Religious reciprocity in 2 Corinthians 9:6–15: Generosity and gratitude as legitimate responses to the χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ

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ABSTRACT
The impact of God's χάρις on the reciprocal relationship between the Corinthians and the Jerusalem community, as reflected in 2 Corinthians 9:6–15, is addressed in this essay. In verse 6–10, where agrarian imagery is related to the collection, Paul emphasises that the χάρις of God provides the Corinthians with material and spiritual αὐτάρκεια to contribute generously to the collection for Jerusalem. In verses 11–15 the apostle reflects on the successful completion of the collection on the part of the Corinthians. Jerusalem's consequent prayers of thanksgiving, which give concrete expression to the reciprocal relationship (κοινωνία) between them, is also related to the pro-active grace of God.

1 RELIGIOUS RECIPROCITY
Reciprocity was basic to all forms of social interaction in the ancient Graeco-Roman world.1 According to Seneca any exchange of gifts or services produced mutual obligations between benefactors and beneficiaries (De beneficiis 1.4.2). Benefactors were not so much concerned about maximising their net income, but rather their net giving. In other words, their aim was to acquire a large number of beneficiaries who were obliged to them. The latter had to reciprocate the benefits they had received in kind, so as to fulfil the conventional roles associated with the principle of balanced reciprocity (that is, returning the same sort of gifts, or gifts of equal value for those received). Any failure in this regard distorted the basic fibre of society. It led to the loss of honour; that is, to an unfavourable public reputation (Neyrey 1998:31).

The reciprocal relationship between deities and humans in the ancient Mediterranean world reflects the same characteristics as that between human

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1 Peterman (1997:3) in this regard uses the term 'social reciprocity' to refer to the convention which dictates that when '...a person (or persons) is the recipient of goods in the form of a favour or a gift, the receiver is obligated to respond to the giver with goodwill and to return a counter-gift or favour in proportion to the good received.'
benefactors and beneficiaries. Seneca (Ben 2.30.1–2), for example, tells us that the gift of life and the preservation thereof is the highest divine benefit. Even though the gods are not in need of anything from humans, since they have been placed beyond desire, people are obliged to reciprocate divine benefits. Refusal to do this could lead to the withholding of further divine gifts.²

Gratitude after the delivery out of specific crises, such as wars, diseases and dangers, was common to the religious experience of most ancient people. Proper responses to divine blessings were usually displayed in public through the building of temples and statues in honour of the gods, or through feasts and sacrifices. According to Philo, sacrifice was used from the earliest times as a form of thanksgiving to God (Spec leg 1.95). Apart from their orientation to the past, these sacrifices also pointed to the future as a means of securing new divine benefits. ‘One is either giving thanks for benefits previously received or as securities for those which are present or to request acquisition of good things in the future or removal of present or anticipated evils’ (Philo, Spec leg 1.283).³

Apart from the basic function of sacrifices as gifts to the gods (in terms of the ancient do ut des principle), they also functioned as specific forms of communio between the deities and people; as ‘Sündenbockmechanismen;’ et cetera.⁴

2 THE χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ AND THE COLLECTION FOR JERUSALEM
In 2 Corinthians 8–9,⁵ where Paul addresses the collection for Jerusalem, religious reciprocity is inherent to and implied in the activities of the respective role players: God, Paul, Jerusalem, and the Pauline communities. In this regard the ‘Stichwort’ χάρις functions as a ‘semantic transparency’ for God’s involvement in the lives of the various parties involved in the collection.⁶ For exam-

² Porphyry in this regard refers to a city plagued by disease due the departure of Asclepius and other gods, because the citizens honoured Jesus and refused to bestow public benefits on any other divine beings (cf Mott 1975:67).
³ At the same time, however, Philo adds that sacrifices or buildings are not sufficient expressions of gratitude to God. Adequate honour comes through recounting his works by eulogies or song (Plant 126–31).
⁴ See in this regard the overview of the nature and functions of sacrificial cults in the ancient Greco-Roman world by Klauck (1995:27–49).
⁵ A number of scholars are of the opinion that 2 Corinthians 8–9 are two separate letters (cf Betz 1986:13–15; Lang 1986:13–14). However, their arguments do not really hold water. Certain expressions in chapter 9, such as those in 9:3–5 cannot be understood without presupposing the remarks in 8:16–24. The second section of chapter 9 (verse 6–15) also functions as a meaningful conclusion to the whole discussion since 7:4, while the χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ in 8:1 (the divine gifts from God), and the χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ in 9:15 (the reciprocal response to God’s gift) also form an inclusio around the arguments in chapter 8–9 (cf Wolff 1989:163).
⁶ The impact of God’s grace is further underlined through Paul’s frequent use of the
ple, in 2 Corinthians 8:1–6 χάρις is used no less than three times to refer to:
(a) the divine gift to the Macedonians ‘im Sinne der ungeschuldeten Gabe’ (Klauck 1986:67)—v 1.
(b) The impact of this divine grace in the lives of the Macedonians that prompted them to ask Paul whether they could share in the privilege of taking part in the collection—v 4.
(c) The nature of the collection as a ‘benevolence’ (Furnish 1984:402), or ‘gracious service’ (Martin 1986:255; Witherington 1995:413)—v 6. According to Paul, God’s active grace impels believers to commit themselves to the collection, and, in turn, to each other. Therefore the χάρις (‘the collection’) transparently shows God’s goodness, and is a symbol of Christian fellowship.
But in order to come to terms with God’s active χάρις on a lower level of abstraction in terms of the collection, we now turn our attention to 2 Corinthians 9:6–15.

3 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6–10: GOD’S GRACIOUS GIFTS LEAD TO GENEROSITY

3.1 The metaphorical use of agrarian imagery

Agrarian imagery, which is applied in verses 6–10, was frequently used in ancient Israelite society and in the Graeco Roman world (Betz 1985:98). As a matter of fact, the wide range of texts in the Mediterranean world that dealt with agricultural imagery by way of proverbs, adages, religious rites, folk wisdom, the household economy and religion, point to the existence of a supra-cultural ‘agrarian ideology.’ This ideology formed part of the majority of Mediterranean people’s basic system of knowledge.

concepts περισσεία/περισσευμα (cf 8:2,7a,b; 9:8b and 12), and περισσευμα (8:14). At the same time, as Theobald (1982:278) correctly notes, the semantic wordfield of prosperity should also be related to this motif of divine grace in 2 Corinthians 8–9. In particular, the christological confession in 8:9 concerning the χάριν του κυρiou ημων 'ημου χριστου who gave up his wealth to become poor for the sake of the believers, found its human counterpart in the overflowing rich generosity on the part of the Macedonians.

7 Well-known in this regard are the views of Windisch on Paul’s use of χάρις in 2 Corinthians 8. These are summarised by Zeilinger (1992:263): ‘Sie ist (1) der objektive Erweiss der göttlichen Huld in Form des Heilsereignisses, (2) der dem Einzelchristen subjektiv zuteil gewordene Gnadenerweis, und (3) “das von der göttlichen Gnade gezeugte, christliche Gnaden- oder Liebeswerk, die Auswirkung der empfangenen Gnade im Verkehr mit den Brüdern.”’

8 According to Klauck (1986:73): ‘Die Erfahrung göttlichen Segens ist in der Bibel oft an das Geschehen von Aussaat und Ernte gebunden.’ More specifically: the idea that one must reap whatever one has sown, formed one of the axioms of Jewish wisdom tradition (cf Ps. 126:5; Prov 11:21, 24, 26, 30; 22:8; Job 4:8; Sir. 7:3).
It is not surprising that agrarian imagery permeated all facets of ancient social reality, since ‘...die Landwirtschaft hatte im Römischen Reich wirtschaftlich eine Vorrangstellung.... Die groß Mehrheit der Bevölkerung arbeitete in der Landwirtschaft’ (Stegemann & Stegemann 1995:30). A complex of secondary reflection on agrarian imagery in ancient philosophical and religious circles was therefore to be expected. Paul also drew from this pre-Christian (and pre-Jewish) ideological complex with its principal component, the emphasis on the religious aspect of sowing and reaping (see also Gl 6:7b-8). For his Corinthian readers this agrarian image was well known since roughly 207 square kilometres of the territorium of the city state of Corinth supported different forms of agriculture in Paul’s time. Although Corinth was not a typical ‘agro-city’ whose economy was based on urban farmers commuting to their fields and back, around 8 000 inhabitants of the city at this time were directly supported by agricultural production.9

In the first of the two chiastically constructed, parallel lines in verse 6, introduced by an elliptical citation formula (τούτο δέ), Paul applies a well-known agricultural rule with regard to the collection, by emphasising that sparse sowing yields a small harvest. The opposite idea is expressed in the second chiasm that is added to this rule so as to create a maxim: generous sowing leads to a generous harvest. The adverbial phrase επ’ εὐλογίας, which is based upon the noun εὐλογία, and which Paul uses with reference to the collection in verse 5, underlines the bounty that goes hand in hand with a good harvest. In terms of the collection (εὐλογία), it implies that a gift that is freely and spontaneously bestowed, constitutes a blessing to the recipients.

Paul refrains from prescribing any specific amount to be contributed by the Corinthians. It is for each person to sow as he or she sees fit (verse 7ab). Giving is a matter of personal conviction. One’s heart, as the centre of all thought and emotions, and also the working place of the Spirit (Rm 5:5; Gal 4:6; 2 Cor 3:2-3) should determine the nature and size of one’s material response. This emphasis on the right moral resolution on the side of the givers in verse 7 (Martin 1986:289) could be understood as rectifying the maxim in verse 6, which might have left the readers with the impression that there is a direct causal relationship between giving and receiving. It could also be understood as a further clarification of the nature of the blessings involved in the ‘right way of giving.’ Perhaps the latter view would come the closest to Paul’s aims in

9 Engels (1990:27ff) states that, although the territorium of the city state of Corinth was around 825 square kilometres, only about 207 square kilometre was capable of supporting any kind of agriculture. Due to the problem of distance from the city (and the time factor involved), agriculture was not the main source of income of the city, but rather its manufactories and its service economy.
verse 7ab, where he deliberately shifts the emphasis away from the size of the Corinthians' contributions to their inner orientation. Two principles are laid down here to ensure the correct disposition on their part. (a) They must not give grudgingly (μη ἐκ λύπης), in the sense of being unwilling to depart with their material possessions. (b) They must also not give under constraint for fear of censure (ἐξ ἀνάγκης). In the same vein as Seneca (Ben 2.1.1ff.), Paul here stresses the right attitude on the side of the givers. The contributions of the Corinthians should be spontaneous. They should not grudgingly yield to Paul's coaxing by being forced into an undertaking without the corresponding inner commitment on their part.

To provide the necessary sanction to these principles, Paul in verse 7c alludes to Proverbs 22:8 (LXX), which states that God loves a cheerful giver. This typical Jewish idea of God's approval of the person who gives from the right inner orientation, provides support for Paul's view of the involvement of God in the relationship between the Corinthians and Jerusalem. To give grudgingly would throw a shadow of doubt over the Corinthians' relationship with Jerusalem. It would also reflect badly on their own gratitude for God's eschatological gifts in their lives.

Paul changes the perspective in verse 8 by applying the principle of sowing and reaping to God's χάρις and its impact on the moral life (and contributions!) of the Corinthians (see also Barnett 1997:439). The result of the χάρις of God in the lives of the Corinthians is αὐτάρκεια, self-sufficiency (see also Phil 4:11-13). This concept, which played such an important role in Stoic thought (in terms of their ideal of inward contentment which leads to material and spiritual independence from others—Sharples 1996), is now applied to the collection effort of the Corinthians. However, αὐτάρκεια does not have the same meaning here as elsewhere in Hellenistic philosophy. Paul fills this provocative term with new meaning. According to him the divine χάρις always (πάντοτε) provides in all the Corinthians' needs (ἐν παντὶ), both materially and spiritually. In fact, God's grace is not merely sufficient, it is abundant and inexhaustible, thus enabling the Corinthians to excel (περισσευεῖν) in all good works. Therefore, the αὐτάρκεια that they experience as a result of God's grace does not lead to independence from others in terms of financial and spiritual needs. Paul rather implies that God's χάρις provides them with sufficient resources in all areas of their life so as to use it to the advantage of fellow believers.\footnote{The only legitimate option available to the readers within this argumentative situation...}
In verse 9 Paul cites from Psalm 111:9 (LXX) to lend biblical support to his view that the person who has experienced God's goodness freely shares his material possessions with the needy. By 'sowing' his possessions lavishly in the fertile ground of people's lives who are in need of his 'material ςυνάσχεσις,' the righteous person in this citation is the embodiment of what is depicted by the agrarian maxim in verse 6. At the same time he also lives up to God's ideal of the 'ideal benefactor' (verse 7c). His δικαιοσύνη is constantly expressed in good deeds.

As part of Paul's strategy to persuade the Corinthians by the use of agrarian imagery and quotations from Scripture, his use of Psalm 111 conveys the message to them that they must open both their hearts and pockets to Jerusalem. Since they are presented as people who fully share in God's abundant χάρις, the only 'honourable' option available to them within the parameters of this rhetorical situation is to contribute generously to the collection. Such behaviour will serve as a positive verification of God's work in their lives.

To assure the Corinthians that they do not have to fear any hardship after the indirect, but very real, pressure on them to contribute to the collection, Paul in verse 10 once again makes explicit use of agrarian imagery. By drawing from Isaiah 55:10 ('seed for the sower and bread for food') and Hosea 10:12 ('the fruits of your righteousness'), Paul applies the example of God's provision in the needs of those in the horticultural sphere of activity to the situation of the readers. They are assured that the same God who provides in the needs of farmers, will also provide them with 'seed' to share with the poor in Jerusalem (that is, with the necessary material means). In fact, when the Corinthians share their possessions, they will actually experience a big harvest in return (πληθυνεῖ τον σπόρον ύμων). This will enable them to have even more 'seed' to sow in the lives of others. Multiplicity is thus the key here. By giving

12 Scholars are divided as to the subject of the 'scattering' in verse 9: God or the righteous person? Without becoming involved in all the arguments in this regard (cf the overview of the various options by Furnish 1984:448-449), the fact that: (a) Ps 111:9 refers not to God but to the righteous man who engages in deeds of righteousness or almsgiving; (b) the logical link between 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7b, 8 (and 9) in terms of the cheerful giver who is prepared to generously 'sow' in order to reap a generous harvest of blessing; (c) the repetition of the idea of permanence in terms of the effects of God's grace in verse 8 and 9, and (d) the reference to the δικαιοσύνη in verse 9 and 10 (with believers clearly as the objects in the latter verse), I conclude that Paul in verse 9 has the recipient of God's grace in mind.
generously and cheerfully, believers will experience the miracle, due to God’s grace in their lives, that they will actually have more to give away in future.

In line with his understanding of the collection as a three-way reciprocal relationship between the Corinthians, Jerusalem, and God, Paul also states in verse 10 that the fruit of the Corinthians’ righteousness will grow. In other words, by doing what God expects of them, they will not only experience σωτηρία on a material level, but also in terms of their faith-relationship with God.

The sharing of material means with those in need is definitely not an inferior spiritual undertaking for Paul. It points to the active presence of God’s grace in the lives of benefactors. More importantly, through the sharing of their possessions, the Corinthians are actually giving to God, as indirect object of their generosity. In turn, he will reward them in an encompassing way.

3.2 2 Corinthians 9:11-15: The collection and Jerusalem’s response of gratitude

3.2.1 Jerusalem’s gratitude for the overflowing grace of God

Paul’s conviction that the same God who provides sufficient material means for all (verse 10), will provide abundantly in the needs of the Corinthians, moves him to anticipate the events following the successful completion of their collection effort. In verse 11 the generosity of the Corinthians is addressed, which, in turn, is based upon their spiritual wealth. This wealth is the result of God’s overflowing grace in their lives, as the passivum divinum πλοῦτιζόμενοι in verse 11a indicates. Thus, Paul once more emphasizes the close relationship between spiritual wealth and the sharing of material possessions with others. ‘Aller ‘Reichtum’ gründet in Gottes Heilstat und dieser spirituelle Reichtum ermöglicht materielle Freigebigkeit aus lauterer Liebe’ (Zeilinger 1992:305).

The chain of events set in motion by the Corinthians’ experience of God’s grace is summarised in verse 12b, namely, the completion of the collection (which is implied in Paul’s cryptic reference to the delivery of the funds to Jerusalem—κατεργάζεται δι’ ἡμῶν), as well as Jerusalem’s prayers of thanks to God (note the wordplay: εὐχαριστία—χάρις). The latter expression points to the fact that the collection is not merely the repayment of an obligation within the parameters of a particular relationship between Jerusalem and the Pauline communities. This reciprocal relationship at the same time also involves God whose active grace is present during the various stages of the project. The Jerusalem believers, who, according to Paul, are well aware of the religious nature of this gift, will therefore rightly direct their own gratitude to God.

In verse 12a Paul further emphasizes the religious nature of the collection in his reference to this project as ἡ διακονία τῆς λειτουργίας ταύτης. Just as
in Romans 15:16ff., Paul here uses λειτουργία in a cultic sense. Διακονία and λειτουργία signify the true nature of the collection as: (a) an act of selfless service to the poor members of the church in Jerusalem, and (b) a spiritual blessing from the side of Pauline Christianity. These two facets are repeated in a more elaborated form in verse 12b and 12c, where both the financial relief (in terms of the collection as διακονία—12b), and the spiritual purpose of the collection (in terms of the collection as λειτουργία—12c) are emphasised.

In verse 12c Paul states that the collection will overflow in many thanksgivings to God. These prayers serve as manifestations of God's power.

The more thanksgiving occurs, the more grace has been bestowed and received, the greater is the testimony, and the greater the power of God. Paul's goal, therefore, was to increase the number of worshippers, for thereby the manifestation of God's power would increase. Since the collection for the saints in Jerusalem served this spiritual purpose, the apostle recommended it with such incessant fervour (Betz 1985:119).

In spite of his sensitivity to the nature of ancient social reciprocity, Betz's surprise at Paul's use of this 'rather primitive concept of God,' reflects a misunderstanding on his part of one of the characteristics of ancient reciprocal relationships, namely the constant efforts on the side of benefactors to acquire as many gift-debtors as possible. 'What a gift transactor desires is the personal relationships that the exchange of gifts creates and not the gifts themselves' (Gregory 1982:19). Divine gifts did not only establish and secure the continuation of relations with deities by creating debts that had to be repaid by worshippers, but they also served as public claims to the honour of the deities. The more worshippers were indebted to specific gods, the higher their power and status within society. Within the context of the ancient Mediterranean world, with its emphasis on repayment of debts to benefactors, deities and humans alike, it was therefore only natural (and definitely not 'primitive' for his time) that Paul would understand the thanksgiving from Jerusalem as flowing back to God. This was the only legitimate response on their part, since

13 Klauck (1986:75) correctly translates it as: 'euer Dienst und euer Opfergabe.'
14 Contra Betz (1985:117); Lang (1986:325), and Georgi (1995:74), who understand this term in its profane sense as an act of public service, the context of 2 Corinthians 9 (particularly verse 12b-c) favours the cultic understanding of λειτουργία—so Nickle (1966:121-122); Theobald (1982:299); Gnalka (1996:310).
15 Luke's reference to the negative reaction from the side of the silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:23ff) to Paul's missionary activities in the city serves as an example of the 'sensitivity' of the religious cults to external threats to their deities' honour. Paul's preaching in the city according to their spokesperson, Demeter, did not only threaten these silversmiths' income, but also the reputation of the cult of Artemis and the future of her magnificence in Asia and in the rest of the world.
thanksgiving was nothing less than a 'sacrificial' repayment for the divine benefits received. According to Paul, such debts could never be repaid in full. One remained in permanent debt to God for his eschatological gifts (cf 1 Ths 3:9).

Paul was convinced that the collection would increase God's honour as heavenly benefactor because of the multiplication of prayers of thanksgiving. In verse 13-14 he actually constructs the contents of Jerusalem's prayers (see Betz 1985:120-121). Firstly, in their praise to God (verse 13), they will acknowledge the obedience that the Pauline communities have shown in their confession of the gospel of Christ. The participation of the Corinthians in the collection is therefore nothing less than a concrete manifestation of their faith (verse 13b).16

The second reason for Jerusalem's praise to God is expressed in the fact that the delivery of the collection would serve as a visible demonstration of the koinonia between them, the Corinthians, and other believers involved in this project. The acceptance of the collection would provide visible proof of the unity and equality of all believers, as well as of their commitment to the one gospel of Christ (Beckenheuer 1997:173).

In verse 14, as the petition of Jerusalem on behalf of the Corinthians (καὶ αὕτων δεῖσαι ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν), the people of Jerusalem express their longing for the latter (ἐπιστοθείν) because of the exceeding grace of God in their lives. Jerusalem's longing is not merely an emotional yearning to personally meet the Corinthians. Verse 14 rather refers to their grateful acceptance of the collection, as well as their concomitant display of gratitude. Within the framework of Paul's theological understanding, verse 14 points to Jerusalem's recognition of the spiritual maturity of the Corinthians. Whereas the spiritual poverty of the Corinthians was referred to earlier in 8:13-15, Paul now implies that the completion of the collection will actually serve as a sign of the presence of God's grace in their lives. Therefore he (in verse 15) appropriately closes with a doxology (Barnett 1997:448).

16 Apart from the implicit pressure this statement brings to bear on the readers on the rhetorical level of the text to involve themselves in the collection, it once again underlines the religious nature of this undertaking. This statement also reflects the readers' submission to the contents of the gospel that Paul preached to them. The collection was not an act of submission to Jerusalem, neither in Paul's eyes, nor, according to him, in the eyes of Jerusalem. However, Betz (1985:122ff) interprets ὑμολογία in its legal sense as a public confirmation of the fact that the donors have entered into a contractual agreement, the substance of which was their submission to Jerusalem. This is in contradiction to the nature of benefit exchange relationships where the delivery and acceptance of a gift signalled a change in roles, status and obligations.
3.2.2 The collection and the principle of socio-religious approval

According to the principle of balanced reciprocity, the parties involved in an exchange of services are to benefit equally from their social interaction. Within the ancient Mediterranean world the positive consequences of people's good deeds were important inducements for such deeds, but any relationship that was conceptualised as a form of social exchange, also on religious level, would soon cease when these expected reactions were not forthcoming. In terms of the collection, the Corinthians thus also had to benefit from their involvement in the collection, not only God.17

The radical redefinition of philanthropy by Jesus was accepted with varying degrees of success within the various early Christian groups. In particular, within the orbit of the Pauline churches in the Greco-Roman world, where the sharp dichotomy between benefaction and charity was experienced as very real, Paul chose to relate the collection to his communities' beneficial relationship with God (and Jerusalem). Therefore, God's approval of their 'correct' religious behaviour (in response to his pro-active χάρις in their lives), is presented as the most important incentive to the Corinthians to complete the collection.

Although the gratification to be gained by the Corinthians from bestowing a benefit that contributed to the glory of God, was viewed as sufficient reward by Paul, he states in verses 11b-14 that they were also fortunate enough to find grateful recipients, namely the Jerusalem church. Because both the Corinthians and the Jerusalem community had the same common goal, namely the honour of God, the collection was the ideal vehicle to give visible expression to the κοινωνία between them. Neither the physical distance between these two groups, nor the cultural differences between them, stood in the way of sharing their common life in Christ.18

Although the approval by Jerusalem of the collection could not be coerced from them, Paul was of the opinion that the presence of God's grace, and the

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17 The agonistic atmosphere of benefaction in the Graeco-Roman world was quite different from the early Christian world where the plight of the socially destitute played a prominent role. However, the principles inherent to benefit exchange were still not replaced completely by purely altruistic forms of care for the needy, particularly within Pauline circles. Therefore, Veyne (1990:19) and Prell (1997:296) are only partially correct when they state that benefaction was substituted for charity in the early Christian movement, since this replacement of the principles of self-gratification as the leading motivation for performing services to others formed part of a complex and protracted process. (It was probably only completed around the time of Tertullian).

18 In the words of Hainz (1994:379): 'Die Kollekte ist eine "partielle Konkretion" der zwischen den paulinischen Missionsgemeinden und Jerusalem bestehenden Gemeinschaft; sie ist ebenso freiwillig wie prinzipiell geschuldet (vgl v 27), keine Auflage oder Steuer, etc., sondern Zeichen von Solidarität und Erweis des Willens zur Gemeinschaft.'
(supposed) positive orientation of the Corinthians to the collection, would elicit the desired response.

This is also what Seneca has in mind when he states that the person who has no desire to heap any burdens upon his recipients when bestowing a benefit, and who makes it look as if he is not bestowing, but actually returning a gift, usually reaps a grateful return, since others gladly return benefits to him (Ben V.1.4). In other words, it leads to social approval as the necessary reward for the time and money invested. At the same time, this gratitude on the side of the recipients usually creates an obligation to reciprocate the benefits received (Blau 1964:16), thus resulting in a mutual exchange of services.

According to Paul this was exactly what would happen between Jerusalem and his communities. The positive commitment of the Corinthians to the collection (in response to their experience of the xárhoiç tou òeou) would lead to a public display of gratitude on the side of Jerusalem. Specifically: Jerusalem would respond with prayers of intercession (verse 14) and a reciprocal bestowal of honour by recognising the Corinthians' spiritual wealth.

4 CONCLUSION

God takes care of all the needs of cheerful and generous givers, both materially and spiritually. This is the message to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9:6–10. To address their concerns that a large contribution to the collection may entail economic hardship for them, Paul, through the use of agrarian imagery, states that God's xárhoiç in their lives will provide them with the necessary material (and spiritual) means. As a result, they will always experience autárkeia. Therefore they will have sufficient means to sow liberally (that is, cheerfully and freely) in the lives of the needy believers in Jerusalem in full confidence that God will bestow a liberal harvest.

In 2 Corinthians 9:11–15 Paul supposes the successful completion of the collection on the part of the Corinthians, as well as Jerusalem’s prayers of thanksgiving for their generous contributions. However, the delivery of the collection does not merely function as the repayment of an obligation within the parameters of a particular relationship between Jerusalem and the Pauline communities. This reciprocal relationship also involves God, whose grace activates the Corinthians to complete the collection. At the same time his grace activates Jerusalem to respond with prayers of thanksgiving and a bestowal of honour on the Corinthians.

WORKS CONSULTED


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