

# GLOBAL CONNECTIONS, IT'S *ONLY* MONEY! CONFERENCE

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### The Ethics of Raising Funds

(Plenary 2)

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There are two major 'axes' around which our thinking will revolve: ethics and raising funds. Let me start by giving you a definition, and then a working practice:

**Ethics** can be defined as,

"the study of how one ought to behave in big and small matters." (Richard Jones).

Conventionally, there are two basic approaches:

\* **deontological** approach, which basically means that there are certain actions that will always be right, regardless of the consequences. Using this approach, our decision will be based on some underlying source of authority, whether that is our religion, conscience, or what we see in 'nature'; and,

\* **teleological** approach, which means that one looks at the consequences to decide what is right and what is wrong. In this approach, there are several underlying bases for evaluating consequences, such as individual self-interest or 'the greatest good for the greatest number'.

I really don't want to focus on this way of looking at the ethics of raising funds on this occasion. But I would suggest that, whilst we might like to think that our raising of funds is based on the former approach (namely what the Bible says), too often our raising of funds is evaluated on a purely teleological basis that has nothing to do with anything Christian. The sole criterion we use is: did we get enough money in to balance the books?

However, I would rather bring in a second statement about ethics as this represents very much how I shall be tackling the subject in this article : 'The ethical process is not to tell you what is right or wrong but rather to train you to see'. (Hauerhas & Williams in 'Resident Aliens'). As we go through the article I think you will quickly see that I am trying to use this approach.

So, 'ethics' is one part of the title, 'raising funds' is the other. We are looking at how we raise funds ethically, not how we encourage people to give ethically. There is not a solid line between the two, but we'll try to keep raising funds and giving apart.

Let me say a couple of things by way of introduction:

1. The Bible is not an ethical 'textbook' - on raising funds or anything else. You can't look up part 3 section 2, sub-section 7, para 4 and find the answer as to what one does in a given situation. Therefore, how we do our hermeneutics is critical to how we use the Bible to try to help us. 'Proof-texting' is not the acceptable way of using the Scriptures, in my book.

2. I would have preferred the article to have been entitled 'the ethics of raising resources'. The reason is that I think we often exercise a fair old degree of dualistic thinking: we quite happily invite people (and especially supporters) to pray for our work - almost as if we have a right to their prayers; we quite happily ask them to give their time to help our work. It may be a fairly simple task of, say, stuffing envelopes etc. - as though we almost have a carte blanche to ask this of the people of God. So, we are quite happy to ask for their resources of time and abilities but when it comes to asking for their money we suddenly become much more reluctant. What is the difference? Whether it is time, talents or money they are all resources given by God to be used for His glory by His people. So, I think we need to ask ourselves why we put some sort of divider between money and other resources. Is this biblical?

### **3. Who am I to write on this subject?**

Well, I was asked to; I have been looking at the question for 25 years: raising my own support; working with Christian organisations for 20 years raising support; and working with a range of Christian organisations and churches to help them raise support. I have more questions than answers. In this article I shall give more pointers than pillars, if you like; helping you perhaps to 'see' more clearly rather than providing certainties for you. I feel very much that it is a subject I need to tackle with humility, recognising my fallen nature and its impact on my thinking. It was John Kenneth Galbraith who said 'Faced' with the choice between changing one's mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everybody gets busy on the proof'. We don't like having to change our minds.

Let's take a very quick look at a little bit of history. Since Pentecost the Church has been involved in raising funds. Almost as soon as the 'compulsory' tithing of Judaism ended, the 'laity' has been inclined not to give as much as the 'clergy'/leadership thought they should. And all sorts of devices/approaches have been used. The following is not in historical order, nor is it comprehensive : - emotional appeal - hiding the whole picture as it might reduce giving - blackmail - pew rent - lotteries - indulgences - buying and selling of goods e.g. books. videos, relics - enforced tithing - linking giving with winning leaders' blessing - linking giving with attainment of office - deliberately trying to out-present other causes - misrepresenting what the donation will achieve and so on. All sorts of methods have been used and abused to try to get in funds. And fundraising activities nowadays are not immune from abuses, alas.

### **Raising funds and Scriptural basis**

So let's go back to the Scriptures and see what light they can shed on the

subject of raising funds. Some of the passages we could consider, and key points from them, are:

- Exodus 25:1-9: people were invited to give; they were told what was required and what the purpose of the funds was [NB no money/currency involved]
- Exodus 35:4 - 36:7: they were invited to give (5) and their gifting was asked for, not just their 'goods' (10); leaders called a halt when the need was met (36:5)
- Exodus 30:11-16: the need was for currency for upkeep of 'fabric'; it was a tax
- 1 Chronicles 29: 1-20: presenting the need (1-5); invitation (5); willingness/freedom/joy (9&17); praise (20) Nehemiah 2: 1-7: Nehemiah asked the king for what he wanted (7) (NB the king was not one of the people of God, but a 'pagan'!)
- Matthew 10:9ff: the 12 are commissioned to go out and told not to take money, and to accept what they are offered. But if we look at the Middle Eastern culture of the day, what were the chances of them not being offered hospitality? It was a very different culture to ours. What weight do we put on that?

Other Scriptures I've heard used:

- Matthew 6:1-4: don't let needs be known (I am not sure the passage says this).
- 2 Corinthians 8&9: (but this is addressing the subject of how we are to give, not how we are to 'ask').
- James 2: I have heard this used to say that we should treat all donors identically, and not favour the rich (I am not sure the passage is addressing that issue).
- Luke 11:42: One writer put that if Jesus had wanted to abolish tithing, this is where He would have done it, and He didn't, so 'tithing' is something we should expect of the people of God. (I find this a quite extraordinary interpretation, looking at the full context of what Jesus was saying here).

I am left with a number of questions I have no adequate answer for:

How was Jesus' ministry financed? We know there were women who gave (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41). Did Jesus ever ask? How was Paul financed? We know he made tents with his own hands. We know that he accepted gifts - but not from the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 11:7-11). Did he ever ask? We don't know. Now if I had listed passages on giving, rather than on raising funds, I suspect we could come up with a much longer list of relevant passages.

[As an aside, I think there is a whole area of study to be done around what we can learn from what Scripture says about giving, and how we might use this to inform our approach to raising funds. But we are still left, I believe, with a considerable problem about the ethics of raising funds - how we are to behave in matters large and small in this area.]

### **Hudson Taylor principle for raising funds**

I must say that I have never heard a convincing argument from Scripture for what is sometimes called the Hudson Taylor principle. Personally, I have absolutely no problem with people 'raising' funds that way - none at all. However, I do have a problem when, as has happened occasionally, and not by senior staff in Hudson Taylor's old mission I must say, I am told

that this is the only biblical way to raise funds. Some people seem to feel that operating this way means you occupy the high spiritual ground. I am afraid I am unconvinced of this, from Scripture.

### **Conclusion**

My conclusion is that the Scriptures do not give us a prescribed 'method' for raising funds. If that is correct then I think we need to look to see if we can achieve an ethical framework. I am helped by Francis Schaeffer's concept that truth is an island, not a point. The island has steep sides, but there is latitude on the island. If this is correct then one organisation may do it differently from another, but there will be boundaries which they agree should not be transgressed.

And if this is correct, what are the 'big principles' that we would all sign up to? I've been out of the Christian organisation scene for the last four years, and maybe someone has done the work but I didn't find anything too comprehensive when I was around Christian organisations. So I am not aware that anyone had done a thorough piece of biblical research to produce an ethical framework we can all work within, even if our methods vary somewhat.

As I observe both Christian organisations and individual churches, their practices seem to be far more informed by their history, than by study of Scripture. In fact there is some research evidence that Christian organisations don't really know how to use Scripture in the overall running of their organisations, never mind their raising of funds.

I feel there is a place for some very solid biblical research in this area. I believe that any organisation(s) that funded this type of work would do the Church a great service.

Alongside Scripture, I think we also need to take into account the history of an organisation, and how God has led over the decades. I would suggest that history rather than scripture has been centre stage in too many organisations' thinking about raising funds. But we must not discount history as that is our pilgrim story of how God has led us.

So what do we do? We can't put everything on hold until someone does the biblical research! We can look at some scenarios to get our thinking going. I am not as interested in what you would do in theory or practice, but in the basis for your decision, ie the ethical principles you might apply.

### **Scenarios:**

What ethical principles would you apply, if faced with the following scenarios, to enable you to reach conclusions as to what you would do.

1. Thanks to a large legacy, you are going to reach the end of your

financial year with a hefty surplus. What do you do about it vis a vis your trustees/board? staff? supporters? What factors do you use to decide?

2. You are offered £50,000 as a lump sum on condition that you use it for a project that is not exactly central to your work ..... but is central to the work of another organisation you know well. What factors do you use to decide?
3. You have a policy that you will endeavour to have enough in 'reserve' to keep your organisation going for X months, how did you come to that figure of X? What factors do you use to decide?
4. What time elapses between receiving a gift and acknowledging it? How do you acknowledge it? What factors do you use to decide?
5. You have a policy of individualised, or alternatively pooled, support and someone asks why you do it this way. How do you respond? What factors do you use to decide?
- 6a. Someone approaches and indicates that if they can identify with your organisation's work etc. they will make a donation of at least a six figure sum (after the decimal point), maybe seven. Can they visit you? What do you do?
- 6b. Then someone else approaches you and says they'd like to visit you and make a donation. Their history is that annually they give you £100-200 and it's about a year since they last gave. How do you respond to them? What are the ethical principles you apply to those two situations?

In the last few paragraphs we have looked at the topic in the two ways that I think we need to proceed, namely: top down i.e. starting from Scripture, working out the principles that would provide a framework; but also 'bottom up' where we look at situations and try to work out some principles we think apply to the particular, working up towards an ethical framework.

### **"Ladder of Abstraction"**

I think most organisations would have followed both approaches at some time or other, whether consciously or unconsciously. My observation would be, however, that we frequently either leap straight from the Biblical principle to our particular practice - or vice versa. I think we need to use what has been called the 'ladder of abstraction', working our way slowly down from big over-arching principles through general principles, and then slowly through to specific practices. Let me try very briefly and inadequately to show you what I mean.

### **Loving God and raising funds**

Jesus summed up all the law and the prophets as, 'Love God and your neighbour as yourself'. That's fine. So how do we apply that to raising funds? Well, we are doing this ministry out of love for God and so we

.... (at this point we normally illustrate from our practices). This is done as a straight leap. I would suggest it would be more helpful if we ask:

“How do we love God, in principle”?

Our reply could be, for example, “by honouring Him”.  
How do we honour Him in principle? We act in ways that reflect Who He is i.e. what He is like/His character. What is His character like? Well, this includes such characteristics as Righteousness, Justice, Truth, Grace, Order (a very partial list).  
If we chose the last one, we could ask,

“How could we reflect God’s sense of order?”

Now we are getting towards the level of practice. Our fundraising /accounting systems should be well ordered, not because SORP 2005 etc. requires it but because we want to reflect the character of God.

I quite accept that we need to be careful here and not just apply one principle in isolation. We have all met people who run our systems who behave almost as if the whole mission exists for them and their systems. Here the principle of ‘order’ has got out of balance with other characteristics of God.

### **Justice, and raising of funds**

We could have picked on the importance to God of ‘Justice’. And ask ‘how does justice’ affect our raising of funds. Perhaps in the way we treat our supporters; or the way we allocate our funds. For example, God’s justice in the Old Testament was particularly concerned for the weak and the vulnerable. How do we behave towards those supporters who are a little tiresome, almost through no fault of their own, but through e.g. illness or

limited intellectual capacity. God says we should take special care of them, but again we have to balance that with other principles.

### **Loving our neighbour and raising funds**

If we had taken the second half of Jesus’ summation of the law - loving our neighbour - we could have asked a similar set of questions:

“What are the big principles of loving our neighbour?”

Again we could have chosen:

“By honouring them”.

- How do we honour them?
- By being honest with them/being transparent.
- How does this apply to raising funds?

I have come across examples of people who have been highly selective in what they told their supporters, which I suspect they chose to be through fear that if they had been

transparent, that support would have dropped. Is that alright? What principles were they applying in not telling? Would we go along with those principles?

### **Praise in giving**

We also honour our neighbour by making it 'easy' for them to worship God. Remember that in 1 Chronicles, a principle I extracted was one of praise as integral to the experience of those people who were invited to give. There are plenty of other places where giving and praise are co-existent. In the way we raise funds, and how we report back on how the funds have been used, do we make it easy for people to worship/praise God?

### **Love, interdependence and raising funds**

Another key principle in the New Testament is interdependence. We love other Christians by being interdependent. How does this make an impact on our raising of funds? We often call our supporters 'partners' but are they really, or do we hold almost all the cards and really only want their money, not their comments, questions, observations, enquiries etc.?

### **Way forward in raising funds**

I realise that I am raising a lot of issues here. Is there a route forward in all of this? One I have found particularly helpful in tackling the 'bottom up' approach is to take as a basic principle that Christianity is nothing if it is not a Relational religion. So we could look at the key relationships that we have.

Very briefly here are **seven fundamental relationships** we have in raising funds:

1. **God** - Do we follow God's lead or are we prepared to go off on potential side-tracks out of fear of missing a golden opportunity for raising funds? - Is bringing glory to God central in our thinking and practice of raising funds? Or are we more concerned with meeting our budgets? I sometimes wonder if we are more concerned with the 'glory' of our organisation than God's glory. - Should we tithe our income and give it to another organisation. Some would argue for this and some against this, but which is more biblical, do we think? Does it apply at all to para-church organisations?

### 2. **Recipients of our ministry**

- Do we let them have a say in how we raise resources? (e.g. whether their priority would be for prayer or money or visiting them etc.) - Do we take into account the culture of those we minister to, in our thinking about raising resources?

### 3. **Our workers**

- do we encourage them to think ethically about raising funds? How do we do that? - are there mechanisms in place to help everyone who works for us to 'sing from the same song sheet' in this? - prayer/newsletters: are we encouraging our workers to love their neighbour through their letters and other communications. - do we encourage them to be accountable to their supporters? If we do all the 'thanking' centrally, does that help or hinder here? What principles are we applying for this to be our practice?

- applying the 'principle' of grace: what do we do about workers who struggle with this whole area of 'raising support'? Do we have a 'one-size-fits-all' approach?

4. **Supporters** (this is a massive area, but to get you thinking:)

- if there are principles for 'giving', do we make it easy for people to follow those principles in the way we raise our funds? If not, are we loving our neighbour?

(John Stott's little study booklet 'The Grace of Giving' is one example of a helpful resource in this.)

- do supporters understand our history of raising support? Are they allowed to question whether it is still appropriate?
- how do we relate at an appropriate level: do we tell them what they will receive from us, or do we enquire to see what they want from us?
- how do we balance what our supporters might want with the limited resources we have, to deliver our ministry?

#### **What principles might inform us on this?**

- I have seen, 'tick if you want an acknowledgement for your donation' on the donation form : - what does that communicate?? - are our supporters our partners or money providers?

Do our systems and communications reflect what we say we believe in this area? - are we truly open with them about the needs?

- how much do we believe that giving to us is a real ministry for them

#### **\* If we ask for funds, what is the basis of the ask?**

- do they understand the ethical principles that undergird our 'asking' or our 'non-asking'? - is our house in order? - is it a real need or just, 'extra funds would be nice'. One organisation I was associated with asked me to raise an extra £50,000. When I asked what it was for, 'I was told we'll find ways to spend it when you have raised it.' What ethical principles were being applied here?

#### **\* Who we ask (assuming we do)**

- only the likely ones - we may be limiting someone's ministry of giving by not asking them! - Do we believe their giving is a ministry for them?

#### **\* How we ask/make needs known**

- do we communicate a real and true vision for our work?  
- do we encourage faith-raising on their part?  
- do we get too caught up on the mechanics of the ask?  
- There's the whole issue here of how we attract major donors versus smaller amount donors - as one of our scenarios earlier indicated. - Do we create an environment where people can give freely and willingly or do they feel pressured/blackmailed? Do they feel they are worshipping God when they give to us? Do we make it easy for them to follow the principles laid out in 2 Corinthians, Chapters 8 & 9?

#### **\* How do we respond to our supporters – (I think this is massive area)**

- do we have different levels of 'thanks' according to the level of gift?

- how long does it take us to thank donors? - do we feel we have done enough when we thank just once?

I'm sure we could all produce in a whole raft of examples of good and poor practice of thanking. But on what basis do we decide these things?

### 5. Other ministries

- do we really care about attracting funds while others go broke. Are we loving our neighbours?

- how much 'duplication' is there?
- how much straight competition is there between us and other organisations?
- how much do we exchange information, practice, personnel etc. and, on what basis do we make those decisions? Do we really love our neighbour organisations?

### 6. The 'Law' of the land

- there are plenty of laws govern raising funds in the UK, and also lots on what is regarded as good practice. Do we follow them? - Do our donation forms conform to the laws of the UK? I've seen plenty that don't. - Do we have a well worked out reserves policy? Did we involve our supporters in its production, or have we just told them (if we've told them at all)? - what principles are there in Scripture about submitting to the authorities that we can apply to raising funds

### 7. Watching world

- is God honoured by what we do in raising funds?

One of my favourite quotes: 'Let our manners distinguish us from our enemies as much as the cause we are engaged in.' How we conduct ourselves as Christians should distinguish us from the rest of the world, as much as what we believe in. We raise our funds before a watching world: what do they make of God as a result of watching us?

### Conclusions

I have skated across the topic in a very uneven and rapid way. The worst thing I could do is just walk off and say 'be warm, be filled'. So let me summarise and draw some conclusions:

#### 1. Biblical research into ethics:

I think there is a place for some real biblical research into this whole area of ethics (how we behave in big and small matters) of raising funds. If some organisation(s) would put up money to get some sound biblical research done I think that would serve us all very well.

2. Organisational history: We need to revisit the history of our organisation and tease out what is core for how we practice raising funds today.

3. Ethical review of fund-raising mechanisms: I think there is a real place for a lot of organisations to have a thorough-going ethical review of how they raise funds. This obviously takes time and effort, but should lead to a rich reward there. The Trustees/Board is obviously the starting place as they have legal responsibility, but I think the whole organisation should be involved. Too often practice has grown up like Topsy or through the promulgation of organisational myth.

#### 4. **Evaluation based on biblical principle and everyday practice.**

The evaluation needs to be both biblical principle worked through to everyday practice - top down - and a review of what actually happens in practice - bottom up. The Relational approach for the latter is a suggestion I'd commend. The use of scenarios is another tool. Remember we are focussing on the 'why' behind the 'what'.

#### 5. **Get help/look outside your organisation**

I think it was Lesslie Newbiggin who, quoting an Eastern philosopher, said, 'If you want to know about water, don't ask a fish'. I think many organisations need someone from the outside to question, 'conventional wisdom', in order for the organisation to see itself more clearly.

If it is not possible to bring in someone from the outside to help you, then garner as much as you can about how other organisations view raising funds - preferably ones that do it differently to you. It is of course critical that you get insider the head - so to speak - of what they do and why they do it that way. Gene Outka in 'Agape: An Ethical Analysis' says 'agape enjoins one to identify with the neighbour's point of view, to try imaginatively to see what it is for him (her), to live the life he does, to occupy the position he holds.' This can yield rich rewards in enabling us to view our practices in a new light - as well as viewing their practices with warmth. Alas, as Galbraith has said: 'Faced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everybody gets busy on the proof'.

When reviewing the raising of funds, I would be so bold as to suggest that the most important thing is not the amount of money/resources we attract, but the way we have viewed the raising and how we have gone about it - **the ethics we have applied is much more important than the amount.**

This article has covered a lot of ground and has posed more questions than answers. My plea and prayer would be that each of us moves forward with God in this - no matter how small the first step is. It is better that we take a small step in becoming more ethical in raising our funds, than that we feel overwhelmed by the size of the task and put it off for another day, when it will probably not get done. Why do I think the topic of the ethics of raising funds is important? Because ultimately what we do affects God's glory.

At the end of every one of his cantatas Johann Sebastian Bach wrote the initials SDG: soli deo gloria: to the glory of God alone. My own faltering steps on the pilgrimage of raising funds have had this as the driving force, which is why the ethics of raising funds is so close to my heart: soli deo gloria.