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Rich Poverty: 2 Corinthians 8.1–15 and the Social Meaning of Poverty and Wealth

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Abstract

This article, originally presented as the Presidential Address at the 2022 SNTS Meeting in Leuven, explores the ways in which Paul configures giving and ‘wealth’, both in relation to the Macedonians and Corinthians (as contributors to the Jerusalem collection) and in relation to Christ. Drawing on the dream-interpretations of Artemidorus, it illustrates how ‘wealth’ could be understood in antiquity as performance rather than possession: one is wealthy in giving and not (or not only) in having. In this light, Paul offers a striking image of the Macedonians who in their poverty were ‘rich’ in their unreserved commitment to the collection, fulfilling the dream of the poor by acquiring the dignity of giving. The Christological statement of 2 Cor 8.9 can also be understood (and integrated) in a new way: it was *in* his wealth (of self-sharing) that Christ became poor (in the weakness of the cross), so that the Corinthians, participating in this momentum, might become ‘rich’ in the same self-giving of Christ. Although grace and money are not identical, neither are they unrelated ‘economies’: the grace of the Christ-event transforms its beneficiaries into givers, rich in multiple forms of generosity, including material gift. The text thus evidences principles of a non-competitive mode of social relations operative in the material sphere, with the capacity to stimulate a theological challenge to dehumanising forms of capitalism.

Keywords: Paul; poverty; wealth; grace; Jerusalem collection; Artemidorus

I Introduction

Among the many arresting graffiti found on the walls of Pompeii is one that reads: ‘I hate poor people: if anyone wants something for nothing, he is a fool. Let him pay for it.’¹ It is not clear who is speaking, from what social position, nor who is meant by ‘poor people’. But one may glimpse here the disdain accorded to those who are unable to live by the rules of reciprocity and exchange, who want ‘something for nothing’, because they have nothing to give in return. The physical and material signs of poverty were frequently noted in antiquity: hunger, malnutrition, shabby clothing, and squalid living conditions. But central to the condition of poverty was also the social stigma associated with the inability to conduct ‘decent’ or ‘dignified’ forms of social exchange. Such social deficit is glimpsed, of course, in New Testament parables: witness the dishonest steward ‘ashamed to beg’ (Luke 16.3) and the impoverished, foreign labourer (the ‘prodigal son’)

¹ *Abomino paupero[s]. Quisqui(s) quid gratis rogat, fatu(u)s est; aes det et accipiat rem, CIL IV 9839b.*

so disdained that ‘no-one would give him anything’ (Luke 15.16).² Poverty was degrading. Not only did it limit the chances of survival; it also diminished social respect, even between those whose differences in material resources were relatively small.

In this paper, I will explore the complex ways in which Paul configures poverty and wealth in 2 Corinthians 8.1–15, with a focus on their meaning for social relations. The dynamics of ‘wealth’ and ‘poverty’ in this passage are complex: the ‘poor’ Macedonians perform a kind of ‘wealth’ in their giving (8.1–5), while the Corinthians are encouraged to contribute to the collection by an appeal to a Christological narrative which figures Christ as both ‘rich’ and ‘poor’, an event through which the Corinthians themselves became in some sense ‘rich’ (8.9). The multiple puzzles of this text are best resolved, I shall argue, if we understand Paul’s ‘wealth’ discourse in terms of *use*, with the accent on performance rather than possession. The Macedonians, Christ, and the Corinthians all turn out to be ‘wealthy’ not in their having but in their giving, a notion that coheres with some ancient assumptions about wealth.³ To illustrate these, I will draw on the dream-interpretations of Artemidorus, an under-utilised resource for illuminating the assumptions and expectations of those who lived at the social level of Paul and his addressees. Since Paul here weaves together economics, social relations, and theology, our reading will bring to light key features of his ‘economy of grace’, in which non-competitive dynamics of self-sharing are integral to the identity of those in Christ, and the poor are accorded dignity through their graced capacity to contribute to relations of exchange.

I leave open whether 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 are a single discourse or two separate letters.⁴ In fact, the rhetorical strategy of 2 Corinthians 8 is sufficiently distinctive to justify our singular focus there, while parallels will sometimes be noted from 2 Corinthians 9 and elsewhere. Within the history of the collection, 2 Corinthians 8 follows Paul’s instructions in 1 Cor 16.1–4.⁵ But the rhetorical situation has changed and is different again from the way Paul later describes the ‘political’ dimensions of the project in Romans 15. Neither 2 Corinthians 8 nor 2 Corinthians 9 brings into focus the ethnic or geographical aspects of the collection: in contrast to Romans 15.25–31, there is here no mention of Jerusalem, of the Gentile identity of the participants, or of an obligation to the Jerusalemite believers. It is clear that the collection discussed in 2 Corinthians 8 is

² Among analyses of ancient poverty alert to these social ramifications, see Gregg E. Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 42–62, and Larry L. Welborn, ‘The Polis and the Poor’, in *The First Urban Churches 1: Methodological Foundations* (ed. James R. Harrison and Larry L. Welborn; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015) 189–243.

³ See, for instance, Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica* 1.5.7: ὄλας δὲ τὸ πλοῦτειν ἔστιν ἐν τῷ χρῆσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ἐν τῷ κεκτῆσθαι: καὶ γὰρ ἡ ἐνέργεια ἔστι τῶν τοιούτων καὶ ἡ χρῆσις πλοῦτος.

⁴ The debate on this matter is summarised by Margaret E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: Volume 1* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994) 36–43. The case for two separate letters (first formulated by Johann Salomo Semler) is mounted by Hans-Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), while the unity of the two chapters is argued by Kieran J. O’Mahony, *Pauline Persuasion: A Sounding in 2 Corinthians 8–9* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). For survey and analysis, see Eve-Marie Becker, ‘Stellung und Funktion von 2. Korinther 8–9 im literarischen Endtext’, in *Theologizing in the Corinthian Conflict* (ed. Reimund Bieringer, Ma. Marilou S. Ibita, Dominika A. Kurek-Chomycz, and Thomas A. Vollmer; Leuven: Peeters, 2013) 283–304.

⁵ It may, in fact, be the first piece of correspondence after 1 Corinthians; see John M.G. Barclay, ‘2 Corinthians’, in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (ed. James D.G. Dunn and John Rogerson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 1353–6; Margaret M. Mitchell, ‘Paul’s Letters to Corinth: The Interpretative Intertwining of Literary and Historical Reconstruction’, in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth* (ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) 307–38.

the same as that discussed in those other texts,⁶ but Paul's focus in 2 Corinthians 8 is necessarily different. Here Paul faces a crisis. While the Macedonian assemblies have joined in the collection, he fears that the Corinthians have, for whatever reason, faltered in their commitment to contribute (2 Cor 8.10–11; cf. 9.3–5). Thus, Paul here presses into the rationale of the Jerusalem collection in a very particular way. In this critical situation, what matters is not its wider significance for inter-ethnic partnership among Christ-followers so much as simply *making a contribution*. The urgent matter at hand is that a gift of some sort be given. Thus, all the attention in our text (2 Cor 8.1–15) is devoted to positioning *the donors* in relation to God, in relation to the other donors, and in relation to the act of giving. Where *the recipients* come into focus (in 2 Cor 8.14–15), it is as partners in a gift-exchange, not as Jews/Judeans in Jerusalem. In other words, the rhetorical exigence of 2 Corinthians 8 (the Corinthian reluctance to give) elicits a discourse primarily concerned with the well-springs of *giving as such* – a discourse both highly specific to this occasion and sufficiently fundamental to evoke a larger matrix of values and beliefs regarding a Christ-oriented regime of gift. It brings to the centre of attention the question of how the contributors to this project should figure themselves as givers.

2 The Social Meaning of Wealth and Poverty

'Wealth' and 'poverty' mean different things at different social levels, and interrogation of such terms requires some sense of the life-experiences of those who use them. After several decades of discussion regarding the economic level of the members of Paul's assemblies, uncertainty still remains around the status of named individuals (such as Erastus, Rom 16.23).⁷ But many scholars would agree that the volatile conditions of the members of Paul's assemblies (including Paul himself) rendered most of them continually vulnerable to the threat of economic crisis.⁸ Volatility is the key word here. Attempts to place individuals in one or another position on a 'poverty scale' tend to mask the *diachronic* reality that life-conditions were, for most people in the Graeco-Roman world, predictably unpredictable.⁹ A wide range of common events could create a crisis for a household, and the vast majority of the ancient population, urban and rural, lived no further than two such crises away from destitution, many much closer to the brink than that. In such vulnerable conditions, the most reliable form of insurance was the cultivation of a network of mutual support, where one could hope for material aid from relatives, neighbours, and friends on the assumption of a commitment to help them when they needed it.

⁶ Here the collection is, at one level, Paul's project (2 Cor 8.4–5, 19–20; cf. 2 Cor 9.4, 11), and it is directed towards the 'lack' (ὕστερημα/ ὑστερήματα, 8.14; cf. 9.9, 12) of 'others' (8.13) labelled 'the saints' (οἱ ἄγιοι, 2 Cor 8.4; cf. 9.1, 12). Those features match both 1 Cor 16.1–3 and Rom 15.25–31.

⁷ For recent analysis of the debate, with scepticism about our ability to assign individuals to specific economic strata, see John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) 186–208.

⁸ Although differences remain about how far above bare subsistence some believers may have been, most scholars now accept that the majority were in a zone where changeable conditions could quickly tip them into disaster. See Steven J. Friesen, 'Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission', in Schowalter and Friesen (eds.), *Urban Religion*, 352–70; Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Peter Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

⁹ For poverty scales, see Steven J. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus', *JNTS* 26 (2004) 323–61; Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 36–59. Crises could be brought about by a large range of events, such as accident, illness, or the death of a family member; harvest-failure and associated price rises; intermittent work or under-employment; theft, bad luck in business, or a loan not repaid; and rises in rents or taxes.

Indeed, peer-to-peer reciprocal favours were by far the most common system of ‘benefaction’ in the ancient world.¹⁰

For the majority of the population, a crucial measure of the difference between ‘wealth’ (or at least ‘sufficiency’) and ‘poverty’ was the capacity to participate as a giver in the humdrum reciprocities of everyday life. Our difficulty is in getting a feel for these realities.¹¹ Much of value can be gleaned from the proverbs, fables, and *gnōmai*, which Teresa Morgan has highlighted as sources of ‘popular morality’.¹² But let me add here the manual of dream-interpretations written by Artemidorus of Daldis (late second – early third century CE), since this remarkable book constitutes a rich source of evidence for the assumptions of the non-elite in the Graeco-Roman world.¹³

Artemidorus offers interpretations of prophetic dreams (ὄνειρα), which are taken to indicate a change of fortune, for the better or the worse. Although he had consulted books, Artemidorus also conducted a form of ‘ethnographic’ research at festivals and cities in Asia and Greece, enquiring into ordinary people’s dreams and their outcomes; he had also ‘consorted for many years with the much-maligned diviners of the market-place’ (Praef. 1). Since, in his hermeneutical schema, dreams meant different things for different types of people, he enquired in each case into the status, gender, age, ethnicity, and occupation of the dreamer. As a result, his book illuminates the hopes and fears of slaves, craftsmen, farmers, sailors, soldiers, immigrants, merchants, and many others. Because he interprets dreams not by esoteric techniques, but by metonymy, metaphor, or analogy, the interpretations draw on assumptions that apparently made sense far down the social scale, and his work has rightly been regarded as a valuable source of social information by scholars of ancient history.¹⁴ The interpretations may surprise us, but their logic is revealing. It is a good sign, for instance, for a poor person to dream that they are being crucified. Why? Because it indicates that they will be elevated socially (as the crucified are elevated

¹⁰ For sharing and exchange as the survival systems of the poor, see Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 56–58, and (with cross-cultural comparison) Ryan Schellenberg, ‘Subsistence, Swapping, and Paul’s Rhetoric of Generosity’, *JBL* 137 (2018) 215–34. The concentration by New Testament scholars on asymmetrical relationships, such as personal patronage and civic or group benefaction (euergetism), has tended to obscure the more humdrum forms of mutual favour that permeated the social relations of everyday life and might save the poor in a crisis. Because ‘benefaction’ has been used to cover a range of structurally different forms of giving, I label the more symmetrical, everyday forms of gift-exchange ‘peer-to-peer reciprocal favours’. For proper emphasis on the variety of exchange relations in the ancient world, see Georges Massinelli, *For Your Sake He Became Poor: Ideology and Practice of Gift Exchange Between Early Christian Groups* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

¹¹ Occasionally, even elite literature will feature the ordinary woman who lends salt, herbs, or items for sacrifice to her friends, or the farmer who lends farm equipment to a neighbour. See, e.g. Theophrastus, *Characters*, 4.11; 9.7; 10.12–13. Alciphron 2.3 is an imagined letter from a farmer: ‘Please lend me twenty bushels [of wheat] to give me the means of saving my own life and the lives of my wife and children. And when a year of good harvest comes, we will repay you the same measure or better, if our crop is abundant.’ Compare 2.12, a letter offering to swap harvest baskets for wine jars, since κοινὰ τὰ φίλων (a proverb attributed first to Pythagoras; see Diogenes Laertius 8.1.10); and 2.29, offering to give spare piglets from a recent litter, since famers know that those in surplus should share with their friends (τοῖς φίλοις κοινῶν εἶναι τοὺς ἐν περισσῆσι ὄντας). The papyri offer many real-life equivalents (e.g., *P. Mich.* 8.511, small-scale economic arrangements between father and son).

¹² Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹³ For text and translation, see Daniel E. Harris-McCoy, *Artemidorus’ Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). His text is lightly adapted from Roger A. Pack, *Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon Libri V* (Bibliotheca Teubneriana; Leipzig: Teubner, 1963). Translations below are adapted from Harris-McCoy.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Arthur J. Pomeroy, ‘Status and Status-Concern in the Greco-Roman Dream-Books’, *Ancient Society* 22 (1991) 51–74; István Hahn, *Traumdeutung und gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit: Artemidorus als sozialgeschichtliche Quelle* (Xenia 27; Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1992); Adele Filippo, ‘La simbologia della ricchezza e della povertà nell’ “Onirocriticon” di Artemidoro’, *Quaderni camerti di studi romanistici* 13 (1985) 425–38.

physically) and that they will nourish others, a sign of wealth (as the crucified corpse nourishes the birds that peck at it, 2.53).¹⁵ If such an interpretation could sound plausible, we should attend to its social assumptions, not least concerning wealth as entailing the capacity to give.

Artemidorus uses a variety of terms for the 'poor' (πένης, ἄπορος, πενίχρης) and is aware that there are grades of poverty, with some people in more 'extreme poverty' (πενία πολλή, 2.36) than others. The prospect of wealth is always a good thing (there are no philosophical hang-ups about attachment to 'external goods'), whether this comes about through luck, work, inheritance, or marriage. Artemidorus can see life-prospects 'from below': he knows that the poor would welcome the role of a client, so long as the patron is reliable (e.g., 2.20, 27, 56; 4.2). He is also familiar with material aspects of poverty, such as going hungry, eating only the cheapest food, looking emaciated, wearing torn and dirty clothes, being infested with lice, and washing only rarely (e.g., 1.64, 68–9, 80; 2.3; 4.47).

My focus is on the social meaning of poverty. As we might expect, poverty is associated with disdain, contempt, and disgrace (e.g., 2.26); the poor are ταπεινοί (4.84) and are liable to be considered 'lightweight' and insignificant (οἱ λεπτοὶ καὶ ἀμαυροί, 2.36).¹⁶ Poverty is regularly associated with metaphors of restriction, necessity, and limitation: commonly linked words are ἀναγκάσιον and στενοχωρία, brought about by hunger or debt (e.g., 1.26, 45, 79). To dream about wearing a body-encompassing cloak signals the 'afflictions and restrictions' (θλίψεις καὶ στενοχωρία) associated with poverty, a loss of freedom parallel to that of a man convicted in a trial (2.3).¹⁷ Poverty brings loneliness (2.36) as it breaks or inhibits friendship ties.¹⁸ To be poor means the inability to 'carry' (βαστάζειν), and dependence on being carried. That might be good if one is 'carried' by (receives benefits from) a rich man, but in general 'it is better to be able to help someone than to need assistance and help' (κρείττον ἀμύνειν τινὶ δύνασθαι τοῦ ἐπιδεῖσθαι τιμωρίας καὶ βοθησίας, 2.56). Realistically, no-one can survive on one's own: one would wish dreams of friendship, since 'human beings need aid and people who collaborate with them (οἱ συλλαμβανόμενοι), since by means of such people they receive benefits' (ὠφελούονται, 3.9).¹⁹ Small gradations of wealth can make a significant difference,²⁰ but it is thrilling to dream of entertaining the Gods: 'for one who is already in poverty and distress, this foretells a substantial outlay of good things; for then the poor [when they fare well] are most thankful to the Gods and make offerings' (3.14).

The social significance of wealth is thus the opposite of poverty. Wealth is associated with height (1.14), freedom (having wings, 1.4), and expansion (enlarged bodily parts, 1.45), and is frequently associated with the capacity to 'carry' or 'nourish' others. In

¹⁵ Cf. 2.54 on being eaten by wild beasts; for discussion of crucifixion dreams, see Justin J. Meggitt, 'Laughing and Dreaming at the Foot of the Cross: Context and Reception of a Religious Symbol', *Journal for the Critical Study of Religion, Ethics and Society* 1 (1996) 9–14.

¹⁶ Tellingly, poor people resemble 'places that are paltry and unremarkable (χαρῖσις λιτοῖς καὶ ἀσίμοις), into which dung is cast, or any other worthless thing'; the rich are associated with 'the shrines of Gods' or 'some other sort of famous place' (2.9).

¹⁷ To be poor means to lack freedom of speech (παρρησία), 'tied down' such that one's speech carries no weight (1.32, citing famous lines from Theognis).

¹⁸ It is a portent of poverty to dream that you are bald, with nothing (no hair) to hold onto, as one might normally expect to 'hold onto' (ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι) one's male or female relatives (hair on the right or left of the head, 1.21).

¹⁹ It is auspicious to dream that you benefit (εὐεργετεῖν) others of whom you have need, since (on the assumption of reciprocity) you will not receive assistance yourself unless you have given them help (4.33). The best sort of dreams for the poor signal that, through luck or profit, they will be able to make public contributions (ἐπιδόσεις, 2.30).

²⁰ The poor are overjoyed with small changes of fortune, 4.84; cf. 2.20.

this regard, dreams of flow or overflow are especially indicative. Since prophetic dreams signal a change in circumstance (not the continuation of present conditions), a flow-dream for the rich might signal an unfortunate drain on their resources. But for the poor it signals wealth (4.26). Thus, to dream of a flow of bodily fluids (of almost all kinds, including vomiting!) means for the poor an abundance of goods – abundance here interpreted not as *having much*, so much as the capacity to *share much* with others. To dream of having milk in one’s breasts signals for a poor man (!) who lacks a livelihood (ἀνδρὶ πένητι καὶ βίου δεομένῳ) an abundance of wealth and acquisitions, so he can nourish others (1.16). Vomit or blood signals the outflow of money (1.33, 61; 4.26; for other kinds of flow, see 1.78; 2.26), while to dream of a river flowing out of one’s house means that one will be rich in the public domain (2.27).²¹

Wealth, therefore, shapes social relations: beyond acquisition, accumulation, and social elevation, it signals gift, generosity, and the support of others. ‘For one who possesses much should likewise share his wealth (μεταδοίη ἄν), and the one who has not should receive (λάβοι ἄν)’ (4.2). That makes perfect sense in a world where identity and honour are defined through social relationships. Those with relatively more wealth were generally concerned to turn economic capital into social capital (making networks of friends or dependants) and to gain, through the use of money, the most valuable forms of symbolic capital (honour and a reputation for generosity).²² In a cultural context where wealth was open to criticism (‘greedy profits’, 4.67) as unjustly gained, uselessly squandered, or selfishly hoarded, it was advantageous (or even socially necessary) to convert money into a positive social asset, through generosity to fellow humans and to the Gods.²³ We learn from Artemidorus that such assumptions reached far down the social scale, even among the poor, where wealth-differentials were small. To ascend from poverty is to be able to give (or give back), and wealth is made salient and socially significant not in its possession but in its performance, and its flow towards others.

3 The Macedonians’ Wealth-in-Poverty

The opening verses of 2 Corinthians 8 present a παράδειγμα concerning the Macedonians, whose function is to stimulate emulation in Corinth and to require the Corinthians to scrutinise their own role as givers. Paul is explicit about his purpose – through the σπουδὴ of others, he is testing the genuineness of the Corinthians’ love (8.8). Honour is here at stake, and because for Paul divine and human agency are not in principle competitive or mutually exclusive,²⁴ a contribution that brings glory to God (or Christ, 8.19, 23; cf.

²¹ Many who are in need and seek help (δεόμενοι καὶ χηρίζοντες) will make their way to one’s house (2.27). For the principle connecting wealth with outlay, see 4.26: ‘Regard all vomiting, whether of blood or food or phlegm, as beneficial for the poor (τοῖς ἀπόροις), but for the wealthy, a portent of harm: for the poor would not lose something unless they had gained it beforehand; but those who have something, lose it’. Notably, if the poor dream of being wealthy, their dreams consist of the flow of wealth, not just its possession.

²² There was a significant turn in the Greek tradition in the fifth century BCE, when wealth in a city-state could be acquired and used in disregard of older rules of social responsibility, and thus became newly subject to criticism; see David M. Schaps, ‘Socrates and the Socratics: When Wealth Became a Problem’, *The Classical World* 96 (2003) 131–57.

²³ Artemidorus treats as one of the universal cultural features of his world the duty to ‘respect the Gods and honour them’ (1.8). It is striking how often Gods feature in the dreams he interprets, as part of the social nexus of everyday life. For the conversion of money into ‘higher’ transactional orders, elevating it from market-relations into the social and cosmic domain, see Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, ‘Introduction’, in Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch, *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1–32.

²⁴ The Macedonians’ behaviour is attributable both to God’s χάρις and to their own choice, 8.1–4; cf. for Titus, 8.16–17. For a range of possibilities in figuring the relationship between divine and human agency, see John M.G.

9.13) can also enhance the honour of the human contributors.²⁵ Paul's depiction of the Macedonians is carefully crafted, using ellipsis, assonance, and ambiguity, and what interests us particularly is his depiction of 'wealth' in 'abject poverty' (8.2), the creation of a space for honourable giving where it is least expected. The picture may be idealised, but it is Paul's construction of reality that is our concern. And since that construction may reflect *his own* experience of poverty, it is all the more interesting.²⁶

Paul places the Macedonians' action, from the beginning, in the domain of divine activity (as initiated by divine χάρις, 8.1), and weaves together, in paradoxical combination, affliction with joy, and poverty with surplus (8.2). On the one side of each pairing, it is no surprise to find affliction (θλίψις) associated with deep poverty (ἢ κατὰ βάθους πτωχείᾳ): as we have seen, poverty is often linked with the vocabulary of friction and pressure.²⁷ What is surprising is that joy goes with affliction and that surplus is linked with poverty. That the Macedonians gave *even* in such circumstances is, of course, a rebuke to the Corinthians whose failure to give thus far Paul cannot (or at least, does not) attribute to any such mitigating factors.²⁸ But what he underlines is the paradoxical presence of plenty in the Macedonians' condition of lack: a περισσεία of joy (χαρά, chiming with χάρις), and a parallel surplus from poverty (πτωχείᾳ), which ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος αὐτῶν (8.2; the assonance is notable). The language of 'surplus into' is reminiscent of Artemidorus' interpretations of flow, with the twist that the flow issues here from the condition of poverty. Here is the dream of the poor, that they become wealthy enough to give, with the honour and empowerment that is associated with benefitting others.

We should note, however, a certain imprecision in Paul's terms. What emerges from Macedonia is the wealth of their ἀπλότης (8.2). Although this term is frequently translated by 'generosity', Paul says nothing here about money and specifies no quantity. The semantic range of ἀπλότης covers a variety of social and psychological postures that are in some sense 'single' or 'wholehearted'.²⁹ Even when associated with 'wealth' (in 8.2; cf. Rom 12.8,

Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole, *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and his Cultural Environment* (London: Continuum, 2006) 1–8.

²⁵ I would thus resist the either/or construction of Downs and others, who posit that by directing thanks to God Paul 'attempts to minimize the honor and thanksgiving that contributors to the relief fund might have anticipated for their donations', David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 94. Paul is not averse to human honour, or to taking pride in human generosity (8.18; 9.2), and it is hard to read 8.1–5 as other than his honouring of the Macedonians.

²⁶ Whatever may be said about Paul's origins, his life as an itinerant craftsman and his precarious existence, subject to beatings and imprisonment, indicate his social milieu among the physically vulnerable and disdained (1 Thess 2.9; 1 Cor 4.9–13; 2 Cor 6.4–10; 11.21–33). For analysis of his imprisonments as a sign of his social and somatic vulnerability, see Ryan Schellenberg, *Abject Joy: Paul, Prison, and the Art of Making Do* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

²⁷ If (as seems likely) some Macedonian believers had encountered (or precipitated) serious conflicts in their social relationships since starting to worship Christ (1 Thess 1.6; 3.1–5; Phil 1.29), such friction was liable to create significant economic difficulties, since it damaged the reciprocal ties on which economic activity was based (Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 523). The same phenomenon may explain the poverty of believers in Jerusalem (1 Thess 2.14).

²⁸ For recent analysis of the differences between the Thessalonian and Corinthian assemblies, see UnChan Jung, *A Tale of Two Churches: Distinctive Social and Economic Dynamics at Thessalonica and Corinth* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

²⁹ Elsewhere in the Corinthian archive it indicates sincerity or single-mindedness (2 Cor 1.12; 11.3; cf. Col 3.22; Eph 6.5), while the echoes of our verse in 2 Cor 9.11 (πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα) and 2 Cor 9.13 (ἀπλότητι τῆς κοινωνίας εἰς αὐτοὺς καὶ εἰς πάντας) indicate an unreserved commitment that is neither reluctant nor half-hearted. The range of meanings is amply discussed in the commentaries and by Joseph Amstutz, *AIAIOTHE: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Studie zum jüdisch-christlichen Griechisch* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1968).

with ὁ μεταδιδούς), the term evokes *quality* rather than quantity: this is about a generosity of spirit (a ‘wealth of unreserved commitment’) not a magnitude of money. Or rather, the association and assonance between ἀπλότης and πλοῦτος suggest material quantity but retain sufficient ambiguity to cover a range of types and quantities of contribution.

Whatever the Macedonians gave, their ἀπλότης is explicated in the following depiction of their posture, which was unstinting (κατὰ δύναμιν ... καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν), unhesitating (ἀυθαίρετοι ... δεόμενοι), and sincere (ἑαυτοὺς ἔδωκαν, 8.3–5).³⁰ There is a heavy emphasis here on the Macedonians’ self-determination: they chose this of their own accord (αὐθαίρετοι) and begged to take part (μετὰ πολλῆς παρακλήσεως δεόμενοι ἡμῶν τὴν χάριν ...). The Macedonians’ ‘begging’ constitutes a nice inversion of what one might expect of the poor (who are often labelled οἱ δεόμενοι): they ‘beg’ here for the favour (χάρις) not of receiving, but of giving! Nothing in that description precludes requests and cajoling by Paul (even, according to 2 Cor 9.2–5, the threat of potential shame), since Paul (like most of his contemporaries) did not adhere to the stark antithesis between freewill and persuasion, or choice and obligation, that governs the moral imagination of Western modernity. Paul presents, in this idealised form, the possibility of an effective agency, a self-determined posture that is not confined by the constraints of poverty. Despite their conditions, the Macedonians have ‘performed’ a kind of ‘wealth’, which is sufficiently under-defined to straddle various forms of generosity, capable of adjustment to the capacities of every giver (as applied to the Corinthians in 8.12).

All that might seem condescending, except for the fact that Paul here echoes (and perhaps projects) his own experience, as one who has experienced volatile life-conditions (Phil 4.12) and is familiar with what it means to be hungry, poorly clothed, sick, homeless, physically abused, socially disdained, and imprisoned (1 Cor 4.11–12; 2 Cor 6.4–5; 11.25–7). As his letters make clear, he has found it possible in such circumstances to configure himself as empowered with dignity, hope, and even joy.³¹ This capacity to adopt an identity opposite to what is socially expected or what is outwardly apparent is an important ingredient of Paul’s self-respect: ‘as grieving, but always rejoicing, as poor, but making many rich, as having nothing and possessing everything’ (ὡς λυπούμενοι ἀεὶ δὲ χαίροντες, ὡς πτωχοὶ πολλοὺς δὲ πλουτίζοντες, ὡς μηδὲν ἔχοντες καὶ πάντα κατέχοντες, 2 Cor 6.10). As these last clauses make clear, a significant part of this dignity is the capacity to find, within poverty, some occasion or dimension in which one is not-poor, some sense of ‘wealth’ in possession and/or performance. As anthropological studies make clear, it is the capacity to give or share (in some form, to some degree) that can make the difference between poverty with dignity and poverty with despair.³² The sense of empowerment, expansion, and affirmation that comes with the act of giving is well documented in anthropological and psychological research, and is all the more powerful if, as here, it is accompanied by an aesthetic of

³⁰ The lack of a main verb in 8.3–5 before ἑαυτοὺς ἔδωκαν (8.5) keeps undefined what they actually contributed to the collection. On the rhetoric of this passage, see Gesila Nneka Uzukwu, ‘The Poverty and Wealth of the Macedonians: A Grammatical and Rhetorical Analysis of 2 Cor 8:1–5’, in Bieringer et al. (eds.), *Theologizing*, 319–30. On self-giving as a possible posture of the poor, see Seneca, *Ben* 1.8.1–2 and its analysis by David E. Briones, ‘Paul and Seneca on the Self-Gift’, in *Paul and Seneca in Dialogue* (ed. Joseph R. Dodson and David E. Briones, Leiden: Brill, 2016) 127–49.

³¹ See on his letter to the Philippians, Schellenberg, *Abject Joy*, who rightly resists readings that interpret Paul’s language as no more than a rhetorical posture.

³² See, e.g., Greg Beckett, *There Is No More Haiti: Between Life and Death in Port-au-Prince* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); Abhijat V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics* (London: Penguin, 2011) 35–8 (spending by the poor on weddings, dowries, festivals, and christenings). Although his tone is often unsympathetic, Theodore Dalrymple rightly notes the importance of self-respect, and of being treated with respect, among those who are materially disadvantaged, *Life at the Bottom* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001).

excess.³³ Paul's language expresses a social and emotional posture of 'doing wealth', locating the honour of the poor at the point where it counts in antiquity, in the capacity to give.³⁴

Paul places that giving in a frame that is both social and sacred. The Macedonians are committed to a project that expresses (or creates) a *κοινωνία* (8.4) – a partnership in which each party is expected to contribute to the common good.³⁵ The fact that they are giving at a distance takes this gift beyond the normal frame of predetermined relationships and elevates it to a generalised gift-relation, more 'spontaneous' and more purely evocative of 'gift' itself. Moreover, in describing the recipients of the collection-service (*διακονία*) as *οἱ ἄγιοι* (8.4), Paul places this project within a larger sacred reality: their contribution is to a cause with an elevated, sacred, and cosmic significance.³⁶ That was already indicated by Paul's attribution of the Macedonians' paradoxical and extravagant behaviour to the *χάρις* of God (8.1), deploying a term that reverberates in multiple senses through 2 Corinthians 8 (vv. 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19; cf. 2 Cor 9.8, 11, 14).³⁷ What is more, Paul presents the Macedonians' response as constituting a self-gift to God: 'they gave themselves first to the Lord, and (then) to us, through the will of God' (8.5).³⁸ Indeed, the multiple ways in which Paul frames this project theologically constitute a determination to invest its monetary and social facets with a meaning derived from the structures of reality.³⁹ In 'giving themselves to the Lord', the Macedonians are taken to place themselves and their giving within a divine dynamic that transcends and transfigures both themselves and their gift. On such terms, their 'wealth-in-poverty' is endowed with a sacred importance that makes their agency and their embodied efficacy part of a vastly meaningful whole.

4 The Corinthians and the Wealth-in-Poverty of Christ

Paul's depiction of the Macedonians' wealth-in-poverty had the Corinthians in view from the start (*γνωρίζομεν ὑμῖν*, 8.1), as the transition in 8.6 confirms. The Macedonian

³³ Simon Coleman, 'The Charismatic Gift', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10 (2004) 421–44. In analysing the gift-giving of a 'Word of Life' group in Sweden, Coleman notes the importance of self-expansion and self-affirmation in the risky generosity of the members, and how 'the very act of extending something from the self expresses the idea of unfetteredness both physically and metaphorically' (433). On the way in which generosity enhances the efficacy and agency of the self, see Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, *The Paradox of Generosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Cassie Mogilner, Zoë Chance, and Michael I. Norton, 'Giving Time Gives You Time', *Psychological Science* 23.10 (2012) 1233–8.

³⁴ Cf. Dio, *Oratio* 7.66 on the hospitality given by a peasant farmer, which gave to his *πενία* a kind of *ἐλευθερία* (a term evoking both honour and freedom).

³⁵ See Julien M. Ogereau, *Paul's Koinonia with the Philippians: A Socio-Historical Investigation of Pauline Economic Partnership* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

³⁶ *οἱ ἄγιοι* might have been a label adopted by the Jerusalem believers for special, scriptural reasons: see Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 140–7, suggesting the influence of Daniel 7. But in Paul's discourse it was applicable to all believers (it is used of the Corinthians themselves in 1 Cor 1.2; 6.1, 11), designating their sacredness to God. It is notable that Paul uses this label frequently when speaking of benefit-sharing in the Pauline assemblies: 1 Cor 16.15; Phlm 5, 7; Rom 12.13; 16.2, as if the act of giving was specially resonant of the sacred domain of gift within which, for Paul, all reality is situated.

³⁷ Paul thus picks up and expands the meanings of a term he had used in 1 Cor 16.3; on Paul's rolling re-use and development of terminology regarding the collection, see Mitchell, 'Paul's Letters to Corinth', 327, n.74.

³⁸ That Paul includes himself ('to us') signals the fact that this project is in an important sense *his* project (cf. 8.4, 20). But at the same time his role is carefully circumscribed by 'the will of God' (the terms of his apostleship, 1 Cor 1.1). That closes a gap that might otherwise open between the human and the divine rationale for this collection.

³⁹ For the possible 'religious' overtones of the term *ἐπιτελέω* (2 Cor 8.6, 11), see Richard S. Ascough, 'The Completion of a Religious Duty: The Background of 2 Cor 8.1–15', *NTS* 42 (1996) 584–99. For the collection as an act of worship, see Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*.

narrative results in Titus' task to complete 'in regard to you' (εις ὑμᾶς) 'this χάρις, also' (καὶ τὴν χάριν ταύτην). The terminology is specific (*this* χάρις) but also broad enough to link back to earlier uses of the term (8.1, 4) and forward to the statement in 8.9 about 'the χάρις of our Lord Jesus Christ'. If the Macedonians have experienced a surplus (ἐπερίσσευσεν, 8.2), so do and should the Corinthians: Ἀλλ' ὡςπερ ἐν πάντι περισεύετε, πίστει καὶ λόγῳ καὶ γνώσει καὶ πάσῃ σπουδῇ καὶ τῇ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπῃ, ἵνα καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χάριτι περισεύητε (8.7). The first three ingredients of surplus listed here match Paul's earlier description of the Corinthians' 'wealth' (1 Cor 1.4–5, λόγος and γνώσις; cf. 1 Cor 12.8–9, with πίστις), but there is a notable addition of σπουδή, a delicate reference to ἀγάπη (at least Paul's love for them: whether they have any is now to be tested, 8.8), and a request in the politest form (ἵνα + subjunctive) that they show surplus also in 'this χάρις' (8.7).⁴⁰ Of course there is a difference, with an implied rebuke: the Macedonians' 'wealth' derived from poverty, while the Corinthians' does not. But what matters is that both sets of donors figure themselves as (in some sense) 'rich', since it is their transformed identity as givers that is of greatest concern to Paul.

It is in that connection that we should read the Christological warrant of 8.9, whose meaning and purpose have puzzled exegetes. One could imagine Paul's discourse flowing from 8.8 to 8.10 without this summary of the 'good news' (cf. 9.13), and many exegetes accordingly regard the Christological statement in 8.9 as a mere 'digression'.⁴¹ But there is good reason to think otherwise: the verse is linked to what precedes it by γάρ, it makes pointed references to 'you' (δὲ ὑμᾶς ... ἵνα ὑμεῖς) as if it matters particularly for *the Corinthians*, and its vocabulary of wealth and poverty matches the context very closely: we may note particularly how the ἵνα-clause at the end of 8.9 (ἵνα ... πλουτήσητε) matches that at the end of 8.7 (ἵνα ... περισεύητε). But how does this confessional statement of the χάρις of Christ (8.9) fit the appeal that Paul is making to the Corinthians?

The Christological statement is arranged in two matching clauses:

8.9a δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν,
8.9b ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε.

On the standard reading of this verse, the story of Christ is one of *dispossession* (he was rich, but became poor): the participle πλούσιος ὢν is read in a concessive sense ('although he was rich'), and Christ's 'wealth' is taken to refer to his 'heavenly existence with God before his incarnation' or his 'original glory'.⁴² Similarly, the 'wealth' that the Corinthians are meant to enjoy (ἵνα ... πλουτήσητε) is normally understood in 'spiritual'

⁴⁰ Paul pointedly refrains from issuing an order in this matter (8.8; cf. 8.10), but the fact that he uses the Macedonians' σπουδή to test the genuineness of the Corinthians' ἀγάπη (cf. 8.24) indicates his authority and threatens the Corinthians with shame (cf. 9.3–5) in a form that risked offence. Earlier it was the Corinthians who would perform an act of δοκιμασία (1 Cor 16.3), now it is Paul (8.8; cf. 8.22; 9.13). The Macedonians endured a δοκιμή (8.2), now it is the turn of the Corinthians. Words from this lexical root seem to be at the centre of the dispute between Paul and the Corinthians in 2 Cor 13.3–8 (cf. 10.18).

⁴¹ See Jean Héring, *La seconde épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1958) 69. For Hans Windisch, this verse 'nimmt sich im Zusammenhang wie ein Einschiesel aus', *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924) 251.

⁴² See, e.g., Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Anchor Bible 32A; New York: Doubleday, 1984) 417, citing Phil 2.6–8 and 1 Tim 3.16 as parallels; Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 534. Dunn's modification of this reading, resisting the notion of incarnation but finding here Christ's spiritual wealth in his fellowship with God before his desolation on the cross, has not found acceptance, since it finds no parallel elsewhere in Paul (James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM Press, 1980) 122–23).

(i.e., non-material) terms.⁴³ But there are at least two major difficulties in this reading. First, it leaves an unbridgeable gap between the ‘spiritual’ wealth (of Christ and of the Corinthians) and the material reality of the collection: if, in Lambrecht’s words, ‘the meaning of “rich” at the beginning of the sentence (Jesus) as well as at its end (the Corinthians) evidently has nothing to do with material and earthly riches’,⁴⁴ this statement about Christ’s χάρις and its effects operates at a metaphorical level that has no direct bearing on the collection (‘this χάρις’, 8.7). Secondly, if Christ’s action here is self-dispossession, and is taken to be (at some level) an *example* to be followed by the Corinthians, it is striking that Paul does *not* ask the Corinthians to make themselves poor, but insists that he is *not* requesting ‘relief for others and hardship for yourselves’ (8.13).

Given these difficulties in the traditional reading of the verse, and given its evident fit with its context, we are entitled to offer a different interpretation. Just a few verses earlier Paul had used the language of ‘wealth’ (in relation to the Macedonians) to refer not to their possession, but to their activity: their deep poverty ‘overflowed in a wealth of unre-served commitment’ (ἐπερίσευσεν εἰς τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος αὐτῶν, 8.2). The same notion of wealth-as-performance will be evident in 2 Corinthians 9.11: ἐν πάντι πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα.⁴⁵ As we have seen from our study of Artemidorus, and could be further illustrated elsewhere (for Aristotle, see above, note 3), it was common in antiquity to conceive of ‘wealth’ in relational and performative terms: one is most truly ‘wealthy’ not so much in having as in giving or sharing what you possess. ‘Wealth’ consists in its flow: to be ‘wealthy’ (πλουτεῖν, 8.9) means to be ‘overflowing’ (περισεύειν, 8.7). Now we may read the Christ-event and its effects in different terms that cohere very well with their immediate context. Christ’s ‘wealth’ consists not in static possession but in active self-sharing or self-giving: in that activity, he ‘made himself poor’ (that is, he adopted to the full the limitations of the human condition) so that ‘you’ (Corinthians) could be ‘wealthy’, that is, could share in the same dynamic of wealth-flow that is now to be instantiated in the collection for Jerusalem. In both cases, the ‘wealth’ is not a ‘thing’ – either a ‘spiritual’ or a ‘material’ possession – but an activity of self-sharing with others, such that the Christ-event results in a transformed posture of self-giving among Corinthian believers, which can be expressed in multiple forms but is here to take place in their monetary contribution. What Paul is testing is their ‘love’ (8.8), and it is their ‘wealth’ in such love that needs to be expressed in practical, material terms.

On this reading, the Christ-event is not dispossession, but the expression of his (overflowing) love in adopting the condition of ‘poverty’. On the standard reading, by which Christ renounces his ‘wealth’, the participle πλούσιος ὧν is read as concessive (‘although he was rich’), and that is certainly possible.⁴⁶ But given Paul’s use of ‘wealth’ here and elsewhere, and given the alternative reading offered above, it is also possible to read

⁴³ In a tradition that stretches back at least as far as John Chrysostom (PG 61.518), the Corinthians’ ‘wealth’ consists of ‘spiritual’ benefits, including ‘forgiveness (5.19), restoration to right relations with God (5.18), and receipt of the Spirit (1.22; 5.5)’ (so Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005)) 578–9. For the Corinthian wealth as ‘geistlich’, see Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 253. For a comprehensive study of the early history of reception of this verse, see Pius Angstenberger, *Der reiche und der arme Christus: die Rezeptionsgeschichte von 2Kor 8,9 zwischen dem zweiten und dem sechsten Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Borengässer, 1997). The early Christian concern to articulate the metaphysics of the incarnation may be one reason why Christ’s ‘wealth’ was understood as his pre-incarnational ‘state of being’.

⁴⁴ Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) 143; however, as he notes, ‘the fact remains that Paul uses this text as a motivation for the collection’.

⁴⁵ Cf. 1 Tim 6.18: ἀγαθοεργεῖν, πλουτεῖν ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς, εὐμεταδότους εἶναι, κοινωνικούς.

⁴⁶ Parallels in Paul include Gal 4.1; Rom 11.7. Phil 2.6 (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων) is ambiguous. For a fuller discussion, 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 Bieringer et al. (eds.), *Theologizing*, 331–44.

the (ambiguous) participle another way: he became poor ‘while being rich’ (temporal), ‘in being rich’ (modal), or even ‘because he was rich’ (causal).⁴⁷ Elsewhere, Paul describes Christ’s wealth as what he gives, not what he has: Christ, as Lord of all, ‘is rich towards all who call upon him’ (πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν, Rom 10.12). Similarly, God’s ‘wealth’ is typically relational, as a mode in which God is kind and patient (Rom 2.9) or will ‘fill your every need’ (Phil 4.19).⁴⁸ As Wolter has shown, this is exactly the pattern we find also in Philo, where God’s ‘boundless wealth’ refers to what is poured out from God into the world.⁴⁹ If the best form of wealth is wealth performed in being shared, Christ’s ‘wealth’ is not something he (once) had all to himself, but something he enacted in self-giving ‘for your sake’.

It seems paradoxical that this wealth is performed in Christ becoming poor, and that through this poverty the Corinthians become rich. But Paul has worked with a parallel paradox before: the power of God was enacted in the weakness of the cross (1 Cor 1.18–25). In our verse, Christ’s ‘becoming poor’ probably refers to the trajectory of the Christ-story towards the cross. Elsewhere, Paul associates poverty with weakness (Gal 4.9) and with humiliation (2 Cor 11.7; Phil 4.12). Christ’s becoming ‘poor’ is thus most likely to be located in his weakness and humiliation on the cross (1 Cor 1.25; Phil 2.8); the fact that this action occurred δι’ ὑμῶν (8.9) also points to the cross, since Paul uses this preposition elsewhere in relation to the death of Christ (1 Cor 8.11). Christ’s ‘poverty’ thus consists in his weakness and self-limitation to the point of death. But just as Paul can see God’s power enacted in the weakness of the cross (1 Cor 1.25), so he can see Christ’s wealth performed and applied (not given up) precisely in his poverty: being rich (in self-sharing love, Gal 1.4; 2.20) he made himself poor (to human eyes, unable to give), in order that, from those depths, he might transform the human condition and create in humans a Christ-shaped wealth.⁵⁰ The fact that his wealth is expressed in poverty opens the possibility that, even in their poverty, the Macedonians (whose condition was that of the vast majority of Paul’s contemporaries) could find empowerment and opportunity for a similar, self-sharing, ‘wealth’.

On this reading, 2 Corinthians 8.9 does not interrupt the flow of Paul’s paraenesis but provides a narrative foundation for his request. It anchors the Corinthians’ giving in an event by which they should consider themselves reconfigured, becoming transformed givers in the trajectory of Christ’s own sharing of wealth. Just as divine χάρις funded the Macedonians’ wealth in unreserved commitment (8.1–2), so its Christological expression enables the Corinthians’ overflow-wealth in their participation in the collection.⁵¹

⁴⁷ For discussion, see Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Pillar Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 329–30, and Barclay, “‘Because he was rich’”, 339–43. For a parallel, see 1 Cor 9.19 (‘being (or because I am) free from all, I have enslaved myself to all’ (discussed by Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, vol 2: *1Kor 6,12 – 11,16* (EKKNT; Zürich, Benziger; Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995)) 339.

⁴⁸ Cf. the continuation of this pattern of speech in Eph 1.7–8, 18; 2.4 (an echo of 2 Cor 8.9?), 7; 3.16; Titus 3.6. In Rom 9.23, the wealth of God’s glory is that by which others are glorified.

⁴⁹ Michael Wolter, ‘Der Reichtum Gottes’, in *Gott und Geld, Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 21 (2006) 145–60; his examples include Philo, *Leg. All.* 1.34; 3.163; *Post.* 144; and *Migr.* 121. Philo often illustrates divine wealth by reference to the flow of snow, rain, rivers, and springs, and he connects such wealth to God’s nature as φιλόδορος.

⁵⁰ Obvious parallels for this pattern of thought include Gal 3.13–14 (blessing arising from Christ becoming a curse), 2 Cor 5.21 (righteousness through Christ becoming sin) and Phil 2.6–11 with 3.20–21 (heavenly glory through Christ becoming a humiliated human). In all these cases, Paul’s logic is best explained through the notion of ‘double participation’, whereby Christ participates in the human condition, so that human beings can participate in him; see Susan G. Eastman, *Paul and the Person* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017). For a reading of ‘kenosis’ in Phil 2.7 along such lines, see John M.G. Barclay, ‘Kenosis and the Drama of Salvation in Philippians 2’, in *Kenosis: The Self-Emptying of Christ in Scripture and Theology* (Paul T. Nimmo and Keith L. Johnson (ed); Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022) 7–23.

⁵¹ We may compare the line of thought in 2 Cor 5.14–15: the love of Christ envelops believers, such that they live no longer for themselves but for the one who died and rose again for them. That reorientation of life (‘to the

The subsequent appeal that the Corinthians should both do and will to do what has been promised (8.10–12) arises from this sense that the Corinthians, as givers, should be reshaped by their experience of the Christ-event. The redirection of their wills and the completion of their task is the sign that they have been made ‘rich’, in Paul’s sense, to the core. When Paul references the manna story (a classic scriptural gift) in 8.13–15, he redeploys its language to figure every surplus as an opportunity for gift, just as the Corinthians’ Christ-founded ‘wealth’ is to be performed in generosity.⁵² In fact, Paul expects that the same wealth-performance can be, and will be, enacted in Jerusalem, when (in some form, and at some time) they will be in surplus (8.14). What he imagines in that relationship (8.14–15) is a form of gift-exchange, which mirrors the peer-to-peer reciprocity of those (the majority) who lived in fluctuating conditions – although played out at a distance.⁵³ But the expectation that any surplus will be given to others is rooted in the fact that the Christ-event was directed to the ‘wealth’ of all parties, a wealth whose hallmark will be their willingness to share.

5 Conclusions

Our analysis has highlighted a common ancient trope that regards ‘wealth’ as significant more in use than in possession, accenting the *performance* of wealth in the outflow of benefits to others. Applying this insight to our passage has enabled us to integrate the Christological statement in 8.9 fully into its context. Its narrative of wealth and poverty does not operate on a ‘spiritual’ plane, parallel but unrelated to the material needs of the collection, but neither is Christ here an example of dispossession, intended to motivate the Corinthians to become poor. Rather, the wealth-sharing of Christ, who became poor precisely in his wealth-in-giving, has wrapped the Corinthians into a dynamic momentum in which their own wealth is to be expressed through participation in the collection-partnership. Like the Macedonians, they are to experience the transforming power of this χάρις, which leads to the flow of wealth-in-giving, just as it led to the Macedonians’ ‘wealth’ of unreserved commitment (ἀπλότης). The paradox of the ‘rich poverty’ enacted both among the Macedonians and in Christ is intended to function not as an intellectual conundrum, but as an invitation to free the imagination, to consider the impossible possible (8.3), that is, to locate a potential dynamic of gift even in outwardly unlikely circumstances.

Giving and gift-exchange become both possible and necessary for all who are enveloped in this narrative trajectory. The ambiguity of Paul’s terminology (ἀπλότης) allows for such generosity to be expressed in various forms, but it is clear that here he underlines the honour of giving, especially by and among the poor. Paul does not idealise poverty (it is not in itself ‘rich’), but he appears conscious of the culture of disdain that

Lord’, 2 Cor 8.5) is given practical, social expression in the collection, in self-sharing with others (cf. 2 Cor 9.13 for a compressed statement of the same).

⁵² On Paul’s strategic redeployment of the manna text, see John M.G. Barclay, ‘Manna and the Circulation 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: Eerdmans, 2008), 409–26.

⁵³ For this reading, see Schellenberg, ‘Subsistence’, 229. For the possible meanings of ἰσότης, and its evocation of friendship ideals, see Larry L. Welborn, ‘“That there may be Equality”: The Context and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal’, *NTS* 59 (2013) 73–90. As John S. Kloppenborg has shown, many features of the organisation of the collection resemble civic ἐπιδοσεις-collections (‘Fiscal Aspects of Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem’, *Early Christianity* 8 (2017) 153–98). But the values it represents are not those of civic honour or security, but the interpersonal virtues of ἀγάπη, κοινωνία, and (friendship-related) ἰσότης. In that sense, the ἐπιδοσεις-protocols have been adapted to apply to a community ethos of a very different sort.

surrounded poverty and, reflecting his own experience, finds dignity in such conditions, specifically the dignity of being able to give. Just as elsewhere he insists on according honour to the ‘weaker’ parts of the body (1 Cor 12.22–4) and is infuriated by the humiliation of those deprived of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11.22), here he highlights the ‘wealth’ potentially present within material poverty. He focuses on the empowerment that takes place in entering a partnership (κοινωνία, 8.4) of mutual contribution, even if the resulting reciprocity operates at different moments and in diverse kinds (8.14–15).⁵⁴

Such giving is wrapped by Paul within an all-encompassing, sacred reality, where the divine gift is the source of human giving (8.1), where gifts to others are a form of self-gift to God (8.4), and where the Christ-event initiates a dynamic of gift-giving and an aesthetic of surplus, both of which reconfigure the self as giver. This theological interpretation of giving is no adornment, but is integral to the meaning of the text.⁵⁵ To use the language of the sociologist Hartmut Rosa, Paul here evokes a kind of ‘resonance’ between the structures of reality and the efficacy of human action: it is by responding to the ‘address’ or ‘call’ of a reality that is beyond themselves and ultimately uncontrollable that human givers are able to express their own agency, and to ‘speak with their own voice’.⁵⁶ For Paul, it is the transformative ‘call’ of the Christ-event that creates new possibilities for self-willed giving, into which he now invites the Corinthians. If there are elements of ‘imitation’ of Christ, they are enclosed within a sense of giving from and into a divine initiative. Within this frame, monetary donations and the givers themselves are accorded an expanded significance.

Paul does not make any simple equation between grace and money, χάρις and χρήματα. But neither does he allow the two phenomena to become separated, or to stand merely side by side, one metaphorical and the other literal. The ‘wealth’ of the Macedonians and the Corinthians concerns a Christ-created posture of outflowing concern, which may take many non-monetary forms, but may also, as here, require expression in a material contribution to the collection. Because it represents a reshaping of the self (both individual and collective), it transforms the social relations of all those graced with such wealth, reorienting their embodied existence in practical ways. We do not find here a structural analysis of the Roman economy, nor an explicit critique of the causes of poverty – although there is an *implicit* critique of hoarded wealth in the scriptural citation in 8.15. What we do find, however, are the principles of non-competitive relations regarding wealth, and thus the rudiments of an economic order that prioritises mutual benefit over private profit.⁵⁷ If the ‘wealth’ of Christ consists not in what he possessed but in his self-sharing, and if the shape of the social order ‘in Christ’ is driven by an equalising drive towards the sharing of surplus (8.14–15), seeking the mutual benefit of κοινωνία (8.4)

⁵⁴ For parallel examples of gifts by the poor in early Christianity, cf. Mark 12.41–4 and parallels (the widow’s mite); Did 4.5; and the tradition of ‘social fasting’ (fasting so as to have enough money to give to someone in even greater need) in *Hermas*, *Sim.* V.3; Gospel of Thomas 69.2; Aristides 15.9. See Denise Kimber Buell, “Be not one who stretches out hands to receive but shuts them when it comes to giving.” *Envisioning Christian Charity When Both Donors and Recipients are Poor*, in Susan R. Holman (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2008) 37–47.

⁵⁵ I would thus resist a social analysis that renders Paul’s theology a ‘secondary level of reflection’; see Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy, and Theological Reflection in Paul’s Collection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 8–13, 73–4.

⁵⁶ Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016); translated by James C. Wagner as *Resonance: A Sociology of our Relationship to the World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019). In his critique of modernity’s attempt to render the world ‘controllable’ (*verfügbar*), Rosa draws attention to the resonant relationship with the world possible through religion but also through our response to nature, music, art, and literature.

⁵⁷ For a critical theological analysis of this matter, see Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). She has more recently offered a powerful theological critique of the current finance-dominated system of capitalism, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

in reciprocal gift-exchange (8.14–15), Paul's statements outline a moral, social and theological dynamic that counteracts the accumulation of profit and the competitive drive for advantage.

A contemporary theological interpretation of such material would require far more than repetition. In deploying the critical tools provided by theology (past and present), it would highlight the potential dangers of this text (e.g., the risk of acquiescence in poverty and the danger of pressuring the poor to make monetary gifts).⁵⁸ It would also need to place the fragments of theology evidenced here within a broader theological frame, linking the grace of the Christ-event to the gift of creation (as suggested in 2 Cor 9.6–16 and developed in Col 1.15–20). But I hope to have shown that this text could provide a stimulus to those who explore the interface between biblical exegesis, economics, and theology – a task of some urgency at a time when economic dysfunction, dehumanising poverty, and scandalous inequalities are threatening our future as a global community.

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⁵⁸ For a critical analysis of 'prosperity gospel' readings of our text, see Viateur Habarurema, *Christian Generosity according to 2 Corinthians 8-9: Its Exegesis, Reception, and Interpretation Today in Dialogue with the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2017).

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