

## PROVIDENTIA FOR THE WIDOWS OF 1 TIMOTHY 5:3-16

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It was not only in Acts 6:1-5 that providing for the widows caused problems for the newly established Christian ἐκκλησία. Similar problems were encountered in another congregation where they were 'a disruptive force', to cite the observation of S. Humphries on 1 Timothy 5:3-16.<sup>1</sup> Sorting out widows was not only a pastoral headache in the early church, it has also proved to be an exegetical one for modern commentators.<sup>2</sup> Discussion of this passage has not been directed towards the important issue of the legal stipulations and social conventions surrounding widows and their support in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to clarify certain puzzling aspects of 1 Timothy 5:3-16 within that legal and social context.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Legal *Providentia*

The dowry which always accompanied a woman to her marriage constituted an important legal aspect of marriage. Greek marriage contracts specified the nature and value of the dowry and continued to do so in the Roman period. 'The only legal obligation that the groom acquired toward the wife upon

<sup>1</sup> S.C. Humphries, *The Family, Women and Death: Comparative Studies* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1983) 47.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. D.C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBL Diss. Series 71 (Chico, Scholars Press 1983) 161-66 and J.M. Bassler, 'The Widows' Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim.5:3-16', *JBL* 103 (1984) 23-41.

<sup>3</sup> Of the array of commentaries consulted E.K. Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, Tyndale Press 1954) 73 refers to the Greek legal requirements of children to support their parents in Athens, but none make mention of the issue of the dowry for which legal stipulations existed concerning widows. See n.6

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to J.A. Crook, Emeritus Professor of Ancient History, Cambridge University for the suggestion that the solution to some issues in this passage alight well rest in Graeco-Roman law. The support of the Tyndale House Council, the Witness Foundation and the Jubilee Foundation is acknowledged for the research on this paper.

receipt of the dowry was her maintenance'.<sup>5</sup> In the event of her husband's death the laws governing that dowry were clearly defined.<sup>6</sup> A widow was cared for by the person in charge of that dowry. Two options were open to her. If she had children, she could remain in her deceased husband's home. There she would be maintained by the new κύριος of the household, possibly her son. She could also return to her parents taking her dowry back to her family.<sup>7</sup> The returning of that dowry meant the legal severance from her late husband's household.<sup>8</sup> The rules which governed the repayment of the dowry were enforced by δίκη προικός and those dealing with the interest rate to be charged on the value of the dowry from the time of the husband's death until its return were covered by δίκη σίτου.<sup>9</sup> The dowry's 'basic object was to provide for the maintenance of the woman'.<sup>10</sup> W.K. Lacey notes 'the law was explicit; the person who had charge of her dowry had the obligation to maintain her'.<sup>11</sup> It was a legal obligation.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> D.M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh, University Press 1979) 75.

<sup>6</sup> D.M. Schaps, 'The Dowry' *op.cit.* ch.6 and appendices for an excellent discussion of the dowry and issues of its inheritance on the husband's death; and A.R.W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens: Family and Property I* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1968) 145-60. See also R. Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri 332 B.O - 640 A.D.* (Warsaw, Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1955) 120-7 for evidence of the continuation of this through the Hellenistic and Roman periods. For examples of extant marriage contracts all of which refer specifically to the contents or value of the dowry and its importance see *P Ryl* 154 (AD 66) 'received from him as a dowry on his daughter', *P Eleph* 1 (311 BC) *P Tebt* 104 (92 BC), *BGU* 1052 (13 BC), cited in A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar, *Select Papyri I* (London and Cambridge Mass. 1970). On the Roman side see J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (London, Bodley Head 21974) 186-9 where the recovery of a dowry in part or whole was for its future use i.e. remarriage.

<sup>7</sup> A.R.W. Harrison, *op.cit.* I, 38, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Just as the dowry set up the marriage, A.R.W. Harrison, *op. cit.* I, 45 its return of it saw the termination of the relationship, S.C. Humphreys, *op.cit.* 46 citing *BGU* 1104 (I BC).

<sup>9</sup> A.R.W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens: Procedures, II* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1971) 22.

<sup>10</sup> A.R.W. Harrison, *op.cit.* I, 57.

<sup>11</sup> W.K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (London, Thames and Hudson 1968) 117.

<sup>12</sup> D.M. Schaps, *op.cit.* Appendix IV.

In Athens there was not only a moral but also a legal obligation placed upon children to care for both parents, and failure to do so rendered one liable to prosecution in which 'the prosecutor ran no risk of punishment'.<sup>13</sup>

The Roman woman had similar security and had what S. Dixon describes as 'a dowager's life interest in her husband's holdings' based on the understanding that she would at death pass it on to children from that issue.<sup>14</sup> The Hellenistic Jewish position according to Falk allowed the wife hold in her own property during marriage, and when made a widow, to retain part of her dowry.<sup>15</sup>

It was expected in the ancient world that a widow would remarry. Augustus in the *lex Papia Poppaea* of AD 9 actually legislated for this after a husband's death if she were still of child-bearing age, i.e. under fifty.<sup>16</sup> The period during which she could remain a widow was finally set at two years. This was the legal position for Roman citizens in the first century but not apparently observed by all.<sup>17</sup> There was also a very strong conviction that the Greek woman would remarry 'so that she be not left a widow', a thought abhorrent to the Greeks.<sup>18</sup> 'There can be little doubt, that young widows, even if they had children, were expected to remarry', for remarriage provided a secure option for the younger widow.<sup>19</sup>

The Graeco-Roman world sought to make sure that widows had security either by sheltering in the οἶκος of the sons of her late husband or in that of her parents with her

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore all who aspired to public office were asked 'Do you treat your Parents well?', W.K. Lacey, *op.cit.* 116-18.

<sup>14</sup> S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London and Sydney, Croom Helm 1988) 47.

<sup>15</sup> Z.W. Falk, *Introduction to Jewish Laws of the Second Commonwealth* (Leiden, E. J. Brill 1978) 290.

<sup>16</sup> A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage Laws', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* (n.s.) 27 (1981) 59; see also J.F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London and Sydney, Crown Helm 1986) 178-9.

<sup>17</sup> B. Rawson, 'The Roman Family', *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* ed. B. Rawson (London and Sydney, Croom Helm 1986) 31.

<sup>18</sup> D.M. Schaps *op.cit.* 41 and sources cited 127 nn.105-6.

<sup>19</sup> W.K. Lacey, *op.cit.* 108.

dowry. As Schaps comments 'Legally, then, a woman was never as thoroughly protected as she was in her old age'.<sup>20</sup>

However worthy the legal intentions were there were always those who slipped through the net, especially those at the lowest end of the economic scale.<sup>21</sup> The church saw itself responsible for Christian widows who were from this group and unable to support themselves financially, 1 Timothy 5:16. In order to fulfil this role there was the need to lay down who were its 'real' widows and to exhort individual congregational members to assume or resume legal and filial responsibility for their relatives bereft of their husbands.

## 2. Trends in *Providentia* in the City

There were societal conventions whereby food was distributed to meet a city-wide crisis.<sup>22</sup> These *ad hoc* arrangements were for emergency situations only.<sup>23</sup> The distribution of basic provisions by a wealthy member or members of a city in time of famine or general food shortage was not motivated by pity for the poor and destitute among whom were widows.<sup>24</sup> Fear of riots and city strife with possible loss of personal property often prompted the rich to stave off food riots by means of food distributions or manipulation of the market to force down the price of essential commodities in time of dearth.<sup>25</sup> In contrast the Jewish synagogues had a permanent

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<sup>20</sup> *Op.cit.* 84.

<sup>21</sup> A.R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (London, Thames and Hudson 1968) 71-3.

<sup>22</sup> See most recently, P. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1988).

<sup>23</sup> The only administrative provision was the appointment of a *curator annonae* to be in charge of the grain supply when such need arose. He was expected as part of this liturgy to use his own resources or persuade others to act as public benefactors in return for customary civic honours, G. Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1980) 218-25.

<sup>24</sup> One only gave to those who could make some return or be of some advantage to the giver see 'Giving for a Return', A.R. Hands, *op.cit.* ch. 3.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of this role by benefactors see P. Garnsey, *op.cit.* 82-6 and its possible application in the N.T. see the author's, 'The Public Praising of Christian Benefactors: Romans 13:3-4 and I Peter 2:14-15', forthcoming *JSNT* 1988.

organization for the needy with the weekly distribution to the sojourner and the resident poor including the widows.<sup>26</sup>

There was the tradition in the East of free meals at some endowed festivals. Distributions in a city would commemorate citizens who acted as benefactors. They had bequeathed funds which were made possible such handouts or feasts.<sup>27</sup> These were given to those 'worthy of honour', and even if a benefactor had stipulated a distribution to all the citizens, the former still received larger proportions.<sup>28</sup> To belong to a group with status bestowed benefits such as this. Distribution was not based on need.

There was the long standing right of Roman citizens living in the capital to receive the monthly corn dole regardless of need.<sup>29</sup> There the head of households found a convenient loophole. They made slaves freedmen, giving them a change of status in the household but of course stipulating at the point of manumission their obligations to live with their masters continuing to undertake their normal duties.<sup>30</sup> 'Gradually during the century after Augustus' death new categories of recipients seem to have been admitted to the *frumentum publicum*.<sup>31</sup> Coins were struck with the emperor feeding Rome and the term *providentia* was one the Principate was happy to use as a description of one of the functions of this office.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> K. F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy*, SBT 48 (London, SCM 1966) 93-4.

<sup>27</sup> A. R. Hands, *op. cit.* 89-94.

<sup>28</sup> A. R. Hands, *op. cit.* 91 and 94 and ch. VI 'Pity for the Destitute'.

<sup>29</sup> For the most recent discussion see P. Garnsey, *op. cit.* 238 and ch. 14 and G. Rickman, 'The Corn Distribution', *op. cit.* ch. vii.

<sup>30</sup> G. Rickman, *op. cit.* 189.

<sup>31</sup> G. Rickman, *op. cit.* 189 and K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves, Sociological Studies in Roman History I* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1978) 141-58.

<sup>32</sup> Claudius struck small coins at the beginning of his reign with two corn ears in the right hand and the legend *Ceres Augusta S.C.*, As G. Rickman, *op. cit.* 260-1 says, 'The message was clear, the new emperor cared'. Nero produced his famous *sestertius* showing himself provisioning Rome and this propaganda was followed by Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. On the use of the term *providentia* or πρόνοια as one of the chief attributes of good emperors 'to care for the life of the state' see C. P. Charlesworth, 'Providentia and Aeternitas', *HTR* 29 (1936)107-32.

There was also the provision of child allowances, *alimenta*, which appear to have operated in some places in the empire from at least the time of Nero onwards, although Augustus appears to have created something of a precedent by including *minores pueri* among his *congiari*. Resources for this allowance were raised from public benefactors and were private schemes in the first century AD.<sup>33</sup>

Reactions to concessions show that there were always those on the look-out to exploit them financially.<sup>34</sup> While a 'welfare' syndrome was not unknown in the first century, it would be wrong to see the Roman government consciously travelling down that road.<sup>35</sup> However, what is clear is that the shifting of the responsibility for the provision of the needs of some members of one's household on to another provider was always welcome. 1 Timothy 5:3-16 appears to be dealing with a similar attitude where some widows, if not all, were not being supported by the heads of their households, but by the church. Its resources were stretched far too thinly to meet adequately the needs of the widow who was without a family. 'Let the church be not burdened, so that it may assist those who are real widows' v. 16. Hence there was the urgent need to reorganize the system for the proper care of the widows.

### 3. *Providentia* in the Jerusalem Church

The adoption by the Jerusalem Church of the procedures of the synagogue in the charitable distributions to Jewish widows appears to have occurred almost from the

<sup>33</sup> A. R Hands, *op. cit.* 108 and Document 19 for the text.

<sup>34</sup> For another example see the tax and liturgy exemptions granted by Vespasian to teachers and the rescript of Domitian to restrain abuses arising from the concession: M. McCrum and A.G. Woodhead, *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors A.D. 68-96* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1966) No.458.

<sup>35</sup> P. Garnsey, *op. cit.* 276. 'However, the extent of the intervention of the imperial state in civil society can be exaggerated. Provincials were expected to help themselves, and they did so in the time-honoured ways...In the cities euergetism continued to be the main shield of the common people against adversity.'

beginning of former's inception.<sup>36</sup> In the synagogues every Friday weekly distributions were made to the poor from the money chest. Among the recipients were the widows.<sup>37</sup> The Jerusalem church followed suit, but with a daily distribution. The reason for this adjustment is not explained but it may be related to its daily corporate activity described in Acts 2:46 as against the weekly gatherings in the synagogues. The synagogue's tried and tested method of collection and distribution proved to be the appropriate model to use to fulfill the injunctions of Jesus to meet the needs of the poor whom the church found only too readily to be 'always' with them.

The apostles who initially assumed the role of the receivers and distributors of alms in the synagogue drew sharp criticism from the Hellenists because of allegations of the neglect of the latter's widows in the distribution. Arrangements that suited a smaller ἐκκλησία apparently proved to be unsatisfactory with an increasing number of disciples coming into the Christian community, including widows, Acts 6:1a. The N.T. gives no further indications that the mechanism for distribution to the poor in Jerusalem needed subsequent adjustments. It does however reveal that the problem continued to be a lack of resources from within the Jerusalem church. Only collections from the Diaspora Jewish and Gentile Christians saved them from destitution especially in a time of famine, Acts 11:27-30.<sup>38</sup>

Was the church's administrative procedure for the distribution in Jerusalem simply taken over by the congregation of 1 Timothy and hence the problems which arose of all widows becoming eligible for the distribution? If there were modifications among Gentile churches of the Christian distribution system of the Jerusalem ἐκκλησία which took account of the social ethos of the secular community from which converts came

<sup>36</sup> E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ II* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark 1979) 437 n.45 who notes that the 'officers charged by the primitive church with the care of the poor (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις)' in Acts 6:1-5 are fulfilling an identical role.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. and K.F. Nickle, *op. cit.* 93-4.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 24:17 and 1 Cor 16:1f., 2 Cor 8-9 and Rom 15:25-27 although in these instances there is no indication of the famine situation referred to in Acts 11:27-30.

it is difficult to determine what they were because of insufficient evidence.<sup>39</sup> Certainly the impression is given that the injunctions in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 aimed to modify the existing procedures which apparently had no means test.<sup>40</sup>

#### 5. *Providentia* by Children and Grandchildren

In 1 Timothy 5:4 the matter of religious duty is spelt out for children and grandchildren. The households of converts were to be the first place where εὐσεβία was expressed in practical help to the resident widows. It was to be seen as the first place where the primary lesson in εὐσεβία was to be learnt, μαθανέτωσαν πρῶτον. εὐσεβία was not expressed here in worship in church or personal piety, but in the household. For the Christian church it was the first commandment 'with a promise'.<sup>41</sup>

This filial piety was seen in financial terms in v. 4b.<sup>42</sup> Christians were told that they were under a clear obligation to support the widow as compensation for the care and financial cost formerly expended upon children and grandchildren when they were young, v. 4b. In a society where the meeting of obligations was of paramount importance, failure to do so would have constituted a very serious breach indeed. This injunction is further supported by the statement that this conduct is acceptable in the sight of God, v. 4c.<sup>43</sup>

In v. 8.a there is reference to those who sought to avoid πρόνοια, i.e. *providentia*: εἰ δέ τις τῶν ἰδίων καὶ μάλιστα οἰκείων οὐ προνοιεῖ. The comment was directed towards the κύριος or κύριοι, of the Christian οἴκοι. There is a diversity of opinion as to whom precisely the terms, ἴδιος and οἰκεῖος refer. Commentators have regarded ἴδιος in v. 8 as a reference to

<sup>39</sup> The only other citing of the commandment of Exodus 20.12 'to honour' in Eph. 6.1-2 was for the purpose of securing obedience. There is no explicit reference to widows *per se*.

<sup>40</sup> J. M. Bassler, *op. cit.* 34 citing in support J. Müller-Bardorff, 'Zur exegese vom 1 Timotheus 5,3-16', *Gott und die Götter: Festgabe für Erick Fasher zum 60. Geburtstag* (Berlin, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 1958) 113-33.

<sup>41</sup> Eph 6:2 citing Ex 20.12.

<sup>42</sup> C. Spicq, *Les Épîtres Pastorales, Études Bibliques* (Paris, Gabalda 1969) 525.

<sup>43</sup> τοῦτο refers back to the imperatives in that verse.

either slaves and freedmen or one's relatives in general, while οἰκεῖνος could refer to either blood relatives or members of one's immediate family.<sup>44</sup>

Verse 8 ἴδιοι, could be a general reference to those belonging to a household and could encompass one's freedmen who may not necessarily live at home, but to whom one had obligations, especially if he were to find himself impoverished. The attempt to avoid *providentia* for one's slaves by making them freedmen was certainly a known reason for granting manumission.<sup>45</sup> It enabled the slave owner to continue to have his services but without the cost of his upkeep. Slaves so manumitted took responsibility for finding their own lodgings. If ἴδιοι covers those belong to this group to whom there were still obligations by the κύριος, then it would follow that οἰκεῖνοι refers specifically to the family who lived at home, and among them was the widow who was residing with the κύριος of the dowry.<sup>46</sup>

If in v. 8a ἴδιοι, is a reference to widows, then the term would refer to widows who were not living at home.<sup>47</sup> The κύριοι had a Christian responsibility towards them based on the Decalogue. οἰκεῖνος would still refer specifically to the widow who was residing at home and for whom legal responsibility has been assumed with the acceptance of the dowry. There was then a special legal obligation towards a

<sup>44</sup> E.g. C. Spicq, *op. cit.* 531, J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London, A&C. Clark 1963) 114-15, and D.C. Verner, *op. cit.* 138. for a summary of opinions.

<sup>45</sup> The *Lex Aelia Sentia* of AD 4 required a patron on pain of losing the right to the *operae* to furnish food for his freedman. This is generally interpreted to mean that 'he had to prevent a freedman from dying of starvation, just as a freedman had to support his patron if he had fallen into need', A.M. Duff, *Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1928) 48. S. Treggiari, *Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1969) 16 'the freedman would usually support himself, taking the burden of finding food and lodging from the shoulders of his patron'.

<sup>46</sup> χωρὶς οἰκοῦντες refers to those who were not part of their master's household in the narrow physical sense according to A.R.W. Harrison, *op. cit.* I 167 n.5.

<sup>47</sup> D.C. Verner, *op. cit.* 138 rightly sees that this possibility is difficult to explain as widows away from home 'would be in greater danger of neglect'. However, if the responsibility for the dowry was assumed by another, then the statement is explicable as it applies to widows living away from those Christian household being addressed in v. 8. Verner's objection thus disappears.

widow living at home and a less committing obligation towards one residing away from the household. As the overall context of vv. 3-16 is the issue of widows, it is suggested that Ἴδιαι refers to those widows residing away from the household. Children and grandchildren were being called upon to accept full financial responsibility for οἰκεῖοι. The number of widows in a family household could be more than two.<sup>48</sup>

The condemnation of the κύριοι in v. 8b is twofold. One relates to the O.T. commandment and the other to the legal situation outlined above.

First, in v. 8b there is the serious charge of the denial of the faith, ἡ πίστις, which encompassed the important commandment to children to honour their parents, but which the church shouldered when there were no others to fulfil it, v. 16. The use of the imperative τίμα in v. 3 indicates that it is the Fifth Commandment from the Decalogue that rests behind the discussion. This avoidance of πρόνοια by the κύριος was seen as a denial of the faith by those who had widowed mothers and grandmothers. It comes within the same category condemned in the teaching of Jesus of the convention whereby one claimed *corban*.<sup>49</sup> It was an avoidance scheme which the Lord criticized because it set aside the command of God. The neglect of a widow whether she lived at home or away from home would come under this condemnation, be she mother or grandmother, v. 3.<sup>50</sup>

Second, the offenders were declared to be *worse than* an unbeliever, ἀπίστος, which is an exceedingly strong charge to bring against members of a Christian congregation, v. 8.<sup>51</sup> Why would this be said of the heads of households? It refers to the

<sup>48</sup> It ought not to be assumed that the Christian families being addressed were either all nuclear families or all extended families. D.C. Barker has shown from a survey of Egyptian census returns that 53.4% were households with offspring and unmarried siblings, while the remainder were either more than one nuclear family or relatives living with the nuclear family. *New Docs* 4 (1988) 89 and 93.

<sup>49</sup> Mk. 7.9-13.

<sup>50</sup> This commandment certainly was interpreted to include more than parents by Philo, *De Decalogo* 165-7.

<sup>51</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *op.cit.* 115 'even pagans...recognize and set store by the obligations of children to parents'.

fact that while holding the dowry, the head was not fulfilling his legal responsibility to support the widow. Harrison notes that by remaining in her husband's house 'her sons were κύριοι. of the dowry, being charged with her maintenance out of it'.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore the preceding verse 'Command this so that they may be without reproach (ἀνεπίλημπτοι)', suggests a condemnation from society for such offensive behaviour which was in clear breach of the law, v. 7.<sup>53</sup>

It would seem that at least some Christians were not supporting their widows whether these widows were residing in their households or possibly living elsewhere. As a result these widows were cast upon the strained financial resources of the church, even though Christians were bound to support them either on legal and/or religious grounds. It may well be that the church's general distribution to widows enabled some of the members of the Christian ἐκκλησία to conveniently evade *providentia*.

Epigraphic evidence from a Christian tombstone shows that Christian children of a subsequent generation followed the injunctions of 1 Timothy 5. 'To well-deserving Rigina her daughter beautifully fashioned this tombstone. Rigina, mother, widow who remained a widow sixty years and never burdened the church; a *univera* who lived eighty years, five months, twenty-six days.'<sup>54</sup>

### 5. *Providentia* by the Believing Women

In an endeavour to provide for the 'real' widow a believing woman, ἡ πιστή, she must support her relatives who were widowed, v. 16. To whom does this refer? F.C. Syngé has argued that this verse means 'If any man or woman is converted and brings with him into the Church his household (with his sisters and cousins and aunts) he or she is to continue to support

<sup>52</sup> A.R.W. Harrison, *op. cit.* 57.

<sup>53</sup> ταῦτα is meant to cover the instructions in v.4 as well as v.8. ἀνεπίλημπτοι 'not censured', 'not culpable'.

<sup>54</sup> E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* (Berlin, Weidmann 1967) 1581 cited M. Lightman and W. Zeisel, 'Univira: An Example of Continuity and Change in Roman Society', *Church History* 46 (1977) 29.

them and not burden the local congregation.<sup>55</sup> A. Padgett argues 'The false teachers were also urging these widows not simply to avoid the married life, but to abandon the support of their elderly mothers and grandmothers as well.'<sup>56</sup>

The injunction however would appear to be an innovation which had neither legal nor ecclesiastical precedent.<sup>57</sup> Christian women were being called upon to relieve the church of the extra mouths to feed who were their widowed relatives. There is no censure in v. 16, but a call to shoulder responsibility for kinship relationships so that the church can adequately support widows who are without relatives.

Later evidence in the Christian church in Egypt shows that there were αἱ πρὸς χήραις but it is not clear that they were relatives of the widows or women appointed by the church to care for them.<sup>58</sup>

#### 6. *Providentia* for the 'Real' Widows

There is great care taken in 5.3-16 to define precisely whom the church should support. The passage begins with the imperative addressed presumably to the one who has the oversight of the congregation *viz.* Timothy. He is to honour the widow who is a real widow i.e. to make sure that the church provides for her needs, v. 3.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> F.C. Synge, 'Studies in texts: 1 Timothy 5.3-16', *Theology* 108 (1968) 200-1. He accepts the reading πιστὸς ἢ πιστή which is usually rejected, see B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York, United Bible Societies 1971) 642.

<sup>56</sup> A. Padgett, 'Wealthy Women at Ephesus: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in Social Context', *Interpretation* 41 (1987) 21.

<sup>57</sup> In the context it seems dear that 'having widows' = relations *contra* D.C. Verner, *op. cit.* 139 where he suggests that αἱ πισταί were probably women like Tabitha in Acts 9:36f. who have taken widows under their protection. The verb 'to have' describes relatives cf. 1 Cor 7:2. The argument of 1 Tim 5:3-16 is about the need to secure support of widows with kinship relationships in the congregation in order for the church to care for its real widows.

<sup>58</sup> E. Wipszycka, *Les ressources et les activités des églises en Égypte du IV<sup>e</sup> au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, *Papyrologica Bruxellensia* 10 (Brussels, 1972) 114 for the discussion of 'les femmes chargés de s'occuper des veunes' and the evidence cited.

<sup>59</sup> Hence the use of a second person singular present imperative.

The 'real' widow is defined in v. 5a as a person without relatives, μεμονωμένη.<sup>60</sup> Because of the situation in which she finds herself she is like the widow in the O.T. who is cast upon God alone, ἤλπικεν, and is therefore given to supplication and prayer day and night for her needs, v. 5b.<sup>61</sup> This is the 'real' widow for whom the church must take financial responsibility, because there is no other person to care for her.

She is described as being 'not less than sixty years of age'. The precise reason for restriction of age is uncertain. Had it been over fifty years, then it would have been explicable in the light of the fact that at least Roman law required a woman under fifty to remarry because she was still regarded as being of child bearing age and as a financial disincentive was precluded from obtaining any inheritance until she was that age.<sup>62</sup> The reason may have simply been that women under sixty years were considered capable of working.<sup>63</sup>

She is also designated 'the wife of one husband'. If one adopts the interpretation that this refers to a woman who has married only once, then it poses problems for those young widows who obey the injunction in v. 9 to remarry. In old age they could be disqualified from assistance from the church on the sole grounds that they are not 'a wife of one husband'. There is no reason to argue that there is here a prohibition on a second marriage. On the contrary women of marriageable age were instructed to do so.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> The perfect participle should be so interpreted and could translated as 'left alone' i.e. without relations. P.G. Duncker, ". . . quae vere viduae sunt"(1 im.5.3)', *Angelicum* 35 (1958) 121-38 for a discussion of distinguishing characteristics of the true widow in the O.T. and the Semitic world., and the real widow as μεμονωμένη.

<sup>61</sup> The perfect indicative also indicates her state or, better, her status, for she has none other than God in whom she can put her confidence to meet her material needs.

<sup>62</sup> A. Wallace-Hadrill, *op. cit.* 59.

<sup>63</sup> Our contemporary society sees no reason to justify the fixing of the age when a woman can receive a pension in some countries at the age of sixty other than she is not expected to work beyond that age. See *P Entreux* 82 (221 BC) where a woman describes herself as 'a working woman' and obviously dependent upon her wages.

<sup>64</sup> ἡ ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή cannot mean that she was married once, but rather she did not commit adultery; cf. M. Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral*

Her proven record of Christian good works is outlined. She is to be 'well attested for her good deeds, having brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted and devoted herself to good in every way.' vv. 9-10.

By a process of elimination the 'real' widow may be defined as being sixty year having neither children nor grandchildren nor a 'believing' woman to 'honour' her, a chaste Christian lady with true spirituality who has been given to good works.

### 7. Disqualifying of Young Widows from *providentia*

The discussion of the young widows in 5:11-15 contains descriptive, evaluative as well as prescriptive elements. An examination of all three helps in seeking to reconstruct the problem the young widows posed for the church.

The descriptive elements in vv. 11b-12 are joined with v.13 by the use of the important connective ἄμα δέ which denotes the coincidence of two actions.<sup>65</sup> The text indicates that the young widows now desire to remarry, v. 11b. Had they taken a vow of *univera* in response to the false teaching of others in the church who forbade marriage and naturally remarriage?<sup>66</sup> Had they dedicated themselves to God in prayer and supplication thus expressing confidence in the God who cares for the needy, and thus epitomizing the attitude of the godly widow? Whatever is meant by the expression it is certain that there was a departure from ἡ πρώτη πίστις.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, ἄμα, there was a change in lifestyle with the emergence of the 'merry' widow of v. 13 who is learning to be idle, going from house to house not for the benefit of the inhabitants, but simply to gossip and to discuss matters

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*Epistles*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1972) 75 who argue that it refers to chastity with whether married once or twice.

<sup>65</sup> BDF #425,2.

<sup>66</sup> M. Lightman and W. Zeisel, *op. cit.* 119f for a discussion of this in secular Roman society.

<sup>67</sup> A. Sand, 'Witwenstand und Amterstrukturen in den urchristlichen Gemeinden', *Bibel und Leben* 12 (1971) 196 who argues that it refers to a vow of celibacy for devotion to God. Cf. also Rev 2:4 ἡ ἀγάπη ἡ πρώτη.

inappropriate to the Christian profession. The nexus between vv. 11b-12 and 13 is clearly related to the decision to remarry. The unbecoming behaviour may be linked to the way another marriage is being sought by the young widow.

The conduct of the widows is evaluated as 'running riot' of Christ, v. 11b and thus condemned because of their abandoning of another way of living.<sup>68</sup> It is explained that some of the widows have already committed apostasy, v. 15.<sup>69</sup>

The solution is laid out in vv. 11a and 14. In the latter case the use of οὖν indicates that the prescription which follows is meant to remedy the unsatisfactory conduct which has been described previously. The young widows are to remarry, but there is an explication of what marriage is from a Christian perspective. They are to have children, rule their own households and conduct themselves in such a way that they do not bring the Christian faith into disrepute, i.e. 'give the enemy no occasion to revile us', v. 14.

The refusal by the church to enrol young widows in v. 11 must be judged in the light of the implications of the injunction to remarry in v. 14. Such a call to the young widow rightly presupposes that the widow has a dowry. There must therefore have been a person in charge of it and thus legally responsible for her maintenance in her present status as a widow.

## 8. Conclusions

The motivation for proscribing distributions to some widows was not to subvert a charismatic claim to office by them in the church.<sup>70</sup> There is no need to invoke a sociological perspective of 'equality and freedom' in order to argue that this passage sees the commencement of the erosion of the egalitarianism of the early stages of Christianity and the adoption of secular society's hierarchial and patriarchial structure.<sup>71</sup> It

<sup>68</sup> καταστρηνιάω does not occur elsewhere in Greek but the meaning is clear from στρηνιάω = 'to run riot', 'become wanton' and the use of κατά simply enforces it.

<sup>69</sup> D.C. Verner, *op. cit.* 165-6 cites similar expressions in I Tim 1:6, 6:20 and 2 Tim 4:4 and shows that the reference is to following false teachers.

<sup>70</sup> H.W. Bartsch, *Die Anfänge: Evangelischer Rechtsbildungen: Studien zu den Pastoralbriefen* (Hamburg, Herbert Reich 1965) 34.

<sup>71</sup> J.M. Bassler, *op. cit.* 39-40.

is not correct to argue that 'predictably, the new Christian norms (including 1 Timothy 5:3-16) are much like the old defensive rules of Judaism' and constitute a post-Pauline regression of 'charismatic customs developed previously'.<sup>72</sup>

If it is felt that a twentieth-century value judgement must be brought to bear on the prescriptions for the support of widows in the early church in 1 Timothy 5:3-16, then the question must first be answered as to whether a local congregation would now be willing to draw on its resources to support widows *per se* if there existed financial provisions for them in secular society? Furthermore, would there be a willingness on the part of the church to assume responsibility for widows if there were children or grandchildren or female relatives in the same congregation who could support them? If it was a convention for young widows remarry, as it still is in some societies, would the governing body of that church support one who refused to do so especially if there were the requisite dowry, and the objection was based on a misfounded belief that there was a Christian proscription on marriage or remarriage?

1 Timothy 5:3-16 addresses the very important issue of the church and its members fulfilling the fifth command by honouring the widow. It is to be done by its members resuming the legal responsibility imposed by custody of the dowry, and by Christian women assuming responsibility for any widowed relatives. There is also to be the care of widows for whom there is no legal responsibility as custodians of the dowry by children and grandchildren. Kinship relationships were still paramount in the Christian community. The young widow cannot draw upon the resources of the church, for she by means of her dowry must remarry in accordance with the conventions of the society of her day.

The overall concerns in redefining the eligibility of widows for financial support is also clearly spelt out. The church must be able to fulfil its role to care for the widow who is on her own and unable to care for herself. If she was a 'real' widow then the church would come to the rescue by showing

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<sup>72</sup> B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta, John Knox Press 1981) 116.

*providentia* to the 'widow of God'.<sup>73</sup> The subsequent history of the church shows that this did happen, for there are extant records of the administration of its distribution which read 'Provide for Sophia, widow, from the coats you have one coat for good use'; 'to the widows...one double jar of wine'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For the Christian inscription 'To the matron Octavia, a widow of God' see H.E. Fox, *Christian Inscriptions in Ancient Rome* (London, Morgan and Scott 1920) 45.

<sup>74</sup> *P Wiscon* 64 and *P Oxy* 1954 cited in *New Docs* 2 (1982) 192-3.