

**THE TRADITIONAL ANGLICAN CHURCH
PROVISIONAL PARISH OF ST. LUKE, AMPHILL**

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On Christian Giving 26/08/07

“While we have time, let us do good to all men” (Galatians 6.10).

We have found ourselves as a body in a little difficulty knowing how to give away surplus funds. So perhaps a few remarks on the general topic will help.

Negatively, I do not teach, as some do, that the Church has a right to 10% of a Christian’s income. I do not find this taught in the New Testament, and it is a distortion of the Old Testament tithe. Churches have in the past sometimes been supported on a tithing basis, but this is not divine law, only human practicality (often in an agricultural setting which is not ours).

Positively, God claims all our lives. Until we realise that, we will never get any aspect of those lives right. We cannot give away 10% or any other proportion of our income and then spend the rest of it on ourselves as if it were none of God’s business. Attending church and giving some time to private prayer do not let us off accounting to God for the rest of our time. We are human, and neither can nor should always be serious - but our abilities and energies should be concentrated on what is of worth. We must take care not to concentrate on frivolities (or worse) and come to God with only the leftovers of our talents. The starting-point of “Christian Stewardship” is absolutely right - though we have probably all noticed how it tends to drift into a campaign to increase Church funds!

I do believe that in almost any normal situation a Christian will be giving (whether money or, more important, time and talents) to the needs of others. I have to add that the modern situation of retirement, which several of us are in, makes some difference to what is practical and so what is obligatory. In particular, we may have less money and more time.

John Wesley preached that a Christian should do three things. First, get all you can (within the limits of right conduct and without wrecking your health.) Second, save all you can, because Christians should not live in an extravagant manner (which is the deadly sins of pride, luxury and gluttony), but moderately. Third, give all you can. John Wesley, you see, did not think there was a place for idle Christians; his Methodism was about method. I would add that I do not think it wrong to save for retirement, since most of us will have to spend quite a long time in that situation.

Most of our giving will be to the needs of the world, and often not to Christian causes, though there must be limits. (I would no longer support giving to Amnesty International, for example.) We should be thoughtful about our giving and it may be appropriate to consider particularly the causes that others are less likely to support. This is particularly true in cases such as disaster relief, when many will give to what is indeed a need, but with the result that other less well publicised needs are neglected.

There have been Christians, like William Law, who practised indiscriminate giving, to anybody who asked. We may be called upon to help an individual, but the emphasis must be on help. I believe that it is wiser to give to charities which try to rehabilitate the homeless, for example, than merely to support the professional beggars who abound in Cambridge.

I am firmly convinced that the church should ask for no more than it needs, and glad that the Traditional Anglican Church is very restrained in this matter. There is no need for a lot of our giving to be channelled through the church. A paid ministry may be a possibility, but it is not essential and personally I am glad to follow St. Paul in not claiming support from the church, and in working enough to make that possible.

This sermon does not relate to the readings for the day.