

THEOLOGIZING IN THE CORINTHIAN CONFLICT

STUDIES IN THE EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGY OF 2 CORINTHIANS

EDITED BY

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‘BECAUSE HE WAS RICH HE BECAME POOR’

TRANSLATION, EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS IN THE READING OF 2 COR 8.9

Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians to contribute to the Jerusalem collection (2 Corinthians 8-9) is widely recognised as a prime example of his rhetorical skills, but also as the distillation of important reflections on community, gift and material resources. Much of the rhetoric in chapter 8 revolves around the different but interconnected senses of the term *χάρις*. Paul draws the Corinthians’ attention to the *χάρις* of God which has been given to the churches of Macedonia (8.1), such that in an excess of joy (*χαρά* - clearly a play on words, 8.2), they have contributed with great generosity, out of their poverty, positively begging for the favour (*χάρις*) of sharing in this contribution (8.4). Paul has thus urged Titus to help the Corinthians bring to completion ‘this *χάρις*’ (8.6) – this gift or favour – and Paul reminds them that, as they abound in so many other things (faith, speech, knowledge, and enthusiasm), they should abound also ‘in this *χάρις*’ (8.7), meaning specifically this act of giving, the collection for Jerusalem.

The rhetorical word-play is, as generally for Paul, a serious theological matter: the term *χάρις* is not idly chosen, but freighted with theological, and specifically Christological, connotations; the opening and closing of all his letters make that abundantly clear (in this letter, or letter-collection, 2 Cor 1.2; 13.13). It is therefore no surprise that the *χάρις*-discourse in this chapter is capped by a specifically Christological reference, in the famous statement of 8.9. Here Paul appeals to the Christ-event as ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’, whose content he sets out in two matching clauses. For the sake of clarity, we may portray this verse as a three-limbed statement:

- 9a: γινώσχετε γὰρ τὴν χάριν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι
- 9b: δι’ ἡμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν,
- 9c: ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε.

The first limb (9a) provides the heading for the Christological statement to follow, defining it as a *χάρις*-event, as fits the context; the second (9b) and third (9c) match each other in multiple ways, in their heavy emphasis on ‘you’ as the beneficiaries of this Christ-gift (both *δι’ ὑμᾶς* and *ὑμεῖς* are strongly emphatic), and in their striking juxtaposition of terms for poverty and wealth (*ἐπτώχην ἐγένετο* in 9b, and *πτωχὴν ἐγένετο* in 9c). The two clauses each have one verb, in a loosely chiasmic arrangement, so that the flow of action runs from ‘he became poor’ to ‘you become rich’. Whether or not Paul has adapted this statement from pre-existing formulae, he has crafted it into a form that speaks directly to the Corinthians (the emphatic double ‘you’) and that fits immediately into its context, with matching *χάρις*-terms and economic vocabulary.

As Jan Lambrecht has commented, ‘the significance of this verse has been manifold’;¹ its history of interpretation has been rich indeed.² The lapidary form of the verse – its characteristically Pauline use of shorthand, or synecdoche – has invited many attempts to spell out its precise reference: did Christ ‘become poor’ at the incarnation, in his human life of poverty, at the cross, or in all of these?³ Its metaphorical expression is teasing – in what sense did he become ‘poor’ and do believers become ‘rich?’ – and the apparent paradox (‘by his poverty you become rich’) again invites considerable interpretative effort (there are many kinds of Pauline paradox). Since the verse is tied into its context by its vocabulary (and the opening *γάρ*), we are entitled to ask what role this statement plays in the logic of the appeal for money, but the fact that Paul never spells this out (and nowhere later refers back to this statement) invites many ways of relating this Christological summary to Paul’s ethical appeal. In this short essay I wish to analyse first the standard reading of this verse and its contextual function, but then to explore an alternative reading, which maximises the paradoxical force of Paul’s language and provides, I think, a smoother fit with the rest of Paul’s appeal. Both readings are, I think, possible, but I wish to commend the second in particular. The difference between the two comes down to a difference in the reading of the metaphor of wealth: in

1. J. LAMBRECHT, *Second Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina, 8), Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1999, p. 143.

2. For the early history of reception, see P. ANGSTENBERGER, *Der reiche und der arme Christus. Die Rezeptionsgeschichte von 2 Kor 8,9 zwischen dem zweiten und dem sechsten Jahrhundert* (Hereditas, 12), Bonn, Borengässer, 1997.

3. On Pauline use of shorthand (or synecdoche), see M. MITCHELL, *Rhetorical Shorthand in Pauline Argumentation: The Functions of ‘the Gospel’ in the Corinthian Correspondence*, in L.A. JERVIS – P. RICHARDSON (eds.), *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic, 1994, 63–88.

both cases it is a metaphor, but in the standard reading the term 'wealth' is not itself paradoxical, while in my reading it is. Thus my two headings, for the two different readings: Wealth as Possession, lost and gained; and 'Wealth' as Generosity, gained in loss. Let me spell out what these readings entail.

1. WEALTH AS POSSESSION, LOST AND GAINED

The standard reading of 2 Cor 8.9 takes the participle, *πλούσιος ὢν*, as concessive, so that the Christological momentum moves from wealth to poverty ('though he was rich he became poor'), while the anthropological condition moves in the opposite direction, via Christ's poverty to the possession of wealth ('so that by his poverty you might become rich'). There are good reasons for reading the text this way. Several times in Paul's letters a present participle of *εἰμί* is used, as here, in the juxtaposition of opposites, and has a concessive sense. To take just two examples: Paul talks of the immature heir as effectively no different from a slave, although he is master of all (*οὐδὲν διαφέρει δούλου κύριος πάντων ὢν*, Gal 4.1), the contrasting terms juxtaposed (*δούλου κύριος*), as in 2 Cor 8.9 (*ἐπτώχυσεν πλούσιος*), with *ὢν* requiring a concessive sense ('although he is master of all'). In a second case, in the olive-tree analogy the Gentile believer is said to be grafted into the olive *ἀγριέλαιος ὢν* (Rom 11.17), the context suggesting the sense 'although you are/were a wild olive'. Both cases suggest that it is perfectly reasonable to read *πλούσιος ὢν* in the sense 'although he was rich'.

As a Christological statement, 2 Cor 5.21 presents an obvious parallel to 8.9. In the former text, the Christ-event entails a change in Christ's condition ('God made the one who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf') which many take as parallel to the Christological movement in our verse: Christ was rich, but despite that wealth, and in renunciation of it, he became poor. Of course the text that most here cite, as the closest parallel to 2 Cor 8.9 (indeed as decisive in its interpretation) is Phil 2.6. There the participle *ὑπάρχων* is equivalent in meaning to *ὢν*, and the sense is taken by most to be concessive: 'who, though he was in the form of God (*ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων*), did not count equality with God as something to be exploited (the controverted *ἀρπαγμόν*), but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ...' (Phil 2.6-7). Here the two kinds of *μορφή* (the form of God ... the form of a slave) and the reference to self-emptying have led most commentators to trace a Christological change in status: he was in the form of God, but gave that up in taking on human form (indeed the form of a slave), the

previous status being temporarily renounced before it was restored (or more than restored) in the final exaltation. As Windisch succinctly writes, 'Phil 2, 5ff. ist denn auch der beste Kommentar zu uns. Satz: ἐπτώχυσεν also = ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτόν, πλούσιος ὢν = ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων.' As he concludes: 'Also bezieht sich der "Reichtum" auf den Besitz des Präexistenten ... und das Armwerden ist die Menschwerdung'.⁴

Christ's 'wealth' is indeed generally read here as the quality of his heavenly, pre-existent status. As Harris writes, following this consensus,

πλούσιος describes the glory of heavenly existence and ἐπτώχυσεν points to the relative lowliness and destitution of earthly existence. Christ himself chose to exchange his royal status as an eternal inhabitant of heaven for a slave's status as a temporary resident on earth. If ὢν denotes Christ's real and personal pre-existence, ἐπτώχυσεν depicts his preincarnate choice. He surrendered all the insignia of divine majesty and assumed all the frailty and vicissitudes of the human condition.⁵

The stress on pre-existence here counters an alternative reading of this Christological renunciation, advanced by Dunn in his *Christology in the Making*, and still advocated in his more recent work.⁶ Linking the renunciation to the cross rather than the incarnation, Dunn suggests that Christ's previous 'wealth' was the richness of his human relationship to God, with an echo of the myth of Adamic perfection prior to his fall. There are good reasons for doubting Dunn's revisionist reading (not least, Paul's silence elsewhere on the earthly God-consciousness of Jesus); as Harris and others insist, if the 'wealth' of Jesus is something he gave up, it would refer most naturally to his status (his 'possessions') before he entered the human condition.⁷ On this reading, his 'impoverishment' does not have to refer to any one moment or act: using characteristic synecdoche, Paul can refer to several aspects of the Christ-event (his 'being sent', his life, and his death) all at once.⁸

4. H. WINDISCH, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924, p. 252.

5. M.J. HARRIS, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2005, p. 579.

6. J.D.G. DUNN, *Christology in the Making*, London, SCM, 1980, pp. 121-123; ID., *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 290-292.

7. HARRIS, *Second Epistle*, p. 579; cf. G.D. FEE, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study*, Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, 2007, pp. 162-165.

8. Reference to the material poverty attending Jesus' ministry is unlikely, given that Paul shows no awareness of this elsewhere. A literal poverty would suggest also that his wealth was literal, which is impossible to square with any of our available evidence; see F.B. CRADDOCK, *The Poverty of Christ: An Investigation of II Corinthians 8:9*, in *Interpretation* 22 (1968) 158-70.

What is characteristic of this pattern of reading, even in its Dunn variant, is that the 'wealth' attributed to Jesus is something given up or renounced, in an act of self-dispossession by which Jesus, once wealthy, becomes poor. The participle, read as concessive, represents a narrative sequence: he who was wealthy became poor. It is not impossible to read a present participle this way, if it is followed by an aorist main verb: one may compare Rom 5.10, where 'we', while or although we were enemies, were reconciled to God (ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ) by the death of Christ. Presumably we are no longer enemies once we are reconciled, so the present participle (ὄντες) actually refers to a past state of affairs. Similarly, it is possible to read our verse (9b) as meaning 'although he was once rich, he became poor', although I will argue in a moment that this is not the only possible, or indeed, the best, way to read this phrase.

We should note that on this, the majority reading, there is no paradox in the notion that Christ was rich but became poor. This may be a very striking, indeed exceptional, form of self-renunciation, but the striking juxtaposition of wealth and poverty (ἐπτώχυσεν πλούσιος ὢν) does not itself involve any element of paradox: even though the terms are used metaphorically, there is nothing inherently paradoxical in the notion that a wealthy person became or made himself poor.

On this standard reading, the last clause of the verse (9c), which refers to the anthropological change effected by the Christ-event, does look paradoxical in expression, but this is only because it omits to state all the means by which humans become 'enriched'. 'So that you by his poverty might become rich' (ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε) looks at first glance highly paradoxical: how can one person's poverty make another person rich? In the standard reading of this phrase, whose pedigree stretches back at least as far as Chrysostom, the believers' riches are the blessings of salvation, forgiveness of sins, justification, and (ultimately) eternal life.⁹ In Luther's paraphrase of our verse, which is often cited in Protestant commentary:

Er ist auf Erden kommen arm,
 Dass er unser sich erbarm,
 Und in dem Himmel mache reich,
 Und seinen lieben Engeln gleich.¹⁰

9. See J. CHRYSOSTOM, *Homily 17.1 on 2 Corinthians* (PG 61.518) cited in R. BRÄNDLE, *Geld und Gnade (zu II Kor 8,9)*, in *ThZ* 41 (1985) 264-71, p. 268, n. 30.

10. M. LUTHER, *Kyrieleis* (1524), cited by BRÄNDLE (see previous note), as by C.K. BARRITT, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, A & C Black, 1973, p. 223, and H. LIETZMANN, *An die Korinther I-II*, Tübingen, Mohr-Siebeck, 1931, p. 134.

Thus, to cite Harris again, 'there is no question that *πλουτήσητε* ... refers to believers' spiritual enrichment, not their economic wealth or security. It denotes their participation, now and in the future, in the benefits of the salvation secured by Christ, including such benefits as forgiveness of sins (5:19), restoration to right relations with God (5:18), and receipt of the Spirit (1:22; 5:5).'¹¹ The apparent paradox that it is by Christ's poverty that believers gain such wealth can be explained in a variety of ways, but it traditionally entails some sense that it was through (and only through) his poverty (that is, his human existence) that Christ could convey to believers the richness of salvation, either by transfer or (normally) through participation in his own richness. Thus Hooker, alluding to the Irenaean scheme of interchange, explains the paradox of 'wealth through poverty' by appeal to a factor hidden by the paradoxical expression: 'if Christians become rich it is presumably because riches have been restored to Christ' (that is, in the resurrection).¹² Others would speak of participation in Christ's own righteousness or divine life, such that his 'poverty' becomes the means by which believers share also in *something other than his poverty*, something here unmentioned but elsewhere expressed or alluded to (cf. 1 Cor 1.30; 2 Cor 5.21). Thus Paul's expression is paradoxical only by omission: the terms 'wealth' and 'poverty' retain their ordinary meaning (though they are of course metaphors), and believers become wealthy by receiving or sharing in a wealth here unexpressed, but concealed beneath the expression of the means by which this wealth was conveyed, that is, the poverty of Christ. Wealth connotes possession of benefits, something lost by Christ, but also in some way conveyed to believers, who become wealthy in the possession of spiritual benefits brought about through the mechanism of Christ's self-dispossession.

Once again, this reading is by no means impossible, though I draw attention to the way that it requires finding beneath Paul's paradoxical expression a transfer or sharing of 'wealth' that is essentially non-paradoxical: there is nothing paradoxical about the sharing of wealth through which a poor person becomes wealthy. It is perfectly possible to read Paul's apparent paradoxes in this way as essentially non-paradoxical. Paul is a master of rhetorical word-play and can employ many forms of paradox, some more real than others. The reading of 2 Cor 8.9 we have considered thus far involves a completely non-paradoxical 'he was rich but became poor', followed by an

11. HARRIS, *Second Epistle*, pp. 578-579.

12. M.D. HOOKER, *Interchange in Christ*, in ID., *From Adam to Christ*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 18.

apparently paradoxical 'by his poverty we became rich' – which turned out to be really non-paradoxical, because his poverty was only the context in which the enrichment takes place not by impoverishment as such but by sharing in his (unexpressed) wealth.

Finally, we should note how this reading relates the Christological and soteriological formula of 8.9 to the context, which appeals for a financial contribution to the Jerusalem collection. Since 'wealth' is read here as spiritual benefits, possessed, renounced and gained, the application to the Corinthian appeal requires a shift from a metaphorical to a literal domain: the renunciation of wealth in one domain, which is the *χάρις* characteristic of Christ, is now to be applied to the realm of the literal, in the generous contribution of the Corinthians to the *χάρις*-as-collection for the saints. Thus Lambrecht, insisting that 'rich' in both clauses in 8.9 'has nothing to do with material and earthly riches', continues, 'However, the fact remains that Paul uses this text as a motivation for the collection. Through it he exhorts the Corinthians: what Jesus did by his incarnation you should analogously do by helping the poor saints of Jerusalem; you should become (more) poor so that they may become (more) rich.'¹³ Again, there is nothing impossible in Paul shifting between metaphorical and literal wealth. Elsewhere in 2 Corinthians he talks of the apostolic condition as *ὡς πτωχοὶ πολλοὺς δὲ πλουτιζόντες* (6.10), a paradoxical expression which works by moving from the literal to the metaphorical: apostles are presumably considered 'poor' in literal terms, but in Paul's view make many rich in terms of their spiritual and thus metaphorical enrichment. But there is an awkwardness here in 2 Corinthians 8 in the application of the metaphorical to the literal, an awkwardness sensed by Lambrecht when he adds, in parentheses, the word 'more': 'you should become (more) poor so that they may become (more) rich'.

In what sense would the givers to this collection act like Christ, only at the literal/material level? Christ started as 'rich' (at a metaphorical/spiritual level), but it is not necessary to be materially rich to make a contribution to the collection. Indeed, Paul has just emphasised that the Macedonians have given out of their poverty, not out of their wealth (8.1-2), and he is careful to say to the Corinthians that what matters is not how much they give, but the spirit in which they give it (8.12). If Christ impoverished himself in his self-dispossession, this is precisely not what Paul requires of the Corinthians: I do not mean, he says, that there should be relief for others and hardship (*θλιψις*) for you (8.13). *θλιψις* would be a good description of literal poverty,

13. LAMBRECHT, *Second Corinthians*, p. 143.

analogous to Christ's spiritual impoverishment, but it is a parallel Paul expressly declines to draw. And if the purpose of Christ's self-dispossession was that others should 'become rich' (metaphorically), the purpose of the collection is not that the Jerusalem believers become rich (literally): my aim, says Paul, is sufficiency and *ἰσότης* (8.13-15), like in the distribution of the manna, so that he who had much ended up with not too much and he who had little did not lack (8.15). This is hardly a call to make the Jerusalem church 'rich'.

It is this awkwardness in fitting the Christ-story to the request Paul makes of the Corinthians, despite the obvious similarity in the language of wealth and gift (*χάρις*), that has led some interpreters to insist that there is, in fact, *no analogy* between the statement of 2 Cor 8.9 and what Paul expects of the Corinthians. Georgi asserts that Christ is not a model or example: the Corinthians are *not* urged to do as Christ did.¹⁴ Furnish acknowledges that in other passages Paul uses Christ's self-giving love 'as a kind of prototype for believers', but insists that here 'Paul is not presenting Christ's act of grace as an example for the Corinthians to emulate. If that were the case, he ought to urge them to become "poor" for the sake of others as Christ did, but this he specifically does not ask them to do (see 8:13).' Furnish concludes that the admonition implicit in 8.9 'is not "Do what Christ did," or even "Do for others what Christ has done for you." It is, rather, "Do what is appropriate to your status as those who have been enriched by the grace of Christ."¹⁵

There is clearly an awkwardness in the normal reading of the verse: what Christ has done on the spiritual/metaphorical level (his renunciation of wealth in order to become poor) and its effect (making others rich in possession) goes well beyond what is demanded on the literal level of the Corinthians (or already fulfilled by the Macedonians) and what is expected as the result. And yet the common use of the term *χάρις*, and the crafting of the Christological statement in an economic metaphor which matches its financial context, suggest that the fit should be closer than Furnish allows. Can we read 8.9 in a way that reflects its play with paradox, that relates its economic metaphor to the financial terms of its context, and that draws a tight and close parallel between the Christ-event and the expected behaviour of believers, both as expressions of one and the same *χάρις*? I believe we can, and the following discussion will suggest how.

14. D. GEORGI, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem*, Nashville, TN, Abingdon, 1992, p. 83; there may be here some influence from the anxieties of twentieth century Lutheran theology in considering Christ a moral example or model.

15. V.P. FURNISH, *II Corinthians* (Anchor Bible, 32A), New York, Doubleday, 1984, p. 418.

2. 'WEALTH' AS GENEROSITY, GAINED IN LOSS

The alternative reading I wish to propound starts by reading the participle, πλούσιος ὢν, in a causative rather than a concessive sense: 'because he was rich he became poor'. Others have noted that the participle does not have to be read with a concessive sense (it could mean also: 'at the time when he was rich'),¹⁶ and it could be suggested that even when Christ became poor he was in a sense rich. But this is usually trumped by the insistence that 'it was precisely by Christ's *giving up* heavenly riches that the Corinthians *became* rich' (so Barrett) – the standard reading of this verse which I wish here to question.¹⁷ There is in fact good reason to read the participle here as causal or causative. In 1 Cor 9.19 Paul describes himself in the following terms: ἐλεύθερος ὢν ἐκ πάντων πάντων ἐμαυτὸν ἐδοῦλωσα. This could be read in the sense 'although I am free from all, I have enslaved myself to all', but it could also be read, as for instance by Schrage, with the meaning '*because* I am free from all, I have enslaved myself to all'. As Schrage writes, 'Paulus macht sich gerade in und aus ἐλευθερία immer neu zum δοῦλος. Die Freiheit selbst ist immer wieder auch die Freiheit zur Knechtschaft, die Freiheit zur Agape.'¹⁸ This reading puts a premium on paradox: Paul does not just juxtapose the terms 'freedom' and 'slave', but interprets 'freedom' as the freedom precisely to be a slave. Does he also interpret Christ's 'wealth' as a wealth not of possession but of generosity?

The same possibility, of a causal reading of a present participle, occurs in Phil 2.6, the passage usually cited as the closest parallel to 2 Cor 8.9. Instead of the concessive ('although he was in the form of God ...') it is possible to read this participle in a different and paradoxical sense, 'because he was in the form of God', implying that it is precisely Christ's divine likeness that is expressed in and as his self-giving and self-emptying trajectory. On this reading, Christ did not cease to be in the form of God when he emptied himself and took the form of a slave: it was the very fact that he was in the form of God that impelled him to take the slave-form, because it is of the very essence and character of God to give of God's self in this way. What is opened up here is a quite different understanding of 'kenosis', and, indeed, of God: is the character of God most fully evidenced not in God's qualitative difference from the world, but in God's bridging of that difference, in self-giving love and self-emptying service for the world? If so, Christ's con-

16. Cf. HARRIS, *Second Epistle*, p. 580 n. 38, citing Meyer to this effect.

17. BARRETT, *Second Epistle*, p. 223, citing Bachmann.

18. W. SCHRAGE, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, vol. 2: *1Kor 6,12 – 11,16* (EKKNT, 7/2), Zürich, Benziger, 1995, p. 339.

descension (self-emptying, becoming poor) is not an abandonment or renunciation of his true identity, but its expression and embodiment. Exploring and exploiting this theological potential, Gorman has argued for a reading of Phil 2.6-11 that suggests that Paul has a wholly counter-cultural (and therefore paradoxical) view of divinity, such that ‘God ... is essentially kenotic, and indeed essentially cruciform. Kenosis, therefore does not mean Christ’s emptying himself of his divinity (or of anything else), but rather Christ’s exercising his divinity, his equality with God.’¹⁹

On analogy with this closely parallel passage, 2 Cor 8.9 could be read to mean that (paradoxically) it was precisely because of his wealth, and as an expression of it, that Christ made himself poor. Here, then, ‘wealth’ means not what Christ possessed, but, with a different and paradoxical sense, *the ‘wealth’ of his generosity*. In fact, there is strong justification for this reading in the immediate context of our verse. In the preceding verses Paul had described the contribution of the Macedonians as arising out of the *χάρις* of God, such that in severe hardship the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty had overflowed in the wealth of their generosity (*ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος*, 8.2). What the Macedonians’ wealth consisted of, in Paul’s analysis, was not their possessions but their generosity – by a play of paradox he redefines their ‘wealth’ as not what they had but how they gave. The same language of ‘abundance’ is used in 8.7 in relation to the term *χάρις* (*ἵνα ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χάριτι περισσεύητε* – we shall note below the parallel with the *ἵνα* clause in 8.9), such that ‘abundance’ is measured not in possession but in gift. In the following chapter (either the same or a closely related letter), Paul again speaks of the abundance of all *χάρις*, provided, as another *ἵνα*-clause explains, that you may ‘abound in every good work’ (*ἵνα ... περισσεύητε εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν*, 9.8), and he proceeds to gloss this again in the language of wealth: ‘being made wealthy for all generosity’ (*ἐν παντὶ πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα*, 9.11). In other words, 2 Cor 8-9 is saturated with the language of abundance and wealth, but in every case people abound not in what they have but in what they give, and ‘wealth’ consists not in possession but in generosity.²⁰

On this reading, the *χάρις* of Christ consists not in giving up his wealth, to make himself poor, but in using his wealth (of generosity) in making himself poor: ‘because he was rich (in generous self-giving), he became

19. M.J. GORMAN, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2009, p. 28. Gorman builds here on a causative reading of the participle *ὑπάρχων* in Phil 2.6, as previously advocated by Moule, Wright, Fowl and Bockmuehl, among others (*Inhabiting*, p. 29, n. 74).

20. Cf. 1 Tim 6.18, where the wealthy are urged: *πλουτεῖν ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς*.

poor'. Christ's 'wealth' is thus a paradoxical concept and the phrase ἐπτώχ-ευσεν πλούσιος ὢν is a self-consciously paradoxical expression (not just a narrative of extraordinary self-dispossession): Christ's becoming poor is an expression of his wealth, not an abrogation of it. Although Christ's 'poverty' is *not the same as* his 'wealth', it is also *not its opposite* (as one might expect). His wealth (as generosity) is demonstrated in the very momentum of his becoming poor. This would match what is said elsewhere in the Pauline corpus concerning Christ's or God's 'richness'. The Lord is 'rich' to all who call upon him (πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους, Rom 10.12), in the sense of 'rich-in-gift', not 'rich-in-possession'; similarly, in Eph 2.4-6, God, being rich in mercy (πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει – the phrase may echo and interpret 2 Cor 8.9), has made the dead alive in Christ and raised them to the heavenly places in Christ. In both cases, God's wealth is not forgone but precisely activated in the Christ-event, since it consists of a wealth-in-generosity, not a wealth-in-possession. If Christ's 'wealth', then, is expressed and embodied in his becoming poor, this is precisely the kind of paradox-in-opposite that we know from Paul's treatment of God's 'power' and God's 'wisdom' (1 Cor 1.18-25). God is 'powerful' in the weakness of the cross, and 'wise' in the folly of Christ-crucified: what we associate with the category turns out to be the opposite of what God is and does. Just as God's power is made perfect (τελειῖται) in weakness, and this as an expression of his χάρις (2 Cor 12.9), so Christ's 'wealth' is made perfect in his impoverishment: it is precisely in Christ becoming poor that we see in what his 'wealth' consists.

This reading of the wealth-poverty expression as paradox has an effect on how one reads 'became poor' (ἐπτώχευσεν). If wealth is not possession, given up in becoming poor, but generosity, expressed in self-giving, the impoverishment attributed here to Christ is the momentum of self-giving that pours itself out for others and thus expresses (and in a sense retains) its true 'wealth', as generosity. Paul is less interested here in what Christ gave up than in what he gave out, a momentum of generosity that is not tied solely to one form of giving (giving away) but could be expressed in a variety of forms (including sharing and mutual participation). Christ's 'becoming poor' did indeed involve utter humiliation, vulnerability and weakness, all the way to the cross. This does not mean that he retained nothing of what he had, but that he gave out from what he had, just as his becoming weak does not mean that he was devoid of all power, but that the power of God worked in him in a paradoxical way. At this point, our construal of the verse is likely to be swayed by larger theological configurations of the Christ-event and of the nature of God, as also, perhaps, by our economic

models of possession and gift. Certainly, Tanner, in an attempt to rethink a theology of gift and grace, construes our verse along the lines of the paradox we are exploring: 'by becoming one with us in Christ, the Word, while remaining rich, acquires our poverty and neediness, for the purpose of giving to us what we mere creatures do not have or own by nature – the very riches of God's own life, its holiness and incorruptibility.'²¹ This reading is integral to her argument that grace involves not dispossession but 'the possession and enjoyment of the very same goods in common',²² an attempt to reconfigure a grace-economy in terms other than the redistribution of goods. Without subscribing to her economic proposals, we may certainly say that our reading of 'wealth'-as-generosity entails that Paul is not wedded to a single model of 'gift' as the alienation of goods: Christ's becoming poor entails entering a relationship in which his generosity is expressed in what he shared, and not only in what he gave up or gave away.

This reading of the second limb of the verse (the statement about Christ, 9b) enables us to reconstrue its final limb (the statement about its soteriological purpose, 9c). If Christ's 'wealth' consists of his generosity, then the purpose of this momentum is to make 'you' rich (ὕνα ... πλουτήσητε) not in the sense that 'you' acquire possessions (spiritual or material), but in the sense that 'you' become *rich in generosity*. As we noted in passing, the ὕνα-clause here seems parallel to the ὕνα-clauses in 8.7 and 9.8: in both cases, the purpose of 'enrichment' or 'abundance' is not that believers may possess more, but give more. As we have seen, the Macedonians' wealth consisted in their ἀπλότης (8.2) and so does that envisaged of the Corinthians (9.11): the purpose of the Christ-event is thus to make the Corinthians rich *in just this sense*. To be sure, Paul can use the 'enrichment' metaphor in a variety of different senses: in 1 Cor 1.4-7 the Corinthians are 'enriched' (ἐπλουτίσθητε) with a variety of χάρισματα whose purposes are multiple, while in 1 Cor 4.8 he satirises them as those already 'rich' (ἤδη ἐπλουτήσατε). As we have noted, in 2 Cor 6.10 he claims to make many rich (πολλοὺς πλουτίζοντες), a metaphor that could have a variety of connotations. But in 2 Cor 8-9 there seems to be a consistent effort to give the abundance and wealth metaphors a paradoxical twist, so that both Christ and the Corinthians may be said to be 'wealthy' not in their possessions but in their generosity: metaphorical 'wealth', in other words, is gained precisely when literal wealth is passed on or shared.

21. K. TANNER, *Economy of Grace*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2005, p. 79; cf. p. 84: 'Jesus entered into our poverty for the sake of the poor, but he did so as someone rich with the Father's own love'.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

The advantage of this reading is that it provides a tight fit between the Christological/soteriological statement of 8.9 and the exhortation in the surrounding context: what seemed awkward on the standard reading fits perfectly on this. You know the *χάρις* of the Lord Jesus Christ, that in his wealth (that is, generosity) he became poor (a single term covering his incarnation, life and death), so that by his poverty (by all that is effected by 'the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me', Gal 2.20) you might become rich, in the same momentum of generous love. On this reading one does not have to plot an 'analogy' between the effects of the Christ-event and the demands on the Corinthians: Christ has made them rich in precisely what is required of them here, rich in generosity and thus in generous contribution to the collection. If 'wealth' does not mean possession but (paradoxically) generosity, everyone involved in this collection can be rich, the poor Macedonians and the Corinthians of varying economic status. There is no difficulty in mapping the terms of 8.9 onto the collection, because the *χάρις* expressed in the Christ-event is precisely the *χάρις* practised in the collection: indeed, according to our reading of 8.9, the purpose of the *χάρις* expressed in the Christ-event was to enable the richness-in-generosity now expected of all believers. The *γάρ* that connects 8.9 to its preceding context works perfectly: Paul wants them to display their love in the abundance of *χάρις* (8.7-8) because they know that the *χάρις* of the Christ-event was aimed precisely towards this. Whatever elements there may be of imitation and obedience, the chief effect of the Christ-event is the transformation of the Corinthians into grace-formed givers, as the momentum of *χάρις* is carried forward into the world.

CONCLUSION

In considering the various possible senses of the participle *ὑπάρχων* in Phil 2.6, Gorman concludes that both the concessive and the causal meanings are possible; using terms from transformational grammar, he posits that the text's surface structure points to the concessive sense ('although he was in the form of God ...') but its deep structure points rather to the causal ('because he was in the form of God ...'). In relation to 2 Cor 8.9 I want to register a stronger claim. Although grammatically both senses are possible (and both can claim support from parallel expressions elsewhere in Paul), the context in 2 Corinthians 8-9, with its consistently paradoxical uses of the term 'wealth', suggests that the better reading of this verse would be to take the participle as causal, rather than concessive. 'Because he was rich he

became poor': to translate it this way would immediately signal that 'rich' is here used in a paradoxical sense, sending readers to the literary context to find that wealth here means 'wealth-as-generosity' (2 Cor 8.2; 9.11). To translate 'being rich' would leave the meaning in limbo: the participle requires some interpretative decision, and I have argued that it is better read, in context, in a causal sense. As I have hinted, I am aware that large theological conclusions might derive from this translation, and might be already implicit within it – which only goes to show, once again, that translation, exegesis and hermeneutics are closely intertwined.

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