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## The Gospel of Foreign Aid: A Theoretical Note

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### *Abstract*

*After handing out more than USD 1 trillion in aid packages – including charitable giving – to Africa over the last fifty years, only few countries are registering modestly improved Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and are making some headway in reducing poverty. But for many sub-Saharan African countries, GDP growth remains insufficient to establish the momentum they need to exit from profound poverty. Worse still, in many cases, poverty is deepening. Understanding this reality is the hallmark of successful aid for both donors and the world's poorest countries.*

*The aim of this paper is not primarily to ask whether or not aid works, or in which cases it does, but to contribute to a much needed process of understanding of foreign aid as an idea invented to overcome the problem of the poor. This requires a research strategy that develops theoretical /analytical frameworks that capture the complexity of Western and current Chinese generosity, namely the underlying motivation, rational and objectives.*

*Drawing on the vast literature on foreign aid, the essay explains how the idea was framed, and how it has manifested itself in contemporary debates as a new type and more complex instrument of foreign policy and economic development. The paper demonstrates a great degree of continuity in the policy concerns of the aid discourse from the Antiquity to Modern era where development assistance becomes a state responsibility, and politically organized as a balancing act between donor/receiver relationships and partnership. The paper concludes that, historically, charity, poor-relief, foreign aid, development assistance – whatever it may be called – has served a multitude of objectives in order to address specific policy concerns of each period. Whether at its best or at its worst, foreign aid is here to stay as poverty still grips over a billion of world population.*

**Keywords:** *Economics, Foreign Aid, Charity, Poverty, Development.*

### **Introduction**

While the notion of foreign aid<sup>1</sup> appears within the framework of development assistance set up following the Second World War (WWII)

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<sup>1</sup> The review ignores military assistance and or arms transfers which date some 2400 years ago. Ever since military assistance exists, some concealed interests

and the independence of former colonies, the idea of transferring money, goods, and services from the rich to poor countries is not new. It is as old as the prophets and as current as today's headlines. Wealthy individuals and local religious bodies have always provided aid to poor compatriots. Certainly, religious ideology and moral principles must have guided their actions. The purpose of the article is twofold: first to investigate the meaning of the religious and secular idea of aid; and secondly, to illustrate the main changes it has undergone in the course of the history.

It is appropriate in this kind of analysis to undertake a thorough investigation into the practice of aiding the less fortunate in community from the earliest periods of civilisation to modern period as most economic thoughts take their roots in ethical and religious systems that have had a huge effect on Western culture and government. Such analysis reveals the truer meaning, nature and scope of the current foreign aid flows, which have been under dispute for the last fifty years.

The paper does not question the positive impact that a charitable giving can have on the recipient. It focuses on a neglected characteristic of Western and current Chinese generosity, namely the underlying motivation and rational. Through a desk/literature review, the paper deepens the understanding of foreign aid as an idea invented to overcome the problem of the poor. It explains how the idea was framed, and how it has manifested itself in contemporary debates. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: sections 2 provides the historical account of foreign aid, section 3 presents the lessons learned and section 4 concludes.

### **Foreign aid: origins and evolution of thinking**

The central notion of "foreign aid" in economic perspective is complex and ancient. As it goes even beyond the frontier of economics as science, the concept is analysed with respect to the philosophical, theological and social constructs of the day deeply rooted in ancient beliefs. The focus on economic objective is in line with contemporary economic scholars (Easterly, 2001; Gordon, 1989; Haney, 1936; Hjertholm and White, 2000; Smith, [1776] 1981) who consider the impulse to share one's wealth with

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always accompany it. For example, during the Peloponnesian war (Athens against Sparta) military assistance was common and appeared to hinder peace and development in ancient Greece. A modern illustration of such concealed interests is the France's military and technical assistance to the 13 insurgent American colonies. After losing its North American empire, the American request for help was an opportunity for France to undermine Britain's position in America.

the less fortunate and destitute in ancient societies as an economic behaviour even though economics as science did not exist. Donors in Ancient were rational since they constantly sought to maximize their happiness, honour or power and minimize their pain. In other words, benefactors always made rational choices.

### **The idea of aid in ancient times**

#### **The Jewish notion of aid<sup>2</sup>**

In tracing the western historical development of the term “foreign aid”, let observe that there is no logical necessity for treating oriental ideas as a whole; rather it is essential to assess the thought of the Hebrews and their later descendents Jews. No scholar can deny the fact that current western religious and moral beliefs come to Europe via the spread of Christianity and Judaism. It is valuable to bear in mind that other religious ideology has also guided the actions of benefactor. Yet, the fact that Christianity is the founder of Western civilisation motivates the author to limit the focus on Judeo-Christian scriptures during the Ancient, the medieval and the early modern period. Besides, the ideal of foreign aid has successively helped to relieve famine and other humanitarian disasters in some part of the world. It is, further, a plain fact that moral and humanitarian principles are behind the Marshall Plan for European economic reconstruction and economic development of former colonies that embraced development ideal.

The source of knowledge for handing generosity and compassion all around and its earliest developments in western part of the world is, therefore, the Bible – New International Version is used here. With reference to the Holy Scriptures, the author takes, to a large extent for granted their authenticity. There is, however, good reason to be confident on its reliability and authenticity in general and in particular to the New Testament written within two generation only. By way of contrast, scholars universally accept the authenticity of the early manuscripts of Plato, Aristotle or Julius Caesar written more than 1000 years after their death.

Justice and righteousness are core values of the Jewish religious belief. Moreover, justice and righteousness are not separate virtues, activities or responsibilities. According to the Bible (1999), the just or righteous person

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<sup>2</sup> The foreign aid historical review starts with ancient Hebrew contrary to most academic literature, which considers ancient Greeks as the first civilised people to use their reason to think systematically about the world around them. The author prefers the approach for practical reason: the itinerary from Orient to West via Greece makes reasoning much clear.

is one and the same (Isaiah 24:16). Justice and righteousness are indeed the literal translation of the Hebrew word *zedakah*<sup>3</sup> (Posner, Ben-Sasson, and Levitats, 2007, p. 569). From a religious and ethical point of view, the ritual observance of *zedakah* and *Mitzvah* is the greatest Biblical instructions, the principle and goal of Jewish moral perfection (Proverbs 21: 3). In a popular view, *Zedakah* means commitment to or acting according to God's covenant. As Bromiley (1982, p. 193) suggests, by giving to poor Hebrew people believe that they are fulfilling the "demand of a relationship, either with God or with other human being". The ideal of *zedakah* is therefore an invitation to materially assist the poor not only as an act of compassion but also as a legitimate, lawful and virtuous act.

Nevertheless, the ideal of *zedakah* has a broader and deep social and economic dimensions and implications for the teaching of economic justice in these days. It brings an apparent justice based on religious and moral ideologies without tackling the real cause of poverty. Contrary to the openly declared objective of the current foreign aid, prophets do not believe that *zedakah* can eliminate poverty once and for all. They do not even have the intention to do so (Deuteronomy 15:11). The objective is to control poverty and not to eradicate it, or change the social or economic status of the poor. Rather Mosaic Law encourages a certain social solidarity among Hebrew as the divine sense of community guides their moral thought. The Mosaic Law is simply a preventive poor-relief since attempt to separate judgments of value from judgments of fact remains an unsettled issue.

### **The Greek notion of aid**

Once the attention is shifted from Oriental nations to West, ancient Palestine finds a serious rival in the ancient world. The parallels in the Greeks myths with Hebrew religious custom of righteousness indicate that ancient Greeks are fully cognisant of the central idea of gift to poor. This does not mean that ancient Greeks accept all Hebrew ideas, even though the sympathy for broken and destitute people receives widespread support in ancient Greek society. Difficult and hazardous are, however, words chosen to describe ancient Greek goodwill since there is no Greek word that completely corresponds to, and covers every aspect of the Hebrew notion of *Zedakah*.

Nevertheless, Robbins (2005, pp. 1757-1758) suggests that Greeks benevolent deeds take its roots in the speculative and religious idea of

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<sup>3</sup> The Septuagint usually renders the Hebrew idea of *zedakah* as *eleos* or *eleomosyne* but has come to mean alms.

*philanthropia* along with its synonymous *agape*, *eleemosune*, or *eleos*, *eros* and *philia*. Literally philanthropy means love of humanity. Ancient Greeks use, however, the term often loosely when referring to righteous deeds, compassion for the afflicted and loving hospitality for the stranger.

For much of recorded ancient Greek gift-giving history, the general view is that the idea of philanthropy emerges as a sign of love or compassion of ancient Greek god Prometheus for humankind. Here again, one may notice the divine nature of gift found in Hebrew. Ancient Greek mythologies portray god Prometheus as “the friend and benefactor of mankind” for endowing humankind with wisdom, arts, sciences as well as the means to survive (Penglase, 1997, p. 220).

Ancient Greek benevolence is, therefore, an imitation of gods’ philanthropy. Illustrative is the Homer’s *Odyssey* – and *Iliad*, where he strongly emphasises on moderation, generosity, sharing and hospitality as forms of philanthropy. For example, in following English translation of the famous epic of *Odyssey*, Homer expresses his gratitude to both Zeus and Eumaeus:

Here I sit, in distress and grief for my kingly master, ...while he, it may be, is wandering foodless about some town or region of foreign speech...And with those words he the way to the cottage door and ushered his guest in...Odyssey rejoiced at such a welcome and uttered his thoughts loudly: ‘My host may Zeus and the other deathless gods reward your generous welcome to me by granting you what you most desire!’

Eumaeus the swineherd answered him: ‘My guest, I should think it a monstrous thing not to honour my guest who come to me, even one more miserable than you, because Zeus is patron of every stranger and every beggar, and to such as these, even so humble a gift as mine means much.’ (Homer, 1998, *Odyssey*, Bk. 14, ll. 38-57).

Though Homer dwells on hospitality at some length, his intention is to contribute to the ethics teaching.

With time, the religious connotations and the religious quality of gift-giving became more and more secular; and hospitality and philanthropy of the ambitious developed new forms, such as tax exemption, land redistribution or provision of medical services at no cost. Illustrative is the Aristotle’s description of the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus (1984, *The Athenian constitution*, 16):

In general he was humane, mild, and forgiving to wrongdoers, and in particular he lent money to those who were in difficulties, to support their work, so that they could continue to maintain themselves by farming. ... he won over the notables by his friendly dealings with

them, and people by his help for their private concerns, and he behaved honourably to both.

In practice, Pisistratus extends Solon's reforms by distributing land grant to poor<sup>4</sup>, giving tax exemption, and sponsoring various constructions and improvements in the city. Furthermore, in the writings usually attributed to the Greek physician Hippocrates for example, one reads the following English translation:

I urge you not to be unkind, but to consider carefully your patient's superabundance or means. Sometimes give your services for nothing, calling to mind a previous benefaction or present satisfaction. And if there be an opportunity of serving one who is stranger in financial strait, give full assistance to all such. For where there is love of man, there is also love of art. (Plato, 1923, p. 319)

One may note that public and general care for the poor is absent at the beginning in most Greek city-states. Public help to the poor in ancient Greece only emerges with the intolerable inequality between rich and other social groups. Its motivations are, therefore, policy consideration rather than benevolence. The practices, desires, and forms of thought, by which people who have special advantages of wealth engage in public generosity are only encouraged if the well-to-do acted as benefactors to the community. In most case aid takes the form of voluntary contributions – money or other material aid – to help the poor. Other forms include legislated gifts for unnecessary ends such as festivals and choruses, equipments and decorating objects, and philanthropic donations.

Yet, the interest in rational evaluation of the ancient Greek gods' goodness that cause human to do good things emerges in the fifth century BC with Socrates in the dialogues of Plato. The reader of Plato's dialogues (*The Euthyphro*; *The Republic*) discovers a Socrates who becomes sensible of some incongruity in a fictitious history of value judgements; and reveals his own thoughts about divine and human perfection. Plato has Socrates say in the *Republic* that: "For good things are far fewer with us than evil, and for the good we must assume no other cause than God, but the cause of evil we must look for in other things and not in God" (Plato, 1956, 2.18). It follows that gods are only authors of good things and communicate their goodness to human through philanthropy, a form or model of the ideal good. In Plato's view, once the person knows what the ideal good is; actions that follow are necessary in harmony with the good for its own sake.

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<sup>4</sup> Noting that in the previously years, "All the land was in the hands of a few" (Aristotle, 1984, *The Athenian constitution*, 2)

This approach to Aristotle's Ethics that takes the notion of virtue as a practical attitudes and habits of doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong has fundamentally influenced many economic scholars (Marx, 1976, c1967; Smith, [1759] 1982, [1776] 1981). Today, many philosophers around the world share the virtue of goodwill. Plato, Aristotle, and their followers are seen as excellent contributors to the development of a moral theory that explains gift-giving practice. The issue of how best to understand the notion of hospitality, love, philanthropy, and the like, and the underlying moral obligation in ancient Greek is therefore important. It can strongly influence one's view of what, if any, theoretical problems might be associated with the notion, and further, if there are problems, what might count as a solution. Theoretical reflection on moral virtue has historically relied upon Plato and Aristotle writings mainly<sup>5</sup>. Its interpretation has to be understood in the context of their small economy almost self-sufficient and based on land and slavery. Their focus is chiefly on the management of the household, on ideal communistic state and on that teaches to look for happiness through gift-giving<sup>6</sup>.

**The Roman notion of aid private property. Thus, donating or being philanthropic is limited to Ethics**

It is natural to pass from Greece to Italy, both by history, geography and by the character of Roman lifestyle. The care for the poor did, however, not come naturally to the ancient Romans as it did to Greeks and Hebrews. Nevertheless, it would be absurd to suggest that ancient Romans were unwilling to recognise the needs of the poor. It would have been suicidal to have taken such stand, and not viable for the Roman expansion and colonisation.

In a formal way, the policy on the provision of organised aid and services took two forms: network of government institutions and private generosity. There is, however, little sign of government intervention except in rare occasion. The standard and generally accepted response to poor problems

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<sup>5</sup> These are major ancient great philosophers. Yet, philosophers such as Zeno, the founder of stoicism (see Wenley, 1924?), and his followers have had remarkably influence on the practice of material aid and services. They widened the virtue of benevolence to include toleration, love, gratitude, charity, patriotism, and philanthropy to accommodate the living under roman occupation.

<sup>6</sup> A close and related practice is the gift-exchange, a structural element of the peasant and gift economy. In gift-exchange economy, the giver expects the recipient to reciprocate. It is not gratuitous. Though it is now an essential part of social behaviour, it may be compared to trade practice of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

was a self-motivated almsgiving called *euergetism* (Atkins and Osborne, 2007). Yet, both public and private generosity have one major and common characteristic: the recipient is not clearly defined as poor. And obviously, aid was not directed to the poorest, and even if it happened it was out of fear of unrest event.

Illustrative is the old Roman custom of “food distribution” from the fifth century BC onwards, which is probably Greek in its simple character at the beginning (Lanciani, 1963, p. 126). Whether for the sake of political survival or other motives, much of the ruling elite’s generosity consists of selling grain at a subsidised rate to Roman citizens, mostly upper class and soldiers. The use of food distribution technique for social order evolved gradually, but not continuously, over many years from a simple to a more complicated and became a general policy. In 58 BC, Publius Clodius Pulcher modifies the law and distributes grains gratuitously (Bartlett, 1994). Later on, Roman benefactors add wine, oil and meat to grain doles. Above and beyond the foodstuffs distribution, Rich Romans who seek a political career display their generosity for all by building public institutions such as hospital – of course not in modern sense of the word, libraries, and give money at some great public event. Since these gifts have a political motivation, high publicity and ostentation generally accompany the gift-giving ceremony in order to call attention to benefactors and their great generosity. The quest for glory on national and personal level is a widely held feature of Roman disposition. Generosity is just an effective means to approach the masses and gain their popularity. Choosing the right gift is therefore important as it can influence the outcome.

Common sense suggests that the Roman gift-giving practice is a way that people use to seek friendship for a variety of objectives such as honour, power, or glory. According to Cicero, this Roman behaviour is a product of the virtue of justice and beneficence or charity (1928, *De Officiis*, Bk.1) but virtues that exclude the idea of helping all needy (Cicero (1928, *De Officiis*, Bk.2.18.61-62):

The case of the man who is overwhelmed by misfortune is different from that of the one who is seeking to better his own condition, though he suffers from no actual distress. It will be the duty of charity to incline more to the unfortunate, unless, perchance, they deserve their misfortune.

The emergence of a real concern for the poor as a separate group within the Roman world appears, however, after the republican era of Cicero in the works of the stoic Seneca. In his handbook on appropriate gift-giving and receipt, he urges his fellow Romans to be generous as much as possible and

the way to hand out the gifts: “Help one man with money, another with credit, another with influence, another with advice, another with sound precepts.” (Seneca, 1958, *De Beneficiis*, Bk.1.2.4).

In the more strictly economic realm, Ancient Rome was an agrarian and slave based economy whose main concern was to feed the vast number of citizens and legionaries at no direct monetary cost. The ostentatious gift-giving allowed rulers to gain popularity within the social inferiors through free corn distribution. Ancient Rome can, however, not be qualified as a welfare state. Grains and other foodstuffs distribution are primary for the citizens as a right rather than the poor because like the ancient Greeks, the chief objective for Roman rulers is the beauty or the improvement of the city. The care for the poor by the state is not a real concern. Strategy rather than by benevolence dictates virtually all state relief. Roman generosity is therefore a simply political measures designed to calm the Roman masses clamouring for bread.

### **The apostolic and patristic idea of aid**

It is no wonder that as applied virtue, *zedakah* passed into popular usage to mean *caritas* i.e. charity, a translation of the Geek word *agape* in the Vulgate Bible<sup>7</sup>. In Christian tradition, *caritas* becomes a mode of divine worship and rituals gift-giving. The most distinctive and original feature of Christianity is, however, its attitude towards the Hebrew idea of *zedakah*, and its Latin and Geek equivalents. Christianity brings a change in connotation of these words and the image they represent.

Naturally, Christianity arises from full Jews firstly, and then develops among Greeks and Romans. Besides, the first generation of Christian evangelists not only inherit Jew scriptures, cultural practices and organisation; but also Greco-Roman thoughts play an important role in shaping Christian dogma. Studies (Chadwick, 1990; Green and McKnight, 1992) indicate, however, that Christianity is the first religion to spread to people on every continent the message of love, generosity, human rights, equality, justice and freedom.

Until the early fifth century A.D., Christians use the Greek version of the Bible. Nevertheless, the terms Christians use to express the ideal of love and self-sacrifice for the greater good in Old Testament and in New

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<sup>7</sup> One may observe that the word charity comes into English usage from the old French *charité* in 1154 (Oxford English Dictionary, 2007, s.v. Charity). The translation from old *caritas* – a Latinised word of the Greek word *charis* – to charity evolved gradually. Protestant Bibles render *agape* as love.

Testament obtain distinct and different meaning in Roman Empire. In particular, and following Paul – the Hellenised Jew with Roman citizen and apostle of Jesus Christ – the New Testament exclusively and constantly makes use of the Greek word *agape*. To understand the importance and the special meaning of *agape* for Christians, it is necessary to look at Paul’s letter to Corinthians in modern English translation:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ... But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians. 13: 4-7, 13).

Love stands here for *agape*. Paul introduces the use of the term *agape* into the New Testament but assigns to it a special meaning (Nygren, 1982). A closer investigation reveals that the ideal of love for humanity is already present in a very rudimentary form among the Greeks and Romans but the rise of the Christian *agape* supplements *philanthropia* and *eleomosyne*. Within the Christian tradition, the Pauline notion of *agape* guides all Christian philanthropic works. Christian philanthropy and fellowship with God become the expression of *agape*, since “God is love” (1 John 4: 8).

Things changed with the year 312 – which marks the momentous conversion of Emperor Constantine – and later in 389 when his successor Theodosius I was able to make Christianity the sole official state religion of the Roman Empire (Chadwick, 1990). Gift-giving becomes a loving practice of the unlovable in Greco-Roman world. Emperor Constantine himself gave the example by broadening the scope of imperial assistance. Furthermore, during his reign laws that invested Bishops with social significance with huge financial resources to alleviate suffering among poor and needy were voted. In so doing, Constantine and his successors publicly acknowledged the new ideal of Christian care for the poor. Indeed, as Horden (2005) observes, Bishops not only gave foodstuffs and clothes to poor but also funded hospitals and houses of care.

In the *Vulgate*, St. Jerome intentionally renders the Greek word for *agape* as *caritas*. Essentially, St. Jerome uses the Latin word *caritas* in its narrow sense to denote the practice of giving aid to these less fortunate. Since Christians idealise interpersonal love with God, for St. Jerome *caritas* means the voluntary and disinterested form of love or sacrifice that one person makes for the good of another. In practice, *caritas* is the product of love that materialises in generosity, a way of Christian life.

The imagery St. Jerome uses to express *caritas* derives from the Hebrew covenant with God. He voluntarily overlooks the Roman ties that link *caritas* to sexual and military things, and focuses on spiritual love. One may, therefore, infer that St. Jerome's intention is to build a strong moral basis for granting aid to poor under the great law of Christianity "...love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10: 27).

As a result, the Latin spelling of *caritas* included all types of benevolence practices associated with the highest form of love (1 Cor. 13: 13). It follows that the crucial insight that emerges from the Greek and Roman conversion into Christianity is that *caritas* turns out to be an obligation or a duty for all members of society. Charity begins therefore as a wonderful word. Accordingly, Christian's benevolence entails the love towards earthly disadvantaged and works of charity and justice.

### **The medieval and renaissance idea of aid**

The Middle Ages witnesses a real expansion and crystallisation of generosity doctrine for the needy in Western Europe. Generally, the Middle Age period<sup>8</sup> runs from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 down to the fall of the Eastern or Byzantine Empire in 1453. Yet, the author deliberately extends the period to include the Renaissance and Humanism era. The tension between tradition and innovation during this period lays out obvious shifts in subject discussion and nomenclature.

The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries mark the development of a commercial economy, the rise of commercial centres and the expansion of city population. The revolutionary expansion of the gift economy to market exchange economy, however, shakes up the existing institutions, social group and the prevailing Christian morality (Little, 1978). During this period, the word charity passes into English use, and has the general Latin sense of benevolence to the poor.

Charity rises up again in the writing of St Thomas Aquinas (c1964) in 13<sup>th</sup> century. He stresses that the Biblical command of love involves, indeed, both charity and justice towards the poor and the weak. Aquinas, however, lays great stress on goodness of giving to several poor rather than relieving one needy than necessary. Yet, most of the time, persons who speak of charity and justice assume that everyone understands what the phrase

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<sup>8</sup> The accurate dates for the beginning and the end of the Middle Ages are subject of discussion. Yet, as Wood (2002) and Haney (1936) point out, the opening and closing dates of such period must be an open interval of time, i.e. from the fifth century to the fifteenth century.

means. In practice, however, what constitutes justice for one group; the other group perceives it as injustice.

Until the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, the church administrates and controls almost the available poor-relief resources of which almsgiving forms the most important element. Moreover, poor-relief becomes more discriminate, and even much more complex as a result of the unexpected calamity of the Black Death, which kills multitude of people in recorded history of Europe during the period 1348-49. The most immediate and obvious effect of the widespread killing is to create a shortage of labour, although, it solves the problem of feeding too many people. The first and direct secular reaction to the Black Death and economic distress is to take control of relief measures. The public authorities' involvement, however, proceeds at varying rate throughout Europe.

A comparative study of poor-relief within England and the rest of Europe lies beyond the study's scope. The review tries to generalise the notion of poor-relief i.e. charity in Western countries. Nevertheless, it acknowledges considerable variation within them due to specific customs and how they broke with Rome. Very broadly, however, charity ideal remains in force; even though the "Statutes of Labourers" indicate an evolution of attitudes toward the poor.

In 1601, the Queen Elizabeth I of England enacts a new poor law based on the experiments of the earlier Elizabethan poor law of 1598. The document puts an end to the religious exclusivity of charity works and paves the way for secular charitable works as instrument of social construction. Subsequently, this and other Elizabethan poor laws become the foundation on which Britain, American colonies and other Western countries erect massive and elaborate structure of poor relief law (Harris, 2004; McIntosh, 2005).

Considering the fact that no economy produces the wealth required to support its social policies prior the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the implementation of a total shift from the Roman Catholic Church based charity – despite the confiscation of most of its properties, legacies and income – to state directed poor-relief seems unlikely. Obviously, many of the medieval Catholic institutions continue to provide charity to poor alongside the municipal "common chest" and state poor-relief wherever needed. Legally speaking; however, reformers emphasise on the responsibility of the state for poor-relief and its secularisation rather than a church responsibility. In practice, the local municipality has the responsibility to care for its poor.

The structure of European public relief in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is, however, a complex structure. It combines independent, voluntary and mutual

associations, and statutory bodies that provide relief to poor. Each group, however, preserves its religious heritage whether from Roman Catholic background or Protestants; and the poverty policy response depends on donor's specific religious orientation. When one recalls, French Huguenots and Ireland Protestants who sought refuge in England relied on English charity for their accommodation and meals. Thus, country's approach towards the poor depends on its institutionalised social and religious doctrines. In Scandinavian countries and Germany – which are mainly Lutheran, poverty is societal problem; while in England, Netherlands and United States of America – predominantly reformed protestants – poverty is an individual failure. On the other hand, catholic countries – such as France, Italy, and Spain, poverty is not only part of natural order and permanent element in the social structure but also it is a virtue and as such no debate takes place.

In short, one may say that prior to the Reformation, the church plays a leading role in poverty alleviation even though spiritual needs of mankind constitute its main concern. It is only in 16<sup>th</sup> century that men and women systematically shift their religious preoccupations to secular concerns of human well-being. Efforts to eradicate poverty embody both state poor-relief that aims at controlling poverty, private philanthropy generally taking the form of money to meet human need and foster excellence, and the old church based charity as social observance and virtuous act. The novelty of the 17<sup>th</sup> century charity is the attempt at organising poor-relief on a much grander scale i.e. province rather than the village for efficient use of factors of production.

### **Aid in modern times**

One cannot date exactly the beginning of the modern era of the European society since it is purely relative. Nevertheless, the changes in economic activities that occur during the years following the industrial revolution in the Kingdom of Great Britain are extraordinary. They mark a new trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create or improve the social and economic living conditions.

Like other innovations that occur in Western society, the need for, the attitude towards, and the ability to practice charity lead to a decisive changes in the nature of the already existing institutions. Under the leadership of religious and secular humanitarians, struggling workers and other less fortunate develop new ways of working together. Specifically, charity schools' capacities increase, hospitals become more specialised institutions, and peasants, farmers and factory workers form mutual aid,

associations, labour unions, clubs and societies. It would be hardly rewarding to speculate at length on the motives which inspire philanthropists to donate huge amount of financial and non-financial resources for public purposes. Human behaviour rarely shows signs of helpful singleness of motives.

A more international form of charity, however, appears as a necessary consequence of the European wars, growth population, the success of the British industrial revolution, and the need for overseas missions.

The history of European colonisation of America suggests that each European country made every effort to assist financially and technically its colonies from which it gained raw materials as well as customers of its manufactured goods. Such movement of labour and capital constitutes a milestone in the history of foreign economic aid in peace time. Pointing up ancient Roman colonisation model, Smith ([1776] 1981, WN, Bk.4.7.2) observes that the mother country “considered the colony as a child, at all times entitled to great favour and assistance, and owing in return much gratitude and respect”. It is for that reason that Great Britain works together with Philanthropic bodies to provide helpful advice about ordering and improving economic conditions in its former colonies and trade partners. According to Smith ([1776] 1981, WN, Bk.4.7.166) such policy is mutually advantageous as “[it enables] them to relieve one another’s wants, to increase one another’s enjoyments, and to encourage one another’s industry”.

France’s greatest innovation in the field of international assistance, however, appears during the American war for independence against Britain, the historical France’s enemy. Not only the French government supplied military equipment to the 13 American colonies, but it also provided them financial and economic assistance. Obviously international politics and alliance opportunities were behind the French assistance.

However, the first cross-boarder state organised humanitarian aid to relieve suffering people appears on March 26, 1812 (Curti, 1963). The 1812 food aid Act in favour of Venezuelan earthquake victims sets a precedent for the congress of the USA. By taking the decision to grant aid to Venezuela, the USA made a step into silent marketing and a host of other ulterior motives. Being the world’s powerful and leading manufacturing nation with enormous food surplus from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the USA started to use its food surplus or its navy for market development and international trade (Hjertholm and White, 2000). This led the USA to support the Greek government against the Ottoman Empire in 1821 and to assist the Ireland and Cape Verde Islands during catastrophes and famines.

Closely related to American food aid is the American technical assistance. From the early technical work in agriculture, American experts were active in Turkey, Japan, Cuba, Haiti, and Liberia. On balance, however, American foreign technical assistance was inconsequential until the late 1940s. Indeed, American experts have never been interested in a broad-based grass roots approach to development. Rather the US foreign economic policy relies to a great extent, albeit not always with desired outcome, on its experts – generally well paid – to serve national and private interests. Foreign governments frequently contract these US experts to offer technical advice at astronomically high price. As Curti and Birr (1954, pp. 41-42)<sup>9</sup> points out, the American advisor to Japan's Hokkaido Development commission Horace Capron, requested in 1870 to have "his expenses paid to and from Japan and to be given a house, guards, and servants – and to get \$10,000 a year. This was a handsome salary for an American public official and considerably more than that of the prime minister of Japan." The success of this well paid job was, however, a mixed blessing for Japan. Studies show that Japan witnessed a rapid growth in agricultural output and productivity under Capron. In the long-run however, the policy advice turned out to be inefficient as the agricultural production declined some decades after Mr Capron had left.

It is worth noting that prior to the late 1920s colonial powers were reluctant to act in the areas such as social security, health or education. Colonial rulers made little effort to develop their colonies, economically, socially or culturally. Colonial assistance if any was only incidental to the process of accumulating and extracting of wealth from the colony. Such colonial aid includes loans for dedicated infrastructures and grant for a limited education and health care. Contrary to American colonisation and other settlement colonies such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, exploitation colonies did not experienced the same flow of factors of production that helped to create wealth. Unlike the immigrants in most settlement colonies, colonist in exploitation colonies continued to regard themselves as outsiders rather than local entrepreneurs. Any colonial assistance was an instrument of trade, colonisation and exploitation.

Yet, official bilateral financial aid from a wealthy country to a poor country grew out of President Truman's declaration of foreign policy and national security principles as the US became a worldwide donor. While addressing a joint session of the Senate and the House of Representatives on 12 March 1947, President Truman not only recommended assistance to Greece and

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Kanbur (2006, p. 1563)

Turkey, but also outlined the priorities and mission for US foreign aid and national security principles that has, since then, guided American leadership. In his speech<sup>10</sup>, he states that:

*The foreign policy and national security of this country are involved.*  
... The United States has received from the Greek Government an urgent appeal for financial and economic assistance.... Greece is today without funds to finance the importation of ... goods which are essential to bare subsistence....Greece is in desperate need of financial and economic assistance to enable it to resume purchases of food, clothing, fuel, and seeds.... The Greek government has also asked for the assistance of experienced American administrators, economists, and technicians to ensure that the financial and other aid given to Greece shall be used effectively in creating a stable and self-sustaining economy and in improving its public administration.... There is no other country to which democratic Greece can turn.... The British Government ... can no longer extend financial or economic aid to Turkey.... We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples ... This is ... a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes ... undermine ... the security of the United States....*it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples ... through economic and financial aid ... in the amount of \$ 400,000,000.* ([Online] Truman, 1947, pp. 1-19)

Present Truman's humanism is the most puzzling feature of early US foreign aid that affirms the goodness of altruism and the protection of free people while promoting US economic and security interests. According to McCullough (1992, p. 548), the US Senate approved the 400 million US dollars<sup>11</sup> in aid package to Greece and Turkey on 22 April 1947, and the President sanctioned the deal one month later. Although the Greek government wanted more, donating USD 200 million for a period of 12 months – whether it includes the payment of American civil and military technical experts working in Greece – was the first bilateral aid of its kind.

On 5 June 1947, less than two months after the bilateral aid agreements under Truman Doctrine, the then US Secretary of State General George Catlett Marshall announced the most generous programme to reconstruct European nations during his speech at Harvard University. Despite United Nations (UN), WB and IMF interventions through which US channelled a great deal of money to help Europe to recover, Marshall portrayed

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<sup>10</sup> Generally referred to as “Truman Doctrine”.

<sup>11</sup> Using the consumer price index that amount is equivalent to USD 3.8 billion in 2010

European economic condition as follows; and announced his recovery plan in the following words:

I need not tell you that ...confidence in the local currency has been severely shaken. The breakdown of the business structure of Europe during the war was complete. Recovery has been seriously retarded by the fact that two years after the close of hostilities a peace settlement with Germany and Austria has not been agreed upon. But even given a more prompt solution of these difficult problems, the rehabilitation of the economic structure of Europe quite evidently will require a much longer time and greater effort than has been foreseen.... The truth of the matter is that Europe's requirements for the next three or four years of foreign food and other essential products - principally from America - are so much greater than her present ability to pay that she must have substantial additional help or face economic, social, and political deterioration of a very grave character.... It would be neither fitting nor efficacious for this Government to undertake to draw up unilaterally a program designed to place Europe on its feet economically. This is the business of the Europeans. The initiative, I think, must come from Europe. The role of this country should consist of friendly aid in the drafting of a European program and of later support of such a program so far as it may be practical for us to do so. The program should be a joint one, agreed to by a number, if not all, European nations. ([Online] Marshall, 1947, pp. 1159-1160)

Almost one year after Marshall's speech, the Congress overwhelmingly approved the "Economic Cooperation Act", which became effective on 3 April 1948 under the name of "European Recovery Programme" (ERP) but generally referred to as "Marshall Plan". From 1948 to 1951, the US disbursed more than 13 billion US dollars in grants for the ERP<sup>12</sup> (McCullough, 1992, p. 565). The Plan's objective according to Marshall was to help European partners to achieve the status of self-supporting nations and be able to buy US goods and services. Americans and Europeans considered, however, the ERP as an emergency plan – and not as a permanent programme.

As researches by Hattori (2003) and Opeskin (1996) show, it is difficult to rule out the traditional religious idea of charity or the humanistic motives inherent in natural law behind the idea of international transfer of resources from rich nations to poor and developing countries. The USA and other former colonial powers are generally guilty for centuries of colonialism and sin of slavery. Nevertheless, the American sponsored ERP had no moral

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<sup>12</sup>Equivalent to more than US\$ 107 billion in 2010.

dimension. Its main purpose was not charity but the safeguard of US trade and security interests in Europe. The reconstruction of Western Europe was fundamental to ensuring United States' prosperity. Though most European nations were thankful, President Truman did not expect any praise from Europeans as he put it unequivocally: "I am doing it because ... it's necessary to be done, if we are going to survive ourselves" (McCullough, 1992, p. 583).

The unexpected rapid success of the Marshall Plan created, however, external economic and political environments that coincided with ideological aspiration, economic and security interests. Economic and social development –as opposed to European Economic Recovery – becomes one of the four major Truman's objectives during his second term. The fourth point of his inaugural address delivered on 20 January 1949, says that:

Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery.... Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve suffering of these people. The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques.... I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples [democratic and independent countries] the benefits of our store of technical knowledge ... This should be a cooperative enterprise in which all nations work together through the United Nations and its specialized agencies whenever practicable.... With the cooperation of business, private capital, agriculture, and labor in this country, this program can greatly increase the industrial activity in other nations and can raise substantially their standards of living.... Guarantees to the investor must be balanced by guarantees in the interest of the people whose resources and whose labor go into these developments.... All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world's human and natural resources. Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically.... Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life... Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies – hunger, misery, and despair. ([Online] Truman, 1949)

Though the rhetoric demonstrates great similarity with the classic public speaking on generosity, Truman's inaugural address marks a turning point in US foreign aid policy. To the humanitarian aid, President Truman adds technical and financial assistance. Such alluring speech during the early Cold War era and at the beginning of European decolonisation of Asia and Africa has obviously created an illusion about a possible development through foreign aid. Not only the Marshall Plan triggered a remarkable development of Western European economies, but also the enthusiasm of the new bilateral and multilateral institutions to extend their help to underdeveloped countries was equally inspiring to Truman's proposal.

The US containment policy, however, jeopardised the translation of Truman administration rhetoric into reality. The US involvement into wars (Korea and Vietnam) wiped out the prospect of an extension of the Marshall Plan. Only a handful and strategic countries outside Western Europe benefited from the American generosity, namely Japan, Hon-Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Israel.

Nevertheless, President Kennedy renewed the commitment to global poverty reduction but refocused the security concerns of previous administrations from containment to development. The foreign aid policy that emerged under President Kennedy emphasised on coordination of both bilateral and multilateral transfer of large financial flows. This led to the creation of the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) and the switch from OEEC to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with a Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The change came just as US was helping to institutionalise foreign aid while Western industrialised countries considered the sustainability of their own growth as a pre-condition to the support of the developing world.

In the years after the Marshall Plan success, the assumption that foreign aid does help underdeveloped countries to develop their resources and improve their living conditions became increasingly accepted for most people actively concerned with aid programme. Foreign aid, therefore, emerges as the primary mechanism designed to not only to help the newly independent nations to grow fast, but also to restrain the spread of communism, and to increase trade and business. Nevertheless, more often than not, aid operated according to the law of unintended consequences.

The paper focuses primarily on western idea of foreign aid. Nevertheless, the rise of China (People's Republic of China) as a very visible non Development Assistance Committee (DAC) actor in foreign aid business has sparked considerable criticism in western literature (Brautigam, 2008).

Chinese foreign aid is termed “external economic cooperation” to give the impression that she focuses on the much needed progress in the recipient country. She pretends to be guided by a principle of “equality and mutual benefit,” or a “win-win” relationship. Yet, this happens to be a myth. China – like other western donors, uses aid as an instrument to increase as many friendly countries as she can to support her values and interests. China for example opened doors to every country in Africa except Swaziland because of her ties with Taiwan.

**Lessons learned over the historical review of the origins of foreign aid  
Aid is rationally desirable**

The foregoing historical review reveals that foreign aid – understood as aid to foreigners i.e. strangers and neighbours – and its sources are closely related. The nature of aid lies in its voluntary nature, and requires freedom and gratitude on both sides. In the light of ancient beliefs, rich individuals have the moral responsibility to help the poor within their family, community and nation. Ancients show a more realistic approach to poverty as rich class double up as landowners, politicians and rulers responsible for the prevailing social injustice. Thus, recommending the goodness of giving because God says so or because it is the right thing to do provides incentives for the rich to ease the suffering of the poor. The fact that the notion is a religious – or simply ethical – one, carries with it enormous goodwill; and ruling elites bask in its glow. Once the society buys the idea of giving, its charm makes it easier to intimidate and impose to the wealthy a moral obligation of generosity. The failure to relieve human misery did not, however, lead to new ways of serving the poor.

**The morally right turns out to be politically expedient**

Aid is not the right thing to do when one party exploits and oppresses another. The evidence is overwhelming that sympathy for the well-being of others is only a supporting objective to selfishness and the desire for wealth. The use of the words charity, aid, assistance and the like is therefore inaccurate and inappropriate if the objective is to render justice and to love the neighbour. The point of concern here is the use of emotive words extracted from the ordinary language to obstruct the separation between means and ends.

Nevertheless, aid actors have more often than not used gifts to promote spiritual welfare of both recipients and donors, buy and maintain friendship, and forge alliances. Basically, they used aid to ensure the

existing social order and to promote the interest of the donor. Aid is an implied rather than an expression of justice and love of humankind.

### **Hard-headed self-interests complement strong moral obligation**

Aid is not a free lunch. People never do anything for nothing. Aid comes with many open and hidden agendas difficult to trace. The donor always gets something out of it. The benefits have even extended to aid administrators while just helping the poor to survive instead of eliminating poverty.

In traditional societies, men of the prayer and men of the pen assert on men of wealth a moral duty to give to one's fellow man, including the provision public goods without expecting anything in return. An examination of the practices of the wealthy in contributing to the well-being of his community, however, shows frequent preference for assisting particular poor or assisting in particular ways that suggest more than a measure of self-interest. In classical Western society, the Church sees men's participation in solidarity and brotherhood efforts to try to wipe out poverty and disease that affected the most vulnerable as a God-given law. The vagaries of the patronage systems, however, show that charity or parish poor-relief does not prevail over other factors. Evidence shows that the underlying motivations were the safety and the salvation of souls of the donors through their remembrance in the prayers of the Church and recipients and political advantages. Aid to poor stemmed from fear of eternal punishment and possible social conflicts. Thus, donating to poor through the Church to ensure impersonal distributions guaranteed huge spiritual rewards. In modern world, the proposal to meet human needs shifts from individual household responsibility and sense of community and neighbourliness to the state. From the very beginning, politicians and tyrannical governments strive to use the vocabulary of religious morality in their power plays and to eliminate Churches as competitors for moral authority. The inaccurate transposition of individual humanitarianism to nations has politicised the issue of aid. Extracting from ordinary language and essential principles of assistance and rationality, politicians turned goodwill into social welfare and insurance programmes more regulated to grasp more power and control of the society.

Humanitarianism or charity does not, however, guide a foreign nation or government. Foreign aid whether from governments or religious oriented organisations advances ideological ideals that generally frame donor's foreign policy or religious establishment. Illustrative is the use of food aid – has helped people to survive in situation of great distress, as a way of

solving surplus production in North America and Western Europe. While millions of people are still starving, Western rich nations have decided to convert their food surplus into bio-fuel production.

### **Too much hoopla at the top and less incentives at the bottom**

It is no wonder that aid increases the power, the wealth, and the influence of individuals, institutions, corporations, and countries that are already wealthy, influential, and powerful. Donors and campaigners place great emphasis on the soup kitchens or on how many people are still alive to deflect attention away from things like teaching how to fish for obvious reason. Despite previous failures to make poverty history, and a track record that shows that much effort has gone to hoopla at the top, wealthy individuals, aid organisations and donor countries surround aid with impressive accomplishment and promise to end poverty. Yet, Western genuine compassion represents only pennies a day from each Western taxpayer. While these pennies receive huge coverage in donor countries, they are almost unnoticed at the bottom if they ever arrive.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature review presented in this paper show that foreign aid, a term that is currently very much in use, is a transposition of personal moral obligation to nations. Donors whether from private or government sector have altruistic feelings for the poor in recipient countries, but also, considerations derived from economics or national interests critically affect the outcomes. In keeping with the development of foreign aid, President Truman is the most important catalyst and an aid wizard. The rise of new and sophisticated aid instruments for economic development of underdeveloped countries takes a turning point in 1961 with the creation of the DAC of the OECD. The new instruments are, moreover, generally more conditional to donor foreign policy interests. Only such interests can justify the current aid flow to China after making so much economic progress<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, China's emergence as a donor to African countries hides as well its own reality of tens of millions of poor. Though it is termed a "win-win" strategy, China's foreign aid is driven by both natural resources and foreign policy reasons.

Learning from Western nations, poor – and rich donors – countries need to make the necessary modification to aid, and use aid as an opportunity for ending the cause of starvation and economic advance. The idea of

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<sup>13</sup> In 2010, China overtook Japan and became the second largest economy.

absolutely pure and simple aid with no strings attached is an illusion. In its typical construction aid is patronising and a political act that shapes everything from donor to local power in the recipient village. It is, however, a matter of political wisdom for the economically poor countries to spend aid on more meaningful productive factors of production while minimising political advantage and prestige. For that to happen, aid actors need to understand the theoretical basis for aid flows in the modern economic structure. The need for further research is therefore urgent.

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