

Giving to the Poor (2 Cor 8:1-9): An Expression of Faith for New Evangelisation

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1. Introduction

Despite the recently publicized economic crises, the world is developing and growing in its finances and resources. Some individuals and institutions accumulate more and more wealth while some are nearly on the verge of financial strangulation, due to one handicap or the other. Many of these disadvantaged individuals and institutions struggle to break this jinx of poverty but in many cases to no avail. It is more excruciating when the rich usurp what by right belongs to the poor. Many of the poor have lost their faith as they watch this scenario and feel helpless even in the presence of the evangelisers. This is the scenario where the new evangelisation is supposed to be taking place for the propagation of faith.

A portion of the English language summary of the final message of the Synod of Bishops on “The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith,” which took place in Rome from October 7 to October 28, 2012 reads: “Finally, it [*the message*] indicates two expressions of a life of faith, which are especially meaningful for new evangelisation: contemplation, where silence allows for the better reception of the Word of God, and service to the poor, in the view of recognising Christ in their faces.”¹ Prompted by this recommendation, this paper reflects on 2 Corinthians 8:1-9. St Paul founded the Christian community in Corinth, a city which was economically well-off in comparison with the poor suffering Church in Jerusalem. Concerned with the poor condition of the Jerusalem Church, Paul reminded the rich Gentile communities always of their spiritual obligation to help her.² Renewed concern for the poor is necessary in the twenty-first century evangelisation. This paper argues that if the agents of the new evangelisation are to let their own faith blossom and impact on the faith of the numerous poor and suffering people, recommitment to their cause in the form of “giving” is a spiritual obligation, which nourishes both the faith of the giver and the receiver.

2. Who are the Poor?

There are many terms used in the OT to denote the poor (*'ebhyon*, Exod 23:6; *dal*, Exod 23:3; *'āni*, Exod 22:25; *ānāw*, Num 12:3, etc). Firstly, these terms mean practically “poor, oppressed, weak, impoverished, needy, etc.” Secondly, they sometimes imply being faithful to, and humble before, God. Most especially, the term *ānāw* has a religious and moral significance – the poor, the lowly, the meek and the humble of Yahweh.³ In the NT, *ptochos* is almost the frequent and exclusive word for “poor” (Mark 14:7; Luke 4:18; 6:20; Matt 5:3, Rom 15:26). We have also *penēs* in 2 Corinthians 9:9 and *penichros* in Luke 21:2. As in the OT *ānāw*, the NT *ptochos* could also refer to the humble of Yahweh. In this paper, the focus is not on this set of the poor but on those who are materially poor, who could equally be among the *ānāwīm* of Yahweh.

¹ Vatican Information Service (VIS), “Final Message of the Synod on New Evangelisation,” available at “<http://visnews-en.blogspot.de/>”, 26/10/12, accessed on 27/08/13

² Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther: 1 Kor 15,1-16,24*, *Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, VII/4 (Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag AG, 2001) 434.

³ S.v. “*ānāw*” in Brown, F., S. R. Driver and A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (2nd Print; Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996) 776.

3. Exegetical Interpretation of the 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

According to J. W. Carter, “Members of the Jerusalem church were persecuted by the rest of the Jewish community. They were disowned by their families and Jewish friends; they were fired from their jobs, and were not allowed to take part in the general economic activity. They were not allowed to own land, buy and sell, etc. This stress placed them in a particular point of need.”⁴ This information is indirectly corroborated in the story of the man born blind, whom Jesus healed in John 9. The parents of the healed blind man were afraid to acknowledge the miracle openly for the fear of being ostracized (cf. v. 22). The *aposynagōgos genētai* of John 9:22 entails excommunication (John 12:42; 16:2). The situation worsened after the ascension of Christ (John 15:20). The hardship could also be linked to the years of draught experienced in Judea in the middle of 40s of the 1st Century.

Among all the NT texts that deal with giving to the poor, 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9, bring out more clearly the theology of giving for the sake of evangelization. This paper sees 8:1-9 as the core of the two chapters, and so exegetically analyses it, using it to make a case for a recommitment to the poor in the new evangelization.

a) Grace... to the Churches of Macedonia (*Charin...ekklēsiais tēs Makedonias*), vv. 1-2

The ancient Roman provinces of the Greeks were Macedonia and Achaia, Macedonia being the leading province. The Macedonian cities that Paul visited include Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Thessalonica, Beorea and Apollonia; while those of Achaia included Athens, Corinth and Cenchrae.

Paul’s first entrance into Macedonia with his companions (Timothy, Silas and Luke) was during his second missionary journey, when he visited the first district, Philippi, through the port of Neapolis (Acts 16:9-12). This was the first city that received the gospel in Europe. Paul left Macedonia for Achaia due to Jewish hostilities (Act 17:15), but he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1-2) and Silas to some other parts of Macedonia so as to ensure the survival of the Christian faith in the region. They only joined him quite much later in Corinth (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess 3:16). The very first letter that Paul wrote was addressed to the Thessalonians. From the tune of the letter, there is evidence that the faith spread rapidly and genuinely: the converts were examples to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:7); their love was outstanding (1 Thess 4:10); they became heralds of the Word; and their faith in God was widely known (1 Thess 1:18).⁵

2 Corinthians, which is written most probably in Philippi, brings out more of Paul’s sentiments with regard to the Churches in the province of Macedonia. The phrase, *hē kata bathous ptōcheia autōn* (8:2), translated as “their poverty reaching down into the depths,” is a figurative expression for “their extreme poverty”⁶. Despite their hardship and poverty, they were known for *to ploutos tēs haplotētos* (the wealth of generosity, v. 2). *Haplotēs* ordinarily means “simplicity,

⁴ J. W. Carter, “2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15: Be Generous,” in http://www.biblicaltheology.com/2co/2co_08_01.html, accessed 29/08/13.

⁵ ISBE Bible Dictionary, “Macedonia” in BibleWorks 7.0 CD-ROM (Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks).

⁶ S.v. “*Bathos*” in W. Bauer, Arndt, W. F. and F. W. Gingrich, trans. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2nd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) 130

sincerity, frankness” (2 Cor 1:12; Eph 6:5; Col 3:22). It could also mean “devotion” (2 Cor 1:12). In Romans 12:8 and 2 Corinthians 9:11-13, it has the nuance of “giving to others ungrudgingly and freely.” This is the meaning it has in this verse. The zeal of the Church in Achaia (though not then yet practically realised) stirred up the Macedonians to great generosity (2 Cor 9:2).

As Paul was in Thessalonica, the Philippians contributed to his needs more than once (Phil 4:16), and likewise, when he was in Corinth (Phil 4:15; 2 Cor 11:9). Paul did not allow any other Church to contribute to his own needs, except the Philippians. This manifests his affection for, and confidence in, them. Even when Paul had left them for a long time and was in prison in Rome, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to him with some gifts (Phil 4:10). It seems that, of all the Pauline communities, Paul loved them most.

The Jews that Paul and his companions meet in Berea were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica. Many believed their teaching after careful introspection (Acts 17:10, 11), though not without persecutions. As Paul and his companions were persecuted in Philippi (Acts 16:22-40), in Thessalonica (17:5-9), and in Berea (17:14-15), the converts also were afflicted. So the Macedonian Christians were *en pollē dokimē thlipseōs* (in many ordeals of afflictions, v. 2). Nevertheless, some members, both from the Philippian and Berean communities, accompanied Paul during his last journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

All this history and faith expressions of the Macedonians could have been in Paul’s mind as he talks of *tēn charin tou Theou* (the grace of God) granted to the Macedonian churches. *Charis* is theologically rich. It means “grace, kindness, mercy, goodwill” (Acts 2:47). It also means “a special manifestation of divine presence, activity, power or glory” (2 Cor 8:1; 9:8), “gift, favour, blessing” (Rom 4:4,16; 1 Cor 16:3), and “thanks, gratitude, graciousness (2 Cor 9: 15; Col 4:6; 1 Tim 1:12).”⁷ All these meanings are related, with the basic fact that *charis* has to do with the divine activity in human beings and the effects it produces. The Macedonians’ faith, love, affection, generosity and steadfastness in affliction were all graces from God.

b) True Giving is *kata dynamin...authairetoi* (According to Ability ...Freely), vv. 3-5

In verse 3, Paul presumes the subject and the main action already in verses 1-2. The issue is that *hē haplotēs* (the generosity) of the Macedonians is abundant and overflowing. From testimony, they gave *kata dynamin...kai para dynamin* (according to ability...and beyond ability, v. 3). *Dynamis* often has the meaning, “force, strength, power” (Acts 1:8; Col 1:11; Rom 1:4; Rom 8:38), ability (2 Cor 1:8; Matt 25:15). It can also mean “miracle” (Matt 11:20; 2 Cor 12:12). The Macedonians gave according to their ability and even beyond their ability. Moreover their generosity was *authairetoi*. This adjective appears only in this verse and in verse 17 in the NT. It emphasises an act done out of one’s free will, of one’s own accord.

Verse 4 demonstrates that the Macedonians even saw the opportunity of giving to the poor as a privilege, begging (*deomenoi*) for it, *meta pollēs paraklēseōs* (with much appeal). Though *paraklēsis* can mean “exhortation, encouragement” (Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 2:3; Acts 13:15), or “comfort, consolation” (Acts 4:36; Phlm 7; 2 Cor 1:3-7), here, as in verse 17, it means “appeal, request.” They were asking for *tēn charin kai tēn koinōnian tēs diakonias tēs eis tous hagious* (the grace and participation in the ministry to the holy ones).

⁷ S.v. “*Charis*” in UBS Lexicon, Bibleworks 7.0; cf also W. Bauer, *et al. Greek-English Lexicon*, 877.

Wolfgang Schrage, interpreting a similar text, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, opines that the *logeia* in verse 1 and 2 is not referring to church tax, which is obligatory and enforceable, but to donation done out of free will, having its synonym as *charis* (1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:4ff), *koinōnia* (Rom 15:26), *diakonia* (Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1), *leitourgia* (2 Cor 9:12) and *eulogia* (2 Cor 9:5).⁸ In the same vein, Ulrich Wilckens interprets Romans 15:25-28: The contribution is a solidarity action which Paul had organized in his communities (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:f.) for the support of the poor in Jerusalem; *hoi hagioi* is the name used often for Christians as baptized people; *tous ptōchous tōn hagiōn* is a partitive genitive indicating the poor among the Christians in Jerusalem; and as in 2 Cor 8:4 and 9:13, the collection is *koinōnia*.⁹ The collection is an active expression of concern for the poor and so it is a realisation of the communion between the giver and the receiver, a means of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. According to Frank J. Matera, if Jerusalem Christians accept the collection from the Gentile Christians, it is a legitimisation of the Torah-free gospel, which Paul preached among the Gentiles, and therefore an external sign of the *koinōnia* between the Jews and Gentiles.¹⁰ The force of *eudokēsan* in Romans 15:27 is pointing to the fact that the collection is as a result of the freewill decision of the Gentile Churches, who fulfilled the obligatory duty they had towards their Jerusalem counterparts, from whom the spiritual gift, the gospel, came to them. The obligation is, however, not according to human law, but according to the Spirit (Rom 8:12-13).¹¹ Brendan Byrne points out Paul's *afortiori* logic here in verse 27 (cf. also Rom 5:8-10, 15, 17; 8:32; 11:24): If the Jews shared with the Gentiles the superior spiritual blessing, the Gentiles are obliged to share their material possession with them.¹²

2 Cor 8:5 points out what ignites true giving. The Macedonians gave themselves *prōton tō Kypriō kai hēmin* (first to the Lord and to us). Immersing oneself in the Lord through contemplation makes one realize *to thelēma Theou* (the will of God). One discovers the temporality and the fluidity of material possessions, and then uses them to serve others.

c) *Hina kai en Chariti perisseuēte* (That also in Grace You may Excel), vv. 6-8

In verses 1-5, Paul presents the Macedonians' *diakonia* to the poor rhetorically and hyperbolically as a challenge to the Corinthians.¹³ As from verse 6, attention turns solely to the Corinthians. Titus, a Greek, could have joined Paul right from the first missionary journey, for his mention in Gal 2:3 implies that he was among the "others" who went for the Jerusalem Council (Act 15:2) after the first mission. He was the one that Paul sent to Corinth to deal with their problems (2 Cor 12:18) and eventually to organise their collections. For Thomas Schmeller, the arrangement for a collection in 1 Cor 16:1-4 for the Church in Jerusalem was halted obviously because of the conflict between Paul and the Corinthians. It was tabled again for

⁸ Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther: 1 Kor 15,1-16,24*, *Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, VII/4 (Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag AG, 2001), 426.

⁹ Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer, 12-16* (Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, VI/3; Köln: Benziger Verlag 1982) 124-128.

¹⁰ Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina, vol. 9; Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 83.

¹¹ Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer, 12-16*, 127-128.

¹² Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Sacra Pagina, vol. 6; ed. Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 441.

¹³ Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina, vol. 8) 141.

discussion in 2 Cor 8:1-9, after the reconciliation which 2 Cor 7:5-12 affirms.¹⁴ The collection is again called *charis* (v. 6). Titus was mandated to complete this project, which he had previously started. *Epiteleō* means “to end, finish” (Rom 15:28); “to complete, perform, bring about” (2 Cor 7:1; Heb 9:6). This is the meaning of this verb in both verses 6 and 11.

The verb, *perisseuō*, occurs twice in verse 7. It can mean “to be abundantly present, highly rich, to overflow (Luke 21:4; 2 Cor 1:5; 2 Cor 3:9; 8:2).” But in this verse, it means “to excel, be prominent or outstanding (1 Cor 14:12; Col 2:7).” Paul affirms that the Corinthians were rich in many virtues. Paul’s first evangelization in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18), although seemingly an unsuccessful venture, given the opposition he faced and his apparently cursing remarks against them (Act 18:6), was a huge success. He established a strong community in Corinth. The synagogue leader, Crispus, together with his family and many other Corinthians were converted and baptized (v. 8). Paul stayed for one year and six months in Corinth. Michael Hesemann, commenting on this stay, which lasted until about March 52 AD, stressed that in no other place until then did Paul record such an amount of success, winning so many people for Christ.¹⁵ In verse 7, Paul could therefore talk about their spiritual riches: *Pistis* (faith), *logos* (word, speech), *gnōsis* (knowledge), *spoudē* (enthusiasm, diligence) and *agapē* (love, affection).

Onwukeme elaborates on the material wealth of Corinth,¹⁶ which had also its concomitant vices. Hesemann hints: “*In der ganzen Antike war sie verrufen als Ort des Reichtums und des Lasters, des Protzes und der Gier nach dem schnellen Geld.*”¹⁷ Corinthians ceramics was well desired in the whole region. It could have been a source of great riches. Paul could have also had in mind this material wealth of the Corinthians. The Christians among them were equally rich. They are being exhorted to use it to excel “in grace,” that is, the collection for the poor, which Titus was organising among them.

In verse 8a, Paul emphasises that he is not commanding the generosity of the Corinthians. The translation of verse 8b is quite difficult due to its syntax. The present participle *dokimazōn* (testing, examining) seems to stand for the main action. Paul is examining the genuineness of their love through the enthusiasm of others. In other words, Paul wants the Corinthians to show that their love is genuine by sharing in the enthusiasm of others, and even surpassing it, with respect to the collection for the poor.

d) The Example of Jesus Christ, v. 9

As verse 1 refers to the *charis* (divine action and its effect) among the Macedonians, verse 9 makes recourse to the *charis* of Christ, and so a unitary *inclusio* is formed. The *charis* of the Macedonians is a good model for giving to the poor, but that of Christ is a perfect model, for though he was divine or rich (*plousios*), he became human or poor (*ptōcheusen*) so that in his humanity or poverty (*ptōcheia*), humanity may be divinised or may become rich. For Lambrecht, the verb *ptōcheuō* and the noun *ptōcheia* indicate the destitution of a beggar rather than to the less severe poverty of a *penes* (poor person).¹⁸ “As Christ became poor for our sakes, so it is

¹⁴ Thomas Schmeller, *Der Zweite Brief an die Korinther* (1,1-7,4) (Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlage, 2010) 15.

¹⁵ Michael Hesemann, *Paulus von Tarsus: Archäologen auf den Spuren des Völkerapostels* (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2008) 156.

¹⁶ Onwukeme Victor, *Being All Things to All People* (Gwagwalada-Abuja: Sir Kuf Ventures, 2013) 257-258.

¹⁷ “In the whole Antiquity, it was famous as a place of riches and vices, of the wealthy and greed for quick money,” cf. Hesemann, 156.

¹⁸ Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina, vol. 8) 137.

fitting for the Corinthians to share their possessions with those [sic] less fortunate (2 Cor 9:12).”¹⁹

4. The Theological Import of Giving to the Poor

The Macedonians saw “giving” as *charis* from God and an opportunity of *koinōnia* in the *diakonia* of the saints, which has its concomitant blessings. “It [*koinōnia*] can mean “fellowship” but also means partnership with and participation in something. The Macedonians were not reluctant partners but churches wanting to be part of this act of grace, to participate in something that God was doing.”²⁰ This is an aspect of the theological understanding of giving to the poor.

Paul puts forward the “grace” of Jesus Christ to the Corinthians as the basis and an example of all “graces.” Jesus Christ from eternity was the divine *logos*, who shared all divine infinite attributes, but his self-giving to humanity through the incarnation for the sake of its salvation subjected him to human limitation. He became poor and suffered like any other humans. But it was this self-giving that resulted in the enrichment or the salvation of humanity, and at the same time the highest exaltation of Jesus. This gives the theological bedrock of all genuine giving. The Christological hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 gives the result of Christ’s self-giving to humanity. Vincent P. Branick describes it as a moral exhortation, which expresses the roots of all morality.²¹

Bonhoeffer, interpreting 1 Cor 16:2 says that each person, rich or poor, is to give according to what he earns, not because the Church needs money but for “the good of the person himself.”²² This, I suppose, is because the act of giving improves one’s spiritual life. It sets into motion the grace of God in one. Commenting on Gal 2:10, Franz Mußner opines that the collection that Paul organised demonstrates a practical care for the poor, which brings to expression the desired unity, communion or fellowship among the churches. Such collection does two functions (2 Cor 9:12): It supplies what the saints are lacking (*ta husterēmata tōn hagiōn*) and it is a multi-fold thanks to God (*pollōn eucharistiōn tō Theō*).²³ Paul postponed his journey to Rome and made sure that this communion and sharing between the rich and the poor was sealed and brought to a logical conclusion so as to emphasis the indispensability of this aspect of evangelisation. This is an expression of faith both in theory and in practice.

In Joachim Gnilka’s exposition of Philippians 4:10-18, Paul states unambiguously the most important thing about the Philippians’ gift to him. It is not the material gift that matters but the spiritual reward that accrues to them. So, in the long run, it is the donor that is really the receiver of the gift of the highest worth (cf. John 4:10). Joachim Gnilka finds the main import of the numerous business terms in verse 17 in the term *karpos* (fruit), which refers to ‘profit or income.’ It has an eschatological meaning, referring to the harvest of the last days. This fruit is the fruit of righteousness (Phil 1:11). It is not the material gift that brings spiritual fruit but the

¹⁹ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina, vol. 7) 586.

²⁰ The Diocese of Liverpool, “Corinthians Sermon Notes, 2005” available at <http://www.givingingrace.org/preaching/Corinthians/corinth001.pdf>, accessed 31/08/13.

²¹ Vincent P. Branick, “The Christology of Philippians 2,” in *The Bible Today* (May/June 2013), 147-152, 147.

²² Bonhoeffer in Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther: 1 Kor 15,1-16,24* (Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, VII/4; Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag AG, 2001) 436.

²³ Franz Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Herder Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, Fünfte Erweiterte Auflage, 1988) 126.

Christian and brotherly *phronein* (concern, care, 4:10) from which the gift comes. The more one practices this *phronein* the greater his *karpós* will be on the last day.²⁴

5. The Mission to the Poor

It is Yahweh's inclination to the poor and the oppressed that necessitated the very foundation of Jewish nation and religion. God saw the misery of his people in Egypt, heard their cry, became aware of their suffering and came down to rescue them (Exod 3:7-8).

Some legislation was made for the sake of the poor. In the Deuteronomic Code, there is a command to eliminate poverty, even though it will always persist (Deut 15:4, 11). Giving to the poor is obligatory and must be done heartily and open-handedly (Deut 15:7-10). The daily essentials taken from them as pledges must be returned before sunset; and as workers, they must not be exploited (Deut 24:6, 13-10, 17), whether they are foreigners or indigenes (Deut 24:14-15). Some farm produce should be left purposely for the needy (Deut 24:19-22). Every third-year tithe belongs to the needy (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12). The poor could appeal against those who neglect or oppress them, and the culprits will incur punishment (Deut 15:9; 24:15). Their oppressors should remember that they were once "slaves" (Deut 24:18, 22).

In the Priestly Code, there are also some provisions: Lend to the poor with no interest (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35-37). All that grow in the fallow land during the sabbatical year belongs to the poor (Exod 23:11). They can use cheaper items for offering in the temple (Lev 5:7; 12:8).

The psalmists and the prophets emphasise always the duty to the poor (Psa 41:1; 112:9; Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:17). The Good News is first of all meant for the liberation of the poor and the afflicted (Isa 61:1-2). The sages have much regard for the poor: The poor and the rich are equal before God; and even the righteous poor soar above the godless rich (Eccl 4:13; Prov 19:1, 22; 22:1, 2). The poor are not to be mocked (Prov 17:5). The one who gives to the poor will be blessed (Prov 22:9).

In the NT, Jesus begins his mission by quoting Isa 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18; and the proof of his being the Messiah is that the Good News is being preached to the poor (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22). His sermon on the mount is mainly a pronouncement of beatitude on those who are poor and are being oppressed (Luke 6:20-22; cf. Matt 5:3; Jam 2:5-6). Jesus makes giving to the poor a *sine-qua-non* for discipleship and having treasure in heaven (Matt 19:22; Luke 18:22). Zacchaeus, after his conversion, promises to share his fortune with the poor (Luke 19:8). The most adequate invitation to banquets are the ones given to the poor and the physically challenged (Luke 14:13, 21). The first deacons were ordained for the service of the poor (Acts 6:1-6). For James, faith that has no expression in the service of the poor is dead (Jam 2:14-17).

6. *Diakonia* to the Poor as an Expression of Faith

In his first encyclical and Lenten Message, Pope Francis delineates the relationship between faith and charity. Faith is knowing, accepting and adhering to the truth; and "charity is "walking" in the truth. Through faith we enter into friendship with the Lord, through charity this friendship is lived and cultivated."²⁵ The zeal to proclaim the gospel and awaken faith in the people must be connected with the charitable concern for the poor. John Paul II emphasises that that concern for

²⁴ Joachim Gnllka, *Der Philipperbrief* (Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Vierte Auflage; Freiburg: Herder, 1987) 179.

²⁵ Vatican Information Service, Year XXIII - N° 23 "Believing In Charity Calls Forth Charity: Papal Message For Lent 2013" (01/0/13).

the poor is at the heart of Church's mission, and that the Church should be the Church of the poor.²⁶ God defends the poor; and the mission of the Church, first and foremost, aims at them. Their evangelisation is an excellent sign and proof of the mission of Jesus.²⁷ It is faith inspired by the gospel that awakens the true charity, and the greatest work of charity is evangelisation itself. It is possible for one to give gifts without love, but it is not possible for one to love without a practical expression in gifts of any kind (Amy Carmichael). Pope Paul VI points out that evangelisation is incomplete if it does not take into account the interplay of the Gospel and people's concrete life:

Peoples, as we know, engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism. The Church, as the bishops repeated, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children - the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization.²⁸

When one gives gifts, one partakes in the dissemination of God's love. One becomes a channel of God's grace. According to Pope Francis, the light of faith makes one not to forget the sufferings of this world; "so it was with Saint Francis of Assisi and the Leper, or with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her poor."²⁹ When one understands that the desire to give comes from God's gracious prompting, one naturally longs to fulfil that desire. It is no longer a question of having the other cringe at one's feet before one gives; instead one looks and begs for an opportunity to let out the flame of love, which God has ignited, otherwise one becomes dead like the Dead Sea, which is dead because, though it receives fresh water from River Jordan, it has no channel through which to give out. This is why the Macedonians begged for a *koinōnia* in the ministry to the poor (v. 4). It is like the case of Jeremiah, who could not but speak God's word that was burning like fire in him (Jer 20:7-9). "Giving is a litmus test of faith. It was Martin Luther who said that we need three conversions: of the heart...of the mind ...and of the purse. He comments that if faith has not touched our purse or wallets, then it is likely that it has not adequately penetrated either the heart or the mind."³⁰ This is in line with Billy Graham's comments that a chequebook is a theological document that tells what one believes in.

Paul was not only organizing collections for the poor but was also ready to make his own personal financial contributions to the cause of the poor. In Philemon 18-19, Paul undertook to offset the financial debt of Onesimus to Philemon. Based on the force of *apotinein*, which is a legally technical term for payment of fine and damages (v. 19), and the double emphasis on this payment, Peter Stuhlmacher opines that Paul was willing to compensate Philemon for the

²⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter (December 07, 1990) no 60.

²⁷ Ibid, no. 60.

²⁸ Paul VI, *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation (December 08, 1975) no. 30.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, Encyclical Letter (June 29, 2013, no. 57; Enugu: Black Belt Konzult, 2013), 82.

³⁰ The Diocese of Liverpool, "Corinthians Sermon Notes, 2005" available at <http://www.givingingrace.org/preaching/Corinthians/corinth001.pdf>, accessed 31/08/13.

productive-time and money lost due to Onesimus' escape.³¹ All these were to render the propagation of faith effective.

7. The Nigerian Situation

By committing themselves to the work of charity to the poor, the evangelisers in Nigeria can let their faith blossom and at the same time nurture the faith of many. Nigeria is a very rich country, but the wealth is in the hand of a few individuals. In addition to the grace of God, some became rich through their hard work; some have the opportunity to enjoy the money in government and politics; and some others became rich through frauds of all kinds.³² Many of these people in the echelon of Nigerian society always like to identify with the clergy and evangelisers of all kinds, the so-called "men of God." Evangelisers equally seek to align with these rich individuals. On both sides of the divide, some long for this identification for selfish interests.

This paper is challenging all evangelisers in Nigeria to heed the cry of the poor. They have to use the opportunity of mixing with the rich to preach the urgency of genuine charity to the poor as Paul did in Corinth. Evangelisers have to aim at transforming so many a rich man's mentality on wealth from being "an acquisition for self-aggrandizement" to "God's grace that is meant for the common good." They can equally lead rich fraudsters like Zacchaeus to conversion. This is nurturing faith in the rich. When this faith is put into action through charity, the poor will experience more practically God's love; and consequently this will deepen their faith in God.

It is the onus of all Christian individuals and groups to give for the sake of evangelisation. Rich parishes and dioceses should help poor ones, and likewise rich nations in respect of the poor ones. For any meaningful new evangelisation, the status quo, where many evangelisers simply accumulate wealth from the rich for themselves, has to change. As far as faith is concerned, this attitude impoverishes the evangelisers themselves, the rich and also the poor.

8. Conclusion

It was God's mission to the poor that kick-started the entire salvation history. It will be a herculean task to convince a hungry and oppressed person, who is denied of his right, that God loves him and that he should have faith in God. Evangelisation therefore calls for a spiritually obligatory charity to the poor that will lead to their empowerment. This is keeping the *charis* of God active. This charity can equally come from one's deep poverty, following the example of the Macedonians, who gave according to their ability and even beyond. The perfect example of giving to the poor is Christ's giving of himself to save humanity. Evangelisers should serve as a medium for breaching the gap between the rich and the poor, and forming a good Christian community and fellowship.

In a country like ours, where there is a teeming number of the poor, who hardly have enough to eat, the new evangelisation will have much meaning when the Church redirects her attention towards them. Church ministers have the opportunity to dine and wine with the rich, as Paul could have done in Corinth, but Paul used the opportunity, not to accumulate personal wealth but for the cause of the poor. This would make a great project for the new evangelization.

³¹ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an Philemon* (Evangelische-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, XVIII; Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1981) 49.

³² One of the fastest ways to become rich in Nigeria is through politics. Recently it was reported that the Nigerian senators are the highest paid in the world. Femi Ajayi, "Nigeria Senator Makes N498,630.13 a Day, What University Professor Does Not Make In A Month!" in *Nigeriaworld*, 20/08/13, accessed 07/09/13.