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THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN THE FACE OF EPIDEMICS

Abstract. The purpose of the article is to present the reaction of the early Christians to the emergence and the spread of the great epidemics. During the early Christian ages (2nd–3rd centuries) different plagues devastated people of the Roman Empire. Christianity has already prepared some modes of activity to deal with epidemics. These were both ideological and practical means. The main conclusion is that the pestilences during which Christians might show their moral principles, the special manner of life, and activity were one of the reasons to explain conversion to Christianity.

Keywords: epidemics, pestilence, Christianity, early Church, charity, consolation

The Church took an active position in social life from the beginning of Christianity, although she was small and persecuted. The activity of the Christians was especially demonstrated in those circumstances that required the Christians to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their neighbour: wars, calamities, social injustice and epidemics. The article aims to present the reaction of the early Christians to the spread of the greatest epidemics and encourage further research or debate in this area.

1. The pestilences during the early Christian ages

During the early Christian ages (2nd–3rd centuries) different plagues devastated people of the Roman Empire. The first pestilence of which we have reliable accounts is ‘The Plague of Antoninus’ that is also called ‘The Plague of Galen.’ This disease took origins in the army of Verus (161–169) which was sojourning in the East in 165 A.D. The disease was spread by the army throughout provinces, after Verus’ soldiers had returned¹. It is usually identified as smallpox². The plague swept

¹ *Historia Augusta*, V, 8, 1–4, [in:] *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, vol. I, ed. H. HOHL, C. SAMBERGER, W. SEYFARTH, Stuttgart–Lipsiae 1965 [= BSGR] (cetera: *Historia Augusta*), p. 80. Cf. D. STATHAKOPOULOS, *Plagues of the Roman Empire*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Pestilence, Pandemics, and Plagues*, vol. II, N–Z, ed. J.P. BYRNE, Westport, Conn.–London 2008, p. 537; J.F. GILLIAM, *The Plague under Marcus Aurelius*, *AJP* 82, 1961, p. 225–251; R.J. LITTMAN, M.L. LITTMAN, *Galen and the Antonine Plague*, *AJP* 94, 1973, p. 243–255.

² W. SCHEIDEL, *Death on the Nile. Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt*, Leiden–Boston–Köln 2001 [= Mn.S., 228].

over most of Rome's provinces. Such a great pestilence caused irreparable damage throughout the Empire including the city of Rome. The enfeebling disease devastated not only the Roman army stationed in its winter quarters along the extensive frontiers of the Empire, but also thousands of people in cities and provinces³. It is supposed that even emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180) caught the disease himself⁴. The pestilence in Europe lasted at least fourteen years⁵. The plague broke out again under Commodus (176–192) in 189. It was greater than before, about two thousand people often died in Rome in a single day⁶. There is an assumption that the Antonine Plague was probably the most devastating pestilence in late antiquity⁷.

Great pestilences did not affect the Roman world from the 180s A.D. until the middle of the 3rd century. There was a burst of a pandemic which is often called 'The Epidemic of Cyprian' because it was described, among others, by Saint Cyprian (ca. 200–258) in his treatise *De mortalitate*⁸. The plague stretched over the Roman Empire between 250 and 270. Orosius (ca. 375–420) claimed that during the reign of Gallienus (253–268) the human race slowly recovered from the severe plague which was worse and more long-lasting than was normally the case⁹. It is confirmed by Porphyry (ca. 234–305), a philosopher, that the disease was spread

³ OROSIUS, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri VII*, VII, 15, 5; VII, 27, 7, rec. et comm. C. ZANGE-
MEISTERL, Vindobonae 1882 [= CSEL, 5] (cetera: OROSIUS), p. 471; 497; *Historia Augusta*, IV, 13,
3–6; IV, 28, 1–4, p. 59; 72; EUTROPIUS, *Breviarium ab Urbe Condita*, VIII, 12, trans., praef. et comm.
H.W. BIRD, Liverpool 1993 [= TTH, 14], p. 52. Cf. H. ZINSSER, *Rats, Lice and History*, New Brun-
swick–London 2008, p. 135. Orosius perceives the persecution of the Christians as immediately
bringing down divine vengeance. The plague immediately follows Marcus Aurelius's persecution.
Cf. A.T. FEAR, *Introduction*, [in:] OROSIUS, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, Liverpool 2010
[= TTH, 54], p. 8.

⁴ On Marcus Aurelius' disease cf. A.R. BIRLEY, *Marcus Aurelius. A Biography*, New York 2001 [= RIB],
p. 209–210.

⁵ H. ZINSSER, *Rats...*, p. 136.

⁶ CASSIUS DIO, *Epitomia*, LXXIII, 14, 3, [in:] *Dio's Roman History IX*, trans. E. CARY, London–Cam-
bridge, Mass. 1955 [= LCL, 177], p. 100; HERODIANUS, *Historia* I, 12, 1–2, [in:] *Herodiani ab excessu
divi Marci libri octo*, ed. L. MENDELSSOHN, Lipsiae 1883, p. 24–25. Cf. H. ZINSSER, *Rats...*, p. 136.

⁷ D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests, and Demons. Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old
World and the New*, Cambridge 2005, p. 46–47. On the plague cf. also L.K. LITTLE, *Life and After-
life of the First Plague Pandemic*, [in:] *Plague and the End of Antiquity. The Pandemic of 541–750*,
ed. IDEM, New York 2007, p. 4.

⁸ CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, [in:] IDEM, *Opera omnia*, rec. et comm. G. HARTEL, Vindobonae 1868
[= CSEL, 3.1] (cetera: CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*), p. 297–314. *De mortalitate* is the most valuable
source of information on a plague which spread over the Roman Empire. Probably it was composed
in 252. Cf. *Introduction to 'Mortality'*, [in:] SAINT CYPRIAN, *Treatises*, ed. et trans. R.J. DEFERRARI,
Washington 2007 [= FC.NT, 36], p. 195–198; D. STATHAKOPOULOS, *Plagues of the Roman Empire...*,
p. 537–538.

⁹ OROSIUS, VII, 22, 1, p. 480.

in the city of Rome in approximately 270¹⁰. Claudius Gothicus (268–270) died of it¹¹. This disease lasted no less than fifteen years¹². Its contagiousness was extreme and it swept over the same regions repeatedly, after intervals of several years¹³. This was a plague of inconceivable ills. There was hardly a province of the Roman Empire, a city, or a home – from east to west – that was not touched and devastated by this pestilence¹⁴. The pestilence was one of the elements that caused the great crisis through which the Roman world passed. Historians noticed that humanity had not seen before such a great destruction of human life¹⁵.

2. The response of the Christians towards epidemics

Christianity during the first centuries of its existence has already prepared some modes of activities to deal with epidemics¹⁶. These were both ideological and practical means. In fact, Christianity established itself firstly in the minds of people¹⁷ and then it was manifested in their acts. Aristides of Athens (2nd century) accentuated both the commandment of the law of the Christians and their manner of life from which it is possible to learn that they alone came near to a knowledge of the truth¹⁸. During epidemics Christianity demonstrated its teaching in consolation and its manner of life in charity.

2.1. Christian consolation

In the face of death brought by epidemics, the pagan teaching could not provide consolation that flowed from the belief in life after death¹⁹. The pagan society plagued by suffering from illness and fear of death could not find answers concerning the benefits of plagues and suffering in either teaching of philosophers

¹⁰ THEODORETUS, *De curatione*, 12, [in:] PG, vol. LXXXIII, col. 1152A–B. Cf. J. CURRAN, *Pagan City and Christian Capital. Rome in the Fourth Century*, Oxford 2000 [= OCM], p. 40.

¹¹ L.K. LITTLE, *Life and Afterlife...*, p. 4; D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 49.

¹² IOANNES ZONARAS, *Epitome Historiarum*, 12, 21, vol. III, ed. L. DINDORFIUS, Lipsiae 1870 [= BSGR] (cetera: IOANNES ZONARAS), p. 137.

¹³ H. ZINSSER, *Rats...*, p. 138.

¹⁴ OROSIUS, VII, 21, 5; VII, 27, 10, p. 480; 498; CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, 14, p. 306–306. Cf. R. DUNCAN-JONES, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy*, Cambridge 2002, p. 172.

¹⁵ ZOSIMUS, *Historia nova*, 1, 26, ed. L. MENDELSSOHN, Lipsiae 1887, p. 19; IOANNES ZONARAS, 12, 21, p. 137.

¹⁶ D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 38.

¹⁷ A. CAMERON, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1994, p. 27.

¹⁸ ARISTIDES, *Apologia*, XVI, ed. et trans. B. POUDERON, M.-J. PIERRE, B. OUTTIER, M. GUIORGADZÉ, Paris 2003 [= SC, 470] (cetera: ARISTIDES), p. 242–247, 290–291; ARISTIDES, XV, 7–9, p. 240–243, 290–291.

¹⁹ D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 72.

or religious leaders²⁰. This problem has existed among the pagans for a long time. Thucydides (ca. 460–400 BC) in his *Historia belli Peloponnesiaci*, describing the great epidemic that killed the inhabitants of Athens in 430–426 BC, writes about the futility of pagan science and religion. Doctors did not know how to treat. Oracles did not know what to foretell. People were so immersed in suffering that they no longer paid attention to it²¹.

In contradistinction to the heathens, Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead was a great source of consolation. The meditation on resurrection was coincident with suffering and death²². The promise of life after death was noticeable in the early 3rd-century *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*²³. Death for the early Christians was viewed as the moment of birth into eternity, a time of joy²⁴. One of the earliest contributions to the Christian literature of consolation during the plague is Cyprian's (ca. 248–258) treatise *De mortalitate*. It was written as a sermon for the Christians of his city²⁵. Cyprian perceives death as a means by which a Christian is freed from the world. Consequently, the plague is a danger only to the unfaithful. To the Christians it is a salutary departure because they are called to refreshment²⁶. Therefore, in *De mortalitate* Cyprian summons not to fear death but to wish to depart from the world²⁷. The world is not worthy of love because of its hatred to the Christians²⁸. By departure the Christians are being freed from its ruin and threatening disasters²⁹. As to the Christians who have already departed, they should not be mourned, because they are not lost but sent before³⁰.

Dionysius of Alexandria (248–264) who reports the standpoint of both Christian and pagan communities of Alexandria towards a severe assault of plague in 262³¹, in a similar tone remarks that for the Christians this pestilence was not so dreadful as for pagans and the Christians treated it as exercise and probation.

²⁰ R. STARK, *The Rise of Christianity. How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, Princeton 1996, p. 79–80.

²¹ THUCYDIDES, *Historia belli Peloponnesiaci*, 2.47–55, trans. F. HAASII, Paris 1855 (cetera: THUCYDIDES), p. 75–78. Cf. R. STARK, *The Rise of Christianity...*, p. 84–85; R. SALLARES, *Plague of Athens*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Pestilence, Pandemics, and Plagues*, vol. II..., p. 531–532. On the plague of Athens cf. also IDEM, *The Ecology of the Ancient Greek World*, New York, 1991, p. 97–98, 207–208, 244–262, 264–265, 463–466.

²² D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 38, 71.

²³ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitia*, [in:] *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. et trans. H. MUSURILLO, Oxford–New York 2000 [= OECT], p. 106–131. Cf. *Introduction*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. XXV–XXVII; M. SZRAM, *Ciało zmartwychwstałe w myśli patrystycznej przełomu II i III wieku*, Lublin 2010, p. 94–161.

²⁴ J. CURRAN, *Pagan City...*, p. 196, 201–216.

²⁵ *Introduction to 'Mortality'...*, p. 195.

²⁶ CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, 15, p. 306–307.

²⁷ CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, 19, p. 308–309.

²⁸ CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, 24, p. 312.

²⁹ CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, 25, p. 312–313.

³⁰ CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, 20–22, p. 309–311.

³¹ A.D. LEE, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity. A Sourcebook*, London–New York 2006, p. 38.

And for pagans the plague was more dreadful than any dread, and more intolerable than any other calamity because it prevailed over all hopes³². The most of the Christians died with the sick most joyfully, taking the affliction of others, and drawing the sickness from their neighbours to themselves and willingly receiving their pains. And many who cared for the sick and gave strength to others died themselves having transferred to themselves their death³³. The best of the Christians departed from life in this manner, including some presbyters and deacons and those of the people who had the highest reputation. This form of death was a kind of martyrdom, because it exhibited great piety and strong faith³⁴.

Accordingly, death for the Christians in times of plagues was perceived as the way to compensatory life in heaven. Their belief into resurrection was a source of a great hope and joy even during pestilence.

2.2. Charity

The members of a Christian community were bound together not only by common faith and rites but also by common manner of life and activity. Christian groups included people from different social groups³⁵. They were united by Christ's commandment of love and self-sacrifice which were presented to late antique Christians as the goals towards which they should have jointly striven³⁶. The Christians practiced love of one's neighbor much more effectively than any other group³⁷.

Christian community became a kind of an alternative society and even new families centered around Christ³⁸. Christianity came to appeal to men who felt deserted³⁹. They took the strangers to their homes, cared for the burial of the poor and supplied the food to the indigent⁴⁰. The wealthy among them helped needy⁴¹. Christianity also cared for widows and orphans, the elderly, and the disabled; it provided a nursing service as well⁴². Peter Brown claims, that to be a Christian

³² EUSEBIUS, *Historia Ecclesiastica (libri V–VII)*, VII, 22, 6, trans. G. BARDY, Paris 1955 [= SC, 41] (cetera: EUSEBIUS), p. 198.

³³ EUSEBIUS, VII, 22, 7, p. 198–199.

³⁴ EUSEBIUS, VII, 22, 8, p. 199.

³⁵ A. CAMERON, *Christianity and the Rhetoric...*, p. 37.

³⁶ L.K. BAILEY, *Christianity's Quiet Success. The Eusebius Gallicanus Sermon Collection and the Power of the Church in Late Antique Gaul*, Notre Dame, IN 2010, p. 40–41.

³⁷ P. BROWN, *The World of Late Antiquity. From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*, London 1976, p. 67. The early Church established some forms of organized assistance. Cf. G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*, Baltimore 2009, p. 114–115.

³⁸ D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 72, 77.

³⁹ P. BROWN, *The World of Late Antiquity...*, p. 67.

⁴⁰ ARISTIDES, XV, 7–9, p. 240–243, 290–291.

⁴¹ JUSTINUS, *Apologiae*, I, 67, 6, ed. et trans. C. MUNIER, Paris 2006 [= SC, 507], p. 310–311.

⁴² E.R. DODDS, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety. Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*, Cambridge 2000, p. 136–137; D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 74.

in the middle of the 3rd century entailed more protection than to be a *civis romanus*⁴³. For people who felt deserted being a member of a Christian community might be the only way to renew their sense of dignity⁴⁴.

We have some knowledge of an attitude of the Christians towards pandemic of the middle 3rd century in Carthage and Alexandria. At this period conditions in the cities stricken by the plague were horrifying; many people did not want to care for the sick, relatives even exposed members of their family lest themselves suffer from contagion, bodies laid in the streets⁴⁵. Bishop Dionysius, describing the situation in Alexandria wrote that everyone was mourning and wailings resounded daily through the city because of the multitude of the dead and dying⁴⁶.

At this time Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258) showed himself as a jealous pastor of his people. Pontius' *Vita Cypriani* described Cyprian's application of the principles of Christian charity. The bishop insisted that the mercy and help should be applied not only to the faithful but also to the heathens according to one's wealth and position. Those who were not able to give money should have given their services⁴⁷. Cyprian's *De mortalitate* is penetrated with the feeling of obligation of responsible charity. Cyprian insisted that the plague was a mark of a Christian love. It tested people's hearts and their love towards relatives and neighbors,

whether the well care of a sick, whether relatives dutifully love their kinsmen as they should, whether masters show compassion to their ailing slaves, whether physicians do not desert the afflicted begging their help, whether the violent repress their violence, whether the greedy even through the fear of death, quench the ever insatiable fire of their raging avarice, whether the proud bend their necks, whether the shameless soften their affrontry, whether the rich, even when their dear ones are perishing and they are about to die without heirs bestow and give something! We are learning not to fear death. These are trying exercises for us.⁴⁸

In a similar spirit, Dionysius of Alexandria testified of the exceeding love and charity which most of the Christians demonstrated. He claimed that they held fast to each other, visited the sick fearlessly, and ministered to them continually⁴⁹. They were present near the dying people and were jealous in the burial of the dead⁵⁰. The service of the burial of the dead entered into ecclesial life

⁴³ P. BROWN, *The World of Late Antiquity*..., p. 67.

⁴⁴ E.R. DODDS, *Pagan and Christian*..., p. 137.

⁴⁵ *Introduction to 'Mortality'*..., p. 196.

⁴⁶ EUSEBIUS, VII, 22, 2, p. 197.

⁴⁷ PONTIUS, *Vita Cypriani*, 9–10, [in:] *Vita di Cipriano. Vita di Ambrogio. Vita di Agostino*, ed. A.A.R. BASTIAENSEN, trans. L. CANALI, C. CARENZA, Verona 1975 (cetera: PONTIUS), p. 22–26. Cf. *Introduction to 'Mortality'*..., p. 196.

⁴⁸ CYPRIANUS, *De mortalitate*, 16, p. 307; trans.: SAINT CYPRIAN, *Mortality*, [in:] IDEM, *Treatises*..., p. 212.

⁴⁹ EUSEBIUS, VII, 22, 7, p. 198–199.

⁵⁰ EUSEBIUS, VII, 22, 9, p. 199. Cf. A.D. LEE, *Pagans and Christians*..., p. 38.

so that the Christian Churches had become identified with the burial of the dead by the fourth century⁵¹.

The conduct of the pagans was very contrasted to that of the Christians in the face of pestilence. The individuals felt little social responsibility for the others. Care for health was regarded as a private responsibility⁵². The pagans deserted those who began to be sick, and left even their dearest friends. They cast out the sick into the streets when they were half dead⁵³. The most unscrupulous of them took advantage of the situation to rob the sick⁵⁴. The pagans refused to bury their dead for fear of contagion. They avoided any contact with death but, regardless all their precautions, it was not easy for them to escape⁵⁵.

The non-Christian classical world had no religious impulse for charity⁵⁶. For example, it is supposed that the famous doctor Galen (129 – ca. 200/216) during the plague fled from Rome to Asia Minor. He himself wrote late in life that he had left Rome in 166 to avoid the pestilence⁵⁷. The indifference of pagans towards their neighbors and their self-centeredness have been known since ancient times. Thucydides wrote that people were dying because there was no one to take care of them. There were piles of dead bodies, and in the streets many half-dead, staggering or flocking around the fountains in their desire for water. People, not knowing what would happen to them, were indifferent to all the rules of religion and laws. There were very few who cared for the sick⁵⁸.

3. The benefits of the Christian responses to the epidemics

The outburst of epidemics showed demoralization and religious confusion of classical pagan society. It was a Christian belief that introduced in the classical world the sense of consolation and social responsibility in treating epidemic disease⁵⁹. Christianity has arisen at a time when caring for health was entering into the consciousness of people because of different factors that increased susceptibility to diseases⁶⁰. This was an opportunity for the Christians to show their deep

⁵¹ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 119; É. REBILLARD, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, trans. E.T. RAWLINGS, J. ROUTIER-PUCCI, Ithaca–London 2009, p. 93–95.

⁵² G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 116–117.

⁵³ EUSEBIUS, VII, 22, 10, p. 199; G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 118.

⁵⁴ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 118. Cf. PONTIUS, 9, p. 64; CYPRIANUS, *Ad Demetrianum*, 10–11, [in:] IDEM, *Opera omnia...*, p. 357–359.

⁵⁵ EUSEBIUS, VII, 22, 10, p. 199.

⁵⁶ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 114, 121.

⁵⁷ E.D. NELSON, *Galen*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Pestilence, Pandemics, and Plagues*, vol. I, A–M, ed. J.P. BYRNE, Westport, Conn.–London 2008, p. 221–222; L.N. MAGNER, *A History of Medicine*, 2nd ed., Boca Raton 2005, p. 122; R.J. LITTMAN, M.L. LITTMAN, *Galen and...*, p. 243–255.

⁵⁸ THUCYDIDES, 51–53, p. 76–77; R. STARK, *The Rise of Christianity...*, p. 85.

⁵⁹ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 117–118.

⁶⁰ H. AVALOS, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity*, Peabody 1999, p. 5.

faith, morality and set an example to follow⁶¹. Christians' caring for the sick and dying was impressive, despite the risk of infection.

Christian teaching and interpretation as well as moral activity were an active force in Christianization. During the early Christian period every disaster entailed the pagan conversions. The Christians presented their active faith to all intellectual and social groups. The calamities and other disasters where Christians might show their moral principles and the special code of life was the reason to explain conversion to Christianity⁶². Christian charity was very fruitful. The number of the Christians increased during the plagues as a result of the destruction of traditional social bonds and the creation of new bonds between surviving pagans and Christians. It resulted in large numbers of conversions⁶³. After the Antonine Plague and during the first half of the 3rd century Christianity began to win significant numbers of converts⁶⁴. That is the case why epidemics are reckoned to contribute to both destruction of classical civilizations and the growth of the Church⁶⁵.

The outspread of Christianity in the cities of the Roman Empire led to the parochial organization of charitable work. Plagues provided the Church with opportunity for the broad extension of medical charity. Christians cared for the sick on the large scale. During the Plague of Cyprian Christian Churches organized in several cities the systematic care of the sick⁶⁶. The experience flowing from the dealing with the sick contributed to the emergence of the Christian hospitals in the fourth century⁶⁷. The hospital became, in origin and conception, a distinctively Christian institution, rooted in Christian concept of charity⁶⁸.

The hospitals arose from the combination of Christian charity with the classical and Christian learning urged by the Greek Fathers⁶⁹. According to the earliest Christian belief, the disease is caused by sin or by demons and is healed supernaturally⁷⁰. By the 3rd and the 4th centuries the Christians had accepted the medical knowledge of the Greco-Roman world⁷¹. The natural causality of disease was admitted⁷². Plagues were treated as both biological problem and divinely inflicted sufferings⁷³.

⁶¹ R. STARK, *The Rise of Christianity...*, p. 74.

⁶² A. CAMERON, *Christianity and the Rhetoric...*, p. 8, 22–23.

⁶³ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 121.

⁶⁴ D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 65–66.

⁶⁵ H. ZINSSER, *Rats...*, p. 139; D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 43, 75.

⁶⁶ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 113, 118, 121.

⁶⁷ J.N. HAYS, *The Burdens of Disease. Epidemics and Human Response in Western History*, New Brunswick 2009, p. 17; G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 113.

⁶⁸ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 124.

⁶⁹ J.N. HAYS, *The Burdens of Disease...*, p. 17.

⁷⁰ G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 42–43; D.T. REFF, *Plagues, Priests...*, p. 67.

⁷¹ J.N. HAYS, *The Burdens of Disease...*, p. 16.

⁷² G.B. FERNGREN, *Medicine and Health Care...*, p. 45–48, 51–53, 57–61.

⁷³ M. LANE, *Ancient Ideas of Politics: Mediating between Ecology and Theology*, [in:] *Ecology and Theology in the Ancient World. Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. A. HUNT, H. MARLOW, London 2019, p. 20.

The plagues contributed also to the rise of the orphanages. In the early middle ages famines and plagues deepened the difficult situation of the poor and increased their numbers. The Christian monasteries accepted children of the lower classes⁷⁴.

The Emperor Julian (361–363) acknowledged the fruitfulness of Christian charity. According to him through charity the ‘Galilaeans’ had won many adherents. He showed his appreciation of their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead⁷⁵, their deeds of piety, their purity in words, acts⁷⁶ and their philanthropy concerning the poor⁷⁷.

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⁷⁴ J. BOSWELL, *The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, New York 1998, p. 256.

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