

A Religio-ethical evaluation of giving In Ethiope Delta Baptist conference

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Abstract

It is quite indisputable that humans show certain level of happiness when they receive gifts and other lifesaving humanitarian gesture from people they least expected anything from. This is because there is joy in monetary and material giving especially to the recipients. Giving is an act of worship, both in the Old and New Testaments; a believer's worship always included some type of gift to the Lord. Offerings and sacrifices, given from the worshipper's flocks or fields defined worship in the Old Testament. But it is sad these days judging from the recent activities of worshippers that the art of giving is dwindling and retrogressing because the tenets of giving as stipulated by Paul in Ephesians 4:14-19 is not being followed in modern day worship. It is against this backdrop that the study examined the religio-ethical significance of giving in Ethiope Delta Baptist Conference. Exegetical, hermeneutical, historical and phenomenological methods were employed in this paper. The study discovered that the absence of consistent teaching of biblical ideas on teaching is one of the major challenges which bedevils some worshippers from endeavoring to carry out the art of giving which is one of the major reason Christ died for the church. The New Testament teaches and promotes generous giving and establishes guidelines which make it consistent, personal, proportionate, and voluntary. The study recommends that church members should be taught how to donate liberally to their churches and other community and organizations as evident in Philippians 4:15-19. The Philippian church is thus presented as a Christian model of giving to be practiced by members of the Ethiope-Delta Baptist Conference and Christians at large.

Key words: Giving, Religion, Ethics, Evaluation

Introduction

It is an indubitable fact that people tend to be happier when they are shown love through giving especially when givers are not coerced. This assertion is also true of those who give from the depth of their hearts. Research has shown that givers are happy when they give and people receive with joy and smile on their faces. There is no doubt that giving is an act of worship. Both in the Old and New Testaments, a believer's worship always included some type of gift to the Lord. Offerings and sacrifices, given from the worshipper's flocks or fields defined worship in the Old Testament. Giving today has posed serious challenge to the contemporary church. Giving is mission oriented because mission work without financial and material provisions is stunted and almost a futile



endeavour. The zeal to give is dying in so many churches¹

Giving also encourages social interaction². Studies have shown that when someone is generous with others, it usually comes back to them or is transferred to someone else³. Too often, churches concentrate on ways to generate money rather than reminding people of the benefits of giving to God first and putting their confidence in him to provide for their necessities. Teaching biblical concepts in the modern church is difficult. Many people approach religion with a consumer mentality, a self-centered attitude that inquires about the services offered. Giving has declined as a result of churches focusing more on meeting people's basic needs than encouraging them to participate in missions. Young people are less committed to the church as an institution and are more interested in how their donations could help them reach a particular objective in their lives, which is another reality that modern churches are coping with.

The bible has many scriptural instances of generosity. One such passage is Philippians 4:14–19. Giving to charity is not a novel idea in the Christian religion. Ancient global faiths including Islam, African traditional religions, Hinduism, and others have fundamental principles of giving ingrained in their theology. Giving and religious rituals are connected. According to⁴ Edmund, religion serves as a social tool for developing inner richness and the straightforward realization of the unquestionable, absolute worth of one's own life.

The Koran lists the recipients of alms, constantly emphasizing generosity as God's will: "Whatever you spend for good must go to parents, to your near relatives, to orphans, and to the poor and the wayfarer" (Surah 2, 215). The Quran states that it is not important to face East or West in order to be just; rather, the righteous one is the one who "gives his wealth for the love of Allah to the relatives, orphans and the needy, and the wayfarer, and those who ask, and for (the liberation of) the slaves." (Surah 2, 177).

Surah 9, verse 60, provides a second list: "Alms are only for the needy and the poor, and those who collect them, and for those whose hearts are to be made right (the non-Muslims), and for the ransom of captives (slaves), and for debtors (who must pay a large fine or blood money), and for the way of Allah, and for (the hospitality of) the wayfarers. It is a requirement of Allah, and Allah is Knowing and Wise. Here, we see that there is no difference between zakat and sadaqa and that Allah firmly regulates the wealthy if they do their duties.

¹Omosomuofa, &Enuwosa, A Contextual Study of Paul's Teaching on Giving in Ethiopia Delta Baptist Conference: *Kampala International University Journal of Humanities*, 2023, ISSN: 2415-0843; 8(1): 99–108.

²Allen, The science of generosity, 2018. Retrieved from https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Generosity-FINAL.pdf.

³Piliavin, & Siegl, Health benefits of volunteering in the Wisconsin longitudinal study. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2007, 48(4), 450-464.

⁴Edmund, *Biographical dictionary of Christian missions*, 2016, New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan

Regarding sadaqa as voluntary alms, nothing is mentioned. Sadaqa cannot be a part or a right of the poor if it is a voluntary donation. Otherwise, a wealthy person may refuse to make the sadaqa without worrying about angering Allah. However, we have witnessed Allah's unmistakable anger against anybody who abuses the amanat of the poor, whether it is through zakat or sadaqa⁵.

There can be no room for disagreement. The Prophet made it clear to his followers that giving sadaqa is necessary for every Muslim. Not surprisingly, Mohammed "did not leave anything (after his death) except his arms, a white mule, and a piece of land which he had given as sadaqa." The uncountable charitable trusts, or waqf, that exist across the Islamic world are the most tangible results of Mohammed's powerful teaching of altruism. Giving is essentially a way of life for Africans. It is thought of as a method of offering sacrifice to the deity. The African people's faiths place a high value on sacrifice rituals. They are frequently quite intricate ritual acts that allow for the possible facilitation, obstruction, and severance of connection between worshipers and spirit entities⁶.

The Meaning of Giving

Allen⁷ notes that giving (or generosity) can imply various things to different individuals in different contexts and that most academics do not use the phrase since they prefer concepts like "altruism" and "pro-social behavior." For the sake of this study, we shall adhere to the Science of Generosity Project's definition of generosity, which describes it as "the virtue of freely and generously sharing good things to others." Generosity may be shown in a variety of ways, including with gifts of cash, property, time, assistance, encouragement, emotional openness, and more.

According to research on the growing science of giving⁸ donating makes us healthier, happier, and even live longer. According to Dillon et al., ⁹giving in schools is associated with improved physical and mental health in adulthood as well as a lower incidence of adolescent depression and suicide. God exhorts Christians to put their faith in charitable giving to the test throughout the Bible. God sent his only son to humanity in the New Testament out of his great love for them, and that Son died on a cross for them (John 3:16). His actions therefore serve as an example of how God's people should contribute liberally and selflessly. Giving is a part of a bigger issue termed stewardship in the biblical sense.

⁵Edmund, *Biographical dictionary of Christian missions*, 2016, New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan

⁶Von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge: The Journal of Religion*, 2006, Vol. 88, No. 1 (July, 2023), pp. 133-134

⁷Allen, *The science of generosity*, 2018, Retrieved from https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Generosity-FINAL.pdf.

⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, *The good work*, 2002, *NAMTA Journal*, 27(3), 67-82.

⁹ Dillon, Wink, & Fay, *Is spirituality detrimental to generativity ? Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2003, 42(3), 427-442.

Christian Teaching on Giving

Giving in the context of a Christian church has grown to be a very contentious activity; many Christian churches and denominations teach and follow various giving practices, some of which are not even scriptural. Additionally, some pastors found churches in an effort to financially benefit themselves. Most people outside of the church believe that the church is a money-making plan and that preachers are nothing more than lovers of money for these and other reasons. Second, the joy of giving is taken away from the members of the church. One thinks that this is far from God's intention for human giving. If only the bible and nothing else is to be followed, then all of this might alter.

Theoretical Underpinning on Giving

Voluntarism is a type of action theory in which the will triumphs over the intellect. Practical intelligence refers to the ability to make rational decisions about which actions to take, whereas the will is typically viewed as the ability to make decisions and choices¹⁰. When voluntarism is applied to divine agency, a morality based on God's will emerge. The concept of "theological voluntarism" distinguishes activities that are proper (or good) because God wills them¹¹. Theological voluntarism is a meta-ethical philosophy that asserts that activities are good because God desires them to be so. Because God commands it, children, for example, should respect and honour their parents. Ethics theory based on God's Command are a type of theological voluntarism. There are two critical variables in this view:

- (i) the moral attribute "Y"; and
- (ii) the divine act.

Although theological voluntarism theoretically encompasses all moral characteristics - values and ethical acts, it usually covers a subset of them¹². The current trend, as we will see, is to focus on responsibilities. Among other things, the appropriate divine act could be an intention, a desire, a mandate, or willingness.

Moral theorists distinguish four types of ethically significant actions:

- (a) mere permissions: these are actions that we are allowed to do but that have no bearing on the moral worth of the world.
- (b) supererogatory acts: these are activities that we are allowed to engage in that have a positive impact on the moral worth of the world.
- (c) prohibited acts: these are actions that we are not allowed to engage in. They are also known as negative responsibilities.

¹⁰Osiek, Carolyn, Philippians. Philemon. In *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, 2000, from https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Philippians,_Epistle_to_the.

¹¹Wolter, *The philosophical theology of John Duns Scotus*. Ithaca, 1990, NY: Cornell University Press

¹²Quinn, Theological voluntarism. In D. Copp (Ed.), *The oxford handbook of ethical theory*, 2006, (pp. 63-90). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(d) Compulsory acts: these are activities that we must carry out. They are also known as positive responsibilities.

The Philippian Model of Giving

Paul's brief answer to the Philippians' generosity in supporting his work may be found in Philippians 4:14–19. Below is a quick analysis of the text.

Partners in Affliction: Philippians 4:14

In his commentary, Adam Clarke interprets this line as "Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction" (Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc.). According to him, Paul is telling the Philippians that despite the difficult lessons he had encountered during his mission and the fact that he had never experienced extreme poverty, the Philippian Christians had done well by providing aid to him during his difficult time (Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database, 2006).

According to The Bible Exposition Commentary (1989), Paul viewed the Philippians' missionary offering as an investment that would provide significant spiritual returns. The verb "communicate" is a synonym for the noun "fellowship." The church engaged into a "giving and receiving" agreement; the congregation provided Paul with tangible goods in exchange for spiritual gifts from the Lord (The Bible Exposition Commentary, 1989). As a result of the Philippian church joining forces with Paul in his suffering, Paul was better able to fulfill his missionary vocation.

Unique Partnership in Giving: Philippians 4:15

This passage demonstrates Paul's gratitude for what others have done for him. Paul's mission among the Macedonian churches was just getting started when the word *en arxhtoueuaggeliou* was coined¹³. Only the Philippian church, he recalls, entered into a partnership of giving with him out of all the congregations to which he served. Thus, he reminds them of the transition to his first encounter with their generosity by using the conjunctions "but" and "and": "But this is no new thing, because you have always been generous. You are aware of this, just as I am"¹⁴. Barnes¹⁵ asserts, using Acts 17:14, that Berea was Paul's final stop in Macedonia at the time. He had to leave because the Jews had stirred up a commotion there. He hurriedly fled Macedonia for Athens, amid scenes of persecution, and at a time when he needed sympathetic support. He claims that the help he needed to meet his needs at the time, as well as when he was at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–10), was not withheld.

¹³Barnes, *Power and partnership: a history of the protestant mission movement*, 201,3
London: Wipf and Stock Publishers

¹⁴Louw, & Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains*,
1988, New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁵ Ibid

Giving as an Attitude: Philippians 4:16

As mentioned above, the textual variations in this verse do not harm the message of Paul regarding the consistency of the Philippians in sending missionary assistance to Paul. Philippians 4:16: .. (as amends for the fact that). One is greatly inclined to take here, as in Philippians 4:15, as dependent upon the fact that. Barnes¹⁶ is of the opinion that the long stay of Paul to build up the Church in Thessalonica meant he needed constant help which the Philippians. However, in this case, it could be important to highlight the fact that they started supporting him "at once" despite Thessalonica being a much wealthier and more significant city than Philippi. It is most likely best to interpret the phrase ".." literally¹⁷. Compare these words with those found in Deuteronomy 9:13: "; o ." Some academics understand it in a broader way¹⁸. Should be read with the majority of the top authority. It is most likely used here in the semi-technical sense that is frequently seen in papyri Fitzgerald as well as in Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 16:1 and Romans 15:26. It explains the purpose of donations, collections, etc., or the numerous obligations in an account¹⁹. This interpretation fits with the passage's financial undertones.

Reciprocity in Giving: Philippians 4:17

Paul makes reference to the idea of reciprocity in giving in this passage. Brandon notes that despite Paul's gratitude for the Philippians' kindness, his main interest in it stemmed from the fact that it would eventually serve their best interests. They would be completely rewarded for their act of giving since they would be operating under the rules of Christian giving, in other words. Though it may not be extremely prevalent, what Paul says here is by no means impossible. Receiving presents from others makes it possible to be happy about them in particular since doing so will benefit the giver personally. So affirms that "all our selfish feelings and gratifications may be absorbed and lost in the superior joy which we have in seeing others actuated by a right spirit, and in the belief that they will be rewarded." This feeling is one of the fruits of Christian kindness that leads Christians to look away from self, and to rejoice in every evidence that others will be made happy²⁰.

In Philippians 4:17: τὸ δῶμα (gift) does not refer to the actual gift put into Paul's hands which has brought him joy, but the attitude of giving (δόσις, Philip. 4:15) and the meaning of that giving. It is the truest index to the abiding reality of his work. καρπὸν ... πλεονάζοντα ... λόγον (Not that I seek the structure, but I seek

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Osiek, Philippians. Philemon. In *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, 2000 From https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Philippians_Epistle_to_the.

¹⁸ O'Brien, *The epistle to the Philippians*, 1991, Michigan, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans

¹⁹ Fitzgerald, Philippians in the light of some ancient discussions on friendship. In: J.T. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Friendship, flattery, and frankness of speech: Studies on friendship in the New Testament World*, 1996, (pp. 141-160). Leiden: E.J. Brill.

²⁰ Brandon, The benefits of giving: Philippians, 2014, 4:15-19. Retrieved from <http://sermons.rvbc.cc/sermons/2014-024>

the fruit that is abundant in your word)²¹. It is believed that some scholars are right in regarding these terms as belonging to the money-market (Witherington, 1994). *ὁ καρπὸς ἐκείνους τίκτεται* (Interest accumulating to your credit)." This is favoured by the language of Philippians 4:15-16 hence, *πλεονάζειν* is never used in a good sense in classical Greek, but always "exceed," or "go beyond bounds" ²²

Religio-Ethical Evaluation of Giving in Ethiope Delta Baptist Conference

In Nigerian culture, charity donations to churches have continuously garnered greater support than donations to other public or private sectors, such as education, healthcare, the arts, and human services. This suggests that the funding sources for churches and other religious organizations are commonly known. But doubt still exists, just as it does with Baptist congregations. The study is offered to assist in providing a theological and biblical framework for understanding the problem. According to the analysis of the tables above, stewardship is the responsibility that individuals have to take care of how God's creation is used. How members use their time, talents, and resources is a factor in every aspect of their lives²³. The act of donating to the church's mission is stewardship. By faith, it is offered as a "thank you" to a loving God. The custom of paying 10% of one's income to God (as a tithe) has been acknowledged as having biblical basis and is frequently stated in the Bible²⁴. It has been said that the tithing sacrifice achieves for the donor what the Latin word for the sacrifice, the *sacrum facere*, meaning "makes us pure"; perhaps this is because the sacrifice of giving 10% to God helps curb the craving for more and more material things. Whatever advantages the tithe could have, it seems that few people ever experience its joy. According to research, just 1% to 3% of the income of Baptist families is allegedly given.

As previously said, giving money to the Baptist church or the Conference is a way for people to say "thank you" to God for giving them life and the means of salvation and redemption. Giving is therefore required because members "need to give" and because it is a common emotional response and a way to find fulfillment and wholeness in life²⁵. Members contribute to a cause as well to help fund church activities. Many people think that helping the church is not the only method to promote the Kingdom of God on Earth and that there are other magnificent, life-giving endeavors that are carried out by many ministries and non-profit producing organizations along the philanthropic spectrum. Contrary to recent trends, donations to godly causes including those in healthcare, human services, education, etc. have increased while giving to churches has fallen. Given this, it is imperative that churches provide their case for funding, or demonstrate how gifts are used to achieve God's goals, which are extremely clear. Here, a crucial component of resource development is a clear communication.

²¹Witherington, B. III, *Friendship and finances in Philippi: The Letter of Paul to the Philippians*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994.

²²Tolmie, *Persuading the Galatians. A text-centred rhetorical analysis of a Pauline letter*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

²³ Interview with Mr. Convey, 2023.

²⁴ Interview with Mr. Ighokparohwo 2023.

²⁵ Interview with Isiorhovoja, 2023

It should not be surprising that different individuals contribute financially to churches for various causes and at various degrees. It is probably safer not to be too critical of the giver because one should leave any judgment to God, regardless of whether a donation is motivated by as lofty a reason as to build the body of Christ²⁶. Responses from participants of the research survey show that members should give gratitude for the financial gifts given by God's people just as we should give thanks for God's generosity. We may be rest assured knowing that God will provide for the church's needs as it carries out its mission in the world.

Biblically, the giving of tithes is required of all Christians. It is an Old Testament requirement made well-known by Malachi 3:10, which mandates that Christians donate 10% of their wealth to God via the priest. The act is considered to draw several benefits from the Lord if diligently followed. Does it matter if a Christian pays tithes at a church different than the one where they typically attend services because the command is to do so? Members use the principles to determine which matters the Bible is categorically clear on and which matters it is not. The concept of tithing is what matters most. The 10% rule is a highly potent rule that existed before the rules of Moses²⁷. The upkeep of the priests and the operation of the temple were the two primary uses of tithes in the Old Testament, but there were several smaller uses as well. But now, circumstances have shifted. Members have churches that have been incorporated and registered with the government, so they must be managed and be kept up. Therefore, the typical person who benefits from the church must contribute to its continued existence. In a sense, it is the fair deal.

Contextualizing Giving in Ethiope Delta Baptist Conference

1. Stewardship is the responsibility that people have to take good care of how God's creation is used, according to the research. How members use their resources, time, abilities, and other aspects of their lives are all taken into consideration. The act of giving to the church's mission is stewardship. By faith, it is offered as a "thank you" to a loving God. The custom of offering 10% of one's income to God (as a tithe) has been defended as being supported by the Bible, which makes numerous references to it.
2. Giving to the Baptist church or the Conference is a way for people to say "thank you" to God for giving them life and the means of salvation and redemption. Giving is therefore required because members "need to give" and because it is a common emotional response and a means of obtaining human happiness and wholeness. Contrary to an increase in donations to godly causes like those in healthcare, human services, education, etc., donations to churches have recently fallen.
3. All Christians are expected to give tithes. Malachi 3:10 makes it clear that it is an Old Testament duty for Christians to give 10% of their wealth to God through the priest. If done with diligence, the act is believed to bring about a number of blessings from the

²⁶Interview with Mr. Eromosele, 2023

²⁷Interview with Mr. Oniomomo, 2023

Lord. First, it is understood that God is the true owner of everything from the standpoint of stewardship. Second, God is a good God. Third, the best is what God requires of His stewards. God provided examples of offerings and tithing in the Old Testament. The New Testament gives instructions on how to contribute under grace. For the Church of Christ to practice greater financial stewardship, godly leaders must stress the church's mission and vision.

4. Nothing is done or given in Christ or for His Kingdom that is outside the bounds of Grace. Through the force of grace, a believer is endowed with everything they possess. One should not expect a child to contribute when they are older if they were not taught to give and did not practice giving when they were little. Young people are quite quick to pick things up. Additionally, keep in mind that children learn through observation, so they should be seeing their parents as they give to God each week.

Conclusion

Even when all the arguments provided in the research on why many church members have negative attitudes regarding donating to Christian mission are considered together, the stated reasons may not seem to constitute the perspective of the majority of individuals who took part in the field survey. While further study is needed, a major neglect of cooperative programme teaching and promotion in local Baptist churches seems to be emerging as the most logical reason for diminishing financial support for the EDBC's Cooperative Programmes. Rather than broad hostility against corporate contributions, there seems to be widespread misunderstanding about the Baptist Church Conference's financial and material requirements. Furthermore, many people who are familiar with it see it as a necessary tool for supporting denominational bureaucracy but not as a crucial approach for comprehensive global evangelism.

Furthermore, the absence of consistent teaching of biblical ideas is a difficult one for the modern Christian Church. For example, the New Testament teaches and promotes generous giving and establishes guidelines for giving: it should be consistent, personal, proportionate, and voluntary. As a result, church goers are urged to donate liberally to their churches and other community organizations. This kind of generosity is similar to how early Christians assisted one another. As a result, Philippians 4:15-19's theology of giving is a model of giving practice that confronts the churches of the Ethiope-Delta Baptist Conference and the Christian Church at large.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the followings recommendations is made:

1. That the leadership of the Conference, in concert with the Great Commission and Cooperative Programmes, should address the problem concerning the serious decline in giving and the impact it is already having on churches, Conference and the Convention ministries.

2. That creating multiple avenues of giving should be discouraged. Christian churches in favour of making Christian stewardship and the traditional biblical giving such as tithing, freewill offerings, seed offerings and willful donations should be made as top priorities. This should be followed by aggressive stewardship education emphasis.
3. The attitude of church pastors and leaders towards church income should be looked into for this could be one reason for a decline in church financial life.
4. Biblical scholars should do more in organizing seminars and workshops aimed at educating churches and their members on the importance of all round giving in promoting the missionary work of the Church

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