

Towards a Theology of Compassion: Lessons from Relief Efforts for Those Affected by the War in Ukraine

Thomas Sears

Thomas Sears serves as the Director of Global Outreach for the TCM International Institute, based in Indianapolis, USA, and is a PhD student at the University of Bucharest.

tom@tcmi.org

Abstract

The war in Ukraine ignited a significant response financially for relief efforts in and around Ukraine. The motivation behind the donations for the Ukraine Relief Fund established by the TCM International Institute serve as the specific case study for the findings outlined in this article. Utilising Oliver Davies' ontological framework of compassion, the article explores some of the hidden complexities of financial stewardship in the modern world. It also considers the key factors of compassion outlined in Davies' conceptual framework in engagement with the research results. This study provides considerations for readers as they pursue a more meaningful theology of compassion when compelled to respond and participate financially to relief efforts during times of international crisis.

Keywords

Compassion; Ukraine; practical theology; financial giving

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked the beginning of what the world would soon recognise as the largest humanitarian crisis of displaced people since World War Two.¹ This conflict sparked a massive response, financially, physically, and spiritually, to support the relief efforts in Ukraine and the surrounding countries. According to a survey conducted by the United States's largest grant-making organisation Fidelity Charitable, one out of every four Americans who were aware of this crisis contributed financially either

¹ UNHCR, 'Ukraine-Fastest Growing Refugee Crisis in Europe Since WWII', *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2022 <<https://www.unhcr.org/hk/en/73141-ukraine-fastest-growing-refugee-crisis-in-europe-since-wwii.html>> [accessed 25 January 2024].

to a relief organisation, directly to a Ukrainian family, or a Ukrainian business or project in support of Ukraine.²

TCM International Institute (TCM)³ is one such organisation that received a significant number of financial contributions in March and April of 2022 for the relief efforts in and around Ukraine. TCM is a Christian graduate-level theological training institution providing degrees in practical theology and organisational leadership. TCM has a long history of working in Eastern Europe, first as a benevolent ministry providing Bibles, clothing, and medicine, before transitioning to an educational institution in the early 1990s. Individuals from a variety of evangelical denominations and independent churches have become TCM students and/or financial supporters of the ministry over the years. Because of TCM's history in Eastern Europe and the number of students, graduates, and representatives in Ukraine, it is not surprising that many of these supporters from the West looked to TCM as a trusted 'door' through which to allocate financial gifts for relief efforts.

Even though TCM's current mission is focused on education, the number of supporters of the ministry who desired to help with the relief efforts led TCM to establish the *Ukraine Relief Fund*. Money received designated to this fund would not be utilised for TCM's educational activities but would flow *through* the organisation to be implemented directly to relief efforts among TCM's constituencies working in and around Ukraine. TCM's Spring Report included an article written by David Wright, TCM's Vice President of Ministry Services, detailing the purpose and impact of this fund. These relief efforts included, but were not limited to, providing food and medicine, transportation, financial assistance to churches and pastors coordinating their own relief activities, and providing what the organisation called

² Engine Group, an independent research firm, conducted a research study on behalf of Fidelity Charitable concerning responses to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion. 1006 adults in the United States were surveyed on 9 March 2022. Fidelity Charitable posted the findings at 'How Americans Are Responding to the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis', *Fidelity Charitable*, 2022 <<https://www.fidelitycharitable.org/insights/how-americans-are-responding-to-ukraine-humanitarian-crisis.html>> [accessed 22 January 2024].

³ TCM is based in Indianapolis, USA and utilises a variety of distance learning methods in over 20 countries around the world. See <www.tcmi.edu>.

‘safe nights’ for Ukrainians in transit to safer locations outside of the warzone.⁴

In a private interview with David Wright about the establishment of this project, Mr. Wright explained that when TCM began communicating this opportunity to its support base (primarily in the United States), the financial response was overwhelming and led to the establishment of TCM’s largest benevolent fund in the history of the organisation. Ironically, TCM expended minimal effort to raise funds for this need. Only a few newsletters and emails describing the purpose and potential impact of the fund were sent to TCM’s mailing list during this short window of time.⁵ According to Wright, TCM’s communications *had* to be focused on Ukraine for a better part of two months since that was what everyone was asking about. Wright simply labelled TCM’s response a ‘faithful organic result to a historic tragedy’.⁶ What motivated these donors to give toward this effort and why did they choose to give through TCM’s Ukraine Relief Fund and not through another organisation or person? What are the various complexities of benevolent giving in the modern age that one should consider? And what can other churches, individuals, and non-profit organisations learn about financial benevolent giving in the process?

On a journey to answer these questions, all 800-plus donors who contributed to the TCM Ukraine Relief Fund received an online survey focused on the motivation for contributing to the relief effort.⁷ These survey respondents consisted of churches and individuals from a variety of locations across the United States and Europe. The first portion of this ten-question survey inquired about the donors’ relationship to TCM

⁴ David Wright, ‘Joyful in Hope, Patient in Affliction, Faithful in Prayer’, *The TCM Report*, no. 2 (2022) <<https://www.tcmi.org/tcm-report>> (p.3).

⁵ According to TCM’s Director of Operations, TCM only published seven communication pieces that focused specifically on TCM’s relief efforts for the war in Ukraine.

⁶ The private interview with David Wright was conducted on 11 January 2024, at the TCM home office in Indianapolis, Indiana. Notes were taken from the interview in the author’s personal notebook and kept for the writing process.

⁷ The survey consisted of ten questions and was administered electronically using Google Forms through a link in an email to each donor. The survey was conducted in January 2024 and the data was stored on a password protected storage drive until the completion of the research and publication of this article.

and how connected they are to other relief efforts in Ukraine. Then the remainder of the survey allowed the respondents to explain the motivation and reasoning behind their financial contribution. The response rate for the online survey was 14 percent, allowing for averages and themes to be created from the responses. The respondents had the opportunity to indicate their willingness for follow-up questions to be asked, which allowed the methodology of this research to then extend to telephone interviews when more detailed information was desired. These interviews allowed the researcher to press further into the theological foundations motivating the donors' decisions to give.⁸

The works of Oliver Davies on the topic of the theology of compassion became a key dialogue partner for this task. His work, most notably found in his foundational book, *The Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition*, established a starting framework from which to consider the data from the survey.⁹ In addition to Davies, several other voices from other parts of the globe were included to attempt to uncover any hidden cultural nuances to what was already a cross-cultural act of financial benevolence.

When considering the distance between the majority of donors to the Ukraine Relief Fund and the in-person relief work in Eastern Europe, the focus of much theological consideration may fall more easily on the compassionate acts of pastors and relief workers 'on the ground'. This article places focus on the potentially overshadowed act of compassion of the donors who sacrificed (at least to some degree) through the giving of finances to support such benevolent work. The results of the survey and interviews with these donors were triangulated with Davies' ontological framework of compassion. The purpose of this article is not to arrive at definitive answers of how to measure the metaphysical impact of such acts of compassion. Rather, the purpose is two-fold: to uncover some of the hidden complexities of financial

⁸ These telephone interviews were also conducted in January 2024. They were not recorded, but notes were taken in the researcher's personal notebook in order to adequately quote and refer back to specific remarks from each individual or church leader interviewed. Names are coded in this article for the privacy of the respondents. Notes from these interviews will be referenced as 'Interview Results, January 2024'.

⁹ Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

stewardship in the modern world, and to explore the application of Davies' theology to the specific act of financial giving as it relates to the act of compassion.

Oliver Davies' Theological Framework of Compassion

Before Oliver Davies embarked on the task of defining his theology of compassion, he found it necessary to establish a 'new way of considering ontology'.¹⁰ He concluded that the act of compassion in and of itself allows for a more fulfilled definition of ontology first seen through the God of the Israelites and later manifested through Jesus Christ. He sought a renewed concept of ontology, not by restoring it to its purest form, but by proposing a new narrative that is hospitable to the *other*.¹¹

Davies utilises several key biblical texts to make the case for the importance of his metaphysical overtones toward the concept of compassion. First, he explores the self-identification of God in Exodus when God speaks to Moses at the burning bush and states 'I am who [I] am'.¹² In this scene, God 'chose to locate his people within the moral order' founded in the narrative context of exile and liberation and sets the stage for humans to participate in a similar essence of being through compassion.¹³

Davies continued to position the act of compassion against the definition of ontology by explaining that one cannot truly live out one's God-given identity if he or she does not interact with the *other* and feel the pain of others.¹⁴ Then, what distinguishes compassion from simply empathy is the progression from sharing in one another's pain and moving to prayerful action. In other words, a person becomes more of a person when their suffering moves them to action. Therefore, 'If

¹⁰ See the opening chapter and entire section dedicated to reworking ontology with the emphasis of *Kenosis* — a self-emptying referred to in Phil 2:6–11 — in Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, pp. 1–45.

¹¹ C. C. Pecknold, 'Review of *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition*, by O. Davies', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 54, no. 1 (2003), 445–448 (p. 445).

¹² Exodus 3:14.

¹³ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 199.

¹⁴ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 20.

intersubjectivity is the interweaving of self and other, then its most intensive form is compassion.¹⁵

Paul Fiddes utilised a similar framework when identifying one's participation in the triune God. In his book, *Participating in God*, he sought to establish a balance between person and personage, and independence and dependence.¹⁶ He challenged the notion of subsistent relations and challenged his readers to consider that there is no 'person at the end of the relations' of the Trinity but that the 'persons' *are* the relations. This idea connects Fiddes's relational participation with ontology.¹⁷ Similar to the way Fiddes's description of this relational 'dance' of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit provides new ways of speaking about the essence of the Trinity, Davies too claims that 'an analysis of the intentionality of compassion *gives access* to the very structure of consciousness itself, and thus provides a resource for articulating a new language of being'.¹⁸

Davies portrays an omnipotent God who is also compassionate. Theologians have struggled to rectify these seemingly divergent characteristics of God with the immutability of God.¹⁹ It did not take long for Davies to introduce a Christological perspective into the discussion and illustrate how sending Jesus into the world formed the climax of God's compassion and rectified this challenge. Davies unpacks the theology of *kenosis* from Philippians 2:5–11 as a concept that climaxed in the complete outpouring of Jesus's sacrificial atonement accomplished on the cross.²⁰

The New Testament is filled with examples of Jesus's compassion. From his miracles extended to the lame, the lost, and the helpless, to the sacrifice on the hill of Golgotha, Jesus manifested compassion through word and deed. Davies demonstrates that the sending of Jesus is the prime example of how the love of God is so

¹⁵ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. xix.

¹⁶ Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 28.

¹⁷ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, p. 34.

¹⁸ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 20. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹ For example, reference the discussion in John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), p. 429.

²⁰ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 248.

‘other-centred’ that Jesus meets even the worst of sinners and provides a way for them to enter perfect communion with himself.²¹ Jesus perfectly embodied the emotional empathy required for the first part of Davies’ construction of compassion *and* he executed the needed action as required for the second part, as humanity fully received the outpouring of God’s divine love.²²

Oliver Davies’ language of compassion is also connected to Paul Fiddes’ theology of the Trinity through the similar language of participation. Comparable to the way Fiddes describes the ontology of God through self-giving relationship, Davies communicates the coherence of self and other in God, not simply as a metaphor or illustration but as a reality in which one participates.²³ For, by the Spirit, God’s human creatures participate in the Trinitarian dance of divine communication through unity with Jesus. As Jesus said in his prayer for all believers, ‘that all of them [believers] may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’²⁴

Just as Jesus encouraged and modelled compassion, Christian leaders have the ability and platform to model and shepherd their followers or congregants to this type of participation through benevolent, financial compassion when times of crisis arise on the other side of the globe. The following analysis of the research results will consider how this type of compassion correlates with the ontological nuances of Davies’ theological framework.

Research Results

The first key finding that surfaced from the survey displayed that the majority of individuals gave to the TCM Ukraine Relief Fund because of an *emotional sense of compassion* toward the Ukrainians who were

²¹ See, as examples, Rom 5:1–2; 2 Cor 5:21; and 1 John 1:3.

²² See the section on ‘Redemptive-Historical Development of Compassion’ as laid out in Mike Biggs, ‘A Biblical Theology of Compassion’ (master’s paper, Union School of Theology, Bridgend Wales, 2019), p. 22.

²³ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 168.

²⁴ John 16:21.

displaced by the war.²⁵ Responses such as ‘I imagined myself fleeing the country’; ‘I had empathy for people whose lives were suddenly upended through no fault of their own’; and even, ‘We lived during World War Two and saw what happens to the people when dictators become rulers’, all indicated their emotional and compassionate response.²⁶

The survey indicated that having a personal connection to someone in Ukraine or having another connection in some way was not a strong correlation with the reasons why respondents chose to give financially. Only 24 percent of donors had a personal connection to someone affected by the war. Several of these respondents recounted a trip they had taken with TCM where they met Ukrainian Christians studying for ministry. Others had visited Ukraine on their own or had supported another cause in Ukraine in the past.²⁷ What did change based on the respondents’ connection, however, was the dollar amounts given. Those who had a personal connection gave 38 percent more, on average, compared to those who had no personal connection.²⁸ Not surprisingly, the frequency of the gifts given by those with a personal connection to Ukraine was also higher.

When questioned further about the motivation behind their financial gifts, the majority of respondents spoke in terms of having a sense of ‘*moral obligation*’ or ‘*Christian duty*’. Answers given included, ‘People *must* be helped in this war’; and ‘I’m blessed to live where there is no fighting and to have resources’.²⁹ One church leader seemingly struggled to find the words to answer the question so simply stated, ‘It’s just what Christians do.’³⁰

²⁵ Some responses indicated a sense of guilt connected to their emotional response, such as this respondent’s answer: ‘I owned a classic car that I didn’t need to get by in my family’s everyday life. And I considered the basic human needs of families in Ukraine displaced by the conflict. I was not comfortable having that car when I knew others could benefit much more from its value’ (Survey results, January 2024).

²⁶ Survey results, January 2024.

²⁷ Survey results, January 2024.

²⁸ Those with a personal connection gave 1.63 gifts on average, while those who did not on average gave 1.49 gifts.

²⁹ Survey results, January 2024.

³⁰ Interview results, January 2024.

The survey also asked about the specific reason why the donors gave financial contributions to TCM rather than to other organisations or groups who were aiding with relief efforts in and around Ukraine. The respondents' answers led to the third key finding from the survey: individuals financially gave to the TCM Ukraine Relief Fund as a rule because of their *relational trust* with the organisation. Respondents displayed evidence of this by stating such things as, 'We have seen how TCM has used its resources in the past and trust it to use our gifts wisely.'³¹ Some identified their personal connection with TCM and even named specific individuals on the staff whom they trusted to utilise the funds effectively. Others indicated their indirect trust by stating that they trusted their pastor, and their pastor recommended that they give to TCM. For 53 percent of these individuals, TCM would be the only organisation they supported for Ukraine relief work during this time. Out of the remaining 47 percent, 11 percent gave to their church in support of Ukraine and 36 percent financially supported other organisations for similar causes in addition to their gift(s) to TCM's Ukraine Relief Fund.

The following sections consider these findings against the backdrop of Oliver Davies' theological framework of compassion. The hope is for readers to then utilise this exploration to expand their considerations of how to steward their own financial donations effectively through the complex layers of benevolence towards a meaningful theology of compassion and help others do the same.

Navigating the Layered Influences of Compassion

The first finding showed that the majority of those who contributed financially to the Ukraine Relief Fund were compelled to give by an emotional sense of compassion. The emotional language found in the responses resembled the language Davies uses when establishing an empathetic posture toward a need. This is worthy of note because Davies connected emotional empathy directly to the next stage of compassion — action.³² Because the physical distance between most of

³¹ Survey results, January 2024.

³² Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. xix.

these donors and the actual events taking place in Europe kept them from observing the need in-person, what were the influences creating this empathy? Furthermore, was the empathy influenced by other less-visible forces such as fear or emotional manipulation, and if so, does that create an inauthentic empathy?

To begin navigating these layers of influence, this section will consider Jesus's teaching and example of compassion, focusing in on financial giving when possible. After all, Davies' theological model considers Jesus as the climax of God's compassion and many of the survey respondents even indicated Christ as a motivator behind their financial gifts. One survey respondent explicitly stated, 'We are followers of Christ, and he has urged us to be HIM in this world. One of the ways we do that is to give of our resources.'³³

We begin with Luke 4:18–19, commonly understood to be Jesus's self-declared purpose of ministry, where, in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus reads an ostensibly compassionate passage from the scroll of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.³⁴

The significance of Jesus connecting himself to the prophecy in Isaiah 61 is obvious enough due to the mention of the anointing of the Spirit. The passage in Isaiah also carries overtones of the Year of Jubilee. Jubilee was perhaps the most radical law of compassion in the Torah. The concept resisted forms of economic oppression by commanding the Israelites to forgive all debts and return ancestral lands to the rightful owners every fifty years.³⁵

Whether the Israelites actually practised the Year of Jubilee or not, the story of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth communicated that Jesus's mission on earth was founded on a biblical theology of compassion stretching as far back as the Law of Moses and was now

³³ Survey results, January 2024.

³⁴ Luke 4:18–19.

³⁵ Lev 25:8–55.

being ‘fulfilled in their hearing’.³⁶ Furthermore, Jesus’s teaching directed his listeners to consider that the new covenant Jesus was ushering in was redefining what everyone knew to be compassion. The well-known antitheses found in the Sermon on the Mount (‘You have heard that it was said...but I tell you...’) provides examples of Jesus challenging the preconceived understandings of compassion in the Law. Advocating what at first glance may seem an absurd gesture that if someone asks you to go one mile, go two miles instead,³⁷ illustrated that Jesus taught a way of compassionate living that pushed the boundaries of self-sacrifice. This alternative way of living accentuated Davies’ focus on kenosis and the self-emptying nature of Christ, further placing Jesus as the climax of God’s compassion for mankind.

The purpose of Jesus’s ministry, as indicated in this passage in Luke 4, set a precedent for Jesus’s compassion for those around him. Yet, Jesus’s followers also witnessed the limits to Jesus’s earthly compassion. For indeed, not everyone who encountered Jesus was healed of their maladies. Jesus, restrained by his humanity, was forced to align his miraculous acts of compassion with his limited physical strength *and* consider them alongside his purpose of being sent by the Father. Jim Harris reflected on this balance by stating that

Jesus, it appears, walked a fine line between doing sufficient signs to make his point, but not so many miracles as to have people follow him for the wrong reason. Had he been more generous with his miracles, surely fewer people would have abandoned him (after his ascension Jesus seemed to remain with only 120 close followers; Acts 1:15 and 2:1). Had he fed more people — he might have had more consistent followers and he might not have got crucified.³⁸

So, with this balance and limitations in mind, who received the miraculous acts of compassion and why? This article does not answer this question. It does, however, recognise the impact of exposure. In almost every case in the New Testament, the people Jesus healed came to him. The people Jesus fed were already around him. Stated conversely, Jesus seemingly did not go out looking for people to show compassion

³⁶ Luke 4:21.

³⁷ Matt 5:41.

³⁸ Jim Harris, ‘Intercultural Generosity in Christian Perspective: The “West” and Africa’, *Transformation*, 32, no. 4 (2015), 269–280 (p. 272).

towards. Rather, as in the example at the beginning of Matthew 8, the lepers and the sick came to him.³⁹ Jesus lived out a *reactionary* model of benevolence structured by (and limited to) his physical vicinity.

One of the questions in the survey inquired about similar influences of exposure and vicinity. The question indirectly acknowledged that the donor could have made a different choice and contributed to relief efforts closer to home. Taking Jesus's model of compassion literally may lead one to a more focused outpouring of time, money, or prayers to the needs in one's immediate vicinity. Yet, these donors chose to give to the Ukraine Relief Fund — a need halfway across the world.

One obvious variable that applies to this situation is the technological advancements deeply integrated into the everyday life of those who live in the twenty-first century. These advancements have essentially demolished such physical boundaries of exposure. A tragedy can occur on the other side of the globe, and if a person with the right tools communicates this tragedy, it can be viewed within seconds to anyone with access to the internet. Yet, most would probably agree that seeing something on the television is not the same as seeing it in person. Communication technology can extend across many boundaries (and the more advanced the tool, often the more boundaries it can cross) but it does not extend across them all. This article does not have the capacity to list all the various influences such as emotional manipulation, selective messaging, and other forms of skewing the message. But it does consider the cause and effect that if boundaries of exposure no longer exist in contemporary western societies (for all practical purposes, anyway), then the opportunities for compassionate financial giving become almost limitless. For individuals considering trends of giving in western societies, this leads to a new series of complex layers of influence on the compassion that Davies argues is key in connecting us to a renewed ontology more deeply connected to the image of God.

The data collected from the survey and the interviews also revealed several other complex layers of influence for readers to consider. First, the responses from the data collection illustrated that the

³⁹ Matt 8:2.

need in and around Ukraine (even though it was thousands of miles away from the majority of the donors) was so large and so overt that it was *as if* it were happening right in front of them.

Church Leader 1 (names coded for privacy purposes) admitted that the enormous attention that his congregants placed on the war in Ukraine in early 2022 caused him and his staff to pause and deeply consider the role of the church in this situation.⁴⁰ Similar to the way TCM leadership shifted the focus on communication to this topic because that is what people were concerned about, the respondent communicated that more than anything he has witnessed before, seemingly everyone just wanted to talk about the war in Ukraine for several weeks consecutively. ‘How can I help?’ was the most common question they received as a church. He and the other leaders at the church concluded that due to the sheer volume of the questions and concerns, the topic needed to be addressed from the stage and not just in the hallways of the church. Another church leader respondent said, ‘The need just seemed so big that it couldn’t be ignored.’⁴¹

It also became clear that because of the distance in geography, culture, and eventually time, more subtle layers of exposure surfaced that seemed to influence financial giving. For example, exposure to certain political ideologies seemed to influence an individual’s concern over the need. One church leader indicated that it seemed as if the majority of those who were most concerned about the conflict were those who grew up during the Cold War and were accustomed to viewing Russia as an oppressor, or were simply more aware of that part of the world.⁴² It should be noted that a myriad of other factors could have influenced these individuals’ and churches’ financial gifts to the Ukraine Relief Fund, such as the impact of the internal pressures of guilt and moral obligation, for example.⁴³

⁴⁰ Interview results, January 2024.

⁴¹ Survey results, January 2024.

⁴² Interview results, January 2024.

⁴³ In contrast to those survey respondents who indicated that their motivation stemmed from a sense of moral obligation, there were other respondents who gave answers solely based on their Spirit-led convictions. Answers like, ‘through the prompting of the Holy Spirit’, and ‘I was compelled by the love of Christ’, indicate motivations antithetical to obligation and guilt. Survey results, January 2023.

Psychologists such as Yongjiao Yang have written extensively on the psychological and social dynamics that influence philanthropic motivation for charitable giving, especially in highly shame-based cultures.⁴⁴ This article does not claim to even scratch the surface of the social and psychological influences of generosity and compassion, but only to recognise that they exist and undoubtedly affect the data. Yang's point still supports the fact that the influences are complex and multi-layered.

Even considering how these layers of exposure influence compassionate benevolent giving, one is undoubtedly still left to make choices of what to support, what not to support, and the level of contribution. Circling back to the example of Jesus, there were probably a considerable number of hungry and hurting people around him that he simply did not feed and did not heal. Considering the selectiveness of Jesus's miraculous signs and wonders leads one to pause and consider why. After all, the Bible never indicates that Jesus went on a fundraising trip to Rome, or anywhere else for that matter. The limitation of Christ's humanity should also be considered when confronting the reality of each person's own limited funds, knowledge, and energy for utilising the available finances for acts of compassionate benevolence.

It has been argued that the complex layers of exposure and other influences complicate the process of arriving *at* compassion. But the question of whether or not these influences affect the *purpose* or the *impact* of compassion as it relates to Davies' framework of the essence of being is yet to be answered. Using an extreme hypothetical example to emphasise the point, if the layers of influence in a communication of a given need were so corrupt and manipulative that the proposed need did not even exist and was just a façade, would a financial gift (or any other act of compassion) bring that donor into the communion and participation in God that Davies and Fiddes illustrate? After all, both empathy and action, the two key aspects of Davies' equation for kenotic

⁴⁴ Yongjiao Yang, 'Modernization and the Shifting Bases of Philanthropy? An Empirical Study on Motivations of Individual Giving Based on CLDS', *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 34, no. 6 (2023), 1146–1159 (p. 1156).

compassion, are there even if the financial gift did not arrive to aid the perceived need.

Regardless of where these questions lead, clearly the survey respondents in this study viewed their act of financial giving as an act of compassion and a way to fulfil God's mission in the world.⁴⁵ In addition, the church leaders interviewed identified the process as a tool in the transformational journey of discipleship that continually shapes us in the image of Christ.⁴⁶ Behind this confidence in these two statements, the consistent appearance of *trust* and *relationship* emerged from the survey. The last section of this article will deal with these two factors and include how Davies incorporated the principle of sacrifice as an additional key indicator within the act of compassion.

Trust, Relationship, and Sacrifice

This article focuses on how the specific stewardship of *money* relates to benevolent compassion. But it also recognises that the concept of stewardship certainly stretches far beyond these monetary examples. Regardless of the type of resource, the act of Christian giving (monetarily or otherwise) recognises God's ownership of everything in life.⁴⁷ Even through his parables, Jesus seemed to have indicated that emotional compassion needed to be balanced with practical and rational decisions.⁴⁸ Keeping this balance will remain a continual consideration for Christians seeking to emulate Christ. While one's rational (as opposed to emotional) financial stewardship can lead to strategic advances for the Gospel when given to the right people at the right time, Jesus also seemed to model the importance of immediate acts of compassion that did not afford the convenience of time. After all, Jesus never suggested that one only give to the *responsible* poor.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Survey results, January 2023.

⁴⁶ Interview results, January 2024.

⁴⁷ *Essential of Christian Practice*, ed. By Steve Burris (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1992), p. 126.

⁴⁸ John Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), p. 339.

⁴⁹ Klyne Snodgrass, 'Jesus and Money — No Place to Hide and No Easy Answers', *Word and World*, 30, no. 2 (2010), 135–143, (p. 142).

The second key finding from the survey indicated the important roles of *relationship* and *trust* and how they participate in the equation of committing to a financial gift for a benevolent cause. As already illustrated in the section above on research results, the respondents' answers were more unified in their answer to the question why they gave specifically to TCM and trusted TCM to distribute the funds for relief efforts. Continuing the theme of Jesus as the climax and appropriate model for these considerations, it is evident that Jesus spoke frequently about money and modelled a balance of immediate emotional compassion and rational thought and strategy.

Some Christ-followers have taken Jesus's model of financial poverty in the most literal sense and have sold everything and devoted themselves to a life of material poverty. Others, such as theologian Klyne Snodgrass, have concluded that Jesus's ostensibly harsh teachings towards finances are *confrontational hyperbole* not uncommon for a prophet to utilise for instruction and critique. Snodgrass asked the questions, 'If possessions are sold and given to the poor, are the poor under the same command to give them away? Is the command only the initial call to discipleship? Does divestiture only increase the number of the poor?'⁵⁰ Granted, the word 'poor' can carry religious connotations in addition to economic ones.⁵¹ These enigmatic topics remain important issues for Christ-followers to consider. Indeed, these literal examples are not unlike those of Jesus's disciples who left everything to follow him.⁵² Yet evidence in Acts and in Paul's letters indicates that the early church, in general, did not apply Jesus's words literally. This leaves the simple question, 'How do I honour God with the finances I have?'

So far, these considerations have only been applied at the individual level. What role does the institutional church play in these forms of financial giving? The research conducted for this article indicated that a significant number of church leaders felt that they played some role, since 10 percent of the gifts given to TCM (and a

⁵⁰ Snodgrass, 'Jesus and Money', p. 143.

⁵¹ Snodgrass, 'Jesus and Money', p. 138.

⁵² Examples found in Matt 4:18; Mark 1:16–20; and Luke 5:1–11.

larger percentage of the dollar amount) came from churches rather than individuals.

Several church leaders were contacted for this survey based on prior knowledge of their indirect involvement and not because their names appeared in the list of financial donors to the Ukraine Relief Fund. These church leaders indicated that they intentionally encouraged their congregants to give directly to organisations with whom they had a relationship and that they trusted; not because the church did not want to be involved, but because it was important to teach their members to give responsibly to benevolent causes without relying on the institutional aspects of the church.⁵³

Another church leader used the mission of his church to influence the answer to this question. The mission of this church is centred around the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, which make up two ‘arms’ of the church’s benevolent giving. Both arms influence the actual intake and distribution of financial gifts and steer the congregants into a lifestyle of giving outside of the church.⁵⁴ Within this ‘two-armed’ approach, the church utilises strategic principles and rational planning to steward finances to advance the Great Commission, while also activating the more immediate and flexible form of financial stewardship pointed toward the Great Commandment when opportunities of compassion arise in their more immediate vicinity. Furthermore, the church had integrated programmes filled with teaching and activities for the purpose of shepherding the congregants into imitating the love of Jesus holistically to those around them.

Considering these scenarios within Davies’ framework of compassion, facilitation of the act of compassion by a ‘gatekeeper’ (in this case the churches) adds another layer of complexity. As the gap in relationship between giver and receiver widens with each mediator involved in the transaction, the potential of diminishing the experience of empathy and sacrifice increases. Yet, the responses from this survey illustrate how the power of trust and relationship can overcome this distance.

⁵³ Interview results, January 2024.

⁵⁴ Interview results, January 2024.

One last factor will be considered that impacts the potential correlation of financial, benevolent giving with Davies' framework. Davies reflects on the idea of sacrifice and returns to the theological concept of *kenosis* as it relates to a renewed ontology. Theologians have connected the fact that compassion is always costly to someone.⁵⁵ Even when King David was given supplies for his altar gift to the Lord as instructed by the prophet Gad, David retorted with, 'No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.'⁵⁶ The Old Testament examples of animal sacrifices as sin coverings ultimately pointed to Jesus's sacrificial atonement. Considering this outpouring of Jesus's love, not only in the self-relating dance of the Trinity but in the love for other humans, confirms the already argued position that Jesus exemplified the climax of God's compassionate self-giving compassion.

Numerous popular writers have referenced the concept of sacrifice as a way in which God measures generosity.⁵⁷ Examples such as the Widows Mite and the Good Samaritan constitute two illustrations of this argument.⁵⁸ The concept of sacrifice is related to the topic of this article in a different manner. The argument Davies unfolds displays that the self, as it relates to his renewed ontology, undergoes a transformation through embracing its own kenotic nature by affirming the other through acts of sacrifice.⁵⁹ It is a progressive movement from 'existence' to 'being'.

In the specific cases of financial giving to the Ukraine Relief Fund, it was the trust and relationship these individuals and churches maintained in TCM that acted as a conduit for the donors' acts of compassion in response to need. As important as trust and relationship and the presence of a mediator may be for navigating the complex layers of exposure that surround issues of compassionate giving as outlined in the previous section, they can distract from the kenotic power of self-

⁵⁵ S. G. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia Press, 1977), p. 48.

⁵⁶ 2 Sam 24:24.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Chip Ingram, *The Genius of Generosity* (Alpharetta, GA: Generous Church, 2011), p. 71.

⁵⁸ See Luke 21:1–4 and Luke 10:29–37 respectively.

⁵⁹ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, p. 45.

giving that establishes the renewed sense of being and participation in the triune relationship of God.

Conclusion

Examining this specific case study of a group of Christians from the West giving to TCM's Ukraine Relief Fund revealed intricacies of benevolent giving as it relates to Christian acts of compassion. This article takes the key findings from this case study and repositions them within Oliver Davies' metaphysical framework, revealing how they relate to his renewed narrative of ontology.

The technologies of the twenty-first century have caused the boundaries of exposure to become more fluid and ambiguous. This creates difficult situations when balancing emotional response with rational strategy regarding financial giving. The results of the study have shown that the donors view their contributions as acts of compassion and utilise the trust and relationship they have with organisations like TCM to facilitate such gifts and to function as a 'bridge' to connect their finances to relief work in times of crisis.

Unfortunately, the tragic situation resulting from the war in Ukraine will not likely be the last emergency that Christians in the West will encounter, either personally or through more distant media connections. Even though financial giving could be easily overlooked as a practical act of compassion, the act of responding to those 'around' oneself through any compassionate act becomes a spiritual discipline. This discipline can contribute to the continual pursuit of Christlikeness and hold metaphysical significance through the self-giving sacrifice of the donor.

The aspect of sacrifice as outlined by Davies pointed toward the biblical paradox of how one can find life only through losing it. Church leaders and congregants alike, reconciled by God's compassion, will share in the more developing communicative harmony modelled by the Trinity, and most notably observed through the climax of God's compassion in Jesus Christ. Financial acts of stewardship and benevolent giving will continue to be an avenue for participating in the

life of God through acts of compassion. As church leaders and congregants alike navigate the complex layers of exposure to and influences on such financial giving in a modern world, the sacrificial acts of benevolent financial giving will undoubtedly contribute to ontological moorings of living as the image-bearers of God, modelling Christ's radical kenotic compassion.