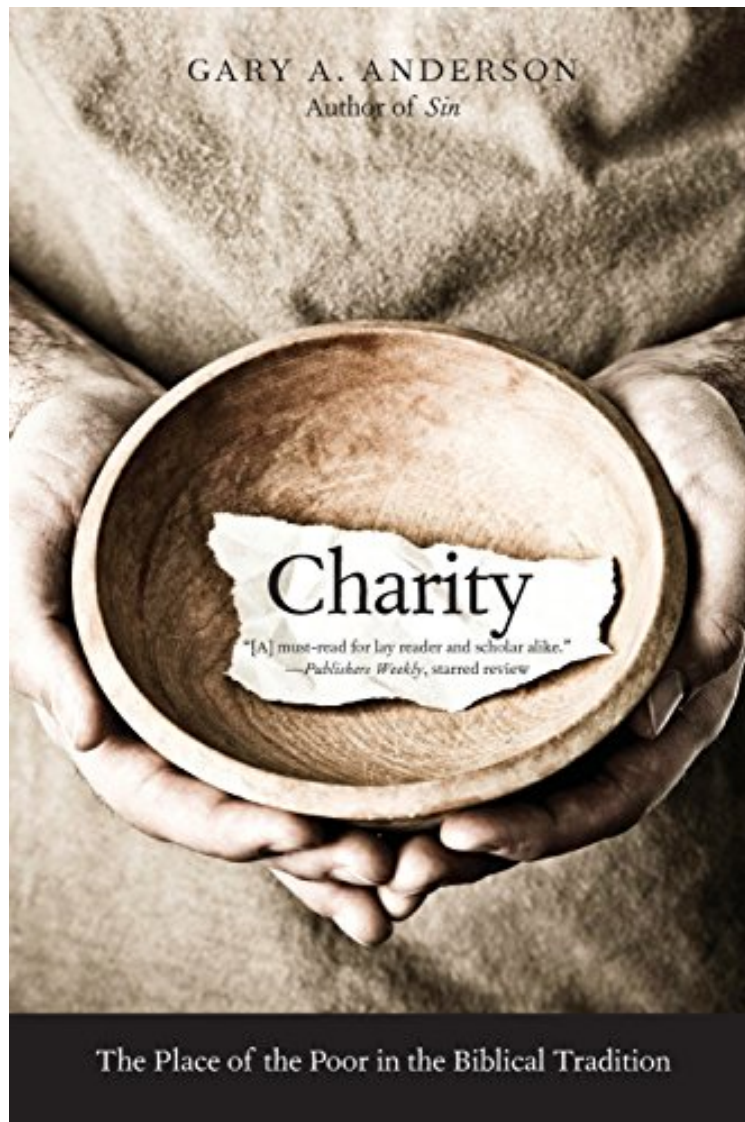


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## Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition

Gary A. Anderson

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**Gary A. Anderson : Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition:

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Several Thoughts for Further Study By Paul Q. Kucera I was hoping this book would spend a good deal of time discussing the poor in the biblical tradition, as the subtitle suggests. The subtitle would probably be better stated as "Almsgiving in the Biblical Tradition." This book is, as the main title makes plain, an exploration of the subject of charity: the poor figure in it only to the extent that they are the nameless, voiceless "slot" through which one's charitable giving goes "clink" in the heavenly treasury. So in one respect,

Anderson's book did not live up to my hopes for it. However, Anderson is not proposing to study the poor as the poor: his aim is to explore how Second Temple Jewish authors, especially Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) and the author of Tobit, thought of almsgiving, and to consider also how almsgiving is treated in the gospels according to Matthew and Luke. If anything, the subtitle might have been, "Time with Tobit." Anderson helpfully explains the way in which almsgiving became an equivalent for temple sacrifice in a time when the Temple in Jerusalem no longer stood. My sense of the sum of Professor Anderson's argument is that charity, specifically giving alms to the poor, is enacting one's faith, in several senses. Anderson discusses those several senses: faith in God, faith in God as the kind of God revealed in Scripture, faith in the goodness of creation, faith in God's promises, faith that God is not indifferent, faith that risking material wealth here on earth is an act that pleases God in heaven, faith that God will remember the faithful. I am still wondering how one chapter leads logically into the next. This is not always made entirely clear. I have the sense that Anderson may have perceived this difficulty, too, because Chapter 7 provides a manner of summary of what he has done in the book up to that point. It might be helpful to refer to Chapter 7 every so often as you read the rest of the book. To my mind, the greatest strength of the book (and the reason I give it four rather than three stars) was the way Anderson challenged me to pay more attention to the "treasury" language used by Jesus, and also to the episodes concerning Cornelius and Tabitha in the Acts of the Apostles. It was also quite helpful for me that Anderson made a valiant if not entirely successful effort throughout his argument to divorce the treasury metaphors from financial/commercial thinking. Thinking about charitable giving as a "memorial" before God was also quite helpful, but this is not quite the same as making a "loan" to God, a metaphor Anderson also explores. Reading from a Protestant, Reformed (Calvinist) perspective, I found the chapter on Purgatory (Ch. 12) engaging, though I do not agree with all of Anderson's readings, propositions, or conclusions. Finally, this book reinforced for me the importance of faith, hope, and love in the life of every disciple. In short, Charity was a mixed bag that seemed to rely very heavily on a small (but influential) handful of texts. The book did not live up to my initial expectations for it. Taken on its own terms, however, Anderson's book provides much food for thought and for further exploration: a good springboard for further study. People with a special interest in Biblical Studies and in Biblical "financial" metaphors will especially appreciate this book. My sense is that a general Christian readership will feel a bit frustrated, impatient, and confused by the book, and I would recommend it to such a reader only with great reservations. For people with some theological/Biblical education, four stars; for the average lay reader, probably three or even two stars.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Continuously interesting, intellectually challenging, and spiritually convicting  
By Christina Grace Dehan  
I found this book continuously continuously interesting, intellectually challenging (without being too dense), and spiritually convicting. While Anderson is clearly a gifted Biblical scholar, he steers clear of jargon and esoteric academic allusions and manages to write in such a way that is accessible to any educated reader who loves Scripture. I highly recommend this book, although readers should be warned that both during and after reading "Charity," they will most likely be compelled to re-examine their own attitudes toward charitable giving.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Life changing book  
By Kevin Cotter  
WOW! I read many books and have studied a lot of theology. What Gary Anderson has done in this book is simply amazing. This is one of the most impactful books that I've read in the last 10 years. It has incredible research and content that transforms your worldview. An tremendous combination of theology, history, and scriptural scholarship that all come together for a moving argument. Well done!

A leading biblical scholar places charity back at the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition, arguing for its biblical roots. It has long been acknowledged that Jews and Christians distinguished themselves through charity to the poor. Though ancient Greeks and Romans were also generous, they funded theaters and baths rather than poorhouses and orphanages. How might we explain this difference?

From Publishers Weekly  
The award-winning author of *Sin: A History* provides another must-read for lay reader and scholar alike, especially those in critical dialogue on how Judeo-Christian biblical values influence the role of the state in caring for the vulnerable. The Greco-Roman empire didn't identify the poor as a priority of the gods. In fact, Roman emperor Julian noted that charity was the defining marker of Christian and Jewish identity, not pagan. How did giving alms and caring for the poor become such a central religious concept? Anderson unpacks the book of Tobit and other biblical literature to reveal a complex and radically countercultural story of how service to the poor became the most privileged way to serve God. "Charity," he argues, "was construed as a loan to God, which was then converted into a form of spiritual currency and stored in an impregnable divine bank." Given the current economic crisis and the low esteem in which our financial industry is held, perhaps "storing up treasure in heaven" by depositing wealth into the hands of the poor is a less volatile economic strategy that offers greater long-term security for all. "The award-winning author of *Sin: A History* provides another must-read for lay reader and scholar alike." Publishers Weekly, starred review  
Ambitious . . . formidable . . . remarkably lucid." Greg Carey, *Christian Century*