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Paul and the Gift to Jerusalem: Overcoming the Problems of the Long-Distance Gift

John M. G. Barclay

Introduction

Paul undertook many challenging tasks, but one of the hardest was his effort to get as many of his churches as possible to contribute to a collection for the ‘saints’ in Jerusalem. He spoke of this in a number of places in his extant letters (1 Cor. 16.1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15.25-28) and devoted much time both to the practical organization of this long-distance gift and to its theological explanation. In this chapter, we will explore, first, how gifts worked in the ancient world, and why they were difficult across a distance, and then the special problematics of the Jerusalem gift. The rest of the chapter will examine the rhetorical and theological dynamics of 2 Corinthians 8-9, in order to draw out Paul’s notion that both giver and receiver, in their reciprocity, participate in the divine gift that flows through each to the other.

Gifts in antiquity

Gifts broadly defined (i.e. gifts as benefits and favours as well as material things) circulated everywhere in the Graeco-Roman world, at all social levels and in all social domains. They constituted one pattern of exchange (alongside trade and pay) but were distinguished from other systems of reciprocal exchange by being voluntary, personal and non-calculable (i.e. not subject to legal regulation or precise monetary evaluation). They were *not* distinguished from reciprocal exchange, as modern Westerners might think, by being unilateral, one-way, with no strings attached. On the contrary, gifts were designed to create or sustain relationships, and those relationships were two-way, with expectation of return.¹ The return could be of a different kind to the gift and at a different time, such that the return for a material favour could be non-material.

¹ For ancient gift-giving, and its expectations of reciprocity, see John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 11-65.

This was especially the case when the wealthy gave benefactions to their cities or to voluntary associations, in the ancient system of benefaction we call 'euergetism'.² In famine relief, in the construction of civic amenities or in carrying out official duties without pay, the elite were eager to give and to be known as givers. They could afford to give without material return, and in any case the return most precious to them was gratitude and honour, social acceptance and an enduring fame.³

Lower down the social scale, and even among those struggling to survive from day to day, gifts circulated in patterns of return that were both material and non-material. Swapping, sharing and lending assistance, giving money or goods was a crucial form of survival among those at or near subsistence level (who constituted the majority of the population in the ancient world). It was astute to gain a reputation for generosity even if that was never going to be inscribed on stone or known outside a small social circle. From early in Greek history (700 BCE?) Hesiod gives advice that makes good sense among economically vulnerable members of society:

Invite your friend, but not your enemy, to dine; especially be cordial to your neighbour, for if trouble comes at home, a neighbour's there, at hand . . . Measure carefully when you must borrow from your neighbour, then pay back the same, or more, if possible, and you will have a friend in time of need . . . We give to a generous person, but no-one gives to someone who is stingy. (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 342–56)

What is evident here is that gifts invite, indeed expect, a return, and are in this sense hardly distinguishable from a loan (except that a legally contracted loan can be recovered by action in law). For those with little surplus and with constant exposure to the vagaries of ill health, accident and failed crops, it was prudent, indeed necessary, to be generous because you never knew when you might need something in return: to be stingy was to cut yourself out of the circles of reciprocity that were the main insurance system of the poor. When we ask why the poor gave (and still give) generously, beyond what they can afford, here is at least part of the answer: because their lives depend on participating in a system of gift-and-return in which they are likely to need, one day, the liberality of others.

This is the informal, regular, face-to-face system of gift that operates locally among neighbours, family and friends; indeed, by entering into this system of give-and-take, strangers became friends. An anonymous gift would make no sense here and is very rare in antiquity: the whole point of gifts is to form and sustain relationships, and anonymity would defeat that aim. Gifts are carefully placed. There is no point in giving to those hostile to you, to those known to be stingy, as they would be *unwilling* to give any return; and there is little point in giving anything substantial to the totally indigent (like the Prodigal Son, a destitute migrant to whom 'no one gave anything', Lk.

² Famously described by Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, abridged and trans. Brian Pearce (London: Penguin, 1990).

³ For a full survey of the evidence, see James R. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace in its Graeco-Roman Context*, WUNT 2/172 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

15.16), since they would be *unable* to give a return. (Of course, if they prayed for God's blessing on you, or if you thought that *God* would give a return, there might be value in this.⁴) And it was hazardous to give to anyone at a distance, unless you already had a tie of mutual commitment by which to maintain the system of reciprocal benefit, even without the pressure of physical presence. Otherwise, to give 'over the horizon' would create no relationship, and without such mutuality, it would hardly constitute a gift.

Long-distance gifts are, in fact, a rare phenomenon in antiquity. Rulers and emperors might grant money to cities or populations at a distance. Helena of Adiabene sent famine relief to the inhabitants of Judaea when she herself became, through conversion, a Jewess;⁵ the Roman emperor might send famine relief to a loyal city in a province, or money for the reconstruction of a city devastated by an earthquake.⁶ In such cases, the gift would be well advertised, and the gratitude and political loyalty of the recipients would be all that the donors needed and wanted. Long-distance ethnic or religious ties might evoke gifts, such as the donations from the Diaspora made to the Jerusalem temple (alongside the tax that adult male Jews paid every year): since the wealthy typically gave money and furniture to local temples, it made sense for Jews or proselytes in the Diaspora to give gifts to 'the one Temple for the one God'.⁷ Voluntary associations might support one another in different locations in accordance with ties of common commercial interest or ethnic connections.⁸ Friends and family sent money and material gifts via intermediaries to their friends or kin at a distance, continuing previously established face-to-face relations despite the interval of space. All of these recognize or affirm existing relationships, ties of politics, friendship, ethnicity or kinship; one would hardly venture a gift at a distance to someone to whom one was not already connected. And, besides the obvious dangers in long-distance transfer of money or goods (given the frequency of highway theft), one needed high levels of trust that gifts sent over a distance would reach their intended destination and would be used for the purposes intended. When giving to a neighbour you could always call in the debt; when giving at a distance, the gift, the relationship and its returns were far more liable to loss.

The Jerusalem collection: A hazardous gift

At the height of his mission in the Mediterranean world, Paul devised a project to collect money from churches in Galatia (central or western Turkey), Achaia (southern

⁴ For Jewish ideologies of gift, in which God is invoked both as giver and as the one who will recompense a generous gift, see Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 39–45.

⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 20.49–50; *J.W.* 4.567; 5.55.

⁶ For examples of imperial benefactions, see Frederick Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St Louis: Clayton, 1982). See further the discussion of benefactions by Lynn Cohick in this volume.

⁷ For the 'half-shekel' tax (Exod. 30.11–16) and its collection in the Diaspora, together with other donations from the Diaspora to the Temple, see John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 417–21.

⁸ See David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts*, WUNT 2/248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 112–18.

Greece) and Macedonia for ‘the saints’ in the Jerusalem church, people hundreds of miles away and mostly of different ethnicity.⁹ At one point, he describes this collection as for ‘the poor among the saints at Jerusalem’ (Rom. 15.26), a commitment perhaps identical with, or more likely a subset, or an imitation, of the agreement at the Jerusalem conference to ‘remember the poor’ (Gal. 2.10).¹⁰ This suggests that material relief is an important aspect of this gift, and in 2 Corinthians 8–9, the longest piece of exhortation about this collection, Paul speaks of the ‘lack’ among the saints which the gift is meant to fill (2 Cor. 8.14; 9.12). The fact that the collection took several years to gather – begun perhaps in 53 CE and not delivered until 57 CE – indicates that it was not designed to meet a short-term emergency, unlike the famine relief sent from Antioch to Jerusalem (described in Acts 11.27–30). In fact, this elongated timescale, and the way that Paul describes the collection in Romans 15, as the Gentiles’ material return for Jerusalem’s ‘spiritual’ gifts (15.26–27), suggest that the collection had a symbolic and not just a material value. In Romans 15, Paul figures the collection as the fruit of his Gentile mission and is anxious lest, after all, it be refused in Jerusalem. It seems it signified for him the tie between the Jerusalem church, with its largely Jewish membership, and the churches he had founded, from largely non-Jewish inhabitants of Graeco-Roman cities. Since gifts create or represent reciprocal relations, Paul intended this gift to tie the churches together across geographical, cultural and political divides. Whether it succeeded in that task is uncertain – and the fact that Acts makes no clear reference to this collection has been taken by some to indicate its failure.¹¹

The gathering of this monetary collection was obviously far more problematic than Paul had expected. Although it was not the same as the temple tax, which was collected annually from adult male Jews both in the homeland and in the Diaspora, Paul may have expected that his collection would be an equally routine affair. The instructions in 1 Cor. 16.1–4 suggest regular tiny deposits of money which would add up to something substantial enough for Corinthian delegates to take to Jerusalem, perhaps accompanied by Paul. But unlike the temple tax, this collection had no scriptural warrant, no support from tradition, no cultural parallel and no atoning significance (‘ransom for the soul’, Exod. 30.12, 16 LXX). It represented no pre-existent ethnic bond, and it attempted to span a distance shortened by few if any bonds of acquaintance. Paul himself knew Jerusalem well, and it is possible that Cephas/Peter had visited Corinth, but even if so, he was not universally acclaimed there (1 Cor. 1.10–12). Otherwise it is not clear if any of Paul’s converts had any familiarity with Jerusalem or with the church members

⁹ For recent full-length treatments of this phenomenon, see Downs, *Offering of the Gentiles*, and Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy, and Theological Reflection in Paul’s Collection*, WUNT 2/124 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

¹⁰ For argument that Gal. 2.10 indicates a general commitment to the poor, not a specific reference to any collection, see Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Graeco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 157–219. For argument that it reflects the earlier collection from the church in Antioch (Acts 11.27–30), a model for the later collection reflected in 1 Cor. 16.1–4, 2 Cor. 8–9 and Rom. 15.14–32, see Downs, *Offering of the Gentiles*, 33–9.

¹¹ The reference to Paul bringing ‘almsgiving’ in Acts 24.17 has been read by some as an oblique reference to the collection; for an argument that Acts makes no reference at all to this collection, see Downs, *Offering of the Gentiles*, 60–70. Of course, silence can be read in more than one way, but Acts 21 suggests that Paul was not well received by the church in Jerusalem, as Paul himself had feared (Rom. 15.31).

there. The most Paul can offer as a mark of their common identity is to depict the Jerusalem recipients as 'saints' (1 Cor. 16.1; 2 Cor. 8.4; 9.1, 12).

Paul's somewhat desperate pleas in 2 Corinthians 8–9 reflect the fact that the Corinthian church had lost interest in this collection (8.6, 10–11).¹² It is possible that they had become positively hostile to it, out of increasing hostility to Paul himself. There are indications that they have lost confidence in Paul and suspect him of intending to pocket this money, after refusing to take pay for his work as an apostle (2 Cor. 11.16–17). Perhaps for that reason, Paul sends Titus ahead to get the Corinthians back on board, and he goes to some lengths to assure them of the probity of the emissaries chosen to take the money to Jerusalem alongside himself (2 Cor. 8.16–24). A local gift one can deliver oneself, certain that it has reached its destination; a long-distance gift disappears over the horizon, and one needs high levels of trust that it will go where one intends. A local gift is part of a face-to-face relationship; a long-distance gift such as this, to unknown recipients, lacks an otherwise essential quality of gift, a personal connection. This impersonality makes the gift feel, in ancient terms, more like a tax, an exaction, than a gift – a feeling Paul tries hard to dispel with his insistence that he wants this gift to be voluntary, not from compulsion (2 Cor. 9.5–7). And because of this distance and impersonality, it would be hard for the Corinthians to imagine any kind of reciprocal relationship with the saints in Jerusalem. What sort of relationship can this gift create, and how will it benefit the Corinthians, either in material or in non-material terms? What will the gratitude of the Jerusalem saints mean to them, assuming that it is gratefully received and that Corinth gets to hear that? What sort of honour can Jerusalem provide, and what would it be worth? And what sort of exchange could develop between Gentile believers in southern Greece and 'the saints' in Jerusalem? There were justified grounds for fearing that this gift would disappear into a black hole without any ensuing friendly relationship – which would make it, in ancient terms, not a good but a bad gift.

Paul's attempts to enable a long-distance gift

Paul's attempts to rescue the situation, to revive the Corinthian commitment to the Jerusalem collection, and to motivate this long-distance gift can be found in the extraordinary and highly rhetorical arguments of 2 Corinthians 8–9.¹³ It is worth noting first what he does *not* do here. We might have expected him to play on the Corinthians' emotions with graphic descriptions of the poverty of the Jerusalem saints, evoking pity by reference to their hunger, their homelessness or their social marginalization. Paul knows how to describe such conditions in relation to himself (e.g. 2 Cor. 6.4–10; 11.23–29) but makes no attempt to do so in relation to the Jerusalem believers. He refers here

¹² Hans Dieter Betz finds two separate letters in 2 Corinthians 8–9, with the second (chapter 9) introducing the topic afresh, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). Most, however, take the two chapters to be part of a single letter.

¹³ For an analysis of its rhetoric, see Kieran J. O'Mahony, *Pauline Persuasion: A Sounding in 2 Corinthians 8–9*, JSNTSup 199 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000). For an earlier treatment of one part of the argumentation (2 Cor. 8.12–15), see John M. G. Barclay, 'Manna and the Circulation

in general terms to their 'lack' (*hysterēma*, 8.4) or 'lacks' (*hysterēmata*, 9.12), but he does not in these chapters refer to the saints as 'poor' (cf. Rom. 15.26), and he offers no depiction of their poverty. Perhaps Paul simply did not know enough about their material condition to give any description of it (it was some time since he had been in Jerusalem), perhaps he could take for granted that they knew what 'lack' meant, or perhaps it would have been hard to make the case that they were any poorer than the Macedonian believers, whom Paul praises for giving generously out of their own deep poverty (8.1-5). This does not mean that the relief of material poverty has fallen out of the picture – filling up the 'lack' of others is a significant part of the argumentation here (8.14). Nor does it mean that Paul eschews any appeal to emotion, preferring to keep on the level of cool, logical argumentation. In fact, these chapters are full of emotional appeal, but the emotions Paul wishes to evoke circle less around the needs of others and more around the motivations to give, motivations internal to the Corinthians and to their relationship to God (and to Paul).

In fact, the bulk of these chapters is spent on manoeuvring the Corinthians into a willingness to give, rhetoric being deployed in antiquity (as today) not to override the will but to make the will willing to do what the persuader would wish. (We are apt to find here arm-twisting, even 'manipulation', but that is a reflection of our modern ideal of 'autonomy' and our naivety about the ways in which we ourselves are influenced by the persuasive techniques of politicians or advertisements.) Paul wants the gift to be voluntary, not an exaction or necessity – in fact, it would not count as a gift at all were it involuntary (9.5, 7). 'Voluntary' may not mean 'spontaneous': Paul approves the way the Macedonians had given 'spontaneously' (8.3), but a willing decision to give may arise from the encouragement of others (cf. 8.17), and Paul, who is careful here not to *order* the Corinthians to give (8.8), is perfectly happy to persuade them, by many available means, to do the right thing (8.8-10). Some of this persuasion concerns the honour of the Corinthians – or their shame, if they were to fail to carry out what Paul says they have promised. As we have seen, honour is a major element of gift-giving in antiquity, typically as the currency returned to the wealthy when they distribute material benefits to those lower down the social scale. But even at a lowlier level, as we glimpse in Hesiod, there is honour in being known as generous – as a giver and not as a Scrooge. In this case, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the honour or shame that will circulate among the churches who are taking part in this collection, and especially of their reputation in the eyes of the Macedonian believers. He holds up before them the level of Macedonian generosity (8.1-5), whose 'abundant joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part' (8.2). And he makes them shudder at the thought that, having boasted of the Corinthians' willingness to give, the Macedonian delegates might arrive in Corinth to find no contribution at all. 'I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be

of Grace: A Study of 2 Corinthians 8:1–15', in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 409–26.

humiliated – to say nothing of you – in this undertaking’ (9.3-4). Here the shame in not keeping one’s promises, in not matching your reputation or fulfilling others’ hopes, is a key part of Paul’s emotive appeal.¹⁴ In a local, face-to-face gift the shame of not carrying through on a promise would be acute in the relationship between benefactor and potential beneficiary. Here, in a long-distance gift, all the work of honour and shame has to be done at the giver’s end of the transaction, and it is those who are watching the giver – that is, the fellow givers and Paul the organizer of the gift – who are depicted as the audience before whom the honour of the giving is displayed. As we shall see, however, the *gratitude* for the gift, the thanks that are the normal return for a benefit or favour, is to be given *not* to the Corinthians (or Macedonians) but to God (9.11, 12), the ultimate source and owner of the gift. In this respect, one key element of the honour-reward for giving will not materialize, which places all the more weight on other factors that will motivate the Corinthians to give.

In fact, there are several other, and deeper, motivations at play here, in the *theological* impetus of the gift. To read this passage in Greek is to be struck by the many ways in which Paul turns the term *charis* – which means favour or privilege (the privilege of taking part in this collection, 8.4), the gift of the collection itself (8.7), and the gift or grace of God in Christ, which has set the whole momentum of this collection in motion. When he begins by speaking of the Macedonian churches, we expect Paul to say, ‘We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the generosity of the churches in Macedonia.’ Actually what he says is, ‘We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace (*charis*) of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia’ (8.1). Behind and before human generosity stands the generosity of God, which enables and impels the human momentum of grace. The whole discussion finishes with the resounding ‘thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift’ (9.15, a reference to Christ) and this echoes the Christological statement that stands at the centre of chapter 8: ‘for you know the *charis* of our Lord Jesus Christ that, because he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’ (8.9).

This verse is usually translated another way, that Jesus, ‘*although* he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor’, with Jesus’s richness understood as a possession or status which he renounced in becoming poor. But I am inclined to think that Paul is playing here on different senses of wealth and poverty, since he has just described the Macedonians’ giving as a ‘wealth of generosity’ (8.2). In other words, Jesus’s poverty (his becoming human) is not a renunciation of his wealth, but an expression of it, his ‘richness’ being not something he once had and gave up, but his wealth of generosity. Hence, it was *because of* his richness (*plousios ōn*) that he became poor (in the incarnation) so that by his poverty we might become rich – that is, rich in the same way, in gift and generosity.¹⁵ In any case, what is clear is

¹⁴ We may compare the appeal to the Corinthians’ reputation for excelling (‘abounding’) in all things (8.7; cf. 1 Cor. 1.7), a form of ‘holy flattery’ as Luther would have said.

¹⁵ For this reading, see John M. G. Barclay, “‘Because He was Rich He Became Poor’: Translation, Exegesis and Hermeneutics in the Reading of 2 Cor. 8.9”, in *Theologizing in the Corinthian Conflict: Studies in the Exegesis and Theology of 2 Corinthians*, ed. R. Bieringer, M. M. S. Ibita, D. A. Kurek-Chomycz and T. A. Vollmer (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 331–44; cf. Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 79–85.

that Paul figures believers as channels or conduits of divine grace, given grace in order to 'pay it forward' in generosity to others. This is what he refers to later as their 'obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ' (9.13): it is because they stand in the path of this grace that they are swept up into its momentum, their wills reshaped in voluntary obedience to its trajectory. 'Voluntary obedience' may sound like an oxymoron to us, with our peculiarly modern antithesis between obligation and (autonomous) freedom. But Paul wants a cheerful and a willing gift (9.5-7) which is also a form of submission to the grace of the gospel, because he knows that wills can be both directed and free.

Placing the Corinthians within the flow of divine grace ensures that their relationship to Jerusalem is 'triangulated' by reference to God. The gift of God in Christ is not just an example they are to imitate; it is a force by which they are enabled and empowered, in fact, transformed. It is as they participate in this gift, allowing it to become both the moral and ontological basis of their action, that they will embody it in their giving, extending the momentum of divine grace received into divine grace passed on. Paul's main work here is to reposition the Corinthians within this flow of grace, making it clear that what they pass on is not truly their own but only what they themselves have received. As conduits of this grace, they can block or unblock this flow, but they are not its source. And for this reason, he can assure them that by giving to Jerusalem they are not putting in jeopardy their own security or well-being. It is God who gives seed to the sower and gifts to the giver (9.10), and against the natural inclination of givers (then and now) to limit their giving before it bites into their future security, Paul assures the Corinthians that 'God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything you may share abundantly in every good work' (9.8). As is even more evident in the Greek, it would have been hard for Paul to pile up more 'alls' and 'everything's' in the course of one sentence!¹⁶

Thus, all the heavy lifting in these chapters is performed in motivating the giver, focused on the 'push factors' in energizing the wills of givers rather than on the 'pull factors' in the needs of the recipients. This is partly to do with the problem of the long-distance gift in the ancient conditions of communication. Knowing exactly what Jerusalem needed, depicting it accurately, explaining it to people who lived in different circumstances at a considerable distance – all of that was next to impossible in relation to this long-range gift. Better to work on the real sticking point – their unwillingness to give at all. And better to work within the one frame that really did unite the believers in Corinth and the believers in Jerusalem – not their common humanity as such, and certainly not common ethnicity or citizenship, but their common status as 'saints', in shared allegiance to Jesus Christ. It is by framing the Corinthians repeatedly as part of the God-sourced cascade of grace that this gift might have the momentum to travel the distance between Corinth and Jerusalem. A long-distance gift needs a lot of power to get airborne: participating in the *charis* of God unleashed in Christ is just the energy required.

¹⁶ For a broad theology of giving in this connection, see Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

Even long-distance gifts aim at reciprocity

So will this gift be one-way, and would it be all the better for being so? For reasons deep in the theology of the Reformation, in the philosophy of the Enlightenment and in the economic and political developments of the modern West, we have come to idealize the notion of the one-way gift, 'pure altruism', the gift without strings, creating no obligation on the recipient, and expecting no return.¹⁷ The anonymous gift enables and enacts exactly that. And certain Gospel passages, which advocate the strategic giving of gifts to those who cannot or will not return (while expecting, indeed guaranteeing, a return from God) have entered into the impression that reciprocity and exchange is commercial and sordid, while gifts live in a purer world of non-circular relations.¹⁸

One might think that a long-distance gift would enable precisely this sort of unilateral charity. So it is all the more striking that Paul does *not* endorse that idealization of the gift, but imagines and expects, even across distance, a form of reciprocity between givers and receivers, between Corinth and Jerusalem. 'I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little" [Exod. 16.18] (8.13-15). The 'fair balance' (*isotēs*, 'equality') is expected to run in both directions: the surplus of one will go to meet the deficit of the other, *each way*. The terms are abstract and broad: it is not at all clear what Jerusalem will have in surplus (material or non-material) or when it will be given to the Corinthians. But it is striking that Paul imagines and insists on this, even in this schematic fashion. He does not settle for, far less idealize, the one-way gift. He figures the Corinthians, for all their surplus in knowledge, speech, eagerness, and so on (8.7), as also vulnerable to lack, needing something from others, even Jerusalem; he does not figure them as the all-sufficient patron.

The quotation about the manna does not spell out how it came to be that the one with much did not have too much and the one with little did not have too little. But it is here interpreted as an expression of a *sharing of surplus*, a redistribution of God-given excess; and it is taken to apply in both directions by a process of continual rebalancing.¹⁹ Rather than one side being permanently the patron, and the other the ever-grateful client, each is a patron to the other or, better, each is equally the client of a surplus-providing patron (God), who gives in order that grace be circulated between them.²⁰ What Paul means by 'equality' or 'fair balance' is that process of equalization by

¹⁷ See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 51–63.

¹⁸ Passages such as Mt. 6.1–5 and Lk. 6.27–38 are often cited here: they warn against the desire for a human reward and work for the creation of new relationships even when a return cannot be expected or guaranteed. But such texts make very clear that there will be a return – only it will come *from God*. Thus, these texts do not idealize non-reciprocity as such; they simply enable creative and extreme forms of giving that do not depend on human reciprocity.

¹⁹ See Barclay, 'Manna and the Circulation of Grace'.

²⁰ The problematics of one-way charity, reinforcing power differentials, crushing the dignity of the recipient, and creating dependencies that reduce rather than enable the agency of the poor, are well

which giving in one direction is continually, though perhaps differentially, equalized by giving in the other. Even the long-distance gift is expected to be, in some fashion and at some time, bilateral. Each can expect, at some time and in some respect, to be in surplus, with enough to give to others, *and* at some other time or in some other respect, to be in deficit, requiring others to fill up that lack. If the long-distance gift was difficult to motivate, precisely because it made the possibility of such reciprocity remote, Paul does not give up on this expectation, but underlines it, even if he is not precise as to its means. The mutuality in gift and need is integral to his vision of social relations, as in the repeated instruction to love, serve and build up 'one another' (Gal. 5.14; 6.2; Rom. 14.19, etc.). It is also his vision of the body, whose varied members give to one another and depend on one another in equal measure (1 Cor. 12.12-31; Rom. 12.4-8). It is striking that this vision is not abandoned, even in the case of the long-distance gift.

There are other examples of long-distance gift in the Pauline letters, not least the material support that the Philippians send to Paul in prison (in Ephesus or Rome; Phil. 4.10-21). There are also gifts and favours of a different kind at play between Paul and Philemon, in their long-distance conversation over what to do with Onesimus. In such cases, a similar dynamic applies: Paul places the gift within a larger theological frame, and figures the parties within a *koinōnia* in which each has something to give to the other. This pattern of 'giving and taking' (Phil. 4.15) is not a corruption or diminishment of the gift but its proper expression, since the relationships that Paul intends to build are of two-way benefit, triangulated by the endless and sufficient giving of God in Christ.

Indeed, it is this theological frame which shapes all Paul's construals of gift-giving. God is the superabundant giver who gives through each party to the other. Thanksgiving for the gift goes first and foremost to God, its ultimate source. By giving and by receiving, each party is therefore taken deeper into the 'inexpressible gift' of God in Christ, giving to and receiving from God precisely as they give on to others and receive from them. This triangulation relieves the pressure on the human relationship. The power of the givers is softened if they are merely the brokers of a God-given gift. The obligations of the receivers are first and foremost to God, rather than to the human giver. And if the intended return never in fact materializes, God will give sufficient return in some other way. Even in a long-distance gift, the creation and sustenance of human relations of reciprocity are not secondary but primary goals. But these relations are subsumed into a theological dynamic which demonstrates that the purpose of this gift-giving goes further than the mutual satisfaction of human wants, directing all parties towards their true human fulfilment, in vulnerability and abundance, in drawing from and responding to the gifts and grace of God.

known. For a popular critique, see Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It)* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).