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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

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Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation. By **Helen Rhee**. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic Press, 2012. xx + 279 pp. $29.99 paper.

The past two decades have seen a large number of studies, both single-authored works and edited volumes, devoted to wealth and poverty in early Christianity. Most have focused either on the New Testament and earliest Christian communities or on the writings of fourth- and fifth-century church fathers, when the church faced distinctive questions about its identity in the post-Constantinian era. Helen Rhee, who describes herself as a "sociocultural and theological historian" (xvii), offers a welcome assessment of the intervening pre-Constantinian period. In *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*, she sets out to show "how early Christians adopted, appropriated and transformed the Jewish and Greco-Roman moral teachings and practices of giving and patronage" and "developed their distinctive theology and social understanding of wealth/the wealthy and poverty/the poor" (xiii).

Within her general chronological parameters, Rhee arranges her chapters topically. Chapter 1 surveys the social, economic, and theological contexts in which early Christian teachings and practices of wealth and poverty emerged. Drawing from recent scholarship, she starts with an overview of Roman economy and social structure with particular attention to patronage, wealth, and poverty. Given Rhee's aim to illumine the process of Christian self-definition vis-à-vis the Jewish as well as Greco-Roman world (xiii), however, this chapter is somewhat less satisfying than her careful analysis of sources in the rest of the book. She presents a brief survey of Old Testament passages sprinkled with Christian commentaries, but neither in her discussion of "the Israelite and Jewish setting" here nor in other chapters does she offer any analysis of or comparison with contemporary Jewish practices or emerging rabbinic teachings.

Chapters 2 through 4 address the themes of eschatology, salvation, and community respectively. Integrating a wealth of primary sources that Rhee has studied thoroughly in her earlier work on second- and third- century Christian literature, these chapters are the strongest part of book. In each

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chapter she describes the ways in which the social realities of wealth and poverty, on the one hand, and specific theological concerns, on the other, intersected and shaped one another. Drawing especially from Shepherd of Hermas, Cyprian, Lactantius, and the Acts of Thomas, chapter 2 examines the social and moral implications of eschatology. Rhee shows how the eschatological theme of the "great reversal," in which the pious poor and the wicked rich receive their due rewards and punishments, gradually gave way to a "reciprocity theme" in which the pious poor and the righteous rich together receive their heavenly reward. As greater numbers of the wealthy entered the church in the third and early fourth century the theology of the "wicked rich" was increasingly toned down and replaced by a new emphasis on redemptive almsgiving and a dualism between earthly and heavenly riches. "God's eschatological people" will be judged by their treatment of the poor and afflicted. This combination of ethical paraenesis and judgment, Rhee argues, both influenced Christian social thought and affected concrete Christian practices (71–72).

Just as eschatological beliefs shaped social concern, so too did soteriology, the subject of chapter 3. Here Rhee tackles the thorny relationship between redemptive almsgiving and salvific faith, especially in light of the delay of the parousia. Analyzing sources from a wide geographical expanse—Clement and Origen in Alexandria, Cyprian and Tertullian in North Africa, the apocryphal Acts and the Gospel of Thomas in Syria—she shows that despite divergent traditions, early patristic authors integrated theology and practices of wealth and poverty into pastoral care and generally upheld almsgiving as a means of dealing with postbaptismal sins (102). Chapter 4 analyzes koinonia, the community context in which Christians practiced sharing of wealth. By performing works of charity and koinonia in fulfillment of the dual command of love of God and neighbor, Christians "reformulated and transformed Greco-Roman understandings of hospitality and patronage" (104). Specific "reformulations" of hospitality included welcoming missionaries and strangers, burying the dead, ransoming captives, and caring for confessors and the sick. "Loving God through loving one's neighbor was not an option but an obligation," Rhee concludes (138), and corresponding acts of charity were also acts of justice that served to bind the community together.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine how increasing institutionalization of the church in the third and early fourth century affected its responses to wealth and poverty. Rhee describes the Christianization of the Greco-Roman patronage system and the tensions that emerged with the transfer of patronage and power from wealthy laity to bishops and clergy. She highlights the shift to a paid clergy (147–149), church ownership and management of property alongside other economic activities, and epigraphic evidence of Christians in

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business (165). As Christians moved up the social ladder, Christian authors expressed increasing disapproval of business and commercial activities which compromise Christian identity. Almsgiving and charity become positive markers of identity just as luxury and avarice, associated with idolatry, represent negative boundary markers (171–172). Echoing the work of Peter Brown, Rhee argues that with the shift in emphasis on traditional Christian charity as public service, "Christian identity was all the more linked to the church's care for the poor in Roman society" (180).

In a final chapter Rhee reflects on the relevance of early Christian writings on wealth and poverty for the church today. Though recognizing the enormous gulf separating contemporary Christians from the second- and third-century Greco-Roman context, Rhee concludes that these ancient texts still offer relevant "frameworks, principles, and practices" for the challenges and opportunities posed by wealth and poverty in the contemporary world (219).

Both theologically sensitive and historically accurate, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich* is also written on a level accessible to a broader audience. Its lucid style and organization make it ideal for advanced undergraduate or graduate seminars on early Christianity or social ethics. Together with Peter Brown's magisterial *Eye of a Needle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2012), which coincidentally was published in the same six-month period, *Loving the Poor* gives readers a great deal to chew on as they contemplate the implications of wealth and poverty for the early church as much for Christians of the twenty-first century.

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Christ Child: Cultural Memories of a Young Jesus. By **Stephen J. Davis**. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014. x + 417 pp. $45.00 cloth.

Scholars have long regarded early Christian stories about Jesus's childhood (*paidika*) as folksy attempts to "fill in the gaps" of biblical narratives and to entertain in the process. In the last few decades, however, we have begun to view the *paidika* as evidence of early Christians' interventions into important issues of the day: as early attempts at Christology; as a defense of Jesus's character in the face of slanderous attacks from Christian opponents; as pedagogical stories that shaped the morality of young readers; or as texts through which Christians could challenge contemporaneous educational

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