Household Networks and Early Christian Economics: A Fresh Study of 1 Timothy 5.3–16

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Abstract: 1 Tim 5.3-16 defines which women may be registered for financial support at church expense. It is integrated around four 'household rules', but is not concerned to regulate an 'order' or 'office' of widows. Rather, it clarifies that the church should not supplant households in financial matters, and should be responsible only for destitute widows who have no other network support. Since χήρα can mean 'woman without a man', the instructions in 5.11-15 are best interpreted as directed against young women who have chosen celibacy. By contrast, the author conceives of the church as a network of Christian households connected by mutual economic support.

1 Timothy 5.3–16 has attracted considerable scholarly attention for its statements about women, and specifically χῆραι – a term normally translated 'widows' but which it is best to leave untranslated for now. The form-critical search for early Christian church-regulations and the rediscovery of early forms of women's ministry led many scholars to trace here evidence of an 'order' or even 'office' of widows, often with the conclusion that the author of our text was intent on limiting both the number and the power of these women.[1] As we shall see, there are reasons to doubt that the text provides evidence for

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[1] See H.-W. Bartsch, *Die Anfänge urchristlicher Rechtsbildungen. Studien zu den Pastoralbriefen* (ThF 34; Hamburg: Evangelischer, 1965) 112-43, who drew anachronistically on much later evidence for an order of widows. The presumption that the text regulates a pre-existing *Stand* or even *Amt* of widows has been continued in much scholarship: see, e.g., U. Wagener, *Die Ordnung des 'Hauses Gottes': Der Ort von Frauen in der Ekklesiologie und Ethik der Pastoralbriefe* (WUNT 2.65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); B.B. Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 36-55. For

anything more formal than a register of women eligible for material support, and our focus here will rest on its financial dimensions. 1 Tim 5.3–16 offers, in fact, a rare glimpse into early Christian economics in the selective allocation of resources. It draws our attention to the intersection of gender, household, and the material support offered by the church at the turn of the second century.[2]

It is unusual in the Pastorals to find such a long treatment of a single theme. Despite the asyndeta at 5.9 and 5.16, and against the opinion that the 'registration' of χῆραι in 5.9–10 represents something different from the financial support envisaged in 5.3–8, there is strong literary and thematic evidence that 5.3–16 constitutes a unified treatment of a single topic. The passage begins and ends with instructions to support only 'genuine χῆραι' (5.3, 16: αἱ ὄντως χῆραι), and there is a persistent concern to define this category (5.5–6) and to exclude those who, on one ground or another, should not be supported by the church (5.4, 8, 11–15, 16).[3] Nonetheless, on an initial reading of this text, puzzles abound. Are the prayers of the χῆραι in 5.5 and the household acts of benefaction in 5.9–10 qualifications

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an early protest (arguing for, at most, a *Gruppe* or *Ordnung*), see A. Sand, 'Witwenstand und Ämsterstrukturen in den urchristlichen Gemeinden', *Bibel und Leben* 12 (1971) 186–97. J.M. Bassler, 'The Widows' Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim 5:3-16', *JBL* 103 (1984) 23–41 refers, more cautiously, to a 'circle' of widows; cf. her more recent treatment of the text, 'Limits and Differentiation: The Calculus of Widows in 1 Timothy 5.3-16', *A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Letters* (ed. A.-J. Levine; London/New York: T & T Clark, 2003) 122–46.

[2] I take the three Pastoral letters to be closely related interpretations of the Pauline tradition dating from the late first/early second century. J. Roloff, *Der erste Brief an Timotheus* (EKKNT 15; Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1988) 46 dates our text 'kaum sehr viel später als um das Jahr 100'. For full discussion of the dating (with a similar result), in light of the probable reception of the Pastorals in the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp (c. 110–120 CE), see A. Merz, *Die fictive Selbstauslegung des Paulus* (NTOA 52; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Academic, 2004) 72–194. I shall refer to our author as 'the Pastor'.

[3] For the *inclusio* of 5.3–4a and 5.16 (with key elements in inverse order), see Bassler, 'Limits', 134. Wagener's treatment of 5.16 as an unrelated addition to the preceding instructions is unconvincing on literary grounds (*Ordnung*, 124, 223–7).

for financial support or outlines of the duties of women admitted to a form of ministry? Why does the Pastor set the age limit so high, at sixty (5.9)? Is it inconsistent to say that a χήρα can be registered only if she has brought up children (ἐτεκνοτρόφησεν, 5.10), but to deny her support in 5.4–8 if she has children to look after her? Who are the younger χῆραι that the Pastor is evidently so anxious about (5.11–15), and what is the πρώτη πίστις he associates with them (5.12)? In 5.11 he appears to criticise these women for wanting to get married, but then instructs that they do so (5.14): is he just inconsistent, or is there some logic we need to grasp? If these are young widows here instructed to remarry, and if they were later widowed again, would they be ineligible for registration by the rule of 5.9 that the χήρα to be registered should have been the wife of only one husband? Although we should not expect the tight logic of a well-formulated legal ruling, any reading of this text that can solve such puzzles and can offer a generally coherent reading of the passage is to be preferred.

The social and financial support of χῆραι is treated here at such length not only because of the vulnerability of women who lack family networks of support, and not only because the church is challenged by requests beyond its financial abilities, but also, and more fundamentally, because it is paradigmatic of a critical question concerning the social constitution and future shape of the church. Here quite self-consciously, the church, collectively and *as church* (ἡ ἐκκλησία, 5.16), is required to make a decision about its financial obligations, and in deciding how to spend its money it both reveals and controversially determines its identity. A decision at this point will crystallise the social configuration of the church and how it relates to the most important social building-block of the Roman world, the household. In that decision both the core activities of the church and its aims will be laid bare. As we shall see, the treatment of χῆραι will serve to determine not

just *their* social and material future but also the future structure of the church as a whole. As I hope to show, at every point the Pastor ensures that the church neither supplants nor competes with the household, but is to be constituted as a network of households committed to mutual economic support. What threatens him most is not so much (or not only) the power of women, but the encouragement of an ideology of celibacy that bypasses or undermines the household and therefore, in his view, creates a church of an altogether different kind. We may best follow this logic by following, in sequence, the four 'house rules' expressed or presupposed in the text.[4]

1. <u>House Rule 1: Household Networks are the Primary System of Support (1 Tim 5.3–8)</u>

Following the series of age-related directions in 5.1–2, the instruction regarding χῆραι in 5.3 uses the imperative of the verb τιμάω in a broad sense. 'Honour' is part of its meaning (cf. the noun, τιμή, in 6.1), but the verb also carries financial connotations, as is made clear by its association with other words in this context that indicate material support (προνοέω, 5.8; ἐπαρκέω, 5.16 (cf. 5.10); ἐπιβαρέω, 5.16; cf. the financial meaning of τιμή in 5.17). This does not indicate 'payment' for duties performed, where one would expect reference to the work for which they are to be paid (cf. 5.17–18). Rather, the 'honour' is to be displayed in practical, material ways, as is envisaged by the same imperative in the fifth commandment (τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μήτερα, Exod 20.12); indeed, in view of the following instructions to children, that commandment may be echoed here (cf. Eph 6.2).[5]

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[4] For the literary structure of the text, founded on the four key imperatives of 5.3, 5.9, 5.11 (with its mirror instruction in 5.14), and 5.16, see Roloff, *Der erste Brief*, 284–5.

[5] For the fifth commandment as envisaging material support for parents, see Philo, *Decal*. 106–20. The elderly, isolated widows to be supported in this context qualify as 'virtual' mothers (cf. 5.2).

This honour-support, however, is immediately limited to τὰς ὄντως χήρας (5.3), a phrase that will reverberate through this passage (5.5, 16). As 5.5 indicates, the author's definition of a 'real' χήρα is one who is μεμονωμένη, that is, a χήρα who is isolated and has lost all network support.[6] As ancient usage and ancient lexicographers indicate, χήρα means a woman without a man.[7] In the majority of cases, this means a widow, someone who has lost her man through death, but the noun (or its cognate verb) could also be used for women who had been abandoned by men, or for any woman deprived of a man.[8] Where there is talk of children (as here in 5.4, 8, 10), we may assume we are talking about widows, but we should not forget this wider possible range of meaning since, as we shall see, early Christian practice could create another, irregular, category of 'women without men' who could be described by this term. Being without a man, the ancient χήρα is deprived of a key link into a network of support, but if she has living children or grandchildren, she has not lost her whole support system.

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[6] In the phrase ἡ δὲ ὄντως χήρα καὶ μεμονωμένη (5.5), the καί is probably epexegetical; so Roloff, *Der erste Brief*, 289 n. 330; I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; London: T & T Clark, 1999) 586–7.

[7] See G. Stählin, 'χήρα', *TDNT* IX, 440–65, at 440–1, with reference to the definition of Hesychius as either ἡ τὸν ἄνδρα στερηθεῖσα γυνή or ἡ μετὰ γάμον μὴ συνοικοῦσα ἀνδρί (the latter by either death or divorce).

[8] In pagan Greek usage, see, e.g., Aeschylus fr. 47a (Radt edition), of the 'manless', unmarried Danae; Euripides, *Andr*. 347–8 (coupled with ἄνανδρος, of a woman rejected by her husband). Cf. the verb χηρεύω in Demosthenes, *Orat*. 30.33 (of a woman who lives without her husband, though it is disputed if she is divorced); it is even used of a man (all alone) in Sophocles, *Oed. Tyr*. 479. In Josephus and Philo we find the noun used of a widow (e.g., Josephus, *Ant*. 16.221; Philo, *Leg*. 2.63) but also extended to a woman who is in other ways separated from a man (Philo, *Spec*. 3.64). Thus it is equivalent to ἐρήμη ('bereft', whether of a man or of other phenomena, Philo, *Deus* 136, 138), μονωθεῖσα (Philo, *Spec*. 1.105) and στερομένη (Philo, *Virt*. 114). Interestingly, χηρεία and χηρεύω can even be used of a woman *before* marriage (Josephus, *Ant.* 7.172), while a woman left alone after her marriage can be considered equivalent to a παρθένος in her condition 'without a man' (Philo, *Spec*. 1.129; *QE* 2.3b; cf. the parallelism in *Spec*. 3.26). See also on this topic Wagener, *Ordnung*, 127 n. 59.

In 5.4 the Pastor is concerned to put the responsibility for support of a χήρα who has living descendants firmly onto their shoulders. In the shift from the singular (εἰ δέ τις χήρα) to the plural third-person imperative (μανθανέτωσαν), the people addressed in 5.4b are the children or grandchildren of the χήρα,[9] who are expected to show proper piety (εὐσεβεῖν) to their own household, and to return to their parents/grandparents (οἱ πρόγονοι) the exchange benefits (ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόναι) that are expected of children to their parents everywhere in the ancient world.[10] Since life itself, and the care and expense of upbringing, are benefits conveyed by parents on their children, it was considered one of the most shocking forms of impiety for children not to give return benefits to their parents when they

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[9] The ἔκγονα here, juxtaposed with τέκνα, are probably 'grandchildren'; women often bore children in their late teens, so they might well have grandchildren, via their daughters, by the age of 40. The reading of 5.4 followed here is adopted by most modern interpreters; see, e.g., Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 583-5; M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia: Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 74; J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: A & C Black, 1963) 113; N. Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1989), 188–9.

[10] An alternative reading of this verse has gained some currency both in ancient and in modern times (e.g., Roloff, *Der erste Brief*, 287-88; Wagener, *Ordnung*, 149-54; J.M. Bassler, *I Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Abingdon NT Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 94–6; ancient commentators include John Chrysostom, *PG* 62.566–67): taking the χῆραι to be the subject of μανθανέτωσαν (cf. the shift in subject in 1 Tim 2.15), the Pastor, on this reading, here instructs *them* first to look after their own offspring. There are two main objections to this reading, which seem fatal: i) it makes no sense for χῆραι to give return benefits (ἀμοιβαί) to their ancestors by looking after their own children. To give a return to your benefactor, you benefit them in exchange, but it is hardly a benefit to your ancestors to care for your own descendants; ii) it seems nonsensical to tell a needy χήρα that she cannot be supported because she has children to look after: dependent children would make her more needy, not less so. This alternative reading only works on the assumption that (self-sufficient) χῆραι are being enlisted into a church office with a set of time-consuming duties, and the Pastor is instructing them not to neglect their families in their devotion to the church. But since, as we shall see, this passage prescribes no duties for χῆραι, this assumption is unfounded. An objection to the reading that I adopt is that πρόγονοι can mean only *dead* ancestors and so cannot apply to the case of children being urged to look after their living parents/grandparents; but this is simply incorrect (see, e.g., Plato, *Leg.* 931e). The instructions in 5.8 and 5.16 confirm that the concern of this verse is how χῆραι are to be supported, not whom they are required to support.

were old or poor: Philo considers this law so basic to nature that it is found even among

animals (*Decal*. 106–20).[11] A widowed mother or grandmother is an obvious case of need,

and the Pastor is concerned that responsibilities within one's own household (ὁ ἴδιος οἶκος)

should be upheld, not displaced, by the church.

Widows were, indeed, often reabsorbed into their family of origin, or supported as

best as was possible by their offspring. Remarriage was another practical option, especially

if there were limited resources at their disposal (in dowry, inheritance, or family network),

and if their children were young, sick, or deceased.[12] Given the differences in age at

marriage (in the early empire wives were commonly 7–12 years younger than their

husbands), and given average life-expectancy, very many women were widowed in their 20s

and 30s, and the loss of their husband's social network and earning power left them

vulnerable.[13] Except for the few who owned property, widows were socially, legally, and

economically insecure, and it was probably debt that saw poor widows lose their homes

(e.g., Mark 12.40) and taken to court by their creditors (e.g., Luke 18.1–5).[14] There is some

realism in the note in Acts that widows were beneficiaries of a *daily* distribution of food:

that was how close many lived to the edge of starvation (Acts 6.1).[15] In his massive study on

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[11] The closing statement of 5.4 (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ἀπόδεκτον ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ), like the matching clause in 1 Tim 2.3, makes clear that the moral standard invoked here is not just human, or natural, but divine.

[12] At the same time, some of these factors might make them less attractive for remarriage (and with less power to bring about this outcome). Egyptian census records suggest that women were less likely to be married the older they got (only 48% by the age of 50), while this is not true of men; see R.S. Bagnall and B.W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 121-26.

[13] For life-expectancy and mortality, see W. Scheidel (ed.), *Debating Roman Demography* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); for age at marriage, R.P. Saller, 'Men's Age at Marriage and its Consequences in the Roman Family', *CP* 82 (1987) 20–35.

[14] By contrast, rich widows are given literary representation in 1 Tim 5.6 and Judith 8.7.

[15] Whatever historical reality may or may not lie behind this text, the question of which network takes responsibility for widows is as urgent there as in 1 Tim 5.

widows in antiquity, Krause has argued that about 30% of adult women were unmarried widows.[16] If we imagine a church community of thirty adults (fifteen men and fifteen women), one might thus find as many as five widows in a community of only thirty adults, not all of whom would have had earning potential. If such widows had dependent children ('orphans'), the burden was increased. The Pastor, who is clearly concerned about such a burden (5.16), shifts its weight where possible onto the widows' own household network.

The 'real', that is, the truly isolated χήρα (μεμονωμένη, 5.5), has only God to turn to. The Pastor uses biblical language to describe her as having 'set her hope on God' (5.5), a phrase that expresses human hopelessness and absolute dependence on God.[17] In this context, we should probably take her prayers 'night and day' to express a piety born of desperation: she prays all the time, because she does not know where her next meal will come from. These prayers are not an indication of her ecclesial duties, nor of her charismatic endowment, except, perhaps, in the sense, indicated by the *Shepherd of Hermas*, that the prayers of the poor are especially powerful (as proven by the fact that they have survived, in answer to prayer).[18] It is this humanly helpless figure whom the church is

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[16] J.-U. Krause, *Witwen und Waisen in römischen Reich. 1: Verwitwung und Wiederverheiratung* (HABES 16; Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1994) 47-73 (at 73). The three further volumes in this study (HABES 17-19) are packed with information, the fourth being devoted to *Witwen und Weisen im frühen Christentum* (1995). For a detailed review, suggesting Krause's figures are accurate chiefly among the sub-elite, see T.A.J. McGinn, 'Widows, Orphans, and Social History', *JRA* 12 (1999) 617–32.

[17] See, e.g., LXX Pss 4.6; 7.2; 15.1; cf. 2 Cor 1.10; 1 Tim 4.10; 6.17; Wagener, *Ordnung*, 132–4.

[18] Hermas, *Sim*. 2.6 (51.6): 'the petition of the poor person is acceptable and rich before the Lord'. Clement of Alexandria indicates the same in *Quis Div*. 34–5. For the confidence that God will listen to the prayers of the poor/widows, see Exod 22.22-3; Job 34.28; Sirach 35.14; Judith 9.4, 9. To continue in prayer night and day indicates persistence (born of necessity), not a church duty; cf. the 'night and day' prayers of widows in Luke 2.37 and 18.7. These prayers may also be for others (Polycarp expects widows to 'pray without ceasing for everyone', *Phil*. 4.3) and it is possible that this association of widows with intercessory prayer led later to the development of a special ecclesial role.

to support, her plight illumined all the more vividly by the contrasting vignette of a wealthy, extravagant widow, satirised in 5.6 (ἡ δὲ σπαταλῶσα ζῶσα τέθνηκεν). The rare verb σπαταλάω is a derogatory term for those who live in luxury; it is found also in James (5.5), Barnabas (10.3), and Hermas (*Sim*. 6.1.6 (61.6); 6.2.6 (62.6)), and reflects the common Christian hostility to those who kept their wealth to themselves (cf. 1 Tim 6.9–10).[19] Not all widows were poor and vulnerable, and the Pastor hereby disqualifies another category of χήρα from church support.

In the chiastic structure of this first paragraph (5.3–8), 5.7–8 returns to the main subject of this opening section (5.3–4): the household network as the primary system of support.[20] The responsibility to look after one's own, and especially members of one's household (οἰκεῖοι are the innermost circle of ἴδιοι), is taken to be basic to human morality: to fail in this would be to behave worse than an unbeliever (5.8).[21] Such is, indeed, the assumption of a reciprocity-based social order: networks of friends, neighbours, and associates are important sources of support for the poor, but the strongest obligations,

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[19] Cf. the discussion in Wagener, *Ordnung*, 155–61. The notion of a 'living death' is paralleled in Hermas (*Sim*. 6.5.4 (65.4); of a life of luxury), and is found in moral critique also in Philo, *Fug.* 55 and Publilius Syrus 47 (of a miser).

[20] It is not wholly clear who is meant to be ἀνεπίλημπτοι in 5.7, but since no *instructions* so far have been issued to widows, this is probably directed at their children/grandchildren who were given a command in 5.4; 5.7 thus leads immediately into 5.8. Some of those who read 5.4 as directed at widows (see above, note 10) regard 5.8 as also directed at widows with family responsibilities (e.g., Wagener, *Ordnung*, 149–54). But, again, this presupposes that widows need this instruction because they are inclined to prioritise their church responsibilities over their duties to their families, whereas our text neither presupposes nor creates responsibilities for widows that could compete with their family roles. The Pastor is particularly sensitive to criticism of apparently 'disordered' Christian households (1 Tim 5.14; 6.1; Titus 2.5, 8, 10), exemplified here by widows unsupported by their offspring.

[21] For the assumption that the children of believers will be believers themselves, cf. 1 Tim 3.4–5, 12; Titus 1.6–7. The Pastor does not consider those whose offspring or wider family were pagan, though his comments here presuppose that even they could be expected to look after a widowed relative.

buttressed by the greatest moral sanctions, rest on the family.[22] The fact that the Pastor

has to emphasise this point, and to give it such strong Christian backing (to fail here is to

'deny the faith'), suggests that an alternative ideology is possible – that the church, as the

'household of God' (1 Tim 3.15), *takes the place* of the natural household, and subsumes

responsibility for Christian 'brothers and sisters'.[23] That radical Christian alternative,

envisaging the church as a *substitute family*, is indeed a live option in the Jesus-tradition,

where disciples abandon their families and receive in this life homes, brothers, and sisters

(Mark 10.28–30).[24] This was the experience of many whose conversion fractured their

households and degraded or destroyed their network of family support, and it is exemplified

in second century apocryphal Acts where travelling preachers and ascetic women renounce

family obligations, break family ties, and depend on the support of the church.[25] For the

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[22] Cf. the quip of Antisthenes in response to the begging priests of Cybele (the mother of the gods): 'I don't feed the mother of the gods; that is the gods' job!' (Clement, *Protr.* 7). B. Winter (*Seek the Welfare of the City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 62–78) notes the legal responsibilities of those who had control of a widow's dowry, but that duty does not surface in this text, and it is unlikely that there would be any remaining dowry for widows from poorer families.

[23] For the attribution of familial labels to all believers, see 1 Tim 5.1–2; for the tensions this could cause within a household between slaves and their owners, see 1 Tim 6.1–2. The financial implications of familial designations in early Christianity are well discussed by T.J. May, *Restricted Generosity in the New Testament* (WUNT 2.480; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018) 139-57.

[24] Cf. Mark 3.31–35; Matt 8.20–2; 19.12. See G. Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993) 33-93.

[25] Thecla is the most obvious, but by no means the only example. See S. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1980); D.R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983); V. Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of Apocryphal Acts* (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1987); P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London/Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988) 140–59. Lucian regards as absurd the Christians' support of Peregrinus, which he relates to the Christian ideology of an alternate family ('they are all brothers of one another'); the resultant pooling of possessions means that 'any charlatan or trickster' can profit from their gullibility and their reconfiguration of economic obligations (*Peregr.* 12-13).

Pastor, on the other hand, the natural family is the essential building-block of the church: leaders are to be exemplary male householders, and women are to manage their households and raise children to be the next generation of believers (1 Tim 3.4–5, 12; 5.14; Titus 1.6–7; 2.3–5). The church is composed of a network of such households, but does not supplant them. Even if it is constituted as a macro-household ('the household of God', 1 Tim 3.15) and draws its structuring rules by analogy with the household, this is not to be interpreted, in the Pastor's view, as *taking the place* of individual households as the natural units of social and economic support.[26] It is only those χῆραι who have lost such household support altogether who are to be supported directly by the church *qua* church (cf. 5.16).

2. House Rule 2: Register only Exemplary House-Managers (1 Tim 5.9–10)

In 5.9–10 the Pastor indicates the kind of χήρα he would like to see supported. The verb καταλέγω is rare in Christian discourse, but there is no reason to find here appointment to an office, or 'ordination' to a role.[27] Καταλέγω means to register or to put someone's name on a list; only the context indicates the nature and purpose of that list. It is commonly used in antiquity for the enlistment of soldiers, but it does not itself imply enrolment for a task.[28] Josephus uses the verb for the making of a list of names (e.g., of

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[26] For the church as macro-household, see D.C. Verner, *The Household of God and the Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (Chico: SBL, 1983). Horrell emphasises the Pastorals' use of the household as a model of unequal relations (with corresponding diminution of sibling-language) in D.G. Horrell, 'From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity', reprinted in idem, *The Making of Christian Morality: Reading Paul in Ancient and Modern Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019) 75-96; cf. his 'Disciplining Performance and "Placing" the Church: Widows, Elders and Slaves in the Household of God (1 Tim 5,1–6,2)', *1 Timothy Reconsidered* (ed. K. Donfried; Leuven: Peeters, 2008) 109–34.
[27] Contrast the 'laying on of hands' (1 Tim 4.14; 5.22; 2 Tim 1.6) and the use of καθίστημι in Titus 1.5.
[28] For soldiers, see, e.g., Josephus, *B.J.* 2.268, 576, 584; Philo, *Abr.* 232; *Virt.* 42.

descendants or kings), and Philo (in the middle voice) for all sorts of lists.[29] The Pastor here

envisages a widow's name being placed on an official list of those to whom the church

makes an open-ended commitment of regular support; the list creates a collective

recognition of this unusual level of responsibility. There is no indication here that such

χῆραι (aged sixty and over) are being appointed to undertake ecclesial duties, unless we

read back into this text the much later instructions on widows to be found in the *Apostolic*

Constitutions and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*.[30] One can understand how it came to be

expected that those supported by the church would give some reciprocal benefit, in the

form of official duties, but there is no indication here of an 'order' with ecclesial tasks.[31]

The earliest we find reference to an 'order' (*ordo*) of widows is in Tertullian, several decades

later and in a different location.[32]

What we find in 5.9–10 are not duties, but qualifications arising from past,

exemplary behaviour (note the past tenses of 5.10).[33] The woman to be registered fits the

ideal of faithfulness to her husband (5.9).[34] More particularly, she has served in the Pastor's

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[29] Josephus, *Ant*. 2.180; 11.68; 18.142; 20.87; *C. Ap.* 1.131; Philo, *Sacr*. 122; *Post*. 110; *Decal*. 29; *Aet*. 114; *Legat*. 323.

[30] For analysis, see C. Methuen, 'Widows, Bishops and the Struggle for Authority in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*', *JEH* 46 (1995) 197–213.

[31] Despite arguments to the contrary (e.g. Thurston, *Widows*), I find no evidence of such an 'order' anywhere else in the NT, even where widows are singled out for special mention (e.g., in Acts 6.1–2; 9.36–43). For recent discussion (and cautious conclusions), see A. Standhartinger, 'Witwen im Neuen Testament', in *Frauen gestalten Diakonie. 1: Von der biblischen Zeit bis zum Pietismus* (ed. A.M. von Hauff; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007) 141–54. The same holds for references in Ignatius (*Smyrn.* 6.2; 13.1; *Poly*. 4.1) and Polycarp (*Phil*. 4.3; 6.1), *pace*, e.g., C. Back, *Die Witwen in der frühen Kirche* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015) 242–50.

[32] Tertullian, *Ux.* 1.7; cf. *Praescr*. 3; *Pud*. 13.

[33] *Pace,* among others, L. Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe. 1: Kommentar zum ersten Timotheusbrief* (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 1994), 233–34, 245.

[34] ἑνὸς ἀνδρὸς γύνη (5.9; cf. the equivalent for male leaders in 1 Tim 3.2, 5) could mean 'not divorced/separated' (or 'not unfaithful' to her husband), or it could mean 'married only once' (equivalent to the Latin *univira*, although that is more often expressed as μόνανδρος.

idealised image of the household, which constitutes a hub in the Christian network of benefits. The list in 5.10 begins and ends with reference to 'good works' (ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς μαρτυρουμένη … εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολούθησεν), and we should not read the doing of 'good works', a prominent motif in the Pastorals, as meaning simply 'being nice'.[35] It refers to the low-level, everyday benefactions which form the support system of the poor: a gift of food, care of children, nursing the sick, sharing household items, a small loan in a crisis, hospitality, and so on.[36] Three practical examples are given in 5.10: giving hospitality for the night (εἰ ἐξενοδόχησεν), caring for guests who come for meals or visits (εἰ ἁγίων πόδας ἔνιψεν), and helping those in hardship (εἰ θλιβομένοις ἐπήρκεσεν).[37] The reference to 'the saints' in relation to one of these items probably indicates that all of them concern the internal gift-reciprocity operative within the Christian community where, in fluctuating conditions, small surpluses are distributed around the community, as need arises. No doubt those addressed as 'the rich' in 6.17–18 are expected to play a larger than average role in this support system: they are instructed in 6.18 in multiple, overlapping terms to be generous, pooling their wealth in the practice of 'good works' (ἀγαθοεργεῖν, πλουτεῖν ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς, εὐμεταδότους εἶναι, κοινωνικούς). But the whole community is bound

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See discussion in Roloff, *Der erste Brief*, 293–4 and S. Page, 'Marital Expectations of Church Leaders in the Pastoral Epistles', *JSNT* 50 (1993) 105–20. The latter option would clash with the instruction of 5.14 only if that concerns *remarriage* (see below), and even then, only if 5.9 is read as a legal ruling (rather than as an idealised image of a worthy widow).

[35] For ἔργα καλά, see 1 Tim 5.25; 6.18; Titus 2.7, 14; 3.8, 14 (expressly in relation to urgent need); for ἔργα ἀγαθά and πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν, see 1 Tim 2.10; 2 Tim 2.21; 3.17; Titus 1.16; 3.1; cf. ἀγαθοεργεῖν in 1 Tim 6.18 (with clear financial implications).

[36] For the social realities, see R.S. Schellenberg, 'Subsistence, Swapping, and Paul's Rhetoric of Generosity', *JBL* 137 (2018) 215–34.

[37] On footwashing as a distinctive early Christian practice (cf. John 13.1-16; Tertullian, *Ux.*2.4), see J.C. Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) and R. Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 191-206.

together in gift-exchange, in a network of households like that imagined in 5.9–10. Women

are the linchpin of this system, since they manage the everyday practices of the household

through which such 'good works' are resourced and exchanged.[38]

The age-limit of 'no less than sixty' is striking: on average life-expectancy, not many

women lived to that age, and of those who did, not many would live much longer.[39] The

rule therefore severely limits those who could be supported, but it probably also represents

something else. At sixty a woman was no longer regarded as marriageable, since she was

no longer able to bear children (the main purpose of marriage in antiquity).[40] Augustan

marriage laws pressured elite women to remarry up to the age of fifty,[41] and the Pastor

seems to be pushing the age limit surprisingly high; but the logic is, as we shall see, that

'younger χῆραι' are to marry (5.14) and to gain the necessary support within a household

context. It is only those for whom there is now no possibility of reintegration into a

household, and who have thus no prospect of that network support, who are to be

registered as beneficiaries of the church. But even in their case the Pastor's description of

their past lives lifts up the model of a socially active household. As always, the distribution

of gifts reflects the values of the giver: the Pastor is urging his churches to enforce, or

reinforce, their commitment to a model of church as a network of households. Just as

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[38] 'Good works' are associated especially with women both here and in 1 Tim 2.10; cf. Titus 2.5: οἰκουργοὶ ἀγαθαί.

[39] T.G. Parker, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2003) 280, estimates that at any one time only 7% of the population would be over sixty and only 4% over sixty-five.

[40] Difficulty in supporting herself economically (because of the limitations of age) might be another factor here, but the insistence in 5.11–15 that 'younger' women should marry suggests that marriageability is the key issue.

[41] S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage:* Iusti Coniuges *from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 60-80. Given the resistance to these laws, the age limit of fifty was perhaps as high as the legislators dared go in the hope of some level of compliance.

leaders are to be exemplary householders (1 Tim 3.1–13), and older women are to teach younger women how to be beneficent house-operatives (οἰκουργοὶ ἀγαθαί, Titus 2.5), so the widows to be supported by the church are expected to have showcased the virtues by which the household network is held together, providing children for its future continuance and serving as models of household 'good works' for others to emulate.[42]

3. House Rule 3: Do Not Support Those Who Take a Non-Household Option (1 Tim 5.11–15)

The Pastor now discourages the support of younger χῆραι: ὅταν γὰρ καταστρηνιάσωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γαμεῖν θέλουσιν ἔχουσαι κρίμα ὅτι τὴν πρώτην πίστιν ἠθέτησαν (5.11–12). Καταστρηνιάω is an extremely rare verb, although the simple verb στρηνιάω and the cognate noun στρῆνος are reasonably common.[43] Their semantic field includes luxury, indulgence, and arrogance, with possible sexual connotations (promiscuity or infidelity). The κατά prefix may be merely intensive, or it may (with the following genitive) suggest infidelity or insubordination in relation to Christ.[44] It seems that the marriage of these younger χῆραι would entail some sort of disloyalty to Christ and to their first πίστις.

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[42] Since the benefits given by these women are said to extend through the church network, it is reasonable for the church, as such, to give such women an appropriate return (cf. 5.4, ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόναι). For the contrast with the ἀργαί (5.13), see below.

[43] LSJ cites only our text for the compound verb. The use in Ps.-Ignatius, *Antioch*. 11 is clearly dependent on this passage. For στρηνιάω see Rev 18.7, 9 and Isa 61.6 (Symmachus); στρῆνος is used in, e.g., Rev 18.3; LXX 4 Kgdms 19.28.

[44] Translations are various. NRSV (following *BAGD*) renders: 'when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ'. But disloyalty may be the stronger connotation, rather than sexual infidelity, in relation to Christ. Wagener, *Ordnung*, 201 suggests 'eine Kombination der Bedeutungsgehalts "Überschreitung von Ordnungsgrenzen" mit der sexuellen Konnotation'.

The usual interpretation of this passage is that the χῆραι here in view are widows who, after becoming widows, have taken some oath or pledge (a possible translation of πίστις) regarding celibacy, out of commitment to Christ.[45] The Pastor holds it against them that they want to marry (5.11), but in 5.14 issues an instruction that they should do so. Unless he is utterly inconsistent, what he disapproves of must be not their marriage, but their reneging on their oath. And since he does, in effect, wish them to renege on that oath, it must be the oath itself that he considers unwise, unnecessary, or dangerous. But this whole scenario is odd: we have no evidence anywhere else that widows might take a vow of subsequent celibacy called a πίστις, and it is very hard to understand why the Pastor would call this their *first* πίστις, since it does not appear to be 'first' in any respect.

However, another interpretation is possible and, in my view, infinitely preferable. As a number of scholars have noted, χῆραι here could refer not to 'widows' but to young Christian women who had made a commitment never to get married; they qualify as χῆραι in the sense of 'women without a man', but they might otherwise be called παρθένοι.[46] The best evidence for this phenomenon is in the near contemporary letter by Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, when he greets two kinds of people: first, the households ('of brothers with their wives and children' – that is, those operating the household network of the church), and secondly, τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγομένας χήρας (Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 13.1). This gives us the evidence we need that in Christian discourse of this period χῆραι can refer to celibate

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[45] For representative examples, see Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles,*117; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 599–601 (though he takes the πίστις as faith, abandoned in marrying an unbeliever); C. Spicq, *Les Épitres Pastorales* (Paris: Gabalda, 1969) 535–6; Roloff, *Der erste Brief*, 296–7.
[46] See, especially, C. Methuen, 'The "Virgin Widow": A Problematic Social Role for the Early Church?', *HTR* 90 (1997) 285–98. For readings along such lines, though importing (unnecessarily) the notion of entry into a 'circle', 'order', or 'office', cf. Wagener, *Ordnung*, 200–11; Bassler, *1 Timothy*, 94–8; Back, *Witwen*, 187; M. Tsuji, 'Zwischen Ideal und Realität: Zu den Witwen in 1 Tim 5.3–16', *NTS* 47 (2001) 92–104.

women who have never been married.[47] All we need to imagine here is that young women, following Paul's advice, devoted themselves entirely 'to the Lord', not wishing to be divided in their commitments (1 Cor 7.32–35). They may have interpreted their commitment to Christ as a kind of 'marriage' (cf. 2 Cor 11.2–3; Eph 5.32), but in any case, their lifelong celibacy is bound up with their faith in Christ.[48] In this case, their πρώτη πίστις is (like the πρώτη ἀγάπη in Rev 2.4) a straightforward reference to their initial faith, not an obscure reference to an oath following widowhood.[49] Renouncing marriage and the normal roles of wife and mother, they represented another (and arguably superior) form of Christian devotion.[50]

We can now understand why the Pastor is worried about these women, since we know from 1 Tim 4.3 that he is opposed to those who forbid marriage. Not only the story of Thecla, but multiple other sources from the second century attest to the attraction for young Christian women in refusing marriage out of allegiance to Christ.[51] Whether one should describe this as a bid for autonomy is a moot point: unless they were self-sufficient in resources, such women would be dependent on other believers for their material support

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[47] J.B. Lightfoot struggles unsuccessfully to read Ignatius' phrase in the sense 'widows who may be called virgins, on the grounds of their purity and devotion', *The Apostolic Fathers Part II: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp* (vol. 2; London/New York: Macmillan, 1889), 322–24. For other examples where Christian unmarried women are given this title, or closely associated with widows, see *Acts Pet*. 29 ('virgins of Christ'); Tertullian, *Virg*. 9 (horrified at the practice of allowing virgins to sit with widows). Since a παρθένος was usually a teenage girl, it was natural to apply another label to older ascetic women which represented their status (without a man) and which encouraged the church to view them charitably.

[48] The notion of virgins as 'brides of Christ' is attested only later (e.g. Tertullian, *Or*. 21–2; *Virg*. 16) but is a natural extrapolation from the Pauline texts cited above, and may be reflected in 1 Tim 5.12, if the language there has sexual connotations.

[49] The Pastorals repeatedly warn against abandoning or undermining faith (ἡ πίστις); see 1 Tim 1.19; 4.1; 5.8; 6.10, 21; 2 Tim 2.18.

[50] At a later date, Tertullian hails women who 'set the seal on their virginity in their flesh at baptism' (*Ux.* 1.6: *statim a lavacro carnem suam obsignant*; cf. *Bapt*. 18).

[51] Pauline authority for this preference is explicitly evoked in *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 5–6.

throughout their lives.[52] But one can well understand this option as a symptom of the radical rejection of 'the world' to which the Christian message drew so many in the early centuries, with the added benefit for women of avoiding the life-threatening perils of childbirth.[53] The Pastor knows about this phenomenon, but considers that these women may not be able to sustain their ascetic commitment, and will thus, in effect, renounce their Christian faith, to which their celibacy was tied.[54]

The criticism of these younger women goes further in 5.13 and reveals more of the Pastor's socio-economic vision of the church. These women are twice described as ἀργαί, and we should take this word in its etymological sense as ἀ-εργαί (cf. Matt 20.3, 6; Jas 2.20), that is, women who do not perform the everyday good works such as those described in 5.10.[55] Since they are not installed with responsibility in one of the household hubs of the Christian network, they do not have the opportunity to practise the routine benefactions that tie the community together. In the Pastor's perspective, they are mobile, peripatetic, περιερχόμεναι τὰς οἰκίας (5.13): that could mean making calls from house to house, but more likely indicates that they move from household to household for periods in residence,

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[52] Conversely, Roman historians have recently emphasised that even in marriage (indeed, even in a *manus*-marriage) and even under the (notional) oversight of a legal *tutor*, women of means enjoyed considerable economic independence; see S. Dixon, 'Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut: Cultural Representations of Women in the Roman Economy', in *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization* (ed. F. McHardy and E. Marshall; London/New York: Routledge, 2004) 56-74.

[53] For scholarly discussion of the ascetic option in early Christianity, see note 24. It is possible to read 1 Tim 2.15 as referring to women being brought safely through the ordeal of childbirth (τεκνογονία); I am indebted to Emily Gathergood for this suggestion.

[54] Nothing in the context here suggests a fear lest they marry unbelievers, *pace* G. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988) 121–2; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 598–601.

[55] Wagener, *Ordnung*, 205–6. Cf. 2 Tim 2.14 (οὐδὲν χρήσιμον); Titus 1.16 (πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἀδόκιμοι) and, for the alternative, Titus 3.14: μανθανέτωσαν δὲ καὶ οἱ ἡμέτεροι καλῶν ἔργων προΐστασθαι εἰς τὰς ἀναγκαίας χρείας, ἵνα μὴ ὦσιν ἄκαρποι.

since (at least after the death of their parents) they have no house of their own.[56] They are unproductive because they are mobile: they do not have the stable base from which to contribute to the Christian system of benefaction-exchange.

There are, from the Pastor's perspective, additional faults: οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀργαὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ φλύαροι καὶ περίεργοι, λαλοῦσαι τὰ μὴ δέοντα (5.13). This language deploys stereotypes concerning women's 'gossip'[57] and the fear of outsiders' 'interference' in the business of the household (cf. 2 Thess 3.11), but the negative judgment of their speech also concerns its content. These women exemplify and perhaps promote an alternative model of Christianity, committed not to marriage, child-rearing, and household management, but to the single, celibate life that undercuts the household model. If many women take this option, there will be too few Christian young women for Christian men to marry. But, more generally, this alternative, non-household model threatens the household-network system which is essential to the Pastor's vision. There is reason to think that the Pastorals polemicise throughout against this alternative, non-household, option, even though it could claim inspiration from Paul. In a close parallel to our text, the letter to Titus inveighs against those who 'overturn whole households, teaching what they should not (ἃ μὴ δεῖ) for the

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[56] The phrase is often interpreted as an indication of the widows' pastoral responsibilities ('pastoral house calls', Dibelius and Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 75). But there is no indication in this text that widows had such duties (rightly, Brox, *Pastoralbriefe*, 195). Going from place to place is precisely the itinerant lifestyle modelled by Jesus and his disciples (Matt 8.18–22; 10.5–14) and is characteristic of Thecla and others in the apocryphal Acts. The Synoptic prohibition against moving from house to house in any one town (μὴ μεταβαίνετε ἐξ οἰκίας εἰς οἰκίαν, Luke 10.7; cf. Mark 6.10) is mitigated by the instruction in *Did*. 11.3–6 about limiting the time one should accommodate 'apostles' and 'prophets'.   For the use of the verb περιέρχομαι in the sense 'live an itinerant life', see Acts 19.13; Heb 11.37. Contrast the emphasis on the ἴδιος οἶκος in 1 Tim 3.4, 5, 12; 5.4.

[57] See M.B. Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2009), 50–66, 142–59 (pointing out, however, uncertainties regarding translation and nuance). For parallel critiques of 'useless' speech, cf. 1 Tim 1.6; 6.20; 2 Tim 2.16; Titus 1.10; 3.9.

sake of gain' (Titus 1.11), while 2 Timothy warns against those who 'enter households and

capture young (or weak) women (γυναικάρια)' who are subject to sinful desires and are

'always learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth' (2 Tim 3.6–7). The

references here to teaching and learning (as in 1 Tim 5.13: μανθάνουσιν) suggest that the

threat comes from teachers who are not themselves embedded in households, and who

travel from church to church embodying a message of radical renunciation of home,

marriage, and wealth – precisely the kind of itinerant 'apostles' we see mirrored in the

apocryphal Acts as successors to the 'wandering charismatics' in the early Jesus-

movement.[58]

The Pastor is vigorously opposed to such 'false teaching'. He knows that this celibacy

option is heavily criticised in pagan society (5.14), and he is concerned that some young

women have adopted it and 'turned away to Satan' (5.15).[59] His alternative is clear: these

young women should marry, get embedded in a household, bear children (for future

Christian households), and manage a household hub in the Christian network (5.14).[60] Once

again, he reverts to the household model as the essence of the Christian economy. To give

financial support to women who flout this model by remaining celibate for their whole lives

would be to validate an option that does not complement but undermine the household

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[58] It is striking that the Pastor takes a motif used in that tradition ('the workman is worthy of his hire', Matt 10.10; Luke 10.7) and applies it not (as in the gospels) to itinerants, but to resident 'elders' (1 Tim 5.18).

[59] The Pastor interprets the adoption of this alternative Christian model as a form of apostasy: cf. the use of ἐκτρέπω in 1 Tim 1.6; 6.20; 2 Tim 4.4. For Satan, cf. 1 Tim 1.20; and for 'the snare of the διάβολος', 1 Tim 3.6–7; 2 Tim 2.26.

[60] Although γαμεῖν (5.14) can mean 'remarry' (cf. 1 Cor 7.39), the instructions of this verse give the impression that these are all first-time activities (not, e.g., bearing *more* children). Would this instruction apply also to young women who had been widowed? By the Pastor's logic, probably so (on the possible clash with 5.9, see above, n. 33), but they do not seem to be those primarily in view.

ideal. Where Ignatius allowed both options to co-exist (*Smyrn*. 13.1), the Pastor sees

danger, and wants the financial decisions of the church to reflect very clearly which model it

supports, and which it does not.[61]

4. House Rule 4: Women believers should take χῆραι into their support networks (1 Tim 5.16)

This last verse returns to the theme of the 'real' χῆραι and clarifies what has been

implicit throughout, that the church, *qua* church, should not be responsible for the support

of χῆραι unless they cannot be placed within some other network of support. According to

the best texts (εἴ τις πιστὴ ἔχει χήρας), the primary responsibility rests on a female believer,

and the echo of 5.4a might suggest that this 'having' represents a familial role, to be

performed by a female relative.[62] But the wording is vague, allowing that χῆραι be

supported by any female supporter or patron.[63] Whether this entails accommodation or

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[61] Both Ignatius and Polycarp indicate that, in Smyrna at least (and perhaps elsewhere), there arose a symbiosis of both models: both the household (married Christians bringing up children) and celibate women (virgins called 'widows'). The two are mentioned side by side not only in Ignatius, *Smyrn*. 13.1, but also in Ignatius, *Pol*. 5.1–2 (those liable to boast in their 'purity' are probably celibate women) and Polycarp, *Phil*. 4.2–3, where 'widows' are easy targets of slander (as in 1 Tim 5.14) as recipients of financial aid. There is an evident anxiety about supporting (virgin) 'widows' (cf. Ignatius, *Pol*. 4.1), but not, as in the Pastorals, an outright ban.

[62] The alternative reading (εἴ τις πιστὸς ἢ πιστή) is less well attested (among uncials, only D Ψ K L) and assimilates the text to the form of later church orders (see Wagener, *Ordnung* 118 n. 24).

[63] A male fulfilling this role might invite scandal, to which the Pastor is very sensitive (5.14). The support of widows by Tabitha/Dorcas might be exemplary in this regard (Acts 9.36–39); at a much higher social level, note the patronage of Thecla by Tryphaena in *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. From the census records in Egypt, E. E. Hanson records a surprising high number of divorced or widowed women (39 out of 103) living in predominantly female households, ''Widows Too Young in their Widowhood', in D.E.E. Kleiner and S.B. Matheson (eds.), *I Claudia II: Women in Roman Art and Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) 149-65, at 152.

regular material support, being taken into the care of a believer would provide the link to a wider network that was otherwise lacking. In any case, the concern is not to burden the ἐκκλησία financially, so that it supports only those who are *truly* χῆραι (5.16). It is presumed that the church has a common pot of money (perhaps administered by an ἐπίσκοπος), but it is limited.[64] Once again, the preference is for a household to take primary responsibility; only those who fall outside the household network are to be supported. Where possible, χῆραι are to be reinserted into such a network. But as a last resort the church is willing to register those who are not, and can no longer be placed, in a household system of support.

5. Conclusions

On the reading of 1 Tim 5.3–16 offered above, the whole text is unified and well integrated in content. Despite persistent claims that the passage is disjointed and concerns two different kinds of 'widow' (those in financial need in 5.3–8 and 5.16, and those to be registered for a church order in 5.9–15),[65] we have found the text to be fully consistent both in subject-matter and in ideology. Its four main sections each encapsulate a 'house rule' that promotes the household as the building-block of the Christian church. The church is not the substitute for households, nor should it undermine them: rather, it is made up of a network of household-hubs, joined by mutual support in 'good works'. The 'genuine χήρα' is consistently defined as one who is isolated and bereft of all network support: she is a

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[64] Cf. the church κοινόν mentioned in Ignatius, *Pol*. 4.3, and similarly protected; later, Justin, *1 Apol*. 67.6–7. For similar limitations in generosity, see 2 Thess 3.10 and May, *Restricted Generosity*.

[65] See Verner, *Household*, 161–6, with reference to earlier proponents of this view; R.M. Kidd, *Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990) 103–6.

widow who has no surviving offspring and is of an age (sixty and over) when she is no longer

marriageable and thus has no prospect of being reintegrated into a household network.

Ruled out from this category are those with independent means (5.6), those whose

offspring could and should care for them (5.4–8), those whom women believers could take

into their care (5.16), and those who are young enough to be (re)married (5.11–15). If, as

seems likely, female Christian virgins were being labelled χῆραι, the Pastor in effect

disqualifies them from the acquisition of this title.   Where possible, the Pastor rules,

women and widows should be (re)integrated into a household network, the primary system

of support for the poor. Only those who cannot be embedded in such networks are to be

registered and thus formally recognised as the communal responsibility of the church.

       We do not have evidence here for an 'order' of widows, a group set apart for special

roles in the church, either one already existing or one here established. χήρα is not a role

description and there is nothing here to indicate what χῆραι are intended to do. Praying

and hoping in the Lord (5.5) are indicators of the desperation of the isolated widow, not

church duties, and the activities of the χήρα in 5.9–10 are described in the past tense; they

are not an outline of duties that a sixty-year-old widow is expected to perform. One of the

chief reasons for finding here an 'order' of widows – the 'pledge' of 5.12 – is, as we have

seen, a mirage: this refers not to a pledge on entry into an office, but to the initial faith of

young girls who promised to remain celibate their whole life long. All that this text

evidences, though this is highly significant in itself, is the decision to support destitute and

otherwise unsupported widows as a collective entity, in the name of the church and from

some common church fund. Even sixty-year-old widows might require food and housing for

some years, and this is a weighty financial commitment for those who had no kinship relations with such women.[66]

The Pastor treats this matter at such length because it brings to the surface an ambiguity about the identity of the church. The problem he faces is not that a widows' 'order' is becoming too large or too powerful, but that the treatment of widows, and other women called χῆραι, poses a challenge to his theological and socio-economic vision of the church. He refuses to allow the church to take the place of the family, or to allow non-household models of the church to become normative. His model of church is a network of solidly Christian households, mutually supportive financially, but not expected to draw from central church resources. As an appendage to this network, but as an echo of its ideals, women who have been house-managers but who have for whatever reason lost their own family network, are to be supported by the church house-network out of collective funds.

This model has implications for all believers, but in differing ways. Men are expected to be faithful to their wives and to lead Christian households, with obedient (i.e. believing) children; and some of them who are exemplary house-leaders can also lead the church house-network as a whole (1 Tim 3.1–7; Titus 2.3–9; cf. Onesiphorus' οἶκος in 2 Tim 1.16–18). The church is expected to continue through procreation within Christian households, with young people duly marrying and raising the next Christian generation. Unlike some other early Christian texts, no mention is made of households divided by conversion (Mark 13.12–13; 1 Cor 7.12–16; 1 Pet 3.1–6). Within and between the Christian households there operates a web of καλὰ ἔργα – the small-scale but vital support system of reciprocated aid

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[66] Cf. the eighty-year-old widow, Regina, whose daughter made a point of insisting that she 'never burdened the church' (4/5th century, Rome, *ILCV* 1.1581, cited and discussed by U.E. Elm, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) 145–6.

that keeps the poor from destitution and knits together households in fluctuating economic conditions. Women, in managing the household, are the motor that keeps this household structure active and effective. As mothers and child-rearers, they raise the next generation, and ensure the formation and moral ethos of the church into the future. If young girls opt not to take on this role, there will be fewer solidly Christian households; and if such celibate women are promoted as *exemplars* by being given financial support, the household network will be in danger of collapse.

Because he is conducting an ideological battle on this topic, the Pastor uses rhetorical antithesis and polemical exaggeration to reinforce his message. Contrasting images of the widow are juxtaposed in exaggerated terms (5.5–6); alternatives constitute apostasy (5.8, 15); the image of the household wife is idealised (5.9–10); and 'virgin-χῆραι' are portrayed in derogatory terms (5.11–15).[67] The text does place limitations on the financial liabilities of the church, but more is at stake than that. It limits the options available to young Christian women, but it is not primarily driven by a fear of female power. Here, as elsewhere in the Pastorals, women are discussed principally in their relation to the household (1 Tim 2.10–15; 2 Tim 3.6–7; Titus 2.3–5), because what matters to the Pastor is the establishment of stable and active Christian households, as the essential building-blocks of the church. It was not at all natural or necessary that the early Christian movement should adopt this structure as its primary model, especially in the Pauline tradition. The energy with which the Pastor promotes it is, perhaps, a sign of how fragile and contested it was.

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[67] For this reason, it is mistake to take this passage as a rule-book, and to worry, pedantically, over how the Pastor would treat aged widows who were childless or had been widowed twice: the portrait of 5.9–10 is idealised and hardly drafted with legal precision.

Alternative models of the church, with an ascetic preference and a school-ethos, were available and attractive. The Pastor's opponents appear to have been travelling Christian teachers with some such alternative vision. Believers, he complains, have 'itchy ears' for instruction from figures who are paid for teaching (Titus 1.10–11; cf. 1 Tim 6.5), and who move from house to house (2 Tim 3.6). In a school model, Christian pupils may come from Christian or non-Christian households, or may live outside the traditional household structure; they attend, learn, and mature *qua* individual believers without an expectation that they will share their knowledge with their households. Celibate women could become not only exemplars but also teachers (1 Tim 5.13), especially if they have the wealth to afford an education (cf. 1 Tim 2.9–12). The names Paul, Timothy, and Titus are residues of the early tradition of church-sponsored teachers, apostles, and prophets who travelled from city to city to spread the good news, and it is ironic that they should be the named figureheads in this household-oriented text.

Of course, the Pastor, too, wants teaching, so long as it is 'healthy' and household-related. What concerns him is a teaching-content that promotes a quite different vision of the nature and future of the church, and he is determined to stop this in its tracks. One respect in which the matter comes to a head is the question of eligibility for financial support from the collective but limited resources of the church. If the church commits this resource to the support of young χῆραι – young women who opt not to enter marriage or to raise Christian families – it is, in the Pastor's view, shooting itself in the foot. Money declares identity and purpose, and how the church decides whom to support is diagnostic of its view of itself and its goals. The issue for the Pastor is not just what the church can afford, but what lifestyle it wants to promote. From the Pastor's perspective, the women who choose not to engage in household management when it is possible for them to do so are

not only a drain on the church's resources, and not only unable to contribute to its internal system of reciprocal welfare: they are inculcating a mode of Christian life which destabilises the church and threatens its future. No doubt the women concerned saw things differently, but if this reading is right, 1 Tim 5.3–16 concerns a fundamental debate about the character of the church that was to continue through the second century and beyond.[68]

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[68] For the development of female asceticism in the church, see Brown, *Body and Society*; S. Elm, *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).