Lockett, Virginia. "Response to John Barclay." *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*. Ed. Walton Steve and Swithinbank Hannah. London: T&T Clark, 2019. 107. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567677747.ch-016>>.

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Response to John Barclay

Virginia Lockett

In my experience as a fundraiser, there is no such thing as pure altruism, and it is refreshing to hear from John Barclay that gifts in ancient antiquity were never understood as or meant to be a one-way exchange. Their purpose was to build relationship. This is the best type of giving, where there is a fuzzy line, a blur, between the donor and recipient because there is a deep recognition that both benefit in mutual reciprocity. As a Christian organization, this reciprocity is at the heart of Tearfund's fundraising, but it is a multi-faceted relationship our organization looks to foster with each other, ourselves, the Triune God and creation. Generosity is the driving motivation for this, rooted in our whole Christian life response to a God who gave everything and continues to give us all things. We Christians today, like the Corinthians, as John describes, should consider our faith and our faith-filled response recognizing everything we think, do or own comes from God.

Long-distance gifts are still a challenge today – I should know! It is hard to give financially into a seemingly unknown situation to an unknown, hard-to-get-to-know people, and that is before we consider the complex sociopolitical situations country by country and the changing climate that besets the world's poorest. This is why stories are so important. They humanize a complex problem as so much can be communicated heart to heart in a simple true story of a poor woman who sells her most precious possession because she is captivated by a future, yet unrealized hope, for herself and her community.

Just as John suggests, extraordinary examples of generosity like this and the Macedonians can inspire and at the same time challenge us; but I know through my work, there is divine grace in giving. Time and time again, we in Tearfund hear from our supporters how much joy they find in their giving – to say it is a privilege to hear their stories cannot fully capture the reverence with which we hear them. As John discusses in relation to Paul's call to the Corinthians, I can say that each and every giver is a blessing to the kingdom, part of our modern day God-sourced cascade of grace.