

13th April 2023**Give and it shall be given...****Luke 6:38**

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again KJV

Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure you receive NET

This is a very pertinent and relevant subject. The Apostolic Ecclesia in the United Kingdom has become very small indeed. Young people have drifted away because of the toughness of the way of life, the obstacles and challenges become too much for them. Groups have split off over time, because of disagreements over personalities, but disguised as supposed issues of doctrine. All who are left are a handful of ageing people, trying with limited resources to maintain the Standard of Christ. Then God, in His mercy, and to ensure that there is a remnant of the elect present in the Last Days at the Coming of the Lord, unites the Apostolic Ecclesia in the UK to an unnamed group of Bible Believers in Africa who demonstrate and prove their faith and belief in the doctrine and practice of the Apostles. We joyfully extend the right hand of fellowship after joint careful examination and much prayer. Soon others are added through the waters of baptism, so that the numbers increase.

The United Kingdom has the sixth largest economy in the world. It consists of approximately 65 million people. There is no such thing in this country of absolute poverty, as there are social networks to support those in the greatest need, although occasionally individuals may slip through the net. Because of the consistent high levels of wealth found in this country, people are satisfied with their bread, and their preoccupation with pleasure and leisure, and fill their days with enjoying themselves. The population is therefore happy with its lot. About 100 years after the death of the Lord Jesus a Roman poet

by the name of Juvenal wrote this in Latin: *iam pridem, ex quo suffragia nulli / vendimus, effudit curas; nam qui dabat olim / imperium, fasces, legiones, omnia, nunc se / continet atque duas tantum res anxius optat, / panem et circenses*

It translates as follows: *Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses*

This is the cultural and political state of things in the UK, where the population full of bread- and circuses, consumables and pleasure seeking, are satisfied with just that, and have no need for God, no requirement for their spiritual salvation, as they consider such talk as complete nonsense. God does not exist. Although it is true that the British people are amongst the most generous of all nations in giving to international causes and charities, this nation does not have time to give or love to give, and is intrinsically selfish.

It is why there is a famine *not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: (Amos 8:11)* It is why our young people have drifted off, and people in the street laugh at our Bibles, and give us looks of pity when we say we “go to church”.

Yet in Africa, in Kenya, Uganda and Congo, things are very different. The economies are described as “developing” but are in fact in crisis, particularly Kenya and Congo which have seen exponential population increases. The corrupt governments have no cash to pay their employees, food stuffs have increased by 16% this year alone, but where labourers commonly earn no more than £47.00 a month which does not cover subsistence. There are no such things as hobbies and sports in rural Africa. Such frivolous pastimes get in the way of survival. Every moment of every day is spent in getting nourishment for the belly, or keeping a decent shelter overhead. Books are unaffordable, and no where to store them anyway,

education is a luxury, sickness and disease is an evil which no one can budget for, and turns the hardworking into broke pitiful beggars. Yet here, everyone believes in God. Such talk of evolution or talk of the god of millions of years is met with looks of incredulity, the evidence of God in everyday life is obvious to all. Those who live by the grace of God and have nothing else, are grateful for the little they receive. The small bowls of ugali and beans produced from their own sweat and back breaking toil from their own land, against all odds, they eat gratefully once maybe twice a day, but always with a spare bowl ready to give to a wandering child, or elderly neighbour. They may finally sit down to rest and pick up the news to read – the Good News – the Bible.

Such is the time of extreme contrasts in which we live in the world, the extreme imbalance of wealth and privilege which has been so for hundreds of years, but gets more extreme as the generations go on. But God has contrived to bring about this situation into the Ecclesia – why? It is to ensure the One Body is ready and prepared for the Coming of the Lord. To get it fit, and healthy.

-To ensure that there is no room for complacency of people sitting down in their comfort and oozing luxury congratulating themselves that they are enduring to the end...when they don't even know what hardship is.

-To ensure that those who live in poverty do not use their hardship as an excuse to be irresponsible, to hold onto their culture as a comfort, when it has in fact caused their hardship in the first place, but instead to be free thinkers, educate their minds with the depth and breadth of the Doctrine of Christ.

The imbalance of the world and injustice of the world has been reintroduced (as it existed in the times of the First and Second Century) to the Ecclesia in the Last Days as to ensure it becomes balanced and wholesome.

We have created this preamble because when we look at a passage like Luke 6:38, it can be interpreted as – ooh we in the UK are

comparatively rich and therefore we must give, give and give yet more money, money, money to our brothers and sisters in Africa, to restore the balance, as it is so unfair, they have nothing, and we have everything. The African brothers see this also and think the same.

But it is not the simple answer.

Restoring the balance is not just about money. That is what the world thinks. Of course, it helps. But as James points out *the love of money is the root of all evil*. 1 Timothy 6:10

Trying to restore the imbalance just through money is impossible, as it would never end. The African brothers and sisters also have to give. But not all have money to give. But there are many things we can all give, whether in UK, or in Africa ... Compassion, Forgiveness, Prayers, Attention – be a good listener, Thoughtfulness, Time.

Giving of money is an obvious way of balancing and assisting those in need.

Proverbs 19:17 *He that hath pity upon the poor lends unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.*

Proverbs 22:9 *He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he gives of his bread to the poor.*

In the same chapter and context of the passage we are looking at Luke 6:30 *Give to every man that asks of you; and of him that takes away your goods ask them not again.*

There are many ways in which we in the UK can raise funds for our poor brethren in Africa, and we must be diligent in distributing assistance. However, as many other religious organisations have discovered, giving money away carelessly and without proper management leads very quickly to corruption, as it provides temptation for deception, lies and envy and jealousy. On no account should this be used as an excuse not to give. Instead it must renew efforts to be equitable, thoughtful, careful.

When the Ecclesia at the time of the Apostles was – as we are describing – balanced – we read that they had all things in common. People sold pieces of land, to raise funds and laid it at the Apostles feet. This was to raise funds for the poor, and help those who had no employment – such as Jewish priests who were now out of work because they had converted to be disciples of Jesus. However, Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5) were not transparent, and introduced corruption and deceit, - in this they were lying against the Holy Spirit. This is what happens today, when people are deceitful, they may think they have gained some extra money through clever use of words of by not being transparent, but in fact, they are lying against the Holy Spirit. They are in danger of their lives. However, this did not stop the collections for the poor and widows, just that going forward specific brethren were appointed to manage this work, and ensure that the process was carried out properly. (See Acts 6)

There is a helpful passage in 2 Corinthians 8:14-15: *But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.* Equality does not mean one Ecclesia helping out all the other Ecclesias. How is that equal? Surely the burden will become so great, it will cause issues and problems in the end. Therefore the poor communities have a responsibility to also provide for the richer communities. They may receive financial help, but they can equally give. There must be this equality. Therefore in the One Body of Christ, the Ecclesias have a responsibility to give spiritual food to one another, encouragement, uplifting verses, thoughts and prayers.

Another useful passage in this study is 2 Corinthians 9:6-8: *But this I say, He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to*

make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

Several points are made here. 1)A direct correlation is made between the amount we give, and the amount we receive.

2)People should give as they purpose in their heart

3)There should be no resentment as a result of the donation being given.

Some people believe in the Prosperity Gospel, that the more you give, the more you get back in this life. So by giving to the priest, you will yourself get rich. This is a wrong understanding- as yes we will be rewarded in this life as Mark 10:30.... explains, but not necessarily in cash! Additionally, we should not give that we will receive – that is not the right motivation. Instead, rewards will come in the way in which God decrees. We should give as we purpose in our heart – what we can afford, or what we decide – it is our money or our belongings to give – it is our decision, and our conscience – we should not feel coerced, or pressured or forced to do it – it should come from a willing heart, as the children of Israel gave willingly for the building of the tabernacle. See also 2 Corinthians 8;11-12. Giving should not be done grudgingly – it should not cause resentment, as all that we have actually belongs to God, and we are just custodians looking after material possessions while we have breath in our body. When we are dead and buried, all these things will belong to others anyway.

While the focus has been on money, and the poor look to the rich to equal the balance, where is the same urgency to share the burden when it comes to giving spiritual lessons? where is the same sense of public duty when it comes to giving of forgiveness? or giving time to listen to the problems of others? How is it that some people feel that they have to receive and have nothing to give? There is always something every member of the ecclesia can and should and must give. It must be a balance and an equality in the body, on many levels and not just financial.

There must be an equality not just in giving of money, but in the willingness to give comfort, concern, fellowship. When Jesus spoke

of the need to give even unto the least of these my brethren in Matthew 25:35-46, he did not mention once about giving money, but in feeding, clothing, and visiting the sick and visiting even those in prison. So whilst helping out financially is useful, needful and important. It is vital that we all as an Ecclesia are as ready to give our time, attention, kindness and concern now matter how poor or rich we are.

Brother Terry