Swithinbank, Hannah. "Response to Fiona Gregson." *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*. Ed. Walton Steve and Swithinbank Hannah. London: T&T Clark, 2019. 158. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567677747.ch-024>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 12:54 UTC.

Copyright © Steve Walton, Hannah Swithinbank and contributors 2019. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Response to Fiona Gregson

Hannah Swithinbank

The first thing I noticed about Fiona Gregson's essay was that we were both starting in the same place – a recognition that there is something happening in our contemporary discussion of poverty in the UK, in which personal responsibility and behaviour are being made key factors in answering the question, 'Who deserves to be helped, and how?' I think what works well about these two essays in partnership is that the discussion of what the Bible has to say about our responsibilities towards people living in poverty can prepare Christians to respond to the rhetoric – and the assumptions to which this rhetoric is tied – which I discuss in my essay.

There are two other issues which Fiona's essay and the two essays together raise. The first is the idea of people having *reciprocal responsibilities* in their relationships with others. It struck me, in Fiona's essay, that one of the ways that the biblical texts might take out the 'sting' of the question of being deserving or underserving is by making it clear that the primary expected response to generosity is not gratitude. As the essay points out, Jesus does not just heal or respond to those who say thank you, and yet Paul calls on the church to give because they have experienced God's generosity. At the same time, that does not seem to mean that there is no reciprocal relationship: it strikes me that there is an expectation that, while generosity should be expected from others, it should not be taken for granted.

The second thing is the question of whom we have these responsibilities to – as Christians and as citizens. By and large, the vast majority of people *do* operate on the assumption that we do have some kind of responsibility to support some of the many people living in poverty in some way, but to *whom*? Are our responsibilities to our families, our local neighbourhoods, our fellow citizens, the members of the global church or our other tribes, or those beyond our national borders? I think the discussion of the particular passages in Fiona's essay – and looking back to the Bible – can help Christians, at least, begin to work out our answers to that question.