



On Just Sharing

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Saint Paul led the first-ever organized effort in Christian history to share resources among the sibling churches. As we know, there was a lot of tension leading up to this mobilization of resources and sharing that Paul organized. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) arrived at an accord to allow gentile Christians to participate and to consider them as full members of the Christian community without any demand that they adopt or adhere to Jewish customs and markings. The only demand put forth by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem—James, Peter, and John—was, as Paul recorded it in Galatians chapter 2 verse 10, that “They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.”

Saint Paul followed up this imperative at the Jerusalem Council to remember the poor by writing about it in his first epistle to the church in Corinth. In First Corinthians chapter 16, verses 1 through 4, Paul outlines how to go about collecting resources and how they could then be handed over to the church in Jerusalem.

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul returns to this theme yet again, articulating an elaborate set of instructions and describing the meaning of this effort in resource mobilization.

Let us read just the three verses from this extensive chapter-length discourse on resource mobilization in Second Corinthians, chapter 8, verses 13 through 15:

For I do not mean that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, in order that there may be equality. As it is written,

“The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too little.”

What is instructive to us who strive to be in partnership with sister churches all over the world is that in all his writings around this theme of resource sharing, Saint Paul never frames it as charity, or appeals to the goodness of hearts, or of the necessary goodwill that Christians should have. Paul rather considers it as a primary responsibility that Christians have in Christ and regards it as a quintessential mark of being the church anywhere in the world.

This added emphasis on equality in resources that Saint Paul talks about in Second Corinthians might make him one of the first people in the whole world to thematize the realization of equality through resource sharing. This insistence on always remembering the poor, the focus on equality around resources, and the concern for those in need gives us enough guidance about the mode and demeanor with which resources ought to be mobilized and on how to accompany our sister churches with whom such resources are being shared.

Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians and the Galatians dispel the notion of center and periphery in the Christian way of life. With this theme of resource sharing, Paul in effect decenters the supposed center of Christianity, which could be viewed as Rome at that time, where the first disciples and the first Christian community were situated, and peripheries like Corinth and Galatia, where new churches were arising. Paul’s concern for Christian siblings who are poor is an everlasting model and guide for us as we strive to continually become Christian along with our brothers and sisters across the world.

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