

## MUSIC and FAITH

# Giving to God as a Gift of God

By Benjamin Ho

“WE are short of money, please give generously”. This is a phrase that we hear very often in our daily lives, especially in an age where fundraising has become a million-dollar industry by itself. Universities, charities and non-profit organizations frequently exhort their members to contribute – whether in cash or in kind – and in turn, to perform a good deed that will benefit the larger society.

Within Christian or church circles, the call to give generously can be a rather challenging experience – both from the perspective of the recipient and the giver. Some organizations, for fear of being accused of being “unspiritual”, chose to skirt this issue entirely, preferring to rely on their “faithful followers” to contribute financially. Others have no qualms utilizing or sorts of corporate marketing strategies to cast their nets as wide as possible, in the hope of deepening their coffers without questioning whether their actions are in line with Scriptural principles.

As a ministry that is devoted to the promotion of church music in order to “glorify God and edify men”, Hallelujah Oratorio Society has come a long way since its inception in 1977. As the scope and significance of our choral ministry expands, it is natural that our financial expenses also increase in tandem. This increased expenditure has resulted in a need for increased revenue to sustain the long-term viability and operations of the choral ministry, especially being based in a country like Singapore where prices of everything is going up.

From the vantage point of a choral member who sees the value of church music as a platform for spiritual witness, there are several important principles that need to be emphasized (or perhaps re-emphasized):

### 1) Giving to God as primarily a Gift of God

Faith, if we understand it rightly, is the acceptance of being accepted by God, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century German theologian Paul Tillich puts it. God takes the initiative to call us to his own and we simply come empty-handed to receive his grace. In other words, all that we receive – our very lives and possessions – are a gift from God. John Piper puts it well in writing, “[God] guards us from the mindset of a debtor by reminding us that all our Christian labor *for* Him is a gift *from* Him (Rom 11:35-36; 15:18) and therefore cannot be conceived as payment of a debt.”<sup>1</sup> We do not repay God back for what He has given us, but instead give to God – in humility and in faith – with the expectation that God will continue to “meet all [our] needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

### 2) God’s Provision for His Own

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, 2003, p.35.

Next, we need to remember that God will certainly provide for His own ministry and will not allow the glory of his Name to be diminished – whether through our poverty or our abundance. As one Jewish proverb puts it well, “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:8-9). We ought not to worry that the church – or for that matter, our choral organization – will crumble if we do not contribute financially as if these are dependent upon our tithes and offerings. No way! On the contrary, we give because we see the high privilege of partaking in God’s redemptive plan in our world and we are confident that “he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

### 3) God is the Lord of All

Through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, God has proclaimed that “Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things My hand has made and all those things exist.” (Isaiah 66:1-2a) The God that we worship is not a God who lacks anything, but He is the Lord of all creation and who is lacking nothing. Those that God looks on in favor however are “those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my Word.” (2b). Indeed, God searches the attitudes behind our giving and not just at our abilities to give. Like the story of the poor widow who put in two copper coins into the treasury, but was praised by Jesus for having “put in all the livelihood that she had” as opposed to those who gave “out of their abundance” (Luke 21:4), our giving ought to be both cheerful and sacrificial, while recognizing that God – who is the Lord of All – will certainly provide us our daily manna.

### 4) What is my Calling?

One crucial question that we need to ask of ourselves is, “what is my calling”, which is linked to what ultimately gives us meaning and purpose in our lives, without which we are merely being dragged along by the wind to follow the latest trends or personalities. The 19<sup>th</sup> century American evangelist Dwight L. Moody was quoted as saying, “Blessed are the money raisers, for in heaven they shall stand next to the martyrs.” The fact that Moody had fundraisers standing next to the martyrs suggests that he knew of the hardship associated with the work that needed to be done, and of the rich blessings to come. If this is indeed what we are called to do, in joyful support of God’s plan of making His Name known to all mankind, then surely no amount of toiling and hardwork is too much for us to bear. To be called to Christ, to be His ambassadors (whether in chains or in high places), and to carry our Cross and follow Him is the grand purpose of our lives on earth. Let us then, as the Apostle Paul exhorts, to “fight the good fight of faith, laying hold on to eternal life, to which you were also called..” (1 Timothy 6:12).

This is part one of a two-part series. Part Two will touch on scriptural principles concerning how organizations ought to go about the work of fund-raising.