

Saint Paul on Raising Funds (Archimandrite Varnavas Lambropoulos)

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Writing in his second epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul urges them- among other things- to contribute towards a fund-raising collection for the Christians of Jerusalem. This was the first time in the history of Christianity that this method of providing assistance to other Christians in need was used and established. And it's worth noting that Paul isn't content with just a couple of words of encouragement. In almost two whole chapters of the epistle [8, 9] he attempts to point out to the Corinthians the immense importance of this effort of charity.

First he highlights for them the love of Christ, Who, for our sakes, abandoned His riches and became poor, so that we could become rich through His poverty. In other words, from being empty vessels containing nothing but the hot air of our egotism, we can become receptacles full of grace and love.



He also emphasizes that charity is pleasing to God, when it's performed not grudgingly and parsimoniously, but gladly and willingly.

He reminds them that their charity will not only meet the needs of the poor in Jerusalem, but will also be a cause for God's name to be glorified, since it will be a practical confession of the Gospel of His own love.

As long as the world is as it is, there'll be a difference between the rich and the poor. No political system and no human effort has ever been able to solve this problem, and the same will be true in the future. In the 'best-case' solution, the state has implemented the system of 'Let's take by force (sometimes involving killing) so that we can distribute fairly'. But the curative measure of throwing out the baby with the bathwater isn't actually very philanthropic.

It's only to the degree that people freely love the will of God that there's any hope of them being cured of their egotism, so that they can love their neighbour.

Following the teachings of Christ and the holy Apostles, the Church has never ceased proclaiming that charity isn't merely a good act, so that we can be good people, but that, instead, it's actually a basic requirement for us to become members of the Body of Christ, for us to belong to Christ.

And in order to stress this, the Church hasn't hesitated, over the centuries, to use blunt language in order to penetrate our insensitive shell. For example:

Basil the Great says that stealing somebody's clothes doesn't mean only that you take from a person who already has things to wear, but also that you don't dress somebody who's naked (Homily on 'I will tear down my barns' [Luke 12, 18]).

Another of the Church's books, the Nomocanon* of Manouil Malaxos the Notary (Thebes 1561), summarizes the Orthodox teaching on charity and says 'God gives what He gives to the rich for one reason only: so that they can share with the poor. And those of the rich who don't share with the poor will be judged by God as if they were murderers'.

In other words, not to beat about the bush, people who 'simply' haven't actively engaged in alms-giving- even if they've never hurt a fly- are considered by the Church to be robbers and murderers.

* **A collection of canon laws**