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Benefaction Today?

John Coleby

Introduction

Benefaction, philanthropy and volunteering are significant activities of civil society. One could be forgiven for making the assumption that the roots for such activities are derived from a Judaeo-Christian value base; but, in fact, all the major religions place an emphasis on charitable giving.

People become benefactors and donate to charities and volunteer for different reasons both from within and without faith (i.e. secular) communities, particularly in the United Kingdom. I shall compare and contrast its activities and motivations. I am writing this essay from the perspective of a Catholic-inspired community practitioner – someone who is motivated by my own faith, inspired by the Gospels, Catholic Social Teaching and my lived experience as a leader, social worker, volunteer and someone who gives to charity. In conclusion, I shall attempt to identify the difference between contemporary faith-based and secular benefaction.

What is benefaction?

The word benefaction comes from the Latin *bene*, meaning ‘well’, and *facere*, ‘to do’ – it is the act of doing good.¹ Philanthropy, a synonym of benefaction, is the desire to promote the welfare of others, expressed especially by the generous donation of money to good causes. Other synonyms include almsgiving, offering, gift, favour, kindness, philanthropy, oblation, volunteering in kind.

On the subject of human nature, biologists say that babies are innately sociable and helpful to others. Of course, every animal must to some extent be selfish to survive, but the biologists see in humans a natural willingness to help.² Christians and Jews

¹ *Collins English Dictionary*, online (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/benefaction>, accessed December 2017).

² Nicholas Wade, ‘We May Be Born with an Urge to Help’, *New York Times*, 30 November 2009 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/science/01human.html?mcubz=0>, accessed December 2017).

say that our belief that we are created in God's image (Gen 1.27) shapes how we see God, the world and one another. It provides a theological foundation for ethics and engagement.

However, benefaction is now a global industry and there are a number of world renowned, super-rich 'benefactors' or philanthropists. Among them are Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Mark Zuckerberg, Margaret Cargill and Chris Hohn. They divest their wealth through their foundations and charitable trusts, giving to their causes and the things they believe in. In contrast to the global super-rich, there are thousands of people in the UK who give time and money to a wide range of causes. Other examples of benefaction are volunteering and participation in social action according to the annual giving report of the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF).³ The Community Life survey – part of the Big Society initiative – conducted on behalf of the Cabinet Office includes volunteering as well as financial giving among its indicators of community life.⁴ I shall follow its lead in including these as examples of benefaction.

An overview of benefaction in the UK

According to the Charity Commission, there are over 167,000 registered charities in the UK with an income of approximately £74.7 billion.⁵ The breadth of special interest causes they support and the scope of their activities is hugely impressive. Some provide services or activities; some distribute funds to other charities and groups. Among the things they are dedicated to are meeting social, cultural and spiritual needs; campaigning for change in legislation and policy; sport; education, training and work reparation; medical research, health and well-being; and animal welfare. They include religious institutions or foundations, that is, different churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, grant-making trusts and foundations, research trusts, schools, universities hospitals and schools. The Commission numbers do not include those groups and associations who are not required to register because their turnover is less than £5,000 per annum. If these numbers were included, the figure is probably more than 400,000.⁶

In 2014, approximately 23 million individual people in the UK gave between £10 and £19 billion in gifts to 'good causes'. The higher number includes individuals,

³ 'UK Giving 2014: An Overview of Charitable Giving in the UK during 2014', 2 (<http://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf-ukgiving2014>, accessed December 2017).

⁴ 'Community Life Survey 2014–2015: Statistical Analysis', 6–10 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/447010/Community_Life_Survey_2014-15_Bulletin.pdf, accessed December 2017); 'Community Life Survey 2016–2017', 3–4 (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/638534/Community_Life_Survey_-_Statistical_Release_2016-17_FINAL_v.2.pdf, accessed December 2017).

⁵ 'Charity Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2016–17', 4 (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/628747/Charity_Commission_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2016_17_web.pdf, accessed December 2017).

⁶ David Ainsworth, 'There are More Than Twice as Many Charities in the UK as You've Been Told' (<https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/voices/there-are-more-than-twice-as-many-charities-in-the-uk-as-you-ve-been-told.html>, accessed December 2017).

trusts and foundation gift aid and corporate giving.⁷ It appears that women are more generous than men, giving both more time and money: the statistics show that 63 per cent of women surveyed volunteer versus 53 per cent of men, and 48 per cent of women give money versus 43 per cent of men.⁸ Interestingly, the least well-off give a higher proportion of their income to charity than the wealthy, no matter what their age, class or beliefs.⁹

According to the data from CAF, the majority of 'benefactors', approximately 33 per cent, donate to medical research into life-long conditions and cancer – 30 per cent to children's causes, 25 per cent to hospitals, 21 per cent to animals, 20 per cent to overseas aid and 14 per cent to religious causes. The percentage discrepancies are accounted for because many people give to more than one cause.¹⁰

A comparison between the scope of benefaction and total income is striking. While the majority of people give to medical research, more money is given to religious causes, which accounts for 14 per cent of all benefaction. Medical research receives 13 per cent, children 12 per cent, hospitals 11 per cent and animals 7 per cent.¹¹

At this point, it is worth highlighting other types of benefaction that drive the industry. For example, corporate giving is the action of a for-profit company sharing some of its resources with a not-for-profit cause or charity. Typically, it includes financial resources and 'in kind' benefits such as volunteer time from its employees, strategic time or business development time. CAF, in its 2016 review of FTSE 100 companies, identified that a total of £2.1 billion was given through corporate giving in 2014 with almost all of the 100 companies reporting activity of this nature – this totals some 3 per cent of the total UK charitable sector.¹² Corporate social responsibility and social investment are other ways in which corporate bodies fund social enterprises or businesses set for social good.

Volunteering as benefaction

The UK government Community Life Survey identifies volunteering as formal, informal and employer-supported.¹³ *Formal* volunteering is where people participate in or support an activity in or on behalf of an organization or group. *Informal* volunteering is where an individual helps or supports another person who is not a family member. *Employer-supported* volunteering is where an employer facilitates or enables volunteering by its employees.

⁷ Cathy Pharoah, Keiran Goddard and Richard Jenkins, 'Giving Trends: Top 100 Family Foundations, 2015 Report', 3 (http://www.acf.org.uk/downloads/publications/Family_Foundation_Giving_Trends_2015_FINAL.pdf, accessed December 2017).

⁸ 'UK Giving 2014', 9.

⁹ Lucy Ward, 'Poor Give More Generously than the Rich', *The Guardian*, 21 December 2001 (<http://theguardian.com/society/2001/dec/21/voluntarysector.fundraising>, accessed February 2018).

¹⁰ 'UK Giving 2014', 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹² Charities Aid Foundation, 'Corporate Giving by the FTSE 100' (March 2016) (https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/1860a_caf_ftse100_report_web_hb_030316.pdf?sfvrsn=4, accessed February 2018).

¹³ 'Community Life Survey 2014–2015', 6.

The 2013 data from the Community Life Survey shows that 23.1 million people volunteer formally at least once a year. At least 15.2 million people volunteer at least once per month. (Volunteers are defined as those over fifteen years of age.)¹⁴

Contemporary Christian benefaction

While the above data provides insights into the scope and depth of philanthropy in the UK, it does not drill down into the detail of giving within and for specific communities. The following section will explore trends in giving in contemporary Christian benefaction, but it will also refer to Jewish and Muslim benefaction.

All the major religions link worship and belief with the requirement to be generous with time and money. The research about charitable giving and religion suggests that religious causes attract the largest proportion of donations compared with other causes.¹⁵ It also suggests people who give to religious causes also give substantially to non-religious causes. The amount of religious giving, however, is falling; this is likely to be due to the falling numbers of congregations.

In Judaism, *tzedakah* is the term that describes charitable giving. 'Doing' *tzedakah* is the act of providing for the poor in order to help restore the social balance. It is an act of justice rather than a paternalistic act of charity. Many Jews see *tzedakah* and its equivalent term for volunteering, *hitnadvoot*, as being connected with the concepts of generosity social action and giving freely. *Tikkun olam* means to mend the world and together with *tzedakah* and *hitnadvoot*, it articulates the work for social justice, which is imperative for social justice within and without Jewish communities.

As one of the five pillars of Islam, *zakat* is mandatory giving. All Muslims eligible to pay it must donate at least 2.5 per cent of their accumulated wealth for the benefit of the poor, destitute and others – classified as *mustahik*. It is one of the largest forms of wealth transfer to the poor in existence.¹⁶ Charitable giving beyond *zakat* or reaching out to one's neighbour is articulated by the term *sadaqah*, which is similar to the Hebrew word *tzedakah* and has connotations of justice as well as charity. In the UK, many millions of pounds are raised within Muslim communities particularly for international development.

Christianity also has a long history in relation to charitable giving. It finds its roots in the Old and New Testaments, specifically in the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving. Alms given in kindness and with mercy is considered as righteous and acceptable to God and, therefore, redeeming of sin (Dan. 4.27; Tob. 12.8; Mt. 10.24; Lk. 19.8-10). It is

¹⁴ 'Community Life Survey 2014–2015', 6.

¹⁵ David P. King, 'Faith and Giving', in *Achieving Excellent in Fundraising*, ed. Eugene R. Tempel, Timothy L. Seiler and Dwight Burlingame, 4th edn (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 145–52, esp. 142.

¹⁶ Zainulbahar Noor and Francine Pickup, 'Zakat Requires Muslims to Donate 2.5% of Their Wealth: Could This End Poverty?', *The Guardian*, 22 June 2017 (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/jun/22/zakat-requires-muslims-to-donate-25-of-their-wealth-could-this-end-poverty>, accessed February 2018).

easy to see how the cultural memory of almsgiving in Christian communities survives and is reinterpreted as a contemporary imperative.

The concept of the tithe or giving one-tenth of one's disposable income to the Church is seen as part of the commitment in some Christian communities. The concept of stewardship is also widely utilized, especially in North America, to give expression to the idea that all Christians are called to respond to the generosity of God using their wealth and talents to build the kingdom of God and a better world for the good of all people.

Some would say that the Roman Catholic (RC) Church has done more than any institution or movement to raise people out of poverty. Indeed, the kingdom of God for a Catholic is encountered through faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and living a life of service and good works. This is reflected in the range and depth of Catholic benefaction around the world both in terms of money and services for developing, marginalized and economically vulnerable communities.

Although it is not arranged as a single corporation, 'RC plc' is the biggest, wealthiest and most influential movement on the planet. It attracts many critics because of its actual and perceived wealth, its lack of transparency and various scandals. In spite of this, Catholics continue to give funds for the causes of the Church whose social justice programmes are provided without qualification to people of all faiths and none.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many UK Catholic-inspired charities were founded to meet the needs of the community and the general population. Services and support are not reserved for Catholics or Christians, and, in general, they are offered unconditionally. Historically, leaders of religious congregations or clergy inspired many services such as the Father Hudson Society in Birmingham and Nugent Care in Liverpool. Funds are raised from the lay benefaction and philanthropy through collections and appeals in parish communities. This continues to be a popular model for raising funds for good works.

However, a large proportion of the day-to-day financial giving within Catholic – as well as other Christian and faith communities – is for housekeeping purposes. For example, the maintenance and upkeep of buildings, salaries for clergy and lay employees, the central administration of a diocese and the functions it is required to support such as education and catechesis, Caritas, sick and retired clergy, and youth ministry. All Catholic dioceses in England and Wales have charitable status – as do all religious congregations – and, as such, they attract financial support in the form of donations and philanthropy from their membership.

The RC Diocese of Westminster receives £23 million per year in voluntary donations; and, by this measure, it is the wealthiest RC diocesan trust in the UK. In contrast, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) receives £41 million per year in donations for its work in the developing world. In Germany, the Diocese of Cologne published its full balance sheet in 2014, revealing a net worth of £3.35 billion.

In the UK, the Church Commissioners – the charitable body which manages the assets of the Church of England – has an estimated value of £8 billion. In the United States, the picture is similar. While much of the value attributed to the Church is accounted for in the appreciation of assets such property and buildings as well as investments, it all ultimately comes from the benefaction of lay people.

The Bakhita Initiative is a good example of successful philanthropic engagement by the Church leading to high-profile benefaction from high net worth donors, ordinary donors, organizations and groups as well trusts and foundations. In 2014, the initiative was established to fight modern slavery and human trafficking through promoting an international partnership between the Church, police and civil society. In the case of England and Wales, Cardinal Vincent Nicholls and Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe established an informal partnership to promote progressive policy developments and joint working at the local regional and international level.

This led to the establishment of the Santa Marta Group, best described as a standing conference of bishops and heads of national police forces to promote joint working. The Santa Marta Group reports to Pope Francis. Initial funding was provided by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; but substantial funds were acquired from trusts and high-value donors in order to drive and extend the membership worldwide and, therefore, influence the battle against modern slavery and human trafficking.

The second strand of the Bakhita Initiative in London was to establish a refuge for women escaping from slavery and trafficking, where the Metropolitan Police and the Church could work together to restore women damaged by their experiences – but also to collect intelligence to identify and bring to justice perpetrators as well as rescue further victims. In 2015, Caritas Westminster opened Bakhita House for trafficked women. In 2014, a campaign was launched to help fund the project for five years. In this field, there are minimal public funds available and Bakhita House's remit is to work with the most vulnerable who have no recourse to public funds. Through a variety of activities and awareness-raising events and appeals, new funds were raised for this work from a donor base made up of fifty individuals and including three trusts and foundations.

The second dimension of benefaction is volunteering or the giving of time and talent to the community for the common good. There is little specific research on volunteering in the Christian community – although in 2014, the Cinnamon Network carried out an audit of faith communities (including some mosques and synagogues) to form a national picture. The findings were drawn from an audit of over 2,000 communities. The sample represented a 47 per cent response rate. The average outcomes per community were 8 projects, 1656 beneficiaries, 4 paid staff, 66 volunteers, 3319 paid hours, 9988 volunteer hours and £111,000 in volunteer hours.¹⁷ The significance of the audit lies in the fact that it is the first time the collective contribution of faith communities for the common good has been articulated and quantified so clearly. The data serves as a standard for communities to work towards taking into consideration their size and resources.

Between 2012 and 2014, Caritas Westminster (the social action umbrella agency of the Diocese of Westminster) carried out a less ambitious survey of social action in its 215 communities. The survey identified a total of 960 individual projects at an average of four per community. Further work is being undertaken to identify numbers

¹⁷ Cinnamon Network, 'Cinnamon Faith Action Audit', 7 (<http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Final-National-Report.pdf>, accessed February 2018).

of volunteers and beneficiaries so that an accurate overview of volunteering and engagement can be maintained, grown and celebrated.

What motivates people to be philanthropists and benefactors?

It is fascinating to reflect on what motivates people to charitable giving and volunteering. Beth Breeze's research suggests that there is broad acceptance among donors that charitable giving should and is targeted at people who are needy. However, when she analysed the 'giving decisions' of her sample, she found there was a disconnect between how people thought about charitable giving and how they actually made decisions to give funds.¹⁸ As she writes,

[A]ll 60 interviewees were committed and methodical donors, yet their charitable decision-making did not appear to involve much precision, forethought or indeed afterthought . . . Despite popular beliefs that charitable giving should be directed primarily to those who are needy, donors often support organizations that promote their own preferences, that help people they feel some affinity with and that support causes which relate to their own life experiences.¹⁹

In short, Breeze's work suggests that charitable giving is largely supply driven and not demand-led. So in contrast to religious concepts of redemptive almsgiving, *tzedakah*, *zadak* and *sadaqah* are not means for the redistribution of wealth between rich and poor or a way of meeting the needs of those less well-off or marginalized but rather a means to reinforce a public identity and demonstrate success to the world.

Other research suggests there are three reasons why people give money to charity: altruism, impure altruism and non-altruism. The first is valuing good done by the charity alone; the second is deriving a feeling of self-worth or value because of the contribution; and the third is showing off to friends or competitors how wealthy a person might be.²⁰

Charles Harvey suggests that what drives entrepreneurs to give is their desire to see people help themselves. So, typically, when they give resources they give them with their expertise and connections.²¹ I believe none of the above is inconsistent with what motivates Christians to give. Christians do not live in an exclusive bubble. We know from Breeze's study on motivation that donors are less scientific and more intuitive

¹⁸ Beth Breeze, 'How Donors Choose Charities: The Role of Personal Taste and Experiences in Giving Decisions', *Voluntary Sector Review* 4.2 (2013): 165–83 (www.researchgate.net/publication/272147122, accessed February 2018).

¹⁹ Breeze, 'How Donors Choose Charities', 71, 81.

²⁰ Michael Sanders and Francesca Tamma, 'The Science behind Why People Give Money to Charity', *The Guardian*, 23 March 2015 (<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2015/mar/23/the-science-behind-why-people-give-money-to-charity>, accessed February 2018).

²¹ Charles Harvey, 'Why Entrepreneurs Like Bill Gates Become Philanthropists', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2014 (<http://theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2013/may/09/bill-gates-warren-buffet-philanthropic>, accessed February 2018).

when it comes to deciding which causes to give to. It is a reasonable assumption that a sample of Christian charitable givers would display the same traits. We also know that charitable giving and volunteering can be transformative. For example, the phrase from volunteers, 'I get more out than I put in' comes to mind. This has echoes of the Talmudic and biblical phrase, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev. 19.18; Mk 12.31). This volunteer reaction implies that this imperative of reaching out to one's neighbour is not only about respect for other people. It also suggests that it is inherently good for the self and therefore not purely altruistic in nature.

There is little research that directly examines the motivation for Christian benefaction. Some comparative work has been done in the United States on counting and measuring 'giving' in terms of numbers of donors and the amount they give compared with other denominations. In charitable giving, there appears to be an assumption that people give because they are Christian: in other words, there is an implicit imperative that Christians share their wealth precisely because they are Christian. In particular, the University of Notre Dame has published research on RC charitable giving within the United States.²² Researchers found that, while there was vast potential for increasing the charitable giving from an increasingly wealthy community, there were significant barriers to this. Their hypothesis lies in the assertion that Roman Catholics compartmentalize their wealth when it comes to their faith. This happens as a result of there being little explicit formation given in relation to the use of money and wealth in day-to-day Catholic thinking.²³ In addition, wealth insecurity has been identified as a psychological barrier holding back generosity. This is the idea that a donor questions whether they will have enough resources left to meet their own present and future needs. The concept of comfortable guilt – where people feel they have done enough can also be seen as a challenge to philanthropy.

While there is a re-emerging emphasis on stewardship and tithing, it is not considered as an essential element of living the faith as Roman Catholic. This is of concern because, although religious giving both in the UK and the United States attracts the largest share of charitable giving overall, it is going down in value, and until the connection can be made, this trend is likely to continue given the competition from other causes and the effects of increasing secularization.

Notwithstanding the ambiguities with regard to charitable giving by Christians and non-Christians alike, the RC Church has some very clear teachings on the use of money, alms and the universal rights of all people to have access to 'goods' which help them fulfil their potential.²⁴ This includes the centrality of the poor in the mission of the Church and the requirement to respond to their needs in charity and justice.²⁵ The social doctrine of the Church is not for nothing referred to as its 'best kept secret'.

²² Brian Starks and Christian Smith, *Unleashing Catholic Generosity: Explaining the Catholic Giving Gap in the United States* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2011) (https://icl.nd.edu/assets/96494/unleashing_catholic_generosity.pdf%22%3Eunleashing_catholic_generosity.pdf, accessed February 2018).

²³ Starks and Smith, 'Unleashing Catholic Generosity', Executive Summary (5).

²⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, new edn (London: Continuum, 2005), 86.

²⁵ Pontifical Council, *Compendium*, 91, 92.

In my mind, this further highlights the disconnection referred to by the work of the University of Notre Dame. Does the disconnection extend to service and volunteering? The answer is probably yes.

Mathew Kelly, in his book *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, speaks about the 7 per cent of people who do 'everything'. His four signs are prayer, study, generosity and evangelization. Charitable giving and service overlap with generosity and evangelization. His theory is that the 7 per cent becomes 8 per cent, or even 10 per cent, and this is transformational. He also adds that the happiest people he knows are the most generous with their time and money.²⁶ The Church's teaching on benefaction, service and the common good is derived from the ultimate gift to humankind from God of his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the exemplar for all Christians. The imperative for Christians is to share in the eucharist and to love one another. The implications of Jesus's washing of feet (Jn 13.1-17) are that to live an authentic Christian life, love, service and generosity are also a perquisite to living.

For Christians, there is plenty of doctrine that encourages generosity and service. The assumption that Christians become benefactors because they are Christians has some validity, but it is clear that by no means all worshipping Christians are generous or are actively volunteering in service of the community. It seems reasonable to assume Christians are also liable to operate using Breeze's heuristic principles.²⁷

Conclusion

Benefaction in the UK and North America is alive and well. Religious causes including day-to-day housekeeping continue to attract the largest proportion of society's charitable giving. Big projects such as Caritas's Bakhita House and disaster appeals capture the need to respond by communities and individuals to both give money and time. However, this is in decline in both the UK and North America, and its efficacy is profoundly affected by the media cycle which moves on quickly.

It is not always possible to disentangle why people give money or volunteer for a particular cause. However, it is likely that they use the measures of personal connection, a notable patron or know someone in the receiving charity, as internal guidelines for giving. Alternatively, as one major Catholic donor said to me, 'I have been very lucky and I am very thankful so I want to give something back.'

I also believe that people want to give to successful causes and projects. For the wealthy, this is especially important, as this is means to extend oneself by gaining community recognition. The RC Church and other faith groups have clear teachings on charity, justice and wealth creation. While large numbers of people within these groups, especially the Catholic Church, are generous, there appears to be a disconnection between their motivations to give and the depth of their understanding of Catholic social teaching. I believe that it is this phenomenon which may account for the reduction in charitable giving to church and religious causes.

²⁶ Matthew Kelly, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic* (Hebron: Beacon, 2012), 109.

²⁷ Breeze, 'How Donors Choose Charities', 9.