The Jerusalem Collection, Economic Inequality, and Human Flourishing: Is Paul’s Concern the Redistribution of Wealth, or a Relationship of Mutuality (or Both)?

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Abstract

Recent research into Paul and the economy has brought clarity to some longstanding debates concerning the Jerusalem Collection while raising a new series of questions. Larry Welborn contends that the Jerusalem Collection’s focus on equality (ισότης) and the redistribution of possessions highlights the idea that Paul contributed to the emergence of a new category of thinking, namely the economic. Julien Ogereau, through a focus on κοινωνία, further grounds historically an economic and eschatological perspective on the collection by arguing that it represents a new socio-economic order that crosses cultural and ethnic differences as part of the movement’s global identity. Both of these scholars, along with a group of other empire-critical ones, assert that the collection was designed to address the rampant economic inequality in the Roman empire and, in some cases, that it represents an example of a call for the redistribution of wealth between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” This article evaluates and builds on this interpretive trajectory and, by drawing on the resources of George Akerlog and Rachel Kranton’s Identity Economics, suggests that the collection also brings to the fore a discourse of mutuality, revealing it as a concrete example of Paul’s vision of the Christ-movement as an alternative community with a distinct ethos, one in which existing identities remain salient and integrated into local expressions of the economic structure embedded in the eastern Mediterranean. Thus, Paul is not seen as thoroughly subversive nor co-opted by imperial ideology; rather, he draws on Israel’s concept of the inclusive economy in order
to invent an embedded kinship structure for his non-Jewish communities that provides for a transformed understanding of human flourishing while critiquing the economic backbone of the ancient economy—patronage and benefaction.

I. Introduction
Economic equality remains a controversial topic. Its very mention functions as a Tajfelian ingroup/outgroup experiment with all the requisite outgroup stereotyping, ingroup bias, and intergroup conflict that made Muzaf er Sherif’s Robbers Cave study such a classic for understanding group prejudice and conflict. For some, society has a responsibility to extend an equality of economic opportunities to everyone, while others go one step further and argue that this entails not just economic opportunities but results. So, public policy solutions such as a graduated tax scale or other income-leveling practices have been attempted, though without significant results. Thus, economic equality remains an elusive ideal.¹

In light of the recent financial crises and the lack of success with regard to economic equality, a few economists have started turning to ancient sources for wisdom. Michael Thompson points out that economic inequalities mask political relations, relations that reveal social power.² This starts to sound quite a bit like the embedded economy of the first century Roman era. Ancient economic values do not exactly overlap with contemporary ones; there were significant differences. Peter Liddel reminds us that even though the term equality was used there was little done to minimize the effects of socioeconomic inequality, especially as it emerged from gender and ethnic differences.³ Pericles (Thucydid es 2.37.1-2) proclaimed that a man is not “barred from a public career” based on his “poverty.” In this framework, equality of political privilege is said to not be adversely impacted by poverty, though undoubtedly this idealistic sentiment disagreed with a Greek’s daily experiences.⁴

Pauline scholars have turned to their corpus of expertise in order to see if there is anything distinct about Paul’s approach to the regulation of financial practices as they impinge upon economic inequality. After discussing the social interaction between the rich and poor at the communal meal, J. Christian Beker concludes, “The love principle that regulates the life of the church does not question or upset

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⁴ Ibid., 126.
basic economic issues, that is, a redistribution of wealth between rich and poor.”

While he recognizes equality discourse in Paul’s letters, he asserts, “This equality in Christ does not lead to an economic equality.”

For Beker, Paul has relatively nothing to say with regard to what Garnsey and Saller refer to as “the Roman system of inequality.”

On the other hand, Steven Friesen sees Paul as one who was actively seeking to overcome the economic inequalities of the empire; in referring to the collection he asserts, “Paul’s gospel called for a network of horizontal sharing among the Mediterranean assemblies (2 Cor. 8:13-15), not an exploitative vertical flow of resources, which characterized the imperial system.”

Friesen highlights a key passage, namely 2 Cor 8:13-15, that may allow us to uncover Paul’s perspective on economic equality. This passage was the focus of a recent article by Larry Welborn entitled, “‘That There May Be Equality’: The Contexts and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal.”

The article argues that Paul’s understanding of “equality” (ἰσότης) seeks the reversal of certain cultural expectations with regard to equality and by virtue of the collection, establishes a new economic structure that seeks to promote equality between individuals of different classes through a process of redistribution. Welborn and Friesen are close in their estimation of Paul’s attempt, though Welborn sees more economic diversity within the Christ-movement than Friesen’s more horizontal understanding.

Welborn begins by claiming that the LXX is not helpful in framing Paul’s understanding of “equality” (ἰσότης), since the word “appears only twice (Job 36:29; Zech 4:7) and without a Hebrew equivalent.” Thus, the Greek context of friendship, polis, and cosmos will serve to provide “clarity about Paul’s notion of ‘equality’ as the ground and goal of Christian relations.”

After highlighting the tendency among Pauline scholars to avoid issues of economic inequality, Welborn brings the contemporary horizon back into focus and notes that a “danger” in “our present moment in late capitalism is that the Judeo-Christian sense of social obligation will be entirely swept away by a resurgence of that structured inequality.

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6 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 73; Julien Ogereau, “The Jerusalem Collection as κοινωνία: Paul’s Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity.” NTS 58, no. 3 (2012): 364-65. Both scholars list Job 36:29; Zech 4:7; Letter of Aristeas 1.263; Ps.-Phoc. 1.137; Ps. Sol. 17.41; Col 4:1. Further, Ogereau highlights some usage in Philo (Opif. 1.51, 106; Cher. 1.105; Sacr. 1.27; Plant. 1.122), and that the adjective ἴσος does occur (Exod 30:34; Lev 7:10; 2 Macc 9:15) (365 n. 23).
11 Welborn, “‘That There May Be Equality,’” 74.
which was the basis of the political system of the Roman Empire.”

Thus, Welborn and Christoph Stenschke agree that there are likely biblical resources drawn from the Jerusalem collection and good stewardship that need to be brought to bear on the current/recent financial crises. However, this raises an important issue: can one draw such economic insights from Paul’s collection or is his focus elsewhere, e.g., “equity” or “fairness” as noted by Blomberg, in which case Paul’s use of ἴσότης provides guidance for treating “others how you would want to be treated if the shoe were on the other foot”? Or, to take this a bit further, is Paul’s concern to show the way non-Jews are part of a relationship of mutuality with Jews? If this should prove to be the case, then the exchange of material for non-material resources (a hallmark of Bourdieu’s symbolic economy) would enter the economic discourse within the Christ-movement, or at least, Paul can be understood to believe that it should. While these approaches may not be mutually exclusive, the question remains: is Paul establishing a framework of economic redistribution through his use of ἴσότης in 2 Cor 8:13-14?

In order to answer that question we will subdivide the remainder of this article into three headings: (II) The Jerusalem collection as poverty alleviation and mutual partnership; (III) The formation of an economic social identity; and (IV) The manna economy and equality of sufficiency and divine provision.

II. The Jerusalem Collection as Poverty Alleviation and Mutual Partnership

The collection has been understood in several different ways, some of which are not mutually exclusive: almsgiving, eschatological pilgrimage, taxation, expres-

12 Ibid., 74
13 Christoph Stenschke, “The current financial crises of Europe, Paul’s collection for Jerusalem and good stewardship,” EJT 21, no. 2 (Oct 2012): 97
14 Longenecker is less convinced; he writes “One further issue cannot be addressed within the covers of this book: that is, how its findings pertain to contemporary Christian theological reflection on issues of poverty and wealth in a globalized context of the twenty-first century.” Nevertheless, he later concedes that “Paul probably would imagine that contemporary Christian theology is legitimate to the extent that it includes such issues within its central remit, and not peripherally so.” Bruce W. Longenecker, Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 301.
16 Thomas Blanton, “Symbolic Goods as Media of Exchange in Paul’s Gift Economy” (unpublished paper), 8, refers to Jerusalem collection as an exchange “between material and symbolic goods” in Paul’s developing “gift economy.” See here Rom 15:27, and also 2 Cor 9:6-15, esp. v. 14, which describes the way those in Jerusalem “long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God on you.” Thus, in 2 Cor 8:14 we are not dealing with strict economic reciprocity, but are viewing the collection within the gift economy in such a way that “non-material, discursive products . . . may be accorded a material exchange” Blanton, “Symbolic Goods as Media of Exchange in Paul’s Gift Economy,” 14.
sion of solidarity, polemic, and reconciliation. Downs organizes these as (a) an eschatological event (which he rejects), (b) an obligation placed by the leaders in Jerusalem, (c) an ecumenical offering, (d) material relief, and, (e) his preferred perspective based on the cultic language employed throughout the relevant passages, worship, so that the collection represents a non-Jewish offering to God. Welborn, our chosen dialogue partner, fits squarely into the material relief category but extends it so that the redistribution of the resources was to be an ongoing and permanent structure within the Christ-movement.

The economic framework approaches, in differing ways, see the collection as Paul’s attempt to relieve poverty in Jerusalem (and often beyond that), and generally describe it as a subset of almsgiving. This is evident in the work of Welborn and Friesen as mentioned above but also in the work of David Horrell, Petros Vassiliadis, and Justin Meggitt. These three undergird Welborn’s (and Friesen’s) arguments and thus provide a broader basis to understand and evaluate the material relief approach. For Horrell, Paul’s work was fundamentally “materialist,” a social implication of his “theology.” Thus, it was more than poverty alleviation or charity; he was concerned with equality and based this on the example of Christ (2 Cor 8:9, 13). Further, for Horrell, Paul’s collection sought structural changes to existing socially-embedded economic practices, ones that would bring about the goal of equality. Vassiliadis sees the collection as an alternative model of economic and social justice to that evident in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44ff.; 5:1ff.), one that allowed for private property rights, rejected voluntary poverty, but still aimed for the perpetual redistribution of surplus resources. Meggitt sees the collection as an economic survival tactic, what he calls “economic mutualism.” The local assemblies within the Pauline Christ-movement were making a calculated attempt to secure their own future financial assistance from the Jerusalem Christ-movement should the need arise in the future. Thus, there is reciprocity anticipated, and the collection should not be seen as a one-time event but a key part of the ongoing structure of the Christ-movement.

How should we assess these economically focused approaches to the collection? First, an interpretive caution is required, and this relates to the broader way

18 Welborn, “‘That There May Be Equality,’” 89.
20 Horrell, “Paul’s Collection,” 76, 79.
in which Paul’s discourse is used for developing economic insights or practices. Gotis and Dodd, after a keen survey of economic ideas in Paul, remind interpreters of the “dangers of selecting apparently-appropriate New Testament passages to support modern economic work without paying due regard to context.”23 It seems that mining the collection for proto-economic structural policies may come close to this. For example, it is not clear that the collection was to be more than a one-time event, and thus it is difficult to attach normative (or permanent) expectations to such an undefined project. Furthermore, the notion of “equality” is central to these approaches, and while drawing on the cultural encyclopedia of ἴσότης is crucial for understanding how Paul’s discourse may have been heard, it is not clear that “equality” is the essence of the project. At least there is a need to clarify more precisely Paul’s notion of equality based on his broader identity-discourse. The approaches we are evaluating interpret the collection through the lens of 2 Cor 8-9; yet the purpose of these chapters was to renew the Corinthians’ motivation to give, not to establish a structural purpose for the collection. Additionally, the nature and presence of reciprocity is uncertain. There may be an ethnic or mission focus to the intimations of social exchange evident in the text, which would then provide a better context for understanding the socially-embedded nature of the collection.24 Thus, while the economic focus of Welborn and others is an important component of this discussion it is likely only one part. Julien Ogereau’s work helps us in two ways: first, by connecting other empire-critical approaches to the collection; second, by bringing into the discussion a missing element, the emphasis on partnership, solidarity, mutuality, and unity, in short κοινωνία.25

Julien Ogereau argues concerning the Jerusalem collection, “the whole enterprise was rooted in the conviction that the advent of the eschatological kingdom of God had inaugurated a new socio-economic order, which was to become distinctive of the emergent Christ-believing communities on a global scale.”26 In this he builds on the earlier approaches of Horsley and Wan who view Paul’s financial

24 Some of these critiques, though with different emphases and implications, are similar to those found in Yohannes Baheru Faye, The Nature and Theological Import of Paul’s Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem, PhD Diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2013.
26 Ibid., 362-63; Johannes Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind (London: SCM, 1954); Dieter Georgi, Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul’s Collection for Jerusalem (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); and Keith Nickle, The Collection: A Study of Paul’s Strategy (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), in different ways, contend that the eschatological pilgrimage tradition influenced Paul’s collection project. This has not been widely accepted since there seems to be little textual basis for the connection. However, Paul’s Jewish interpretive-context, its provocative nature among the broader Jewish community, and its potential reconciliatory impulse are important contributions from the work of these scholars. See more on this below.
practice as a direct confrontation of the inequitable tributary financial structures within the Roman Empire. Thus, the collection was to become a permanent parallel economic structure that was global and trans-local in orientation, and did not rely on the flow of resources (taxes, etc.) from the low-status majority to the elites centered in Rome. Wan puts this more into a colonial context, where Paul is challenging the power structures of the elites by emphasizing the equitable distribution of resources among a group in solidarity with one another, a distribution not structured around or reliant on patronage structures or other social discourses that continue to facilitate inequality. Ogereau, however, recognizes that Paul’s understanding of “equality” (ἰσότης) is not primarily informed by Greek and Roman thought (contra Welborn, Horsley, and Wan) but is clarified by his manna narrative citation from Exod 16:18 in 2 Cor 8:15. There Paul’s “edited citation suggests that the goal was to achieve a relative, proportional equality by restoring a certain balance between need and surplus.” This approach, then, offers a corrective to Horsley and Wan, and places certain constraints on the application of the principle of “equality” (ἰσότης). It should not be understood as a normative principle of Paul’s economic policy. Rather, its focus is on the sufficiency of needs being met (see below).

Ogereau rightly brings to the fore an often missed component of these discussions, the use of κοινωνία as “partnership” in 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; and Rom 15:26 to describe the collection. After providing ample documentary and literary evidence, he points out that in these instances κοινωνία did not refer to “monetary contribution,” but to “some kind of partnership or association with socio-political ramifications, which Paul envisioned between the Gentile churches and their Judean counterparts, and which would ultimately manifest itself in the form of a concrete monetary gift.”

If what Ogereau suggests is accurate, then the connection of “equality” (ἰσότης) and “partnership” (κοινωνία) is indeed significant and highlights the existence of both political and economic links between the predominantly non-Jewish members of the Pauline Christ movement and the “holy ones” in Jerusalem. So what at first sight appears to be a one-time project may in fact be an ongoing relationship-based movement.

28 Ibid., 366; see similarly on this point in Blomberg, Christians in an Age of Wealth.
29 Ibid., 366. “Begging us with much urging for the favor of partnership (κοινωνίαν) in the support of the saints” (2 Cor 8:4). “Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your partnership (κοινωνίας) with them and to all” (2 Cor 9:13). “For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a partnership (κοινωνίαν) for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26).
30 Ibid., 371.
31 John M. G. Barclay, in an important article entitled, “Money and Meetings: Group Formation among Diaspora Jews and Early Christians,” argues that more attention should be paid to “associations” in antiquity in order to understand the social dynamics involved in the formation of
At the same time, in seeking to redress socioeconomic inequalities with regard to sufficiency—at least as they are manifested within the broader Christ-movement—the project offers a secondary critique of the broader practices of patronage and benefaction that was the backbone of the Roman system of economic inequality. So was Paul concerned about economic inequality? A qualified yes may be offered with regard to the way patronage functioned within the Christ-movement though, generally speaking, inequalities of sufficiency were deemed to be unacceptable within the congregation.

One example of such Christ-movement socioeconomic inequality that is often noted and mentioned above, although discounted by Beker, is found in 1 Cor 11:17-34. There Paul highlights divisions that have their basis in socioeconomic disparity: “For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk” (1 Cor 11:21 NRSV). From Paul’s perspective this deviant behavior has its basis in practices that reinforce inequality: “What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” (1 Cor 11:22). The phrase “those who have nothing” is particularly probative; it has those, according to Longenecker’s revised economic scale, in the ES6-ES7 categories in view; a group that would make up around 65% of urban Christ-followers. Paul’s concern is with the non-elite, middling group (Longenecker’s ES4), who were not properly discerning the mutual relationship between the various parts of Christ’s body (1 Cor 11:29). Carter is more explicit and sees the problems associated with the supper as an “act of dishonoring, humiliating, and shaming the poor”. He believes that Paul, who identifies with the lower group, thought that within the Christ-movement there was to be a “preferential option for the poor and the practice of sharing of economic resources.”

Summary

So, the collection does alleviate poverty and economic inequalities to a degree (thus contributing to an improved well-being or flourishing of its recipients) but that is not enough. It also forms a superordinate social identity between non-Jews and those living in Jerusalem through the practical outworking of their relational

the earliest Christ-movement (Barclay, Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 106-21). In particular, Paul’s collection should be considered in the context of these “associations.” In The Offering of the Gentiles (118), Downs does just that; he offers an extensive discussion of monetary practices among Greek and Roman voluntary associations and concludes that these data offer evidence of both similarity and difference with regard to Paul’s efforts to organize the collection for Jerusalem.

32 Beker, Paul the Apostle, 323.
33 Longenecker, Remember the Poor, 295
35 Ibid.
(and financial) partnership, one characterized by mutuality and equality (but more on that anon).

III. The Formation of an Economic Social Identity

What I’m suggesting is that what we see in the instructions concerning the collection, the supper, and other economic guidance (e.g., 1 Cor 7:30) in the Corinthian correspondence is the formation of the economic aspects of an “in Christ” social identity (see esp. 2 Cor 8:9, 13, where Christ is put forth as the ingroup prototype), which is a superordinate identity that reprioritizes existing identities. Indeed, they all belong to Christ, who in turn belongs to God (1 Cor 3:23). Or, in a Bourdieu-ian way of describing it, they are undergoing the conversion of bodily practices.36

Longenecker’s work has made a significant contribution to our understanding of economics and the formation of identity in Paul as an integral social implication of his gospel.37 At the same time, in the broader field of economics, Akerlof and Kranton provide theoretical grounding for our understanding of the way identity informs economic choices, namely the way non-economic motivations have a significant influence on people’s work, wages, and well-being (i.e., their flourishing).38 By the use of Tajfel and Turner’s social identity approaches they bring to the fore the idea that what appear to be economic challenges are often identity ones.39 The way non-economic indicators influence economic choices sounds very much like the socially embedded economy of the first century. With that in mind, we should consider the way patronage and benefaction (as social identity ordering principles40) may have misinformed the economic practices of some in Corinth.41 To do this, we need to look first at one of Paul’s earlier comments on the collection in 1 Cor 16:1-4.

Paul’s earliest reference to the collection is in 1 Cor 16:1-4; he begins “Now concerning the collection” (περὶ δὲ τῆς λογείας). The presence of περὶ δὲ suggests this is a topic that was raised by the Corinthians, likely asking for clarification, as

36 See W. Coppins, “To Eat or Not to Eat Meat?: Conversion, Bodily Practice, and the Relationship between Formal Worship and Everyday Life in the Anthropology of Religion and 1 Corinthians 8:7.” BTB 41, no. 2 (2011): 84-91. As a former pastor, I can attest to the “wallet” being the last part to be converted.
37 Longenecker, Remember the Poor, 198-99.
41 On whether the whole group is in view or not compare Tucker, You Belong to Christ, 9; Andrew Clarke, Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6 (Leiden: Brill), 130.
noted by Horsley, as to the practical details and future plans for the collection.\(^{42}\) However, Witherington has suggested that their inquiry came from those who had heard of the collection and were interested in participating in this benefaction.\(^ {43}\) It is likely a combination of the two, and, as will become apparent, both the practical outworking of the collection and the entanglements with benefaction will become problematic for Paul’s relationship with some of the Corinthian Christ-followers.

Paul uses the term \(\lambdaογεία\) to refer to “the collection” (\(τῆς \lambdaογείας\)). The word is used twice in the NT and only in this passage. It is found in business documents and could describe a general collection of money, e.g., taxes, but could also reference money collected for ritual purposes, e.g., “the collection (\(τῆν \λογίαν\)) of Isis.”\(^ {44}\) Two ideas are of interest here. First, this is the only place that Paul uses this term to refer to his financial project. Elsewhere he calls it “the service” (\(τῆς \διακονίας\); 2 Cor 9:1) or “the partnership” (\(τῆν \κοινωνίαν\); 2 Cor 8:4), terms more in keeping with Paul’s general perspective on life within the Christ-movement. Thus, \(\lambdaογεία\) may reflect the Corinthian Christ-followers’ (mis)understanding of the nature of the project, i.e., one drawn primarily from the socially embedded economic sphere, while Paul places the accent on another component, namely mutuality and relationality. Second, an ostracon referring to “the collection of Isis” may offer further insight into what some in Corinth thought Paul’s collection involved, namely a continuation of existing benefaction duties and practices that previously had been directed to provincial deities. (Further, the cultic language may be a way to fill the empty sacred space now that these non-Jews can no longer participate in venerating these deities).\(^{45}\)

Second Corinthians 8:14, with its focus on the way the Corinthians’ current “abundance” might “supply” the “needs” of others, and the way in which this might be reversed in the future has led many to argue that 8:14 reflects Paul’s involvement in and tacit approval of existing socioeconomic practices within the empire. Richard Ascough and Stephen Joubert illustratively argue that the presentation of the Jerusalem collection in Paul’s letters amounts to his involvement in benefaction as it was practiced during the mid-first century; in this way Paul’s

\(^{42}\) Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 221.

\(^{43}\) Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 313. The phrase \(\piερδ \\delta \varepsilon\) occurs in 7:1, 25; 8:1; 21:1; and 16:12.


understanding would be similar to the Corinthians’. Based on Paul’s use of “complete” (ἐπιτελέω) in 2 Cor 8:6, 11, Ascough rightly contends that this term is more than simply a financial one but one that intimates a religious duty, and thus may put the collection project within the practice of benefaction.\(^{46}\) Joubert picks up on similar themes focusing on “agonistic rivalry” between the Corinthians and the Macedonians, a discourse that was also part of the practice of benefaction (2 Cor 8:1-6, 7-9, 9:1-5).\(^{47}\) For both Ascough and Joubert, reciprocity and its concomitant obligation is a central component to Paul’s collection project. However, reciprocity should be distinguished from mutuality, in that the mutuality seeks the welfare of the other partner. While this is not evident in Greek and Roman reciprocal exchanges, it is present in Paul’s collection discourse.\(^{48}\)

The various vertical exchange relationships are often broadly referred to as patronage, and the inherent asymmetry in these structures have led many to suggest that, in fact, Paul was working to transform these one-way approaches to communal and economic life rather than continuing to work within them.\(^{49}\) Paul appears to allude to this general system when he refers to the Corinthians’ contribution in 1 Cor 16:3 as “your gift to Jerusalem” (τὴν χάριν ὑμῶν εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ), though recently Briones has questioned whether patronage is an appropriate model for understanding Paul’s financial policy.

For Ehrensperger, Paul’s discourse of “grace” (χάρις) as God’s gift transforms these one-way-oriented approaches to ones that highlight “mutual concern for each other and the well-being of all involved in the network of the Christ-movement.”\(^{50}\) While Harrison has clearly shown that “grace” (χάρις) is a key concept in the Greek and Roman reciprocity system and is important for issues of cultural translation, it is still unlikely that Paul so frequently chose this term when dealing with the collection because he was relying on or supporting an uncritical dependence on this system.\(^{51}\) Rather, Paul’s discourse of grace relies on a covenantal understanding of חן/חסד. Thus, I call into question the approaches that try to separate חן/חסד/χάρις/ἔλεος related terminology, and suggest, rather, that depending

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\(^{50}\) Ehrensperger, Paul and the Dynamics of Power, 70.

on the context the semantic fields of חֵן/חָסד/χάρις/ἔλεος are similar. The use of חֵן/חָסד, which I take generally to refer to “goodness or generosity in interpersonal relations,” does not include within it the idea of reciprocity, but it does provoke a response based on a relationship.52

God’s gracious favor is more than an attitude; it is an action, a social identification that emerges within a relationship and not some type of equity presupposed by the benefaction system, or a gift given to enhance one’s social status. Rather, as noted by Ehrensperger, “it is . . . supposed to be a response which implies an affirmation of the relationship and which is appropriate to it in its emphasis on mutuality.”53 For example, this is seen in Israel’s scriptural call for doing justice to those inside and outside the community, a key component of Israel’s inclusive/manna/Sabbath economy (Mic 6:6, 8; Isa 58:6-14; Deut 24:17-18).54 In that sense, Welborn’s claim that “Paul contributes to the tentative emergence of a new category of thought—the economic” should be tempered.55 Paul does challenge aspects of Roman policies as they hinder the attainment of the basic necessities of life, and he does offer an alternative ideological perspective to patronage and benefaction. But this is not properly new. It is the appropriation of Israel’s manna economy with its ideology of God’s provision for daily needs among the Pauline Christ-movement (see further below on 2 Cor 8:15).

I would suggest, then, that we should not see in Paul’s use of benefaction-related terms when discussing the collection, as Ascough, Joubert, and Harrison do, as a reinforcement of the status quo or a move to bring the Jerusalem Christ-followers into a patron-client relationship with the Pauline Christ-movement. Rather, we should see his instruction in the context of חֵן/חָסד/χάρις/ἔλεος discourse from Israel’s scriptural tradition, which emphasizes mutuality and relationality, and not hierarchy and obligation. This, i.e., goodness and generosity in interpersonal relations, is what I suggest Paul means when he uses “equality” (ἰσότης) in 2 Cor 8:13-14. It represents a critique of the backbone of the ancient economy, with its reliance on patronage and benefaction. His primary concern is with mutuality and relationality within the broader Christ-movement. This socially-embedded “equality” in turn can “promote the empowerment and well-being [i.e., flourishing] of others within the network.”56 Paul’s language here functions, then, as a kinship

52 However, see Josh 2:12; Judges 1:24.
53 Ibid., 76.
54 “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:6, 8). “You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this” (Deut 24:17-18).
55 Welborn, “‘That There May Be Equality,’” 88.
56 Ehrensperger, Paul and the Dynamics of Power, 79-80.
discourse contributing to the formation of an “in Christ” social identity, one concerned with human flourishing rather than an increase in or the accrual of honor and power.57

Summary

Paul uses the collection to contribute to the formation of a transformed economic social identity among non-Jewish Christ-followers. It is one that challenges the backbone of the Roman economy with its reliance on patronage and benefaction. Further, rather than relying on discourses of reciprocity or obligation, Paul wants to see among the Christ-followers an ethic of mutuality, generosity, and grace-filled-other-regard similar to that found in Israel’s scriptural tradition in its use of חן/חסד/χάρις/ἔλεος. This renewed kinship discourse should contribute to the formation of a salient “in Christ” social identity with its concomitant (and contested) practices and social identifications. Let’s turn finally to the focal point of Paul’s rhetoric, 2 Cor 8:15. Before doing so, however, I will set the stage by revisiting some evidence concerning ἰσότης that may help us understand Paul’s idea of equality of sufficiency and divine provision in the manna economy.

IV. The Manna Economy and Equality of Sufficiency and Divine Provision

Because it is not our intention that others should have relief while you have affliction; it is rather a matter of equality. In the now time your surplus is for their insufficiency so that their surplus would be available for your insufficiency, in order that there may be equality.

As it is written, “The one who gathered much had no excess, and the one who gathered little did not lack” (2 Cor 8:13-15).58

Two first-century Greek and Roman authors may assist us in correlating the way Paul’s equality discourse might have been heard, and the way he may have been using it as a bi-cultural mediator. Dio Chrysostom, in De Avaritia, offers a few insights regarding equality in the context of a broader discussion on greed. First, Dio contends that greed is the enemy of equality; it causes communal difficulties while equality brings healing (Avar. 6b).59 Second, equality binds people together

57 Mark T. Finney, Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World: 1 Corinthians in Its Greco-Roman Social Setting (LNTS 460; London: T & T Clark, 2011) for the presence of this idea in other parts of 1 Corinthians.

58 οὐ γὰρ ἴνα ἄλλοις ἄνεσες, ύμεν θλίψις, ἀλλ᾽ εἰς ἰσότητος· ἐν τῷ νῦν καὶ τῷ ὑμῶν περίσσευμα εἰς τὸ ἐκείνων ἰσότημα, ὑμᾶς εἰς τὸ ὑμῶν ἰσότημα, ὅπως γένεται ἰσότης, καθὼς γέρατε· ὁ τὸ πολὺ οὐκ ἐπελεύσατε, καὶ ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον οὐκ ἠλαττώνησεν.

59 “My assertion also regarding greed, is that even though all know that it is neither expedient nor noble—but rather is a cause of the greatest of evils—yet no one person shuns it or is willing to have equality (of possessions) with one’s neighbor.”
even in differing socio-economic situations (Avar. 9). Third, the principle of equality is a universally understood component of the human experience (Avar. 10b). Plutarch thinks that proportional equality is to be a goal but not one that would extend to the masses (Quaest. Conv. 719 C). Plutarch and Dio see the importance of equality for social cohesion, though their elite perspective on equality is rather asymmetrical, and not aligned with Paul’s idea of mutuality.

In addition to these authors, also potentially instructive here is an early second-century non-literary papyri, P.Mil.Vogl. 1.23.7, which uses ἱσότης in regard to the way an inheritance is to be subdivided: “the things established by us in view of equality of the portion that each one has been allotted from the property.” While one cannot be certain, it is likely that a sense of equality or fairness was to be maintained as the property was distributed among those involved. Another papyri, SB 14.11651.7, though dated in the early third-century, might likewise be helpful. In preparations for the arrival of the emperor, the provincial officials were to organize everything with all “equality” and “rightness.” The juxtaposition of these two words brings to the fore a similar construction in Col 4:1, “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly.” The papyri highlight a desire to maintain equality in ways that are contextually appropriate and can be seen to connect ideas of righteousness and equality at the societal level.

Nevertheless, Paul doesn’t use ἱσότης enough to determine if these insights are probative. What he does do is use Exod 16:18 as a way to show the Corinthians what he has in mind by equality. Thus, building on the work of Cherian, I wish to highlight the use of the manna narrative, and, as suggested above, demonstrate that what Paul is developing is a manna economy in which one’s needs are met for the day. In doing so he addresses a pressing economic concern of the first-century.

Exodus 16 recounts the consistent supply of food for Israel in the wilderness. During their travels in the wilderness they were to go out and gather for their daily needs. But further, in Exod 16:4, God also intends to “test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.” It seems, then, that the manna discourse is as much about

60 “Son, why do you long for Greed, the worst among the deities? Do not! She is an unjust goddess! She enters many prosperous homes and cities, and does not leave till her votaries are ruined. And you are mad for her! This is best for mortal ones, to reverence Equality and to be friends with friends, to bind cities to cities and allies to fellow allies. For Nature has granted humans equality as that which is lawful, such that whenever the lesser stands in opposition/war against the greater, that leads to the dawn of hate.”

61 “And again, honor equality as a law for humans, for this produces solidarity of friendship and peace for all toward each other; whereas disagreements, internal wrangling, and external wars ensue from nothing other than the lust for more, so that each side is kept from sufficiency.”

62 “The equality that the masses pursue, which actually is the greatest injustice of all, God removes as far as is possible. God preserves distinctions according to their worth, maintaining the proportional relation in geometric model, as the norm of lawfulness.”

faith as it is about food. They would collect the food each day, except on the day before the Sabbath. On that day, they would collect enough for two days since there would be no food on the ground on the Sabbath (Exod 16:5, 26), though some departed from the Lord’s command (Exod 16:28).

Claassens rightly highlights the way the interruption of the delivery of fresh manna points to a Sabbath economy. The idea of sufficiency is also brought to the fore in the miracle; each gathered an amount equal to their need. Claassens remarks that there is “a principle of total equality . . . the manna is distributed in such a way that everyone receives a portion that is exactly enough to satisfy their needs.” Thus, the idea of equality that emerges from the manna discourse is one in which neither scarcity nor over-abundance is present, and hoarding or greed is rendered ineffective since the leftover spoils anyway.

The manna story is used several other times throughout Israel’s scriptures to emphasize God’s provision and the need to rely on him (see Num 11; Deut 8:2-6; Josh 5:12; Pss 78; 105; 4 Ezra 1:19-20; and Wisd 16:20-23). Second Baruch 29:8 should be particularly pointed out since it connects manna and the messianic time: “And it will happen in that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time” (see also Sib Or. 7.149). This messianic time may also be in view in 2 Cor 8:14, as Paul specifies, “in the now time” (ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ). While this phrase could only be a temporal marker, based on a similar use in 2 Cor 6:2 “now is the acceptable time” (ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρός εὐπρόσδεκτος), as well as the later use of the exact phrase in Rom 3:16; 8:18; and 11:5, it may be the case that Paul views the collection as an eschatological event, the so-called eschatological pilgrimage tradition, where the wealth of the nations flows into Zion (Isa 60:5), such as suggested by Munck, Georgi, and Nickle.

Regardless, in 1 Cor 7:29-30 Paul does make it clear that one’s view of the eschatological time will impact one’s economic practice. He introduces the eschatological time framework in v. 29, noting that “the appointed time has grown very short” (ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος). In 7:29-32, Paul describes several identities that entangle one in the affairs of life, e.g., marriage and commerce. The presence of ὡς μή in these verses has led Schrage to argue that economics are

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66 See Cherian, Toward a Commonwealth, 172.

67 Victor Paul Furnish, II Corinthians (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 408.

68 Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind, 299-305; Georgi, Remembering the Poor, 119; Nickle, The Collection, 136.
adiaphora for Paul. However, this doesn’t seem to align with his rule in all the churches in 1 Cor 7:17-24 that Christ-followers should remain in their calling. Paul is not calling the Corinthians to abandon their cultural identities and engagements; rather, they are to allow their awareness of the eschatological time to impact their perspective on consumption.

Hron puts 1 Cor 7:29-31 in his general mandate category and connects it with Jesus’s possession-focused teaching. So, for Paul (as well as Jesus, e.g., Matt 6:16-21, 24-34; 10:9-10; 19:21-25, 27-30), “those who buy” should act “as though they did not possess” (1 Cor 7:30). Further, Hron understands that “a practical sense of detachment is reaffirmed in the mandate to use the things of the world but not as one makes ‘full use of’ them (v. 31).” Regardless of whether we see the eschatological pilgrimage tradition in the use of the “now time,” Paul’s eschatologically-oriented time perspective does challenge accepted possessions-focused social practices (cf. 1 Cor 13:3; Acts 2:44-46).

Philo, as is often mentioned by commentators, also draws on Exod 16:18 in his equality discourse in Her. He similarly points out the dangers of greed since it rejects a divinely ordered proportionality evident in equality (see Leg. 3.166). With regard to Her. 191, Cherian provides an apt summary: “For Philo manna stands for wisdom; the divine word makes effectual the distribution . . . so equality is maintained; Moses witness[es] to divine equality; equality is achieved when measured in proportion; equality is predetermined.” Welborn rejects the idea that Paul’s use of equality discourse resonates with that of Philo’s in Who is the Heir 191, since Paul in 2 Cor 8:15 has confused human and divine action.

While it is accurate to state that Philo relies on the idea of “the divine λόγος” as that which ensures equitable distribution (in this case of wisdom), Philo earlier connects ἴσοτης with the idea of proportionality (Her 145). Since Paul does this as

71 Ibid.
72 It may further be worthwhile to consider 1 Cor 13:3 and the way Paul affirms giving away one’s “possessions to feed the poor” in this light as well. It is not obligatory, and as such is a trajectory away from Acts 2:44-46, but it is still praiseworthy, and thus within plausible actions in the “now time.” See Hron, The Mirage Shall Become a Pool, 177. I question whether the commonality in Acts 2 is not also non-obligatory in the sense that it is “free-willed,” particularly in light of Acts 5:4-5.
73 “Therefore, in the case of manna as well as with every gift that God grants to our race, it is good to receive what is measured out and fixed and not to (reach for) what is beyond/above us; for this would be greed.”
74 Cherian, Toward a Commonwealth, 181.
75 Welborn, “‘That There May Be Equality,’” 88.
well in 2 Cor 8:13, there may be some reason to consider such a providential 
distribution understanding in Paul.\(^{76}\)

In any case, we should pause and seriously consider Paul’s use of the law to 
serve as a way of organizing the communal life of a primarily non-Jewish move-
ment. Akerlof and Kranton have suggested the importance of focusing on social 
categories, norms, and utility gain and loss as a way to better understand econom-
ic motivations.\(^{77}\) Their basic claim is that people care about what they should do, 
who they understand themselves to be, what groups they are part of, and what 
their beliefs are, and that these are integral to economic choices. In short, people’s 
social identities shape their economic practice. It would seem to be the case that 
Akerlof and Kranton have again alerted us to one of Paul’s economic motivations. 
What seems sufficiently clear is that Paul’s economic policy, if we can call it that, 
reflects his continuing salient Jewish identity and encourages non-Jews to adjust 
their perspective on the way they should care for those that are not from their own 
ethnic or social group. The suggestion here, then, is that Paul’s identity as a Jew-
ish Christ-follower shaped his identity with regard to work, money, and human 
flourishing (well-being) even as he sought to invent non-Jewish identity in Christ.

Paul’s purpose for the citation may be further highlighted through a brief com-
parison of 2 Cor 8:15 with Exod 16:18. First, Exod 16:18 opens with καὶ 
μετρήσαντες τῷ γομῷ “but when they measured it with an omer.” This is left off 
by Paul, who rather starts with the standard citation formula καθὼς γέγραπται “as 
it is written.” Next, Paul moves ὁ τὸ πολὺ “the one who gathered much” before 
ὁκ ἐπλεόνασεν “had nothing left over.” Finally, Paul changes ὁ τὸ ἔλαττον “he 
who had less” from the LXX, to ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον “he who had little.” The significance 
of these changes are minimal, though they may combine to focus the referent, 
emphasize the poverty of the collection’s recipients, and, as suggested by Stanley, 
draw out the focal point, i.e., “the equality of Yahweh’s provision for his people.”\(^{78}\) 
This does, however, raise another issue: the Exodus passage emphasizes God’s 
provision while Paul’s passage (notwithstanding any providential overtones) 
brings to the fore human agency. While the tension is there, the Exodus passage 
does not delineate the structures by which the material was distributed, so it is 
difficult to determine if there is any real inconsistency here.

In light of all the above, we are in a position to offer some insights into the 
rhetorical purpose for Paul’s citation of Exod 16:18 in 2 Cor 8:15. First, it is a way 
to ask the Corinthians whether they have adequately considered the idea ex-
pressed in the passage in keeping with Paul’s desire for an emergence of an ethic 

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\(^{76}\) However, Philo’s cosmic orientation does not develop the discourse of mutuality as does Paul. See 
\(^{78}\) Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline 
of generosity among them. Second, the verse supports his claim concerning equality. Third, drawing on the way the manna tradition was used in other Jewish writings, Paul uses it to teach them about God’s gracious provision. Fourth, he uses it to test their proper response to God’s gracious provision by participating in the collection (2 Cor 8:8). Fifth, by drawing on the manna discourse and its connection to the Sabbath economy, he may be hinting at the way the traditions of Israel continue to be relevant within a non-Jewish Christ-movement (cf. esp. 1 Cor 10:11). Thus, it would seem overall that Paul cites Exod 16:18 in 2 Cor 8:15 to emphasize “God’s gracious equality of sufficiency.” Indeed, for Paul, God is ultimately sufficient for the needs of each person in the community.

Hays suggests that what we have in 2 Cor 8:15 is an “economic parable.” Paul draws on the Mosaic tradition to instruct non-Jewish communities as to what a community of Christ-followers should do in response to the needs of others, which, generally speaking, would be the opposite of the way the broader Roman society responded to poverty. Verhey summarizes the import of this most effectively:

The collection was gift answering gift . . . it was illustrative of a community of friends, not clients and patrons. And it was illustrative of what may be called ‘a manna economy.’ After Paul has reminded the Corinthians of Jesus and commended ‘equality,’ he corroborates his argument by reminding them of God’s provision of manna. ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little’ (2 Cor 8:15; Exod. 16:18). Manna was a familiar eschatological symbol . . . and Paul did not empty the story of its economic associations. In a ‘manna economy’ hoarding is futile, loafing is foolish, daily needs are met, and God is trusted to provide. Such a ‘manna economy’ illustrates and participates in God’s good economic future.

V. Conclusion
So, does Paul develop anything close to an economic policy in 2 Cor 8:13-15, as Welborn contends? It is unlikely that he sought economic equality through redistributive action since he did not address the equally dire economic situation of the Macedonians (2 Cor 8:1-5). However, it is likely that he does address the main economic question in antiquity: does each member of the household

79 Cherian, Toward a Commonwealth, 192.
80 Hays, Echoes, 90.
have enough to survive for the day? The citation from the manna story suggests Paul’s economic policy did not seek to address the macro-level inequalities evident throughout the Roman Empire though he did seek to tweak the system inside the Christ-movement, and form an economic social identity among non-Jews through Jewish traditions and Christ’s example. However, all is not lost; Paul did offer a solution to that burning economic question: “Will everyone in the household get what it takes to survive the day?” If placed within that context, then Paul does indeed offer crucial economic insights for those within the Christ-movement, called to live as an alternative community with a distinct ethos.