

## Contents

### **THEME: Contagious Generosity**

Editorial: Contagious Generosity *page 3*

What Is Generosity?

CHRIS WILLARD AND JIM SHEPPARD

*page 5*

Contagious Generosity– towards creating a culture of giving  
as a life-style

SAS CONRADIE

*page 12*

Generosity from a Pauline Perspective

KAR YONG LIM

*page 20*

Responsible Generosity

DANIEL HILLION

*page 34*

In the Service of One God only: financial integrity in Christian  
leadership

R. SCOTT RODIN

*page 46*

Generosity: Befriending at the Margins, Re-centring  
Human Dignity

HEALTHSERVE TEAM

*page 57*

The Urgency to Develop Fundraising Capacity and Generosity  
within the Latin American Missionary Movement

NYDIA R. GARCIA-SCHMIDT

*page 72*

Selected Generosity Resources *page 84*

Reviews *page 88*

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# Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews reflecting  
global evangelical theology for the purpose  
of discerning the obedience of faith*



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Dr Thomas Schirmmacher, Friedrichstrasse 38, 53111 Bonn, Germany.

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# Editorial – Contagious Generosity

CHRIS WILLARD AND Jim Sheppard say in their new book, *Contagious Generosity* (Zondervan: 2012), that generous living may be the most compelling and effective evangelism strategy. This understanding of Christian generosity is not new. The whole Bible is a depiction of the generous God who blesses people with resources so that they can bless others with those resources. The Bible is also clear about the right relationship with and use of money which is one of the most important aspects of generosity – the way we use our finances to bless and serve others.

Throughout the centuries Christians have understood biblical generosity in this way. Their generosity and compassion became a channel for showing God's generosity to people in spiritual, physical and emotional need. As Tom and Christine Sine say in their book, *Living on Purpose*, 'a decisive movement from a self-interested life to one that was extended in compassion to their neighbours near and far' (Baker, 2002: 22), was at the centre of the life faith of early Christians and a witness to those around them.

Since the 1970s there has been a greater interest in the themes of stewardship, generosity, giving and philanthropy. In a globalised world, scholars such as Ron Sider, Tom Sine, Jonathan Bonk and Vinay Samuel have written on different issues around poverty, wealth, income inequality, compassion and a Christian approach to money. Ministries such as Crown Financial Ministries, Christian Community Foundations and Generous Giving were started to facilitate thinking and en-

gagement around generosity related issues.

There has been a number of different reasons for this growing interest in generosity. The baby-boomer generation and wealth of this generation have been seen as one catalyst for this increased interest in generosity and the development of generosity focused ministries. The need for missionary and ministry financial support resulted in another dimension of Christian generosity thinking and engagement – the professionalization of 'Christian fundraising' or 'resource mobilization' since the 1980s. Many ministries and churches now employ full time fundraisers or even teams of full time fundraisers. Western financial giving, however, had an adverse effect with many churches in the Global South remaining dependent on western support.

With these different perspectives on generosity, those of us involved in the generosity field are very grateful to the editors of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* for this special generosity issue of the publication. I hope that the articles will contribute to further scholarly reflection and engagement in generosity as study area.

We commence with the introductory chapter of Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard's newly released book, *Contagious Generosity: Creating a culture of generosity in your church*. In this chapter the authors explain how generosity should be understood and how it should be applied specifically in the local church setting. My review article follows, in which I emphasise how generous living has to become visible in all aspects of

life and not only monetary giving.

Next, looking to Scripture for guidance, Rev Dr Kar Yong Lim reflects on generosity from a Pauline perspective, drawing some insights from the Corinthian letters. He argues that Paul's understanding of generosity in remembering the poor is not only the heart of Paul's message but is rooted in the story of Jesus.

Daniel Hillion follows on by linking generosity to Christian ethics and a response to God's grace. He argues for Christian generosity 'exercised in a responsible and realistic manner, not some utopia wherein we ourselves build the Kingdom of God on earth'. How many Christian leaders have a theology of money? R. Scott Rodin calls for such a view in his article on financial integrity in Christian leadership. It is easy to talk about generosity in theoretical terms, but our next article by the HealthServe team in Singapore, describes how generosity becomes practical reality when Christians share their time and material resources with those in need in their communities.

For help on understanding Christian fundraising within the broader subject of generosity, we listen to Nydia Garcia-Schmidt from the Global South. Her article on fundraising within the Latin

American missionary movement is based on a study on how mission agencies in that area approach fundraising. One of her recommendations is that theological institutions and missionary training centres in Latin America should provide more training in the biblical foundations of fundraising and training. It is our hope that this recommendation will be taken seriously!

The book reviews and selected bibliography on generosity resources will provide further stimulus and assistance in understanding generosity and teaching about it in our churches and theological institutions.

I am writing this editorial just after the 2012 Olympic Games in London. Generosity became one of the buzz words during the Games. With the scriptural foundation of God's generosity, generous living should be natural for Christians. Just think about the impact if Christians across the globe would live out biblical generosity in all aspects of their lives. We might discover that generosity is indeed the new evangelism!

Dr Sas Conradie, Guest Editor  
Coordinator Lausanne/World Evangelical Alliance Global Generosity Network

**Thomas Schirmacher, General Editor**  
**David Parker, Executive Editor**

# What Is Generosity?

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard

*Keywords: Kingdom of God, stewardship, faith, discipleship, financial security, transformation*

YOU WILL BE ENRICHED in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God ( 2 Cor. 9:11).<sup>1</sup>

Within the church, there is currently a significant ‘generosity movement’, but generosity is also a debated topic among Christian leaders. How we understand the role of generosity in our lives—and in the Christian communities in which we do life together—perhaps says more about our faith and our understanding of the gospel than any other single aspect of our faith.

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**1** All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com) The ‘NIV’ and ‘New International Version’ are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Christian leaders tend to fall into one of three categories. Those in the first category have adopted generosity as the standard by which they live out their faith. It is the lens through which they interpret the will of God and their role in his kingdom on earth. Those in the second category embrace generosity as an appropriate substitute for the more established language of stewardship. For decades, the language of stewardship has been used to refer to believers’ responsibility to support the work of the church and to faithfully use their resources to serve its mission. Finally, those in the third category are sceptical of the notion of generosity. This group includes Christian leaders who are disillusioned by the church and its relationship with money. They see hypocrisy and sense that there is a fundamental disconnection between what the church practises and the biblical principles of stewardship that the church teaches.

These three groups view the same subject—how our faith informs our relationship to money—through three perspectives. But they have more in common than they might think.

We believe it is necessary to view

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*This article is the introduction to the book, Contagious Generosity: creating a culture of giving in your church, by Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard (Zondervan, 2012) (Copyright © 2012), and is used by permission of Zondervan ([www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)). Chris Willard is director of generosity initiatives and premium services for Leadership Network. Jim Sheppard is CEO and principal of Generis, a consulting firm committed to developing and accelerating generosity for churches and Christian ministry organizations.*

generosity through each perspective and to learn where these views converge, based on what the Bible teaches. Doing so will lead to a shift in lifestyle among the followers of Christ—nothing short of a revolution, one that will attract countless people who are looking for a new way to live that is not based on self-serving motives but instead represents the heart of the one who made us and generously gave himself for us.

### I A Working Definition

Let's begin with a working definition of generosity. Generosity is at its core a lifestyle, a lifestyle in which we share all that we have, are, and ever will become as a demonstration of God's love and a response to God's grace. It is not enough for the church to talk about generosity, nor is it enough for individual Christians simply to commit to being generous. What makes generosity a real and powerful witness to God's love is our action. Generosity flows from an understanding that all that we have, are, and ever will become is not ours to possess, and it results in sharing what we've been given with others for the advancement of the kingdom and the glory of God. Generosity embraces a biblical understanding of stewardship:

- God is the owner of everything.
- What we have has been given to us by God.
- The resources we possess are assets to be invested in the kingdom.

Before we can be generous, we must understand what it means to be a steward, recognizing that what we have is not ours to own and confessing that Jesus is Lord over our money, posses-

sions, positions of authority, and talents. You can't be generous without the discipline of biblical stewardship, and biblical stewardship demands generosity. The gift of God's grace shapes our faith and leads to the conviction that all that we have—our time, talent, treasure, and testimony—has been given to us for a purpose. We cannot separate our acceptance of God's grace from the practice of generosity. We are generous because God was first generous to us, freely giving his life for our sakes. As followers of Christ, we seek to imitate the one who gave himself for us (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14). Stewardship is more than an obligation. It's an opportunity to witness to the reckless nature of the God who gives the gift of salvation by grace to all who will receive it. Generosity is the fullest expression of the life of a steward, one who has been given a gift that must be used wisely and for a purpose, bringing glory to God.

### II Why Should I Care?

Given the challenges that many individuals, families, and churches are facing in the aftermath of the global economic crisis that began in late 2008, the topic of this book is more timely now than ever before. When our security is threatened by job loss or scarcity, we are tempted to lock up what we've stored away. But God is working in amazing ways as churches and individuals choose the opposite approach. Instead of fearfully locking away their resources, they choose to share what they have with people in need, and their generous giving has drawn attention. In some cases, these faith communities received local and national media coverage for their acts

of generosity.

Even though their financial security was uncertain, some churches gave away their surplus to meet the desperate needs of people in their communities. This act of generosity, motivated by love for God, earned these churches credibility and made an impact on their communities, changing the lives of those who gave as well as those who received. The financial crisis became a bridge that enabled the church to take the message of a generous God to a struggling world. Churches, in ways they never had done before, began to talk about money, teaching their people how to gain freedom from debt and emphasizing the discipline of sacrificial giving.

Generosity, when it flows naturally from the heart of a church community, is contagious. It has an undeniable effect on people who come into contact with it. It expresses in practical and powerful ways the message at the core of our faith: God gave his only Son to us that we might have life. Generous churches believe that they have been given everything, and as an expression of their love for God, they share what they have with one another and with people in need.

### III Who This Book Is For (and Who It's Not For)

This book is based on our individual experiences and observations over nearly twenty years as we have worked with hundreds of churches, consulting and teaching on the topic of stewardship and generosity. Most recently it was born of a multiyear emphasis, organized by Leadership Network, called the Generous Church Leadership Com-

munity. Church staffs from across the country came together to talk about the ways in which generosity was changing their church communities. Leaders listened to each other, sharing what worked, what didn't, and what they had learned along the way.

We wrote this book to speak to the concerns of those who are leading churches and missional communities and who are working to maximize kingdom impact through local church ministry. We appreciate these leaders' dedication and obedience to God's call, and we sincerely hope this book will encourage you and challenge you. This is not an academic text, nor is it a theological book. Neither of us is qualified to address the subject of generosity in those ways. However, we acknowledge that this book has significant theological implications. Our intent is to facilitate a much broader conversation about generosity, based on the experience of church leaders and our own experience as guides to church leaders on this topic.

We also wrote this book for individual believers. Some of the greatest movements in history began because individuals didn't wait for those in positions of leadership to take the first step. Perhaps you want more from your faith experience but just aren't sure what that looks like. You are curious about generosity, and your desire is to practise generosity in your personal life and inspire it in the life of your church. In an attempt to make this book as valuable as possible, we decided to limit its scope by addressing two things: financial generosity and how our generosity relates to the church. We acknowledge that there are many books that address generosity



and that there are often many generous individuals within a church. But this book is intended to focus on those aspects of generosity that apply to the corporate experience of the church.

The local church is the primary means that God uses to build his kingdom on earth. And every local church has a unique culture that shapes its identity. Our personal beliefs are grounded in our culture. Our actions reflect our culture. And our impact on our community is determined largely by our culture. We believe that church leaders have been given the primary responsibility for creating a culture of faith and practice that aligns with biblical teaching on generosity.

We also limited our conversation about generosity to money and finances. We certainly believe that generosity can be expressed in many other ways, but one of the most common ways in which people give to the work of the church is through financial gifts, so we've limited our focus in order to make this book a valuable tool for church leaders.

Money is perhaps the most measurable aspect of our faith. How we spend our money reflects our commitment to our faith, indicating whether we practise what we say we believe. But that same standard should also be applied to our churches, corporately. How a church uses the resources God has entrusted to it is a reflection of what the church values and what it believes. A church that does not reflect a generous spirit will struggle to grow and disciple generous givers.

## IV Two Guides

Imagine sitting in a tree by a river,

watching boats dock and unload their cargo. If you spent enough time in that tree, you would observe some patterns. Some of the boats' crews would work more effectively, while others would make decisions that lead to mishaps. After watching long enough, you might anticipate the success of the docking process, based on the initial moves made by the boat and its crew.

We didn't write this book because we are more gifted or more qualified than you are to lead your church. Instead this book synthesizes our observations of countless churches as they navigate the challenges of developing a culture of generosity. After watching long enough, we've learned to anticipate what is likely to happen when a church takes specific steps.

Chris Willard has served in several strategic roles within para-church ministry, on executive church staff, and now as director of generosity initiatives for Leadership Network. Part of his role is to organize leaders around strategic subjects, like generosity, and help them to dig deep in order to gain a broader, deeper understanding of a particular subject's application in local church ministry. The other part of his role is to work one-on-one with churches to help them implement thoughts, ideas, and practices that are proven to accelerate generosity.

Jim Sheppard began his career in the world of accounting and finance. Working with numbers is a natural gifting for Jim that God later used in a way he never anticipated. As a principal of Generis, an innovative church-generosity consulting firm, Jim, like Chris, works with churches to help them navigate the waters of everyday giving, project giving, and legacy giving.

Together we have worked with leaders in the Christian community to answer their questions, advise their decision making, and help them inspire a spirit of contagious generosity that transforms their churches from institutions that protect a tradition to communities of faith that engage in changing lives. We know that many pastors sit on the edges of this conversation. They want to know more, do more, and be more radical in their generosity. Some are simply waiting for an invitation. Consider yourself invited, and prepare to join a movement that is sweeping Christian communities around the world.

There is no list of ten steps to success hidden within the pages of this book. Instead we invite you to grow, to learn, and to struggle through the complex issues every church deals with:

- What is generosity?
- What does being a generous church look like?
- How can I encourage the members of my church to be more generous?
- What is God calling us to do that we never dreamt would be possible?
- Who can benefit from our financial blessing?
- How can we use our excess to transform the communities where we live and work and play?
- What can we do to free people from unbiblical habits related to money?
- What does leading my church to be generous mean for me as pastor or leader?

There is no quick fix, fast track, or answer key in this book. Leading your church to become a generous church often begins with an honest appraisal and a time of confession, bringing your

personal habits with money into the light of God's truth. You may need to repair some relationships with your church leadership, depending on how you've made financial decisions in the past. Perhaps you'll also need to make some adjustments by adding or removing positions in your staff and organizational structure. The changes God is calling you to make will not be easy. There is a cost to everything we do. Jesus warned people who were interested in following him that they had to be willing to put aside their own desires, leaving what was comfortable and accepting the cost. They had to put their feet into action and follow him. The same is true for us. If we want to be churches that create a culture of reckless, contagious generosity, we need to be willing to pay the price.

## V The Decision is Yours

The Old Testament book of 1 Kings relates a story of a widow and her son, a family so impoverished that they have enough flour and oil left for only one more meal. They are prepared to eat their final meal and then die. The prophet Elijah is in town that day, visiting the drought-stricken region, and he asks this poor woman for some bread and water. At first the woman assures the prophet that she does not have enough food to feed all three of them, but he tells her first to make him a loaf of bread and then to bake one for herself and her son. He encourages her, telling her not to be afraid and promising her that God will not let the oil or the flour run out before the drought is over.

In faith, the widow obeys the word of the prophet and finds that she does

indeed have enough flour and oil to feed them all. Not only that, but both her flour jar and her oil jug remain full until the rains return and the drought ends. She and her son are kept alive, demonstrating the abundant life that God is ready to give us when we choose to step out in faith and share what he has given to us.

This pattern of faith-filled, sacrificial generosity is in direct conflict with a theme in American culture. We Americans perpetuate the myth that tells us that we must be independent, providing for ourselves, and that we must pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We believe that we are responsible for our own success and therefore that whatever success we find is ours to keep and to use to meet our desires and needs. But as followers of Christ, we have a different perspective. We understand that everything we have is not just something we've earned or deserve; it's a gift of God's grace. We recognize that we are stewards and that everything we have belongs to God and is intended to be invested in the growth of the kingdom. Developing a culture of generosity begins with an understanding of who owns what. If I own what I have, am, and will become, then it is mine to give at my discretion. But if God owns it all, then I am merely an instrument of generosity designed to distribute his resources for the abundant advancement of the kingdom.

Unfortunately, much of American Christianity has tended to believe that we have to preserve our wealth in order to meet our own needs and that being generous is a matter of convenience. In their book, *Passing the Plate* (Oxford, 2008), Christian Smith and Michael Emerson introduce the phrase

'discretionary obligation' as a way to understand the typical American Christian's approach to giving. Smith and Emerson suggest that Christians believe that they should give generously to the kingdom, yet at the same time feel free to give at their discretion, giving only what they can, when they can, and never feeling burdened by a compulsion to give. If 'discretionary obligation' defines our understanding of generosity, we will never experience true abundance in our churches.

Though many Americans have faced significant financial setbacks in recent years, we have observed that wealth in America has increased at a record pace over the last sixty years, even after taking into account the economic retraction of 2008. However, the percentage of income Americans give to churches has been decreasing over the same period of time. This just doesn't make sense. We have more than ever, but we give less than ever. The American church can no longer turn its back on this issue. It is time to take a look at ways we can reverse this disturbing trend of more wealth and less giving to the church.

The culture of a church is revealed when there is a crisis of faith. When the global recession hit in 2008, some churches thrived, some churches plateaued, and some churches declined. Few churches had a safety net, so a portion of those that declined did so with great speed. Some churches responded in fear, locking up whatever cash they had in order to weather the storm. Others decided to take another path, recognizing that the recession had revealed significant need in their communities.

In our conversations with church

leaders, we found that many of the churches that chose to share, even when there wasn't a clear path to replenishment, experienced something unexpected and transformational: abundance, learning that there were more resources available to them than they had ever imagined. They used what God had given them to prevent foreclosures, promote adoptions of orphans, feed the hungry, help those living in extreme poverty, and assist communities recovering from natural disasters. These churches witnessed a level of spiritual formation that rapidly

and holistically changed their cultures.

We had a front-row seat as a number of these churches processed what they were experiencing as individuals and corporately. We have worked hard to harness the observations we've made along the way. But if all you do is read this book, then we have not done our jobs. Our hopes and prayers are grounded in the expectation that you will become more intentional about building a culture of generosity in your church so that your church can be an accurate reflection of the Christ we profess as Lord and Saviour.

We are grateful to Zondervan Publishing Company for permission to print the first article in this issue which is the introduction to their book and forms the starting point for discussion of our theme in this special issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

**Contagious Generosity: Creating a Culture of Giving in Your Church**

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard

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Zondervan 5300 Patterson Avenue SE, Grand Rapids MI 49530

zondervan.com

Contact [evarner@academicps.com](mailto:evarner@academicps.com)

Church funding practices that are the generally accepted norm aren't producing the same results they have in the past. Most pastors and church leaders recognize that something has changed. A growing number of leaders are beginning to discover there is another way. In this book, their collective wisdom provides a simple, working definition of 'generosity' and reveals the 'secrets' that are resulting in unexplainable ministry growth and unprecedented church funding even in tough economic times. The content of *Contagious Generosity* was developed and refined by Jim Sheppard and Chris Willard through years of ministry leadership in the local church, consulting with church leaders across a broad spectrum of church settings, and through participation in and leadership of the Generous Church Leadership Community facilitated by Leadership Network.

# Contagious Generosity – towards creating a culture of giving as life-style in a church

Sas Conradie

**KEYWORDS:** *Generosity, culture, giving, church, wealth, money.*

## I. Introduction

The first words that strike you when looking at the outside cover of Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard's new book *Contagious Generosity: Creating a culture of giving in your church*<sup>1</sup> is not the title. It is actually a quote from Dave Ramsey saying, 'This book will show you a better way to approach giving: God's way'. If you know Dave Ramsey's books (as many if not most American Christian leaders will), then you will know this is a serious book. Yes, he is the author of 'The Total Money Makeover',<sup>2</sup> a bestseller in the US.

Opening the book and the string of endorsements from people such as Howard Dayton, Randy Pope, Scott Ridout and Dr Joel C. Hunter will tell you that this book has the potential to greatly influence the church. That is, at least the American church. With an endorsement such as, 'It will change the way your church views money, giving, and the power of radical generosity', from Greg Surratt, lead pastor of Seacoast Church, it is clear that this is a book to take more than just a note of! It should therefore not come as a surprise that the introductory chapter of the book is included in a respected theological journal such as *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

But do I hear people in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America ask, 'Who is Dave Ramsey?' And Howard Dayton, and Randy Pope, and Scott Ridout, and Dr Joel C. Hunter? This exactly explains the contradiction and the challenge of the book – potentially influential in the US but overlooked and

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1 Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity: Creating a culture of giving in your church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012)

2 Dave Ramsey, *The Total Money Makeover: A proven plan for financial fitness* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 3 Edition, 2009).

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*Sas Conradie* (DD, University of Pretoria) is the coordinator of the Global Generosity Network, a joint initiative of the Lausanne Movement and World Evangelical Alliance to encourage stewardship, generous living and giving amongst Christians. Originally from South Africa and an ordained minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, Sas has worked in the Ukraine, and in various ministries in the UK, including the Church Mission Society (CMS). This article is an extended review and reflection on the book, *Contagious Generosity: Creating a Culture of Giving in Your Church* by Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, the first chapter of which is printed as the opening article in this issue.

even seen as part of American Christian consumer culture elsewhere. But this is also the reason why I, as an African living in Europe, want to engage with the book. Yes, I believe the book has much to say not only to American churches (the target audience of the book) but also to the wider world.

The vision of the Global Generosity Network is a culture of global Christian generosity and wise stewardship in support of global mission. Just for this reason a book with the subtitle of ‘Creating a culture of giving in your church’ should become prescribed reading not only for American pastors but pastors across the globe. Or perhaps I should qualify that statement – I hope that by reading and reflecting on ‘Contagious Generosity’, Christian leaders in other parts of the world will write a similar kind of book for their contexts.

## II. Message of Contagious Generosity

The book is divided into an introductory chapter (which is the first article in this special issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology*) and then three parts – Church Development, Leadership Development and Impact. The introductory chapter provides the framework for the whole book. It states clearly that generosity ‘is at its core a lifestyle, a lifestyle in which we share all that we have, are, and ever will become as a demonstration of God’s love and a response to God’s grace’.<sup>3</sup> Generous churches therefore share what they have with one another and with peo-

ple in need. And generosity becomes contagious when it flows naturally from the heart of a church community. Others want to join in this life-style of sharing. The question is how it can be done.

The different chapters of the book give some direction on how generosity can become contagious in a church:

- Generosity should become a thread that runs through the organisation and mission of the entire church. In essence generosity should become part of the culture or DNA of the church. It should touch every aspect of ministry in a church. This is the fruit of God’s grace and a product of a transformed heart;
- For generosity to become contagious, church leaders should intentionally encourage generosity and develop and implement a strategy that will result in measurable results. For this to happen churches should think about appointing a generosity or stewardship pastor;<sup>4</sup>
- When church leaders live out gener-

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<sup>4</sup> The Church of England is a good example of a denomination that decided to encourage the development of stewardship departments and the appointment of stewardship officers. A National Stewardship Officer was appointed in 2005 while the different Church of England Dioceses have Stewardship Departments that provide resources and training. Local church stewardship officers or champions share information and approaches to enhance the effectiveness of stewardship in each church. See for example Parish Resources <[www.parishresources.org.uk/](http://www.parishresources.org.uk/)>, the website of the Church of England’s National Stewardship Department that offers a wide range of resources to support all aspects of stewardship and giving in the local church.

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<sup>3</sup> Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 18.

osity and give freely, others will follow. Generosity then becomes exciting and part of the church's natural response to the grace of God. That draws people to Christ;

- Pastors have a specific responsibility to lead their churches towards financial generosity;
- The Sunday worship services (weekend experience) are key opportunities to share generosity stories, teach giving, build trust, cast vision and build relationships with people;
- Asking people to become generous and give to ministry is a ministry in itself. However, the focus should not be on what the church wants from the giving but to help people accomplish their God-given dreams with the giving;
- Financially blessed people are among the most overlooked groups in a church. They should be disciplined and helped to deal with their wealth;
- Generosity progress should be measured to show the increased giving and determine what more could be done to encourage a culture of generosity in the church. Giving information and benchmark setting are therefore essential;
- Celebrate generosity to encourage generosity in others. Share generosity stories and thank people for their giving. 'Celebrate generosity at least as much as you celebrate attendance, baptism, and other special times in the life of the church';<sup>5</sup>
- Generous behaviour is the best validation of what Christians believe

and profess about God, faith, the Bible and eternity. Practising generosity has a magnetic power on non-believers in Christ. Generosity is the new evangelism;

- In conclusion, generosity is not a program or a one-time emphasis. It is much more a repositioning of leadership and direction to ensure a culture of generosity is being developed over a period of time. Cultivating a culture of giving in a church takes time!

### III. Key themes

A number of key themes emerge throughout the book. Many of them are fresh and some of them had me really thinking. I want to mention a few.

#### 1. Generosity is the new evangelism

The first time I became aware of this understanding of generosity was when I read Chris Willard's article, 'Generosity Becoming a Fundamental Spiritual Discipline for Churches'.<sup>6</sup> I was intrigued by this concept and I am glad that he and Jim Sheppard unpack it further in *Contagious Generosity*. It becomes much clearer how they understand generosity as the new evangelism: 'The growing emphasis on sharing what we have and giving generously of our resources to others is quickly becoming one of the best evan-

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<sup>5</sup> Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 164.

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<sup>6</sup> Chris Willard, *Generosity becoming a fundamental discipline in churches* <[http://leadnet.org/resources/download/generosity\\_becoming\\_a\\_fundamental\\_spiritual\\_discipline\\_for\\_churches](http://leadnet.org/resources/download/generosity_becoming_a_fundamental_spiritual_discipline_for_churches)> accessed 31 January 2012.

gelistic efforts in America today'.<sup>7</sup>

I was therefore a bit disappointed when the authors explain the generosity mainly in monetary terms. A generosity weekend during which the income is given away as part of an outreach strategy<sup>8</sup> is important. But if spontaneous acts of generosity 'demonstrate(s) the authentic spiritual growth of a believer' flowing 'from a heart changed by the grace of God',<sup>9</sup> then that generosity should be expressed in much more than monetary terms.

Dennis Tongoi of Kenya emphasises that our giving should be to God, not to people or even ourselves.<sup>10</sup> 'Our biggest sacrifice is therefore giving ourselves to God, then to others.'<sup>11</sup> Wealthy people often give their money rather than themselves.<sup>12</sup> Just think about parents who buy gifts for their children to compensate for their absence. But these gifts are often empty because people long for relationships instead of material 'things'. It is interesting that Tongoi then says that poor people 'are more likely to know how to give of themselves'.<sup>13</sup>

Though Willard and Sheppard highlight the fact that generosity can be expressed in many other ways than money and finances, it is this giving of ourselves that is the most important. This kind of generosity will attract

people to Christ and can therefore be the new evangelism that Willard and Sheppard encourage. And let us not forget that the greatest gift we can give to people is to tell them about Jesus so that they can put their trust in him. The last generosity act of the Stewardship 40 Acts campaign<sup>14</sup> is therefore to tell somebody else about Jesus. As it says on the website, 'What could be more generous than helping someone along the way to salvation?'

Perhaps I am a bit sensitive, perhaps I have been too impacted by a long-term illness in our family. However, I am more and more convinced that financial giving to those in need is just one characteristic of a generous life—and it might not even be the most important! There was not one Christian in our town who visited us as a family or invited us to visit them during the family illness—not even to pray with us. I asked once in a church whether there are any Christians in our town because Jesus says, 'I was sick and you looked after me' (Mt. 25:36). If nobody visited us during this illness my conclusion from that passage is that there are no Christians! We did not need monetary generosity but we needed spiritual, social and emotional generosity. That seems to be much more difficult to share at least in our town than money.

Compare our experience with that of my sister and her family. They moved to a city in the US in the beginning of May 2012, actually just as I read *Contagious Generosity*. I was surprised to the point of shock when I heard how American Christians cared for them. Without

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7 Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 167.

8 Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 171.

9 Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 173.

10 Dennis Tongoi, *Mixing God with Money: Strategies for living in an uncertain economy* (Nairobi: Bezalel Investments, 2001).

11 See 2 Cor. 8:5.

12 Tongoi, *Mixing God with Money*, 85.

13 Tongoi, *Mixing God with Money*, 86.

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14 < <http://www.40acts.org.uk> > accessed 25 July 2012.



having met anybody in the specific city before their arrival, the Christians in the city organised accommodation for them, invited them for meals, offered to look after their children and distributed my brother in law's CV to potential employers. Somebody even bought a vehicle for them on his account that they are paying off. This is what Jesus said, 'I was a stranger and you invited me in' (Mt. 25:35).

This kind of generosity is indeed a tremendous witness, a very powerful way to attract people to Christ and an opportunity for them to follow him as well. A life that is characterised by generosity can be 'the most compelling, effective evangelism strategy we have as followers of Christ'.<sup>15</sup> But it should be more than monetary generosity! I just wish the Christians in our town in England would understand that as well...

## 2. Cultivating a culture of contagious generosity

The intentional cultivating of a culture in a church is a key theme throughout *Contagious Generosity*. A church should be clear about what it believes on the topic of giving and stewardship. It should be taught and preached so that it becomes part of how the church operates and its members live. Such a culture will shape generous hearts and lead people to a life-style of Biblical generosity.

Culture is shaped by intentional, systematic processes. A culture of generosity should be developed in all aspects of church life. This is being done

through a clear generosity strategy that informs church members about generosity, helps them to apply that information through a call to action that will then become visible in generous acts such as giving money away to those in need.

I totally support what Willard and Sheppard are saying. However, I am concerned that they might be misunderstood when they say culture trumps vision when cultivating a culture of generosity in a church.<sup>16</sup> Vision should be an essential part of cultivating or creating such a culture as Brian Kluth<sup>17</sup> suggests:<sup>18</sup>

- Instructing through Scriptures – generosity and financial teaching should be about the Bible;
- Influencing with resources such as videos and written material that teach people biblical truth about finances and generosity;
- Involving with systems to collect offerings;
- Inspiring with stories that show how God has used generosity in the past;
- Igniting with vision to show what God can do through our generosity.

I added a sixth element – soaking in prayer. We need to ask God to understand his heart for the spiritually lost

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<sup>16</sup> Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Kluth, 'How to Create a Generosity Culture in Your Church: 5 Things You Need to Do'.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Johnson mentions seven attributes of a generous church that are fairly similar to Brian Kluth's outline. See Patrick Johnson, Seven Attributes of a Generous Church <[www.generouschurch.com](http://www.generouschurch.com)>.

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<sup>15</sup> Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 175.

and those who have other needs. Then we will find it easier to give.

I also think that there is potentially an important point not mentioned – that of linking mission awareness and generosity in a church especially as expressed in financial giving. Having written an article on mission giving in the local church,<sup>19</sup> it is clear that we need a more integrated approach towards biblical generosity and stewardship, church life, mission awareness, mission education and mission giving. Unless something drastic is being done mission giving in churches will not increase.

My concern is that much of that money will be spent on the church itself and even be given to those who are not the most needy (spiritually and physically). I have real questions of some of the giving examples mentioned in *Contagious Generosity*. Such ‘unwise’ and often uninformed giving has the potential to discourage and even destroy a generosity culture in a church. I have personal experience of horror stories to illustrate this danger but will leave that for another time.

I will therefore argue that we need a more balanced approach in cultivating and sustaining a contagious generosity culture in a church, an approach through which the church understands itself as mission orientated by nature just as much as it is generous by nature. Where mission awareness, mission education and generous giving become part of the same process, the

church will better understand where to give to and generosity will become really exciting as people see how God uses their giving to take the gospel where it has not yet been heard.

### 3. Generosity as fundamental to spiritual formation

Just think what can happen if generosity is included in the discipleship plan of every church! The primary goal ‘when creating a generous culture in your church is not financial gain or expansion of your budget. In fact, the real goal has very little to do with money. The real goal is spiritual formation.’<sup>20</sup> I wish all pastors would read this quote! That would definitely transform churches and indeed global Christianity when lived out.

We need to understand the Bible from the perspective of a generous God who made the world for the enjoyment and stewarding of people whom he made in his image. And when they rejected them he generously gave himself so that his people can have life to the full. The result can only be that as we received freely from our generous God we give freely as well. As the Global Generosity Network Generosity Declaration says,

I, therefore, commit myself to foster a culture of Biblical generosity and stewardship that will transform individuals and communities as I recognise that generosity is manifested in giving funds, resources, time, talents, gifts, prayer and my very presence and practice holistic stewardship, generous living, and

<sup>19</sup> Sas Conradie, ‘Mission giving in the local church’, unpublished article prepared for the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission.

<sup>20</sup> Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 41.

gracious financial giving.<sup>21</sup>

The Cape Town Commitment also links generosity to whole-life discipleship when it says:

Biblical mission demands that those who claim Christ's name should be like him, by taking up their cross, denying themselves, and following him in the paths of humility, love, integrity, generosity, and servant-hood. To fail in discipleship and disciple-making, is to fail at the most basic level of our mission.<sup>22</sup>

I pray that every church, every theological institution and every ministry will take this challenge of Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard seriously and make generosity a key building block of spiritual formation.

#### 4. Embracing the ministry of asking

Rob Martin, Lausanne Senior Associate for Resource Mobilization says,

Fundraising is the act of recruiting and nurturing your resource partners. Simple. Straight forward—yet fundraising is one of the most convoluted and dangerous functions a leader of a mission will ever face.<sup>23</sup>

But Rob always emphasises that fundraising (or the asking for dona-

tions) is a ministry. I love the way Willard and Sheppard state it – Christian leaders, and pastors in particular, need to embrace the ministry of asking! Calling members of the body of Christ to invest their financial resources in the kingdom is as important as calling Christians to exercise their spiritual gifts in ministry.<sup>24</sup> These are strong words but seen from the perspective that the use of financial resources should be part of discipleship, they make sense. Asking people for money also enables them to live out their calling and achieve their kingdom vision.

Paul was not afraid to bring the needs of, for example, the Jerusalem church to the attention of other churches. But asking means relationship building or, as William Dillon calls it, 'people raising'.<sup>25</sup> The ministry of asking is therefore much more than asking for money. If Christian leaders see it from this perspective they might also embrace this ministry.

One of the reasons why Christian leaders are so reluctant to embrace the ministry of asking is that money is still seen as in essence worldly or even evil. It is much more spiritual to trust God and wait for his provision. Hudson Taylor who prayed, trusted and God provided becomes the ideal. But we forget that people like Hudson Taylor also mentioned needs through prayer requests.

While struggling one day to send a project proposal to possible donors, I

<sup>21</sup> *Global Generosity Network Declaration* <<http://generositymovement.org/network/>>

<sup>22</sup> *The Cape Town Commitment: African Edition* (Parow: AcadSA Publishing, 2012), 53.

<sup>23</sup> Rob Martin, *From A Wallet In The Purse of the Bride To Nickels For Beggars: The Divide That Binds Us*, <[http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/12497#article\\_page\\_1](http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/12497#article_page_1)>.

<sup>24</sup> Willard, *Contagious Generosity*, 107.

<sup>25</sup> William P. Dillon, *People Raising: A practical guide to raising support* (Chicago, Illinois, USA: Moody Publishers, 2012).

suddenly realised that Romans 10:14, ‘And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?’, can apply to telling people about needs as well. How can potential givers hear and give without somebody mentioning needs and asking for support? That was liberation in my life. But the asking has to go along with the right motives (see James 4:2-3). How often pastors ask for themselves and for churches to show off new buildings instead of asking for funding that will transform the lives of people?

I therefore believe that pastors can embrace the ministry of asking only if it is not about themselves but for the sake of the kingdom of God. If we realise that asking is kingdom work, it might become easier!

#### IV. Conclusion

I agree with Greg Surratt that *Contagious Generosity* could change the way a church views money, giving, and the power of radical generosity. Just think what could happen if a culture of giving could be created intentionally in every church in the world and generosity could become part of the DNA of every denomination and local church! That will be really transformational!

That is why I hope that this book will be taken seriously not only by American churches but by churches across the globe. Themes such as a culture of generosity and giving, contagious generosity, generosity as the new evangelism, generosity as fundamental to spiritual formation and the ministry of asking have the potential to influence the way we understand what

Christian life and ministry is about.

However, it is important to engage with these themes because there is a danger that they could be misunderstood. After I read and reread the book and thought and rethought about it, there remained this lingering concern that the book might be seen by some readers as an example of the over-emphasis on money in American church culture. Some might even argue that this shows how materialism has crept into the church. However, *Contagious Generosity* actually argues for the opposite – by cultivating contagious generosity churches can help Christians be salt and light in a world where money and possessions are important. We need a more in-depth conversation on how this could be done.

Perhaps *Contagious Generosity* should be read together with *The Church as Window to the Kingdom*,<sup>26</sup> another book that engages with a church's culture and worldview. However, this is written from an African perspective. And when I read in this book that ‘Generosity can be a stumbling block to the ministry of the Church’<sup>27</sup> because it creates a culture of dependency and from the ‘destructive worldview that the two thirds world is poor and unable to do anything’ I realise that the conversation on contagious generosity in different contexts and between different contexts has only started or perhaps not yet started...

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<sup>26</sup> Dennis Tongoi (ed.), *The Church as Window to the Kingdom: The transforming story* (Nairobi: CMS Africa, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> *The Church as Window*, 47.

# Generosity from Pauline Perspective: Insights from Paul's Letters to the Corinthians

Kar Yong Lim

**KEYWORDS:** *Caring for poor, wealth, poverty, collection, Lord's Supper, equality.*

## I A Neglected Theme?

When exploring the economic dimensions of the early Christ-movement, there appears to be a clear lack of engagement with the apostle Paul. It has often been assumed that Paul does not address issues regarding wealth and poverty extensively in his letters. Thus, his treatment of economic issues and caring for the poor is rarely featured and discussed by the interpreters of Paul.

This can be seen in many of the major works on Paul's theology and ethics. Topics that are typically included are Paul's views on Christology, soteriology, anthropology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, law, eschatology, and related themes, but do not include any real interaction with Paul's view on generosity, giving, or even poverty. For example, in James Dunn's excellent

work on *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, nothing is mentioned of Paul's care for the poor.<sup>1</sup>

If there is any significant mention of Paul's economic view, it is often narrowly discussed in relation to the collection for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem by referring to Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; and 2 Corinthians 8-9.<sup>2</sup> Even if this relief project for the poor is used as an example of Paul's charity, David Downs notes,

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1 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Similar examples can be seen in the works of Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); Robert L. Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian* (Fearon: Mentor, 2000); and Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

2 See the discussion in Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 312-18, under the heading, 'The Cruciform Grace of Generosity'.

'Given that the collection for Jerusalem seems to have been a one-time charitable donation, we should not overstate the extent to which ... charity was "of the essence" in the Pauline churches'.<sup>3</sup> In some instances, when 2 Corinthians 8-9 is mentioned, instead of focusing on the collection for Jerusalem, its discussion is often directed to Paul's Christology by way of reference to 2 Corinthians 8:9: 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich'.<sup>4</sup>

Studies in Pauline ethics do not fare any better, although there is some brief mention of Paul's economic view. Richard Burridge's *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, has only about six pages discussing Paul's view on money and poverty.<sup>5</sup> Richard Hays's ground-breaking work on *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, makes reference to material possession only as part of the concluding remarks of the book.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of Pauline mission, it has been assumed that Paul was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and

that his primary concern was to establish congregations throughout the Mediterranean basin. This urgency of the Pauline mission has often been thought to be fuelled by his understanding of the imminent eschatological hope of the final triumph of Christ. As a result, Paul's primary task is the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the world before the return of Christ, and there is less concern with the poor. Leslie J. Hoppe is representative of this view when he writes:

Paul's attitude toward the poor was probably colored by his expectations regarding the imminent return of Christ. The apostle's belief that Christ's return was near made dealing with socioeconomic problems at any great length unnecessary.<sup>7</sup>

Based on this brief survey, it appears that there is hardly any significant feature to suggest that the poor are of special significance in Paul's theology, ethics and mission. Therefore, it is not surprising if one were to conclude that Paul has an underdeveloped concern for the poor. However, nothing can be further from the truth. As I will argue in this essay, Paul's understanding of generosity in alleviating the economic hardship of the poor is not only the heart of his gospel but is rooted in the story of Jesus itself.

I will begin by examining the phrase, 'remember the poor' in Galatians 2:10 as the primary concern of Paul in his mission, and that 'the poor' is not limited to any geographical restriction. Then I will consider two

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3 David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts*, WUNT 2:248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008), 110.

4 See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 290-92.

5 Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 131-36.

6 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1996), 464-68.

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7 Leslie J. Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor among You: Poverty in the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 158.

passages from Paul's Corinthian correspondence, namely 2 Corinthians 8-9 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, in examining Paul's understanding of generosity that is closely associated with caring for the poor. I will argue that Paul's understanding of generosity is not limited to monetary giving but also to providing for the very basic material needs of the poor.

## II Paul's Concern for the Poor

### 1. 'Remember the Poor': Galatians 2:10

That Paul clearly has deep concern for the poor is evident from Galatians 2:8-10:<sup>8</sup>

For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to *remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along* (emphasis mine).

In Galatians 2:1-10, Paul summarises the main issues which were decided in what is commonly known as the Jerusalem Council (see also Acts 15:1-36). From the account in Acts in which a letter was sent from the Council to the Gentiles subsequent to the

Jerusalem meeting, there was no mention about remembering the poor, only to exhort the Gentiles 'to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality' (Acts 15:29).

As such, it is not surprising that Paul's mention of 'the poor' in Galatians 2:10 is often treated as peripheral and secondary to the main issues of inclusion of the Gentiles and the rite of circumcision debated in the meeting. Hans Dieter Betz describes the instruction to remember the poor as an 'additional request' and 'unrelated to the main points of the debate' in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Larry Hurtado also states that this phrase, 'remember the poor', is often thought to be 'of no real significance, and serves only to give an unimportant detail of the agreement with Jerusalem'.<sup>10</sup>

This line of argument fails to do justice to what Paul is saying to the Galatians. If remembering the poor is indeed an 'additional request' or 'unrelated' or 'of no real significance', it is therefore very curious that in Galatians, Paul makes no mention of the major advice or instructions given by the 'pillars' of Jerusalem to the Gentiles such as abstaining from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality (see Acts 15:29). This raises the following questions: In light of the numerous details and debates about the Jerusalem meeting

<sup>8</sup> Biblical quotations are from the *New International Version*.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 101.

<sup>10</sup> Larry Hurtado, 'The Jerusalem Collection and the Book of Galatians', *JSNT* 5 (1979): 46-62, quotation from 51.

that are missing in Galatians 2:1-10, why does Paul choose to include this one particular request to remember the poor? If remembering the poor is what Paul describes as something he is 'eager to do', who then are this group of people described as 'the poor'?

## 2. Who are the Poor in Galatians 2:10?

It has generally been accepted in New Testament scholarship that 'the poor' mentioned in Galatians 2:10 refer to the poor in Jerusalem. This is partly due to reading Romans 15:25-32 into Galatians 2:10. Romans 15:26 refers to Paul's contribution 'for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem'. As such, it is assumed that the phrase, 'remember the poor', in Galatians 2:10 naturally referred to the poor in Jerusalem.

J. Louis Martyn specifically indicates that by referring to the 'poor', 'the Jerusalem leaders refer to their own church, or to a circle of persons within that church'.<sup>11</sup> Richard Horsley also makes a similar point that the poor

meant those in the Jerusalem community who were literally poor, probably because they had no means of self-support. The limited resources they had pooled were hardly sufficient to sustain them long-range. Thus other nascent assemblies of Christ were to send economic assistance to the poor in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 207.

<sup>12</sup> Richard A. Horsely, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 144.

This line of argument receives overwhelming support from a number of commentators including Ben Witherington,<sup>13</sup> Richard Longenecker<sup>14</sup> and James Dunn.<sup>15</sup>

There is no doubt that 'the poor' in Galatians 2:10 would have included the poor in Jerusalem. But should the phrase 'remember the poor' be so narrowly defined in terms of geographical restrictions? If it is true that 'the poor' are specifically and narrowly those in the Jerusalem church, then it is understandable that Paul's collection project is a direct result from the command received from the leaders in Jerusalem. However, this consensus has been recently and rightfully challenged by Bruce Longenecker.

According to Longenecker, the understanding of 'the poor' as a reference to the believers in Jerusalem finds no support from the interpretation of Galatians 2:10 prior to the fourth century CE.<sup>16</sup> By assessing data from various patristic writers such as Tertullian, Origen, Arthanasius and Aphrahat, Longenecker concludes that, at least until the middle of the fourth century, 'the poor' has no geographical restriction to believers in Jerusalem only. It included the poor within local congregations scattered throughout Judea and the Greco-Roman world. It is only by the middle of the fourth century that

<sup>13</sup> Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 144.

<sup>14</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 60.

<sup>15</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1993), 112.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 159.



this interpretation changed as testified to by Ephrem, Jerome, and John Chrysostom where ‘the poor’ takes on a technical meaning and has been since then narrowly referred to as ‘the poor in Jerusalem’.<sup>17</sup>

If Longenecker is right in his interpretation that the phrase ‘remember the poor’ does not have geographical restriction, it opens up fresh perspectives in reading of Paul’s concern for the poor—that the Jerusalem collection constitutes one of the examples in which Paul establishes his care for the poor. In other words, Paul is eager to remember the poor not only in Jerusalem but also in the local congregations that he established throughout the Mediterranean basin.

Can this argument be further sustained? If so, why is Paul eager to remember the poor? Following this, we will examine two passages from Paul’s Corinthian correspondence where Paul’s eagerness to ‘remember the poor’ is rooted in his understanding of the generosity of Christ. This is subsequently demonstrated in the monetary collection from the Gentiles to the poor in Jerusalem in 2 Corinthians 8-9 and the rebuke of the wealthy in marginalising the poor within the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

### III Paul’s Jerusalem Collection

Organising a major relief fund for the poor in Jerusalem from the Corinthian congregation is no easy task for Paul.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For further discussion, see Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 159-76.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed historical treatment of Paul’s collection, see Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul lays down his advice for the collection:

Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians are clear. They were to set aside a sum of money on a weekly basis for the relief fund, so that on his next visit, the contribution would be ready to be despatched to Jerusalem. However, these instructions were ignored by the Corinthians, possibly due to the deteriorating relationship between the Corinthians and Paul. Paul’s subsequent visit to the Corinthians after writing 1 Corinthians ended abruptly, resulting in a ‘painful visit’ alluded to in 2 Corinthians 2:1-4.

The tension and conflict between Paul and the Corinthians further deepened, and this resulted in a ‘letter of tears’ that Paul apparently wrote after this ‘painful visit’. The Corinthians seemed to have responded favourably to this letter in which their relationship with Paul was somewhat restored (see 2 Cor. 1:12-2:11; 7:2-16). So, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to resume the collection for the poor in Jerusalem by appealing to the example of the Macedonians and also Jesus Christ himself in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Paul begins by emphasising the

example of the Macedonians who had generously contributed to the fund despite their extreme poverty. According to Paul, the Macedonians literally begged Paul to accept the monetary gift despite the fact that they themselves had greater need for the money (2 Cor. 8:1-5). This act of generosity was a result of the Macedonians giving 'themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to (Paul)' (2 Cor. 8:6).

Following this, Paul appeals to the paradigmatic grace of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' (2 Cor. 8:9). Drawing on the narrative of Jesus, Paul then challenges the Corinthians to finish the collection for the poor in Jerusalem by drawing on the principle of equality – the abundance that the Corinthians currently enjoyed would supply for the needs of the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:11-15).

To challenge the Corinthians further, Paul reiterates that both he and the Corinthians would be shamed if the Macedonians found out that the collection was left unfinished by the Corinthians (2 Cor. 9:1-5). Then Paul evokes an agrarian metaphor, suggesting that all giving to the Jerusalem collection was like sowing seed which would surely reap a harvest. Finally, Paul underscores that true generosity was also a direct result of the confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This generosity would also bring about thanksgiving and praise to God from the recipients of the collection (2 Cor. 9:6-15).

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul's understanding of generosity and concern for

the poor come to the fore. There are many practical implications that can be drawn from these two chapters. Space does not permit me to enter into detailed discussion of all these implications, and as such, I will focus only on three particular aspects.

### 1. Generosity Grounded in the Story of Jesus

One of the most significant economic projects undertaken by Paul was the monetary collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem that he organised among the Gentile congregation he established. Paul seems to have spent a considerable amount of time, energy and resources in organising this collection for Jerusalem. This is evident from his comments about the project in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15; and Romans 15:25-32.

Where does Paul receive the inspiration to organise such a major relief fund project? Is there any organised charity in Jerusalem or elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world during the New Testament times that Paul could have emulated?

Joachim Jeremias claims that there existed an organised system of public relief for the poor based on the Jewish institutions of *tamhuy* (daily distribution of food to the non-resident poor) and *quppah* (weekly distribution of food and clothing to the poor residents).<sup>19</sup> Jeremias concludes that this system of arrangement 'served as a model for the primitive Church'.<sup>20</sup> However, this posi-

<sup>19</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 126-34.

<sup>20</sup> Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 131.

tion has been challenged by David Seccombe, based on Jeremias' doubtful use of sources as stipulated in the Mishnah and lack of positive evidence.<sup>21</sup> The administration system described by Jeremias did not originate until later in the post-New Testament era.

Having said that, it does not mean that caring for the poor did not exist within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Evidence from Acts suggests that there was some form of charity drive to care for the poor, as seen in the appointment of the seven deacons to care for the Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1-6). However, such charity activities were ad hoc rather than organised.

What about the Greco-Roman world? Bruce Longenecker critically assesses the perceptions of and attitudes to poverty in the Greco-Roman world and analyses the charitable initiatives in the Gentile world in his fascinating work, *Remember the Poor*.<sup>22</sup> He comes to the conclusion that in the Greco-Roman world organised charity in caring for the poor was sporadic at best. Although concern for the poor was not entirely absent, it was mainly restricted to temporary support for members of one's own group or association, but hardly to those outside one's circles.

The system of patronage so engrained in the Greco-Roman conventions did not extend to those at the bottom of the poverty scale. Neither did the practice of hospitality. As such,

while it cannot be argued that charitable initiatives and some form of concern for the poor were entirely unknown in the Greco-Roman world, it was very limited. Therefore, if it cannot be convincingly proven that both the Jewish and Greco-Roman societies carried out any sustainable and organised charity for the general public, we need to look elsewhere for Paul's understanding of generosity and his rationale for carrying out the Jerusalem collection at such a magnitude.

Paul's understanding of generosity finds concrete expression in 2 Corinthians 8:9. In this passage, Paul evokes the example of Jesus as the ground of his appeal to the Corinthians for his monetary collection for Jerusalem, 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.' There have been debates as to whether Paul has in mind in this context the act of Christ voluntarily embracing human poverty, or the humiliating death of Christ by identifying with the spiritual poverty of fallen humanity, or the event of incarnation.<sup>23</sup> As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> the story of Jesus in Paul's thought would constitute the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus in what Horrell

<sup>21</sup> David Seccombe, 'Was There Organized Charity in Jerusalem Before the Christians?', *JTS* 29 (1978): 140-43.

<sup>22</sup> Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 60-107.

<sup>23</sup> See Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 578-580.

<sup>24</sup> Kar Yong Lim, 'The Sufferings of Christ are Abundant in Us': A Narrative Dynamics Investigation of Paul's Sufferings in 2 Corinthians, *LNTS* 399 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 151-55.

describes as 'one seamless act'.<sup>25</sup> Murray Harris is right in indicating that 'Christ's incarnation, life, and death-resurrection' is to be taken 'in a single glance as "becoming poor"'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is not necessary to limit it to a particular event in the life of Jesus, be it the incarnation or death.

In retelling the story of Jesus, Paul is attempting to inculcate in the Corinthians the kind of behaviour that he wishes them to emulate. Jesus himself is the model for generous giving. The 'self-lowering other-regard' paradigm reflected in 2 Corinthians 8:9, as suggested by Horrell, is paradigmatically demonstrated in the central story of Jesus himself, whose self-lowering takes the movement from one extreme to another: from being rich to being poor.<sup>27</sup>

A similar pattern is also found in Philippians 2:5-11 where Jesus is said to have 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross' (Phil. 2:7-8). In this passage, the 'self-lowering other-regard' paradigm is reflected where the

movement from the form of God (and equality with God) to the form of slave is also exemplified.

This 'self-lowering other-regard' plot of the story of Christ becomes the lens through which Paul makes sense of his own understanding of generosity and concern for the poor. Clearly, Paul's notion of generosity is rooted in Christ, and it is one that is orientated towards others and not for any self-benefit. Recalling the story of Jesus as the supreme exemplar is to motivate the Corinthians to emulate Christ their master in his generosity in giving for the poor in Jerusalem and to look out for the interests of others.

## 2. Generosity resulting in Equality

The notion of having the interests of others in mind in giving generously is further developed in 2 Corinthians 8:12-15. Here, Paul comments about giving according to one's proportion by offering further remarks on the subject of equality:

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little' (2 Cor. 8:13-15).

The idea of equality is frequently explained in Hellenistic literature. Philo praises equality as the highest good<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 212, 237. So Thomas D. Stegman, *The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin to Paul's Argument in 2 Corinthians*, AnBib 158 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 189.

<sup>26</sup> Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 580.

<sup>27</sup> Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 210. For a detailed treatment by Horrell, see 204-45. See also the discussion by Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 242-44 and Stegman, *Character of Jesus*, 188-96.

<sup>28</sup> Philo, *The Special Laws* IV, 165-66.

and devotes an extended discussion on the subject:

But the idea of equality is a necessary one, and so is that of equality in proportion, according to which a few things are looked upon as equal to many, and small things are equal to larger ones. And their proportionate equality, cities are accustomed to use at suitable times, when they command every citizen to contribute an equal share of his property, not equal in number, but in proportion to the value of his assessment, so that in some cases he who contributes a hundred drachmas will appear to have brought an equal sum with him who contributes a talent.<sup>29</sup>

In 2 Corinthians 8:13-15, Paul makes it clear that he is not seeking for a role reversal of rich and poor, but equality or fairness. Paul recognises that there are extremes of wealth and poverty, and that this is not acceptable in the Christian community. Those who have surplus should contribute to those who have needs, according to the proportion that the individuals have, and not a fixed percentage for everyone. Closing the gap between the rich and poor in the body of Christ is needed to ensure that no one has any lack. The needs of the poor are to be met out of the surplus of others.

This is also the ideal of Christian partnership as presented in Acts 2:44-45: 'All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need' (see also Acts 4:36-37).

The basis for Paul's appeal is grounded in 2 Corinthians 8:14: 'At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.' Here, Paul cautions the Corinthians that the tables might one day be reversed, and they would also hope for the Jerusalem saints to help alleviate their suffering.

By saying this, Paul is traversing sensitively through the intricacies of the Greco-Roman conventions. The protocol of gift giving in the Corinthians' culture dictates that the one who gives more generously than others will gain the superior status while others move down the rung in the social ladder. This explains why Paul makes it clear that the Corinthians' surplus will now meet the needs of the poor so that their needs may one day be met by the Jerusalem saints. By stressing the notion of reciprocity, Paul underscores the belief that no one should outgive another in order to attain a higher status over the other, but should give out of a cheerful and willing heart.

Following this, Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 which is a reference to the account of the experience of God's people in the wilderness (see Ex. 16:11-36). Manna is distributed according to each person's need, and this becomes for Paul a pattern for the distribution of material possessions. In the wilderness experience, trying to amass more than what one needs, hoarding it, or refusing to share is a futile waste of energy in which one ends up with a pile of rotten manna.

By using this Old Testament incident, Paul is showing the Corinthians that one can share with others and still have enough. Yet at the same time,

<sup>29</sup> Philo, *Who is the Heir of Divine Things?*, 141-206, quotation taken from 145.

Paul is also warning the Corinthians that as believers, they cannot do nothing and let the poor starve. God intends that there should be distribution of what others need to survive, so that inequalities are eliminated. As Harris points out:

the equality that the people of God of old experienced in the wilderness was the result of a divine miracle and was enforced and inescapable. The equality to be experienced by the new people of God, on the other hand, would be the result of human initiative and would be voluntary and so not automatic.<sup>30</sup>

It is in this collection project that the narrative of the self-giving of Christ comes to the fore. Macedonian believers have demonstrated in their giving the attitude that Jesus had when he gave up his riches for others. What remains to be seen now is that the Corinthians too should give of themselves and their 'riches' to help the poor among the saints in Jerusalem so that there could be equality. No one has excessive surplus, and no one has a severe shortage.

### 3. Generosity as the Confession of the Gospel

As I have mentioned earlier, the collection for the poor in Jerusalem is a project that consumes much of Paul's time, energy and resources. The rationale for this initiative is grounded in the supreme exemplar of Jesus as highlighted in 2 Corinthians 8:9. The paradigm of 'self-lowering other-regard' is exemplified in the notion of equality

that Paul expounded in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15.

Now we can turn our attention to explore how Paul's understanding of generosity is a direct result of the confession of the gospel. We will see that it is because of Paul's unflinching commitment to the gospel that he continued to channel his energies and the resources of his communities into this effort of alleviating the material destitution of a special needy group of people in Jerusalem.

In 2 Corinthians 9:13, Paul writes:

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

The 'obedience' that Paul refers to is the obedience in the working out of the gospel of Christ, a gospel that demands that believers should help to provide for the needs of those both inside and outside of the family of God.

As Paul wraps up his extended discussion on the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, he puts forward a final test to the Corinthians. They must prove themselves obedient to the demands of the gospel during times of relative prosperity. If the Corinthians follow through their generosity with a commitment to and involvement in the Jerusalem relief fund, they will have passed the test. Their obedience will not only bring out relief for the poor, but will also bring glory to God from the recipients.

The willingness of the Corinthians to be a part of this project also means that the dividing lines of racial and

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30 Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 594.

social classes have indeed been broken down in Christ. As part of their confession of the gospel of Christ, the generous gift that the Corinthians give constitutes a concrete gesture of love that speaks of the unity of the body of Christ. Indeed, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28).

For Paul, confession of the gospel cannot be merely mouthing some pious clichés or even a series of creeds. It should lead to actions that speak louder than words. The very confession that Jesus Christ is Lord should ignite within the Corinthians a generosity towards the poor in Jerusalem. This confession transcends any ethnic, national heritage, social classes and geographical boundaries and demonstrates that both Jews and Gentiles are partners together in the gospel.

It is through this confession, an expression of authentic love resulting in the generosity of the Gentiles believers, that the Jewish believers in Jerusalem will give praise and glory to God. It is evident that the gospel of Jesus Christ ultimately brings reconciliation to those who were once strangers and enemies.

#### IV Divisions at the Lord's Supper

In examining 2 Corinthians 8-9, we have seen how Paul's concern to remember the poor in Jerusalem is demonstrated through the collection of a relief fund. We now turn our attention to another passage to consider briefly Paul's instruction to remember the poor within his own congregation.

According to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, divisions mark the celebration of

the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian congregation. Some wealthier members of the community arrived at the meal earlier, devouring the food and drink, and shaming those who are poor and could only arrive late, presumably at the end of the day's work. This can be seen in Paul's admonition:

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! (1 Cor. 11:20-22).

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment (1 Cor. 11:33-34).

It is clear that Paul is rebuking the wealthy, those who go ahead without waiting for anybody else, those who get drunk, those who have homes to eat and drink in, and those who despise the church and humiliate those who have nothing. The works of Gerd Theissen and others have argued that these factions resulted from the practice of the Lord's Supper in a manner that is consistent with the practices and values of the Greco-Roman patronage system.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 145-74 and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 178-85.

Within such a setting, close associates of the patrons would receive choice wine and food, and most honoured seats in the dining area, whereas the patron's clients and those who are poor will receive lesser treatment and will most likely dine separately in the courtyard of the house. Such behaviour is succinctly summarised by Theissen:

It can be assumed that the conflict over the Lord's Supper is a conflict between poor and rich Christians. The cause of this conflict was a particular habit of the rich. They took part in the congregational meal which they themselves had made possible, but they did so by themselves – possibly physically separated from the others and at their own table.<sup>32</sup>

Theissen continues:

The core of the problem was that the wealthier Christians made it plain to all just how much the rest were dependent on them, dependent on the generosity of those who were better off. Differences in menu are a relatively timeless symbol of status and wealth, and those not so well off came face to face with their own social inferiority at a most basic level. It is made plain to them that they stand on the lower rungs of the social ladder.<sup>33</sup>

The primary reason why Paul instructs the Corinthian church on proper observance of the Lord's Supper is the disregard for the poor shown by the wealthy Corinthians. Some in the congregation had food, and some did not. Paul refuses to commend the

Corinthians for this practice. It is unfortunate that in examining 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, much concentration has been placed on the history and theological meaning of the ritual;<sup>34</sup> the study of the possible layout of the house of the wealthy that hosted the meal;<sup>35</sup> and the study of social status<sup>36</sup> leading to the so called 'new consensus' among New Testament scholars that regarded Pauline communities as comprising a cross section of society or the rich and poor.

While these studies certainly enrich our understanding of the social world of Paul's congregation, it is unfortunate that focus on the poor in the reading of this text has been largely ignored. Richard Hays notes the irony that without the public humiliation of the poor in Corinth, we would probably have no idea how Paul instructed the congregation to observe the Lord's Supper.<sup>37</sup> It is only in recent years that this deficiency has been corrected in the works of Steven Friesen and others that rightly put the poor back into focus in the reading of this text.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 192-203.

<sup>35</sup> See Theissen, *Social Setting*, 145-68 and Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 178-85.

<sup>36</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale, 2003), 51-73.

<sup>37</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 203.

<sup>38</sup> Steven J. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus', *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323-361; Justin J. Meggit, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); and Longenecker, *Remembering the Poor*.

<sup>32</sup> See Theissen, *Social Setting*, 151.

<sup>33</sup> Theissen, *Social Setting*, 160.



From 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, it is clear that those who have food not only disregard the poor, but also refuse to share food with the poor. The refusal to share food with the poor violated Paul's understanding of the Lord's Supper. The hunger and humiliation experienced by the poor at Corinth is a clear denial of the character of what a Pauline community should look like. And most of all, it discredited the gospel that Paul preached. As such, Paul's assault on the social class structure of Roman society in which division between those who have the power to control their economic destinies and those who could not comes to the fore as is seen as he challenges the rich to wait for one another before the meal (1 Cor. 11:33).

To counter this unbecoming behaviour of the wealthy Corinthians, Paul reminds them that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is rooted in the narrative of Jesus' self-giving for the benefit of others. It is only when the Corinthians celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way in which the poor are not disadvantaged that they are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes – the self-giving death of Jesus for others. Paul also warns the Corinthians that judgement awaits those who eat and drink without discerning the body of believers (1 Cor. 11:27-34).

With this understanding, it seems to be the case that the celebration of the Lord's Supper together with a proper meal may not merely be a religious occasion, but also a means by which distribution of food to the poor is being practised.<sup>39</sup> If this is correct, then the celebration of Lord's Supper is a clear demonstration of how a community cares and provides for the poor so that

there can be equality in sharing the most basic means of survival—food. For the rich to wait for one another and to eat at home if they are hungry would ensure a proper redistribution of food and possibly be a strategy to offset poverty among the poor in Corinth.

Unless the community embodies a concern for others, particularly the poor and less fortunate, rooted in the model of Jesus himself, it cannot proclaim the Lord's death. In defending those who have nothing against those who have houses in which to eat, Paul is concerned not about the position or status of the person – but economic relationships in the body of Christ. There is no room for the exploitation and humiliation of the have-nots. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is oriented towards the economy of God – an economy that welcomes and embraces the poor to share in the abundant banquet of the table of the Lord. It reminds us of Jesus' Parable of the Great Banquet, where 'still there is room' for everyone (Lk. 14:15-24).

Interestingly, the implications of Paul's understanding of generosity in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 are similar to that in 2 Corinthians 8-9 as I have examined earlier. We have seen how generosity is grounded in the story of Jesus when Paul evokes the tradition of the institution of the Lord's Supper by referring to the giving up of Jesus for others. Generosity also results in equality where the wealthy are exhorted to wait for the poor in the celebration of the Lord's Supper so that every-

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<sup>39</sup> See also the discussion in Suzanne Watts Henderson, "If Anyone Hungers...": An Integrated Reading of 1 Cor 11.17-34', *NTS* 48 (2002): 295-208.

one has the same share of food. Finally, it is when generosity is being practised in a way that meets the needs of the poor that the celebration of the Lord's Supper becomes a proclamation of the death of Jesus – the very confession of the gospel.

## V Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Paul's understanding of generosity in remembering the poor is not only the heart of his gospel but it is rooted in the story of Jesus himself, in which the 'self-lowering other-regard' paradigm is visibly displayed. For Paul, the poor as mentioned in Galatians 2:10 do not have geographical restrictions – they are both the poor in Jerusalem and the poor in the local congregations that he

established in the Mediterranean basin.

Paul's understanding of generosity and his vision of the right of all to have a fair share so that no one has needs is timely today especially in many instances where the rich are getting richer, and the poor poorer. Christian generosity requires that a relative proportion of giving should be guided accordingly. The wealthier should be challenged to give more in terms of higher percentage, compared to those who are poorer so that the confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ can be authenticated through love in action.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A special word of thanks is due to Ruth Ng for her assistance in compiling the bibliographical references for this article.

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# Responsible Generosity

Daniel Hillion

**KEY-WORDS:** *Simple lifestyle, grace, poverty, private property, money, vocation.*

BEING GENEROUS IN a responsible way can be a challenge. Yet that is how the Christian is called to exercise generosity. The issue is not primarily about my feelings: it is about my *choices*. This raises a number of questions: why should I choose to be generous? How can I find the motivation and strength to be generous when I am tempted to keep everything I have for myself and overlook the needs of others? What should I actually do? This article tries to provide some answers with a focus on Christian social action, first by evoking some fundamental principles and then more specific ones on generosity in our present condition and on responsibility.

## I A Response to Grace

Christian ethics is a response to the grace of salvation. Of course, there is a sense in which ethics is first of all grounded in creation and God's commandment. But if we come to the effective practice of what is pleasing to

God, we must emphasize the fact that, after the fall, when Christians begin to act responsibly, it is as a response to the grace they have received. In Christ, God has been and continues to be generous towards us. This is why we need to learn how to imitate him. This may be by generously forgiving those who have sinned against us, or by being concerned for the salvation of those who do not know the gospel, or by sharing with the poor first of all within the church and also in wider society. The grace of a generous God should be revealed in our daily lifestyle.

It is not enough to understand that there is a link between God's generosity and the choices we ought to make: we have to taste God's grace, come daily to the cross of Christ, and ask the Father to give us the Holy Spirit so that we will have something to offer to our neighbour and that we will be willing to share with him. It is only when we have heard our Lord saying: 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom' (Lk. 12:32),<sup>1</sup> that we are able to hear the next sentence about giving away our possessions: 'Sell your possessions

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the NIV.

and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys (Lk. 12:33).’ The *logic* of grace (God has been generous, so I must be generous too) has to go hand in hand with the *experience* of grace (being touched by the generosity of God, I become generous myself).<sup>2</sup>

More precisely, I would suggest that we need to hear repeatedly the proclamation of justification by faith. This doctrine has been termed the *articulus stantis vel candantis ecclesiae* (i.e. the article of faith with which the church stands or falls). However, I wonder if it has the place it deserves in the preaching and teaching of most evangelical churches, in the hymns they sing, and in the lives of their members. Are we really able to connect this truth with our daily choices? Does the knowledge of the fact that we have been justified freely make any difference in the way we use our money or in the way we act towards the poor?

It is true that the juridical flavour of the theme of justification appeals little to the mentality of people in the West. It is more difficult to comprehend than notions such as ‘meaning’, ‘fulfilment’, ‘healing’ or ‘blessing’. Nevertheless it gives the answer to the deepest needs and fears of human beings: ‘The sting

of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law’ (1 Cor. 15:56). When the condemnation of law is removed there is nothing left to hinder us from loving God with all our hearts and our neighbour as ourselves. Through the knowledge of our free and complete justification before the judgement seat of God, the Spirit overcomes little by little all the obstacles to our doing the will of God, including all the obstacles to our being generous in a responsible manner.

The practical knowledge of justification by faith is fragile. There is a very strong temptation to lose sight of it, to act ‘foolishly’ and ‘after beginning by means of the Spirit’ to go on ‘trying to finish by means of the flesh’ (Gal. 3:3). Unfortunately, the discussion of topics such as generosity, social responsibility, action against poverty and radical discipleship can reinforce the temptation if it is not handled properly. It is sometimes necessary to challenge Christians ‘prophetically’ about the nature of their lifestyles and to make them feel uncomfortable about their choices. But the result should be first of all that they be grounded more and more in the grace of God and that *this* leads them to change.

If evangelical Christians preach the importance of a culture of generosity and simple lifestyle without recalling again and again the message of grace and justification by faith, there is a huge risk that there will be more Christians feeling guilty for not being generous, but who will not become more generous anyway. Or (worse maybe) some will become involved with wrong motivations (self-righteously) and become judgmental towards those not as ‘radical’ as themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> See Elaine Storkey, ‘Integral Mission in the Ministry of Jesus: Luke 7:36-50 and 19:1-10’, in *Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral mission and the poor*, edited by Tim Chester (Carlisle, Cumbria (UK) and Waynesboro (USA): Paternoster Press, 2002), 33-41 for a very profound meditation on how the experience of grace can have radical impact on socially excluded persons and foster action towards the poor.

## II A response to our Vocation as People and as Christians

If the grace of God in Christ applied by the Spirit and the message of justification by faith provide us with motivation and strength to be generous in a responsible manner, we also need to reflect on the foundation of generosity and on the theological framework in which we can inscribe it.

The creation narrative teaches that when God created man and woman, he gave them the mandate to fill the earth and subdue it. Talking about ‘stewardship’ can shed light on human vocation. We have the responsibility of using creation’s resources for the glory of God and the good of others. We can enjoy these resources – because God is a generous God – but we must be careful not to waste or destroy what fundamentally belongs to God and can be useful for the common good.

The fall has been followed by many dreadful consequences. Among them are suffering and poverty. It is true that some specialists tell us that there are enough resources to feed everyone on the planet, but it is more difficult now to enjoy them—firstly because the environment is not what it was when God created the earth: ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil will you eat food from it...’ (Gen. 3:17b-18a) and secondly, the human heart has become hard. Selfishness, abuse of power and social injustice have become the source of much poverty. As long as we live in a fallen world we should expect to have the poor with us and / or be poor ourselves.

After having pronounced the death-sentence because of sin, God shows sinners that he has not forsaken us. He

has a plan of salvation that will be fulfilled in Jesus; the seed of the woman that will crush the serpent’s head. Life continues after the sentence of death!

The fall and redemption create a new context for our lives, but do not change our vocation to act as stewards of God’s resources. Developing a simple lifestyle to enable generosity is all the more necessary if we are to respond to our vocation as humans in a context where it is more difficult to meet the needs of everyone. It is also a means of responding to the grace of God who has a hope for humankind and to bear witness to it. It is acting responsibly as a human-being and a Christian.

## III Some principles on generosity

To apply the biblical teaching on generosity, it might be important to underline certain principles. These would be especially relevant to Christians living in the West.

### 1. Christians as foreigners and exiles

The apostle Peter, in his first epistle, calls his readers both ‘God’s elect’ and ‘exiles scattered’ (1 Pet. 1:1); ‘foreigners and exiles’ (1 Pet. 2:11). Although it has been argued that his readers might have been literally strangers in Asia Minor, it seems more probable that his use of this vocabulary is metaphorical and applies to all Christians as Christians.<sup>3</sup> As Abraham, the father of all believers, confessed himself to be

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<sup>3</sup> See Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), Appendix A: ‘Resident aliens’ – literal or figurative, 227-229.

a foreigner and stranger, despite being in the Promised Land (Gen. 23:4), the Christian is a foreigner and exile on earth, despite possessing the promise to inherit the world (cf. Rom. 4:13).

What strikes the observer of the western evangelical microcosm is that Christians seem to be very much at home in the world. It would be hard to describe them as 'foreigners and exiles'. They have much in common with their non-Christian neighbours in terms of how they envision a successful life. The distinction between 'already' and 'not yet', although theoretically received, is being replaced in a number of ways by the requirement to obtain everything now.

Rediscovering the two sides of Peter's description (elect/exiles) appears to me to be a prerequisite to the exercise of generosity for western Christians. It may seem strange but sound evangelical social doctrine and social involvement – with the culture of generosity and giving that they presuppose – depend on the acceptance of the fact that Christians are strangers in society and cannot be completely part of it.

Our identity is not determined by what we possess or by the way in which we match society's standards of success. We are God's elect and exiles on earth. An exile does not get entangled with many material possessions. He is travelling and may be obliged to move quickly. Being elected for a great purpose, you do not have to pay too much attention to what the world deems important. The consequence is that we are free to be generous!

Recognizing that we are strangers in the world may open our eyes to the necessity to show solidarity to our 'fellow strangers' (the needs of our broth-

ers and sisters in Christ). It may also give us the will to share with those among whom we live in wider society by generously supporting the evangelization of the world and Christian social action. We want to be a blessing for those who are not yet part of the people of God. (See below the section on poverty for more on this.)

Once again: it is not sufficient to rediscover the theme of the Christian as a stranger if we do not ponder the doctrine of election at the same time. The theme of God's choice is not a popular one because it hurts the natural desire of the sinful heart to be autonomous. Nevertheless, it is itself the foundation of the doctrine of justification by faith (cf. Rom. 8:29-30) and a doctrine of grace. Without it, the Christian life is weakened.

If more Christians were to understand correctly what it means to be elected 'to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood' (1 Pet. 1:2), this would certainly further a culture of generosity and who knows if this would not benefit many poor people in the world. Being truly really generous requires that we integrate the full breadth of the Bible's teaching on grace, including election.

## 2. The question of money

Talking about generosity, simple lifestyle, social involvement, mission, etc., implies talking about money. It does not end with money, but it often *begins* here. It is not always easy to discuss this issue because the use of money can be considered a very personal matter. Money can be a kind of taboo subject. But it can also be, to some degree a kind of domestic idol.

Giving to the church or to mission agencies, taking care of our neighbour in need and alms-giving require that we put aside part of what we own to give it away. There is a lot more that we can do (and we should, for example, look carefully at what the Bible says about hospitality), but usually, being incapable of giving part of one's money is indicative of a problem somewhere. The solution to this problem... is to go back to the grace of God!

The Lausanne Movement has emphasised the issue of simple living. The Lausanne Covenant (1974) states in its ninth paragraph:

All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple life-style in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism.

This clause was a topic of discussion at the first Lausanne Conference. John Stott explained that 'perhaps no expression in the Covenant caused more anxious thought in would-be signatories at Lausanne than this'.<sup>4</sup>

In the years following the Congress, Tim Chester tells us that 'as John Stott met with Third World Christians he was asked by them whether Western Christians were really serious about the commitment they had made to simple lifestyle in the Lausanne Cov-

enant'.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, a consultation was held in 1980 that issued a text called 'An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle'.<sup>6</sup>

The paragraph of the Commitment on personal lifestyle is particularly relevant for the topic of generosity. It puts things clearly by talking about money: 'We intend to re-examine our income and expenditure, in order to manage on less and give away more.' I once heard someone dismissing this statement as simplistic because it sounded as though the issue of living simply and justly was a question of spending less money. It was argued that sometimes the concern for justice would lead us to buy more costly items. Fair trade and concern for the environment may force us to spend more.

It can be answered that the Commitment is not dealing with the issue of spending more or less *per se*. The distinction is between what is necessary and what is superfluous, and the idea is that if we avoided superfluous expense, we could give more generously to both relief and evangelism.

Nevertheless, I think that there is something interesting in the criticism and that it should be heard. The issue of generosity is an issue of money and of giving (even 'sacrificially' as is often said today), but in what sense? There is a story in the Gospels about a widow who gave 'two very small copper coins,

<sup>4</sup> John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*, Lausanne Occasional Papers 3, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/69-lop-3.html> accessed 3 Jul 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Chester, *Awakening to a World of Need: The recovery of evangelical social concern* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 100-101.

<sup>6</sup> The text has been published in *Lifestyle in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle*, Ronald J. Sider, Editor (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 13-19.

worth only a few cents' and the Lord Jesus said that 'this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others', even those who gave 'large amounts' (Mk. 12:41-44).

This text is very well-known, but it faces us with a challenge: what is our primary end when promoting generosity among Christians? Is it that Christians be more generous or that the amount of money raised be higher? Of course we can normally expect both but the question of priority is important: in some circumstances we *could* have more generous Christians and less money raised. A significant issue at that point is the way we encourage Christians to be generous. If the communication and advertisement techniques that we use are exactly the same as those that are so closely linked to the consumerist mentality that we seek to challenge by talking about simple lifestyle, then we may have gone wrong somewhere in our priorities.

The Commitment on Simple Lifestyle is careful not to become legalistic in the way it envisions simple living but it gives some practical suggestions: 'We lay down no rules or regulations, for either ourselves or others. Yet we resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church building.' It goes so far as to suggest that Christians from the West receive help from Christians of the 'Third World' in 'evaluating our standard of spending', while recognizing that 'those of us who live in the Third World [...] too are exposed to the temptation to covetousness. So we need each other's understanding, encouragement and prayers.'

### 3. Concern for the poor

One of the main areas that is relevant to the topic of generosity is concern for the poor. As the development of a more systematized evangelical social doctrine is one of the challenges that face us at the beginning of the 21st century, it is right that we underline the issue of generosity and the poor. As western Christians living in more or less affluent circumstances, it is natural that we should think about our responsibility towards those living in abject poverty, even in countries far from us. Two biblical themes might receive more emphasis than they usually do in evangelical circles today.

First, the teaching of the Scriptures, especially of the New Testament, should lead us to be particularly concerned for our fellow Christians who suffer from poverty. This might be a sensitive issue, especially for NGOs committed to help people irrespective of their religious affiliation. Nevertheless, we should be able to find a way of doing good to all people 'especially to those who belong to the family of believers' (Gal. 6:10). It might begin with our personal relationships within our own local church, as was the case in the first community of Jerusalem (Acts 2:45; 4:32-37).

We should also find ways to express Christian solidarity and generosity throughout the global body of Christ, as the apostle Paul did by organising a collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. May I also suggest that Christian development agencies take more time to struggle with the question of special responsibility that the church has towards its own members and whether they could help it to assume it?



The second theme – that could help balance it with the first – would be the following: concern for the poor and generosity towards them is a duty imposed upon us on the basis of the common humanity we share with them. This is particularly true of those living in affluent circumstances. This teaching appears in several passages of Holy Scriptures, most notably in the Wisdom Literature. Job and Proverbs are especially noteworthy in this respect.

Part of the vindication that Job presents of his case amounts to this: he was generous towards the poor when he could be (Job 29:13-17; 31:16-23). The model of Job, far as it is from our conditions of life in the West today, seems to me to be of great interest for our reflection on social action. It presents us with the story of a rich man, living among his fellow citizens, doing good and being generous. Job is not an Israelite and does not live among the people of God. In this, his situation is similar to that of Christians today living in the world.

On the basis of what Job recounts, could we not imagine how he would have responded to the challenges of the situation of poor people in the developing world today? How would he have dealt with socio-political injustices towards the poor (see Job 29:17)? What would he have done with his wealth to relieve at least some of them (see Job 31:17)? Maybe the book of Job can provide us with precious tools to develop a culture of generosity among affluent Christians as they have to be present in the world today.

We live in the world as ‘foreigners and exiles’. And yet it does not mean that we are of a different nature from the people among whom we live. Per-

haps this is the most painful side of our present condition: we are strangers among our own). We are not a closed group, indifferent to the fate of those outside. We still have links with them. We share the same human nature.

Evangelical Christians have not always talked much about ‘nature’. The concept may have appeared to imply a sort of autonomy of nature. The will to underline the need of special revelation to understand aright what we should do in any area of life may have caused evangelical Christians to neglect or dismiss the concept of nature. But it is a fact that generosity and benevolence towards the poor is a value recognized as such among many non-Christians, even some of those unreached by the light of special revelation. They have learned it from natural revelation! The Wisdom Literature of the Bible can help us to value and give proper weight to the importance of human solidarity and apply it to the realm of international solidarity today.

### III Some Principles on Living Responsibly

We should be generous in a responsible way. It means first of all that our generosity is a *response* to the grace of God, to our calling as humans and as Christians. But there are some principles about responsibility that need to be underlined today to avoid our discussion and practice of generosity being unbalanced.

#### 1. The nature of responsibility

‘Responsibility’ is, by its very definition, a *relative* concept. We are responsible before someone, ultimately

before God. There is no such thing as 'absolute responsibility'. Talking about human beings as responsible beings reminds us that they are created by God. Responsibility is also a *concrete* concept: we are responsible to do the task assigned to us, not less, but not more. For example, we are commanded to love our neighbour, i.e. the one God places near us;<sup>7</sup> we are not asked to love 'all men' if by 'all men' we mean all individuals belonging to the human race.

We are responsible before God: this means that our responsibility is a very serious matter and at the same time it implies that our responsibility is limited. It has the boundaries that God has given it. We should be very careful not to 'play God' and talk or act as if everything in the world could depend on us, our involvement and our generosity. We don't control much of the complex interweaving of human actions nor all the consequences of our decisions.

How does this apply more specifically to the issue of generosity? What God is requiring of us is not, first of all, that we change the world through our generous giving. True, what we do can make a far greater difference than we sometimes imagine. But our task is to love our neighbour. This means that most of us will get involved in the life of one or two or ten or maybe a few more people. We will have to love them with all the costs implied in terms of time, money and self-giving. We will not become some kind of 'superheroes' through our simple lifestyle and sacri-

ficial giving. If we have to become 'heroes' it will be, like the title of one of Tim Chester's books, 'ordinary heroes', heroes in the daily routine.

## 2. The value of private property

In a discussion about being generous in a responsible way, it is important to emphasize the value of private property as a foundation to well-orientated generosity. It is interesting to note that several classical Protestant confessions of faith have felt the need to underline this principle. For example, the 38th of the Church of England's Articles of Religion states:

The riches and goods of Christians are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.

Commenting on this, W. H. Griffith Thomas aptly remarks: 'Property as the fruit of industry is involved in the very notion of society as it exists by natural law, *and if Christians have nothing of their own there can be no place for bounty and no necessity for liberality.*'<sup>8</sup>

To foster a culture of generosity among Christians, it is necessary to respect everyone's individual private property and the fact that everyone has to make his own choices before God as to how and how much he will give. It is not legitimate for a community to try

<sup>7</sup> 'Near' can be read literally and metaphorically. God may link me (and in this sense make me near) to somebody living very far from me.

<sup>8</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: Vine Books Ltd, 1930, Sixth Edition Revised 1978), 481, italics mine.

to force its members to be generous or to attempt to control their use of their possessions. Neither the church nor wider society should dare do this.

These remarks may seem hardly necessary for those who think that Christians today need rather to be exhorted to be oriented towards community, sharing and renouncing their possessions. On the other hand it is my belief that current criticisms made of individualism (as relevant as they may be) often fail to give proper value to each individual person, to individual salvation, individual choices and individual responsibility. Professor Henri Blocher wrote: 'Scripture recognizes the individual's ultimate value that forbids considering him as being simply part of a bigger whole.'<sup>9</sup> There will soon be a great need to learn again the value of the individual.

We have to find a way of talking about generosity, simple lifestyle, sharing with the poor, etc. that profoundly respects each individual's choices by avoiding putting too much pressure on them and/or trying to manipulate them through communication techniques (for example those that are easily used when addressing a crowd). Encouraging people to be generous, even reminding them of biblical imperatives, by no means entails blurring the distinction between what is mine and what is yours. If, in the first Christian community 'no one claimed that any of

their possessions was their own' (Acts 4:32), it was by choice and Peter's words to Ananias (and the rest of the New Testament) make it very clear.

In this respect, it is necessary to guard ourselves against the temptation to suspect property as such, money as such, material goods as such. It is an ever-recurring temptation that amounts to locating the problem of humankind in *things* rather than in human beings' *hearts*.

It has become common to remind Christians that God is the owner of everything and that there is no absolute right to private property.<sup>10</sup> The latter thesis might need clarification.

What does it mean to talk about 'absolute' right? Before God we have no absolute right and it is probably best to avoid using the right vocabulary at all when talking about our relationship with God: 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised' (Job 1:21). This exclamation gives the right attitude before God as far as our property is concerned.

But when we come to our relationships with our fellow human beings, what can be meant by denying an 'absolute right' to private property? It could be that our right to *acquire* new properties can be limited. Or that we cannot use all conceivable means to *protect* our property or to *claim* what we are entitled to receive.<sup>11</sup> To use the lan-

<sup>9</sup> Henri Blocher, 'L'Individu menacé', in *Ichthus*, 2, April 1970, 9. Translation mine. The French text reads: 'L'Écriture reconnaît à l'individu une valeur dernière, qui interdit de le considérer comme un simple élément d'un tout plus vaste.' (The text is in bold characters.)

<sup>10</sup> See for example Howard Peskett and Vино Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: The glory of Christ in all time and space*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 46.

<sup>11</sup> See for example the condemnation on those who 'who add house to house and join

guage of the Roman Catholic Church's social doctrine, we must keep together the right of private property and the principle of the universal destination of goods.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, it is right to say that there is no absolute right to private property.

Nevertheless, this expression can also be used in more problematic ways to make a distinction between 'absolute rights' and 'relative rights' or to suggest that the commandment not to steal would not always be binding, or to imply that what belongs to me also, in a sense, belongs to you, or that the State can, with sovereign power, put limits on private property. Suffice it to say here that the Bible does not seem to encourage the idea that even poverty can justify theft. In the context of a comparison with another matter it mentions the fact that 'people do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house' (Prov. 6:30-31). This practice is not criticized. Private property is a serious matter.

For these reasons, I think it would be better to denounce the abuses of the right to private property rather than to speak of the right to private property as not being absolute. This would make clear that there is no problem in private property as such. Our generos-

ity towards the poor should even be orientated to their having access to private property in such a way that they will be able to support themselves and their family and, of their own property, be generous themselves. This could be a way of implementing the affirmation of the Global Generosity Network:

... it is incumbent upon every Christian to exercise generosity toward individuals and efforts in ways that foster dignity and promote personal responsibility.

### 3. Living in keeping with one's station in life

In the first 'social' encyclical (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891), Pope Leo XIII, after stressing the right to private property and the duty to use one's property by sharing with those in need, makes a very insightful comment:

True, no one is commanded to distribute to others that which is required for his own needs and those of his household; nor even to give away what is reasonably required to keep up becomingly his condition in life, 'for no one ought to live other than becomingly'.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of living 'becomingly' requires further thinking. The quote at the end of the text mentioned is from St. Thomas Aquinas. In his *Summa Theologiae*, the Angelic Doctor states

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field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land' (Is. 5:8) or restriction on the action of the owner of a loan (Deut. 24:10) or on protecting oneself against theft (Ex. 22:2, but see verse 1).

<sup>12</sup> The Roman Catholic Church clearly subordinates the right of private property to the principle of the universal destination of goods.

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<sup>13</sup> Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html), accessed 5 Jul 2012. On the Vatican's website the paragraph is number 22. In the French edition that I usually consult, the number is 453.

that 'a thing is necessary in two ways'.<sup>14</sup> This twofold kind of necessity can help us with the distinction between what is necessary and what is superfluous: a thing may be necessary 'first, because without it something is impossible'. So, for example, eating is necessary because without it life is impossible. 'Secondly, a thing is said to be necessary, if a man cannot without it live in keeping with his social station, as regards either himself or those of whom he has charge.'

St. Thomas' text can provide guidance as to how we ought to exercise generosity, although we should accept the context of his discussion, i.e. the (thoroughly unbiblical) distinction between precept and counsel.<sup>15</sup> Consider the following:

- The faithful, in the Holy Scriptures, seem to have lived according to their social station either as ordinary people, poor, slave or as rich or even kings. There are some exceptions to this such as John the Baptist who might not have lived 'becomingly'. He did it out of a special calling. Rather than introducing the distinction between 'precept' and 'counsel', we should, with professor August Lecerf (in a study on Calvinism and Capitalism), speak of a virtual renouncement to everything

that must become a real renouncement as soon as God demands it.<sup>16</sup> The implied reference is to 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

- The idea of living with what is necessary in St. Thomas' second sense (and giving the rest) surely implies that we renounce all waste, prodigality and that we be generous. It may also imply that we be much more cautious about becoming entangled in debts than is usually the case in the present western culture.
- St. Thomas comments very wisely on the second kind of necessity:

The 'necessary' considered thus is not an invariable quantity, for one might add much more to a man's property, and yet not go beyond what he needs in this way, or one might take much from him, and he would still have sufficient for the decencies of life in keeping with his own position.

If this is true, it means that there is space for considerable variation between different individuals or for the same person at different times. We would always have the challenge to become *more* generous (because 'one might take much from him, and he would still have sufficient for the decencies of life in keeping with his own position') without feeling guilty for not being as generous as we possibly could (because it is right to 'live in keeping with one's station').

I am well aware that some will find these propositions disappointing and not radical enough. I would argue that

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<sup>14</sup> My quotes are all from St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, qu. 32, art. 6. I use the English translation found on [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS\\_Q32\\_A6.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS_Q32_A6.html), accessed 5 July 2012.

<sup>15</sup> St. Thomas thinks that it is 'wrong' (except in certain very definite circumstances) to give alms out of the necessary in the first sense, and that it is a matter of counsel but not of precept to do it in the second sense.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Auguste Lecerf, 'Calvinisme et capitalisme', in *Études calvinistes* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 1999, 1st edition 1949), 99-106.

they follow from an understanding of our responsibility as being real but limited, and of private property as being a positive thing before the face of God who both 'richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment' and wants us 'to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share' (1 Tim. 6: 17-18). If seriously taken to heart, it would in fact foster a real culture of generosity among Christians. But it would be a generosity exercised in a responsible and realistic manner, not some utopia wherein we ourselves build the Kingdom of God on earth. Our generosity is important. But not everything depends on it. Everything depends on *God's* generosity! *Sola Gratia* once again, and this way *Soli Deo Gloria!*

The anonymous epistle to Diognetus (2nd century) beautifully expresses the distinguishing style of life of Christians, what it is and what it is not:<sup>17</sup>

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. [...] But, inhabiting

Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners.

As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. [...] They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. [...]

In this way, we would engage in a simple lifestyle as a response to the grace of God. In this way we would become increasingly generous. And the church, missions, our neighbour in general and the poor in particular would certainly benefit from it.

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<sup>17</sup> *Epistle to Diognetus*, ch. V., <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iii.ii.v.html>, accessed 9 July 2012.

# In the Service of One God only: Financial Integrity in Christian Leadership

R. Scott Rodin

**KEYWORDS:** *Stewardship, theology of money, secularity, self-image, power, kingdom, fundraising, transformation.*

WHOEVER CAN BE TRUSTED with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? (Lk. 16:10-12).

Jesus is making it unmistakably clear that money is not some impersonal medium of exchange. Money is not something that is morally neutral, a resource to be used in good or bad ways depending solely upon our attitude toward it. Mammon is a power that seeks to dominate us.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Money, Sex and Power* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1985), 24.

Any Christian who has served in a leadership capacity knows that the position is dominated by issues related to money. We assume positions of leadership because of our passion and calling to carry out a mission, achieve a vision and accomplish significant work. Whether leading a for-profit company or a not-for-profit ministry, we come into leadership with our eyes focused on some other prize than the merely financial. However, it is not long before we realize that our day-to-day work is dominated by decisions surrounding income and expenses, debt and investment, balance sheets and cash flow projections. Every decision we make as a leader has financial implications, and how we understand the place and role of money in our institutions may have a greater effect on our success as leaders than any other single factor.

This is a powerful and provocative statement but one that I believe to be true. Think back over the last four weeks in your leadership role. How much of your thinking and plan-

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**R. Scott Rodin** (PhD Aberdeen) is President of Rodin Consulting in Spokane, Washington and consults with Christian organisations in the areas of leadership, fund raising, strategic planning and organizational development. He is past President of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia where he also taught theology and ethics. His books include *The Million-Dollar Dime* (Spokane: Kingdom Life Publishing, 2012), *The Third Conversion* (Spokane: Kingdom Life Publishing, 2010) and *The Steward Leader* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

ning was dominated and influenced by the financial realities you face? How much conversation and strategy was focused on securing more income, controlling expenses, setting or adjusting budgets, taking on or eliminating debt, managing investments? The discerning leader understands that because every decision he or she makes has financial implications their own personal view of money will shape those decisions and with them the future of the entire organization.

In this article we will look at the *temptations* faced by every leader with regard to the role and function of money in their organization, and the *transformation* that is our obligation and opportunity as Christian leaders.

## I Temptation – Facing our Demons

Every Christian leader has a personal theology of money. They may never have thought about it in those terms or articulated it in a systematic way, but we all hold views and attitudes toward money that guide the way we earn it, invest it, spend it and give it. This personal theology may have been built purposefully on a solid biblical basis, but for most people it is a syncretic set of beliefs and attitudes that have been influenced more by worldly standards than solid biblical principles. These beliefs and attitudes are especially influenced in our American culture by six prevailing misconceptions of money and the temptations inherent in each. We will seek to understand the temptations we face as Christian leaders and develop a biblically sound theology of money.<sup>2</sup>

Consider the following definition

from the popular website Wikipedia,

Money is any object that is generally accepted as payment for goods and services and repayment of debts in a given country or socio-economic context. The main functions of money are distinguished as: a medium of exchange; a unit of account; a store of value; and, occasionally, a standard of deferred payment.<sup>3</sup>

In this functional definition money is amoral; a neutral medium for the exchange of value. It carries no inherent goodness or malevolence but serves the user equally whether one chooses to invest it for benevolent or malicious purposes. At face value this seems an obvious conclusion. Money is, after all, ink on paper or impressions on semi-precious metals. We don't value a quarter because of the material from which it is made but for its ability to secure for us about \$.25 worth of goods and services. A piece of paper upon which a \$100 bill is printed has no more value than the paper used to print this page. The value is bestowed on it by the arrangement of ink and what it denotes to the one who possesses it. There is nothing right or wrong with the piece of paper itself, so the definition would lead us to believe.

The *first temptation* we face as leaders is viewing money in this detached, amoral way. The world of money and finance can be viewed erroneously as operating on the periphery of the true spiritual core of an organization. Consider the church that selects from

<sup>2</sup> For a splendid treatment of this subject in a systematic way, see Gene Getz, *Rich in Every Way* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)



among its most spiritually mature people those that will serve as Elders with the responsibility for the spiritual vitality of the congregation. That same church will elect Deacons to handle financial matters with little if any consideration of their spiritual maturity as long as they come with the requisite financial experience.

We see the same attitude in not-for-profit organizations when chief financial officers and fundraising staff are hired with little regard to the depth of their spiritual maturity or their ability to integrate a robust and living faith with their work of managing and raising the resources for the organization. Whenever we separate the spiritual from the financial we bear witness to this view of money as a morally vacuous medium of exchange. And we do so to our great peril.

In his three-year ministry, Jesus spoke more often about money than any other subject except the kingdom of God. What he said bore no resemblance to money as morally vacuous. Indeed he taught quite the opposite. As Christian leaders, Jesus' words should stop us in our tracks. The problem is we have heard them too often and have downplayed their implications. Hear them again and test your view of money against them,

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (Mt. 6:24).

Jesus is not setting up a dialectic between the sovereign God of the universe and a neutral medium of exchange. He is speaking of two rival

spiritual forces where each seeks our absolute devotion. The words he uses are extreme and absolute: master, love, hate, devoted, despised. The only alternatives Jesus provides are love and hate, devotion and despising. There is no room for loving God and simply using money. Money is ascribed power that rivals the divine and demands from us our total love and allegiance. There is no denying the power that Jesus prescribes to money.

Richard Foster states that, 'according to Jesus and all the writers of the New Testament, behind money are very real spiritual forces that energize it and give it a life of its own. Hence, money is an active agent; it is a law unto itself; and it is capable of inspiring devotion.'<sup>4</sup> The first temptation that must be overcome by every Christian leader is to view money as anything less than a significant spiritual force that constantly works to gain our allegiance and compromise our total trust in God and God alone.

A *second temptation*, and one that is a natural product of the first, is the seduction of linking our self-image and that of our organization to our financial status. This may seem less threatening than the first temptation, but beware. Consider the ways in which organizations talk about themselves and measure success. While not-for-profit ministries may pride themselves on leading with mission-focused accomplishments, true success is almost always measured in financial terms.

Pastors talk to other pastors about the size of their congregation, the success of the latest building project and

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<sup>4</sup> Foster, *Money, Sex and Power*, 26.

whether their giving has gone up or down. Presidents of Christian schools, colleges and universities speak to alumni in terms of growing enrolment, new academic buildings and an increasing endowment. Owners of businesses speak to shareholders about profits, reinvestment and share prices.

For each of these, whether the pastor of a small church, the president of a community not-for-profit organization or the owner of a growing business, the financial success of their respective organization reflects heavily on their own self-image and reputation.

This connection between financial success and self-image starts at home. Our American culture idolizes the financially successful and as a result has developed a culture that measures self-image in financial terms. While we may deeply desire to value our neighbour based solely on his or her integrity and contribution to the greater societal good, we find it hard to keep out of the mix ingredients such as the size of their house, the cost of their car, the places they vacation and the schools their children attend. When we are called to positions of leadership this temptation only increases. Now our self-worth is determined both by our personal financial status and the success of the organization we lead. When we allow our self-image to be determined by these factors we have fallen prey to the second temptation.

The *third temptation* is to yield to the power that is inherent in all dealings with money. The apostle Paul warned his young colleague Timothy, 'the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil' (1 Tim. 6:10). What tempts us is not the love of a neutral medium of exchange but the desire for the power

that comes from the accumulation of wealth. With money comes power and with power comes control, and it is the power to control that we find so intoxicating.

As leaders, the opportunity to increase control is a never-ending siren song that calls to us, promising us success and stature if we will but grasp it. Of course what happens is that it grasps us and soon our thirst for power that comes through the pursuing of wealth ends up controlling us. As Christian leaders we must fight every day this temptation to grasp at the power that comes from the accumulation of financial resources.

The *fourth temptation* is kingdom building. Loving one master and despising the other calls us to be one-kingdom Christians. Christ's call on our life is uncompromising and unequivocal. We are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. There is place for only one allegiance, one Lord, one master. The abundant Christian life is found only in the total surrender of all we have and all we are to the one kingdom of God. As Christian leaders, Christ calls us to the total surrender of control and renunciation of the desire for the power that comes from success that is measured in any terms other than the building of the kingdom of God.

This is an amazingly difficult surrender! Our tendency, given our sinful nature, is to build alongside the kingdom of God our own little earthly kingdom where we get to play the lord. It may consist of our time, some or all of our possessions, our relationships and our attitudes. Anything that has not been completely submitted and surrendered to Christ, any control that

has not been thoroughly turned over to him, and any power that still wins our allegiance will be the stuff of our earthly kingdom. If we are honest with ourselves we will acknowledge that we are all kingdom builders.

In our personal life we struggle with a desire to keep control over those parts of our lives that seem just too important to trust fully to God. As Christian leaders we struggle to satisfy employees, board members, donors, stakeholders, shareholders and business partners while at the same time relinquishing control and placing all of our business or organization into the one kingdom of Christ. This struggle is seen in its greatest intensity in the way we deal with money in our institutions. As Christian leaders we must understand the struggle as a battle for lordship and we must help our colleagues to see the same.

The *fifth temptation* is to separate our personal spiritual journey from our work as Christian leaders. In our post-modern culture we are encouraged to compartmentalize our private life from our public service. It is perfectly acceptable (if not actually encouraged) to live one life at home and another at the office. We are told that there is no meta-ethic that requires us to be consistent in the application of values across all areas of our life. As this temptation seeps into the church it quietly encourages us to keep our personal faith separate from our public role as Christian leaders. Surprisingly, this happens even in the church and the Christian not-for-profit world.

In working with Christian fundraising professionals I am often surprised at the resistance I face when I link a person's personal history of generosity

and sacrificial giving to the success of their work of asking others to do the same. We seem reticent to make that connection, believing somehow that we can be personally stingy and professionally successful in helping others be generous. As Christian leaders our ability to help our organizations deal properly and effectively with money must flow from our own personal and on-going transformation as followers of Christ whose hearts are rich toward God.

The *sixth temptation* is to play the owner and not the steward. The previous five temptations may be wrapped up and subsumed under this one powerful Christian concept. We are stewards not owners. Our earthly existence can be understood on four planes; our relationships with God, with ourselves, with our neighbour and with the creation itself. On all four planes we live in relationships that were distorted and destroyed in the fall and completely restored in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have now been given back to us as precious gifts with the command to steward each to the glory of God. There is not one item on any plane that we ever own for one moment of our earthly existence. It all belongs to God.

When we pretend to be owners we return to the original sin in Eden and grasp at an alien ownership that will only serve to put us in bondage. The Christian leader must never forget that these two things are inseparable; ownership and bondage. And just as inseparable are stewardship and freedom! That is the choice set before us every moment we choose to serve as a leader. If we believe we own our employees, our clients, our facilities, our students,

our inventory or our profits, we will serve as leaders in absolute bondage. With that bondage comes fear, anxiety, relentless pressure, discouragement and despair. It is from this place of bondage that all five of the temptations listed above will call to us louder and louder, offering us freedom through the accumulation of wealth and the supposed control and power that it can offer. Ownership and bondage simply yield deeper bondage.

The Christian leader must make it a daily discipline to refuse the temptation to ownership and assume with joy and privilege the mantle of the godly steward in every area of his or her life. As stewards we can handle money in a way that robs it of its power and places it in the service of the kingdom of God. And we can lead our people to do the same.

## II Transformation—The Journey of the Christian Leader

There are five indistinguishable marks of the journey of transformation of every Christian with regard to money and possessions; death, dethroning, delivery, discovery and doxology. Each of these marks will transcend the individual life of the Christian leader and have an indelible impression on the organization they're called to lead.

### 1. Death

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he makes the startling statement that, 'when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die'.<sup>5</sup> In doing so he was simply restating Jesus own words, 'whoever finds his life

will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' (Mt. 10:39). The Christian life begins with the death of self, or it does not begin at all. The apostle Paul tells us boldly,

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:1-3).

Earlier in Colossians he reminds us, 'Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules?' (Col. 2:20).

To lose our life, to die in such a way that our life is hidden with Christ in God is to start the journey of our complete transformation from our sinful, self-centred worldview to the fully committed child of God conformed to the image of Christ. In one sense it is a once and for all event. It happened fully for us in the completed work of Christ. Just as Christ does not have to die again and again, so our death to sin has happened once in Christ and as such it is 'finished'. However, in another sense it must be recollected on a daily basis. Our on-going battle with our sinful nature requires that we reaffirm the finality of this event and claim the freedom that is ours as a result.

This work of recollection and reclaiming is the ministry that every Christian leader brings to his or her organization. In dealing with finances we

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<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: MacMillan Company, 1957), 73.

lead with integrity when we help our organization to remember that we have put to death the desires to follow the basic principles of this world. Christian leaders help their people name those principles, recognize them whenever they surface and come against them with the full force of absolute death in regard to them. This is the first plank in an organizational theology of money which every Christian leader must help fashion and enforce. Organizations must collectively embrace this death as their first step toward communal transformation.

## 2. Dethroning

Death alters our worldview fundamentally. From the vista of our absolute death to the things of this world we will be able to see the parapets of our earthly kingdom. As individual followers of Christ the next step is a total relinquishment of our attempts to play the Lord and master over this kingdom. We take off our crown, step off our throne, tear down the walls and dismantle the defences that have protected our stuff as our stuff. This requires a process of naming the things in our kingdom, repenting of our kingdom building ways, and placing them one by one at the feet of Jesus. This can be accomplished only by the on-going work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and it is a process we will undertake until God takes us home.

As Christian leaders we must serve our organizations by helping them walk through the same steps with regard to finances and possessions. This process will require us on both the personal and corporate level to identify and reject three lies that the enemy seeks to

whisper in our ears with regard to our two-kingdom lifestyle.

The *first lie* is that these two kingdoms are somehow *compatible*. Our sinful nature combined with our prevailing American culture will provide a formidable defence and protection of our earthly kingdom. 'Surely', we will hear ourselves say, 'there is no harm in some things remaining in a kingdom over which I continue to exercise control. Surely the Lord will not care if a few things remain as mine to do with as I please.'

This is especially hard in our organizational life. We run our organizations on the business school model that assigns all components of our work to individual responsibility that requires us to control, manage and direct every part of our organizational life. Success or failure in our outcomes is traced back to the quality of our individual or team performance and our ability to control and manage the means of production that brought about these outcomes. It is difficult for the Christian leader to find a place in this process for a one-kingdom approach to the operation of a business or ministry.

The difference may seem subtle between responsibly carrying out our work using our God-given talents and seeking to control and manipulate our work for our own ends. It is, however, one of the great spiritual battlefields in the life of every Christian institution. So much is at stake when we step off the throne of our own kingdom. For most of us, including the Christian leader, the greatest threat is to our self-image. We build earthly kingdoms in order to prop up the image we wish to portray to the world around us. This usually includes success, competency,

relevance, charisma, wisdom and courage. Leaders can use their organizations as their own personal kingdoms and manage their people in order to bear witness to this image.

We must not underestimate the power of this temptation, not just for leaders but also for every person in our organization. We are all seeking personal affirmation from our work, the admiration of our peers and the reassurance that we are a valuable part of the community. When people in our organizations link the measurable outcomes in their work performance to their self-image and sense of importance the foundation has been laid for the construction of an impenetrable earthly kingdom.

Christian leaders face the challenge of helping the people they serve to understand the danger in this linkage. In its place we are called to be image-bearers of Christ and find our satisfaction in our work solely in the faithfulness with which we employ our skills and bear that image. This shift from a performance-based self-image to a faithfulness-inspired self-image will produce the kind of freedom that is necessary for organizations to undertake a thoroughgoing process of dethroning. It all begins with the heart of a leader who is moving successfully along that same journey. Only such a leader can face this first lie straight on and name it for what it is.

The *second lie* is that we can *compartmentalize* these two kingdoms. The storyline here is simple—be faithful in your spiritual kingdom and God will not really care what you do in your earthly one. This is the postmodern philosophy that encourages an eclectic approach to the application of ethical

values in the different spheres of our life. It is perfectly acceptable to hold to one set of values in our spiritual kingdom while at the same time applying a different set of values to our earthly kingdom. The importance, so say the postmoderns, is to be true to each set of values within their sphere without the pressure of pursuing a consistency of ethics across the totality of our life. In organizational life this is most often seen in a compartmentalization of the mission and program part of our work from the financial and fundraising side.

As we pointed out above, there is a temptation for Christian organizations to spiritualize their mission and secularize their operations. If we fail to recognize the spiritual forces behind money it will be easy to fall prey to this two-kingdom lie. Christian leaders are challenged to articulate and apply the core values and ethics of their organization to every area of their communal life. Again a leader can accomplish this only if the same consistency is being pursued in their personal life.

The *third lie* is that we can placate God and justify our earthly kingdom through a series of *transactions*. The logic is as follows; by overachieving in the spiritual work we undertake we buy ourselves the space to ignore or live comfortably with the compromises we have made in constructing our earthly kingdoms. It is a sort of sleight-of-hand approach; keep God happy with the good spiritual work we are doing and he may not notice the compromises we make in the other parts of our life. We buy God off through our good work on his behalf.

This may sound harsh but as Christian leaders we must look for this attitude in our own hearts and in the at-

itudes and actions of the people in our organizations. Here more than in any other place we will face the difficulty of leading our people through a process of identifying, naming and owning the earthly kingdoms that we have built in our organizations. The temptation to downplay these kingdoms and justify them in the face of all the good work we are doing is enormous. Christian leaders must be winning this battle in their own heart, and then they must lead with courage in helping their organization to refuse to compromise at any point in this dethroning process.

Faithful Christian leadership will include naming these three lies, leading with transparency and vulnerability combined with an uncompromising approach to building a one-kingdom organization.

### 3. Delivery

In spiritual terms delivery means to be freed from the restraints and shackles of old ways of thinking. It is, as the apostle Paul put it, a taking off of the old self and a putting on of the new self, 'which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator' (Col. 3:10). Delivery results in a new set of attitudes and perspectives that significantly alter our worldview and allow us to make decisions with a new set of tools at our disposal. Both individually and corporately it means viewing money in its true perspective and being able to deal with it without being influenced by it.

This is a real, tangible freedom that allows us to handle, invest, earn and spend money effectively while remaining unaffected by the power and control it offers. As individual Christians we must hunger and thirst for this delivery

that comes only through God's Spirit working in us. As Christian leaders who are being delivered, we must help shape and form the new attitudes and perspectives that will guide the way our organizations deal with finances. Spiritual delivery in a community context is hard work. It can be carried out successfully only by leaders who are experiencing that delivery every day in their own lives.

### 4. Discovery

God's way of doing everything is seldom if ever the same as the world's way. The values of the kingdom of God are antithetical to the values of the world. For this reason, as we continue our journey from death and dethroning through our delivery we will open ourselves up to discover a way of dealing with money and finances that otherwise would have been impossible. Through prayer and discernment and a heart newly tuned to the will of God our journey will be filled with the joy of discovery of God's way of leading our organizations.

This includes fresh thinking about important issues such as the role of faith in developing budgets, the proper use of debt, a God-pleasing approach to giving and asking, the tension between trusting God and building endowments, and the true meaning of transparency and financial accountability.

There are three key components to this process of discovery, and the successful leader must know them and follow them tenaciously.

*First*, the leader must establish and hold fast to the influencers that he or she will use to undertake this investigation. There will be a strong push

by many voices to hold sway over the process, especially the always-present politics of scarcity. Those that believe we are in a competition for limited resources will force the discussions along those lines. Motivated by fear and faction, they will 'advise' the organization to deal with money as a sacred commodity, and in so doing they will put the organization in bondage to the old wineskins marked by attitudes of absolute ownership and control. The successful leader will need to raise up the one voice of Scripture interpreted and applied by the community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and not let any other voice compete with it.

*Second*, the leader must be willing to lead the organization through the hard task of dismantling the systems that may be shown to be unbiblical or not in alignment with the direction the organization will choose to go in as a result of the discovery process. Fear of this kind of systemic change will keep many organizations from embracing what they discover. Be prepared for the push back when the implications of the discovery become known. It will often require sacrifice and change, and every leader knows the challenges of both to organizational life.

*Thirdly*, the leader and his or her organization must be prepared to develop new vocabulary and tools for what they discover. Most discoveries transcend old language and cannot be measured by the former methods and tools. For instance, when an organization discovers what God may be calling them to regarding how they handle debt, they may need to measure success and growth in different ways, and use language to communicate that change. A college that has historically measured

success by student enrolment may take on massive debt to fund sustaining growth. If the measurement of success is changed to decreasing the amount of debt per student, at least as one measurement, the discussion changes, and so does the strategy for the use of money. Without new vocabulary and tools for measurement, it will be difficult for the leader to embrace the discovery of how God may lead them to use money in their organization.

Organizations, like individuals, must be freed in order to have these discovery conversations. As Christian leaders we are called to proclaim freedom in Christ, to help organizations move through the process from death and dethroning to delivery and discovery. It is in this discovery phase that we have the attitudes and tools to discern God's will and the courage and freedom to carry it out.

## 5. Doxology

God's work done God's way by God's people always results in worship and praise. In our personal lives it is manifest in a heart that is increasingly rich toward God. It results in joyous generosity and sacrificial giving. As we experience this transformational process in our own lives we, as Christian leaders, have the opportunity to help our organization develop a culture of generosity and joyful giving. When we are truly freed in our relationship to money, when we are fully serving one master, then as an organization we can be used by God in marvellous ways.

Doxology requires a kingdom perspective. Here we come to a most critical aspect of Christian leadership. What will elicit your applause?



As a leader and as an organization, what will you choose to lift up and celebrate? If our measurements for success, whether personal or communal, are focused only on the external, the visible and the quantifiable, we will find it almost impossible to be people of doxology as the natural result of the process of death, dethroning, delivery and discovery.

Such a process as we have outlined here will yield much that is cause for celebration and praise to God, but it will look different to us. It will require that we lift up kingdom values as our sole guide. Jesus celebrated changed lives, broken yokes, re-established justice, reconciliation, peace and love. He rejoiced when kingdom work was done, even when it looked to everyone around him as if his ministry was failing. He did not measure his success in numbers of followers, size of budget for his work, or even mission impact. He sought to be kingdom-focused, rejoicing in the work that served kingdom purposes for kingdom ends.

Our doxology will come naturally and fully when we watch for signs that kingdom values are guiding our organization, and the fruit of our work is aligned with the fruit of the spirit of God.

These are the steps of personal and organizational transformation. While the process is never ending there are measurable milestones that tell us we are moving along the continuum and growing in our personal role as stewards in the kingdom of the triune God of grace. The same is true for our organizations. As leaders we are able to measure the process of moving from death to dethroning, and from delivery to discovery. The pressures and temp-

tations to slide backwards are enormous.

This work will demand the very best of us and it begins not with what we do but with who we are. We need not be perfect but we must be in process, continually being conformed to the image of Christ in all areas of our life and especially in our relationship to money and the things of this world. Then we trust that God will use us and our peers and colleagues in our organizations to help lead our community through the same process to the glory of God.

### III Conclusion

As leaders we must first face our demons regarding money, and help our organizations do the same. That means we must address and conquer the temptations of seeing money in a detached, amoral way; tying our self-image to financial success; giving in to money's power that seeks to control us; using it to build our own kingdoms; separating our personal journey from that of our role as leader; and playing the owner and not the steward.

In facing these temptations we enter into the journey of transformation of the faithful steward leader. That journey will take us through the five steps of death, dethroning, delivery, discovery and doxology.

In all of these issues pertaining to money the real bottom line is the disposition of the heart and not the dispensing of the asset. Christian leaders who deal with finances with the utmost integrity have reached that point of discovery and doxology in their own transformation, and they have the vision and courage to lead their organization toward the same.

# Generosity: Befriending at the Margins, Re-centring Human Dignity

HealthServe Team

*Keywords: HealthServe, Geylang, community, transient foreign worker, commercial sex worker, labour policies, mutual transformation.*

## I Introduction

This is the story of a community called 'HealthServe' that emerged out of a desire to serve the poor and marginalised groups in Singapore.

At its inception in 2006, HealthServe was a medical clinic set up through the generous donations of second-hand furniture and medical equipment, including supplies of medicines. However, the critical contribution to the functioning of the clinic was the generous offering of time, energies, professional skills and talents of a team of volunteers who had 'no fancy blueprint but only a simple dream of reaching out and making a difference'<sup>1</sup> within the eclectic neighbourhood where the clinic was being located.

Six years later, these volunteers have learnt that generosity in sharing material resources and professional

skills was but only the beginning of a much larger 'dream'. When the clinic doors were opened to the neighbourhood, the volunteers realised they were being challenged with the potential of forming friendships across the inadvertent boundary between giver and recipient or between a people leveraged on social acceptance and a people marginalised by society. When such boundary collapsing friendships began to flourish it nurtured a generosity of mutual acceptance and respect that paved a way to restore and re-centre human dignity despite the social divisions. The initial act of generosity in volunteering medical assistance had begun to emerge as the first step to a larger 'dream' of 'making a difference' to how the neighbourhood outside and the community inside could relate.

The Global Generosity Network affirms that generosity is more than the stewardship of material resources but a principle that extends to all aspects of created life that God as Creator has entrusted humanity to care for.<sup>2</sup> In the HealthServe community acts of gener-

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Goh Wei Leong, Chairman and a founding member of HealthServe.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://generositymovement.org/network/> accessed 9 July, 2012.

osity are expressed in the stewardship of the material and in the stewardship of the *imago Dei* as the theological foundation of human dignity.

The HealthServe stories that follow were collected when the community organised a workshop on 21 April, 2012 to reflect on their different perceptions of generosity. The workshop participants were not only from a spectrum of social classes ranging from the healthcare worker to the construction worker, but they were also of different religious convictions as well as of different nationalities. Making space for this unique mix of experiences and cultures to learn and share together meant having to negotiate patiently the interpretation of mother tongue languages into the working language of the workshop and to also make time to explain Christian theological concepts to the uninitiated. However, it was this element of diversity and plurality of the community that added to an invigorating time of sharing. There were also follow-up personal interviews after the workshop with select story contributors to add and clarify details of their accounts.<sup>3</sup>

The set of stories in this presentation describes the acts of generosity that have come to distinguish the everyday life of the HealthServe community. These initiatives in befriending have come to mean advocating on behalf of the friend who is being exploited, sharing the problems of the friend who was injured and left impoverished or attending to the friend suffering the pain

of cultural and human isolation. The stories also capture the community's experience of the integral link between cultivating friendships and the restoration and re-centring of human dignity in their interactions. The restoration of human dignity is critical in large part because of the socio-economic realities and context that the HealthServe stories are embedded in.

The rest of this presentation will outline the socio-economic context within which HealthServe operates and the series of initiatives that have evolved out of their response to a range of human predicaments emerging from that context. Finally, the HealthServe stories will offer the lessons in generosity that they have gained in their journey as a community.

## II Introducing the HealthServe Context

### 1 The Geylang neighbourhood

'Geylang' is the name of the neighbourhood where the HealthServe clinic is located. The area harbours a past that persists in defining its present. The name, 'Geylang' is a corrupted Malay word referring to 'mills' or 'factories', as Geylang was historically a farming area and a processing centre of farm produce. Others believe 'Geylang' referred to a tribal group notorious for their pillaging forays.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the Malay community was sharing their space with

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<sup>3</sup> The interviews and content of the article were compiled and edited by Goh Wei Leong, Kimhong Hazra, Eric Lee, Shirley Lee and Jacqueline Tan.

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Savage and Brenda Yeoh, *Toponymics: A study of Singapore street names* (Singapore: Marshall and Cavendish, 2004 2nd ed.), 138-9.

waves of migrant workers from China who arrived in the then British colonial port of Singapore to look for their 'pot of gold'. The men eked out a living through backbreaking and sweaty work as labourers or rickshaw pullers whilst desperate women resorted to prostitution to feed their families.<sup>5</sup> Sadly, the 'pot of gold' eluded these migrant workers. They did not find passage home and they were compelled eventually to build new homes in independent Singapore.

Geylang today continues to be a multi-ethnic neighbourhood of predominantly low-wage income families housed in old buildings built in the mid 1940s and in modern subsidised apartment buildings. It is a bustling satellite town with a range of social amenities in public transport, schools, markets and worship spaces. There are several small businesses in manufacturing and retail industries, including a competitive range of eateries that appeal to local and tourist palates alike.

Contemporary Geylang has also retained its historic legacy of being home to the marginalised communities of transient foreign workers and commercial sex workers. There are sections of the neighbourhood where foreign workers are crammed into rented low-cost rooms. Close to these 'dormitories' is another grid-like layout of small lanes lined with brothels creating an enclave that has earned Geylang the appellation of being the red light district of the country.

## 2 Marginalised Communities in Geylang

The social and economic realities that dictate the marginalised world of the transient foreign labour and commercial sex worker communities are harsh and grim.

One reality is the *modus vivendi* relationship that binds the foreign worker to the employment agency and the employer. The worker depends on the employment agency to broker a job that he may secure only after paying exorbitant mandatory fees that he predictably does not have in hand but must be raised through loans from family and friends. Thus, before he leaves home the worker has imprisoned himself in debts, making him vulnerable to any potential wiles of the employment agent and his potential employer. The worker is dependent on a work permit from his employer to enjoy legal status in the country. Thus feeling at the mercy of the employer, the worker is often reluctant to protest about long hours of work with inadequate rest times or even delayed payment of wages, lest the employer rescinds his work permit.

A second reality is the State bias towards the interest of the employer over that of the foreign worker. Most civic societies concerned about the rights of the foreign transient worker concede that the State's Labour Office has been more proactive in addressing labour issues relating to the fair and just treatment of the worker in recent times. This includes ensuring that adequate work safety measures are being maintained. However, these civic groups would also say that more stringent vigilance of 'high-handed' methods that employment agents and employers use to exploit the workers is needed.

<sup>5</sup> See James Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and *Rickshaw coolie: A people's history of Singapore, 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

One oft-quoted example is the lack of policing over employers who hire 'repatriation companies'. The civic society community has accused employers of cancelling the work permits of the foreign workers in their employ and then hiring a repatriation company to forcefully detain such workers in order to deport them to their countries of origin. Such tactics close the doors on these workers to available legal channels for lodging their complaints.<sup>6</sup>

A third reality is that life for foreign workers is difficult because they often feel desperate and caught between a rock and a hard place. The worker lives as a marginalised alien in a culturally unfamiliar environment and often in accommodation that typically ranges from basic to sub-standard. He is isolated from family and community and worries constantly about them and is on his mobile telephone to them once or several times a day. He is burdened by the debts he incurred in coming to Singapore that he has yet to pay off; he is troubled by the bills at home that had compelled him in the first place to become a foreign worker and the hopes he treasures to build a better life at home for the family. Thus, he decides that he should lie low because he cannot afford to lose his job however crushed he feels by a situation that is not what he was promised. He chooses

to avoid rocking the boat with his employer because the status quo is preferable to being repatriated home.

In contrast, the idiosyncratic transactions in the world of commercial sexual favours are vastly different from what takes place in the world of the transient foreign worker, yet strong parallels undergird the lives of the people of both communities. Both are essentially unhappy with the way they must work but feel they have no viable options for how else will they make a living that will meet their needs and expenses?

While prostitution is legal in Singapore, public solicitation, engaging in prostitution as a means of livelihood and running a brothel along with pimping are illegal activities. An international transient traffic of women and men from around the region and further afield such as from India and China visit and keep the nightlife in Geylang busy.

The HealthServe community has discovered that relating to the commercial sex workers and their associates is an enigmatic and elusive undertaking. In seeking to befriend and understand the women, HealthServe volunteers have realised being available as friends who can be relied upon to be on hand to help solve problems is a concrete expression of generosity and care that makes the difference.

Befriending has meant getting involved in the women's families such as participating in the care of their children's welfare or education and sometimes helping out the children's fathers and grandparents when resources are desperately needed but not available.

As street life can be both dangerous and unpredictable, being available

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<sup>6</sup> <http://theonlinecitizen.com/2011/11/repatriation-companies-manpower-ministers-response-belittles-the-efforts-of-migrant-workers/> accessed 13 July 2012. See also HOME and TWC2, *Justice delayed, justice denied: The experiences of migrant workers in Singapore, 2010 Report* (Singapore: The Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics and Transit Workers Count Too, 2010).

when there is a crisis has been the cardinal test of the friendship the HealthServe community is willing to offer. At other times, organising a party on the streets to celebrate a birthday, a marriage or Christmas are important acts of generosity. These moments not only inject celebration in an otherwise morose and sombre atmosphere but also affirm to the street community the trustworthiness of a HealthServe friend.

Both the transient foreign worker and the sex worker communities in Geylang experience a violated human dignity from discriminating and unjust social policies and structures and relationships of exploitation. At the same time, both communities are also broken and accountable for wilful personal errors of judgements, mistakes and poor decisions in each of their personal life journeys. There is a convergence of systemic and personal reasons, regrets and errors of judgement that have contributed to the marginalised realities found in the Geylang neighbourhood.

When the doors of the HealthServe clinic opened to this neighbourhood, it resolved to offer acts of generosity in medical assistance but was uninitiated and naive regarding the myriad layers of human need. Thus, the open doors became a window into the possibilities of human transformation that faithful acts of generosity might usher into their newfound neighbourhood and community.

### III The HealthServe Community in Geylang

In entering the world of the marginalised communities of Geylang, the HealthServe clinic inadvertently ex-

panded into an international community of folk from Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia and Nepal. It evolved from being a space to give and receive medical assistance into a meeting point for the exchange and interaction of people whose paths do not normally intersect. As professional urbanites, foreign construction workers and sex workers met and interacted they were not just a mix of people of varying social and economic class, they were also people belonging to a plurality of religious faiths and diverse if not conflicting life values and perspectives who now shared a common space to learn to work together.

More painfully, the clinic realised that while medical assistance was a generous and important service to provide, there was a deeper and profound need to contribute to a restoration of human dignity in a marginalised context:

CJS was from China and had sustained a head injury at work after barely four months in Singapore. He was now penniless without work, depressed and suicidal. We then realised that simply running a clinic was not holistic. We also realised that more medication was not the answer to the struggles of loneliness, poverty and exploitation that CJS was undergoing. The Lord led us to start a counselling service, a social assistance programme and a legal advisory clinic.<sup>7</sup>

The awareness of the need of a holistic approach led to the conception of a series of projects and priorities

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<sup>7</sup> Goh Wei Leong

in response to the plethora of issues and problems besetting the Geylang neighbourhood. In addition to providing medical assistance, a holistic approach began to take the shape of lending support to the foreign worker friend advocating for a just redress to his labour problems and providing food and accommodation while he waits out the long haul for a legal resolution.

As essential as these legal and practical processes have been in supporting a stranded foreign worker, many of these initiatives stem from a basic desire to extend generosity to a friend in need. Thus, being available as a friend has been an act of generosity that has restored human dignity and wrought mutual human transformation in the community.

Furthermore, the demands of a holistic approach in servicing the marginalized communities prompted some volunteers to become HealthServe employees and so invest and channel their life energies into standing in solidarity with newfound friends in the transient foreign worker and in the commercial sex worker. Thus, in generously offering their time and energies to solve the problems of friends from these communities, the HealthServe community was experiencing a reciprocal effect in the way they were being challenged to reshape their perceptions and vocations to become more concrete in their 'dream to make a difference'.

### 1 Advocating on behalf of the injured worker

The volunteers who helm the pro-bono legal advisory clinic spend many hours reviewing and re-interpreting the fine print in the employment contract and

thus map a way forward to ensure the worker will be paid the wages owing to him or get his rightful compensation for injury suffered on site which are some of the more common employment irregularities dealt with. But the crunch was to know which office door to knock on, how to speak the business language and articulate the issues of the case and in convincing and succinct terms that will get a hearing. Furthermore, this was going to be a diplomatic as well as laborious undertaking, demanding many hours of waiting in hospital queues to retrieve the relevant medical report, twiddling thumbs at the Labour Office to catch a glimpse of the targeted case officer and streamlining the paperwork to substantiate the nuances of the case.

It was evident that to serve a foreign worker friend it was needful to travel and accompany him to negotiate the dreaded maze of bureaucratic protocols and so mount a meaningful case for a fair and just redress to his labour problems.

### 2 The Geylang Food Project

When a foreign worker has sustained an injury at work, he needs not only medical attention, he also needs adequate medical leave to recuperate. If his injury requires an extensive recuperation, he may lose his job as well as his work permit. If such a worker approaches HealthServe for assistance, its volunteer-lawyer will assist but apart from needing legal aid, the worker is now also desperately in need of refuge to rest his head and to find food while waiting for his appeal for injury claims to pan out through the legal system. The crunch sets in and starts to

bite if the waiting period for his claims to be met, stretches from a couple of months to more than twelve months.

HealthServe initiated the Geylang Food Project (GFP) through generous donations from the larger community to relieve this crunch. GFP has a special arrangement with the vendor of a neighbourhood eatery to serve two hot meals a day from Monday to Saturday to the person who produces a GFP 'voucher'. In addition, HealthServe has secured a space on their clinic premises to accommodate some who were stranded without accommodation. Others, who have found their own accommodation but located a distance from Geylang, are also remembered. HealthServe staff bring the GFP to them by delivering weekly groceries and sharing an afternoon to talk and to eat together.

### 3 Community art therapy

Community art therapy is a vehicle to help a person get in touch with one's inner thoughts and feeling and to own them through articulating them in images. A volunteer, SX, who was trained as a facilitator in community art, explained that a piece of artwork is the artist's ownership of his own life and voice. A good lawyer at best speaks on behalf of the client but the foreign worker-artist speaks in his own voice and becomes visible to listeners. In this way, SX felt human dignity might be recovered.

SX was inspired while mingling with the HealthServe community to introduce a community art workshop for the workers as she had begun to identify with their sense of 'longing for home' which was her experience while

studying art as a foreign student away from home.

In the early sessions of the workshop, there was more jeering and scoffing at the idea of doing art than actual human transformation taking place, but in time the participants learnt to respect the validity of each other's voices and in particular, the voice that is not understood. The workers were guided to reflect on their time in the country since leaving home and prompted to articulate their strongest impressions in images, craftwork or in words. There were moments when the raw emotions stemming from both personal mistakes and the unjust repercussions of social injustice were caught, such as in these words:

I came to Singapore with much hope.

But I ended up with an injury and no pay.

Hope shattered. Confused heart.

Wandering spirit. Pressurised.

I was treated unfairly by my boss.

My heart filled with rage.

Learned to let go of hatred at church.

Understood that forgiveness begets forgiveness.

Much is gained while much is lost.

I have learned to express myself and unlock my heart through their exercises.

I felt that my heart was detoxified.<sup>8</sup>

In conducting the workshop, SX felt she was taken beyond her own social, economic and religious boundaries as a Buddhist into another orbit of real-

<sup>8</sup> The poem was written by Chai Shui Hong and translated by Jessie Koh.



ity where it was the norm to have to struggle to keep body and soul together because of a world of unscrupulous exploitation, unfair and bullying treatment. She also appreciated the common space for herself as a Buddhist to work with people of different religious convictions to seek transformation.

#### 4 A platform for friendships and partnerships

It is distressing that fighting to make ends meet is iconic of the struggle that wearies the foreign worker community. Material poverty is depressing but it is equally disconcerting to suffer poverty in meaningful relationships as the foreign workers are removed from the family as fathers, husbands and brothers. There is also the injustice of having to suffer as a marginalised community as the disenfranchised worker is handicapped in accessing adequate legal and medical support. In this context acts of generosity in kind and in human kindness are most significantly found in a sharing of friendship that dignifies both giver and recipient.

##### a) Befriending as healing

When YJ was living in a dormitory, he got into a scuffle with a dormitory mate and unwittingly ended up waving a knife at his friend. The police were called in. YJ was locked up and subsequently sent to a psychiatric hospital for tests and observation. The HealthServe volunteer-lawyer who was assisting YJ with his work injury case, visited him in hospital and spent a few hours talking to him, advising and comforting him. The lawyer-friend went on to act on behalf of YJ in court and the charge against him was dropped. YJ

was very touched by the generosity of the lawyer-friend, who made time for him at the hospital, who took up his knife-wielding scuffle case in court and also argued the case on his work injury claims.

YJ had sustained injuries to his head and back after he fell from a height in 2009 and since then he had been waiting for his injury claims to be paid up by the insurance agents. He spent ten months in hospital and then in a nursing home to recuperate from his injuries and was banned from all work while waiting for his injury claims. He has been living without income and dependent on the goodwill of the community and unable to send home any support to his wife and two school-going children.

##### b) Befriending as cultural sensitivity

A major factor in befriending is the need to exercise cultural sensitivity. In the HealthServe community, most of the foreign workers come from rural districts of China and are unfamiliar with the urban etiquette of Singapore life and Singapore work culture. When and if caught in the dilemma of incurring a work injury it becomes a particular challenge for the worker to process the vicissitudes of a paper culture that defines Singapore society. Yet persevere they must if they want to secure that longed for and deserved compensation for their injuries.

LYF was hospitalised because he had inadvertently suffered an allergic reaction that had immobilised him when he was being treated for a work injury. As a result, he was deemed ineligible for compensation because his hospital bills were for an allergic

reaction and not for a work injury. In addition to being strapped down with illness and with no personal resources because his work permit was cancelled when he was hospitalised, LYF was in a quandary because he could not decipher the maze of insurance and legal processes in order to resolve his problem. At that point in time, the foreign workers' grapevine pointed him to HealthServe. As HealthServe was listed on the hospital's list of trusted Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), they used that leverage to retrieve a pertinent medical history and then mounted a legal defence with the Labour Office and so ironed out the kinks in LYF's predicament, to his grateful relief.

The community spends many hours interpreting differences in attitudes and manners between Singapore and other countries. These conversations also address and empathise with the emotional hurts and aftershocks suffered from negotiating the circuitous infrastructures that comprise the insurance companies, the hospitals and the Labour Office of the country.

Sadly, there is a bristling unease between the local community and the growing foreign worker community. About a third of Singapore's total work force is made up of transient foreign workers while more than 80 per cent of the construction industry is manned by the foreign worker.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the country's public transport system and public space for recreation are stretched close to their bursting limits. Yet, the

government has reiterated the need to maintain the foreign worker population to ensure the continued growth of the nation's economy.

The negative vibes from the local environment exacerbates the sense of social isolation felt by the foreign worker. In contrast to this lack of welcome, there is no more human activity than to talk about the cultural idiosyncrasies that sets one community apart from another. This same conversation highlights the common humanity shared between foreigner and local. The culture dialogue centres human identity in human interaction and preserves human dignity that is essential to friendships.

However, nuances of human cultures can emerge from unexpected quarters. While all the patients who visited the clinic were appreciative of the medical assistance that HealthServe offered, it was noticed that some Chinese patients were not as enthusiastic about taking the medicines they were prescribed for their ailments. The health workers were culturally sensitive and adept in engaging their Chinese patients in the Chinese language but could not penetrate this particular scepticism.

Finally, it came to light that some Chinese patients were suspicious of treatments that were not under the exigencies of Traditional Chinese Medicine or TCM. In Singapore, TCM is a recognised discipline and there is also a State registered roster of licensed TCM practitioners. This hiccup in culture sensitivity was resolved when a licensed TCM practitioner agreed to counsel those suspicious of non-TCM approaches to healthcare.

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9 HOME, *The exploitation of Chinese migrant construction workers in Singapore, 2011 Report* (Singapore, The Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics, 2011)

### c) Befriending as play and skills learning

It may be an understatement to say that it is a demoralising prospect to be stuck as an alien in an unknown country, without any opportunity to earn some form of income, while at best waiting with a vague idea of when one may go home—yet this is often a typical worker dilemma in the HealthServe community. The community battles to keep depression and bitterness at bay and at the same time to keep hope and self-esteem alive. One approach is to inject play into community life and in this regard, recreation activities such as fishing or running in open spaces to launch and fly a kite is balm to the inert spirit. These activities wake up the mind and body literally and provide a safe space for interaction as well as nourishing a culture of befriending.

HealthServe volunteers have also initiated classes on how to operate a computer, on how to acquire the working language of the country, in addition to organising celebrations such as a water festival for Burmese workers and cricket tournaments for the South Asian workers.

### d) Befriending begets more generosity

Much as the foreign worker who is sojourning under the wings of the HealthServe community recognises the timely support and help he is enjoying, he often seems to hold closer to his heart the simple everyday acts of generosity. They notice HealthServe staff digging into their personal pockets to meet community needs; they notice the volunteer doctor who is willing to fill in an eleventh hour vacancy that crops up on

the clinic roster and with home-made cakes in tow; they notice that the food vendor on the Geylang Food Project doles out extra servings on the food queues and they also notice that the HealthServe Director thinks nothing of doubling up as the driver to provide transport for workers attending language classes.

The HealthServe community celebrates every time someone is finally successful in getting his claims met and can go home. It is especially meaningful to the friends who are going home to have their HealthServe friends escort them to the airport and wave them off, regardless of the hour of day or night of departure. These 'send-off' parties have become iconic of a HealthServe tradition and an act of generosity that has sealed many friendships.

What is particularly delightful to HealthServe staff is the unanticipated experience that generosity and friendships begets more of the same. They can point to a modest pile of watermelons and cans of Coca-cola that are the signature gifts of appreciation they are blessed with from their friends when they finally go home. Workers have also made donations from their compensation package towards a fund to assist others who are also caught in the distress of waiting for their compensation.

Migrant friends become accustomed to living on the periphery of society and think only of how to survive the days till they may retrieve what they can of the money they have lost and go home. So it touches them when HealthServe staff and volunteers make time for them and accompany them and interpret on their behalf at the hospital, at the Labour Office, with the employer

and befriend them and become the few Singapore friends they have.

Sharing and participating in community allows different members to enjoy a sense of belonging despite the concrete realities of social and economic demarcations and cultural gaps. Befriending at the margins becomes akin to entering an experience of dependence and trust that nourishes a sense of humanness and restores and re-centres human dignity in relationships.

### e) Befriending beyond Geylang

As the transient foreign workers comprise some 85 per cent of the workforce in the country's construction industry, ensuring that these hundreds of thousands of people have adequate accommodation has been a point of discontent and debate in overcrowded Singapore. There have been damaging reports of gross overcrowding and unhygienic conditions including housing people in improvised metal containers without ventilation or proper washing facilities.<sup>10</sup>

The accommodation issue is contentious from the perspectives of poorly housed workers, tight-fisted employers, turf-minded citizenry and a harassed Labour Office. While the Labour Office may have set down terms of reference for what is deemed decent accommodation, sub-standard accommodation persists. In Geylang in February 2012, about half of the residences checked were deemed inadequate which meant charging 200 employers to relocate 430 workers into suitable

accommodation.<sup>11</sup>

Public space for recreation has also emerged as a point of dissonance as house owners do not want to share the same open areas in their neighbourhood with foreign workers who need a space to relax after a week of back-breaking construction work.

One way out has been to build foreign worker dormitories in outlying areas. The HealthServe community is trying to run its medical and dental services at some of these new dormitories because access to such amenities is scant in the new locations.

However, moving beyond Geylang has also meant recruiting new volunteers willing to be generous with their time and skill and energy to travel into unfamiliar corners of the country. This is where partnering educational institutions where their students agree to do an internship with HealthServe, such as those from the university's medical faculty, is inspiring. Another group of humanity students from the polytechnic said they had not thought of foreign workers as human beings and had gone into Geylang with fears that they might be robbed or even molested. After a couple of weeks walking the streets of Geylang, the students reflected that,

In interviewing the workers I had better insight into their lives and the problems they had to go through, their kind of living conditions, how they were being exploited and the way we locals sidelined them... It was a life-transforming experi-

10 HealthServe case notes.

11 <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20120214-327953.html> accessed 9 July, 2012

ence...We can make a difference because change begins with us.

In the desire to 'dream...to make a difference', an opportunity to influence the country's young people towards befriending the marginalised communities is an opportunity to sow seeds of generosity in civic life.

#### f) A full circle in the befriending journey

It is another HealthServe tradition to visit their returned Chinese friends on their home ground and so renew the friendships forged in Geylang. The Singapore team reports that they are invariably overwhelmed by the warm welcome and generous hospitality they receive on these visits. These journeys are experiences that reaffirm the potential of how befriending at the margins may narrow the gaps between givers and recipients and so partially fulfil a 'dream...to make a difference'.

In 2010, a small team that had travelled to China tragically collided in a road accident and the driver was killed on the spot. Some HealthServe returned China friends got wind of it and very quickly offered help in the form of money and assistance. These friends covered the long distances across their county to get to the team, lobbied the bureaucracy to render help and gave of their personal time to resolve the episode. The returned Chinese friends sacrificially came alongside the HealthServe community at their point of deep need. In an ironic twist, HealthServe Chinese friends had the opportunity to turn the tables around as they negotiated the protocols with the authorities on behalf of their Singapore friends.

In June 2012, another HealthServe

team visited the two Chinese provinces of Anhui and Henan provinces and re-connected with twenty-four returned friends and twenty families. Out of this group, more than ten had found new jobs and others had continued in the church life they had enjoyed in Singapore. The group had travelled from their different regions to designated meeting places in Anhui and Henan to form a welcoming host party. They had pulled their meagre resources together to ensure they hosted their friends to a grand welcome. It was an indicator of the deep appreciation they had for people who had befriended them during their ordeal in Singapore. Their families were no less expressive in their gratitude that their loved ones were given refuge in a strange land and found solace among generous people.

It was an exceptional pleasure for the HealthServe team to renew their friendship with XY and his family. XY had entered the life of the HealthServe community in Geylang when he needed assistance and refuge because he was destitute, waiting for his compensation from a work injury. But the dreaded hiatus for a foreign worker took an extraordinary turn in the case of XY as he came to embrace the Christian faith and made a series of equally unprecedented life decisions.

XY had left home to find work in Singapore because of a quarrel with his wife but he now wanted to apologise. XY not only called his wife on his mobile but also made a video recording of his apology. HealthServe friends were tasked to deliver the video recording to Mrs XY personally on a visit to China. Mrs XY relented and accepted the apology and the Christian faith. Today, XY has dreams to put to use the computer

skills he picked up in his sojourn at Geylang and to initiate a HealthServe-type work in his neighbourhood.

## IV Reflections on Generosity

### 1 Motivations

Volunteers at HealthServe share a common understanding that generosity is borne out in the life of Jesus Christ and his teaching as recorded in the Gospels as some share,

Jesus has given us everything and so not only models generosity for us but also compels us to be good stewards of his gifts to us. God has given us everything in money and talents and time and so calls us to use these gifts wisely for his kingdom.

The father in the parable of the prodigal son was generous in receiving his son after the son had turned his back against the father, in addition to squandering the father's money. The father's acceptance of his son is iconic of the principle of generosity.<sup>12</sup>

In choosing to relate to a marginalised community from a personal context that is buffered against it by economic security and social privilege, volunteers at HealthServe are motivated by two influential realities. One is the personal conviction that generosity is integral to an expression of Christian character and the other is the personal experience of having seen models and acts of generosity that have ministered

to their personal spiritual formation and so shaped their maturing into a generous attitude to humanity. Thus, generosity is more than a principle but is a concrete reality embodied in human acts of generosity given freely and received by others. Many responses from volunteers substantiate this perspective as they share,

I learnt generosity from the way my father lived.

When I was a teenager and did not have the money to buy lunch at school, a Malay [a differing ethnic group from that of the speaker's] classmate paid for my lunch—the experience and memory of receiving that act of generosity motivates me to bless others today.

I experienced generosity from one of my patients on social assistance. When he receives his monthly State allowance, he will buy me a bowl of hot noodle soup. He not only shares with me from the little he gets but shows appreciation for me as his doctor and friend and that ministers to me.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of the marginalised communities in their neighbourhood, the generosity of the HealthServe community is experienced in their offer of a friendship that cares for the practical needs of a marginalised people and thus dignifies both giver and recipient as people and friends sharing the same humanity. Seen in this light, living generously towards others is fundamental to living as disciples of Christ

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<sup>12</sup> Select contributions from HealthServe volunteers at a workshop on generosity on 21 April 2012.

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<sup>13</sup> Select contributions from HealthServe volunteers at a workshop on generosity on 21 April 2012.

There is much to be grateful for in the practical ways that HealthServe volunteers share their resources to feed, heal and advocate on behalf of people who are not as privileged. But more than material resources is the infinite healing that comes with restoring human dignity when it has been violated by indifference. Generosity in the sharing of human dignity becomes a profound panacea in this labour conundrum. There is also reciprocal healing in human dignity for the privileged as he or she participates in redressing a wrong.

## 2 Perseverance

The HealthServe experience is an affirmation of the 'dream...to make a difference' but also a prayer to persevere in that dream. The ugliness of exploitation prevails in civil society and social policies and structures are not abreast in redressing the human damage and injustice exploitation wreaks.

Despite public education on worker rights over a number of platforms, the voice of the marginalised transient foreign worker is often weak as low waged workers inevitably command little bargaining power. The work permit system under which foreign workers enter the country and seek work is a system that opens them to the risk of wrongful dismissals. The channels for appeal against wrongful dismissals are established and in place, but in many instances these conduits get choked up and become impassable.

There is a Labour Court that is empowered by the laws of the country to arbitrate and mediate disputes between workers and employers. If the employer does not comply with the

Court ruling, the worker has the option to appeal to a higher court. But a foreign worker cannot pay the mandatory legal fees to do this. Furthermore, the process will certainly prompt the employer to exercise his option of cancelling the employee's work permit, making him an illegal immigrant liable for immediate deportation unless he gets a special pass from the Labour Office.

In the case of R, HealthServe found a pro-bono lawyer to help him prepare his appeal to a higher court when his employer did not pay R his fourteen months of arrears in wages as ordered by the Labour Court to do so. However, the intervention was belated, as the employer had by that time closed his business, thus cutting off the legal channels that would help R retrieve his money or be vindicated. It was a dismal dead end. With financial help from a variety of individuals and groups, R was able to return home to his family, but without retrieving any of the money he had spent working ten hours daily for over more than a year. Moreover, in seeking redress for his unpaid hard-earned wages, he had incurred a substantial debt that he does not expect to repay for a long time yet, given the unemployment situation in his country. Meanwhile, his former employer suffers only an imposed ban on employing more foreign workers.

Such systemic failure to mediate justice for the oppressed low-wage worker has been raised for debate in State Parliamentary circles, and papers and appeals have been sent by major civic organisations with suggestions for how Labour Court processes could be adjusted to work more justice on the ground. The system may not change today but 'the dream...to make

a difference' must persevere in hope for a just tomorrow.

In befriending at the margins and on the Geylang streets, a persevering available presence makes the difference between hope and futility. G was the manager of a brothel but underwent a radical change of heart to become a Christian when he landed in prison. When G was released from prison, he could not return to Geylang and had to find a living elsewhere.

There are others like G whom the HealthServe team consider friends. Sometimes, their friends tell them about street ladies who may need their help and at other times they have long conversations and arguments about the safety of the women. In this context, being generous and persevering in trustworthy friendships as in a ministry of presence is an end in itself that offers hope for a more just tomorrow.

### 3 Transformation

The HealthServe stories tell of human transformation that emerges from committed persevering acts of generosity of care and love and from a generosity that befriends at the margins. Such generosity forges a human transformation that provokes the side effect of building community and even civic society because it gives dignity to those who have been exploited and treated with indifference.

Human transformation is embedded in the relationships formed across the gaps that divide the privileged from the marginalised. When such social divisions are conflated then human dignity as conceived on the basis of the *imago Dei* may flourish as a bridge between people who are different socially, economically and even religiously. From this position, it will be very natural to speak of the cross of Christ that metes out healing love and offers forgiveness.

## What is Economic Justice?

### Biblical and Secular Perspectives Contrasted

Andrew Hartropp

This book argues that a biblically-rooted account of justice in economic life has three great strengths as opposed to the confusing disarray of views evident in the secular world. First, it is harmonious: the various strands of a scriptural perspective on economic justice are clearly woven together and they find their unity in the person of the God. Secondly, it is substantial: able to engage thoroughly and critically with leading secular perspectives. Thirdly, it is contemporary: applying in powerful and relevant ways to current economic issues in our globalized world. This book indicates how a biblical understanding of production and exchange applies to contemporary topics such as the relationships between borrowers and lenders and the use of monopoly power.

**Andrew Hartropp** has lectured in economics at Brunel University and is currently a Church of England Curate in Watford, Hertfordshire, UK.

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# The Urgency to Develop Fundraising Capacity and Generosity within the Latin American Missionary Movement

Nydia R. Garcia-Schmidt

**KEYWORDS:** *Fundraising, giving, generosity, interdependency, international donors, research, social movements, resource mobilization*

AS A LATIN AMERICAN and having interacted with Latin American mission organizations more closely for the last ten years, at the same time having seen a great deal of how fundraising is done in the US within non-profit organizations, I have had the opportunity to see both scenarios of funding. This research and analysis comes out of this comparison between both regions—the USA and Latin America.

## I Biblical Basis for Generosity and Fundraising in Missions

God continues to invite the church from all the continents to actively participate in the blessing of giving to advance the extension of his kingdom. In Deuteronomy, we read about the first

fundraising event recorded in the Bible. After about six weeks of traveling in the desert, Moses was informed by God that he wanted to dwell among the people. He needed the people of Israel to prepare a place, so he gave Moses specific instructions on how to build *and fund* the place of his dwelling, the Tabernacle.

### 1. Moses and the Tabernacle

Many times we have focused on what each piece of furniture within the Tabernacle represents, yet little is studied about the funding model. A basic element in this action was that the people of Israel were to bring in their offerings with a willing heart. In Exodus 25:2<sup>1</sup> we read that God gave Moses clear instructions: ‘The LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone *whose heart*

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are taken from the New International Version.

*prompts them to give.”*

What happens between chapter 25 and 35 is both sublime, and heart breaking. In the chapters that follow we read about specific instructions on how to build the Tabernacle, the Ten Commandments written by God himself, and in contrast, the heart breaking story of the Israelites building the Golden Calf, eventually leading to the tragic 3,000 deaths in the camp. Then we have Moses ascending Mount Sinai once again to receive for the second time the Ten Commandments, and his face-to-face encounter with God. So, after all this drama and tragedy, Moses is finally able to convey the message of generosity to the camp in Exodus 35:4-9. Moses said to the whole Israelite community,

This is what the LORD has commanded: From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. Everyone who is *willing* is to bring to the LORD an offering of gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breast-piece.

The story then goes on to tell how the people of Israel were of one mind, and how day after day they brought large numbers of gifts to fund the building of the Tabernacle.

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the LORD for

the work on the tent of meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewellery of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD. ....

All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do. (Ex. 35: 20-22, 29)

Perhaps we can say that, because of all that happened between chapters 25 and 35, the people of Israel had experienced a spiritual purification, and the fear of God was fresh in their minds once again. The story has a happy ending, and we see that Moses was a successful fundraiser. The people gave, and they gave so generously that word had to be sent to the camp for people not to bring in their gifts! In today's equivalent, what was raised for the Tabernacle (Exodus 38) would be approximately 45.7 million in US dollars.

Then in Exodus 36:5, we read that the offerings were stopped because there was more than enough. They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary, but the people kept bringing more! So the craftsmen who were working on the sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, 'The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done.'

This story from the Old Testament is so encouraging for anyone seeking to find ways to engage the church in

generosity. We remember that the main reason God wanted to build the Tabernacle was so that he could have a dwelling place in the midst of the camp. So *his presence* then becomes the centre of the matter, not the Tabernacle, not the furniture, not the journey or the desert. Let us then keep in mind that his presence in our midst is that which will move us to seek generosity in the church.

## 2. Application to Missions

How does that relate to missions, missionaries and extending the gospel? Can his presence dwell in the midst of sin and darkness? Of course not! So then our motive to seek and invite generosity from the church is motivated entirely so that his presence can descend, dwell in our midst, and in those hearts yet to hear the gospel. Any personal ambition or gain is out of place. In order for biblical generosity to be shown, financial resources need to be gathered and mobilized in the same way that Moses gathered them from the people of Israel.

A more in-depth study of this story shows that a careful fundraising plan was established where Moses appointed people to count and manage the funds, and to see that they would be used in the way they were intended. There was no place for mismanagement of funds. Exodus 38:21 can be seen as an example of how an accountant model was to function under the direction of Moses and led directly by Ithamar, son of Aaron, a Levite. In all, the Bible says that the number of men older than 21 years who came forward to give was more than 600, 000 (Ex. 38:26).

All this background brings us back to the reason for this research, which is explained below. In 2011, research was done to gather information about where the Latin Missions Movement stands in terms of competency to raise funds locally, the best ways to respond to this challenging task, and the matter of funding from outside the region. The outcomes would then help both international partners and Latin leaders to see where the gaps remain and what programs were needed to strengthen this area of generosity and fundraising in the church of the Americas.

The use and management of money requires that the global church understands and practises the biblical principles we find in God's Word. That is why this research was born, out of a desire to continue seeing the global church function and grow in interdependent ways, understanding and recognizing that we need each other. It is most important to continue learning together how to keep this interdependency healthy for the glory of God and the extension of his kingdom here on earth.

This research responds to the need to also continue studying the complex intricacy of money, funding and international partnerships as expressed by the research of the Oxford Initiative, in 'Money and International Partnerships'.<sup>2</sup> That study states; 'The sharing of money in cross-cultural ministry partnership is a substantial issue that warrants serious attention, study, discussion and resources.' Furthermore,

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<sup>2</sup> Rob Martin and C.B. Samuel *Oxford Initiative Research Report* <[www.gmi.org/aboutus/whatwedo/projectportfolio/research-projects/oxford-initiative/](http://www.gmi.org/aboutus/whatwedo/projectportfolio/research-projects/oxford-initiative/)> accessed on 15 March 2011

the Oxford Initiative invites more dissertations or theses on money and partnership in mission from a missiological perspective. This research is an initial attempt to provide insights and perspectives with the goal of strengthening and celebrating what is working, as well as identifying areas of need.

Additionally, this research will aim to provide the international donors with insights and relevant feedback from Latin leaders currently involved in missions, about their local challenges and where and how to use and allocate funds in more strategic ways. It will also aim to provide collective information and general challenges to current leaders in determining which issues to address in order to strengthen local systems. This will enable the local church to participate in the blessings of contributing to the extension of God's work here on earth.

The aim is that, at the onset of the relationship, funders will understand the importance of establishing specific principles and determine that, in all the programs, the organization receiving the funding will be stronger and able to carry on the ministry with the balanced help of local and international funding without developing unhealthy dependencies.

## II Research Program

### 1. Need

There is an urgent need for international partners and local leaders to realize the important role that each plays in the extension of the kingdom of God and to learn how to face and deal with this delicate matter of raising,

allocating and managing funds in local churches and organizations. Local leaders face the challenge of developing programs that are contextualized to fit the local norms of fund raising. In other words, they need to develop systems that are culturally appropriate to the way the microeconomic system works in their particular area of the world and culture. Because of this, many different 'experiments' need to be done, and this is where short-term funding and investments may be needed from the international partner to allow multiple ways to develop and raise local resources.

The premise that has guided the thinking and purpose of this study is that God has supplied us with all the resources needed to carry on his ministry, according to Philippians 4:19, 'And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus' (NIV).

Why is it, then, that mission organizations, leaders and missionary families are still lacking some very basic elements such as food and clothing? Why is it that on some occasions a missionary leader must decide whether to buy groceries, struggle to find ways to pay for his child's tuition, or pay the Internet fee? Where is the fundamental problem? Is it lack of faith from the church of the Global South or could it be the lack of a good local system that generates adequate income? Why does it seem that there is an over-abundance of resources from the North and less than ideal resources generated from the Global South? Could it be that the North has learned to develop a system that works well for them and we, in trying to imitate *their* model in the South, are losing the point of learning to con-

textualize for our own needs? Does God supply for some and not for others? How do we remain interdependent, yet not allow in our processes the development of unhealthy dependencies?

## 2. Expected Outcomes

The research will be able to give both local leaders and international funders a better picture of the local capacities that exist for raising funds in Latin America and establishing a generosity movement motivated by the need to reach the Unreached People Groups. Is there a greater need to provide training workshops on how to raise funds? Is there a need to develop sustainable programs within the organization? How equipped are the local leaders to organize these programs? Has the issue of fund raising become a general stress factor for all because of negative experiences? How does a local leader perceive the task of raising funds? All these issues will be considered in the survey in order to understand where we stand in the mission movement in Latin America. We need to look at all aspects associated with raising funds, whether spiritual, practical, psychological, etc.

As part of an overall strengthening strategy that the missionary movement in Latin America is facing and needing, this research aims to assess current resource mobilization efforts in Latin America, focusing on mission leaders, or those that are considered the decision-making people in the missionary movement. This research methodology includes an on-line and anonymous survey for mission leaders, interviews, data collection and analysis.

## III Missionary Movement as a Social Movement

### 1. Background

The best way to analyze the issue of fundraising in Latin America for missionary purposes is first to take a step back and see that mission organizations are part of a larger *social missionary movement*. This missionary movement in Latin America can be best understood in the history and development of *COMIBAM Internacional*.<sup>3</sup> This history is available in Spanish through COMIBAM's web page ([www.comibam.org](http://www.comibam.org)). COMIBAM is the Spanish acronym for *Congreso Misionero Iberoamericano* (Missionary Congress for Ibero-America).

In 1984, several Latin leaders met in Mexico to discuss the need to organize an international Congress which would focus on promoting and developing the missionary vision in the continent. Three years later, in 1987, the first COMIBAM Congress was held in San Paulo, Brazil, with more than three thousand representatives from Latin America, Spain and Portugal gathering to revive a vision and make a commitment to develop a missionary movement from within Latin America. It was estimated that in 1987, when the first COMIBAM Congress was held, there were about 1,600 Latin missionaries sent by approximately 70 mission organizations. By the time of the COMIBAM II Congress in 1997, there were about 4,000 missionaries

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<sup>3</sup> COMIBAM Internacional, *Qué es COMIBAM?* <[www.comibam.org/queescomi.htm](http://www.comibam.org/queescomi.htm)> accessed 15 March 2011

being sent by 300 missionary organizations. The COMIBAM III Congress in 2017 will, no doubt, show an even greater increase in the number of Latin missionaries involved in cross-cultural ministries around the world.

This missions movement is, in fact, a social movement. A social movement can be defined according to the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* as

a collective attempt to bring about a change in certain social institutions or to create an entirely new order. Social movements also develop a more or less consistent set of ideas which its members must accept more or less uncritically; and from these set ideologies or constitutive ideas are derived action programs or a more changing nature.<sup>4</sup>

The definition in this chapter titled 'Social Movements: Types and Functions' goes on to say that 'social movements tend to spread beyond the states or national societies and extend over the entire area of civilization'.<sup>5</sup> The missionary movement attempts to bring changes in the church and individuals, a spiritual transformation with a holistic approach, improving education, respecting the culture and giving value to their language as people that are created in God's image.

In Latin America, church members are being ignited with a missionary zeal, such zeal as was seen in earlier centuries in Europe and North America. As this movement grows and at-

tempts to bring this change to the fore, it causes people to develop contextualized training and sending institutions that will prepare them for this mission. All across Latin America, churches and individuals are responding to serve in cross-cultural missions, either supporting the cause through prayer, or sending missionaries or finances to a lesser degree.

However, in any social movement there are those individuals living in the midst of the movement who will have contrasting views and opinions. In this definition provided by the *Encyclopedia of Social Science* we read that 'as movements arise, grow, and become recognized, they tend to generate public controversy. Uncommitted portions of the society may be polarized into partisan support on the one hand and resistant opposition on the other.'<sup>6</sup> The missionary movement is not exempt from this phenomenon.

As Christians within the church respond to the missionary call and desire to serve overseas, they commonly face lack of support (emotional and financial) from key people, such as their pastors, congregations and their own families. This contrasting view of what doing missionary work means to both pastors and missionary candidates, is the biggest challenge that the movement will need to address if it wants to be effective in reaching the unreached peoples of the world. For this movement to grow and become stronger, all ideologies based on biblical and sound theology will need to be understood and practised by the church in general.

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4 David L. Sills, 'Social Movements' in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Vol. 14) (Crowell Collier and MacMillan, 1968), 439.

5 Sills, 'Social Movements', 439.

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6 Sills, 'Social Movements', 445.

## 2. Resource Mobilization

For social movements to develop, grow and advance, mobilizing resources is crucial and indispensable. In the article written by Eduardo Canel entitled 'New Social Movement Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory: The Need for Integration'<sup>7</sup> we find that

resource mobilization focuses on how groups organize to pursue their ends by mobilizing and managing resources and that these could be material or non-material such as money, organizational facilities, manpower, means of communication. This mobilization of resources is the process by which a group assembles resources and places them under collective control for the explicit purpose of pursuing the group's interest through collective action.

In the missionary movement of Latin America these resources are being mobilized, yet there are still *grievances* within the movement for a lack of appropriate funds to support those being mobilized.

In the book titled *Kingdom Stewardship*<sup>8</sup> we read about the Resource Mobilization Working Group (RMWG) that

works under the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. This group exists to provide a vision for a global culture of generosity and effective stewardship of *God's resources* to support world evangelization. The mission of the RMWG is to enable the discovery, development, and deployment of God's resources for world evangelization by catalyzing Global Generosity Networks in the twelve Lausanne regions. Ram Gidoomal, Chairman of the Lausanne Resource Mobilization Working Group, states that

a proper understanding of the scope of God's mission places a stewardship responsibility on every Christian...and at its most basic level, biblical stewardship is holistic and missional, touching every area of life and employing every legitimate vocation in service to Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

If Christians have a stewardship responsibility to further God's kingdom, why is there a continued tension between mission leaders, pastors and churches in the Americas over the use and allocation of financial resources? Why do Latin missionaries in general live without proper and basic living expenses? Why does it become so challenging to raise support in Latin America? Why do we have denominational barriers, and will we one day see the day when we can work across them?

In chapter six of the book, *Walking with the Poor*,<sup>10</sup> Bryant Myers writes

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<sup>7</sup> Eduardo Canel 'New Social Movement Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory: The Need for Integration', < <http://imamsamroni.wordpress.com/2009/01/04/new-social-movement-theory-and-resource-mobilization-theory-the-need-for-integration/>> accessed 15 March 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Mohamed, Arif; Brett Elder and Stephen Grabill (editors): *Kingdom Stewardship: Occasional Papers* prepared by the Lausanne Resource Mobilization Working Group for Cape Town 2010 (Grand Rapids: Christian Library Press, 2010).

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<sup>9</sup> Mohamed, *Kingdom Stewardship*, back cover.

<sup>10</sup> Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

about the need to think holistically when working in partnership with communities. He stresses in his chapter titled 'Principles and Practitioners' that those working in partnership within communities need to see the world the way the community sees it. Myers explains that helping the community describe its survival strategy is also a way for us to see what the community considers important as well as the community's understanding of what causes things to happen or not happen.<sup>11</sup>

In the book titled *When Helping Hurts*,<sup>12</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fickert confirm the need to pay close attention to *how* we approach funding projects. The key is not simply giving material things, but rather exploring and finding contextualized approaches to needs. This will require that both parties get involved in a 'participatory process that takes lots of time...and it might help donors if they remembered that creating decision-making capacity on the part of the receiver is a return on their investment'.<sup>13</sup>

Corbett and Fickert go on to say that development is a process of ongoing change that moves all the people involved—both the helpers and the helped—closer to being in right relationship with God, self, and others. As the materially poor develop, they are better able to fulfil their calling. Development is not to people or for people but with people. They state that 'the

key dynamic in development is promoting an empowering process in which all the people involved become more of what God created them to be'. In summary, they state that one of the biggest mistakes North American churches make is applying relief to situations in which rehabilitation or development is the appropriate intervention.<sup>14</sup>

This research will show areas that warrant attention and development. Are the programs that receive international financial support supplanting what the local church should be supporting? What are the long-term solutions needed to allow greater participation from the church, and who is responsible?

Another part of this research aims to understand the local conditions of the Latin American mission leaders regarding raising funds—their perceptions and their realities. If, in fact, we all live in a cursed world and need to apply biblical truths and principles to our approaches, could it be that the Latin Church is in the midst of a political, religious, economic and social system that tries to pull it away from the truth? Could it be that there are spiritual strongholds that need to be dismantled?

John C. Van Drunen<sup>15</sup> states that one area where the church can have a stronghold is on theological issues. He states that 'theological issues can be

11 Myers, *Walking with the poor*, 141.

12 Steve Corbett and Brian Fickert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).

13 Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 152.

14 Corbett, *When Helping Hurts*, 105.

15 John C. Van Drunen, 'Reducing Ecclesiastical Crime', in Arif Mohamed, Brett Elder and Stephen Grabill (editors), *Kingdom Stewardship: Occasional Papers prepared by the Lausanne Resource Mobilization Working Group for Cape Town 2010* (Grand Rapids: Christian Library Press, 2010), 39.



come strongholds that need to be challenged and overthrown...confused theology can stagger resource-effective stewardship'. How can biblical truths free or liberate church leaders from cycles of thoughts and habits that have led local leaders away from supporting and providing the necessary resources and elements indispensable to the continued expansion of his work? Too often we hear that missionaries have difficulty getting support from pastors and churches.

In general, do leaders enjoy this activity? Understanding their viewpoint will give us insights into general attitudes that leaders have in this field, whether positive or negative. In the book titled *Spirituality of Fundraising*<sup>16</sup> Christians are encouraged to see the matter of raising funds as a spiritual practice. The author goes on to say, 'We begin with the notion of fund-raising as a necessary but unpleasant activity to support spiritual things...but fundraising is first and foremost a form of ministry'.<sup>17</sup>

Can we say that this is how Latin mission leaders view the matter of raising funds? If attitudes and behaviour reflect inner understanding and interpretation, and these attitudes and behaviours are passed on to the younger generations of mission leaders, it is necessary that we seek to find what the general thinking is on this matter. What can be done to make this task more spiritual and satisfactory?

#### IV The Survey, Results and Proposed Actions

The Latin American Survey on mission institutions' fundraising is the first survey conducted jointly by Wycliffe Global Alliance, America and COMIBAM International, for the purpose of understanding the problems and challenges that institutions and their leaders face regarding issues of institutional fundraising. The topics discussed have been divided into five sections: General profile of those surveyed; Training mission leaders have had in fundraising; Information on funds coming from abroad; Local context, experience and efforts in fund raising; Local operations, structures and real estate.

The Survey was motivated by several factors including the lack of adequate data to make a diagnosis of the problems faced by mission institutions regarding fundraising; the urgency and need for Latin American mission institutions to have better data and to maintain analysis of their fundraising activities and sharing experiences, and the need to provide contextualized tools and programs to enable the development of strategies and best practices in terms of fundraising in the interests of self-sustainability, continuity and institutional growth.

The survey was sent out in December 2010 and January 2011 in Spanish and Portuguese to about 70 mission leaders in Latin America, representing over 30 mission organizations on the Ibero-American continent. They were encouraged to forward it to their local networks, and therefore the number of people who received it is unknown. The only verification was that the number of leaders who responded was 55.

<sup>16</sup> Henry J.M. Nouwen, *Spirituality of Fundraising* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Nouwen, *Spirituality*, 6.

The tabulation of the responses was completed on February 7, 2011. The survey was anonymous and was sent electronically through Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

The first findings of this study show that further surveys will be required in the future with the church community, elders and church leaders, pastors and others who are also a fundamental part of the Latin American missions movement. Some of the initial results are listed below.

Finally, I finish my arguments by referring to the book titled *Cross-Cultural Partnerships, Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission*<sup>18</sup> in which we read that because cross-cultural partnerships are on the rise and are becoming the primary method in which churches and organizations engage in global missions, it is very important to carefully study issues related to culture and money. We need to grow in cultural intelligence.<sup>19</sup> This research will aim to shed more light on the complex dynamics among partnerships, Latin culture, money and biblical truths.

### 1. Profile

The following are the results in percentages of the respondent's profile. The purpose of this is to create confidence in the survey, showing that those who have contributed to this missions survey know the environment in the Latin American context.

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<sup>18</sup> Lederleitner, Mary, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*, 21.

- 83% live in South America or Central America
- 69% are between 40 and 60 years of age
- 75% have a university degree and/or post-graduate studies
- 74% have leadership responsibilities, whether in the administrative area or governance of the entity
- 73% have lived in more than one country
- 54% speak more than one language (mainly English and Spanish)
- 51% receive a monthly salary or offering through their local organization (only 25% receive a monthly salary or offering from a foreign organization)
- While 59% like to raise funds for their organization, only 36% like personal fundraising.

### 2. Training mission leaders have had regarding Fundraising

An important observation made in the context of this survey is that in general the percentage of leaders who are trained in fundraising is low and there is little personal involvement. (See Table 1, p.83)

### 3. Information about funds coming from abroad

The results indicate certain compliance with the financial situation and some dependence on foreign funds. (See Table 2, p.83)

### 4. Context, experience and local efforts in fundraising

Commitment and support from the

churches and institutions are low. The institutions have no consultancy on fundraising strategies. Efforts are sporadic, unorganized and there is not a long-term fundraising strategy.

Organizations need to rely on their ability and develop it to get the financial support they need. (See Table 3, p.83)

### 5. Operations, structures and local real estate

47% of the organizations own the facilities from where they operate.

54% of the organizations have an annual operating budget of \$10,000 to \$30,000.

68% of the organizations have a professional to manage finances.

42% of the organizations use special software to manage the donations they receive.

## V Conclusions and Recommendations

Fundraising should be an ongoing activity within an organization, involving various activities, planning and preparation. The study shows that the frequency and time allocated to the task of resource development is low. To achieve adequate financial development, leaders must invest more time, resources and effort in the field of fundraising. Developing a fundraising guide to substantiate biblically the need for a strategy in mission institutions and ways of raising awareness among the donors is recommended.

Mission institutions in Latin America must develop solid fundraising (development) programs and have staff

dedicated to developing a local initiative in fundraising. Organizations must develop a fundraising strategy and integrate their long-term strategic plan and annual operating plan. Fund raising must be part of mission institutions' strategic plan. Leaders must think of ways to get different types of support. If the institutions plan their fundraising strategy they will achieve a more sustainable impact in their results.

More effort is needed in training leaders in fundraising. The percentage of leaders trained in fundraising is low, and this may be the reason that it is one of the most difficult tasks facing a leader. This research then urgently invites and encourages those organizations with more experience to come and join the missionary movement with a new sense of commitment and support, to train leaders and their respective staff in this critical area. In addition, 81% of the organizations do not have a fundraising specialist for their institution.

The information obtained shows that, in general, leaders are not receiving adequate training about biblical principles of fundraising and their responsibility as leaders. Bible schools, seminaries, cross-cultural missionary training centres, and the church in general, must be encouraged to provide more training in solid biblical foundations of fundraising and generosity. The misuse and abuse of funds causes leaders to be afraid to talk openly and frequently about money. Generosity and fundraising training should be given in discipleship training for all believers.

It is important that mission institutions have more trained staff and appropriate tools for managing their finances. While 70% have trained per-

sonnel, thereby achieving good results in terms of resource management and proper financial reporting, fewer than 50% of organizations use appropriate software to manage finances. Organizations must intentionally invest in training their staff in the area of financial management. The research reports that the other 30% of organizations administer funds without trained personnel.

International ministries or organizations supporting programs in Latin

America must increase and develop funding models that encourage and leave room for the national organization or program to seek funds locally also. A matching fund program is one of the most effective models. This process will allow this interdependent relationship to exist without developing dependency. At the same time, international funders must have an exit funding strategy. As national funds increase, their funding decreases.

**Table 1**

Has taken a training course on fund-raising for missionaries in the past two years	40%
Has taken some training in fund-raising for institutions in the past two years	27%
The institution's Board of Directors has had some training	59%
The personnel or work team has taken a course	28%
Continually apply lessons learned	50%

**Table 2**

Your organization has received financial help from abroad in the past two years	46%
Organizations that have always received external support	28%
Organizations that have not received support for more than 10 years	19%
Are satisfied with the criteria established by the donor to determine when and how to use the designated funds	46%
Are not sure if they will continue to receive support in the future	48%

**Table 3**

Have set a goal to reach 100% of amount required	40%
Local support comes from:	
People	57%
Churches	39%
Institutions	4%
Has developed standards for reporting with the donor	36%
The funds raised are invested in:	
Projects with specific objectives	49%
Operations	17%
Other	30%
Frequency of fundraising efforts at local level	
Annual	33%
Quarterly	17%
Monthly	28%
Weekly	22%
Share their fundraising experiences with colleagues:	
All the time	12%
Occasionally	44%
When the subject is brought up	28%
Never	16%
Have a fundraising specialist (part-time or full-time)	19%

# Selected Generosity Resources List

**Dr Sas Conradie**

Coordinator Lausanne Movement/World Evangelical Alliance  
Global Generosity Network<sup>1</sup>

## I) Generosity Network

The Global Generosity Network (<http://generositymovement.org/about/>) is a joint initiative of the World Evangelical Alliance and Lausanne Movement. The Generosity Declaration (<http://generositymovement.org/network/>) and Affirmations (<http://generositymovement.org/about/>). The Lausanne Standards ([www.lausannestandards.org](http://www.lausannestandards.org)). The Global Generosity pages on the Lausanne Conversation website ([www.lausanne.org/en/blog/1852-a-communion-of-giving-and-receiving-the-lausanne-standards.html](http://www.lausanne.org/en/blog/1852-a-communion-of-giving-and-receiving-the-lausanne-standards.html))

## II) Generosity centres, training and courses

'Seasons of Giving' ([www.stewardship.org.uk/money/spotlight/seasons-of-giving](http://www.stewardship.org.uk/money/spotlight/seasons-of-giving))  
Asia Theological Seminary Stewardship Center (<http://atscbs.wordpress.com/about/>).  
Baylor University Institute for the Study of Religion (ISR) Program on Faith and Generosity ([www.baylorisr.org/programs-research/faith-generosity/](http://www.baylorisr.org/programs-research/faith-generosity/)).  
Colombo Theological Seminary ([www.cts.lk](http://www.cts.lk))  
First Fruit Institute ([www.firstfruit.org/institute](http://www.firstfruit.org/institute))  
Generous Leader ([www.generousleader.com/](http://www.generousleader.com/))  
Mission Increase Foundation (<http://www.mif.org/index.cfm?action=general.trainingResources>)  
Stewardship Ministries Small Group Studies ([www.stewardshipministries.org/resources/life-stewardship-small-group-study/](http://www.stewardshipministries.org/resources/life-stewardship-small-group-study/))  
Stewardship of Life Institute ([www.stewardshipoflife.org/](http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/)).  
The Christian Institute of Management in India ([http://cimindia.in/mcm\\_christian\\_mgt.htm](http://cimindia.in/mcm_christian_mgt.htm))  
The Samaritan Strategy Africa ([www.cms-africa.org](http://www.cms-africa.org)).  
TWR Faith Reliance team (Barbara Shantz at [bshantz@twr.org](mailto:bshantz@twr.org))

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed Generosity Resources List and a Generosity Resources CD with generosity resources are available from Dr. Sas Conradie ([ggncoord@gmail.com](mailto:ggncoord@gmail.com)).

### III) Generosity ministries

#### Church related<sup>2</sup>

- i. Giving in Grace ([www.givinginGrace.org/summary.html](http://www.givinginGrace.org/summary.html)) of the Diocese of Liverpool.
- ii. Parish Resources ([www.parishresources.org.uk/](http://www.parishresources.org.uk/)) of the Church of England's National Stewardship Department
- iii. The International Mission Board ([www.imb.org/main/give/default.asp](http://www.imb.org/main/give/default.asp)).
- iv. The Nairobi Baptist Church Missions Allocation Committee ([www.nairobibaptist.co.ke/index.php/ministries/outreach-ministries](http://www.nairobibaptist.co.ke/index.php/ministries/outreach-ministries)).
- v. The Nigerian Baptist Convention Stewardship Department ([www.nigerianbaptist.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=11&Itemid=38](http://www.nigerianbaptist.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11&Itemid=38)).

Christian Community Foundations for example the Generosity Trust (<http://thegenerositytrust.org/>).

Christian Management Australia (CMA—[www.cma.net.au](http://www.cma.net.au)).

Crown Financial Ministries ([www.crown.org](http://www.crown.org)) and their offices that have generosity related resources in different languages.

Disciple Nations Alliance ([www.disciplenations.org](http://www.disciplenations.org))

El Instituto para la Cultura Financiera ([www.culturafinanciera.org](http://www.culturafinanciera.org))

Generosity Monk ([www.generositymonk.com](http://www.generositymonk.com)).

Generous Church ([www.generouschurch.com](http://www.generouschurch.com) and [www.generouschurchos.org](http://www.generouschurchos.org)).

Generous Giving ([www.generousgiving.org/](http://www.generousgiving.org/)).

Giving Wisely ([www.givingwisely.com](http://www.givingwisely.com)).

Gospel Bankers ([www.gospelbankers.com/](http://www.gospelbankers.com/)).

International Steward ([www.intsteward.org](http://www.intsteward.org)).

Issachar Initiative (<http://issacharinitiative.org>)

Kingfisher Mobilising Centre ([www.kfmc.co.za](http://www.kfmc.co.za))

Leadership Network ([www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org))

Maximum Generosity ([www.MAXIMUMgenerosity.org](http://www.MAXIMUMgenerosity.org))

Mission Increase Foundation ([www.mif.org/index.cfm](http://www.mif.org/index.cfm))

Mission Supporters League ([www.mslonline.org/index.html](http://www.mslonline.org/index.html))

National Christian Foundation ([www.nationalchristian.com](http://www.nationalchristian.com))

Royal Treasure ([www.royaltreasure.org/](http://www.royaltreasure.org/))

SEL France ([www.selfrance.org](http://selfrance.org)) developed generosity related resources in French (<http://selfrance.org/index.php?id=897> and <http://selfrance.org/index.php?id=917>)

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<sup>2</sup> These are examples of generosity focused ministries in churches. Many churches have stewardship departments. The main function of most of these departments is to raise funds for the church but increasingly they have an emphasis on encouraging generous living and giving more widely.

Stewardship ([www.stewardship.org.uk](http://www.stewardship.org.uk))  
 Stewardship Council ([www.stewardshipcouncil.net](http://www.stewardshipcouncil.net))  
 Stewardship Ministries ([www.stewardshipministries.org](http://www.stewardshipministries.org))  
 The Canadian National Christian Foundation ([www.cncf.ca](http://www.cncf.ca))  
 The Christian Leadership Alliance ([www.christianleadershipalliance.org](http://www.christianleadershipalliance.org))  
 The Christian Stewardship Network ([www.christianstewardshipnetwork.com](http://www.christianstewardshipnetwork.com))  
 The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability ([www.ecfa.org](http://www.ecfa.org)).  
 The Gathering (<http://thegathering.com/>)  
 The Genesis Charitable Foundation ([www.genesisfoundation.org.au/](http://www.genesisfoundation.org.au/)).  
 The Global Generosity Movement ([www.generositymovement.org](http://www.generositymovement.org)).  
 Women Doing Well ([www.womendoingwell.org](http://www.womendoingwell.org))  
 World Mission Associates ([www.wmausa.org](http://www.wmausa.org))  
 World Thrust International ([www.worldthrust.com/](http://www.worldthrust.com/))

#### IV) Publications

Alcorn, Randy: *Managing God's Money: A Biblical guide* (Carol Stream, Illinois, USA: Tyndale House, 2011)  
 Alcorn, Randy: *Money, Possessions and Eternity* (Carol Stream, Illinois, USA: Tyndale House, 2003)  
 Cunningham Chad E. with Howard Dayton: *Faith and Money: A Practical Theology* (Atlanta: Crown Financial Ministries, 2009)  
 De Neui, Paul H.: *Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia* (Pasadena, USA: William Carey Library, 2012)  
 Elder, Brett and Stephen Grabill (editors): *NIV Stewardship Study Bible: Discover God's design for life, the environment, finances, generosity and eternity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009)  
 Higginson, Richard: *Faith, Hope and the Global Economy* (London: InterVarsity Press, 2012)  
 Jabini, Frank S. *How to Give Joyfully* (Johannesburg: South African Theological Seminary Press, 2009)  
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 Link, E.G. 'Jay': *Spiritual Thoughts on Material Things: 30 Days of Food for Thought* (Maitland, Florida, USA: Xulon Press, 2009)  
 Longenecker, Bruce: *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, USA: Eerdmans, 2010)  
 MacDonald, Gordon: *Generosity: Moving Toward Life that is Truly Life* (Alpharetta, Georgia, USA: National Christian Foundation, 2008)  
 Mohamed, Arif; Brett Elder and Stephen Grabill (editors): *Kingdom Stewardship: Occasional Papers prepared by the Lausanne Resource*

- Mobilization Working Group for Cape Town 2010 (Grand Rapids: Christian Library Press, 2010)
- Reese, Robert: *Roots and Remedies: 'Of the Dependency Syndrome in World Missions'* (Pasadena, California, USA: William Carey Library, 2010)
- Rodin, Scott R. and Gary G. Hoag: *The Sower: Redefining the Ministry of Raising Kingdom Resources* (Winchester, Virginia, USA: ECFAPress, 2010)
- Sheppard, Jim and Chris Willard: *Contagious Generosity: Creating a Culture of Giving in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 2012)
- Sider, Ron: *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from affluence to generosity* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005)
- Smith, Christian, Michael O Emerson and Patricia Snell: *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians do not give away more money* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Stott, John: *The Grace of Giving: 10 Principles of Christian Giving* (London: LPI and IFES, 2004)
- Tondeur, Keith: *Money: Your money and your life*, (London, UK: SPCK, 2010)
- Tongoi, Dennis: *Mixing God with Money: Strategies for living in an uncertain economy* (Nairobi, Kenya: Bezalel Investment Ltd, 2001)
- Willmer, Wesley K. (ed.): *Revolution in Generosity: Transforming Stewards to Be Rich Toward God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008)
- Wilson, Myles: *Funding the Family Business* (Laughton, UK: Stewardship, 2006)

### V) Generosity DVD's, videos, articles and devotionals<sup>3</sup>

- '40 Day Journey to a More Generous Life' Devotional ([http://generositymovement.org/category/resources/study\\_guides/](http://generositymovement.org/category/resources/study_guides/))
- 'Fundraising' ([http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Roots/English/Fundraising/Fundraising\\_E.pdf](http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Roots/English/Fundraising/Fundraising_E.pdf)).
- 'Unhealthy Dependency to Faith Reliance', Keynote presentations of the March 2011 HCJB Global/TWR symposium (available from TWR [www.twr.org/resources/catalog.html?cat=&item=67](http://www.twr.org/resources/catalog.html?cat=&item=67))
- Funding the Family Business ([www.fundingthefamilybusiness.org](http://www.fundingthefamilybusiness.org))
- Generous Life ([www.generouslife.info/index.htm](http://www.generouslife.info/index.htm))
- Short films by Stewardship ([www.youtube.com/stewardshipuk](http://www.youtube.com/stewardshipuk))
- The Generous Giving Library (<http://library.generousgiving.org/page.asp?sec=28&page=>)

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<sup>3</sup> Nearly all the ministries have extensive online generosity resources on their websites available. They are not included under this heading.



## Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Kar Yong Lim  
Bruce W. Longenecker  
*Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World*

Reviewed by Pastor Robert Oh  
Jeff Anderson  
*Plastic Donuts*

Reviewed by Barbara Shantz  
R. Scott Rodin & Gary G. Hoag  
*The Sower: Redefining the Ministry of Raising Kingdom Resources*

Reviewed by John Pearson  
Chris McDaniel  
*Igniting a Life of Generosity*

Reviewed by Sas Conradie  
Randy Alcorn  
*Managing God's Money: A Biblical Guide*

Reviewed by Dr Sas Conradie  
Paul H De Neui (ed)  
*Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia*

Reviewed by Sas Conradie  
Richard Higginson  
*Faith, Hope and the Global Economy: A power for good*

## Book Reviews

ERT (2013) 37:1, 88-89

**Remember the Poor: Paul,  
Poverty, and the Greco-Roman  
World**

**Bruce W. Longenecker**

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,  
2010

ISBN 978-0-8028-6373-7

Pb., pp380, bibliog., index.

*Reviewed by Kar Yong Lim, Seminari  
Teoloji Malaysia (Malaysia Theological  
Seminary), Seremban, Malaysia*

In this excellent and substantial treatment of economic dimensions of early Christianity, Bruce Longenecker challenges the view that the apostle Paul has little concern for the poor and that his theology has little or no relevance to studies of wealth and poverty. Longenecker argues persuasively that care for

the poor is integral to Paul's understanding of the gospel and standard practice among the congregations he established in the Mediterranean basin. Longenecker's work combines some of his earlier published research and new materials, making this volume a coherent and significant contribution to the subject of Paul and poverty.

After critically assessing and evaluating Paul's alleged disregard for the poor in recent New Testament scholarship in the introductory Chapter 1, Longenecker argues that Paul's concern for the poor is at the heart of his gospel. This argument is subsequently substantiated in the following chapters which are divided into two major parts: chapters 2-5 examine 'The Poor in Their Ancient Places' and chapters 6-13 focus on 'The Poor in Pauline Places'.

In the first part of the book, 'The Poor

in *Their Ancient Places*, Longenecker highlights the economic disparity between the elite who controlled the mechanism of wealth and the rest of the poor population within agrarianism of the ancient world. Following this, Longenecker presents his own paradigm which is a multi-level economic scale that aims to assist in interpreting the data in this volume. Based on this economic scale, Longenecker establishes that charitable activities for the economically vulnerable in the Greco-Roman world were very limited, although some concern for the poor was not entirely unknown. It was only within the theological traditions of early Judaism that care for the poor was slightly more noticeable, especially in the Gospel narratives, Acts and James.

Moving on to the second part of the book, *'The Poor in Pauline Places'*, Longenecker examines the poor in Paul's theology and the communities he founded. He persuasively presents evidence demonstrating that 'remembering the poor was to lie at the heart of the eschatological identity of communities he had founded, and was itself a practice integral to an embodied proclamation of the good news' (155). Longenecker argues that there are clearer links to the Jewish and Jesus traditions in caring for the poor than most interpreters of Paul have allowed.

Following this, Longenecker spends considerable amount of space deliberating on the meaning of the phrase, 'remember the poor' in Galatians 2:10. He presents a case for a non-geographical restricted interpretation of the 'poor' in which the poor should not be narrowly limited to 'the poor in Jerusalem' as prevailing in current New Testament scholarship, but should include all the poor in local congregations spread throughout both Judean and Greco-Roman worlds. Subsequently, Longe-

necker suggests that precisely because the early Jesus-movement specifically provided for the poor, it proved attractive to people from different economic levels, particularly those who did not belong to the household structure and could not compete in the reciprocity system of patronage engrained in the Greco-Roman world. Longenecker also outlines some theological implications of the significance of care for the poor, and presents Paul himself as one who took on the economic position of downward mobility, embodying the very message he proclaimed.

This volume is a significant and invaluable contribution to the study of Paul and poverty. Even if one is not fully persuaded by Longenecker's argument, particularly his complex paradigm of economic scale, he has successfully challenged the current consensus views by arguing that the poor are integral to Paul's gospel and the standard practice of the early church. In this respect, Longenecker offers a fresh vision in shaping and helping us read the Pauline corpus with fresh insights. This will surely trigger further discussion on how the church today could more meaningfully respond to the needy in the midst of a global economic crisis and how generosity could be practised.

ERT (2013) 37:1, 90

## Plastic Donuts

Jeff Anderson

Tulsa, USA: Acceptable Gift, 2012

ISBN 978-0984826803

Pb. pp 58

*Pastor Robert Oh, Vision to Reality  
Foundation, USA*

After receiving *Plastic Donuts*, I devoured the book in one session. My perspective on giving was enhanced and endorsed by Jeff Anderson's concise but deep insights which can come only from a personal relationship with God. When he writes, 'God enjoys receiving gifts!' I could almost hear the voice of little Autumn Joy sharing this secret with her siblings: 'Dad enjoys receiving my gifts – Plastic Donuts!'

In the course of writing a book on 'tithing' I read through about one hundred books on giving and tithing, and I must admit Jeff Anderson brings out one of the key elements of giving that many of us miss altogether – because of our theological bent or academic zeal. The point is this: We must 'give' out of our 'relationship' with God and not out of 'religious obligations'. Our money is in fact like Plastic Donuts to God; with good relationship with him, it means something for both parties involved, but without proper relationship with him, it is just a toy.

The author's argument that 'free will giving' was the bedrock of the Old Testament giving system and a subsequent chart showing different categories made me understand that even within the context of law, we had a choice in deciding the amount of gifts. I meet too many ministries that refuse to teach on the principle of tithing because they claim that it is only part of the Old Testament

law. They then suffer financially and wonder why God does not provide for their needs. In both Old and New Testament times, God rejoices in receiving our gifts that we give freely because of the love we have for him.

Anderson's passionate plea that 'from God's perspective, the amount matters' caught my attention, but from my personal experience the percentage matters more than the actual amount, especially in the Cambodian context which I know best. Jeff's friend's testimony about sacrificially selling his boat to give an offering would not make sense to many of my friends who live on \$2 a day. Although their offering amount is small, it is a very high percentage of their income.

As I was sharing about Christian prisoners in Cambodia at a pastor's conference in Kenya a few years ago, several pastors from Rwanda collected a love offering on the spot for them – it was more than \$200. Considering the GDP per capita of Rwanda is about \$1,000 it was two months' wages – what a sacrificial giving! I shared this offering with prisoners in Cambodia, and in return, they collected an offering of \$23 and wrote a letter stating that as they received generously, they want to generously give back to those less fortunate than them. This is true giving by every sense of the word – giving by relationship!

Jeff Anderson is right in claiming that there is more to Christian stewardship than just having finances and a clean tithing record. God passionately pursues our relationship with him, and so our giving gets his attention – giving by relationship. I pray that this book will produce a hunger in everyone who reads it to understand how God views giving, and find true spiritual peace about giving.

ERT (2013) 37:1, 91-92

**The Sower: Redefining the  
Ministry of Raising Kingdom  
Resources**

R. Scott Rodin & Gary G. Hoag  
Winchester, VA: ECFA Press, 2010  
ISBN: 978-0979990793  
Hb. Pp 112

*Barbara Shantz, TWR Global Development  
Liaison*

Whenever I've introduced the topic of biblical fundraising outside the West, and sometimes even *inside* the West, people cringe. Even speaking the word 'fundraising' seems to spur mental images of guilt-laden manipulation and hard-sell tactics.

Imagine a world where fundraisers want to get to know you just to find out and respect the causes that God has placed in your mind and heart to help. If one of their organizations doesn't fit the bill, they point you to another organization that better suits your interests. They are more like stewardship consultants, only you don't have to pay them (although a small donation to their cause in exchange for services rendered probably would not be refused!). Finally, someone is there just to listen and help you know what to do best and responsibly with the resources that God has given you. We know we are to be generous as Christ followers, but we don't want or need to be 'sold' anything.

Welcome to the pages of *The Sower*. While Christian leaders, pastors and fundraisers muddy the word 'stewardship' to the point that you're almost afraid to think it, *The Sower* explains the biblical meaning of steward to those who still measure their fundraisers purely on money transacted rather than lives transformed. Now the fundraisers can

turn to prayer and spiritual growth for themselves as they look to model the same for their donors.

Thus, a sower-fundraiser is transformed into a biblical 'steward-raiser who seek(s) transformation: to help others use the spiritual and material gifts entrusted to them to accomplish God's work' (p 48). The purpose of *The Sower* is to inform fundraisers that they are like the sower in the beautiful Van Gogh painting that graces the cover of the book and indeed the everyday farmer referred to in 1 Corinthians 3. They can plant and water with information about their organisations and teach the joy and discipline of generous giving to potential donors, but it is God – and God alone – who makes anything grow. In other words, the fundraiser/sower is presented as a respected minister who in turn treats the giver as a respected and knowledgeable Christian capable of hearing God's voice and responding to his leading rather than to the voice and urging of the salesperson – I mean, fundraiser.

Although it will still take a while for the Christian fundraising industry to be changed, I now believe that it is possible to see the day when those who receive funding are treated as joint believers in fulfilling the Great Commission and they will become transformed stewards.

Rodin and Hoag have successfully used their years of training and practising both 'transaction' and 'transformation' fundraising to ensure that we never again will need to go back to pressure sales in Christian fund development. Is it too much to hope that one day their efforts will also turn fundraising into a globally respected career? Then those of us to whom the Lord has assigned the incredibly exciting job of connecting the giver and the ministry might see our-

selves, and be seen as, helping to fill the earth with worship and glory to God.

ERT (2013) 37:1, 92-93

### Igniting a Life of Generosity

Chris McDaniel

Winchester, VA, USA: ECFAPress,  
ISBN-13: 978-0979990762  
Pb., pp 60

*Reviewed by John Pearson, John Pearson Associates, Inc., San Clemente, California, USA*

What if...there were so many men and women in your organization's 'generous givers' circle'—that when you reviewed possible future board member prospects, you had ten times more qualified candidates than open spots? What if...before your organization mailed the monthly appeal letter, hundreds and hundreds of generous givers—prompted by the Holy Spirit—sent in their cheques and made online gifts *before* you asked for the contribution?

What if...the stories of sacrificial giving in your church were so numerous—and so life-changing—that a revival broke out even before your pastor broke out his sermon? What if...God prompted you to use the funds you've saved for a special 'this is for me' purchase...and you diverted the money to a friend in need? No fanfare. No name. No tax deduction. And...what if you realized that this act of generosity (and obedience) actually produced more joy than your original plan?

If any of these 'what if's' capture your imagination, then you'll resonate with the quick-reading message of *Igniting a Life of Generosity*, a 21-day journey to help Jesus' followers experience the joy of generosity. Published by the Evangeli-

cal Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA), this 60-page powerhouse will impact your head, your heart and your wallet with 21 short stories and call-to-action ideas like these:

Day 1: A 20-something receives a company car and so he tries to sell his personal vehicle. No buyers. He prays. God speaks: 'What are you going to do with the money if I sell your car?' Oops! Plan B kicks in. His deal: 'OK, God, if you sell my car, I'll give a sizeable portion to this [needy] family.' No surprise—car sells. Anonymous cash delivered to needy family. No surprise—immense joy experienced by a young steward.

Day 13: (You must read this one!) In the late 1800s, a young girl in a Pennsylvania church, Hattie May Wiatt, was prompted by God to begin saving money for a larger church building. Yet she died in her youth. Good news: the pastor took the 57 cents she had saved and inspired his congregation to multiply that into \$250—and the multiplication continued so that by 1912, the church had expanded and grown to over 5,600 members.

Day 14: A graduate school student learns the power and joy of giving monthly (in six-month specific commitments) rather than writing just one cheque—and being done with it. The author says that igniting the generosity gift also involves faithfulness and asks, 'When you think of wanting to become more faithful, what is one thing you believe God is nudging you about?'

So what if...instead of hassling givers, manipulating givers and shaming givers, our churches and nonprofit ministries actually *inspired* givers and challenged their heads and hearts with Scriptures and stories—so that their cheque writing and online giving would be prompted by their attentive ears to the Holy

Spirit's nudges?

Light the fire and share this powerful mini-book with your generous givers and those who have not yet experienced the joy of giving.

ERT (2013) 37:1, 93-94

### Managing God's Money: A Biblical Guide

Randy Alcorn

Carol Stream, Illinois, USA: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011  
ISBN 978-1-4143-4553-6  
Pb., pp272, bibliog., index.

*Reviewed by Sas Conradie, Coordinator  
Global Generosity Network, Oxford, UK*

'Our perspective on money and possessions – and the way we handle them – lies at the heart of the Christian life.' Does that sound like an overstatement? It's not. The Bible emphatically demonstrates that how we view our money and possessions is of utmost importance. What we do with them will influence eternity'.

This opening statement of Randy Alcorn's book, 'Managing God's Money: A Biblical guide', provides the framework for perhaps the most comprehensive guide to biblical based financial stewardship and giving that I know about. Alcorn touches on nearly every theme around a biblical perspective on money, including

- Money and possessions in the Bible—a biblical mind-set about money, God being the owner of everything and our responsibility to steward God's resources;
- Perspectives that impede faithful money management – 'money is bad', materialism and prosperity theology;
- Stewardship from an eternal perspective – storing up treasure in heaven and the reward to faithful stewards;
- Giving and sharing God's money and possessions – tithing, freewill giving and supporting God's work with God's wealth;
- Handling God's money and possessions wisely – stewardship and generosity discipleship, debt, saving, investing and inheritance;
- Passing the baton of wise stewardship – teaching financial stewardship in families and in the church;
- The spiritual gift of giving.

Alcorn is hard hitting at points – 'we will never manage God's money well unless we *truly* believe it is God's money'. We need to relinquish what we thought is ours and give it to him. He goes as far as suggesting drawing up a written title deed that somebody can sign as visible commitment to surrender his/her finances to God. Just think about the implications if every Christian will do that!

Alcorn also provides new perspectives. One of those perspectives to me was his emphasis on a strategic lifestyle in comparison to a simple lifestyle. Somebody might reject something as nonessential while it could have been used as a tool for kingdom purposes. And then he adds one of his brilliant nuggets for which he has become famous: 'Simple living may be self-centred. Strategic living is Kingdom centred'.

Then Alcorn is very practical. For example he recommends eight steps to get out of debt, as follows:

Repent – admit that you used your money wrongly, ask God's forgiveness and change the way you view possessions;  
Immediately give God the first-fruits;  
Incur no new debts; Systematically

eliminate existing debt;

Perform plastic surgery on your credit card – pay off the balance on your credit card and cut it up; Stop rationalising debt habits such as the need for expensive clothes, furniture or electronic equipment; Develop a schedule to pay off debt; If you have done everything to get out of debt and there is still not enough money to pay it off, consider new ways to increase your income.

He closes with the question, ‘what are we living for?’ Is it for the treasures on earth that ends in junkyards or for the treasures in heaven that never fade? Faithful stewardship and generous kingdom giving on earth is about living for that eternity.

I had been reading many books on financial stewardship, generosity and giving. *Managing God’s Money* is by far the best. It is easy to read but has enough depth to satisfy those who do not just want a cursory overview of a practical guide to stewardship. It easily translates into different contexts and cultures. Not only are the principles universal but the examples will be as well understood in Nairobi as in Atlanta. Not many books can do that. It explains the framework of kingdom stewardship, generous living and financial giving very well. Financial giving therefore is one aspect of generous living and the result of being good stewards. Quite often authors do not explain this framework for financial giving well. *Managing God’s Money* got it right even though the emphasis is still on the financial. His call is to immediate action. After having taken the reader through the biblical principles and practical application of managing God’s money, Alcorn calls on the reader to respond to make a real commitment to surrender everything to God and his lordship. I hope that many Christians will read

*Managing God’s Money: A Biblical guide and embrace what Alcorn calls ‘Scripture’s exciting perspectives on being God’s money manager’.* I also hope that the material of the book will be taught in families, in churches and theological institutions. Just think what can happen if every Christian will become God’s money manager!

ERT (2013) 37:1, 94-95

### Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia

Paul H De Neui (ed)

Pasadena, USA: William Carey Library, 2012

ISBN 978-0-87808-038-0.

Pb., pp176, Indices

*Reviewed by Dr Sas Conradie, Coordinator Global Generosity Network, Oxford, UK*

One of the memories I have from our time as missionaries in Ukraine was the arrival of a new North American missionary. We had arrived in the country with suitcases, but this specific missionary came with a container full of his possessions. As we carried their furniture to their flat, one of the neighbours screamed from the bottom of the bottom of the building, ‘What is this?!’ ‘An American, what do you think!’ replied another. At another point the first thing somebody did after he decided to become a Christian was to resign from his job in the market to become a ‘full-time missionary’. That was his ideal job. His understanding of missionaries was that they received lots of money and then ate the food of others!

From my own experience in dealing with issues around finances in a mission environment, *Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia* edited by Paul H. De

Neui, published by SEANET (a network of groups and individuals living and serving in the Buddhist world), is very significant. In a Buddhist context where unquestionable attachment to material possessions in the temporary world will result in greater suffering in the next, the way missionaries view and engage with money becomes even more important. The publication should be required reading not only for missionaries going to the Buddhist world but also other contexts.

The articles that are included in the volume are presentations delivered from indigenous and expatriate perspectives during the SEANET annual conference in 2011. They deal with a wide variety of themes, including Buddhist perceptions of the Christian use of funds in Sri Lanka; reflections on financial responsibility of missionaries and indigenous churches; money and missionary lifestyle in the Buddhist world; possessions, positions and power; partnerships, money and dialogue in Buddhist contexts, and money and missions in patron-client Buddhist cultures. Some of the conclusions in the articles are startling. For example, the impact of Christian ministry in the Buddhist world hinges on the way money is viewed and used by missionaries. I am fairly certain this is the case not only in the Buddhist world but in other religious contexts as well! Jonathan Bonk therefore calls for better training of missionaries in dealing with issues around wealth and poverty in his article on material inequality between missionaries and people they are serving. He suggests that an understanding of the 'righteous rich' might be a way to deal with this inequality.

Unsurprisingly a key theme that comes through in nearly every article is the importance of cultivating a giving life-style amongst local Christians. Such a

life-style should be part of whole-life discipleship, will be a witness to the local community and will result in less dependency of local churches on outside funding. A generous life-style by local Christians will also counter the argument that people convert to Christianity because of the material benefits.

Mary Lederleitner gives an explanation of the Ecology of Human Development theory that can be a tool in contextualising cross-cultural partnerships, especially in navigating financial issues.

As somebody with little knowledge of the Buddhist world I found the comparisons between the biblical and Buddhist understanding of generosity fascinating. Paul De Neui explains patron-client relationships in the Buddhist world while the generosity motivation especially to gain merit in future life is described in a few articles. This understanding is important not only for missionaries working in Asia but for anybody with an interest in generosity and philanthropy. The UBS-INSEAD Study on Family Philanthropy in Asia emphasises the importance of the role of Buddhism in Asian philanthropy.

These were just some of the themes that struck me but every article in the publication is excellent with very good case studies. Looking now back at our time in Ukraine and in other contexts where I ministered, I realise how little Christian workers understand the concepts of gift giving and the implications of their own dealing with money in the contexts where they serve. For these reasons I strongly recommend that *Complexities of Mission in Asia* be used as a text book for training missionaries and in cross-cultural studies. I also hope that the book will generate further research and encourage other Christian networks to publish similar studies.



### Short review

*Faith, Hope and the Global Economy: A power for good* by Richard Higginson (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012) ISBN 978-1-84474-580-7. Pb., pp256

Rightly understood and applied, faith can be an enormous power for good in the global economy as it stimulates enterprise, reduces poverty, promotes integrity, ensures sustainability and makes disciples. Faith can therefore be integrated into business and the marketplace and the themes of Scripture can be applied to the world of commerce. Using historical and contemporary examples from across the world to understand the inter-relationship between faith and business, Higginson shows how approaching business activities from a Christian perspective can bring life and hope to communities and countries. Christians can therefore play an essential role in the transformation of the global economy through, amongst others, social enterprise, fair trade, micro-credit, cooperatives and eco-friendly companies – enterprises in which Christians often take a leading role. In a commercial environment where we hear nearly on a daily basis of unethical behaviour by banks and other enterprises, this book will help Christian business leaders in impacting their environments with the biblical message as well as church leaders empowering their members for their service in the commercial world.

*Reviewed by Sas Conradie, Coordinator, Global Generosity Network*

## Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology

Edited by Neil B. MacDonald and Carl R. Trueman

Karl Barth and John Calvin belong to the first rank of great theologians of the Church. Both, of course, were also Reformed theologians. Historically, Calvin's influence on Reformed doctrine has been much greater than that of Barth's, and continues to be so in the present day. In contrast, Barth's Reformed credentials have been questioned – not least in his understanding of election and atonement. The question is: who should be of greater importance for the Reformed church in the twenty-first century? Who has the better arguments on the Bible? Barth or Calvin? Doctrinal areas of focus are the nature of the atonement, Scripture, and the sacraments.

**Neil B. MacDonald** is Senior Lecturer in Theology, University of Surrey Roehampton, London, UK. **Carl R. Trueman** is Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA.

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