

Document 1

Source: Catholic priest, sermon, France, fifteenth century.

Whoever gives a penny to the poor for God while in good health, it will be worth 240 pennies after [his or her] death. To give a penny in sickness is worth 20 pennies. To bequeath money after death, that is worth a leaden penny, because there is no great value in giving what one cannot hold on to.

Document 2

Source: Town council, resolution, Dijon, France, 1482.

In order to care for the poor begging creatures and the poor children who go shrieking at night throughout this city, we will rent at the city's cost a barn or other place to put them for the night and to care for them as well as possible.

Document 3

Source: Juan Luis Vives, Spanish humanist, *On Assistance to the Poor*, Bruges, Spanish Netherlands, 1526.

When the general funds have been expended, those without means of subsistence are driven to robbery in the city and on the highways; others commit theft stealthily. Women of eligible years put modesty aside and, no longer holding to chastity, put it on sale. Old women run brothels and then take up sorcery. Children of the needy receive a deplorable upbringing. Together with their offspring, the poor are shut out of the churches and wander over the land. We do not know by what law the poor live, nor what their practices or beliefs are.

Some know that they have a duty of charity to the poor, yet they do not perform what has been commanded. Others are repelled by the unworthiness of the applicants. Still others withdraw because their good intention is embarrassed by the great number, and they are uncertain where first or most effectively to bestow their money.

Document 4

Source: Emperor Charles V, imperial decree for the Netherlands, 1531.

Experience shows that if begging for alms* is permitted to everyone indiscriminately, many errors and abuses will result, for they will fall into idleness, which is the beginning of all evils. They and their children will abandon their trade or occupation for a wicked and contemptible life and condemn their daughters to poverty, unhappiness, and all manner of wickedness and vice. Above all, those who are poor and sick, and other indigents unable to earn a living, should receive food and sustenance, to the glory of God, our Savior, and according to His will.

*Charitable gifts of food or money

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

Document 5

Source: Town council, meeting minutes, Rouen, France, 1542.

—Those who are unwilling to work should indeed be expelled from the city, but those who are simply unable to find work should not be treated thus. Instead, they should be put to work on sites in the city in exchange for food until such time as they succeed in finding work in their trades.

—Idleness is harmful to the public good and should not be tolerated. Idlers should not be considered as poor.

—Before expelling the poor from the city we must consider whether our defensive capacity would not suffer from such a measure. After all, it is the people, and not the judges and the councillors, who will fight if the need arises.

~~Document 5~~ Document 6

Source: William Turner, English doctor, *New Booke of Spiritual Physick*. London, England, 1555.

When I practiced medicine in my lord the Earl of Somerset's house, many sick beggars came to me, and not knowing I was a physician, asked me for alms. Instead, I offered to heal them, for God's sake. But they would have none of that, for they would much rather be sick and live with ease and idleness than to be well and to honestly earn their living with great pain and labor.

Document 7

Source: Poorhouse regulations, Suffolk County, England, 1588.

Every strong rogue, at his or her first entrance into the house, shall have 12 stripes with the whip on the bare skin and every young rogue or idle loiterer shall have 6 stripes in the same manner. All unruly and stubborn persons shall be corrected oftener and given heavier shackles, a thinner diet, and harder labor until they are brought to reasonable obedience and submission to the master of the poorhouse.

Document 8

Source: Cardinal Richelieu, royal councillor, unofficial statement on poverty, France, 1625.

Instead of working as they should to earn a living, vagabonds and good-for-nothings have turned to begging, taking the bread from the sick and deserving poor to whom it is due. We desire that in every town in our kingdom rules and regulations for the poor should be established, so that not only all those of the said town but also of the neighboring areas should be confined and fed, and those who are able to do so should be employed on public works.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

Document 9

Source: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Beggars Receiving Alms at the Door of a House*, Netherlands, 1648.



National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

Document 10

Source: Vincent de Paul, Catholic priest and founder of a religious order that ministered to the poor, speech to members of his order, France, 1658.

If there are those among us who think that they are in the Order to evangelize the poor and not to look after them, to see to their spiritual but not to their temporal needs, then I have to tell them that we must assist the poor and see that they are helped in every possible way. And I have heard it said that what enabled bishops to become saints was their alms-giving.

Document 11

Source: Jean Maillefer, wealthy merchant, letter to his children, Reims, France, 1674.

I have heard the poor talk and learned that those who have grown accustomed to this life cannot leave it. They have no cares, pay no rents or taxes, have no losses to fear. They are independent, they warm themselves by the sun, sleep and laugh as long as they like, are at home everywhere, have the sky for a blanket, the earth for a mattress. In a word, they have no worries.