

**Patronage and Reciprocity:
The Context of Grace in the New Testament**

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The term “patronage” refers to a system in which access to goods, positions, or services is enjoyed by means of personal relationships and the exchanging of “favors” rather than by impersonal and impartial systems of distribution. People in the United States and Northern Europe may be culturally conditioned to find the concept of patronage distasteful at first, and not at all a suitable metaphor for talking about God’s relationship to us. When we say “it’s not what you know but whom you know,” it is usually because we sense someone has had an unfair advantage over us or over the friend whom we console with these words. It violates our conviction that everyone should have equal access to employment opportunities (being evaluated on the basis of pertinent skills rather than personal connection) or to services offered by private businesses or civic agencies.¹ Where patronage occurs (often deridingly called nepotism: channeling opportunities to relations or personal friends), it is often done “under the table” and kept as quiet as possible.²

We tend to get what we need or want by means of buying and selling, where exchange is precisely measured out ahead of time. You do not leave a department store owing the sales person a favor, nor does the cashier at a restaurant owe me a good turn for the money I gave after dinner. When we seek employment, most often we are hired on the basis of our skills and experience by people we do not know. We prepare for employment not so much by cultivating “connections” (although this is still useful!) as by equipping ourselves with the knowledge and skills that, we hope, a potential employer will recognize as giving us the necessary resources to do the job well. When we fall into hard times, there is a massive public welfare system in place, access to which is offered not as a personal favor but as a bureaucratized “right” of the poor or unemployed. If an alien wants citizenship and the rights that go along with it, he or she applies and undergoes the same process as every other naturalized citizen — it is not a favor granted personally by an individual in power.

The world of the authors and readers of the New Testament, however, was a world in which personal patronage was an essential means of acquiring access to goods, protection, or opportunities for employment and advancement. Not only was it essential — it was expected and publicized! The giving and

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receiving of favors was, according to a first-century participant, the “practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society” (Seneca, *De beneficiis* 1.4.2). To enter their world and hear their words more authentically, we have to leave behind our cultural norms and ways of doing things and learn a quite different way of managing resources and meeting needs.

Patronage and Friendship

For everyday needs there was the market, in which buying and selling provided access to daily necessities; for anything outside of the ordinary, one sought out the person who possessed or controlled access to what one needed, and received what one needed as a “favor.” The ancient world from the classical through the Roman periods was one of greatly limited access to goods. The greater part of the property, wealth, and power was concentrated into the hands of the few, and access to these goods was through personal connection rather than bureaucratic channels. The kinds of benefits sought from patrons depended on the need or desires of the petitioner: they might include plots of land or distributions of money to get started in business or to supply food after a crop failure or failed business venture, protection, debt relief, or an appointment to some office or position in government. “Help one person with money, another with credit, another with influence, another with advice, another with sound precepts” (Seneca, *Ben.* 1.2.4; LCL). If the patron granted the petition, the petitioner would become the client of the patron and a potentially long-term relationship would begin.³ This relationship would be marked by the mutual exchange of desired goods and services, the patron being available for assistance in the future, the client doing everything in his or her power to enhance the fame and honor of the patron (publicizing the benefit and showing the patron respect), remaining loyal to the patron, and providing services whenever the opportunity arose.

Sometimes the most important gift a patron could give was access to (and influence with) another patron who actually had power over the benefit being sought. For the sake of clarity, a patron who provides access to another patron for his or her client has been called a “broker”⁴ (a classical term for this was “mediator”). Brokerage was commonplace and expected in public life. Sophocles (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 771-774) provides a fictional example of this in the words of Creon in his defense against Oedipus’ charge of conspiracy to usurp the kingship:

I am welcome everywhere; every man salutes me,
And those who want your favor seek my ear,
Since I know how to manage what they ask.

Creon enjoys high esteem and displays of public reputation on the basis of his ability to grant or withhold his single resource: access to King Oedipus and thus

to royal favors.

Numerous examples of brokerage can be found in the letters of Cicero, Pliny the Younger, and Fronto, correspondence providing windows into public policy from the late Republic through the second century of the Empire.⁵ Pliny's letters to the emperor Trajan (dating from 111-113AD, the time during which Pliny was governor of Bithynia) contain attempts by Pliny to procure imperial favors for his own friends and clients. In one such letter (*Ep.* 10.4), Pliny introduces a client of his, named Voconius Romanus, to Trajan with a view to getting Voconius a senatorial appointment. He addresses Trajan clearly as a client addressing his patron, and proceeds to ask a favor for Voconius. Pliny offers his own character as a guarantee of his client's character, and Trajan's "favorable judgement" of Pliny (not Voconius, whom he does not know) would become the basis for Trajan's granting of this favor. Should the favor be granted by the emperor, Voconius would be indebted not only to Trajan but also to Pliny, who will, in turn, be indebted further to Trajan.⁶ The broker, or mediator, at the same time incurs a debt and increases his own honor through the indebtedness of his or her client. Brokerage — the gift of access to another, often greater, patron — was in itself a highly valued benefit. Without such connections, the client would never have had access to what he or she desired or needed. This is especially apparent in the case of Pliny's physical therapist, Arpocras, who gains both Roman and Alexandrian citizenship by means of Pliny, who petitions Trajan on his behalf (*Ep.* 10.5-7, 10). Pliny gives this local physician access to the emperor, the fount of patronage, which he would never have enjoyed otherwise. Brokerage could even intervene in the judicial process. Both Cicero⁷ and Marcus Aurelius (*Ad M. Caes.* 3.2) use their connections of friendship with a judge to secure favorable outcomes for their clients, on whose behalf they write.

So far we have been discussing personal patronage as it occurred between people of unequal social status: someone of lesser power, honor, and wealth seeks out the aid of a person of superior power, honor, and wealth. The kinds of benefits exchanged between such people will be different in kind and quality, the patron providing material gifts or opportunities for advancement, the client contributing to the patron's reputation and power base. Relationships of reciprocity also occur between social equals, people of like means who can exchange like resources, neither one being seen by the other or by society as the inferior of the other. Such relationships went by the name of "friendship."⁸ The basic ethos undergirding this relationship, however, is no different from that of the relationship of patrons and clients: the same principal of reciprocity and mutual fidelity is the bedrock of both. Moreover, because patrons were sensitive to the honor of their clients, they rarely called their clients by that name. Instead, they "graciously" referred to them as "friends," even though

they were far from social equals. Clients, on the whole, did not attempt to hide their junior status, referring to their patrons as “patrons” rather than as “friends” so as to highlight the honor and respect with which they esteemed their benefactors.⁹ Where we see people called “friends” or “partners,” therefore, we should suspect that we are still looking at relationships of reciprocity.

Patronage among the Poor

The greater part of the ancient population has left no written legacy for us to study. Observation of modern agrarian societies leads scholars to believe that all classes participated, in their own ways, in forming relationships of reciprocity. One such cultural anthropologist, Julian Pitt-Rivers, studied the rural communities of Southern France,¹⁰ noting that neighbors are always ready to help one another at harvest or sheep-shearing time, not for money or for specific returns. While the helper would even publicly deny that he has placed the helped party under obligation, should the latter refuse to help others it would be remembered and become a blot on that farmer’s reputation as a “good neighbor”:

Great prestige attaches to a good reputation as a neighbor. Everyone would like to be in credit with everybody and those who show reluctance to lend a hand when they are asked to do so soon acquire a bad reputation which is commented on by innuendo. Those who fail to return the favor done to them come to be excluded from the system altogether. Those of good repute can be sure of compliance on all sides.¹¹

Even in the rural areas, there are those who do more favors than receive favors, and these become local patrons of a sort. This situation bears remarkable resemblance to the discussion of reciprocity among farmers in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, written in the sixth century BC.¹²

Pitt-Rivers advances another motive for helping when help is needed, and that is “insurance” against the time when one might, oneself, rely on the neighbors to get through a difficult crisis, to which “a single family farm is particularly vulnerable.”¹³ Seneca had seen this as an essential aspect of the system of reciprocity two millennia before: “how else do we live in security if it is not that we help each other by an exchange of good offices? It is only through the interchange of benefits that life becomes in some measure equipped and fortified against sudden disasters. Take us singly, and what are we? The prey of all creatures....” (*Ben.* 4.18.1). We may conclude then, that those who left us no direct testimony — namely peasant farmers and local artisans — also entered into relationships of reciprocity and sought to fulfill their part of the relationship nobly as the means both to local honor and security.

Public Benefaction

Personal patronage was not the only form of beneficence in the ancient world. Most public entertainments, whether religious festivals and feasts or local athletic competitions, were “given” to the inhabitants of the city by wealthy benefactors. Moreover, most civic improvements, whether temples or theaters, pavements or porticoes, were also the gifts either local elites or wealthy persons abroad who wished to confer benefits on a famous city (as Herod the Great provided the money for buildings not only in Jerusalem but also Rhodes, Athens, and Sparta).¹⁴ In times of crisis, wealthy benefactors would come to the aid of the public, providing, for example, famine or disaster relief. Public benefaction was an arena open to both men and women of means.¹⁵

Such public gifts did not make every recipient a “client” of the benefactor,¹⁶ for lines were drawn between personal patronage and public munificence, but the public as a whole was nevertheless still indebted to that benefactor.¹⁷ In general, the response of the grateful city would consist of the conferral of public honors (like crowning at a prominent public festival, special seating at games) and the provision for a permanent commemoration of the generosity of the giver in the form of honorary inscriptions or, in special cases, statues. Inscriptions across the Mediterranean from North Africa to Greece, Asia and Egypt bear witness to the phenomenon of both personal patronage and public benefaction.¹⁸

The most powerful figures in the ancient world, namely kings and emperors, frequently granted public benefactions to cities or even whole provinces in addition to the numerous personal benefactions by which they bound to themselves their client base. Relief from oppression, whether from an extortionate local official, from pirates on the sea, or from a hostile force from outside would be a benefaction especially well-suited for an emperor to give. Pardon for crimes committed was also reserved for kings and emperors, who were also credited with doing the broad public a great service if peace and stability characterized their rule. The extreme form of response to benefactions from rulers was the offering of worship. Those who gave gifts usually besought from the gods were judged to be worthy of the honors offered the gods. When the Athenians greeted their general, Demetrius Poliorketes, who had just freed them from foreign domination in 307 BC, they used cultic language: “other deities are far away, or have no ears, or are not, or have no care for us at all: but you we see here present — not shaped by wood or stone but in reality. And so to you we pray: First bring us peace, for you possess the power.”¹⁹

A similar picture emerges from Nicolaus of Damascus’ first-hand observations concerning the origin of the cult of Augustus: “all people address

him [as Augustus] in accordance with their estimation of his honor, revering him with temples and sacrifices across islands and continents, organized in cities and provinces, matching the greatness of his virtue and repaying his benefactions towards them.”²⁰ The “peace of Augustus” was viewed as relief of divine proportions, and the return of thanks must be equal to the gift. Augustus thus succeeded in the East to the tradition of according divine honors to benefactors, generals, and, during the Roman Republic, governors. The imperial cult also provided people in the province with a bridge of access to their ultimate patron. Provinces sought imperial aid (benefactions) through the mediation of the priests of the imperial cult, who both officiated in the province, and became the official ambassadors to Rome on behalf of the province. Sending the priests of imperial cultic honors to Rome put the province in the most positive light. The priest was an image of the province’s uncompromising loyalty and gratitude, so that the province could be assured for ongoing favor.

Patronage in Greek and Roman Settings

Patronage is not strictly a Roman phenomenon, even though our richest discussions of the institution were written by Romans (Cicero in *De officiis* and Seneca in *De beneficiis*). Both public benefaction and personal patronage are well-attested in both Greek and Roman cultures. Only during the time of the Athenian democracy is there an attempt to move away from patronage as the basic model for structuring society.²¹ From before the Democratic Revolution of 462 BC, we have the example of Cimon of Athens, whose provision of personal patronage to needy suppliants as well as gifts to the city in general win him the status of “first citizen” and result in his “election” to the generalship for seventeen consecutive years.²² Throughout the period of the democracy itself, the avoidance of open patronage applied only between citizens, whose freedom should not be compromised out of a need to gratify a potential or past benefactor. The non-citizens (called “metics,” or “resident aliens”) were *required* to have a sponsor or patron (a *prostatēs*) who would provide access to the institutions of the city for the non-citizen.²³

By the time that Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander, rise to prominence, however, personal patronage is once again openly spoken of in Athens. Demosthenes, an orator who died in 322 BC, speaks openly both of his public benefactions (fortification of the city walls), which he deems worthy of gratitude and public honor, and his private acts of patronage to the distressed and financially challenged (*De corona* 268-69, 299). Aristotle speaks in his *Nicomachian Ethics* (1163b1-5, 12-18) of the type of friendship in which one partner receives the larger share of honor and acclamation, the other partner the larger share of material assistance — clearly a reference to personal patronage

between people of unequal social status. By the first century AD, the attempt at Athens to restrict personal patronage is but a distant memory, an exception to an unobjectionable rule.

Greek and Latin authors from the Hellenistic and Roman periods express a shared ethos where friendship, patronage, and public benefaction are concerned, as we shall see below. Aristotle and Seneca, Dio and Cicero, agree concerning what guidelines the giver and recipient should follow. Moreover, as the Greek world is transformed into the provinces of the Roman Empire, Greek cities no less than Roman colonies become acquainted with patronage as the means by which the whole city gets connected with the center of power and resources, namely the emperor and senate of Rome. A Greek statesman like Plutarch, instructing aspiring politicians, discusses the advisability of having well-placed friends who can support and advance one's political agenda (*Mor.* 814C). The main difference between personal patronage in the Greek and Roman cultures is the formalized etiquette surrounding the latter in the morning greeting of the patron by his or her clients. The *salutatio* displayed the relationship of patron and clients visibly and publicly, a display that would continue throughout the day as some number of clients accompanied the patron in public places, displaying the patron's prestige and power with a visible entourage at home and in the public spaces.²⁴ With this one difference (a difference which disappeared as Roman customs spread throughout their empire), patronage and benefaction proceeded in Greek and Roman circles with much the same ethos and expectations.

The social context of "Grace"

We have looked closely and at some length at the relationships and activities which mark the patron-client relationship, friendship, or public benefaction, because these are the social contexts in which the word "grace" (*charis*) is at home in the first century AD. Today, "grace" is primarily a religious word, heard only in churches and Christian circles. It has progressed through millennia of theological reflection, developments, and accretions (witness the multiplication of terms like "justifying grace," "sanctifying grace," and "prevenient grace" in Christian theology, systematizing the order of salvation). For the actual writers and readers of the New Testament, however, "grace" was not primarily a religious, as opposed to secular, word: rather it was used to speak of reciprocity among human beings and between mortals and God (or, in pagan literature, the gods). This single word encapsulated the entire ethos of the relationships we have been describing.

First, "grace" was used to refer to the willingness of a patron to grant some benefit to another person or to a group. In this sense, it means "favor," in the sense of "favorable disposition." In Aristotle's words (*Rhetoric* 2.7.1

[1385a16-20]), “Grace (*charis*) may be defined as helpfulness toward someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself [or herself], but for that of the person helped.”²⁵ In this sense, the word highlights the generosity and disposition of the patron, benefactor, or giver. The same word carries a second sense, often being used to denote the “gift” itself, that is, the result of the giver’s beneficent feelings.²⁶ Many honorary inscriptions mention the “graces” (*charitas*) of the benefactor as the cause for conferring public praise, emphasizing the real and received products of the benefactor’s good will toward a city or group.²⁷ Finally, “grace” can be used to speak of the response to a benefactor and his or her gifts, namely “gratitude.” Demosthenes provides a helpful window into this aspect in his *De corona* as he chides his audience for not responding honorably to those who have helped them in the past: “but you are so ungrateful (*acharistos*) and wicked by nature that, having been made free out of slavery and wealthy out of poverty by these people, you do not show gratitude (*charin echeis*) toward them but rather enriched yourself by taking action against them” (*De corona* 131).²⁸ “Grace” thus has very specific meanings for the authors and readers of the New Testament, meanings derived primarily from the use of the word in the context of the giving of benefits and the requiting of favors.

The fact that one and the same word can be used to speak of a beneficent act and the response to a beneficent act suggests implicitly what many moralists from the Greek and Roman cultures stated explicitly: “grace” must be met with “grace,” favor must always give birth to favor,²⁹ gift must always be met with gratitude. An image that captured this ethos for the ancients was three goddesses, the three “Graces,” dancing hand-in-hand in a circle. Seneca’s explanation of the image is most revealing:

Some would have it appear that there is one for bestowing a benefit, one for receiving it, and a third for returning it; others hold that there are three classes of benefactors — those who receive benefits, those who return them, those who receive and return them at the same time.... Why do the sisters hand in hand dance in a ring which returns upon itself? For the reason that a benefit passing in its course from hand to hand returns nevertheless to the giver; *the beauty of the whole is destroyed if the course in anywhere broken*, and it has most beauty if it is continuous and maintains an uninterrupted succession.... Their faces are cheerful, as are ordinarily the faces of those who bestow or receive benefits. They are young because the memory of benefits ought not to grow old. They are maidens because benefits are pure and holy and undefiled in the eyes of all; [their robes] are

transparent because benefits desire to be seen (*Ben.* 1.3.2-5; LCL, emphasis mine).

From this, and many other ancient witnesses, we learn that there is no such thing as an isolated act of “grace.” An act of favor and its manifestation (the gift) initiate a circle dance in which the recipients of favor and gifts must “return the favor,” that is, give again to the giver (both in terms of a generous disposition and in terms of some gift, whether material or otherwise). Only a gift requited is a gift well and nobly received. To fail to return favor for favor is, in effect, to break off the dance and destroy the beauty of the gracious act.

In what follows, we will look closely at how Greek and Roman authors conceived of well executed grace-exchanges first in relation to the giver and then in relation to the recipient.

Showing Favor (Grace)

Generosity was a highly valued characteristic in people in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Most public works, public festivals and entertainments, and private aid to individuals or groups came through the willingness of generous people of means to spend their wealth on others. Because their assistance was essential in so many ways, there were strong social sanctions against violating the expectations of gratitude (see below), violations that threatened to cut off the source of aid or redirect that aid in more promising directions.

There were also clear codes of conduct for the giver as well, guidelines that sought to preserve, in theory at least, the nobility and purity of a generous act. First, ancient ethicists spoke much of the motives that should guide the benefactor or patron. Aristotle’s definition of “grace” in its first sense (the generous disposition of the giver), quoted above, underscores the fact that a giver must act not from self-interest but in the interest of the recipient.³⁰ If the motive is primarily self-interest, any sense of “favor” is nullified and with it the deep feelings and obligations of gratitude (Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1385a35-1385b3). The Jewish sage, Yeshua Ben Sira, lampoons the ungrateful giver (*Sir* 20:13-16). This character gives not out the virtue of generosity but in anticipation of profit, and if the profit does not come immediately he considers his gifts to be thrown away and complains aloud about the ingratitude of the human race. Seneca also speaks censoriously of this character: “He who gives benefits imitates the gods, he who seeks a return, money-lenders” (*Ben.* 3.15.4).³¹ The point is that the giver, if he or she gives nobly, never gives with an eye to what can be gained from the gift.³² The giver does not give to an elderly person so as to be remembered in a will, or to an elected official with a view to getting some leverage in politics. Such people are investors, not benefactors or friends.

Gifts are not to be made with a view to having some desired object given in return, but gifts were still to be made strategically. According to Cicero, good gifts badly placed are badly given (*De officiis* 2.62). The shared advice of Isocrates, Ben Sira, Cicero, and Seneca is that the giver should scrutinize the person to whom he or she is thinking of giving a gift.³³ The recipient should be a virtuous person who will honor the generosity and kindness behind the gift, who would value more the continuing relationship with the giver than any particular gift. Especially poignant is Isocrates' advice: "Bestow your favors on the good; for a goodly treasure is a store of gratitude laid up in the heart of an honest man. If you benefit bad men, you will have the same reward as those who feed stray dogs; for these snarl alike at those who give them food and at the passing stranger; and just so base men wrong alike those who help them and those who harm them" (*To Demonicus* 29; LCL). An important component in deciding who will be a worthy recipient of one's gifts is his or her track record of how he or she has responded to other givers in the past.³⁴ Has he or she responded nobly, with gratitude? He or she will probably be worthy of more favors. A reputation for knowing how to be grateful was, in effect, the ancient equivalent of a credit-rating.

Giving without advance calculation of a return and selecting one's beneficiaries carefully may at first glance appear to be contradictory principles. When Seneca writes that gifts given to the ungrateful are "thrown away" (*Ben.* 1.1.2), he may appear to intensify this contradiction. Aware of this potential misunderstanding, he writes: "I choose a person who will be grateful, not one who is likely to make a return, and it often happens that the grateful man is one who is not likely to make a return, while the ungrateful man is one who has made a return. It is to the heart that my estimate is directed" (*Ben.* 4.10.4). The noble giver evaluates his or her potential beneficiaries not in light of any actual return they might make — not in terms of the value of the gifts or services they might give in exchange in the future — but in light of the disposition of the recipient's heart toward feeling gratitude, appreciating and remembering the gift and making whatever return he or she is able, given his or her means. The patron's motive must be kept pure, that is, not sowing benefits for the sake of material gains or other temporal advantages, but looking only for the grateful heart irrespective of the means possessed by the potential recipient to "be of service" in the future.

The benefactor's favor was not, however, to be limited by the potential beneficiary's virtue (or lack thereof). Even while advising his readers to channel their resources first toward the deserving (that is, those who have given signs of a grateful character),³⁵ Seneca urges givers to remain as free as "the gods" in terms of their generosity. Benefaction was the initiation of the dance of grace, an action rather than a response, a perfect and self-contained act rather

than an act that depended on anything beyond the virtue and goodwill of the giver. Therefore, Seneca, would advise his readers, the human benefactor should imitate the “gods,” by whose design “the sun rises also upon the wicked” and “rains” are provided for both good and bad (*Ben.* 4.26.1; 4.28.1), who follow the leading of their own generous and kind hearts in their dealings with human beings, both the grateful and the sacrilegious (*Ben.* 1.1.9).

A virtuous, human patron or benefactor, then, will be willing to grant public benefactions even though she or he knows that the ingrates will also derive enjoyment from the games, the public meals, the construction of a new theater. Seneca’s lofty code for givers, however, applies also to personal patronage. A generous-hearted patron might even choose a known ingrate — even someone who has previously failed to show gratitude for a gift granted by this same patron — to receive a favor (Seneca, *Ben.* 1.10.5; 7.31.2, 4). Repeated acts of kindness, like a farmer’s ongoing labor over difficult soil, may yet awaken a slow heart to show gratitude and respond nobly (Seneca, *Ben.* 7.32).

Responding with Grace

As we have already seen in Seneca’s allegory of the three “Graces,” an act of favor must give rise to a response of gratitude — grace *must* answer grace, or else something beautiful will be defaced and turned into something ugly. According to Cicero, while initiating a gift was a matter of choice, gratitude was not optional for honorable people, but rather an absolute duty (*De Officiis* 1.47-48). Receiving a favor or kindness meant incurring very directly a “debt” or “obligation” to respond gratefully, a debt on which one could not default.³⁶ Seneca stresses the simultaneity of receiving a gift and an obligation: “The person who intends to be grateful, even while she or he is receiving, should turn his or her thoughts to returning the favor” (*Ben.* 2.25.3). Indeed, the virtuous person could seek to compete with the giver in terms of kindnesses and favor, trying not merely to “return” the favor but to return it with interest like the fruitful soil that bears crops far more abundant than the seeds that were scattered upon it.³⁷

Gratitude towards one’s patrons (or toward public benefactors) was a prominent example in discussions of what it meant to live out the cardinal virtue of “justice,” a virtue defined as giving to each person what was his or her due. It was ranked in importance next to showing the gods, those supreme benefactors, the proper honor and services.³⁸ Failure to show gratitude, however, was classed as the worst of crimes, being compared to sacrilege against the gods, since the Graces were considered goddesses,³⁹ and being censured as an injury against the human race, since ingratitude discourages the very generosity that was so crucial to public life and to personal aid. Seneca

captures well the perilous nature of life in the first-century world and the need for firm tethers of friendship and patronage to secure one against mishap:

Ingratitude is something to be avoided in itself because there is nothing that so effectually disrupts and destroys the harmony of the human race as this vice. For how else do we live in security if it is not that we help each other by an exchange of good offices? It is only through the interchange of benefits that life becomes in some measure equipped and fortified against sudden disasters. Take us singly, and what are we? The prey of all creatures (*Ben. 4.18.1*; LCL).⁴⁰

The ingrate committed a crime against the gods, humanity, and ultimately himself or herself, while the person who returned grace for grace embodied the highest virtues of piety and justice and was valued for contributing to the forward movement of the dance of grace on which so much depended.

Responding justly to one's benefactors was a behavior enforced not by written laws but rather "by unwritten customs and universal practice," with the result that a person known for gratitude would be considered praiseworthy and honorable by all, while the ingrate would be regarded as disgraceful.⁴¹ There was no law for the prosecution of the person who failed to requite a favor (with the interesting exception of classical Macedonia), but, Seneca affirmed, the punishment of shame and hatred by all good people would more than make up for the lack of official sanctions.⁴² Neglecting to return a kindness, forgetfulness of kindnesses already received in the past, and, most horrendous of all, repaying favor with insult or injury — these were courses of action to be avoided by an honorable person at *all* costs.⁴³ Rather, gifts were always to be remembered, commemorated first of all in the shrine of one's own mind, and always to be requited with gratitude. The social sanctions of honor and shame, therefore, were important bulwarks for the virtue of gratitude and exerted considerable pressure in this direction.

Practically speaking, responding with gratitude was also reinforced by the knowledge that if one has needed favors in the past, one most assuredly will still need favors and assistance in the future. As we have seen already, a reputation for gratitude is the best credit-line one can have in the ancient world, since patrons and benefactors, when selecting beneficiaries, would seek out those who knew how to be grateful. Even though benefactors might be moved to risk giving to a person whose reputation has been marred by ingratitude, since most benefactors' resources were limited they would seek out the worthy recipients first.⁴⁴ The person who "requites favors," then, is commended by Ben Sira for his or her foresight, since he or she will not fail to find aid when needed in the future (*Sir 3:31*).

An extreme, yet surprisingly common, example of showing gratitude

with an eye to future favors comes to expression in honorary inscriptions. Several inscriptions proclaiming honors to public benefactors contained in Danker's collection make explicit the motive behind the inscription, namely "that all might know that we express appropriate appreciation to those who ... make us the beneficiaries of their philanthropies," and that other benefactors may confer their benefits in the assurance that "they shall receive appropriate gratitude" as well.⁴⁵ Seeing that these cities or groups provided for the honor and remembrance of their benefactors, other benefactors would be encouraged to channel their resources in their direction as well (even as the honored benefactor would be positively inclined to continue her or his beneficence).⁴⁶ The opposite would also be true, namely that those who have shown ingratitude to their patrons or benefactors should expect to be excluded from future favors, both by the insulted benefactor and by other potential patrons as well. Just as no one goes back to a merchant who has been discovered to cheat his customers, and as no one entrusts valuables to the safe-keeping of someone who has previously lost valuables entrusted to him, so "those who have insulted their benefactors will not be thought worthy of a favor (*charitos axious*) by anyone" (Dio, *Or.* 31.38, 65).

As we consider gratitude, then, we are presented with something of a paradox. Just as the favor was freely bestowed, so the response must be free and uncoerced. Nonetheless, that response is at the same time necessary and unavoidable for an honorable person who wishes to be known as such (and hence the recipient of favor in the future). Gratitude is never a formal obligation: there is no advance calculation of, or agreed upon, return for the gift given.⁴⁷ Nevertheless the recipient of a favor knows that he or she stands under the necessity of returning favor when favor has been received. The element of "exchange" must settle into the background, being dominated instead by a sense of mutual favor, of mutual good will and generosity.⁴⁸

Manifestations of Gratitude

"Returning a favor" could take on many forms, depending on the nature of the gift and the relative economic and political clout of the parties concerned. Cities or associations would show their gratitude for public benefactions by providing for the public recognition (honoring and increasing the fame) of the giver and often memorializing the gift and the honors conferred by means of a public inscription or, in exceptional cases, a statue of the giver or other monument.⁴⁹

Even in personal patronage (in which the parties are not on equal footing), however, public honor and testimony would comprise an important component of a grateful response. An early witness to this is Aristotle, who writes in his *Nicomachian Ethics* that "both parties should receive a larger

share from the friendship, but not a larger share of the same thing: the superior should receive the larger share of honor, the needy one the larger share of profit; for honor is the due reward of virtue and beneficence" (1163b1-5; LCL). Such a return, though of a very different kind, preserves the "friendship." Seneca emphasizes the public nature of the testimony that the recipient of a patron's gifts is to bear. Gratitude for, and pleasure at, receiving these gifts should be expressed "not merely in the hearing of the giver, but everywhere" (*Ben.* 2.22.1): "The greater the favour, the more earnestly must we express ourselves, resorting to such compliments as: ... 'I shall never be able to repay you my gratitude, but, at any rate, I shall not cease from declaring everywhere that I am unable to repay it'" (*Ben.* 2.24.4). Increasing the fame of the giver is part of the proper return for a benefit, and a gift that one is ashamed to acknowledge openly in the hearing of all one has no business accepting in the first place (*Ben.* 2.23.1).

These dynamics are also at work in Jewish literature with regard to formulating a proper response to God's favors, that is, with regard to answering the Psalmist's question "What shall I give back to the Lord for all his gifts to me?" (Ps 116:12). The psalmist answers his own question by enumerating the public testimonies he will give to God's fidelity and favor. Similarly, after God brings a happy ending to the many dangers and trials faced by Tobit and his family, the angel Raphael enjoins such public testimony to honor God as a fitting response: "Bless God and acknowledge him in the presence of all the living for the good things he has done for you.... With fitting honor declare to all people the deeds of God. Do not be slow to acknowledge him.... Reveal the works of God, and with fitting honor ... acknowledge him" (Tob 12:6-7; NRSV).⁵⁰

A second component of gratitude as this comes to expression in relationships of personal patronage or friendship is loyalty to the giver, that is, showing gratitude and owning one's association with the giver even when fortunes turn and it becomes costly. Thus Seneca would write about gratitude that "if you wish to make a return for a favor, you must be willing to go into exile, or to pour forth your blood, or to undergo poverty, or, ... even to let your very innocence be stained and exposed to shameful slanders" (*Ep.* 81.27). Wallace-Hadrill writes that, despite the fact that, in theory, clients were expected to remain loyal to their patrons, in practice if a patron fell into political trouble or if his fortunes began to wane, his entourage of clients would evaporate.⁵¹ Such practice, however, was contrary to the ideal of gratitude, according to which one would stand by (or under) one's patron and continue to live gratefully even if it cost one the future favors of others, or brought one into dangerous places and worked contrary to self-interest.⁵² The person who disowned or dissociated himself from a patron because of self-interest was an

ingrate.

It is worth noting at this point that “faith” (Latin, *fides*; Greek, *pistis*) is a term also very much at home in patron-client and friendship relations, and had, like “grace,” a variety of meanings as the context shifted from the patron’s “faith” to the client’s “faith.” In one sense, “faith” meant “dependability.” The patron needed to prove himself or herself reliable in providing the assistance he or she promised to grant; the client needed to “keep faith” as well, in the sense of showing loyalty and commitment to the patron and to his or her obligations of gratitude.⁵³ A second meaning is the more familiar sense of “trust”: the client had to “trust” the good will and ability of the patron to whom he entrusted his need, that the latter would indeed perform what he promised,⁵⁴ while the benefactor would also have to trust the recipients to act nobly and make a grateful response. In Seneca’s words, once a gift was given there was “no law [that can] restore you to your original estate — look only to the good faith (*fidem*) of the recipient” (*Ben.* 3.14.2).

The principal of loyalty meant that clients or friends would have to take care not to become entangled in webs of crossed loyalties. Although a person could have multiple patrons,⁵⁵ to have as patrons two people who were enemies or rivals of one another would place one in a dangerous position, since ultimately one would have to prove loyal and grateful to one but disloyal and ungrateful to the other. “No one can serve two masters” honorably in the context of these masters being at odds with one another, but if the masters are “friends” or bound to each other by some other means the client should be safe in receiving favors from both.

Finally, the grateful person would look for an occasion to bestow timely gifts or services. If we have shown forth our gratitude in the hearing of the patron and borne witness to the patron’s virtue and generosity in the public halls, we have “repaid favor (the generous disposition of the giver) with favor (an equally gracious reception of the gift),” but for the actual gift one still “owes” an actual gift (Seneca, *Ben.* 2.35.1). Once again, people of similar authority and wealth (“friends”) can exchange gifts similar in kind and value; clients, on the other hand, can offer services when called upon so to do or when they see the opportunity arise. Seneca especially seeks to cultivate a certain watchfulness on the part of the one who has been “indebted,” urging him or her not to try to return the favor at the first possible moment (as if the debt weighed uncomfortably on one’s shoulders), but to return the favor in the best possible moment, the moment in which the opportunity will be real and not manufactured (*Ben.* 6.41.1-2). The point of the gift, in the first place, was not, after all, to obtain a return but to create a “bond” that “binds two people together”.

The Dance of Grace

The careful reader may already have observed some apparent contradictions in the codes of “grace.” Rather than make the system fall apart, these contrary principles result in a creative tension between the mindset that must guide the giver and the mindset that should direct the recipient of favor. As a pair of dancers must sometimes move in contrary directions for the dance to be beautiful (and to avoid crashing into one another), so the patron and client are each given their own chart of “steps” to follow in the dance of grace. Sometimes they move together, sometimes in contrary ways, all for the sake of preserving the freedom and nobility of the practice of giving and receiving benefits. Seneca is especially fond of bringing contrasting rules of conduct together, only to tell each party to forget that it knows, in effect, what the other party is thinking. Clients are advised to think one way, patrons another — and if these mindsets get mixed up or crossed, the beauty of reciprocity, the gracefulness of grace, becomes irreparably marred.

Speaking to the giver, Seneca says that “the book-keeping is simple — so much is paid out; if anything comes back, it is gain, if nothing comes back, there is no loss. I made the gift for the sake of giving” (*Ben.* 1.2.3). While the giver is to train his or her mind to give no thought to the return and never to think a gift “lost,” the recipient is never allowed to forget his or her obligation and the absolute necessity of making a return (*Ben.* 2.25.3; 3.1.1). The point is that the giver should wholly be concerned with giving for the sake of the other, while the recipient should be concerned wholly with showing gratitude to the giver. If the recipient should say to himself, “she gave it for the sake of giving; I owe nothing,” then the dance has turned sour and one partner has trampled the other’s toes.

Many other examples of this double set of rules exist. The giver is told “to make no record of the amount,” but the recipient is “to feel indebted for more than the amount” (*Ben.* 1.4.3); the giver should forget that the gift was given, the recipient should always remember that the gift was received (*Ben.* 2.10.4; see Demosthenes, *De corona* 269); the giver is not to mention the gift again, while the recipient is to publicize it as broadly as possible (*Ben.* 2.11.2). In cases where a recipient has taken great pains to try to return a benefit, being watchful and thoughtful for the opportunity but simply not finding a way to help one who is far greater than himself or herself, “the one should consider that he has received the return of his benefit, while the other should know that he has not returned it; the one should release the other, while the other should feel himself bound; the one should say, ‘I have received,’ the other, ‘I still owe’” (*Ben.* 7.16.1-2).

The most dramatic contradiction exists between the denial that the ingrate can again hope to receive favors (*Dio, Or.* 31.38, 65) and the

exhortation of patrons to imitate the gods and give even to the unworthy and ungrateful (Seneca, *Ben.* 1.10.5; 7.31.2, 4; 7.32). What accounts for the contradiction? Simply, the different audience and situation. Seneca speaks to patrons in these passages, discoursing about the loftiest ideals for generosity; Dio speaks to recipients of favor, urging them to cease a specific practice that shows ingratitude toward their benefactors. The recipients of favor should not dwell too long on the possibility (perhaps even the obligation) of benefactors giving even to the ingrate, lest this lead them to excuse themselves from showing gratitude (especially when costly) and to presume upon the favor of the giver, favor that is never to be taken for granted. The patron should not, on the other hand, dwell too long on the impossibility of restoring the ingrate to favor, for different considerations are to guide him, namely generosity even to the undeserving.

Such mutually contradictory rules (forgetting and remembering, being silent and bearing witness, and the like) are constructed so as to keep the giver's mind wholly on what is noble about patronage (generosity, acting in the interest of others) and the recipient's mind wholly on what is noble for the client (namely making a full and rich return of gratitude for favors conferred). They are devised in order to sustain both parties' commitment to acting nobly within the system of reciprocity. The ultimate goal for these ancient ethicists, after all, was not perfect systematization, but virtuous conduct.

Patronage and Grace in the New Testament

It was within this world where many relationships would be characterized in terms of patronage and friendship, and in which the wealthy were indeed known as "benefactors" (Lk 22:25), that Jesus' message took shape and that the good news of God's favor was taken out into the Mediterranean world. Not all relationships fell under this heading of "grace relationships," since there are many "contractual" relationships (e.g., between tenants and landlord, merchants, and the like) in which the return for goods, services, or privileges is spelled out in advance and not left to "goodwill." Nevertheless, Jesus and his first disciples moved among and within patronage and friendship networks, for patronage was as much at home on Palestinian soil as in Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Africa, and Rome. Centuries of living under Greek, then Ptolemaic, then Seleucid⁵⁶ and finally Roman domination⁵⁷ obliterated any hard and fast boundaries between "Palestinian" and "non-Palestinian" culture.

Moreover, after just a few years of incubation in Judea, Christianity began to spread through the urban centers of the Mediterranean world where there would be a consistently high level of exposure among all the Christians to public benefaction and public responses of gratitude, and among many

Christians to personal patronage. These would have been prominent aspects of the world which they inhabited, and even of the experiences they personally enjoyed. As Jews and Gentiles came to hear Paul or other missionaries celebrate the marvels of God's "grace" made available through Jesus, the "sole mediator" between God and humanity, they would have heard it in the context of so many inscriptions and other public declarations of the beneficence of great figures.⁵⁸ For such converts, God's "grace" (*charis*) would not be of a different kind than the "grace" with which they were already familiar: it would be understood as different only in quality and degree. Moreover, they would know that the reception of gifts "given freely" laid the recipients under obligation to respond with grace to match (insofar as possible), with the result that much exhortation in the New Testament falls within the scope of directing believers to a proper, "grateful response" to God's favor.⁵⁹

Luke 7 provides us with a place to start as we consider the networks of grace relationships in operation within the pages of the New Testament:

A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health (7:2-10; NRSV).

The centurion is presented as a local benefactor, doing what benefactors frequently do — erecting a building for public use (here, a synagogue). Faced with the mortal illness of a member of his household, and made aware of Jesus' reputation as a healer (thus himself a broker of God's favors), he seeks assistance from Jesus whom he knows has the resources to meet the need. He does not go himself, for he is an outsider — a Gentile (and a Roman officer, at

that). Instead, he looks for someone who has some connection with Jesus, someone who might be better placed in the scheme of things to secure a favor from this Jewish healer. So he calls upon those whom he has benefitted, the local Jewish elders, who will be glad for this opportunity to do him a good service (to do a favor for one who has bestowed costly favors on the community). He knows they will do their best to plead his cause, and thinks that their being of the same race and, in effect, extended kinship group as Jesus will make success likely. Thus the centurion's beneficiaries return the favor by brokering access to someone who has what the centurion needs. When the Jewish elders approach Jesus, they are, in effect, asking for the favor. As mediators, they also provide testimony to the virtuous character of the man who will ultimately be the recipient of favor. Jesus agrees to the request. Then the centurion does something surprising. He sends some of his "friends" (either people of like status with whom he shares benefits or people of lesser status that are attached to him as their personal patron) to intercept Jesus. A local benefactor shows astonishing humility in his dealings with a transient Jewish healer, and shows exceptional trust in Jesus' ability to grant God's favors. The end result is that the Roman centurion receives from Jesus the gift he needed.⁶⁰

Another text that prominently displays the cultural codes and dynamics of reciprocity is Paul's letter to Philemon, which speaks of past benefits conferred by Paul and Philemon and calls for a new gift, namely freeing Onesimus to join Paul. Although Paul lacks both property and a place in a community, he nevertheless claims to be able to exercise authority over Philemon on the basis of having brought Philemon the message of salvation, thus on the basis of having given a valuable benefit (Philem 8, 18). Philemon himself has been the benefactor of the Colossian Christians, seen in his opening up of his house to them (Philem 2) and in the generosity that has been the means by which "the hearts of the saints have been refreshed" (Philem 7), perhaps including material assistance offered Paul during the time of their acquaintance and after.

We find a mixture of grounds on which Paul bases his request: on the one hand, Paul claims authority to command Philemon's obedience as Paul's client (Philem 8, 14, 20);⁶¹ on the other, he voices his preference to address Philemon as friend (Philem 1), co-worker, and partner, and only actually makes his request on that basis (Philem 9, 14, 17, 20), hoping now to "benefit" (Philem 20) from Philemon's continued generosity toward the saints, which has earned him much honor in the community. The gift (really, the "return") that Paul seeks is the company and help of Onesimus, Philemon's slave. Paul presents Onesimus as someone who can give Paul the kind of help and service that Philemon ought to be providing Paul (Philem 13), and Paul's mention of his own need (his age and his imprisonment, Philem 9) will both rouse

Philemon's feelings of friendship and desire to help as well as make failure to help a friend in such need the more reprehensible.

The situation is somewhat complicated by the fact that Onesimus has estranged himself from Philemon, running from his master and lodging with Paul.⁶² This means that Paul must act first as mediator for Onesimus, first seeking to gain a benefit from his friend, Philemon, for his own client. Paul's mediation means that Philemon will no longer treat Onesimus as Onesimus deserves (that is, as a disobedient and troublesome slave), but will treat him as his patron, Paul, deserves. Any injury committed by Onesimus is to be written on Paul's account, which shows a very wide credit margin (Philem 18-19).⁶³ Paul's decision to return Onesimus with Paul's letter allows Philemon to act nobly and charitably toward both his new brother in the faith (Philem 16) and toward his partner and spiritual patron, first by welcoming Onesimus on Paul's merits (Philem 17) and then by releasing him to help Paul (Philem 13-14).

Philemon really does appear to be in a corner in this letter — Paul has left him little room to refuse his request! If he is to keep his reputation for generosity and for acting nobly in his relations of reciprocity (the public reading of the letter creates a court of reputation that will make this evaluation), he can only respond to Paul's request in the affirmative. Only then would his generosity bring him any credit at all in the community; if he refuses and Paul must command what he now asks, Philemon will either have to break with Paul or lose Onesimus anyway without gaining any honor as a benefactor and reliable friend.

Many other examples of favors being granted by local patrons or human benefactors being acknowledged exist in the New Testament.⁶⁴ These provide us with but a starting point for discovering the social codes of grace within the text. Of greater import is the manner in which New Testament authors conceptualize the involvement of God in human affairs as the involvement of a benefactor and a personal patron, how they understand Jesus' role within the framework of God's beneficence, and how they direct the recipient of God's gifts to respond to such "amazing grace." To these we now turn, concluding with an examination of how patronage within the Christian community is transformed into stewardship, so that God remains, in fact, "all in all."

God the Benefactor and Patron

The opening and closing wishes in New Testament epistles are consistently for God's "grace" (favor) to be upon the recipients of the letter. God's grace (*charis*) would have been understood by the recipients of those epistles within the context of the meaning of usage of "grace" in everyday parlance: it is not a different species of *charis*, but rather derives its

meaningfulness as a kind of *charis* — one in which certain surprising qualities are displayed but also one with some important areas of continuity with “grace” in general.⁶⁵

God has indebted all living beings by virtue of being the creator and sustainer of all life (Acts 14:17; 17:24-28; 1 Cor 8:6; Rev 4:9-11). From the moment one draws breath, one is bound to revere the God who gives breath (Rev 14:6-7).⁶⁶ Paul reminds his readers that no human being has ever made God a debtor: God is always the first giver who obligates us, “for from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom 11:35-36; NRSV). This is why Jew and Gentile have exactly the same standing before God, namely recipients of the favor of the Gracious One, neither with a claim on God’s return of favor but both obligated to respond to God’s favor. It is precisely here, however, that humanity has failed. Neither Gentile nor Jew returned to God the reverence and service God merited, but even went so far as to insult God through blatant disobedience (Rom 1:18-2:24). Meeting God’s favor with insult, humanity incurred the anger of the one who had sought to benefit them.⁶⁷

The New Testament authors, however, announce a new manifestation of God’s favor, an opportunity for deliverance from experiencing God’s wrath made available to all through Jesus the Christ (1 Tim 4:10). This beneficent act is presented as God’s fulfillment of longstanding promises made to Israel, presenting God as a reliable benefactor who has “kept faith” with his historic body of clients (Luke 1:54, 68-75; Acts 3:26; Rom 15:8). The songs of Mary and Zechariah in Luke’s infancy narratives are especially noteworthy as testimonies to God’s fidelity with regard to delivering the grants he had promised to Abraham and his descendants, expressed in terms familiar from decrees honoring contemporary emperors (bringing peace, deliverance from oppression, and the like).⁶⁸ Christians are repeatedly made aware that they are specially privileged to witness the working out of God’s provision for deliverance in Jesus — many great people of the past looked forward to the day when that gift would be given (Mt 13:16-17; Lk 10:23-24; 1 Pet 1:10-12).

An important component of the New Testament message about God’s beneficence is that, while having kept faith with Israel, God now invites all people to stand in his favor and enjoy his patronage. Recognition for God’s inclusion of the Gentiles within the sphere of his favor was not easily won in the early church, but eventually the church came to realize the breadth and scope of God’s generosity in this new act of favor. The specific gift of God in bestowing the Holy Spirit even on Gentiles was the decisive proof of God’s acceptance of the non-Jew into God’s favor (Acts 11:15-18; Gal 3:1-5; 3:28-4:7).⁶⁹ The experience of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers was understood as a gift from God that signified adoption into God’s family (Gal 4:5-6), the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham (Gal 3:14), the

restoration of peace and favor with God (Rom 5:5), and as a pledge of the future benefits God has prepared and will confer at the return of Jesus or after the believer's death (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13-14). The vibrant and vital presence of the Spirit was thus an important assurance to the church of God's favor toward them.

We come at last to what is surprising about God's grace. It is not that God gives "freely and uncoerced": every benefactor, in theory at least, did this.⁷⁰ God goes far beyond the high-water mark of generosity set by Seneca, which was for virtuous people to consider even giving to the ungrateful⁷¹ (if they had resources to spare after benefitting the virtuous). To provide some modest assistance to those who had failed to be grateful in the past would be accounted a proof of great generosity, but God shows the supreme, fullest generosity (not just what God has to spare!) toward those who are God's enemies (not just ingrates, but those who have been actively hostile to God and God's desires). This is an outgrowth of God's determination to be "kind"⁷² even "toward the ungrateful [*acharistous*] and the wicked" (Lk 6:35). God's selection of his enemies as beneficiaries of his most costly gift is one area in which God's favor truly stands out.⁷³

A second aspect of God's favor that stands out is God's initiative in effecting reconciliation with those who have affronted God's honor. God does not wait for the offenders to make an overture, or to offer some token acknowledging their own disgrace and shame in acting against God in the first place. Rather, God sets aside his anger in setting forth Jesus, providing an opportunity for people to come into favor and escape the consequences of having previously acted as enemies (hence the choice of "deliverance," *sōtēria*, as a dominant image for God's gift). We will see below that Jesus is primarily presented in terms of a mediator or "broker" of access to God's favor, since he connects those who make themselves his clients to another patron; nevertheless, those images cannot make us ignore that even such a mediator is God's gift to the world, hence an evidence of God's initiative in forming this relationship (Rom 3:22-26; 5:8; 8:3-4; 2 Cor 5:18, 21; 1 Jn 4:10). The formation of this grace-relationship thus runs contrary to the normal stream of lower-echelon people seeking out brokers who can connect them with higher patrons.

God is guided in this generosity by the consideration of "his own reputation and arete" (2 Pet 1:3), a phrase that resonates again with honorary inscriptions, in which benefactors are said to demonstrate their virtuous character, or live up to their forebears' reputation for virtue, through their generosity.⁷⁴ The death of Jesus on behalf of humankind thus becomes a "demonstration of God's righteousness" (his character and virtue, Rom 1:16-17; 3:25-26), showing that God's generosity exceeds all expectations and upper limits and that God needs nothing from the sinner in order to act in accordance

with his own generous character. The early Christians are repeatedly admonished, however, to take such a demonstration of boundless generosity as God's single call to humankind at last to respond virtuously and wholeheartedly (most eloquently, 2 Pet 1:3-11), and never as an excuse to offend God further (Rom 6:1; Gal 5:1, 13).

God not only dispenses general (rather than personal) benefactions like the grant of life to all creatures (Acts 14:17) or gifts of sun and rain (Matt 5:45)⁷⁵ but becomes a personal patron to the Christians who receive his Son. These believers become part of God's own household⁷⁶ and enjoy a special access to divine favors. The rich and well-placed were careful in their choice of friends and clients: while they might provide meals, games, or buildings for the public (benefaction), they did not accept any and all as clients (personal patronage). Rather distinctive about God's favor is that he offers to any who will come (thus in the form of a public benefaction), without prior scrutiny of the character and reliability of the recipients, the assurance of welcome into God's own extended household (thus into a relationship of personal patronage) — even to the point of adoption into God's family as sons and daughters and to the point of sharing the inheritance of the Son (which is exceptional even in personal patronage).⁷⁷ The authors of the New Testament therefore offer attachment to God as personal patron, something that would be considered highly desirable for those in need of the security and protection a great patron would provide.⁷⁸

As God proved reliable in his promises to Israel, so God will prove reliable toward the Christians who have trusted his promises and welcomed his invitation to become God's clients (1 Thess 5:23-24; 2 Tim 1:12; Tit 1:2; Heb 10:23). Paul speaks thus about God being responsible for rescuing him from past distress, about his confidence of personal help in future trials, about God assisting and multiplying his labors, and the like.⁷⁹ Each Christian also enjoys this assurance that God is open to hearing specific petitions from individuals or local communities of faith, and the privilege of access to God for such timely and specific help (Eph 3:20; Phil 4:6-7, 19; 2 Thess 3:3; Heb 13:5-6; 1 Pet 5:7). Christians need never falter in their commitment to Jesus or release their grasp on God's final rewards because of the hostility or pressures applied by unbelievers: rather, they may "hold fast their confession" as they "approach the throne of favor with boldness," so as to "receive mercy and find favor for timely help" (Heb 4:14-16).⁸⁰

Christian scriptures are unanimous in affirming that God's favor and help are assured, so that trust is justified and only appropriate. Romans 8:32 is perhaps the most poignant assurance of ongoing favor: what assistance or favor would God withhold from us, after having given up his Son on our behalf even before we were reconciled?⁸¹ Jesus taught that God had knowledge of his

clients' needs and exercised forethought to provide both for their physical and eternal well-being (Mt 6:7-8; 6:25-33).⁸² Jesus did not, however, discourage prayer in spite of God's knowledge, and the rest of the New Testament authors either promote prayer as the means to securing divine favors or display prayer as effective (e.g., Lk 1:13). Why pray if God already knows our needs? Because God delights to grant favors to those who belong to God's household. When we ask, we also have the opportunity to know the "blessed experience" of gratitude⁸³ and live out our response (in fact, be ennobled by feeling grateful and responding to God's grace). The result of the offering of prayers and God's answering of petitions is thanksgiving "from many mouths," the increase of God's honor and reputation for generosity and beneficence (2 Cor 1:11). Prayer becomes, then, the means by which believers can personally seek God's favor, and request specific benefactions, for themselves or on behalf of one another.⁸⁴

God's patronage of the Christian community is also evidenced in the growth and building up of the churches and their members. The thanksgiving sections of Paul's letters attribute all progress as disciples and as communities of faith to God's gifting and equipping (1 Cor 1:5-7; Col 1:3-4; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 1:3-6). As churches or their leaders "take stock" of what has been accomplished in their midst, it becomes a time to return thanks and honor to the God who accomplishes every good work. God bestows spiritual and material endowments on individual believers to be used for the health and strengthening of the whole church (1 Cor 12:1-11, 18; 14:12; Eph 4:1-12). Even monetary contributions made by Christians to churches or other works of charity are now seen as God's provision for the Body and not the means by which local patrons (or would-be patrons) can make a power base out of the church (the recipients of their favors).

God is presented in the New Testament, then, as the source of many gifts (indeed, of "every good and complete gift," Jas 1:17) in connection with Jesus. From the gift of life and provision of all things needed for the sustaining of life to the provision for people to exchange enmity with God for a place in God's household and under God's personal patronage, God is the one who supplies our lack, who gives assistance in our need. Nor does God's favor exist for this life only. The announcement of God's "year of favor" includes being chosen by God and being made holy (2 Thess 2:19; 1 Pet 1:1-2), given a new birth into a new family and heritage (Jn 1:12-13; Jas 1:18), and qualified to share in an eternal inheritance (Col 1:12), which is deliverance itself (Col 1:13). When the day of God's reckoning arrives, God will vindicate his clients in the face of all the shame and abuse they suffered at the hands of those who refused favor, for God protects the honor of his household by avenging wrongs done to them (Luke 18:1-8; 2 Thess 1:6), but those who have committed themselves

to God in trust and gratitude will receive their unshakable kingdom (Heb 12:28).

Jesus, the Mediator of God's Favor

While Jesus is “put forward” by God (Rom 3:25) as a provision for reconciliation, and thus a gift from God, he is cast more frequently in the New Testament in the role of Mediator of God's favors and broker of access to God. From an early point in the developing reflection on Jesus' significance, that mediation was seen to have begun in the act of creation itself as the pre-incarnate Son was assigned the role of God's co-worker in creation,⁸⁵ indeed the “agent” through whom God fostered creation (John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2-3).

Luke sums up the earthly ministry of Jesus as follows: “he went about doing good (*euergetōn*) and healing” (Acts 10:38). Luke has chosen a the verb form of the noun “benefactor” (*euergetēs*) to characterize Jesus' activity, which was “benefitting” others. Indeed, the second verb reveals the principal kind of benefaction bestowed by Jesus throughout his ministry, namely healing disease or infirmity and delivering from demonic oppression,⁸⁶ even the restoration of the dead to life (Mt 9:18-25; Lk 7:11-17). Jesus' ministry of teaching could also be considered a gift (and not something the crowds endured in order to receive gifts!), since good advice and guidance were valued and valuable commodities. Seneca (*Ben.* 1.2.4), for example, had included “advice” and “sound precepts” amidst the various kinds of assistance a friend or patron would give. Jesus' provision of simple meals for his vast entourage of five thousand and four thousand also resembles (with the important difference of the miraculous element; Mt 14:14-21; 15:32-38) the Roman *sportulae* (akin to our modern “boxed lunch”) provided by patrons for the clients who attended them at their doorstep. This connection is especially apparent in John, where Jesus chides the crowds for following after him (joining his entourage) for the sake of a handout of food rather than for the spiritual food he has to offer (Jn 6:11, 15, 26-27, 34-35).

Jesus' ability to confer benefits of such kind derives from his relationship with God, specifically as the mediator of favors that reside in the province of God's power and prerogatives to grant or withhold. One episode that brings this to the fore poignantly is the healing of the paralytic who was let down through Peter's roof (Mk 2:3-12//Mt 9:2-8//Lk 5:20-26). Jesus' first act is to grant the man forgiveness of his sins, a bold move that prompts the religious experts sitting in the crowd to criticize him for presuming upon God's prerogatives (Mk 2:7), namely pardon for crimes committed against God. Jesus successfully defends his claim to be able to confer divine favors (like pardon), however, as he heals the paralytic and allows him to walk away. The visible

benefit proves the unobservable one, demonstrating that his declaring forgiveness is not blasphemy, but the real conferral of God's gift.⁸⁷

The response to Jesus during his earthly ministry bears the stamp of responses typical of beneficiaries to their benefactors. Notable is the spread of Jesus' fame, the result of public testimony being given to the benefactor's generosity (Mk 5:19-20; Lk 8:39; Mk 4:24; 9:26, 31; Lk 5:15; 7:17). Even those who are commanded to be silent cannot refrain from spreading his fame, so ingrained is public praise of one's benefactor (Mk 1:45; 7:36-37; Lk 13:17; Mt 9:30-31).⁸⁸ It is possible that those healed understood Jesus' commands against publicizing it as signs of the genuineness of Jesus' motives in healing — he was not a "glory-seeker" but a sincere benefactor. Ironically, this would have the effect of making them feel gratitude even more deeply, and thus more apt to declare Jesus' *aretai*, his demonstrations of his virtue in well-doing. The result of this spread of the report of his well-doing is the collection of vast entourage (in essence, a *clientela*; Mt 4:25; Lk 5:15) who are clearly presented as seekers, or recipients, of his favors. The mass of followers is the visible representation of Jesus' fame and a potential power base for any public agenda he might entertain, hence the cause of the arousal of envy (Jn 12:19) and possibly the source of the fear that led to his execution by the Romans as a political enemy.

In addition to the increase of his reputation by his clients and those who approve his beneficent acts, Jesus personally receives the thanks and reverence due a patron. The story of the ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19) especially highlights the appropriateness of such expressions of gratitude at the reception of a benefit.⁸⁹ Jesus is approached by suppliants in an attitude of trust that he could provide access to divine favor and benefits (Mt 8:8-10; 9:18, 28). When one suppliant expresses an ounce of doubt about Jesus' ability in this regard, Jesus takes issue with him (Mk 9:22-24). When encountering the trust of the Syro-Phoenician woman, Jesus even alters his determination to channel God's favors to the people of Israel (the stated mission of his earthly ministry) since his generous character compels him to respond graciously to such trust (Mt 15:22-28). Some who had been benefitted by Jesus find ways to offer him a service in turn. For example, Peter's mother-in-law responds to Jesus' healing by taking the lead in offering hospitality (Lk 4:38-39), and the women who had been healed or exorcized now support financially the ministry of the One who benefitted them (Lk 8:1-3). Finally, Jesus' benefactions motivate praise of God, showing people's awareness of the ultimate source of these benefits, as of all "good gifts" (Lk 7:16; 17:15-18; 18:43; 19:37; Acts 4:21).⁹⁰

The crowning benefaction conferred by Jesus is, of course, his voluntary death by means of which he grants deliverance from sin, death, and the power of Satan.⁹¹ A prominent feature of passages speaking about this

deliverance is the great cost that Jesus incurred upon himself (e.g., “gave himself for us,” “died on our behalf,” and the like) to bring us these benefactions.⁹² It often happened that a benefactor would put himself at risk and even incur great personal loss to bring benefits to others. Paul articulates the model as it would be practiced by the “best” or most generous of people (Rom 5:6-8; see also Jn 15:13), and indeed it was considered the height of generosity to give one’s life for the good of another (hence the extreme honor showed to those who died in battle to protect a city). Jesus, then, is primarily celebrated as one who spent his all bringing us good: “You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9),⁹³ “He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2:14). This topic is widely utilized by New Testament authors to explain how a degrading execution was in reality a noble, beneficial death, and to stimulate our gratitude and sound the depths of the return we are to make by underscoring the costliness of Jesus’ act of favor. Most poignant in this regard is 2 Cor 5:15: “he died *for all*, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised *for them*.”

By means of his death, by which the memory of our sins is wiped away (in our conscience as well as the mind of God, Heb 9:9-14; 10:17), and now by means of his ongoing priesthood,⁹⁴ Jesus has opened up for his clients access to God the Father, the great Patron. He achieves for those who rely on him what neither angels, nor Moses, nor generations of Levitical priests had been able to provide,⁹⁵ namely direct access to God’s “throne of favor,” giving human beings the boldness to enter that holy space in the assurance of finding “mercy and favor for timely help” (Heb 4:14-16), having effectively removed all that stood in the way of God’s favor, namely sins (Heb 10:1-14). Many passages of the New Testament emphasize that Jesus is the sole grantor of access to the Father (see Mt 11:27; Jn 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5), placing him in the familiar role of “broker,” whose principal gift is connection with another patron (the whole work of reconciliation is an aspect of securing this relationship and prerequisite to conferring the access the Christian now enjoys).⁹⁶

In the Gospels, Jesus makes his disciples mediators of divine favor as well, conferring on them the grant of authority to do the things he had been doing (healing, exorcizing, teaching). After his ascension, his benefaction continues through the work of his apostles, who publicly attest that Jesus’ “beneficence” (*euergesia*) stood behind the healing of the lame man in the Temple (Acts 4:9-10). The disciples appear at first to have understood their role as analogous to other middle-level brokers of access to a great person: they are the gate-keepers (note how they attempt to regulate the flow of access to Jesus

in Mk 10:13-14), and jealously guard that privilege (Mk 9:38-39). Jesus must teach them that, in the kingdom that God is building, being a mediator of the great Patron's favor is not to become the means to build up one's own power base or enhance the perception of one's importance as a channel of divine favor, monopolizing access to Jesus and God's favor (Lk 9:49-50). Instead, although they do go out as brokers of Jesus (Mt 10:40; Jn 13:20), they are not giving with a view to receiving honor or thanks or service from the recipients of the favors they mediate, but are to give as a response to having received themselves from God (Mt 10:1, 8). As if by way of extreme lesson, teaching those who enter into Christ's service that they do so not to enhance their own prestige and power through collecting clients, Jesus elevates those with whom no worldly-minded person would think it advantageous to "network," namely the weak, the little ones, as also his brokers and thus brokers of the One who sent Jesus (Mt 18:5; Mk 9:37; Lk 9:46-48). Not only does this remedy the wrong view of our brokering role as disciples, but it directs us ever against our cultural wisdom to network with the needy — the "unconnected!" — as the way to connect with Jesus.

Reception of "power from on high" after Jesus' ascension (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), which continues to place the apostles in a mediatorial role, stands in parallel with the authority and offices sought for as "favors" by local elites or semi-elites from those above them in the political chain of command. Such a gift brought with it both the obligations of the office (which could be quite burdensome) and the power and prestige of the office (from which angle it was indeed a benefit). Paul views his own apostleship this way as well: it is a great honor (hence a great favor from God, as in Rom 1:5; "the grace that had been given to me," Gal 2:9) that has at the same time obligated him to serve people (Rom 1:14), to discharge an office zealously and at great expense to himself for the good of others. Being granted a privileged office, Paul becomes the mediator himself of divine favor, if only as the one who brings the announcement (the good news) about Jesus the One Mediator who reconciles us to God. He presents himself consistently as acting on behalf of the believers, bringing them spiritual blessing, and often incurring great costs and braving great dangers and pains to bring them these benefits.⁹⁷ The believers are thus obligated to Paul,⁹⁸ even as God obligated Paul to execute his office. They are not to despise his sufferings and his manual labor, since it is all "for them" (see especially 2 Cor 1:3-7; 4:7-15)

Jesus' favor is certainly not presented in terms of past generosity only. Hebrews, as we have noted, underscores his present mediatorial assistance in securing access to God for us, to which one may add his ongoing intercession on behalf of his own before the Father (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 1 Jn 2:1). This is presented primarily in terms of the removal of sins and their potential damage

to the relationship of favor, but one suspects that the author of Hebrews has in mind Jesus' interest in securing for the believers all the divine assistance they need to arrive at the end of their journey. In their midst of their trials and temptations (not just wrestling with particular sins, but wrestling with finding the strength to continue to endure society's insults and abuse for their association with Jesus), Jesus "lays hold of" and "helps" the believers (Heb 2:16-18). Through his intimate acquaintance with their condition, he knows what specific assistance they will need from the "throne of favor."

This continued intercession and assistance itself points to the great gifts that are yet to come: we need Christ's assistance in overcoming those obstacles that threaten to despoil us of that prize. The New Testament authors point the believers consistently forward to the future benefaction, promised, awaited now in trust ("faith") and hope. Through Jesus, believers look forward to receiving the redemption of our bodies, which Paul equates with the realization of our adoption as sons and daughters (Rom 8:23), namely the transformation of our mortal body (Phil 3:20-21) into the resurrection body, the "tent not made with hands" (2 Cor 5:1-5; 1 Thess 4:14). This is the "promise of life" (2 Tim 1:1) that we await in hope (Tit 1:2). Having been made heirs (Tit 3:7; 1 Pet 3:7), believers do not yet "possess," so that believers still await reception of the promised inheritance (Eph 1:13-14; 1 Pet 1:4). Other images used to describe this future, impending grant from God are "deliverance" effected at Jesus' return (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 1:5, 9, 13), entrance into "rest" (Heb 4:1-11), or our heavenly city (Heb 11:16; 13:14), namely New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2-7), a share in Christ's honor (glory, 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Pet 5:10; Heb 2:10) and reign (Rev 5:10). When the Christian enjoys these benefactions, he or she has at last received the "hope" laid up for God's faithful clients in heaven (Col 1:5).

Mindful of the many benefits God has already conferred in Christ, and that Christ has secured for the Christians, the believers are left by the New Testament authors in a posture of hope and anticipation: "Set all your hope on the grace [*charin*, better rendered "gift" in this context] that Jesus Christ will bring when he is revealed" (1 Pet 1:13; NRSV). The history of God's generosity toward the Christian community gives strong assurance that these future gifts will not fail to be granted, hence bolsters "faith" or "trust."⁹⁹ The hope of this gift of unending life in God's realm becomes the "anchor of the soul" (Heb 6:19-20): as the addressees of these texts keep their hope and yearning for this gift strong, these authors know, the Christians' own firmness and reliability in their loyalty toward Jesus and their orientation toward their divine Patron will be similarly strong.

The tendency of New Testament authors to speak of Jesus as "Savior" is also in keeping with his role as benefactor, for the term was applied as an

honorary term to great and powerful figures who brought a city deliverance from an enemy, provided famine relief, and removed other threats to the well-being and stability of a group of people.¹⁰⁰ The believers have already experienced many aspects of his saving activity, namely deliverance (“salvation”) from sin (Mt 1:21; Acts 5:31) or from the godlessness and slavery to the passions of the flesh that characterized our life prior to experiencing God’s kindness (Tit 3:3-5). This Savior (or Deliverer) has conquered death and opened up the way to unending life (2 Tim 1:10); his beneficiaries, however, still await other aspects of this act of “deliverance” (Heb 1:14; 1 Pet 1:5, 9): deliverance from the wrath of God on the day of Judgment (Rom 5:9); the final deliverance from mortality that will come on that anticipated day when the Savior “that we are expecting” returns (Phil 3:20-21).

Making a Gracious Response

“Since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us show gratitude” (*echōmen charin*, Heb 12:28). One of the more important contributions an awareness of the ethos of “grace” in the first-century world can make is implanting in our minds the necessary connection between receiving and responding, between “favor” and “gratitude” in its fullest sense. Because we think about the “grace” of God through the lens of sixteenth-century Protestant polemics against “earning salvation by means of pious works,” we have a difficult time hearing the New Testament’s own affirmation of the simple, yet noble and beautiful, circle of grace. God has acted generously, and Jesus has granted great and wonderful gifts. These were not earned, but “grace” is never earned in the ancient world (this, again, is not something that sets New Testament “grace” apart from everyday “grace”). Once favor has been shown and gifts conferred, however, the result must invariably be that the recipient will show gratitude, will answer “grace” with “grace.” The indicative and the imperative of the New Testament are held together by this circle of grace: we must respond generously and fully, for God has given generously and fully.¹⁰¹

How are Christians directed to respond to the beneficence of God in Christ? The first component of a fulsome response of gratitude is simply giving thanks to the Giver. “When we have decided that we ought to accept, let us accept cheerfully, professing our pleasure and letting the giver have proof of it in order that he may reap instant reward. Let us show how grateful we are for the blessing that has come by pouring forth our feelings” (Seneca, *Ben.* 2.22.1). Exuberant thanksgiving characterizes the worship of Israel (see Ps 92:1-4; 95:1-2; 103; 138; Sir 51:1-12), and was to mark the lives and gatherings of Christians as well (Eph 5:4, 19-20; Col 3:15, 17; 4:2; 1 Thess 5:18). Paul provides his churches with a remarkable model for thanksgiving, rendering praise to God for all progress in the churches (evidence to him of God’s

nurturing and equipping: Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4-7; Col 1:3-4; 1 Thess 3:9), for every deliverance from hardship or trouble (2 Cor 1:9-11), and for the work that God was accomplishing through him (2 Cor 2:14). Paul's example teaches us to be mindful ever of God's past gifts and watchful for the signs of God's continued assistance and gifting at work in our lives and in our churches, so that we can give God thanks as the firstfruits, as it were, of grateful hearts (Col 1:12; 2:7).

"Let us bear witness to them, not merely in the hearing of the giver, but everywhere" (Seneca, *Ben.* 2.22.1). Recipients of God's favor should therefore zealously seek the increase of God's honor or, better, the increase of the recognition of God's honor and generosity. The author of Ephesians shares the assumption of an Aristotle or a Seneca, namely that beneficence rightly results in the augmented renown and praise of the giver. So also God's generosity revealed in Jesus flows "unto the praise of the honor of his generosity (*charis*) with which he graced (*echaritōsen*) us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6; see also 1:12, 14). It falls to the recipient of favor to testify to the favor and bring honor to the giver: the believers are now "to announce the virtuous deeds (*aretai*) of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:10).¹⁰² Showing gratitude to God in the first instance means proclamation of God's favors and publicly acknowledging one's debt to (and thus association with) Jesus, the mediator through whom we have access to God's favor (Lk 12:8-9).¹⁰³ A grateful heart is the source of evangelism and witness, which is perhaps most effectively done as we simply and honestly give God public praise for the gifts and help we have received from God. Perhaps some shrink from "evangelism" because they think they need to work the hearer through Romans, or discourse on the two natures of Christ. Begin by speaking openly, rather, about the favor God has shown you, the positive difference God's gifts have made in your life: tell other people facing great need about the One who supplies every need generously.

Words are not the only medium for increasing God's honor. Jesus directed his followers to pursue a life of "good works" which would lead those seeing them to "give honor to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).¹⁰⁴ As believers persist in pursuing "noble deeds," those who now slander them will come to "glorify God" at the judgement (1 Pet 2:11-12). A particular "good work" and "noble deed" is benefaction: abundance in this ministry "overflows with many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor 9:11-12). Living worthily of God's call, that is, walking in the life of virtue made possible through God's gift of the Spirit, also results in the increase of the honor given Jesus' name (2 Thess 1:11-12). By telling others of God's gifts, and by being zealous for virtue and well-doing, we have opportunity to advance our great Patron's reputation in this world, possibly leading others in this way to seek to attach themselves to so

good a benefactor.

Besides bringing honor to one's patron, it was also a vital part of gratitude to show loyalty to one's patron. Attachment to a patron could become costly,¹⁰⁵ should that patron have powerful enemies. Being grateful — owning one's association and remaining committed to that patron — could mean great loss (Seneca, *Ep.* 81.27). True gratitude entails, however, setting the relationship of "grace" above considerations of what is at the moment advantageous.¹⁰⁶ First-century Christians often faced, as so many international Christians in this century continue to face, choosing between loyalty to God and personal safety. For this reason, several texts underscore the positive results of enduring hostility and loss for their commitment. 1 Pet 1:6-9 interprets the believers' present experiences of testing as an opportunity for them to demonstrate the firmness of their commitment to their Divine Patron. Even though the mediator of their salvation, Jesus, is presently unseen, they love him and persist in trust toward him. The end result of keeping this trust firm is the preservation of their souls. Their joy in this interim is an outward witness to their confidence in their Patron to deliver what has been promised.

Suffering on account of association with the name of Jesus is considered a gift from God (Phil 1:29-30; 1 Pet 2:18-21).¹⁰⁷ Loyalty to God even in the face of suffering is a gift insofar as it brings one in line with Christ's example, so that "you may follow in his footsteps" (2 Pet 2:21). It is the ultimate destination of that path that makes suffering for the name of Christ a gift now, namely the deliverance and honor that God will give to those who commit themselves to him, trusting him (1 Pet 3:14; 4:13, 19; cf. Jesus' posture in 2:23). Given the cost Jesus was willing to incur in bringing us into God's favor, the believer should be emboldened to make a like return, leaving behind worldly comfort, honor, and safety for the sake of responding to Jesus (Heb 13:12-13). Loyalty to God means being careful to avoid courting God's enemies as potential patrons as well. In the first century, this meant not participating in rites that proclaimed one's indebtedness to the gods whose favor non-Christians were careful to cultivate (whether the Greco-Roman pantheon or the emperor: 1 Cor 10:14-21; Rev 14:6-13). If avoidance of such rituals meant losing the favor of one's human patrons, this was but the cost of loyalty to the Great Patron. One could not be more concerned with the preservation of one's economic and social well-being than living out a grateful response to the One God (Mt 6:24; Lk 12:8-9).

The other side of loyalty is trust (quite literally, since *pistis* referred to both). As seen already in 1 Pet 1:6-9, believers endured society's hostility not only out of gratitude for God's past gifts, but trusting firmly in the future benefactions of God, specifically the deliverance about to be revealed at the second coming (1:5, 13). At stake in Galatia, from Paul's perspective, was the

Christian community's trust in Jesus' ability to secure God's favor for them. If they were to seek to secure God's favor for themselves on the basis of works of Torah, this would now amount to a vote of "no confidence" in Jesus' mediation, to which they had previously committed themselves (and by means of which they had already received the Holy Spirit, 3:1-5). The result would be alienation from Jesus, who would no longer "benefit" those who distrusted, and ultimately from God's favor itself (Gal 2:20-21; 5:2-4). Firm trust in God becomes a source of "stability" for the believer, allowing him or her, in turn, to be a reliable client of God and friend of fellow-believers (Col 1:5). Jesus' own stability — the fact that he is the same person today as yesterday, and will still remain such tomorrow — provides the suitable platform for a stable trust (Heb 13:7-8).¹⁰⁸

Clients would return gratitude in the form not only on honor and loyalty, but also in services performed for the patron. It is here that good works, acts of obedience, and the pursuit of virtue are held together inseparably with the reception of God's favor and kindnesses. A life of obedience to Jesus' teachings and the apostles' admonitions — in short, a life of good works — are not offered to gain favor from God, but nevertheless they *must* be offered in grateful response to God. To refuse these is to refuse the Patron who gave his all for us the return He specifically requests from us. Paul well understands how full our response should be: if Jesus gave his life for us, we fall short of a fair return unless we live our lives for him (2 Cor 5:14-15; Gal 2:20).

God's acts on our behalf become the strongest motivation for specific Christian behaviors. For example, Paul reminds the Corinthian church that, since they were ransomed for a great price, they are no longer their own masters: they owe it to their redeemer to use their bodies now as pleases him (1 Cor 6:12-20).¹⁰⁹ In more general terms, he reminds the Roman Christians that their experience of deliverance from sin and welcome into God's favor leaves them obliged now to use their bodies and lives to serve God, as once they served sin: they are "debtors," not to the flesh, but to the God who delivered them and will deliver them (8:12).¹¹⁰ Such righteous conduct is always itself the result of God's enabling, God making us able even to offer a suitable response to his favor (Rom 8:2-4; Phil 1:11; Heb 13:20-21; 2 Pet 1:3-4). The fact that such resources are provided, however, makes it all the more incumbent upon the Christians to avail themselves of God's abundant supply and to make use of them rather than neglect them.

A prominent kind of exhortation in the New Testament promotes imitation of the virtues and generosity displayed by God and Jesus. First, Jesus enjoins the recipients of God's favor to imitate God's beneficence (see Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:27-36). He challenges normal limits of reciprocity and generosity, setting rather as the standard God's example.¹¹¹ Christians are

directed to be benefactors to their non-Christian neighbors (1 Thess 3:12; 5:15), especially in the face of antagonism, so as to silence slander by “doing good” (1 Pet 2:15). The logic of these exhortations is consistently to respond in accordance with what benefactions one has received, whether “pardon” (or forgiveness, Mt 6:14-15; 18:23-35; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13), Jews and Gentiles extending welcome and acceptance within the church since they have each been welcomed freely by Christ (Rom 15:7), loving one another as Christ had shown love for us (Eph 5:2; 1 Jn 4:11), being more mindful of the interests of others than our own interests and recognition, as Christ gave example when he poured himself out for our benefit (Phil 2:1-11), laying down our lives to help one another, and this often in very practical and material demonstrations, because Jesus laid down his life to help us (1 Jn 3:16-18).

Another angle from which New Testament authors approach this response of service is calling Christians to be mindful of fulfilling God’s purposes for us in giving us what he has and doing for us what he has done — that is to say, using God’s gifts rightly and to their proper end.¹¹² God’s patience toward the sinner is a gift meant to lead the sinner to repentance, “the riches of God’s kindness” to bring about a change of heart (Rom 2:4). Failure to use this gift correctly shows that one “despises” God’s kindness, and results in wrath. God’s gift of freedom in Christ is neither to be set aside (Gal 5:1) nor used for purposes that do not honor or please God (Gal 5:13); rather, this freedom is an opportunity for love and service to fellow believers. Both Tit 2:11-14 and 2 Pet 1:4 focus on the transformation of our lives from lives marked by “the corruption that is in the world because of lust” or by “impiety and worldly passions” into “lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly,” reflecting our participation “in the divine nature.” Sanctification, in essence, is simply a right response to God’s gifts, putting the resources God has made available for holiness in Christ to good and proper use.

Similarly, Paul and the author of 1 Peter speak frequently of the ways in which God has gifted individual believers for the good of the whole church. Divine endowments of this kind (whether teaching, prophetic utterance, wisdom, tongues, or even monetary contributions) become opportunities and obligations for service. The proper response to receiving such gifts is not boasting (1 Cor 4:7), which in effect suppresses the acknowledgment that these qualities stem from God’s endowment, but sharing God’s gifts with the whole church and the world. We are to exercise stewardship of the varied gifts that God has granted with the result that the honor and praise offered to God increases (1 Pet 4:10-11).¹¹³

Commitment to respond as grateful recipients is reinforced throughout the New Testament by the assurance that such a response keeps one centered in God’s favor and leads to future benefactions from God. “You are my friends

if you do what I command you.... I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (Jn 15:14-16). Obedience leads to a “friendship” relationship with Jesus and access to and assurance of God’s personal patronage (God’s willingness to hear and answer believers’ petitions; see also Jn 14:14-17). Jesus is the “source of eternal deliverance for those who obey him” (Heb 5:9), the author of Hebrews especially motivating perseverance in gratitude by keeping the addressees focused on “salvation” as something they are “about to inherit” (Heb 1:14) at Christ’s second coming (Heb 9:28). Both 1 Pet 3:12 (quoting Ps 34:16) and 1 Jn 3:21-22 affirm that “obeying what God commands” brings assurance that God remains favorable to the Christians’ petitions. In a passage that has been helpfully compared with the very form of the honorary decree commemorating benefactors,¹¹⁴ the author of 2 Peter suggests that responding properly to God’s ample provision for godliness meant the believers’ “supplying alongside” God’s provision our own zeal to bear the most fruit with the seed God plants within us (1:3-10). Such a lifestyle, demonstrating mindfulness of God’s past benefactions of cleansing from sin and God’s “precious and great promises” (meant to give us the impetus to rise above worldly corruption), leads to the final benefit: “entrance into the eternal kingdom” will “be abundantly supplied to you” (1:11).¹¹⁵

Ungraceful Responses to God’s Beneficence

The Christian Scriptures also present the danger of failing to attain God’s gift (Heb 12:15), of “receiving God’s gift in vain” (2 Cor 6:1). Just as living out a response of gratitude assures the believer of God’s favor in the future, so responding to God’s favor with neglect, ingratitude, or even contempt threatens to make one “fall from favor” (Gal 5:4) resulting in the danger of exclusion from future benefactions. When attempting to dissuade their audiences from a particular course of action, the New Testament authors will show the hearers how such a course of action is inconsistent with the obligations of gratitude, and how such a course threatens to turn the affronted Patron’s favor into wrath.

In effect, refusal or neglect of the sorts of acts described above as constituting a response demonstrating gratitude would mean that the recipient of priceless favors broke the circle of grace and brought the dance to a strident halt. Disowning Jesus (Mt 10:32-33), failing to honor God or return reverence (Rom 1:21; Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11), failing to use God’s gifts for their intended purposes (Jude 4; Rom 2:4-5), showing distrust toward God or Jesus, faltering rather than acting on their promises (Gal 1:6; 2:21; 5:2-4; Jas 1:6-7; Heb 3:12, 19), showing disloyalty by making alliances with God’s enemies (Jas 4:4; Rev 14:9-11), and responding to the divine patron’s call for service with

disobedience (Heb 3:18-19), such as brings God's name into dishonor (Rom 2:17-24), are all ugly and unsuitable courses of action in light of the generosity and favor God has lavished upon the Christians. Such actions show gross forgetfulness of these benefits,¹¹⁶ and provoke God by meeting his favor and kindness with insult and abuse.

The sermon "to the Hebrews" provides strong examples of these topics at work.¹¹⁷ Here was a congregation that had faced a time of painful hostility, reproach, abuse, and marginalization (10:32-34), some members of which were finding their association with the Christian group less valuable than returning to the good favor of society (10:25). The author strongly urges the believers to resist any pull that leads them to "drift away" from a straight course toward the good goal that God has set for them. They must "press forward to perfection" (6:1), since

it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt. Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over (6:4-8; NRSV).

The audience is described as having received several important gifts from God ("enlightenment," the Holy Spirit, the unspecified "heavenly gift") as well as foretastes of the benefactions yet to come. How, then, could they think of falling away? Such an act would display contempt for the gifts and the Giver, bringing public disgrace on Jesus rather than enhancing his honor as they testify to their neighbors: "you were right; Jesus' favor is not worth the cost of remaining associated with his name." The agricultural illustration that closes the paragraph teaches that God's gifts (here, rain) look for a return, a "suitable crop"; if the land bears instead what is unpleasant and unprofitable, it has only the fire to look forward to.¹¹⁸ The author asserts that God has carefully cultivated the believers through abundance of gifts to be "fruitful soil" for him, to bear "suitable vegetation for those on whose behalf [they] were cultivated," namely acts of love and service for their fellow-believers (6:9-10), remaining reliable and faithful supports to one another in the face of society's shaming techniques. How could they, then, think of bearing the prickly thorns of defection, or shirking their responsibilities to help one another and support one

another through their common pilgrimage?¹¹⁹

This passage has stood at the center of the theological controversy of eternal security as opposed to the possibility of believers committing an unpardonable sin. The author of Hebrews, however, moves in a social ethos in which recipients of benefactions are led to act with one set of considerations in view (namely, the importance of maintaining a response of gratitude and avoiding any course which would show ingratitude toward a patron) while benefactors are led to act with another set of considerations in view (with an emphasis on exercising generosity and magnanimity). Most poignant in this regard is Seneca's advice to the patron who has met with ingratitude not to be afraid to give a second gift, in the hope that, as the farmer works the unproductive soil, this new gift will awaken gratitude and loyalty in all their fullness (*Ben.* 7.32). The doctrine of eternal security threatens to distract us, who are clearly in the role of clients, from focusing on what is our proper business, namely maintaining our commitment to return grace for grace; attempts to set limits on God's generosity, on the other hand, also impinge on what is not properly ours, namely God's freedom to give even to one who has proven ungrateful in the extreme. The scriptural witness creates the same sort of tension discovered in Greco-Roman texts on patronage — warning clients about the grave perils of ingratitude and the exclusion from favor it brings, but also extolling the patron whose generosity is greater than the ingratitude of some recipients. It is a healthy tension, and choosing one side to the exclusion of the other would be a misstep in the dance of grace.

Christian Giving

It seems appropriate to give some space in this chapter to the topic of Christian giving, and to the New Testament interpretation of acts of benefaction and patronage within the new community. Jesus had much to say about beneficence toward the poor. Charity leads to lasting (eternal) wealth (Lk 2:33; 14:12-14; 16:9; 18:22), with the result that Jesus urges all his hearers to “sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven” (Lk 12:33).¹²⁰ The concept that one's true possessions are what one gives away was known to Seneca,¹²¹ although Seneca would have advised a more “judicious” (from a worldly point of view) deployment of benefits than Jesus, who tells us to seek out those who have no means of repayment, so that God will repay us “at the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk 14:12-14). The striking vision of Mt 25:31-46, in which the righteous are separated from the wicked on the basis of beneficence toward the needy, surprises the hearers and readers by asserting that providing food and clothing and comfort to the needy is the way to “return the favor” to the One who has given us all we need for our well-being and survival (gifts of food and

clothing, for example: Mt 6:11, 25-33). We have the opportunity to make a gracious return to our Lord and benefactor in the person of the poor or the oppressed.

Especially in the letters of Paul one finds a remarkable transformation of the cultural code of patronage. Monetary contributions and other forms of assistance or beneficence within the local church or between cells of the Church universal remains a source of recognition and honor. Paul honors the Macedonian Christians for their generosity by praising them to the Corinthian congregations (2 Cor 8:1-5; 11:9), amplifying their virtue by stressing that they did not let their own poverty hinder their generosity.¹²² Paul includes in his letters remembrances of individuals who have undergone expense or exercised beneficence for his good or the good of the church. He announces that he is himself, together with “all the churches of the Gentiles,” indebted to Prisca and Aquila, who “risked their necks for [Paul’s] life,” thus who displayed the greatest generosity (Rom 16:3-4). Paul calls for public honors to be given Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus for their service (“so give recognition to such persons,” 1 Cor 16:17-18). He makes special mention of the service of Epaphroditus, a person who, acting as the agent or vehicle of the Philippian church’s support of Paul, spends himself to the uttermost (he endures illness even almost to death). Such a person, Paul declares, merits honor in the community (Phil 2:29-30). Since the letters are public documents, read before the gathered assembly of believers, such mention amounts to a public announcement of the individual’s generosity and brings him or her honor in the congregation.

Nevertheless, benefaction within the church is a specific gift of God: it is a manifestation of God’s patronage of the community, mediated through its members (Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:7, 11-12).¹²³ Alongside and among spiritual endowments and edifying services like prophecy, tongues, teaching and words of knowledge, God also bestows the gift of giving to achieve God’s purposes in the family of God. God supplies all things, so that Christians are called to share on the basis of their kinship responsibilities toward one another in the church rather than use gifts of money and hospitality to build up their client base (the source of local prestige and power).¹²⁴ This is a bold transformation of patronage into stewardship.

Patronage and benefaction are therefore removed from the realm of competition among humans for honor and accumulation of power — a message as relevant today as ever. Indeed, participating in relief efforts is presented as much as a favor granted the givers as a favor done by the givers. The collection for the poor in the Judean churches is perhaps the most prominent act of beneficence among the churches in the New Testament (Acts 11:29; Rom 15:26-27; 2 Cor 8-9). Paul views this, however, not as an act of human

patronage, but as God's beneficence working itself out through responsive Christians (2 Cor 9:8-15; God "supplies" (*epichorōgeō*) the resources which meet the needs of the Corinthians fully and give them "abundance for every good deed"), so that ultimately God rightly receives the thanks for the donation (2 Cor 9:11-12). Participation in the relief effort is a "favor" for which the Macedonian Christians earnestly "begged" Paul (2 Cor 8:4). The Judean Christians reciprocate with prayer on behalf of the Gentile Christians (2 Cor 9:14).¹²⁵ An important motive for giving is supplied by Paul in his interjection of Christ's generous example, who "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (2 Cor 8:9). Participating in the relief effort is a means of honoring the divine benefactor (9:13) by imitating his generosity: his example should spur them on in this endeavor. Moreover, since the Corinthians have been enriched by Christ (8:9) and by God (9:10-11) in so many ways, they are honor-bound to use the riches entrusted to them for God's purposes, namely relieving the needs of the saints.

Much tension within contemporary churches could be relieved if we took to heart Paul's "paradigm shift" for patronage. Those who contribute to the local church do not lay the minister or the congregation under obligation, but are enacting faithfully their service to God (and ought to be honored on that basis). They give not in order to secure a return (usually in the form of power and influence within the local church), but because God has given.

Conclusion

Growing in our understanding of the social contexts of "grace" contributes to our reading of the New Testament in several ways. We become more attuned to the gifts God has granted to those who approach him through his Son, and are reminded of the favors God has promised for the future. It keeps our focus returning to these, so that God's benefits remain always on our minds (rather than neglected or forgotten as we go about our daily lives). Paul prays in the opening of Ephesians that Christians be made mindful of the magnificence of God's generosity (Eph 1:3, 7-11, 17-19). Indeed we should return frequently to meditate upon the immensity of God's favor both in terms of his general benefactions (life, salvation, a future of hope) as well as in terms of his personal patronage, the ways in which his favor has entered into our own lives at our points of need. Our awareness of God's generosity and our indebtedness to God will in this way become the focal points for our understanding of our lives, with the result that the cares of the world, as well as its promises, are less like to distract and entangle us.

The fundamental ethos governing relationships of patrons and the clients, benefactors and beneficiaries, and friends is that grace must answer grace: the receiving of favor must lead to the return of gratitude, or else the

beauty and nobility of the relationship is defaced (dis-graced). As we grow in our appreciation of God's beneficence, we are thereby impelled to energize our commitment to make an appropriate response of gratitude to God. When the magnitude of God's generosity is considered, gratitude and its fruits must of necessity fill our speech, attitudes, and actions.

The New Testament authors outline what a just and suitable response would entail, guiding us to act as honorable recipients of favor and averting us from making an ugly response of ingratitude, neglect, or disloyalty, which would also lead to the danger of exclusion from future favors yet to be conferred. We come to engage evangelism more naturally (but also necessarily) not now as a contest for winning souls, but as an opportunity to spread the fame of God and testify to the good things God has done in our behalf. The obligations of gratitude demand that we not hold our tongue in this regard! We begin to understand that obedience to God -- throwing ourselves and our resources into the work of caring for the global church -- is not something we might do "over and above" the demands of everyday life. Rather, these pursuits are placed at the center of each day's agenda. As God did not bestow on us what was merely left over after he satisfied himself, so we are called upon to make a like exchange by giving our all and our best to God's service first. Moreover, we discover that loyalty to such a patron must be preserved without wavering. This can embolden us in our struggles with our own sins, as we consider how indulging them enacts disloyalty toward the One we should only please. It can also embolden our confrontations with an unbelieving world that finds whole-hearted loyalty to this God and his ways a threat and reproach to its way of life. Gratitude provides a clarifying focus to the Christian for his or her life, a single value that, lived out as the New Testament authors direct, will result in a vibrant, fruitful discipleship.

Finally, as we read the pages of the New Testament with an eye to promises of favor, we become more highly sensitized to the way these authors seek to instill in us such a hope for, and trust in, God's promised benefactions that we will have firmness and fixedness in the midst of this life's chances and changes. Such an undivided hope provides an anchor for the soul and the means for stability and reliability in our Christian commitment. As our ambitions are all channelled toward the good gifts that God has prepared for us, we, like the early Christians, will find it easier to detach ourselves from the trivial pursuits and rewards promoted by the society around us and remain constant in our orientation toward the Divine Patron.

Endnotes

¹ See Halvor Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991),

241-268, pp. 242-244.

² Rightly, J. H. Elliott, "Patronage and Clientism in Early Christian Society," *Forum* 3 (1987): 39-48, p. 40.

³ Bonds of reciprocity (whether between social equals, called friends, or between patrons and their clients) could continue across the generations. A child inherits, as it were, his or her parents' networks of friends and enemies. Ben Sira bears witness: "he has left behind him an avenger against his enemies, and one to repay the kindness of his friends" (30:6), as does Isocrates: "it is fitting that a son should inherit his father's friendships even as he inherits his estate" (*To Demonicus* 2; LCL). See also Seneca, *Ben. 2.18.5*: "I must be far more careful in selecting my creditor for a benefit than my creditor for a loan. For to the latter I shall have to return the same amount that I have received, and, when I have returned it, I have paid all my debt and am free; but to the other I must make an additional payment, and, even after I have paid my debt of gratitude, the bond between us still holds; for, just when I have finished paying it, I am obliged to begin again, and friendship endures; and, as I would not admit an unworthy man to my friendship, so neither would I admit one who is unworthy to the most sacred privilege of benefits, from which friendship springs" (LCL).

⁴ J. Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions* (New York: St. Martin's, 1974), 148.

⁵ A fuller analysis of these can be found in G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Suffragium: From Vote to Patronage," *British Journal of Sociology* 5 (1954) 33-48.

⁶ See also Saller, *Patronage*, p. 75, n.194: "That the mediators would have received the credit and gratitude from the ultimate recipient of the favor is clear from the last sentence of Pliny, *Ep. 3.8*, where Pliny secures a tribunate for Suetonius who passes it on to a relative, with the result that the relative is indebted to Suetonius who is in turn indebted to Pliny."

⁷ *Ad familiares* 13, cited in Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society: from Republic to Empire," in Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in the Ancient World*, 63-89, p. 77.

⁸ See R. P. Saller (*Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982], 8-11). Cicero (*De officiis* 1.56) provides this testimony: "Another strong bond of fellowship is effected by mutual interchange of kind services; and as long as these kindnesses are mutual and acceptable, those between whom they are interchanged are united by ties of enduring intimacy" (LCL).

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11; see also C. Osiek and D. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1997), p. 49.

¹⁰ J. Pitt-Rivers, "Postscript: the place of grace in anthropology," in J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 215-246.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹² See especially lines 342-51; 401-404. These are ably discussed in Millett, "Patronage and its avoidance," pp. 19-20.

¹³ Pitt-Rivers, "Postscript," 233.

¹⁴ Josephus, *BJ* 1.21.11-12.

¹⁵ C. Osiek and D. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1997), p. 50.

¹⁶ In Seneca's words, "there is a great difference between not excluding a man and choosing him" (*Ben.* 4.28.5). Personal patronage involves a choice and a commitment to an ongoing relationship with a client.

¹⁷ See Seneca, *De beneficiis* 6.19.2-5.

¹⁸ See R. P. Saller, "Patronage and friendship in early imperial Rome: drawing the distinction," in Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge, 1989), 49-62, pp. 54-55; especially important is the collection of 51 inscriptions analyzed in F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis, MO: Clayton Publishing House, 1982).

¹⁹ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 6.253e-f; quoted in Danker, *Benefactor*, 202-203.

²⁰ Quoted in S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

²¹ See Paul Millett, "Patronage and its avoidance in classical Athens," in Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society*, 15-48.

²² *Ibid.*, 23-25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ Saller, "Patronage and Friendship," 57-58.

²⁵ See the discussion also in *TDNT* IX:373-376.

²⁶ It is in its meaning as "gift" that "grace" also referred to the qualities of "poise," "charm," or "beauty" and that the adjective "graceful" was, and is, applied to "charming, beautiful, skilled" people. In these cases "graceful" means "graced" or "gifted," that is, "having received positive endowments from God or nature."

²⁷ See the frequent occurrence of the plural "graces" ("gifts," *charitas*) in the inscriptions collected in Danker, *Benefactor* (as well as the discussion on p. 328); *TDNT* IX:375 also cites the customary formula: "on account of the gifts, the χάριτας, of so-and-so we proclaim these honors." The Latin term *beneficium* is defined by Seneca as the equivalent of these first two meanings of *charis* (*Ben.* 2.34.5). The Latin word *gratia*, moreover, shares the three meanings wedded within the Greek *charis*.

²⁸ See, further, *TDNT* IX:376: "in relation to the recipient of grace χάρις means 'thanks' to the benefactor." The following passages also use the expression "have grace" in the sense of "show thanks": Luke 17:9; Heb 12:28; on "grace" as "thanks," see the expression "thanks be to God" in Rom 6:17; 7:25; 2 Cor 8:16; 9:15.

²⁹ Hence the saying of Sophocles (*Ajax* 522): "favor (*charis*) is always giving birth to favor (*charin*).

³⁰ Seneca (*Ben.* 6.13.1-2) allows the giving of a benefaction to be profitable both to the giver and the recipient, stressing that the recipient is not released from showing gratitude: "I am not so unjust as to feel under no obligation to a man who, when he was profitable to me, was also profitable to himself....nay, I am also desirous that a benefit given to me should even be more advantageous to the giver, provided that, when he gave it, he was considering us both, and meant to divide it between himself and me.... I am, not merely unjust, I am grateful, if I do not rejoice that, while he has benefitted me, he has also benefitted himself" (LCL).

³¹ Throughout his book, Seneca stresses that benefactors and friends give "for the sake of giving" and not for the sake of any return (*Ben.* 1.2.3; 4.29.3).

³² Pitt-Rivers ("Postscript," 217-218) points out that the typical responses to thanks in

English, French, Italian, and German-speaking countries involve some equivalent of “it was nothing” or “it was a pleasure,” sayings which, in denying that obligation has been incurred, stresses the purity of the motive of the giver (without nullifying any obligation — in fact, only making that obligation felt more strongly by the recipient of favor since the motives are seen to have been pure). It is astounding that the moral ideal of giving “purely” for the sake of the recipient has persisted intact across the millennia.

³³ Ben Sira advises: “If you do a kindness, know to whom you do it, and you will be thanked for your good deeds” (Sir 12:1), advice that was remembered in the early church (see *Didache* 1.5-6) as a good rule for giving alms (an important form of benefaction, which, though personal, did not initiate the ongoing relationship of patron and client). Cicero (*De officiis* 1.45) affirms that “our love [a common way to refer to beneficence] must be shown to the worthy,” urging his reader to consider the potential recipient’s “character, his regard for us, his closeness to us, his usefulness to us in former services” when weighing the decision to give or not to give. The need to select beneficiaries and clients with great care is a frequent theme in Seneca (*Ben.* 1.1.2; 3.11.1; 3.14.1; 4.8.2).

³⁴ Thus Isocrates (*Ad Demonicam* 24): “Make no man your friend before inquiring how he has used his former friends; for you must expect him to treat you as he has treated them” (LCL).

³⁵ See Seneca, *Ben.* 1.10.5.

³⁶ See Seneca, *Ben.* 2.35.3-4; 5.11.5; 1.4.3 (which uses the expression “debt of gratitude”). Aristotle (*Nic. Eth.* 1163b12-15) also speaks of the necessity of “repaying” a gift, even though the kind of gifts may be vastly different (e.g., a “friend” of lesser means returns intangible goods like honor and fame for material goods received from a “friend” of greater means, i.e., a patron).

³⁷ Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.48; Seneca, *Ben.* 1.4.3; see also Isocrates, *Ad Demonicam* 26: “Consider it equally disgraceful to be outdone by your enemies in doing injury and to be surpassed by your friends in going kindness (*tais euergesiais*)” (LCL). See also Pseudo-Phocylides (*Sentences*, 80): “It is proper to surpass benefactors with still more.”

³⁸ Thus Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 31.7. Ben Sira goes so far as to suggest that the requital of favors “counts” as an offering to God: “He who returns a kindness (*antapodidous charin*) offers fine flour” (Sir 35:2).

³⁹ Seneca (*Ben.* 1.4.4) and Dio (*Or.* 31.37) both call ingratitude an assault on the honor of the three Graces, and thus a wicked act of sacrilege.

⁴⁰ See also Cicero, *De officiis* 2.63.

⁴¹ Quote from Anaximenes (frequently attributed to Aristotle), *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1421b3-1422a2. Seneca appeals to unanimity of human opinion in this regard: “What is so praiseworthy, upon what are all our minds so uniformly agreed, as the repayment of good services with gratitude?” (*Ben.* 4.16.3); “Not to return gratitude for benefits is a disgrace, and the whole world counts it as such” (*Ben.* 3.1.1).

⁴² Seneca, *Ben.* 3.6.2; 3.17.1-12.

⁴³ On the shamefulness of forgetting benefactions, see Cicero, *De officiis* 2.63; Seneca, *Ben.* 3.1.3; 3.2.1; on the even greater dangers of insulting one’s benefactors, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.2.8 and Dio, *Oration* 31. Such courses of action do not only destroy a patron’s benevolent disposition toward one, they can turn benevolence into virulent anger and the desire for revenge (see also Pitt-Rivers, “Postscript,” 236).

⁴⁴ See, again, Seneca, *Ben.* 1.10.5; Isocrates, *Ad Demonicam* 24, 29. Wallace-Hadrill

("Patronage," 72-73) suggests, astutely in light of the perception of limited goods that marked the ancient world, that a patron's power came not from being able to give whatever was needed to whomever asked, but from the impossibility of bestowing favors on all who needed them: the finitude of beneficence made jockeying for limited resources all the more intense and enhanced the willingness of clients or would-be clients to vie with one another to attain the patron's favor through services, honors, and the like: "their success in control lay as much in their power to refuse as in their readiness to deliver the goods." This certainly plays out in the scene of provinces and cities vying for a special place in the emperor's eye, so that scarce resources would be diverted one way and not another. At this point an important distinction between human patronage and God's patronage emerges, for the latter is proclaimed as the giver of boundless benefits to whomever asks (Lk 11:9-13; Jas 1:5).

⁴⁵ Five out of 51 inscriptions collected and translated by Danker contain these expressions or their near equivalents. See Danker, *Benefactor*, 57, 77-79, 89-91, 152-53; 283-85. Cicero (*De officiis* 2.70) also attests that showing gratitude to present patrons attracts the positive attention of potential future patrons as well.

⁴⁶ Dio (*Or.* 31.7) bears witness to the truth of these dynamics: "For those who take seriously their obligations toward their benefactors and mete out just treatment to those who have loved them, all men regard as worthy of favour (*charitos axios*), and without exception each would wish to benefit them to the best of his ability."

⁴⁷ Seneca, *Ben.* 3.7.2

⁴⁸ Seneca, *Ben.* 6.41.1-2. Once again, Pitt-Rivers' observations of reciprocity in the modern Mediterranean (rural) context resonates deeply with its ancient counterpart: "A gift is not a gift unless it is a free gift, i.e., involving no obligation on the part of the receiver, and yet...it nevertheless requires to be returned" ("Postscript," 233); "You cannot pay for a favor in any way or it ceases to be one, you can only thank, though on a later occasion you can demonstrate gratitude by making an equally 'free' gift in return" ("Postscript," 231).

⁴⁹ See Dio, *Or.* 31.17, 20; 51.9. The first half of Danker, *Benefactor*, consists of translations and analyses of such honorary inscriptions. In *Oration* 66, Dio lampoons the "glory seeker" who spends all his or her fortune on public benefactions just to receive crowns, special seating, and public proclamations — "lures for the simpletons."

⁵⁰ Aristotle regards human patronage and the favor of the gods to be of one kind, different merely in terms of degree, with the result that, in the case of the gods, one cannot ever repay their favors and a person "is deemed virtuous if he pays them all the regard he can" (*Nic. Eth.* 1163b12-18).

⁵¹ "Patronage," 82.

⁵² Thus Seneca, *Ben.* 4.20.2; 4.24.2.

⁵³ This is the sense of "faith" (*pistis*) in *4 Maccabees* 13:13; 16:18-22. Seven Jewish brothers have the choice laid before them by the tyrant Antiochus IV: transgress Torah and assimilate wholly to the Greek way of life, or die miserably. The brothers choose to brave the tortures, keeping "faith" with the God who gave the brothers the gift of life.

⁵⁴ See, again, *4 Maccabees* 8:5-7, where King Antiochus urges the young Jewish brothers to "trust," or "have faith in," him for their future well-being and advancement, abandoning their current alliances and associations in favor of a new attachment to him.

⁵⁵ See Saller, "Patronage," 53-56.

⁵⁶ During this period we have clear evidence of the intentional and aggressive Hellenizing of Jerusalem and Judea, led by priestly and other aristocratic Jewish families. See 1 Maccabees 1 and 2 Maccabees 3-4.

⁵⁷ Especially during the period of Roman rule we find Judean monarchs like Herod the Great continuing a strong Hellenizing and Romanizing program both in Jerusalem and in the creation of new cities in Galilee and coastlands. See Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), the groundbreaking study of how fully Hellenized Judea and Jerusalem were by the time of Christ. The mindset that somehow Palestine maintained an "Old Testament" or "Hebrew" culture while the rest of the world went on its Hellenized way persists even in the work of otherwise excellent scholars (see Randall Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," *Bib Sac* 155 [1998] 62-91, especially p. 63 and n.4), but looking to "Jewish" backgrounds (themselves quite Hellenized, if one considers intertestamental literature) to the exclusion of, or in preference to, "Greco-Roman" backgrounds is not consistent with what we know about the Hellenization of Palestine and the Jews' creative use of Hellenistic thought and culture as they re-formulated their own culture and religion during the centuries before Christ.

⁵⁸ Danker (*Benefactor*, 28-29) draws a correct and perceptive conclusion: "It is not probable that Greek or Roman bakers and shoemakers bothered to read the words of every dedicatory stele. Yet there would be far more acquaintance on the part of the general public with the themes and formulations of these documents than with the works of literary figures. People who had never heard of Herodotos or Sophokles would certainly have opened their eyes or ears when a Caesar proclaimed relief from oppressive legislation"; "To do hermeneutical justice, then, to public documents like those in the Pauline corpus — including even the Letter to Philemon — it is necessary to interpret them first of all in the light of linguistic data that would have been available to the larger public and which would have provided the necessary semantic field for understanding the argument of a versatile communicator like Paul."

⁵⁹ E.g., wherever reception of gifts or promises from God is used as the motivation for some act or behavior (the frequent use of "therefore" to connect exhortation to a prior discourse on God's "grace" or favors and kindnesses is far from accidental or cosmetic).

⁶⁰ See also the treatment of this passage in Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations," 252-253.

⁶¹ This may be a bold move on Paul's part, for his claim to being Philemon's patron is far less visible (in terms of "actual," visible favors) than Philemon's claim on the church and, quite likely, on Paul.

⁶² Onesimus, who was now lodged with Paul, might not legally have been considered a runaway slave. Slaves who were experiencing difficulty in their masters' homes were known to leave the master in search of one of the master's "friends," who could plead the slave's case, acting as a broker between slave and master, in the hope of the slave's returning to a more endurable situation. Such a slave remained, in effect, within the master's household by fleeing to a friend of the master -- making him disobedient, perhaps, but not a runaway.

⁶³ This is strikingly similar to the case of Voconius Romanus in Pliny's letter to the emperor Trajan, discussed above.

⁶⁴ Just considering Luke-Acts, we have the following examples. Acts 10:2, 22 presents

a second centurion, one who “gave alms generously,” that is, committed himself to public benefaction, particularly of the poor (providing sustenance rather than entertainments or buildings — but still a form of public benefaction), with the result that he was “well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation,” the recipients and observers of his beneficence. The opening of the speech of Tertullus before Felix (Acts 24:2-4) is filled with the customary praises of a beneficent ruler who has maintained peace through his foresight, a profession of gratitude before a new request for a favor is made. Acts 24:27 and 25:9 show again how manipulation of the judicial process could be construed as a “favor” done to benefit someone or some group (recall Cicero’s and Marcus Aurelius’ attempts to secure favorable verdicts for their friends and clients). In the parable of the prudent steward (Lk 16:4-9), the soon-to-be-unemployed steward provides relief from substantial amounts of debt to the master’s debtors as a benefaction, anticipating (indeed, counting on) the recipients to show their gratitude when he will need aid in the near future. In the middle of Luke’s passion narrative, we find a new “friendship” relationship being formed (replacing former mistrust and rivalry) as Pilate and Herod exchange mutual courtesies (Lk 23:6-12), honoring one another by giving the other the right to decide a case. Finally, we would mention the prologues to Luke and Acts (Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2) as quite probably the literary dedication of a work to the patron whose support had made the leisure for research and writing possible (which would be in keeping with the many other dedications beginning works of literature in Greek or Latin).

⁶⁵ There is a peculiar tendency in scholarship (particularly among those claiming the title “evangelical”) to drive wedges between the New Testament texts or early Christianity and the Greco-Roman culture within which it grew up and formulated its conception of the work of God and human response (within which, for that matter, Judaism continued to take shape both in Palestine and, let us not forget, in the Diaspora). This is evident, for example, when scholars insist without defense that Old Testament backgrounds are “closer” to the New Testament and on that basis exclude other backgrounds (as in Gleason, “Old Testament Background,” p. 63), or when scholars affirm differences without allowing themselves to acknowledge or “see” similarities (a recurring problem in D. N. Howell, Jr., “Review of *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*,” *JETS* 42 [1999] 161-63). This ideological trend has been helpfully demonstrated and criticized in Vernon Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 232-235. The result is a skewed presentation of the sources that informed and were transformed within early Christian culture. Paul, for example, appears to have used whatever material would help convey the significance of Jesus Christ and shape and motivate a faithful response within a community of disciples, whether that material was drawn from the Jewish Scriptures, Greek poets, or philosophical ethicists. Holding the text up against a variety of background, rather than choosing one to the exclusion of all others, will result in a more richly-nuanced understanding of how the text was heard by its (largely) Greco-Roman audience and how it sought to persuade them. Do we believe that Christianity is “more legitimate” if its ideas can be traced back to Jewish (or, more specifically, Hebrew) sources than if we find Greek or Roman ideas informing Paul or Luke?

⁶⁶ In this regard, the fact that Greek and Latin authors classify people’s obligations to

God (or, in some authors, the “gods”) under the rubric of returning just thanks and honor is significant. Long before the birth of Christianity, the ancients knew the divine to be the supreme benefactor of humanity, and thus upheld the virtue of piety as an essential obligation (see Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1163b16-18).

⁶⁷ Aristotle, for example, noted among the things that rouse anger and desire for vengeance insulting or mistreating a benefactor (*Rhetoric* 2.2.8).

⁶⁸ Mary’s song also highlights God’s interest in benefitting and protecting the poor and humble, often to the exclusion of the rich and powerful (Lk 1:48, 51-53; see also Jas 2:5); Jesus also presents himself as the agent of God’s beneficence toward the poor and marginal (Luke 4:18-19), and Paul interprets the Corinthians’ reception of favor along similar lines (1 Cor 1:26-31). In this way, God subverts the “food chain” in normal patron-client relationships, taking on as his clients not those closer up in rank and status (hence possessing greater potential for returning favors) but reaching down to those who lack rank and status. Humility rather than upward-climbing is the way to get close to this patron, to “find favor” from God (see Sir 3:18; Jas 4:10; 1 Pet 5:5-6).

⁶⁹ See also Lk 4:25-30, in which Jesus reminds the hearers of God’s previous benefactions bestowed specifically on Gentiles — and that at times when there were many Jews in need of such a favor, but received none. Eph 1:3-3:21 is in many respects a lengthy public decree honoring God for God’s immense generosity, and prominent within this paean is the celebration of God’s favor extending to Gentiles as well as Jews. It is noteworthy that the New Testament authors consider even repentance to be, not a human act, but a gift bestowed by God (Acts 11:15-18; 2 Tim 2:25).

⁷⁰ The distinction made by D. Howell (“Review of *Despising Shame*,” 163), to the effect that God’s grace is unmerited and unconstrained (while somehow Pliny’s favors are consistently merited and constrained?) is thus a false one. “Grace” always looks to the needs of the recipient, remains free, and can be granted to the meritorious and the notorious by human patrons as well.

⁷¹ The Greco-Roman world, too, did understand the difference between “merited” favors and “unmerited” favors, both of which exhibited the generosity of the giver (but the latter even more so). While we are not deserving of God’s favor (thus favor remains unmerited), the fact that God does extend such favor to us communicates to us our worth in God’s estimation. God shows not only his love for us, but also his regard for us in the quality of the gifts he gives (most poignantly in the laying down of the life of his Son for our sake). It is this communication of both love and esteem that should wash over the hardest heart and dissolve it in a return to God. “A gift is not a benefit if the best part of it is lacking — the fact that it was given as a mark of esteem” (Seneca, *Ben.* 1.15.6; also 4.29.3).

⁷² “Kindness” (*chrēstotēs* or its adjectival form) is an important descriptor of benefactors in Danker’s collection of inscriptions (see *Benefactor*, 325-37).

⁷³ Read Rom 5:6-10 now in this light: God does for enemies what even a virtuous person would hesitate to do for a friend; see also Eph 2:1-6; Tit 3:3-7.

⁷⁴ Danker (*Benefactor*, 457) draws a comparison with an inscription from Priene which declares that a certain benefactor named Moschion has proven “worthy of the arete and reputation of his ancestors.”

⁷⁵ A comparison between Jesus’ words in Mt 5:45 and Seneca’s words on the gods’ beneficence toward good and wicked alike (see above) is striking indeed, particularly

considering that both use the model of divine beneficence as an impetus to be generous to the good and ungrateful alike.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Heb 3:6; 10:20-21; Gal 3:26-4:7; 1 Jn 3:1.

⁷⁷ This statement needs to be tempered, however, in light of statements like “many are called, but few are selected”: the New Testament does not speak of universal incorporation into the household of God, but only of *potential* universal incorporation. Many recipients of God’s beneficence remain quite dead to their obligations of gratitude and persist in their rejection of the divine patron and his invitation to become a part of his household (see, e.g., 2 Cor 4:3-4).

⁷⁸ Christians were not alone in this view of God: the Stoic philosopher Epictetus also suggested that a person could find no better patron to whom to attach oneself than God — not even Caesar could compare (*Dissertations* 4.1.91-98).

⁷⁹ Look closely at Acts 26:22; 2 Cor 1:9-11; Phil 4:13; 2 Thess 3:1-2; 1 Tim 1:12-15; 2 Tim 3:11; 4:16-18 from this perspective.

⁸⁰ Seneca (*Ben.* 4.4.2) speaks in similar terms of divine benefits: people are “conscious of their benefits that sometimes are presented unasked, sometimes are granted in answer to prayer — great and timely gifts, which by their coming remove grave menaces.”

⁸¹ See also such texts as Mt 7:7-11; 11:22-24; 21:21-22; Lk 11:9-13, with regard to the granting of the Holy Spirit; Rom 8:32; Jas 1:5-8, with regard to the specific gift of wisdom; 1 Jn 5:14-16.

⁸² An interesting development of the belief that God has created and provided all manner of foods for human consumption is that receiving food with thanksgiving (gratitude) to the creator and giver nullifies concerns over defilement or pollution from foods (Rom 14:6; 1 Cor 10:30-31; 1 Tim 4:3-4). Convictions about God as giver override pollution taboos — indeed those very taboos legislated in Torah.

⁸³ Thus Seneca (*Ep.* 81.21): Gratitude is “a great experience which is the outcome of an utterly happy condition of soul.”

⁸⁴ See Eph 6:19; 2 Cor 1:10-11; Phil 1:19; 4:6-7; Col 1:3; 4:12; 1 Thess 5:17, 25; 2 Thess 3:1-2; 1 Tim 2:1; Jas 5:15-16; 1 Jn 5:14-16.

⁸⁵ A role formerly ascribed to “Wisdom” in Jewish literature: Prov 8:27-31, 35-36; Wis 9:1-2, 9.

⁸⁶ See Mt 4:23-25; 8:5-17; 9:18-35, etc; Mk 1:34, 39; 3:10, etc.; Lk 4:40; 5:15; 6:18; 7:21; 9:11, etc. Physicians and healers were considered a kind of benefactor in the Greco-Roman world, as the inscriptions honoring physicians included by Danker (*Benefactor*, 57-64) attest.

⁸⁷ See also John 9:30-33; 11:22; 14:6, 13-14; 16:23-27 for passages emphasizing Jesus’ mediation of God’s favors.

⁸⁸ Recall Aristotle’s dictum that well-doers merit honor, and Seneca’s directions to testify publicly to benefits received as a prime ingredient of gratitude.

⁸⁹ So, rightly, Danker, *Benefactor*, 441. Bruce J. Malina (*Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea* [Louisville: W/JKP, 1993]) offers a peculiar analysis of this passage. From his observations of modern Mediterranean culture, Malina claims that saying “thank you” to a social equal means a breaking off of relations of reciprocity, whereas one does still give thanks to social superiors for their gifts. He suggests that Mediterranean people might empathize more with the nine lepers who do not thank Jesus, who leave the relationship open in case they have needs in the future.

Such a reading, however clever, cannot be supported from the text. Jesus is addressed as a social superior (“Master”), and the petition is cast in terms suggestive of the supplicants’ awareness of social inferiority (“have mercy on us”). Jesus’ response to the one leper who did return suggests the expectation that the other nine ought to have returned to express gratitude to God for their healing in the presence of the mediator of God’s favor. Were Malina correct, we should have found Jesus saying to this Samaritan leper: “You dolt! You think that’s the last favor you’re going to need from me?!”

⁹⁰ This, too, is not wholly unparalleled in Greco-Roman world, as inscriptions give credit not only to the immediate benefactor but also to divine “providence” for providing such a virtuous person for the benefit of humankind (see, for example, the famous inscription from Priene celebrating the benefits conferred on the whole world through Augustus by the divine; translation given in Danker, *Benefactor*, 215-218).

⁹¹ See, among many others, Mt 1:21; Jn 1:29; Acts 5:31; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; Col 1:19-20, 22: 2:13-14; Heb 2:14-15; 1 Pet 3:18.

⁹² Danker (*Benefactor*, 417-435) calls this the “endangered benefactor” motif, and documents that it was widely applied to those who braved dangers, incurred risks, or shouldered inordinate expenses for the public good or the good of others. “He gave himself for others” is common diction honoring such a benefactor (Danker, *Benefactor*, 321-323). In the New Testament, see 1 John 3:16-17 (which also expresses the appropriate response to such beneficence), the words of institution at the Last Supper (e.g., Lk 22:19-22); Mt 20:28; 26:26-28; Mk 10:45; Lk 22:19-20; Jn 6:51; Jn 10:11, 15, 17-18; Jn 15:13; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 1:4; 3:13; Eph 5:2; 1 Tim 2:6; Tit 2:14; Heb 2:9; 7:27; 13:12; Rev 1:5; 5:9-10.

⁹³ The decision of the NRSV translators to render *charis* here as “generous act” is most astute, combining an emphasis both on the giver’s disposition and the resulting benefaction.

⁹⁴ Priests were seen, in general, as the parties who “managed” relationships with the divine, restoring favor, mediating thanks, and securing gifts from the divine. Heb 5:1 captures, by way of general definition, the essence of priesthood as standing between human beings before God on behalf of human beings. The Latin word for priest, *pontifex*, or “bridge-maker,” also underscored the mediatorial (=brokering) nature of the priest’s role.

⁹⁵ Hebrews 1-10 contains many topics geared to “amplify” the favor (gift of access) conferred by Jesus (thus amplifying also the corresponding sense of indebtedness to the giver). Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 2.7.1) wrote that a favor “is great if shown to one who is in great need, or who needs what is important and hard to get, or who needs it at an important and difficult crisis; or if the helper is the only, the first, or the chief person to give the help.” Jesus is consistently celebrated in Hebrews as the “first” and “only” broker (mediator) to succeed in conferring the gift of direct access to God (see, e.g., Heb 7:11-28; 9:6-15; 10:1-14).

⁹⁶ Other texts emphasizing Jesus’ gift of a new access to God’s favor and assistance include John 16:26-27; Rom 8:34; Eph 2:18; 3:11-12; 1 Tim 2:5-6; Heb 10:19-23; 1 Pet 1:21; Rev 1:6 (making us priests means bestowing access to God).

⁹⁷ 2 Cor 1:3-7; 4:7-15; 6:4-10 (esp 6:10); Eph 3:1-2, 13; Col 1:24-25; 2:1; 1 Thess 2:8-9 (where he emphasizes that he has not been a burden on the “public” in the execution of

his office).

⁹⁸ Paul does not use this to “lord it over” his converts (and he takes explicit pains to avoid giving this impression; 2 Cor 1:24), but he does remind his addressees of their debt to him at times when he is uncertain of their response and needs to use his trump card (as perhaps in Philem 18-19) or when fidelity to Paul is at stake (as in 2 Corinthians).

⁹⁹ Seneca (*Ben.* 4.15.3) speaks of the tendency of human patrons to give repeatedly to those they have helped in the past: “How often will you hear a man say: ‘I cannot bear to desert him, for I have given him his life, I have rescued him from peril. He now begs me to plead his cause against men of influence; I do not want to, but what can I do? I have already helped him once, no, twice.’ Do you not see that there is, inherent in the thing itself, some peculiar power that compels us to give benefits, first, because we ought, then, because we have already given them?... We continue to bestow because we have already bestowed.” The investment God and Christ have already made in us becomes a cause for confidence of their continued favor and investment in the faithful, an assurance of future help. In Paul’s words, “He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?” (Rom 8:32).

¹⁰⁰ See Danker, *Benefactor*, 324-25.

¹⁰¹ The objection raised by Howell (“Review of *Despising Shame*,” 163) that, somehow in contrast to “the giving and receiving of benefactions in the patronal society of Greece,” Christians realize that they can never repay the favors of God. This is, however, a point that resonates strongly and specifically with Greco-Roman patronage, for the client, being a social inferior to the patron, was not in a position to “repay” the patron, hence expressed his or her gratitude by some other means than offering an equally valuable gift in the future. Aristotle (*Nic. Eth.* 1163b15-18) knew that the favors of the gods and of parents can never be adequately repaid, with the result that the person who pays them all the regard he or she can is deemed virtuous. With regard to human patrons, Seneca envisions the situation where a recipient shows his gratitude thus: “I may not be able to repay you, but at the least I shall not refrain from declaring everywhere that I cannot repay you” (*Ben.* 2.24.4). He discourses also at some length (*Ben.* 7.16.1-4) about the recipient who has taken great pains to try to return a benefit, being watchful for the opportunity but simply not finding a way to help one who is far greater than himself or herself: “the one should say, ‘I have received,’ the other, ‘I still owe’.”

¹⁰² The declaration of God’s *aretai* resembles the use of this term in honorary inscriptions, where it means not just virtue but “demonstration of character and exceptional performance” (Danker, *Benefactor*, 318). This aspect of response to divine benefits is deeply rooted in the worship of Israel (see Ps 96:1-4; 105:1-2; 107; 116:12-18).

¹⁰³ Early Christians frequently had reason to hide their attachment to Jesus and his followers, since association with that group brought suspicion, reproach, even physical abuse and financial ruin (see Heb 10:32-34; 1 Pet 4:14-16). Keeping silence about one’s patron, and denying his gifts through their silence, was not an option for virtuous recipients of favor. Recall Seneca’s admonition (*Ben.* 2.23.1): “As the giver should add

to his gift only that measure of publicity which will please the one to whom he gives it, so the recipient should invite the whole city to witness it; a debt that you are ashamed to acknowledge you should not accept.”

¹⁰⁴ In John 15:8, Jesus says that the Father is glorified when Jesus’ followers “bear much fruit and be[come] my disciples.” The vagueness of this expression (the “fruit” is never specified in John) may have been quite intentional, alerting the readers to watch for all possible opportunities to “be fruitful” to the increase of God’s honor, whether that be in good works that point to the Source of all goodness, in making new disciples, or simply in internalizing ever more fully the life of discipleship as taught by Jesus and his apostles.

¹⁰⁵ Although I deeply appreciate Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s challenging words on “cheap grace” and “costly grace” in *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier, 1959), the concept of “costly gratitude” might have served his point better (avoiding any misunderstandings that grace could be acquired or purchased). His argument is, of course, that gifts costing the Son so dearly must rouse us to make a like return.

¹⁰⁶ Recall Seneca, *Ben.* 4.24.2: “It is the ungrateful man who thinks: ‘I should have liked to return gratitude, but I fear the expense, I fear the danger, I shrink from giving offense; I would rather consult my own interest.’”

¹⁰⁷ 1 Pet 2:19-20 contains the enigmatic phrases *touto gar charis* and *touto charis para theō(i)*. The NRSV renders these “it is a credit to you” and “you have God’s approval,” but in both obscures the more immediate impression of the words: “this is a gift”; “this is a gift from God” (or “this is [the manifestation of] favor before God”).

¹⁰⁸ In an oration on the reasons for distrust, Dio points out that “what someone has said about Fortune might much rather be said about human beings, that no one knows about any one whether he will remain as he is until the morrow,” changing his word and breaking agreements as his advantage leads (*Or.* 74.21-22). There is no such lack of “constancy” (*Or.* 74.4) in the Christian’s patron, Jesus, affirms the author of Hebrews.

¹⁰⁹ Consider the similar logic in 1 Pet 1:17-21: The believers have an obligation to conduct themselves in such a way as shows reverence for God (1:17) because of the acts of beneficence already performed for them by God in Jesus, namely being ransomed at no less a price than Jesus’ own lifeblood — a price foreseen before creation itself (the topic of forethought in beneficence was common: see Acts 24:2-4 for but one example). They thus owe God more than they would owe any human benefactor who effected their deliverance through the paying of a ransom in gold or silver (already a staggering debt of gratitude). The beneficent intent of God in the incarnation and passion of Jesus is underscored again as “on your account” (δι’ ὑμᾶς, 1:20).

¹¹⁰ See, rightly, Danker, *Benefactor*, 451. Other passages deserving attention in this context are Rom 12:1 and Eph 4:1 (which begin to outline the proper response to the beneficence celebrated in Rom 1-11 and Eph 1-3) and Heb 13:15-16, which describes the proper demonstration of “gratitude” and “reverent service” (Heb 12:28) to be rendered to God by those his Son has cleansed, to whom he gave access to God’s favor and presence, whom he will yet “perfect” by leading them into the unshakable realm.

¹¹¹ Recall Seneca’s attempt to do the same, directing patrons and benefactors to imitate the gods, who lavish their gifts on the sacrilegious and indifferent as well as the pious (*Ben.* 1.1.9; 4.25.1; 4.26.1; 4.28.1), acting ever in accordance with their own character and virtue, even in the face of lack of virtue.

¹¹² Failure to do so inevitably insults the giver, who gives in the expectation that a gift will be utilized and used in a manner suitable to its worth (the person given a precious artefact should not put it in the attic, nor use it for a spittoon, for example).

¹¹³ See also Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:7-16.

¹¹⁴ Danker, *Benefactor*, 453-466.

¹¹⁵ On the frequent occurrence of the verb *epichorēgeō* in reference to the activity of benefactors, see Danker, *Benefactor*, 331-332.

¹¹⁶ Forgetfulness of benefits is strongly censured by Seneca (*Ben.* 3.1.3-3.3.2), as also in Cicero, *De officiis* 2.63: "all people hate forgetfulness of benefactions, thinking it to be an injury against themselves since it discourages generosity and the ingrate to be the common enemy of the needy." We should expect 2 Pet 1:9 to arouse similar disgust and shame, leading the hearers to take care to pursue the course recommended by the author that shows mindfulness of God's favors.

¹¹⁷ For a close analysis of patron-client and "grace" scripts at work in the pastoral strategy of this text, see my "Exchanging Favor for Wrath: Apostasy in Hebrews and Patron-Client Relations," *JBL* 115 (1996) 91-116; on Heb 6:4-8 specifically, see my "Hebrews 6:4-8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation," *Tyndale Bulletin* 50.1 (1999) and 50.2 (1999).

¹¹⁸ Agricultural images are common in classical texts on patronage and reciprocity: Seneca frequently compares giving to sowing seed, grateful clients to good soil, ingrates to worn out soil (*Ben.* 1.1.2; 2.11.4-5; 4.8.2; 4.33.1-2). Pseudo-Phocylides (the real name of the author of this Jewish collection of wise advice is unknown) similarly writes: "Do no good to a bad man; it is like sowing into the sea" (*Sentences*, 152).

¹¹⁹ Heb 10:26-31 offers an even more intense depiction of the significance of withdrawing from open association with the Christian community in the hope of getting back in the good graces of society: the value of the gift and what it cost the Giver are despised by such life choices, and the honor of Jesus, whose favor has been trampled, is avenged by God the Judge in the punishment of the ingrates.

¹²⁰ Luke lays special emphasis on this point: only in his gospel are we told how to provide ourselves with these "treasures in heaven," namely by charitable giving, and only in his gospel is the challenge poised at the young rich man also poised to all who would follow Jesus (see especially 14:33). This conviction is developed in the second-century Christian text, *Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 1.

¹²¹ "'Whatever I have given, that I still possess!' ... These are the riches that will abide, and remain steadfast amid all the fickleness of our human lot: and, the greater they become, the less envy they will arouse. Why do you spare your wealth as though it were your own? You are but a steward.... Do you ask how you can make them your own? By bestowing them as gifts! Do you, therefore, make the best of your possessions, and, by making them, not only safer, but more honorable, render your own claim to them assured and inviolable" (*Ben.* 6.3.1, 3).

¹²² Compare Seneca, *Ben.* 1.7.1: "Sometimes we feel under greater obligations to one who has given small gifts out of a great heart, who 'by his spirit matched the gift of kings', who bestowed his little, but gave it gladly, who beholding my poverty forgot his own." Also striking is the similarity between Seneca's and Jesus' evaluations of gifts from the rich and from those of poor means. "A gift has been made by someone of a large sum of money, but the giver was rich, he was not likely to feel the sacrifice; the

same gift was made by another, but the giver was likely to lose the whole of his patrimony. The sum given is the same, but the benefit is not the same" (*Ben.* 3.8.2). Compare this with the story of the Widow's Mite (Lk 21:1-4).

¹²³ This theme will recur throughout early Christian literature. The *Acts of Peter*, for example, promotes the awareness that the benefactions of wealthy Christians are presented as examples "of Christ's care for his own" (R. F. Stoops, Jr., "Patronage in the *Acts of Peter*," *Semeia* 38 [1986] 91-100, p. 94) that result in praise and thanks to Jesus rather than as the means by which rich people enhance their own prestige in the community. Their gifts are not to advance his personal power but are given on the basis of their loyalty to Jesus (p. 98; *Acts of Peter* 19); see also Clement of Alexandria's sermon, "On the Rich Man who Enters Heaven."

¹²⁴ Another model used to communicate the ideal of Christian giving is that of friendship. Luke presents the earliest community of believers fulfilling the ancient ideal of friendship, where friends, united by a common commitment to virtue, "hold all things in common" (Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 8.11; 1159b31): no one considered his or her property to be "his own," but rather treated it as the common property of all the believers and used his or her property to relieve need wherever it arose (Acts 4:32-35). Within this relationship there was sharing without power-plays.

¹²⁵ Spiritual favors and material favors can be exchanged in the reciprocal relationships between believers and churches: the latter is certainly not more "real" than the former, and even less glowing. See Rom 1:11-12; 15:26-27; 1 Cor 9:11; Gal 6:6.