir; *P.Gen.* 2.103-04; cf. Hanson 2000:158-59; Gardner 1984:132-33; 1986:53; Grubbs 2002:261-69); and Aurelia Artemis' defence of her children's interests against a *dekaprotos* (a local tax-collecting official) Syrion (*P.Sakaon* 36, 31) and against her sister-in-law Aurelia Annous (*P.Sakaon* 37; see Grubbs 2002:257-60).
[127] Krause 1994b:245. See also Grubbs 2002:47-55. Grubbs (52-53) points out that sometimes a widow could use her 'womanly weakness' as 'a useful rhetorical device for attracting sympathy from officials', e.g., *P.Oxy.* 2.261 (55 CE) which records Demetria's authorisation of her grandson to serve as her legal representative in a legal dispute because of her 'womanly weakness'. See also Huebner 2019a:56-57.

impossible for poor widows to employ a court representative if they were to initiate a lawsuit.[128] Therefore, it is not surprising that women's appearance in court was rare and exceptional in the Roman empire, and even when it comes to late antiquity, Krause maintains, the fact that clerics had to petition on behalf of widows and orphans indicates their vulnerability and defencelessness in court.[129]

5.3. Social vulnerability

Without the protection of their husbands, widows often became the victims of tax collectors and public officials. Krause discloses that in the imperial period, widows did not enjoy any legal privileges when it came to taxes and duties on properties. Except for those in Egypt, widows were subject to poll tax. And they also had to pay land taxes, which were a particular burden for landowners.[130] The regular tax payments were already a heavy burden, yet widows in many instances had to face the violence of tax collectors, which made their already miserable life even more unbearable. In order to accumulate wealth, the tax collectors often abused their position of power and demanded more than they were entitled to. Since widows were the most defenceless, they frequently became victims. Besides being exploited by tax collectors, widows were additionally victims of violent attacks by public officials. There are numerous examples from both literary sources and the papyri. For instance, some women's estates were forcibly auctioned off by state organs for less than their value in the name of tax repayment (alleging that taxes had not been paid), and the buyers were in collusion with the officials.[131] Another widowed and aged mother was violently attacked by the tax collectors while her two sons were away from home (one son was in the field)

[128] Krause 1994b:247-50.
[129] Krause 1994b:250.
[130] Krause 1994b:220-24. For women's exemption from poll tax in Roman Egypt, see also Hobson 1983:312; Rathbone 2006:103, 108.
[131] Cod. justin. 7.39.1 and 10.1.3; cf. Krause 1994b:227-28.

although they had duly paid the taxes. The mother was so violently attacked that she became bedridden.[132] If a widow under her sons' protection could still become the victim of violent attacks by officials, how much more vulnerable was the position of other widows who had no children or whose children were still minors.

Moreover, widows were particularly vulnerable to robbery and theft and hence became the preferred targets of thieves and robbers, who sometimes subjected them to brutal violence.[133] For example, a widow by the name of Thaesis petitioned the *strategos* that a man named Psenatoimis had not only physically attacked her before witnesses but also threatened her regularly by interfering with her access to her house.[134] In another petition, a widow complained that the curator Thonis had violently kidnapped a slave girl from her house.[135]

Furthermore, widows were often victims of sexual violence. For example, theft and rape against women became the subject of ecclesiastical legislation in late antiquity, and numerous sources indicate that Christian ascetic women (whether virgins or widows) were victims of seduction and rape, most of whom lived on their own.[136] The fact that large numbers of single women fell victim to sexual violence obviously reflects the exceedingly vulnerable and defenceless situation of women without the protection of a father or a husband. If a widow was young, she could be robbed, raped, and/or coerced into marriage. In Roman Egypt, even women living alone temporarily were victims of sexual violence.[137] Therefore, in Roman society till late antiquity, the death of the head of the family threw

[132] *BGU* 2.515 (also in Hunt-Edgar 2.286) (193 CE); cf. Krause (1994b:230n53) who erroneously refers to it as 2.288.
[133] Krause 1994b:235-36.
[134] *P.Stras*. 241; cf. Krause 1994b:237.
[135] *P.Oxy*. 8.1120; cf. Krause 1994b:237.
[136] Krause 1994b:238-40.
[137] Krause 1994b:240.

women into an especially vulnerable and even risky situation, as especially indicated by the Church Fathers.[138]

6. Wealthy widows

Although the majority of widows in the Roman world were poor and needy, a considerable number of widows owned large assets due to Roman testamentary practice (property passed down from father to daughter).[139] Rawson points out that 'legacies, dowries and other forms of transmitting property resulted in some very wealthy women in the late Republic and in the Principate, and by then they were also able to bequeath their wealth fairly freely'.[140] For instance, Hobson assesses that at least one-third of the real estate of Socnopaiou Nesos (a small village in Roman Egypt) may have been owned by women, including houses, camels, and slaves; and almost two-fifths of the landowners in Karanis (another much larger and more flourishing village in Roman Egypt) were women.[141] Rathbone also suggests that 'many older women' in Roman Egypt 'did not seek to remarry because they could and did lead independent and not solitary lives'.[142] Gardner additionally states that

> wealthy women, especially from the late Republic onwards, give the appearance at least not only of enjoying a good deal of *de facto* autonomy in their personal lives and the control of their property, but also of playing a role in the public sphere. In the provinces especially, they are epigraphically attested as conferring benefactions,

[138] In late antiquity, it was the Church Fathers who complained the most about the miserable suffering of widows (e.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. Bas.* 43.56; Gregory the Great, *Epist.* 3.5; Jerome, *Epist.* 130.7); see Krause 1994b:232-43.
[139] Krause 1994b:174; Gardner 1986:18; Hobson 1983:311-21; Huebner 2013:112, 123.
[140] Rawson 1986b:19.
[141] Hobson 1983:311-21. For women as property owners in Roman Egypt, see also Bagnall and Cribiore 2006:80; Rowlandson 1998:220; Nielsen 1994:129-36; Pomeroy 1981:305; Saavedra 2002:297-312. For the role of women in the economic life of Roman Egypt (based on a case study from first century Tebtunis), see Hobson 1984:373-90.
[142] Rathbone 2006:104-05. Rathbone argues that Roman Egypt in the first three centuries CE was a prosperous society where few people lived in poverty. See also Huebner (2019a:56) for the social-economic status of women in Roman Egypt.

> holding priesthoods and honorific magistracies, and 'patrons' and 'mothers' of colleges, and so on.[143]

For example, Petronia, a widow probably of a Roman official or soldier, financed the construction of a chapel dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite.[144] Compared with the majority of widows who were generally needy and vulnerable, wealthy widows enjoyed much more economic independence and social respect.

6.1. Economic independence

As mentioned earlier, in a marriage *sine manu* (the norm from the late Republic onwards), the wife's property was separate from that of her husband (particularly in the upper classes), which means the wife would have managed her own property independently. Saller is thus right in saying that 'a Roman woman could gain standing and power in a marriage through a large dowry; the possession of additional property in her own right could give her even more power and independence'.[145] For such women, the death of the husband probably did not bring many economic changes, because they would have had some experience in the administration of property and hence were able to manage it (the property) independently.

The legal and economic capacity of Roman women, including widows, could be restricted by their tutors, however. As mentioned earlier, women were required to have a tutor after becoming *sui iuris* and had to obtain the tutor's consent in various financial transactions and property disposition. The tutor of freeborn women was usually the next agnatic relative who simultaneously was the next beneficiary of the inheritance. Thus the tutor would ensure that the property of the woman was well protected.[146] The father or the

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[143] Gardner 1986:264. See also MacMullen 1980:208-18; Will 1979:34-43; Bielman 2012:238-48; D'Ambra 2012:400-13; Meyers 2012:461-65; Hemelrijk 2012:478-90. Although these scholars do not mention widows specifically, it may be assumed that among these wealthy women there were widows who likely enjoyed more autonomy compared with wives.
[144] *OGIS* 2.675 (88 CE); see Rowlandson 1998:67.
[145] Saller 1994:221.
[146] Krause 1994b:179; Saavedra 2002:302-03.

husband (in a marriage *cum manu*) could, however, at a later time appoint a tutor for the daughter or the wife by will, who need not be the next agnate and thus was less interested in controlling the administration of the widow's property.[147] So by the end of the Republic, for women not in *tutela legitima* (the next agnate for freeborn women and the patron for freedwomen), guardianship had become a formality. A woman could force her tutor to authorise not only financial transactions but also testamentary dispositions; if a woman was not satisfied with her tutor, she could even have him replaced.[148] The Augustan law further allowed women who produced enough children (three for freeborn women and four for freedwomen) to be released completely from all forms of *tutela*.[149] The abolition of the agnatic *tutela* of women took place under Claudius,[150] which freed both women from such forms of guardianship and the agnatic relations from their 'increasingly burdensome duties'.[151] With the tutorial restrictions reduced to a minimum, women (particularly widows) could now conduct business on their own account and engage in various financial activities independently.

Gardner points out that women *sui iuris* could freely undertake both ownership and administration of property, with tutorial consent needed only for certain transactions. She further reveals that 'women appear frequently in papyri and in the Herculaneum tablets engaging in buying, selling, leasing and other activities'.[152] Rowlandson additionally states that 'women at all levels of society can be found during the Roman period buying and selling agricultural land'.[153] Dixon furthermore notes that 'by the late Republic, the women of the elite seem to have made wills as a matter of course and to have engaged freely in property

[147] Krause 1994b:179; Pudsey 2012:173.
[148] Crook 1986:84; Gardner 1986:168, 234; Pudsey 2012:173.
[149] Gaius, *Inst.* 1.194; see Grubbs 2002:28; Wallace-Hadrill 1981:61.
[150] Gaius, *Inst.* 1.171; see Dixon 1986:99.
[151] Dixon 1986:99-100; Krause 1994b:179-80; Gardner 1986:234.
[152] Gardner 1986:233.
[153] Rowlandson 1998:220.

sales'.[154] There is no doubt widows (compared with wives) were more likely to engage in these financial activities in order to secure their living, especially wealthy widows from the upper classes. For example, Krause notes that widows commonly made purchases (including purchase of landed property), while the sale of inherited property or slaves could be due to money shortage or for the purpose of patrimony distribution (division?).[155] Wealthy widows could also earn their living as money lenders.[156] For instance, a widow named Herais lent some money to Valerius Apolinarius and, after he failed to repay the loan, seized some of his land.[157] According to Krause, generous loans were granted among people in the upper class, not so much for the purpose of making money, but to strengthen existing political alliances and to establish new ones; similarly, widows of the upper class practised the same to their relatives, friends and clients.[158] As mentioned earlier, many women were landowners, particularly among upper-class women who had dependent personnel (workers/slaves?) to manage their property. And for such women, land ownership was usually the most secure investment. For example, the widowed Caesennia purchased an estate with inherited money, which was viewed as the best possible investment by her relatives and friends.[159] Another woman Corellia, a friend of Pliny the Younger, bought a country estate with the price below its value.[160] Some widows managed their large assets very efficiently: in a letter to her son, Pudentilla underscored that despite being a single widow she had even increased her fortune.[161] In addition, widows with large estates could lease them out in small plots, but more often entrusted them to administrators, especially when the estates were spread across

[154] Dixon 1992:44.
[155] Krause 1994b:185-87.
[156] Gardner 1986:236; Krause 1994b:191.
[157] *P.Gen.* 1.74 (139-145 CE); see Bagnall and Cribiore 2006:313.
[158] Krause 1994b:190. A widow's granting of loans might serve to advance her son's (or other close male kin's) political career, as Dixon (1992:109) discloses, 'the young senatorial woman was obliged to marry within her class and to foster by her own activities the political ambitions of her brothers and sons'. This should not exclude the purpose of acquiring money, however, which was probably often the case.
[159] Cicero, *Caecin*. 5.15; cf. Krause 1994b:204.
[160] Pliny, *Ep*. 7.11; cf. Krause 1994b:204.
[161] Apuleius, *Apol*. 70; cf. Krause 1994b:184.

provinces. For instance, during her fourteen years of widowhood, Pudentilla engaged the services of administrators and had good overall charge of her considerable landed properties.[162] Moreover, slaves often made up a considerable part of the assets of wealthy widows. Sometimes instead of leasing out plots of land, a widow could leave their management to slaves. Slaves trained in textile handicrafts or other skills could also serve as a source of income – they could work for their widowed mistress or be hired out as wage labourers, or be pledged as loan collateral.[163] In the case of an old and childless widow, slaves sometimes even provided for her maintenance.[164]

Wealthy widows were not without problems in dealing with their properties, however. Many widows (particularly the young ones) had insufficient experience in business and property management and had to rely on administrators or slaves for help. Without the protection of the head of her household, a widow could be easily cheated and exploited by her administrators who often ingratiated themselves with widows in order to advance their own business and enhance their own wealth. As a result, widows with no land or business management experience often suffered at the hands of untrustworthy administrators. For example, a widow named Aurelia complained to the prefect that she was cheated and robbed by her estate managers while her sons were away on foreign service as soldiers.[165] Moreover, widows could face difficulty exercising authority over their slaves (especially male ones), because in the absence of a male master, slaves generally tended to behave disrespectfully towards a female head of the household. In addition, widows had to take extra care in their interactions with administrators, slaves or other male subordinates, lest they be accused of being too intimate, or worse, of sexual liaison, with the latter.[166] Furthermore, as Rawson

[162] Apuleius, *Apol*. 68; 87; cf. Krause 1994b:208.
[163] Krause 1994b:211-12.
[164] Mueller 2004:130-96; 2002:265-81. E.g., *P.Oxy*. 50.3555; 187-Ar-30; 215-Hm-3. Cf. Rathbone 2006:104; Huebner 2013:172-73.
[165] *P.Oxy*. 1.71 (303 CE). Cf. Hanson 2000:156; Grubbs 2002:54-55; Huebner 2013:165.
[166] Krause 1994b:211-15.

notes, elderly widows (particularly the childless) were very vulnerable to 'legacy-hunters', whom she describes as 'fawning, self-seeking opportunists'.[167] Nevertheless, compared with the majority of widows who were generally poor and needy, wealthy widows had greater financial independence, whose wealth accorded them a certain degree of authority and power particularly in their households (this applies especially to widows from imperial and senatorial families).

6.2. Household authority

Although a widowed Roman mother had no legal authority over her children, her financial independence could enhance her position in the household, sometimes as head of the household if she was the owner of the house.[168] For example, a certain Kronous (64 years old) from early second-century Arsinoe made a census declaration as the head of her household in which her son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren were also living.[169] And in the next census return fourteen years later, she still functioned as the head of her household.[170] In another census return, a 50-year-old woman Herois declared her household through her son-in-law as she inherited from her father half of the house, in which she was living with her daughter and granddaughter.[171] But her son-in-law was living in his natal home,[172] in which his 74-year-old grandmother Tasoucharion functioned as the head of the household in which her children (two sons and a daughter), grandson and great-granddaughter were living with her.[173] As Dixon maintains, 'the position of respect and authority of the Roman mother emanated in part from her effective power of disposition over

[167] Rawson 1986b:19. See also Gardner and Wiedemann 1991:129-30.
[168] Huebner 2019b:48-49.
[169] 117-Ar-12. Cf. Huebner 2013:131.
[170] 131-Ar-12. Cf. Huebner 2013:131.
[171] 201-Ar-8. Cf. Hanson 2000:157.
[172] Mueller (2004:94) suggests that Herois' daughter is divorced.
[173] 201-Ar-9. Cf. Hanson 2000:157; Huebner 2013:112.

her fortune, especially in the case of widows who assumed responsibility for a young family'.[174] According to Huebner, in Roman Egypt 'about two-thirds of all men would have lost their fathers when they reached the age of full majority at 25'.[175] Presumably, in many cases it was the widowed mother who played a decisive role in the education and training of her adolescent son and in the direction of his career. As Pudsey reveals, Roman Egyptian mothers 'appear frequently as the applicant for their sons' registration in epikrisis documents, presenting their sons for apprenticeships, and arranging inheritances of [*sic*] their children's behalf'.[176] In addition, among the Roman aristocratic families it was important for a young man to gain the support of his widowed mother who, with her large wealth or ancestral distinction, was an important contributor to his political career.[177] In fact, a mother was expected to cultivate the political ambition of her son 'by her own activities'.[178] Moreover, as Dixon suggests, 'it was by no means unusual for husbands to bequeath to their widows their whole estate or a sizeable portion of it on the understanding that they would manage and enjoy it for life, then pass it on to the common children of the marriage'.[179] Pudsey also indicates that 'women themselves had acted as guardians for their children since the Hellenistic period'.[180] These practices no doubt further enhanced the position of the widowed mother in her son's eyes, even when he had reached adulthood. Hence, widowed mothers could advise and influence their sons even in areas (e.g., politics) where women were not allowed to have direct, personal experience.

A widowed mother's authority over her daughter was slightly different. The relationship between Roman mothers and daughters is characterised by 'maternal authority

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[174] Dixon 1988:41. See also Huebner 2013:124.
[175] Huebner 2013:124.
[176] Pudsey 2012:174.
[177] See MacMullen 1980:216; Dixon 1988:179.
[178] Dixon 1992:109. See Brennan (2012:361) and Hallett (2012:374-75) for the political influence of some Roman mothers over their sons (e.g., Servilia over her son Brutus, and Cornelia over her sons Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus).
[179] Dixon 1988:66.
[180] Pudsey 2012:173. E.g., *P.Mich*. 5.232 (36 CE); *P.Oxy*. 6.907 (276 CE).

and mutual affection' – a mother's authority over daughters was not only enhanced by her power of economic disposition through dowry and inheritance but also reinforced by common social activity and interests.[181] While a widowed mother offered her daughter help and part (or the whole, if the mother had no son) of her wealth, the daughter owed her mother obedience, support and company through respectful visits or other practical acts.[182]

It should be noted, however, that a widowed mother's authority over her children was different from that of a father – the power of the father had a legal basis, but that of the mother was recognised only by social convention and moral force. Since a mother had no legal *potestas* over her son, her authority could be challenged or even attacked when an adult son became impatient with her 'interference' in his life. What was worse, after a son had advanced in his career, he could well consider his mother's advice dispensable and even neglect his filial duties to her as a son.[183] Therefore, a mother's capacity for economic disposition was not necessarily always a source of power over her son; it could also be a cause of conflicts, if her 'interference' in her son's life was considered beyond limits. Nevertheless, children were expected to respect their mother in whatever circumstances – 'a failure to reciprocate the love and care one had received in earlier years or even to abandon, neglect, or mistreat one's elderly parents was met by strong social opprobrium'.[184] And in Roman Egypt, those who cared for their aged parents were granted some exemption from liturgies imposed on property.[185] There could be serious conflicts between mother and son (e.g., Nero and his mother [the younger Agrippina]), but those were extreme cases and by no means common.[186]

[181] Dixon 1988:211-12.
[182] Dixon 1988:228.
[183] Dixon 1988:177.
[184] Huebner 2013:205.
[185] Rathbone 2006:103.
[186] For a discussion of the conflicts between Nero and his mother, see Dixon 1988:184-86.

7. Conclusion

The above study of the social-economic situation of widows in the Roman world reveals that there were a vast number of widows in that society, among whom many were young and with minors, and the majority did not have enough for maintenance. In order to survive, many widows chose to remarry, but poverty and underage children were their main obstacles to remarriage. And it was equally difficult for widows of advanced age to remarry due to reduced (or lack of) fertility (it was already difficult for widows above 30 to remarry).

For widows who had no chance of remarriage, their situation could be extremely vulnerable and defenceless. In most cases, their adult children (particularly sons, since daughters would have married out) became their only source of support (those without children might live with their siblings, or young widows with their parents); otherwise, they had to seek gainful employment. However, the gender-specific division of labour in the ancient world had severely limited the job opportunities for women whose occupations (e.g., as spinner, weaver, garment-maker, wet nurse, midwife, food dealer, and hairdresser, etc.) were primarily concerned with fabrics, health, food, and personal service. These occupations involved mostly sales and services, provided meagre wages, and were often associated with low social status. Some widows had no choice but to accept disreputable jobs such as catering and prostitution, with the most miserable – old and sick widows – ending up begging. Apart from economic difficulties, widows were additionally vulnerable to the violence of tax collectors, public officials, thieves and robbers, who knew how to exploit their defencelessness.

Although the majority of widows in the Roman world were poor and needy, there were still a considerable number of wealthy widows who owned large assets and managed them independently. Their wealth enabled them to engage in various economic activities, and their power of economic disposition further enhanced their authority in the household, even

after their children had grown up. Although a mother's authority over her children had no legal foundation, the social force was so strong that children were obliged to respect and support their mother, whatever the circumstances.

Through the above survey, this chapter has set up a historical background, against which the social-economic situation of early Christian widows will be examined in this thesis. The necessity of this historical background lies in the fact that the early church was established within the context of the Roman world. As has been shown in this chapter, the majority of widows were needy and vulnerable, and their primary means of support came from either a new husband through remarriage (for young widows) or adult children (for elderly widows). But for those more elderly, childless widows who could neither remarry nor support themselves through gainful employment, their situation could be extremely desperate. How about those widows who became Christians? Did the church make any difference in their life economically and socially? What role did they play in the church? These questions are to be explored in the following chapters through the analysis of early Chrisitan literature. But before that, we will first examine the social-economic situation of widows in ancient Judaism, since Christianity not only originated from Judaism but also inherited its ethos of caring for the poor, especially widows.

Chapter 3

Widows in Ancient Judaism

1. Introduction

Since the early church inherited the ethos of caring for the poor, especially the most vulnerable representatives – widows and orphans – from ancient Judaism, this chapter will explore the care of widows presented in the Jewish writings and documents. Because of the limited space and the large quantities of materials, this chapter will not cover the Rabbinic literature (apart from a few references to the Mishnah in the notes), but will mainly focus on relevant texts during the Second Temple period (i.e., the LXX; [1] select Second Temple literature, including Josephus and Philo, and the Dead Sea Scrolls [particularly the Damascus Document]), and the Judean Desert papyri (particularly the Babatha archive). In addition, since this chapter discusses the support of widows in ancient Judaism as a whole and as a resource or inspiration for early Christianity, the discussion of the relevant texts will not be based on chronological sequence but on their relevance to the different points being discussed.

This chapter will explore the situation of widows in ancient Judaism from a social-economic perspective. I will first discuss the social-economic vulnerabilities of widows reflected in the relevant texts, and then investigate the mechanisms for their support, followed by the discussion of the enforcement and effect of these mechanisms. Thereafter, the support of widows outside the mechanisms will be explored. Finally I will discuss the social-economic situation of certain wealthy widows. Through the discussion, this chapter seeks to explore the various means of support for widows in ancient Judaism and to show the

[1] The LXX (and its English translation NETS) rather than the MT is used in this chapter, because the evidence suggests that Greek-speaking early Christians were most likely to use Old Greek translations of the biblical texts rather than the Hebrew originals.

significance of the ethos that encouraged support of widows and other marginalised people in society.

2. The social-economic vulnerability of widows

The social-economic vulnerability of widows is most clearly reflected in the three-item catalogue of strangers, widows, and orphans in the Mosaic law (e.g., Deut 10.18; 16.11; 24.17, 19-21; 26.12-13; 27.19), Wisdom literature (e.g., Pss 93.6; 145.9),[2] and Prophetic literature (e.g., Jer 7.6; 22.3; Ezek 22.7; Zech 7.10). According to Galpaz-Feller, in the context of these texts when widows are mentioned together with strangers, orphans, and the poor, it means there are no male relatives available at their side to support and protect them.[3] This is due to the common difficulty faced by all of them – 'their lack of kin network to support them at a specific locale'.[4] 'Strangers' refers to those who had left their places of origin or homelands and moved to another place to live because of famine (e.g., Naomi's migration to Moab in Ruth 1.1-2), war (e.g., the Canaanites living among the Israelites), or other reasons.[5] Having left their homelands meant the 'strangers' were cut off from their kin networks while living in a foreign land, which left them defenceless and isolated in the adopted society, because they lacked the social protection of networks of kin/friends in the locality.[6] As resident aliens, they were denied the right of land ownership,[7] which made their situation very vulnerable and precarious in an agrarian society. 'Orphans' refers to children without fathers or, even worse, both parents. The absence of a father meant not only the loss of the most important family member but also the deprivation of a provider and protector,

[2] The duality of widows and orphans also appears very often in the Wisdom literature, especially in the Book of Job (e.g., Job 22.9; 24.3; 29.12-13; Pss 67.6; 108.9).
[3] Galpaz-Feller 2008:233.
[4] Sneed 1999:500. For the vulnerability of the fatherless and the widow caused by the social structure of ancient Israel, see Bendor 1996:190-94.
[5] The strangers were not necessarily foreigners; they could be Israelites who had moved to other tribes. See Propp 2006:258.
[6] Childs 1974:478.
[7] Unterman 2017:61.

which exposed the orphan to various forms of exploitation and oppression (e.g., Job 24.3; Ps 93.6; Isa 10.2; Ezek 22.7).[8] Widows without the protection and support of their husbands and other male relatives were subject to legal, social, and economic difficulties. Legally, in the patriarchal society of ancient Israel, women had no legal rights of their own but were under the protection of their fathers before marriage and of their husbands thereafter. Without the protection of her husband, a widow was exposed to the danger of violation and even rape (cf. Ruth 2.8-9;[9] Philo, *Spec*. 3.64[10]). Socially, a widow was thrown into a critical condition along with the demise of her husband, especially if they had no children. In her comments on Genesis 38, Niditch notes that in most patriarchal societies the identity of a woman depends on whether she bears her husband's child/ren, before which she never fully becomes part of his family.[11] However, without the protection of her husband (i.e., she is widowed), even after she has borne him children, she might still be considered as an outsider by other family members of her husband and treated 'as a lowly element in the society where she dwells' (e.g., 2 Kgdms 14.7).[12] On the other hand, since she has joined her husband's family through marriage, she no longer belongs to her father's house and hence is not under her father's protection either. Thus, without any patriarchal protection, a widow in ancient Israel became a misfit in the social structure,[13] and was totally defenceless and vulnerable.

Economically, a widow could not inherit her husband's possessions in ancient Israel (cf. Num 27.8-11).[14] Upon the death of a man, his property would be inherited by his son/s; if he had no son, his daughter/s would claim the patrimony. If a man died childless, his estate

[8] Propp 2006:259; Childs 1974:478.
[9] Boaz's insistence that Ruth gleans only in his field and stays close to his female reapers and his warning to his male servants against bothering Ruth reveal more than Boaz's kindness and grace to Ruth but also his concern for Ruth's physical safety in the field. See Schipper 2016:129.
[10] Philo comments that if a man rapes (βιασάμενος αἰσχύνῃ) a widow, the crime he commits is only considered as half of adultery, and hence he will not receive the death penalty (which is for adultery) but only need to pay the compensation or receive other penalties of similar effect.
[11] Niditch 1979:144-45.
[12] Galpaz-Feller 2008:234.
[13] Niditch 1979:145.
[14] Gur-Klein 2013:276. See also Davies 1981a:138-39; Weisberg 2009:26; Pitkänen 2018:172.

would be passed on to his brother/s or other male kin, in which circumstances 'a widow would be left with no source of support'.[15] According to Weisberg, widows with daughters only 'could not be certain of financial assistance' either, because 'assistance to a widow by her daughters might be constrained by their husbands'.[16] Therefore, in the patriarchal society of ancient Israel, the situation of a widow without an adult son could be very precarious; she could be left with no source of support at all. Although some biblical texts indicate the existence of the customs of bride-price (e.g., Exod 22.16-17; Deut 22.28-29; Gen 34.12) and dowry (e.g., Gen 24.59, 61; 29.24, 29; Josh 15.19; Judg 1.15), which might serve as a source of maintenance for a woman in her widowhood, the widow could be easily impoverished due to exploitation and oppression (e.g., Job 24.3; Isa 10.2) without the protection of a male kin. Moreover, as the majority of people lived at subsistence level in the ancient world, the bride-price and dowry would be modest and hence were unlikely to be sustainable for a widow's maintenance. Therefore, the lack of legal rights, social support, and economic provision for widows in ancient Israel often left them in dire poverty and utter vulnerability.

Philo also acknowledges the social-economic vulnerability of widows. He recognises strangers, orphans, and widows as 'the most helplessly in need' (τῶν ἐν ἐνδείαις ἀπορωτάτων; *Spec*. 1.308). He additionally states (*Spec*. 1.310) that

> ὀρφανῶν δὲ καὶ χηρῶν, ἐπειδὴ κηδεμόνας ἀφῇρηνται, οἱ μὲν γονεῖς, αἱ δὲ ἄνδρας, καταφυγὴ δ' οὐδεμία τοῖς οὕτως ἐρήμοις ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀπολείπεται· διὸ τῆς μεγίστης ἐλπίδος οὐκ ἀμοιροῦσι, τοῦ θεοῦ, διὰ τὴν ἵλεω φύσιν αὐτοῦ τὴν πρόνοιαν καὶ ἐπιμέλειαν μὴ ἀποστραφέντος τῶν οὕτως ἐρήμων.
>
> He (God) provides for[17] the orphans and widows because they have lost their protectors, in the first case parents, in the second husbands, and in this desolation no refuge remains that men can give; and therefore they are not denied the hope that is greatest of all, the hope in God, Who in the graciousness of His nature does not refuse the task of caring for and watching over them in this desolate condition.[18]

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[15] Weisberg 2004:410. If the man's brother took the widow as his wife through levirate marriage, the widow's situation would be different (see further below).
[16] Weisberg 2004:410.
[17] This phrase is supplied by the translator, as required by the sense.
[18] All the cited texts of Philo and their English translations are from LCL.

Philo further indicates that it is to the 'weak and lowly' (ἀσθενὲς δὲ καὶ ταπεινόν; *Spec*. 4.176) widows, orphans, and incomers that the supreme king should administer justice, because even God the ruler of the universe executes justice for them (*Spec*. 4.176). Philo then explains in more detail why God executes justice for them rather than for those with power and wealth (*Spec*. 4.178):

> τῷ μὲν ὅτι τοὺς συγγενεῖς, οὕς μόνους εἰκὸς ἔχειν συναγωνιστάς, ἐχθροὺς ἀσυμβάτους εἰργάσατο ἑαυτῷ... τῷ δ' ἐπειδὴ πατρὸς καὶ μητρὸς τῶν ἐκ φύσεως βοηθῶν καὶ ὑπερμάχων ἐστέρηται δυνάμεως τῆς μόνης εἰς συμμαχίαν ἀναγκαίας ἐρημωθείς· τῇ δ' ὅτι τὸν διαδεξάμενον ἄνδρα τὴν τῶν γονέων ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ προστασίαν ἀφῄρηται· γυναικὶ γὰρ ἀνὴρ εἰς κηδεμονίαν ὅπερ γονεῖς παρθένῳ.
>
> For the incomer,[19] because he has turned his kinsfolk, who in the ordinary course of things would be his sole confederates, into mortal enemies... For the orphan, because he has been bereft of his father and mother his natural helpers and champions, deserted by the sole force which was bound to take up his cause. For the widow because she has been deprived of her husband who took over from the parents the charge of guarding and watching over her, since for the purpose of giving protection the husband is to the wife what the parents are to the maiden.

Philo's explanation reveals that strangers, orphans, and widows in ancient Israel were defenceless and vulnerable because they had been deprived of protectors, providers, and networks of kin: in the case of strangers their kindred; for orphans, parents; for widows, husbands. He additionally adds that because they are deprived of closely related supporters and caretakers, the Scripture expresses special concern and thoughtfulness to widows and orphans and prohibits others from mistreating them (*QE* 2.3a). Moreover, in his comments on the law concerning vows made by women (*Spec*. 2.25; cf. Num 30.4-16), Philo suggests that widows should be slow to swear, because they 'have none to intervene on their behalf, neither husbands from whom they have been parted, nor fathers whom they left behind them

[19] Philo is following the LXX (cf. Deut 10.17-18) which talks here of a προσήλυτος. According to Colson (1939:119, note a), Philo 'assumes that he is a proselyte to Judaism', which means he has abandoned his own people's religion and belief, and hence turned them into enemies.

when they set out to find a new home in marriage',[20] and their lack of protectors would inevitably make their oaths beyond repeal.

The social-economic vulnerability of widows is also reflected in some narrative biblical texts. In the story of Naomi and Ruth, Naomi goes to Moab with her husband and two sons from their hometown Bethlehem because of famine (Ruth 1.1-2). But during their ten years in Moab, Naomi's husband and two sons die, so she returns to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth (1.3-19).[21] As a widow without anyone or anything to rely on for maintenance, Naomi laments (Ruth 1.20-21):

> Μὴ δὴ καλεῖτε με Νωεμιν, καλέσατέ με Πικράν,[22] ὅτι ἐπικράνθη ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ ἱκανὸς σφόδρα· ἐγὼ πλήρης ἐπορεύθην, καὶ κενὴν ἀπέστρεψέν με ὁ κύριος· καὶ ἵνα τί καλεῖτέ με Νωεμιν; καὶ κύριος ἐταπείνωσέν με, καὶ ὁ ἱκανὸς ἐκάκωσέν με.
>
> Call me no longer Noemin; call me Bitter, for the Sufficient One was greatly embittered against me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Noemin when the Lord has abased me and the Sufficient One has maltreated me?

The situation of Naomi and Ruth is truly miserable and destitute: as for Naomi, having been away for ten years and now returned as a widow with neither husband nor children, she becomes an outsider and a misfit in Bethlehem. As for Ruth, having left behind her native place, parents, and all connections of kin, she is now a stranger in an unknown land among an unfamiliar people. Her only chance of finding security is through remarriage since she is still young. As the text shows, however, her status as a widow and a gentile can make remarriage difficult for her (Ruth 4.5-6). The circumstances of poor and childless widows in ancient Israel were thus extremely miserable and helpless.

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[20] οὐ γὰρ ἔχουσι τοὺς παραιτητάς, οὔτε ἄνδρας ὧν διεζεύχθησαν οὔτε πατέρας ἀφ' ὧν μετανέστησαν, ὅτε τὴν πρὸς γάμον ἀποικίαν ἐστέλλοντο—, …

[21] Cf. Josephus (*Ant*. 5.320) who emphasises the emotional suffering of Naomi due to the loss of her husband and sons. For discussions on Josephus' retelling of Ruth (*Ant*. 5.318-37), see Levison 1991:31-44; Feldman 1991:45-52; Sterling 1998:104-30.

[22] Cf. Josephus (*Ant*. 5.323) who contrasts the meanings of the two names Ναάμις ('felicity') and Μαρὰν ('grief').

As some other narrative texts show, however, the situation of widows with young children is even more vulnerable. In the story of 3 Kingdoms 17.8-24, as a result of famine caused by drought, the widow whom Elijah meets has been so impoverished that she does not even have enough food for one last meal for herself and her son (3 Kgdms 17.12). Therefore, when Elijah asks her for a morsel of bread, she answers desperately:

> …Ζῇ κύριος ὁ θεός σου, εἰ ἔστιν μοι ἐγκρυφίας ἀλλ᾽ ἢ ὅσον δρὰξ ἀλεύρου ἐν τῇ ὑδρίᾳ καὶ ὀλίγον ἔλαιον ἐν τῷ καψάκῃ· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ συλλέγω δύο ξυλάρια καὶ εἰσελεύσομαι καὶ ποιήσω αὐτὸ ἐμαυτῇ καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις μου,[23] καὶ φαγόμεθα καὶ ἀποθανούμεθα.
>
> The Lord your God lives, if I have a cake, but there is only a handful of meal in the jar and a little oil in the jug, and behold, I am now gathering two sticks, and I shall go in and make it for myself and my children, and we shall eat and die.

The widow's words evidently reveal her desperation. What is even worse, as a mother she is witnessing her son starve but can do nothing. In another story (4 Kgdms 4.1-7), a widow, whose destitution leaves her with only a jar of oil (4.2), asks for help from Elisha because a creditor has come to take away her two sons as slaves (4.1).[24] Her sons are probably the only source of her future maintenance; if they were taken, she would have lost all life security.[25] Loewenberg recognises this widow's situation as 'a case of utter poverty', which 'was not an exceptional situation but a fate suffered by many widows at that time'.[26]

Although in ancient Israel if a widow had grown-up children, she could rely on them for maintenance, sometimes such maintenance could be taken away by others. In the account of 2 Kingdoms 14.4-7, two sons of a widow fight with each other in the field, and one kills the other (14.6). The whole family then rises up against the widow and demands that she gives up her other son for the life of his brother, even though this means destroying the heir of her husband (14.7). The widow complains to the king: 'thus they would quench my one

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[23] Although the LXX uses the plural τοῖς τέκνοις μου (for my children), the Hebrew uses the singular וְלִבְנִי (and for my son) which also fits the immediate context (1 Kgs 17.17) better.
[24] See Sweeney (2007:288-89) for an explanation of the widow's plight in the context.
[25] For the economic value of a child in the household, see Garroway 2018:269.
[26] Loewenberg 2001:148.

remaining ember, and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth' (14.7).[27] When the widow refers to her remaining son as her 'one remaining ember' (τὸν ἄνθρακά[28] μου τὸν καταλειφθέντα), it means he is now her only source of maintenance. As the heir, he would inherit his father's property and thus be able to support his widowed mother. But if the family kills the widow's remaining son – the heir – her husband's property would go to the other family members of her husband, in which case the widow would be left with no source of maintenance. Although the text states that it is Joab, king David's military commander, who instructs the woman to describe her situation in such terms before David, which might make us question the true marital status of the woman, the account described by the woman reflects the precarious circumstances of widows in ancient Israel.[29]

Based on the description in the Jewish literature, a widow is so defenceless and helpless that she can only release her distress and agony through tears and by crying out before God against those who oppress her (Sir 35.15). Becoming a widow (especially if childless) is considered the worst misfortune (cf. Isa 47.8-9; Jer 18.21; Lam 5.3), and being a widow means desolation and loneliness (cf. Isa 49.21; Bar 4.12, 16). Therefore, according to the Jewish texts, God pays special attention to the protection and provision of widows and other vulnerable people: he prohibits others from abusing widows (Exod 22.21-23), executes justice for them (Deut 10.18), upholds them (Ps 145.9), maintains their boundaries (Prov 15.25), listens to their complaints (Sir 35.14), and makes specific commandments for their support (e.g., Deut 14.28-29; 24.17, 19-21). What then are these commandments and what mechanisms are available for the support of widows according to the Jewish literature?

[27] καὶ σβέσουσιν τὸν ἄνθρακά μου τὸν καταλειφθέντα ὥστε μὴ θέσθαι τῷ ἀνδρί μου κατάλειμμα καὶ ὄνομα ἐπὶ προσώπου τῆς γῆς (2 Kgdms 14.7).
[28] Liddell-Scott 1940:141; BDAG 2000:80.
[29] The fact that king David believes what the woman says initially (cf. 2 Kgdms 14.8, 10) and gives orders concerning her indicates the possibility of the existence of such cases then.

3. The mechanisms for the support of widows

Levirate marriage

The Mosaic law, particularly Deuteronomy, offers several mechanisms that are beneficial to widows, of which the most favourable is levirate marriage, as described in Deuteronomy 25.5-6:

> Ἐὰν δὲ κατοικῶσιν ἀδελφοὶ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ ἀποθάνῃ εἷς ἐξ αὐτῶν, σπέρμα δὲ μὴ ᾖ αὐτῷ, οὐκ ἔσται ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ τεθνηκότος ἔξω ἀνδρὶ μὴ ἐγγίζοντι· ὁ ἀδελφὸς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς εἰσελεύσεται πρὸς αὐτὴν καὶ λήμψεται αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ γυναῖκα καὶ συνοικήσει αὐτῇ. καὶ ἔσται τὸ παιδίον, ὃ ἐὰν τέκῃ, κατασταθήσεται ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ τετελευτηκότος, καὶ οὐκ ἐξαλειφθήσεται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐξ Ισραηλ.
>
> Now if brothers reside together and one of them dies and there is no offspring to him, the wife of the deceased shall not be outside, for a man not close. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and shall take her for himself as wife and shall live with her, and it shall be that the child that she might bear shall be established from the name of the deceased, and his name shall not be blotted out from Israel.

According to this passage, levirate marriage refers to the marriage between a childless widow and her deceased husband's brother, i.e., if the deceased has no offspring (σπέρμα),[30] his brother is obliged to marry his widow[31] and produce an offspring for him to succeed to his name.[32] Therefore, the primary purpose of levirate marriage is 'to provide the deceased with an heir'[33] who will not only continue the lineage of the deceased but also inherit his property (cf. Deut 25.9).[34] However, the widow will also benefit from levirate marriage.[35] First, it reaffirms the widow's place in her husband's family, allowing her to continue to live there

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[30] The Greek term σπέρμα (literally 'seed') refers to a child or a descendant in general; it can refer to a son or a daughter. See further Liddell-Scott 1940:1626; BDAG 2000:937. Moreover, according to Gur-Klein (2013:276), its corresponding Hebrew term (בֵּן) implies offspring, therefore lacking בֵּן 'implies childlessness – being survived by neither daughter nor son'.

[31] There are exceptions, however, especially when the widow is a near kin to the deceased husband's brother, etc. (cf. Lev 18.6-18; m.Yebam. 1.1-2; 2.2; also 1.1n1). For a discussion of the contradiction between the incest laws in Leviticus (18.16; 20.21) and the levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25, see Weisberg 2009:30-31.

[32] For a more detailed discussion on this law, see *ABD* 4:567-68; Westbrook 1991:69-89; Weisberg 2009.

[33] Weisberg 2004:409. The heir is not necessarily a son; it can be a daughter. According to Numbers 27.8-11, if a man dies without a son, his daughter/s will inherit his possessions. This also matches the description of Deuteronomy 25.6 which does not emphasise a *son* but a *child* (be it male or female) of the levirate marriage to succeed to the name of the deceased.

[34] Seidler 2018:438-40.

[35] Davies 1981a:144.

and ‘be supported by the household’s property’.[36] As mentioned earlier, without any patriarchal protection – neither from husband nor from father – a childless widow is a misfit in the social structure of ancient Israel.[37] However, levirate marriage reintegrates the widow into her deceased husband’s family, which then provides new patriarchal protection for her. Second, levirate marriage also ensures a childless widow the possibility of children.[38] According to Niditch, regarding long-term security in the social structure of ancient Israel, it is more important for a woman to become a mother than a wife, because ‘if her husband dies, the woman must rely on her children for support; for they inherit the father’s property’.[39] Hence, as Gur-Klein states, ‘a levirate child secures the socio-materialistic status of his widowed mother’.[40] The above analysis shows that levirate marriage with a levirate child actually provides double security for the widow: a new husband who can provide immediate maintenance and protection, and a child who will inherit her deceased husband’s property and support her in her old age. If the widow bears other children for her second husband besides the levirate child, her support would be triply secured, because the other children would inherit the possessions of her second husband and support her together with the levirate child. Therefore, in the social structure of ancient Israel, levirate marriage appears to be the most beneficial mechanism for the support of widows, and if ideally put into practice, it can produce lifetime security for the widow.

However, some Jewish texts indicate that levirate marriage is not always practised among Israelites.[41] In fact, immediately after the regulation on the duty of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25.5-6, the text continues with the ritual for its refusal in 25.7-10. Based on the description of the ritual, if a man has no desire to marry his brother’s widow, he can refuse to

[36] Galpaz-Feller 2008:236; Weisberg 2009:26.
[37] Niditch 1979:145-46.
[38] Weisberg 2004:410; 2009:26.
[39] Niditch 1979:145.
[40] Gur-Klein 2013:276.
[41] Davies 1981b:257-68; Weisberg 2009:26-30.

do so but must undergo a humiliating ritual carried out by the widow (Deut 25.9-10).[42] Despite the humiliation, the man is at least freed from this duty. Scholars propose different reasons for the conflicting regulations concerning levirate marriage: Seidler appeals to the tension between a levir's obligation of building up his brother's house and his right to choose the woman he desires;[43] whereas Weisberg argues that 'what connects all of them is a sense of discomfort with levirate marriage, particularly on the part of men', possibly caused by 'concerns about paternity or the preservation of property'.[44] Whatever the reason, the fact that the institution of levirate marriage allows a man to be released from this obligation indicates that there were men who refused to marry their widowed sisters-in-law, which apparently directly threatened the social-economic security of the widow, for she had been deprived of a second chance of being a wife and a mother.[45]

In terms of the practice of levirate marriage, the most obvious example in the Jewish scripture is the story of Tamar in Genesis 38. Scholars propose different interpretations of this account due to its ambiguous position in the immediate literary context. For example, Clifford discusses it within the larger story of Jacob and view Judah's transformation as a paradigm which sheds light on the rest of his brothers.[46] Abasili understands this narrative as about 'the search for progeny and heir'.[47] While Menn analyses it within its canonical contexts,[48] some others discuss this story from a feminist perspective, interpreting it as a woman's quest for human dignity[49] and for her rights of childbearing and maintenance within her late husband's family.[50] Despite the various interpretations, this story discloses people's different reactions towards levirate marriage: Judah as the patriarch of his family initially

[42] For exceptions, see m. Yebam. 1-16.
[43] Seidler 2018:435-56.
[44] Weisberg 2004:403; 2009:27.
[45] See Weisberg (2009:1-22) for a discussion of levirate marriage in different cultures.
[46] Clifford 2004:519-32.
[47] Abasili 2011:276-88.
[48] Menn 1997:55-64.
[49] Claassens 2012:659-74.
[50] Coats 1972:461-66; Niditch 1979:143-49.

observed the obligation of levirate marriage and gave Tamar – the widow of his first son Er – to his second son Onan as wife, but after the death of Onan, he refused to give Tamar to his third son Shelah – his only remaining offspring – out of fear that Shelah might also die childless.[51] As for Onan, although he married Tamar, he refused to produce offspring for his brother out of paternity concern,[52] which caused his own death. As for Tamar, although Judah refused to give her to Shelah as wife, she managed to achieve her levirate rights – conception of a child which would secure not only her place in her father's-in-law house but also her maintenance in old age. Although she used an unconventional and dangerous way to achieve her goal, risking an accusation of harlotry and even her life, she successfully conceived, and 'through her children, born of Judah, Tamar is made a full member of the patriarchal clan which she had first joined through her marriage to Er'.[53] And the acceptance of her children from Judah as levirate children may suggest that 'in lieu of a brother, another male relative might serve as the surrogate for the deceased, or at least that a levirate union with a kinsman other than a brother is preferable to no levirate union'.[54] This leads us to the story of Ruth and Boaz.[55]

The social-economic vulnerability of Naomi and Ruth as childless widows has been discussed. And as mentioned earlier, the only (and best) way for Ruth to find security is to remarry, hence the narrative in Ruth 4.[56] In this chapter Elimelech's next-of-kin initially agrees to buy/redeem Elimelech's land, but later gives up his right of redemption (ἀγχιστεία;

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[51] Weisberg 2009:28.
[52] Weisberg 2009:28-29.
[53] Niditch 1979:148. Weisberg (2009:30) additionally suggests that the assignment of Tamar's sons to Judah rather than to Er might imply that levirate marriage is primarily meant to provide offspring to the widow instead of to the deceased husband. See also Davies 1981a:138-44.
[54] Weisberg 2004:415; 2009:29. He additionally indicates, however, that 'Judah's role as surrogate for his deceased son Er is hardly portrayed by Genesis 38 as "normative"' (cf. Gen 38.15, 26; Lev 18.15; m.Yebam. 1.1).
[55] For a discussion of the various reading strategies applied to the Book of Ruth, see Greenstein 1999:211-31. See also Fewell and Gunn (1999:233-39) who interpret this text from a literary critical and feminist approach.
[56] According to Weisberg (2009:31), 'Ruth's marriage is seen as a solution to two problems, a dead man's lack of offspring and the need to provide support for two widows'.

'duty of redeeming, right or responsibility of next of kin')[57] to Boaz out of inheritance concern when Boaz tells him that he also needs to marry Ruth in order to maintain the name of the deceased on his inheritance (Ruth 4.3-6).[58] According to Leviticus 25.25, it is the duty of the next-of-kin to redeem the property of a kin sold in difficult times, but he is not required to marry his kin's widow, which is the obligation of a brother via levirate marriage. According to Weisberg, however, 'even if the proposed union between the unnamed kinsman and Ruth is not technically levirate marriage, the concerns raised by the kinsman in Ruth 4 could certainly apply to a levirate marriage as well'.[59] Therefore, the possible explanation of Ruth 4 and the marriage between Ruth and Boaz is that it is the combination of two customs – land redemption and levirate marriage.[60] Through the marriage between Ruth and Boaz, Naomi not only redeems the land of her husband, perpetuates his family line, restores the family's asset rights, and finds Ruth a new home, but she also secures her own maintenance for old age (Ruth 4.14-17).

Food provision

However, levirate marriage was not available to every widow in ancient Israel. As for those who had to remain in widowhood, the most important requirement for them was food provision. And in relation to this purpose there were mainly three legal injunctions: the regulations on harvest gleanings (Deut 24.19-22; cf. Lev 19.9-10; 23.22), on tithes (Deut 14.28-29; 26.12-13), and on the sabbatical year (Exod 23.10-11; cf. Lev 25.1-7).[61] Regarding

[57] Lust et al. 2003: 'ἀγχιστεία, etc.'. For a discussion on the redemption of land in Ruth, see Westbrook 1991:63-68. Cf. Josephus (*Ant*. 5.332-37) who interprets Deuteronomy 25.5-10 and its counterpart in Ruth 'as laws of inheritance rather than redemption'; see Levison 1991:43-44.
[58] Campbell 1975:147; Weisberg 2009:32. Campbell (159) points out that the consequences are great for the near kin to bear the burdens of caring for two widows now and the likely drain on his inheritance should Ruth also carry offspring, whereas Weisberg (32-33) thinks the stories of Tamar and Ruth suggest that such fears are unnecessary and groundless.
[59] Weisberg 2004:418; 2009:31.
[60] Gur-Klein 2013:284-92; Schipper 2016:174. Weisberg (2009:31), however, understands it as a custom of 'widow-inheritance', through which 'a man's heir inherits his widow together with his property'.
[61] For the development of these mechanisms over time, see Loewenberg 2001:91-107.

the regulations on harvest gleanings, Deuteronomy 24.19-21 states that when the Israelites harvest their grains, olives, and grapes, they should not glean what is left, but leave them for widows, orphans, and strangers. Although Leviticus 19.9-10 and 23.22 do not mention widows specifically but the poor in general, widows are apparently included among the poor. Moreover, the regulations concerning harvest gleanings in Leviticus are stricter than those in Deuteronomy. In Leviticus, the Israelites are not only forbidden from gleaning what is left in their fields and vineyards but are also commanded to deliberately leave the corners of their fields unharvested for the poor. Bennett argues that the legal injunctions on gleanings in Deuteronomy 'invite people to discredit and use negative terms' such as 'nonproducers' and even 'parasites and a scavenger class' to describe 'this subgroup of socially weak individuals', which results in the stigmatisation and humiliation of widows, orphans, and strangers.[62] However, these legal injunctions should be understood in the context of the Israelites' social and religious experience, as indicated in Deuteronomy 24.22. This emphasis on the Israelites' past experience as slaves in Egypt reminds them again that it was Yahweh their God who brought them out of slavery, made a covenant with them, and led them to the promised land. Therefore, as McConville suggests, 'the underlying idea of this law is the same as at 23.24-25 [25-26], namely that all members of the covenant society have rights, in principle, to a share in the blessings of the land, which is ultimately Yahweh's gift to the people as a whole'.[63] Moreover, God chose them not because they were strong and powerful but because they were weak and vulnerable (cf. Deut 7.7). And he helped them when they were most helpless. Hence, they are now commanded to be merciful and gracious to the weak and vulnerable, particularly widows, orphans, and strangers, as demonstrated by Boaz in his kindness and generosity to Ruth when she gleans in his fields (Ruth 2.2-23). Therefore, this

[62] Bennett 2002:123-24.
[63] McConville 2002:364. See also Loewenberg 2001:94. Houston (2006:116) additionally suggests that the law on harvest gleaning is a 'symbolic abandonment of absolute claim on the produce' rather than 'a seriously intended means of support for the landless'. See further below on the enforcement of the laws.

law serves to generate among the Israelites both gratitude to God for his blessings and, in view of their own past experience of lowliness and humiliation, empathy for the socially and economically deprived, so as to share benevolently their abundance with the needy.

Another mechanism that concerns food provision for widows and the poor is the regulation concerning tithes, as described in Deuteronomy 14.28-29:

> μετὰ τρία ἔτη ἐξοίσεις πᾶν τὸ ἐπιδέκατον τῶν γενημάτων σου· ἐν τῷ ἐνιαυτῷ ἐκείνῳ θήσεις αὐτὸ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσίν σου, καὶ ἐλεύσεται ὁ Λευίτης, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῷ μερὶς οὐδὲ κλῆρος μετὰ σοῦ, καὶ ὁ προσήλυτος καὶ ὁ ὀρφανὸς καὶ ἡ χήρα ἡ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσίν σου καὶ φάγονται καὶ ἐμπλησθήσονται, ἵνα εὐλογήσῃ σε κύριος ὁ θεός σου ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔργοις, οἷς ἐὰν ποιῇς.
>
> After three years you shall bring out every tithe of your yield; in that year, you shall store it within your cities, and the Leuite shall come, because he has no part or allotment with you, and the guest and the orphan and the widow in your cities, and they shall eat and shall be filled so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the works whatever you may do.

This account displays two main differences about the triennial collection and distribution of the Israelites' annual tithes compared with the other two years – the location and the participants. In the first two years, the annual tithes are brought to the central sanctuary (Deut 14.23), whereas in the third year, the tithes are collected and stored within the local towns of the Israelites (14.28).[64] Moreover, in the first two years, the offerers and their households (and probably the cultic officials as well) consume the tithes at the official cultic place (14.23);[65] whereas in the third year, the tithes are distributed to the Levites, resident aliens, orphans, and widows for their consumption.[66] This triennial tithe is emphasised again in Deuteronomy 26.12-13:

> Ἐὰν δὲ συντελέσῃς ἀποδεκατῶσαι πᾶν τὸ ἐπιδέκατον τῶν γενημάτων τῆς γῆς σου ἐν τῷ ἔτει τῷ τρίτῳ, τὸ δεύτερον ἐπιδέκατον δώσεις τῷ Λευίτῃ καὶ τῷ προσηλύτῳ καὶ τῷ ὀρφανῷ καὶ τῇ χήρᾳ, καὶ φάγονται ἐν ταῖς πόλεσίν σου καὶ ἐμπλησθήσονται. καὶ ἐρεῖς ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου Ἐξεκάθαρα τὰ ἅγια ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας μου καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτὰ τῷ Λευίτῃ καὶ τῷ προσηλύτῳ καὶ τῷ ὀρφανῷ καὶ τῇ χήρᾳ κατὰ πάσας τὰς ἐντολάς, ἃς ἐνετείλω μοι· ...

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[64] Brueggemann 2001:162.
[65] Bennett (2002:82) points out that it is unlikely that the offerers consumed all the tithes since consequently the tithes became a source of material support for the cultic ministrants. See also Lundbom 2013:484.
[66] Brueggemann 2001:162-63.

> Now if you finish paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, you shall give the second tithe to the Leuite and the guest and the orphan and the widow, and they shall eat within your cities and be filled. And you shall say before the Lord your God: 'I have cleansed the sacred portions from my house, and I gave them to the Leuite and the guest and the orphan and the widow, in accordance with all the commandments that you commanded me; …

In the Hebrew text of the Bible the third year is described as 'the year of the tithe' (שְׁנַת הַמַּעֲשֵׂר; Deut 26.12),[67] whereas in the LXX the Israelites are commanded to give a second tithe (τὸ δεύτερον ἐπιδέκατον δώσεις; 'you shall give the second tithe'; cf. Tob 1.7-8 S) in the third year, which is for the consumption by the Levites and the needy. Josephus interprets it in such a way that there is even a third tithe in addition to another two tithes (one for the Levites [*Ant*. 4.68] and the other the banquets [*Ant*. 4.205]) every third year for the support of widows and orphans (*Ant*. 4.240; cf. Tob 1.6-8 BA).[68] Despite the discrepancy mentioned above, one thing in common is that the Deuteronomic law grants widows (along with the Levites, resident aliens, and orphans) the annual tithe triennially, and as Galpaz-Feller observes, 'these tithes, transferred from the sanctified sphere as it appears in the priestly literature (Lev 27.30-33) or as belonging to the Levites (Num 18.21-32) to the social sphere, enhance the emphasis on sharing with the needy'.[69] Bennett is very critical about this periodic assistance to widows (as well as strangers and orphans), raising questions about their maintenance beyond the period of food distribution, and thus argues that the infrequent distribution of food actually 'contributed to a critical level of deprivation and hardship for these vulnerable, socially weak individuals'.[70] Bennett's argument is flawed, however. First, it is unlikely that the tithes are consumed all at once but, as Lundbom indicates, are probably

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[67] Christensen 2002:641.
[68] Thackeray and Marcus (1930:117, note d) comment that Josephus is not referring to an *additional* tithe in the third year, but the Greek text seems to imply otherwise, as Feldman (2000:421n759) also agrees: 'Josephus speaks here of a third tithe'. In addition, Josephus mentions elsewhere (*Ant*. 4.227) about sharing the fruits of the fourth year with widows and orphans, along with the tithe of other products. According to Thackeray and Marcus (1930: 111, note d), Josephus has added the sharing of the fourth-year fruits with widows and orphans to the traditional practice described in Leviticus 19.24. See also Feldman 2000: 417n723.
[69] Galpaz-Feller 2008:238. See also Brueggemann 2001:163, 247.
[70] Bennett 2002:120.

'placed in storage facilities and doled out as needed'.[71] Second, the triennial tithe is not the only assistance to widows and the needy; there are other mechanisms in place for their support. Third, there is no evidence that the distribution of food, however infrequent, has contributed to the hardship of the poor. On the contrary, their situation might be worse without these aids, for as discussed earlier, their destitution and neglect by others necessitate legislation to support and protect them.[72]

A third mechanism that stipulates food provision for widows and other needy people is the law concerning the sabbatical year, as described in Exodus 23.10-11:

> Ἓξ ἔτη σπερεῖς τὴν γῆν σου καὶ συνάξεις τὰ γενήματα αὐτῆς· τῷ δὲ ἑβδόμῳ ἄφεσιν ποιήσεις καὶ ἀνήσεις αὐτήν, καὶ ἔδονται οἱ πτωχοὶ τοῦ ἔθνους σου, τὰ δὲ ὑπολειπόμενα ἔδεται τὰ ἄγρια θηρία. οὕτως ποιήσεις τὸν ἀμπελῶνά σου καὶ τὸν ἐλαιῶνά σου.
>
> For six years you shall sow your land and gather its produce. But in the seventh year you shall make it rest and leave it, and the poor of your nation shall eat, and that which is left over the wild animals shall eat. So shall you do with your vineyard and your olive grove.

The above text displays two main purposes of the regulations on the sabbatical year: first, to let the land rest; second, to allow the poor (and even the wild animals) to eat from the land, who otherwise would never have such opportunity. And the same should be done with the vineyards and the olive orchards of Israel.[73] Although the text mentions the poor in general, widows are obviously included since they were representative of the poor in antiquity.[74] Leviticus 25.1-7 describes similar regulations regarding the sabbatical year. Although here the law emphasises the rest of the land and does not directly mention the material support for the poor, it is implied, as Milgrom indicates, in the regulations on gleanings in 19.9-10 and

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[71] Lundbom 2013:486.
[72] Some scholars (e.g., Sneed 1999; Knight 2000; Bennett 2002; Houston 2006:174-78) interpret the Deuteronomic law from a political-economic perspective and argue that these legal injunctions actually serve the interests of the elitist class who were responsible for their formulation. This chapter, however, adopts a social-economic approach and discusses the support of widows primarily through literary analysis.
[73] Durham 1987:331-32.
[74] Childs (1974:482) observes that the social motivation is at the fore in Exodus.

23.22 which 'apply to the Sabbatical as well as all other years'.[75] And, based on the command that wild animals should be allowed to eat from the land, it can be additionally assumed: if even the wild animals could benefit from the land during its sabbath, more so should the poor.[76] In his interpretation of the law regarding the sabbatical year, Philo indicates that apart from other reasons/purposes (*Spec*. 2.86-97) the legislator moved further to forbid the landowners from closing up their fields so that the poor could 'at any rate enjoy as their own what appeared to belong to others' (ὡς ἰδίων ἀπολαύειν τότε γοῦν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων; *Spec*. 2.106) and the rich might also learn to 'give liberally and share what they have with others' (μεταδιδόναι καὶ κοινωνεῖν ὧν ἔχουσι; *Spec*. 2.107). Philo particularly highlights (*Spec*. 2.108):

> χῆραι καὶ ὀρφανοὶ παῖδες καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι τῶν ἠμελημένων καὶ ἀφανῶν ἕνεκα τοῦ μὴ περιουσιάζειν τότε περιουσιάζουσι ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ δωρεαῖς ἐξαπιναίως πεπλουτηκότες, ὃς αὐτοὺς πρὸς κοινωνίαν ἐκάλεσε τῶν κτητόρων ἐν τῷ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἑβδόμης ἀριθμῷ·
>
> Widows and orphans and all others who are neglected and ignored because they have no surplus of income have at this time such a surplus and find themselves suddenly affluent through the gifts of God, Who invites them to share with the owners under the sanction of the holy number seven.

Philo might have exaggerated in his description about the material support received by widows and other needy people, for the description is rather general, and it is hard to know exactly how long the gathered food could last for their maintenance. In addition, based on the account of Leviticus 25.1-7, the landowners and their households are also allowed to eat from the land during the sabbatical year. Nevertheless, if the regulations concerning the sabbatical year were truly and faithfully carried out, the poor, including widows, would have surely benefited abundantly from the land during that year.[77]

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[75] Milgrom 2004:312-13.

[76] Hartley (1992:433-34) rightly says landowners are to freely share their produce with everyone, so that no one is excluded.

[77] Deuteronomy 15.1-18 also contains regulations on the sabbatical year, but they concern totally different matters, i.e., the remission of debts, and the manumission of slaves. Although the regulations here are not specifically for the support of widows, widows could apparently benefit from these regulations, since there are

Participation in festivals

The laws for the support of widows and the poor concern not only their material needs but also their participation in community events, particularly celebrations of festivals. In Deuteronomy 16.9-12 and 13-15, two festivals are mentioned – the festival of weeks and that of booths. In the celebration of both festivals, the statutes (Deut 16.11) command:

> καὶ εὐφρανθήσῃ ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου, σὺ καὶ ὁ υἱός σου καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ σου, ὁ παῖς σου καὶ ἡ παιδίσκη σου καὶ ὁ Λευίτης ὁ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσίν σου καὶ ὁ προσήλυτος καὶ ὁ ὀρφανὸς καὶ ἡ χήρα ἡ ἐν ὑμῖν …
>
> And you shall be joyful before the Lord your God – you and your son and your daughter, your male slave and your female slave and the Leuite who is in your cities, as well as the guest and the orphan and the widow who is among you …[78]

Both texts emphasise that the whole community of the Israelites – not only themselves, their households, and their slaves, but also the deprived individuals of society, such as the strangers, orphans, and widows among them – should be included in their celebration of the festivals (Deut 16.11, 14). The stress on the inclusivity and equality of the socially deprived people with other members of the Israelite community[79] is explained in Deuteronomy 16.12: they were once slaves in Egypt. And this reminder implies at least two points: first, each of them was once 'a member of the weakest, poorest, most downtrodden segment of society',[80] hence they should not disdain the socially low and weak members among them, i.e., the widows, orphans, and strangers. Second, God has been merciful to them and brought them out of Egypt when they were most desperate and miserable, thus they as God's people should also be merciful to others, especially the socially and economically deprived members in their community.[81] Therefore, the statutes on the celebration of festivals in ancient Israel indicate

biblical texts mentioning the widow's ox being taken as a pledge (Job 24.3) and her children as slaves because of debts (4 Kgdms 4.1). For a case study of Deuteronomy 15 on social justice, see Hamilton 1992.

[78] Since Deuteronomy 16.14 is simply a repetition of 16.11 (although not every word), only one of them is quoted here.

[79] McConville 2002:275-76; Brueggemann 2001:175; Gowan 1987:346.

[80] Unterman 2017:76.

[81] Bruggemann (2001:175) highlights the link to '*the Exodus memory*' (his italics).

that widows should be treated as full members of the Israelite community, just as Houston states, 'Deuteronomy's appeals are not simply appeals to individual generosity. When they are read in context we see that they are attempts to re-create a sense of community'.[82]

Loans and pledges

In addition to the above mechanisms, there are regulations concerning loans and pledges which are also beneficial to widows.[83] Deuteronomy 24.17 forbids the Israelites from taking a widow's garment in pledge. In light of Deuteronomy 24.10-13, this command reflects 'the law's greater sensitivity to the widow's needs and dignity'.[84] First, it is already 'humiliating enough to have to borrow',[85] as Gowan indicates, hence the law forbids the creditor from going into the debtor's house to take the pledge; he should wait outside while the debtor brings the pledge out to him (Deut 24.10-11), so that the debtor's dignity may not be further eroded. Second, if the debtor is poor and has nothing else but a garment to give as a pledge, the creditor is ordered to return it to the debtor by sunset,[86] because the debtor may need it for sleep in the night (Deut 24.12-13; cf. Exod 22.25-26). According to Galpaz-Feller, these commands reflect 'a humanitarian approach' and forbid 'the taking of vital objects as a pledge from the oppressed of society, including the widow'.[87] Bennett argues that while this law seems to consider a widow's dilemma, 'it also provides a basis for discriminating against her', because it encourages her potential creditors either to withhold items she needs to borrow or 'to impose other strategies for the collection of debts from her, e.g., the usage of her children as collateral for loans'.[88] However, if viewed in its literary context, the ethos of

[82] Houston 2020:32; also 2006:188.
[83] For the changes of these regulations over time, see Loewenberg 2001:110-14.
[84] Unterman 2017:73. See also Brueggemann (2001:239) who observes that the restraint on the creditor is further advanced, to ensure there is no collateral for the poor.
[85] Gowan 1987:352.
[86] Childs (1974:479) indicates that 'by forcing a creditor to restore a poor man's garment every night, it erected a hindrance to the practice by the fact of sheer inconvenience'.
[87] Galpaz-Feller 2008:239.
[88] Bennett 2002:122.

this law is to protect the need and dignity of the widow rather than to generate discrimination against her. First, in light of Deuteronomy 15.7-11which also concerns regulations on loans, the Israelites are forbidden from being hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward their needy neighbours, but are ordered to willingly and generously lend to them.[89] Although these regulations in Deuteronomy are mentioned in the context of the sabbatical year, its principle should be applied to all the social laws. Second, if, as Galpaz-Feller suggests, the garment in Deuteronomy 24.12-13 and 24.17 represents one of the 'vital objects' of the poor and the widow which are forbidden from being taken as pledges, the creditor is not supposed to take from the widow anything vital to her, let alone her children. Therefore, although people may break or even abuse the law, that should not nullify its humanitarian ethos towards the poor.

4. The enforcement and effect of the mechanisms

The social laws discussed above do not simply command people to do good, but are reinforced through moral and religious teachings. In terms of moral reinforcement, the most frequently mentioned is the Israelites' own experience as slaves in Egypt (Exod 22.20; Deut 16.12; 24.18, 22). The emphasis on Israel's past experience has several implications. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, it generates empathy among the Israelites towards socially deprived people, particularly strangers, widows, and orphans, because they were once 'in a similar inferior social situation' and had 'similar precarious experience'.[90] They know the heart of such people, for they were like them before (cf. Exod 23.9). Therefore, secondly, if an Israelite afflicts the socially vulnerable, it 'would call into question his very self-identity as a Hebrew whose ancestors arose from a similar marginal status'.[91] And thirdly, since they were oppressed in Egypt and know the suffering, if they also oppress others, 'they would be no

[89] See Brueggemann (2001:165-66) for a concise yet poignant treatment of this passage as a reference to 'anyone in need'; and also Christensen 2001:313-14.
[90] Unterman 2017:61.
[91] Sneed 1999:502.

better than their arch-enemies the Egyptians'.[92] Last but not least, God brought them out of Egypt with mercy, and with grace brought them to a land 'flowing with milk and honey' (Exod 3.8), thus they should also be merciful and gracious to the vulnerable and share God's blessings with the poor and needy. Another moral teaching appeals to the concepts of honour and shame in ancient society.[93] In the biblical texts, especially the Wisdom literature, the wicked are often associated with oppression against the vulnerable (e.g., Ps 93.6),[94] whereas the righteous are described as those who love and help the poor (Pss 36.21; 40.2; Prov 14.31).[95] And the wicked are often condemned because of their evil deeds, whereas the righteous are blessed by all for their kindness to the needy (e.g., Prov 14.21, 32).[96] It is apparent that such strong moral judgement is to shame those who wrong the poor and meanwhile to encourage people to do good to the needy.

In terms of religious reinforcement, these laws appeal to the authority, justice, and benevolence of Yahweh the God of Israel. The Israelites are commanded to obey the laws, because the ultimate authority of the laws lies in the authority of their God, as indicated repeatedly in the phrase: ἐγώ εἰμι κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ('I am the Lord your God'; Lev 18.2, 5; 19.10, 34, 37).[97] This repeated emphasis at the end of each law indicates that these laws have a divine origin and authority, given by the Lord their God, whose holy character obligates the Israelites to observe them.[98] Moreover, the justice of God is stressed for the reinforcement of the law. Deuteronomy 10.17-18 states that the God of Israel is a just God who takes no bribe, executes justice for widows and orphans, and loves and provides for strangers.[99] The psalmist

[92] Sneed 1999:502.
[93] Sneed 1999:503.
[94] See Tate 1990:491.
[95] See Craigie 1983:298, 320; Fox 2009:584-85.
[96] Murphy 1998:106-07; Fox 2009:581, 585-86.
[97] See Hartley (1992:291-93) for a detailed treatment of the phrase.
[98] Hartley 1992:291.
[99] Brueggemann (2001:130) thus states that YHWH is a God 'concretely and effectively involved in the affairs of the earth as advocate and protector of the vulnerable', for he 'cares about the specificities of justice and victims of injustice'.

also proclaims that the Lord watches over strangers, upholds widows and orphans, but destroys the wicked (Ps 145.9; cf. Prov 15.25). Therefore, the Israelites should not oppress the poor and vulnerable but should do justice to them, for whoever oppresses the poor will be punished by God (Deut 24.15; 27.19; Mal 3.5). Furthermore, the legislator appeals to God's compassion towards the poor and the oppressed for the reinforcement of the law, as Exodus 22.26 indicates: if a poor man cries out to the Lord, he will listen, for he is compassionate.[100] Isaiah 41.17 additionally declares in the divine first person that when the poor and needy are dying of thirst but cannot find water, the Lord will answer them and will not forsake them.[101] Sirach 35.14 further states that the God of Israel will never ignore the supplications of widows and orphans. Therefore, as God is compassionate towards the poor and needy and benevolent to them, the Israelites too are expected to care for them. And for those who do good to the poor, they are promised God's blessings (Deut 14.29; 24.13; Prov 19.17; 22.9; Sir 4.10).[102]

The moral and religious reinforcements discussed above are far from sufficient for the enforcement of these mechanisms, however. As Knight observes, 'these laws of protection have no teeth, no provisions for enforcement and no remedies for violations – only moral appeals with the promise of divine blessing or punishment'.[103] Gowan additionally points out that the approach to these laws is 'individualistic and addressed to the righteous', and that 'if one cares nothing about righteousness, no coercions are provided'.[104] These flaws mean that people can easily break these laws without facing any legal consequences, and the Prophetic literature indicates that the Israelites have indeed ignored these mechanisms. For example, Isaiah criticises the rulers of Jerusalem for their failure to execute justice for widows and

[100] Propp 2006:261-62.
[101] Watts (2005:642) compares God's provision for the poor and needy to that for Israel.
[102] Fox 2009:656, 699-700.
[103] Knight 2000:111. See also Houston 2006:169; Sneed 1999:504; Gowan 1987:346.
[104] Gowan 1987:352.

orphans (Isa 1.23), and the legislators for making iniquitous decrees and oppressive statutes against the poor and the needy (Isa 10.1-2). Jeremiah similarly attacks the powerful and wealthy Israelites for their wicked deeds and their failure to defend the rights of widows and orphans (Jer 5.28).[105] Ezekiel again condemns the officials of Israel because they have afflicted the resident aliens, wronged widows and orphans, and devoured human lives (Ezek 22.6-7, 25). He additionally criticises the people of the land for their oppression against the poor and needy and their extortion from the resident aliens (Ezek 22.29).[106] According to Zechariah, it is the evil deeds of the Israelites and their oppression against widows, orphans, strangers, and the needy that have caused their exile to other nations (Zech 7.8-14). Moreover, the fact that the prophets have to call for repentance and exhort the Israelites to do good and justice to widows and the poor (Isa 1.17; Jer 7.5-7; 22.3) indicates that the Israelites have not been observing these laws, and hence widows are actually not guaranteed support from these mechanisms. They need additional support from outside the mechanisms.

5. The support of widows outside the mechanisms

Family support

Among all types of support outside the mechanisms, the most important is family support. Based on the description of relevant Jewish texts, widows can obtain family support in three ways. First, they can remarry, especially young childless widows. For example, in 1 Kingdoms 25.40-42, after the death of her husband Nabal, Abigail became the wife of David. And in 2 Kingdoms 12.8, after the death of king Saul, his wives were similarly (re)married to David.[107] Moreover, after the death of Uriah, his wife Bathsheba also became the wife of

[105] For a study on Jeremiah and the poor in his time, see Domeris 2007:45-58.
[106] See Mein (2001:95-96) on social justice in Ezekiel 22.
[107] Gur-Klein (2013:274-75) defines the marriage between David and the widows of Nabal and king Saul as 'marriage by succession' (i.e., a man – not necessarily a kinsman – succeeds to the position of the deceased and

David. Different from the cases of Abigail and the wives of king Saul, Bathsheba's widowhood was caused by David, because David murdered her husband Uriah.[108] Nevertheless, Bathsheba's remarriage to David not only secures her maintenance but also grants her prominent status as the mother of king Solomon (3 Kgdms 1.28-30). Obviously, these are special cases due to the preeminent position of David as king of the Israelites. Nevertheless, considering the patriarchal structure of the society in ancient Israel, if a widow could remarry, that would not only secure her provision but also offer her the possibility of offspring – the most reliable source of support in her old age.

If a widow is childless and cannot remarry, she may return to her natal home and be supported there. For example, in the story of Tamar, while waiting for Shelah to grow up and take her as wife, Tamar returned to her father's house and remained a widow there (Gen 38.11). Similarly, in the Book of Ruth, Naomi asks her two daughters-in-law to return to their natal families (Ruth 1.8; although Ruth insists on following Naomi; 1.14). And in the Book of Tobit, Sarah, who was widowed seven times, also lives with her parents after the death of each of her former husbands (cf. Tobit 3.7-8) until she marries Tobias son of Tobit. In addition, the Holiness Code allows a priest's widowed or divorced but childless daughter to return to her father's house and be provided for there (Lev 22.13). According to Galpaz-Feller, 'the fact that she is childless is important, because if she had small children, they would belong to their late father's household, and thus there would be no apparent reason for the widow's parents to agree to support them'.[109] Therefore, if a widow had small children, usually she would not return to her natal home but have to raise her children herself (cf. 3 Kgdms 17.12; 4 Kgdms 4.7). Moreover, according to Josephus, Glaphyra 'returned home and

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claims both his widow and property), which not only propels David to power and position but also ensures the widows with provision and status.

[108] Bailey (1990:83-123), however, views the marriage between David and Bathsheba as a political deal (rather than merely the result of lust), which then should be viewed in the same light as David's marriage to Abigail, Maacah (daughter of king Talmai of Geshur; 2 Kgdms 3.3), and the widows of king Saul.

[109] Galpaz-Feller 2008:237.

lived in widowhood with her father' (ἐπανελθοῦσαν αὐτὴν καὶ χηρεύουσαν παρὰ τῷ πατρί)[110] after the death of her second husband Juba king of Libya (*J.W.* 2.114-15; *Ant.* 17.350).[111] According to Thackeray, after the death of Glaphyra's first husband Alexander son of king Herod, 'Herod sent her back to her father with her dowry but without her children'.[112] This indicates that Glaphyra also returned to her father's house after she was first widowed. Although she had small children from her first husband, she did not bring them with her to her father's house but returned home alone. Therefore, it seems common for a widow to return to her natal home after the death of her husband, especially if she is childless.

If a widow has grown-up children, especially sons, she can receive support from them, as reflected in 2 Kingdoms 14.7 where the widow refers to her sons as her ember (τὸν ἄνθρακά μου). Moreover, according to 3 Kingdoms 7.1-2 (1 Kgs 7.13-14), the mother of Hiram is a widow who is presumably living with or supported by her son Hiram – an artisan in bronze. The text discloses that Hiram is invited by king Solomon for work because of his skill, intelligence, and knowledge in working bronze, which implies not only status and wealth for Hiram but also assurance of maintenance for his widowed mother. Similarly, it is stated in 3 Kingdoms 11.26 that the mother of Jeroboam is also a widow who apparently receives support from her son Jeroboam – an important servant of king Solomon. Based on the description of the text, Jeroboam later becomes the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel (3 Kgdms 12.20), and hence his widowed mother is also promoted to the honourable position of a king's mother, which evidently resolves all her concerns about provision and protection.

[110] All the cited works of Josephus and their English translations are from LCL.
[111] According to Thackeray (1927:366, note b) and Marcus (1963:329, note a), Josephus' statement about Juba's death is erroneous, because there is evidence indicating that Juba lived until 23 CE, therefore, he probably divorced Glaphyra.
[112] Thackeray 1927:365, note f.

Support from non-kin individuals

If a widow is totally deprived of family support, she will have to seek help from others. A typical case of this is Elisha's help of a widow in 4 Kingdoms 4.1-7. The text narrates that the widow cries out to Elisha for help because a creditor has come to take her two children away as slaves (4 Kgdms 4.1). This indicates that the widow is living alone with her two small children and is in desperate need of help. Since the widow has nothing else except a jar of oil, Elisha helps her with a miracle: he instructs her to borrow as many empty vessels as possible and fills them all with oil (4.2-6). He then tells the widow to sell the oil, pay her debts, and live on the rest with her children (4.7). Similar to Elisha's story is Elijah's help of another widow in 3 Kingdoms 17.8-24.[113] Although it is Elijah who first seeks help from the widow (3 Kgdms 17.10-11), the widow's initial help of Elijah eventually saves herself and her son.[114] As mentioned earlier, when Elijah asks for some bread from her, she is actually preparing their last meal, after which she and her son would wait for death due to the lack of food (17.12). But Elijah helps her with a miracle too: the jar of meal and the jug of oil in her house are never emptied until the end of the drought (17.14-16). In fact, Elijah saves her son a second time: after Elijah's miraculous provision of food to the widow and her household, one day her son becomes severely ill and has no breath (17.17), but Elijah revives the child and returns him to the widow (17.19-23).[115]

If Elijah and Elisha as God's prophets have helped the widows through miracles, Job as a righteous and wealthy man has supported widows through his wealth and influence. Job proclaims in 29.12-13 that he delivered the poor from their oppressors and helped orphans

[113] For comparative studies on this passage with other biblical texts, see Siebert-Hommes 2000:98-114; Kalmanofsky 2011:55-74; Steenkamp 2004:646-58; Steenkamp 2005:811-25; Wyatt 2012:435-58.
[114] For a theological interpretation of this, see van der Walt 2021:220-31.
[115] Sweeney (2007:213-16) suggests the narrative serves to demonstrate YHWH's power to provide and heal and Elijah's role as God's authoritative spokesman.

who had no helper, and that he was blessed by both the wretched and widows.[116] He continues in 31.16-23 that he had provided for the poor whatever they needed, reared orphans like a father, and protected widows always. According to Houston, Job's support of widows and the poor has gone beyond alms-giving;[117] it is a personal relationship in the form of patronage, as especially described in Job 29.[118] The Testament of Job demonstrates Job's philanthropy and hospitality in more detail. He states that he used to have 7000 of his sheep sheared for the clothing of orphans, widows, and the poor (T.Job 9.2), and 3000 of his camels loaded with good things for distribution to the helpless, the destitute, and all the widows (9.4-5). He also used to maintain thirty tables for strangers and twelve for widows at all hours so that they could be fed whenever they approached him for alms (10.1-4); and he even played the lyre for the widows after feeding them (14.2). Therefore, at the burial of Job, all the poor and the helpless lament his death (53.2-4). And all the widows and orphans even try to prevent Job's body from being laid in the tomb till three days later (53.5-8). Although Job's wealth and good deeds towards widows and the poor are likely to be exaggerated in the Testament of Job, the story reflects the possibility of widows being supported by wealthy individuals in ancient Israel.

Support from communities

Apart from family provision and individual help, widows may also receive support from their communities. For example, it is described in 2 Maccabees that after Judas defeated Nicanor's army, he distributed part of the spoils to widows and orphans (2 Macc. 8.28). And similar statements about distribution of spoils are narrated again after Judah's triumph over

[116] Fokkelman (2012:275) indicates that Job builds up a strong reputation and prestige by upholding justice for the weakest.
[117] But this does not reduce the importance of almsgiving, as especially indicated in the Book of Tobit (4.7-11 BA; 12.8-9) which claims that almsgiving delivers from death. For the influence of Tobit on early Christian literature concerning almsgiving, see deSilva 2002:81-83. See also Downs (2016) on almsgiving in early Christianity.
[118] Houston 2006:44-46.

the forces of Timothy and Bacchides (8.30), although this time 'the aged' are also included as recipients of the plunder.[119] Doran observes the division of the booty described in 2 Maccabees appears very remarkable, because, different from the accounts concerning the distribution of spoils in the Hebrew scriptures (e.g., 1 Sam 30.24-25; Num 31.25-30) and the *Temple Scroll* from Qumran (11QT [11Q19] 58.11-15), which mention neither widows nor orphans, 2 Maccabees not only includes widows and orphans but also gives priority to them as recipients of the spoils.[120] The description of the text and Doran's observation indicate that the widows (and orphans) in Judas' community are not neglected but cared for by the community.

Another text that indicates possible community support for widows is the *Damascus Document*.[121] It is mentioned in the text that the members of the community are 'to set apart holy portions according to their exact interpretation; for each to love his brother like himself; to strengthen the hand of the poor, the needy and the foreigner; …' (CD 6.20-21).[122] The exact interpretation (i.e., the rule) for those who live in the camps – 'the Many'[123] – is specified as follows:

> And this is the rule of the Many, to provide for all their needs: the salary of two days each month at least. They shall place it in the hand of the Inspector and of the judges. From it they shall give to the <[in]jured> and with it they shall support the needy and poor, and to the elder who [is ben]t, and to the af[flic]ted, and to the prisoner of a foreign people, and to the girl who has [n]o re[dee]mer, [and] to the <youth> [w]ho has no-one looking after him; everything is the task of the association, and [the house of the association shall] not [be deprived of] its [means]… (CD 14.12-17).

These regulations reveal that there is a pooling of money every month for the support of the needy in their community and that 'the proceeds are distributed in a structured, organized

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[119] Schwartz (2008:342-43) suggests the author is emphasising that Judah and his men took no more than what they gave to these needy ones.
[120] Doran 2012:178.
[121] For an introduction to the *Document*, see Hempel 2000. For a detailed analysis of wealth in the *Damascus Document*, see Murphy 2002:25-102.
[122] All the texts and English translations of the *Damascus Document* are from Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997.
[123] Murray (2018:112) concisely summarises that '"the Many" are to be registered by name, and only admitted into the community gatherings on the authority of the Inspector'.

manner under the supervision of selected officials', which Murray regards as 'the clearest example of a concrete organized system of poor-care from the first century'.[124] Although widows are not mentioned specifically in these regulations, they can be assumed to be among the recipients of support. First, according to Tigchelaar, the *Damascus Document* 'focuses on the congregation of those Israelite households or families who lived in cities and camps throughout the land'.[125] Hempel additionally indicates that 'the legal part of the document also contains prescriptions for the organization of a family-based community that dwelled in camps presided over by an overseer'.[126] Moreover, the *Damascus Document* contains regulations on marriage transactions (e.g., CD 13.15-18), which additionally indicates the community as family-oriented. Thus, if the congregation referred to in the *Damascus Document* was a family-based community, there were likely widows among them. Second, if all the needy and poor in the community, including the elderly, the afflicted, and the orphans, were supported, it is unlikely that widows were excluded. In addition, it would be ironic if the community 'committed themselves to return to the Law of Moses'[127] but neglected widows among them. Therefore, it is very likely that widows were also among the recipients of community support mentioned in the *Damascus Document*.[128]

Moreover, both Philo and Josephus depict the communal life of the Essenes who hold their possessions in common and share one single property, including their houses, clothing, food, and wages.[129] And with a common purse, they care for every needy person among them, such as the sick and the aged, and other Essenes who travel to their local community from another place (Philo, *Prob.* 85-87; *Hypoth.* 11.10-13; Josephus, *Ant*. 18.18-22; *J.W.*

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[124] Murray 2018:113.
[125] Tigchelaar 2010:177. See also Knibb 2000:137.
[126] Hempel 2010:511.
[127] Tigchelaar 2010:177.
[128] Although communal provision is also mentioned in the *Community Rule*, 'it never refers to women or families but only to the "men of the community"', as Tigchelaar (2010:177) observes, hence it is not relevant to the discussion of support of widows.
[129] For a study of the Essenes in Philo and Josephus, see Bilde 1998:32-68; cf. Pliny (*Nat.* 5.15.73) for his description of the Essenes.

2.122, 124-25).[130] Although both Philo and Josephus reveal that these Essenes refuse marriage and live a sexually continent life (Philo, *Hypoth.* 11.14; Josephus, *Ant*. 18.21; *J.W.* 2.120-21), which implies the absence of widows among them, Josephus discloses at the end of his accounts concerning the Essenes that there is 'another order of Essenes' (ἕτερον Ἐσσηνῶν τάγμα) in which the members choose to marry. And apart from the difference in their views on marriage, this order maintains the same 'mode of life, customs, and regulations' (δίαιταν μὲν καὶ ἔθη καὶ νόμιμα) with other Essenes (*J.W.* 2.160), which suggests the existence of widows in this order whom the community supports through the common purse.

Although the various types of support for widows discussed above are far from comprehensive and systematic, all of them together form a general picture about the possible sources of maintenance available to widows in ancient Israel. This chapter has so far focused on the social-economic vulnerability of widows and the possible means of support for them, but it is not necessary to assume that every widow in ancient Israel was poor and vulnerable. Some widows could be wealthy and even powerful.

6. Wealthy widows

In 2 Maccabees, Heliodorus an official of the king demands to inspect the treasury in the Jerusalem temple, and the High Priest replies by saying that 'there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans' (παρακαταθήκας εἶναι χηρῶν τε καὶ ὀρφανῶν; 2 Macc. 3.10). Doran points out that the deposits refer to money 'placed in a temple for safekeeping', and he proposes three interpretations concerning the deposits of widows and orphans: (1) 'if the genitive is objective, these are deposits on behalf of widows and orphans that the temple

[130] For detailed comments on Josephus' description of the Essenes, see Beall 1988:34-122; Goodman 2007:137-43.

authorities can dispense when needed'; (2) 'if the genitive is subjective, that is, widows and orphans deposit the money', this could be 'a rhetorical ploy' to suggest the wickedness of others taking the money; or (3) 'evidence of widows inheriting their husband's wealth' (e.g., Judith; see further below).[131] However, Murray regards this as a reference to 'the use of the temple as a bank *by* widows and orphans' rather than 'organised financial provision for the poor in Jerusalem'[132] and maintains that the High Priest was trying to prevent Heliodorus from taking the deposits of widows and orphans, because that would leave them impoverished.[133] If Murray's position is acceptable, it raises another question: where did the widows get the money? As mentioned earlier, it was possible for a widow to gain property through bride-price, dowry, and inheritance. According to Galpaz-Feller, although the bride-price was paid by the bride's husband to her father, 'the latter was supposed to place part of that sum at his daughter's disposal'.[134] Galpaz-Feller additionally states that 'the dowry was in fact the daughter's portion of her parent's property, which was transferred to her at the time of her marriage, instead of an inheritance when her parents died' and that 'one of the functions of the dowry was to assure the woman's livelihood in case she should be widowed or divorced'.[135] In addition, according to Numbers 27.8, if a man dies with no son but only daughter/s, the daughter/s can inherit his property. Although the Jewish law (Num 27.8-11) does not allow a widow to inherit her husband's possessions, there are exceptions (e.g., Jdt. 8.7). Therefore, if a widow's husband or parents are wealthy, it is possible for her to accumulate considerable wealth.

There are depictions of wealthy widows in both biblical and non-biblical Jewish literature. For example, Judges 17 tells of a man named Micah in the hill country of Ephraim,

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[131] Doran 2012:82.
[132] Murray 2018:132. For the temple functioning as a bank, see also Hamilton 1964:365-72; Loewenberg 2001:148-49; Stevens 2006:136-66.
[133] Murray 2018:133. See also Schwartz 2008:194.
[134] Galpaz-Feller 2008:234.
[135] Galpaz-Feller 2008:235.

whose mother has eleven hundred pieces of silver (Judg 17.1-2). The text's description suggests that Micah's mother is a widow since Micah's father is not mentioned and Micah himself has grown-up sons (cf. 17.5).[136] In addition, based on the reference that Micah's mother engages a silversmith to make an idol with *two hundred* pieces of silver (17.4) and that the Levite accepts Micah's offer of *ten* pieces of silver as the wage (δέκα ἀργυρίου εἰς ἡμέρας [A]/ἡμέραν [B];[137] 17.10) to be his priest, the *eleven hundred* pieces of silver owned by Micah's mother is a huge amount of money.[138] Therefore, Micah's mother has double life security – wealth and an adult son.

Another biblical example is the account of the Shunammite woman who appeals to the king for the restoration of her house and land after returning from the land of the Philistines where she had lived for seven years due to the famine in her hometown (4 Kgdms 8.1-6). This woman is the one whose son was restored by Elisha (8.5), as described in an earlier account (4 Kgdms 4.8-37) which states that the woman is wealthy (4.8) and is a patroness of Elisha (4.8-10).[139] Although the woman is mentioned to have a husband, he is old – even too old to father a child (4.14-16). Hence by the time the woman went to the land of the Philistines, her husband would likely have died, since her husband is not mentioned but she alone with her household (8.2). If that is the case, she is probably the one managing her late husband's property before her son grows up.[140] The text does not explain how the woman dealt with her house and land before leaving her hometown, except that she finds she has lost

[136] Considering the short life expectancy, high mortality, and age gap between spouses in antiquity (cf. Chapter 2, section 2), Micah's father has probably died.
[137] The NETS translations ('ten pieces of silver for days' [A]; 'ten pieces of silver a day' [B]) are not satisfactory. The ten pieces of silver are unlikely the Levite's *daily* wage (the same amount is the *annual* wage in the Hebrew text), but should be the total wage *for the days* when the Levite is with Micah or *to the day* when he leaves, especially when Micah will also provide him a set of clothes and what he needs to live on.
[138] Cf. Deuteronomy 22.28-29 (cf. Exod 22.15-16) which suggests the bride-price for a virgin in ancient Israel was about fifty pieces of silver. Tigay (1996:208), however, views the 50 pieces as a combination of both the bride-price and the fine. This would mean Micah's mother is far richer.
[139] Guillaume 2012:80.
[140] Guillaume (2012:82) similarly suggests the possibility that the Shunamite woman was widowed with an under-aged son.

possession of them on her return (cf. 8.3, 5). But she manages to restore not only her house and land but also all the produce (πάντα τὰ γενήματα) of her fields for the past seven years (8.6), which would undoubtedly make her wealthy again.

In non-biblical Jewish literature, the most well-known wealthy widow is probably Judith. Her wealth includes 'gold and silver, men and women slaves, livestock, and fields', all of which are left to her by her husband (Jdt. 8.7). She is not only wealthy, but also beautiful (8.7; 10.4, 7, 14, 18-19, 23), pious (8.4-6, 8), and faithful to her husband (16.22). In a word, she is portrayed as a perfect widow or idealised as such. What is even more remarkable is her bravery, intelligence, and dedication to her people, which sees her successfully save them from their enemy Holofernes the general of king Nebuchadnezzar (13.6-8; 15.5-7).[141] Her heroic deeds bring her fame and honour throughout the whole country for the rest of her life (16.21). She lives up to one hundred and five years, and before her death, she distributes her property to the nearest kindred of her husband and herself (16.23-24). The prominence of Judith is well summarised by Wills:

> Her name is the feminine form of *Yehudi*, which means Judean or Jew, and suggests that she represents both the heroic spirit of the Jewish people and the female equivalent of Judah Maccabee. Because of her unswerving religious devotion, she is able to step outside of her widow's role, dress and act in a sexually provocative manner, lie to the opposing general Holofernes, seduce him, and behead him, without a single moment of self-doubt.[142]

Another non-biblical example is the depiction of Berenice sister of Herod Agrippa II. According to Josephus, after the death of her husband Herod of Caix who is also her uncle, Berenice remains in widowhood for a long time (*Ant.* 20.145). But later in order to clear

[141] See White (1992:5-16), deSilva (2002:95-97), Wills (2018:1410), and van Henten (1995:224-52) who compare Judith with Jael and Deborah (Judg 4-5), with the judges of Israel who deliver their people from danger, and with Moses (Exod 17.1-7; Num 20.2-13).

[142] Wills 2018:1410. Wills additionally indicates that despite Judith's heroic actions, she does not 'undermine accepted social conventions' but 'returns to her life as an exemplary pious widow' after saving her people from annihilation; see also Levine (1992:17-30; 1995:208-23) for the otherness and domestication of Judith. Miller (2014:234-43), however, interprets Judith as a personification of Yahweh in her words, deeds, the praises she receives, and even her retreat from the limelight after her salvific act.

herself from the accusation of incest with her brother, she persuades, mainly by her wealth, Polemo king of Cilicia to be circumcised and to marry her (20.145-46). However, Berenice deserts Polemo soon after the marriage due to her licentiousness (20.146). Josephus' account suggests that Berenice's wealth and high social status also granted her privilege and power, which even enabled her to manipulate a king.

A third example is Babatha – a wealthy Jewish woman from Maoza in the Roman province of Arabia[143] – as described in the Babatha archive.[144] In *P.Yadin* 16 Babatha declares her possession of four orchards of date palms at Maoza for a provincial census by the Roman governor.[145] And her wealth has enabled her to fight for her son's guardianship. In *P.Yadin* 12-15 Babatha complains to the provincial governor that the guardians of her orphaned son (from her first marriage) have not been giving her sufficient money for the maintenance of her son (*P.Yadin* 13). She offers to take over the boy's assets (cf. *P.Yadin* 5) with a pledge of an equivalent amount of her own property, and promises to increase threefold the money for her son's maintenance (i.e., an increase from 2 denarii to 6 per month; *P.Yadin* 15).[146] Her wealth has also enabled her to remarry after she was first widowed, with a large dowry of 400 denarii (*P.Yadin* 10).[147] And later she additionally lends 300 denarii to her second husband Judah, with all of Judah's possessions as a pledge (*P.Yadin* 17). So after Judah's death, Babatha distrains three of his date orchards and sells the crop in

[143] It became a Roman province in 106 CE, before which it was an independent kingdom (the Nabataean Kingdom). See Lewis 1989:36; Grubbs 2002:250; Oudshoorn 2007:12, 19-20.
[144] For an introduction to the Babatha archive and a summary of its content, see Oudshoorn 2007:5-12.
[145] Cotton and Greenfield (1994:211-224) suggest that Babatha received her property from her father through the deed of gift at her first marriage. See also Esler (2017) and Satlow (2005:53) on the origin of Babatha's orchard.
[146] The result of Babatha's petition is unknown, although *P.Yadin* 27 shows Babatha receives the same amount of money from one of the two guardians for her son's maintenance (6 denarii for three months). For discussions on Babatha and her orphaned son, see Cotton 1993:94-108; Hanson 2005:85-103; Chiusi 2005:105-32; Oudshoorn 2007:300-45.
[147] Cf. *P.Yadin* 18 which records the dowry of Babatha's stepdaughter with the amount of 200 denarii, and Mishnah, Ketubbot 1.2 which suggests the dowry as '200 denarii for a virgin and one *mane* (i.e., 100 denarii) for a widow'. For discussions on Babatha's *ketubba* (marriage contract), see Yadin, Greenfield and Yardeni 1994:75-101; Friedman 1996:55-76; Oudshoorn 2007:379-98.

lieu of her dowry and debt owed her (*P.Yadin* 21-22).[148] Although Babatha's claim of Judah's property has caused litigious disputes from Judah's other relatives (*P.Yadin* 23-26), 'the fact that Babatha kept these documents presumably implies that she emerged victorious in this litigation' or 'at the very least, these documents constitute evidence that she complied with the requisite legal formalities', as indicated by Lewis.[149]

7. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the majority of widows are described as poor and vulnerable in ancient Jewish literature, and their vulnerability is mainly caused by the lack of a male kin (especially a husband) as their provider and protector, which is essential in a patriarchal society. To support widows and other vulnerable and needy people such as strangers and orphans, the Israelites enact laws concerning the levirate marriage, harvest gleanings, triennial tithes, the sabbatical year, celebration of festivals, loans and pledges. These mechanisms concern a widow's re-integration into her late husband's family, food provision, participation in community events, and preservation of dignity. However, these mechanisms may not have been practised universally due to the lack of enforcement (the laws primarily appeal to moral and religious exhortations). It is therefore important for widows to seek other support, including support from families such as parents or grown children, from other individuals such as benefactors or patrons, and from their own communities. Nevertheless, not all widows are poor and vulnerable; there are also wealthy widows. And for some widows, their wealth has not only ensured their maintenance but also granted them

[148] For discussions on *P.Yadin* 21-22, see Radzyner 2005:145-63; Katzoff 2007:545-75; Oudshoorn 2007:168-81.
[149] Lewis 1989:102.

privilege and power,[150] with which they could not only defend their own rights and those of their beloved ones but also manipulate or deliver others.

The sources we have discussed in this chapter are primarily literary texts, whose historicity may be open to debate. However, some of them are likely a reflection of historical reality and our historical examples (Glaphyra, Berenice, Babatha, and the Qumran community) confirm this. Furthermore, although the support of widows in ancient Israel does not appear comprehensive and systematic, its ethos does reveal people's awareness of the social-economic vulnerability of widows and their concern for the support of widows in the ancient Jewish context. And it was this ethos of supporting widows (and the poor in general) that played an important role in the development of early Christianity, although one should not expect the various mechanisms and ways of support for widows in ancient Judaism to be duplicated in the early church due to their differences in social and economic contexts and community structures. Hence, in light of this ethos generated from ancient Judaism, and against the Roman background, the following chapters will explore the situation of widows in the early church through literary analyses of relevant Christian texts.

[150] See also Brooten (1982) on women leaders in the ancient synagogue, among whom there were probably wealthy widows.

Chapter 4

Widows in Early Christian Narrative Texts

1. Introduction

Among the different genres of early Christian literature, the narrative texts mention most the support of the poor and widows. Hence, this chapter seeks to explore the presentation of widows in the narrative texts, including both biblical and non-biblical literature in the early church. As for the biblical literature, compared with the OT which pays special attention to certain groups of people, particularly aliens, orphans and widows, the NT does not mention widows as frequently but shifts the focus to the broader and more general group of the poor (e.g., Matt 11.5; 19.21; Mark 10.21; Luke 4.18-19; 6.20; 14.13; 19.8; Rom 15.26; 2 Cor 9.9; Gal 2.10; Jas 2.5-6). This does not mean that widows are neglected, however. In fact, widows are referred to quite a number of times in the Synoptic Gospels, especially in the Gospel of Luke. The support of widows is also highlighted in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6.1-7; 9.36-43). First Timothy even devotes a long passage to discussing the support of widows (1 Tim 5.3-16; see Chapter 5). Among the NT narrative texts, therefore, Luke-Acts appears to reflect the greatest concern for the poor, especially widows.[1] As for the non-biblical early Christian literature, the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (AAA) are the most representative narrative texts. Although the predominant theme in the AAA appears to be chastity and continence, the needs of the poor and widows remain a major concern of the authors, as presented particularly in the Acts of Peter (APt) and the Acts of Thomas (ATh). Therefore, this chapter will focus on the relevant texts in Luke-Acts, APt and ATh to discuss the presentation of widows in the early Christian narrative texts.

[1] Since the narratives relevant to widows in Mark and Matthew are included in Luke, I will focus only on Luke for the discussion on widows in the Synoptic Gospels and highlight the differences in Mark and Matthew where they are significant to the discussion. The Gospel of John does not seem to have anything relevant, except perhaps Jesus' words to his mother (a widow?) on the cross.

This chapter applies a literary analysis to studying the social-economic aspects of widows depicted in the relevant texts, conscious that the literary depiction of widows is not the same as a historical description. When we have examined these texts, alongside texts from other genres (Chapters 5 and 6) we will be in a position to posit some historical conclusions (Chapter 7) which can shed light on the general situation of the poor, particularly widows, in the early church, including their survival strategies and their contributions to the Christian community. To achieve this goal, this chapter will explore the vulnerability of widows, the support for them, and their agency in the establishment and development of the early church, as presented in Luke-Acts, APt and ATh.

2. Widows in Luke-Acts

As mentioned above, compared with other narrative texts in the NT, Luke-Acts appears to pay more attention to widows – their vulnerability, support, and agency. While most scholars recognise Luke's concern for widows, Price reconstructs the widow stories in Luke-Acts through a feminist interpretation and maintains that Luke intended to minimise widows' significant influence in the early church by redacting the pre-Lucan widow traditions available to him.[2] This chapter, however, will not discuss the prehistory of the text but will focus on the text of Luke-Acts itself to explore the vulnerability, support, and agency of widows.

2.1. The vulnerability of widows

Widows in Luke-Acts are generally portrayed as poor and vulnerable. For example, Luke's mention of the many widows in Israel and particularly the widow at Zarephath who was helped by Elijah through miracles during a severe drought that lasted three and a half

[2] Price 1997.

years (Luke 4.25-26; cf. 1 Kgs 17.8-24) reflects the vulnerability and destitution of many widows in ancient Judaism. In addition, all the Synoptic Gospels record the Sadducees' questioning of Jesus about the relationship of a widow with seven brothers all of whom had married her under the Levirate Marriage law (Matt 22.24-25; Mark 12.19; Luke 20.27-28). Although the point of the Sadducees' question is about the resurrection, it reflects the vulnerable situation of the widow, as she, without children, had to marry different brothers of her late husband in order to seek protection. And this reminds us again of the helpless circumstances of widows in ancient Judaism, such as Tamar, Ruth and Naomi, who had to take unconventional and even dangerous actions in order to secure the maintenance of their life (see Chapter 3).

Another passage that reflects the vulnerability of widows is the parable of the persistent widow who seeks justice from an unjust judge (Luke 18.1-8). In this parable, the widow's defencelessness is multi-dimensional. First, she has to seek justice from an *unjust* judge. According to Harries, the Roman court systems were elitist and filled with corrupt manoeuvring, resulting in the inaccessibility to justice for the non-elites.[3] The widow in this parable is obviously outside the elite circle.[4] In addition, the judge is described as someone 'who neither fears God nor has respect for people' (τὸν θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος καὶ ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρεπόμενος; Luke 18.2) – a totally negative description of the judge who is 'devoid of both *pietas* and *humanitas*'.[5] Yet the widow seeks justice from this judge, probably because there is no better way available to her, which clearly reveals her helplessness and desperation. Second, she has to seek justice on her own. Obviously, she has no one to speak for her[6] nor can she afford to employ a lawyer to defend her case. All she could do is approach the unjust judge all by herself, risking being further mistreated by the judge or avenged by her opponent

[3] Harries 1999:171.
[4] Marshall 1978:672; Fitzmyer 1985:1178-79; Cotter 2005:332.
[5] Cotter 2005:332. See also Marshall 1978:672; Fitzmyer 1985:1178; Nolland 1993:867; Bovon 2013:530.
[6] Bovon 2013:533.

because of her pursuit of justice. Thirdly, she has to keep returning to the judge (as indicated by the imperfect tense of the Greek expression ἤρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν – 'kept coming to him'; 18.3), as he refuses to grant her justice. Green points out that 'the fact that she must do so continuously suggests that she lacks the economic resources to offer the appropriate bribe necessary for a swift settlement'.[7] Fitzmyer additionally indicates that 'because of the position of women in the contemporary Palestinian society' and the loss of support from her husband, the widow 'was helpless and could exert no real influence on those in power'; 'persistence was her only weapon' – a weapon 'inspired by her desperation'.[8] Indeed, so long as she has not been granted justice, she is still under the oppression of her opponent, and she has to go to the judge repeatedly, each time with increasing anxiety and desperation, without knowing what she would face. Some commentators further suggest that this pericope echoes Sirach 35.12-23 (LXX)[9] and the latter underlies the present Lucan parable.[10] As discussed in Chapter 3 (section 2), Sirach 35.14-15 reveals the utmost vulnerability of a widow, as she is so helpless and desperate that she *pours out* (ἐκχέῃ) her complaint and *cries out* (ἡ καταβόησις [the crying out]) before the Lord against her oppressor with *tears running down her cheek* (δάκρυα χήρας ἐπὶ σιαγόνα καταβαίνει). Similarly, the widow in the Lucan parable is equally desperate that she keeps coming to the judge to seek justice, despite the fact that the judge is neither pious nor humane. Although this story is, of course, a parable, it would work only if it bore some relation to a scenario that the audience could recognise as plausible (even if somewhat exaggerated). Thus even as a literary depiction, this parable can be used (later) to build a composite picture of the situation of widows at the time of the early church.

[7] Green 1997:640.
[8] Fitzmyer 1985:1179.
[9] Green 1997:638.
[10] Johnson 1991:269. For the close relationship between the two, see also Marshall 1978:673-75; Fitzmyer 1985:1179; Nolland 1993:866.

Apart from the parable of the persistent widow, Luke 20.45-47 (cf. Mark 12.38-40) further reveals the vulnerability of widows in the Lucan context. This passage narrates Jesus' condemnation of the scribes whose problematic attitudes are well summarised by Bovon: 'the pride expressed by arrogance and a haughty behaviour; the avarice expressed by the exploitation of the weak, who actually should be protected; and the hypocrisy that resorts to religion in order to beguile or to impress'.[11] The description of the scribes in verse 46 – their walking around in long robes and their demanding of respect and honour in public places – highlights their claim to prominent social status. However, as persons of status, instead of helping the weak and vulnerable, the scribes 'devour widows' houses' (κατεσθίουσιν τὰς οἰκίας τῶν χηρῶν; 20.47). Scholars propose different possibilities concerning the scribes' devouring of the widows' properties. Levine and Witherington suggest that Luke may refer to 'women's patronage of scribes', just as 'women served as patrons … of Jesus' own movement (see 8.1-3)'.[12] Green, reading it in light of 18.1-3 and 21.1-4, proposes that it has to do with 'systemic injustice on the part of the scribes'.[13] Derrett comments that the scribes may have cheated widows of what belonged to them through acting as their guardians appointed either by a husband's will or by the court, since (1) as the teachers of the law, the scribes are legal experts, and (2) they say long prayers (μακρὰ προσεύχονται; 20.47) which make them appear pious and trustworthy.[14] Fitzmyer additionally references several other interpretations proposed by different readers, suggesting that the scribes may have required payment for legal assistance to widows, exploited the hospitality of widows of limited means, mismanaged the property of religiously dedicated widows, exacted money from credulous widows in exchange for prayers, or taken widows' houses as pledges for debts.[15] He further

[11] Bovon 2012:86.
[12] Levine and Witherington 2018:547.
[13] Green 1997:727.
[14] Derrett 1972a:1-9.
[15] Fitzmyer 1985:1318. See also Bock 1996:1643.

indicates that since the text does not provide any explanation, any of the above readings might be valid, although he himself regards Derrett's interpretation as the most plausible.[16] Although the various interpretations mentioned above are only scholars' conjectures, in light of the general situation of widows in ancient Roman and Jewish societies discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, this passage indicates the extreme vulnerability of widows – they could be impoverished and exploited in many and various ways.

Immediately following Jesus' condemnation of the scribes who 'devour' widows' houses, the adjacent text describes the offering of a poor widow (Luke 21.1-4; cf. Mark 12.41-44) who represents the extreme poor in Luke-Acts. First, the need and poverty of the widow is acknowledged by both the narrator and Jesus. When the widow is first mentioned, she is described as a 'poor' (πενιχράν; 21.2) widow. Immediately after that when Jesus mentions this widow to his disciples, he again refers to her as a 'poor' (πτωχή; 21.3) widow who gives 'out of her poverty' (ἐκ τοῦ ὑστερήματος αὐτῆς; 21.4). It is noticeable that different from Mark who uses πτωχός repeatedly in the description of the widow, Luke introduces another but less common adjective πενιχρός (in addition to πτωχός) to describe the widow's poverty. Bovon points out that πενιχρός (with its verb πένομαι meaning 'initially "to work", "to toil" to earn one's living, then "to be poor"') refers first to someone who has to work and toil in order to make a living, then to a person 'who is needy, destitute, poor, or a beggar'; whereas πτωχός refers to someone 'who has nothing and can do nothing except cower in shame and, sometimes, beg'.[17] Nevertheless, Bovon further indicates that 'in Luke's day πενιχρός expressed poverty more than the need to work' and thus suggests that the reason

[16] Fitzmyer 1985:1318.

[17] Bovon 2012:94. See also Fitzmyer (1985:1322) and BDAG (2000:795) who differentiate these two adjectives by citing Aristophanes *Plutus* 553: 'The life of a poor person (πτωχός) is to live, having nothing at all, whereas the life of a needy person (πένης) is to live sparingly, and dependent on toil'. Although both Fitzmyer and Bovon suggest a close relationship between πενιχρός and πένης, BDAG simply defines πενιχρός as 'being in need of things relating to livelihood, *poor, needy*', which fits the Lucan context better.

for Luke to use πενιχρός is to 'avoid monotony'.[18] Although he adds that Luke may also want to 'suggest discreetly that this widow works to survive',[19] Jesus' comments on the widow do not support this interpretation; rather, the widow is viewed as extremely poor – all she has to live on is two small copper coins or two lepta (λεπτὰ δύο; 21.2, 4). According to Green, the daily wage of a day labourer was one hundred and thirty-two lepta, whereas the two lepta offered by the widow encompass 'her entire means of support',[20] which reveals strikingly her extreme poverty. Second, the immediate (i.e., 20.47; 21.5-6) and broader (e.g., 18.2-5; 19.45-46) contexts depict a world in which a widow could be easily exploited and impoverished. In fact, the widow's poverty is so drastic that some scholars contend that Jesus' comment in 21.3-4 is not a praise but a lament for the victimised widow who has been 'taught and encouraged by religious leaders to donate as she does' and a condemnation of the temple and 'the value system that motivates her action'.[21] Some scholars disagree with this view, however. They view this episode as neither a lament for the widow nor a condemnation of the temple system, but a praise of the widow's generosity.[22] Although there is no consensus on this among commentators (see further below), her dire poverty and vulnerability is undeniable, as revealed clearly by the text.

The above discussions disclose that the vulnerability of widows in Luke-Acts is presented from different aspects – legal, social, and financial, which is in line with what has been discussed about widows in Chapters 2 and 3. Since widows in Luke-Acts are depicted as very vulnerable and poor in general, how then do they survive? And where do they get their means of support?

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[18] Bovon 2012:94. See also Fitzmyer 1985:1322; Johnson 1991:316; Nolland 1993:979.
[19] Bovon 2012:94.
[20] Green 1997:728. See also Bock 1996:1645.
[21] Wright 1982:262. See also Fitzmyer 1985:1321; Green 1997:728-29.
[22] Levine and Witherington 2018:557-58; Bovon 2012:95-96; Bock 1996:1647.

2.2. The support of widows

As the following discussions will show, Luke presents three different forms of support for widows in the early Christian community, household, individual, and collective.

Household support

On the text of Luke 7.11-17, most commentators appear to focus on Jesus' miraculous deed of raising a young man from death (7.14-15) and his identity as a great prophet as proclaimed by the crowd (7.16).[23] Little attention is paid to the widow and the significant role she plays in the restoration of her son. However, as Green indicates, the interpretation of this passage is 'fundamentally guided by Luke's location of the woman at the center of this story'.[24] He further points out how the dead man is presented in relation to the widow – 'he was his mother's only son' (7.12) – in a social context in which 'females are typically identified in relation to males', and how the focus of attention is put on the widow following this – '*she* was a widow, the crowd was with *her*; Jesus saw *her*, had compassion on *her*, spoke to *her*, and, finally, gave the dead man brought back to life to *her*' (italics original).[25] He is right in saying that the widow is 'the real recipient of Jesus' compassionate ministry' and the miraculous event should be interpreted as 'the restoration of this woman within her community'.[26]

Among various interpretations of this passage, Green observes that 'most telling in Luke's account is his portrayal of this woman's catastrophic state'.[27] Firstly, she is a widow. As discussed in Chapter 3, widows were considered particularly vulnerable in ancient Jewish society. To an extent, they had to rely on the charity of others for survival, and hence 'the

[23] E.g., Tannehill 1986:96-99; Johnson 1991:119-20; Rowe 2006:117-22; Plummer 1901:198-201.
[24] Green 1997:290.
[25] Green 1997:289.
[26] Green 1997:290.
[27] Green 1997:291.

Law singled them out for concern'.[28] Moreover, as mentioned earlier, widows are generally portrayed as vulnerable and needy in Luke-Acts. Secondly, she has now lost her *only* son. This makes her affliction most drastic, because, having lost her husband, the son is now her 'only means of support'.[29] With the passing of her son, the widow 'has no family now and in effect is an "orphaned parent"',[30] and hence is 'relegated to a status of "dire vulnerability" – without a visible means of support and, certainly, deprived of her access to the larger community and any vestiges of social status within the village'.[31] Thirdly, a large crowd from the town is with her. Although the text does not specify the crowd's reaction to the widow's affliction, most scholars agree that they were grieving together with the widow,[32] probably because they feel sorry for the widow's misfortune. Therefore, as Byrne maintains, 'it is the plight of the woman rather than her son that draws Jesus' concern'.[33] That is why, unlike in many of his other miraculous deeds, Jesus – moved with compassion (7.13) – does not require faith from the widow, but takes the initiative to raise her son and gives him back to her (7.13-14). Hence, as Byrne comments, 'the restoration of life to the young man, remarkable though it be, is subsumed into ministry to the bereft and grieving mother',[34] or as Price similarly states, 'the miracle is not done in the first instance for the dead man, but for the widow herself'.[35] Green further demonstrates the central role of the widow in the story, in a statement that deserves full quotation:

> That Luke's central concern is with the widow is evidenced by the *inclusio* formed in vv 13-15. At the beginning of this encounter, Jesus saw, had compassion for, and spoke to her; at its close, he returns her restored son to his mother. The young man's

[28] Byrne 2000:70.
[29] Price 1997:91.
[30] Bock 1994:649.
[31] Green 1997:291.
[32] Bovon 2002:267; Green 1997:290; Bock 1994:650. Although some scholars (e.g., Plummer 1901:199; Geldenhuys 1950:222) state that there are hired mourners and musicians with flutes and cymbals among the multitude, this does not downplay the catastrophic state of the widow.
[33] Byrne 2000:70.
[34] Byrne 2000:70.
[35] Price 1997:85.

> resuscitation is a concrete parable of his mother's, for with his life returned to him her life is again made whole.[36] (Italics original)

Therefore, Green argues that the purpose of this passage is not to disclose Jesus' miraculous power which 'has been amply demonstrated thus far in the narrative', but to identify Jesus 'as the compassionate benefactor of this widow'.[37] Hence, through narrating the restoration of a widow's son – her only source of support, this passage reflects a most basic and important mode of support for widows in Luke-Acts – household support.

Another case that reflects household support for widows is that of Simon's (i.e., Peter's, or Cephas'; cf. John 1.42) mother-in-law (Luke 4.38-39; cf. Mark 1.29-31and Matt 8.14-15). The text narrates that Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law of her high fever at Simon's house. There are several implications here: first, the phrase τὴν οἰκίαν Σίμωνος ('the house of Simon'; 4.38) naturally suggests that Simon is the owner of the house or the head of the household.[38] Second, the fact that Jesus saw Simon's mother-in-law at Simon's house implies that she 'was actually living in Simon's house, or at least was visiting there'.[39] But the way the text mentions Simon's mother-in-law seems to assume that she was living with Peter. If that is the case, third, it suggests that Simon's mother-in-law is 'a widow without sons of her own'.[40] If she was not a widow or she had any son/s of her own, she would have been living with her husband or her son/s rather than her son-in-law Peter. Although the text does not mention Peter's wife, she should still be alive based on Paul's reference to Peter and his wife in 1 Corinthians 9.5.[41] Bovon assumes that it is Simon and his wife who make request to Jesus for help concerning Simon's mother-in-law.[42] Hence, it is very likely that

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[36] Green 1997:292.
[37] Green 1997:291.
[38] Fitzmyer 1981:549-50.
[39] Fitzmyer 1981:550.
[40] Green 1997:225.
[41] The Coptic Acts of Peter also mentions Peter's wife (and his daughter).
[42] Bovon 2002:163. See also Fitzmyer (1981:550) and Levine and Witherington (2018:126) who make more general proposals, i.e., 'the members of Simon's household' and 'the people in the house' respectively.

Simon's mother-in-law is a widow who lives together with her daughter and son-in-law and receives support from them.

As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, it was the standard expectation in the ancient world that children would support their parents in their old age. The need for a son/daughter to support his/her widowed mother is an especially important case of this. In Luke 9.59, Jesus radically forbids a man from burying his father, but Jesus says that for a very special reason. In fact, the text itself reflects that it was a standard rule and common practice for children to bury their dead parents. As Hengel observes, various Jewish traditions allowed a person to attend to their dead on humanitarian grounds, including participating in funeral rites – part of the duty of *works of love* – and 'cancelled even the prohibition on pollution of the high priests and Nazarites by a corpse'.[43]

Philo has some strong comments on this duty in his *De Decalogo* 106-20 where he discusses the fifth commandment of the Decalogue. He argues that those who do not show respect to their parents are impious in the divine court and inhuman in the human court, because if people despise their parents – the closest of their kinsfolk – they are unable to show kindness to anyone else. He further contends that those who do not support their parents are less than beasts and birds, for even beasts become tame with those who feed them and in gratitude with everybody else (113) and even birds provide for the needs of their parents (116-17). Therefore, Philo maintains, human beings should take their parents' welfare as their sole or primary care (118). He further indicates that those who dishonour their parents dishonour also the Lord, because 'parents are the servants of God for the task of begetting children' (119).

The above discussions show that what Luke envisages here (children supporting their widowed mothers) is the standard expectation in antiquity and the most common means of

[43] Hengel 1981:8-10.

widows' support.[44] Luke apparently takes it for granted that the first form of support for a widow would be members of her own household, here specifically her children.

Individual support

In the traditional interpretations of the passage on Tabitha's resurrection (Acts 9.36-43), most scholars focus on the topic of mission[45] and the miraculous power of Peter.[46] However, as Reimer suggests, the raising of Tabitha from death should be seen in the context of multiple actors, in a narrative full of 'human cooperation: the two messengers who brought Peter, the widows who witnessed for Tabitha, Peter who says the powerful words to Tabitha'.[47] Each of them plays an indispensable part in the miracle. Thus, it is necessary to stress also the significance of Tabitha and the widows in this story, not just Peter.

Scholars who focus on the role of Tabitha emphasise different aspects of her presentation by Luke, such as the meaning of her name,[48] her identity as a disciple,[49] her good works and acts of charity, and her resurrection, among which her charity and resurrection are apparently what Luke wants to draw attention to (as will be seen, the two are interrelated as well). Scholars maintain various opinions regarding the good works and acts of charity (ἔργων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἐλεημοσυνῶν; 9.36) that characterise Tabitha, which are viewed as either an indication of her 'general piety'[50] or 'an instrument of *pathos*' justifying her resurrection[51] or a revelation of 'the power of the gospel'.[52] Many of them regard Tabitha as the patron or benefactor of widows in Joppa as they showed Peter the clothes made by

[44] We will encounter this again in 1 Timothy 5.3-8, where not to do this is 'worse than an unbeliever' – i.e., a basic moral rule for everyone.
[45] E.g., Keener 2013:1714; Allen 2013:89; Strelan 2009:85.
[46] E.g., Johnson 1992:180; Haenchen 1971:341.
[47] Reimer 1995:62.
[48] See Strelan 2009:77-86.
[49] E.g., Pervo 2009:255; Haenchen 1971:338-39; Reimer 1995:35.
[50] Woodington 2017:636; see also Johnson 1992:177-78.
[51] Woodington 2017:636.
[52] Tannehill 1990:127.

Tabitha (9.39).[53] Allen further indicates that 'Dorcas was not simply a philanthropist, but was a means through whom God provided for widows'.[54] Although scholars have different opinions about Tabitha's social and economic status,[55] they generally agree that Tabitha provides support for the widows in Joppa, especially through making clothes for them as indicated in the text (9.39). There are indications of the cost of making clothes and their value in some texts. For example, Luke 10.30 shows how a victim of robbery is stripped of his clothes (presumably for the value). Similarly, at his crucifixion soldiers cast lots over Jesus' clothing (Matt 27.35; Mark 15.24; Luke 23.34; John 19.23-24). Thus clothes, though a necessity, are a major expense, and it is therefore a significant benefaction to the widows when Tabitha makes clothes for them. According to Reimer, good works and acts of charity in the NT texts, which are not restricted to almsgiving, represent not only the mercy and love of God but also the righteousness of a person.[56] It is the same with Tabitha whose good and charitable works are said to be neither limited to her ministry to widows[57] nor confined to fellow disciples.[58] Some scholars point out that Tabitha's good works and acts of charity are not regarded by Luke as 'ministry' which is a term reserved only for the same services rendered by *male* disciples, and that Tabitha seems to support others out of her own means rather than those of the church.[59] Smith further indicates that although Tabitha is described as a female disciple, she is silent and speechless.[60] However, as Spencer states, Tabitha 'distinguishes herself as the first active female minister in Acts' by engaging in 'noble,

[53] Strelan 2004:237; Pervo 2009:254; Haenchen 1971:340; Krause 1995b:6.
[54] Allen 2013:92.
[55] For example, Strelan (2004:236) and Spencer (2004:117) suggest that Tabitha is a woman with certain means/wealth; Finger (2007:260) views Tabitha as 'a craftswoman working in textiles' who employed the widows 'in the shop in her home'; while Reimer (1995:43-44) maintains that since Tabitha made those clothes by herself, she is by no means rich; see also Pervo 2009:256.
[56] Reimer 1995:36-41. See also Strelan 2004:236.
[57] Keener 2013:1716.
[58] Bruce 1990:249.
[59] O'Day 1998:309; D'Angelo 1990:455.
[60] Smith 2011:123.

charitable service to widows', like the Seven appointed to table service in Acts 6.[61] Although Tabitha is not mentioned to have preached the word and worked wonders like the Seven, Spencer continues, 'there are signs of Tabitha's higher status as a community leader', such as the disciples' sending of two men to Peter on behalf of Tabitha and Peter's return of the resurrected Tabitha to not only the widows but also 'the saints' as a whole, all of which imply 'enormous community sympathy and respect for this woman'.[62] Spencer even further suggests that Tabitha is the owner of the house where her body is laid and where the Joppa Christians gather together for worship and fellowship.[63] If that is the case, Tabitha would have been a single woman (no husband appears upon her death), possibly a widow herself,[64] and the patroness of the house church in Joppa, which implies her leadership in the church.[65] Hence, her resurrection is important not only to the widows but also to the whole Christian community in Joppa.

Tabitha's resurrection is said to function as a living testimony that stimulates people to convert to Jesus Christ (9.42).[66] In addition, the verb referring to the raising of Tabitha (ἀνίστημι in various forms) is used 'regularly by Luke for the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 9.22; 18.33; 24.7, 46; Acts 2.24, 32; 3.26; 13.33)',[67] which further highlights the significance of Tabitha's resurrection. According to Woodington, both Tabitha and Cornelius are delivered from death due to their charity and almsgiving.[68] Tabitha is saved from physical death and Cornelius from eternal death. To demonstrate the reward of charity as deliverance from death, Woodington not only surveys ancient Jewish and Christian texts (e.g., Prov 10.2; 11.4; Ps 41.1-3; Sir 29.11-12; Tob 4.9-10; 12.8-9; Matt 19.16-30; Mark 10.17-30; Luke

[61] Spencer 2004:117.
[62] Spencer 2004:117.
[63] Spencer 2004:117-18.
[64] She is unlikely a divorcee due to negative views of such women in antiquity.
[65] Spencer (2004:118) explains that 'in Tabitha's case, being community *host* does not guarantee her position as community *head*, but within a patronage society it certainly points in that direction'.
[66] Johnson 1992:178.
[67] Johnson 1992:178. See also Dunn 1996:129.
[68] Woodington 2017:634-50.

18.18-30) but also analyses 'how the stories of Tabitha and Cornelius can be understood as narratival examples of charity saving someone from death'.[69] While Woodington helps us see the significance of almsgiving and charity in Judeo-Christian tradition, his argument is not satisfactory. The effect of charity is on both the recipient and the doer – the former receives support for survival and the latter the reward of life. To some extent, both are saved from death because of charity. However, Woodington emphasises only the doers of charity and the rewards they receive but does not pay much attention to the recipients of charity. He maintains that, in Tabitha's story, Tabitha is raised from death solely because she has lived a life of charity. If that is the case, why are widows and their weeping mentioned? It would have sufficed to mention Tabitha's good works and charities alone. But according to the Jewish and Christian literature, what lies behind the reward of charity is God's care for the poor and the vulnerable. The reason for charity doers to be rewarded is that they have helped the poor. Luke exhibits great concern for the poor in Luke-Acts and, in the story of Tabitha, mentions the widows twice. Luke not only emphasises their grief over Tabitha's death (9.39) which was a disaster to them,[70] but also highlights Tabitha's restoration to them after she was raised from death (9.41), as her resurrection was 'not only for the benefit of the raised but indeed also a blessing for the widows that stood by and wept'.[71] Therefore, it is apparent that the widows play an important role in the resurrection of Tabitha; it is at least partially for their sake that Tabitha was delivered from death.

Many scholars regard the presence and weeping of widows in Acts 9.39 as pathos for the raising of Tabitha,[72] because widows are generally depicted by Luke as poor and vulnerable (e.g. Luke 18.1-5; 21.1-4)[73] and hence treated as 'objects of compassion'.[74] Some

[69] Woodington 2017:635.
[70] Pervo 2009:256.
[71] Scheffler 2016:144
[72] Pervo 2009:256; Tannehill 1990:125.
[73] Reimer 1995:43.
[74] Keener 2013:1718.

commentators regard the widows' showing of the clothes made by Tabitha (9.39) as a witness to her charity[75] or an indication of their need of Tabitha.[76] Reimer further highlights that Tabitha's story and its parallels in the biblical literature (e.g., 1 Kgs 17.17-24; 2 Kgs 4.32-37; Luke 7.11-17) exhibit a common feature, that is, those who are left behind are in need of social or economic assistance and the raising of the dead is 'especially beneficial to them'.[77] Although some scholars maintain that Acts 9.36-43 reflects an established order or society of widows in Luke-Acts,[78] and that the widows are not recipients of almsgiving but employed by Tabitha to support themselves,[79] this position is not generally accepted. The majority of scholars believe that these widows are not an order, nor are they said to 'perform any service for the church';[80] rather, they are 'recipients of charity'[81] and 'supplied with clothing'.[82] Moreover, since the churches in Luke-Acts are still at their earliest stage, it is unlikely for Luke to portray a scenario with an already established order. On the other hand, there is neither evidence nor implication in the text of the existence of such an order, nor is there indication that the widows were selected, or organised, or had any role in or for a church: the scholars (e.g., Finger and Pervo) who speak of an 'order' here seem to be reading back later evidence into an earlier text. In fact, throughout the NT an 'order' of widows is never mentioned; the earliest time such an 'order' is clearly referred to is in the second century.[83] In addition, the key point is that there is no indication that the widows here receive support from any collective entity (a church), only from an individual. Luke knows how

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[75] Reimer 1995:61.
[76] Keener 2013:1720. Some commentators argue that the middle form of the verb 'showing' (ἐπιδεικνύμεναι; 9.39) implies that the widows were actually wearing those clothes on themselves; see Bruce 1990:249. Some others disagree with this opinion (e.g., Barrett 1994:485) but generally assume that those clothes made by Tabitha were for the widows in Joppa; see Allen 2013:92 and Barrett 1994:478.
[77] Reimer 1995:51.
[78] Finger 2007:261; Pervo 2009:256; Haenchen 1971:341; Stählin 1974:452.
[79] Finger 2007:260.
[80] Barrett 1994:478. See also Bruce 1990:249; Keener 2013:1718.
[81] Bruce 1990:249.
[82] Barrett 1994:478.
[83] Tertullian clearly mentions the order of widows in his works (e.g., *Ux*. 1.7.4; *Virg*. 9.5-6); see Chapter 5 for further discussion on Tertullian.

to represent collective support (Acts 2, 4, 6) but does not hint at that here. Moreover, regardless of whether Tabitha makes clothes directly for the widows or employs them as a way of helping them support themselves, her support for the widows appears indisputable. Furthermore, considering Luke's narrative that Tabitha is a disciple full of good works and acts of charity, the relationship of Tabitha to the widows is probably more than an employer, but more like a benefactor or even a friend. Therefore, considering Luke's general portrayal of widows in Luke-Acts as poor and vulnerable, it is more plausible to view the widows in Acts 9.36-43 as recipients of support from Tabitha. This may be the only case where widows are the beneficiaries of an individual, but there are other places where people take the kind of benefactor-role that Tabitha does. In other words, this mode of support for widows is one that Luke portrays happening in a variety of contexts, so it is not surprising that it is one of the modes he portrays in support of widows. For example, in the Lucan accounts, both Jesus and John the Baptist teach others to care for and share with the poor (Luke 3.11; 6.35-36; 14.13; 18.22), Cornelius gives alms generously to others (Acts 10.2), and Paul sets an example of supporting the weak by providing for his companions (Acts 20.34-35). Therefore, the story of Tabitha, which continues the ethic of the gospel, is a story about support of widows that comes not from family, nor from a collective entity (the church), but from a generous individual who has the means and time to support widows in a vital aspect of their economic need.

Collective support

As one of the most complicated and controversial texts in the NT, Acts 6.1-7 has attracted numerous scholars who interpret this episode from various perspectives. While the majority of scholars focus on the leadership of the Twelve and the Seven, they have mostly neglected the widows who are the central characters of the story.[84] Although some feminist

[84] It is for their sake that the whole community is involved and a collective effort is made (6.2-6).

scholars have approached Acts 6.1-7 from the neglected widows' perspective, their interpretations are not persuasive. For example, Reid interprets this passage with a hermeneutic of suspicion and views it as a suppression of the widows' power. She argues that Acts 6.1-7 and other accounts in Luke-Acts that involve widows 'reveal an increasing conflict in the early church over the ministry of widows and that part of Luke's aim is to squelch the controversies engendered by the widows' attempts to exercise their power'.[85] Price goes even further to contend that Luke has added the grumbling (γογγυσμός; 6.1), with its detrimental OT connotations (cf. Num 11.1 [LXX]), which 'changes the sense completely, transforming the widow welfare story into a sarcastic put-down of the widows'.[86] Their arguments are not plausible, however. Firstly, their arguments are speculative and require attributing motives to Luke that are not clear in the text. Secondly, the parallel of the grumbling in Acts 6.1 with that in Numbers 11.1 does not have to bring a negative overtone upon the widows; it depends on the perspective from which the two narratives are compared.[87] Thirdly, Luke does not say that it is the widows who complain against the Hebrews, but other Hellenists who do so on the widows' behalf. Last but not least, it is generally agreed that Luke's description of widows shows his great concern for them and reflects his positive view of them, and that Luke's theology of caring for the poor is established on the basis of Jesus' teaching and ministry. Therefore, we should take special note of the presence of widows in this story and investigate why Luke should highlight them as recipients of aid. To do that, we need to understand the meaning of the 'daily service' (τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ; 6.1), clarify the identities of the Hebrews and the Hellenists (6.1),

[85] Reid 2004:73.
[86] Price 1997:216.
[87] For example, when Pao (2011:137) compares the grumbling in Acts 6.1 with that in Numbers 11.1, his focus is on the context of food supply, which sets Acts 6.1-7 in a meal scene.

explore the significance of the widows (6.1), and examine 'the nature of the resolution' (6.2-6).[88]

Scholars maintain different positions in their understandings of the meaning of διακονία (6.1). After illustrating the term's various lexical meanings and surveying its diverse connotations in different Lucan accounts, Tyson concludes that in view of the entire narrative of 6.1-7, διακονία in 6.1 must be understood as a meal which is 'like that described in Acts 2.42, 46, a common meal', and thus the threat described in 6.1 is caused 'by a tendency to overlook some widows at the daily common meal'.[89] Pao similarly views τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ in 6.1 as 'the common sacred meal'.[90] He first highlights that τραπέζαις is 'more commonly used as "dining table" (Luke 16.21; 22.21; Acts 16.34)'[91] and hence sets διακονεῖν τραπέζαις in Acts 6.2 in the context of a meal. He then discusses the specific meaning of τῇ διακονίᾳ in Acts 6.1. Although most scholars translate it as 'distribution', Pao contends that it should be understood in the sense of '(table-)serving' in light of Acts 6.2; 2.46-47, and the words of διαμερίζω (Acts 2.45) and διαδίδωμι (4.35).[92] Therefore, he maintains, τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ in Acts 6.1 refers to 'the common sacred meal' as noted in 2.46, and the complaint of the Hellenists is that 'their widows "were not allowed to participate in the daily meal"'.[93]

Finger also views τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ in Acts 6.1 as a common meal in light of 2.42-47 rather than poor relief, but she regards the widows as the 'subjects rather than objects of charity',[94] as she proposes,

> The issue here is probably not poor relief at all, but problems relating to administration of daily meals. Since women are intimately bound up with serving

[88] Tyson 1983:153.
[89] Tyson 1983:153-55.
[90] Pao (2011:137) indicates, however, that 'the common sacred meal' here does not refer to the eucharistic meal, but that 'these various meal scenes, together with Acts 2.46-47, should be considered within the wider context of the Lucan motif of table fellowship'.
[91] Pao 2011:135.
[92] Pao 2011:136-37.
[93] Pao 2011:137.
[94] Finger 2007:95.

> food, especially in this culture, the widows may have been responsible for organizing the daily common tables. Luke may possibly be referring to an established order of widows.[95]

Finger's argument is not persuasive, however. Firstly, it is generally agreed that in the first-century Roman Empire, the majority of people lived in poverty.[96] And the reason for Christians then to live a communal life was to create fictive kinship groups where everyone could be taken care of (cf. Acts 2.42-47; 4.32-35).[97] Even though some women may have certain means, Luke usually mentions them specifically by name (e.g., Luke 8.2-3; Acts 9.36-43; 16.14-15); but here he mentions the Hellenist widows altogether and in general. Hence, it is hard to imagine the entire group of Hellenist widows are givers of charity; it is more likely that they are the recipients of charity. Secondly, as discussed earlier (i.e., on Acts 9.36-43), Finger's proposal of the existence of an established order of widows lacks both textual and historical evidence. Thirdly, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 2.2), if the issue here is about 'the honorable female role of *serving* food' (italics original),[98] why then are the *widows* rather than other *women* the only neglected ones? Hence, παραθεωρέω (neglect, overlook) probably suggests that the Hellenist widows are being left out of a benefit, not out of an honour. Moreover, even if it is a common meal, it still has the function of poor relief in view of Luke's general portrayal of widows and the description in Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-35. Therefore, in this sense, τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ can be regarded as a collective support for the needy especially the widows. As Bruce states, 'a daily distribution to needy members

[95] Finger 2007:95-96.
[96] Meggitt 1998; Friesen 2004; Longenecker 2010; Schellenberg 2018.
[97] Hume 2011:111-12. It should be noted, however, that the descriptions in Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-35 should not be understood literally, i.e., it is not a depiction of Christian communism in which everyone submits all their possessions to a common purse. Rather, the context shows that it is voluntary giving in times of need. The ethos is such that the wealthier members share their possessions with the poorer members through the common fund when the need arises so as to achieve the result that there is not a needy person among them. For more detailed explanations, see Pilgrim 1981:148-52; Richardson 2018:109-12; Witherington 1998:162, 207-08; Peterson 2009:162-63; Bock 2007:152-53; Gray 2022:301-02.
[98] Finger 2007:167.

of the church was evidently made out of the common fund, established by the voluntary pooling of resources (2.44f.; 4.34f.)'.[99]

To apprehend the issue in Acts 6.1, it is necessary to clarify the identities of the Hellenists and the Hebrews, as Luke seems to purposely contrast the two when he states that the *Hellenists* complained against the *Hebrews* concerning the neglect of their widows in the daily meal. Cadbury views the Hellenists as Gentiles (Greeks).[100] However, this position is opposed by most scholars, as Barrett contests,

> If from 6.1 (or from the Day of Pentecost…) there had been Jewish and Gentile elements in the Jerusalem church, or if Luke had believed that it was so, could he have made so much of Peter's preaching to Cornelius, of the founding of a mixed church in Antioch, of Paul's break with the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, and of the Council of ch. 15?[101]

Johnson argues against the identification of 'Hellenists' as Gentiles from the linguistic perspective. He points out that when Luke wants to make an *ethnic* distinction between Jews and Greeks, he does not use the term Ἑλληνιστής but Ἕλλην (with four explicit references: Acts 14.1; 16.1; 19.17; 21.18; and two implicit references: 17.4; 19.10). He further highlights that Luke uses the term Ἑβραῖος only in Acts 6.1, but when he uses its adjective form Ἑβραΐς, he always refers to the Hebrew (or Aramaic) dialect.[102] Therefore, Johnson concludes, Luke is here 'making a linguistic distinction' and the Hellenists are Jews (with some of them from the Diaspora) whose predominant language is Greek.[103] Witherington includes a detailed discussion of the identification of the Hellenists.[104] He points out that the primary meaning of the word Ἑλληνιστής – derived from the verbal form ἑλληνιζεῖν – is 'one who speaks Greek'.[105] After arguing against Cadbury, he concludes that the Hellenists are

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[99] Bruce 1990:182. Allen (2013:61) suggests that 'the distribution likely included a fuller range of material resources' since 'the Greek lacks the actual words "of food"'. However, as discussed in the above, the narrative context of Acts 6.1-7, especially that of 6.2 suggests that 6.1 should be understood in the context of meals.
[100] Cadbury 1933:59-74. See also Tyson 1983:158.
[101] Barrett 1994:309. See also Johnson 1992:105; Finger 2007:253; Conzelmann 1987:45.
[102] Johnson 1992:105n1.
[103] Johnson 1992:105n1. See also Keener 2013:1253, 1255.
[104] Witherington 1998:240-47.
[105] Witherington 1998:240. See also Dunn 1996:81.

'Greek-speaking Jewish Christians' and the Hebrews are 'Jewish Christians whose everyday spoken language was Aramaic (or less likely Hebrew)'.[106] He further suggests that the Hellenists are 'Diaspora Jews living in or around Jerusalem (or their descendants) for whom Greek is their spoken language' and hence there is no 'doctrinal' or ideological rift between the Hebrews and the Hellenists.[107] While similarly viewing the Hellenists as diaspora Jews whose predominant language is Greek and the Hebrews as the Aramaic speakers who probably also understand some Greek, Dunn explicitly emphasises the linguistic and cultural differences between the two.[108] Therefore, it seems widely accepted that both the Hebrews and the Hellenists are Jewish Christians, between whom the differences are primarily linguistic and cultural, and some of the Hellenists are probably diaspora Jews living in or around Jerusalem.

Since the reason for the Hellenists' complaint is the neglect of their *widows* by the Hebrews, it is necessary to explore the significance of 'widows'. Witherington indicates that 'the discussion here and the resolution of the problem should probably be seen in the light of the OT and early Jewish provisions for widows and other marginalized people in a highly patriarchal society (cf. Exod 22.22; Deut 10.18; 14.29; Ps 146.9)'.[109] As discussed in Chapter 3, widows in such a society are usually considered extremely vulnerable and poor. Therefore, the OT pays much attention to the care of widows while Luke shows particular interest in their welfare. As Keener observes, 'widows play a prominent and invariably positive role in Luke-Acts'.[110] They are not only the recipients of support and blessings (e.g., Luke 7.11-17; Acts 9.36-43), but also models of piety (e.g., Luke 2.36-38), persistence in seeking justice (e.g., Luke 18.2-5) and sacrificial giving (e.g., Luke 21.2-3).[111] In his discussion of the

[106] Witherington 1998:241.
[107] Witherington 1998:242. See also Haenchen 1971:261; Pervo 2009:154; Peterson 2009:231.
[108] Dunn 1996:81-82. See also Bruce 1990:181; Tannehill 1990:81; Finger 2007:253-54.
[109] Witherington 1998:248.
[110] Keener 2013:1264. See also Tyson 1983:158.
[111] For discussions on the exemplary role of widows in Luke-Acts, see further below.

widows in Luke-Acts, Spencer contends that 'in contrast to their lowly and lonely position in society, widows play an important role in relation to other characters in the Lucan story' because 'other characters are defined and judged by their treatment of widows'.[112] Therefore, it is unlikely that Luke negatively portrays the Hellenist widows in Acts 6.1 as the disrupters of the peace of the church; rather, the text highlights the conflict in order to indicate that no widows should be excluded and their needs must not be neglected.

'If the "Hellenist" widows were indeed the widows of Greek-speaking Jews, some or many of whom may have immigrated to Jerusalem in order to die in the Holy City', as Witherington states, 'they may have been left without support when their husbands died because their family (and that of their husbands as well) may have been far away in the Diaspora'.[113] Hence, they had to rely on public charity, or as Christians the collective support of the church. But these widows are neglected in the church. Some scholars indicate that the imperfect verb παρεθεωροῦντο (Acts 6.1) suggests the neglect is persistent rather than incidental.[114] Pao compares the grumbling (γογγυσμός) of the Hellenists in Acts 6.1 with those in Luke 5.30, 15.2, and 19.7, and concludes that the issue of complaint in these contexts focuses on 'whether the outcasts can be included in the table fellowship of Jesus and his disciples'.[115] He further states that the widows in Acts 6 are 'doubly marginalised, as they are not only "widows" but also widows of "the Hellenists", who are outside of the centre of power'.[116] Pao is certainly correct as this is about networks, i.e., if the common support is organised by the apostles and their networks in Jerusalem, it would function naturally most effectively among those within their cultural/linguistic circles. The Diaspora Jewish community may have had only weak links to Aramaic/Hebrew-speaking Jews, and so they, to

[112] Spencer 1994:732.
[113] Witherington 1998:248. See also Spencer 1994:728; Haenchen 1971:261.
[114] Keener 2013:1253; Tyson 1983:158.
[115] Pao 2011:138.
[116] Pao 2011:138.

begin with at least, were marginal to the Jerusalem church network. The neglect of their most needy members (the widows) is a sign that they were less well connected to the centre of this Jerusalem network.[117] Since Jesus always reaches out to the poor and widows in his teaching and ministry and criticises those who oppress and exploit them, the neglect of widows among his disciples is intolerable and must be resolved. This is because it not only threatens the peace and unity of the church described in Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-35, but more importantly, it appears 'as an act of extreme cruelty and impiety'.[118] By neglecting the Hellenist widows, 'the church finds itself in an unholy alliance with unjust judges (Luke 18.1-8), hypocritical scribes (20.45-47), and an exploitative temple system (21.1-6)'.[119]

The rest of the text (6.2-6) focuses on the resolution of the conflict presented in 6.1. It involves the whole community, including all the twelve apostles, which reflects the significant role the widows play in the community and the importance of ensuring their support. Many commentators notice 'the apparent inconsistency between the assigned role and the subsequent function of the Seven'[120] and think that the Seven are overqualified for the menial table service. Some even reject the existence of such a conflict and claim it is Luke's creation.[121] However, they have incorrectly assessed the problem presented by Luke, for the broad context of the Lucan writings indicates that to Luke, waiting on tables and preaching God's word are closely connected and the two should go together. Table service is neither inferior to preaching and praying nor simply menial, rather, it is 'to provide the setting where table fellowship with the outcasts and the oppressed becomes possible'.[122] By serving and supporting the Hellenist widows, the Seven are therefore continuing the ministry

[117] The appointment of Hellenist leaders indicates their growing influence, which will ensure that their widows are given attention in communal decisions about the distribution of resources.
[118] Tyson 1983:158.
[119] Spencer 1994:729.
[120] Pao 2011:139.
[121] E.g., Lüdemann 2005:93; Price 1997:216; Pervo 2009:152.
[122] Pao 2011:139. See also Tyson 1983:159-60.

of Jesus who helps and blesses the poor and marginalised. And like Jesus who also serves while teaching and praying, the Seven similarly connect table service with the spread of God's word as indicated by Acts 6.7-8.40. And in this sense, the Seven are 'successors of Jesus'.[123]

The above discussions reveal that the real issue in Acts 6.1-7 is about caring and supporting the doubly marginalised Hellenist widows who are excluded from the daily meal due to their vulnerability and linguistic and cultural differences in the Jerusalem Christian community. The way in which the issue is resolved reflects the significant role the widows play in the community and the collective effort the church makes to support the widows and the needy. As Luke portrays the matter in Acts 2 and 4, the Jerusalem church (uniquely) created a common fund in which people brought funds and placed them at the disposal of the apostles. This raises one of the main problems with resource pooling: who decides who gets what out of the common fund? Luke indicates the ideal ('according to need'; 2.45), but who decides who is most needy and how? The daily meal indicates that there are some people reliant on this distribution for everyday, basic sustenance, but it was natural that those closest to the centre of the network would get more attention than those who were new, marginal, or of uncertain status. The Ananias story (Acts 5.1-11) shows the difficulties that arise in gathering resources for the common fund; this story (i.e., Acts 6.1-7) shows the problems that can arise in the distribution of the resources. Nonetheless, in raising this issue, Luke seems to want to indicate that the church could surmount the difficulty in integrating different networks of believers, and so showcases community support as *one* method by which the church might support those most in need (the widows).

[123] Pao (2011:141-42) illustrates not only the frequently noted parallels between the Lucan portrayal of Stephen in Acts 6.8-7.60 and that of Jesus, but also the less noticed parallels between Jesus in Luke and the Hellenists in Acts 6.1-7. It should be noted that if the meal is a sacred event, with prayers and preaching, the Seven who serve may also be hosts or facilitators of meals that are *also* occasions for prayer and preaching, just as in the Corinthian Lord's Supper where the common eating of the meal is also where 'you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Cor 11.26).

2.3. The agency of widows

As discussed earlier, the widows in Luke-Acts are generally portrayed as vulnerable and in need of support, but it does not mean that they are solely recipients of support. As will be shown, widows play a very important and invariably positive role in Luke-Acts. In many cases, they are exemplars of piety, hospitality, and generosity.

When Jesus is presented to the Temple after his birth, two persons speak about him in the Temple – Simeon and Anna (Luke 2.25-38). Different from Simeon who is described as a man in Jerusalem (2.25), Anna is said to be a 'prophetess' (προφῆτις; 2.36) of Jewish origin. According to Serrano, the names of Anna's father (Phanuel) and tribe (Asher) 'are connected with Israel's prophetic tradition', for the name Phanuel – 'face of God' (see Gen 32.31; Judg 8.8; 1 Kgs 12.25) – recalls those (prophets) who have seen God face to face, such as Jacob (Gen 32.31), Moses (Exod 33.11; Num 12.7-8; Deut 34.10) and Elijah (1 Kgs 19.11-12).[124] And 'Asher is the name of the northern tribe (Deut 33.24-25; Josh 19.24-31) where Elijah's prophetic preaching took place (1 Kgs 17-18)'.[125] In addition, the portrayal of Anna as a Jewish prophetess stands in the line of the Israelite prophetesses in the OT – Miriam (Exod 15.20), Deborah (Judg 4.4), Hulda (2 Kgs 22.14), and Isaiah's wife (Isa 8.3) – 'who speak on behalf of YHWH' to his people.[126] Thus, Luke's depiction of Anna as a Jewish prophetess links her 'with a revelation by God to God's people, a revelation that Anna herself is going to see, face to face, and proclaim'.[127] This revelation concerns Jesus who is the redemption of Jerusalem, and Anna responds with praise to God and proclamation about Jesus (Luke 2.38).[128] Bovon thus views Anna, together with John and Simeon, as a prophetess between

[124] Serrano 2014:468. See also Levine and Witherington 2018:69.
[125] Serrano 2014:468.
[126] Harris 2018:63-67; Mielcarek 2012:89; Levine and Witherington 2018:68; Bock 1994:251.
[127] Serrano 2014:469.
[128] Some scholars (e.g., Price 1997:47-61; Bovon 2002:97, 105; Fitzmyer 1981:423, 431) notice Luke's silence about the content of Anna's prophecy, but this does not reduce the significance of Anna as a prophetess based on Luke's detailed and positive description of her.

the Testaments who belongs to 'the eschatological efflorescence of Spirit-directed prophecy (cf. Acts 2.17)'.[129] Serrano indicates that by speaking repeatedly (as indicated by the imperfect verb ἐλάλει) about Jesus to all who were looking for God's redemption, 'Anna seems to be one of the first Christian missionaries'.[130] Levine and Witherington think Anna functions as 'an evangelist'.[131] Harris additionally suggests that Anna's action 'may in fact prefigure the witnessing of the disciples to all nations, which Jesus commands in 24.48'.[132] And she thus states that Anna is 'a prophetess like Philip's four daughters (Acts 21.9), the first of the eschatological Spirit-filled female prophetesses promised through Joel (Joel 2.28-29)' and 'an exemplar of the post-resurrection disciples who are continually in the temple blessing God (24.53)'.[133]

Anna's significance is displayed not only in her identity as a prophetess but also in her exemplary piety (and purity) as a widow. First, as a widow, Anna is associated with the 'pious poor' by some scholars, 'who lived in utter dependence upon God'.[134] This is reflected not only in the OT and Lucan contexts but also in Anna's own action. Second, Anna's age is another element that highlights her exemplary character. Commentators have different opinions over Anna's age: whether she was eighty-four years old or she had been widowed for eighty-four years when she met Jesus. Some posit that Anna was more than one hundred, or even more specifically (with consideration of the significance of 'seven' and 'twelve' as symbolic numbers in biblical literature), one hundred and five years old,[135] and they thus compare Anna with Judith – another pious widow who lived up to the same age.[136] Serrano further interprets 'seven' and 'eighty-four' as indications of Anna's 'perfect married life

[129] Bovon 2002:106.
[130] Serrano 2014:473.
[131] Levine and Witherington 2018:69.
[132] Harris 2018:74.
[133] Harris 2018:62.
[134] Pilgrim 1981:78. See also Serrano 2014:469-70; Harris 2018:72-73.
[135] That is, fourteen years (seven times two) before marriage, seven years of marriage, and eighty-four years (seven times twelve) of widowhood.
[136] Elliott 1988:100-02; Mielcarek 2012:89; Harris 2018:67-69; Price 1997:48-49.

(seven years)' and 'even more perfect widowhood (seven times twelve years)', for in his opinion 'seven' is an expression of abundance and 'twelve' perfection.[137] Green maintains, however, that even if 'eighty-four' refers to Anna's current age rather than the length of her widowhood, 'the effect is the same, for she exemplifies the ascetic ideal of marrying once and devoting oneself only to God in widowhood', and in that sense 'her similarity to Judith remains'.[138] Indeed, Anna's purity and piety are most evidently revealed in her action – 'she never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day' (ἡ οὐκ ἀφίστατο τοῦ ἱεροῦ νηστείαις καὶ δεήσεσιν λατρεύουσα νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν; Luke 2.37). Levine and Witherington comment that 'Anna's widowhood and continence conform to Luke's ideal of Christian behaviour as well as to the Roman valuation of the *univira*, the once-married woman'.[139] Bovon additionally highlights that Anna's piety 'explains her presence at the temple (2.38)'[140] and that 'she corresponds to the ideal of the Jewish and Christian widow' (e.g., Jdt 8.4-6; 1 Tim 5.3-16).[141] Serrano further views Anna as 'the forerunner of the Jerusalem Christian community that devotes itself to fasting and praying and daily attending the temple (Acts 2.42, 46)'.[142] Therefore, through both her bold proclamation about God's redemption and her complete devotion to God with fasting and prayer, Anna presents herself as a paradigm for the early Christians.

In the earlier discussion of Luke 18.1-8, the vulnerability of the widow has been analysed, but that is not the whole story. Although the unjust judge initially refuses to grant her justice, he eventually decides to do so after self-reasoning/soliloquy: εἰ καὶ τὸν θεὸν οὐ φοβοῦμαι οὐδὲ ἄνθρωπον ἐντρέπομαι, διά γε τὸ παρέχειν μοι κόπον τὴν χήραν ταύτην ἐκδικήσω αὐτήν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς τέλος ἐρχομένη ὑπωπιάζῃ με (18.4-5). The judge's self-reasoning

[137] Serrano 2014:470.
[138] Green 1997:151. Bovon (2002:106) also views eighty-four as Anna's present age.
[139] Levine and Witherington 2018:68.
[140] Bovon 2002:97.
[141] Bovon 2002:106.
[142] Serrano 2014:472.

reveals three points: first, he himself confesses his impiety towards God and indifference towards people, which confirms Jesus' depiction of him (18.2, 6). This explains his initial rejection of the widow's appeal for justice, just as Freed says 'as a person of such character, he would not be easily moved by emotional appeals or the status of the person requesting his help'.[143] 'Therefore', Freed continues, 'the emphasis is on the persistence of the woman making the request'[144] – the second point disclosed by the judge's soliloquy: the widow keeps coming to him, to the extent that the judge begins to feel distressed. Green maintains that 'the NRSV rendering of τὸ παρέχειν μοι κόπον as "bothering me" is weak', because it suggests 'neither the duress the judge was under nor the level the widow's shocking behaviour had reached in the judge's view'.[145] And Johnson, in light of the next clause, takes the literal meaning of κόπος ('beating')[146] and suggests the rendering of 'giving me such a beating',[147] which displays vividly the shock and distress caused to the unrighteous judge by the widow's persistence. What the next clause discloses, however, is even more astonishing: third, the judge is afraid that the widow may in the end come and 'give (him) a black eye' (ὑπωπιάζῃ). Scholars have different opinions on the rendering of the verb ὑπωπιάζω – whether it should be understood in its literal or figurative sense. Literally, it means 'give a black eye', 'strike in the face'; figuratively, it means 'bring someone to submission by constant annoyance', 'wear down'.[148] Those who take the figurative meaning usually translate it as 'wear out'[149] or view the widow's persistence as a threat to the judge's reputation.[150] However, BDAG credibly points out that 'in such case the denouement lacks punch, for the judge has already been worn

[143] Freed 1987:51.
[144] Freed 1987:51.
[145] Green 1997:640n92. Spencer (2012:284-90) views the widow's aggressive agency in relation to her 'savvy strategy' (i.e., 'her *nagging* and her *shaming* of the judge') through which the widow manipulates 'the honour-shame system to her own advantage'.
[146] BDAG 2000:558.
[147] Johnson 1991:270.
[148] BDAG 2000:1043.
[149] E.g., Bovon 2013:534; Fitzmyer 1985:1175.
[150] E.g., Bovon 2013:534; Derrett 1972b:189-91.

down and wants nothing added to the κόπος that he has already endured' and suggests that 'a more appropriate rendering for a figurative sense would be *browbeat*'.[151] Moreover, since the judge has no regard for people, which indicates he has no concern for others' opinion, it is doubtful that he would feel threatened for or even care about his reputation.[152] Considering the weaknesses of the figurative reading, some scholars take the verb in its literal sense here to 'maintain the delicious ambiguity of the original'[153] or to highlight the feistiness of the widow.[154] Green's excellent demonstration of the significance of the widow's behaviour is worth a full quote:

> Interestingly, the judge's self-assessment is identical to Jesus' characterization of him, verifying that the action he proposes on behalf of this widow is not motivated by his commitment to God's priorities nor by his concern for his standing in the community nor by any residual altruism on his part. He is motivated, rather, by the woman's astonishing behaviour. She is acting so out of station that, he muses, she may even be capable of assaulting him with more than words! The language Luke uses is startling, perhaps even humorous, borrowed as it is from the boxing ring, for it invokes images of the almighty, fearless, macho judge cornered and slugged by the least powerful in society. Thus Jesus accents the astonishingly uncharacteristic initiative and persistence of an allegedly impotent woman in the face of injustice.[155]

Indeed, the widow's behaviour is so extraordinary that readers recognise her as 'the principal character in the parable'[156] and the unjust judge 'only as a foil' to emphasise her persistence.[157] Price goes even further to view the pericope (18.2-5) as an 'exemplary story' for its original hearer – a widow herself – to imitate directly.[158] But even when read as a parable in the context of Luke, the significance of the widow as an exemplary figure is not diminished. As Bovon indicates, 'she is a living illustration of the believer's unceasing

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[151] BDAG 2000:1043.
[152] Bock 1996:1448-49.
[153] Johnson 1991:270.
[154] Cotter 2005:338-42. But Cotter (341-42) states that it is the fear of public ridicule or losing 'public face' due to his possible appearance in public with a black eye that makes the judge change his mind. It is unlikely so given the judge's disregard for public opinion. It is probably the shock and the distress that make the judge decide to grant the widow justice.
[155] Green 1997:640-41.
[156] Bovon 2013:531.
[157] Freed 1987:51.
[158] Price 1997:194-95. See also Dickerson (2019) who adopts a 'womanist biblical hermeneutic' (9), interpreting this parable in the context of African American women instead of the Lucan context.

prayer'.[159] Green additionally states that 'we see in the widow's action a model of perseverance in the midst of wrong'.[160] And he astutely observes that 'according to the Greek text of v 8, Jesus' question is not concerned with "faith" (in general) but with "*the* faith" – that is, that manner of faith demonstrated by the widow in the antecedent parable'.[161] Therefore, whether standing on her own or as a parable figure, the widow is an exemplar of persistence, determination, and courage (in pursuing justice).

As discussed earlier concerning the poor widow's offering in Luke 21.1-4, some scholars regard Jesus' comment as a lament for the widow's tragic victimisation by the temple system, whereas some others view it as a praise of the widow's generosity. Those who hold the first position, represented by Wright, interpret 21.1-4 based on its immediate context (i.e., 20.45-47) and the catchword 'widow' shared by both passages, and hence draw a thematic link between the criticism against the scribes' exploitation of widows and the occasion of the poor widow in 21.1-4.[162] However, Bovon argues that 'according to both the tradition and the redaction the contrast is between the rich and the poor widow and not between the widow and gloomy exploiters'[163] and that 'independent of its literary context, the pericope cannot imply a criticism of the temple or a criticism of the exploitation of widows'.[164] Both Wright and Bovon have their points: if we focus on the text itself, it contrasts the widow's small but sacrificial offering with that of the rich who give only out of their abundance (21.4); if we read the text in its literary context, the contrast between the poor widow and the scribes is not negligible, especially their attitudes towards money and God. However, the contrast between the exploitative scribes and the poor widow does not

[159] Bovon 2013:531.
[160] Green 1997:637.
[161] Green 1997:637.
[162] Wright 1982:256-65; Fitzmyer 1985:1321; Green 1997:728-29.
[163] Bovon 2012:95. It should be noted that by 'the tradition' Bovon refers to the oral tradition of the widow's offering; and by 'the redaction' the written form of the text.
[164] Bovon 2012:92.

necessarily make the case of the widow a lament for her;[165] it can be a praise of her in both the contrast between her and the scribes and that between her and the rich. Regarding the contrast between the poor widow and the oppressive scribes, Johnson reads it in light of the contrast between the 'oppressive rich' and the 'righteous poor' – an important theme presented by Luke.[166] And he associates the scribes with the 'oppressive rich' condemned by Jesus, and the poor widow with the 'righteous poor who receive the good news (4.18; 6.20; 7.22; 14.21; 16.20), as shown by her response of disposing of her own possessions'.[167] In terms of the contrast between the widow and the rich, Bovon makes a detailed comparison between Luke's and Mark's accounts and comments that Luke's simplification of the scenery and reduction of the number of people involved 'support a comparison and a contrast'[168] through which Luke 'develops a topic that is favourite with him, sharing goods and the gift of oneself'.[169] Indeed, compared with the rich 'who though they may give from their abundance, do not go beyond or even anywhere near the point at which their abundance might be threatened',[170] the poor widow – out of need herself – has given 'all she had to live on' (πάντα τὸν βίον ὃν εἶχεν; 21.4). As Pilgrim states, 'even though she was one of the poor and even one of those under the special divine protection of Yahweh (widows, orphans, strangers) she held nothing back. Hence her action becomes an example of sacrificial giving, giving that shares unconditionally with the poor'.[171] In addition, by giving everything she has, the poor widow has accomplished what the rich fail to do (cf. 18.22) and has obtained eternal life.[172] Furthermore, as Levine and Witherington suggest, this widow can be viewed as 'the ideal

[165] The widow might be a victim of the scribes or the temple system, but we cannot be sure about this, since the text does not say anything about it explicitly other than the poverty of the widow and her sacrificial offering.
[166] Johnson 1991:317.
[167] Johnson 1991:316.
[168] Bovon 2012:92.
[169] Bovon 2012:95.
[170] Pilgrim 1981:95.
[171] Pilgrim 1981:95.
[172] Bovon 2012:95.

disciple',[173] for she has fulfilled Jesus' teaching on the cost of discipleship (cf. 12.33; 14.33) by giving up all her possessions. In fact, Bovon observes that what she has given is more than her possessions, but 'her whole life', for βίος means not only 'resources needed to maintain life' but also 'life' itself.[174] Therefore, as Bovon concludes, 'Luke draws here not only a lesson of morality but also a lesson of theology',[175] for this widow, although extremely poor and in need herself, has not only given generously and even sacrificially but also offered her entire life to God. Thus, this is another case where a widow is not passive, but has agency and even exemplary agency as far as Luke is concerned.

In the episode about the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4.38-39), we have studied only the household support she receives as a widow, but her response after being healed by Jesus has yet to be discussed. The text says παραχρῆμα δὲ ἀναστᾶσα διηκόνει αὐτοῖς ('immediately she got up and began to serve them'; 4.39). Fitzmyer comments that 'the woman's immediate reaction of getting up and serving them' not only stresses 'the instantaneous and complete character of her restoration' but also emphasises 'her service and implicit gratitude'.[176] He additionally indicates that 'she is a paradigm of other women from Galilee who will serve Jesus in the Lucan account (8.1-3; 23.49, 55)'.[177] Green similarly regards her 'hospitality and gratitude' as 'an authentic, positive response to Jesus' salvific ministry' in light of the broader Lucan context (e.g., Luke 8.1-3; Acts 16.33-34).[178] He further points out that 'her "service" may reflect patterns of reciprocity', but in his opinion, 'this woman serves not as Jesus' debtor, but as benefactor for him and for his companions (see 8.1-3)'.[179] Fitzmyer additionally discloses that the imperfect tense of διηκόνει 'could

[173] Levine and Witherington 2018:557.
[174] Bovon 2012:95. For the two meanings of βίος, see BDAG 2000:176-77.
[175] Bovon 2012:96.
[176] Fitzmyer 1981:549.
[177] Fitzmyer 1981:549.
[178] Green 1997:225-26.
[179] Green 1997:225n83.

mean, when used absolutely, to serve table or serve in a more generic sense'.[180] Green's and Fitzmyer's comments suggest that the service of Simon's mother-in-law may go beyond table service; she may be the first among those women who followed Jesus and provided for him and his disciples out of their own resources (see 8.1-3). As Bovon states, 'in Luke discipleship to Jesus for a woman expresses itself primarily in a ministry of service. This is reflected not only in practical work but also in financial support (cf. 8.3)'.[181] Therefore, based on the above discussions, Simon's mother's-in-law immediate response of getting up and serving Jesus (and others) not only displays her hospitality and gratitude but also implies that she has become a benefactor and disciple of Jesus thereafter.

Apart from Simon's mother-in-law, Luke records another woman – Lydia – who offers a form of benefaction, in this case responding to Paul and his team with hospitality (Acts 16.11-15). Luke's introduction of Lydia is very concise – with her name, occupation, origin, and religious position all included in one short sentence: Lydia is a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira and a worshiper of God (πορφυρόπωλις πόλεως Θυατείρων σεβομένη τὸν θεόν; 16.14). According to Witherington, that Lydia is mentioned by name 'probably indicates she is a person of some status, since it was normal in such a Greco-Roman setting *not* to mention women by personal name in public unless they were either notable or notorious' (italics original).[182] Although some scholars suggest that Lydia is a

[180] Fitzmyer 1981:550. Levine and Witherington (2018:126) go so far that they regard Simon's mother-in-law as 'the prototype for Jesus' based on the connotations of the terms ἀναστᾶσα (i.e., 'resurrection'; cf. Luke 24.46) and διηκόνει (i.e., 'Jesus' own actions and commendations'; cf. 22.26-27). However, as Green (1997:225n83) states, 'even though Luke uses what will become a heavily freighted term, διακονέω (see esp. 12.37; 22.26-27), it is doubtful that one should read much more into the woman's activity'.
[181] Bovon 2002:164.
[182] Witherington 1998:491-92. See also Peterson 2009:460-61.

freedwoman based on her name[183] and her occupation,[184] most of them agree that Lydia is a woman of some means. Keener additionally indicates that in the ancient Roman world 'even slaves could control considerable wealth as business agents, and purple dealers could achieve considerable status'[185] and that 'Lydia was probably economically secure'.[186] Witherington similarly regards Lydia as 'a person of some social importance and means'.[187] Peterson also views Lydia as a woman with 'some degree of wealth and independence'.[188] It may be difficult to know the social status of Lydia simply based on her occupation, but as scholars comment, she is at least financially secure. Besides her financial independence, Lydia is also described as a devout woman – 'a worshiper of God' (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν). Witherington indicates, however, that the term σεβομένη here does not refer to 'merely a devout person of any sort but a Gentile who worships the biblical God',[189] or as Fitzmyer states, Lydia is 'a Jewish sympathiser, which accounts for her being at the place of prayer on a sabbath'.[190] As the text shows, Lydia's association with Judaism also explains her encounter with Paul and her subsequent baptism with her household (16.15). According to Pervo, the mentioning of her household suggests that 'she was the head of her household, and a person of some means'.[191] In fact, Johnson regards her as a wealthy woman of 'substantial means'.[192] Matthews even considers her as someone among the ranks of the 'quasi-elite' class with

[183] Lydia is named after the name of her province Lydia, which often happens to slaves and freedpersons. See Keener 2020:389; Hornik and Parsons 2017:179; Barrett 1998:782; Pervo 2009:403. But Keener additionally indicates that 'Lydia was also a common name, including within Lydia'. Barrett (1998:782), citing Hemer, further points out that 'the name can now be shown to have been used by women of higher class'. See also Matthews (2001:86) who discloses that in evidence of first- and second-century inscriptions, 'women of the social elite bear the name as well'.
[184] Keener (2020:390) views Lydia as a seller of purple cloth, and he discloses that 'wholesalers were often slaves and freedpersons'.
[185] Keener 2020:390. Nevertheless, Keener thinks Lydia might be a free Greek residing in Philippi, employed in services. See also Keener 2014:2399.
[186] Keener 2020:390; also 2014:2398.
[187] Witherington 1998:492.
[188] Peterson 2009:458.
[189] Witherington 1998:493. See also Bock 2007:53; Holladay 2016:321; Keener 2014:2393.
[190] Fitzmyer 1998:586. See also Barrett 1998:783; Reimer 1995:93.
[191] Pervo 2009:403.
[192] Johnson 1992:293, 297.

certain wealth and education.[193] Moreover, as commentators indicate, the fact that Lydia is the head of her household suggests she has no husband; she might be a divorcee or a widow, but less likely a single woman of means.[194] However, considering the generally negative reputation of a divorced woman in antiquity, Lydia is more likely a widow than a divorcee. And obviously being a pious widow makes it easier for the missionaries to accept her hospitality (16.15), which also confirms the genuineness of her conversion and faithfulness.[195] Thus, as most scholars recognise, Lydia's hospitality demonstrates 'the genuineness of her faith'[196] and 'true discipleship'[197] and marks the merger of Jewish Christians and Gentile converts in Philippi.[198] Lydia is probably the first Gentile Christian in Philippi, whose home subsequently becomes 'a centre for the new faith in the city (16.40)'.[199] Witherington stresses that Lydia's provision of a meeting place was 'crucial to the existence and growth of Christianity' in Philippi due to Roman antipathy to oriental religions.[200] Therefore, Witherington further states, 'Lydia's significance was not confined to her being a disciple or hostess to traveling disciples. Luke wishes us to understand that what began as a lodging for missionaries, became home of the embryonic church in Philippi'.[201] Indeed, Lydia – a devout woman (and very likely a widow) – is not only a hostess to the missionaries but also a patroness/benefactor to the Christian community in Philippi.[202]

Another woman who plays the same role in Jerusalem as Lydia in Philippi is Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12.12-17). The text states that after being delivered from

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[193] Matthews 2001:88.
[194] Peterson 2009:461; Witherington 1998:493; Keener 2020:392; Holladay 2016:321. Commentators do not explain why Lydia is unlikely to be a single woman of means, perhaps because such a case was rare in antiquity.
[195] Witherington 1998:493.
[196] Witherington 1998:493. See also Keener 2020:393; Peterson 2009:462; Johnson 1992:297.
[197] Holladay 2016:322.
[198] Bock 2007:535; Fitzmyer 1998:586.
[199] Bock 2007:535. See also Johnson 1992:297; Reimer 1995:113; Keener 2014:2530.
[200] Witherington 1998:487. He provides a detailed explanation (n68) about the importance for Christians to have a meeting place in such a city.
[201] Witherington 1988:149.
[202] Peterson 2009:458; Witherington 1998:338.

prison, Peter goes to the house of Mary, where many have gathered and are praying (probably for Peter; cf. 12.5). Scholars find the description concerning Mary noteworthy: first, she is the head of her household, which suggests she is a widow (cf. Lydia).[203] Second, the reference to 'many' (ἱκανοί; 12.12) gathering in her house, an entrance gate (τὴν θύραν τοῦ πυλῶνος; 12.13), and a female slave (παιδίσκη; 12.13), reveals that the house is of considerable size, which indicates that Mary is a woman of means.[204] Third, the fact that Peter goes to Mary's house directly after being delivered from prison, expecting to find Christians meeting there, suggests it is 'a regular location of a house church'[205] under the patronage of Mary.[206] Thus, as Witherington maintains, 'in the mother of John Mark (Acts 12.12-17) and in Lydia (Acts 16.12-40) we see women assuming the role of "mother" or patroness and benefactor to the then fledgling Christian communities in Jerusalem and Philippi respectively',[207] which indicates the significant role women or, more specifically, widows play in the establishment and development of the early church.

This chapter has so far discussed the presentation of widows in Luke-Acts, including their vulnerability, support, and agency. The discussions reveal that widows depicted in Luke-Acts are generally poor and vulnerable and supported by their families, other individuals, or the church. However, poverty and vulnerability do not reduce them to solely pitiable and passive recipients of support; in many cases, they are models of piety, devotion, persistence, hospitality, and generosity. Some of them even play a crucial and prominent role in the establishment and development of the early church (e.g., Lydia and Mary the mother of John Mark). How about widows in other narrative texts, e.g., in the AAA? This will be explored in the following sections.

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[203] Pervo 2009:305; Witherington 1998:386.
[204] Bock 2007:428; Pervo 2009:305; Keener 2020:320.
[205] Witherington 1998:386. See also Bock 2007:428; Reimer 1995:242. Reimer even concludes that 'Mary was engaged in the daily work of organisation and preaching', which, however, is not clearly evident in the text.
[206] Pervo 2009:305.
[207] Witherington 1998:338.

3. Widows in the Acts of Peter

As an important non-biblical early Christian work and a major text of the AAA, APt has long been a subject of wide-ranging discussion.[208] For example, some scholars have discussed the intertextual issues concerning APt, including its relationship with other AAA and the NT;[209] some are interested in its genre, origin and compositional/redactional history;[210] some seek to construct the social world of APt (and other AAA);[211] while others examine the various themes (e.g., miracles, chastity, patronage, prayer, devotion)[212] or study the characters mentioned in the text (e.g., Simon Magus, Peter, Agrippa, Marcellus, the prominent women).[213] While most of these discussions focus on the source, redaction, origin, or intertextuality of APt, the contents of the text have been surprisingly little studied,[214] which will therefore be the focus of this section, particularly those passages relevant to 'widows/widowhood'. Before narrowing the focus to our subject widows, it is necessary to have a general understanding of its presentations of money and women since both are not only prominent themes in APt but also closely related to 'widows'.

3.1. Money and women in APt

According to Elliott, the original text of APt, written in Greek, is unfortunately lost except for the part on Peter's martyrdom and a small Oxyrhynchus fragment (*P.Oxy.* 849).

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[208] The original text (composed in Greek) is dated 'in the closing decades of the second century' (Elliott 1993:392), or more specifically, 'in the decade 180-190' (Schneemelcher 1992:283).
[209] E.g., MacDonald 1997:11-41; Stoops 1997:57-86; Lalleman 1998:161-77; Rordorf 1998:178-91; Thomas 1997:185-205; Matthews 1997b:207-22.
[210] E.g., Burrus 1986:101-17; Thomas 2003; 1999:39-62; Erbes 1911:161-85, 353-77, 497-530; Schmidt 1903; 1924:321-48; 1927:481-513; 1930:150-55.
[211] Davies 2012; Brock 1999:147-69; Jacobs 1999:105-38; Perkins 1994:296-307; Burrus 1986:101-17.
[212] See Perkins (1995:124-41) and De Weg (1998:97-110) on miracles and healings; Burrus (1986:101-17) on chastity; Stoops (1986:91-100) on patronage; Houghton (2004:171-200) on prayer; and Bremmer (2023:87-115) on devotion to Christ.
[213] See Luttikhuizen (1998:39-51) and Adamik (1998:52-64) on Simon Magus; Karasszon (1998:21-28) on Agrippa; Bolyki (1998:111-22) on Peter; Bremmer (1998:1-20) on women; and Callon (2012:797-818) on slaves.
[214] Klauck (2008) and Lapham (2003) provide a brief introduction of the content of APt respectively, but do not engage in much serious discussion.

However, about two-thirds of APt have been found in a Latin (Codex Vercellensis 158) [215] and a Coptic (Codex Berolinensis 8502.4) manuscripts. The Coptic text contains an episode of the story of Peter's daughter, which, together with another episode of the story of the gardener's daughter found in the Epistle of Pseudo-Titus, is generally accepted as part of the first one-third of APt that describes Peter's acts in Jerusalem.[216] Thus, these two episodes are also included in the following discussion, together with the main part on the contest between Peter and Simon Magus, and the martyrdom of Peter.

Money in APt

Perkins observes that 'attention to finances seems almost obsessive in the *Acts*; few scenes have no financial references.'[217] Indeed, the issue of money is presented throughout the narrative. In the episode of Peter's daughter, after selling the land bequeathed to his daughter by Ptolemy, Peter gives all the money to the poor. After sending Peter to Puteoli, the captain Theon sells everything in his ship in order to follow Peter to Rome (6). Marcellus spends much wealth on Christians, which even enrages the emperor. After being perverted by Simon, however, Marcellus regrets spending money on them (8). Later when he witnesses the miracles performed by Peter, he repents and confesses to Peter that he would have given all his property to Peter if it could win Peter over and save his soul (10). He then invites widows and elders to his house for prayer and gives each of them a piece of gold for their ministry (19). He also spends much money on Peter's corpse after Peter's martyrdom but is reprimanded by Peter (in a vision) for spending unnecessarily on the dead (40). The rich woman Eubola who possesses much gold and valuables, having recovered her stolen property

[215] Many scholars notice the special characteristics of the Latin version of the APt (the *Actus Vercellenses* is one of the most prominent sources of vulgar Latin). Nevertheless, this thesis follows the critical edition of Lipsius-Bonnet (1959a:45-103) for the text of APt. And for the English translation, Elliott (1993:397-426) is used, unless otherwise indicated.
[216] Elliott 1993:391. See also Schneemelcher 1992:278-79. *Contra* Molinari (2000) who argues against this view. Cf. Klauck (2008:107) who advises caution and leaves the question open.
[217] Perkins 1995:137; 1994:302.

from Simon, gives it all up for the service of the poor (17). During his contest with Simon in the forum, Peter tells the Romans how Simon attempted to bribe him and Paul in Jerusalem into enabling him to perform miracles like them, but they cursed Simon and rejected the possession of money as their purpose (23). Later when the mother of a young senator beseeches Peter to raise her son from death, she agrees to distribute the money for her son's funeral to her slaves and the widows (28). And when her son is restored, she brings two thousand pieces of gold to Peter for distribution among 'the virgins of Christ', while her son brings double the amount of money to Peter (29). On the Sunday after Peter's contest with Simon at the forum, a rich woman Chryse brings to Peter ten thousand pieces of gold at the command of God in a dream (30).

The various presentations of money in APt seem to serve different purposes. Firstly, how a person handles money to a great extent reflects whether the person is truly of God. The contrast between Peter and Simon in their attitudes towards money is an evident example. Peter, the real servant and apostle of God, never makes use of his miraculous power to make money. Even when he receives money from others, he never keeps anything for himself but always uses it for the service of the poor and the whole Christian community. Simon the magician, however, is so obsessed with money that he uses his magical tricks to deceive others (e.g., Eubola, Marcellus) for their money. He even thinks he can buy God's power with money (cf. Acts 8.9-24). Even though he claims to be the power of God, his behaviour and attitude towards money betray his real identity – a deceiver and servant of the devil. Marcellus' story additionally reveals that the object of his conversion determines his attitude towards money and people: when he converts to God, he becomes a patron to the Christian community, especially to the poor; but when he is converted by Simon, he spends his money on Simon and persecutes the Christians.

Secondly, money is also presented as a means through which God's care and provision for his own people are manifested. The most obvious example is that of Chryse who is commanded by God himself to bring Peter a large amount of money for the support of the poor. Other narratives, such as those of Eubola, the senator Nicostratus and his mother, and Marcellus, additionally reflect God's provision for the poor and the Christian community through rich people. Thirdly, the presentation of money in APt seems also to have a symbolic purpose, a symbol of 'an alternative social structure'.[218] As Perkins points out, the most powerful signifiers for social networks are sexuality and property.[219] But in APt, 'wealth is no longer in the control of the wealthy, but susceptible to Christ's word and control'.[220] As Stoops argues, APt presents Jesus as the ultimate patron to all Christians – he alone receives 'the honour and loyalty generated by the gifts of benefactors',[221] whereas the rich are obligated to support the poor without receiving any honour or leadership function in the Christian community.

Women in APt

Female characters not only appear frequently in APt but are also of different types. There are virgins – represented by Peter's and the gardener's daughters.[222] In these two episodes, virginity and purity are emphasised to an extreme extent – it is better for a virgin to become paralysed and to die than to be defiled. Another group of women are those who pursue chastity, such as the four concubines of Agrippa (33) and the wife of Albinus (34). In order to maintain their chastity and purity, they are ready to endure any persecution and torture from their husbands. Sharply contrasted with these women are those who engage in

[218] Perkins 1995:137; 1994:302.
[219] Perkins 1995:138; 1994:303.
[220] Perkins 1995:136; 1994:301. Similarly, sexual life is not controlled by authoritative men but by women themselves who seek chastity. On women, see below.
[221] Stoops 1986:91. See also Perkins 1994:300-01; Bremmer 2023:106-07.
[222] The text mentions the 'virgins of the Lord/Christ' a few times (22, 29), but the literary context suggests that they are actually widows who are called virgins (see further below).

fornication, represented by Rufina (2) and Chryse (30). The two figures are portrayed quite differently, however. Rufina is condemned by Paul while receiving the eucharist because of her fornication and becomes paralysed and mute (2); whereas Chryse, although she is notorious for her fornication, is not condemned by Peter nor does she receive any punishment. Instead, Peter accepts her money as provision from God for the service of the poor. The contrasting receptions of Rufina and Chryse in the same text are striking. It seems, as Perkins suggests, the emphasis of the Chryse episode is that 'money may be accepted from any benefactor if it is used for the community's good'.[223] What is portrayed even more negatively is a very ugly woman whom Marcellus sees in a vision (22). This woman – black, dirty, and fettered with chains on her neck, hands, and feet – is said to be a demon who is the whole power of Simon and of his god. And she is beheaded and cut into pieces by Jesus Christ who appears in the likeness of Peter.

Another category is the upper-class wealthy women. As Bremmer observes, APt seems to 'mention more women of the upper classes than any other of the major AAA'.[224] Besides Eubola (17) and the senator's mother (28-29) who support the poor with their own wealth, and the concubines of Agrippa (33) and the wife of Albinus (34) who pursue chastity, another two matrons Berenice and Philostrate are indicated to be among the great multitude of women who dispatch Paul to the harbour at his departure from Rome (3). And many wealthy women and matrons are said to be present at Peter's preaching on a Sunday when Chryse brings a huge amount of money to Peter (30). These wealthy women are apparently described as either patronesses or potential patronesses of the Christian community, especially the poor and needy members. There are also women of strong faith. For example, Candida not only becomes a believer herself after listening to Paul's words but also

[223] Perkins 1995:137.
[224] Bremmer 1998:5.

successfully converts her husband Quartus who is a prison warder (1). In addition, when most of the believers in Rome are led astray by Simon, two women in the lodging-house of the Bithynians are profiled among the few who stand firmly in their faith (4).

The most prominent group of women depicted in APt appear to be widows, however. They are mentioned most frequently and specifically, whether as beneficiaries of support or as contributors to the Christian community. Rich people are obligated to support widows (8, 17, 28), whom Marcellus invites to his house for prayer (19, 22), and to whom Peter ministers with his own hands (29). The only son of an aged widow is raised (25, 27). Blind widows are not only healed but also granted the privilege to see Jesus in different forms through visions (21), and 'they were singled out among the Christians who tried to save Peter from the cross (36)'.[225] It is evident that widows play a significant role in APt.

3.2. The support of widows

APt pays special attention to the welfare of widows, both physically and financially, as indicated by the fact that widows are mentioned numerous times as recipients of healing or financial support. It is therefore important to examine the different means of support for widows in APt.

Household support

Brock observes that APt 'demonstrates a commitment to social and familial ties'.[226] Two narratives reflect familial loyalty and support, especially that of children to their widowed mothers: the healing of a blind widow led by her daughter to Marcellus' house (20) and the raising of an aged widow's son (25, 27).

[225] Bremmer 1998:4.
[226] Brock 1999:163.

As mentioned earlier, after seeing Peter at Rome, Marcellus repents, drives out Simon, purifies his house, invites widows and elders to pray together, and requests Peter to go to his house. When Peter enters the house, he notices among the old women a blind widow led by her daughter and brought into the house of Marcellus. Peter calls the widow to himself, puts his hand upon her, and heals her (20). Compared with the healing of other blind widows in chapter 21, this story is noticeably short. However, as Brock states, 'even the inclusion of such a small detail as the daughter giving her mother a hand indicates the presence of familial support'.[227] First, this old woman is not just a widow but a *blind* (*ab oculis*) widow. If being a *widow* places her in a socially vulnerable position, being *old* then means fragility and helplessness, but being *blind* reduces her to complete misery and dependence. She thus would need help and support in almost every aspect of her life. Because of her old age and blindness, it is impossible for her to work and to fend for herself. She certainly needs others' support for survival. Second, the narrative shows that her support comes from her daughter and very likely Marcellus as well. Since Marcellus receives many other old women, it may not be possible for him to attend to the widow personally other than give her some financial support. Apparently, the blind widow has to depend on her daughter in her daily life. The daughter is probably her closest and possibly only family member who serves as her eyes wherever she goes. It is evidently difficult for the daughter to support her mother alone, especially financially, which is why the widow is also receiving financial support from Marcellus. The daughter, however, remains the main and daily support of the widow, even after the widow regains her sight. And the case of this blind widow probably reflects the situation of other old women and blind widows mentioned in APt who receive support mainly from their own households, especially from their children (if any), without excluding

[227] Brock 1999:164.

financial help from others who are rich. This scenario is even more likely in the next episode – the raising of the only son of an aged widow.

The raising of the widow's son happens during Peter's contest with Simon at the forum (25, 27). In order to show his impartiality, the prefect commands Simon to kill one of his (the prefect's) slaves and Peter is to revive him. While people are murmuring about Simon's killing of the slave, an aged widow who has been cared for by Marcellus cries out to Peter for help, because her only son has also died whom she needs dearly and desperately (25). After her son is carried to Peter, Peter raises him from death and commands him to take care of his mother before being called to a higher ministry (i.e., to serve as deacon and bishop; 27). As Brock posits, this story reflects 'Peter's advocacy for a primary accountability to familial ties',[228] especially in supporting one's aged parents. Firstly, this widow is extremely vulnerable and helpless – she is old and weak to the extent that she cannot even walk on her own. As a result, when she asks for help from Peter, she has to cry out loudly first so that people can hear her and bring her to Peter. This is additionally borne out by the fact that she needs to be carried by the young men as she directs them to fetch her dead son (25). Indeed, the widow is mentioned a few times as being carried or lifted up by her son or by others, which indicates her extreme vulnerability and complete dependence. Secondly, the loss of her son turns her life into one of tragedy and sorrow. Before even seeing Peter, the widow cries out, 'Peter, servant of God, my son also is dead, the only one I had' (*Petre, seruus dei, filius meus mortuus est, unicum quem habebam*; 25). And after being brought to Peter, she falls down at Peter's feet and laments desperately, 'I had only one son; by the labour of his hands he provided for me; he lifted me up, he carried me. Now he is dead, who will give me a hand?' (*Vnicum filium habebam; hic umeris suis alimentum mihi praestabat, ipse me leuabat, ipse me portabat. hoc mortuo, qui mihi manum porriget?* 25).

[228] Brock 1999:163.

These words expose the extreme agony, utter sorrow and complete desperation the aged widow is going through. In addition, she indicates more than once that she has *only one* son (*unicum filium*) and that the son who has died is the *only one* (*unicum*) she has. In other words, her son is the *one and only* person on whom she relies in her daily life for support and survival.[229] The death of her son can only mean 'the end' of the widow's life itself. Thus for the widow to continue life, her son will have to come back. Therefore, thirdly, the revival of her son is of utmost significance to the widow. In his prayer, Peter recognises the widow's desperation and the dire need of raising her son: 'revive the son of the aged widow, who is helpless without him' (*suscita uiduae senioris filium, quae sibi adiuuare non potest sine filio*; 27).[230] The revival of the widow's son is more than the restoration of a son to his mother: it recovers the single means of support to an aged widow, rekindles her hope, and renews her life. As the text shows, the raising of the son is almost solely for the sake of the widow rather than for the son himself: he is raised so he can continue to provide for the widow and to take care of her, including assisting her physical movements. Last but not least, Peter's order to the son (i.e., he shall look after his mother till her death, and afterward he will be called into church ministry; 27) suggests that Peter views one's support of his/her parents (especially if they are old and helpless) as more important than church ministry. Although Peter considers church ministry as a 'higher ministry' (*altiis ministrans*; 27), he instructs the son to care for his mother first before serving in the church. And this instruction/command is issued in the presence of all the young men who carried the son to Peter, and of all present at the forum

[229] Obviously, 'the labour of his (the son's) hands' is insufficient to feed two mouths, hence the need for Marcellus' financial help. However, what the son provides for the widow is more than the financial, i.e., including the physical and moral. In this sense, Marcellus' support can never replace that of the son.
[230] This story obviously echoes Luke 7.11-17 which narrates Jesus' raising of the only son of a widow at Nain. The two stories are so similar that there are even verbal echoes when Jesus (νεανίσκε, σοὶ λέγω, ἐγέρθητι; Luke 7.14) and Peter (*dico tibi: iuuenis, surge*; APt 27) order the young men to rise respectively.

(including not just Christians, but all those in Rome; 23). The implication is significant. Indeed, this story has placed the household support for widows as of the first order.

Individual support

Although widows receive support first and foremost from their own households, such support alone is often insufficient, and so they need additional supply from other people who are rich. The most representative individuals in APt who provide for widows are Marcellus and Eubola.

Marcellus' benevolence towards widows and the poor is best summarised in chapter 8: 'All the widows who hoped in Christ took their refuge in him; all the orphans were fed by him. … All the poor called Marcellus their patron; his house was called the house of the pilgrims and poor' (*uiduae omnes sperantes in Christo ad hunc refugium habebant; omnes orfani ab eo pascebantur. … Marcellum omnes pauperi patronum uocabant; cuius domus peregrinorum et pauperorum uocabulum habebat*). Here Marcellus is clearly described as a patron (*patronum*) of the Christian widows, orphans, and other needy believers. According to Stoops, 'Roman society operated to a large extent as a system of interlocking patronage networks' in which the patron 'was obliged to protect and care for his dependent clients', whereas the clients were expected to offer the patron in return 'honour and loyalty'.[231] As a patron, Marcellus' support for the Christians is even met with the emperor's disapproval who consequently refuses to grant him any office in order to prevent him from further benefiting Christians (8). As mentioned earlier, the frequent description of money in APt reflects the great financial concern of the Christian community, among whom the majority are poor and in need of financial support from the rich. Marcellus as their patron is thus very important to them. In fact, Marcellus' influence on the Christian community is so significant that when he believes, many benefit from his conversion; but when he apostatises, many are also caused to

[231] Stoops 1986:92. For discussions of patronage in the Roman empire, see also Saller 1982.

leave the faith, as indicated by the believers: 'had he not been changed we certainly should not have left the holy faith in God our Lord' (*si enim ille uersatus non fuisset, nec nos remoti fuissemus a sancta fide dei domini nostri*; 8). Marcellus' conversion by Simon has resulted in not only his renunciation of the Christian faith but also his cessation of financial assistance to Christians. In order to continue receipt of help from Marcellus, many Christians have also given up their Christian faith, until Peter comes to Rome and wins them back again. Despite Marcellus' apostasy and even persecution against Christians, they still speak up for him and ask for help on his behalf from Peter. The reason is 'he has shown goodness to a great many of God's servants' (*qui tam magno numero in serbos dei aelemosynas fecit*; 8 [*sic*]), which obviously refers to his financial support to the believers, especially widows and the poor. It is evident, therefore, that Marcellus' importance to the Christian community lies mainly in his financial support to them (and widows in particular).

Immediately after his repentance and reconversion to the Christian faith, Marcellus invites the widows and the aged to his house for prayer and distributes to each of them a piece of gold for their ministry (19). Although here the money given to the widows appears to be payment for their prayers, it naturally serves also as a means of support for them. The indication of 'the widows and the aged' (*uiduas et seniores*) is notable, for it implies their desire for financial security, especially in the broad context of APt in which widows are generally described as poor and vulnerable. It is additionally noteworthy that the healing of the blind widows takes place at Marcellus' house (20-21). Obviously they are among the widows invited by Marcellus; and they are there not only to pray with others, but also to receive support, for more than once the widows are said to be ministered to by Peter with the help of Marcellus and other believers at Marcellus' house (22, 29).[232] Marcellus' support of

[232] Although in chapter 22, it is the 'virgins of the Lord' (uirginibus domini) who are said to be ministered to by Peter, as will be shown (see further below), they are actually *widows* invited by Marcellus for prayer.

widows is further revealed when a widow cries out for help from Peter on account of the death of her only son, for the author describes her as 'one of the widows who had been cared for by Marcellus' (*una euro de uiduis, quae ad Marcellum refrigerabat*; 25). As discussed earlier, even though the son is the primary and most important means of sustenance for the widow, his labour alone is unlikely to sustain both of them, hence the need for Marcellus' support. The other widows who are also cared for by Marcellus are presumably in a similar situation, regardless of whether they have children or not. Evidently, Marcellus has become again the benefactor/patron of the Christian community, particularly the widows.

Another person who provides for widows and in a sense is a female counterpart of Marcellus in APt is Eubola. Firstly, like Marcellus, Eubola is a very wealthy and highly respected figure. She is said to be 'highly esteemed in this world, possessing much gold and valuable pearls' (*honesta nimis in saeculo hoc, adiacente ei auro copioso et margaritis non minimo praetio*; 17). And the text further describes her as 'a highly respected but simple woman' (*honestae feminae et simplicissime*) in chapter 23. Secondly, both Eubola and Marcellus are deceived by Simon. While Marcellus tells Peter that he was deceived into regarding Simon as the power of God and as a result he even erected a statue in honour of him (10), Eubola confesses to Peter that she received Simon as a servant of God and gave him whatever he asked of her in the name of caring for the poor (based on the text's portrayal of Simon, he obviously pocketed the money), in addition to large presents (17). Thirdly, with the help of Peter, both of them recognise Simon's deception and convert to the Christian faith. While Marcellus is truly repentant and believes in Christ wholeheartedly after meeting Peter, which enables him to perform a miracle himself (11), Eubola also believes after hearing Peter's words and is strengthened in faith after recovering her property (17). Last but not least, Eubola does (even more than) what Marcellus does after conversion, that is, to help the poor. As the text states,

> *Eubola autem postquam recepit omnia sua dedit in ministerium pauperorum, credens autem in dominum Iesum Christum et confortata et contemnens et abrenuntians huic saeculo, tribuebat uiduis et orfanis et uestiens pauperos, per multum tempus accepit dormitionem* (17).
>
> Eubola, after recovering her property, gave it for the service of the poor; she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and was strengthened; she despised and renounced this world, supported the widows and orphans, clothed the poor, and after a long time fell asleep (17).

The description shows Eubola has committed her whole life to caring for the poor since her conversion. And 'after a long time' (*per multum tempus*) suggests that she does these acts of charity for many years. The cases of Marcellus and Eubola reveal that the rich individuals who seek after God can greatly reduce the financial burden of the Christian community through supporting widows and other needy members.

Collective support

As discussed earlier, a widows' households (usually her children) are her primary source of support, although she often needs further financial aid from other individuals who are rich. There are, however, widows who have neither children nor other individuals to support them. Such widows can only pin their hopes on God who always takes care of his own. This is where the whole Christian community – the collective support – comes to the aid of the otherwise helpless widows, most likely through pooling of resources from anyone who can and is willing to contribute, and then distributing them to the widows by the Christian leader who is normally the apostle himself.[233]

In the process of money collection, the contributors – mostly wealthy people – in many cases bring money to the apostle after experiencing God's power in one way or another, such as the senator Nicostratus and his mother (28-29) and Chryse (30). In addition, the text narrates that when Peter preaches on the Sunday after the revival of Nicostratus,

[233] The pooling and distribution of resources in APt are not as obvious as in Acts 2.44-45 and 4.32-35, but are still implied in APt, as can be seen in the following discussion.

‘many senators and knights and wealthy women and matrons were present, and they were strengthened in the faith’ (παρόντων πολλῶν συγκλητικῶν καὶ ἱππικῶν πλειόνων καὶ γυναικῶν πλουσίων <καὶ> ματρωνῶν καὶ στηριζομένων τῇ πίστει; 30). Apparently, these upper-class people have witnessed the revival of Nicostratus, which has led to their conversion to the Christian faith. In addition, Chryse’s donation of money happens in their presence, which not only reveals God’s care and provision for his people but also reminds these wealthy people to give for the support of the poor. Therefore, although the text does not mention these upper-class wealthy people bringing money to Peter, the indication of their faith and the immediate context suggest that they also are (potential) contributors in the pooling of resources.

As can be seen, the money collected is a huge amount, which can easily become a great temptation, so who should be in charge of the money and its distribution is of great importance. Obviously, it must be someone who is trustworthy and respected in the Christian community, and such a person would usually be a leader or an office-bearer in the church. Besides Peter the apostle, the only other office-bearer is Narcissus who is a presbyter and who receives Peter when Peter first arrives in Rome (6). However, after Marcellus invites Peter to his house (19), Narcissus fades away from the scene, and does not appear to take charge of the money and its distribution. As for Marcellus, although he evidently plays a significant role in the Christian community, he is never acknowledged as a leader of the community. Furthermore, he once abandoned his faith.[234] Based on the description of the text, since his arrival in Rome, Peter has become the one and only leader among the Christians: it is he who saves the lost Christians from Simon’s deception, testifies to God’s power and mercy through miracles and healings, and receives financial donations from the wealthy. More importantly, Peter always resists accepting or possessing money for his

[234] For the weaknesses of Marcellus, see Perkins 1994:299-300.

personal benefits and as mentioned earlier, he even sells the land given by Ptolemy to his (Peter's) daughter and gives all proceeds to the poor. It therefore appears that Peter is the most suitable and qualified person to take charge of the gathered money and its distribution. This is confirmed by the description that Peter ministers to the widows with his own hand (29), although with the help of Marcellus and other believers. Peter's service to the widows evidently involves distributing the pooled resources to them, although other aspects of service such as healing and teaching may also be included.

Besides the widows, the text seems to describe another group of women who are also the beneficiaries of the collective resources. They are the 'virgins of the Lord' (*uirginibus domini*; 22) who are ministered to by Peter and the 'virgins of Christ' (*uirginibus Christi*; 29) who are the specified recipients of the money donated by Nicostratus' mother. Scholars have different views on the identity of this group of women. Bremmer assumes, with little or no evidence, that they are virgins in need of support who have 'deserted their families' and formed 'a separate category among the faithful'.[235] Davies posits that 'the words "widow" and "virgin" are used to designate the same women'[236] in APt 21-22 and 29. Based on his definition of 'widow', i.e., continent women, including both virgins and widows, it is not entirely clear whether he views the 'virgins of the Lord/Christ' as virgins who are called widows or vice versa. When he later discusses a vision seen by the blind widows (21), however, he specifically refers to it as 'a vision beheld by widows who are called the virgins of the Lord'.[237]

The literary context additionally suggests that the 'virgins of the Lord/Christ' are actually the widows whom Marcellus has invited. If these women were virgins, their appearance in the scene would seem rather sudden and abrupt, as the text never mentions

[235] Bremmer 1998:3.
[236] Davies 2012:72.
[237] Davies 2012:76.

Marcellus' invitation of virgins to his house for prayer, but only widows and the aged (19). In addition, before Peter attends to the 'virgins of the Lord' (22), he is said to be healing the blind *widows* who are accompanied by other old women (possibly also widows; 21). And before the senator's mother offers money to Peter for distribution among the 'virgins of Christ' (29), she first agrees to distribute the money meant for her son's funeral to the *widows* (28). The immediate texts mention no virgins at all but only widows. If we view the 'virgins of the Lord/Christ' as widows, however, everything seems to fall into place: after purifying his house, Marcellus first invites the widows and the aged to his house for prayer, and then goes to the presbyter Narcissus' house to invite Peter (19). After entering Marcellus' house, Peter first heals the blind widows (20-21), and then attends to all the widows at Marcellus' house who are called the 'virgins of the Lord', whom Marcellus requests to stay overnight to pray for Peter's contest with Simon (22). Similarly, the mother of the senator first agrees to distribute the money for her son's funeral to the widows should her son come back to life (28); and after her son is indeed raised, she offers more money to Peter for distribution among the widows whom she refers to as the 'virgins of Christ' (29).

Moreover, the term 'virgins of the Lord/Christ' indicates a woman's purity and dedication to Christ. Davies indicates that 'widows were women who had a special bond to Christ, one like the bond of marriage'.[238] Since the widows are neither in an earthly marriage nor sexually active but commit themselves completely to Christ through prayers and chastity – a symbol of purity and holiness (cf. Luke 2.36-38; 1 Tim 5.5, 9-10; and see 1 Cor 7.34) – they are indeed, as Marcellus addresses them, the 'holy undefiled virgins of the Lord' (*sanctae inuiolatae uirgines domini*; 22). Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 1), the Greek term χήρα which is often translated as 'widow' actually means 'a woman who lives without a man' and thus can refer to any woman who lives a sexually continent life, whether

[238] Davies 2012:72.

a widow, a divorcee, or a virgin. Methuen additionally points out the existence of 'virgin widow' in the second century, which could denote either 'a woman who has chosen either to live apart from her husband, or not to remarry after his death, pursuing a life of sexual continence and thereby regarding herself as having regained virginity', such as the widows in APt who are called 'virgins of the Lord/Christ';[239] or an unmarried woman (i.e., a virgin) who is called a 'widow' due to the same work she does as widows, as indicated in Ignatius' letter (*Smyrn*. 13.1),[240] which reflects the equivalent (and opposite) phenomenon to APt. Methuen thus argues that these early Christian authors 'apparently use the terms interchangeably to refer to what is the same group of women'.[241] Based on the above discussion, therefore, the 'virgins of the Lord/Christ' are most likely the same group of widows who benefit from the church's collective support. In this case, the widows are clients of the church, not (only) of an individual benefactor, and that cements their loyalty to the group, not to an individual within it.

3.3. The agency of widows

Widows in the early church are often stereotyped as poor, vulnerable and even helpless women who utterly rely on others for survival. However, as the text of APt shows, they also make significant contributions to the early Christian community.

Praying for others

Bremmer recognises that in APt, just as in the Jewish tradition and the NT, 'widows were valued for their prayer because God was thought to have pity on them in particular'.[242] Indeed, more than once, the widows are highlighted in relation to their prayer whose

[239] Methuen 1997:288.
[240] Methuen 1997:289. See also Barclay 2020:279-80.
[241] Methuen 1997:287-88.
[242] Bremmer 1998:5.

importance can be demonstrated from a few aspects. Firstly, Marcellus invites them to his house specifically for the purpose of prayer (19). In fact, Marcellus invites them not only to pray with others but also to pray for himself. Although as the patron Marcellus has a great influence on the Christian community, he needs the widows to pray for him, which indicates the value and power of their prayer. As the text describes, the widows are either blind or old, helpless without the assistance of others. It is not surprising that such desperate situation would generate more compelling, devout, and hence powerful prayers. Secondly, what makes the widows' prayer even more effective is their purity and holiness. As mentioned earlier, they are repeatedly called the 'virgins of the Lord/Christ', which reflects their purity and holiness before the Lord and their complete dedication to Christ. They are not engaged in any earthly marriage or sexual activity but fully devoted to Christ alone, which draws them closer to the Lord and enables them to pray more wholeheartedly and passionately. Hence the widows are so valued for their prayer that they are requested by Marcellus to pray even for Peter before his contest with Simon, although Peter himself has been fasting and praying for the contest (22).

Thirdly, the significance of the widows' prayer is further emphasised by Marcellus' recognition of it as a ministry. When Marcellus informs Peter of his invitation to the widows for prayer, he indicates that 'each will receive for the sake of their ministry a piece of gold, that in truth they may be called servants of Christ' (*accipient autem ministerii nomine singulos aureos, ut possint uocari uere Christi serui*; 19). In addition, later when the senator's mother brings two thousand pieces of gold to Peter, she tells Peter to divide them among the widows who 'minister' (*deseruiunt*) to Christ (29). These descriptions are striking in attributing to widows a 'ministry' and service, which could be (or develop to be) different things in different contexts (e.g., prayer, hospitality, hosting house churches, nursing orphans, looking after the sick, teaching other women, and supporting other widows, etc.). When the

widows serve others, they are also serving or ministering to Christ; and their ministry to Christ is also a ministry to the church. Although the text does not specify exactly what ministries the widows are involved in, we can be sure of at least one ministry, i.e., prayer, as indicated by Marcellus' words mentioned above (19), in which the 'ministry' (*ministerii*) clearly refers to the widows' prayer. And the widows' reception of money for their prayer reminds us of Jesus' teaching that 'the labourer deserves to be paid' (Luke 10.7; see also Matt 10.9-10), of Paul's argument for an apostle's rights to material support (1 Cor 9.3-14), and of the Pastor's insistence that diligent elders should receive double honour (1 Tim 5.17-18). However, just as Peter and Paul do not make possessing money their purpose, nor do the widows pray for the sake of money but that, as Marcellus indicates, they may truly be called 'servants of Christ' (*Christi serui*; 19). The emphasis lies in the widows' complete devotion to Christ and their worthiness of his ministry, just like Peter whom God regards as 'a servant worthy of his service' (*dignum…in ministerio suo ministrum*; 5). As Peter – the holy one of God and the apostle of Christ – testifies to God's power through miracles and healing, the widows – the holy virgins of the Lord and the servants of Christ – bear witness to Christ's mercy through prayers (and possibly other ministries as well). Therefore, the widows in APt contribute to the church through at least one very important ministry – prayer.[243]

Testifying to Jesus

APt describes numerous visions, among which the one seen by the blind widows is 'one of the lengthiest and most detailed reports of a vision of Christ in the Acts'.[244] This account begins with Peter going to Marcellus' house at his (Marcellus') request (19). Upon his entry into Marcellus' house, Peter heals a blind widow and then delivers a lengthy speech

[243] Cf. the importance of the prayer of the poor (not specifically widows) which sustains the spiritual life of the rich in the Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitude* 2. See also Clement of Alexandria, *The Rich Man's Salvation* 34 (LCL 92), in which the prayers of widows (among other saints) protect and bless the rich.
[244] Davies 2012:76.

concerning his vision of Christ on a mountain (20; cf. 2 Pet 1.16-18).[245] Thereafter a group of blind widows entreat Peter to heal them, and so all pray together with Peter. Suddenly the dining room where they are all gathered becomes as bright as lightning, and the light enters the eyes of the blind widows who then regain their sight. They subsequently describe to Peter their vision of the Lord who is revealed to them in a variety of forms – an old man, a young man, and a boy. Peter thus praises the Lord and reminds the congregation that God is greater than their thoughts, as they have learned from the widows (21). The lengthy and detailed description of the widows' vision undoubtedly manifests its importance.

The significance of the widows' vision is further demonstrated by the fact that it is revealed only to the widows, not to anyone else, not even to Peter.[246] As the text describes, the light is so intense that the believers present can neither see nor endure but are dazzled with bewilderment. While they are all prostrated, only the blind widows stand there; and the light enters their eyes and makes them see. The contrast between the blind widows and the rest is striking: while all the others are struck down by fear, shock, or perplexity in sight of God's glorious light, the widows long for it and receive it with a welcoming gesture. Moreover, when the blind widows first cried out to Peter for healing, Peter told them that if they believed in Jesus Christ, they could see with the mind what they could not see with the eyes. He further said that the physical eyes could see nothing but worldly things; only the inner eyes could see Jesus Christ (21).[247] The blind widows' vision is even more remarkable against this background, for even while they were blind, they had already believed in Jesus Christ; even though their physical eyes were closed, their inner eyes were opened and they

[245] Peter obviously refers to Jesus' transfiguration described in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 17.1-8; Mark 9.2-8; Luke 9.28-36).
[246] Davies (2012:76) and Bremmer (1998:5) both recognise the special position of the widows in APt with regard to their vision of Jesus.
[247] The Latin *sed Iesum Christum non omnes oculi uident* literally means 'but not all eyes see Jesus Christ', which Elliot (1993:414n16) understands as referring to 'only the inner eyes see Jesus Christ'. Schneemelcher (1992:304) uses 'only the inner eyes' directly in his translation.

alone saw Christ. That is why while others lay prostrate by the dazzling light, the widows stood there, received the light and were healed. Because of their faith, purity and holiness, the blind widows were granted the privilege to see the Lord in a variety of forms.

The immediate literary context additionally highlights the prominence of the widows' vision. Before the episode of the widows' vision (21), Peter delivers a long discourse about his encounter with the transfigured Jesus on the holy mountain (20). After hearing about the widows' vision, Peter refers again to his earlier speech about Jesus' transfiguration to indicate God's greatness. Hence, the widows' vision of Jesus is closely related to Peter's vision of the transfigured Jesus:[248] as Jesus exclusively revealed himself to Peter, James and John, Jesus now does the same to the widows; as Peter once saw the glory and majesty of the Lord with his own eyes, the widows now also experience the greatness and power of God themselves. The contrast between Peter's reaction and that of the widows to the vision of Jesus is even more striking. Similar to the congregation in sight of God's light, Peter falls at the Lord's feet as if dead. The *blind* widows, however, stand there while all the rest lie prostrate, eager to receive the light. While Peter thinks God's brightness will make him blind, the blind widows believe God's light will make them see. Moreover, before sharing with the congregation about his encounter with the transfigured Jesus, Peter says 'each of us saw him as his capacity permitted' (*unusquisque eim nostrum sicut capiebat uidere, prout poterat uidebat*; 20). The fact that the widows see Jesus in various forms indicates their insight into his divine capacity to be greater than all the opposites we can imagine (e.g., '…this Young Man and Old Man…'; 20). Indeed, the widows' faith and holiness have made them exemplars for the Christian community, so even Peter has to learn from them about their vision of Jesus (21), and Marcellus has to request them to pray for himself (19) and for Peter (22). The widows

[248] Cartlidge (1986:58-59) also recognises the close relation between Jesus' transfiguration explained by Peter (20) and the blind widows' vision of Jesus (21).

may be financially poor and physically weak, but they are spiritually rich and strong; and their spirituality has enabled them to play an active and important role in the Christian community.

Providing for the poor

APt does not mention specifically any widow who helps the poor. However, the description of Eubola and the senator's mother suggests they are probably widows. In the case of Eubola (17), no husband is mentioned throughout the episode, but Eubola does everything on her own with absolute freedom and autonomy. She freely receives Simon to stay with her and, besides large presents, freely gives him whatever he asks of her (in the name of helping the poor). After recovering her property stolen by Simon, she freely gives it up for the service of the poor and provides for them till the end of her life. In addition, when she grieves over her loss of property, no husband appears to help or comfort her; instead, it is Peter who assists her to find her possessions. Moreover, as one who has never appeared in public before, Eubola has to go to the magistrate herself. If she had a husband, he would likely do so on her behalf, a common practice in Roman society. Furthermore, the text mentions more than once the 'house of Eubola': Simon steals Eubola's possessions from 'the house of Eubola' (*domo Eubolae*; 17), and Eubola laments her loss as a great misery to her 'house' (*domui*; 17). These references to the 'house of Eubola' suggest that she is the head of her household, which explains her absolute autonomy and authority in her house. Therefore, the discussions suggest that Eubola does not have a husband or her husband has died or divorced her, which means she is either a virgin who has never married, or a divorcee, or a widow. In the literary context of APt, a virgin is usually under the authority of her parents and is specifically referred to as a *virgo*, such as Peter's and the gardener's daughters. None of these appear in Eubola's case, however. Instead, Eubola is completely independent and is described as a *domine* and a *matrona*, terms usually used to refer to a married woman, just as

the senator's mother who also refers to herself as a *matrona* (28). In addition, if a woman was divorced by her husband in antiquity, it was often due to the woman's moral deficiencies (e.g., adultery; cf. Matt 1.18-19; 19.3-9). Hence, a divorced woman usually had a very negative reputation. But the text says Eubola is 'highly esteemed in this world' (*honesta nimis in saeculo hoc*; 17), which does not suggest that she is a divorcee. Therefore, it is highly likely that Eubola is a widow who supports other widows, orphans, and the poor after recovering her property.

Another woman who is possibly also a widow who helps the poor is the senator's mother (28-29).[249] Similar to the case of Eubola, no husband ever appears throughout her story. After the death of her son the senator, it is she who goes to the forum to seek help from Peter. Had her husband been alive, it would be strange that he did not appear at all, especially when his son is said to be very noble and respected in the senate. And it would be even more unbelievable that he would allow his wife – a noble lady – to throw herself at a strange man's feet, in the presence of all the multitude in the forum. Moreover, when Peter agrees to raise her son and asks for the corpse to be brought to him, the mother tells the young men to 'put their caps on their heads and walk in front of the bier' (*acciperent pilia in capita sua et ante lectu irent*; 28),[250] so that after seeing it Peter may have pity on her son and herself. According to Callon, the young men are actually slaves manumitted by the mother after her son's death, and the caps (*pilia*) they put on their heads are 'freedom caps' which symbolise the manumission of these slaves. Callon further points out that this reflects the common practice in a Roman funeral, at which slaves were set free in order to show the deceased master's generosity and kindness.[251] This is confirmed by Peter's statement in the text: 'these young men, whom you set free in honour of your son, can as free men obey their living

[249] Brock (1999:159) also views her as a widow, although he says so only in passing.
[250] Translated by Schneemelcher 1992:309.
[251] Callon 2012:807-08.

master' (*Istos iuuenes quos manummisisti in honore filii tui, possunt liberi obsequium domino suo uiuo prestare*; 28), which suggests that these slaves belong to the deceased senator.[252] If the senator's father was still alive, as the head of the household he should be the one manumitting the slaves on behalf of his deceased son. But here it is the mother who carries out the manumission and arranges everything regarding her son's funeral. Before Peter raises her son, it is again the mother who agrees to distribute to the slaves and the widows the money she originally planned to spend on her son's funeral. In addition, while the mother brings two thousand pieces of gold to Peter after her son is restored to life, the son brings double the amount, which would be hardly possible for his father to permit if he was alive.[253] If the senator's father was still alive and had converted to the Christian faith, such a significant event would certainly have been mentioned in the text. It is therefore more likely that the senator's father has died[254] and left his mother alone as a widow who provides latterly for other widows.

The above discussions show that similar to the widows presented in Luke-Acts, widows in APt are also sustained by three means of support in general – family support (mainly from one's children), individual support (e.g., from patrons and benefactors), and collective support (i.e., from the Christian community) – although they are not mutually exclusive, but sometimes complementary to one another. And the widows have also made significant contributions to the Christian community through the ministry of prayer, testifying to Jesus and, in some cases, providing for the poor where they have the means. The next section will examine the presentation of widows in ATh.

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[252] As a senator who is 'very noble and respected in the senate', it is unlikely that he does not have slaves. If he does, his mother has no reason to manumit her own slaves rather than her son's.

[253] As discussed in Chapter 2, because of the *patria potestas* in the Roman household, a son would be always under the authority of his father as long as the latter was alive. But if a wife married her husband *sine manu*, she could handle her own property independent of her husband's authority.

[254] This is also suggested by the adulthood of his son, in consideration of the very short life expectancy and the common practice of 'late male and early female' marriage in Roman society (see Chapter 2).

4. Widows in the Acts of Thomas[255]

Scholars have studied ATh from various perspectives,[256] such as its relation with Christianity in India,[257] its intertextuality with other contemporary literature (e.g., other texts of AAA, the NT, and the Roman romantic novels),[258] the speaking animals in the text (e.g., the serpent in 31-33, the colt in 39-41, and the asses in 68-81),[259] and the asceticism and chastity of women in light of eschatology.[260] However, the support of the poor, especially widows, is seldom mentioned, although this remains an important concern in ATh. This section, therefore, will focus on passages relevant to the support of the poor and widows in ATh.[261]

4.1. The support of the poor

ATh contains thirteen Acts of the apostle Thomas and the story of his martyrdom in India. In the second Act (17-29), Thomas agrees to build a palace for King Gundaphorus. However, without his knowledge, Thomas distributes all the king's financial provisions for building the palace to the poor and needy (19). And he tells them that it is the Lord who has provided for them, for αὐτός ἐστιν πατὴρ τῶν ὀρφανῶν καὶ τῶν χηρῶν προστάτης καὶ τοῖς ἐν θλίψει αὐτὸς γίνεται ἀντιλήπτωρ ('he is father of the orphans and protector of the widows and to those in afflictions he is helper'; 19). This not only echoes God's special concern for widows, orphans, and the afflicted in the OT (e.g., Deut 10.18; Ps 68.5; Isa 1.17), but also

[255] Although ATh is generally dated in the first half of the third century, or more specifically, between 220 and 240 CE (see Klauck 2008:146 and Bremmer 2001:77), which goes beyond the second century, it is still composed within the early decades of the third century and shares a similar social world with other major texts of AAA, as Davies (2012) indicates.
[256] For a general introduction of ATh, see Klauck 2008:141-79; Drijvers 1992:322-38; Klijn 2003:1-15.
[257] E.g., Nedungatt 2011:533-57; Andrade 2018:27-66; van den Bosch 2001:125-48.
[258] E.g., Attridge 1997:87-124; Matthews 1997a:125-35; Perkins 1997:247-60; Valantasis 1997:261-76.
[259] E.g., Czachesz 2008:275-85; Adamik 2001:115-24; Perkins 2005:385-96; Matthews 1999:205-32.
[260] E.g., Dell'Isola 2023:155-75; Bremmer 2001:74-90; Davies 2012:50-69.
[261] The Greek text of ATh referred to in this thesis is taken from Lipsius-Bonnet (1959b:99-291), and its English translation from Elliott (1993:447-511), unless otherwise indicated. For its commentary (based on the Syriac edition), see Klijn 2003:17-251.

implies that the majority of the poor who have received assistance from Thomas are widows (and orphans)[262] – the most needy and vulnerable among the poor. Hence, Thomas' words and deeds emphasise again the importance of supporting the poor and widows in the early church. In fact, according to the text, God cares exceedingly for the poor that he rewards those who help the poor (22) but punishes those who do not (56).

Although King Gundaphorus becomes very furious and decides to execute Thomas when he discovers that Thomas has 'cheated' him and 'wasted' his money, he later changes his mind after hearing from his revived brother that Thomas has indeed built a palace for him in heaven. It is interesting that while distributing the king's money to the poor and needy, Thomas is actually building him a *heavenly* palace, which suggests that when the king spends his money on the poor and needy (although unwittingly), he is storing up treasure in heaven (cf. Matt 6.19-21). The reward of a heavenly palace in ATh mirrors John 14 in which Jesus says he will prepare dwelling places for his disciples in his Father's house (14.2-3).[263] But Jesus further states that only those who love him and keep his commandments could stay with him and his Father. According to the Gospel of Matthew, the measurement of one's love for Jesus is to feed the hungry, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to look after the sick, and to visit the imprisoned (Matt 25.34-40; cf. Jas 1.27). Moreover, in John 13 Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment – to love one another (13.34) – for two reasons: (1) he has loved them and (2) by this everyone will know that they are his disciples (13.34-35). Thus, if the disciples fail to assist the destitute members among themselves, they are neither qualified to be Jesus' disciples nor worthy of his love and reward. To support the poor, therefore, concerns not only one's identity as Jesus' disciple but also one's eschatological destiny. Moreover, Hilhorst highlights that some other Christian works also mention the

[262] Cf. chapter 59 of ATh which mentions only widows who receive food and clothing from the deacons of Thomas.
[263] For an intertextual comparison concerning the heavenly house in ATh and the Gospel of John, see Klauck 2004:5-35.

reward of heavenly palaces for those who support the poor, and that in some texts the heavenly dwellings for the saints are 'provided with their negative counterparts' for the sinners (e.g., hell), including those who refuse to share their possessions with the needy.[264] The punishments for those who commit sins and fail to help the poor are also described in ATh.

In the sixth Act, after being raised from death, a maiden tells people about her after-death experiences and visions. She was brought to an extremely fearful and grievous place where there were many chasms with a great stench and most hateful vapour coming forth. In each chasm were souls being tormented. They were the souls of those who committed sins, including adultery, covetousness, stealing, lying and slandering (55-56). And among the tormented souls were also those who never supported the poor nor helped the afflicted, and those who did not visit the sick or escort the dying. The former were hung by their hands and the latter by their feet, all reeking with smoke and sulphur (56). The vividly depicted punishments of the souls who failed to help the poor and the sick echo the description in Luke 16.19-31 which tells of the story of a rich man and Lazarus. The rich man lives an extravagant life and feasts sumptuously every day but refuses to show mercy to Lazarus who lies at his gate, covered with sores and longing to relieve his hunger with what falls from the rich man's table (16.19-21). Throughout, the rich man never gives Lazarus any food. Finally, Lazarus dies and is carried away by the angels to be with Abraham, and the rich man also dies but is tormented in Hades (16.22-23). Although the rich man pleads with Abraham to ease his agony in the flames and to warn his living brothers through Lazarus, his pleas are rejected (16.24-31). The punishment of people who fail to help the needy is also reflected in Matthew 25.41-46, in which the Son of Man punishes with eternal fire those who do not take care of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, or the imprisoned. These

[264] See Hilhorst (2001:60-64) for the specific examples, although some of them date to the late Middle Ages.

people will suffer eternal punishment, but the righteous, i.e., those who care for the poor and the afflicted, will be rewarded with eternal life and inherit the kingdom of God. The vivid and frightful description of the punishments of those who fail to provide for the poor and needy no doubt manifests the early Christians' great concern for the poor and the importance of supporting them. According to the description in ATh and Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, caring for the poor is not something ancillary to the Christian faith and message; it is a necessity. To some extent, helping the poor seemed to be taken for granted in the early church. As indicated in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 19.16-24; Mark 10.17-25; Luke 18.18-25), even if a rich man has kept all the commandments but fails to share his wealth with the poor, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Thus, these various texts seem to suggest that 'helping the poor' is central to entering the kingdom of God because it is an expression of love of and for Jesus.

The importance of supporting the poor is demonstrated not only through the experiences and visions of different people in ATh but also through Thomas' own teaching and preaching. In chapter 85, Thomas preaches that

> ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ καὶ τῷ διὰ χειρὸς ὀρέγοντι τοῖς πένησιν καὶ πληροῦντι τὸ ἐνδεὲς τῶν λειπομένων, κομίζουσα καὶ μεταδιδοῦσα τοῖς δεομένοις· μάλιστα τοῖς ἐν ἁγιωσύνῃ πολιτευομένοις· αὕτη γὰρ ἐπιλεκτός ἐστιν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ εἰσάγουσα εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον ζωήν· αὕτη γὰρ μητρόπολίς ἐστιν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἁπάντων·
>
> (And walk)[265] in gentleness, helping the poor and satisfying the want of the needy, by bringing your possessions and distributing them to the needy, especially to those who walk in holiness, for this is chosen by God and leads to eternal life. Before God this is the chief city of all good.

Although this teaching of Thomas is brief, it is comprehensive. It tells people clearly what they should do (help the poor), how to do it (by sharing their possessions with the needy), and why they should do it (this is the greatest of all good, a divine choice leading to eternal life). Thomas' preaching here corresponds to his own deeds in the second Act (17-29). In addition,

[265] Explanatory additions by the translator.

Thomas' emphasis on helping the poor as the 'mother-city' (μητρόπολις)[266] of all good echoes both Jesus' teaching about the two greatest commandments – to love God wholeheartedly and to love one's neighbour as oneself (Matt 22.34-40; cf. Luke 10.25-37) – and James' statement on pure and undefiled religion before God, i.e., 'to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world' (Jas 1.27).

Therefore, supporting the poor is a constant concern in ATh, as indicated at the beginning (the second Act, especially 19, 22), in the middle (the sixth Acts, specifically 56), and towards the end of the text (the ninth Act, 85). And the descriptions of the relevant passages suggest that loving the poor not only defines one's identity as a true Christian but also determines the eschatological destiny of that person. And as the text shows, Thomas' words and deeds inspire people's immediate response in helping the poor and widows.

4.2. The support of widows

As mentioned earlier, in the second Act, although it is Thomas who distributes to the poor what they need, the money actually comes from King Gundaphorus. It means Thomas is supporting the poor on behalf of the king (although without his knowledge), which explains why the heavenly palace is built for the king rather than for Thomas. In other words, King Gundaphorus has been unwittingly acting as the benefactor of the poor, with Thomas as his agent.[267] Although he initially becomes extremely angry with Thomas for what he has done with his money, he is completely appeased and even converts to Christ on learning about his newly acquired heavenly palace. And his conversion proves his identity as a true benefactor of the poor and justifies the reward of a heavenly palace.

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[266] The literal translation of μητρόπολίς as 'mother-city' here by Drijvers (1992:373) seems to better manifest the significance of supporting the poor.

[267] The description of the text is almost humorous that while secretly giving away the king's money to the poor, Thomas tells them that 'the king knows that he will receive a royal recompense, but the poor must for the present be refreshed' (οἶδεν ὁ βασιλεὺς βασιλικῶν τεύξασθαι ἀμοιβῶν, πένητας δὲ πρὸς τὸ παρὸν ἀναπαύεσθαι χρή; 19).

The conversion of King Gundaphorus, together with his brother Gad, is not the end of the story, however. As the text states,

> Πάνυ οὖν διατεθέντες ἐν τῷ ἀποστόλῳ ὅ τε βασιλεὺς Γουνδαφόρος καὶ ὁ τούτου ἀδελφὸς Γὰδ εἵποντο αὐτῷ μηδ' ὅλως ἀναχωροῦντες, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐπαρκοῦντες τοῖς δεομένοις, πᾶσιν διδόντες καὶ ἀναπαύοντες πάντας (26).
>
> Being well disposed now toward the apostle, King Gundaphorus and his brother Gad followed him, never leaving him, (themselves) providing for the poor, giving to all, and relieving all (26).

The description reveals that the immediate response of the king and his brother after conversion is to support the poor. Their giving to all and relieving all suggests that as king, Gundaphorus (together with his brother) has practically become the patron of his people, particularly of those in need. This echoes the description of the ideal king in Psalm 72 who delivers the needy and helps the poor (vv 12-13). Apparently, this king is also described as the patron of his people, who is responsible for the protection and support of the poor and needy.[268] And like the ideal king of Israel who is blessed by both his people and God, King Gundaphorus is also assured of his reward – eternal life in the heavenly palace; and so is his brother Gad who supports the poor in the same way. In addition, although King Gundaphorus and his brother are said to help the poor in general, it can be assumed that widows are among the beneficiaries. In fact, as mentioned earlier, while distributing money to the poor, Thomas' teaching of God as father of orphans and protector of widows indicates widows and orphans are the major recipients of support. And this naturally implies that widows (and orphans) are the most needy among the poor and hence would likely be given priority in receiving support.

Apart from individual support, another passage (59) focuses particularly on the collective support of widows. As mentioned earlier, in the sixth Act a maiden sees various punishments of sinners after her death, and after being restored to life, describes them to Thomas and other people present. Hearing her description and Thomas' preaching, all the

[268] Houston 2006:135-60.

people believe and convert to Christianity. Thereafter, interestingly, their immediate response is also helping the poor, specifically widows, as narrated in the text:

> ἐκόμιζον δὲ χρήματα πολλὰ εἰς διακονίαν τῶν χηρῶν· εἶχεν γὰρ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν συνηθροισμένας, καὶ πάσας αὐτὰς διὰ τῶν ἰδίων διακόνων ἀπέστελλεν τὰ ἐπιτήδεια, τά τε ἐνδύματα καὶ τὰ πρὸς τὴν τροφήν (59).
>
> And they brought (much) money for the service of the widows. For he had them gathered together in the cities, and he sent to all of them by his deacons what was necessary, both clothing as well as food (59).

This is an evident expression about the collective support of widows in ATh: Thomas first collects the money brought by the believers and then appoints his deacons to distribute the necessities (i.e., clothing and food)[269] to the widows who have been gathered together in the cities. The description indicates not only the importance of providing for the needy but also the priority of widows as recipients of support due to their usually more destitute and vulnerable situation. In addition, this narration reminds one of the collective support of widows in the Jerusalem Church described in Acts 6.1-7, in which seven men are chosen particularly for the service of widows while the disciples devote themselves to prayer and preaching. Although the Seven are not referred to as deacons (διακόνοι) in the text, the descriptions of their task (i.e., to serve tables [διακονεῖν τραπέζαις; 6.2] in the daily distribution of food [ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ; 6.1]), the criteria for their selection (6.3) and the way they are appointed (6.6) suggest their roles are those of a deacon.[270] Similarly, in ATh Thomas appoints his deacons to distribute the necessities to the widows while he himself continues preaching (59). This does not mean that Thomas does not want to serve the widows personally, however. Based on the description of the text, it seems to be simply because there are too many widows to be served in different cities that he needs the help of his deacons. In fact, throughout the text of ATh, Thomas is always described as caring for

[269] Presumably the collected money is used to purchase the necessities for the widows.
[270] Fitzmyer 1998:344; Pervo 2009:159.

and helping the poor and widows (e.g., 19, 85). Although the collective support of widows in ATh appears spontaneous, unlike that in Acts 6.1-7 which involves organised daily distribution of food, the mention of deacons suggests that there is some sort of structure in the church. Thus, it is unlikely that this is a one-off support for the widows. There may be even a common fund from which regular support for widows is drawn, as suggested by the expression ἐκόμιζον δὲ χρήματα πολλὰ εἰς διακονίαν τῶν χηρῶν ('and they brought much money for the service of the widows'; 59). First, the adjective πολλά indicates that the money collected is a large amount which is unlikely to be spent all at once; the rest may be put into the common fund for future distributions.[271] Second, the particular reference to 'the widows' (τῶν χηρῶν) for whose service money is collected suggests that the text does not refer to *any* widow, but to *a certain group* of widows whom the church is familiar with and has been supporting regularly. These widows are probably Christian widows who have no other source of support and thus rely on the church for maintenance, like the real widows in 1 Timothy 5.3-16.

Therefore, although ATh does not devote substantial space to discussing the support of widows and the poor, the relevant passages do reveal its great concern for the poor in general and widows in particular. This is reflected not only in the descriptions of reward for those who help the poor and punishment for those who fail to do so but also in the presentations of both individual and collective support for the poor and widows.

5. Conclusion

The above discussions on widows in the narrative texts of early Christian literature, represented by Luke-Acts, APt and ATh, reveal several interesting patterns. First, widows are

[271] The references in Justin Martyr (*1 Apol*. 67.6-7) and Tertullian (*Apol*. 39.5-6) clearly suggest the existence of common funds in the second century churches. Since ATh is dated later than Justin and Tertullian (see n255), it is entirely possible for the church represented in ATh to have a common fund as well.

generally described as poor and vulnerable in these texts and thus in need of support. For example, the vulnerability of widows in Luke-Acts is manifested through the descriptions of the widow who seeks justice from an unjust judge (Luke 18.1-8), the widows whose houses are 'devoured' by the scribes (Luke 20.45-47), and the poor widow who offers two small coins in the temple (Luke 21.1-4). There also appear in APt widows who are helpless without the assistance of others, such as the blind widow who needs her daughter's guidance to go to Marcellus' house (20) and the aged widow who relies on her son both financially and physically in her daily life (25, 27). And in ATh the text mentions people's donation of money specifically for the support of widows (59), which reflects the need of these widows. As is shown in these texts, therefore, widows are generally portrayed as poor and vulnerable, whether financially, socially, or legally. Although it is too early at this point to draw firm historical conclusions, these descriptions echo what we have noted in Chapters 2 and 3 concerning the poverty and vulnerability of widows, and may be plausibly interpreted as a reflection of the situation of at least some widows in the early church.

A second pattern concerns the support of widows: there are mainly three possible means of support for them – family/household support from their children (or other relatives), individual support from friends or benefactors, and collective support from the church. For example, in Luke-Acts the family support of widows is reflected in the stories of Jesus' raising of a widow's only son from death (Luke 7.11-17) and his healing of Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4.38-39); the individual support in Tabitha's help of the widows in Joppa (Acts 9.36-43); and the collective support in the Jerusalem church's appointment of the Seven (Acts 6.1-7). Similarly, while the widows in APt are primarily supported by their households especially their children, they are not entirely free from financial needs as household resources are often insufficient to sustain both the widows and their children. They are therefore inevitably compelled to receive financial aid from other individuals who are rich.

Hence in APt we frequently encounter a dual means of support for the widows, such as the situation of the blind widow led by her daughter to Marcellus' house and the widow whose only son is raised from death by Peter, both of whom are supported by both their children and Marcellus. For widows who do not have any or sufficient means of support from their own households or other individuals, they are at the mercy of God who takes care of them through the collective support of the church. As APt describes, wealthy people such as the senator Nicostratus and his mother and Chryse are encouraged, and to a great extent obligated, to donate money to the church for the service of the poor. After resources are pooled together, the church leader, usually the apostle himself with the help of other church members, distributes them to the widows and others in need. As for the support of widows in ATh, two forms are presented – individual support, as described in the second Act concerning King Gundaphorus and his brother Gad; and collective support, as presented in chapter 59, in which a large amount of money is collected and distributed to the widows by Thomas and his deacons. The widows in these texts are therefore assisted mainly by three different means – family, individual, and collective support; and these categories of support are not mutually exclusive, but might in some cases be complementary. The match between the means of support for widows in these texts is interesting: it might suggest that these are, historically, the three predominant modes that were used for support of widows, and of others in extreme need, more widely in the early church.

However, as is shown at least in Luke-Acts and APt, the vulnerability and support of the widows do not reduce them to mere passive recipients of assistance and, as a result, liabilities to others. They also contribute to the church in various ways and are even described as exemplars for other believers in many cases. For example, Luke-Acts stresses the piety of widows, as displayed by the widow and prophetess Anna (Luke 2.36-38); their persistence in seeking justice, as demonstrated by the widow in Luke 18.1-8; devotion, as exemplified by

the poor widow in Luke 21.1-4; and hospitality, as illustrated by Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4.38-39), Lydia (Acts 16.11-15), and Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12.12-17), among whom Lydia and Mary are also hosts and patronesses of the house churches in Philippi and Jerusalem respectively. As for widows in APt, well known for their passionate and powerful prayers, they are invited by Marcellus to pray not only for himself but also on behalf of Peter. Their complete dependence on God also enables them to see the vision of Jesus and to testify his greatness to both Peter and the whole congregation. Moreover, not all widows portrayed in APt live in abject poverty. Some of them, such as Eubola and the senator's mother, are affluent enough to assist other widows and the poor. Although the texts do not state clearly the marital status of some of the women mentioned above, such as Peter's mother-in-law, Lydia, and Mary the mother of John Mark in Luke-Acts, and Eubola and the senator's mother in APt, the literary contexts suggest that they are very likely to be widows. The portrayal of these widows (at least in Luke-Acts and APt) thus demonstrates their contributions to the Christian community and their exemplary roles among the believers, especially their piety expressed through fasting and prayer, their generosity in supporting the poor, and their hospitality to missionaries and other believers. If these literary descriptions bear some relation to historical fact, they may suggest that widows in the early church were not merely recipients of support; they also made significant contributions to the church in various forms. Obviously, whether it is about the vulnerability of widows in antiquity, the three dominant means of support for them, or the contributions they made to the early church, one would need to bring in further texts, and move from literary representation to historical reality, in order to establish this hypothesis.

Chapter 5

Widows in Early Christian Instruction Texts

1. Introduction

The previous chapter reveals certain patterns concerning the social-economic situation, survival strategies, and contributions of widows in the narrative texts of the early church. However, as mentioned earlier, the narrative texts alone are not sufficient to establish a full historical picture; we need to bring in further texts in different genres. Hence, this chapter will discuss the subject of widows in another genre – the instruction texts, particularly 1 Timothy 5.3-16, Shepherd of Hermas, the relevant texts of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Tertullian. As in the previous chapter, we will be treating the texts in the first place as literary phenomena, with a view to how they present the social-economic situation of widows, including their poverty (or wealth for a minority of widows), their maintenance, and their ministry functions in the church.

2. Widows in 1 Timothy 5.3-16

Together with 2 Timothy and Titus, 1 Timothy reflects both the internal and the external challenges faced by the churches at the turn of the second century.[1] Externally, the churches faced the threats of 'false teachings' (e.g., 1 Tim 1.3-8; 4.1-5) and the social pressure of reproach from outsiders (e.g., 3.7; 5.7, 14). Internally, the churches encountered

[1] There are mainly two positions concerning the authorship of 1 Timothy: one accepts the traditional Pauline authorship (probably with an amanuensis) and hence proposes a date in the sixth decade of the first century CE (e.g., Perkins 2017:xviii-xix; Kelly 1963:34-36; Fee 1988:26; Mounce 2000:cxviii-cxxix; Knight 1992:51-54; Lock 1924:xxii-xxxi); the other suggests that 1 Timothy was written by someone else and dates the epistle from soon after the death of Paul till around the mid-second century CE (e.g., Harrison 1921:85-86; Barrett 1963:18-19; Houlden 1976:44; Marshall 1999:57-92; Bassler 1996:21; Scott 1936:xxii-xxiii; Quinn and Wacker 2000:19). But as Huizenga (2013:247-48) rightly suggests, 'a date around 100 CE falls toward the middle of the range, and takes into account an increased circulation of the larger Pauline corpus after Paul's death, while also allowing time for the Pastorals to be attached to the collection in order to be available to Polycarp and *1 Clement* (and perhaps Ignatius)'. See also Easton 1948:21; Roloff 1988:46; Thurston 1989:36; Butzer 1998:35; Merz 2004:72-194; Back 2015:169; and Barclay 2020:269, who hold a similar view concerning the date of 1 Timothy.

problems in relation to church order, reflected particularly in the two passages concerning women (2.9-15) and widows (5.3-16).

Various questions have been raised regarding 1 Timothy 5.3-16: what is the passage about? Who were the 'real widows' (αἱ ὄντως χῆραι; 5.3, 5, 16) and the 'younger widows' (αἱ νεώτεραι χῆραι; 5.11-15)? How should we understand the seemingly contradictory instructions about marriage in verses 9, 11 and 14? And what does τὴν πρώτην πίστιν (5.12) refer to, etc.? To answer these questions, scholars have studied this passage from various perspectives (see Chapter 1, section 2.2). Building on the earlier scholarship, this chapter seeks to explore the different ways of support for widows advocated by the author based on the different categories of widows described in 1 Timothy 5.3-16, namely, the 'real widows' left alone without any means of support (5.3, 5-6, 9-10), widows with children or other relatives (5.4, 7-8), the 'younger widows' who were still marriageable (5.11-15), and widows with benefactors (5.16).

2.1. The 'real widows' (αἱ ὄντως χῆραι; 5.3, 5-6, 9-10)

There are two general approaches to the interpretation of 1 Timothy 5.3-16 based on its structure. One views the passage as a composition of three sections: 5.3-8 as a section on the support of widows, 5.9-15 on the requirements for the widows' office/order, and 5.16 as another distinct section. The other regards the passage as a unified whole which attends to the problem of determining who is qualified to be a 'real widow'.[2] The first view obtains support from the absence of connectives between 5.8-9 and 5.15-16 and argues for the existence of an office/order of widows which distinguishes the enrolled widows from other widows who simply receive support from the church.[3] However, as Barclay contends, 'there is strong

[2] For a brief survey on these two views, see Verner 1983:161-62; Thurston 1989:41.
[3] For scholars who argue for an 'order/office' of widows in Timothy 5, see Kelly 1963:113-21; Stählin 1974:453; Verner 1983:161-66; Bassler 1984:34; 1996:97; 2003:134-36; Thurston 1989:40-55; Hanson

literary and thematic evidence that 5.3-16 constitutes a unified treatment of a single topic'.[4] He additionally observes the *inclusio* of 5.3 and 5.16 concerning the support of 'real widows' and the author's persistent concern to define this category (5.3, 5-6, 9-10) and simultaneouly to exclude the unqualified women (5.4, 8, 11-15, 16) from receiving support from the church.[5]

The author first commands the community to honour widows who are 'real widows' (χήρας τίμα τὰς ὄντως χήρας; 5.3) and spends the rest of the passage on regulating the support of different categories of widows. There have been three different interpretations of the verb τιμάω in this controlling and leading instruction: (1) to show respect/reverence to the 'real widows'; (2) to pay/reward these widows for their service and ministry; and (3) to provide them with material/financial aid. The first interpretation is inadequate within the literary context, for the previous two verses (5.1-2) have already set a tone on the attitude/s between believers: respect is the basic requirement that is applied to every church member, so it is unlikely that the author would then instruct the community to show respect only to one category of widows.[6] In addition, the author's expansion of this instruction in the rest of the passage (e.g., 5.4, 8, 16) requires a broader understanding of this term; hence most scholars agree that there is a financial connotation in this term besides its basic meaning of 'respect'.[7] Those who hold the second view argue for the use of τιμάω in a technical sense that refers to the payment of widows as officers of the church.[8] This view additionally draws support from 5.17 where the noun form τιμή clearly refers to payment (especially in light of 5.18)[9] and the

1982a:96-100; Spicq 1969:524-40; Kidd 1990:103-06; Wagener 1994:115-233; Roloff 1988:282-304; Quinn and Wacker 2000:426; Parry 1920:29-33; and Kartzow 2009:144, etc.

[4] Barclay 2020:269. See also Towner 1989:180-90.

[5] Barclay 2020:269. See Gray (2022:303-06), Pietersen (2004:124-25) and Krause (1995b:7) who also regard the widows in this passage as beneficiaries rather than church officials.

[6] Marshall 1999:582; Towner 2006:337.

[7] Barclay 2020:270; Perkins 2017:99-100; Montague 2008:108; Towner 2006:337-38; Marshall 1999:582; Kidd 1990:103; Barrett 1963:74.

[8] For scholars who hold this view, see Thurston 1989:44-45; Kelly 1963:112-13; Oden 1989:154; Easton 1948:152; Quinn and Wacker 2000:430.

[9] Müller-Bardorff 1958:114-15.

fact that τιμᾶν was used as a technical term for 'pay' in later church orders.[10] However, there is no explicit affirmation of a widows' office in this passage. Moreover, while the same noun τιμή is employed again in 6.1 in the instruction to slaves on their relationships with their masters, it contains no implication of payment besides the basic meaning of respect (and obedience). Therefore, the most plausible interpretation should be the one that best fits the present context, whereas the second view fails to serve this purpose. In light of verses 4, 8 and 16, especially the terms προνοέω ('care for, provide for'; 5.8)[11] and ἐπαρκέω ('help, aid'; 5.16)[12] which apparently indicate material support in this context, the third interpretation seems the most persuasive.[13] Moreover, according to BDAG (and the immediate context of the passage), the term βαρέω ('weigh down, burden') in 5.16 refers to financial burdens carried by the congregation in supporting widows.[14] Therefore, by instructing the church to 'honour' the real widows, the author is requiring it to provide material/financial support to these widows (besides showing them respect). In addition, as Murray indicates, the fact that the author simply gives this command (indicated by the unconditional imperative τίμα) without making any justification reveals that taking care of widows is an 'assumed norm' 'shared between the author and the recipient(s) of the letter'.[15]

Indeed, caring for widows was a recognised obligation in the early church which inherited it from the Jewish tradition (see Chapter 3). Moreover, the author may be intentionally echoing the fifth commandment (τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μήτερα σου; Exod 20.12; Deut 5.16 LXX) here.[16] The same imperative τίμα is often used in the NT to refer to the fifth commandment (Matt 15.4; 19.19; Mark 7.10; 10.19; Luke 18.20; Eph 6.2)

[10] Bartsch 1965:118. However, Barclay (2020:268n1) rightly points out that Bartsch (1965:112-43) 'drew anachronistically on much later evidence for an order of widows'.
[11] BDAG 2000:872.
[12] BDAG 2000:359.
[13] Verner 1983:162-63; Lehtipuu 2017:34; Barclay 2020:270; Gray 2022:303.
[14] BDAG 2000:166.
[15] Murray 2018:204.
[16] Barclay 2020:270-71; Towner 2006:338; Mounce 2000:279.

and should be understood to include material/financial provision for one's elderly parents (especially as implied in Matt 15.4-6 and Mark 7.10-13). In the context of the current passage, this allusion is further reflected in the following verse (5.4) which emphasises the children's responsibility in providing for their parents. Hence the author instructs the church to respect and support the 'real widows' as mothers with the allusion to the fifth commandment and in light of 5.2. But what kind of women are qualified as 'real widows'? And how is a 'real widow' defined?

Based on verses 5-6 and 9-10, a 'real widow' (ὄντως χήρα) is defined mainly from two perspectives: her living circumstance and Christian character. In terms of the former, she is in a desperate situation. As described in 5.5, she has been left alone – an indication of deprivation of any living resource, be it financial or familial; she has fallen into a completely desolate and vulnerable circumstance – poor and unprotected. Parkin highlights that in classical Roman society, there was no social welfare system or legislation to secure the maintenance of people in their old age. As for men who were heads of their households, they could in theory retain power until death due to the Roman practice of *patria potestas*. As for widowed or divorced women without children, or for that matter never-married women (although relatively few in number), they would have faced the most difficult situation 'if they did not have control over inherited property and their own means of support'.[17] This might be the case of the widow in 5.5: she has no one else to look to except God – 'left alone, (she) has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day' (μεμονωμένη ἤλπικεν ἐπὶ θεὸν καὶ προσμένει ταῖς δεήσεσιν καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας; 5.5). It is true that the widow's constant prayers indicate her faith and piety.[18] Nevertheless in this context we should understand her piety as being generated by her dire

[17] Parkin 2003:212-13. See also Chapter 2.
[18] Beattie 2005:100; Towner 2006:341-42.

circumstance: she can only cleave to prayer for her security and provision.[19] The intensity and the constancy of her prayer, as indicated by both the verb προσμένω ('to be steadfast in association, *remain*/*stay with*…'; '*continue in*…')[20] and the phrase νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ('night and day'), further highlight her desperation: 'she prays all the time, because she does not know where her next meal will come from'.[21] The plight of the 'real widow' is additionally manifested by the contrasting example of the wealthy and extravagant widow who is severely criticised in 5.6: ἡ δὲ σπαταλῶσα ζῶσα τέθνηκεν ('but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives'). The verb σπαταλάω means 'to indulge oneself beyond the bounds of propriety, *live luxuriously/voluptuously*'.[22] It is also found in the biblical texts of James 5.5 and Ezekiel 16.49 (LXX) and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (e.g., Barn. 10.3 and Herm. Sim. 6.1.6; 6.2.6), which highlight the selfish indulgence of the wealthy who not only fail to share their wealth with the poor but even ill-treat them.[23] It probably carries a similar connotation in the context of 1 Timothy 5.6 and indicates a luxurious lifestyle enabled by wealth.[24] Easton views this term as specifically referring to the sexual impropriety of such widows who indulge themselves in prostitution, whether as a means of support or a way to relieve their sexual tension.[25] However, this does not seem to be the focus in this context; the sexual misconduct may be implied, but the emphasis is on the luxurious and self-indulgent living of the wealthy widow, which forms a striking contrast to the destitute and desperate poor widow – the 'real widow'.[26] Therefore, as Johnson indicates, the contrast with the 'real widow' is 'not merely moral but also social and economic: the women here described are not "left alone" economically, but can afford a life of luxury and idleness'.[27] In the author's eyes,

[19] Perkins 2017:103-104.
[20] BDAG 2000:883.
[21] Barclay 2020:273.
[22] BDAG 2000:936.
[23] Barclay 2020:274; Murray 2018:205; Towner 2006:342.
[24] Beattie 2005:100; Johnson 1996:174.
[25] Easton 1948:152.
[26] Gray 2022:305.
[27] Johnson 1996:174.

such a woman ‘is dead even while she lives’, hence she ‘should receive no support from the church, nor should she expect any’.[28] But for the ‘real widow’ who has been left alone and set her hope on God, the responsibility for her legitimately falls on the church – the household of God (1 Tim 3.15).[29]

Financial need alone does not qualify a widow as a ‘real widow’, however; she has to fulfil additional criteria – age, marital faithfulness, and reputation for good works – in order to be registered (καταλέγω) for church support (5.9-10). Some scholars understand the verb καταλέγω as a technical term for enrolment and thus regard it as a clear reference to an ‘order’ of widows.[30] But the context of the passage does not support this view. According to BDAG, καταλέγω means ‘to make a selection for membership in a group’.[31] Barclay points out that ‘it is commonly used in antiquity for the enlistment of soldiers, but it does not itself imply enrolment for a task’.[32] According to Mounce, it is also used ‘for joining the circle of the gods (Diodorus Siculus 4.39.4), the senate (Plutarch *Pomp*. 13.11 [*sic*]), and the clergy (Tertullian *Ad uxorem* 1.7; cf. BGU 4.1073.10 [MM, 329])’.[33] But scholars generally agree that the term itself does not reveal the nature of the enrolment; it is the context alone that decides.[34] Moreover, the text does not mention any duties for the widows to perform except qualifications demonstrated in the past for the enrolment (5.10). Therefore, the enrolment itself does not indicate a widows’ office, but reveals the church’s long-term commitment to the support of ‘real widows’ with its collective resources.

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[28] Towner 2006:342.
[29] Kelly 1963:114. See also Scott 1936:58.
[30] Kelly 1963:115; Dibelius and Conzelmann 1972:75; Scott 1936:60; Parry 1920:31; Easton 1948:153. Montague (2008:110) and Lock (1924:59) similarly argue for an ‘order of widows’ by associating this enrolment with making a vow of celibacy. Tsuji (2001:97-98) understands 5.9-10 as related to a ‘widow’s office’ in the church.
[31] BDAG 2000:520.
[32] Barclay 2020:276.
[33] Mounce 2000:286.
[34] Barclay 2020:276; Murray 2018:208; Towner 2006:345-46; Marshall 1999:591-92; Mounce 2000:286.

To be enrolled, a widow must be 'not less than sixty years old' (μὴ ἔλαττον ἐτῶν ἑξήκοντα γεγονυῖα; 5.9). This requirement appears striking, as Barclay observes that in the ancient world only a small number of people could live up to sixty, and for those who did reach that age, 'not many would live much longer'.[35] According to Parkin, on the basis of the average life expectancy at birth being twenty-five years old, those who were sixty and above occupied only 6.98 percent of the whole population in the Roman world and those who were sixty-five and above only 4.07 percent.[36] Some scholars therefore posit that 1 Timothy 5.9-10 refers to an office of widows who were appointed with church ministries and distinct from other widows who were merely recipients of support from the church.[37] However, it is doubtful that widows at such an advanced age could still actively participate in church ministries that required physical strength. It is therefore more plausible to understand μὴ ἔλαττον ἐτῶν ἑξήκοντα γεγονυῖα ('not less than sixty years old'; 5.9) as a requirement for receiving church support. There are a few possible reasons for the author to set such a high age limit: firstly, as Barclay indicates, 'at sixty a woman was no longer regarded as marriageable, since she was no longer able to bear children (the main purpose of marriage in antiquity)'.[38] Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the Augustan legislation set the upper limit of age requirement for widows to remarry at fifty years old, which implies that widows over fifty were unlikely to have any chance of remarriage;[39] let alone those sixty or above. The deprivation of remarriage meant the loss of possible maintenance from a new family. Without any other resource of sustenance, the church became her last straw. Secondly, as many scholars suggest, sixty was considered as the threshold of old age in antiquity.[40]

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[35] Barclay 2020:278. See also Krause (1995b:7), Bassler (1984:33-34) and Gray (2022:304) who recognise the strictness of the requirements illustrated in verses 9-10 and the severe limitations on the number of enrolled widows.
[36] Parkin 2003:280-81, Tables 3 and 4.
[37] See note 3 for those who argue for a widows' office.
[38] Barclay 2020:278. See also Fee 1988:119; Oden 1989:156.
[39] A man might choose to marry an elite widow over fifty for the sake of her property, but this situation was probably rare.
[40] Perkins 2017:107; Kelly 1963:115; Bassler 1996:97; Knight 1992:223; Holtz 1966:117.

Considering the short life expectancy caused by poor living and health conditions (see Chapter 2), those who reached sixty were probably too weak physically to make a living for themselves.[41] Thirdly, as Kelly indicates, at sixty 'a woman's sexual passions might be deemed to have lost their dangers then'.[42] Given the description of 5.11-15, younger widows seemed to be driven by sensual desires more easily and thus affect the reputation of the church negatively. The author therefore pushes the age limit extremely high so as to minimise the risk.

The interpretation of ἑνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή ('wife of one husband'; 5.9) has been controversial due to the seemingly self-contradictory instruction in 5.14. If this phrase is understood as referring to a woman who had married only once, how about the younger widows who are required to remarry in 5.14? Does it mean that they would never have the chance to be put on the list? In response to this problem, scholars have proposed various solutions. Bassler understands this requirement (together with other requirements) as the author's intentional purpose to 'reduce the circle of widows to a minimum' due to the financial strain it placed on the church (v 16) and the 'potential and real abuse of the office (v 13)'.[43] Kelly similarly views this as an indication of a widows' office and posits that this stipulation corresponds to the rule for bishops (3.2), deacons (3.12), and elders (Tit 1.6), where the requirement of being 'husband of one wife' is equivalent to 'wife of one husband' here.[44] However, while noticing the parallel in 1 Timothy 3.2 (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα), Beattie points out that the requirements for the ἐπίσκοπος in 3.2-7 focus on his personal qualities and performance at present, whereas the stipulations for widows emphasise what they did in the past, and the office of ἐπίσκοπος 'carries no age limit' as long as he fulfils other

[41] Oden 1989:156; Wall 2012:129; Towner 2006:346.
[42] Kelly 1963:115.
[43] Bassler 1984:34. See also Beattie (2005:104) and Tsuji (2001:100) who hold a similar view.
[44] Kelly 1963:115-16. See also Holtz 1966:118. Although Krause (1995b:53-54) also regards this as an analogous requirement expressed for the (male) clergy which could speak for an official character of the enrolled widows, he thinks the church widows were intended to play a passive role (cf. 1 Tim 5.5, 11-15).

requirements.[45] Beattie instead appeals to the contemporary cultural ideal of the *univira* to support her view that this phrase refers to a widow who had married only once.[46] Murray, however, raises several questions against this interpretation: first is the apparent inconsistency with 5.14,[47] second is the lack of the most natural Greek term for a *univira* – a μόνανδρος, and third is the fact that only wealthy women could afford to remain a *univira*, as most women would have endangered their security and future if they were to refuse remarriage. This would then ironically make the church's financial support 'primarily available to the wealthy'.[48] To address all these problems, Murray offers an alternative interpretation, i.e., this phrase refers to marital and sexual faithfulness.[49] The immediate context (especially 5.11-15) additionally indicates that the author's real concern is what impact these women's behaviour would bring upon the reputation of the church rather than whether they were married only once or twice.[50] Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (section 4), despite the ideal of the *univira*, in reality Roman women were expected to remarry after being widowed: for elite women there was the Augustan law which required them to marry between twenty and fifty; for other non-elite women, the pressure of maintenance and security.

Apart from advanced age and marital fidelity, a widow also needs to have a good reputation testified by her good works (as indicated at both the beginning [ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς μαρτυρουμένη] and the end [εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολούθησεν] of 5.10) in order to be enrolled for church support. Several points may be observed concerning the good works

[45] Beattie 2005:102. As may be noticed, the nature of the requirements for deacons (3.12) and elders (Tit 1.6) is similar to that for bishops.
[46] Beattie 2005:101-102. See also Wall (2012:129-30) who holds a similar view by appealing to the Roman culture and the Jewish tradition.
[47] If the author is trying to promote the Roman ideal of the *univira* with the requirement of ἑνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή in 5.9, he is then contradicting himself when he asks the younger widows to marry in 5.14.
[48] Murray 2018:209.
[49] Murray 2018:209. See also Knight1992:223; Marshall 1999:594; Towner 2006:346; Dibelius and Conzelmann 1972:75; Houlden 1976:93; Lock 1924:60.
[50] Winter (2003:136-37) similarly maintains that 'the reference is not to the older widow's marital history but to her moral conduct'.

listed in 5.10: first, they are 'qualifications arising from past, exemplary behaviour (note the past tenses of 5.10)'[51] rather than 'duties to be performed for the future'.[52] Second, the list is merely illustrative; those specific qualifications are simply examples of good works and hence should not be taken as a checklist.[53] Third, it is not clear when the widow was supposed to have performed those tasks: after being widowed or since adulthood? Marshall suggests that 'either or both can be meant'.[54] While recognising these good works as within the Christian community, scholars focus on different aspects in their interpretations. Viewing the church depicted in 5.3-16 as 'a network of Christian households connected by mutual economic support',[55] Barclay understands the widow's exemplary deeds as 'the low-level, everyday benefactions which form the support system of the poor'.[56] Murray who understands the church described in 1 Timothy as a fictive family regards the widow's care of others in the community as part of the 'reciprocity within the fictive kinship of the church, the household of God (1 Tim 3.15)'.[57] He views this as 'a clear example of appeal to familial reciprocity': to receive support from the church at old age, a widow should have formerly performed Christian service within the church.[58] Towner interprets the widow's good works as 'the outworking of faith'.[59] Regardless of the distinct focuses in their interpretations, these scholars all regard the good works as qualifications for a widow to receive support from the church rather than to be enrolled in an office of ministry.

The author lists four specific examples to demonstrate the good works: εἰ ἐτεκνοτρόφησεν, εἰ ἐξενοδόχησεν, εἰ ἁγίων πόδας ἔνιψεν, εἰ θλιβομένοις ἐπήρκεσεν (5.10).

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[51] Barclay 2020:277.
[52] Marshall 1999:594.
[53] Towner 2006:347; Murray 2018:209; Marshall 1999:595.
[54] Marshall 1999:594.
[55] Barclay 2020:268.
[56] Barclay 2020:277. In his illustrations, these benefactions include 'a gift of food, care of children, nursing the sick, sharing household items, a small loan in a crisis, hospitality, and so on'.
[57] Murray 2018:210.
[58] Murray 2018:209-10.
[59] Towner 2006:349.

According to BDAG, τεκνοτροφέω means to '*bring up children*, i.e. care for them physically and spiritually'.[60] For some scholars who argue for the existence of a widows' order, the 'children' here does not refer to the widows' own children but orphans who were put under the widows' charge as part of their ministry.[61] Although Marshall rejects the possibility of a widows' order, he maintains that the 'children' primarily refers to orphans in light of 5.5 and the fact that 'the other qualities are all concerned with service to other people'.[62] However, as Towner and Murray point out, the status of the 'real widow' being alone does not necessarily exclude the possibility that she did have children at an earlier stage of her life.[63] And Murray additionally states that 'even care of one's own children may be taken as fulfilling one's duty to the church in line with the wider concerns of this passage: caring for one's own dependants rightly relieves the church from having to do so'.[64] It is therefore more plausible to understand the phrase as bringing up the widow's own children, although the thought of caring for others' children might be included. Scholars generally understand ξενοδοχέω as 'showing hospitality to travelling Christians'[65] and ἁγίων πόδας νίπτω ('to wash the saints' feet') as an action of hospitality and humble service towards guest believers 'who come for meals or visits'.[66] In the phrase θλιβομένοις ἐπαρκέω ('to help the afflicted'), θλιβομένοις can refer to people suffering from affliction in general such as poverty, bereavement and destitution (cf. the widows in 5.16) or affliction caused by persecution as Christians. However, since the context does not suggest persecution, the phrase probably refers to helping those in hardship in a general sense.[67] As mentioned earlier, these qualifications are

[60] BDAG 2000:995.
[61] Kelly 1963:116-117; Dibelius and Conzelmann 1972:75.
[62] Marshall 1999:595.
[63] Towner 2006:347; Murray 2018:209-10. Considering especially the high mortality of children in antiquity (see Chapter 2, section 2.1), it was very possible for a woman to lose her children before they reached adulthood.
[64] Murray 2018:210.
[65] Marshall 1999:595. See also Towner 2006:347; Barclay 2020:277.
[66] Barclay 2020:277. See also Towner 2006:347-48; Marshall 1999:595-97.
[67] Mounce 2000:289; Marshall 1999:597; Towner 2006:348; Barclay 2020:277.

only illustrative and idealised expressions. It does not mean that every widow has to fulfil all the qualifications in order to be registered for support. The point is that the widow must be well attested for her devotion in good deeds and works of love, whether as a wife, a mother, or a member of the Christian community (especially as indicated in the last phrase of 5.10).

The above discussion reveals that a 'real widow' is one in her advanced age with desperate needs, who had been faithful to her husband and well attested for her good deeds, including raising children, hospitality, and helping the afflicted. And the purpose of the enrolment is double-sided: one is to help 'real widows' with the collective resources of the church; the other is to exclude those who are not qualified as 'real widows' so as to reduce the church's financial burden. Therefore, the qualifications of the 'real widows' are for them to receive support from the church rather than to be enrolled into an office of the church's ministry. But what kind of widows are disqualified as 'real widows'? And how do they obtain support?

2.2. Widows with children or relatives (5.4, 7-8)

The first category of widows disqualified from receiving support from the church as 'real widows' are those with children or relatives, for their households should be their primary source of support. The author states in 5.4 that εἰ δέ τις χήρα τέκνα ἢ ἔκγονα ἔχει, μανθανέτωσαν πρῶτον τὸν ἴδιον οἶκον εὐσεβεῖν καὶ ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόναι τοῖς προγόνοις· τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ἀπόδεκτον ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. The difficulty with the interpretation of this verse lies in the ambiguity of the subject of μανθανέτωσαν. There are mainly two positions concerning this: one views the widow's descendants as the subject who are exhorted to take care of their widowed mother or grandmother;[68] the other regards the widows themselves as

[68] This position is supported by the majority of scholars, including Gray 2022:305; Barclay 2020:271-72; Murray 2018:204-205; Towner 2006:339-40; Beattie 2005:99; Quinn and Wacker 2000:430-31; Marshall 1999:583-85; Oberlinner 1994:225; Brox 1969:188; Holtz 1966:115; Kelly 1963:113; Scott 1936:58.

the subject who are instructed to fulfil their family duties first before participating in church ministry.[69] With regard to the second position, several questions arise: first, the verb μανθανέτωσαν is in plural form, but χήρα is singular, hence grammatically it is more logical to regard the τέκνα and ἔκγονα of the widows as the subject of μανθανέτωσαν.[70] Second, it does not make sense for the widows to bring up their *children* as a repayment to their parents (ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόναι τοῖς προγόνοις); they should repay what their parents have given and done for them (i.e., life and nurture) to their *parents* rather than to their *children*. Besides, bringing up their own children should be considered as their duty rather than repayment to their parents. Therefore, as Scott states, it is 'much too subtle and artificial' to view the widows' rearing of their children as a way to repay or honour their progenitors.[71] Third, in light of 5.5 which is clearly about the destitute situation of a poor widow who has no means of support, it is more plausible to understand 5.4 as a widow in need of support from her children rather than vice versa. Fourth, this passage both begins (5.3) and ends (5.16) with the concern about the support of widows, which further indicates that 5.4 should be understood as an instruction to the widow's children and grandchildren to support their widowed mother and grandmother.[72] Moreover, as Marshall indicates, εὐσεβέω as a synonym of τιμάω is 'more likely to refer to duty towards the older rather than the younger members of the family'.[73] According to BDAG, εὐσεβέω 'refers to a sense of awesome obligation arising within a system of reciprocity in which special respect is showed to those who have the greatest investment in one's well-being, such as deities and parental figures'.[74] Based on this definition, εὐσεβέω in the context of 1 Timothy 5.4 should be understood as referring to the

[69] E.g., Roloff 1988:287-88; Wagener 1994:149-54; Bassler 1996:94-96; Tsuji 2001:96.
[70] Although those who view widows as the subject draw on the shift in subject in 1 Timothy 2.15, the context indicates that it is more natural to view the widow's descendants as the subject. And although a neuter plural normally takes a singular verb, the two together (i.e., τέκνα and ἔκγονα) should take a plural verb.
[71] Scott 1936:58.
[72] Brox 1969:188.
[73] Marshall 1999:584.
[74] BDAG 2000:413.

children's/grandchildren's respect and obligation towards their widowed mother/grandmother, not vice versa. Last but not least, as Barclay indicates, it is nonsensical to exclude a needy widow from receiving support from the church based on the reason that she has children to bring up, for 'dependent children would make her more needy, not less so'.[75] Furthermore, it is unlikely that here it refers to an office of widows who have been involved in too many church ministries and as a result neglected their families, since the passage neither mentions an office/order of widows nor prescribes any duties for them. Therefore, it is more natural and logical to interpret the subject of μανθανέτωσαν as the descendants of the widows rather than the widows themselves. Although this view is objected to on the basis that προγόνοι is always used to refer to *deceased* ancestors[76] and so cannot apply to the case of children being instructed to support their *living* parents/grandparents, the objection is unfounded, because this term is indeed used to refer to living parents as well (e.g., Plato, *Leg*. 931e).[77]

If the instruction in 5.4 is understood as directed at the offspring of the widow, the instruction can be interpreted from both ethical and theological aspects. Ethically, we can draw on the Roman virtue of *pietas* (filial piety in particular) in the interpretation of the term εὐσεβέω and the entire instruction, for as Murray discloses, εὐσέβεια – the noun form of εὐσεβέω – is the Greek equivalent of *pietas* and often represents 'the same set of values'.[78] According to Saller, the virtue of *pietas* was at the very heart of the Romans' idealised conception of family relations.[79] Apart from filial duty and obedience, Saller pays more attention to the affective and reciprocal qualities of *pietas*. In his opinion, *pietas* went beyond the idea of filial obedience; in essence it stands for 'a reciprocal devotion to family

[75] Barclay 2020:272n10.
[76] Tsuji 2001:96; Wagener 1994:152.
[77] Barclay 2020:272n10; Marshall 1999:586.
[78] Murray 2018:204.
[79] Saller 1994:105.

members', which 'obliged parents and children to provide maintenance for one another in case of need' during their lifetime.[80] Parkin equally recognises the significance of the virtue of *pietas* among the Romans. However, differing from Saller who focuses on the idealised description of *pietas* in Roman family relations, Parkin stresses the hard reality in which adult children often failed to provide maintenance for their elderly parents, especially when the parents became completely dependent (see also Chapter 2, section 5.1). In his opinion, besides the fact that some elderly people became a burden to their children due to illness or poverty, the lack of legal enforcement concerning *pietas* was another reason that resulted in some children's reluctance or failure to fulfil their filial duties towards their parents.[81] He further discloses that although in the second century CE there appeared discussion in the legal corpus concerning the duty of maintenance between parents and children, it was only compiled several centuries later. And even in the legal corpus, 'the duty is seen again as a moral or natural one, rather than one strictly required by the letter of the law'.[82] In the case of Christian widows referred to in 1 Timothy 5.4, some of their children probably are not providing for their maintenance but instead have shifted the responsibility to the church, thus increasing the financial burden on the church (cf. 5.16). The author therefore urges these Christians to learn to 'show proper piety (εὐσεβεῖν) to their own household';[83] and even more so, this should become their priority (as indicated by πρῶτον). By doing this, they are actually making a repayment to their parents (ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόναι τοῖς προγόνοις) who have not only given them life but also nurtured them and brought them up, and it is now their turn to support their parents when they (the parents) become old and needy. Nevertheless, Murray plausibly points out that 'although the content of εὐσέβια (*sic*) must be ascertained by identifying the shared cultural assumptions, the author does not justify this instruction by

[80] Saller 1994:110-11.
[81] Parkin 2003:212-16.
[82] Parkin 2003:214.
[83] Barclay 2020:272.

appeal to common custom, but to what pleases God'.[84] When the author states that τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ἀπόδεκτον ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, he has endowed the instruction with religious and theological authority. And the probable reason that this conduct is pleasing before God is that it fulfils the fifth commandment which is also echoed in 5.3.[85]

In addition to his teaching for the congregation to look after their family members and relatives, the author severely criticises those who refuse to do so: εἰ δέ τις τῶν ἰδίων καὶ μάλιστα οἰκείων οὐ προνοεῖ, τὴν πίστιν ἤρνηται καὶ ἔστιν ἀπίστου χείρων (1 Tim 5.8). According to BDAG, the verb προνοέω in this verse means 'to think about beforehand in a solicitous manner' and to care for or provide for someone.[86] Some scholars additionally point out that its noun form πρόνοια is the Greek equivalent to the Latin *providentia* which 'referred, amongst other things, to the provision undertaken for one's dependants'.[87] And Marshall further indicates that 'here it is used with respect to family relationships'.[88] It is generally agreed that this verse is directed at the householders who have the responsibility to provide for other members of their household.[89] But there are different opinions regarding the interpretation of ἴδιος and οἰκεῖος. Winter views ἴδιοι in 5.8 as 'a general reference to those belonging to a household' but not necessarily living at home, such as freedmen. He further states that since this text deals with the issue of widows, ἴδιοι refers to 'those widows residing away from the household', whereas οἰκεῖοι 'refers specifically to the family who lived at home, and among them was the widow who was residing with the κύριος of the dowry'.[90] Marshall translates the term μάλιστα as 'namely' and interprets both ἴδιοι and οἰκεῖοι as referring to the members of one's household, or more specifically 'those relatives who

[84] Murray 2018:205. See also Towner 2006:340.
[85] Marshall 1999:586; Towner 2006:340; Murray 2018:205.
[86] BDAG 2000:872.
[87] Murray 2018:206. See also Winter 1988:90; Marshall 1999:590.
[88] Marshall 1999:590.
[89] Winter 1988:90; Marshall 1999:589; Towner 2006:344.
[90] Winter 1988:91-92.

actually lived in the household'.[91] Murray holds a similar view, but stresses 'the common conventions of familial reciprocity' in the Roman world and interprets the πρόνοια for one's ἰδίων and οἰκείων as referring to 'one's reciprocal financial duties' within the household.[92] However, it seems more appropriate to translate μάλιστα as 'especially', 'particularly', or 'above all', which indicates a shift 'from a broad idea to a specific application of it'.[93] The interpretation of ἴδιοι should then go beyond 'members of one's own household', such as one's kin/relatives belonging to a different household; and οἰκεῖοι refers specifically to the members of one's household (whether residing in or away from the household), who are, as Barclay indicates, 'the innermost circle of ἴδιοι'.[94]

The criticism of those who do not provide for their own, and especially members of their household is twofold: (1) they have denied their faith, and (2) they are worse than unbelievers. The charge of 'denial of the faith' should be viewed in light of 5.4 which echoes the fifth commandment, hence for those who avoid their responsibility of providing for their widowed mothers and grandmothers, their behaviour is seen as a rejection of God's Word.[95] Towner interprets the denial of the faith from a broader sense. He understands provision for one's family as 'an outworking of genuine faith', and 'shirking this responsibility is, thus, denial of "the faith"…, an act that reveals a breach in the integrity of the faith-generated behaviour that is authentic Christianity'.[96] As for the second charge: ἔστιν ἀπίστου χείρων ('worse than an unbeliever'), Winter interprets it from a legal perspective and posits that the condemnation is against the head of a household who, 'while holding the dowry', 'was not fulfilling his legal responsibility to support the widow'.[97] According to Winter, in the Graeco-

[91] Marshall 1999:590.
[92] Murray 2018:206-207.
[93] Towner 2006:344.
[94] Barclay 2020:274.
[95] Cf. Mark 7.9-13 in which Jesus criticises the Pharisees and the scribes who forbid others from providing for their parents after claiming Corban. Jesus regards such behaviour (avoidance of provision for parents) as a rejection of the commandment of God.
[96] Towner 2006:344-45.
[97] Winter 1988:92-93; also 1994:70; 2003:127.

Roman world it was the legal obligation of the dowry holder (be it the son or a male blood relative) to provide for the widow's maintenance, but there were always widows 'who slipped through the net, especially those at the lowest end of the economic scale'.[98] The church then took the responsibility of caring for the Christian widows who were otherwise incapable of supporting themselves financially, which unfortunately 'enabled some of the members of the Christian ἐκκλησία to conveniently evade *providentia*'.[99] Winter's interpretation has a point, but in light of the literary context, especially that of 5.4 which indicates strongly the Roman convention of mutual support between parents and children, it is better to understand the second charge on the ground of 'the common ideology of familial reciprocity'.[100] Therefore, in order to reduce the financial burden of the church, the author exhorted the believers to shoulder their responsibility of providing for their own widows, whether their widowed mothers, grandmothers, or other relatives, so that they may be above reproach (5.7; cf. 3.2, 13).[101]

2.3. The younger widows (αἱ νεώτεραι χῆραι; 5.11-15)

Apart from widows with children or relatives, another category of widows who are disqualified from church support is the 'younger widows' (νεώτεραι χῆραι) mentioned in 5.11-15. The complexity and ambiguity of the issue concerning the νεώτεραι χῆραι has invited extensive discussion among scholars. Who are these widows? What are their problems? And what solution does the author provide?

In terms of the identity of these νεώτεραι χῆραι, we should not simply assume that they refer to widows whose husbands have died, for as mentioned in Chapters 1 (section 1)

[98] Winter 1988:86.
[99] Winter 1988:93; also 1994:70.
[100] Murray 2018:208.
[101] Some scholars (e.g., Brox 1969:190; Holtz 1966:117) understand 5.7 as an instruction to the widows, but given the context of 5.4-8, and considering the fact that ὦσιν requires a subject in plural form, it is more plausible and logical to view 5.7 as directing at the children and relatives of the widows.

and 4 (section 3.2), the Greek term χήρα could refer to any woman who lived without a man in the ancient world. Based on this definition, Methuen argues for the existence of 'virgin widows' by drawing on early Christian literature and contends that the νεώτεραι χῆραι in 1 Timothy 5.11-15 are actually virgins who have been admitted into the order of widows, which the author does not approve due to the concern that they might change their minds later and seek marriage.[102] Barclay also regards the νεώτεραι χῆραι in 5.11-15 as virgins who have committed themselves to celibacy, but he does not link them with any 'order of widows'. He views their celibacy as a personal devotion or a kind of 'marriage' to Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11.2-3; Eph 5.32), in which case 'their lifelong celibacy is bound up with their faith in Christ'; hence their failure in sustaining this celibacy (i.e., if they marry) would imply the renunciation of their Christian faith.[103] Bassler proposes a broader understanding of the νεώτεραι χῆραι in 5.11-15. In addition to virgins, she also includes converted divorced women (whose divorce resulted from their conversion to Christianity) among these νεώτεραι χῆραι who have joined the widows' circle.[104] Based on the general meaning of χήρα and the description of 5.11-15, the author is likely addressing all the three categories of women – young widows, divorcees, and virgins – in his reference to the νεώτεραι χῆραι. But this does not necessarily indicate the existence of a widows' order. As will be seen, the author's real concern is that the church's financial support, in addition to their single life freed from marital and domestic responsibilities, has enabled them to live an idle and unproductive life and thus brought about a negative impact on the reputation and credibility of the church in the world.

[102] Methuen 1997:291. See also Parry 1920:32; Wagener 1994:202-204; Tsuji 2001:100-02; Back 2015:186-87; Kidson 2020:202-03.
[103] Barclay 2020:279-81.
[104] Bassler 2003:138-39; also 1984:35; Kartzow 2009:142. Bassler (2003:138-39) refers to 1 Corinthians 7.10-24 as an illustration which reflects the possible divorces between recently converted women and their unconverted husbands. This situation is also reflected in Apocryphal Acts in which the newly converted female protagonists refuse to sleep together with their non-Christian husbands, which eventually leads to either persecution against the wives or, potentially, divorce.

The author refuses to put the νεώτεραι χῆραι on the list because when καταστρηνιάσωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γαμεῖν θέλουσιν ἔχουσαι κρίμα ὅτι τὴν πρώτην πίστιν ἠθέτησαν (5.11b-12). According to Barclay, 'καταστρηνιάω is an extremely rare verb, although the simple verb στρηνιάω and the cognate noun στρῆνος are reasonably common'.[105] He further states that 'their semantic field includes luxury, indulgence and arrogance, with possible sexual connotations (promiscuity or infidelity)' and that 'the κατά prefix may be merely intensive, or it may (with the following genitive) suggest infidelity or insubordination in relation to Christ'.[106] Winter understands this expression as 'a promiscuous lifestyle' under the influence of the 'new woman' in the Roman world, which was characterised with wantonness against Christ, i.e., 'in rebellion to his purposes'.[107] According to Murray, however, Winter's argument concerning the 'new woman' is not entirely convincing considering the fact that 'many of the primary sources that Winter appeals to for evidence of the "new woman" are highly polemical, satirical or by their nature difficult to consider reliable as an accurate portrayal of reality' and that 'the existence of the "new women" is "*not* generally accepted" by the acadamy (*sic*)'.[108] Nevertheless, Murray still affirms the possibility and probability of Winter's thesis concerning the 'new woman' based on the NT evidence.[109] Thornton holds a different view, however. In his opinion, it is the sexual desire of the younger widows that is 'in conflict with their commitment to Christ', for 'this sexual drive leads them "to desire marriage" (γαμεῖν θέλουσιν)'.[110] He therefore maintains that the problem does not lie in the younger widows' sexual immorality but *the marriage itself.*[111] Towner holds a similar view to Winter's and draws additional support

[105] Barclay 2020:279.
[106] Barclay 2020:279. But he views 'disloyalty' as 'the stronger connotation, rather than sexual infidelity, in relation to Christ', as indicated in his n44.
[107] Winter 2003:132-33.
[108] Murray 2018:216.
[109] Murray 2018:217. He does not provide specific examples in the NT that support Winter's thesis, however.
[110] Thornton 2016:123.
[111] Thornton 2016:123.

from Revelation 18.7 and 18.9 which describe the 'determined pursuit of luxury' of the harlot Babylon (in particular contrast to a widow; Rev 18.7) and her sexual promiscuity in association with her luxurious living.[112] Both Winter and Towner suggest that it was this promiscuous lifestyle that caused the younger widows' rejection of Christ (or negation of their devotion to Christ), for such a lifestyle was 'in conflict with their Christian profession'.[113] The problem with Winter's and Towner's interpretations is that if the younger widows had indulged themselves in a promiscuous lifestyle, it is unlikely that this would generate the desire to marry, for marriage (whether with believers or non-believers) would presumably impose restrictions on or even put an end to such a lifestyle. Moreover, since this promiscuous lifestyle itself is already a rejection of Christ and a negation of their Christian faith, why should the author mention their desire for marriage and indicate that it is because of the marriage that they incur judgement upon themselves? Furthermore, if they needed to rely on the church's support for maintenance, it is doubtful that they could afford a life of promiscuity and luxury. Therefore, it is more plausible to understand καταστρηνιάω as referring to sexual desire that makes the νεώτεραι χῆραι want to marry.

But how does this desire for marriage (γαμεῖν θέλουσιν; 5.11) nullify (ἀθετέω; 5.12) their πρώτη πίστις (5.12) and hence bring judgement on themselves? If the problem concerns their desire for marriage, why does the author encourage them to marry in 5.14? The crux of the matter seems to lie in the understanding of the πρώτη πίστις which has sparked heated discussions among scholars, for πρῶτος can mean both 'first' and 'former', and πίστις can mean both 'pledge' and 'faith'.[114] Among those who think πρώτη πίστις means the first vow or pledge, there are different proposals. Some suggest that this expression refers to the pledge

[112] Towner 2006:350.
[113] Winter 2003:133; Towner 2006:350.
[114] Mounce 2000:291.

of fidelity to one's first husband even after his death.[115] This interpretation seems irrelevant to the context, however, for (1) the breaking of the πρώτη πίστις is described in relation to Christ rather than the first husband (as indicated by καταστρηνιάσωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ; 5.11a); (2) the author encourages the νεώτεραι χῆραι to marry in 5.14; (3) the social reality in antiquity (mostly financial need) would expect them to (re)marry. Some understand this phrase as a vow or a pledge of celibacy (with an implication of marriage to Christ) taken by the χῆραι upon enrolment for the widows' order, hence the desire to (re)marry would not merely nullify this pledge but also expose one's infidelity towards Christ.[116] Some others similarly regard this as a vow not to (re)marry, but not for the admission into a widows' order; rather, it is for the commitment to church ministry (e.g., prayer) in exchange for financial support, and the desire for (re)marriage would break such a commitment.[117] There are two main objections against this interpretation of 'first vow/pledge': first, if the author views the judgement against the younger widows as a result of their breaking of the pledge of celibacy by wanting to (re)marry, he would contradict himself when he actually encourages them to (re)marry in 5.14. Second, it is difficult to explain why the author should call this their *first* pledge, since the χῆραι would have already made a pledge to follow Christ upon their conversion.[118] In addition, an order of widows is never mentioned in the text.

Some scholars therefore interpret the term πίστις in this context as referring to one's Christian faith. As mentioned earlier, Barclay regards the χῆραι in 5.11-12 as virgins who followed Paul's advice and devoted themselves entirely to Christ through lifelong celibacy (1

[115] This interpretation is mentioned by Marshall (1999:599-600) and Mounce (2000:291) who, however, do not support it.
[116] Kelly 1963:117; Verner 1983:164; Thurston 1989:49-50; Hanson 1982a:98; Spicq 1969:535-36; Wagener 1994:202-204; Oberlinner 1994:237-38; Parry 1920:32; Roloff 1988:296-97. It should be noted that Roloff (1988:286) recognises the *Stand* of widows in 1 Timothy but not an *Amt*, as he considers the former as an institutionalised group characterised by certain conditions of admission and fixed ways of life, while the latter an office determined by established functions. See also Sand (1971:186-97) who similarly distinguishes between *Stand* and *Amt* in his discussion of 1 Timothy 5.3-16.
[117] Barrett 1963:76; Johnson 2001:266; Knight 1992:226-27; Horrell 2008:121.
[118] Thornton 2016:123-24; Barclay 2020:279.

Cor 7.32-5) which is 'bound up with their faith in Christ'.[119] In this case, their failure in sustaining their ascetic commitment would mean the renunciation of their Christian faith.[120] Barclay's interpretation is possible but excludes widows and divorced women from the reference of the νεώτεραι χῆραι. In addition, it is doubtful that a young virgin would be considered to have renounced her Christian faith simply because she has regretted her previous decision of lifelong celibacy and thus changed her mind and wanted to marry, especially if the man she would marry was a Christian. Some other scholars propose that the younger widows in 5.11-12 were actually thinking of marrying unbelievers, which would mean the abandonment of their Christian faith, because a Roman woman was supposed to adopt her husband's religion after getting married.[121] The difficulty with this interpretation is the assumption which is absent from the text. Besides, if the younger widows' desire for marriage is stirred by their sexual drive, they could always marry believers, which would not only resolve their struggle but also enable them to keep their Christian faith; thus, the case of them having to marry unbelievers is not a plausible scenario. Moreover, if we read 5.11-15 at one go, the immediate impression is that what the author disapproves of is not their (re)marriage since he encourages them to (re)marry in 5.14, but their πρώτη πίστις which can be nullified by their (re)marriage. Given all the above discussion, this could be the scenario: in order to keep their commitment to Christ pure and complete,[122] the younger widows (possibly including virgins and divorced women) have chosen not to (re)marry for the rest of their life.[123] But the author is concerned that if they were stirred by their sexual desire later,

[119] Barclay 2020:280.
[120] Barclay 2020:281.
[121] Thornton 2016:124; Winter 2003:137; Marshall 1999:599-601; Towner 2006:352; Oden 1989:157.
[122] Sand (1971:196) views πίστις in light of 5.5 and understands it as faithfulness and devotion to God in prayer and intercession. It should be noted that I make a distinction here between 'commitment to Christ' and 'Christian faith', the former of which includes 'prayer' (1 Tim 5.5), 'service' (cf. 1 Cor 7.34), etc., while the latter refers to 'faith in Christ' as a believer. Thus, although a remarried widow's attention to Christ in terms of prayer and/or service may be divided, she cannot be considered to have abandoned her 'Christian faith' as she remains a believer and her 'faith in Christ' remains intact.
[123] Presumably the church takes the responsibility of supporting them in the absence of husbands and households for their maintenance.

they would no longer focus on Christ (5.11) but want to (re)marry, in which case they would set aside their former commitment to Christ (5.12). This concern of the author is apparently due to the fact that some have already 'turned away' (ἐξετράπησαν; 5.15). Therefore, the author probably considered this commitment unwise and is thus suggesting that they should marry rather than make such a challenging commitment and then break it later (5.14).

In addition to the problem described in 5.11-12, the author illustrates other issues of the younger widows in 5.13. Firstly, 'they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house' (ἀργαὶ μανθάνουσιν περιερχόμεναι τὰς οἰκίας; 5.13a). According to Barclay, the term ἀργαί which appears twice in the description of the younger widows within this verse should be read 'in its etymological sense as ἀ-εργαί (cf. Matt 20.3, 6; Jas 2.20), that is, women who do not perform the everyday good works such as those described in 5.10'.[124] And apparently their idleness is made possible by their freedom from household responsibilities and the financial support from the church,[125] for a woman who is occupied with managing the household or has to make a living on her own would not have time to idle around from house to house. There are different opinions concerning the interpretation of the phrase περιερχόμεναι τὰς οἰκίας (5.13a). Some view this as a description of the younger widows' abuse of the visitation ministry.[126] This view is not commended by the text, however, due to the fact that their idleness is caused by the excess time on their hands.[127] Barclay understands this phrase as referring to the virgin widows' move 'from household to household for periods in residence, since (at least after the death of their parents) they have no house of their own'.[128] This interpretation needs some qualifications, however. First, as mentioned earlier, the νεώτεραι χῆραι in 5.11-15 may include but should not be exclusive to virgins; there is no

[124] Barclay 2020:281. See also Wagener 1994:205-06; Fee 1984:122.
[125] Barclay 2020:281; Wagener 1994:205; Towner 2006:353; Marshall 1999:602.
[126] Scott 1936:62; Kelly 1963:118; Dibelius and Conzelmann 1972:75; Knight 1992:227.
[127] Brox 1969:195. He views this interpretation as a mere assumption, which to him is inherently uncertain, if not improbable.
[128] Barclay 2020:281.

reason to exclude young widows whose husbands have died and divorced women from the νεώτεραι χῆραι based on the description of the text. Second, even after the death of her parents, it remains possible for a virgin to live in her deceased parents' house, especially if she is her parents' only child; the contrary means she has siblings, with whom she can then live. Towner's suggestion seems more plausible: 'without household responsibilities to occupy their time, these young widows were moving through the household terrain where they felt comfortable and had easy access',[129] hence the author's concern that they might influence the women of the households with chatter and gossip which could eventually threaten the stability of the community.[130]

What makes the situation even worse is that 'they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say' (οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀργαὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ φλύαροι καὶ περίεργοι, λαλοῦσαι τὰ μὴ δέοντα; 5.13b). Kelly considers the description as a reference to the younger widows' resort to 'charms, incantations, and magical formulae in dealing, e.g., with sick people' during 'house-to-house visiting'.[131] But Marshall points out that 'nothing in the context supports it, and the link with φλύαρος speaks against it'.[132] Fee interprets the expression in the context of false teaching, arguing that the young widows, like the false teachers, talk nonsense and foolishness (cf. 1 Tim 1.6; 6.20), and become busybodies as the 'purveyors of the false teachings'.[133] Marshall and Towner hold a similar view as Fee, although they understand περιερχόμεναι ('busybody') as referring to the excessive curiosity of the younger widows 'who involve themselves in affairs that are none of their business'.[134] Winter interprets the gossip and inappropriate speeches of the younger widows within 'the semantic field of sexuality', which means the nature of their gossip and the content of their

[129] Towner 2006:353.
[130] Towner 2006:353.
[131] Kelly 1963:118. See also Holtz 1966:120; Quinn and Wacker 2000:444; Kartzow 2009:151.
[132] Marshall 1999:603.
[133] Fee 1984:122. See also Tsuji 2001:102-03; Standhartinger 2007:152.
[134] Towner 2006:354-55; Marshall 1999:603.

conversations are related to the sexuality (of other people).[135] He further indicates that these widows' inappropriate speeches 'flow from the description of their lifestyle (5.11)'.[136] It is possible to understand these young women as either spreading false teachings (cf. 1 Tim 1.6; 4.1; 6.20) or gossiping about others' (sexual) affairs (cf. 1 Tim 5.6, 11), since the text can equally point to either interpretation and nothing more can be certain due to the lack of evidence.[137] The general impression is that the author is concerned that being freed from household responsibilities and assured of provision from the church, the νεώτεραι χῆραι would become unproductive, disruptive, and even dangerous to the community.

In order to circumvent the problems described in 5.11-13, the author encourages these young women to (re)marry, bear children, and manage their households (e.g., βούλομαι οὖν νεωτέρας γαμεῖν, τεκνογονεῖν, οἰκοδεσποτεῖν; 5.14a). This instruction can achieve several potential outcomes. First, child rearing and household management would leave no room for idleness and so prevent the younger widows from disrupting others' lives and households. Second, when these younger widows return to the domestic sphere and fulfil the responsibility of a Christian housewife, the church's reputation and credibility would be retained and protected (as indicated in 5.14b).[138] As Marshall indicates, these young women's 'inability to live up to their faith and their apostasy from it' (as indicated in 5.15) brought a bad name to the church 'for not being able to maintain the loyalty of its members'.[139] Third, a family life with children and household responsibilities would put these young women beyond the influence of 'false teachers'. As mentioned earlier, some scholars understand 5.13 as a reference to the younger widows' spreading of 'false teachings'. They additionally view

[135] Winter 2003:135-36.
[136] Winter 2003:136.
[137] Kartzow (2009:152-55, 208) nevertheless views 'practising witchcraft' as another possible interpretation in addition to the two interpretations mentioned above.
[138] Towner (2006:357) additionally states that a significant goal of protecting the church's reputation is to promote the gospel.
[139] Marshall 1999:606.

5.15 as a description of the apostasy of the young women who have followed the opponents.[140] Although the most direct understanding of 5.15 is that some of the younger widows have already fallen in the situation described in 5.11-13, it does not exclude the possibility of them being influenced by the opponents, even to the extent of apostasy.[141] Verse 15 needs to be interpretated in light of 5.11-13 and thus can mean apostasy related to either 'false teachings' or immoral living.[142] Lastly, by getting married the younger widows would find support from their own (new) families and so reduce the financial burden of the church, which, as a major concern of the author in this passage, is emphasised in the following verse (5.16).

2.4. Widows with benefactors (5.16)

The sudden change of the subject in 5.16 has puzzled many scholars. This has led to some extreme views: Wagener views the whole verse as a gloss,[143] and Kelly regards it as an afterthought which the author added to the text before he went on to the topic of elders in 5.17.[144] However, more scholars view it as a concluding statement that harks back to the primary concern of the author: the economic support of real widows (see 5.3).[145] Apparently, the church has been financially burdened by its support for too many widows; consequently it

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[140] For example, Kidson (2020:203) posits that 'turned away to follow Satan' is 'another way of saying that they have taken up the "διδασκαλία of demons" (1.20; 4.1)'. Marshall (1999:605) draws on 'the similarity of the language to 1.6 and the probable allusion to spreading false teaching in v. 13' for additional support. For a similar view, see also Back 2015:188; Thornton 2016:127-28; Barclay 2020:282-83.

[141] Brox (1969:197) rejects this possibility based on the younger widows' desire for marriage which seems to contradict the opponents' prohibition of marriage (1 Tim 4.3). However, these young women's desire for marriage and the author's instruction for them to (re)marry presume that they have decided/chosen not to (re)marry (i.e., originally and possibly under the influence of the 'false teaching'), but now they are changing their minds and want to (re)marry because of their sexual desire.

[142] It means some of the younger widows have either followed the opponents or turned to immoral living, but either way is an abandonment of their Christian faith.

[143] Wagener 1994:223-27.

[144] Kelly 1963:120.

[145] As especially indicated by Johnson 2001:268-69. Marshall (1999:606) and Towner (2006:358) maintain that the primary concern/theme of the passage is to reduce the church's burden. This is obviously in the author's mind, but there is a further purpose for that: to 'assist those who are real widows' (5.16b). The author is not simply trying to reduce the church's burden for its own sake, but in order to support widows who are truly destitute.

is running short of resources to assist some really destitute widows. Therefore, the author seeks to set some new regulations to restrict the number of widows who could receive assistance from the church.

Another puzzling point is: why does the author address only the 'believing woman' (τις πιστή; 5.16a)?[146] The reason could simply be that if this role were to be taken up by an unmarried, divorced, or widowed man, it might cause scandals and consequently bring the church into disrepute.[147] If the man were married, as Kelly states, 'the responsibility in all its practical aspects would naturally devolve upon his wife',[148] since in practice the wife would have been the one managing the household (cf. 5.14a).

The next question is about the identity of the πιστή: to whom is the author referring? One suggestion is that the author is referring to young widows of sufficient means who have widowed mothers or grandmothers or other elder widows who go to them for support, and the author is exhorting them to (or continue to) support those widows.[149] However, Kelly contends that 'it is impossible to narrow down the meaning of believing woman to "widow"'.[150] Therefore, as Marshall states, it is not necessary to suppose that 'the "believing woman" is herself a widow'.[151] Another position is that the author is addressing the wealthy women (possibly householders themselves) of the church who have needy widows in their households but now want to hand these widows over to the church's care, and the author thus encourages them to continue their support for these widows.[152] A third opinion is that the πιστή refers to 'the wives of householders in general' upon whom the main burden of caring

[146] The longer version of 'πιστὸς ἢ πιστή' ('believing man or believing woman') is not as well attested as the shorter version of the text, hence the latter is preferred by most scholars. See Barclay 2020:283n62; Johnson 2001:268; Towner 2006:358n152; Barrett 1963:77; Knight 1992:229.
[147] Barclay 2020:283n63; Kelly 1963:121.
[148] Kelly 1963:121. See also Knight 1992:229; Towner 2006:359; Marshall 1999:606.
[149] Scott 1936:63; Murray 2018:214-15; Fee 1984:124; Knight 1992:229.
[150] Kelly 1963:120-21.
[151] Marshall 1999:607. In other words, the 'believing woman' may or may not be a widow.
[152] Kelly 1963:121; Johnson 2001:268; Towner 2006:358-59; Marshall 1999:606; Fee 1984:124. Johnson, Towner, and Fee additionally illustrate this point by reference to some wealthy women in the NT, such as Lydia (Acts 16.14-15), Phoebe (Rom 16.1-3), Chloe (1 Cor 1.11), Prisca (1 Cor 16.19), and Nympha (Col 4.15).

for a widow would fall in practice.[153] Given all the above interpretations, most scholars recognise that the exact reference of the πιστή is unclear. It probably refers to any Christian woman (regardless of her marital status) who has sufficient financial resources to support the widows under her charge.[154]

Equally confusing as the identity of the πιστή is her relationship with the widows whom she is instructed to assist. Some scholars understand this in light of verses 4 and 8, suggesting that these believing women are actually family members or relatives of the widows in 5.16, and the author is asking them to fulfil their familial responsibility.[155] However, Barclay points out that 'the wording is vague, allowing that χῆραι be supported by any female supporter or patron'.[156] Moreover, if the πιστή indeed refers to family members and relatives of the widows, the author is simply repeating his teaching in verses 4 and 8, but this is unlikely. In addition, since the author has already so severely condemned those who do not care for their family members and relatives (5.8), it does not make sense for him to instruct them again in a gentler way (5.16).[157] Furthermore, Parkin discloses that apart from family support, other potential sources of welfare for older people in the Roman world mainly came from friends and neighbours.[158] Barclay additionally maintains that the poor in the ancient world survived 'primarily through networks of mutual support, in which kin, friends, and neighbours helped each other through periods of crisis', and Christians 'formed new, trustworthy networks' in supporting one another as 'siblings'.[159] Based on the above

[153] Towner 2006:359; Knight 1992:229.
[154] Brox 1969:197.
[155] Fee 1984:124; Marshall 1999:606; Knight 1992:229.
[156] Barclay 2020:283.
[157] Back 2015:189; Kelly 1963:121. Kelly views the widows in the households of the 'believing women' as their 'servants or dependants or friends'.
[158] Parkin 2003:219, although according to him it was usually the wealthy elderly and childless people who had many friends.
[159] Barclay 2019:243.

analysis, it is thus more plausible to view the πιστή as a benefactor or a friend of the widows who receive support from her.[160]

Therefore, the author is seeking to reduce the church's burden by instructing all the believers to support their widowed family members and relatives (5.4, 8), the 'younger widows' (be they widows, virgins, or divorcees) to get married and be maintained by their new households (5.11-15), and the better off believing women to provide for the widows who have looked to them for support (5.16), so that the church could assist the 'real widows' who have not only been left entirely alone and helpless in the world (5.5) but also attested for their good works (5.9-10). Hence this passage reveals a similar pattern: widows in the churches addressed in 1 Timothy at the turn of the second century were also provided for mainly through three modes of support – family support, individual support, and collective support. Among them family support was the primary source for a widow's maintenance, individual support from a benefactor or a friend was highly encouraged, and collective support from the church was for those who fell out of all the above welfare networks and became completely destitute. And the practice of collective support for widows additionally implies the existence of a common fund for the support of the poor in the church. Moreover, the description of the supplications and prayers (5.5) and the good works (5.10) of the widows indicates that they were not merely passive recipients of support; they also made various contributions to the church. However, these contributions do not indicate the existence of a widows' office, since they are not depicted as the widows' official duties, nor does the text mention such an office explicitly.

[160] Brox 1969:197; Wagener 1994:223. Cf. the support of widows by Tabitha/Dorcas in Acts 9.36-39, and the patronage of Thecla by Tryphaena in Acts of Paul and Thecla. Hanson (2000:152) additionally discloses that according to an Egyptian census, among 103 widows/divorcees, 39 lived in predominantly female households.

3. Widows in Shepherd of Hermas

Although various theories concerning the authorship of Shepherd of Hermas had been proposed in the past,[161] most scholars today have accepted single authorship due to the thematic, linguistic, and theological consistency of the text.[162] For the sake of clarity, this chapter takes Hermas to be the author who wrote this text within the period from the late first century CE to the middle of the second century CE.[163] The description of the text suggests the audience was likely to be a Roman Christian community (cf. Vis. 1.1.1-2; 4.1.2)[164] with relatively wealthy members whose preoccupation with wealth and business became a concern to Hermas (see further below). Some scholars propose that the rich members in Hermas' community (including Hermas himself) were actually from a lower social stratum and most likely freedmen who had accumulated certain wealth through business activities.[165] The main theological themes which scholars have discussed include Christology,[166] pneumatology,[167] ecclesiology,[168] baptism,[169] and prophecy.[170] Recent scholarship has studied this text from other perspectives, such as feminist,[171] inter-religious,[172] or historical-social perspectives.[173] This chapter, however, will discuss this text from a social-economic perspective.

[161] For a survey of scholarship on its authorship, see Wilson 1993:14-23.
[162] Wilson 1993:22-23. See also Osiek 1999:10. As Ehrman (2003:166) points out, some scholars have discussed certain topics which tie the various sections of the text together, such as sin and repentance (Henne 1990:640-51; 1991:358-97), desire and self-control (Wudel 2004:39-49), purity (Maier 1991:55-78), and the transformation of Hermas (Young 1994:237-55), etc.
[163] Osiek 1999:18-20.
[164] Ehrman 2003:167. In this thesis, the traditional text referencing method is used (e.g., Vis. 1.1.1; Mand. 3.5; Sim. 9.26.2) since it distinguishes the three parts (Visions, Mandates, and Similitudes) of the text.
[165] Osiek 1983a:127-32. Beavis (2018:655-69) and Lookadoo (2021a:270-80) also view Hermas as a freedman and interpret Similitude 5.2 from the perspective of a freedman.
[166] Hauck 1993:187-98.
[167] Wilson 1993. See also Bautista (2014:1-43), although he focuses on the discernment of the two spirits (the spirit of righteousness and the spirit of evil) in the text.
[168] Pernveden 1966.
[169] Hartman 1994:127-43.
[170] Reiling 1973.
[171] Walsh 2017:73-91; 2019a:467-90; 2019b:517-47.
[172] Cattoi and Racine 2021:76-89.
[173] Beavis 2018:655-69; Lookadoo 2021a:270-80.

Shepherd of Hermas consists of three parts – Visions, Mandates, and Similitudes. The Visions include revelations about the sins of Hermas and his own family through the images of Rhoda and an elderly lady, about the upcoming persecution in the form of a beast, and about the building of a tower – a symbol of the church. The Mandates include twelve commandments which encourage the virtues of faith, simplicity, truth, purity, endurance and temperance, and criticise the vices of doublemindedness, falsehood and evil desires. The Similitudes include ten parables which demonstrate the interdependent relationship between the rich and the poor, the practice of genuine fasting, and the importance and urgency of repentance, etc. Despite the complexity of the text and its loose structure, one prominent theme that runs through the text and ties various sections together is 'sin and repentance', particularly of those who have been baptised but are still preoccupied with wealth, business and worldly affairs.[174] If they want to be saved before it is too late, they must repent and use their wealth for God's ministry – to help the poor and the needy, especially widows and orphans. This section seeks to explore the role of widows in Shepherd of Hermas and their relationship with the rich. It is necessary, however, to look first at Hermas' message for the rich.

3.1. The message for the rich

According to Osiek, the depiction of Hermas in the text is a composite of both autobiographic and literary elements, and thus 'the text contains a mixture of biography and literary reworking, so that the family becomes a literary mirror of the whole community'.[175] Based on the description of the text, Hermas is probably a freedman (cf. Vis. 1.1.1) who used to be involved in business (cf. Mand. 3.5) and was among the wealthy members in his

[174] For a general study on the rich Christian in the church of the early Empire, see Countryman 1980; and on wealth and poverty in early Christian formation, see Rhee 2012.
[175] Osiek 1999:24.

community (cf. Vis. 3.6.7).[176] However, his negligence regarding his family has resulted in their evil desires and sinful actions (Vis. 1.3.1-2; 2.2.2-4; 2.3.1). If, as Osiek suggests, Hermas' family mirrors the whole community, what are the sins that the community (or the wealthy members) have committed?

Criticism of the rich

The text's most obvious criticism of the rich is their over-involvement in wealth (πλοῦτος) and business (πραγματεία), because of which they are not only corrupted and become barren in spirit (Mand. 10.1.4) but also commit numerous sins (Sim. 4.5). Some wealthy believers become so arrogant and conceited that they abandon the truth, keep away from the righteous, and live together with non-believers (Sim. 8.9.1-3; 9.20.1-2). Some even blaspheme and deny the Lord because of their business (Vis. 3.6.5; Sim. 8.8.1-2).[177] All these are different forms of apostasy, or at least self-distancing from the Christian community, in favour of the social networks that are integral to their business interests.

Besides the preoccupation with business and worldly affairs, the luxurious lifestyle of the rich is also severely criticised. In the Mandates the shepherd emphasises more than once that Christians should refrain from wicked deeds and evil desires, such as excessive eating and drinking, lavish parties, various luxuries, lust for women, and haughtiness and arrogance (Mand. 6.2.5; 8.3; 12.2.1). However, based on the description of Vision 3.9.3, there are Christians in Hermas' community who live with a luxurious lifestyle. In fact, their overindulgent lifestyle is harming themselves.

As can be seen from the above, the destructive impacts of over-involvement in wealth and business and of luxurious lifestyle are both physical and spiritual. Physically, the

[176] Osiek 1983a:131-32. According to Osiek, Hermas' acquaintance with Rhoda (Vis. 1.1.1), the reference to his wife as σύμβιος (Vis. 2.2.3) and to his 'household' (ὁ οἶκός σου; Vis. 1.3.1) indicate Hermas' identity as a freedman. See also Beavis 2018:655-6; Lookadoo 2021a:270-80.

[177] The 'denial' of the Lord is presumably related to acts of religious devotion to other gods that are necessary parts of their business networks (e.g., in pagan associations).

overconsumption of food weakens their bodies and even causes them illnesses (Vis. 3.9.3). Spiritually, their obsession with wealth accumulation and attachment to non-Christians make them weak in faith, slow in understanding (the truth), indifferent to the poor, unwilling to cling to the righteous, and even unfaithful to the Lord. Besides these negative impacts, there is another serious consequence which is mentioned repeatedly throughout the text – double-mindedness (διψυχία).[178] According to Seitz, 'the adjective δίψυχος occurs 19 times, the cognate verb διψυχεῖν 20 times, and the substantive διψυχία 16 times'.[179] The numerous and frequent appearances of this concept indicate the seriousness of this problem in Hermas' church. Firstly, Hermas himself and his family members are criticised for their double-mindedness, as indicated in Vision 3.10.9 and 3.11.1-4, Mandate 12.4.1-2 and Similitude 6.1.2. Thus, Hermas is urged in a vision not to be double-minded in the impending persecution (Vis. 4.1.4, 7) and his family members are exhorted to repent and set aside double-mindedness if they would be forgiven of former sins (Vis. 2.2.4). Secondly, there seem to be many double-minded members in Hermas' church, as especially indicated in Similitude 8 (e.g., 8.7.1-3; 8.8.1-5; 8.9.1-4). Osiek suggests that in the context of Similitude 8.8 and 8.9 διψυχία 'seems to mean the inability to decide and act one way or the other, for or against the Lord'.[180] She further indicates that 'according to Sim. 8.8.3 and 8.9.4 *dipsychia* flows from business involvements and wealth rather than vice versa'.[181]

Thirdly, double-mindedness leads to many other problems which are destructive to the believers. The double-minded easily go astray and become ill-tempered and bitter because of (concerns about) their business and worldly affairs (Mand. 5.2.1-2). They are also easily

[178] Lookadoo 2021b:167-85; Robinson 2010:303-08; Rhee 2012:61.
[179] Seitz 1994:131-32. In this article, Seitz focuses on the origin/source of the word δίψυχος in his discussion of the relationship between Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of James. He rejects the literary dependence of Hermas upon James but suggests that both have derived the word and concept of δίψυχος from an anonymous scripture which says 'miserable are the doubleminded, who doubt in their heart'. See also his other articles (1947:211-19; 1958:327-34) where he discusses in more detail the origins, antecedents, and usages of the term δίψυχος.
[180] Osiek 1983a:50.
[181] Osiek 1983a:50.

corrupted and deceived by false prophets because of the lusts and evil desires in their hearts (Mand. 11.1-2, 13). Thus, the double-minded will not receive any of their petitions (Mand. 9.5). What is worse, it is difficult for them to be saved, for double-mindedness 'uproots many from the faith' (πολλὺς ἐκριζοῖ ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως) and 'works great evil against the slaves of God' (λίαν πονηρεύεται εἰς τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ; Mand. 9.9).[182] As Robinson states, 'διψυχία leaves a person spiritually unfit: familiar with failure, frustrated in prayer, preoccupied with the affairs of this age, and anxious about the future'.[183] It also 'leads those affected to disassociate themselves from their Christian community and to ignore acts of charity and hospitality (i.e., "the works of faith") in favour of their own affairs'.[184] Therefore, this double-mindedness 'has communal consequences'[185] and the double-minded must be removed (with the evildoers, hypocrites, and blasphemers; Sim. 9.18.3) from the church so that the church of God will be purified and unified as 'one body, with one thought, one understanding, one faith, one love' (ἓν σῶμα, μία φρόνησις, εἷς νοῦς, μία πίστις, μία ἀγάπη; Sim. 9.18.4). However, the text repeatedly stresses that there remains a chance for these people to dwell in the tower (i.e., the church). What then do they need to do in order to be part of the church and be saved?

Instructions for the rich

The short answer for the above question is for the rich to repent and do good.[186] Repentance (μετάνοια) is one of the most important themes in Shepherd of Hermas; it is also the key for the salvation of those who sin again post-baptism. If they repent, they will be

[182] The Greek (partially Latin) text of Shepherd of Hermas is taken from the new edition of LCL 25 (Ehrman 2003), and its English translation from both the old (Lake 1913) and the new editions interchangeably.
[183] Robinson 2010:306.
[184] Rhee 2012:61.
[185] Rhee 2012:61.
[186] O'Brien (2010:325-30) views self-sufficiency as the quest for rich members in Hermas' community, which 'entails divestment of superfluous possessions', 'leads to freedom from cares and anxieties', and 'has a social dimension' of helping the poor. But this position seems to have downplayed or even disregarded the 'divine assistance' to the rich reflected more than once in the text (e.g., Vis. 4.1.8; Mand. 12.4.7; 12.6.1).

forgiven and made alive to God (Vis. 1.3.2; 2.2.4). In fact, this is the main purpose of the shepherd – not to condemn the believers who have sinned again after baptism but to exhort them to repent so as to be saved (Mand. 4.2.2; 4.3.5; 12.3.2-3; 12.6.1).[187] Thus, the shepherd is also called 'the angel of repentance' (ὁ ἄγγελος τῆς μετανοίας; Vis. 5.7; Mand. 12.4.7; 12.6.1; Sim. 9.1.1; 9.14.3; 9.23.5; 9.24.4; 9.31.3; 9.33.1). As especially indicated in Similitudes 8 and 9, the shepherd grants hope of repentance to almost all believers who have sinned before. After explaining the parables, he emphasises again that the Lord has sent him to 'give repentance to all' (πᾶσι δοῦναι τὴν μετάνοιαν; Sim. 8.11.1) and so he exhorts all to repent (Sim. 9.32.5), for it is for their repentance and salvation that the building of the tower has been suspended (Sim. 9.14.2; 10.4.4).

Apart from repentance, the rich believers also need to do good in order to be saved (Mand. 4.2.2; 8.12; 12.6.2; Sim. 8.11.4; 9.20.4; 10.4.2, 4). But what are good deeds? In Mandate 8 the shepherd illustrates both wicked deeds which Christians should refrain from (8.3, 5) and good deeds which Christians should do (8.9-10). The good deeds are illustrated in two parts: the first part contains a traditional list of virtues found in Christian literature, including 'faith, fear of the Lord, love, harmony, words of righteousness, truth, and endurance' (πίστις, φόβος κυρίου, ἀγάπη, ὁμόνοια, ῥήματα δικαιοσύνης, ἀλήθεια, ὑπομονή; 8.9); the second part displays a list of practical deeds that the believers are expected to carry out (8.10):

> χήραις ὑπηρετεῖν, ὀρφανοὺς καὶ ὑστερουμένους ἐπισκέπτεσθαι, ἐξ ἀναγκῶν λυτροῦσθαι τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ … ἐνδεέστερον γίνεσθαι πάντων ἀνθρώπων, πρεσβύτας σέβεσθαι, δικαιοσύνην ἀσκεῖν … χρεώστας μὴ θλίβειν καὶ ἐνδεεῖς, καὶ εἴ τινα τούτοις ὅμοιά ἐστι.
>
> To minister to widows, to look after orphans and the needy, to redeem from distress the servants of God … to become poorer than all men, to reverence the aged, to practise justice … not to oppress debtors and the poor, and whatever is similar to these things.[188]

[187] It should be noted that this repentance is the only chance for such believers, so their repentance must be speedy and pure (Mand. 4.1.8; 4.3.6; 11.4).
[188] Translation mine, based on LCL 25 (both old and new editions).

This list displays an apparent concern for the poor and vulnerable, be they widows, orphans, the needy, the aged, or debtors, who are prominent both at the beginning and at the end of the list. Osiek analyses in detail the phrases ἐνδεέστερον γίνεσθαι πάντων ἀνθρώπων and χρεώστας μὴ θλίβειν καὶ ἐνδεεῖς.[189] She states that the first phrase of these two (also in 11.8) suggests to both prophets and ordinary Christians an attitude of 'God's poor and lowly ones who depend entirely upon him and therefore have no claim to public notice by which they can be preferred to others'.[190] The second phrase, she continues, 'reflects the financial world of imperial Rome, where moneylending and borrowing were enterprises undertaken on a broad scale among every class and *ordo*'.[191] And it is 'an expression of concern about Christian oppression of the poor or in particular debtors', which has 'no precedent in Christian literature'.[192]

If Mandate 8.10 is for all the believers concerning good deeds, Similitude 1 addresses specifically the rich about what they should do with their wealth. The shepherd tells Hermas that Christians are strangers in this world (1.1), and it is futile for them to purchase lands and build houses, for all these things do not belong to them but are under the power of someone else (1.3). Therefore, apart from what is necessary, they should make no further purchases and investments for themselves in this world (1.6). Instead, they should 'purchase afflicted souls' (ἀγοράζετε ψυχὰς θλιβομένας),[193] 'take care of widows and orphans' (χήρας καὶ ὀρφανοὺς ἐπισκέπτεσθε), and spend their wealth on such things (1.8). And this is why the Lord has made them rich, that as 'the servants of God' (οἱ δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ in 1.1; οἱ

[189] Osiek 1983a:64-77.
[190] Osiek 1983a:67.
[191] Osiek 1983a:73.
[192] Osiek 1983a:76. This means Christians are described as the ones who are 'unjust or harsh to (not necessarily Christian) paupers and debtors', which is opposite to the traditional and ideal image of Christians who are either the poor themselves or the ones who help the poor. Osiek additionally discloses that for the poor debtor, 'the laws of debt remained "uniformly harsh and unyielding," and compulsory labour, the sale of children, and the seizure of property were the usual results of insolvency'.
[193] The language of 'purchase' is used because of its juxtaposition with the alternative use of money: buying property.

δουλεύοντες τῷ κυρίῳ in 1.7) they may fulfil these 'ministries' (τὰς διακονίας) for him (1.9). Thus, the preferred and intended way for the rich to use their money is to do charity works, particularly for the support of widows and orphans. As Osiek states, 'the first level of meaning of ἀγοράζετε ψυχὰς θλιβομένας ("purchase oppressed souls") relates to simple helping of those in need, as suggested by the following allusion to widows and orphans, the classic objects of charity', although she additionally suggests that this phrase may mean further 'the ransoming of prisoners and/or the providing of funds for the manumission of Christian slaves'.[194]

Similitude 2 further demonstrates the necessity for the rich to support the poor. In this parable, the relationship between the rich and the poor is associated with that of vine and elm[195] – a relationship of reciprocity with 'mutual cooperation and dependence'.[196] While the rich have much wealth, they are poor spiritually, because they are distracted by their wealth and as a result their prayers and confessions to the Lord are weak and insignificant (2.5). But the poor are rich in their petitions and intercessions which are powerful and effective before God (2.5). That being the case, the rich can supply to the poor what they need; and the poor, with their needs satisfied, will give thanks to God for the rich and pray for them (2.6).[197]

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[194] Osiek 1999:160. She draws from Ignatius' *To the Romans* (1.2; 2.1; 4.1) as an example for the ransoming of prisoners, but does not provide any evidence for the manumission of Christian slaves, which, however, is suggested in Ignatius' *To Polycarp* 4.3. See also Lampe (2003:91n5) on the possibility of a slave to have his freedom bought by the congregation.

[195] According to Osiek (1983a:79), this was a common viticultural sight in Rome during Hermas' time, and this image was often used to describe the marital relationship. Therefore, its use by Hermas to depict the relationship of social groups (i.e., the rich and the poor) to one another was unprecedented and unique. For its use in the marital relationship, see Demetz 1958:521-32.

[196] Rhee 2012:65. See also Osiek 1999:163. Scholars hold different positions concerning the exact correspondence of these terms. Osiek (163) reasonably states that 'exact correspondence of terms is not the point of the teaching, but mutual help and dependence', although she (1983a:85-86) associates the elm with the rich and the vine with the poor.

[197] It is noteworthy that Osiek (1999:163) thinks there is an appeal to the 'self-interest of the rich' here and it is to their advantage to support the poor who will then continue their effective intercession for the rich. And she (163-64) views the relationship between the rich and the poor as 'a spiritualization of the institution of patronage: the *obsequium* and *operae* owed by the client to a patron takes the form of intercessory prayer'. Grundeken (2015:114-27) holds a similar position, viewing the charity works of the rich as 'a matter of self-interest'. But the repeated emphases on helping the poor and the description of the severe impact of poverty upon the poor (e.g., Vis. 3.9.3; Sim. 10.4.2-4) do reveal the author's concern about the interest of the poor.

Through this mutual help and reciprocity, the two accomplish the work of God together (2.7). Thus, the rich need the intercession of the poor for their spiritual growth, and the poor need the material support of the rich for their maintenance. Moreover, as Osiek observes, 'the key to the success of the model is not only the cooperation of each side to make its contribution, but the "understanding" (σύνεσις) of the rich that this is the reason for their wealth' (2.7, 10) – 'God has made them wealthy in order that they might help the poor'.[198] Furthermore, helping the poor 'is more than responsibility; it is raised to the level of "ministry"' (διακονία; 2.7; 1.9; verbal form in 2.10: διακονῆσαι).[199] Osiek additionally points out that the further question raised by Similitude 2 is whether the mutual support between the rich and the poor is to be provided at church level or among individuals. Osiek assumes the parallel operation of both models.[200] But Grundeken argues against the possibility of a weekly Sunday collection of money in the church.[201] He interprets the charity works in the text (Vis. 3.9.5; Mand. 2.4-6; Sim. 2.4-9; 9.27.2) as providing personal help to the poor.[202] However, the lack of evidence for a weekly Sunday collection does not necessarily deny the possible existence of a centralised church fund for the support of the poor (especially in the context of Sim. 9.26.2; see further below). It is thus more likely that the poorer members of Hermas' church receive support from both the church and individuals.

The rich are further exhorted to help the poor through fasting in Similitude 5. The shepherd explains to Hermas that the true fast that is great and acceptable to God goes beyond keeping the commandments of God; it also includes doing good and righteous deeds (5.3.3). Besides keeping God's commandments, the person should have bread and water alone on the day of fasting, and then estimate the cost of the food for that day and give it to a

[198] Osiek 1999:164.
[199] Osiek 1999:164.
[200] Osiek 1999:164.
[201] Grundeken 2015:159.
[202] Grundeken 2015:154-59.

widow, an orphan, or someone destitute (5.3.7).[203] Snyder posits that this social responsibility (also illustrated in 5.2.9-11) is a 'modification of the "true fast"' demonstrated in Similitude 5.3.1-6, rather than an additional work.[204] Such fasts will be recorded and the service (ἡ λειτουργία) done in this way will be 'good and cheerful and pleasing to the Lord' (καλὴ καὶ ἱλαρά ἐστι καὶ εὐπρόσδεκτος τῷ κυρίῳ; 5.3.8). Moreover, as Osiek observes, the focus of the consequence of fasting on the needy in Similitude 5.3.7 confirms directly the teaching of Mandate 8.10 and Similitude 1.8, and indirectly the author's continued concern for the appropriate interrelation between the rich and the poor.[205]

3.2. The role of widows

The above discussion shows that the main message for the rich in Shepherd of Hermas is for them to repent and to do good, or more specifically, to help the poor and the needy, which is precisely the reason God made them rich. By providing for the poor, especially widows (and orphans), the rich are not only fulfilling their responsibility but also participating in God's ministry. Hence, it is necessary and important to support widows.

The necessity of supporting widows

As discussed earlier, the rich are frequently exhorted to support widows (e.g., Mand. 8.10; Sim. 1.8; 5.3.7). More importantly, providing for widows is prioritised among all the good deeds instructed to the rich believers. For example, in the long list of all the good deeds which Christians are exhorted to do in Mandate 8.10, 'to minister to widows' (χήραις

[203] The social perspective of fasting is also emphasised in Isaiah 58.3-7. Barclay (2019:247) illustrates similar examples in other early Christian literature. For example, Aristides mentions in his apology that 'when there is one among them [the Christians] needy or poor, and they do not have surplus resources, they fast for two or three days, in order to supply to the poor their lack of food' (15.9). The Gospel of Thomas implies something similar in its proclamation – 'blessed are those who hunger, so that they may fill the belly of the one who desires' (69.2). This may imply that the rich in Hermas' church are not from the upper class but, as Osiek (1983a:134) suggests, most probably freed slaves from the lower class who are nevertheless the better-off in the community.
[204] Snyder 1968:104.
[205] Osiek 1999:174.

ὑπηρετεῖν) is given first priority. In Similitude 1.8 widows (and orphans) are stated as the only recipients of charity works. Similarly in Similitude 5.3.7 widows are mentioned particularly as recipients of money saved by others through fasting.[206] This practice seems to indicate that even those who do not have extra for others are encouraged to raise money for the support of widows and the needy.

Apart from the above three passages, Hermas' great concern for widows is further reflected in Vision 2.4.3. Here Hermas is ordered to write two little books – one to Clement for other cities and the other to Grapte who 'will admonish the widows and orphans' (νουθετήσει τὰς χήρας καὶ τοὺς ὀρφανούς). Scholars hold different views on the identity of Grapte. Lampe regards Grapte as a teacher who is responsible for the Christian instruction (i.e., 'the Christian doctrines of faith and rules of life') of widows and orphans in the absence of their husbands and fathers (or parents).[207] Snyder thinks Grapte possibly belongs to an order of widows or deaconesses, or even virgins.[208] Stählin views Grapte as a deaconess who takes care of widows and orphans both spiritually and physically.[209] Trevett considers Grapte as 'a female elder' who is singled out 'to fulfil a specific ministry to widows and children'.[210] D'Angelo further counts Grapte as 'among the *episkopoi* or elders of the Roman communities'.[211] Grundeken equally recognises the important role Grapte plays in the Christian community, although he does not agree with the titles/positions of Grapte suggested by other scholars.[212] Whatever position Grapte may hold, the fact that she is entrusted to proclaim messages of God (although only to women and children) suggests that 'women

[206] It should be noted that 'widows' are often mentioned before 'orphans' and 'the destitute' by Hermas (cf. Mand. 8.10; Sim. 1.8). Although 'widows' and 'orphans' are generally mentioned together as the most needy and vulnerable people in antiquity, orphans usually refer to fatherless children who would then be brought up by their widowed mothers. As a result, the situation of young widows with minor children or that of elderly widows without children is most difficult and distressing (see Chapter 2).
[207] Lampe 2003:353-54.
[208] Snyder 1968:40.
[209] Stählin 1974:461.
[210] Trevett 2006:157.
[211] D'Angelo 2003:280.
[212] Grundeken 2015:108-11.

were active in leadership and teaching within the Roman community'.[213] This does not mean, however, that the text indicates an order of widows. The reason is that when widows are mentioned together with orphans, it is often an indication of their vulnerability and need of support, which has nothing to do with church office. In addition, there is no other evidence for an order of widows at this time in early Christian literature. Moreover, Grapte is clearly important, but there is no evidence that she is herself a widow. Thus, it is unlikely that Hermas is referring to an order of widows here. The description of the text suggests the two little books are copied directly from the one given to Hermas (Vis. 2.1.3-4) and hence contain the same content. Based on the meaning of νουθετέω ('admonish, warn, instruct'),[214] its usage in other places of the text,[215] and the literary context of Vision 2, the book probably contains criticism of sins committed by believers in Hermas' church (Vis. 2.2.2-4), exhortation to repentance and good works (Vis. 2.2.4-6), and assurance to those who work righteousness and endure persecutions (Vis. 2.2.7). Based on the general description of widows and orphans in the text, they might be exhorted in the little book to endure in their suffering (cf. Vis. 3.9.3; Sim. 10.4.2-4) and be assured of God's care and provision for them (cf. Sim. 5.3.7; 1.8; Mand. 8.10).[216] In addition, the fact that among all the believers who will receive the little book (only three copies are available) the widows (and orphans) are singled out as a particular group of recipients, indicates again Hermas' particular concern for them.

The contrasting examples of the ministers (διάκονοι in Sim. 9.26.2; ἐπίσκοποι καὶ φιλόξενοι in Sim. 9.27.2) in their treatment of widows (and orphans) in Similitude 9.26.1-2 and 9.27.1-3 demonstrate in a more specific way the importance of helping widows. While

[213] Eisen 2000:208.
[214] BDAG 2000:679.
[215] Hermas frequently uses νουθετέω in reference to sinners for them to repent (e.g., Vis. 1.3.1-2; 3.5.4) and sometimes to new believers for them to avoid evil (e.g., Mand. 8.10).
[216] The text does not criticise or warn the widows (and orphans) against any sin or evil. Based on the description of the severe impact of poverty on the poor in the text (e.g., Vis. 3.9.3; Sim. 10.4.2-3), some of them (including widows) might feel so desperate due to their destitute situation that they give up their faith and even their life.

the ministers (διάκονοι) in Similitude 9.26.2 'devour' the livelihoods of widows and orphans and make gains for themselves from the ministry which they have received, the bishops (ἐπίσκοποι) in Similitude 9.27.2 always shelter widows and the destitute through their ministry. Their contrasting attitudes towards widows lead to opposite consequences for themselves. The corrupt ministers have two choices: remain in their covetousness with no hope of life but certainty of death; or repent and fulfil their ministry in holiness and live (9.26.2). As for the bishops who always shelter the widows and the destitute, they are assured of the sheltering of the Lord at all times, and of being with the angels if they persist till the end (9.27.3). The striking contrast between the harsh condemnation of the covetous ministers and the great exaltation of the bishops no doubt signifies even more significantly the importance and necessity of supporting widows. Moreover, the reference to the corrupt ministers (9.26.2) suggests they have access to/control of the church fund intended for the needy, but instead of distributing it to the poor, they have embezzled the money. As Osiek indicates, 'such a reference presupposes already some kind of centralized organization for distribution of relief'.[217]

The severe impact of poverty

The primary reason for supporting widows and the destitute lies in the fact that they are most severely affected by poverty. The situation of the rich and that of the poor form a dramatic contrast in Vision 3.9.3:

> οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ἐδεσμάτων ἀσθένειαν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτῶν ἐπισπῶνται καὶ λυμαίνονται τὴν σάρκα αὐτῶν· τῶν δὲ μὴ ἐχόντων ἐδέσματα λυμαίνεται ἡ σὰρξ αὐτῶν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν τὸ ἀρκετὸν τῆς τροφῆς, καὶ διαφθείρεται τὸ σῶμα αὐτῶν.
>
> For those who enjoy many kinds of food make their flesh weak and harm it; but the flesh of those without enough food is harmed by lack of proper nourishment, and their body wastes away.

[217] Osiek 1999:249. However, individual support for the poor apparently remains an important channel.

This contrast not only signifies the devastating situation of the poor, i.e., the malnutrition and the accompanying illnesses/disabilities, but also reflects the problems in Hermas' church: the indifference of the wealthy towards the needy (Vis. 3.9.4), and the disunity within the community caused by the huge disparity between the two (Vis. 3.9.9). Although widows are not mentioned specifically here, they are probably the most affected due to their oftentimes extremely difficult circumstances (cf. Sim. 1.8 and 5.3.7). The suffering of the poor must have seriously aroused Hermas' concern that the rich are severely criticised for not sharing with the poor: they are responsible for the groans of the needy and condemned as outcasts of the church if they do not change (Vis. 3.9.4-6). Verheyden succinctly notes that Hermas' appeal to help the poor and the destitute 'is present throughout the work and up until the very last chapter where it is once more expressed in a most dramatic language'.[218]

According to the description in the last chapter of the text, the poor suffer so much in their daily life that they are tormented by anguish and misery (Sim. 10.4.2). They are vexed and tortured by distress and agony like those who are chained and jailed; some of them even take their own lives when they can no longer bear the affliction (Sim. 10.4.3). Although the text does not state exactly who these people are, widows can be easily associated with such adversity, especially the elderly widows who are sick and desolate. Although Osiek indicates that the meaning of the phrase *mortem sibi adducunt* ('they bring death upon themselves'; Sim. 10.4.3) is not entirely clear,[219] she contends that the last statement of Similitude 10.4.3 clearly suggests suicide as the intended meaning.[220] Moreover, if the primary purpose of the exhortations for repentance and good deeds from the rich is for their salvation, at least here in the second part of Similitude 10.4.2 and in 10.4.3, 'the reason for doing good deeds is not so

[218] Verheyden 2006:400.
[219] Osiek (1999:261) mentions other possible meanings, such as 'doing something sinful out of desperation that leads to spiritual death, or sale of children or self-sale into slavery to escape debt'.
[220] Osiek 1999:261. The last statement says that those who consciously ignore the affliction of such a person is 'guilty of his blood' (*reus fit sanguinis eius*; Sim. 10.4.3).

much self-improvement or salvation, but the imperative (*oportere*: "it ought to be") to relieve the suffering of others'.[221] As Osiek additionally demonstrates:

> The motif of relieving the suffering of others has been integrated into the Christian sense of the mutual obligations of persons in community and especially into the ethic of community solidarity as Hermas has worked at it through the entire book: the need to share abundance with the needy, to spend money to 'buy souls in distress', to understand this as the reason for wealth, and to continue community solidarity even though it may mean constant expectations of generosity on the part of those better off.[222]

The power of the prayers of widows

The reason and necessity to provide for widows and the poor also lies in the power of their prayers. The prayers of the poor can either benefit the rich or bring about God's wrath and punishment upon them – it depends on how they treat the poor. In Vision 3.9.6 the rich are warned that when the Lord hears the groan (στεναγμός) of the poor, he will be angry with the rich for not sharing with the poor and banish them from the church. It is therefore necessary for the rich to help the poor and share their wealth with them if they want to be saved and included in the church.

If Vision 3.9.6 displays a negative effect of the prayer of the poor upon the rich, Similitude 2 manifests its positive power. As discussed earlier, the parable of the vine and the elm indicates the interdependence and mutual obligations between the rich and the poor, with the rich providing material support to the poor and the poor interceding for the rich in return (2.5-6). It should be noted, however, that this reciprocal exchange starts with the need and lack of the rich rather than that of the poor. The text emphasises the spiritual poverty of the rich first and the lack of power in their prayer and confession, whereas the impact of poverty upon the poor is not stated explicitly; instead, it is the great power of their intercession and petition that is highlighted (2.5). As a consequence, the rich supply material support to the

[221] Osiek 1999:261.
[222] Osiek 1999:261.

poor because they need the latter's intercession for them, for they know that the poor are rich in intercession and their intercession is acceptable and powerful before the Lord (2.6). In other words, in Hermas' church the poor are not simply passive recipients of help, they 'have worthwhile contributions to make in spite of their low status in the community' and their contributions are 'heard and valued'.[223] Moreover, as discussed earlier, since widows are usually the poorest among the poor, their prayers are consequently the most urgent and effective. As a result, widows are often referred to concerning their powerful prayers and intercessions – for relief of distress and for blessings on (and thus contributing to) the Christian community.

The above discussion shows that Hermas not only has a great concern for the welfare of the widows in his church but also describes them as the prioritised (or sometimes even sole) recipients of support (at both church and individual levels; e.g., Mand. 8.10; Sim. 1.8; 5.3.7; 9.26-27) due to their extremely difficult situation (e.g., Vis. 3.9.3; Sim. 10.4.2-3). There is some evidence for a pooled resource, administered by church leaders (e.g., Sim. 9.26.2); but it is not clear how this works (who contributes and how much). This is clearly open to abuse and not sufficient to meet all the needs of the poorer members, so some direct forms of patronage from the rich to the poor are also necessary and important. By these instructions, the rich are tied to the community in important ways, at a time when they could easily drift away. The use of their money indicates their social priorities, and if they give to the poor in the church (rather than spending on investments or luxuries for themselves) they cement at the same time their commitment to Christ and to the church. Thus the widows form an important part of the social strategy of the church, as hooks to attach the richer members to the faith and the church. In addition, the widows are not simply passive recipients of support; they uphold the rich and the whole community with their powerful and effective prayers and

[223] Lookadoo 2021a:276.

intercessions (e.g., Sim. 2). The rich and the poor are interdependent; only through the reciprocity and mutual obligations of both can the work of God be accomplished.

4. Widows in the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp

The epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp provide important information about the situation of Christianity in the first half of the second century CE. Ignatius wrote his epistles while on his way from Antioch to Rome to receive the death penalty.[224] For the purpose of the present discussion, I will adopt the middle recension which includes seven epistles, namely *To the Ephesians*, *To the Magnesians*, *To the Trallians*, *To the Romans*, *To the Philadelphians*, *To the Smyrnaeans*, and *To Polycarp*.[225] Most scholars agree that these letters were written in the first half of the second century.[226] Holmes suggests that Polycarp died 'sometime between 155-160 CE',[227] but his *To the Philippians* was written at a time closer to Ignatius' martyrdom ('sometime during the first third of the second century')[228] than to Polycarp's. Selby proposes a similar date of somewhere between 115 and 138 CE.[229]

Traditional scholarship has studied the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp mainly from theological, ecclesiastical, textual, and intertextual approaches.[230] Scholars' research topics include the theology of suffering/martyrdom,[231] heresy,[232] soteriology,[233] Christology,[234] the

[224] He would be 'thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre on his arrival'. See Lightfoot 1885: 1.
[225] For a brief introduction to the long, middle, and short recensions, see Foster 2006a:487-89. For recent discussions on the authenticity of the Ignatian letters, see Lookadoo 2020:88-114; 2021c:209-13.
[226] Lightfoot (1885:430-470) proposes a date of 100-118 CE, and Harnack (1958:388-406) 110-117 CE or some years later (117-125 CE). See also Schoedel 1985:5, although he suggests a wider time range of between 105 and 135 CE in another article (1993:347-49). Foster (2006a:490-92) proposes a later date of the second quarter of the second century CE.
[227] Holmes 2006:60.
[228] Holmes 2006:62.
[229] Selby 2012:80-81.
[230] For a summary of scholarship on Ignatius and Polycarp, see Schoedel 1993:272-358.
[231] Hanson 1982b:694-701; McConnell 2010:385-89.
[232] Foster 2006a:492-94.
[233] Winslow 1965:119-31.
[234] Foster 2006b:5-6. Apart from Christology, Foster (2-11) additionally discusses other theological concepts and ideas in the epistles of Ignatius, such as ecclesiology, episcopacy and eucharist, the virgin Mary, martyrdom, and Ignatius' use of the NT.

authority of the bishop,[235] the number and authenticity of Ignatius' epistles,[236] the integrity and authenticity of Polycarp's *To the Philippians*,[237] and Ignatius' and Polycarp's receptions of the NT and other early Christian literature.[238] This section will study the subject of widows in the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp and analyse relevant texts from a social-economic approach. But before coming to the texts directly related to widows, we will first examine the problems faced by the church which nonetheless can affect the life of widows.

4.1. Problems faced by the church

Ignatius criticises 'heretics' and their 'false teaching' in almost every of his epistles, which indicates the seriousness of this issue. Polycarp mentions not only the same issue, but more frequently the problem of avarice/love of money (φιλαργυρία; *avaritia*) in his letter to the Philippians. As will be seen, these two major problems could threaten not only the unity and purity of the church but also the support of widows.

Heretics

One of the most significant issues that has arisen in scholarly discussion and debate is the number of groups of heretics condemned by Ignatius in his epistles.[239] There are mainly two positions: some argue that there is only one group of opponents, but some others contend that two groups are present in the letters. Those who hold the first position argue for a close connection between (or a mixture of) docetic ideas and Jewish practices in the characteristics of the heretics,[240] or resort to Jewish angelomorphic traditions and view the heretics as people

[235] Wiles 1982:750-55.
[236] Foster 2006a:487-89.
[237] Holmes 2006:60-62; Dehandschutter 1989:276-79.
[238] Smith 2011:37-56; Holmes 2011:57-69; Hartog 2002; Dehandschutter 1989:281-91.
[239] For a brief summary of the scholarship on this issue, see Schoedel 1993:301-04; Foster 2006a:492-94.
[240] This position is represented by Lightfoot (1885:124-25) who views the heresy in Ignatius' letters as of the same category as that in Colossians and the Pastorals, which is 'Judaism crossed with Gnosticism' or 'Doceto-judaism'. Bauer (1920:238-40) agrees with the one-group position, noting the presence of anti-docetic traits in Ignatius' criticism of the Judaizers (*Magn*. 9.1; 11). In a later work, however, Bauer (1971:88-89) refers to Ignatius' lack of a full grasp of the situation as the cause of his mixing the heretics (here he combines both

who hold an angelomorphic Christology.[241] Those who stand for the second position generally distinguish two heretical groups: one is composed of Jewish Christians, while the other is a docetic group.[242] Based on Ignatius' description of the heretics, however, the second position appears more compelling. For example, in his letters to the Magnesians (8-10) and the Philadelphians (6) Ignatius clearly warns his readers against Judaism. And in the letters to the Trallians and the Smyrnaeans, he condemns the docetists for their denial of the physical reality of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (*Trall*. 9-10; *Smyrn*. 1-5) and their neglect of charity works (*Smyrn*. 6), eucharist and prayer (*Smyrn*. 7).[243]

With regard to the docetists' neglect of charitable deeds, Ignatius states (*Smyrn*. 6.2):

> καταμάθετε δὲ τοὺς ἑτεροδοξοῦντας εἰς τὴν χάριν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐλθοῦσαν, πῶς ἐναντίοι εἰσὶν τῇ γνώμῃ τοῦ θεοῦ. περὶ ἀγάπης οὐ μέλει αὐτοῖς, οὐ περὶ χήρας, οὐ περὶ ὀρφανοῦ, οὐ περὶ θλιβομένου, οὐ περὶ δεδεμένου ἢ λελυμένου, οὐ περὶ πεινῶντος ἢ διψῶντος.[244]
>
> 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 orphan, the oppressed, the one who is in chains or the one set free, the one who is hungry or the one who thirsts.

Ignatius seems to think that the heretics' false understanding of the grace of Jesus Christ (τὴν χάριν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) has led to their lack of interest in love and care for the needy,

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Gnostics and Judaizers). Molland (1954:1-6) also contends that only one group was involved but regards the heresy as related to a certain interpretation of the Old Testament, which denies the suffering of the Messiah.

[241] Marshall (2005:17-18) proposes that 'the people against whom Ignatius warns his readers may be understood as a single group of Jewish Christians who understand Jesus to be an angel'; such Christology basically runs counter to the doctrine of Jesus' bodily suffering.

[242] Schoedel (1985:118) argues for the existence of two distinct groups but regards the conflation of Judaizing and docetic tendencies as Ignatius' intentional invention. Grant (1966:22-24) distinguishes the two groups based on the obvious differences of terminologies Ignatius uses in his reference to the opponents. Myllykoski (2005:341-77) holds a similar view although he considers the term 'docetic' as inadequate in describing the second group of the heretics due to the obscurity of the idea of Docetism. But according to Foster (2006a:494), Ignatius' description of these heretics' denial of Jesus' physical birth, death and resurrection does reflect the key elements of Docetism understood by many scholars.

[243] Ignatius does not mention the issue of heresy in his letter to the Romans, and his depictions of the heretics in his letters to the Ephesians (*Eph*. 7, 16) and to Polycarp (*Pol*. 3) are too obscure to understand, but they (the heretics) probably belong to either of the two groups discussed above.

[244] The Greek (partially Latin) texts of Ignatius and Polycarp are taken from the new edition of LCL 24 (Ehrman 2003), and their English translations from both the old (Lake 1912) and the new editions interchangeably.

particularly widows, orphans, prisoners, and the hungry/thirsty.[245] According to Lightfoot, however, 'the care of widows and orphans was regarded as of primary obligation in the Christian Church from the beginning'.[246] Rhee additionally highlights almsgiving and sharing as Christian obligations and 'a boundary marker' for Christian identity.[247] Grant further comments that to Ignatius grace (χάρις) is expressed through or actualised in love and charity works, and so the heretics' neglect of charity works reveals their misunderstanding of the grace of Jesus Christ.[248] Schoedel discusses in more detail about 'grace' (χάρις) which appears repeatedly in Ignatius' letters and suggests that 'grace' in both *To the Magnesians* 8.1 and *To the Smyrneans* 6.2 refers to 'a whole pattern of life and thought bestowed on the church by God or Christ'.[249] Apparently, for Ignatius doing works of love – especially towards widows and orphans – played a fundamental role in the life of Christians and Ignatius used it as a tool to attack his opponents.[250]

Love of money

Polycarp also warns his readers against heresy in his *To the Philippians*, but another issue appears even more urgent and serious, i.e., the problem of avarice/love of money (φιλαργυρία; *avaratia*).[251] Hartog observes φιλαργυρία/*avaritia* as a key term in *To the Philippians*, which 'appears seven times in the epistle (2.2; 4.1; 4.3; 5.2; 6.1; 11.1; 11.2),

[245] Cf. James 1.27 in which the author regards care for orphans and widows as the principle of pure and undefiled religion; Matthew 25.34-46 which vividly demonstrates the importance of caring for the needy and the distressed; and Mandate 8 in Shepherd of Hermas which presents a sharp contrast between evil and good/righteous deeds.
[246] Lightfoot 1885:304. For the examples he cites from the NT and other early Christian writings, see pages 304-05.
[247] Rhee 2012:171-79.
[248] Grant 1966:119.
[249] Schoedel 1985:238-39.
[250] It should be noted, however, that Schoedel (1985:240) does not think Ignatius 'was describing the behaviour of his opponents accurately' (cf. *Smyrn*. 5.2); rather, Schoedel maintains, 'it is evidently Ignatius who polarises the situation by insisting that the theology of the docetists logically leads to the destruction of what he can take for granted as the aim of all (because it corresponds to the deepest social needs of the early Christians): unity and love'.
[251] Rhee (2012:167-71), drawing from many relevant texts from the NT and other early Christian writings, demonstrates the importance of denouncing avarice and luxury to keep one's Christian identity.

reaching a climax with the Valens affair (11.1f)'.[252] Polycarp first exhorts the Philippians to refrain from covetousness (πλεονεξία) and love of money (φιλαργυρία) in 2.2 for the hope of resurrection, and then warns them that 'the beginning of all evils is the love of money' (ἀρχὴ δὲ πάντων χαλεπῶν φιλαργυρία; 4.1).[253] Later he instructs particularly widows, deacons, and presbyters to refrain from the love of money (4.3; 5.2; 6.1). As for deacons and presbyters (see further below for widows), it could be that as church leaders they had access to/control of church money which no doubt was a huge temptation to them, e.g., the obvious case of Valens (11.1).

Polycarp strongly expresses his sorrow for Valens who had seriously misunderstood his office (*locum*) as a presbyter (11.1). Immediately after mentioning Valens, Polycarp repeats twice the importance of abstaining from avarice (*avaritia*; 11.1-2), which suggests that Valens' case 'involved some financial abuse'.[254] There are generally two positions among scholars regarding the issue of Valens (and his wife). The first views Valens as a wealthy leader and patron of the Philippian community who had failed to support his fellow Christians (especially those in need) and, for the purpose of profit-making and upward social mobility, had defiled the church by associating with non-Christians. For example, Maier argues for this position by demonstrating how well-to-do patrons enjoyed leadership in early Christian communities, and the danger of financial abuses by wealthy leaders (as displayed especially in the approximately contemporary text of Herm. Vis. 3.9.5-10).[255] Trevett interprets the problem of Valens and his wife in the frame of διψυχία ('double-mindedness'; cf. the presentation in Shepherd of Hermas) and constructs a scenario in which Valens and his

[252] Hartog 2013b:31. Oakes (2005:368) also indicates that 'φιλαργυρία is frequent enough to stick out to the hearer as a key issue'.
[253] Cf. 1 Tim 6.10. Hartog (2013a:116) suggests that Polycarp draws from 1 Timothy here, especially with the next sentence almost identical with 1 Timothy 6.7.
[254] Lookadoo 2019:36.
[255] Maier 1993:229-47.

wife were sent to Philippi from Smyrna but had failed to 'honour their responsibilities of patronage and support'.[256]

The second position regards Valens as a presbyter who had access to/control of church money but had abused it. For instance, Selby and Schoedel propose that Valens had 'mismanaged church money'[257] or 'misused church funds'.[258] Hartog suggests more specifically that 'Valens may have stolen from a congregational common fund'.[259] Regardless of the different positions, Valens' avarice probably had affected the needy in the community. As Trevett maintains, Polycarp's frequent mention of widows, orphans and the poor suggests that 'the poor and the most vulnerable had suffered in Philippi because of abuse of influence'.[260] However, as will be shown in the following discussion, Valens' avarice was most likely related to his abuse of church funds which were intended for the support of the poor, particularly widows.

4.2. Instructions concerning widows

In *To the Philippians* 6.1, Polycarp instructs the presbyters to care for all who are sick (ἐπισκεπτόμενοι πάντας ἀσθενεῖς), not to neglect the widow, the orphan, or the poor (μὴ ἀμελοῦντες χήρας ἢ ὀρφανοῦ ἢ πένητος), and to avoid all love of money (μακρὰν ὄντες πάσης φιλαργυρίας). Scholars have different interpretations on this instruction. For example, while Selby interprets 6.1 in light of Valens' case and states that Valens' avarice 'further suggests elders in general had some control over the church's financial resources',[261] Maier views the presbyters as 'financial patrons of their community's less fortunate members

[256] Trevett 2006:231.
[257] Selby 2012:86.
[258] Schoedel 1993:274.
[259] Hartog 2013a:141. It is noteworthy that Lightfoot (1885:925) compares the case of Valens and his wife to that of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11) and posits that Valens' case 'points rather to some sordid and dishonest money transaction'.
[260] Trevett 2006:229.
[261] Selby 2012:86.

(widows, orphans, the poor)'.[262] Based on Maier's interpretation (i.e., patrons were often church leaders and vice versa), there seems to be a direct link between one's financial situation and church leadership. However, being rich is never among the requirements for leadership in early Christian literature; instead, what matters is one's Christian faith and character (e.g., 1 Tim 3.2-13). A rich Christian may be a patron of many, but he/she is not necessarily a leader of the church (e.g., Marcellus in APt; see Chapter 4, section 3). In addition, following Maier's interpretation, the deacons (διάκονοι; *Phil*. 5.2) should also be patrons of the church and instructed with similar responsibilities. But that is not the case. Although the deacons are also warned against love of money (ἀφιλάργυροι; 5.2), they are not instructed to support the poor. The distinct instructions to different groups of church leaders (i.e., deacons and presbyters) indicate that their responsibilities are related to their ecclesiastical titles/positions rather than their financial wealth. The presbyters do not have to be rich or be patrons of the poor in order to support them; they can do so through church funds. And even if the presbyters are rich, it is not likely that they were able or willing to support all the poor of the Philippian church. As discussed earlier in the section on Hermas, in the Roman church of the first half of the second century it is unlikely that there were Christians from the upper class. The relatively well-to-do believers primarily came from a lower social stratum, which implies that there remained a considerable number of needy members in the church (cf. Vis. 3.9.3; Sim. 10.4.3). And the fact that the prosperous members were unwilling to support their fellow needy Christians suggests that the financial burden of supporting the poor was too heavy for them. The heaviness of such a burden can be additionally perceived from 1 Timothy 5.9-16 in which the pastor appears to tighten up the criteria for widows to receive support from the church (see above, section 2). The situation of the Philippian church was likely similar if not worse. Therefore, it is unlikely that the

[262] Maier 1993:237.

presbyters were supporting all the poor of the Philippian church with their own financial resources. In fact, as demonstrated in the NT and other early Christian texts, helping the poor (especially widows and orphans) is the obligation of every Christian, not just that of the presbyters. But why does Polycarp specifically instruct the presbyters to take care of widows, orphans and the poor? A possible answer is that they are a select group of church leaders in charge of collecting and distributing money to the poor.

Although Polycarp does not mention the existence of a common fund in *To the Philippians*, many churches seemed to have common funds for the support of the needy. For example, 1 Timothy 5.9-16 clearly suggests the existence of a common fund in the church (see above, section 2). In addition, in his epistle to Polycarp, Ignatius advises Polycarp not to ransom slaves 'through the common fund' (ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ; *Pol*. 4.3), lest they become slaves of lust, 'but to protect and support the widows presumably from the same common fund' (*Pol*. 4.1-3).[263] Moreover, according to Justin, around mid-second century CE, there was a common fund in the Roman church for the support of the needy, including widows, orphans, imprisoned Christians, and strangers/sojourners (*1 Apol.* 14.2; 67). Money was collected and deposited with the president (προεστώς) every Sunday, who then assisted those in need (*1 Apol.* 67.6-7; see discussion below, Chapter 6). The presbyters in *To the Philippians* 6.1 may be assigned to social duties like those of the president in Justin. And this interpretation can provide a more reasonable and compelling explanation for Valens' case in which Valens, like the corrupt ministers in Hermas (Sim. 9.26.1-2), had abused the church fund to enrich himself.

Similar social and pastoral duties are stressed in Ignatius's epistle to Polycarp, in which Polycarp is advised not to neglect widows (χῆραι μὴ ἀμελείσθωσαν) but be their φροντιστής himself (*Pol*. 4.1). Lightfoot indicates that φροντιστής ('guardian, protector,

[263] Rhee 2012:108.

trustee') is a 'semi-official term' that corresponds to the Latin 'curator', and suggests that like *curator*, the term refers to the guardianship of widows here.[264] Grant additionally acknowledges the importance of caring for widows from apostolic times onwards (e.g., Acts 6.1; 9.36-41; Jas 1.27; 1 Tim 5.3-16) and its frequent mentions in the Apostolic Fathers (e.g., Ign. *Smyrn*. 6.2; Ign. *Pol*. 4.1; Pol. *Phil*. 6.1; Herm. Sim. 9.26.2; 9.27.2), and proposes that it is perhaps in a 'semilegal sense' that Ignatius advises Polycarp to be the widows' 'guardian'.[265] While equally recognising the centrality of supporting widows and the poor in the early church – a distinguishing feature that attracted people to Christian communities – Schoedel additionally points out the importance of fund control and suggests that is one reason for Ignatius to instruct Polycarp to 'let nothing be done without your approval' (μηδὲν ἄνευ γνώμης σου γινέσθω; *Pol*. 4.1).[266]

Trevett holds a different view, however. She contends that Ignatius' instruction to Polycarp concerning widows 'was the language of guardianship and control';[267] the point was to centralise the authority of Polycarp as a bishop.[268] She conjectures that the widows in *To Polycarp* 4.1 and the 'virgins who are called widows' in *To the Smyrnaeans* 13.1 had lived under the oversight of Tavia (Ταουΐας; *Smyrn*. 13.2), whom Trevett regards as a wealthy widow.[269] Hence such a group of 'celibate women of independent mind under the protection of a woman of substance' might have caused a conflict of interest and proved a problem for the bishop.[270] Trevett is getting too speculative here, however. Although Ignatius' greetings to 'the household of Tavia' (τὸν οἶκον Ταουΐας; *Smyrn*. 13.2) with no mention of her husband suggests that she might be a widow, the text does not express any implication that she was

[264] Lightfoot 1885:344.
[265] Grant 1966:132.
[266] Schoedel 1985:269.
[267] Trevett 2006:220.
[268] When she comments on Ignatius' *To Polycarp* 4-5 in another article, Trevett (1989:213-14) maintains again that 'Ignatius is interested in episcopal control – over widows, the celibate, endogamous marriage, finances, the manumission of slaves and much else'.
[269] Trevett 2006:219.
[270] Trevett 2006:221.

wealthy or that she had oversight of widows. In addition, the concern in *To Polycarp* 4.1 is not that someone else may be looking after the widows but that no-one else is ('do not allow the widows to be neglected'). Therefore, even if this passage expresses 'guardianship and control' over the widows in some senses, it is unlikely to be Tavia who does so but Polycarp himself. But undoubtedly *To Polycarp* 4.1 is also an expression of care for the widows, especially in light of Polycarp's instruction to the presbyters of Philippi who are similarly exhorted not to neglect the widows (μὴ ἀμελοῦντες χήρας; *Phil*. 6.1).

4.3. Instructions to widows

As discussed earlier, in Polycarp's instructions to all categories of Christians in Philippi (*Phil*. 4-6), widows are exhorted together with deacons and presbyters to refrain from the love of money (φιλαργυρία; 4.3; 5.2; 6.1). In fact, far more instructions are directed at widows:

> τὰς χήρας σωφρονούσας περὶ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου πίστιν, ἐντυγχανούσας ἀδιαλείπτως περὶ πάντων, μακρὰν οὔσας πάσης διαβολῆς, καταλαλιᾶς , ψευδομαρτυρίας, φιλαργυρίας καὶ παντὸς κακοῦ· γινωσκούσας, ὅτι εἰσὶ θυσιαστήριον θεοῦ καὶ ὅτι πάντα μωμοσκοπεῖται, καὶ λέληθεν αὐτὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε λογισμῶν οὔτε ἐννοιῶν οὔτε τι τῶν κρυπτῶν τῆς καρδίας (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 (4.3).

Lightfoot maintains that Polycarp's mention of widows here refers to 'the office or order of widows', on the basis of both his expressions (e.g., περὶ τὴν τοῦ Κυρίου πίστιν, ἐντυγχανούσας ἀδιαλείπτως, θυσιαστήριον θεοῦ) and his positioning of the widows, i.e., immediately before the deacons and presbyters.[271] However, as Krause indicates, their naming alongside other categories of Christians (*Phil*. 4-6), including deacons and presbyters,

[271] Lightfoot 1885:913.

leaves open the question of whether widows should be considered officials,[272] since (1) there is no explicit mention of a widows' order in the text, and (2) besides widows, young men and virgins are also mentioned alongside deacons and presbyters. Hence, the positioning of widows in the text does not necessarily indicate them as an office. Lightfoot additionally suggests that the phrase σωφρονούσας περὶ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου πίστιν implies some teaching functions of the widows.[273] And the association of widows with the imagery of God's altar (θυσιαστήριον θεοῦ) makes their thoughts, words, deeds, and especially prayers 'the sacrifices offered' which must be pure and holy without blemish, hence the widows must be free from 'all libel, slander, false witness, love of money, and all evil'.[274] This interpretation seems to suggest, however, that widows are both the altar and the sacrifice upon it.[275] Schoedel similarly regards the widows in *To the Philippians* 4.3 as an 'order' differentiated from other widows who simply receive support from the church. But he thinks the term σωφρονέω has 'no hint here of a teaching function' but may refer to chastity (cf. 1 Clem. 1.3; 1 Tim 5.11-15).[276] He further suggests that the reason for the widows to be connected with the altar lies in their concern with prayer, especially in light of the Rabbinic teaching that 'prayer is of a value equal to that of the cultus'.[277] After introducing the emergence and responsibilities of widows as 'a distinct rank' or 'order',[278] Rhee additionally interprets the symbolism of widows as God's altar from two aspects:

> First, it reflects the widows as recipients of charity; since the gifts offered for their support were regarded as a sacrifice, giving to widows was like bringing a sacrifice to the altar. Second, it underlines prayer as the special ministry of widows; prayer was a

[272] Krause 1995b:55.
[273] Lightfoot 1885:913.
[274] Lightfoot 1885:914. See also Maier 1993:244.
[275] See also Osiek 1983b:167; Butterfield 2017:75. Butterfield (77) further suggests that the widows are also 'the offerer of the sacrifice of their prayers' and even 'the ritual officiant who considers the worthiness of participants'.
[276] Schoedel 1967:18.
[277] Schoedel 1967:18. See also Hartog 2013a:118.
[278] Rhee 2012:131.

> form of spiritual sacrifice (Rev 5:8), and widows who were to devote themselves to prayers were the altar where sacrifice was made to God.[279]

Methuen proposes a different position concerning the association of widows with the altar, however. She analyses this figurative expression in the context of *Didascalia Apostolorum* in which the widows are also referred to as the altar of God. She observes that the list of complaints against widows in the *Didascalia* 'is similar to, although much longer than, that found in Polycarp's letter to the Philippians 4',[280] hence widows are exhorted to do certain things but are restrained from other things. On that account, she maintains, while the metaphor of altar – 'the centre of worship' – grants widows great honour, it also implies control: 'just as only the bishop and deacon have access to the altar in the church, so they control access to the widow, the altar of God' so as to 'restrict severely the behaviour and influence of widows'.[281] In the context of Polycarp's instructions to all the categories of the Philippian congregation, however, his emphasis seems to be on the purity and righteousness of the community rather than the control of widows.[282]

Another text concerning widows that has evoked a flood of comments is *To the Smyrnaeans* 13.1 in which Ignatius greets 'the virgins who are called widows' (τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγομένας χήρας).[283] According to Lightfoot, this phrase is a clear sign of the 'order of widows' and refers to actual widows who are nevertheless regarded as virgins by

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[279] Rhee 2012:132. See also Osiek 1983b:166-67. Cf. Hip-Flores (2019:114) who indicates widows as recipients of support and Thurston (1985:279-89) who emphasises the 'positive contribution' and 'spiritual power' of widows through their intercessions and examples of sacrificial living.

[280] Methuen 1995:199n15. For example, the *Didascalia* criticises some widows about their gossiping, chattering, murmuring, quarrelling, and greed in receiving (e.g., they 'run about among the houses of the faithful to receive'; *Did. apost*. 15).

[281] Methuen 1995:202. According to Methuen (197-213), the fundamental reason for the control of widows lies in the recognition of women's authority (e.g., prophesying, teaching, baptising, and celebrating the eucharist) among some Christian communities in the second- and third-century Syria and Asia Minor, and widows were the most representative among these women.

[282] E.g., Polycarp's emphasis on righteousness to the adult men; purity to the wives, younger men, and virgins; and restriction from slander to both widows and deacons.

[283] This indicates a second form of the Christian life, in contrast to the other form – family life – as indicated in the preceding greeting to the households of the brothers with their wives and children (Ἀσπάζομαι τοὺς οἴκους τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις; *Smyrn*. 13.1).

Ignatius because of their purity and devotion to God.[284] He (Lightfoot) alludes to 1 Timothy 5.10 and Tertullian's *The Veiling of Virgins* 9.5-6 as further evidence to support his position. He argues that if at the beginning of the third century Tertullian regarded the admission of a virgin to the 'order of widows' as something 'monstrous and unheard-of', it is impossible that during Ignatius' time the 'order of widows' would have been largely composed of virgins. And he further points out the difficulty of a literal translation which requires the supposition that 'the χηρικόν of Smyrna was *wholly* composed of virgins', or that 'Ignatius selected out of the order for salutation those only who had never been married'; in his opinion, neither supposition is explicable.[285]

Most scholars do not agree with Lightfoot, however. Grant, agreeing with Bauer,[286] understands τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγομένας χήρας as unmarried elderly women on the 'official list of widows' who receive financial support from the church (cf. 1 Tim. 5.9; Pol. *Phil*. 4.3).[287] Schoedel argues against Lightfoot's interpretation based on the order in which the terms are placed and the expression τὰς λεγομένας ('called') which indicates the unusual application of the term 'widows' to the virgins. Instead, citing Zahn,[288] he offers an answer similar to Grant's: the 'order of widows' was 'opened up also to virgins (especially older women) who had no other means of support'.[289] He further attributes Tertullian's disapproval of the enrolment of a young virgin in the order of widows (*Virg*. 9.5-6) to his (Tertullian's) independent mind,[290] and Ignatius' greeting to only the virgins among the widows to their

[284] Lightfoot 1885:322-23.
[285] Lightfoot 1885:323.
[286] See Bauer 1920:273-74.
[287] Grant 1966:125. It is not clear, however, in his use of 'the official list of widows', whether Grant refers to the 'order' of widows or simply a list of the names of the widows who receive financial support from the church, although Bauer (1920:273-74) clearly speaks of a widows' order in his interpretation.
[288] See Zahn 1873:334-38.
[289] Schoedel 1985:252. See also Stählin 1974:464. Schoedel (n25) further notes, however, that there is no significant distinction between the technical use of 'widows' as an order and its common usage that refers to widows in need, since 'the order of widows was "in no sense an active order" in the first two centuries'.
[290] Bauer (1920:273) attributes this to the young age of the virgin.

(the virgins') distinct and special features.[291] Although Schoedel's explanations concerning Tertullian's complaint about the case of the young virgin (more on Tertullian in the next section) and Ignatius' selective greeting to the virgins among the widows appear perfunctory and unsatisfactory, his emphases on the order of the terms in this phrase and the implication of the expression τὰς λεγομένας in his argument against Lightfoot's view are compelling. Methuen additionally alludes to different Christian texts to demonstrate the existence of 'virgin widows' in early Christian communities, which include Ignatius' greeting to 'the virgins who are called widows' (*Smyrn*.13.1). She convincingly argues that if 'virgins' in this quotation refers to actual widows whom Ignatius regards as 'virgins', then he would have phrased his greeting as to 'the widows who are called virgins' or 'the widows who live as virgins'.[292] Thus, Methuen correctly concludes that what Ignatius says 'suggests that at least some of the so-called widows referred to in his greeting had not been married' who nevertheless were 'doing the same work of the "widows"'.[293] Therefore, it is more plausible to understand τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγομένας χήρας as referring to virgins/unmarried women who are regarded as 'widows' or 'virgin widows' by Ignatius because of their purity and piety.

However, it remains unclear whether there was already an 'order' of widows during Ignatius' time since the text does not mention it explicitly.[294] Nevertheless it is likely that 'the virgins who are called widows' (*Smyrn*.13.1) and the widows who are regarded as God's altar (*Phil*. 4.3) refer to a distinct group of women who lived in celibacy and devoted their time to prayer and intercession. One can see why there might be anxieties over this group: they

[291] Schoedel 1985:252. He alludes to Tertullian's complaint about the young virgin leaving her head unveiled as an indication of one distinct feature of virgins. He additionally points out the 'special enthusiasm in Smyrna for virginity' (Ign. *Pol*. 5.2) and the special responsibilities entrusted to virgins with regard to their visitor (i.e., Ignatius).
[292] Methuen 1997:289.
[293] Methuen 1997:289. See also Rhee 2012:131; Hip-Flores 2019:112-13.
[294] As mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 3), the earliest explicit mention of the 'order' of widows is in Tertullian's works (e.g., *Ux*. 1.7.4; *Virg*. 9.5).

represent the peak of Christian commitment, in some sense, but also the height of danger. If this kind of super-piety is sullied in any way, it damages the whole of the church.[295] Hence they are the 'altar' – the holiest place, that must be kept totally pure. In addition, the Christian widows as the 'altar' of God seem to share some parallels with the Roman Vestal Virgins, among which the most obvious is the importance of their purity/chastity.[296] Moreover, like the Vestals who 'represented a peculiarly extreme version of the connection between the religious life of the home and of the community',[297] the widows represent an ideal and extreme version of the Christian life – they are the *virtuose*; hence how they conduct themselves would directly affect the purity and reputation of the community.

The above discussion on the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp reveals again that in the first half of the second century there was probably already a centralised church fund (presumably in addition to family support and personal patronage) for the support of widows (and the poor in general). However, while handling the common fund in the process of collection and distribution, the church leaders were also facing severe temptations to misuse the money for their own benefits (e.g., Valens in *Phil*. 11.1). In addition, while receiving support from the church, the widows (including some virgins; e.g., *Smyrn*. 13.1) might have also formed a distinct group who lived in celibacy and devoted themselves to prayer and intercession. As the 'altar' of God, they represented the holiest status of the community, hence they must be pure in every way (e.g., *Phil*. 4.3).

[295] As described in Chapter 2 of this thesis and some early Christian literature, single women (both widows and virgins) could easily fall victim to sexual seduction and violence (e.g., 1 Tim 5.11; the gardener's daughter in APt; Chryse in APt 30; and Thecla in Acts of Paul 26), which causes libel and slander against them (cf. Pol. *Phil*. 4.3) and damages their reputation.
[296] The penalty on unchaste Vestals was so severe that they could be 'buried alive' (Beard, et al. 1998:51).
[297] Beard, et al. 1998:52.

5. Widows in the treatises of Tertullian[298]

Tertullian is a figure much debated in many aspects, such as his background, education, and his relationship with the church, etc.[299] He is generally viewed as a pagan from birth who converted to Christianity as an adult, and 'an elite in terms of his education' who spent his literary career in Carthage.[300] His works are equally controversial, especially those concerning women. On the one hand, he describes a most beautiful and harmonious picture of Christian marriage in which both the husband and the wife serve God together with mutuality and equality (*Ux.* 2.8.7-8). On the other hand, he clearly forbids women from taking any teaching or sacerdotal roles in the church, which are reserved for men (*Virg.* 9.2). But one group of women – the widows – held a specially honorary status in Tertullian's church. Interestingly, the prominence of widows is mentioned mostly in Tertullian's works written after he became a Montanist,[301] such as *The Veiling of Virgins* (208/9 CE), *Exhortation to Chastity* (208/9 CE), *Monogamy* (210/11 CE), and *Modesty* (210/11 CE).[302] According to Barnes, 'Tertullian first openly turned to Montanism in 207',[303] after which there appear clear Montanist elements in his writings, especially his exhortation to chastity after the decease of one's spouse. In fact, even before he became a Montanist, he had already enjoined women, including his own wife, to remain in widowhood and live in continence upon the death of their husbands, as indicated in his open letter *To His Wife*.[304] This section,

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[298] The Latin texts of Tertullian and their English translations for this Chapter are from the online Tertullian Project. See https://tertullian.org/

[299] For a general introduction to Tertullian, see Dunn 2004:3-56 and Ferguson 2009:313-21; for a historical and literary study of Tertullian, see Barnes 1971; for an anthropological reading of Tertullian's context and identities, see Wilhite 2007; and for a theological study of Tertullian, see Osborn 1997.

[300] Dunn 2004:4-5.

[301] This may be due to his stronger emphasis on chastity which is best exemplified by widows. It should be noted, however, that, according to Wilhite (2009:227-28), 'Tertullian was not a schismatic Montanist' and that 'the understanding of Tertullian as in full communion with the North African church is now a consensus among Tertullian scholars'.

[302] For the chronology of Tertullian's works, see Barnes 1971:55.

[303] Barnes 1971:46.

[304] Barnes (1971:55) proposes a conjectural date (between 198 and 203) with the addition of a question mark, while Wilhite (2009:222) suggests a dating of 200 CE.

therefore, will first explore Tertullian's attitude towards the remarriage of widows, as especially revealed in *To His Wife*, and then the 'order' of widows presented in his Montanist works.

5.1. The remarriage of widows

Tertullian's main concern in *To His Wife* is whether a widow should remarry. Although it is an open letter addressed to his wife, Tertullian obviously has a wider audience in mind – other Christian women in Carthage (*Ux.* 1.1.6). In the first book of the treatise, Tertullian rejects widow remarriage completely and requests his wife not to remarry after his death. In the second book, however, Tertullian reluctantly accepts the remarriage of those widows who insist on remarrying, but requires the husband to be a Christian. The primary reason for Tertullian to reject a second marriage concerns continence and purity. According to Tertullian, the decease of a husband which ends a marriage is God's call to the widow to continence (1.7.1-3). He further turns to the Pastoral Letters to demonstrate the obstructiveness of remarriage, that neither the church offices (cf. 1 Tim 3.2, 12; Tit 1.6) nor the 'order' of widows (cf. 1 Tim 5.9)[305] accept those who have been married more than once (*Ux.* 1.7.4). And he additionally mentions the traditional association of widows with God's altar to stress the importance and necessity for them to be pure and chaste (1.7.4). However, while mentioning the 'order' of widows and associating them with God's altar, Tertullian focuses merely on the matter of chastity and ignores completely other aspects, such as the ministries and functions of the enrolled widows in the church. Moreover, as discussed earlier (see section 2), when a widow is required to be 'the wife of one man' in 1 Timothy 5.9, it does not have to be understood as a rejection of remarriage, but of marital unfaithfulness, for

[305] Tertullian interprets 1 Timothy 5.9-10 as an indication of a widows' 'order' for the support of his argumentation, although the literary context of 1 Timothy suggests that the enrolment is solely for the purpose of material support.

the younger widows are clearly instructed to remarry in the same passage (5.14). But Tertullian simply ignores (if not purposely contradicts) this instruction of 1 Timothy, although he displays a particular reliance on this text for his argumentation.

As discussed earlier, 1 Timothy 5.3-16 exhibits a strong economic concern of the church. The primary purpose of this passage is to limit the number of enrolled widows for the collective support so as to reduce the financial burden of the church, as indicated at both the beginning (5.3) and the end (5.16) of this passage. The younger widows are therefore encouraged to remarry so that they will not drain the church funds. To understand Tertullian's negative attitude towards widow remarriage in *To His Wife*, Wilhite employs an economic reading of the text,[306] which insightfully explains the contrasting positions of Tertullian and 1 Timothy in their instructions on widow remarriage. Tertullian illustrates three reasons for (re)marriage: fleshly desire (*Ux.* 1.4.1-5), worldly greed (1.4.6-8), and anxiety for children (1.5.1-3). As for fleshly desire, Tertullian exhorts Christian women to overcome it with spiritual strength and to learn from those widows who have remained unmarried after the death of their husbands. Interestingly, Tertullian portrays such widows in domestic and economic terms:[307] they are 'wedded to God' to whom they dedicate both their beauty and their youth and offer their prayers as dowries (*dotes*), and from whom they receive approval as dotal gifts (*munera maritalia*; 1.4.4). And by committing themselves completely to God, they are already counted as belonging to the angelic family (*familia angelica*) while on earth (1.4.4). In addition, as Butterfield insightfully observes, unlike the widows described in 1 Timothy 5.5 who engage in supplications and prayers night and day, or the widows in Polycarp's *To the Philippians* 4.3 who are referred to as God's altar and instructed to pray for all, the widows in Tertullian's *To His Wife* are portrayed as 'young

[306] Wilhite 2009:222-42.
[307] Wilhite 2009:233.

newlyweds' whose prayers are diminished to 'pillow talk' within 'a marital context', while the community function and prominence of their prayers are not mentioned at all.[308] Furthermore, although Tertullian views these widows as married to God – the head (*dominus*) of God's household (i.e., the Christian community) – he does not acknowledge them as God's *matronae*, the term which implies certain authority and active involvement in the community. Instead, he depicts them as God's *puellae* (*Ux.* 1.4.4) who do nothing except praying-as-pillow-talking.[309] Indeed, even when Tertullian mentions the 'order' of widows, associates them with God's altar, and refers to them as married to God, he refuses to acknowledge any ecclesiastical importance or ministry function of these widows.[310]

The second reason for (re)marriage illustrated by Tertullian is worldly greed (*Ux.* 1.4.6) which, according to Wilhite, mostly relates to economic matters.[311] Tertullian's response is that Christian women should not lust after 'ponderous necklaces' (*monilium pondera*), 'burdensome garments' (*uestium taedia*), 'Gallic mules' (*Gallicos mulos*), or 'German bearers' (*Germanicos baiulos*), but should be satisfied with 'sufficiency' (*sufficientiam*), which is suitable to moderation and modesty (*modestiae et pudicitiae*; 1.4.7). As discussed in Chapter 2, the majority of widows in the ancient Roman world lived at or near subsistence level. It would be impossible for them to spend money on luxurious goods mentioned above; only wealthy women could afford them. Thus, Tertullian probably has wealthy Christian women in mind in his reference to worldly greed as one of the reasons for (re)marriage.[312]

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[308] Butterfield 2017:84-86.
[309] Butterfield 2017:92.
[310] The widows were unlikely to be doing nothing, especially if they were receiving assistance from the church (more on this later).
[311] Wilhite 2009:231.
[312] See also Schöllgen (1985:13-14) who carefully analyses Tertullian's writings and maintains that there were wealthy members who were well-educated and with relatively high social status in the church of Tertullian's day.

Following the reason of worldly greed, Tertullian introduces a third reason for (re)marriage, i.e., anxiety for posterity (*Ux.* 1.5.1), which he again dismisses for the Christians, on the basis of the imminent distress (*imminentium angustiarum*; 1.5.1),[313] the desire of Christians 'to be taken out of this most wicked world' (*iniquissimo isto saeculo eximi*; 1.5.1), and the burdens of rearing children during the last days (1.5.2-3; cf. Luke 21.23; Matt 24.19). Tertullian additionally states that so heavy are the burdens of rearing children that they are 'avoided even by the majority of the Gentiles, who are compelled by laws' (*Ux.* 1.5.2). According to Wilhite, the 'laws' (*legibus*) mentioned by Tertullian refers to 'the imperial edicts of Augustus that required widows who were Roman citizens to remarry ten months after the death of their husband in order to bear children'.[314] As discussed in Chapter 2, this legislation was applied mostly to the wealthy women in the upper class for the purposes of succession and inheritance, and was thus irrelevant to those widows who lived in poverty or near-poverty. This suggests again that Tertullian's implied audience in *To His Wife* are wealthy widows. Therefore, concerning Tertullian's frequent references to economics in his argumentation against widow remarriage, Wilhite proposes that 'Tertullian's concern is in regard to the widows' wealth: if the widows remarry, their "dowries" will be paid to new husbands and not to God via the church'.[315] But there are problems with this hypothesis: Tertullian's argumentation may suggest that his implied audience are wealthy widows, but he never mentions how their wealth is related to the church. Although he does mention their 'dowries' to God (1.4.4), the term is a metaphorical reference to their prayers, which has nothing to do with their wealth. In other words, Tertullian may have a concern about the widows' wealth in relation to their remarriage, but

[313] Based on Wilhite's analysis of the context of Tertullian (Wilhite 2007:31-33), Tertullian probably refers to the persecution which he was expecting the Christians in Carthage to undergo.
[314] Wilhite 2009:232. See also Chapter 2 (section 4) of this thesis which mentions an extended period of two years for childless widows between ages 20 and 50 to remarry according to the Augustan marriage legislation.
[315] Wilhite 2009:234. See also Gray 2022:305.

he does not express it explicitly in the first book; it is to be discovered in the second book of the treatise.

As mentioned earlier, in the second book of *To His Wife*, Tertullian reluctantly accepts the remarriage of widows who want to remarry, on the condition that the marriage must be 'in the Lord' (2.1.1; cf. 1 Cor 7.39). The reason for Tertullian to provide this 'next best' advice is that he had heard of some divorced or widowed Christian women who were remarried to non-Christians (2.1.1), which was unacceptable to him. He stresses that one cannot serve two lords – the Lord, and her non-Christian husband (2.3.4) – who represent the heads of two different households – the church and her husband's household respectively. Tertullian thus painstakingly demonstrates the destructive consequences of marrying an unbeliever. Firstly, in obeying a non-Christian she will carry out non-Christian practices: 'personal attractiveness, dressing of the head, worldly elegancies, baser blandishments' (*formam, extructionem, munditias saeculares, blanditias turpiores*; 2.3.4). According to Tertullian, these practices not only contaminate a marriage but also disregard 'the duties of the sex' which are supposed to be conducted with modesty and temperance (2.3.4). In addition, the description of these practices indicates again the interest of wealthy widows, since the majority of widows would have struggled for survival and thus would not be able to afford such a luxurious lifestyle. Secondly, Tertullian lists in 2.4.1-3 a number of hindrances which an unbelieving husband puts in his wife's way with regard to the pursuits and duties of believers. According to Wilhite, 'throughout this paragraph Tertullian contrasts the interests of husbands (i.e., the non-Christian husband and Christ)'[316] and their households (i.e., the husband's household and the church). Both husbands wish the wife to 'invest her dowry', but 'they do so in much different ways': while the non-Christian husband 'thrusts the baths, the feasts, and the storehouses upon the wife', the Lord 'summons her to the slums, the prisoners,

[316] Wilhite 2009:237.

and the aliens'.[317] In fact, some non-Christian husbands even resort to extortion by turning their wives' dowries (*dotes*) into 'bribes' for them to keep quiet about their wives' Christian identity (2.5.4). What is even worse, the wife may be forced to participate in non-Christian rites and revels (2.6.1), which is completely detrimental to her faith.

In addition to the hindrances and destruction a non-Christian husband may bring to the wife's faith, Tertullian states that even among the nations, masters forbid their slaves from marrying out of their own house to prevent them from deserting their duties or purveying their masters' goods (*dominica*) to strangers (2.8.1), so it is 'madness' (*amentiae*; 2.8.2) for Christians to hold themselves to a lower standard. According to Tertullian, the cause of this 'madness' is the 'lusts of worldly joys' (*concupiscentias saecularium gaudiorum*; 2.8.2) which is chiefly found among the 'wealthier' (*plurimum*; 2.8.3) who hold the name of 'matrons' (*matronae*; 2.8.3) and seek a husband apt for maintaining 'their sedan, and their mules, and their hair-curlers of outlandish stature' (*sellae et mulabus et cinerariis peregrinae proceritatis*; 2.8.3). If in the first book of his treatise Tertullian does not reveal explicitly the economic status of the implied audience, he does so in the second book: they are wealthy widows who can hardly find a husband in the church who matches her in estate (2.8.3), hence the 'madness' of marrying out of the church, with the risk of her property being extorted and her faith lost (2.5.4).

Tertullian nevertheless urges these widows that if they insist on remarriage, they should marry a Christian, even if he be poor, and give their dowries to a Christian husband instead of an unbeliever, for such a husband is rich in the Lord (2.8.5). And more importantly, together with their Christian husbands, they can still fulfil their faith duties, such as visiting the sick, relieving the poor, and giving alms, etc. (2.8.8). Therefore, as Wilhite states, 'the underlying concern with the remarriage of widows in book 1 is accentuated in

[317] Wilhite 2009:238.

book 2, where the widows' "dowries" are not only at risk of being pulled out of the church's funds but are at risk of being placed in the accounts of non-Christians and being lost entirely'.[318] And in view of this, Tertullian reluctantly accepts the remarriage of widows 'in the Lord' if they insist on remarrying, but he is totally against remarriage to non-Christians.

The above discussion reveals that Tertullian shares a similar economic concern seen in 1 Timothy 5.3-16, although the specific context of Tertullian's church in Carthage leads to an opposite injunction: while the author of 1 Timothy exhorts the younger widows to remarry so as to prevent them from draining the church funds, Tertullian urges the wealthy widows in his church to remain in their widowhood so that their dowries would not be pulled out of the church's funds through remarriage.[319] However, as mentioned earlier, apart from exhorting the widows to be pure and continent, Tertullian does not mention any specific ministry they do or any important role they play in the community, although they are supposed to be active in the church, given their wealth and freedom. Even when he refers to the 'order' of widows, Tertullian mentions nothing else except the requirement of having been 'the wife of one man' for admission (to the 'order': *in ordinem*; *Ux*. 1.7.4). But as can be observed from other works of Tertullian, widows (particularly those in the 'order') do enjoy a prominent status in his church.

5.2. The 'order' of widows

In his treatise *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian criticises a specific case in which a *virgin* less than twenty years old had been placed by the bishop in the 'order' of *widows* (*in viduatu*; *Virg*. 9.5-6). This case reveals several points concerning widows. First, Tertullian knew of (at least one) 'virgin widow' (a virgin who is called 'widow' in Tertullian's context)

[318] Wilhite 2009:238-39. Tertullian explicitly mentions the collection of church funds in his *Apology* 39.5-6 (see discussion below, Chapter 6).
[319] Gray 2022:305.

during his time. In fact, the concept of 'virgin widow' appeared much earlier than Tertullian and the two terms ('virgin' and 'widow') were often used interchangeably to refer to the same group of women. For example, the widows in APt are addressed as the 'virgins of Christ/the Lord' (22, 29; see Chapter 4, section 3.2), Ignatius clearly mentions 'the virgins who are called widows' in his greetings to the Smyrnaeans (*Smyrn*. 13.1), and, as discussed earlier, in 1 Timothy 5.11-14 there are probably virgins among the younger widows who are instructed to marry.[320] However, Tertullian views the mixture of the two – virgins and widows – as an abuse of church discipline (*Virg*. 9.5) and hence severely criticises the case mentioned above. This leads to the second point: there existed an 'order' of widows in Tertullian's church, which excluded virgins who, from Tertullian's point of view, were neither qualified for admission nor worthy of the honour of widowhood (9.6). As for the admission which was under the charge of the bishop (9.5), a widow must be (besides the age of sixty or above) married only once and have raised children in order to be admitted (9.6). Obviously, a (young) virgin is not qualified for any of these criteria.[321] It is noteworthy, however, that although Tertullian evidently draws from 1 Timothy 5.9-10 for the criteria of admission to the widows' 'order', he mentions nothing about their good works such as hospitality and charitable service towards other Christians but focuses solely on her past domestic role as a wife and a mother. The reason could be that mentioning her good works is not helpful to Tertullian's argumentation against the virgin's case, since a virgin can do those works as well. But it could also be that Tertullian is unwilling to describe widows as playing any active role in the church, just as he does in *To His Wife* where he emphasises nothing but continence and purity of widows with regard to the honour of widowhood.

[320] For a detailed discussion on 'virgin widow' in the early church, see Methuen 1997:285-98.
[321] Considering Tertullian's emphasis on the purity/chastity of widows (e.g., *Ux*. 1.7.4) and his distrust of women (e.g., *Cult. fem*. 1.1.2), he may also be concerned that the young virgin might want to marry in the future and as a result violate her pledge of lifelong celibacy (cf. 1 Tim 5.11-12).

Moreover, since Tertullian assumes that the reason for the bishop to place the young virgin in the order of widows was that he felt obliged to provide for her needs (9.5), admission to the widows' order probably implied material support from the church. The collective support of widows is additionally implied in *Exhortation to Chastity* 12.2 where Tertullian advises a Christian widower, for the purpose of housekeeping, to take from among the widows a spiritual wife who is 'fair in faith, dowered with poverty, sealed with age' (*fide pulchram, paupertate dotatam, aetate signatam*). Tertullian even encourages the widower to have more than one such wife: *huiusmodi uxores etiam plures haberi deo gratum est* ('a plurality of such wives is pleasing to God'; *Exh. cast.* 12.2). Thurston comments that 'a number of such wives is pleasing presumably not only because such marriages are asexual but because they diminish the number of women the church must support in the order'.[322] However, this does not mean that all the widows in the 'order' are assisted by the church because of poverty but likely also because of their engagement in ministry.[323] As discussed earlier on the text of *To His Wife*, there are wealthy widows in Tertullian's church who are exhorted by Tertullian to remain in their widowhood. Their presence in the church suggests that there should be wealthy widows in the 'order' as well, unless the purpose of this office is solely for the support of poor widows, which, as can be seen, is evidently not the case.

As admitted members of the 'order', the widows have (at least) one function in the community, i.e., 'to help others with counsel and comfort' (*ceteras et consilio et solacio iuvare*; *Virg.* 9.6). However, the literary context suggests that the 'others' basically means other *women* rather than *anyone* (including *men*) in the church. In addition, since the 'counsel and comfort' provided by the widows is based on their 'experiences of all affections' (*experimentis omnium affectuum*; 9.6) – an evident reference to their experiences in different

[322] Thurston 1989:84. See also Bremmer 1995:40.
[323] For example, see LaPorte 1982:126. See also Krause (1995b:56) who thinks the church widows received a salary ('Gehalt').

stages of life as a Christian woman, including that of a virgin, a wife, a mother, and then a widow – the widows' role as counsellors and comforters is confined to a female, marital, and domestic context. Nevertheless, Tertullian explicitly acknowledges the honorific status of the widows in the church, as indicated by the special seating reserved for them in the congregation (9.6). Moreover, Tertullian testifies in *Exhortation to Chastity* 13.4 that there were both men and women in 'ecclesiastical orders' (*ecclesiasticis ordinibus*). According to Gryson, 'the term *ordo*, borrowed from ancient Roman institutions, was applied analogously by Tertullian to those who occupied an official position in the Church', and the women in the 'orders' were actually the widows who 'gave the example of continence' just like the male members of the 'orders', including the bishops, presbyters, and deacons.[324] The widows appear alongside the male officials in other works of Tertullian as well. For example, in *Monogamy* 11.1 Tertullian refers to the way of life exhibited by both the male clergy and the widows as evidence for his argumentation against second marriages. Gryson indicates that 'all the scholars who comment on this text affirm without any reservation that Tertullian ranked the widows among the clergy'.[325] In another text (*Pud.* 13.7), Tertullian describes penitents prostrating themselves in the middle of the assembly before the widows and the presbyters (*in medium ante uiduas, ante presbyteros*) to seek reconciliation, which suggests that the widows are seated together with the clergy (at least with the presbyters). However, Rankin contends that

> Tertullian probably does on occasion include the widows within the category of 'clergy', in the sense of them belonging to a church order for entrance into which there was a formal rite of admission. Yet he offers no clues as to any specific ministry function for them, save their appearance during the penitential rite in *De Pudicitia*. The widows were clearly part of a well-defined and prestigious group within the life of the church. Their role, however, may have been a largely passive one. It is not in question that they were materially supported by the congregation…[326]

[324] Gryson 1976:20-21. See also Thurston 1989:84.
[325] Gryson 1976:21.
[326] Rankin 1995:178. See also Krause (1995b:56) who, while recognising their prominent position in the church of Carthage, denies that the widows were church officials ('kirchlichen Amtsträgern').

Rankin is right in his observation about Tertullian's reluctance to describe the widows' ministries, but that does not mean they were merely passive recipients of support from the church. In fact, some of 'the admittedly rare notices'[327] of Tertullian do provide clues to the widows' ministry functions. For example, besides their participation with the clergy in the penitential rite in *Modesty* 13.7, and their role as counsellors and comforters to other women in *The Veiling of Virgins* 9.6, the widows also played a part in the ordination of priests (they were surrounded by the widows during the ritual; *Exh. cast.* 11.2), which, as Butterfield posits, indicates the widows' 'liturgical importance in the Christian community'.[328] Moreover, Tertullian states in *The Veiling of Virgins* 9.2 that 'it is not permitted to a *woman* to speak in the church; but neither (is it permitted her) to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, not to say (in any) sacerdotal office' (cf. 1 Tim 2.11-12). According to Bremmer, however, such explicit prohibition against women's participation in the above activities suggests evidently that 'in a number of cases they had appropriated these tasks'.[329] And considering the liberty they obtained upon the death of their husbands and their prestigious status in the church, the widows were the most likely group of women who had practised these tasks. Furthermore, Tertullian stresses in *To His Wife* 1.8.4 that 'talkative, idle, winebibbing, curious tent-fellows, do the very greatest hurt to the purpose of widowhood' (cf. 1 Tim 5.13). Not everyone agrees with Tertullian, however. As Brown states, for example, '"passing around the houses", continent adult women, as widows, enjoyed some of the enviable mobility associated with the apostolic calling'.[330] Bremmer additionally regards 'visits by widows to other women' as 'important evidence for the sociability of the women' in the early church, and he views this 'networking' of women as 'an important key to the success of the Christian mission' which brought many women to the

[327] Bremmer 1995:41.
[328] Butterfield 2017:99-100.
[329] Bremmer 1995:42. See also Methuen (1997:294) who agrees with Bremmer.
[330] Brown 1988:150.

church who constituted 'the great majority of the early Christians'.[331] Therefore, despite Tertullian's prohibition and disguise, the Christian widows in Carthage had probably played an active role in various church ministries.

Therefore, although Tertullian, as reflected in *To His Wife*, focuses mainly on the purity and chastity of widows with regard to their remarriage and admission to the 'order' but mentions in minimal terms their ministry functions in the church, the widows in the 'order' held a prestigious status in the community, as indicated by their special seating with the clergy in the congregation (*Virg*. 9.6). Moreover, some of Tertullian's references to widows (although admittedly rare) indicate that they were involved in the ministry of counselling and comforting other women (*Virg*. 9.6) and had some liturgical importance in the penitential rite of sinners (*Pud*. 13.7) and the ordination of priests (*Exh*. *cast*. 11.2). And his explicit prohibition against women's teaching, baptising, and ordination (*Virg*. 9.2) additionally suggests that some women, particularly widows, might be doing so.

6. Conclusion

The above discussion on the instruction texts portrays again the poverty and vulnerability of widows (e.g., 1 Tim 5.5; Herm. Vis. 3.9.3; Sim. 10.4.2-3) and thus the importance of supporting them in the early church. As reflected especially in the Shepherd of Hermas and Ignatius' *To the Smyrneans* 6.2, the treatment of widows (with orphans) is of paradigmatic importance: how one treats them indicates the quality of faith-commitment. So widows take a prominent place as a means of reading the spiritual health of the community.

Apart from the primary means of support from one's family (which was often insufficient or unavailable at all to some widows; e.g., 1 Tim 5.5), the long-term support of widows in the early church is portrayed as requiring either long-term patronage (which would

[331] Bremmer 1995:42.

have to entail some counter-benefit to the patron) or a centralised church fund (both models may be operative side by side). However, the commitment to support widows (a long-term and costly affair) entailed a big commitment to Christians all the way down to the bottom of the social scale. This was apparently too much for some wealthier believers, who were tempted to form parallel Christian commitments that did not require so much, or who drifted away from the church community and maintained stronger commitments outside the church. For example, the rich Christians in Shepherd of Hermas are accused of preoccupation with business and worldly affairs, the 'heretics' are attacked by Ignatius for their lack of interest in caring for widows and orphans (*Smyrn*. 6.2), and the wealthy widows are criticised by Tertullian for remarrying non-Christians for the maintenance of their luxurious lifestyle (*Ux*. 2.8.3).

Faced with the heavy financial burden of supporting the poor (particularly widows), churches in the second century took different measures. For example, the churches addressed in 1 Timothy strictly limited the number of widows who could receive support from the church: they must be 'real widows' who were not only old, alone and helpless but also well attested for their faith and good works (1 Tim 5.5, 9-10). As for widows who had children or relatives, family support should be the primary source of their provision, and the members of the congregation with widowed family members or relatives were strongly exhorted to fulfil the responsibility of looking after their own widows (5.4, 7-8). And for widows who were currently assisted by other believing women, the latter were encouraged to continue this good work, so that the church could be relieved of its financial burden and support the 'real' widows (5.16). But the younger widows were instructed to (re)marry so that they would not drain the church funds (5.11-15). In the case of the Roman church, the rich were exhorted to repent and to help the poor, especially widows and orphans (e.g., Herm. Mand. 8.10; Sim. 1.8-9; 2; 5.3), and to understand that it was for this reason that God had made them rich.

Hence, if they wanted to be saved and included in the church, they must fulfil their responsibility of helping the poor. As for the church in Carthage, Tertullian, as revealed in *To His Wife*, urged the wealthy women to remain in widowhood after the death of their husbands so that their dowries would not be pulled out of the church's funds through remarriage. And for those who insisted on remarrying, they were instructed to marry Christians so that they (together with their husbands) could still give alms and help the poor. Moreover, drawing from 1 Timothy 5, Tertullian set a strict standard for the 'order' of widows, which would naturally restrict the assisted widows to a limited number (e.g., *Virg*. 9.5-6). And he additionally encouraged widowers, for the purpose of housekeeping, to take widows from the 'order' as their 'spiritual wives' so as to reduce the number of widows supported by the church (each widower was encouraged to take as many such wives as he could! *Exh. Cast.* 12.2).

The collective support for widows in various churches in the second century suggests the existence of a centralised church fund, which required organisation and authority, and carried severe temptations to appropriate the funds. The best examples are the ministers in Shepherd of Hermas (Sim. 9.26.2) who 'devoured' the livelihoods of widows and orphans, and the presbyter Valens who was criticised by Polycarp for abusing his office and church funds (*Phil*. 11.1). The church leaders were therefore admonished to abstain from avarice, to look after widows and orphans, and to fulfil their ministry in a holy way (e.g., Pol. *Phil*. 6.1; 11.1; Ign. *Pol*. 4.1; Herm. Sim. 9.26.2).

The above instructions indicate again the three main modes of support for widows in the early church, with different emphases in different texts: 1 Timothy equally emphasises all three; Shepherd of Hermas pays most attention to patronage (without excluding church support); Ignatius and Polycarp focus on the collective assistance to widows; and Tertullian mentions both the church and the family support of widows in his treatises. Having said that,

widows were not solely passive recipients of support in the early church; they were attested for their powerful prayers and intercessions (e.g., 1 Tim 5.5; Herm. Sim. 2; 5.3.7; Pol. *Phil*. 4.3) and good works in various forms (e.g., 1 Tim 5.10). In addition, running alongside the household-model of Christian life (cf. Ign. *Smyrn*. 13.1), the ideal of widow celibacy represented the peak of Christian commitment, which carried not only particular status (they were the 'altar' of God; e.g., Pol. *Phil*. 4.3; *Ux*. 1.7.4) but also special danger (if things went wrong here, even in the form of slander, the whole church would be damaged). Therefore, as the 'altar' of God, the widows, like the Roman Vestal Virgins, must be pure and chaste.

However, there was no explicit mention of the 'order' of widows in the early church until Tertullian. The widows in the 'order' enjoyed a very honourable and prestigious status in Tertullian's church, as indicated by the special seating arrangements for them in the congregation (*Virg*. 9.5-6). In addition, the widows participated in the church ministry of counselling and comforting other women (*Virg*. 9.6) and exhibited liturgical importance in the penitential rite of sinners (*Pud*. 13.7) and the ordination of priests (*Exh*. *cast*. 11.2). They were probably also involved in the ministry of prayer and intercession, and the good works listed in 1 Timothy 5.10, as suggested by Tertullian's description in *To His Wife* 2.4.1-3, although Tertullian refers to the duties of every believer here. And his explicit prohibition against women's teaching, baptising, and ordination (*Virg*. 9.2) additionally suggests that some widows as free and independent women were probably doing such things, even though they might be from other Carthaginian Christian communities, and not Tertullian's church.

Chapter 6

Widows in Early Christian Apologetic Texts

1. Introduction

Apart from the narrative and instruction texts, another genre of texts also pays special attention to the welfare of the poor – the apologetic texts. The Christian apologetic literature first flourished in the second century CE, especially in the second half of the century. Among the apologists of that period, the most representative include Justin Martyr, Aristides, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Minucius Felix, and Tertullian.[1] Although the apparent addressees in most apologies are Roman emperors or governors (e.g., Justin's *1 Apology*; Aristides' *Apology*; Athenagoras' *Legatio pro Christianis*; Tertullian's *Apologeticus*), it is doubtful that these apologies had ever reached the imperial authorities.[2] Instead, the actual audiences were more likely to be Christians, especially those whose faith was facing challenges, and the sympathetic non-Christians who were also potential converts.[3] Along with the rapid development of Christianity in the second century, more and more Romans began to notice this new religious movement, albeit with a mostly negative attitude. Although Christians had not experienced systematic and empire-wide persecutions yet, they seemed to face regional and occasional persecutions, which even resulted in the martyrdom of some Christians.[4] However, compared with deathly persecutions, more prevalent and dangerous were the misunderstanding and accusations against Christians from different social levels, which

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[1] For the Greek and Latin texts of the above apologists and their English translations, see Minns and Parvis 2009 (on Justin), Harris 1893 and Kay 1994 (on Aristides), Whittaker 1982 (on Tatian), Schoedel 1972 (on Athenagoras), Grant 1970 (on Theophilus), Glover 1931 (LCL 250) and Thelwall 1994 (on Tertullian), and Rendall 1931 (on Minucius Felix; LCL 250). It should be noted, however, that for the English translation of Aristides, only that based on the Syrian text is referred to in this chapter.

[2] Sheather 2018:131. Sheather (118) suggests that the reason for the Apologists to address the emperors and their imperial colleagues was to catch 'the attention and approval of the Christians or potential converts who were the actual audience'.

[3] See Sheather 2018:118; Nyström 2018: 65; Williams 2020:142, 185, 199.

[4] See Barnard 1997:1; Nasrallah 2010:2; Sheather 2018:115; Richardson 2018:145; Willert 2014:183; Engberg 2014:206.

formed a hostile atmosphere and an antagonistic mentality among non-Christians in the Roman society. Christians were accused of atheism due to their rejection of the Roman gods (e.g., Justin, *1 Apol*. 6.1; 13.1; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 3.1), of disloyalty on account of their rejection of imperial cultic worship (e.g., Justin, *1 Apol*. 12.1), and of immoral living (particularly of incest and cannibalism; e.g., Athenagoras, *Leg.* 3.1; Theophilus, *Autol.* III.4; Tertullian, *Apol.* 7.1; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 9.1-7) because of the non-Christians' (intentional?) misunderstanding of Christian rituals and doctrines (e.g., the eucharist).[5] Facing various charges and persecutions, the early church responded with apologetic writings, not only to encourage and strengthen the Christians whose faith might be weakened in times of accusations and persecutions, and to defend the moral superiority of Christians compared with that of non-Christians, but also to convince and if possible, even to convert non-Christians.[6] Therefore, the apologies in the second century contain multiple purposes: they were designed not only to perform didactic functions but also to fulfil defensive and missional intentions.

Given the above general description of the Christian apologetic literature in the second century, this chapter will focus on the ethical aspect of the Christian life reflected in these writings, especially the love and support for one another, particularly the poor, among Christians. As will be seen, the Apologists' description of the Christian life as pure and loving reflects the Apologists' emphasis on the moral and ethical superiority of the Christians and possibly indicates alternative survival strategies for the poor in the early church. It is necessary, however, to note that there might be exaggeration, idealisation, or one-sidedness on the part of the Apologists due to the apologetic nature of the material. For example, how much about fact can be determined from it? Or does it only tell us what the Christians liked to

[5] See Clarke 1965:198; Barnard 1997:1; Young 1999:101; Livermore 2001:62; Ulrich 2014a:13-17; Engberg 2014:209; Jacobsen 2009:85-110; 2014:86; Williams 2020:211, 227; Pettersen 2020:27, 49-50.
[6] Pettersen 2020:137; Williams 2020:142.

believe about themselves (especially if it is mostly directed internally)? Is it borne out by evidence from elsewhere? Thus, in the following caution will be exercised regarding any historical claims on the basis of these texts. Having said the above, it is necessary and helpful first to have an overall picture of the general arguments of the Apologists.

2. The arguments of the Apologists

In face of the various charges against Christians, the Apologists adopt different strategies and arguments in their writings. For the accusation of atheism due to the Christians' refusal to worship the Graeco-Roman gods, the Apologists respond from two aspects. On the one hand, they explain that Christians do not worship the Graeco-Roman gods or emperors because they are not real gods but humans deified after death (e.g., Tertullian, *Apol*. 11) or demons filled with lust and violence (e.g., Tertullian, *Apol*. 15; Justin, 1 *Apol*. 5; Minucius Felix, *Oct*. 27.1; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 25.1-27.2), and their images are perishable handicrafts made of earthly materials (e.g., Tertullian, *Apol*. 12.2; 13.4; Theophilus, *Autol*. I.10; II.2; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 15.1-17.5). On the other hand, they emphasise that Christians are not atheists but monotheists, because they believe in and worship the one true God (e.g., Athenagoras, *Leg*. 5.1-10.5).

For the accusation of disloyalty to the emperors due to the Christians' rejection of offering sacrifices to their images, Tertullian emphasises that Christians have been praying for the emperors and for the whole estate of the empire, and it is the God of the Christians who has installed the emperors. Hence, the Christians are more supportive and loyal to the emperors than the Romans who express loyalty with words but are rebellious in their hearts (*Apol*. 28-35). Justin additionally indicates that Christians, following the example of Jesus Christ, pay their taxes and levies very cooperatively and actively, so as to demonstrate that while worshipping the one true God alone, Christians actually serve the emperors and

government authorities joyfully in other respects and acknowledge them as kings and rulers within the human sphere (*1 Apol*. 17.1-3). Thus, with different examples the Apologists illustrate to the authorities that Christians are not their enemies but good people who are loyal to and supportive of them and the state.

For the accusation of ethical misconduct, particularly that of incestuous promiscuity and cannibalism, the Apologists respond from several points. First, the charges against Christians have no evidence (e.g., Athenagoras, *Leg*. 35.1-3; Tertullian, *Apol*. 7-8; Minucius Felix, *Oct*. 28). Second, because of their belief in God's eschatological judgement for one's earthly deeds, Christians would restrain themselves from doing evil (Justin, 1 *Apol*. 12.1-2; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 31.3-4; 36). Third, it is the pagans and their gods who have committed the crimes of sexual promiscuity, incest, murder and cannibalism (e.g., Aristides, *Apol*. 17; Justin, 1 *Apol*. 27; Tatian, *Or. Craec*. 23.1-2; 25.3; 29.1; 33.2; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 32.1; 34.1-3; Theophilus, *Autol*. III.3, 5, 6; Tertullian, *Apol*. 9; Minucius Felix, *Oct*. 30-31). Last but not least, the Christians actually live with purity and morality, as demonstrated by both their teachings and practices.

As for Christian teachings, the Apologists mostly turn to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) and Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6). Among the various themes of these teachings, the Apologists mainly focus on purity and chastity, generosity, and love of enemies. As for purity and chastity, the Apologists cite Jesus' teaching that whoever looks at a woman with lust or marries a divorced woman has committed adultery (e.g., Justin, *1 Apol*. 15.1-4; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 32.2-3; Theophilus, *Autol.* III.13; cf. Matt 5.28, 32; Luke 16.18). As for generosity, the Apologists refer to Jesus' teaching that Christians should give to everyone who begs from them and lend to anyone who wants to borrow from them; and when they lend to others, they should not hope to receive from them (e.g., Justin, *1 Apol*. 15.10; cf. Matt 5.42; Luke 6.34). As for love of enemies, the

Apologists recall Jesus' teaching that Christians should love their enemies, do good to those who hate them, bless those who curse them, and pray for those who persecute them (e.g., Justin, *1 Apol*. 15.9; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 11.2; Theophilus, *Autol.* III.14; cf. Matt 5.44-46; Luke 6.27-28). According to Barclay, the Christian teaching of generosity and love of enemies 'extends beyond the normal limits of reciprocal relations and displays beneficence in the face of hostility'[7] and this hyper-generous attitude is an important part of 'Christian self-perception and self-presentation to others'.[8] Rhetorically, these teachings represent 'a distinctive, and superior, moral ethos, uniquely characteristic of those who follow Christ'.[9] Theologically, they reflect the good news that is rooted in 'the prospect of eschatological divine judgement' which will bring 'divine eschatological rewards' to those who have followed these teachings.[10] Socially, these teachings have kept Christian networks open and made it possible to 'repair a social breach in the hope of a more positive relationship'[11] with the non-Christians, to an extent, to win them over as friends and even, eventually, fellow Christians.[12] In addition to the above teachings, Theophilus mentions the ten commandments (*Autol.* III.9) and the teachings on repentance (III.11) and justice (III.12) in the Old Testament. As for the teaching on justice, Theophilus pays special attention to God's concern for the vulnerable and marginalised, particularly widows, orphans, and sojourners. God's people are taught to free the oppressed, defend the orphans, vindicate the widows, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and show mercy and kindness to their neighbours (*Autol.* III.12; cf. Isa 1.16-17; 58.6-7; Zech 7.9-10). In parading these social demands, Theophilus is drawing on a perception that such practices would be considered

[7] Barclay 2022:167-68.
[8] Barclay 2022:189.
[9] Barclay 2022:171.
[10] Barclay 2022:176-82.
[11] Barclay 2022:185
[12] Barclay 2022:182-88.

admirable across Roman society. No one would criticise, for instance, the support of widows. What stands out would be the seriousness, the extent and the means of such a commitment.

Apart from presenting the Christian teachings which form a striking contrast to those of non-Christians, the Apologists also display the conduct of Christians, including their piety, purity, innocence, justice, kindness, generosity, and love of enemies. As for piety, the Christians neither worship idols nor consume meat sacrificed to idols but dedicate themselves to the one true God (Aristides, *Apol*. 15; Justin, *1 Apol*. 14.2). As for purity, the Christians get married only for the purpose of procreation and are content with one marriage or remain unmarried throughout their lives; the Christian wives are pure like virgins, and their daughters are modest (Aristides, *Apol*. 15; Justin, *1 Apol*. 15.6; Tatian, *Or. Craec*. 33.2; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 33.1-5; Tertullian, *Apol*. 9.19; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 31.5). As for innocence, the Christians are forbidden from attending gladiatorial shows, aborting a child, or even consuming animals' blood (Theophilus, *Autol.* III.15; Tertullian, *Apol*. 9.8, 13; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 30.6). As for justice, the Christians do not bear false witness, and when they are judges they judge fairly (Aristides, *Apol*. 15). As for kindness, the Christians comfort those who grieve and befriend them, and they do good to their neighbours (Aristides, *Apol*. 15; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 11.4). As for generosity, the Christians give to those who ask and share what they have with those in need (Athenagoras, *Leg*. 11.4; Justin, *1 Apol*. 14.2). As for love of enemies, while the Christians are persecuted by their enemies, they not only endure the suffering but also pray for their enemies (Aristides, *Apol*. 15, 17; Justin, *1 Apol*. 14.3; Athenagoras, *Leg*. 11.4). Theophilus well summarises the moral superiority and perfection of the Christians:

> among them temperance is present, continence is exercised, monogamy is preserved, purity is guarded; injustice is driven out, sin is uprooted, righteousness is practised, law is the guiding principle, piety is performed, God is acknowledged; truth controls,

> grace preserves, peace protects; holy Logos leads, Sophia teaches, Life controls, God reigns (*Autol.* III.15).[13]

3. Love and support among Christians

In addition to the above general description of Christian teachings and deeds, some Apologists present the love and support practised specifically among the Christians themselves.[14]

Aristides

In his description of the Christian love for one another, Aristides states:

> 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 (*Apol.* 15).[15]

This account reveals several distinct modes of support in the Christian community: supporting the poor, receiving missionaries and evangelists, burying the dead, looking after the condemned for Christ, ransoming the imprisoned, and feeding the hungry through social fasting.[16] Supporting the poor, especially widows and orphans, is a ministry of the utmost importance in the early church. It is a form of piety which the early church inherited from Judaism. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, caring for widows and orphans is of great concern

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[13] Translated by Grant (1970:121): παρ' οἷς σωφροσύνη πάρεστιν, ἐγκράτεια ἀσκεῖται, μονογαμία τηρεῖται, ἁγνεία φυλάσσεται, ἀδικία ἐκπορθεῖται, ἁμαρτία ἐκριζοῦται, δικαιοσύνη μελετᾶται, νόμος πολιτεύεται, θεοσέβεια πράσσεται, θεὸς ὁμολογεῖται, ἀλήθεια βραβεύει, χάρις συντηρεῖ, εἰρήνη περισκέπει, λόγος ἅγιος ὁδηγεῖ, σοφία διδάσκει, ζωὴ βραβεύει, θεὸς βασιλεύει.

[14] For a general discussion of Christian living in the second century, see Ferguson 1999:189-202.

[15] Translated from the Syriac by Kay 1994:277. For the transmission of the text, see Pedersen 2014:36-39.

[16] Rhee (2012:112-31) summarises five modes of Christian hospitality based on Aristides' description, which include 'entertaining missionaries and strangers', 'burying the dead', 'caring for confessors', 'ransoming prisoners and captives', and 'caring for the sick'. But she does not include the support of widows and orphans, and the social fasting in her discussion, although they are mentioned by Aristides.

to God and frequently mentioned by the prophets in the OT, and Jesus is often described as showing mercy to widows and the vulnerable in the NT. This is because, as mentioned in Chapter 2, in the ancient world the majority of people lived at or near subsistence level and could easily slide to below that level. Widows and orphans as socially helpless and needy were often deprived of all resources of maintenance, and for those who had converted to Christianity, the church was usually their only source of support. Therefore, supporting the poor, particularly widows and orphans, was out of both piety and necessity in the early church. In addition, the support and love for one another among the Christians not only strengthened the unity of the early church but may also have helped to achieve its missional goal if such support attracted people to the church. It should be noted, however, that supporting the poor was not done by the wealthy alone. As Aristides indicates, some of the Christians, because they did not have extra other than the necessities for themselves, would fast a few days in order to feed the hungry among them. Based on the teaching of Isaiah (58.3-12), the right kind of fasting goes beyond performing religious piety; it should involve social responsibilities and justice. The Christians in the early church apparently had followed this teaching faithfully (cf. Herm. Sim. 5.3.7).

Based on Aristides' description, the 'stranger' quoted above likely refers to a fellow Christian who is travelling as a missionary, an evangelist, or a messenger.[17] As the travelling Christians often 'carried and disseminated the gospel message', hospitality to them not only demonstrated Christians' care for one another but also built up the networks of house churches at different places in the early centuries.[18]

According to Rhee, in the ancient Roman world, providing a proper burial for one's family or community member was the greatest 'moral-religious duty (*pietas*)', yet with the

[17] Rhee 2012:113. Cf. Phoebe (Rom 16.1-2); Paul (Gal 4.14-15); Ignatius (*Magn.* 15; *Rom.* 10.1; *Phld.* 11.2); Philo and Rheus Agathopous (Ign. *Phld.* 11.1); and Crescens (Pol. *Phil.* 14).
[18] Rhee 2012:113.

'ever-increasing demand for burial space and its rising costs' in the second century (especially the second half of the century), those without means could not even afford proper burials for themselves.[19] Therefore, Rhee states, 'given the serious and sacred nature of burials, Christians made sure that the poorest members of their communities would be provided with suitable burials'.[20] Drawing on Tertullian (*Apol*. 39.5-6), she further suggests that Aristides' description of burying the poor indicates a collective operation of the church with its common chest contributed by each member of the Christian community according to his/her ability.[21] Such a collective effort, however, may not necessarily mean the existence of a common chest, as it could well be an *ad hoc* project undertaken in times of need (e.g., to bury the poor, or to ransom the imprisoned Christians). Moreover, although Tertullian explicitly mentions the existence of a common chest with burying the poor as one of its purposes, the situation of Tertullian's church in Carthage at the end of the second century (around 197 CE)[22] should not be assumed to be the case of the Christian community in Athens described by Aristides at the first quarter of the second century (around 125 CE).[23] Having said this, we should not exclude the possibility of the existence of a common fund in the church described by Aristides (see further below).

As mentioned earlier, some early Christians were imprisoned and even executed because of their faith, especially those who were viewed as carrying remarkable spiritual authority in the church (e.g., Ignatius, Polycarp, etc.). These Christians often had to rely on 'outside help for the basic necessities of life, such as food and clothing' due to the poor condition of the ancient prison.[24] It is therefore of great importance for the church to care for the imprisoned Christians and provide for their needs. Based on Lucian's contemptuous

[19] Rhee 2012:117.
[20] Rhee 2012:118.
[21] Rhee 2012:118.
[22] Willert 2014:159.
[23] Pedersen 2014:35.
[24] Rhee 2012:122.

description of the Christians' uncritical care of the charlatan Peregrinus in prison (*Peregr*. 12-13), Christians indeed took this ministry very seriously. According to Rhee, this ministry of hospitality was also extended to those on the road for their martyrdom and other Christians condemned to the mines and exile.[25] But whenever possible, the church would try to ransom the imprisoned and condemned Christians. This can be seen from the case of Ignatius who pleaded with the Roman Christians not to rescue him from martyrdom (Ign. *Rom.* 1.2; 2.1; 4.1; 6.2-3). Shepherd of Hermas also testifies to this practice of redeeming imprisoned Christians as an essential ministry, along with supporting widows, orphans, and the destitute (Mand. 8.10). Aristides' account may be an idealised picture of the early Christians for apologetic purposes, but it reflects the general ethos of the Christian community as a unique group in the Roman society, and the above distinct modes of support are representative in understanding the community life of the early church.

Justin

If Aristides' description of the Christian support of their poor and needy appears rather general, Justin and Tertullian provide a more detailed account in the context of regular Christian meetings. According to Justin, the Christians gathered together every Sunday,[26] and the meeting involved readings, exhortations, prayers, and the eucharist (*1 Apol*. 67.3-5). At the end of the meeting, offerings were collected for the common fund of the church (*1 Apol*. 67.6-7):

> οἱ εὐποροῦντες δὲ καὶ βουλόμενοι, κατὰ προαίρεσιν ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ, ὃ βούλεται δίδωσι, καὶ τὸ συλλεγόμενον παρὰ τῷ προεστῶτι ἀποτίθεται. καὶ ἀυτὸς ἐπικουρεῖ ὀρφανοῖς τε καὶ χήραις καὶ τοῖς διὰ νόσον ἢ δι' ἄλλην αἰτίαν λειπομένοις καὶ τοῖς ἐν δεσμοῖς οὖσι καὶ τοῖς παρεπιδήμοις οὖσι ξένοις, καὶ ἁπλῶς πᾶσι τοῖς ἐν χρείᾳ οὖσι κηδεμὼν γίνεται.[27]

[25] Rhee 2012:122-23.
[26] Based on Justin's description, the Christians (likely in Rome) should meet at different house churches nearby, for it is unlikely that those in the countryside could travel to the city of Rome every Sunday for worship. In addition, it is doubtful that the church in the second century was able to construct its own building big enough for all the Christians in a city. For a more detailed explanation, see Minns and Parvis 2009:259n3 and 261n6.
[27] Text and translation are from Minns and Parvis 2009:260-61.

> 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. 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.

According to Justin's description, the offertory of his congregation (mid-second century, probably in Rome)[28] exhibits several features. First, it was voluntary. Only those who were well-off and willing were encouraged to give, and 'each what he wishes according to his own choice'. Second, the president (ὁ προεστώς) was in charge of the collections (including money and possibly other resources as well, such as food and clothing). Whatever collected was deposited with him which he then distributed to those in need. As Justin indicates, 'he is the protector of all in general who are in need' (ἁπλῶς πᾶσι τοῖς ἐν χρείᾳ οὖσι κηδεμὼν γίνεται; 67.7). The collecting, depositing and distributing of the offertory by the president suggests the existence of a common fund in Justin's church. Third, the collection of the common fund was for the support of the poor and the needy. Those who benefited from this common fund included Christian widows, orphans, the sick, the imprisoned, and the sojourners among them.[29]

As discussed earlier, Aristides illustrates several distinct modes of support among Christians, including that for widows and orphans and care for imprisoned Christians. In light of Justin's statement, most of the ministries mentioned by Aristides were probably done with collective and corporate efforts, i.e., through a common fund (although without excluding individual support). This can be further supported by other early Christian texts (e.g., 1 Tim 5.9-16; Ign. *Pol*. 4.3; Pol. *Phil*. 11.1-4), which indicate the existence of common funds in the churches in the early second century. If this is right, that both Aristides and Justin are talking about a collective/common pot (as are the authors of 1 Timothy, Ignatius, and Polycarp in

[28] For the date and possible place of Justin's *1 Apology*, see Ulrich 2014b:52-53 and Grant 1988:53.
[29] The sojourners were possibly Christians who travelled or relocated to Rome from other places.

other contexts), this is important, cumulative, evidence that churches in the early/mid second century were adopting a structure of a common pot (administered by bishops or equivalent?).

Although Aristides does not mention care for the sick, Rhee nevertheless includes it in the five distinct modes of Christian hospitality based on Aristides' description and highlights the significant role this ministry played in manifesting Christian hospitality, especially during the period of epidemic and plague in the third century (e.g., Pontius, *Vit. Cypr.* 9-10). Based on Justin's account, caring for the sick was indeed part of the essential ministry of the early church, together with the support of widows and orphans. Caring for the sojourners has an equally long history with supporting widows and orphans and is rooted in God's teaching to the Hebrews related to their own experience as sojourners in Egypt. The exhortation of showing kindness and mercy to sojourners is emphasised again by Theophilus in his apology (*Autol.* III.10). It is therefore not surprising that the common fund in Justin's church was also used for the care of sojourners among them.

Tertullian

Tertullian's account of Christian care for their needy in Carthage at the end of the second century reveals noticeable similarities with that of Justin. The meetings in Tertullian's church similarly included prayers, scripture readings, exhortations and admonitions, although Tertullian presents a more detailed report about their prayers (e.g., for emperors and their ministers, those in authority, the security and peace in the world, etc.; *Apol*. 39.2). Tertullian also mentions a common chest (*arcae genus*) with monthly collection (39.5-6):

> *Etiam si quod arcae genus est, non de honoraria summa quasi redemptae religionis congregatur. Modicam unusquisque stipem menstrua die, vel cum velit, et si modo velit, et si modo possit, apponit ; nam nemo compellitur, sed sponte confert. Haec quasi deposita pietatis sunt. Nam inde non epulis nec potaculis nec ingratis voratrinis dispensatur, sed egenis alendis humandisque et pueris ac puellis re ac parentibus destitutis, iamque domesticis senibus, item naufragis, et si qui in metallis, et si qui in insulis vel in custodiis, dumtaxat ex causa dei sectae, alumni confessionis suae fiunt*.[30]

[30] Text and translation are from Glover 1931:174-77.

> Even if there is a chest of a sort, it is not made up of money paid in entrance-fees, as if religion were a matter of a contract. 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[31] and shipwrecked mariners; and any who may be in mines, islands or prisons, provided that it is for the sake of God's school, become the pensioners of their confession.

Similar to Justin's description, the common chest in Tertullian's church was also a voluntary offering based on one's willingness and ability to give (*Apol*. 39.5). Tertullian appears to purposely distinguish the Christian community from non-Christian associations when he stresses the voluntary nature of Christian giving, contrasting it with the mandatory membership fees of non-Christian associations (39.5). Tertullian further emphasises that, unlike the non-Christians who spent their communal fund on banquets (*epulis*), drinking-parties (*potaculis*), and thankless eating-houses (*ingratis voratrinis*), the Christians used their common chest to help the poor (39.6). Likewise, the Christian common meal was not extravagant but modest, for the sake of fellowship and with the purpose of helping the needy (to satisfy their hunger with basic sustenance). Therefore, the common meal of the Christians was called *agape* and conducted with piety and modesty (39.16-19).[32] In general, the common chest was used to provide for the poor, bury the dead, help the orphans,[33] support the house-bound aged, assist the shipwrecked, and minister to those banished in mines, exiled to islands, or imprisoned (39.6).

Compared with Aristides and Justin, Tertullian additionally mentions the shipwrecked among the beneficiaries. According to Richardson, they may refer to maritime traders 'who had lost their livelihood at sea' since 'Carthage was a prosperous port city in the western

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[31] The Latin text (*domesticis senibus*) seems to support the broader translation of 'the house-bound aged', however. See Thelwall (1994:46) who translates this phrase as 'old persons confined now to the house'.
[32] For a discussion of the love feast of Christians (*agape*), see Ferguson 1999:125-32.
[33] Richardson (2018:151) suggests that Tertullian 'could also have in mind exposed children who were claimed and raised by the Christian community'.

Mediterranean'.[34] He further points out that 'though in some cases these merchants were relatively affluent, they might experience need as a result of unfortunate catastrophic circumstances'.[35] Based on Justin's and Tertullian's descriptions of Christians' support of the poor, Richardson observes three characteristics: first, need is the primary and basic criterion for determining whether a person is worthy of receiving support from the common fund, as reflected by the circumstances of the beneficiaries who were generally poor, vulnerable, or needy. Second, 'it is the wealthy who take the leading role in the Christians' charitable giving'.[36] This position of Richardson is not entirely plausible, however. He draws on the MS 67.1 (Ἡμεῖς δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα λοιπὸν ἀεὶ τούτων ἀλλήλους ἀναμιμνήσκομεν: καὶ οἱ ἔχοντες τοῖς λειπομένοις πᾶσιν ἐπικουροῦμεν, καὶ σύνεσμεν ἀλλήλοις ἀεί)[37] to argue for the support of the needy by the wealthy. However, Minns and Parvis point out a number of difficulties presented by this text and suggest that 'extraneous material has been incorporated into the text at this point', based on which they accept only 'Ἡμεῖς δὲ' as the original.[38] In addition, although Justin specifically mentions the wealthy (οἱ εὐποροῦντες; *1 Apol*. 67.6) in contributing to the common fund, it does not necessarily mean that only the wealthy give or that the wealthy take the leading role in giving, as Justin indicates that the offertory is voluntary and based on one's willingness (*1 Apol*. 67.6). In fact, the text of Shepherd of Hermas (e.g., Vis. 3.9.3-4; Sim. 9.20.1-2), which was written at roughly the same time as Justin, suggests that the wealthy are often reluctant to share their wealth with the needy and so let their fellow Christians down. Moreover, Tertullian does not mention the wealthy at all in terms of giving but emphasises that the voluntary (monthly) offering of each person is

[34] Richardson 2018:151.
[35] Richardson 2018:151.
[36] Richardson 2018:148.
[37] Richardson 2018:147n18. Minns and Parvis (2009:259n2) translate as: '(But) after these things, for the rest, we remind one another of these things always, and those who have things give assistance to all those who are in need, and we are together with one another always'.
[38] For their detailed analysis, see Minns and Parvis 2009:259n2.

modest and little (*modicam*; *Apol*. 39.5), which suggests that the giver might not be wealthy (although this does not exclude the wealthy among the givers). It is thus possible that the poor, while receiving support in times of need, also contribute to the common chest when they are able to. In this way, they do not become a burden to the church but provide mutual support to each other. Having said the above, even the relatively wealthy among the givers are not necessarily from the elite class, as Richardson explains, 'the expanding Roman economy of this period created an upwardly mobile segment of the population, which was not only personally secure against food shortage but also had a level of surplus income that could be used for discretionary spending'.[39] Among these people there might be 'freedmen, successful peasant farmers, affluent artisans, merchants, and perhaps even Roman soldiers and centurions'.[40]

Third, the common fund of the church was primarily for the support of its own needy members rather than the poor in the society as a whole. This does not mean that the Christians had no concern about the difficult situation of the non-Christian poor in the Roman society (cf. Pontius, *Vit. Cypr*. 9-10), rather, as Richardson indicates, 'it is to acknowledge the very personal, face-to-face form in which generosity typically occurred in antiquity'.[41] And as mentioned earlier, the Christians' indiscriminate care for the poor and love for others (even their enemies) actually kept the networks open and played a significant role in the increase of the Christian number. Nevertheless, it should be noted that although both Justin (*1 Apol*. 14.2) and Tertullian (*Apol*. 39.11) highlight the holding of everything in common, including the sharing of property, among Christians, to the extent Tertullian claims that 'all is common among us – except our wives' (*omnia indiscreta sunt apud nos praeter uxores*; *Apol*. 39.11), this should not be taken literally. One reason is that both Justin and Tertullian

[39] Richardson 2018:149.
[40] Richardson 2018:138.
[41] Richardson 2018:150.

indicate in other places of the texts that nobody is compelled to give but every offering is given voluntarily. Moreover, the immediate contexts suggest that they might have purposely said so for apologetic reasons: Justin seeks to highlight the tremendous transformation after a person converted to the Christian faith (cf. 1 *Apol*. 65-66), while Tertullian endeavours to contrast the true brotherly love among Christians with the feigned affection among non-Christian brothers (who quarrelled over family possessions; *Apol*. 39.7-10) and to compare the moral superiority of Christians with the promiscuous behaviour of non-Christians (who shared and exchanged with their friends their own wives; *Apol*. 39.12-13).

Based on the above observations, Richardson proposes that Christian care for the poor in the second century resembled 'the traditional subsistence strategies of rural communities' in which the relatively wealthy patrons provided for other needy members in the village during times of crisis or food shortage.[42] But as discussed earlier, the descriptions of Justin and Tertullian seem to indicate more the collaborative effort of the whole community rather than the patronage of the wealthy in supporting the needy members among them. This kind of generous and mutual love among Christians could be attributed to their belief in eschatological divine judgement which enforced a religious obligation on every Christian,[43] and their use of sibling language which indicated a fictive kinship relationship among them.[44] According to Tertullian, the Christians did not simply address but truly treated each other as 'brothers' (*Apol*. 39.8-9). For Tertullian, the Christian 'brotherhood' created a fraternal bond among Christians which was stronger than that of non-Christian blood kin, for while natural siblings among non-Christians fought over family possessions, the Christians shared their property with those in need (*Apol*. 39.10-11).[45] This fictive kinship relationship among Christians is emphasised by Aristides (*Apol*. 15), Minucius Felix (*Oct.* 31.8), and

[42] Richardson 2018:145-54.
[43] Ferguson 1999:196.
[44] For a discussion of the early church as a fictive family, see Hellerman 2001.
[45] See Hellerman 2001:180-82; Richardson 2018:153.

Athenagoras (*Leg*. 32.5) as well. Athenagoras further extends the sibling language of 'brother' to the familial language of 'sons and daughters', 'brothers and sisters', and 'fathers and mothers'. Therefore, the assumption of fictive kinship among Christians not only created strong familial bonds in their community but also, together with their belief in eschatological divine judgement, 'enabled them to practice a generalized form of reciprocity in which a return, though expected for an act of generosity, could be delayed and different in kind'.[46] In this way, the early church provided an alternative subsistence system for those who otherwise had no means of maintenance.

4. The support of widows and their contributions

Because of their apologetic purposes, the Apologists mainly focus on responding to the charges against Christians, namely, atheism, disloyalty, and ethical misconduct (mainly about sexual promiscuity, incest, and cannibalism, in relation to Christian meetings and rituals), hence there is not much discussion particularly on widows in the apologetic literature. Nevertheless, the Apologists' description of Christian care for the poor in general should also apply to the support of widows. Besides, Aristides mentions specifically the Christians' concern about widows among them (*Apol*. 15), and Justin even more explicitly stresses widows as among the beneficiaries of the Christian common fund (*1 Apol*. 67.7). Furthermore, among all the categories of the beneficiaries, widows and orphans are put in the first place. Although Tertullian does not mention widows specifically when he describes Christian care for the poor, widows were not therefore excluded among the recipients of support in Tertullian's church. They were probably among the poor who were supported and even buried (after death) by the church. They might be also among the aged who were house-bound due to illness or other reasons. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 5 (section 5.2), the

[46] Richardson 2018:153.

'order' of widows in Tertullian's church also provided material support to the widows, and widowers were encouraged to take (poor) widows as their 'spiritual wives' so as to reduce the church's burden of supporting them. Thus, as representatives of the poor, widows certainly received support from the common fund and the common meal in the early church and, as might be expected, also from relatively wealthy individuals or even those who did not have extra but gave through fasting.

Although in most cases widows in the early church appeared as the major recipients of support, they also played a significant role in the service of the church through hospitable and charitable works. As described in 1 Timothy 5.9-10 and other early Christian literature (e.g., Acts of Paul 27, 41), widows were involved in hospitable works such as receiving traveling Christians for missional or evangelistic purposes, caring for those who were imprisoned or afflicted because of their Christian confession, and looking after the sick, etc. In addition, Lucian describes in *The Passing of Peregrinus*[47] that when Peregrinus was in prison, 'from the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison' (ἔωθεν μὲν εὐθὺς ἦν ὁρᾶν παρὰ τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ περιμένοντα γρᾴδια χήρας τινὰς καὶ παιδία ὀρφανά; *Peregr*. 12) and 'then elaborate meals were brought in' (εἶτα δεῖπνα ποικίλα εἰσεκομίζετο; *Peregr*. 12). He further highlights that 'people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the hero (Peregrinus)' (κἀκ τῶν ἐν Ἀσίᾳ πόλεων ἔστιν ὧν ἦκόν τινες, τῶν Χριστιανῶν στελλόντων ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ, βοηθήσοντες καὶ συναγορεύσοντες καὶ παραμυθησόμενοι τὸν ἄνδρα; *Peregr*. 13). Lucian's portrayal suggests that the aged widows were involved in providing care and nourishment for Peregrinus during his imprisonment, and they probably did this at the church's common expense (i.e., drawing on the church's common chest). The reason is that when widows and orphans are mentioned together, it is

[47] For its Greek text and English translation, see Harmon 1936:1-51 (LCL 302).

usually an indication of their vulnerability and need of support, and the particular highlight of the widows as 'aged' (γρᾴδια) even further suggests the possibility of them taking support from the church. Moreover, Lucian's later explicit mention of the Christian κοινόν (*Peregr*. 13) indicates the possible existence of common funds among the churches in Asia, at least in or around the mid-second century.[48] Therefore, in light of other early Christian literature and even the non-Christian Lucian's account, there were probably widows who served in the hospitable ministries described by Aristides (*Apol*. 15), although some of them might do so at the church's common expense. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that every widow was poor and destitute. As discussed in Chapter 5, Tertullian appears to address the wealthy women/widows of his church in *To His Wife*. Moreover, both the NT and other early Christian literature reveal that there were (relatively) wealthy widows in the early church (e.g., Tabitha in Acts 9.36-42; Queen Tryphaena in Acts of Paul 27, 41), who offered hospitality and charity to their fellow Christians. According to Rhee, 'the origins of some of the major Roman catacombs are associated with women, who were most likely owners and/or donors of the burial grounds, mausolea, or columbaria at some point in the process: Domitilla, Priscilla, Commodilla, Lucina, and Balbina'.[49] It is not impossible that there were such wealthy widows in Aristides' and Tertullian's communities who helped bury their deceased members by providing burial spaces, since both Aristides and Tertullian highlight burying the dead as an essential ministry in their communities. Having said the above, even widows without extra to give could still provide the necessity of food for the hungry through fasting. And at the very least, a widow could serve the community with prayer and intercession. Therefore, although the Apologists do not mention much about widows, the latter are presumably included in the recipients of support from the church, and some

[48] Harmon (1936:1) states that Peregrinus died in 165 CE, and it was in his early life that he converted to Christianity and practised it 'to the point of imprisonment'.
[49] Rhee 2012:134. See also Osiek 2008:246-57.

widows, especially those who are wealthy, were likely expected to contribute, and would have contributed, to the church in various ways.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the Apologists' responses to the various charges against Christians in the second-century Roman world. In response to the charge of atheism on account of Christians' rejection of worshipping Graeco-Roman gods, the Apologists explained that they were not gods but deified humans or evil demons, and their images were handicrafts. But the God whom the Christians worshipped was the only true God and therefore the Christians were not atheists but monotheists. With regard to the charge of disloyalty to the emperor and the state, the Apologists emphasised their prayers for the emperor and the Roman Empire and highlighted their payment of taxes to demonstrate their loyalty. Regarding the charge of ethical misconduct, particularly of sexual promiscuity, incest, and cannibalism, the Apologists refuted this charge based on the lack of evidence and the Christians' belief in eschatological divine judgement. And they further displayed the immoral and criminal behaviour of the non-Christians and argued that it was they who did those things of which they accused the Christians. To demonstrate the moral and ethical superiority of the Christians, the Apologists then illustrated the contrasting teachings and deeds of Christians that manifested their piety, purity, justice, kindness, generosity, and even love of enemies.

Among all the good deeds of Christians, the most impressive was their love for one another, especially their care and support for the poor and needy. This is most manifest in the accounts of Aristides (*Apol*. 15), Justin (*1 Apol*. 67) and Tertullian (*Apol*. 39). Despite the probable idealisations in these portrayals, the ways they match what we have found in other Christian (and non-Christian) evidence suggests that there is at least a degree of truth in the

claim that the early church created an alternative subsistence system with different survival strategies for those who otherwise had no source of maintenance. The success of this system in the early church to a great extent can be attributed to the fictive kinship relationship among the Christians and their belief in eschatological divine judgement, which enabled them to support their poor through both individual generosity and the collective charity of church funds and common meals. Although in this maintenance system widows were only mentioned as recipients of support, the apologetic texts suggest that they also contributed to the community in various ways, including hospitality (e.g., receiving travelling Christians, caring for prisoners, looking after the sick, etc.), charity (e.g., supporting the more needy), and spirituality (e.g., praying and interceding for others).

Chapter 7

Conclusion

1. Summary

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this thesis seeks to explore mainly three questions concerning widows in the early church: (1) what was their social-economic situation? (2) How were they supported? And (3) what contributions did they make to the church? To answer these questions, this thesis first examined the general social-economic situation of widows and their means of support in the Roman world (Chapter 2) and in ancient Judaism (Chapter 3). This set up a historical and cultural background for the subsequent study of widows (Chapters 4-6) as described in early Christian literature mainly of the first two centuries (i.e., from the NT to the works of Tertullian, with the exception of ATh).

The survey of Roman widows' social-economic situation in Chapter 2 shows that although there were wealthy widows in the Roman world who were financially independent and had authority over their households, the majority of widows were needy and vulnerable. In order to survive, they adopted different strategies among which the most common was remarriage. For those who could not remarry, the younger ones had to look for gainful employment, whereas the older ones had to rely on their children (if any) for support. But for those who had neither source of support nor strength to work (e.g., old and sick childless widows), their situation was extremely miserable.

The examination of widows in ancient Judaism in Chapter 3 reveals the Jewish community's awareness of the poverty and vulnerability of the disadvantaged people among them and their concern about the welfare of such people, particularly widows, orphans, and strangers. Although wealthy widows are occasionally mentioned in some ancient Jewish texts, the majority of widows are described as poor and vulnerable. For their support, the

Israelites established various mechanisms (e.g., levirate marriage, harvest gleanings, triennial tithes, the sabbatical year, communal celebration of festivals, loans and pledges) which concerned not only food provision and recovery of family support but also social inclusion in community events and preservation of dignity. Although these mechanisms were not universally practised among the ancient Israelites/Jewish people, which resulted in widows needing to seek help from outside the mechanisms, the ethos of helping the poor at both communal and individual levels in ancient Judaism played a significant role in the early Christian community for their care of the poor.

Chapters 4-6 focus on the description of widows in different genres of early Christian texts. Chapter 4 discusses the social-economic situation of widows in the narrative texts, particularly Luke-Acts, APt, and ATh. The discussion yields several interesting patterns: (1) widows are generally described as poor and vulnerable in the narrative texts; (2) widows are supported mainly through three means of support – family support (from their children or other relatives), individual support (from benefactors or patrons), and collective support (from the church); and (3) widows, whether poor or rich, also make various contributions to the church, especially in the forms of prayer and intercession, hospitality, and charitable works.

Chapter 5 focuses on widows described in the instruction texts, specifically 1 Timothy 5.3-16, Shepherd of Hermas, the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp, and the treatises of Tertullian. These texts reflect the distinct features of different Christian communities in the second century. Concerning the collective support of widows, these texts reveal various problems that arise in the process of collecting and distributing resources: Shepherd of Hermas indicates that not every well-to-do Christian is willing to donate money to the church's common pool; the case of Valens (Pol. *Phil*. 11.1; cf. Herm. Sim. 9.26.2) implies the huge temptation of appropriating church money by church leaders who have access to/control

of the common funds; and the criticism of the younger widows in 1 Timothy 5.11-15 suggests the recipients' possible abuse of church support. Regarding the heavy financial burden of the church, the author of 1 Timothy seeks to restrict the number of widows who could receive support from the church by setting strict criteria. Tertullian urges the wealthy widows in his church to remain in widowhood so that they would not give their money (i.e., dowry) to their new husbands but would give it to the church. But he encourages the widowers in his church to take poor and aged widows as their spiritual wives (*Exh. cast.* 12.2), presumably to reduce the church's financial burden. Besides the support of widows, the phenomenon of 'virgin widows' is also mentioned, of which Ignatius (*Smyrn.* 13.1) and Tertullian (*Virg.* 9.5-6) hold completely opposite views. And the purity of widows is emphasised by both Polycarp (*Phil.* 4.3) and Tertullian (*Ux.* 1.7.4) who associate them with God's altar. Tertullian also explicitly mentions the widows' 'order' and their honourable status in the church (*Virg.* 9.5-6). Some of his references to widows (although admittedly rare) indicate not only their participation in church ministry but also their liturgical importance on certain occasions.

Chapter 6 studies the description of widows in the apologetic texts, especially the apologies of Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian. The apologetic nature of these texts suggests that their main purpose is to respond to various accusations against Christians, such as atheism, disloyalty (to the emperor and the state), and immoral living. Consequently, widows receive less attention than in the narrative and the instruction texts. Nevertheless, in order to underscore the moral superiority of Christians, the apologists describe in detail the community life of Christians and their love for one another, especially their care and support for the poor and needy. Justin (*1 Apol.* 67.6-7) and Tertullian (*Apol.* 39.5-6) particularly report the regular collection of church funds for the support of widows and other needy people.

2. Critical analysis of the sources

This thesis has so far examined the description of widows in different genres of early Christian texts, and these texts have been treated mainly as literary works rather than historical documents. Thus the thesis has been careful in not drawing any absolute historical conclusions based on these texts. The reason is that each genre of these texts has its problems as historical evidence. The narrative texts may be fictional, idealised or exaggerated. For example, the communal life of the Jerusalem church described in Acts 2.44-45 and 4.32-35 is likely an idealised portrayal, as suggested by the immediate context (e.g., Acts 5.4) and Paul's raising of funds for the Jerusalem church (cf. Rom 15.25-27). And the description in the Apocryphal Acts is, as Aune suggests, probably a combination of oral traditions and creative imagination,[1] which implies the existence of fictional elements in these texts. The instruction texts may be partial, ambiguous and not transparent. This is because these texts are usually written in response to specific issues within particular contexts which are familiar to the audience. Hence in most cases the author simply gives instructions without providing any explanation, which makes the text ambiguous and difficult to understand. The obvious examples are scholars' different interpretations of 1 Timothy 5.3-16 (e.g., are the instructions about widows' support or office?) and the case of Valens in Polycarp's *To the Philippians* 11.1 (e.g., what did Valens do exactly?). The apologetic texts may be polemical, exaggerated or idealised. This is suggested mostly by the purpose of these texts, i.e., to respond to the accusations against Christians (although without excluding other possible purposes such as to strengthen the faith of some members among them and to spread the gospel to non-Christians). Thus in order to show the credibility and even superiority of Christianity, the apologists often use polemical language and portray an idealised picture of Christians, as

[1] Aune 1987:142.

indicated by their criticism of non-Christians and their description of the communal life of Christians (e.g., Aristides, *Apol*. 15).

Each genre of the texts also has its historical value, however. The narrative texts have quantities of materials, provide a context and space for interpretation, and display some common patterns. For example, Luke-Acts and the Apocryphal Acts display similar patterns concerning the social-economic situation of widows, their main sources of support, and the positive role they play in the church. The instruction texts are practical and straightforward, rich in variety, and reflect real life situations, for their authors usually give clear and direct instructions in the text about what the audience should do and what they should not. Even in Shepherd of Hermas which contains visions and parables, the author explains them and thus makes his instructions understandable and practical to the audience. The apologetic texts can reflect a general historical situation and confirm the conclusions from the narrative and instruction texts. For instance, Justin's and Tertullian's detailed descriptions of the regular collection of money for the support of the poor confirm the existence of common funds at different churches in the second century. Therefore, despite the weaknesses of each genre of these texts, if they all point to similar conclusions or patterns concerning early Christian widows, it is plausible to draw some historical conclusions when all the different genres of texts are put together.

3. Possible historical conclusions

This section will suggest some plausible historical conclusions by combining the evidence of the literary sources concerning the three questions in relation to early Christian widows, i.e., their social-economic situation, their means of support, and their contributions to the church. Where we find our sources from different genres in agreement in their depiction of early Christianity, we may be on relatively firm historical ground. If, despite

their differences in genre, they portray similar scenarios regarding widows, it seems reasonable to presume that, at least in general terms, such text may reflect historical reality. Even here many of our conclusions will have to remain tentative, but it does seem possible, on these grounds, to press beyond the literary representations we find in our texts to a general pattern of historical truth, even if many of the details in our text remain uncertain historically in their particulars, and some clearly fictional.

The social-economic situation of widows

Regarding the social-economic situation of widows in the early church, all the three genres of texts indicate that the majority of them were poor and vulnerable, not only economically but also socially and legally. Their economic poverty is most evidently reflected by the example of the poor widow in Luke 21.1-4 (cf. Mark 12.41-44), the destitute situation of some widows mentioned in 1 Timothy 5.5, and the severe suffering of the poor (among whom there were probably widows) described by Hermas (Vis. 3.9.3; Sim. 10.4.2-3). And the repeated emphases on the support of widows in all the three genres of texts additionally indicate their need of provision and protection. The economic poverty of Christian widows described in early Christian literature is in line with the situation of the Roman and the Jewish widows discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In a patriarchal society, whether the Roman Empire or ancient Israel, the loss of husband was disastrous to most women, especially if they had underage child/ren. Although in the Roman world a widow could recover her dowry after the death of her husband, and the husband could additionally leave her a legacy in his will for the interest of their child/ren, the dowry and the legacy usually could not sustain the widow and her child/ren long-term. And the gender-specific division of labour in the society made it difficult for women to find sufficiently well paid employment. The situation of widows in ancient Israel was even worse, as especially indicated by the frequent reference to the triad of strangers, widows, and orphans – the

representative of the most needy and vulnerable people in ancient Jewish society. Therefore, the majority of widows in the ancient world, including Christian widows, lived in poverty and were in need of financial/material support.

Although the early Christian authors focused mostly on the economic poverty of widows, they also occasionally presented the legal and social vulnerabilities of widows. For example, the parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18.2-5) – likely recognisable to the audience – probably reflects the legal vulnerability of widows in reality, especially in light of what is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2 we learned that a Roman woman could never be the legal representative of her household (only a male could play this role), which greatly limited her legal rights in the court. She did not even have legal authority over her children, which means an elderly widow could not use legal force to ensure her support from her children. And in a marriage *sine manu* (the norm in the Roman Empire), the wife ranked the lowest in the order of succession if her husband died without making a testamentary provision. The situation of a Jewish woman was even worse, since she had no legal rights of her own (she was under the protection of her father before marriage and of her husband thereafter) nor could she inherit the property of her husband (cf. Num 27.8-11). Thus, widows in antiquity were extremely vulnerable without the protection of their husbands since they had few or no legal rights of their own.

The lack of legal protection for widows in the early church further led to their social vulnerability, as especially indicated by Luke's description of the scribes' 'devouring' of widows' houses (Luke 20.47; cf. Mark 12.40). This social vulnerability of early Christian widows is in alignment with the situation of the Roman and the Jewish widows discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. As discussed in Chapter 2, Roman widows were frequently afflicted by tax collectors and public officials, fell victim to thieves and robbers, and suffered from sexual exploitation and violence. Widows in ancient Israel were even more vulnerable, as indicated

by the example of a widow who asked for help from Elisha because a creditor had come to take her two children as slaves (4 Kgdms 4.1-7) and by the story of another widow whose in-laws sought to kill her remaining son – the heir of her husband – 'in order to' take away what was now her only source of maintenance (2 Kgdms 14.4-7). Therefore, the social-economic situation of early Christian widows was similar to that of Roman and Jewish widows, the majority of whom lived in poverty and vulnerability, whether economically, legally, or socially.

Having said the above, it does not mean that all widows in the early church were poor; there were also wealthy widows. For example, Tertullian's target audience were obviously wealthy Christian women/widows. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, if a woman had wealthy parents (especially if she was the only child; e.g., Babatha) or husband (e.g., Judith), it was possible for her to accumulate considerable wealth through inheritance, dowry, or legacy. Interestingly, it appears that wealthy widows were often not labelled as 'widows' in early Christian writings but referred to by their names although their portrayal in the literature strongly suggests that they were widows, such as Mary mother of John Mark (Acts 12), Lydia (Acts 16), Eubola (APt 17), and the senator Nicostratus' mother (APt 28-29). In these cases it is often their financial contributions or patronage to the church and its needy members that are emphasised; whereas when a woman is referred to as a widow, it is usually her poverty and vulnerability and thus her need of provision and protection that are stressed. This indicates again that most widows in the early church were poor and in need of support.

The support of widows

The discussions of all the three genres of early Christian texts combine to suggest that there were mainly three means of support for widows in the early church – family support, individual support, and collective support – which, however, were not mutually exclusive but might in some cases be complementary. The fact that all three genres of text point in the same

direction at this point is strong evidence that these three were the main means of survival for early Christian widows. There were different forms of family support: while young widows could remarry and thus be supported by their new husbands (cf. 1 Tim 5.14), elderly widows mainly relied on their children (if any) for maintenance. The early Christian works provide plenty of examples about the support of widows by their children, such as the widow at Nain whose only son was restored to life by Jesus (Luke 7.11-17), Peter's mother-in-law whose fever was healed by Jesus at Peter's house (Luke 4.38-39; cf. Mark 1.29-31; Matt 8.14-15), the blind widow who was led by her daughter to Marcellus' home (APt 20), and the aged widow whose only son was raised from death by Peter (APt 25, 27). In fact, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, children's support of their elderly parents was a standard expectation in antiquity, whether in the Roman world or in ancient Israel. In addition, the Jewish scriptural tradition contained regulations which, whether still practised or not in the first century, predisposed Christians to look to the family as the primary means of support for widows. For instance, the establishment of levirate marriage in ancient Israelite society (Deut 25.5-6) not only reintegrated a childless widow into her deceased husband's family and restored her family support with a new husband, but also granted her the possibility of children – the security of her old age (e.g., Gen 38; Ruth 4.13-17). Apart from the levirate marriage, some young childless widows could return to their parents' home and be supported there (before remarrying), such as the daughter of a priest (Lev 22.13), Orpah (Ruth 1.8-14), and, as a historical example, Glaphyra (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.114-15; *Ant.* 17.350). Thus, similar to the Roman and the Jewish widows, the primary means of support for widows in the early church was family support which was mainly from their children (or grandchildren; cf. 1 Tim 5.4), their new husband (through remarriage), or their parents (or other relatives; cf. 1 Tim 5.8). This mode of support not only integrated widows into networks of their family members and the larger society but was also the most sustainable means of support for them.

As discussed in Chapter 2, however, many widows could not remarry nor had children or other relatives to provide for them. These widows had to seek help from others who were able and willing to help them, such as friends, benefactors, or patrons. The stories of Tabitha (Acts 9.36-43), Marcellus (APt 8, 19-21, 25), Eubola (APt 17), King Gundaphorus and his brother Gad (ATh 26) all reflect the support of widows by non-kin individuals who were rich. Both Hermas (e.g., Mand. 1.8; Sim. 1.8; 2.5-10) and the author of 1 Timothy (e.g., 5.16) instructed affluent Christians to help widows and the poor; even those who did not have surplus resources were encouraged to fast and give the money to widows (Sim. 5.3.7). Aristides additionally described Christians' love for one another, including support of widows (*Apol*. 15). The emphases on support of widows by individual Christians in all the three genres of texts indicate again the poverty of widows and the importance of supporting them. The individual support of widows was also encouraged and practised in ancient Israel, as indicated by the legislation of harvest gleanings (Deut 24.19-22) and the sabbatical year (Exod 23.10-11), the regulations on loans and pledges (Deut 24.17), and Job's patronage of widows (e.g., Job 29.12-13; 31.16-23; T. Job 9.2-5; 10.1-4; 53.2-8). This mode of support not only supplied the need of widows who had little or no family support, but also tied rich Christians to the church and thus strengthened its unity. However, individual support was also very fragile and unstable, as it basically depended on the benefactor who might change his/her mind anytime and cut off his/her support for the widows (e.g., Marcellus; APt 8). And as shown by Hermas, some wealthier believers drifted away from the Christian community, perhaps partly due to the great financial cost of helping the poor in the church.

In order to ensure widows' provision, the early church developed collective support for them through common funds. The best examples of church support for widows are Acts 6.1-7 and 1 Timothy 5.3-16. Although these two passages are very controversial among scholars, our discussions in Chapters 4 and 5 have shown that Acts 6.1-7 is neither about the

deprivation of the Hellenist widows' honourable female role of serving at the communal meals (a view proposed by Finger; see Chapter 1, section 2.2; Chapter 4, section 2.2), nor about the restriction or rejection of widows' ministry function such as preaching or organising in the Jerusalem church (an interpretation presented by Back; see Chapter 1, section 2.1). Nor does 1 Timothy 5.3-16 deal with a widows' office/order – a position held by Thurston and many other scholars (see Chapter 1, section 2; Chapter 5, section 2). Instead, both passages concern the church's support for widows and seek to solve the problems that arise in the process. In addition, Justin (*1 Apol*. 67.6) and Tertullian (*Apol*. 39.5-6) clearly mentioned the existence of common funds in their churches and described in detail the regular collection and distribution of money to widows and other needy Christians. This ethos of caring for the poor (especially widows, orphans, and strangers) with collective effort, was emphasised repeatedly in ancient Judaism, for which the Israelites established regulations on the tithes (Deut 14.28-29; 26.12-13) and the celebration of festivals (Deut 16.9-12, 13-15). Compared with individual support, the collective support for widows was more resilient and stable since it was the collaborative effort of the whole church through pooling of resources. Meanwhile, this type of support required the church to have good organisation with trustworthy leaders so that the collected resources were not abused.

The contributions of widows to the church

The different genres of early Christian texts additionally reveal that apart from receiving support, the widows also made contributions to the church in various forms, especially concerning their spirituality, generosity, hospitality, charity, and purity. Their spirituality was demonstrated by their powerful and passionate prayer and intercession (e.g., Luke 2.36-38; Acts Pet. 19, 22; 1 Tim 5.5; Herm. Sim. 2.5-6; Pol. *Phil*. 4.3). Their generosity was manifested by the examples of the poor widow who donated all she had to live on to the temple (Luke 21.1-4; cf. Mark 12.41-44), of Eubola who renounced this world and gave up

all her recovered property for the service of the poor (APt 17), and of the senator Nicostratus' mother who brought a huge amount of money to Peter for distribution among the widows after her son Nicostratus was restored to life by Peter (APt 28-29). And the actions of the poor widow and Eubola also revealed their complete commitment to God. The hospitality of widows was well displayed by Peter's mother-in-law who started to serve Jesus and others immediately after she was healed from a high fever (Luke 4.38-39) and by Lydia who received Paul and other Christians enthusiastically (Acts 16.11-15). In addition, 1 Timothy 5.10 indicates not only the widows' hospitality (i.e., receiving travelling Christians) but also their other good works, including possibly nursing orphans, visiting prisoners (cf. Lucian, *Peregr*. 12), and looking after the sick.

As mentioned earlier, there were also wealthy widows in the early church. Some of them, such as Tabitha (Acts 9.36-42), Eubola (APt 17), and the senator Nicostratus' mother (APt 28-29), provided for other widows who were needy. Some, such as Lydia (Acts 16.40) and Mary mother of John Mark (Acts 12.12-17), even became patronesses to the church by opening up their own houses for Christian worship services and gatherings. In a marginal movement like early Christianity (cf. the accusations against Christians illustrated by the Apologists), which few would be willing to patronise (cf. the rich believers criticised by Hermas), the wealthier widows took on special social significance since they had more agency than married women, in that they did not need the permission or agreement of a man to do what they wanted with their resources. The examples of Lydia and Mary mother of John Mark evidently demonstrate the prominent role these widows played in the establishment and the development of the early church. And the prevalent economic concerns in Tertullian's *To His Wife* betrayed his real intention of prohibiting widows' remarriage: he wanted them to give their dowries to God via the church rather than to their new husbands, for, as discussed in Chapter 5 (section 5.1), Tertullian's target audience were wealthy

Christian women/widows. In order to prevent their money from being pulled out of the church's funds, he even contradicted the biblical text which he relied on heavily (i.e., 1 Tim 5.3-16).[2] Thus, Tertullian's *To His Wife* reveals again the significant role the wealthier widows played in the early church.

Apart from the above contributions, the widows also represented the peak of Christian purity and commitment through their celibate life, because of which they were referred to as the 'altar' of God (e.g., Pol. *Phil*. 4.3; Ux. 1.7.4) and the 'virgins' of Christ (APt 22, 29). The particular status of widows in the early church was additionally indicated by the establishment of the widows' 'order', which Tertullian explicitly and repeatedly mentioned in his works (e.g., *Ux*. 1.7.4; *Virg*. 9.5-6; *Exh*. *cast*. 13.4). Widows in the 'order' not only enjoyed honourable and prestigious status in the church, as indicated by their special seating (e.g., *Virg*. 9.5-6), but also participated in church ministry such as pastoral care for other women (e.g., *Virg*. 9.6) and exhibited liturgical importance on certain occasions, e.g., in the penitential rite of sinners (*Pud*. 13.7) and the ordination of priests (*Exh*. *cast*. 11.2). Moreover, the prohibitions against women's teaching and baptising by some early Christian authors (e.g., 1 Tim 2.12; *Virg*. 9.2) suggest that some women in the early church were involved in such things, among whom there were likely widows. Therefore, the role of widows in the early church was not always a passive one, as some scholars have suggested (e.g., Krause; see Chapter 1, section 2.1; and Rankin; see Chapter 5, section 5.2); instead, they actively participated in church ministry, contributed to the Christian community in various ways/forms, and played a significant and possibly even a crucial role in the establishment and the development of the early church.

[2] In fact, in order to reduce the church's financial burden, Tertullian also contradicted himself, for in another treatise he encouraged widowers to take poor aged widows as their spiritual wives, and each widower was encouraged to take more than one such wife (*Exh*. *cast*. 12.2). Therefore, Tertullian's seemingly self-contradictory attitudes towards widows' remarriage basically grew out of economic concerns.

4. Contributions

This thesis contributes to scholarship on early Christianity in a few ways. First, it helps us have a fuller understanding of widows in the early church, including their identity, social-economic situation, and ecclesiastical role. In terms of their identity, we have learned that in the early church not only a widow whose husband had died was identified as χήρα (although that was the usual case); sometimes a divorcee or even an unmarried woman (i.e., a virgin) was also referred to as χήρα (e.g., 1 Tim 5.11-15; Ign. *Smyrn*. 13.1). Thus, we should not assume that every woman labelled as a 'widow' was someone whose husband had died. On the other hand, a woman whose husband had died was not always referred to as a 'widow'; she might be mentioned simply by name (e.g., Tabitha, Lydia, and Eubola) or by her 'social role' (e.g., Mary mother of John Mark, and the mother of the senator Nicostratus) or even addressed as a 'virgin' (e.g., APt 22, 29). This ambiguous understanding of 'widow' among early Christians accounts for the strange phenomenon in the early church – the 'virgin widow'.[3] As for their social-economic situation, widows in the early church, though many of them were needy, should not be stereotyped as merely poor and miserable women begging for others' pity and aid. There were widows in the early church who not only had sufficient resources to maintain themselves but could even afford a life of pleasure and luxury (e.g., 1 Tim 5.6; Tertullian, *Ux*. 1.4.7; 2.3.4; 2.8.3). And the Christian authors' portrayals of some noble and wealthy women/widows, such as those in APt (see Chapter 4, section 3.1) and in Tertullian's *To His Wife* (see Chapter 5, section 5.1), suggest that some widows in the early church were well-educated and had relatively high social status. As for their ecclesiastical role, widows in the early church should not be stereotyped either as only passive recipients of support, for our research has shown that they actually played an active role in church

[3] See Methuen (1997) for a more detailed explanation. Tertullian's strong criticism against it (*Virg*. 9.5-6) does not deny but, on the contrary, implies its existence in the early church.

ministry, regardless of their social-economic situation. Some widows might be financially poor and physically weak, but they were spiritually rich and strong and thus could be role models to other Christians through their spiritual and pious life (e.g., Anna in Luke 2.36-38; the poor widow in Luke 21.1-4; the blind widows in APt; see Chapter 4, section 3.3). And some relatively wealthier widows, although oftentimes they were not labelled as 'widows', were not only benefactors of their fellow Christians who were needy but also patronesses of the then fledgling Christian communities in different places (e.g., Mary mother of John Mark in Jerusalem; Lydia in Philippi). The emergence of the widows' 'order' further highlights the particular status this special group of women enjoyed and the significant role they played in the early church.

A second contribution of this thesis is that the different modes of support for widows in the early church also shed light on the survival strategies of the poor in general. Scholars have proposed different theories concerning the survival strategies of the poor in the early church, such as almsgiving/charity,[4] patronage,[5] mutualism,[6] reciprocity,[7] and networks of a fictive/surrogate family.[8] As can be noticed, these theories focus mostly on the support of the poor at an individual level. However, our studies in this thesis have shown that the three modes of support for widows (i.e., family support, individual support, and collective support) were also applicable to the poor in general (even though our focus is on the support of widows), since widows were representative of the poor. This means the poor were likely supported not only by individual members of the Christian community but also by the church at a collective level and by their natural family. The collective support of the poor was indicated by the existence of common funds which were used to support not only widows but

[4] E.g., Downs 2016; Longenecker 2010.
[5] E.g., Richardson 2018.
[6] E.g., Meggitt 1998.
[7] E.g., Schellenberg 2018.
[8] E.g., Hellerman 2001; Barclay 2019.

also others who were in need (e.g., Justin, *1 Apol*. 67.6-7; Tertullian, *Apol*. 39.5-6). The church funds were nevertheless limited, so those with families should have their natural family as their primary source of support (cf. 1 Tim 5.4, 8), although individual Christians were always encouraged to love one another, especially those in need. Thus, the three predominant modes of support for widows were likely also applicable to the poor in general. And these modes of support were not mutually exclusive but complementary to one another.

A third contribution is that the studies of early Christian widows in this thesis also shed light on how the early church viewed women in general and widows in particular. The early Christian writings reveal that women were viewed mostly in relation to procreation and sex. On the one hand, child-bearing was considered as one of the most important tasks of a woman (cf. 1 Tim 5.10, 14), which to an extent was attached to a woman's fundamental value (or even salvation; cf. 1 Tim 2.15). That is why it was difficult for a widow above 30 to remarry in the Roman world (see Chapter 1, section 4) and shameful for a woman to be barren in ancient Judaism (e.g., Gen 16.1-4; 1 Kgdms 1.1-18). On the other hand, women were viewed as the dangerous and even sinful sex and thus were condemned and controlled (e.g., 1 Tim 2.11-14; Tertullian, *Cult*. *fem*. 1.1.2; *Virg*. 9.2), although it was exactly their sex that enabled them to bear children. A woman was expected to be faithful, loving, chaste, modest, silent and submissive (e.g., 1 Cor 14.34-35; Eph 5.22-24; 1 Tim 2.9-12, 15; Titus 2.3-5; Col 3.18; 1 Pet 3.1-6). The view of widows – married yet single women – in the early church was even more ambiguous. On the one hand, the ideal of widow celibacy represented the peak of Christian commitment and widows were thus granted a particular status in the church (they were regarded as the 'altar' of God). On the other hand, as women who were no longer bound by marriage, widows were regarded as more dangerous than women in general and thus were examined more critically with stricter standards (e.g., 1 Tim 5.5-6, 9-15; Pol. *Phil*. 4.3). But when we read the various texts, in some cases against the grain, we notice that

women, especially widows, were likely to have played a much more active role in the early church than we are told (the prohibition of various activities from women, such as speaking in the church, teaching and baptising, is a good example of this).

Last but not least, the research of this thesis enhances our view of the early church. First, it deepens our understanding of the care of the poor in the early church, which was more than simply an ethos inherited from ancient Judaism. It was so important to love the poor in the early church that whether a person was regarded as a true Christian (e.g., Jas 1.27; Ign. *Smyrn*. 6.2), what eschatological destiny someone would face (e.g., Matt 25.34-36; ATh 17-29; 56), and whether a Christian community was spiritually healthy (e.g., Acts 6.1-7; Aristides, *Apol*. 15) were all determined by how the poor were treated. As widows were regarded as the representative of the poor, supporting them became an iconic practice in the early church. Second, our research enables us to see the complexity of the early church, which was not as united and harmonious as Luke (Acts 2.44-47; 4.32-35) and the apologists (Aristides, *Apol*. 15; Justin, *1 Apol*. 67.6-7; Tertullian, *Apol*. 39.5-6) have portrayed but a church faced with various problems. For example, Acts 6.1-7 shows that there existed discrimination against the marginalised people (i.e., the Hellenist widows) in the Jerusalem church (see Chapter 4, section 2.2). Hermas' description of the striking contrast between the life of the rich and that of the poor (e.g., Vis. 3.9.3) and his criticism of the wealthy Christians' luxurious lifestyle and their preoccupation with business and worldly affairs indicate that some Christians, especially those who were rich, did not commit themselves to the church, nor were they willing to support the poor. Hermas' censure of the evil ministers (Sim. 9.26.2) and Polycarp's disapproval of Valens (*Phil*. 11.1) suggest that there were corrupt leaders in the early church who abused their positions for their own benefits. 1 Timothy 5.11-16 reveals not only the heavy financial burden faced by the church in supporting the poor but also the abuse of the common funds by some recipients. The above

examples additionally manifest that problems could arise at every stage of the collective support for the poor, whether the collection (e.g., some rich Christians were not willing to donate), the management (e.g., some corrupt leaders appropriated church money), or the distribution (e.g., some of the poor were neglected) of church funds. All these problems required the church to have a strong and sound management system, which accelerated the institutionalisation of the early church with a centralised episcopate, especially after Constantine when Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire.[9]

[9] See Brown 2002.

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