

Wealth and Poverty in Luke's Gospel and Acts in Terms of Brewer's Analysis and its Challenge for Today's Church

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Abstract

In recent times, there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the issue of wealth and poverty. The article describes the Lukan theology of wealth and poverty in the Gospel of Luke and Acts in terms of Brewer's analysis and indicates its implications for today's Church and the individual Christian. In terms of Brewer's analysis, the Gospel of Luke focuses largely on the condition of the poor, the way that God views poverty, the attitudes, actions and teachings of Jesus relating to the poor, and his warnings regarding their abuse and neglect. Brewer's analysis of the Book of Acts reveals that Luke seeks to exemplify the theological principles found in his gospel in the circumstances and responses of the Early Church. When one applies the Lukan theological concepts *to the present day*, it can be concluded that the church has a particular obligation to acknowledge and address the problem of poverty effectively.

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

In recent years, numerous Bible scholars have debated the responsibility of the church towards the poor, and 'how that responsibility should affect the individual believer's economic policy ... The current economic crisis has encouraged interest in the Christian response to financial responsibility as well' (Brewer 2009:2).

Brewer (2009:2) maintains that 'The evidence of research supports the view that Luke does in fact possess a consistent theology regarding the poor in both his Gospel and in Acts based on the teachings of Christ'. Based on this evidence, this article examines Brewer's analysis of 'wealth and poverty in Luke's Gospel and Acts' and its implications for today's church. It presents 'an historical and exegetical overview of Luke's economic theology' (Brewer 2009:4) and its practical implications for today's church (and the individual Christian) regarding its moral obligation to the poor.

2. A Concise Contextual Analysis of the Rich and the Poor in Scripture

2.1. The generosity of wealthy followers of God in the Old Testament

Brewer (2009:5) claims that, 'Many significant biblical examples of wealthy followers of God can be found throughout Scripture'. For example, Davids (1992:703) indicates that 'Abraham, Solomon, and Job illustrate the connection between wealth and the blessing of God'. However, Davids adds the following regarding their generosity: 'Thus in Jewish tradition Abraham and Job were singled out as being wealthy persons who were righteous because they excelled in generosity' (p. 703). Re-emphasising this point, Pilgrim (1981:19) states: 'There is a

continuous tradition running throughout the Old Testament that regards possessions as a sign of God's favour ... Along with this, goes an emphasis upon their generosity and hospitality to friends and foes alike.'

2.2. God's instructions concerning the poor in Israel in the Old Testament

Brewer (2009:4) claims that to fully understand Luke's theology regarding the poor, it is important to study the concept of the poor in the Old Testament in terms of God's instructions. Myers et al. (1987:341) explain that 'God made special provisions for specific groups of poor people within the giving of the law'. These provisions are illustrated in the following scriptures:

- 'Do not deny justice to a poor person when he appears in court' (Exod 23:6, GNT)
- 'There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need, and so I command you to be generous to them' (Deut 15:11, GNT).

When God gave instructions regarding sacrifices, he bore in mind the plight of the poor: 'If you cannot afford a sheep or a goat, you shall bring to the LORD as the payment for your sin two doves or two pigeons...' (Lev 5:7, GNT).

Myers et al. (1987:341) further point out that 'The regulations regarding the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee were meant to keep any individual or group from oppressing another group.' God addressed the issue of poverty to Israel as a nation, rather than to individual people. He promised Israel that, if they obeyed his instructions, 'Not one of your people will be poor' (Deut 15:4-5, GNT).

2.3. The plight and status of the poor in the New Testament

Brewer states that in the first century, the 'vast majority of the population was considered of poor status from both an economic and religious standpoint'. There was a 'large gap between the religious elite and the "people of the land" living in poverty' (Brewer 2009:6).

Dauids (1992:703) indicates that the poor were frequently unable to observe the requirements of the Jewish Law, because of their dire poverty. Hence, Dauids concludes that the religious elite looked down upon them as being religiously poor. He says that 'While the Pharisees and wealthy classes often viewed the poor as religiously and spiritually poor, Jesus' sayings contrast the poor with the rich, instead of the greedy or wicked as in the Old Testament' (Dauids 1992:703).

3. Wealth and Poverty in Luke's Gospel

3.1. God's perception of the poor

3.1.1. *Luke 1:46–55: The magnificat*

Brewer (2009:6) describes how at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, Mary sings a beautiful song of thanksgiving to God, known as the Magnificat, after hearing that she would be the mother of the Messiah. Pilgrim (1981:79) adds that 'Mary praises God for choosing her as an instrument of blessing in her lowly estate.' She continues her song as follows: 'he has ... exalted those of humble estate' (v. 52, ESV) and 'he has filled the hungry with good things (v. 53, ESV)'. Hence, Brewer (2009:7) indicates that 'in the first chapter of Luke the reader is already given a clear indication through Mary's song that the poor are chosen of God and are promised His rewards'.

3.1.2. Luke 4:18–21: Jesus’ announcement in the synagogue in Nazareth

Brewer (2009:7) argues that one of the most significant passages, in which the poor are specifically mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, is Luke 4:18–21, where Jesus preaches in the synagogue in his hometown in Nazareth. He had just returned from being tempted in the desert for 40 days. While reading from the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1–2 and identifies himself as God’s Suffering Servant:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people (Luke 4:18–19; Isa 61:1–2, GNT).

Jesus then tells those listening, ‘This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read’ (v. 20, GNT). Davids (1992:706) claims that Jesus’ statement is the first indication that God gives priority to the poor in the message of the gospel. Furthermore, Hertig (1998:172) indicates that Jesus’ pronouncement ‘confirms His fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy’, when he says: ‘This holistic deliverance of the Messiah includes spiritual (v. 1), physical (vv. 3–4), socio-political (vv. 3–4), and psychological (v. 1b) dimensions. Jesus expresses and practises this holistic mission in Luke 4:18–19 and 7:20–23.’

Pilgrim (1981: 64–65) claims that the phrase ‘good news to the poor’ in Luke 4:18–19 could be understood as introducing the concept of the ‘poor’ in terms of the captives, blind, and oppressed.

Brewer indicates that 'Although this passage does not specifically address the economically poor, one can conclude that people burdened financially were of high priority in Jesus' message of freedom and deliverance' (2009:7).

3.2. Contrast between the rich and the poor

According to Brewer (2009:7), a good example of Jesus contrasting the rich and the poor can be found in the 'the Beatitudes' in Luke 6:20–24, where he encourages the poor by stating in verse 20 (ESV), 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'. By contrast, in 24 (ESV), he warns the rich as follows: 'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation'. In the light of these verses Brewer (2009:7) explains God's attitude towards the rich and the poor in Lukan theology as follows: 'Due to God's overarching love for all people, one cannot conclude that Christ despises the rich; however, one can see His displeasure with the oppression of those who base their status on riches and squander their wealth on personal gain.'

Frank Thielman (2005:42) concludes as follows: 'God's saving purposes involve, to some extent, an economic leveling so that the disparity between rich and poor is not as great among God's people as it is among those outside his people'.

In the book of Luke, Jesus seems to show a special interest in the poor. However, Brewer points out that the main purpose of Jesus is the salvation of both the rich and the poor:

Jesus expresses obvious concern for the salvation of the economically rich, as well as the poor ... Salvation through Christ is not dependent on the economic status of an individual. Giving to the poor and to the causes of Christ rather than living a life of greed

will accomplish Christ's purposes in significant ways (Brewer 2009:8).

Luke records a good example of the dangers of the rich, living a life of greed, in the 'parable of the rich fool' (Luke 12:16–21, GNT):

Then Jesus told them this parable: 'There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. He began to think to himself, I don't have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do,' he told himself; 'I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?' And Jesus concluded, 'This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight.'

Dauids (1992:705) says that 'This parable clearly reveals Jesus' assessment of greed. This "fool" had not given to the poor; this hindered him from becoming "rich towards God."' Instead, the rich man gathered wealth for himself.

Brewer (2009:8) describes Jesus' message to a Pharisee in Luke 14 as follows: 'Jesus, while at the home of a Pharisee, emphasises the importance of humbling oneself ... Jesus implores the host to invite the poor to dinner, rather than his "rich neighbours," who are fully capable of repayment' (vv. 12–14).

Jesus states, 'you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just' (v. 14, ESV). Jesus' statement clearly indicates that 'blessing the poor results in heavenly

blessings' (Brewer 2009:8). Pilgrim (1981:140) adds that the reward for showing (*agape*) love towards the poor is 'the eschatological reward of salvation and doing the will of God'.

3.3. Eschatological implications in Jesus' teachings regarding the poor

3.3.1. Luke 14:15–24: The parable of the great banquet

In Luke 14:15–24 Jesus tells the story 'There was once a man who was giving a great feast to which he invited many people' (v. 16, GNT). However, when it was time for the supper to be served, 'they all began, one after another, to make excuses' (v. 18, GNT), as to why they could not come. Pilgrim (1981:140) argues that all the excuses focus on matters relating to wealth, such as 'the purchase of a field, the purchase of an ox, and marriage'. Finally, the servants were ordered by the host to 'Hurry out to the streets and alleys of the town, and bring back the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame' (v. 21b, GNT). When these did not fill up the room, 'the master said to the servant "Go out to the country roads and lanes and make people come in, so that my house will be full"' (v. 22, GNT).

Brewer (2009:9) indicates that this parable shows a great concern for the poor and illustrates the obedience displayed by them. According to Pilgrim (1981:141), it appears that Luke's parable confirms that, while the rich reject the generous offer of God, 'the poor become grateful guests at the banquet, displaying the eschatological reversal of the poor and rich'. This parable shows that wealth could easily serve as a hindrance to the rich, since it could prevent them from receiving their heavenly reward and from entering the kingdom of God. As Pilgrim (1981:140) concludes,

This hindrance is created by selfish greed instead of unselfish, agape love that is essential to the gospel ... Thus the parable as a whole serves to warn the rich to accept God's invitation. And that means to invite the poor and maimed and blind and lame to their tables, lest God leave them out of the heavenly banquet.

3.3.2. Luke 16:19–31: The rich man and Lazarus

Brewer (2009:9) points out that in chapter 16, Luke provides 'another story that emphasises the importance of taking care of the poor'. Wiersbe (1992:186) notes that 'The rich man used his wealth only to please himself ... He did not use it to care for the poor and needy, not even the poor man begging at his very door.' According to Brewer (2009:9), 'When both die, the rich man finds eternal torment in hell while Lazarus resides in heaven at Abraham's side.' The rich man tries to beg Lazarus for water, 'but Abraham said, "Remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, while you are in pain"' (Luke 16:25, GNT). According to Brewer (2009:9), this narrative is one of the best examples in which Jesus emphasises the need to give to the poor and 'the difference one's generosity on earth makes in eternity'. Kim (1998:189) states that in the context of the passage, it is clear that 'the rich man does not deserve the torment in hell based on what he did on earth, but rather on what he failed to do.' During his lifetime, the rich man did not show love to God and his neighbour, as commanded in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. It can be concluded that this story makes it clear that 'the way in which one deals with worldly finances significantly impacts the afterlife' (Brewer 2009:9).

3.3.3. Luke 19:1–10: The story of Zacchaeus

In Luke 19:1–10 ‘while passing through Jericho, Jesus spots Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, perched in a tree—trying to get a good view of Jesus’ (Enter the Bible 2014). Jesus welcomes him, despite his crooked lifestyle and selfish greed. Brewer (2009:10) remarks that Zacchaeus shocks the crowd by announcing, ‘I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!’ (v. 8, NLT). Jesus responds by declaring, ‘Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost’ (vv. 9–10, NLT).

Shoemaker (192:188) concludes that, to a certain extent, Jesus connects salvation with the passion to give to the poor. However, Luke uses Zacchaeus as a good example of anyone who first experiences God's salvation, and then gives generously to the poor. Brewer (2009:10) argues that, if the ‘chief tax collector’ (v. 1) was willing to provide ‘for the needy, surely the wealthy elite could learn to generously care for others’.

4. The Church's Historical Response in The Book of Acts

The book of Acts is a follow-up of Luke's writing to Theophilus, as if he were writing a sequence of a story. The book is not a recipe book, but shares with us a number of principles that emerged within the Early Church based on their theology, their faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Regarding the book of Acts, Brewer (2009:10) comments as follows: ‘Luke not only focuses on concern for the poor in the teachings of Christ in his Gospel, but he continues this theme in Acts as well. Throughout Acts, one can see concern for the

poor exemplified in the Early Church and in the lifestyle of the apostles.’

In the next section, we shall take a closer look at some communal and individual examples presented in the book of Acts of those who showed concern for the poor within the faith community (the church), as they adhered to the principles that they had been taught by the apostles, including the apostle Paul.

4.1. Historical examples of communal benevolence commended

4.1.1. Acts 2:44–45: The fellowship of believers

Brewer (2009:10) claims that in the book of Acts, Luke tried to illustrate the ‘theological principles in his Gospel’ within the context of the Early Church. In this context (v. 42–43), the new faith community ‘devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer’. The outcome of their new-found faith in Jesus Christ was that the people would devote themselves in what today we would call liturgical activities: teaching or preaching, fellowship, Holy Communion, and prayer. Another outcome of their new-found faith in Christ, whether from the apostles’ teaching or from their fellowship, was that they shared their belongings; ‘selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need’ (Acts 2:45).

The giving to the poor stems from the teaching, and their fellowship was with one another. The sharing was amongst each other depending on the needs that occurred (Was this perhaps an in-house arrangement?).

4.1.2. Acts 3:1–10: Peter heals the crippled beggar

In this passage, not discussed by Brewer, Peter and John were confronted by 'a man crippled from birth', as he was sitting at the temple gate begging for money. In their response they told the man: 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk' (v. 6) and then they helped him up.

The principle here is that their giving was not limited to the giving of material goods; it also involved the sharing of the gospel and the ministry of healing with the people in need. Although this was at the temple gate, it was not directly part of the community of God, the church; it was a spontaneous act of love and caring of someone along the day's journey. Here, the giving extends to people outside the faith community—a beggar on the street. Wiersbe (1992:283) elaborates: 'Peter performed the miracle, not only to relieve the man's handicap and save his soul, but also to prove to the Jews that the Holy Spirit had come with promised blessings.'

4.1.3. Acts 4:32–37: The believers share their possessions

Brewer (2009:11) refers to another instance in which believers shared their possessions. As in the previous instance (Acts 2:44–45), it is again evident that their sharing was the consequence of what had happened in their lives: 'they prayed', 'they were all filled with the Holy Spirit', 'they spoke the word of God boldly', they 'were one of heart and mind', and 'they shared everything they had' (v. 31).

Marshall and Peterson (1998:487) indicate that the early Christians 'did not neglect the poor and needy'; they 'looked for ways to accommodate' the needy, 'including the selling of property'. They created a community with 'not a needy person among them' (Phillips 2007:12).

The sharing came as a result of what God was doing in their lives. Again, the emphasis is not only on the sharing of their material belongings, but also on the sharing of the Word of God and the unity that was developing among the faith community.

4.1.4. Acts 6:1: Care for the widows by the deacons

The needs among the widows in the local community were so great that the leaders had to develop a ministry to the poor, by people who would need to dedicate their time to visiting the poor, and to ensuring that they were treated justly. According to the Brewer (2009:11), ‘This story confirms that taking care of the needy was of utmost priority in the minds of the apostles’. In terms of church history, this was the establishment of the office of a deacon. The modern view of what a deacon is or should be, that is, his (or her) required role and responsibilities, is sometimes far removed from the requirements in this passage of scripture.

Kim (1998:246) claims that several passages in the book of Acts (6:1; 2:45; 4:35) confirm the existence of ‘a common fund of the Jerusalem community in Acts with the sole purpose of distributing money or food to the poor and widows’.

What we gain from this passage is the principle of developing ministries that would take care of a specific need within the congregation or within the local community.

4.1.5. Acts 11: 27–30: Help for the brothers in Judea

Brewer (2009:11) provides another example of ‘a communal understanding of benevolence’ as portrayed in the church at Antioch. The Early Church had been challenged by the news that a severe famine

was going to 'spread over the entire Roman world' (v. 28). The reaction of the Early Church was that 'the disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gifts to the elders by Barnabas and Saul' (v. 29–30). The church's response to the famine could be regarded 'as a form of almsgiving in which benevolence is provided from an institution with wealth towards an institution in need' (Kim 1998:221).

Being aware of an upcoming disaster, the church mobilised themselves to become involved in the possible needs of people, fellow-believers, who were going to be affected by the famine. In today's context, a disaster could easily be described in terms of a tsunami, tornado, or a war-stricken country!

4.1.6. Acts 20:35: help for the weak

Another significant verse, not discussed by Brewer, is Acts 20:35. As Paul was ending his ministry in Asia Minor (the area currently called Turkey), he highlighted the fact that he did not rely on their financial support, but was willing to work for his and his companions' needs. He also laid down a principle that believers should not only work to support themselves, but also to support the 'weak'. He reminded them and us of another principle that he had received from the Lord, namely, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (v. 35). In this regard, Wiersbe (1992:337) gives the following advice: 'Christian servants should seek to minister to others rather than having others minister to them'.

It is clear from this passage that this principle emphasises that the income from our work is not merely to support our own needs or to accumulate our own possessions, but it should be shared with the weak and those in need. God frequently blesses us when we care for the poor and needy people around us.

4.2. Historical examples of individual benevolence commended

4.2.1. *Acts 9:36: doing good and helping the poor*

Brewer (2009:12) includes some examples provided by Luke of individuals in the book of Acts who cared for the poor. Here, (in Acts 9:36) one disciple (Tabitha) is highlighted. Tabitha (Dorcas) was described as someone ‘who was always doing good and helping the poor’ (v. 36). In the context of the passage, readers are told that the widows showed Peter ‘the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them’ (v. 39). Kim (1998:219–220) speculates that Luke might have provided this story to emphasise the importance of helping the poor, since ‘Tabitha got her life back because of her good works and alms she had contributed towards the poor’.

The first principle that can be derived from this passage is that not all deeds of helping the poor need to be done in collaboration with the faith community. In this case, Tabitha as an individual, out of her own conviction, helped the widows in the local community. A second principle is that her helping had to do with the making of clothes for the widows. Helping does not have to involve the giving of money or food. In this case, she provided clothing. A third principle was her focus on the widows. There may have been other needs in her community, but she focused on the making of clothes for the widows.

4.2.2. *Acts 10:2, 4 and 31: Cornelius’ prayers and gifts to the poor*

Brewer (2009:12) refers to Cornelius, as another significant example (used by Luke) of an individual who demonstrated care for the poor. Cornelius was ‘a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment’ (v. 1). He and his family are described as ‘devout and God-fearing’ people (v. 2). It is further indicated that ‘he gave generously to those in

need and prayed to God regularly' (v. 2). According to Kim (1998:219–220), this verse is significant, because, when Cornelius received 'a vision from God, the angel told him that his prayers and gifts to the poor had "come up as a memorial offering before God."'

In the context of this passage, the prayers and the generous giving are the result of Cornelius' devout and God-fearing characteristic. This is confirmed by an angel (vv. 31)—his prayer was answered prayer, as a result of his generous giving to the poor. Does this mean that we can 'bribe' God by doing something for the poor? Not at all! The principle of giving to the poor lies embedded in the devout, God-fearing prayer life of Cornelius.

5. A Challenge to the Christian Church: Worthwhile Opportunities

5.1. Surrendering possessions

How should the Church 'respond to the idea of surrendering one's possessions'? Throughout the Bible, there are many examples 'in which heroes of God were those of high and wealthy status' (Brewer 2009:17). Generally, in the gospels possessions are identified 'as both necessary and good gifts of God' (Pilgrim 1981:124). However, in Luke 14:33 Jesus mentioned that the true disciple should be willing to give up all his possessions. Brewer (2009:17) elaborates: 'Luke's understanding of this concept seems to encourage an introspective look on the sacrifice made for the sake of Christ and how this affects one's own possessions.' This principle became very evident in the Early Church when believers sold their property and shared their belongings with those in need. This probably included the sharing of food, clothing, money, property, and so on. The surrendering of their possessions

depended on the need that confronted them and what they already owned.

5.2. Dangers of wealth

A second aspect highlighted by Brewer (2009:17) deals with the dangers of wealth in Luke's gospel. According to Pilgrim (1981:122), in Luke's writing the concepts of wealth and discipleship seem to conflict with each other. 'In the story of the Rich Ruler (Luke 18:24–30), the man becomes disheartened over the idea of giving up his wealth' (Brewer 2009:17). The outcome: 'Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God"' (vv. 24–25). Luke consistently reminds God's people of the danger of wealth. Hence, he frequently emphasises that it is important to guard one's heart against the spirit of Mammon: 'Christians must recognise the ease with which material temptations might overtake a person who finds dependence on his or her own ability regarding finances' (Brewer (2009:17).

When Simon the sorcerer (Acts 9) saw the miracles that God had performed through the apostles, he wanted to have the same gift (that is, to be filled with the Holy Spirit); he was even willing to pay for it. The assumption is that he wanted to make money from the 'gift'.

Although there may be dangers in wealth, we cannot conclude that acquiring wealth is completely ruled out of a Christian's life. 'Members of the body of Christ should always regard themselves as under the sovereignty of God and his purposes when approaching financial obligations' (Brewer 2009:17).

5.3. Instruction in the correct use of wealth

Another theme of Luke's writings is that he 'heavily focuses on Jesus' exhortations regarding the right use of possessions' (Brewer (2009:17). In Luke 3:11–14, John the Baptist instructs the crowds as follows: 'John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." Even tax collectors came to be baptised. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay"'.

John's first instruction confirms 'the principle of almsgiving'. However, his next two responses relate to 'the financial circumstances' of the individual (Kim 1998:179). In this regard, Pilgrim points out that 'throughout Luke's writings, he attempts to define and encourage a discipleship of one's material gifts in the service of love' (1981:123).

In the book of Acts, Luke also uses specific examples regarding the obligation of Christians to provide for needy people. Luke shows that possessions are 'good gifts from God when used correctly' (Pilgrim 1981:146). In general, Luke challenges Christians 'to change their selfish ways by sharing their wealth with others' (Pilgrim 1981:123).

6. Conclusion

Brewer's analysis of Luke's gospel and his book of 'Acts reveals a clear message regarding the poor'. The Gospel of Luke clearly calls upon believers to 'aid the physically, and economically weak and to welcome them into the community' (Brewer 2009:12–13). However, 'this actually happens in Luke's second volume' (Thielman 2005:137). The

Acts of the Apostles supports the principles presented in Luke's gospel and demonstrates 'the true nature of Christian benevolence' (p. 13). It is clear that in the book of Acts, the Early Church provided a specific and ongoing ministry to the poor that demonstrated a concern 'for the overall well-being of those in need. In fact, they often sacrificed their own financial status in order to aid others' (Brewer 2009:13).

In the light of the above research, the contemporary church should challenge herself to revisit its ministry to the poor. It needs to meet the challenges of the day and consider how it can make a difference in the lives and circumstances of the needy. In particular, we, the church should give attention to the following:

- Redefine our view of who is poor. We need to ensure that, when we are challenged by the need of the poor in the area of our local church, we address the matter based on biblical principles.
- Focus much more on the spiritual growth of both the individual and the faith community as a whole. By providing worthwhile opportunities for addressing the material needs of the poor in context of the local church, it will have an effect on the spiritual growth of each member of the congregation.

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