

**The origins of modern  
welfare:**

**Volume 1**

**Juan Luis Vives**  
***On the relief of the poor, or of  
human need***

**Paul Spicker (editor)**

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## **Introduction to Volume 1:**

### ***Vives, On the relief of the poor***

The two books included in *The Origins of Modern Welfare* are probably the earliest studies ever written in the field of Social Policy, and among the earliest written about public administration. Social Policy is the study of welfare, policy and administration. The field of study developed mainly to meet the needs of professionals and policy makers working in related subject areas, and although the subject has seen considerable expansion and development in recent years, the core of its area of interest continues to be an understanding of the nature, purpose and methods through which welfare is delivered.

The book in this first volume, by Juan-Luis Vives, makes proposals for the organisation of social welfare provision. It was written for the Senate of Bruges, at the request of a former Prefect, and despite a nominal date of 1525 it was published early in 1526

(Mattheeussen, 1986, p 88). It combines a set of theoretical arguments and a literature review, with detailed prescriptions for the management and administration of social welfare provision in the city.

This book has some claim to be the first ever published on social policy. There have been various social policies since ancient times, and of course there were things written about welfare and charity. However, most of what had been written before these documents appeared - in the Bible or the Talmud, Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah* (Maimonides, 1180), or Luther's *Ordinances on a common chest* (Salter, 1926) - were laws, policies or instructions, rather than discussions of the subject. Aquinas's discussion of beneficence and almsgiving in the *Summa Theologica* is also relevant (Aquinas, c. 1274, II-II, questions 31 and 32), but it is still mainly about the moral duty of charity, not about social welfare. None of these works is recognisable as a study of the social policy in the contemporary sense. This one is.

## Why the book was written

*De Subventione Pauperum* was a commissioned academic report. Juan-Luis Vives had moved to Bruges at the age of 20, after a period at the Sorbonne, and from 1517 he held a position at Louvain. Vives first expressed an interest in poor relief in a letter in 1522, which shows, Mattheeussen argues, that he had formed an interest while still at Bruges (Mattheeussen, 1986, pp 91-2); but in the period when the reform of welfare provision was being most actively debated, from 1523 to 1525, Vives was mainly in England, where he had a post in Cardinal College, at Corpus Christi, Oxford. During this period, he travelled frequently between England and Flanders and he returned to Flanders in the summer of 1524 to be married. He most probably learned about the plans for Ypres while he was still in England: Tobriner suggests that Lauwereyens, a former mayor of Ypres, and Vives were in

London together in the spring of 1525 (Tobriner, 1999, p 16). It has been suggested that Vives was working on the *De Subventionem Pauperum* much earlier (Norena, 1970, p 96n), but the claim is tenuous. He said in a letter in 1525 that he was working on something stunningly ambitious. There is no good reason to suppose that it is the project on welfare reform that he was talking about. Several of his later works were far more adventurous intellectually than this book is. *De Disciplinis* was an attempt to summarise the scope of human knowledge; that seems to have had the same kind of aspiration as the French *Encyclopédie* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Watson, 1913). If that is right, *De Subventionem Pauperum* was little more than a distraction from the main academic project – a familiar position for academics nowadays.

Before this commission, Vives was already an established and respected academic writer. Though relatively young, he had published some major works, including *De institutione feminae Christianae* (On the



education of Christian women) in 1523 and *Introductio ad sapientiam* (Introduction to wisdom) in 1524. He had an unusually wide range of academic interests. Few people had written about the subjects that Vives was ready to tackle - for example, love, marriage, education and the role of women.

Commentators have put considerable emphasis on Vives's practical approach and his apparent experience as an administrator. Vives certainly had a strong belief in applied knowledge or "practical wisdom" (see Watson, 1913). (Practical wisdom, the "phronesis" of Aristotle, has become a subject of renewed interest in contemporary social science: see Flyvbjerg, 2001). There are aspects of Vives's writing, such as his understanding of the situation of people with mental illness, that he probably could not have written if he had not had some direct contact with the people he was writing about. However, Vives was a full-time scholar and writer: even if he had some practical experience, which is uncertain, he was clearly an academic rather than a

practitioner.

It is possible that the request to review welfare in Bruges was a recognition of Vives's personal interests, and that he had a free hand as to how to interpret his brief. However, it seems unlikely that Vives was working wholly by his own lights. He was not paid personally for the work – there were evidently funds, because the city paid for a translation of the book into Dutch (Watson, 1913, p lxvii), and Vives was rewarded with a silver cup - but he was engaged on the basis that the work needed to be done, and he did the work as a service to the city. Any working researcher in public policy is likely to be familiar with the issues around the “research relationship” (see e.g. Wenger, 1987; Percy-Smith et al., 2002) - the relationship between the researcher and the body sponsoring research. The question that should come to mind is what Lodewijk van Praet, formerly the prefect or mayor of Bruges, could have expected to see when he invited Vives to write his report - and, indeed, why the city should have paid to make the

work accessible to the public afterwards.

Policy makers may sometimes engage academics because they want ideas about what to do, but that is unusual. More typically they commission work because they want justifications for action, because they want a reason to delay a decision, because they want an independent view about whether a policy is working, or because they want the seal of approval or legitimacy which comes from academic authority. The timing of the commission, when Mons and Ypres were to introduce schemes and Bruges was not, sets aside some of these possible reasons; it suggests that the commission was intended to review arguments for change, or to add legitimacy to the process of making decisions. The first of these, that Vives was simply asked to review the arguments, is possible. There were certainly disputes at the time within the polity at Bruges: Vives's scheme was not adopted there, and it was thirty years before Bruges set up a municipal system. Vives could, then, have been commissioned in the

expectation that he would present the arguments for extending the Senate's powers and role. The revised edition of Vives's work, published in the Paris version adds these words to Book 2 Chapter 7: "Political rivalry, the cruel plague of every city, must be especially avoided." (Mattheussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 127)

Beyond that, though, the structure of the *De Subventione* served a wider political purpose. In a period when the reform of welfare was strongly associated with a challenge to the authority of the Church, a proposal to invest the role in the secular authorities was highly controversial, and strongly linked to Lutheranism. Catholics as well as Protestants, however, wanted to see reforms in welfare (Pullan, 1976). The *De Subventione* mounted a defence of welfare reform that could still be accepted within the Catholic Church.

Vives was an unusual theologian. Mattheussen and Fantazzi describe his work as "thoroughly Christian" (2002, p xv), but

there are reasons to question that judgment, which will become apparent later in the notes to the text. If Vives was hardly a typical adherent of the doctrines of the Catholic church, however, nor was he remotely sympathetic to Luther's negative, condemnatory view of humanity (Norena, 1970, pp 292-3). Erasmus wrote of him, in a letter to Thomas More, that "no other man is more fitted to utterly overwhelm the battalions of the dialecticians in whose camps he served for a long time." (cited Watson, 1913, p xxiii)

If anyone could present the material in a way that could satisfy the religious authorities, it was Vives. He set out to show that reform had a good theological grounding, and he devoted the first book to the purpose. He was certainly aware of the political sensitivity of what he was writing: he commented privately that he had had to approach the subject with caution, "for fear of contradicting the happy effect that I was hoping for, for so many thousands of beings"

(cited Guy, 1972, p 138) “Rather than initiating change”, Kingdon suggests, “intellectuals often justified the changes engineered by the practical business leaders of the community. ... [Vives’s treatise] may thus be regarded ... as more a consecration of reform already under way than an impetus to new reform.”

(Kingdon, 1971, p 68) Ultimately, it was legitimacy, more than any plan for action, that Vives’s arguments supplied.

## **The report**

Vives’s text was written in two ‘Books’ or parts. Book 1 is labelled, in the 1530 Paris edition, as being about private charity; Book 2, about public relief organised by the city. (The front page of that edition, using those terms, is duplicated on page 37 of this volume.) In the interests of accessibility, I have used this as a guide, but the subtitles I have extracted from the frontispiece - *De subventionem privata* and *De subventionem publica* - are not part of the original text, and they are only part of the

story; it is no less true that Book 1 is concerned with general principles, and Book 2 with practical administration. Most writers and commentators have only referred to the second Book, and for nearly five hundred years only the second Book was available in an English translation.

Many commentators are dismissive of the first Book (e.g. Salter, 1926); Mattheussen and Fantazzi describe it as “generalising pious reflections” (2002, p xvii). Vives’ report begins conventionally enough with a review of the literature – basically the Bible, and the classics. People thinking about charity might have referred to classical texts like Cicero’s *De Officiis*, or Seneca’s *De beneficiis*, both cited in this work. Neither however is really about social welfare: Cicero’s work is a consideration of moral duties, and Seneca’s book is an extended discussion of giving, receiving and the role of gratitude. Chapters 5 to 8 (and chapter 8 in particular) seem much more concerned to justify the work with appropriate scriptural authority than to advance the

argument. Book 2, which offers practical prescriptions for the development of policy, seems much more interesting. Without Book 1, however, we would lose Vives's main references to key concepts like solidarity, reciprocity, precariousness, dependency, basic needs and common property – concepts which have been central to the discussion of welfare.

In relation to society, Vives begins from a model of a “golden age”. People have come together for practical reasons, forming communities, developing a division of labour, and exchanging goods through the development of money; but social relationships are corrupted by oppression and inequality. Fernandez-Santamaria makes the case that for Vives, society is bound by “caritas” or charitable feeling (Fernandez-Santamaria, 1998); but Vives takes a less abstract view. Vives identifies the whole of Christendom as one body, linked by common bonds; Alves argues that this is unusual and distinctive, though Vives was followed by others arguing for “Christian



communitarianism”, a morality based in a union of Christians (Alves, 1989). For Vives, people are bound together by their creation, their nature and the practical necessities of social life to life by exchange, reciprocity and mutual support. Vives sees people as mutually dependent, but bonded together through a combination of common identity, shared needs and interdependence. The position of everyone in society is precarious, and everyone, rich or poor, is inter-dependent. “All human life and health depend on the help of others.” His expression for this relationship is *communio vitae*, the communion of life. This term is more often used in relation to marriage, but to Vives it seems to be equivalent to the contemporary concept of solidarity in Catholic social teaching. Solidarity is ‘A firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is ... the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for each other’ (Pope John Paul II, 1987). There are several points where Vives seems to be saying just

that. The main difference is that, as the idea of solidarity is currently understood in Europe, it depends in large part, and places high value on, responsibilities to families and small communities. Vives's priority is often a more general altruism, and he is suspicious of those who claim to put their family first.

Government is seen as an instrument to make people's lives better. Vives writes, in his preface, that "If we consider the origin of all cities, their governments have had the aim of making them places where benefits were given and received." Vives' politics can reasonably be described as 'corporatist', in the literal sense of seeing a political society as a body. This was a common approach in mediaeval political thought (Black, 1984). Vives represents the ruler, governor or senate as the mind of the political body. The duty of the government is to ensure the health of the city. "Just as the body cannot be fed or live only through in one of its parts, but as a whole, the magistrate must take care of everything in his city, and cannot neglect anything." Governors

are responsible for every that happens in their city, and particularly for those who are dependent on others. They cannot hold back on the basis that some private body is doing it: "Nothing is so independent in a city that it should be beyond the knowledge of those who govern it." Vives' proposals consequently include mechanisms for gathering information, structures of accountability and a marked expansion of responsibilities.

The model is paternalistic, not democratic. Vives's censors will gather reports on everyone, as fathers of the city. Poor people should have done what is good for them, regardless of what they want: "Let us act as wise doctors do with patients who rave, and as wise fathers do with their bad sons, to work for the benefit and profit of those even when they protest and resist." However, there are also sentiments which point in the direction of democracy. Vives argues that the authority of any ruler depends on the consent of others: "What child, what old woman does not know that the greatest empires are established with

the consent of their vassals, and that they would be nothing if nobody obeyed them?"

Vives, is critical of inequality and oppression; there are times when he seems to suggest that property should be held in common. "We make our property, from what generous nature has made common to all." He sees material goods as both precarious and on loan from God. "Everyone should know that he has not received his body, his soul, his life or his money only for his own use and convenience. He should know that he is a trustee, a faithful distributor of every thing, and that he has received them from God for this purpose." Charity is a moral, religious duty, but it is also a practical necessity: without it, people (rich and poor) become corrupt and debased. "Almost all the vices of the poor", Vives writes, "are our fault."

Vives has been described as a Christian socialist (Watson, 1913, pp lxvi-vii; and Guy, 1972, p 145). However, he was not committed to redistribution. He does hint that some redistribution might be desirable; "it would be

just to renew the initial distribution of money, which over the course of time, has been breached in all sorts of ways". At the same time, he shies away from the idea that goods should be redistributed by government; the responsibility for charity rests with each and every individual, as a member of common humanity.

## **The influence of Vives' work**

Vives has been credited perhaps with more influence than he actually achieved. The origins of welfare reform are mainly attributable to social change and the growth of Protestantism, not to the influence of this kind of study. Lutheran and other Protestant reforms were happening before this book was written. Several German cities had introduced reforms of poor relief between 1522 and 1524; for example, Augsburg had forbidden begging in the street and appointed six almoners (*Armenpfleger*) (Ashley, 1906, p 169). It is plausible, Kingdon suggests, that

“German models influenced the development of welfare reform in other countries. One cannot prove direct influence, however, partly because so many of these other countries remained Catholic and hence would deny or disguise influence that might be labelled Lutheran ... In particular the seminal reforms in Mons and Ypres ... resemble the Strasbourg reforms of 1523-24.” (Kingdon, 1971, p 67) Vives was aware of developments in Strasbourg; a friend had sent him information about the scheme in 1524 (Lindberg, 1993, 84). The movement for reform in the Low Countries was widespread.

“Vives’s treatise”, Fehler writes, “can be viewed in part as a confirmation of the reform changes already under way in the Low Countries. Nevertheless, the values and ideas represented by Vives and other northern humanists promoted poor relief reform after 1526 as Vives’s plan circulated widely through Europe.” (Fehler, 1999, p 14) To contemporary eyes, Vives’s work tends to be seen as the most significant document of the period; it has a

stronger intellectual basis than the report from Ypres, presented in volume 2 of *The Origins of Modern Welfare*, and Vives' work has come to symbolise the movement of the time.. Todd argues, for example, that "The Elizabethan poor laws ... came closer than any other sixteenth-century legislation to implementing the Vivesian ideal." (Todd, 1987, p 147) That is debatable; there is a much more direct connection with the influence of the Ypres report. Vives' work was translated into Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch and French, but not into English - the first complete translation is in Mattheussen and Fantazzi's edition of 2002. By contrast, the English version of the Ypres report was published in 1535, and the case it made was directly reflected in the construction of the Tudor Poor Law of 1536.

## **Reading Vives**

Students and practitioners who read classic texts often struggle to relate their insights to

the contemporary world. This book needs to be read differently. The greatest challenge is not to find material which can be related to contemporary experience, because there is so much, but to bear in mind that their roots lie in a fundamentally different social order.

In most standard accounts of social policy, understanding the origins of modern welfare begins with the English Poor Laws, introduced more than seventy years after the reforms in Europe. The Poor Laws were the first national administration of welfare provision. They were to become a by-word for harsh, punitive treatment of the poor. These texts, however, begin with a different perspective. There are elements of mediaeval thought, and sometimes but there are also passages which seem thoroughly modern. There are many competing interpretations of the purpose of this work: some see it as punitive, some as disciplinary, some as liberal, some as universalist. All these positions are defensible. There is a point in Northern Europe where you can stand at the land's end, and



three seas meet around you, with the waves coming in different directions. Vives' work offers a vantage point of a similar kind, where three different world views wash up against each other.

The first perspective is the world of mediaeval Christianity, a world where there was a natural order, the fortune of each person was ordained by God, and people merited different treatment according to the quality and condition of their birth. Charity was a duty to God rather than to the recipient, and God "offers us such great rewards if we obey Him, and threatens us with guaranteed punishment if we do not." Inclusion in the social order is inseparable with membership of a Christian community, and one of the greatest virtues of the reform seems to be the participation of poor people in services and their receipt of the sacraments.

The second view comes from the modern world, the world of an emerging industrial order. On occasion, there is the judgmental, condemnatory view of poor

people that came to dominate in the new industrial society. Man has to work to live; work gives people a purpose; some people who are begging are plainly lazy; the devil makes work for idle hands; there needs to be a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Several writers have emphasised the disciplinary elements in these policies: Fernandez-Santamaria emphasises the strong work ethic (Fernandez-Santamaria, 1998), Todd the intention to purify people through work (Todd, 1987, pp 118-75), and Michielse sees the work mainly as a means of policing the poor (Michielse, 1990). Mollat writes of humanism's "subtle and perfidious" contempt for the poor; for Kuttner, the image is one of destructive masses who have to be led to the good by the higher orders (both cited by Michielse, 1990, pp 6, 10). Welfare has to be rationalised and controlled; caution has to be taken to deal with malingerers and frauds; paupers need to be controlled, like children; the begging has to stop. In this text, as in the work of Octavia Hill in the nineteenth

century (Hill, 1884), there is a view that the disorderly poor must be given a chance to reform. "Perhaps the most striking advance in the sixteenth century", Pullan writes, "lay in the ardour and sophistication of the attempts made, not to reject or punish, but to reclaim the undeserving." (Pullan, 1988, p 202)

The third view is the most surprising to a contemporary reader - a perspective which have led some writers to think of Vives' scheme as a model for a welfare state (e.g. BIEN, n.d.). The two key concepts in these texts are the idea of "communion of life", or solidarity, and the view that government exists for the benefit of the people. "Who is acting more inhumanely?", Vives writes:

Someone who wants poor people to choke on their refuse, their dirt, vice, wantonness, immodesty, wickedness, ignorance, madness, misfortune and all their wretchedness? Or those who see the means and ways to pull them out of such a miserable state and lead them to

a more polite, pure and wise life,  
making men out of those who, without  
it, would have stayed useless and lost?

The gist of this report is progressive, communitarian and inclusive. People without work should be helped to employment, or to start a business; employment should be developed through a programme of public works. People with disabilities, mental illness and chronic sickness should be treated seriously, and recognised for what they can do. Migrants should be helped, even if it is not possible to help everyone. Special efforts should be made to help people who are reluctant or too proud to claim.

Vives' work represents a watershed in thinking about governance, social responsibility and public policy. Part of the interest of his work is of course historical, and it is unsurprising if the task of reading and interpreting them has usually been left to specialist historians. However, people mainly read Machiavelli's *Prince*, not for the countries

or the times when it was written, but for what it says about policy, politics and power; and I think it can be said, without exaggeration, that Vives at least deserves a similar status in the study of social welfare. Vives may not have been the founder of modern welfare policy (as he has sometimes been represented), but he certainly has a place among the leading writers and thinkers in the history of the subject, such as Bentham or Titmuss. This is a major work in the study of social policy.

*A note on this modern English version*

The version I have put together here of Vives was pieced together from a range of sources. There was no full English version of Vives available when I started the work. At first I used a parallel text with an unreliable French translation (Saitta 1973; Casanova, Caby, 1943), and then checked what I had against alternative versions for differences in interpretation. Mattheeussen and Fantazzi's English translation is a faithful, scholarly

rendition in parallel text with the Latin (Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002). I first had sight of that edition only after I had completed most of my work, and had identified the quotations for myself. I have noted two points (on observing the wishes of the founders, and the regime for mentally ill people) where I understood the content differently.

Latin texts have some stylistic differences from modern English texts, and I should note three of them. First, Latin uses fewer words than English, and there are markedly more words in the translation than there are in the original. Second, the Latin sentences are very long, there is no paragraphing, and the punctuation used in different published versions seems to be optional. There is often a rough equivalence between a sentence in the Latin text and a paragraph in English: both consist, more or less, of a line of thought on a particular subject.

The third key difference lies in the treatment of quotations. Vives uses quotations liberally, but in most cases he does not give the

references, or identify where a quotation begins or ends. Sometimes the quotations are fairly free. To explain this, I have to break into the Latin; bear with me. In Book 1 Chapter 11, for example, he writes

*De magnitudine beneficii, et in quem  
conferendum, sunt illa Christi: Omni  
petenti abs te dato; volenti mutuari abs  
te ne avertaris; benefacite  
persequentibus vos, amate eos, quibus  
estis invisī; orate pro iis qui vos  
execrantur ac devouent.*

The colon is an indication that this will be what Jesus says, but it isn't quite a quotation. The first phrase after the colon - "*omni petenti abs te dato*" - is from St Luke's gospel. The second phrase is from St Matthew, bar one small word (*abs* instead of *a*). The third and fourth say what the Bible says, and when they are translated into English they may look as if they're also quotations, but both are paraphrases. The original of Luke 6:27 is

*“benefacite his qui oderunt vos; benedicite maledicentibus vobis, et orate pro calumniantibus vos”*; Matthew 5:44 is *“benefacite his qui oderunt vos, et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos”*.

My first impression was that Vives was fairly cavalier about his sources – several quotations are inaccurate or crossed with other quotations, and few of the references to the Psalms, for example, looked much like the Psalms as I knew them. Vives, however, is referring to the Bible as he knew it - the Latin Vulgate, which has different references, numbers and sometimes words, from many of the versions familiar today. He could reasonably rely on his readers knowing the scriptures, and obviously he did not feel the need to be too explicit. Unfortunately, for a modern reader, this does not work; so, when there are quotations from the scriptures or the classics, I have tried to identify them explicitly. I am not a Christian and my knowledge of the New Testament is sketchy, but here I have had an advantage over previous scholars, and



indeed of people who are much better with mediaeval texts than I could imagine being, which is the magic of the Internet. I was able to search for Latin terms in the Vulgate or other texts and, if the Latin was close enough, I could locate many of them fairly quickly. (This approach also made it possible to give sources in the text for citations from Latin texts like *De Vera Religione* or *Moralia in Iob*, which I have not read.) I think that seeing the quotations presented as quotations changes the character and feel of the text altogether. I have mainly used the standard translation of the Catholic Bible, in the version agreed at Rheims in 1572 (for the New Testament) and Douai in 1609 (for the Old Testament), because that is the closest to the text that Vives would have used. Where it does not change the sense too much, I have also on occasion used the King James version, partly because it captures sentiments that would have made sense to Vives's contemporary readers, but mainly because it sounds wonderful.

Scholars who have occasion to compare

this edition with Mattheussen and Fantazzi's work should find this one rather more accessible. Most of their textual references are in Latin, presented in abbreviated form and referred to whole paragraphs of the Latin text, and they do not distinguish exact quotations, paraphrases or supportive statements – a form of presentation which would simply not be acceptable in contemporary publications in social science. The distinctions have to be made much more rigorously, and I have tried to reflect them faithfully in the text.

A reviewer in a specialist journal expressed disapproval of my temerity in preparing this book, because I have no claim to expertise in mediaeval literature or history – though if there are specific faults I should correct, the review did not tell me what they are. Let me return fire. By comparison with every other version I have seen, this edition is distinctive in three ways: the accessibility and clarity of the presentation, the rigorous sourcing of derived material, and a unique perspective based on specialized knowledge of

policy.

I'd want, though, to emphasise something else about this work: it has been a labour of love. Few people currently working in this field, coming to Vives for the first time, imagine that this sort of thing could possibly have been produced nearly five hundred years ago.

**Juan Luis Vives**

***De Subventionē***

***Pauperum* (1526)**

**On the relief of the poor, or of  
human need**

*Modern English version, with  
commentary, by Paul Spicker*



# Preface

The traveller, like the stranger, must not interfere in the affairs of a foreign republic, says Cicero.<sup>1</sup> This is true, because even if one cannot disapprove of friendly concern or advice, it is deplorable to meddle in the business of other people. However, by the law of nature<sup>2</sup> it is not possible for things which relate to some of us to remain absolutely alien to others. This is because Christian grace unites us all, binding us with the strongest

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<sup>11</sup> Cicero, *De Officiis*, Liber Primis, para 125. This is not an exact quotation.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of the “law of nature” is a recurrent theme in mediaeval political philosophy. It is based on the distinction between the laws that were specific to a developed society (the *jus Romanum*) and the universal principles that applied to others (the *jus gentium*) (see d’Entreves, 1951). Vives was an enthusiastic advocate of the principle of natural law, which in his hands came close to the idea of human rights: “Natural law has the same validity everywhere because it was impressed into the heart of every human being even before he was born.” (cited Norena, 1990, p 216)

cement.

Even if some things are foreign here, it does not seem that way to me. I have the same attachment for this city as I do for my own Valencia.<sup>3</sup> I never call it anything other than "my country", because I have lived here for fourteen years. During that time, whenever I have had to break my stay here, when I come

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<sup>3</sup> This suggests a close attachment to Valencia. Vives's personal history suggests otherwise. He was a native of Spain, but had left as a teenager, while his *marrano* family - theoretically converted Jews who were engaged in clandestine worship - were subject to the Inquisition. (Some commentators think the term 'marrano' is offensive; I would consider it a badge of pride.) Vives' aunt and cousin had been burned at the stake in 1500, when Vives was 8; his father was also accused of returning to Judaism, and after a long legal process he was executed in an *auto-da-fé* in 1524. In 1528, after witnesses revealed that his mother, who died in 1508, had also attended the synagogue during her life, her bones were exhumed and publicly burned (Norena, 1970, p 20). Vives went to the Sorbonne at the age of 17, and then three years later to Bruges in 1512; but he concealed his Jewish origins so well that they were not confirmed for centuries afterward (Norena, 1970, p 19). For a fuller biography, see Norena (1970).

back I feel I am coming home.<sup>4</sup> I like the way you conduct your government and your administration, the education and the civility of the people here. The peace and justice that are found here are hard to believe, but things that everyone praises and applauds. That is why I married here. I am seeking the welfare of this city as the place where I have resolved

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<sup>4</sup> Erasmus described Vives as “amphibious”, ostensibly because he spent so much time commuting across the Channel. The comment, however, has a double edge. Vives was a misfit: an intellectual in a society where learning was mistrusted, an exile with no country, a Christian with a Jewish background, a scholar who was not part of the Church. Vives’s concerns with learning, education, charity and public engagement were clearly acceptable to the humanists, but they could also be seen as characteristic elements of his Jewish background. Although he evidently had a knowledge both of Hebrew and rabbinical teaching - there are direct references in his earlier work on the education of Christian women (e.g. Fantazzi, Mattheeussen, 1998, pp 51-3, 175) - there are few overt clues in this book, and he spent much of his life disguising his background. He is the epitome of Stonequist’s “marginal man”, a man between cultures who belongs properly to none of them (Stonequist, 1935).



to pass the remainder of days that the good Christ will grant me yet, where I claim to be a citizen, and where I consider others as my brothers.

Many of them are in need, and that has encouraged me to write about the means I think it right to use to help them. I was asked to undertake this study a long time ago, when I was in England, by Lord Lodewijk van Praet, your prefect.<sup>5</sup> He is a man who has devoted himself to the public good of this city, and who thinks about it much and often. I am dedicating this work to you, mainly because you strive to do good and to relieve misfortune. The evidence of this is the multitude of poor people that flock here from everywhere, seeing it as a refuge for the needy which is always open. If we consider the origin of all cities, their governments have had the aim of making them places where benefits were given and

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<sup>5</sup> Van Praet was in England as Imperial Ambassador.

received.<sup>6</sup> By mutual effort, charity has increased and the solidarity of mankind<sup>7</sup> has been strengthened. I believe that it is particularly the responsibility of those that govern to consider and offer support, to make sure that each person helps others, that no-one is oppressed, no-one should be abused, no-one should suffer unjust injury, the most powerful should help the weakest, and so that the general harmony and agreement of citizens to give charity will grow each day, and can be maintained perpetually. It is inconceivable for a head of the household to leave some of his family to suffer hunger, destitution or the

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<sup>6</sup> This theme, which is taken up at several points, is crucial to the way that both Vives and the Ypres report think about government. Government is done to make people's lives better.

<sup>7</sup> Solidarity is a key concept in Catholic social teaching: it consists, not just of a simple sense of kinship, but a network of mutual responsibilities, of which charity and exchange are core elements (see Pope John Paul II, 1987). Fernandez-Santamaria argues that Vives understood charity, or *caritas*, very much in that sense (Fernandez-Santamaria, 1998).

shame of being miserably dressed in a house where everyone is opulent. In the same way, it is unjust that in a rich city, the magistrates should tolerate some citizens being seized by hunger and poverty.

If this document does not please you, do not dismiss it; please give it the same accurate care that you give when you concern yourselves with the legal case of a private individual, which might be an argument about, say, a thousand florins.

I wish you, and your city, all prosperity and happiness.

Bruges, 6 January 1526.

# Book One:

## On private assistance

### Chapter 1: The origin of need and human misery

God, who is the father of all things, was wonderfully generous in the creation and formation of Mankind. There is nothing nobler than Man under the heavens, and nothing greater in this world under the moon. Man has been favored with a robust and healthy body, endowed with health-giving foods that one finds everywhere in abundance, created with a very refined understanding and a well developed soul, suited to living communally.<sup>8</sup> Man was created to make up for the first fall from heaven, and he can begin in this life, in

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<sup>8</sup> Vives's term for this is *communio vitae*, which could be interpreted either as communion with the divine or community with others. In Chapter 4, however, he uses the expression strictly in a social context, and it appears that what he is talking about is equivalent to the contemporary Catholic concept of solidarity.

this mortal body, to meditate on the fellowship of the divine.

Spurred on by pride, and coveting a status above to his condition, unhappy with his humanity, Man aspired to divinity. He was urged on by the promises of one who had lost his happiness by the same route: "You will be as gods, knowing good and evil."<sup>9</sup> It was arrogant pride, to want to rise to the height of a god, above which there is nothing. And Man was so far from reaching the object of his desire that he lost first the greatest part of what he had received himself. As it is said in the Psalms of David,

And man when he was in honour did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like them.<sup>10</sup>

That is to say, that he distanced himself so far

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 3:5.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 48, verse 13. The references to the Psalms follow the numbering of the Catholic Bible.

from the likeness of God that he made himself like the beasts and, thinking to raise himself over the angels he became less than Man. He is like, then, those who, by hurrying without thinking to climb a high point, without taking into account the gradient, fall back to the bottom. It was from that point that the status of humanity was overturned.

Man has suppressed what he had in common with God, so that his passions no longer obey his reason, his body does not obey his soul, and what is outside does not obey what is within. It is as if, during a civil war, all respect for a prince and his laws is forgotten. Deprived of his innocence, man has worked towards his own ruin. His understanding has grown, but his reason has been obscured. Pride, envy, hatred, cruelty, the innumerable kinds of passion and the other disturbances of the soul were for Man as storms unleashed on the sea by the violence of the wind. Fidelity is lost, love grows cold, every vice springs to the attack. The human body has become prey to every form of misery.

"Cursed will be the earth in your work!"<sup>11</sup> All these curses spread across every field of human endeavour. Everything within us, everything outside us, appears to have conspired to ruin our body: air infected with the breath of disease, polluted waters, the dangers of navigation, cruel winters, withering summers, fierce animals, sicknesses from food. Who can count the number of types of poison, or the means of doing people harm? Who can count the harm that men do each other? Such machinations, against beings so weak that a grape or a hair trapped in their throat is enough to choke them<sup>12</sup>, so feeble that many of them die suddenly for no known reason!

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 3:17.

<sup>12</sup> Frater Moyardus, whose work is reproduced by Mattheussen and Fantazzi, identifies this as a reference to a comment by Pliny (Mattheussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 147). Pliny's *Natural History* was a staple of Vives's teaching (Watson, 1913).

## Chapter 2: The needs of mankind

Not without reason, many of the ancients have said that our life is not life, but death. The Greeks called our body *soma*, a word close to *sema* which for them meant “tomb”. God threatened Adam that on the day he ate the forbidden fruit, he would die. Adam ate of it, and death was the punishment for this act. Indeed, what is life, but a slow death, which reaches its final stage when the soul is completely free from this body? When we are born, we die<sup>13</sup>, the poet says, and the end starts with the beginning. From the first moment of a man’s life, the soul struggles with the body, and the body, doubtless, would be immediately distressed if it did not strengthen itself by feeding.

To bring this about, God created foods so that they might be, so to speak, like props or girders, holding up a rickety structure which is always on its way to ruin. Among these foods,

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<sup>13</sup> Attributed to Manilius (Stone, 1995), who Vives also cites in *De Tradendis Disciplinis* (Watson, 1913, p 20)



some are given spontaneously by the earth: its trees, its bushes, its herbs, its roots. Some food, like herds of animals, are found in the pasture. There is food we take from the water, and food that we hunt in the air. We keep from the reach of cold by means of furs, cloth and fire, and we shelter from the heat by seeking the shade. No-one, however robust his body may be, however refined his understanding, is self-sufficient, if he wants to live according to custom, which is the human condition.<sup>14</sup> A man unites with a woman to ensure his succession<sup>15</sup>, and to keep what he has gained, because women, although timid, are conservative by nature. Then man looks to those who share his misery, for whom he wants good. And while he tries to do as much good for them as possible, love grows, and

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<sup>14</sup> This is only the first of many statements which might be found in a textbook of modern sociology.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, in the *Politics*, begins here to explain the development of society.

society, little by little, develops and spreads.<sup>16</sup>

Because men are already linked to others by obligations and kindnesses, their love is not confined within the narrow limits of a family or a home. The person under an obligation recognises the benefit, and does not neglect to make pay it back at the first opportunity.<sup>17</sup> This is because, in truth, Nature, which inspires sentiments of gratitude and the memory of kindness, even in wild beasts such as elephants, lions and dragons, does not loathe anything so much as the ungrateful soul. Men could not fail to recognise, since they

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<sup>16</sup> This can be seen as a naive view of society, as being based in love and brotherhood; but it seems more likely, from other passages, that Vives is seeing the origins of society as developing from family, kinship and tribe. It contrasts both with the Hobbesian view, which sees society as a means of maintaining order, and Rousseau's state of nature, where the extension of society is linked to the extension of human misery.

<sup>17</sup> The "norm of reciprocity" occurs in many sociological analyses and was central to the development of "exchange theory" in the 1960s (Gouldner, 1960; Ekeh, 1974). I based a previous work on a similar premise (Spicker, 2000).

desired actively to help each other in meeting their needs, how useful and agreeable it is to bring their dwelling places together, so that they could provide things to those they wanted to help. They chose to occupy the fields that were nearest to each other. Each person, so as to provide for his own needs and the needs of others, applied himself to the job for which he found he had the greatest aptitude and was most disposed to follow. Some took to fishing, some hunting, agriculture, guarding herds, weaving, construction or other professions useful or necessary to life.

Up to this point, people maintained between themselves the greatest friendliness and the greatest union. But the ancient evil did not hesitate to seize many people with the desire to be superior to others - or, to say it better, to oppress others <sup>18</sup> They wanted to take advantage of the work of their neighbour

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<sup>18</sup> Roeck identifies the decline from a golden age with the Catholic idea of the fall; the position, he argues, distinguishes Vives strongly from the deterministic views of the Protestant reformers (Roeck, 1999).

and to oblige him to carry out their orders, while they remained idle and respected, lounging in the splendour of authority and power, protected by an army of those they had bound to recognize their tyranny, by trickery or by fear. This all began from the same ambition by which our first parents had recklessly presumed and hoped to become gods. And in reality, our appetite for domination is fixed on no limit short of reaching godhead. Is this not shown enough by the turbulent youth from Macedonia, when, thinking he had conquered the whole world, he realised that he had only done little and that most of the world still remained to be overcome?<sup>19</sup> Because of this, laws that were accepted as just by everyone were corrupted by the violence of the oppressors. Because of

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander wept, reputedly, because he had no worlds left to conquer. According to Moyardus, however, this relates to a different story: that Alexander was told about the theory of parallel worlds, and wept because he could not conquer them as well (Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 147).

this, walls were made around cities. Because of this, there is war, sometimes civil, sometimes foreign, worse than any plague. In these circumstances, it became necessary to begin to hold back the current of laziness, arrogance and human misery.<sup>20</sup>

Because the number of humans was increasing, some did not have enough to sustain themselves, and the lazy people demanded to be fed by the work of others.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the fields next to cities were divided up, and the boundaries sanctioned by the authority of the law were marked between citizens. As the direct exchange of goods between citizens, the only way it had been done till then, seemed inconvenient, money was invented with a common, public

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<sup>20</sup> In a later work, *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, Vives sets out a similar view of the origins of society (Watson, 1913, pp 11-16).

<sup>21</sup> This parallels the argument in Hardin's well-known article on "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin, 1968). Contemporary economists argue (questionably) that common ownership is liable to be destroyed by "free riders".

agreement. It was a mark, authorized by the guarantee of the city, that would be enough for anyone who got a shoe from the shoemaker, bread from the baker or a sheet from the cloth maker. This mark or sign was engraved in a material hard and solid enough to preserve the imprint; it would not be worn down by the fingers that would handle it; it would not depreciate by too much and had to be accepted without difficulty because of its value. Copper was used first, then silver, then gold, metals to which a value was granted because of an essential nobility that, people said, set them apart. In the beginning, a large number of these coins were struck, and they were distributed between citizens. As each person used them, they were given in payment of the work or goods of others, and accepted in return. By this means, honestly applied, commodities for living were sustained. Money was passed from person to person, and, because their distribution was balanced by reciprocal exchange between the trades of the city, everyone could have his share.

However, various things could happen. Some people were unable to work because of physical illness; they fell into poverty because they were placed under an obligation to spend their money without receiving any more. The same thing happened to those that lost their goods through war or in some other great calamity, an inevitable part of living in this unpredictable world, such as fires, floods, ruin or shipwreck. There were others whose profession ceased to be lucrative and, in addition, there were those who stupidly wasted their inheritance, or squandered it foolishly. If there are many ways to acquire and preserve a fortune, there are perhaps no fewer ways for people to lose one.<sup>22</sup> All this applies by a mysterious law - that is to say, a law hidden to human understanding - to external goods, which the ancients described

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<sup>22</sup> Vives refers back to this argument later, making it clear that poverty is not to be blamed on the poor.

as being “precarious”.<sup>23</sup>

Relief of Man’s miserable, sickly body is provided for by remedies that have been sought out at the cost of experience. For the relief of a man’s battered spirit, he looks to conversations and the support of his friends. Men gave themselves to teachers of a mature age to direct their lives, to show the path of virtue and to guide talent. This was mainly for each person the father, the mother, nurses, and then godparents, uncles, and more distant relatives with less direct blood ties. Then came schools, masters of philosophy, and a multitude of foundations that produced the most famous men. But one has to go a long way to find such remedies as these; sometimes they were unknown or costly, or people did not know how to get them. It follows, then, that some people needed the assistance of

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<sup>23</sup> The idea of precariousness (and “risk”) has re-emerged in discourses about society in a slightly different sense, but in modern terms Vives here is referring to the contingencies requiring social protection (see Spicker, 2001).



others, Some of these did not find a teacher to cultivate their abilities. Others were corrupted and ruined by a perverse and evil teacher himself, as the common people are the source of many errors. One neighbour for another, a father for a son, become the authors and initiators of perverse opinions. There are, besides, many teachers who have an impure and depraved spirit, masters, who direct schools for the children of nobles, when one would not trust them to look after geese. There are others who, taking the position of teacher lightly, float from one principle to another. Blindly obstinate, they distance themselves from every guide, and choose whatever seems obscure. This is how a man, who has become completely impoverished, externally and internally, pays for the wickedness that led him to usurp the position of the divine. This is how the pride of the most presumptuous animal is beaten down, until he comes to be the weakest and, in his own eyes, the most worthless of all.

All human life and health depend on the

help of others. This is intended to cut out at the roots the pride that, by the fault of our first parents, is transmitted to their descendants. The effect of God's mysterious decree is to remove money from some, or health and intelligence from others, because they would have used these goods badly. For others, poverty becomes the instrument of great virtue, because the Prince and Governor of this world, the wisest and the most liberal of fathers, orients all of us to our advantage. Let us conclude, therefore, that everyone who is dependent on the aid of other people is poor, and has need of charitable help.<sup>24</sup> The Greek

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<sup>24</sup> Vives seems to be saying that everyone stands in need of other people, and so that everyone is poor. Fernandez-Santamaria sees this as a religious statement: "mankind itself is poor - again, personally, socially and politically - and in need of *caritas*." (Fernandez-Santamaria, 1998, p 148) Another interpretation might be that Vives is identifying poverty with dependency rather than with material need. (Georg Simmel wrote: "The poor person, sociologically speaking, is the individual who receives assistance because of the lack of means." Simmel, 1908). Poverty

name *eleemosyna* refers to alms, which do not consist solely in the distribution the money, as the common people think, but reside in all work by which one relieves human misery.

### **Chapter 3: How we should be charitable**

So that everyone should know what the order of importance is between forms of charity, how it has to be accomplished and received, and how far the gratitude of each person has to extend, I will declare what are the principal benefits: which are the first, which second, and which third. Many people think that charity is about nothing but money, and that there is no greater charitable act than to give money. From there we have the vulgar error that supposes: "Who was charitable and helpful, if they did not give anything?" or "He was very charitable because he gave a lot." Moreover the idea of benefits can be extended to cover

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by this definition is a social relationship rather than the state of any individual - which would be consistent with Vives's understanding of man as a social being.

the means by which a person obtains money, for example when someone teaches a trade that leads to a lucrative engagement.<sup>25</sup> Many people sin in this if, when they give advice, they fix all their attention on the money and neglect the benefit of reason and virtue.

Being composed of a soul and a body, we have in us the following things, which sometimes are called goods, sometimes possessions. In the first place, in the spirit is virtue, a unique and real good; next, there is intelligence, perspicacity, erudition, reflection and prudence. Beyond that, in the service of

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<sup>25</sup> The idea in this passage that there is an “order of importance” in charity was well established in Judaism, and Maimonides, in the *Mishneh Torah*, described helping someone into employment as the highest form of charity: “There are eight levels of benevolence, each greater than the next. The highest degree, above which there is no other, is to help another Jew by giving him a gift or loan, or making a partnership with him, or helping him find employment, until he no longer needs the help of other people.” (Maimonides, 1180, sections 10:1, 7-14) This is probably, then, a reflection of a Jewish influence.

the soul there is the robust health of the body, and also sufficient strength to accomplish works of the life. Finally, among external goods, are money, property, resources and foods.

The supreme benefit, the highest point of beneficence, is the collaboration of one person for the virtue of the other. For this reason, the people most favored by God are not those who are granted nobility, beauty, wealth, intelligence or reputation. They are those to whom the Lord deigned to communicate His spirit, to know and do what is holy and salutary, that is to say everything that can please Him. Concerning this gift, we read in Psalm 147: "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments to Israel".<sup>26</sup> He did not do anything similar for any other nation, and did not reveal or teach his judgements or his secrets. Such is the great benefit that Christ grants to these that have been truly baptized in His holy name and that believe and trust themselves solely to him. His

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<sup>26</sup> Psalm 147, verse 19

representatives, as the dispensers of this benefit, were first His disciples who did so much good for human kind, and, after them, all these who succeeded the apostles, not so much in status, as in their mission and their works. It is impossible to express as one should how much recognition we owe to this benefit. It is something which everyone should want for every other mortal and which they should obtain for them, at the first chance they have, by their advice, diligence and works.

After virtue comes teaching, that concerns the knowledge of the truth. Instruction, I say, by which a man lights up another with his own light, without it decreasing; on the contrary, the light increases as a result. How beautiful and magnificent it is to teach, polish, instruct, and adorn understanding, which is the highest ability! Socrates proclaimed that he would not thank someone who gave him money, but that he would be supremely grateful to someone who liberated him from ignorance. Holy Job, coming out of his miseries and his denials,

does not ask gifts from his powerful friends; he implores them only to instruct him.

Did I say: Bring to me, and give me of your substance?

Or deliver me from the hand of the enemy, and rescue me out of the hand of the mighty?

Teach me, and I will hold my peace: and if I have been ignorant of any thing, instruct me.<sup>27</sup>

There are base men who make so much of the money that they give; they praise themselves to have borne the instruction of others. Let them teach themselves; then they will have some reason to glorify themselves. Aristotle compares the benefit of teachers to that of God and to that of one's parents, and of those three, he says, no-one can recognise the benefit sufficiently. It is impossible to say how much the republic would owe to a few great learned men, if they came to instruct the children.

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<sup>27</sup> Job 6:22-24.

Childhood is an impressionable age for everyone, and it is very easy to inculcate healthy opinions. They could at least assist teachers by their opinions, precepts or other help of the same type, and to point them toward the path to follow. Indeed, it would not be appropriate for those who govern cities not to interest themselves in getting the best teachers for the children, endowed not just with intelligence and learning, but also with a sane and straight judgement. The instruction of children has a great influence on the rest of their lives, as much as seeds have for future harvests.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, it would be more fitting to treat this with more care than we use to

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<sup>28</sup> Vives is probably better remembered as an educationist than for his work on the administration of welfare (see e.g. Watson, 1913; Ibanez, 1994). This paragraph is a digression, but one which reflects Vives's abiding interests. And once again, though it is fully consistent with the perspective of the Christian humanists, it also reflects a strong element in the Jewish tradition. "The world itself rests on the breath of children in the schoolhouse." (Talmud, *Tractate Shabbat* 119b).



beautify and enrich the city, unless we prefer to leave descendants who will be as bad as they are rich.

Beyond what we have said so far, how great and glorious is the task of pacifying and calming a courageous person who has been defeated. This is done by the precepts of virtue, by good procedures, by consolation, good grace, visiting and attention. Let us add another example: defending people. These benefactors have been seen as liberators and guardians,. They were crowned with symbols of courage and glory: grass for someone who had saved a citizen in battle, oak for one who had lifted a siege. For the same reason, medicine was also held in the highest esteem and praised as an invention of the gods. "The physician", says Homer, "is worth several men." And the Lord orders that one honors the physician. The same is true of freeing people. Is it not a great act is not this do to deliver others from prison and captivity? Terence Culleo, the senator, who was liberated from prison in Carthage by Scipio of Africa,

esteemed and venerated him all his life as his lord. He assisted in his triumph, with his head uncovered. In former times, it was very honorable, even among the heathens, to free captives by paying with one's own goods, as Cicero states in his book *De Officiis*<sup>29</sup>; and to increase the love of the people for their prince, the prisons and the condemned cells were opened on the day of his accession, giving him the quality of a supreme benefactor.

Money is left almost to the last place. However, to help by this means is an honest and liberal thing. There is a wonderful sweetness in it. As Aristotle, Cicero and the other philosophers teach, it is more glorious and agreeable to give than to receive. This confirms elsewhere the statement of the Lord, as Saint Paul records in the Acts of the Apostles: according to the word of the Lord, he

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<sup>29</sup> Cicero actually says that it is a service to the state, which falls short of this (Cicero, *De Officiis*, Book 2 para 63). By contrast, the Talmud states that "the redemption of captives is a religious duty of great importance" (*Tractate Baba Bathra* 8b).

says, it is more blessed to give than to receive.<sup>30</sup>

Once someone has acquired the taste for generosity, they cannot hold back so long as they have thing to give, and, when nothing is left to give, they seek sometimes to do it even by stealing. This is demonstrated by some people, such as Alexander, Sulla and Caesar, who took things from some to give to others. For this reason, an ancient proverb tells that giving is bottomless.<sup>31</sup> To give, even to these that we know to be ungrateful, brings us joy simply because we are giving. There is actually a certain analogy with attributes and the nature of God when we see that others need our help, while we do not need theirs and realise that they are waiting for out hands and our help. Because it is told of God in the Psalms: " I have said to the Lord, thou art my God, for thou hast no need of my goods."<sup>32</sup>; and in another place:

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<sup>30</sup> Acts 20:35.

<sup>31</sup> Cicero, *De Officiis*, Book 2, para 55.

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 15, verse 2.

The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou  
givest them their meat in due season.  
Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest  
the desire of every living thing.<sup>33</sup>

There is a very great error here, that consists  
in taking from some to give to others.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, what kind of beneficence can find its  
essence in injustice? In reality, such acts  
cannot reach the grace they aspire to, because  
whoever profits from a gift forgets it, while the  
person who suffers remembers. Those who  
want to appear powerful are obliged to have  
recourse to their inferiors, with the effect that

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<sup>33</sup> Psalm 144, verses 15-16. Vives renders "*oculi omnium in te sperant*" as "*omnium ad te spectant*"; this may be a misquotation, but might also reflect a difference in the version of the vulgate he was using.

<sup>34</sup> Vives appears here to be condemning compulsory redistribution, or tithing for charity. This is a critical difference from the position which developed in England in the Poor Laws, where a compulsory poor rate was levied, or indeed from the schemes in Mons and Ypres.

it is commonly said: "Great prince, great beggar". But I have only said this to show how much pleasure there is in the act of giving. This can in itself lead people to be generous, without any other motive. Just as a man, who needs help in every way, should not be helped only in the things he needs for subsistence, the good we do should not be limited to the gift of money.<sup>35</sup> One must be charitable, first, in respect of what is right for the soul, such as hope, advice, prudence and precepts for life; then, with what is inherent to the body, namely, the material substance, words, strength, work and assistance; and finally with what is external, such as dignity, constancy, friendships and money, taking into account everything which is bought by it. In every way, he will bring aid and assistance to those who need it. And if he shares the excitement in doing good which masters everyone - that is, right or virtue - he will not deny anyone anything who depends on him. No-one should

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<sup>35</sup> This would be referred to in contemporary writing on welfare as an "holistic" approach.

harm another if they can avoid it, unless this serves virtue, which is the prior good.

This cannot be called a burden, because it is not necessary to give each person what they want, but what is appropriate for him to give. And for that end, whoever has the task of deciding should be free of any passion of the soul.

## **Chapter 4: How it is natural to be charitable**

The Lord in his mercy took pity on Man because he was ashamed of his failings, taking into consideration that he had been led into it by the urging of a wily foe. He reserved for Man the place for which he had originally been destined, but He made it much harsher. He wanted people in this life to help others by charity, principally so that men should begin by this kind of love to prepare for the heavenly city where eternal love and indissolvable harmony reign. Further, God made it so that man, whose soul is depraved and whose pride reflects the original taint, should live in society

and solidarity with others<sup>36</sup>; he needs the help of others, because that is the only way to establish and maintain a faithful, lasting sociability. He was certain that each person, inflated by his original pride and arrogance, and by his propensity to evil, would mistrust and abandon his fellow man, if he was not held back by the fear that he would, in due time, have need of him.

No-one is given favour and fortune by chance, without having to bow to the limits of his body, and asking the help of his inferiors. And this favour cannot be got, or kept, without the help of lesser people.<sup>37</sup> For example, there are great kings whose power is founded on their subjects and falls at the moment where their subjects abandon them. What child, what old woman does not know that the greatest

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<sup>36</sup> *Communio vitae*, the same expression used in Chapter 1.

<sup>37</sup> Rousseau makes the same point: our interdependence, he argues, means not only that poor people depend on rich ones, but that rich people need the service of others (Rousseau, 1755).

empires are established with the consent of their vassals, and that they would be nothing if nobody obeyed them?<sup>38</sup> A state could not last long, where people concern themselves only with their own business and those of their friends, where no-one cares about the business of the community.

Sometimes, everyone is governed by the will of a single person: we call this “monarchy”. At times, a few people govern: we call this “oligarchy”. If the people hold supreme power and authority, this is “democracy”.<sup>39</sup> A republic is just, and the empire is beneficial, whenever citizens and the advisors of those who govern refer to the utility of the public. If, however, some individual goes along drawing everything to himself that he can by wiliness, ability and strength, the people creates a tyrant for itself, and it is impossible to keep liberty and power

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<sup>38</sup> In other words, the power of kings depends on the power of the people.

<sup>39</sup> This is the standard Aristotelian classification (see Aristotle, *Politics*, part 7).



for long. In short order, the citizens become slaves to the force and arbitrary power of others. This is well demonstrated by the example of the very powerful republics of Rome and Athens. They were afflicted with citizens like this, more jealous of their own grandeur and power than their country's.

It seems to true in nature that, because we need help from many people, equally we give ours to many others.<sup>40</sup> So it happens, marvellously, that the desire to be useful penetrates human hearts, that generous spirits want to be charitable and to give as much assistance as possible to people like them, valuing this act as the most honorable and noblest thing. This is done without profit for themselves - even, sometimes, to the great detriment of their goods, or of their lives. So it is understood that many great men, with generous and noble hearts, support the

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<sup>40</sup> This reinforces the idea of reciprocity in Chapter 2. Vives seems to be referring to the idea of generalised reciprocity identified by Mauss (1925), or Titmuss in *The Gift Relationship* (1971).

oppressed, relieve the poor, comfort the sick and obtain help and consolation to the afflicted. By this means, they receive the great reward, that they are judged worthy of immortality. It is just as certain that people in ancient times knew that beneficence is a very godly thing. But why do I talk just of good men? There are pirates and brigands who infest land and sea with the aim of stealing, and who still want to appear to be kind to some people. They could kill these people, but they spare them, which is the greatest benefit one could hope for from a thief. Military men, who are braggarts by nature, only boast about their strength when it is used in the defence of the community.

Consequently, nothing should excite and preoccupy men's thoughts as much as the desire to be charitable to other people, whether this is because Heaven has ordained the most magnificent reward for obedience to its teachings; whether, without it, the society of men could not endure; whether because someone who does not do good when he can,

acts uselessly and against nature; or whether if the more powerful protects the weakest, in this way some people provide a common resource for others. It is right that everyone should be brought in to this, in view of our common condition.

## **Chapter 5: The reasons why some people are discouraged from being charitable <sup>41</sup>**

There are two reasons why our beneficence is usually limited. One is that we have no hope of being useful to others, or we think that we may be doing wrong to those we love, such as our children, our parents and our friends. Another is that we judge that money given to the

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<sup>41</sup> The title of this chapter does not describe the content. The structure of the following sections emphasises the vices of the poor in this chapter, and the way they should behave in the next. For Michielse, Vives sees the poor as “hideous and vicious” characters (Michielse, 1990, p 6). He argues on that basis that Vives’s arguments for reform are disciplinary in intent - that his main concern is not with helping the poor, but with policing them.

wicked is of no avail, and that we show ourselves to be too much affected by ingratitude. Besides, we love ourselves so dearly that we do not like to risk ourselves by doing good, even if it does not really inconvenience us. I will consider poor people first, then the rich.<sup>42</sup>

Nothing is more likeable than virtue, and nothing attracts man as much as the beauty of what is honest. By contrast, nothing is uglier than vice and nothing provokes as much repulsion in those who consider it. There is an old proverb: "He who gives to someone who is worthy, is honoured by the giving."<sup>43</sup> Ennius has this precept: "I hold doing good, in the wrong place, to be a misdeed."<sup>44</sup> There is nothing that holds us back more than the fear of distributing benefits in a way which is unworthy. This is true first, because the favour brings no profit to the person we give it to, and second, because we observe that the receiver

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<sup>42</sup> Vives does not really get to the rich until Chapter 7.

<sup>43</sup> Part of a verse by Publius Syrus.

<sup>44</sup> This phrase is attributed to Cicero (Stone, 1995).

is ungrateful.

The vice of ingratitude offends not only the person against whom it is committed, because it does wrong to the ungrateful person, but it affects everyone, holding back men's desire to do good and cooling their enthusiasm to help people in need. The story is told of a certain Timon, a rich man of Athens, who to begin with did much good and was extraordinarily generous; but, when he saw that many people were ungrateful to him and did not recognise what he had done, he fell into a kind of detestation of the human race. This earned him the name of a "misanthrope". We can see many pupils who use against their teachers the same eloquence, language and style which the teachers themselves polished, refined and perfected in them. Who would want to be a teacher? We can see that many people treated as favourites, domestics, servants, brought into the home and the family, helped financially, raised up with dignity, looked after and treated like children, will sully the wives of their masters, their

daughters, their relatives, the behaviour of their children; they will steal from the family and betray their benefactors. One would rather have brought a serpent into the house as people who are so wicked. Who would not rather pass spend their life in forests and deserts? The governor of a city, who takes care day and night of the public welfare, who works hard and to his own detriment, will be accused of not being serious enough, and incompetence in government. The people trample on a prince who is just, and follow a bad one. This leads many princes to be bad, making respectful people pay for the faults of ungrateful ones.

Everyone hates ingratitude, even ingratitude to other people. It is such a grave offence that, even though it is common in every republic, no punishment is established by the laws. The measure of the offence goes beyond anything humans can appreciate, and so for ingratitude, as Seneca says, one must

rely on the vengeance of God.<sup>45</sup>

Some people will even choose the sons of beggars, educating and instructing them how to earn a living, adopting them as their own son, making them their heirs. These people then distance themselves from their masters, with what they have taken from them; or they will stay for some time in the house, turning themselves over to wantonness and immodesty, running themselves down.<sup>46</sup> They deserve to be called argumentative, insolent, treacherous and intolerable. And since we have moved on to the subject of beggars, if one observes their life and their

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<sup>45</sup> Seneca does not say this. "If a man is ungrateful", Seneca says, "he does not injure me, but himself." (Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, Book 7, 32)

<sup>46</sup> This could be read, from a modern perspective, as a condemnation of an hereditary taint. Vives's purpose in this section seems, however, to be more like the condemnation of ill-directed individual charity that came to be associated in Victorian England with the Charity Organisation Society. They condemned "unscientific" charity for perpetuating poverty (see Woodroffe, 1966, ch 2).

vices, the crimes and misdemeanours that they commit every day, one has to admire those who are ready to spend time with them. This is a hopeless task! They ask shamelessly and persistently, trying to get things by force rather than by prayer. For this reason alone, some people will not give to them, while others will give to get away from the situation. Taking no account of time or place, they will even beg during sacred services and holy communion, stopping other people from worshipping the sacrament piously and attentively. They work themselves into the thickest crowds, disfigured by sores, their bodies giving off a repulsive hideousness. They think so much of themselves, and are so little concerned with public health, that they do not think much of communicating their germs and their illnesses to other people, because there is hardly any disease which cannot be passed on.

This is not all. It has been found that many, with the aid of certain drugs, provoke and aggravate sores on themselves, so that they might seem more pitiable to those who



look at them. Not only do they make their own bodies ugly, to get money, but also those of their children and little ones who they have borrowed to train.<sup>47</sup> I know of people who have used sick, stolen children to gain the sympathy of those from whom they were asking for charity. Beyond that, many who are healthy and strong pretend to be sick in different ways; but when they think they are alone, or if the need comes on them, they show very clearly how well they can move. Some run away if someone comes to cure their sores or their accidents. Some lazy ones make a profession of their misfortune, better to profit from the gentleness of others. There is no way that they would want to change the way they get their money. And if someone wanted to get them out of their state, they would be no less keen to stay as they are than others would be to guard their wealth. Some are rich already,

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<sup>47</sup> Warnings against false and deceiving beggars were a recurring theme of sermons in the fifteenth century, and a literature describing such frauds was in circulation (Lindberg, 1993, pp 48-51).

albeit secretly, and they demand charity, and receive it, from those who, if the truth were known, they ought to give it to. What some people have revealed has made others suspect.

There are some who always have the name of God and all the saints on their lips, but they have nothing of that in their heart and they utter blasphemies against God. It is painful to see their raging quarrels, the curses and the swearing.<sup>48</sup> For a small coin, one gets sworn at a hundred times, blows and murders, all done with the wildest, most horrifying cruelty. Sometimes, they spurn the alms that one gives them, if it is not as much as they want; they push it away with a frustrated, angry look and with abusive words. When they have received alms, they laugh and mock at the people who have given them, so far are they from praying for their benefactor. Some hide, with incredible meanness, what they collect, and do not reveal it, even when they die and

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<sup>48</sup> Compare Vives's friend Thomas More, in *Utopia*: "where shall a man find more wrangling, quarrelling, brawling, and chiding than among beggars?"

one could use it in their favour.<sup>49</sup>

Others, showing off with detestable wastefulness, use whatever they get chaotically, with a splendid meal that one only sees otherwise with rich citizens. They squander a gold coin on capons or fine fish or noble wines more more easily than a rich person would spent a copper coin. Not without reason, it has been said that these people beg for the innkeeper rather than themselves. And that comes from the confidence that they will find as much money tomorrow, which they will spend with the same ease. I do not really know why economy is so rare among people with a modest fortune, and much more rare if

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<sup>49</sup> Vives's condemnation of the poor sits oddly with his apparent purpose, which is to argue for systematic and structured relief; later he argues that no-one, however undeserving, should be left to starve. The gist of the argument seems to be that people who are not prepared to give individually, because the money will go to the undeserving poor, will be prepared to give to a properly organised, appropriately rigorous system. The same pattern of argument is repeated with some force in the Ypres report, in volume 2.

their fortune has been acquired with no effort and no work. What a noise they make when they eat! How loudly they talk! One would think, to hear them, that there is some quarrel between whores and their pimps. They seek and invite pleasures more avidly, and dive in more relentlessly and more deeply than the rich. Such a type of life makes them unsociable, brazen, thieves and inhuman ; and the girls become dissolute and shameless.

If someone generously gives the poor good advice, they murmur without constraint, having always these words to the mouth : "We are the poor people of Jesus Christ". As if Christ took to himself poor people who were so far removed from the morals and the

sanctity of life that it taught us!<sup>50</sup> Christ does not call blessed, people who are poor because they have no money, but people who are poor in spirit. Those we are talking about sometimes lift up their hearts and spirit with pride, just because they are poor, over the rich because they are rich and have too much. They hate everyone who does not give or who tells them off. Nothing stops them from stealing, apart from the fear of punishment or the absence of opportunity. When they get that chance, they have no respect for the law or the

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<sup>50</sup> Christians might be forgiven for thinking that Jesus did exactly that: e.g. Luke 5:30-32. Pullan suggests that Vives's position reflects a more widely held view.

"Broadly speaking", he writes, "in the late Middle Ages, charity was chiefly intended for the respectable, the innocent and the holy. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although such deserving poor were never cast aside, there was a heavier stress on the reclamation of those whose entire way of life, or system of belief, was sinful or erroneous." (Pullan, 1988, p 181) In that light, Vives's ambivalence towards the poor seems more characteristic of the period; he represents the move away from charity for the deserving poor towards a view that charity can help to reform the poor.

courts. They all believe that their poverty justifies everything they do. They would not want to settle their anger with words or fists, but with iron and death. This is proved by the several murders they have secretly committed. And if sometimes there is a hue and cry, no-one is made out to be guilty of murder, whether by the denouncements by women who betray them, the prompting of others or by their own hand. It was not without weighty reasons that the Romans kept needy people from all work, all responsibility and the administration of the republic, because they considered them to be enemies of the citizens. I am not saying this of everyone without exception, but as a generalisation. There are some men, and some nations, in which these vices reign, and if others have their own vices, perhaps different, there are some who have none of them. I am saying this to urge the magistrates and other individuals to help poor people urgently, to make sure that this great stain, this hideous plague, does not take root and embed itself wickedly in the bowels of

their city.

## **Chapter 6: How poor people ought to behave**

Now, it is appropriate to teach and advise poor people themselves how they ought to act in their adverse circumstances. They should consider, first, that poverty has been sent to them by the mysterious judgment of a very just God, to their advantage; for it relieves them of the occasion and the means to sin. This blessing is given to them so that they can exercise virtue more easily. It follows, not just that they should support their poverty with patience, but that they should welcome it with pleasure, as a gift from God.

They should turn towards the Lord, who has touched them with a mark of his love, because He punishes those He loves.<sup>51</sup> They should not lose the benefit of their test and their adversity, to know themselves and to know the Creator who warns them, calls them

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<sup>51</sup> Hebrews 12:6.

and brings them close to Him. Being naked, without ties and without obstacles, they should joyously accompany Christ who is himself naked and liberated. They should act in a holy way, trusting themselves to God and not to some human being to rescue them. There are curses to overcome in this life, so that they can work and become virtuous, so as not to have much greater and worse problems in the next. They should not, for the minimal and commonplace benefits of a life filled with bitterness, run the risk of losing heavenly bliss. They should not pretend, or appear while using disguise, to have more confidence in their ability to dissimulate that they do in the goodness of Christ who feeds us all.

We are not fed by money or bread, which anyway will never be lacking for those who are the sort of poor that Jesus loves: simple, pure, humble and friendly. He does not call every poor person blessed, but those whose spirit is poor - that is, moderate and pious - those who do not give way to greed or the love of money. The poor should ask and



Speak to people modestly and gently. Nothing is finer than humility and modesty; and nothing is more effective in winning sympathy. By contrast, is anything more intolerable than a pauper who is proud? It is of him that the Jewish sage says:

Three sorts my soul hateth, and I am  
greatly grieved at their life:  
a poor man that is proud, a rich man  
that is a liar, an old man that is a fool  
and doting.<sup>52</sup>

Poor people should hate nobody. They would not be jealous of other people's perishable goods. They should resign themselves and direct themselves with great steps towards immortal bliss. They should love and they will be loved. They should be like Christ in poverty,

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<sup>52</sup> Ecclesiasticus 25:3-4. Ecclesiasticus, also known as Sirach, is part of the Catholic bible, but in most English versions is relegated to the Apocrypha.

and imitate Him in charity.<sup>53</sup>

Those who can work should not remain idle, because Paul, the disciple of Christ, forbids it.<sup>54</sup> The law of God subjects mankind to work, and the Psalmist says that happy is the man who eats bread earned by the work of his hands.<sup>55</sup> Although nothing is softer and easier than leisure and idleness, if people get used to do something, nothing will seem to them as painful and detestable as having nothing to do, nothing as agreeable as work. There may be those who do not believe me,

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<sup>53</sup> This seems to point in the direction of a Kempis's book *The imitation of Christ* (1471), but it is a book which Vives does not cite - and one with which Vives, like other humanists, may otherwise have had little sympathy, because it is opposed to learning and suspicious of engagement in public life.

<sup>54</sup> II Thessalonians 3:10

<sup>55</sup> Based on Psalm 127, verse 2.

but they should question<sup>56</sup> those who leave idleness and laziness for activity and occupation. For a man accustomed to work, whether by habit, or by the nature of the human condition, inaction and idleness are a sort of death.

Poor people should pray often to God, with pious sentiments for the good of their soul and for those who help them with the necessities of life, so that the Lord will deign to recompense them, a hundred for one, with eternal goods. They should not hold limit their thanks in words for the assistance they receive; they should have a grateful spirit, that is to say that they should remember the kindness. They should not squander, prodigally and stupidly, what people have given them, but they should not try to keep it

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<sup>56</sup> The Latin word *interrogant*, is to question, interrogate or interview people - not simply to ask, talk with or converse. The intriguing choice of this word suggests that Vives was thinking about purposive questioning - and it implies that he had done something of the kind himself.

sordidly and meanly, because they cannot take it with them to another life. They should spend wisely and use it for the things they need. Then, when they have been helped, they should not fail to give alms to other poor people; on the contrary, those who get such help should, when they can, give others their daily surplus, imitating this old woman from Judea who, offered two coins to the Lord, that is to say everything she had, and was praised from the holy mouth of our Saviour.<sup>57</sup> Happy woman, who forgot her poverty to think only about God! This is how she merited a such high praise for her devotion. What blessed charity this is, given priority even over the needs of poverty! By the witness of Christ, this act of charity was preferred to the magnificent gifts of the rich. This should not seem impossible to Christian people, because some heathens, who knew nothing of holy piety, did the same; when they had sold enough in their shop to meet the needs of their day, they would send a buyer to a neighbouring shop who had sold

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<sup>57</sup> Luke 21 1:4.

little or nothing. How hard must be the heart of a Christian who does not bow to the examples of such men, who serve the world, rather than God, or any promises of great penalties or the rewards of the divine Master. These promises ask for nothing but the desire to do good whenever one can.

But let us get back to poor people. They should educate and teach their children<sup>58</sup>, piously and religiously. Even if they do not leave them any wealth, they can pass on virtue and wisdom, a heritage which is worth more than any kingdom. If they practise what we have said, if they live this way, I declare, and I dare to promise on my head and my life, that if food is lacking among men, God, from the heavenly heights, will provide. The person who does not believe that is does not, in truth,

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<sup>58</sup> Vives's emphasis on education is characteristic of him (Watson, 1913). It is one of the key points on which the Humanists parted company with the view of medieval Christianity, represented by Thomas a Kempis: "Shun too great a desire for knowledge, for in it there is much fretting and delusion." (a Kempis, Book 1 Chapter 2)

believe the promises of Christ, and does not understand that staying alive is nothing to do with food in the first place, but with the will of God.

## **Chapter 7: What vices prevent those that could do good from doing it<sup>59</sup>**

There are on the other hand in us other vices that hold us back from doing good. All are born from our immoderate self-centredness, which leads inevitably to pride and the desire to outshine our peers, with the result that we oppress others. This is the source of envy, which is always strongly related to pride. Because of this, we want our goods to belong absolutely to us and no-one else, so that we cannot bear to have someone be equal to us in

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<sup>59</sup> In Chapters 5 and 6, Vives considered what was wrong with the poor, and how they ought to behave. In Chapters 7 and 8, he does the same for donors. This is the subject of Seneca's work *De Beneficiis*, and Seneca is quoted at length in Chapter 8. The four chapters are, however, less relevant to social welfare provision.

status or grandeur. We hate not only those who rise, but also those who lift them up. There is a certain hesitation in our hearts, when we fear that some people will be offended by the things which lead others to favour us. This leads many people to defend injustices done to other people, because they fear that they themselves will suffer reprisals and injuries.

Some people fear to give to an ungrateful person. They take more notice of the disillusionment and failure of other people than of their own experience, without trying for themselves if the charity will not perhaps have greater success. We are also held back from doing good by a kind of physical inertia, which stems from our over-delicate and oversensitive habits. We are diligent enough for our own profit and entertainment, but we avoid all effort which could profit our brother. We will cross land and sea for a little satisfaction, we court a thousand dangers for a minor pastime or for pleasure; but for the good of our neighbour, to show the slightest

urgency, even to move a hand, seems to us too difficult. Far from it: pleasures, entertainments, luxury, ostentation and superfluous expenses are so important to us that the greatest fortune is not enough. We will not risk doing good for others, for fear of missing out on whatever it might be for ourselves. This meanness is not just because we have lost the ability to select good things; we have even forgotten what good things really are. We have so far given way to vices that, by tacit consent, we rank them as if they were virtues. No-one would think he did evil, if others did not judge him to be doing it. Praise for temperance and economy is treated with contempt. Prodigality and empty ostentation are absurdly appreciated, as worthy behaviour for nobles and rich people. This happens to such a point that some people vaunt themselves for getting frequently drunk, as if a drunken man was not at the level of a beast. Squandering considerable sums of money on gambling, clowns and feasts, is thought of as something full of glory and beauty. Simplicity,



candour and straightforwardness are seen as the behaviour of fools. Fraud and canniness are given the name of “prudence”, and the term “wit” is reserved for wicked satire.

Teaching, instructing others, is thought of as a base occupation for low-born men, even when it is for one’s own children, except when they are learning the arts of vanity and pride.

Praying to the Lord and making entreaties are thought of as inconvenient, hardly decent acts; we are not supposed to admit that God is greater than us, and that we have need of His assistance for anything. This state has been brought upon us in an age of ignorance and barbarism.

Money, which in the beginning was only a means of acquiring the means of life, has become the universal instrument of honour, dignity, pride, anger, abundance, vengeance, life, death, power - in short, everything we measure with money.<sup>60</sup> Its value has been so exaggerated, that everyone considers that they have to try to acquire it and keep it by every

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<sup>60</sup> This is a traditional Christian view.

possible means and every route, with or without reason, justly or unjustly, without distinguishing the sacred and the profane, the legal and the illegal. The person who gets it is considered a wise man, a lord, a king, a great man, an admirable advisor and a talent. The poor person is a fool, held in contempt, and he is hardly given the dignity of a man. This lamentable view, so well accepted by everyone, forces men to make themselves slaves to fortune, even those who are furthest removed from caring about it, because some people serve as examples to others and as a snare for evil. Fathers, mothers, nurses and friends, everyone who would say that they love someone, want nothing better for him than money. The same applies from friend to friend, relative to relative; even enemies curse each others with the desire to see the other one reduced to poverty.

Some protest, with arguments that seem to them serious and honest. They say they are only saving money for their old age, that they have a weak, fragile constitution and

that they need plenty of comfort. It is just as true, they say, for sickness and for other unexpected circumstances that may happen; or it is for their children, their grandchildren and other relatives by blood or marriage. They call this "foresight". If that is what it is, the care they take is infinitely imprudent; we should be looking to our immortal posterity, and providing it with everything it needs. This preoccupation leads to the custom of saying, when one gives a little more generously to the poor, that one is depriving one's heirs - or even, to use stronger language - that one is robbing them, stealing, despoiling them. There is no shortage of laws which favour greed, and tie the hands of those who want to be charitable. From this we have the common feeling, that all is due to the worst heir, nothing to the best pauper. The exaggerated thought and reverence given to money has put things in such a state that everyone prefers their fortune to their life and their soul; and those who give charity to a poor person think that they are giving their blood, not a just a

little metal.

We should take issue with those who have the custom to die as they live. Someone who passes life in ambition, pride and envy, has built, according to his fortune, a church, a chapel or a mausoleum decorated with silver, marble and ivory. So, in death, greed continues to live. In death, armories are expanded everywhere, the nobility of one's lineage is displayed with pride and vanity, offensive and defensive armaments are added - perhaps to conquer heaven itself if necessary, perhaps to defend the body and revenge any injury on someone who tried to despoil it, or above all to kill the worms which feed on him. Facts about war, representations and memorials of military prowess, figure just as much on the tombstone. It is a sad recommendation to take to the Judge of Peace! As for the thefts and spoliations that are committed against poor people, as for the riches which are unjustly acquired and kept, even though they are no longer ours, we ask that psalms are sung for us

and that masses are said.<sup>61</sup> Others build fortresses, castles, pyramids, statues, so that our memory will not be forgotten. While we go on stirring such thoughts, while we promise the greatest glory for doing them, even promising that it will go on after we die, we can refuse to give a denier to a poor person so that we will not be short of anything needed for such expenses, or, to say it plainly, we take away from the poor person if he has one, and if we can, we strip the naked person even more bare.

The main cause, then, of our not doing good is our pride and our self-centredness, which extinguish charity towards our neighbour so that these vices can burn more brightly in us. On this subject, our Lord said in

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<sup>61</sup> Vives had expressed similar reservations about spending on religious practice in his earlier writing: "How much better is it to clothe poor strangers than rich relatives, to feed hungry strangers rather than wealthy priests, and to distribute to poor widows and orphans the great expenditures devoted to candles and magnificent tombs!" (Fantazzi, Mattheussen, 1998, p 213).

the Gospel: “And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall go cold.”<sup>62</sup> These are the truest and most certain reasons why we hold back from giving alms. However, it is the common custom among all men to blame others for our own faults. The things we do not do voluntarily, we excuse by saying that, if we do not do them, it is the fault of someone else.

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<sup>62</sup> Matthew 24:12.

## **Chapter 8: How nothing should stop us from being charitable** <sup>63</sup>

It is a beautiful and excellent thing to be charitable. Nothing is more decent or becomes us more than to imitate God our father. His benevolence is such that our ingratitude does not exhaust it. "It rains on the just and the unjust: he makes the sun shine for good people

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<sup>63</sup> This is a long chapter, drawing extensively on sources from the classics and the Scriptures. Although the substance tends to be less interesting for the modern reader, there are still points where Vives raises issues, like status and equality, which have a contemporary resonance.

The material from here to the end of Book 1 was important as a means of justifying the religious basis of the scheme which follows. There is far more from the Bible, and far more from the New Testament, than is found in his other works (compare Watson, 1913, who identifies the sources scrupulously), and that is certainly deliberate. At the same time, Vives does not mention many Christian authorities; the lack of any reference to Aquinas, who had summarised most of the teaching about benevolence and almsgiving, is particularly striking.

as for wicked people.”<sup>64</sup> It is just as true that, when everything is taken into account, almost all the vices of the poor are our fault. We make them ungrateful by relieving them half-heartedly, with coldness or malice, not with pure intentions. We have other aims than charity and grace; we outrage the poor person by the benefit itself, by the reminders, by our faces or by the annoyance we show. Some people are so susceptible to the ingratitude of one person, that they do not want to do anything more for anyone. And yet everyone knows that men do not have the same character or behaviour. Before you decide not to give charity for fear of ingratitude, try it out for yourself.

Listen to Seneca, who is just a heathen, teaching Christians what he should rather have learned from them. I will transcribe the whole passage so that all of us can be ashamed not to order our own lives according to teachings, approved by heathens, that are a

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<sup>64</sup> Matthew 5:45: Vives's words are quoted from the Vulgate, but the order of the quotation is reversed.



little more moral. He says:

the number of the ungrateful ought not to deter us from earning men's gratitude; for, in the first place, their number is increased by our own acts. Secondly, the sacrilege and indifference to religion of some men does not prevent even the immortal gods from continuing to shower their benefits upon us: for they act according to their divine nature and help all alike, among them even those who so ill appreciate their bounty. Let us take them for our guides as far as the weakness of our mortal nature permits; let us bestow benefits, not put them out at interest. The man who while he gives thinks of what he will get in return, deserves to be deceived. But what if the benefit turns out ill? Why, our wives and our children often disappoint our hopes, yet we marry--and bring up children, and are so obstinate in the face of

experience that we fight after we have been beaten, and put to sea after we have been shipwrecked. How much more constancy ought we to show in bestowing benefits! If a man does not bestow benefits because he has not received any, he must have bestowed them in order to receive them in return, and he justifies ingratitude, whose disgrace lies in not returning benefits when able to do so. How many are there who are unworthy of the light of day? and nevertheless the sun rises. How many complain because they have been born? yet Nature is ever renewing our race, and even suffers men to live who wish that they had never lived. It is the property of a great and good mind to covet, not the fruit of good deeds, but good deeds themselves, and to seek for a good man even after having met with bad men. If there were no rogues, what glory would there be in doing good to many? As it is, virtue consists in

bestowing benefits for which we are not certain of meeting with any return, but whose fruit is at once enjoyed by noble minds. So little influence ought this to have in restraining us from doing good actions, that even though I were denied the hope of meeting with a grateful man, yet the fear of not having my benefits returned would not prevent my bestowing them, because he who does not give, forestalls the vice of him who is ungrateful.

These are Seneca's words.<sup>65</sup>

Let us admit that, among the heathens, there was the fear of ingratitude which Seneca tried, as you have heard, to root out so forcibly in the first chapter of the book which he called *De beneficiis*.<sup>66</sup> It is as if this was a stumbling block in the threshold of virtue, to stop people entering and obstruct their first steps. But for

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<sup>65</sup> Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, Book 1 Chapter 1.

<sup>66</sup> The translation of the title as "On benefits" is perhaps better understood as "On giving".

us, what fear could hold us back from giving alms when the Lord has offered himself to us, as a guarantor for the poor? He affirms that He Himself has received what we give to the wretched. Are we looking perhaps for another debtor who is richer and offers better security? What can be thought sweeter and more merciful than our God? Since He has given us everything we possess, if someone, in obedience to Him, gives charity to the poor for His divine love, He becomes the debtor. He wants us to consider that what we give to our brothers is offered to Him. These are God's goods, not ours. Can there be anything harder, more cruel and more ungrateful than we are, if we refuse to give a part of what he has put in our power, when He commands it? Besides, He offers us such great rewards if we obey Him, and threatens us with guaranteed punishment if we do not. It is inconceivable that we should rush towards a certain punishment for tying ourselves so closely to precarious goods, which are exposed to a thousand accidents.

Furthermore, if we help poor people

promptly and at the right time, it is likely that, in view of the condition and state of their affairs, they will change their behaviour. Currently, we leave poor people to rot in their needs. How can they pull away from their worldly miseries, except by all the vices we have described? Because of that, their faults are the miseries of human beings, and in some ways inevitable, while ours are voluntary, free and almost diabolical. In a Christian city, where one reads the Gospel every day - that is to say, the book of life and charity, the distinctive principle that one finds in it - what does it mean to live in a way that is so different from that which the Gospel prescribes? The wiser heathens would not approve our behaviour. We have changed the name of heathen cities and nothing else; if only we had not increased their vices!

We hear: "Do good and pray to God for those who persecute and attack you."<sup>67</sup> We could help our fellow citizens, we ought to do so, but we consider it awkward and

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<sup>67</sup> Matthew 5:44, paraphrased.

inconvenient to speak a word in their favour, and more, we think it is beneath us even to talk to them. Socrates, who was a heathen, treated his private affairs as secondary, despite opposition and the envy of many; he went through the city teaching, admonishing and exhorting all and everyone, always preoccupied with the care to make his fellow citizens better, and insisting on the subject ceaselessly. I do not want to recall now the wanderings of the apostles, and all the trials they endured. The life and the works of the heathens should be enough for Christians to blush with shame. It is said: "He that hath two coats, let him give to him that hath none"<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Luke 3:11.

How much inequality is there now?<sup>69</sup> You can only wear silk, while and other lacks the piece of rough cloth to cover himself. For you, the skins of sheep, ewe or lamb are coarse, and you cover yourself in the delicate deerskins, while your neighbour shivers with cold, pierced to the core with the harshness of the winter. You, laid down with gold and precious stones, will not give a farthing to save the life of a poor person! You are filled, to the point of nausea, with capons, partridge and other very

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<sup>69</sup> The reference to “inequality” is a relatively modern concept, and it is surprising to find it stated so clearly in a text of this date. The dominant model of society in feudal times was one where each person would have resources appropriate to their station; the responsibility of the nobility was to distribute the excess, or “superflux”, to the lower orders. The Ypres report, in Volume 2, suggests that rich people should send poor people the food left over from their banquets. Later in this chapter, and again in Chapter 10, Vives does refer to the distribution of excess, but in his hands it looks more like a condemnation of all forms of luxury. The linking of a principle of equality together with the feudal disapproval of excess was manifest over a century later, in Puritanism.

delicate and expensive dishes. And your brother, weak and sick, does not even have bread to sustain himself and keep his wife and dear children, while you throw better bread to the dogs! During this time, do you not feel guilt or the reproach of the memory of poor beggar Lazarus, of the rich man, full of ostentation, who dressed in purple and fine linen, and ate splendidly every day? Houses where the king's retinue would have lived are no longer good enough for you today, while your poor brother has nowhere to go at night to rest. And you persist, without fearing that one day, you will be told, as the Gospel says: "My son, you have already received your goods in this life."<sup>70</sup> Remember the terrible curse of the Lord: Rich man, be unhappy, for you have already had your consolations here!

When there are no more limits on accumulating wealth and building treasure store to provide for sick and elderly people, these sentences fall on deaf ears. Do not think about tomorrow; lift your eyes, see the birds in

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<sup>70</sup> Luke 16:25.



the sky and the lilies in the fields which our heavenly Father feeds and makes to grow, without any care on their part.<sup>71</sup> Is it by chance, that all these riches and treasures are not exposed to many risks? It does not help a man to acquire and keep things, against the will of God, in whose mighty hands are everything that happens. How many rich people have been reduced to poverty by an unnoticed spark of a fire, by the lack of a little pitch on a ship, by a sudden flood in the river or the sea, by the malice of man or by a simple word of slander or insult?<sup>72</sup> How can we explain that poor people live and keep themselves in good health when they are missing so many things, while rich people, who are provided for, become sick and die? What enormous folly it is to think that live is

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<sup>71</sup> Matthew 6:25-8, freely paraphrased.

<sup>72</sup> This sentiment is not much like the traditional Christian view, but it is very typical of Jewish thought: "Let one pray to be spared this fate [poverty], for if he does not descend to poverty, his son will, and if not his son, his grandson ... There is a wheel that revolves in the world." (Talmud, *Tractate Shabbat* 151b).

sustained by money and bread! Anyway, in all this, we must not forget what we have heard said so many times: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by the word and the will of God."<sup>73</sup> And, besides, we read: "the life of man does not rest in the sum of what he possesses."

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What could stand more clearly against empty effort, and the vain desire to accumulate wealth, than the parable of the rich man? The accumulation of possessions has established such great security in his thoughts, that he tells himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry"<sup>75</sup> But that very night, he hears what many of us tell ourselves in the midst of plans based on riches and property:

Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those

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<sup>73</sup> Although this seems to refer to Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4, the quotation is not in the same words as either.

<sup>74</sup> Based on Luke 12:15, but again it is not a quotation.

<sup>75</sup> Luke 12:19.

things be, which thou has provided?<sup>76</sup>

Once he has heard the wisdom of God from His own mouth, there is no need to scrape around for examples in secular sources which tell us that many people have died just as their fortune started to grow, when they were ready to be less preoccupied, to enjoy the goods they had acquired and to live from that point on a pleasant life without having to work.

On the other hand, if riches are only put together and amassed to cover old age and sickness, how can we justify so much excess in clothing and food? What is the point of this throng of servants and courtesans who live idly, trusting in the wealth of their master? Why are there so many dogs, falcons, monkeys, gaming tables and jugglers? When a rich person wants something, nothing is refused him. How much capital is spent on fools and clowns! We put no limit on our spending on them - my fellow Spaniards are mad about it - while we do nothing for the honour and glory

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<sup>76</sup> Luke 12:20.

of God. The habit of vice has hardened us so much that we are no longer aware of the extreme way some things pollute us. To such rich people, the advice of the wise man often applies:

He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.<sup>77</sup>

So that no-one should hold his hand back from aiding the poor, or only does it because meanly he is afraid of becoming destitute, let us listen to Solomon: “He that giveth to the poor shall not want; he that despiseth his intreaty, shall suffer indigence.”<sup>78</sup>

Saint Paul encourages the Corinthians to give alms in these terms:

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may

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<sup>77</sup> Proverbs 22:16.

<sup>78</sup> Proverbs 28:27.

abound to every good work  
As it is written, He hath dispersed  
abroad; he hath given to the poor; his  
righteousness remaineth for ever.  
Now he that ministereth seed to the  
sower both minister bread for your  
food, and multiply your seed sown, and  
increase the fruits of your  
righteousness;  
Being enriched in every thing to all  
bountifulness, which causeth through  
us thanksgiving to God.<sup>79</sup>

These are the words of Paul. They teach us that prayer and the acts of grace, which raise themselves to God by the alms which have been given, will get from him the same kind of benefit that we have given. Can this not be established by words and recommendation, rather than by example? In The Third Book of Kings<sup>80</sup>, we read that there was in Zarephath in Sidonia a widow, who had a little flour she

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<sup>79</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:8-11.

<sup>80</sup> This is an old name for the first book of Kings.

could hold in the palm of her hand, and a few drops of oil. The poor woman, going out to look for wood, was carrying two logs to cook a pie for her and her little boy. There was a cruel famine in Israel, and all that remained for them was to die. She came to Elijah who asked her for alms, promising her that both she and her son would live. The woman believed the prophet, and gave him everything she had. After that the little jar where she kept the flour never ran out, and her jug of oil the liquid never went down, until the day when the Lord had pity on Israel.<sup>81</sup> Think about it, and give with piety; what you give will come back to you with interest, even in goods in this life.

Maybe someone will say that he was protecting his posterity and his heirs. This is a wretched reason. Posterity has no end: what limits could one place on the accumulation of wealth? What are you doing? Do you want to protect your descendants from all care? Do you want to leave them with nothing to do, with no way to improve themselves? Truly,

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<sup>81</sup> 1 Kings 17 9-16.

how stupid this behaviour is, only thinking of them and living miserably and badly yourself, for the profit of people you do not even know will be worthy of it. Listen to the wisest of kings, who says:

Again I hated all my application  
wherewith I had earnestly laboured  
under the sun, being like to have an heir  
after me,  
Whom I know not whether he will be a  
wise man or a fool, and he shall have  
rule over all my labours with which I  
have laboured and been solicitous: and  
is there anything so vain?  
Wherefore I left off and my heart  
renounced labouring anymore under  
the sun.  
For when a man laboureth in wisdom,  
and knowledge, and carefulness, he  
leaveth what he hath gotten to an idle  
man.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ecclesiastes 2 18-21.

This was from Solomon.

We are so blind that we are not convinced by examples that present themselves to our eyes every day. On the contrary, we turn away, thinking mistakenly that we are not included in the common condition of other men, although we are human like them. There are some people from whom, when they least expect it, God takes away the children for whom they have amassed great wealth. This proves what we read in Psalm 48:

And they shall leave their riches to  
strangers  
And their sepulchres shall be their  
houses for ever. Their dwelling places  
to all generations; they have called their  
lands by their names.<sup>83</sup>

There are others for whom their wealth

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<sup>83</sup> Psalm 48, verses 11-12 in the Catholic Bible; in the King James version, this is rendered in Psalm 49, verses 10-11.



does not reach the third generation, because the character and behaviour of their children have been corrupted by the prospect of their inheritance or be the weakness and indulgence of the parents themselves, and also because someone who has not worked to get things has not learned how to keep them. There are others whose sons would have been excellent without riches, but become very bad with them; it seems that in trying by every means to enrich their children, the father has left them nothing but the means to be foolish and badly behaved. It happens, too, that seeing their father prefer wealth the everything else, the sons equally prefer wealth to their father. It is a just penalty by the *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye) which God gives for our education.

You will leave your sons very rich, if you instruct them in an honourable profession of a good job, with honest behaviour. Do not teach them that wealth is always wealth, or that wealth gotten by any means is still wealth; because you will be the first to experience the strength of this pretext, at your own expense.

Would you like to know, what are true riches, and the counsel that father ought to leave his sons in the last moments of his life? Listen, then, to Tobias who, as he neared death, spoke as follows:

Hearken therefore, my children, to your father: serve the Lord in truth and seek to do the things that please him:  
And command your children that they do justice and almsdeeds, and that they be mindful of God, and bless him at all times in truth, and with all their power.<sup>84</sup>

In the same vein, Chapter 4 of the same book of Tobias is full of the kinds of precept that a father should enrich his son with, rather than gold and silver. There is an old proverb which says that “a miser will be followed by a spendthrift for an heir” or that “money is not

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<sup>84</sup> Tobit 14 10-11. Tobit is in the Apocrypha, and this is the version from the Catholic Bible; the text differs in Protestant bibles.

needed either by a good heir, or by a bad one, because the first will acquire wealth easily, while the second will spend it as soon as he can." You can consider that you have left your sons rich if you have succeeded in making a prince their tutor, their patron and their father. If you have faith, you should believe as a certainty that, if you are good and charitable, you have left God to be the father to your son. "The generation of the righteous shall be blessed", says the Lord.<sup>85</sup> And in another place: "Whoever lives truly justly, beyond reproach, will leave happy and fortunate sons."<sup>86</sup> The Lord himself forgives the people of Israel, because of their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But he pursues and punishes the wickedness of father who offend him, in their sons, even to the third and fourth generation. He gives mercy for a thousand generations, always and without end, to those he loves who keep his teachings. "It is better to die without descendants", says the sage Sirach, "than to

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<sup>85</sup> Psalm 111 verse 2.

<sup>86</sup> This is not in the Bible.

leave impious children.”<sup>87</sup> I am going to say something, not commonly admitted, perhaps, but in my view very true. Fathers who know by experience that their sons have a bad character, knowing that they can be corrupted by money like a poison, act very badly in leaving them substantial riches, which is a sure way to vice. The same kind of riches are taken away from good people who know how to use them, and given to evil ones who, when they have obtained the means or instrument for their wickedness, become even worse as a result of these riches. If some rich person wants to make a son happy who is behaving badly, he should believe me and follow my advice: put his money into the hands of some trustworthy men, who will release the money to son if he changes his life and behaves well. If, however, he perseveres and persists in his malice and misdeeds, this money should be distributed as charity for the worthy poor - or, to say it better, this money should be returned

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<sup>87</sup> Ecclesiasticus 16:4. The quotation is not quite accurate.

to the poor, because one owes it to them and it is restitution, rather than generosity. Listen to a prophet of great age: "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."<sup>88</sup> The just man gives charity without stopping, and loans without interest, and his descendants will be blessed.

You are concerned to care for your children's bodies, now and for the future. It is appropriate to care more diligently about the soul. The wise and saintly Job is an example. He offered a sacrifice to God for each of his sons, so that they could be purified by the religious act of their father, if by mischance they had sinned or could not give to the Lord the homage which he is due.<sup>89</sup> Charity is a sacrifice, and a pious act, very real and very agreeable to God. It is of this that it is written in the Holy Scriptures: "Water quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sin, and God

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<sup>88</sup> Psalm 38, verse 25.

<sup>89</sup> Job 1:5.

provideth for him that showeth favour.”<sup>90</sup>

What great fortune, even among men, to be the son of a good father! There is no need to call on examples from ancient times; there are too many to count, such as one finds in writers from every nation. Every day, we see some people who, even if they are unworthy themselves, get great wealth and high honours, simply by the memory of the virtue of their fathers. Even if we regard these sons without respect, or with contempt, we will revere them nevertheless in consideration of their parents rather than their selves. This is where the true adornment of nobility resides. The sepulchres, the altars, the holy ornaments, the masses and the psalms are abominations to God, when you build him a temple with dead stones but let his living temple fall, crumble and perish. God does not take notice of offerings and magnificent gifts, but of a pure soul and an immaculate conscience. This truth is well known, even by pagans, and it is taught by Plato, Xenophon, Cicero and Seneca. How

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<sup>90</sup> Ecclesiasticus 3:33-4.

much more, then, should it be known by Christians, for whom no temple is absolutely indispensable, because they must adore the Father, in spirit and truth, whose temple is all the world. It is more true of pure souls, of whom the Apostle says: "The temple of God is holy, which you are"<sup>91</sup>? This is why I must finally say that, by these things, people are seeking fame, not the service of God. This is clearly seen when one find the name of the person who pays written everywhere, and his arms and insignia engraved at every step. Does gold matter in all this? Do you think, perhaps, that God is like a child who will be overwhelmed and enchanted by the splendour of gold? Or a miser who gets enthusiastic about his possessions? Or a man who wants to use it? Glory while a man is alive is a burden if he wants it and useless if he does not. To the dead man, glory is meaningless, because the joys or torments where he will find himself are much greater than the voices and praises of the world, and if they could get to where he is,

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<sup>91</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:17.

they will not be able to move him. What use to Achilles now is Homer's Iliad, or the Odyssey to Ulysses, or either of these works, to their author? What use to Alexander is all the "Alexandrias" of the East? Or to the counts of Flanders, the golden statues in front of the town hall? Without thinking about the fragility of all these works, or the brief span in which they will perish, few people even notice them; fewer still are those who stop to think about them. Almost none of them know what they represent, the facts or the deeds of the people to whom these monuments have been erected; and even when one does learn about them, one does not think much of them.

If one is looking for true glory, where better to find it than in doing good, assisting and helping the greatest possible number of one's peers? This was, among the ancients, the only way to attain immortality, as we have said before. Charitable men were deified. Pliny says: "The mortal who aids another mortal is a god."<sup>92</sup> No virtue is more agreeable, and more

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<sup>92</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, Book 2, ch 7.



worthy of admiration, than generosity and philanthropy; many people, by that alone, obtained great goods. Above all, every man must think it good, true and great glory to be in peace with his conscience when death comes, to be well received by God, and to achieve eternal bliss for this reason, and for good works.

## **Chapter 9: How what God gives to each person is not given for him alone <sup>93</sup>**

The philosopher Plato said that republics would be happy if men were relieved of the use of two words: “mine” and “yours”. What dramas they provoke between us! How vehemently we declare these expressions and sentences: I gave what was mine; he took from

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<sup>93</sup> This is a critical chapter for political thought. Vives condemns inequality, which he considers unnatural, and in passages that foreshadow Rousseau he comes close to arguing for common property.

me what was mine; no-one should come near my property; I did not touch your things; keep what you have, be happy with that! As if there was any man who could say of anything, with reason, that it was his. Even our virtue comes from God, who has given us it for the benefit of others. First, there is Nature, and by that I understand God himself, because Nature is nothing but the will and command of the Lord. Nature obtains many benefits for us and continues to do so, by food - herbs, roots, fruits, harvests, herds and fish; and to clothe us, skins and wools. The same is true for woods, metals and the useful things we get from animals such as dogs, horses and cows. Finally, He has put everything which He has brought into existence into the great realm of the world, without barriers or locks, so that they can be common to all He has created.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The suggestion here is that property might be held in common. This seems to have been a view Vives shared with his humanist contemporaries, notably Erasmus and More (Todd, 1987, p 133). An anonymous German pamphlet of 1525 similarly suggested that "God will

Tell me now, whether your status is high or low: are you, more than me, the child of Nature?<sup>95</sup> If you are not, why do you exclude me, as if you were the legitimate child of Nature and I was the bastard? But you answer: "I have used my work and my industry. No-one is stopping you from owning things. Do as I do." So, by our malevolence, we make our property, from what generous nature has made common to all.<sup>96</sup> Though something is put in the view of all for their use, we divert it, hide it, enclose it, forbid it to others, and we keep it from others by signs, walls, locks, iron,

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equalise all estates, and people will no longer say, 'this is mine'" (cited Lindberg, 1993, p 76).

<sup>95</sup> A century later, this sentiment was expressed in the English civil war: "When Adam delved, and Eve span, where was then the gentleman?" At a time when men were presumed to be created unequal, the idea of natural equality seems extraordinary and radical.

<sup>96</sup> The terms in which this is said are surprisingly similar to Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*: "The first person who, having enclosed a piece of land, persuaded himself to say 'This is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society." (Rousseau, 1755)

arms and finally by laws.

Our avarice and malevolence has introduced scarcity and hunger into the abundance of nature, and put poverty amid the riches of God. Our wickedness has almost made it so that one cannot truly say to God: "Lord, you open your hand, and fill every living being with blessings."<sup>97</sup> One cannot count the number of people who, three years ago, died of hunger in Andalusia, They would still be alive if we were as prompt to provide assistance as they asked, or if we were moved simply by the generosity of animals and their kind of sense, which is more in tune with nature than ours is. There is no animal which, once it has eaten and is satisfied, does not leave the excess to the community, without protection, like great public offices generously open to the supply of nature. Every man who owns the gifts of nature should know that he is making his brother experience need. He possess these things by the consent, will, intention and

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<sup>97</sup> Psalm 144 verse 16; Vives has quoted the same verse before.

disposition of nature itself. Otherwise, he is nothing but a thief, a monopolist, convicted and condemned by natural law, because he occupies and holds what nature did not exclusively create for him. Plato, writing to the Pythagorean Archytas, tells him: “we are not born only for ourselves, but for our country and our friends.”<sup>98</sup> Another ancient says in a play: “I am a man, and I consider that nothing human is alien to me.”<sup>99</sup> Everyone should know that he has not received his body, his soul, his life or his money only for his own use and convenience. He should know that he is a trustee, a faithful distributor of every thing, and that he has received them from God for this purpose.

This was known, however vaguely, by the ancient pagans, who established laws for their citizens stating that each person owed

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<sup>98</sup> Cited in Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.22

<sup>99</sup> The play, like others referred to by Vives, is by Terence. Moyardus identifies the quotation as coming from the *Heautontimouroumenos* (Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 157).

everything to the city, and that the city had the right and authority over everyone to dispose of their body, their life and their goods. So, the members of the supreme tribunal in Athens, and the censors of Rome, would make enquiries about the lives, the income and the behaviour of everyone, would inspect them to review how each person put them in practice and used them for the public benefit, and make judgements and apply sanctions according to the laws and codes.<sup>100</sup> In this way, let us keep in view, not only the witness of men, but the edict and order of God himself: “Freely”, says the Lord, “ye have received, freely give.”<sup>101</sup>

He set this out in a parable, about someone who was punished with the greatest rigor for having wasted the talent he had received from God and had not used.<sup>102</sup> The parable heaps praise on those who increase their share through fair actions, that is to say

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<sup>100</sup> This is a key point of justification for the scheme which follows in Book 2 Chapter 2.

<sup>101</sup> Matthew 10:8.

<sup>102</sup> Matthew 25.

those who help and support many of their peers with the same benefits that they have graciously received from the Lord. So, someone who takes from that he has directed to his heirs, to give it to the poor, is not a thief. But the same cannot be said of someone who abuses his learning and education uselessly, consumes his strength vainly, lets his knowledge grow hollow, wastes money or hordes it.

Some might say, perhaps, haughtily and with great disdain, "I do what I want with what is mine". But why do you plead before the court of Christ, the defender and avenger of charity and reciprocal benefit, what you would not have been allowed to plead before the court and the bench of the pagan censors of Rome? I have already shown good reason why no-one owns anything. Everyone is guilty of theft and diversion, I repeat, if they waste money by gambling, if they hoard it in chests at home, spend it in feasts and banquets, spends it on precious clothing or on furniture full of diverse gold and silver vessels; whoever has

clothing rotting in their house, whoever consumes their wealth by buying excessive or useless things. In conclusion, there is no doubt, everyone who does not distribute to poor people what he has in excess of the necessary uses of nature, is a thief, and as such, if he is not punished by human laws (such as there are) he will certainly be by divine laws.<sup>103</sup>

## **Chapter 10: There cannot be true piety or Christianity without mutual assistance** <sup>104</sup>

Up to this point, I have combined divine issues with human ones, because some, who are still plunged into thick shadows, cannot bear the brightness of the divine light. Now, we will

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<sup>103</sup> This argument reflects the position of Erasmus, Vives's mentor. "The civil law punishes you if you take to your self what belongs to another. It does not punish you if you refuse your possessions to a needy brother. Yet even so Christ will punish you." (Cited Lindberg, 1993, pp 71-2)

<sup>104</sup> This is another lengthy chapter, concerned entirely with giving scriptural authority. The references given here make its purpose clear.



focus on the teachings of the Prince and Lord, of whom it is said: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."<sup>105</sup> Our iniquities make us insensible to evil, so that nothing is heard more distantly and falls on deafer ears than what God commands. Vanity, the precarious nature of this life, warns us not to fix our hopes on this world. Nor does it make us reflect that we should put ourselves in the hands of God, the reader and witness of our thoughts, who will keep us with him in eternal bliss, or who will send us to punishments without end, according to our deserts.

Who does this God speak by, unless it is mainly by his own Son, and later, by the saintly men to whom he communicates his spirit? In the books of the Old and New Testaments, there are the infallible predictions and the judgments of God himself, and nothing there is commended with greater force than insistence on mercy (or in Greek, *eleemosyne*). The Lord

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<sup>105</sup> Matthew 10:28.

speaks thus in Deuteronomy:

“For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide to thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in the land.”<sup>106</sup>

This command is not without its reward, the promise is added that mercy will meet those who have practised it. So David also declares in Psalm 40:

Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.

The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him to his enemies.

The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; thou wilt make all his bed in sickness.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Deuteronomy 15:11.

<sup>107</sup> Psalm 40, verses 1-3.

This verse is found in Psalm 9: “To you has been confided and recommended the poor person; you will be the support for the orphan.”<sup>108</sup> This shows clearly that the powerful have not been burdened with high status by the Lord, or strengthened and made great by power, honour, authority and wealth, except to become the tutor and defender of the needy and the miserable, just as a father charges his healthy son with the protection of one who is weaker. The Lord shows no desire to have ceremonies and sacrifices; what he wants and demands from Man, is mercy, and it is for mercy that he offers a reward.

In the prophet Isaiah, one reads these words from God:

They take delight in approaching to God. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the

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<sup>108</sup> Psalm 9, verse 35.

day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness; ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice be heard on high.

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bans of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not from thyself thine own flesh?

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall

answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say,  
Here I am.<sup>109</sup>

So speaks Isaiah.

Everywhere, the sinner seeks and examines the means to be able to appease the Lord who he has offended. He wants to offer victims up to Him, even his eldest son. God, meanwhile, rejects everything which could be offered him in exterior goods, but asks the sinner for mercy from his (bowels) heart. So we read in the prophet Micah:

Wherewith shall I come before the  
Lord, and bow myself before the high  
god? Shall I come before him with burnt  
offerings, with calves of a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with  
thousands of rams, or with ten  
thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give  
my firstborn for my transgression, the  
fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is

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<sup>109</sup> Isaiah 58: 2-9.

good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy ...? <sup>110</sup>

Those who try to apply themselves to the study of the nature of things affirm that love, in its nature and character, springs naturally from love. Nothing reconciles us as well to the mercy of God that our own mercy. “He that is inclined to mercy shall be blessed”, says Solomon.<sup>111</sup> For the person without mercy, he says: “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.”<sup>112</sup> . For us, it is, people say, like looking for water in the sea. What else do we understand in the ancient teachings of God, if not that the only way to get divine mercy, even in relation to the good things of this temporal life, is through our own mercy? Abraham and

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<sup>110</sup> Micah 6: 6-8. The Latin ends abruptly, missing out the final injunction, “to walk humbly with thy God”.

<sup>111</sup> Proverbs 22:9; it continues, “for he giveth of his bread to the poor”.

<sup>112</sup> Proverbs 21:13.

Lot, exercising the holy custom of hospitality, received angels without knowing it.<sup>113</sup> The angels did not leave without acknowledging their greeting and obtaining favours for them. Lot was saved from burning and from the ruin of five cities; Abraham received from them the news that he would have son who would be the source of the posterity without number which he had been promised. King David, when he was old, said as a prophet:

I have been young, and now am old; yet  
I have not seen the righteous forsaken,  
nor his seed begging bread.  
He is ever merciful, and lendeth and his  
seed is blessed.<sup>114</sup>

Let us come to Christ, the most faithful messenger of the Father, sent to us in a humble body with the great and wonderful power of doing miracles. He would reconcile Man, the

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<sup>113</sup> Genesis 18, 19

<sup>114</sup> Psalm 38, verses 25-6; Vives also used verse 25 in Chapter 8.

enemy of God, with his angry Father; he would teach the ignorant; he would lead the person who had strayed back to the path, and give the blind the use of the sun and the light. He commanded us to hear the Father himself by His voice. We declare that we are the followers of his teaching and his light. We are proud to carry His name, which is greater than all names. There is no-one else on the earth by whom we can be saved, and like St Paul there is nothing we would be prouder of than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. But I do not see how we dare claim to be Christians when we do none of the things which Christ orders as of the highest importance.

The pagan philosophers made themselves known and distinguished by going barefoot, or wearing vulgar clothes, as Saint Gregory of Nazaire shows. Jews have circumcision; soldiers have their coats of arms in war; sheep are marked, and goods for sale. Should not the Christian have some sign to mark him out, to distinguish his fellows, and separate them from strangers? Of course. In



this, says Christ, you will recognise all who are my disciples, if you love each other from the heart. And he says later: “This is my commandment, that you love one another”.<sup>115</sup> This is the first and main teaching.

It is the essence and the nature of love to do everything in common, according to the ancient judgment and expression of Pythagoras, upheld by his disciples and kept by other philosophical sects.<sup>116</sup> Someone who truly loves will look after the business of his friend as much as his own. He will work for his friends with as much zeal, love and burning affection. Between us, each person looks after his own business, and no-one looks after that of his brother or his neighbour. This is what Saint Paul reproved the Corinthians for, when he told them: “One is hungry, while the other is drunken.”<sup>117</sup> We should likewise realise that

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<sup>115</sup> John 15:12.

<sup>116</sup> Moyardus explains that this quotation was also used by Erasmus, Vives’s mentor, in *Chiliades adagiorum* (Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 159).

<sup>117</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:21.

we are so far from sharing what we have with our poor neighbour and brother, that, by any means and trickery we can, we will take from him the little that he possesses. You see a destitute poor person, and you give him a wide berth - you who are not just dressed, but laden and burdened with clothes. Where then is the sign that signals and marks out the followers of Christ? He does not love God, who does not love his neighbour. This is said by St John in his Epistle:

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?<sup>118</sup>

A little later he says: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen. How can he love God whom he hath not

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<sup>118</sup> 1 John 3:17.

seen?"<sup>119</sup> He does not believe in Christ, if he does not trust to Him; does it not mean, to believe in someone, that one trusts his word and holds for certain that his promises will be kept? The Lord commands us to do good, and what is more difficult, to want good for all - even for those who behave badly to us, and would cause us evil or harm if they could in some way. He offers to pay you for those to whom you do good. If you believe that Christ will reward you as abundantly as he promises, will you hold back from giving? While you are ready to release ten thousand ducats, for example, because you will be paid back with interest, trusting the word of a mortal, or the written promise of a cheat? You can see that Christ has also given you a firm promise. But we let ourselves be influenced and moved too much by worldly, temporal issues; spiritual things do not reach as far as our souls, which are surrounded by heavy flesh, hardened by the habit of vice.

We do not trust our lives to our God,

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<sup>119</sup> 1 John 4:20.

although only He give us existence and keeps us alive. If we believe in Christ, who says to give the Father the care of defending and sustaining us- to the Father from whom all things come and who keeps and feeds those who cannot prove for themselves - would we be so very much preoccupied with ourselves? We certainly would not be if some mortal king had made the promise. What else can I say? We talk as if we believe everything, and we live as if we believe nothing. The end of your life does not move you, and causes you no worries. If it is passed in virtue or in vice, rewards or punishments will infallibly follow. This is the most important and final issue in religion. God says that sins can be purged by charity.<sup>120</sup> Nothing is left to you, He says, but to practise alms, and you can be pure in everything.<sup>121</sup> I

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<sup>120</sup> By contrast with much that has gone before, this is a deeply mediaeval concept of charity. Charity is a virtue, rather than an act, and rests in one's duty to God rather than to the recipients: compare Aquinas on charity (Aquinas, c.1274).

<sup>121</sup> A very free paraphrase of Luke 11:41.

agree the judgement of the ancients, as Tobias says:

For thus thou storest up to thyself a  
good reward for the day of necessity.  
For alms deliver from all sin, and from  
death, and will not suffer the soul to go  
into darkness.<sup>122</sup>

Ecclesiasticus says: "Water quencheth a  
flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins."<sup>123</sup> Daniel  
advised the proudest of kings to buy back his  
sins and blasphemies by mercy and alms to  
poor people.<sup>124</sup> The disciples of Christ agree  
with all this by telling, as they had learnt it  
in the school of their Master, that "charity  
covers the crowd of sins."<sup>125</sup> In the Acts of the  
Apostles, one reads that because of the charity  
given by a pagan centurion, an angel showed

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<sup>122</sup> Tobit 4:10-11.

<sup>123</sup> Ecclesiasticus 3:33, already used in Chapter 8.

<sup>124</sup> Daniel 4:24.

<sup>125</sup> 1 Peter 4:8.

him the way to salvation.<sup>126</sup> In the same way, it is salutary advice to those who have to go to some town that they should try to merit the attention of its citizens by some service.

The Lord admonishes and exhorts us to give up iniquity of Mammon. We are searching and winning friends, who we will greet later in the palaces of eternity. Christ answered a young man who asked him about eternal life: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me."<sup>127</sup> Is there any doubt, about what we have heard so many times and know? This sentence from the judge of the living and the dead rewards works of charity with eternal life, and condemns for ever those who fail to do it. What can we answer to all this? Will the misfortune befall us that happens, according to the Gospel of Saint Luke, to the Pharisees because they were miserly, and mocked the precepts of Christ? Even now, the teaching of

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<sup>126</sup> Acts 10 1:4

<sup>127</sup> Matthew 19:21.

heaven seems just as ridiculous to those who are free from care by their wealth. The rich person, who loves his riches, is insensible and unworthy of the kingdom of God! It is no without great cause that Saint Paul referred to avarice as the slavery of false gods, because those who love their money passionately distance themselves from the most effective protection of faith. The Apostles did not punish any sin with death, except for the avarice of Ananias and his wife.<sup>128</sup> Against this vice, Saint Peter showed and exercised his apostolic power, not as a torturer or executioner might, but by the power of his voice. He knew that the perverse inclination of an unlimited desire for wealth was a declaration of hate and bloody war against the good conduct and piety of Christians. He knew that one day, this tendency would wake to the great detriment and ruin of the religion.

Everyone should examine his conscience to see if he really believes the truths I have just reported, seeing how little he

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<sup>128</sup> Acts 5.

is moved by them. Well, everyone says, I believe. Yes, I hear that you believe, but I don't see you doing it. My children, St John says, do not love only in words, but do it in reality.<sup>129</sup> St James adds: act on the word, do not just hear it.<sup>130</sup> If you believe, how can you not take account of such great promises and threats? Why do you not accept the responsibility of doing the duty which is given you, to do good? It is more true because such great joys are foreseen for those who do it, and such great torments for those who avoid it. Everything I have said can be summed up in this: I do not hold someone who does not give charity to be a true Christian, when he can help and his brother in need.

Paul and Barnabas arrived at Jerusalem and spoke with James, the Lord's brother, who was the most holy bishop of the town. At the same time they spoke with Peter and John. After they had taken account of the Gospel which He had preached to the gentiles, and

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<sup>129</sup> 1 John 3:18.

<sup>130</sup> James 1:22.



after the apostles have praised their conduct, they made, before they left, recommendations to each other about charity.

They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship: that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision;  
Only that we should be mindful of the poor.<sup>131</sup>

The apostles and the disciplines of Christ were concerned integrally with the whole man, who they nourished and comforted. They tried to aid the whole man; the soul, by preaching and sacred doctrine; the body, mainly by miracles and healing the sick. They went together with their preaching and steadfast faith. At the same time they helped in this temporal life, because they received alms with which they supported unfortunates. This is how to be a Christian and a true disciple of the Prince and Master. He gave existence to the whole man, cured and fed

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<sup>131</sup> Galatians 2:9-10.

the whole man: the soul by teaching, and the body by food. It is just, then, that we should do good to our neighbour in soul and body, according to what we can do.

## **Chapter 11: Of the good that must be done for each person, and how it must be done**

Cicero, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Panaetius, Posidonios, Hecaton,<sup>132</sup> Seneca and all of those who write on the subject of action in communal life, set down certain laws which prescribe, for those who give alms, charity or afford them recognition, for whose profit, of what kind, in what quantity, when and how it

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<sup>132</sup> Theophrastus was a pupil of Aristotle, who wrote on several topics including personality, but nothing is obviously relevant to this discussion. Panaetius and Hecaton had written books on duty which were referred to by Cicero, but those books have not survived. Posidonius was a pupil of Panaetius, distinguished in his scientific work, and Hecaton was his pupil. As Vives could not possibly have seen the texts that Cicero used, this list of names looks like gratuitous scholarly name-dropping.

should be done. As they were concerned only with human issues, they could not take everything into account in their teachings, because human nature, in its diversity, offers an infinite number of issues which only the Lord alone, as the author and creator, can comprehend. And He covered the issues in a brief, unique, divine formula: the precept of loving God and loving one's neighbour. He set an infallible norm, a rule, a canon, by which the life of mortals can be governed completely. If someone loves God truly and from the heart, and loves his brother for the sake of God, this love will guide him more really and justly than any master of philosophy could. Whoever has a legitimate affection, and true friendship, for his neighbour, and who thinks only of God when he helps his peers, can expect God's reward. There is nothing more to be said; this lesson is greater than all the long writings of the philosophers who I have just cited.

On the subject of the nature of charity, and who should receive it, here are the words

of Christ.<sup>133</sup>

Give to each person who asks of you.<sup>134</sup>

...

Do not send away someone who asks you to lend him your aid.<sup>135</sup> ...

Do good to those who persecute you; pray to God for those who hate you and curse you.<sup>136</sup>

This is how someone ought to behave who puts himself above the things of this world, lifting himself up to the trust and love of God. But the word of Tobias is more applicable to our nature:

Give alms out of your substance, and do not turn your face away from any poor

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<sup>133</sup> There is no indication of this in the text, but these words are drawn from different places in the Bible and the Latin is not faithful to the original.

<sup>134</sup> Luke 6: 30.

<sup>135</sup> Matthew 5, 42.

<sup>136</sup> A paraphrase, in Latin, of Matthew 5:44.

person; for so it shall come to pass that the face of the Lord shall not be turned from thee.

According to thy ability be merciful. If thou have much give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even to bestow willingly a little.<sup>137</sup>

This is not contradicted by what one reads in Ecclesiastes: “Do good to thy friend before thou die, and according to thy ability, stretching out thy hand to the poor.”<sup>138</sup> Those who act in this way will match their generosity to what they have, but they will still have the concern, which seems prudent to them, that they may not leave anything for themselves, which true love would ignore.

How much better is their behaviour than those who, from great rents and other means of doing good, distribute only a tiny amount, or those who, possessing very great wealth, only give alms from time to time with

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<sup>137</sup> Tobit 4:7-9

<sup>138</sup> Ecclesiasticus 14:13. The Latin is again inaccurate.

as little money as possible. We would call this a “*minuta*”, using the idiomatic word or expression. Listen to this: “He which soweth sparingly”, says the apostle, “shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”<sup>139</sup> The same judgment is written to the Galatians, which I will remind you of.<sup>140</sup> As you are receiving from God, make a return. If he gives you abundantly, why do you respond with so much meanness, avarice and malice? He has not given you anything for yourself alone, as an individual, as I have already said. Equally, we must not measure our needs in a way that takes account of luxuries, ostentation, or excess. For example, dressing oneself in silk, showing off gold and precious stones, going round with a great retinue of servants, eating sumptuously and playing carelessly with large

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<sup>139</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:6

<sup>140</sup> Galatians 6:7.

sums of money.<sup>141</sup> No-one should flatter himself that he gives much to the poor, if he has a great fortune. We should be convinced that alms made out of money which the rich person has taken and held from the sweat and the fortune of the poor are not agreeable to God. It is a strange sort of charity, to strip large amounts from your peers by fraud, lies, violence and plundering, in order to give a little to some of them! Taking from a thousand to give back a hundred ! Those who think they have fulfilled their obligations are sorely mistaken, and they have taken part in great injustice or fraud if they have given a miserly part of their produce, or endowed some hermitage or chapel, putting up their coat of arms, decorating some temple with a luxurious gallery or, even worse, giving presents or

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<sup>141</sup> This is not really consistent with the apparent emphasis on equality in Chapter 9, where Vives was arguing that “everyone who does not distribute to poor people what he has in excess of the necessary uses of nature is a thief”. The examples he gives here are of those who have luxury greater than their status merits – a superflux.

money to some confessor to be absolved. The confession of the publican Zacchaeus was as follows: "Look, Lord, I give poor people half of everything I possess, and if I have wronged someone in something, I will pay him back fourfold." Christ replied: "Today, the house of Zacchaeus has received grace, because he is a true son of Abraham."<sup>142</sup> This shows that he was not just praising the justice of Abraham in words, but that he was practicing it in deeds. Briefly, alms are only agreeable to God if they are made with what has been justly and well earned. Everyone should do what Zacchaeus did, if he wants to hear what he heard.

To whom do we owe it to do good? To everyone, because Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for everyone. The unworthiness of the needy person should not cool or diminish our charity. We have an infinitely merciful God who, although we do not merit it, and even if we are unworthy, will load his benefits onto us. He acts, not as a creditor, but as a debtor if we give to the poor. Aristotle, a pagan

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<sup>142</sup> Luke 19:8-9.



philosopher, not so much a good man as a wise one, gave a small coin to a bad man who was poor. His friends learned of it and reproached him for having given charity to the unworthy person. He replied: I did not pity him, but his nature. How much more should we, as Christians, have pity on the poor because God commands it? Consider the undertaking of God and Lord of the universe: "What you do for these little ones, you do for me."<sup>143</sup> Listen too to a man, if one is allowed to listen after hearing God, but this is from a very wise, enlightened writer of God, so that one should think that God speaks through him: "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."<sup>144</sup> Who among us could bear this terrible reproach from the Lord: "You bad

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<sup>143</sup> Matthew 10:42; Vives does not quote exactly.

<sup>144</sup> Proverbs 19:17. Describing part of the Bible as possibly divinely inspired falls on the safe side of theological speculation. This may be a rhetorical flourish, but it may also indicate a caution in Vives about relying on Old Testament sources.

servant, why have you not given what was mine as I told you to?" What would you have done if it had been yours? For this, you will not possess the eternal goods which you could not be faithful to because you were attached to the empty goods of this world.

I do not exaggerate these statements; no; they are the words of Christ himself. In the gospel of Saint Luke, he says:

He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been unfaithful in the unrighteous mammon, how will ye commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, how shall ye give you that which is your own?<sup>145</sup>

One should reflect on and weigh the needs of men, because some are more needy than others. There are some for whom it is better to

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<sup>145</sup> Luke 16:10-12.

give a talent, others a denier; such are they who would use them honestly. Giving to gamblers or debauchees, what is it but to throw fuel on the fire, as they say? This would not be a kindness, but an injury.

Saint Paul writes this to the Galatians:

When anyone is under instruction in the faith, he should give his teacher a share of all good things he has.

Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of

faith.<sup>146</sup>

Paul commands Timothy that the priests who look well after their flocks, especially those who work at preaching and instruction, should be considered worthy of a double honour, that is double reward, generosity or portion,<sup>147</sup> for the only reason that they will use and distribute the capital entrusted them better than others who are clumsy, wicked or irreligious. Good will should be encouraged, aided, encouraged, decorated and educated with elegance, learning and authority; the bad should be restrained, stripped, disarmed and punished. From the bad should be taken eloquence, authority and everything which could be an instrument to do evil, because one does not put a sword in the hands of an angry madman. The distinction between good and

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<sup>146</sup> Galatians 6: 6-10. I have rendered the first verse as it is translated in the New English Bible, because only this translation gets the sense that Vives is referring to, and switched to the King James version for the rest.

<sup>147</sup> 1 Timothy 5 17-18.

bad should not be done as we do it now, when we favour relatives, acquaintances or our countrymen, our intimates or those who have given us some service over those who distinguish themselves by wisdom, behaviour and virtue. This, and no other consideration, should guide our choice.

Our real brothers are those who Christ has led to be born again in a particular holy way. He made “no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”<sup>148</sup> The core of the whole question lies in this: everything should be directed towards the principal good. Everyone must be helped in everything he appears to need for this holy end. It is necessary to give everyone what he needs for his health and one should give it at the moment his need calls for it, and where our available choices make it possible. Whatever is not useful is superfluous, and more a burden than a benefit; for example, as Seneca says, giving hunting weapons to a weak woman or a

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<sup>148</sup> Romans 10:12.

frail old man, or giving books to a peasant.<sup>149</sup> How much worse are gifts that do harm, such as giving wine to a drunk or a sword to a man who is irascible. We think we are being useful, but we are doing great damage. What difference is there between the curses which support our enemies or throw us to them, and good wishes with such gifts from our friends? One has to be careful not to mistake oneself in the manner of doing good, so that we bring nothing to ourselves, but everything to God. It is necessary, then, to act serenely, giving alms with a good face, or, as Tobias says, with good grace and pleasure. Saint Paul says, too: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."<sup>150</sup>

Charity should grow from a spirit which is prompt to help and to do good, not because you do not dare do otherwise, or because you are ashamed to refuse. Someone who delays in giving is not far from someone who refuses,

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<sup>149</sup> *De Officiis*, Book 1, para 11.

<sup>150</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:7.

because the delay is a certain sign that we wanted to refuse alms, and that it has been drawn from us more by force than by agreement. One should give promptly, then, that is to say, as soon as the opportunity and occasion present themselves. Charity is too late when it is done after the opportune time, or to say it better, it is no longer a benefit, because it is no longer needed. That does not mean that one should give before the need arises, but prompt giving is done before necessity bites, before it can lead to foolishness or wickedness, before it lights in the face of the needy person the shame and the embarrassment of asking; because that is a penalty much greater and heavier than the money is worth. The charity which comes before the need to ask for it is much more worthy of thanks.

The laughter which St Paul hopes to see mixed with charity and alms, is the prompt reaction of the spirit which springs up in one's character, one's words and in one's whole attitude. The gift does not have to be decorated

with words, like the mad lover in the comedy tells his servant to do.<sup>151</sup> But one should show oneself to be eager and happy, because charity gives us the chance to do good. One should express the desire to give more than is needed, if it is just, because this desire should be released freely and without reserve.

It is appropriate to show what is not pleasing and what one should wish to see corrected or changed, because advice and remonstrations as we have said, are a superior type of alms to giving money. One should always strive to correct people in a way that does not make it appear that one is doing it because one does not like being asked for charity. Nor should it appear that you have taken the right to tell someone except because of their own fault, or through a good intentions and a good heart. If it seems that you are taking up the right just from the fact of having helped someone, the reprimand is worthless in

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<sup>151</sup> Moyardus identifies this as a reference to a play by Terence, *The Eunuch* (Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 159).



any case. It is better, particularly with men who are wary, to save the admonishment of another occasion, when one is not giving anything.

We can take no credit for giving a little, because what we give comes not from us, but we only return to God what is his. Better, give thanks that it has been permitted to us to use it, and think ourselves happy in seeing that we have obtained in this way the means to get such a great reward as eternal happiness. We must not diminish the benefit by throwing it in anyone's face, vaunting ourselves or recalling ostentatiously what we have done. In the end, we are not giving for men to see it, but only God. The less we expect from men, the more God will give us. If we want the reward of men, we will be denied that of God, and, most probably, what we expect from men. We should know, then, that this charity is more agreeable to God when it is shown only to him, because in that way they will not lead to human vanity. It is a good action to build and decorate the temples in which one gives

service to God, but I do not know what kind of vanity can slip into these affairs, even among men with good judgment, because why else would those who act solely for glory want us to talk about it? What passes only between the person who gives and the person who receives is much more pure, more saintly, agreeable and acceptable to God. One does not have to look for another witness, than the invisible one who sees everything. If you behave this way, it is absolutely certain that you want to be agreeable only to God, and you take no account of praises and vain glory. In this way, you guarantee yourself the heavenly Father as the most sure and noblest source of recompense, the only one you wish to be seen by. Let us listen above all to the Lord himself, speaking in Matthew:

Take heed that ye do not your alms  
before me, to be seen of them;  
otherwise ye have no reward of your  
Father which is in heaven.  
Therefore when thou does thine alms,

do not sound a trumpeter before thee,  
as the hypocrites do in the synagogues  
and the streets, that they may have  
glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they  
have their reward.

But when thou does alms, let not they  
left hand know what they right hand  
doeth.

That thine alms may be in secret: and  
they Father which seeth in secret  
himself shall reward thee openly. <sup>152</sup>

## **Book 2:**

### **On public relief**

#### **Chapter 1: How it is the responsibility of the ruler of a city to take care of the poor**

Until now, we have said what each individual should do; henceforth, we will deal with what is appropriate to a municipality and to the governor<sup>153</sup>, who is for it what the soul is for the body.<sup>154</sup> Just as the body cannot be fed or live only through in one of its parts, but as a whole, the magistrate must take care of everything in his city, and cannot neglect anything. Those who care only for the rich,

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<sup>153</sup> There is a considerable gap between the argument of Book 1 and this statement. Vives's critics, and later the Council of Trent, were to take exception to this position; they held that it does not necessarily follow, because there are moral obligations on individuals, that the same obligations fall to the state. Vives could have made the argument in Book 1, but he did not.

<sup>154</sup> The metaphor of the state as a body was well established (see Black, 1984).

holding poor people in contempt, are like a doctor who decides not to look after the hands and feet because they are a long way from the heart. In the same way as this cannot be done for a whole man without great problems, it is not possible in a republic to ignore the weakest and most poor without danger for the powerful; by force of necessity, they will become thieves. The judge may think knowing them is beneath him, but that does not matter. They envy the rich. They become indignant and angry with those who have so much excess wealth that they can maintain fools, dogs, whores, mules, horses and elephants, while they do not have what they need for their hungry little children. They are exasperated when the fortunate ones waste, insolently and proudly, the wealth which they have taken from them and others like them.<sup>155</sup> It is hard to believe how many civil wars have been set alight by such protests, in every

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<sup>155</sup> Erasmus shared the view that too much inequality corrupted the rich as well as the poor (Todd, 1987, p 133).

nation; the crowd, urged on by protests and carried away by hate, vent their anger first, and bloodily, on the rich. For example, the Gracchi and Lucius Catiline had no other motive for the revolt that they started.<sup>156</sup>

I do not need further to remind you of what has happened in our time, in our regions. It will be less upsetting to copy here a passage from Isocrates in the discourse which is called *Areopagiticus*, concerning the society of the republic of Athens.

In a similar manner they behaved in their relations towards one another. For they were not only in accord upon public matters, but, in regard to their

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<sup>156</sup> This were two distinct attempts to rebel against the Roman republic, before the successful rebellion of Julius Caesar. The rebellion of the Gracchi, in the second century BCE, was justified by a programme of land reform and redistribution to the populace - a cause to which one might have thought Vives would be sympathetic. By contrast, the Catiline conspiracy seems to have been mainly concerned with the pursuit of personal power.

private life, they showed such consideration for one another as befits men of sense and members of one and the same fatherland. Far from the poorer citizens envying the richer, they were as anxious about the wealthy families as about their own, considering their prosperity to be a source of advantage to themselves; while those who were possessed of means not only did not look down upon those who were in a humbler position, but, considering it disgraceful to themselves that the citizens should be in want, relieved their needs, handing over plots of land to some at a moderate rental, sending others out on business, and advancing capital to others for other occupations. For they were not afraid either of losing all, or with great difficulty recovering only a part of what had been lent, but felt as safe about the money put out as if it had been stored

away at home.<sup>157</sup>

So speaks Isocrates.

Let us move on to a problem mentioned before; the public danger which results from the spread of diseases.<sup>158</sup> We have often seen that a single man has brought a great, deadly illness into the city, which kills many people, such as plague, syphilis<sup>159</sup> or the like. It is inescapable that in any place of worship, whenever there is a solemn ceremony, one has to go in through two files of sick people, with putrid tumours, sores and other blights, too disgusting to name - but this is the only way through for children, young girls, old people and pregnant women. Do you think that people are so guarded against this, when they are fasting, going to confession or for some other

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<sup>157</sup> Isocrates, *Areopagiticus*.

<sup>158</sup> Vives is clearly saying that public health is a civic responsibility.

<sup>159</sup> The Latin version I was using has "French Scabies", and Mattheeussen and Fantazzi translate this as "Indian scabies". I have followed Travill (1987b).



reason, that they are not going to be moved by such a spectacle, by so many ulcers, not just what they see with their eyes, but by what comes into the nose, the mouth and almost the hands and body? Such is the cynicism of beggars! I will not mention that many who mix in the crowd have just come from the beside of one who has died of the plague. These matters should not be beneath the notice of the governors of a city; they ought to relieve diseases, if only to stop them spreading to many others.<sup>160</sup> It is not proper for a wise magistrate who cares about the public good to let a large part of the city become, not just useless, but dangerous to itself and other parts. When people's generosity is at an end, those in need do not have anything to eat. Some of them find themselves virtually obliged to become thieves in the town or on the roads. Others steal anything. Women who are old enough, putting all shame aside, caring nothing for their reputation, sell it anywhere at the

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<sup>160</sup> Vives is saying that the governors of a city have a responsibility for public health.

lowest price. It is difficult later to get them to give up such a bad way of living, and those who are advanced in age become procurers, with the evil-doing that usually goes along with that, or witches. The small children of needy people are educated in perversion. Fathers and sons, lying in front of churches or wandering round begging, take no part in the mass, don't listen to sermons, do not know what the laws are that govern their lives, and care nothing for faith or manners. For the Church, discipline has degraded so far, that nothing is done without a price. Everyone hates the idea of "selling", but they are obliged to render an account, and the bishops of the diocese do not consider that anyone is part of their flock who does not have a fleece to be sheared. <sup>161</sup>

Nobody ever sees the beggars go to confession or take communion, and as no-one teaches them, it is inevitable that they make very bad and mistaken judgments, that their

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<sup>161</sup> These are coals of fire. Vives is skirting perilously close to Lutheranism.

behaviour is disorderly and that if by chance they should become rich, they will be intolerable because of their base education. From here are born the vices that I have reported. In truth, they should be credited not to the poor, but to the magistrates. The rulers are not thinking of the government of the people as they must. They treat the republic as if they believed they were elected only to deliberate on issues concerning wealth and money, or to condemn criminals. On the contrary, it would be much better if they worked to produce good citizens rather than punish or restrain the bad ones. Would condemnation be less necessary if one tried first to cut off the root causes of evil, as early as possible? In ancient times, the Romans helped their citizens and looked after them so that none needed to beg, which was not otherwise allowed to them under the ancient prohibition of the "Law of twelve tables".<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Moyardus links this to another work by Vives, where it is explained that these were tablets of law which the Romans copied from the Greek laws of Solon

The Athenians understood the issues in the same way. The Lord gave the Jews a specially strong, hard law appropriate to a people of their character, but nevertheless, in Deuteronomy, He commanded them to take the care and make the effort, as far as they could, not to have any wretch or beggar, above all in the year of rest and quiet so agreeable to the Lord.<sup>163</sup> Let us note that we Christians are always in this year of quiet<sup>164</sup>, because it is for us that our Lord Jesus Christ was laid in his tomb with the old law and the “old man”, and he came to life for ever so that we could have new life and new spirit. It is absurd and shameful for Christians, for whom nothing has been asked so directly, I could almost say so uniquely, as charity, to find so many miserable people and beggars, at every step in our towns. Wherever you turn, you will see poverty, misery and many people who are obliged to

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(Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 161).

<sup>163</sup> Deuteronomy 15: 7-9.

<sup>164</sup> The Year of Release, when slaves were freed in Jewish law.

hold out their hand for you to give.

Truly, in the same way as a city renews itself, over time and with changes in fortune; as walls, ditches, parapets, streams, institutions, custom and laws themselves are changed or disappear; it would be just to renew the initial distribution of money, which over the course of time, has been breached in all sorts of ways.<sup>165</sup> Some wise men, who wanted the good of the city, have developed some helpful remedies, which we have done even in our epoch. They include cutting taxes, giving poor people common fields to cultivate, and publicly distributing excess money. But to do this, there have to be some occasions and possibilities, which arise rarely nowadays. We must therefore find other remedies which are more useful and long-term.

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<sup>165</sup> Nozick (1984) defends the outcome of legitimate transactions as being legitimate, even if they are very unequal; but he also suggests that some redress or compensation might be appropriate for past injustices, such as those done to native Americans. Vives is making a similar argument here, over 450 years beforehand.

## **Chapter 2: The collection of poor people and the census**

Someone may ask me: "How do you think that so many people can be helped?" If charity had some power to move us, that alone would be the law, and it would not be necessary to impose it on people who act through love. Charity would make everything held in common, and no-one would think of the needs of others differently from their own needs. Nowadays, no-one goes further than his own house; some do not go beyond their own room, or even beyond themselves. Many people detach themselves from parents, children, brothers or wives. When we see how little effect divine prescriptions have on some people, we are forced to resort to human methods to deal with destitution. In my view, this is the way.

Some of the poor live in what people call "hospitals" - in Greek *ptochotropia*, but I will use the more familiar term. Some beg

publicly. Others manage their needs as they can, in their own homes. I use the term hospitals for those establishments where sick people are nursed and care for, where a certain number of needy people are maintained, where boys and girls are educated, where children are brought up, where mad people are detained and where blind people pass their lives.<sup>166</sup> The governors of a city should know that all these things fall to their care.<sup>167</sup>

Let no-one make the pretext that the

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<sup>166</sup> Pullan explains that there was no clear distinction between hospitals, caring for the sick, hospices which received elderly and infirm people, and almshouses, which might also receive families (Pullan, 1988, p 188).

<sup>167</sup> Hospitals, in the sense in which Vives is using the term, had been generally founded through donations or bequests, and all were voluntary, in the sense of being independent of government. The statement that government had to take an interest was, therefore, controversial.

rules of the founders remain inviolate.<sup>168</sup> They do not have to be kept to the letter. They should be kept in equity, as we do with contracts made in good faith, and in intention, as we do with wills. There can be no doubt that these wishes were for the rents or the sums they bequeathed were given for the best possible use, and spent in the most worthy way. The founders did not worry too much about how it would be done or what form the

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<sup>168</sup> This is confusingly written in the original. Three other interpreters have seized on part of the phrase, that the wishes of the founders should remain inviolate (Tobriner, 1999, p 38; Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 97; Fernandez-Santamaria, 1998, p 156). I have taken it in the opposite sense, partly because Vives is dismissing the idea as an excuse, but also because I think that is the only way it can be read consistently with what comes before and after it. Vives seems here to be anticipating an objection, and this may indeed have been one of the key objections to removing the management of alms from established charitable foundations to the city. He repeats the argument in Book 2, Chapter 8: "We do not want to change the initial institution, but we do not accept that the wishes of the founders, in every will, are the primary, or the only, thing to respect."



charity would take. Nothing is so independent in a city that it should be beyond the knowledge of those who govern it. Not to be subject, not to obey, the community's magistrates is not a rational freedom; it is an invitation to savagery and a reason for anarchy. It is licence, which contaminates everyone who witnesses it. No-one can withdraw his goods from the care and the authority of the government of the city, without at the same time withdrawing from the city itself; it is not possible to withdraw one's own life, and that is higher and more important to people than goods are. The reasoning is stronger when one has been able to obtain and keep one's fortune through the care and protection of good government in the republic.

It follows that every one of these establishments should be visited and inspected. This should be done by two senators, accompanied by a scribe. They should note and verify the resources, the number and the names of those who live there,

and at the same time record the reasons why each person is located there. A report must then be made to the judges and the senate tribunal. Those who manage poverty at home should also be censused, together with their children.<sup>169</sup> Two deputies in each parish should note their needs, the manner in which they lived formerly, and how they came to be reduced to poverty. From the neighbours, it is easily established what kind of people they are, how they behave and what their customs are. However, they should not get information on one poor person from another poor person, because there is no shortage of envy.

By doing this, an account can be rendered to the judges and to the government. If it happens that some people have undergone some misfortune, they should let the tribunal know about it by way of one of its members, and appropriate action should be taken, according to the quality and condition of the

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<sup>169</sup> This was a mammoth undertaking. Bruges was not a small town; it may have had 50,000 inhabitants at this point (Tobriner, 1999, p 13).

needy person. Wandering beggars, who have no fixed abode, who are healthy, should declare their names before the judges and the governors, along with the reason which has forced them to beg. This should be done in some set place or open space, so that such a mob does not go into the house where the governors sit. Sick people should do the same before two or four senators, assisted by a doctor, so that the whole council does not have to see them. They should be asked to declare who knows them, and who can give witness about their life. Those officers whom the government chooses to examine and carry out these provisions should be given the power to order, to arrest, and even to imprison, so that the senators will know those who do not obey them.

### **Chapter 3: How food can be found for everyone**

Above all, we must recognise the law imposed by the Lord on all humankind: that is, that each

person should eat bread got through his own work. When I use the words “eat”, “feed” or “subsistence” I understand them to mean not just food, but also clothing, shelter, fuel, light and everything that is needed to keep the human body. No poor person who can work, according to his age and his health, should remain idle. St Paul wrote this to the Thessalonians:

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.<sup>170</sup>

The Psalmist offers happiness to those who eat what they have produced by their own

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<sup>170</sup> 2 Thessalonians 3 10-12.

hands, in this life and the next.<sup>171</sup> One should not then permit anyone to live idly in the city where, as in a well-governed household, everyone should have their role.

There is an old proverb, that "men who do nothing are learning to do evil".<sup>172</sup> Age and the want of health have to be taken into account; subject to the reservation that we are not deceived or that sickness is not an excuse, which often happens. To avoid it, the judgment of doctors should be referred to, and those who mislead should be punished. Where beggars are able-bodied, foreigners should be sent back to their cities or villages, as is already ordered by the Emperor's law<sup>173</sup>, but with provisions for a journey. It would be inhuman to send needy people away without the resources for the trip. If we act in this way, what else can they do but turn to theft? There

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<sup>171</sup> Apparently based on Psalm 127, verse 2

<sup>172</sup> Attributed to Cato (Stone, 1995).

<sup>173</sup> Bruges was subject to the law of the Spanish Emperor. The law referred to was a decree of 1515 (Nolf, 1915, p xvi).

are however villages and small areas afflicted and ravaged by war, and the people affected should be considered as fellow citizens.<sup>174</sup> The teaching of St Paul is that among those baptised by the holy blood of Christ, there are no Greeks, no barbarians, French or Flemish, but a new creature.

People born in the country should be asked if they know a trade. Those who do not know any, if they are old enough, should be instructed in the one which they are most suited to, if possible; if not, in the one which is nearest to it. For example, someone who cannot sew clothes can sew stockings. If he is of advanced age, or slow of thinking, he should be taught an easier trade, which can be taught in a few days, like digging earth, drawing water, carrying a load, pushing a cart,

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<sup>174</sup> This is a cursory treatment of a set of issues dealt with at greater length in the Ypres report. They have in common, though, a general view that there is a continuing responsibility to migrants even if this responsibility is less than for citizens, and that people who are displaced or stateless should be helped nevertheless.

accompanying the magistrate, helping him with some errands, carrying letters or instructions, or tending horses for hire. Those who waste their fortune in bad and stupid ways, like gaming, whoring, by luxury or on gluttony, still have to be fed because people cannot be left to starve. For those, however, the most unpleasant work should be reserved. They should be given less to live on, so that they serve as a lesson to others, repent of their former lives and do not easily fall back into the same vices. They must not die of hunger, but they should be limited by a frugal diet and hard work.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> The Basic Income European Network claims, somewhat questionably, that this passage identifies the roots of arguments for a basic income for all (BIEN, n.d.). It is admittedly more generous than some other provisions of the time: Zwingli had ordained that "The following types of poor citizens and country folk are not to be given alms: any persons, whether men or women, of whom it is known that they have spent and wasted all their days in luxury and idleness, and will not work, but frequent public houses, drinking places and haunts of ill repute. Such folk shall be given nothing in the way

There is no shortage of workshops where all these people can be admitted. In the region of Armentieres, those who work with wool - like most manufacturers - complain that workers are scarce. Those who make silk clothes in Bruges will take on some adolescents, if only to turn and roll spinners and scrapers; they will pay each one a sou a day above their keep. And they can find no-one who will accept, because according to their parents, children who go begging can bring more money back to the house.

The public authorities should assign those who cannot find work for themselves to particular manufacturers. If some of them are sufficiently proficient in their trade, they could

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of Poor Relief until they arrive at the last stage of destitution, and even then reference must be made to the Mayor and city council before settling what is to be done for them." (Salter, 1926, pp 100-1). However, it still falls short of an acknowledgement of the rights of the poor. More likely, it represents the same ethic as the New Poor Law, which held that paupers should receive a bare minimum, but thought that starving people would be scandalous (see Anstruther, 1973).



open their own workshop. To those, and to those who the magistrate assigns apprentices, should be commissioned the public works of the city. There are many works of this kind, such as pictures, statues, clothes, sewers, common areas, ditches and buildings. There are all the works which need to be done in the hospitals, which would mean that all the funds which the founders intended for poor people could be used by the poor. I would advise the same to bishops, colleges and abbots. I will write to them some other time, but I hope that they will do it anyway on their own initiative, without me or anyone else prompting them.

Those who have not been occupied in some house or by an employer, should be fed for a little time and supported with the alms that have been raised. In the meantime, however, work should not be neglected, if only to avoid them learning to be lazy from their inactivity. In the same establishment, one can provide meals to genuine able-bodied poor

people who are going on the road,<sup>176</sup> and provide them with the means of travel, or a small amount of assistance, which will be enough to get to the next town on their journey.

Those who stay at hospital when they are not ill are parasites living on the sweat of others, and they should be sent out to work. The exception are those who have a right to stay there, such as those who have a blood right, because their ancestors made provision in exchange for the good they were doing with the hospital, or by giving a large enough part of their fortune. However, such people should be made to work, so that the product of their work should be shared. If someone else who is strong and healthy wants to do the same, by attachment to the house or to his old companions, he should be allowed to do so on the same conditions.

It should not be allowed anyone to

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<sup>176</sup> The Talmud recommends that "The soup kitchen is for all comers, the charity fund for the poor of the town only." (*Tractate Baba Bathra* 8b)

draw profit from goods which were formerly bequeathed for the benefit of the poor. There are employees and servants of hospitals who have become its masters. Some women, admitted at the start only to serve, hold poor people in contempt and mistreat them, as if they were high ladies, and they live there in comfort. This should be taken away from them, and it should not be said that they grow fat with the basic substance of weak, thin paupers. They should meet the aim and the role for which they were admitted to the house: to occupy themselves in the service of sick people, like the widows in the early Church, who the apostles praised so highly. During their free time, they should pray, read, spin, weave and occupy themselves with some good, honest work, as St Jerome commands the richest and most noble ladies.

Even blind people should not remain idle. There are many things they can do. Some are good at letters and should study, because we see many make considerable progress in learning. Others have a talent for music and

sing or play string or wind instruments,. Some turn lathes and machines; others work at the presses. Some work at the bellows in the smithies. It is also known that blind people make boxes, baskets with and without handles, and cages. Blind women spin and wind yarn. They should not want not be unemployed and they do not shy from work. They find it easy to find something to occupy themselves; laziness, softness and not the fault of the body is the only reason they could claim for doing nothing. Sick and old people should be given easy things to work on, according to their age and their health. No-one is so ill that he lacks the strength to do anything at all.<sup>177</sup> In this way, occupied and focused on their work, the thoughts and bad practices which would otherwise be born in them will be restrained.

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<sup>177</sup> Fernandez-Santamaria reads this critically: "The blind, the infirm, the old: all are grist to the mill of Vives's work ethic." (1998, p 159) But Vives's views can also be read very positively; he has a remarkably high opinion of the competence and capacity of people who at other times and epochs have been dismissed as social refuse.

Once the hospitals have been cleared of the bloodsuckers, taking stock of their annual income and their wealth in money, the resources of each of these houses may be considered. Gifts and superfluous ornaments should be sold, which are more agreeable to children and misers than they are to pious people. Once this is done, each hospital should accommodate sick beggars who actually appear, with enough not to reduce them to such a small ration that they cannot even meet half their hunger. This has to be considered for sicknesses of the body and the soul, because both are made worse by lack of food. But they should not receive any luxuries, because they could easily form bad habits.<sup>178</sup>

Next, our subject brings us to those who

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<sup>178</sup> To a modern reader, this looks like the argument for minimum subsistence that informed the Victorian Poor Law. There is some evidence to support that interpretation - Vives uses the idea of subsistence in Book 2, Chapter 3 - but the comparison may be misleading. The argument here seems to be that those of lowly status should not receive more than their station merits.

are insane. Because there is nothing in the world more excellent than man, and nothing in man is more noble than understanding, it is necessary mainly to work for their welfare. To lead the understanding of others back to health, or to keep and strengthen it, should be considered the greatest benefit. If a man with a disturbed mind is brought to hospital, one can confirm if the madness is natural, or comes from some event, if there is hope of a cure or if the case is completely hopeless. We should be sympathetic to such a disease, and feel pain for such distress in the most noble thing in the human soul. Above all, for those who suffer in this way, one should try not to aggravate or reinforce madness. This happens with furious people, when they are mocked, provoked or teased. It happens with disordered people, when one pretends to accept their madness, when one approves what they say, or when people incite them to act ridiculously. This is what people do who provoke and excite madness and foolishness. Is there anything more inhuman than to make a fool of someone,

to laugh and make a game of such great misery? The necessary remedies should be applied for each person. Some people need relief and an ordered way of life<sup>179</sup>; some people will need gentle and friendly management, so that they can calm themselves little by little, like wild animals; others need instruction. There are some who will need punishment and restraints, but it needs to be done in a way that does not put them into more of a fury; above all, one should try to introduce some peace into their soul which will facilitates the restoration of reason and

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<sup>179</sup> The Latin is ambiguous: the words here have both a literal meaning and a more general abstract one. I have taken the abstract meaning; Mattheussen and Fantazzi favour the literal meaning, and render the phrase as "compresses and a special diet" (Mattheussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 107).

sanity.<sup>180</sup>

If there are not enough places for all the

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<sup>180</sup> Mental illness has long been regarded as the subject of fear and social rejection; in traditional societies it is often responded to with restraint and physical chastisement, while in the new industrial society it was the subject of confinement and forms of medical treatment that tended to be punitive. Vives, however, shows an understanding and determination to preserve the dignity of the mental patient which makes it hard to believe that he had not personally observed the issue in practice. (This passage also puts one of Vives's earlier writings in context. In his book *On the education of a Christian woman*, he suggests that a woman whose husband is deranged has to lead him along, while caring for him, tolerating him and discussing issues with him, and continuing to respect his wishes: Fantazzi, Mattheeussen, 1998, pp 51-3. Vives is sexist at times, but this is not one of those times.)

Vives's views on mental illness did not have any direct influence, but they do have a wider importance. Travill comments that "The most significant aspect of Vives's recommendations for the care and treatment of the insane or mentally retarded lay not in the obvious common sense of inherent humanism but rather in the municipal regulation of the facilities available for these functions." (Travill, 1987b, p 176)



sick beggars in hospitals, one or more houses should be established where, for as much as is needed, they can be received and helped by a doctor, a pharmacist and male and female nurses. In the same way as Nature itself acts, or like those who build ships - all the foulness is put in one place so that it does not cause problems for the rest of the body - those who are affected by some awful or contagious disease should sleep and eat separately from others, or they will communicate disgust and infection to others, and the illnesses will never end. Once someone is cured, he should be treated like others who are able-bodied and sent out to work, unless, moved by pity, he prefers to serve in the place where he is currently. For the poor who live at home, it is necessary to procure work or employment in public works; other citizens have no shortage of work to give them. If it turns out that their needs are greater than they happen to earn by work, one can add what is judged they lack.

The investigating officers should examine the needs of poor people with

humanity and good will. They should not be influenced by rumours.<sup>181</sup> They should not use violence with them, except in cases where they judge it necessary to take some measures against obstinate people and those who hold the government in contempt and resist it. This law should be established: if someone uses authority or exercises influence to divert money to a needy person, it should not be done, and the person should be subject to a fine judged appropriate by a magistrate. It should only be allowed to advise that someone is in need; for the rest, only the administrators of charity and those who the senate designates should decide, and alms should be given according to the urgency of the need. This should avoid the event that rich people, to save themselves the expense, obtain a part of what is intended for the poor to be given to their servants, families and relatives by blood or

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<sup>181</sup> There is a contrast here with the Ypres report, in Volume 2. The administrators at Ypres are concerned about rumours affecting the officers; Vives is concerned with rumours affecting service users.

marriage. This would deprive the most needy and would intervene to supplant the poor, which we have seen happening in hospitals.

## **Chapter 4: The care of children**

Vulnerable children should have a hospital where they are supported. Those whose mothers are known<sup>182</sup> would be raised by them until the age of six, then transferred to a public school where they would learn to read and write and good behaviour, and they would be maintained. This school would be run by honest men, as well educated as possible, who would communicate their practices to the basic school. Nothing creates greater risks for the children of poor people than a base, uncivil and vulgar education. The magistrates should spare no expense to engage such teachers, because if they come, they will bring to the city they govern a very greatest profit, and it will

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<sup>182</sup> Vives is not talking, then, only about abandonment.

cost them dear not to have it.<sup>183</sup> Children should learn to live temperately, clean and pure, and should content themselves with little. They should be kept away from all pleasures, so that they do not get used to delights and over-eating; they should not fall into the vice of gluttony, because when they lack something to satisfy their appetite, putting aside all reserve, they will give themselves up to begging, as we have seen many do when they lack, not just food, but sauce or something like it. They should learn not just how to read and write, but in the first place to practice Christian piety and to judge things righteously. I say the same about the school for girls, where the rudiments of first

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<sup>183</sup> The provision of education was cited by the Ypres magistrates as a justification for their scheme. The mendicant orders objected that it was not necessary to have a scheme of poor relief in order to establish a school (Nolf, 1915, p 65).

letters should be taught<sup>184</sup>; if someone is capable and applied to study, she should be allowed to devote more time to it, in a way that will lead to acquisition of the best habits. Girls should learn healthy opinions, piety and Christian doctrine, as well as to spin, sew, weave, embroider, running a kitchen and other domestic things; modesty, sobriety, politeness and propriety; and, most important, they should educate themselves in chastity, persuaded that this is uniquely good for women. The boys are gifted in letters should be kept at school to become teachers, or in the

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<sup>184</sup> Vives's commitment to basic education for male and female is strongly in contrast with earlier views. His views in *On the education of Christian women* (Fantazzi, Mattheeussen, 1998) or even those in the following paragraph, are likely nowadays to be seen as patriarchal; but what is striking, for the period, is that he thought that women should be literate and educated, and that he was prepared to extend that to all social classes. "A dull-witted woman is of no advantage to a dull-witted husband ... Who will look after the property? Who will bring up the children? Who will educate them?" (Fantazzi, 2006, p 63)

seminary to become priests. As for the others, they should be sent to learn a trade according to their inclinations.

## **Chapter 5: Censors<sup>185</sup> and their role**

Each year censors will be appointed from the senate. They should be two members of the magistrates, very serious, and commendable

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<sup>185</sup> This is equivalent to the role of the “prefect” in the Ypres report; the word chosen by Marshall for his translation of the *Forma Subventionis Pauperum* was “overseer”.

for their integrity.<sup>186</sup> They should inform themselves of the life and customs of poor people, whether they be children, young men or elderly. They should know what the children do, how they are progressing, what are their habits and character, what they might become, and, if some of them sin, whose fault it is. All this has to be corrected.

The censors should take care to know if

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<sup>186</sup> When Bruges had introduced a scheme to control able-bodied beggars in 1496, it gave the task to three citizens (Nolf, 1915, p xvii). Douai had five people responsible for its long-established community chest (Nolf, 1915, p lviii); that number was imitated by Antwerp in 1521, and by Lille when they set up their scheme in 1527. Luther had ordained a membership of ten: "two honourable men, two from the governing council, three from the common burgesses of the town, and three from the peasants of the land." (*Ordinance on a common chest*, in Salter, 1926). That would make Vives's recommendation for two people unusual, but for an exception. The Talmud had considered that "Any office conferring authority over the community must be filled by at least two persons", and that this must apply to the organisation of charity (*Tractate Baba Bathra* 8b).

young and old people are living according to the laws they have been made aware of. They should enquire carefully about old women, who are the most likely to become pandars or to occupy themselves with witchcraft. They should know whether everyone conducts themselves with economy and temperance. They should reprimand those who spend time at games of chance or who frequent wine or beer taverns. If one or two warnings are not enough, they should be punished. Penalties will be imposed according to the judgment of those who, in each town, are most prudent; the same rules do not work in every place or time, and people are affected differently by different things. Special care must be taken to protect against frauds by idle people and malingerers, so that they do not have the chance to cheat.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Vives is aware, then, of a problem of fraud; the Ypres report thinks about this fraud only in the context of fraudulent begging, not of fraudulent use of the system.



I should want, too, for the censors to be aware of children and young people among the rich. It would be very useful for the city if they could account to the magistrates, as the fathers of the city, how, in arts or business, they are using their time, This would be a better form of charity than redistributing thousands of florins among the poor. In ancient times, the Romans did this through the function of censors, and the Athenians through the role of the Areopagites. When the integrity of these customs fell into disuse, the emperor Justinian re-established the function in the role of the Quaestor<sup>188</sup>, with the order that it should apply to every individual. Everyone, clergy and lay, should be asked who they are, where they come from and why. A law like this allows no-one to live in idleness.

## **Chapter 6: About the money needed for these expenses**

Someone may say, this is all very well: but

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<sup>188</sup> Cicero had been a Quaestor, but his orations refer to the role only obliquely.

where will the money come from for all this? I have no fear that the money will not be there; on the contrary, I can see clearly that there will be more than enough, not just for the everyday needs, but for the extraordinary ones which every city finds itself having to deal with in large numbers.<sup>189</sup> Once, when the blood of Christ was still warm, everyone laid their wealth at the feet of the apostles for them to distribute according to the needs of each person. The apostles subsequently gave up this task, because it interfered with their ministry, as it was more appropriate for them to spend their time preaching and teaching the Gospel rather than receiving and distributing money. This duty fell to the deacons, but they did not

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<sup>189</sup> There is a resonance here with recent social policy. From the 1970s onwards, provision for “exceptional” needs in the UK was put under considerable pressure because of the frequent, routine occurrence of such circumstances. The key problem is that where people’s income is generally inadequate, they cannot make provision for unexpected items, and are particularly vulnerable to contingencies like sickness or interruption of earnings, even where those contingencies might be reasonably predictable.

keep to it for long, because they had such a great desire to increase piety and religion, and to rush towards the eternal benefits they would get by a glorious death. Consequently, it was left to lay Christians to obtain and collect the money required for people in need. As the number of Christians increased, and many people with few virtues were admitted to the faith, some of them took on this business with no standards. Bishops and priests, who were moved by charity towards the poor, took back the duty of managing the riches that have been received for assistance to the poor. The bishops of that time were righteous and of a faith that was known and tested, and there was no reason not to have confidence in them. This is reported by John Chrysostom. However, the fervour from the bleeding wounds of Christ gradually cooled, and the spirit of the Lord was maintained only by a few. The Church came to rival the world in splendour, luxury and pomp. St Jerome complained in his time that provincial governors dined with more splendour in a monastery than in a palace. This expense called for a lot of money, and some

bishops and priests turned the money which had belonged to the poor into personal wealth and income. May the spirit of God touch them, and remind them why they have what they possess, who gave them it, for what reason. They should remember that they only hold power thanks to the wealth of those who have none. Their duty is to teach, to counsel, to correct people in the things that concern their souls, and to heal the body. They would do so, if they trusted in Christ as much as they exhort others to trust in Him. But this is a common evil. We all demand severely from others, the good that we are not ready to do ourselves.

It is also their duty to help unfortunates, however little one has, like St Paul; and to be perfect in charity, doing everything for the good of all. Without condemning poor people, they should make themselves humble to help them. They should do it by means of prayer and the word of Christ, to illuminate others. without giving way to the powerful. If abbots, and other higher churchmen, wanted to, they could relieve a large proportion of those in need, with their

massive incomes. If they will not, they will account to Christ.

It is necessary to avoid riot and civil disorder, which is one of the great problems of those who divert the wealth of the poor. No sum of money, however great, should be esteemed to the point of taking up arms to defend it. Everything should be done for public peace, as Christ, and saint Paul after his master, commanded. Poor people should not want to raise a tumult in the city to get assistance. The state of their poverty should make them dead to the world, keeping in mind the purpose of our sojourn in this life. Poor Lazarus received woe in this life, and because of that he is now in bliss and will be for ever.<sup>190</sup>

An annual account should be made of

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<sup>190</sup> Apparently a reference to Luke 16:25.

the income of hospitals.<sup>191</sup> From those, one will doubtless find that, taking into account what is made from the work of poor people who have enough strength, not only will the income be enough for those who are in the hospitals, but it will be possible to distribute the income to others outside.<sup>192</sup> The wealth of hospitals everywhere is so great that if it is well administered and allocated, it will be more than enough to meet all the needs of the citizens, both routine and exceptional. Rich hospitals should give their excess to others which are less well endowed; if they in turn do not need it, they should give it to the hidden

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<sup>191</sup> The hospitals were independent foundations, and they did not necessarily have accountable structures of management. The implication of the previous arguments is that the accounts should be presented to someone in authority - the senate or the censors. This is, then, a radical suggestion, but Vives does not consider either the mechanisms or the implications. The *Forma Subventionis Pauperum*, considered in volume 2, does.

<sup>192</sup> Vives's reservations about the compulsory redistribution of individual income do not extend to institutions.

poor.

Christian charity should not be spread only by the whole city, which will be transformed into a house of union and harmony, where each person is the friend of all. It should go beyond the city, embracing the whole of Christianity. This will make a reality of what we read in the writings of the Apostles:

And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul. Neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own: but all things were common unto them. ... For neither was there any one in need among them.”<sup>193</sup>

So, when rich hospitals, like rich men, do not find anyone in their own cities to whom part of their wealth can be distributed, it would be just to go out to neighbouring villages and beyond, where needs are greater. This is what

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<sup>193</sup> Acts 4:32, 34.

true Christians should do.

The government should appoint two wardens for each hospital. They should be respectable men, distinguished by a great fear of God. These men should account every year to the magistrate for their administration, and if their good faith is approved, they should continue with their duty; if not, new people should be appointed.<sup>194</sup>

Everyone, when they die, leaves something for the needy, according to their means. They should be counselled to hold back on the pomp of the burial to help the poor. Funerals on this basis are more agreeable to God, and they have no less merit in the eyes of men. Anyway, those who are going from this life to life eternal should not be worrying about glory or praise, but for that which comes from God. At some burials, meat and bread are distributed, with money for those who carry a document, or who have some sign of recognition that has been given for the

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<sup>194</sup> This is a clear statement of a mechanism for accountability and review. The Ypres report in volume 2 is much more explicit about such mechanisms.



purpose. This allocation, at funerals and at the end of the year, should be left to the judgment of the executors. But after that, the method of distribution of money which is left to the church should be in the charge of prefects and the administrators of charity, so it is not given to those who do not need it. If this is not enough, collecting boxes should be placed in the three or four main temples in the town, the most often visited, so that each person can throw in whatever their devotions inspire them to.

Everyone prefers to give a greater sum - say ten sous at a time - rather than giving a couple of small coins to wandering beggars. These boxes will not be left every week, but only when they are needed. The two men who should look after the boxes should be chosen by the senate. They should be honest and proven: not so much rich, as of a character without greed or avarice. This quality should be demanded above all from those who take on the responsibility. The money to be collected should not be the maximum possible, but enough for each week, and a little more in

times of need. They should not get used to managing a large sum of money, in the way that wardens of hospitals do. I do not know what happens here in Flanders, and I have not tried to find out, being wholly given up to my studies. In Spain, however, I have heard talk of some who had expanded their own houses with income from hospitals, looked after themselves and their own instead of the poor, filling their houses with members of their family while emptying the hospitals of poor people. This is the result of too much money, too soon. No plans should be made to make investments for the poor, because, on this pretext, when the administrators of hospitals do not spend the money straight away, they hold it back, either to put together enough to get a good investment, or until they are able to buy. While they wait, the poor rot in misery and die of hunger. If there is a large sum of money in the possession of those who administer public alms, it should be taken away, as I have suggested, to be sent to those places where it is most needed. A great sum of money leads people to want to increase it;

those who manage it are sorry to see part of it go, if it is only for a small expense. The amount that is needed should be trusted to the senate, consecrating and solemnising its remit, the trust and receipt of the money with the condition not to use it for other purposes. It should be spent at the first practical occasion; they must not get used to keeping large sums for longer periods.

There will never be a lack of poor people, according to the word of the Lord: “The poor you will always have among you”.<sup>195</sup> Priests should never keep money from the poor on the pretext of religion and the celebration of masses; they have enough to live on, and do not need more. If it should happen that there is not enough in alms, the rich should be approached and asked to help the

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<sup>195</sup> John 12:8.

poor, as God tells them to do.<sup>196</sup> At the least, they should lend what is needed, to be returned to them faithfully if they insist, when charity is more abundant.

Besides that, the body of the city should hold back public spending, such as feasts, presents, pomp, gifts, anniversaries, ceremonies and all those things that are only done for pleasure, pride and ambition. I have no doubt that a prince, arriving at any town, would find it good and would be pleased to be received with less pomp, if he knew how that the money which would have been spent on his visit had been used for godly purposes. And if he did not think it was well spent, he would be really stupid and vain.

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<sup>196</sup> This is the least realistic aspect of Vives's arguments; it would have relied on raising the largest sums of money at the time when the economy of the city was least able to sustain it. The stress on ad-hoc voluntary finance did, however, meet the requirement of the religious establishment for the maintenance of individualised charity, and the Ypres report stretches the argument later to assure the Faculty of Theology that the principle of voluntary charity has not been undermined.

If the city does not do this, when it has the funds, at least it should grant loans which will be reimbursed when charity increases. Charity should be given absolutely freely, as Saint Paul says: everyone should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion.<sup>197</sup> People cannot be forced to do good, because otherwise the very idea of charity and welfare will perish.

Although there is no doubt that these funds will be enough, we should not depend only on human strength. We should trust ourselves only to the divine. The goodness of God will always help holy efforts. He will multiply the wealth of rich people who give alms; and increase the assistance given to poor people, when it is demanded discreetly, received religiously and distributed soberly and wisely. The Lord, who is Lord of Earth and everything in it, takes care of all. He creates abundance for our use, and He asks only true, timely good will, and a feeling of recognition

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<sup>197</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:7, a repetition from Book 1 Chapter 11. The principle of voluntary charity was central to the theological arguments of the time.

for such enormous benefits. There are many examples of men who have begun saintly work apprehensively, without hope that their strength or resources would be enough for the purpose. But once the work is under way, the capital increases so that those who are managing the business can only wonder by what secret and unexpected ways such great increases have been achieved.

Recall one example, which is worth many, from the school for your poor children. Ten years ago, you started, from small beginnings, and only eighteen children could be maintained. Currently, there are already about a hundred children, and there are enough funds to maintain many more.<sup>198</sup> If others come, nothing will be lacking. One can see that everything feeds, keeps itself, lives and survives not by wealth, personal skill or human advice, but by the generosity of God. You should know that to undertake works of religion, you should not consider only what you can do yourself and stop with that, but

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<sup>198</sup> This was the Bogaarden School (Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p xxi).

believe in what everyone can do. Poor people who do not work learn not save much for the long term, because this leads to false security and reduces trust in the Lord. They should not trust in the assistance of men, but only in Christ, who urges us to leave our survival to His care and the care of His Father, who feeds and clothes those who do not sow, or reap, nor weave, or spin.<sup>199</sup> Poor people should make their life like the angels, both for themselves and for those who they help, because the Lord Jesus is committed to pay them back a hundredfold in eternal goods.<sup>200</sup>

## **Chapter 7: On those who are afflicted with some hidden or unexpected need**

We should not only try to relieve poor people who lack what they need on a daily basis, but also those who find themselves suddenly in great distress. Examples include prisoners of war, imprisonment for debt, fire, shipwreck, flood, the many kinds of disease, and the

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<sup>199</sup> Matthew 6:25-32.

<sup>200</sup> Matthew 19:29.

countless events which afflict honest households and families. It is just as important to occupy oneself with poor girls, who are obliged sometimes by their poverty to abandon their decency.<sup>201</sup> In any town, not just Christian but pagan too, while people are able to consume riches to the point of spending thousands for a tomb, a tower or a folly, or on banquets and other extravagances, it is not tolerable that the chastity of a virgin, the health and life of an honest man should be put at risk for fifty or a hundred florins. Nor should a husband be forced to desert his wife and children.

Those in captivity have to be ransomed, a duty which the ancient philosophers like Aristotle and Cicero counted as among the most important.<sup>202</sup> Among them, the first who should be considered are those who have been enslaved by their enemies, such as Christians

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<sup>201</sup> That is, prostitutes.

<sup>202</sup> This repeats the point from Book 1, Chapter 3. In this context, though - where Vives is talking about a scheme of welfare - he seems to be implying that the city will pay ransom for its citizens held elsewhere.



in the power of Mohammedans, who are in continual risk of their faith. Then there are merchants and those who, having no arms to defend themselves, have fallen into enemy hands. Last are those who bear arms, who are the cause of many problems. Among poor people in prison come first those who, through bad luck or their own fault, have fallen into poverty and cannot pay their debts. Then there are long term prisoners.<sup>203</sup> One needs great and special compassion for those who were happy, who have fallen into poverty through no fault of their own: partly because it should warn us, and be an example to us, that the same thing could happen to us tomorrow, and partly because they are suffering a greater unhappiness, because they hold the memory of past happiness.

We should not expect those who have been honourably educated to reveal their needs. They need to be traced with care and relieved discreetly, as reports suggests many have been. One can cite the case of Arcesilaus.

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<sup>203</sup> Prisons were mainly used for debt rather than for punishment.

One of his friends had been stricken by poverty and disease, and hid them for shame. While he was sleeping, Arcesilaus placed a great sum of money under the pillow, so that when he woke up he would find enough to relieve him without being embarrassed by his poverty.<sup>204</sup> When those who are being relieved have been raised to be proud and prudent, they should not be humiliated or embarrassed, and relief should not be more of a burden than the benefit is useful or agreeable to them.<sup>205</sup> The people who are charged with the care of parishes should seek out hidden needs, and they should make them known to the government and to rich people, holding back the names of those who are suffering until the relief is given. At that point it should be revealed, so that no-one should suspect the

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<sup>204</sup> This story comes from Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, Book 2:10. Coincidentally, discreet giving is also one of the points approved by Maimonides: "The greatest sages used to walk about in secret and put coins into the doors of the poor." (Maimonides, 1180)

<sup>205</sup> The Talmud advises: "It had been better that you had not given him, than now that you have given him publicly and put him to shame." (*Tractate Chagigah*, 5a)

intermediary by whom the charity has been given, unless the dignity of the person in need is so great that their identity should not be revealed for risk of shame.<sup>206</sup>

Well, you may say, if one has to relieve those people as well, there will never be an end to giving. Is anything more desirable than to give without limit? I should think rather that you might complain that the moment will come when no-one is poor and there is no-one left to give to. You might hope, for the good of your neighbour, that no-one should need aid; but for your own good, you should hope that the opportunity should always be there to exchange worldly goods, which are temporary and subject to circumstances, for eternal bliss. That is how it appears to me that things really are.

Perhaps it appears that this does not apply in every city, at every time. The wise men of different peoples should think and

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<sup>206</sup> The existence of a provision for confidentiality in these terms was the subject of some controversy in Ypres, where it was seen as leading to some inequity (Nolf, 1915).

consider the question relative to their community, and they should be moved by a deep love for their country. I believe that always, and everywhere, people should share the aim, the goal and the end that I have proposed. If it cannot all be done at the same time, because received custom and practice are opposed to innovations, it is possible to use some judgement and to introduce at the beginning the simplest measures, and only later, little by little and unnoticed, the more difficult ones.

## **Chapter 8: Of those who will disapprove of these new institutions** <sup>207</sup>

While it is true that virtue is a beautiful thing, worthy of emulation, virtue has its enemies.

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<sup>207</sup> Fernandez-Santamaria thinks that this whole chapter is "disingenuous" (1998, pp 167-8). Vives cannot have been unaware of the real political objections to his scheme - that it undermined the role of church, and that it sought to do away with begging, which was the practical focus of that role. He does not address either of those issues.

They do not see its beauty and generosity, because it is odious to them and contrary to their customs and pleasures. The world makes war, and still declares that it follows the law of Christ. His enlightenment drives out shadows and is unbearable to the weakened eyes of the worldly. In the plan that I have been discussing, everything points to relief for the needs of men and helping the poor population, as anyone who is not unfair will judge. In spite of this, there is no shortage of people who will find something to blame in the argument, or at least will be biased. Some people will only hear that paupers are being removed. They will think that it they are being driven away, and that it is inhuman to push away unfortunates like this, as if we were excluding them or trying to make them more miserable. This is not what we have in mind. They have be delivered from misery, tears and misfortune without end, so that they can be treated as human beings who are worthy of charity.

Some people want to present themselves as theologians. They cite the passage of the Gospel, taking the prophecy of

Christ, our Lord and God, literally: “The poor you shall always have with you”.<sup>208</sup> What do we make of that? Did He not also say that there would be scandals, and Saint Paul, that there would be heresies? Should we not help the poor, avoid scandal and resist heresy because it would make Christ and Saint Paul look like liars if we did otherwise? God forbid! Christ did not say that there would always be poor people because he wanted it to be true, nor that scandals would happen because he liked them. On the contrary, he urged us to give assistance to poor people, and cursed those who cause scandals. He knew the weakness of our spirit, which would make us turn from poverty, and the ill will that meant people would not relieve someone who had fallen into poverty promptly, leaving him unable to move and exhausted. That is why he said we would always have the poor with us. The same is true of scandals. As for heresies, Saint Paul had the same reason to predict them, because he knew this would spring from the nature of man,

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<sup>208</sup> John 12:8.

corrupted and soiled by numerous vices. He still wanted us to meet them and oppose them when they emerged, as he told Titus: bishops should be powerful in holy teaching, to dispute with those who would contradict it.<sup>209</sup> By his predictions, Christ was not telling us that we should act this way; he was only telling us how we would act.

In the same way, we are not trying to push poor people away, but to support them. We are not taught that no-one should be poor, but that they should not be poor for long, because we should hold out a hand to relieve poverty. I hope we might achieve the state where no-one is poor in this city. There is no fear or danger than Christ might have lied, or that He might be mistaken; there will always be plenty of poor people somewhere else. And some people are poor, not for lack of money, but because they lack physical strength, health, intelligence or judgment, as we explained at the beginning of our work. It should be added that one can also justly describe people as

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<sup>209</sup> Titus 1:9.

poor for want of money if they receive, while in hospital, or their own home, a small benefit which is not earned by their work or their job, but only through the benevolence of others.<sup>210</sup>

Who is acting more inhumanely?

Someone who wants poor people to choke on their refuse, their dirt, vice, wantonness, immodesty, wickedness, ignorance, madness, misfortune and all their wretchedness? Or those who see the means and ways to pull them out of such a miserable state and lead them to a more polite, pure and wise life, making men out of those who, without it, would have stayed useless and lost? We behave as the art of medicine does; it does not remove all the diseases of mankind, but cures

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<sup>210</sup> This reinforces the earlier identification of poverty with dependency.



them as much as it can.<sup>211</sup> May the law of Christ work in our souls and our hearts, may it be more effective than our medical knowledge; There should be no poor among us, as there were none in the foundation of the Church, as Luke says in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>212</sup> There were no scandals and no heresies. However, as our wickedness prevails, and men do not profess the name of Christians in their hearts and their actions in the way they do with their mouths, there will never be a lack of heresies, scandals or poverty.

There are some, as there usually are in public office, who approve of nothing that they have not begun themselves. They want to be thought wise, and so gain authority for themselves. There are some who take a bad

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<sup>211</sup> This looks like a throwaway remark, but Travill suggests that Vives made a more detailed study of medicine and health care as part of his general approach to learning: a learned person would be expected to know such things (Travill, 1987a). Certainly Vives recommends that anatomy and dissection should be a part of the educational curriculum (Watson, 1913, p 221).

<sup>212</sup> Acts 4:32, already cited in Book 2 Chapter 6.

view, not just of men, but of God Himself. They believe, or want others to believe, that the Lord, who they claim takes note of their work, has invested all the forces of intelligence, judgment and prudence in them. Job, mocking such men, tells them: "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you."<sup>213</sup> I do not deny that there are some who have such advantages in their mind, their approach, the liveliness and the acuity of their judgement, who think and meditate, who invent what almost no-one else could. For all that, thinking that it all comes from oneself, and that you are always the best, is the character of a prideful man and even, as Terence says, a pretentious one, who holds that nothing is done right unless he has done it himself.<sup>214</sup>

There are however two classes of men, who I think are dangerous. The first comprises those to whom the fruits of charity will be directed; the other is those who are removed from the administration of relief.

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<sup>213</sup> Job 12:2.

<sup>214</sup> Moyardus identifies the source as Terence, *The Brothers* (Mattheeussen, Fantazzi, 2002, p 167).

There are those who, being used to their dirtiness and their abject wretchedness, find it hard to pull themselves out of it. They are held back by a false attachment to their lazy idleness, and think it is a fate worse than death to be active, to work or to be diligent and temperate. It is a thankless task to do good for men who are so wicked that they consider charity to be an insult. Is anything more odious, to gather benefits with pride, as if they were weighting it, while they view it as offensive? This vice is like that of the Jews who persecuted the author of all life to His death, because he burdened them with benefits, helped them, and brought them health, salvation and light. In return for his generosity towards all those who wanted to take advantage of it, they covered him in ignominy. They were seized by pride, arrogance, ambition and avarice, thinking it an affront to be freed from their cruel masters; and in the same way, these people are hardened to dirt, ugliness, impudence, laziness and vice, and think they are being sold into slavery if they are offered a better state. We should imitate

Christ, and not hold ourselves back from doing good because of the ingratitude of those who are receiving favours and support. It is not a question of whether people want to get help, but whether they ought to have it. They will understand the benefit when they come to their senses. Then they will say, "the Senate of Bruges saved us against our will". If you give way to their wishes, if you satisfy their desires, then if they open their eyes and have some discernment, even if it is only for a moment, they will say: "The Senate killed us, because they did what we wanted rather than what they ought to have done." This is the kind of complaint made by a son against his father, when he has been brought up too indulgently. In time, they will hate those who have led them to their perdition. This is not how it should be. Let us act as wise doctors do with patients who rave, and as wise fathers do with their bad sons, to work for the benefit and profit of those even when they protest and resist. At the end of the day, the office of governor of the republic is not to take account of what one person, or even a few, regret about

the government and the laws, if they have been formed for the good of all the city. Laws are useful even for the wicked, either because they correct them, or because they mean they can no longer continue to do evil.

Those who have been managing funds for the poor will find it wrong that they are deprived of the work. The great and noisy words they will use to exaggerate the damage go something like this: things that have been confirmed and approved over many years should be left alone; it is dangerous to innovate around established practice; the statutes of the founders must be respected; or that otherwise will lead to total ruin. To this we first reply: why should good practices not be able to undo what bad ones have done? I am sure that they will not dare to enter a dispute about which are better, the measures we want to take or those they want to keep. And if nothing should be changed, why is it that they have altered the instructions of their founders little by little, until they are doing something the seems inconsistent with them? If the registers are checked, if one consults with the

memories of ancient times, we will find how much the present method of administration differs from the way it was at the foundation, when the founder was still alive or shortly before he died. We do not want to change the initial institution, but we do not accept that the wishes of the founders, in every will, are the primary, or the only, thing to respect.<sup>215</sup> The acts and memory of many people bear testament to the initial institution. The intention was not to see these good men leaving money and annual income to support the rich, but to assist the poor, with the obligation to pray for the soul of the dead person, so that, free and purified of its sins and the penalties, it would be received by God in his heavenly domain. If these people insist otherwise, they only prove that they are defending their own interest, not that of the poor; because they are opposing us from taking responsibility for the poor. What are they thinking of, at the end? If they are hardened in their avarice, and declare openly

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<sup>215</sup> Compare Book 2, Chapter 3.

that they are administering for themselves and not for the poor, this avarice is not just contemptible, but wicked and hateful. If it is a crime to take something from a rich person, how much more wicked is it to take it from the poor? From the rich person one is only taking money, but from the poor person one is taking life itself. If they are really thinking of the poor, and the Senate wants to help them more broadly and effectively, why should they care who does it, so long as it is done and done fairly? They should have confidence in the Senate. As long as Christ is preached, says St Paul, it does not matter how, as long as he is preached.<sup>216</sup> If they want to have the care of the poor for themselves, as long as they have God in view, they have only to follow his will. If they are thinking about the regard of men, their ambition is revealed. Can they complain if you are not the ministers or instruments of their ambition or avarice, or that you are not favouring them by agreeing to their role? I will ignore the rest, of whom one could ask that

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<sup>216</sup> e.g. Philippians 1:16-18.

they render an account for everything they have administered over so many years. Let us not stir up the pond, and leave the mud alone. They should consider that the most honorable course is not to resist, not to retain the money stubbornly that has been entrusted to them, and their power should be removed. Their views should be brought together with that of the city, and they should be as well disposed to the good of the public, as if it were their own.

## **Chapter 9: How nothing should stop us from doing what we have said**

In every kind of virtue, we will encounter many great and happy things which are recognised with seriousness and dignity by the ancients. However, nothing has been stated with as much confidence and force as the thing which they have fixed and established as fundamental themselves: respect for one's country, love and charity for one's fellow citizens. They bore, with an unswerving equanimity, the rumours, unjust interpretations, calumnies and insults by word



and deed, without turning a hair, as one says, from their determination to serve their country, even when they were criticized or condemned by those who they were saving with all their might. The most important amongst them were Miltiades, Themistocles and Scipio, but there were two others: Epaminondas of Thebes and Quintus Fabius Maximus of Rome.<sup>217</sup> The last of them, when he saw that Hannibal could not be conquered by force, but by the use of delay, made war over time without declaring it or admitting the battle, because he understood that only this

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<sup>217</sup> These are all soldiers, as if to say that the Senate needs to gird its loins for battle. Miltiades, Themistocles and Scipio were generals associated respectively with famous battles at Marathon, Salamis and Zama (where Hannibal was defeated). Epaminondas led the defeat of the Spartans for Athens, and Quintus Fabius Maximus is Fabian, famous for outwaiting Hannibal. If Vives was, as Guy argues, a pacifist (1972, pp 113-22 and 192-4), this is a strange choice of metaphor. Certainly, in his other writing he expresses a horror of war and its consequences, and a mistrust of the military; but it is possible he was trimming his argument to the audience.

would lead to victory. His behaviour was condemned by many lazy or maliciously hostile men, who thought that he had made a secret agreement with Hannibal; or that he acted from ambition, so that he could hold the command of the army longer, or become dictator; or that he behaved in this way because of cowardice or fear. They tried to depose him from command. Minicius, a commander of cavalry, was treated as equal to Fabius, the dictator, which was quite unprecedented. The old man ignored the insults and the stupidity of his fellows, and continued as he had begun. He saved his people who would have certainly fallen into the hands of Hannibal without the wisdom and strategy of Quintus Fabius.<sup>218</sup> The opinion of

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<sup>218</sup> This seems to be an exhortation to the Senate to be determined, but the terms it is being put in are oblique. It is difficult for a modern reader not to relate the passage, however anachronistically, to a later group, who adopted exactly the same metaphor: the Fabian Society, who stood for slow, gradual, inexorable social reform. The characteristic mode of argument in Fabianism was to combine moral argument with practical methods to realise the

everyone was that this great man's success was inspired by courage, prudence, patriotism and love of citizens, and he became very famous. These lines written about him; they are old and roughly worked, but they contain a magnificent and moving elegy.

One man, by delaying, restored the state to us.  
Reputation did not take precedence over security.  
Therefore his glory shines brighter and brighter. <sup>219</sup>

Others have behaved in the same way. They have done this without thinking of God, because they were pagans and were not enlightened by the sun of Christianity. They acted only through their education, their reputation or the honour and the good of their

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objectives. In those terms, Vives was identifiably and explicitly a Fabian nearly four hundred years before the society was formed.

<sup>219</sup> The words, written by Ennius, are quoted in Cicero's *De Officiis*, Chapter 24.

city.

How much more so, then, should we undertake great and excellent things, inspired by Christ. We should ignore, mistrust and disdain the force of human beings. We have been illumined by the brightest sun, and taught the holy doctrine. He recommended and ordered us to give charity, threatening us with the greatest punishment if we did not do it, and promising us a great reward if we did. He also said that if we suffer difficulties as a result, the reward will be so much the greater. Our advice is worthy not just of approval, but of being adopted and put into practice; it is not enough to want to do good if one does not set one's hand to the task when the opportunity arises. Human obstacles should not stop us, when we are urged by divine teaching, especially when for each and all of us there are advantages, both human and divine.

## **Chapter 10: The divine and human advantages that would result from these institutions**

These are the advantages which, it seems to me, would arise from this arrangement. The human benefits are first. It would be a great honour for the city in which no-one is seen begging. The crowd of beggars is a sign, for the citizens, of malice and inhumanity, and for the magistrates, of neglect of the public good. There will be fewer thefts, crimes, robberies, murders, and capital offences, while prostitution and witchcraft will be rarer, because the need which mainly pushes people to vice and degraded morals will be less.

When everyone is provided for, there will be greater harmony. The poorest person will not envy the richest, but on the contrary will see him as his benefactor. The richest will not look at the poorest person with suspicion, but will love him as the object of his favours and his charity, because nature itself urges us to love those who we favour. In this way, one kind of grace generates another. It will be less

dangerous to health and more agreeable to go to church or anywhere else in the town without having to see at every step the ugly sores and illnesses which are horrifying to nature and to the charitable and humane spirit. Those who are unfortunate will not be pressed to give or put on the spot; if they want to give something, they will not hold back because of the great mass of beggars or because they fear to give to someone who is unworthy. The city will achieve a great benefit in seeing its citizens becoming more modest, more civil and more sociable. They will love it because it has helped them and they will not think of change, sedition or riot. Women will be protected from promiscuity, young girls delivered from peril, and old women will not think of witchcraft. Children will be instructed in literacy and religion, in temperance, arts and crafts, so that they can live decently, honestly and virtuously. In fine, everyone will gain in lawfulness, good sense and piety; men will talk to each other politely and civilly, as human dignity demands; they will have, and will keep, hands free from evil. They will

remember God with truth and good faith. They will be men, and they will be really what they say they are, that is, Christians, because this is enough to bring thousands of men back to themselves and to win them for Christ.

As for the divine advantages, the spirits of many will enjoy a peaceful conscience, which few have now. They ought to give charity, but they do not give it, some held back by the unworthiness of those who ask for it, others by their numbers. They feel their free will is hindered, and are assailed from several sides at once without knowing who to help first. Because they are so often discouraged, and see so many unfortunates, they help no-one. They know that they can make little difference, as if they were throwing a little water on a vast fire. Those who have greater resources will give them with greater pleasure, and more generously, because it is well and safely distributed, and they are bringing their charity to a good place. At the same time they will be helping mankind and obeying the commandments of Christ, and in that will be acquiring considerable merit in His sight.

It is to be hoped that other towns, where the same care is not taken for poor people as it is here, many rich people will send their money, because they know it will be well distributed to help those most in need. It should be added that the Lord will defend specially, and will make truly happy, such a charitable people. Hear the witness, not of any man, but a prophet:

Rid me and deliver me from the hand of  
strange children, whose mouth  
speaketh vanity, and their right hand is  
a right hand of falsehood;  
That our sons may be as plants grown  
up in their youth; that our daughters  
may be as corner stones, polished after  
the similitude of a palace;  
That our garners may be full, affording  
all manner of store; that our sheep may  
bring forth thousands and ten  
thousands in our streets  
That our oxen may be strong to labour;  
that there be no breaking in, nor going  
out; that there be no complaining in our



streets.

Happy is that people, that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord.<sup>220</sup>

The goods of this life will not be lacking either. We are assured of this by the example of the widow who gave food to Elijah. The Psalmist sings in the same way of the city where God lives: “I will bless her widow; I will satisfy her poor with bread.”<sup>221</sup> And besides, he says of the city: “He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the

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<sup>220</sup> Psalm 143, verses 11-15.

<sup>221</sup> Psalm 131, verse 15. At this point, Mattheeussen and Fantazzi include a note from the Paris edition, offering a version based on Hebrew instead (2002, p 143). This is the only direct reference to a Hebrew source in the text - though not, one should note, the only reference to Hebrew in Vives's wider work (see Fantazzi, Mattheeussen, 1998, p 3). Vives claimed, in a book he wrote in 1518, that he did not know a word of Hebrew (Norena, 1970, p 126). That seems unlikely, and although Vives was not beyond citing work he could not have read, like the earlier references to Panaetius and Hecaton, it is easier to believe that he was hiding his Jewish roots.

wheat.”<sup>222</sup>

Above all, there is the love of people for others, which is marked by the mutual exchange of welfare, done straightforwardly, with simplicity and without a backward glance. Surpassing all, there is the heavenly reward, which we have shown is destined for the alms which spring from charity.

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<sup>222</sup> Psalm 146, verse 14. The point is not made very clearly, but Vives is concluding here because this is how the Psalms characterise Jerusalem, God’s holy city.

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