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Response to Virginia Lockett

John M. G. Barclay

I find Virginia's story of Betty in Uganda inspiring. It is a story of how gift-giving, trust and community operate among the relatively poor, breaking down the assumption that rich Western Christians are always the givers and the rest of the world the receivers. Although Paul does not use stories from the poor in Jerusalem, he does use the example of the poor Macedonians (2 Cor. 8.1-5) to activate the Corinthians' giving, but what Virginia provides richly complements that. If all giving is part of the 'cascade of grace', the purpose of our giving is to enable others to give, in which they will in some cases be paying it 'back' but, in many cases, rather, paying it 'forward' to others.

Paul's model of giving generally involves some form of reciprocity, and he imagines gifts going two ways between Corinth and Jerusalem. But the reciprocity does not have to be as simple as this kind of bilateral arrangement. Very often, gifts circulate in what anthropologists call 'generalized reciprocity': a gift from one person gets passed on, in substance or in spirit, to other people in the community and, thus, circulated around the wider society in a way that certainly benefits the original giver, but not in a direct or immediate way. (You let someone into the traffic, in a way that will not benefit you directly, but it does set a tone of considerate behaviour among drivers that will benefit you when you need someone to let you into the traffic.) Thus, it exactly fits the biblical picture that Betty in Uganda (and others like her) should not be just the recipient of benefaction from richer countries but should be enabled to become herself a giver, thus enabling others to become givers, and so on *ad infinitum*. And the more we hear such encouraging stories, the more we are inspired to give, because we are not sinking money into a bottomless pit of 'receipt' but investing it into a system of generosity, collaboration and hard work (a mixture of business and charity), which will itself be productive, for the benefit of all.

Thus, when we hear such stories, we do not sit back and say, 'They can do it for themselves', but we are inspired to get on board with such creative processes of gift and development. And in and behind it all, inspiring, directing and funding such generosity, is the 'grace of God in Betty' (cf. 2 Cor. 8.1), a momentum Paul would want us to be part of, both for Betty's sake and for ours.