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ORPHANAGES AND PHILANTHROPY IN BYZANTIUM

As the author of *The Orphans of Byzantium* and *The Birth of the Hospital in Byzantium*, Dr. Timothy S. Miller, Professor of History at Salisbury University in Maryland, is one of our most respected American Byzantinists. In November of 2011 he spent a morning near Washington D.C. talking to *Road to Emmaus* about Byzantine philanthropy, hospitals and orphanages, East and West.

RTE: Professor Miller, can you tell us a bit about your background in Byzantine history?

PROF. MILLER: I taught Byzantine History for three years at the University of Washington, and in 1983 I began teaching general history at Salisbury University. I also do a course on the Medieval West from the time of the Crusades and one on Renaissance Italy where I bring in Byzantium. My research is almost like a second job, and fortunately, Dumbarton Oaks, the American institute for Byzantine studies in Georgetown (Washington D.C.) is not far away.

RTE: What sparked your interest in Byzantium?

PROF. MILLER: When I was in a Roman Catholic grade school, I saw a movie called *Boy on a Dolphin*. It was Sophia Loren's first big hit and in the movie an archeologist goes to a monastery on Meteora. After watching it, I asked our nun-teacher, "Who are these monks?" She said, "Oh, they're not Catholic. Those are Orthodox monks." I asked if we were allowed to go to these churches and she said, "Well, yes, they have the real presence of the Lord in the sacraments, but they don't like us..." She was trying to say that the Orthodox were different than the Protestants and this made me wonder, "Why haven't we ever heard about these people?" Around the same time I read a book for children called, *The Fall of Constantinople* in the Landmark series

of books for children. That combined with *Boy on a Dolphin* caught my interest and I began studying Greek in high school.

RTE: You were also in the Peace Corps in Turkey—formerly Asia Minor—in the late sixties. That must have helped.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, I was about to be drafted to Viet Nam when I joined the Peace Corps. I was already studying Byzantine History in grad school and thought that Turkey would at least be relevant. Teaching high school English there was difficult, but being in Turkey was extremely helpful for my Byzantine geography. I was able to see Cappadocia, western Asia Minor with Ephesus, and the Mediterranean coast, passing through Adana and Tarsus. I learned some Turkish, but most of it has slipped away. I find that I use more Greek and Italian in my research, though now there is much more interest in Byzantine history among the Turks themselves.

The Birth of the Orphanage

RTE: From your book *The Orphans of Byzantium*, it seems that pre-Christian Greek and Roman laws tended to concentrate not on the needs of orphans per se, but on fairly administering the property of wealthy orphans. There would have been a great need for honest guardians at a time when parents often died relatively young, and inheritance problems were acute for young survivors. Were there institutions in pre-Christian Greece or Rome that would have cared for poor orphans as well?

PROF. MILLER: When it comes to philanthropy and charity it's clear that the ancient world did not have the same approach that we see later in Byzantium. Christianity is key to that, particularly in regard to orphans. Your point about the care of the property is really good. Montesquieu, the French philosopher and legal scholar, says that a society that allows only the male side of the family to be legal guardians is more concerned with property. Societies that also allow the mothers or female side to be guardians when the father dies are more concerned with the care of the children. Byzantium made that switch. By the end of the fourth century there were a number of laws that allowed first the mothers and later grandmothers to become guardians rather than guardianship going to the father's brother or uncle. Uncles usually weren't too bad and there were many examples of bishops serving as

guardians because they were the family's surviving male relative. One of the big mistakes in guardianship in classical Roman law, which changed in Christian law only with respect to mothers and grandmothers, was that it was preferred that the guardianship go to an older brother. In almost all of the cases that came to Byzantine courts, a younger brother or sister was disputing the older brother's management of his property and often a bishop, acting as judge, had to intervene to adjust the issue. This happened again and again.

RTE: When do we start seeing orphans being cared for outside the interests of property inheritance?

PROF. MILLER: This is a Christian idea. The conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity made a total difference about what to do with people who were socially unacceptable. In the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, God protects the orphans, the widows and the strangers. In classical Greece, an orphan was considered to be disliked by the gods—that's why he's an orphan. The gods have punished his family or the orphan himself. Conversely, the child with both parents living was considered blessed by the gods, whereas in Judaism, the God of Israel particularly loves the orphan, and that translates to Christianity. We have a Syrian text from about 230 AD around the area of Antioch, the *Didascalia*, which describes the duties of a bishop with a long exhortation to care for orphans, and a proto-orphanage is described. This becomes the basis for a later, longer collection of instructions for bishops usually called the *Apostolic Constitutions*.

I haven't found any mention of Jewish orphanages, although there is some evidence that the Essenes may have taken care of orphans. The theory is that the Jewish family was strong and the extended family connections were so well-maintained that they could always find a relative to take care of the child. With Christianity we begin to have people taking care of orphans from outside the extended family. For example, in the fourth century there are cases of abandoned pagan children being taken into Christian orphanages and



Prof. Timothy S. Miller.

raised as Christians. Jews often objected to Christian philanthropic activities because these were sometimes used to convert non-Christian beneficiaries of these charitable services who were often pagans and sometimes Jews.

RTE: They could hardly expect Christians to raise them as pagans or Jews. We are so used to the Christian idea of the value of the person that we forget that classical Greece and Rome didn't have that view, nor did Judaism have it about non-Jews.

PROF. MILLER: And remember that the classical world really approved of abandoning children. There's even a case in Plato's dialogue, *Theaetetus*, where Socrates says, "We have to examine a new idea just like a father examines the baby to determine whether to reject it or not." Plato sees nothing wrong with that. I'm not sure what the criteria would be in the case of boys, but the other criteria was girls. We can't afford a second or third girl, we don't have a dowry, so.... Ending infanticide was one of the biggest changes that Christianity brought.

RTE: In his book *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark has a whole chapter about how, because Christians were not abandoning their infant girls, there was soon a higher percentage of Christian women. Because of this, pagan men frequently wound up with Christian wives, and even if the husband did not convert, the children were often raised as Christians. This was the case of St. Gregory the Theologian's father, who later converted and became bishop of Nazianzus.

PROF. MILLER: There are also implications for this lack of women in some modern countries, like the forced abortions in China.

RTE: Yes, with their one-child family policies, sex-selective abortions have resulted in a huge population of missing girls.

PROF. MILLER: The secular U.S. academic world comes after Christianity about oppressing women and pushing them out of the spotlight, but if you really look at the legislation about women, their situation improves the minute that Constantine converts to Christianity. The direction of legislation begins to change immediately.

There are academic theories that Constantine didn't actually convert, because he used a pagan sacrifice when he dedicated Constantinople. This

goes back to the fact that the empire was predominantly pagan. Constantine had to be consistent with what most people expected. Tradition demanded the same ceremonies to dedicate Constantinople that had been recorded in the founding of old Rome. Constantine was simply being a shrewd politician. What I think is significant is that in 313, one year after the traditional date for his conversion to Christianity, he issued the first law to beef up the protection of orphans. Every year he added something new, and by the reign of Theodosius I (380-395) mothers had a right to act as guardians of their own children.

Finally Emperor Justinian (527-565) actually preferred the mother and grandmother over any male heir. Justinian thereby radically altered the traditional Roman law which had given the guardianship only to male heirs: first the grandfather, then the older brother, and finally the uncle. From now on, this order would be followed only if there was no living mother or grandmother. Later, the eighth-century iconoclast Emperor Leo III issued a series of decrees in which the mother was no longer considered a legal guardian—when her husband died, she just became the head of the family, as we see her today. It was a natural continuation. When that dynasty was later condemned as iconoclast, some of the changes were overridden, but not Leo's marriage and inheritance policy.

Guest Houses, Leprosaria, and Hospitals in Byzantium

RTE: Economic development has been defined as, "Bringing forth new work from old, in the context of many others who are doing the same." Now obviously, the Byzantines weren't capitalists or socialists, so what were they and how did they develop this new work of caring for orphans? What changed when Christianity gained imperial patronage in the fourth century, and did it differ in the two halves of the empire?

PROF. MILLER: Christian ethics were the same in the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire, for example with lepers. There is a story of St. Basil the Great embracing a leper, and almost at the same time we have an account of St. Martin of Tours doing the same thing outside of Paris. Obviously they weren't communicating with each other, but a gradual evolution of Christian thought has taken place in both East and West so that now we have to take care of people with leprosy. It seems to have taken a while

though, as I've not been able to find examples of Christians taking care of lepers until the fourth century. Perhaps the old Jewish idea lingered that they were being punished for their sins.

At the same time the *xenodocheion* is being developed in the East something similar occurs in the West. *Xenodocheion* originally meant a public inn, but during the early fourth-century, around the time Constantine converts, the Christian Church begins opening up *xenodocheia* in which they take in guests without charge. Bishops are building these *xenodocheia* near churches, and monasteries put them outside of their gates; our first are mentioned in Syria and Egypt.

Christian bishops began to build the *xenodocheia* as an alternative to the *pandocheia*, inns or hotels which were run for profit throughout the Roman Empire. One reason that Christians built their own *xenodocheia* was that the *pandocheion* had such a bad moral reputation—the innkeeper's daughter and so on. As we know, Constantine's mother was supposedly an innkeeper's daughter and was never able to become the official wife of Constantine's father. By the end of the fourth century some of these Christian *xenodocheia* began specializing as medical hospices. The argument was that travelers sometimes got sick and needed more than soup and a bed, so the bishop or the monastery would hire a physician. Also, the *xenodocheia* were for people who didn't have money. *Xenodocheia* didn't charge their guests, whereas the public inns did.

RTE: It was more like a guesthouse.

PROF. MILLER: Yes. *Xenodocheia* which emphasize medical care (the first hospitals) multiply rapidly in Byzantium, but nothing like that happens yet in the West. One reason may be that there were more physicians in the East. In researching the book, I discovered that many eastern bishops had studied medicine, whereas in the West very few had medical backgrounds. If we remember, St. Basil had studied medicine and St. Gregory of Nyssa also wrote about it. Basil goes into it at some length, using the images of physicians and medical care to look at the problems of sin and illness.

RTE: Would the *xenodocheia* ever take in local orphaned or abandoned children? Were they the forerunners of the orphanages?

PROF. MILLER: I actually think that the orphanage predates the *xenodocheion*. In the East we see an increasing interest in meeting the needs of specific

groups and the third-century guide about how a bishop should care for orphans pre-dates the Christian *xenodocheia*. In turn, *xenodocheia* branch off into different institutions, such as a *xenodocheion* for lepers. That shows up before the *xenodocheion* for curable diseases, the general hospital.

All of this comes from the strong sense in the Greek world of the pre-Christian *polis*, of the city having obligations, a view that was stronger in the East than in the West. The eastern communities combined Christian ethics with the old pagan practice of donating money to the city for the good of the citizens. While in the classical world the wealthy might build a nice theater, a fountain, or baths, now wealthy Christians would build a hospital or orphanage and endow it so that it could be more than just a poor house. Exactly who these eastern donors were isn't always clear, but you can see from their writings that Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, Basil the Great and John Chrysostom were always trying to squeeze money from the wealthy to endow new institutions for the *polis*. Not only for churches, but for philanthropic institutions. As I said earlier, another difference from the *pandocheia* is that the Christian institutions didn't charge.

The first leprosarium that we know of was built by an Arian bishop of Sebasteia, named Eustathios, who had been abbot of a local monastery. He felt the monks should be helping the poor as well as praying, and he is one of the early monastic leaders we know of who encourages the monks to work with people. Basil knew him, and although they disagreed on dogma, Basil copied his idea when he built his famous *Basileias* in Caesarea. I suspect that Basil's institution was primarily a leprosarium, because when it was described by Gregory Nazianzus in his funeral oration for his boyhood friend Basil, he only mentions lepers there. The text is quite clear.

RTE: I had the impression that Basil's was a huge complex with hospital and orphanage, school, and so on....

PROF. MILLER: It definitely had an orphanage because Basil describes it in his *Long Rules* for monks, and speaks of still-living parents who want their children to go there. It was a preparatory school for the monastery, though he is very clear that when the students came to adulthood, they should freely decide whether they want to remain or not; they shouldn't be forced to become monks just because they had studied there.

Here's the thing I'm a little suspicious of. Basil writes a long letter to the governor of Cappadocia, describing his charitable complex, the *Basileias*,

as a hospital, and it's clear that a lot of people are complaining about it because he asks, "What injustice have we done by providing physicians for the sick and guides for travelers?" I wonder if he was soft-pedaling the fact that many of the patients were lepers because a leprosarium would have been very unpopular with local landowners. We know that when John Chrysostom tried to build a leprosarium outside of Constantinople, he had a huge fight, and this was one of the reasons that he was deposed. There's a newly edited life of Chrysostom—in fact, it was a funeral oration delivered shortly after Chrysostom died—which first appeared in print in 2007. It includes a long passage about the empress Eudoxia who was receiving complaints from the local landowners near where Chrysostom tried to build the leprosarium. It was extra ammunition to get rid of him.

RTE: And sadly they were successful. One thing that I've been curious about is that classical Greece had healing temples dedicated to the god Asclepius with their attendant pilgrims, and these have been compared to Christians pilgrimaging to famous shrines to seek healing. Even today, in Greece, Egypt and Ethiopia, Christians have told me of saints healing them in dreams. People have always turned to the other world when they cannot be healed by natural means and who is to say that God didn't also heal pre-Christians who came in faith. Do you see a parallel here with Byzantine Christian practice?

PROF. MILLER: We can make a connection between the temples to Asclepius and the hospital, but a more direct connection is with the cults of certain saints, such as Sts. Cosmas and Damian, the unmercenary physicians from Syria. In the fifth and sixth centuries there was a large church dedicated to them in Constantinople and we know that ill people would go there to sleep in the church. Sometimes they would see Cosmas and Damian in dreams or visions examining them or doing operations, and this is exactly what people encountered when they went to the pre-Christian Asclepian temples. Asclepius would appear to them as a physician and give them miraculous physical healing. So there is a direct parallel there.

But there isn't much coming out of the Asclepian cult that relates to the hospitals. The hospitals came from a strong sense that God can work through medicine and that medicine is His gift. Basil emphasized that when we fell in the Garden of Eden, the result was disease, manual labor, pain in childbirth... but for each of these things God also provides help. For work He not only gives us intelligence, but provides the means to develop agriculture. Likewise,

He didn't just leave us to suffer from disease, He gives us cures from plants, animals and creatures from the sea, along with the intelligence to use them.

Initially Christianity was a little uncomfortable with medicine. It was a pagan science, and its symbol was Asklepius' staff with the snake. Some early Christians saw this as evil and rejected medicine, saying that using a physician was a lack of faith, just as some Protestants do today. But Orthodox Christian writers, particularly Basil, really push the idea that it is right to use doctors and that Christianity should support medicine that is beneficial. As they felt more and more comfortable employing doctors in a Christian context, the *xenodocheion* gradually evolves into the *nosokomeion*, the hospital.

RTE: So this is the first appearance of what we moderns would think of as a hospital?

PROF. MILLER: Yes. Byzantium gave birth to the hospital we are familiar with today.

Monastic and Lay Philanthropy in Byzantium

RTE: Another thought in regard to these early Christian charities is that we forget that in the pagan world there was no reward for such philanthropy. Dying as a result of assisting plague victims or lepers would only mean a quicker departure to the pagan Hades. Do you see this self-sacrifice on the part of Christians as an integral part of early philanthropy?

PROF. MILLER: Yes, and one of the things you can work into this is the idea of the monks and nuns being engaged in charitable work as a laying down of self in following Christ. There was another major shift from pre-Byzantine classical culture to Christian culture in terms of who should be helped, regardless of the usefulness of the recipient. How did John Chrysostom put it? "Not according to what you can do, but according to what your need is." Classical Greco-Roman culture had the idea of helping the community, but it was always from a position of power and ability. The wealthy contribute to help build the city, the poor give their labor. But what do you do with the people who can neither work nor contribute? In a Christian culture they are still seen as valuable.

Now, there is no doubt that the monastic movement was key to the early hospitals because Basil definitely promoted hospitals and leprosaria. His

own monastic complex in Caesarea included a leprosarium, an orphan school, and a *xenodocheion* that also seems to have taken care of the sick.

RTE: So it was more of a hospital than a guesthouse or hospice?

PROF. MILLER: Yes, because he mentions doctors. Neither a hospice nor a leprosarium by themselves would have required physicians. With leprosia you don't really have doctors because lepers couldn't be cured. They were given baths, clothing, a bed, and food so that they weren't wandering around. It's mentioned repeatedly in the early literature that even fathers and mothers would turn their children out of the house if they contracted leprosy because it was considered contagious. Interestingly, Gregory of Nyssa argues that it's not contagious, that this is a delusion of the devil, and we know today that leprosy is not really that contagious. Less than ten percent of the population can get it and you have to have a specific immune deficiency.

RTE: Fr. Damian, the Roman Catholic priest at the leprosarium in Molokai, Hawaii served for sixteen years before he contracted it.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, and I wonder if one's immunity may break down with repeated contact because to catch leprosy you have to live in very close contact. You can't just get it from talking to lepers, you have to live with them for years.

Gregory Nazianzen's *Sermon 14*, "On the Care of the Poor" is about lepers. He has a long passage in which he says that even worse than pagans are Christians who think that God is punishing lepers for their sins. You don't know how God works; it might very well be that the person that is healthy, strong and beautiful is actually the one that God is not blessing because He allows the healthy person to become arrogant and sinful, whereas the leper's suffering will purify him for heaven. Like Lazarus in the gospel, when he dies he will be saved.

This is a complete reversal of the classical idea of health, beauty, and strength dedicated to the city. There's no doubt about the transformation. Now how many people actually believed Gregory's sermon? You still occasionally see negative attitudes in Christian literature, because people still didn't feel comfortable around lepers, but the official Orthodox theology was sympathetic. In contrast, the changed attitude toward orphans was universally accepted and encouraged in the Christian East and West.

RTE: Weren't St. Basil's monks involved in both nursing and teaching?

PROF. MILLER: Yes. The earliest monks wanted to flee the world and live in the desert but Eustathius of Sebasteia, Basil of Caesarea, and some monastic leaders in Palestine began to promote the idea that to fulfill the commandments to love God and your neighbor you have to be involved in the community. This new form of community self-sacrifice becomes a big part of the monastic movement in the fourth century and gives rise to the *theoria/praxis* debate within Eastern Orthodox monasticism about whether monastic life should be dedicated to outward service or only to the contemplative life. This same debate doesn't take place in the West until much later. I'm not an expert on monastic life in Byzantium, but if you look at the later tradition, this idea of physical service by monks and nuns for the needy does gradually die out in the Orthodox Church. Instead, the monastery provides money for the philanthropic institutions and bureaucratic supervision, but because there are too many sexual temptations and worldly distractions for monastics, laymen are hired in their place.

RTE: *In The Birth of the Hospital in Byzantium*, you mention only a handful of doctors who were also monastics.

PROF. MILLER: Not only was it exceptional, but in the twelfth century Patriarch Lukas of Constantinople says that he doesn't want priests and deacons practicing medicine anymore. There were still monk-physicians but they weren't supposed to treat laypeople. Also I would imagine that as the hesychastic movement became stronger in the fourteenth century you would have less and less involvement, although I've also heard that after the Turks took Constantinople some of the monasteries did go back to providing medical care for the Greek lay population so that they wouldn't be forced to use Muslim doctors.

RTE: Also, as Byzantine medicine became more sophisticated and the training became more rigorous, perhaps it was difficult to keep up with both vocations. Medicine and monasticism are intense ways of life.

PROF. MILLER: And apparently, Byzantine medicine was pretty sophisticated. Critics of my book on the history of Byzantine hospitals claim that I made up the accounts of how good Byzantine physicians were, but there are surviving descriptions of complicated operations. The eleventh-century St.

Symeon the New Theologian says that in confession the priest should investigate the soul just as once a person dies, the physician cuts open the body to see how the disease has affected the organs. Byzantines were practising pathological anatomy, a very advanced technique which didn't appear in the West until the eighteenth century. Why they didn't write down what they saw, such as, "There were lesions in the liver," we don't know. We can only glean what they were doing from religious writings that compare contemporary medical practice to how you treat a soul.

RTE: Wouldn't many Byzantine libraries and institutional records also have been destroyed with the coming of the Ottomans?

PROF. MILLER: There is a lot of that, and it's also possible that there was a guild mentality among the physicians, that you learned by practice and you didn't write your observations down. Perhaps they didn't want it to be general knowledge; it was the private skill of these particular professionals.

RTE: Like the guild trade secrets in the West.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, yet it is unusual that their practice hasn't left more traces in Byzantine medical literature, which is mostly just lists of drugs with no description of how to apply them.

RTE: Returning to the idea of these early philanthropic monks, John Kelly in his book *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* says that Chrysostom curtailed the public service orders of Constantinople's monks because they were disorderly and becoming involved in politics.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, this was the movement that some historians call urban monasticism. Many of these particular monks were also Arians, and even after the reestablishment of the Nicene church in Constantinople, one important group, the Macedonians, denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They were very much into charity, but there was a strong heretical aspect. Also, they didn't have fixed residences, but lived in small communities that were possibly undisciplined, which would have been a problem for the archbishop. I don't think that Chrysostom was particularly against them doing charity because it is mentioned that he hired the unmarried, the *agamoï* to work in the hospitals, by which I assume he means these monks. I believe he

wanted urban monks working in his hospitals, but he wanted them to live in a community with an identifiable leader to watch over them.

RTE: What about St. Olympia and her deaconesses? Did they take part in organizing hospitals or orphanages?

PROF. MILLER: I'm not sure if her deaconesses did hands-on public service. I never saw her involved in an organization, although she did sponsor charities. Olympia died around 400, but in Rome at the same time there is a parallel to her in Fabiola, the friend of Jerome who lived at the same time. She was a wealthy woman, twice married, who consecrated herself to the Church and funded a leprosarium and a hospital.

RTE: And presumably an orphanage?

PROF. MILLER: Actually, there is no evidence that Fabiola founded an orphanage. I don't know of any orphanages in Rome until the seventh century when the papacy organized the Roman *Orphanotropheion*, which was undoubtedly based on the institution of the same name in Constantinople. Apparently the Roman orphanage was founded with the pope's blessing by Greek refugees fleeing the Arabs, many of whom went to Rome and parts of Sicily. The most amazing thing is that the Romans used Greek in this orphanage school until the ninth century, and were still singing in Greek in the twelfth century. They didn't understand Greek anymore but they had written the characters, and the words are Greek.

RTE: We forget how far the Byzantine refugees went. This same emigration includes St. Theodore of Tarsus and Antioch who came to Rome during the Arab conquests. In 668 he was named the eighth Archbishop of Canterbury by the pope, and completely reorganized the English church. He also ushered in the golden-age of Anglo-Saxon learning with a school that taught Greek, Latin, Holy Scripture, literature, poetry, and astronomy. Were there many charitable institutions in the West that came about through these educated and skilled refugees?

PROF. MILLER: Certainly, the Roman *Orphanotropheion* was, and Roman hospitals providing medical care that appeared around this time used the word *nosokomeion*, the Greek word for hospital, instead of what would become the common Latin term *hospitium* or *hospitale*. But as we mentioned

earlier, Fabiola had also seen the leprosaria and hospices in fourth-century Palestine and set up her own after returning to Rome.

Orphanages East and West

RTE: Returning to your earlier point, I don't find it surprising that monasteries would go back to providing medical care after the Ottoman conquest; many doctors in Asia Minor even after the conquest were Greek. Monastic philanthropy was widespread after the 1922 Exchange of Populations and World War II, when many monasteries provided food, clothing, and even shelter to refugees. Also, until about twenty years ago orphanages in Greece were all run by Orthodox nuns, and it was only a few decades ago that the leftist government took the orphans away and placed them in rather unsuccessful government-run institutions.

When I visited St. Barbara's Monastery on the island of Syros in 1996 there were three elderly nuns with a handful of retarded adult orphans that the government had left behind. The monastery had facilities for hundreds of children. It had been a very natural life for the orphans who lived on this beautiful island with animals, gardens, handicrafts, schools and open hills to play in. The nuns of this particular monastery had dedicated their lives to caring for them, and the orphan women who are left do beautiful weaving and embroidery to help support themselves.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, and although the earlier Byzantine hospitals were employing non-monastic staff, they were still sponsored and administered by the monasteries. In the case of orphanages I was only able to identify one that was a state institution, and that was the original *Orphanotropheion* in Constantinople, which was founded in the fourth century by a mysterious figure named Zotikos, who also set up the first leprosarium in the city. He was apparently supported by an Arian bishop during a time when most of Constantinople was under the influence of Arianism. When the Nicene Church takes over during the reign of Emperor Theodosius I, Zotikos is forgotten. Later tradition says that he was martyred under Constantine's son Constantius II, but there is a long intervening period of silence about him. Both of the institutions that he set up were supervised by the patriarch of Constantinople, but they eventually became independent from the church along with a number of other charities when the administrative duties became too great

for the patriarch. Eventually, the emperor takes the orphanage over and forms it into a sort of government office, but this is the only state-run orphanage that we know of. Despite the many times the *Orphanotropheion* is mentioned, we don't know exactly who was working in it, whether they were nuns, monks, or hired laypeople. Other Byzantine orphanages are run either by local bishops or superiors of monasteries. There were many orphanages in monasteries and some of these orphans eventually became monks.

RTE: Did the Constantinople *Orphanotropheion* function until the coming of the Turks? If so it must have been almost 1000 years old and surely the longest-lasting social service institution in history.

PROF. MILLER: The *Orphanotropheion* lasted at least until the early 14th century. It is not mentioned after that and probably collapsed during the long period of decline that began after the civil war between the Cantakouzenos emperor and John V Palaiologos' party. Still, if we say from 400 to 1340, that is 900 plus years. How old is Oxford? It was founded in about 1215, so it is also about 900 years old.

RTE: Is there any evidence that there were problems in Byzantine orphanages? Unruly children, perhaps?

PROF. MILLER: One thirteenth-century bishop named John Apokauko, bishop of Nafpaktos in the Greek peninsula, wrote a number of letters in which he says that he has many orphans and that he considers this a blessing from God. He teaches them music, prayers, and calligraphy, so we know that they can read and write. Some of the orphans he sends to other bishops to learn accounting. In one letter, he sends an orphan to study with a bishop-friend in another town, and you can tell that he is trying to "sell" the kid. "He's very smart, but you have to keep your eye on him because he tends not to do what you tell him." Then it finally comes out, "Every now and then you have to beat him because otherwise he's not going to obey." Then he says, "You know, a lot of orphans don't like me." Of course not, if he was spanking them often. The saying from Proverbs, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," was a universal maxim and in this there was no difference between the family and the orphanage. So, monasteries and bishops continued to run the orphanages and this was true in the West also.

RTE: Can you highlight a few of these orphanages for us? What was noteworthy about them?

PROF. MILLER: The major one, of course, was the *Orphanotropheion* in Constantinople, which was a huge operation. We don't know how many orphans there were, but Fr. George Dennis, my thesis director at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., found a letter from St. Theodore the Studite that mentions a couple in Prusa in Bithynia who had set up a private orphanage for eighty orphans with their own money. They had forty boys and forty girls. It specifically mentions that the wife took care of the forty girls. If a private provincial orphanage had eighty orphans, Constantinople's *Orphanotropheion* could have had 500 or 600. The *Orphanotropheion* eventually became a famous school where important scholars got their start as teachers of poetry and rhetoric.

I also found a reference to orphans who were not Christians being baptized in Constantinople at Pascha. Many children who were wandering around in war-torn border areas were taken in by the emperors and brought to Constantinople where they were placed in orphanages for Christian instruction and eventually baptized. These were usually children of Christian families who had been semi-Islamicized and had never received the sacraments. In one narrative Emperor John Comnenus II marches in to drive the Turks out of Western Asia Minor. He doesn't gain complete control of the area, however, and has to return in battle formation. The army puts a phalanx around the women and children, many of whom are widows and orphans, and when they return to Constantinople he divides the orphans up. Those who have been baptized he sends to monastery schools; for those who have relatives, he finds these relatives for them; and those who have neither relatives nor a Christian upbringing he puts in the *Orphanotropheion*, which had this catechetical function as well.

RTE: Fascinating. Did you find that Byzantine empresses were also involved in social services for women and children?

PROF. MILLER: Yes. For example, Empress Theodora, Justinian's wife, built a *xenodocheion* for prostitutes so that they could get off the street and lead a decent life. She provided them with stipends and means of livelihood. Earlier than Theodora is Empress Pulcheria, who is a Byzantine saint, and her sister-in-law, Empress Aelia Eudocia, an orphan herself who was raised by

her brothers. She became Christian when she married Pulcheria's brother, Emperor Theodosius II. Later, he exiled Eudocia to Palestine, where she built a huge leprosarium outside of Jerusalem and two hospitals. She was also a devoted patron of monasteries, and built several monasteries for communities that had been living in small huts. I don't specifically remember empresses and orphanages, but they must have been involved.

There are also references to orphanages run by hierarchs, including the one at Nafpaktos and another tenth-century orphanage at Argos, founded by Bishop Peter who had himself been raised at a monastic orphanage in Constantinople. Peter's successor as bishop of Argos had been a child in the Argos orphanage which Peter had organized. These orphanages under the supervision of bishops and monasteries are very difficult to document because they don't call them orphanages, they just mention that there are orphans at the school. I found several monastic leaders who grew up in monastic orphanages, and you can assume they wouldn't have willingly joined the monastery if they had had a bad experience. They would have fled. One example is Athanasios who eventually became superior of the twelfth-century Mamas Monastery in Constantinople where he had been raised as an orphan. Another was Blasios who was raised in a Greek monastery on Sicily and eventually became the superior of the institution.

Orphans and Music

RTE: Was there anything in your research on orphanages that particularly touched or surprised you?

PROF. MILLER: It would have to be the singing orphans. From the earliest days, all of these Byzantine orphanages focused on music. In the fifth century it is mentioned that the orphan choir was so good that people used to go out to listen to it on Sunday afternoons. In every orphanage connected to a bishop the children were trained to sing the liturgy and this tradition was very strong in Byzantium and later in Rome.

The *Orphanotropheion* in Rome eventually becomes the Schola Cantorum, the principal choir for papal liturgies. Of four famous Renaissance orphanages in Venice, one for girls called the Ospedale della Pieta became a famous music center and Antonio Vivaldi spent his entire life there writing music for the girls' ensemble. Also, the Latin word for a girls' orphanage is

a *conservatorio*, to conserve the girls from the world and the vices of the street, and this is where the idea of musical conservatories comes from.

Even here in the U.S., after the Civil War in Charleston, Rev. Daniel Jenkins, a black Protestant pastor, founded the first orphanage for African-American children. After the war there were huge numbers of freed slaves with no work and many abandoned and orphaned children on the streets of Charleston. After four years the orphanage had 500 children, and before Jenkins died, the 5000th orphan was taken in. The orphanage became famous for a marching band that went all over the United States and eventually to Europe. As they played their instruments they would do a dance that was the origin of the Charleston, and they were some of the earliest jazz performers. So music and orphans have gone together since Byzantium. We can ask if this means that we can trace back all of these musical orphanages to Constantinople, or is it simply that people working with children see that music is one of the things they like to do. The children learn discipline and how to work with others, but they also enjoy it.

RTE: The Republic of Georgia must be one of the most musical countries on earth, because each family is its own little choir—everyone sings. A few years ago I met a Scotswoman who works internationally with traumatized orphans, who found from her experience in Georgia that music is absolutely the key to healing these children of their trauma.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, I also implied that in an article I wrote for Richard B. McKenzie's book, *Home Away from Home*. McKenzie advocates bringing back orphanages today. Music is soothing and it would help orphans who have traumatic memories. It is one of the things that makes them feel better about themselves, and the Byzantines knew this.

Modern Nation-States: Orphanages, Foster Care and Charity

RTE: Why does Richard McKenzie want to bring back orphanages?

PROF. MILLER: Because foster care isn't working. He lived in an orphanage in North Carolina from the time he was eight, and had a very good upbringing and happy memories. It is a fact that foster care as we know it was first pushed as anti-church legislation. Most of the orphanages were Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish and there was an attempt by social workers to create a non-religious based institution. They came up with some very faulty

research about orphanages, such as looking at orphanages in London during World War II. The whole country was on rationing, and the orphans were severely traumatized because they were constantly under bombardment or forced to move to the country; many of their families may have been killed in air raids. You can't take that as an example of a stable institutional environment. There exist earlier studies which reveal that orphanage care produced positive outcomes. In fact, McKenzie in the preface to his *Home Away from Home* published the results of his own survey of more than 2500 adults in the United States who grew up in orphanages and a surprising 80% said that they had positive experiences.

The problem with orphanages is, of course, that some child abusers do end up getting jobs in these institutions, but you also have a lot of other adults around. McKenzie maintains that he remembers bad adults and good adults, and the kids knew who could be trusted and who could not. If a bad adult beat you, you could always go to a good one to complain. There were always advocates in the institution. When you are put into a foster home, you have no real control. There are good foster parents, but there are others who are negligent and just doing it for the money without any on-site accountability. It isn't working very well.

RTE: When the Greek state took orphanages away from the monasteries, many of the kids simply ran away from the state institutions to live on the streets.

PROF. MILLER: The argument against orphanages was built by Hillary Clinton based on what she read in *Oliver Twist*. Newt Gingrich, who wants to bring orphanages back, based his on the movie about Father Flanagan and Boy's Town. Both of these are somewhat fictionalized accounts and I thought, "You know, someone should go back and look at history." Orphanages work, but you can't cut corners.

Gingrich and the Republicans thought that if you set up orphanages you'd be able to cut money from the foster care budget but I don't know if that's true. You would have to pay responsible people good salaries, keep up the institution's grounds, programs, and so on. Social workers are against this because they'd lose case management jobs, but on the other hand you would still need a lot of supervision in the orphanages and skilled teachers. I believe there is some interest now in creating what we might call smaller orphanages, cluster "families" with one or two adults and a limited number

of orphans. In his surveys, McKenzie found that U.S. orphanage graduates usually know how to work well with people, they do very well in business and in the business world, but they often don't do well in marriage and they have a higher rate of divorce than the regular population.

RTE: It would be difficult to maintain what you've never known. I remember elderly Catholic men in the 1970's and 80's reminiscing fondly about being raised by nuns in Catholic orphanages. They might say, "They were strict, but fair," but usually they reminisced about their favorite nuns as one would talk about a beloved aunt or an older sister.

PROF. MILLER: I had an entirely Catholic education until I went to Haverford College. My Catholic school training gave me Latin and Greek, one of the best educations you could have had in the 1950's and 60's. All of my success at school I owed to two or three nuns. In the 1950's one nun noticed that I had a very bad form of dyslexia and she kept me after school and worked with me every day until I was able to read and write.

RTE: That's wonderful. What do you think has been gained and lost in transferring orphanages to state jurisdiction and do you think it possible to have both versions?

PROF. MILLER: Taking away these philanthropic institutions from Christian organizations hasn't worked. The famous example is the French Revolution, particularly the Second Revolution in 1792, when radical atheists secularized the country overnight. They arrested and executed the king, queen and their children, burnt the monasteries, and murdered many of the monks and nuns.

RTE: It's a chilling parallel to the Russian Revolution and the atheist Bolsheviks.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, and the French revolutionaries also replaced these church orphanages with state-run institutions that were horrible failures. They were so bad that when Napoleon took over, he gradually restored many of the Catholic institutions. He was no great lover of the church but he didn't go to extremes.

Leaving children in orphanages became a problem in Italy during the Renaissance. In many of the orphanages or foundling homes, people could put a

baby into a rotating door and walk away with no questions asked. By the eighteenth century there was a huge scandal because there were so many children and the death rate was very high. Doctors from the Santa Maria Della Scala orphanage in Siena began to suspect that part of the problem was that they had begun bottle feeding infant orphans with cow's milk. Bottle feeding had come to Italy from Spain. When a committee of physicians did a three-year study comparing the orphans fed with cow's milk from a bottle to those who were put out to wet nurses, the researchers found that the orphan infants fed cow's milk suffered a much higher mortality rate than did those fed with human milk. This was documented in 1775, yet educated Americans were still using bottles in the 1960's. No one thought that there was anything to learn by reading research reports from eighteenth-century Italy. The La Leche League only started in the U.S. in the late 1950's, and for many years it was considered a wacky movement. Bottle feeding has always been a disaster.

RTE: Do you remember that in the 1970's many people were boycotting Nestlé's because they were trying to convince women in third-world countries to bottle feed by passing out formula samples in maternity wards? Once these women began using bottles, their own milk dried up and when they found that they couldn't afford the formula, the mothers would water it down. Babies became malnourished and sometimes died. In May of 2011 the debate over Nestlé's marketing of infant formula was reignited in the Asia-Pacific region by Save the Children Fund, Oxfam, Care International, and others. The problems of infant care among the poor are still with us.

An interesting historical note is that the last Russian Tsar, Nicholas II, and Empress Alexandra maintained residences for wet nurses for orphans in St. Petersburg out of their own funds. These were young women who were able to feed a second infant as well as their own, or who continued nursing when their own baby was weaned, or had even lost a child, but were still able to nurse. They were well-paid and given nutritious food and good living accommodations.

Professor Miller, you've said that Byzantine Christians had a strong sense of the need for personal charity? Is this something we are losing in the modern welfare and social aid models, or do you think we have about the same ratio of personal giving?

PROF. MILLER: I don't know. I've actually heard an interesting statistic that if you go back to New York in 1810, there were many more people on welfare

then than now. The difference was that in the early nineteenth century, it was church welfare; now it is state welfare. The Catholics and Protestants had good social service organizations, and many people were helped through difficult times by the churches. Now that aid is mostly through the government and it has been politicized. How many times have we heard people say that a major reason for our economic problems is the number of people on welfare? This is utter nonsense. If you look at the welfare piece of the pie, not counting social security, it is a very small part of the budget. It's the military and overseas operations that have broken us, as well as other things, but not making welfare payments.

Somehow the Byzantines were able to set up a welfare system that, as far as I can see, never had a negative reputation, and this may be because most of the welfare was available to both rich and poor. For example, the *Orphanotropheion* was one of the best schools in Byzantine society, and we know that there were both street orphans, and orphans from rich families whose guardians had placed them there. Hospitals in Byzantium were free, and we know from a poem that one of the patients of the Pantocrator, one of the biggest hospitals in Constantinople, was a close relative of Emperor Manuel I. How many other imperial relatives were in those free hospital beds and how many patients were scraped up off of the street, we're not sure. There were certainly both, and the idea was that if you don't make it available to everyone, it becomes a socially negative thing to use. In the United States now people feel that it's a bad thing to accept charity. It isn't a bad thing. The original Christian idea is that you are saving other people's souls by giving them a chance to help. We don't want to hear that now, although all of the Church fathers said so.

RTE: That's a good point and with our pride, we easily forget.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, it's pride. If you need it, take it, but don't deceive people. We don't want to overidealize Byzantine charity because we just have these little glimpses. There may have been larger problems that we don't know about, but one of the things that they understood more clearly than we do was that if a charitable institution is just for the destitute, it becomes an embarrassment to them. The only way welfare works is from the point of view of something that is esteemed because anyone can have access to it, even the person with wealth if he needs something from the institution. Social Security works like this because everyone benefits from it across the board.

No one wants anyone touching their Social Security. So, if you have a welfare system in which everyone receives some benefit, then it would have more widespread support. If welfare is only something for the bottom twenty percent, the top eighty percent get mad about supporting it. When I look at the evidence, the Byzantines didn't seem to draw that black and white difference between the users and providers.

A problem with patronage, though, is that the wealthy tend to want to control prestigious institutions they are connected to. An American orphanage founded by Hershey, the chocolate magnate, was so well-endowed that it became a very good school and gradually even wealthy people were trying to get their kids in. They kind of took it over, and about a decade ago there was a movement by the former orphans to guarantee that a certain percentage of the children in the institution should be orphans, which in modern terminology could include kids from broken homes. Real orphans are fairly rare nowadays.

Orphanages East and West

RTE: You've mentioned this in passing, but did you find much difference in eastern Byzantine orphanages from those in the West?

PROF. MILLER: It is clear that the *Orphanotropheion* founded by the popes during the seventh century was imported from the Byzantine Empire. As I pointed out earlier, the orphans at this institution even learned Greek songs to sing at papal ceremonies. Other orphan schools, especially those in Latin monasteries, seem to have emerged to meet local needs. A wide-spread usage in the West was oblation. Living parents as well as guardians of orphans often brought young children to monasteries and offered them to God as "oblates." The problem with this custom, however, was that the child was expected to fulfill their parents' vow, and some children were offered at very young ages—even as infants. In Basil's school, there was the idea that when the child reached adulthood he would decide whether he wanted to take vows or not, but in the West there was probably more of a feeling that once you were offered to a monastery you were under a moral obligation to stay as a monk.

RTE: I suppose it was a kind of "first-fruits" offering to God or in fulfillment of a vow, just as marriages were often arranged when children were very young.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, and to justify the practice of oblation, Latin Christians used the example of the Prophet Samuel, offered to the priest Eli by Hannah, his mother, to serve God at the altar. Also, barbarian invasions had destroyed much of Western civilization and outside of the Italian city-states, towns and cities didn't really exist. As a result, there were fewer charitable facilities such as orphanages run by bishops. This "offering" may have been used by poor people as a way to procure food, clothing and an education for the child at a nearby monastery.

The lack of cities and towns is perhaps the main reason why I believe that the West didn't develop sophisticated charities until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. With the invasions they weren't able to maintain the roads, bridges fell in, commerce stopped, and communities fell back on agriculture. As the towns begin to reemerge so do the charitable foundations, from Italy to France and England. The East had much larger cities and a more active economy until the coming of the Arabs, after which the cities of Asia Minor also begin to dry up and then everything moves to Constantinople.

RTE: How would the Byzantine Christian sense of personhood and freedom have differed from our modern view?

PROF. MILLER: Of course, we don't have a single view in America. This is just my opinion, but there seems to be a contradiction in modern liberalism in that all of this idea of personal freedom is based somehow on the value of human beings, yet liberalism is shaky about the individual's relationship with God. If there is no God, what underpins this nobility of the individual human being? I suppose that some liberals would say that something needs to be done for the preservation of the species, which is a more secular view.

RTE: How would that attitude of individual dignity work out in the context of the Byzantine empire, monarchy and nobility? Were they inspired by the liturgical world view in which the earthly society tries to imitate the heavenly?

PROF. MILLER: In contrast with the West, Byzantium never had a blood nobility. There was always an upper class, based on inherited wealth and family connections, but not defined as a closed class as in feudal Europe. The imperial throne was never strictly hereditary in Byzantium and the job of emperor was always open to talent, so if you were a very smart peasant, you could make it. In some areas of the West, no matter how smart you were, if you weren't of the nobility you wouldn't go anywhere. This was worse in

France and England and less so in Italy where money allowed social mobility. The Medici of Florence seem to have started their rise to fame as humble shepherds. Certainly, Christian teaching in both East and West and the sermons of the Fathers were adamant about the idea that the more money you have, the greater the need is to share it; wealth is a curse, not a blessing.

I'm not so sure that Byzantine inspiration comes from the liturgical world view, that what is going on in heaven is somehow a pattern of what should be happening on earth. Although this idea inspired art, in the case of the philanthropies, I think it's more a Christianizing of the institutions of the *polis*, which in pre-Christian Greece and Rome was the idea that it was the obligation of the wealthy in the city to make sure that their city was among the best. You even see this pride in St. Paul when he mentions Tarsus as "no small city." When he relates to the Athenians, he appeals to their civic pride, so people had this almost tribal identity with their towns.

City pride would be to a Greek or Byzantine what patriotism is to us. There was no Greek state and there still isn't. That's the problem today in Greece, no one feels an obligation to do anything for the Greek state and it's on the verge of collapse.

RTE: Their nationhood was created artificially and administered by foreigners.

PROF. MILLER: Yes, and Greeks still have a devotion to their native villages. The Italians don't like their state either and they don't pay their taxes. City-states are a big thing in that kind of mentality, and the only motivation to help the poor before Christianity was that if you have a lot of poor people it's a disgrace for your city. Once Christianity arises you want the city to be a loving harmonious society. The image of heaven as a city is a particularly Christian one, and Gregory Nazianzen says that Constantinople can become a city of God if we all do our part, in the material sense. His sermons are very beautiful. Saint Augustine's phrase, "the City of God", has a more abstract meaning of the community of true believers, not a real Christian city based on love of one's neighbor.

One of the things that caught my interest in doing this research was reading *Poverty, Society and Philanthropy in the Late Mediaeval Greek World and Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare*, by Fr. Demetrios Constantelos, a Greek priest in New Jersey. I really liked his chapters on hospitals and orphanages, and wanted to know more, so I began to focus on those subjects. His work was particularly important when it was first published

in 1969 because academia was flooded with neo-leftist stuff about Marxism. One of his points was that you don't need Marxism to have a strong social network. We already have that in a Christian context in Byzantium.

RTE: To end our conversation, do you have any thoughts on how Byzantine orphanages and other philanthropic institutions can enlighten efforts to reform welfare programs in Europe and the United States?

PROF. MILLER: Building on my last statement about Christian welfare, I think that it is key for Catholic and Orthodox leaders to counter the argument made by some evangelical Protestants that Christianity is somehow strongly opposed to any government assistance to the poor and needy. A careful study of the Fathers of the fourth century and of bishops and monks of later centuries makes it clear that they not only expected private individuals to share their wealth, but they wanted the government to pitch in as well. Saint Basil had no problem in accepting large tracts of imperial land which the emperor Valens gave him to help finance his charitable facilities outside Caesarea. Second, all Christians and people of other faiths as well have to unite against extreme secularist demands which insist on the total withdrawal of religion and religious principles from any institution receiving government money of any sort. Such an extreme position would even halt any government assistance to Catholic hospitals unless they permit abortions in their facilities. Extreme views from some sectors of Christianity as well as from the radical forces of secularism will destroy social welfare which was originally a Christian system. There is absolutely no doubt that the origins of organized charity are in the Christian Church and especially in the churches of the East—at Caesarea in Cappadocia, Sebasteia, Antioch in Syria, and of course, Constantinople. ✦