

A South African exploration of the Jerusalem collection in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

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In response to a request made by the Jerusalem council (Gl 2:10), Paul collected funds from the Gentile churches for the poor in Jerusalem. This collection, also called the Jerusalem Collection, formed a big part of Paul's ministry, evidenced by the number of references in his epistles. This article aims to influence the contemporary church through a South African perspective, as a microcosm of the modern, global context, in an evaluation of the Jerusalem Collection. The aim is to provide clear strategies for the Church to contribute to improving poverty, economic inequality and unemployment, based on principles introduced by Paul through the Jerusalem Collection. The research was conducted through desk research and interviews. The outcome of this research showed that contemporary churches should employ a job-creation strategy through market-creating innovation to achieve a similar objective to Paul's concerning the Jerusalem Collection. Through the Jerusalem Collection, Paul sought to alleviate poverty while maintaining relative financial equality within the Church. Through the collection raised by Gentile churches for the poor in Jerusalem, Paul promoted partnership and unity across racial and social lines. The local church can replicate this in its contemporary context by emphasising job creation programmes, using Market Creating Innovation as a guiding paradigm.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Utilising Osmer's four tasks of practical theological reflection about job creation, church programmes and the meaning of the Jerusalem Collection in relation to the South African context leads to an interdisciplinary exploration between economics, sociology and theology.

Keywords: Jerusalem Collection; economic inequality; poverty; market-creating innovations; Corinthians; apartheid; job creation; South Africa.

Introduction

The World Economic Forum (Hutt 2016) lists economic inequality and financial exclusion as two of the world's 10 major challenges today. Inequality can be defined as "*the unequal distribution of income and opportunities between different groups in society*" (World of Labour 2020). From a statistical point of view, approximately 40% of the world's population lives on less than USD 2 per day, with a majority of this group located in Africa (Platt 2010:108–111), making socio-economic inequality still one of the most pressing challenges facing the African continent (Nangula 2004:237–239). In South Africa alone, over 30.4 million people are financially excluded and live beneath the poverty line (Koko 2019). This number is attributed to a significant increase in unemployment, totalling 34.9% during the third quarter of 2021 (Stats SA 2019). Communities such as Alexandra in Johannesburg have incredibly high levels of poverty; in particular, youth unemployment is excessive (Manyaka-Boshielo 2017:1).

At the same time, South Africa is currently in a post-apartheid period of reconciliation between people of different racial, social and cultural backgrounds, with financial exclusion and social classism still correlated with race in a South African context (Nyapokoto 2014:iii). Just like the need for reconciliation between races in South Africa, there was a similar need for unity and collaboration between Jews and Gentiles in the network of churches led by the apostle Paul (Ogereau 2012:360–378). Paul aimed to unite both Jews and Gentiles through their faith in Christ (Eph¹ 2:11–22).² Similarly, there was significant poverty in the Greco-Roman world, where most

1. Not all scholars agree on a Pauline authorship of Ephesians. Thus, there is some contestation in the literature.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural references are taken from the ESV.

people barely had enough financial resources to eat enough nutrients to nourish the human body (Friesen 2004:340).

Paul responded to both the socio-economic issues and the racial tension between Jews and Gentiles through the Jerusalem Collection (Ogereau 2012:360–378). In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, he pleads for a more economically equal society by instructing giving to the poor in Jerusalem, who were impoverished because of famine (Ac 11:28) and economic persecution because of their conversion to Christianity (Meulenberg & Joynt 2022:4). As the collection was sourced primarily from Gentile churches and was meant for impoverished Jews, this was also used to create unity between the two ethnic groups (Ogereau 2012:360–378). Paul used a collection from his churches that resembled elements of patronage and benefaction, a well-known phenomenon at that time, to achieve his goal of wealth distribution, financial inclusion and reconciliation (Downs 2008:3–27).

Alexandra and Sandton – a South African evaluation

Sandton is a wealthy suburb in Johannesburg, and Alexandra is an underserved, poverty-stricken area across the road from Sandton. The complex history of Alexandra and Sandton, both shaped by apartheid ideology that was aggressively pursued in the 1950s, explains the current social and economic divide that exists between Sandton and Alexandra (Nieftagodien & Bonner 2001:2). The word 'apartheid' translates to separateness or segregation in the Afrikaans language and was the adopted legal system of the National Party after its electoral triumph in 1948 (Black 2009:46). Apartheid remained the political governance methodology, underpinned by apartheid theology (Loubser 1996:323), for nearly 50 years until it was officially dismantled after the release of Nelson Mandela from Victor Verster Prison on Robben Island in February 1990. Apartheid was a perpetuation of systematic racism and segregation in South Africa's tumultuous history which commenced upon the arrival of Dutch colonialists on the shores of the Western Cape in 1652 (Meulenberg & Joynt 2022:37). One of the main components of apartheid was the conception of systematic exploitation of Africans, driven by the unearthing of minerals through South African mining operations (Nyapokoto 2014:2). This means that the current narrative when it comes to inequality, poverty and wealth in South Africa is interconnected with discussions concerning racial relations (Palmer & Parsons 1997:175), making relieving many South Africans from the daily socio-economic hardships they face the biggest challenge the country faces (Modise 2018:1).

Frantz Fanon (Nyapokoto 2014:70) describes segregated impoverished areas as places of non-being and wealthy, often suburban areas, as places of being. In light of this, Sandton can be described as a place of being and Alexandra as a place of non-being (Nyapokoto 2014:iii). Within the place of being, there is abundance, safety, structure and relative peace, while in the place of non-being, poverty, crime and violence are the order of the day (Nyapokoto 2014:70). The fact that this is often

divided along racial lines, where white South Africans represent wealth and black South Africans represent poverty, makes the current situation even more problematic.

The current context in South Africa relating to the vast disparity in economic and socio-economic access between, for example, Alexandra and Sandton residents cannot be simplified by placing the entirety of its blame at the feet of the apartheid regime. Another contributing factor to the current situation, when it comes to the extreme inequality between Alexandra and Sandton, is the low economic growth South Africa has experienced over the last 10 years (Meulenberg & Joynt 2022:45). In 2020, more than 18 million South Africans received social grants which amounts to an estimated population share of 31% (Black 2009:54). This trend has continued where South Africa currently has more recipients of social grants than formally employed people (Businessstech 2021). Another reason is the poor performance of South Africa's education system, which was rated 126th out of 138 countries during the World Economic Forum in 2016–2017 (Mtantato 2018). Failure of South Africa's education negatively impacts the economy by (1) limiting the labour force's direct contribution to economic growth because of the lack of relevant skills and (2) resulting in income inequality, unemployment, and low productivity.

To change the current socio-economic context relating to unemployment, poverty and economic inequality, a different approach to economic development is required in Alexandra township. Historically, development work has often focused on treating symptoms of poverty rather than sourcing sustainable solutions to assist people out of the poverty cycle (Christensen, Ojomo & Dillon 2019:235). Many developing countries have adopted a push strategy, meaning that the development of communities and people is pushed upon them, generally by the government and civil society. This often results in building new wells, school classrooms, hospitals, houses or roads; however, the problem is that these resources that are pushed into the community are often not well maintained, resulting in broken, abandoned or significantly aged infrastructure (Christensen et al. 2019:92). A better strategy is a pull strategy. This strategy is focused on creating access for communities and people to products and services to which they currently are non-consumers. Market-creating innovations enable this process. Similarly, most South African churches are involved with compassion-related poverty relief programmes. The biblical mandate compels the church to meet the unmet needs of the marginalised, while simultaneously creating sustainable solutions to break the poverty cycle (Black 2009:4).

The main focus of this article³ is to provide a contemporary interpretation of the Jerusalem Collection (2 Cor 8 and 9) that offers a pragmatic solution to economic inequality and ethnic tensions, primarily in developing countries. The research is located within the discipline of practical theology and the sub-discipline of ecclesiology, as it reflects

3.This article is based on a research study conducted at two church-linked job-creation organisations.

on the theological doctrine and the praxis of the church concerning job creation and poverty alleviation (Meulenberg & Joynt 2022). Osmer's (2008) practical theological reflection methodology's four tasks are utilised as the theoretical framework. Interviews were conducted with members of two Sandton-based churches, community members in Alexandra, and industry specialists regarding job creation programmes. A two-pronged research approach was adopted consisting of semi-structured interviews and a scholarly review of existing theories, models and best practices concerning the topic. Participants for interviews were selected through snowball sampling (Nikolopoulou 2022), purposeful sampling (Crossman 2020) and convenience sampling (Nikolopoulou 2022).⁴ After completing an exegesis relating to the main normative text, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, the relevance of the collection for today's church was examined through a South African perspective.

Exegesis: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

There were most likely two major collections carried out by the Apostle Paul. The first collection served as an emergency relief fund to assist those affected by a severe famine in Judea. This was prophesied by a New Testament prophet named Agabus (Ac 11:27–30). The purpose of the second collection is more complicated and is the collection Paul references in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 (Downs 2016:39). Other references to the Jerusalem Collection are made in Romans 15:26; Acts 11:29–30; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4, and Galatians 2:10. The most elaborate motivation for the Jerusalem Collection to any Pauline church is made in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

The second Jerusalem Collection must have originated during the Jerusalem Council, which took place in approximately 49 AD (Matera 2003:182). During this council, Paul was faced with a formal request made by Peter, James and John, where they specifically asked him to 'remember the poor' (Gl 2:10). Paul noted his eagerness to act on this request, and there is some evidence in 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 that he had already instructed the Galatians on how they should prepare a collection. He subsequently gave the Corinthians the same instructions (Matera 2003:182). After the Corinthians started to implement the collection, following Paul's request in the first epistle to the church, something impeded the ongoing progress. This is the main reason Paul uses as a compelling argument for the Corinthians to complete what they began the year prior (2 Cor 8:10). The most probable reason for Paul to send Titus back to Corinth was to ensure that he would finalise the Jerusalem Collection within the church (Barnett 1997:387–388).

⁴Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Purposeful sampling is selecting participants based on specific criteria useful for the research project, and convenience sampling is a technique used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population that is easiest accessible to the researcher.

Paul hoped that the collection would unite the estranged Jewish and Gentile churches (Matera 2003:183). From a physical standpoint, however, the collection did not have a lasting and sustainable impact, as it most likely only temporarily relieved the immediate needs of the poor in Jerusalem. The theological message of God's abundance and overflowing grace, however, lasts throughout the ages (Matera 2003:184). Three themes, therefore, arise when analysing the Jerusalem Collection in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, namely: patronage; grace and love; and equality and unity.

Patronage

Paul uses patronage, as a tool to convince the Corinthians to partake in the collection. Within the Greco-Roman world, people with similar goals often came together as a collective in the form of a voluntary association or a collegium. People united in these collegia through their shared ethnicity, networks, work relations or general cultural preferences (Downs 2016:73–120). Within these associations the practice of Greek benefaction, comparable with Roman patronage, was common practice. Benefaction or patronage was based on the reciprocity of gifts by wealthy leaders, or benefactors, who, by contributing financially to events, construction projects and similar occasions, would generate public honour in a community. Because of the regularity of this practice, collections such as the Jerusalem Collection were well known to the general public (Downs 2016:73–120). The principles of benefaction are evidently noticeable when reading 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul lists the benefits for the church relating to giving financially to the poor in Jerusalem. Paul indicates that giving is an integral part of ministry [διακονία] (2 Cor 8:4; 9:1), that it is a blessing [εὐλογία] (2 Cor 9:5), he considers it a grace [χάρις] and finally, that it shows spiritual commitment or service to God [λειτουργία] (2 Cor 9:12).

Grace and love

From a theological perspective, Paul is certain that God's grace ensures that the generous giver unites spiritually with the receiver (Barnett 1997:388). This is evident when one observes the frequent use of the word 'charis' (grace) in these chapters. Paul informs the Corinthians concerning the manner in which the 'grace of God' was given by God to the Macedonian churches (Matera 2003:185). As a direct consequence of the gospel working within the Macedonian churches, since Paul returned to them, the members of these churches have continuously given themselves to the Lord. This has proven to have a deep connection when it comes to their generosity as they begged Paul to participate in the Jerusalem Collection (2 Cor 8:5). Paul has directly witnessed their generosity, despite their circumstances of extreme poverty (2 Cor 8:2–3), which according to Paul was a result of the grace that God gave them (Barnett 1997:390).

The freedom in which the Corinthians can give, and the Macedonians sacrificially gave towards the collection, is because of the grace and divine favour of God. Inward states and the consequent outward positive manifestations are

because of the hidden influence of the Holy Spirit (Hodge 2014:624). The joy of the Macedonians was a direct result of their freedom in giving. Similarly, there is a direct connection in this verse between the poverty in which they lived and their liberality (Hodge 2014:625).

Paul points out the failure of generosity on the Corinthians' part, this in contrast to Christ who voluntarily became poor [δι' ὑμᾶς], so that the Corinthians could be made rich. Being rich [πλούσις ὄν], indicates Christ's 'un-begun' pre-existence in the possession of the glory which he had with the Father and Holy Spirit (Hodge 2014:632–633). He temporarily became poor during his incarnation; 'that you might be rich' describes and points towards the benefits of atonement and that by his gracious impoverishment, they were enriched. The passage 2 Corinthians 8:9 therefore has a strong soteriological dimension (Matera 2003:191). Paul, in relation to the Jerusalem Collection, does not make any mention of money (Matera 2003:181). In addition to this, Paul often speaks about abundance, need, abounding and generosity to further emphasise the grace relating to the collection. The collection's focus is not only on financial relief, but also an open invitation to the Corinthians to partake in God's grace. Therefore, the main topic in the chapters is God, who enables Christians to be both gracious and generous, because he is the very source of all generosity (Matera 2003:181).

Paul therefore argues that the church can give towards the Jerusalem Collection out of love [ἀγαπᾶτε], as an act of worship to God (Ogereau 2010:364). This means that by participating in the Jerusalem Collection, a believer had the opportunity to imitate the grace of Christ, 'who was rich in heaven, but chose to become poor for our sake so that in the end we might be rich' (2 Cor 8:9). According to Paul, this also means that through this same grace, the offering does not originate from human endeavours; but that God himself is the originator of the offering (Downs 2016:132–133). Biblical giving is not to be offered out of obligation but rather always be offered voluntarily and with a cheerful heart after thoughtful consideration. When this is done as an act of worship, giving is indeed a great blessing [εὐλογία].

Equality and unity

Concerning equality, the collection would right the scales towards equality within the church (Matera 2003:192–193). To illuminate the principle of equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13 and 14, Paul refers to Exodus 16. In this Old Testament passage, Moses highlights that during the time in the wilderness wanderings, God miraculously provided to the Israelites through manna from heaven. The Israelites could only access 'an omer each' of this manna, so that everyone would have an equal share of God's provision. If some Israelites gathered more, they would, however, have nothing left over, while those who gathered less, never had a shortage of manna either. The equality therefore is not

focused on equal property ownership, but rather equal relief from the burden of need and poverty (Hodge 2014:637).

Paul's argument therefore is that God, through his grace, manifested in Christ, has provided sufficiently within his global church. In Paul's case, this means that God has provided sufficiently between the Jewish and Gentile churches. Paul is thus arguing for a manna economy where the daily needs of Christians are met irrespective of their ethnicity and/or social status (Tucker 2014:54). This was an important issue during the 1st century. Surviving the day was not as common in 1st century Judea, as it is in the contemporary Western world and even in comparison to the developing world; this is probably why Jesus told his disciples to pray for their daily bread (Mt 6:11). Placing the offering in that context, Paul is teaching his missionary churches valuable and indeed crucial economic principles, which set the church apart from other religions at the time (Tucker 2014:52–53).

A final important argument provided by Paul is based on a shared consciousness among believers, being the assurance that believers, despite coming from various race, gender, age and social status, are one body in Christ. This unique fellowship [κοινωνία] is the ground of the praise of others (Hodge 2014:659). In the same verse (2 Cor 9:13), Paul describes the collection as *diakonia* [ministry] and that the direct result of this ministry is praise [*doxazontes*] to God through the obedience of the Corinthians (Matera 2003:210).

A contemporary South African consideration

Similar to Paul's day, there is significant financial inequality within today's global church. In this research study's context, Sandton portrays the wealthy community, and according to the principles derived from the normative text, the churches from Sandton should be more concerned with assisting churches in the developing world, which, in this research study's context, would be Alexandra. A partnership [κοινωνία] between predominantly Caucasian Sandton and African Alexandra can promote cross-ethnic unity within the church in these communities. In order to contextualise the principles from the Jerusalem Collection, interviews and desk research have informed four propositions (systemic change, access to socio-economic opportunities, change of mindsets, direct job creation) for Sandton-based churches to assist Alexandra township.

Systemic change

The first thing to recognise is that poverty is not an individualised entity. Systemically, people are living in poverty, and this means that every part of a system needs to be analysed and further developed, including ideologically, socio-economically and sociologically (Black 2009:49).

Addressing the systems that perpetuate poverty is important when it comes to changing the narrative of millions of South Africans living in townships (Mtantato 2018). If these systems fail to change, the masses will be left behind, and society will continue to see outbursts of frustration expressed by the burning of tyres in the streets, the looting of shops, and the destruction of schools and libraries. Relative equality (2 Cor 8:13–14) cannot be achieved unless there is a significant change in economic and socio-economic systems that currently make-up society.

Churches can advocate for systemic changes to structural societal problems, in particular when the current praxis undermines human rights (Davila 2009). This goes beyond raising awareness towards the breaking down of systemic barriers that keep people in poverty or the lack of access to relevant opportunities. Scripturally speaking, Christians are implored to be voices for the voiceless (Pr 31:1–9), to take care of the orphans and widows (Jm 1:27) and for those who are impoverished. Thus, the church can play an advocacy role in this, where the truth is spoken and advice is given to the political and industrial powers in the country (Davila 2009).

Access to socio-economic opportunities

Poverty is transformed through education, which is the catalyst for change, as good quality education can liberate the mind (Nyapokoto 2014:111). There must be access to education, health and personal safety. Education can either improve the standard of education in the community or provide opportunities for children to be educated outside of the township. Once someone is educated, they have a skill that can contribute towards economic growth (Williams 2015:55–57). Following education and healthcare, it is important for unemployed youth to have access to knowledge through skills programmes such as work readiness, information communication technology (ICT) and various other skills that are relevant for sustainable employment, as a skilful workforce means economic growth and a reduction in poverty (Ndungane 2002). Once they are employed, they get an income that sustains them and their families. The principle here is to teach people to fish rather than to hand out a fish. Unity across racial lines can be established when affluent, predominantly white, Sandton based churches act out of love [*ἀγαπᾶτε*] and assist African churches from Alexandra. (Bowers du Toit and Nkomo 2014:1–5).

To achieve this, wealthy Sandton-based churches can and should be significant contributors to charitable organisations that are directly implementing job creation initiatives (Beukes 2002:9). Offering job creation initiatives is not a core mandate of the church, but churches do have a responsibility to partner with social entrepreneurs, for example, and contribute to an environment that enhances job creation and reduces the dependency on government grants (Manyaka-Boshielo 2017:1). Funding from churches, spent on the right initiatives, can address challenges local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have with regard to funding.

Change of mindsets

Addressing the mindsets that keep people in poverty is important. Having lived in communities that are characterised by a lack of access to opportunities for generations means that there is a certain poverty mentality that is passed on unconsciously. Mindset shifts become central to how poverty, including its constructs, is understood. A big part of getting out of poverty is a change of mindset where people in poverty often make poor financial decisions to fulfil an immediate desire for relief of the suffering experienced by living in poverty (Janse van Rensburg 2013:2) and to look for relevant opportunities to better oneself. There is often a correlation between poverty and low self-esteem, leading to an unbelief in one's own abilities (Mabuza 2010:66–67). From a Christian point of view, one of the most profound things that can change people's mindsets is that God values every individual.

Culture change and therefore a change of mindsets can trigger the development of jobs and the active participation of people in the economy. The moment people become less reliant on the state to solve their daily challenges, their worldview and view of their direct environment change. This cultural shift is often a significant contributor towards crime and corruption reductions (Christensen et al. 2019:35).

Direct job creation

Where Paul used patronage, the contemporary church can use job creation, as a tool to achieve relative equality, unity and partnership within the church. An important component of direct job creation is entrepreneurship. By accepting the informal economy as a part of the solution regarding the reduction of poverty and unemployment, communities such as Alexandra can become significantly more entrepreneurial (Alcock 2018:270). If someone is unable to access employment opportunities or relevant social capital, then entrepreneurship is the only opportunity to sustainably break the cycle of poverty. Even though entrepreneurship is challenging, entrepreneurs and particularly social entrepreneurs are the ones who create jobs in their communities (Beukes 2022:9).

According to Christensen et al. (2019:34–35), every single market is based on three outcomes, namely, profits, jobs and cultural changes. These three outcomes are the very foundation for future growth and are also currently inhibiting the community of Alexandra to grow, especially if they are focused on high growth sectors (Magwentshu et al. 2019:3). Organisations in Alexandra do not make sufficient profits, nor are they creating the number of jobs required for employment in the community to grow, which has led to crime and high levels of local corruption. For any market to be sustainable, it must create organisations that showcase profitability. The profits generated provide the potential for further economic growth and are the basis for job creation, the development of new technologies and increased productivity (Kritikos 2012:1). For the markets to deliver

effectively on the promised outcome to its new customers, distribution, sales and production channels have to be created, which means that more people find employment.

Conclusion

Through the Jerusalem Collection as recorded in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul, practically speaking, aimed to relieve poverty, while ensuring that a level of relative financial equality was achieved within the church. By ensuring that Gentile churches gave towards the poor in Jerusalem, Paul also promoted partnership and unity within the church. This partnership had to lead to fellowship across racial and social lines. The third theological theme of the passage related to giving as an act of worship. As important as the inter-congregational relationships were, the Jerusalem Collection was first and foremost a response to the grace [χάρις] God had given the Corinthians.

Translating this to contemporary South Africa, the church can achieve the same objectives by focusing on contributing to: (1) systemic change to reduce systemic poverty, inequality and unemployment; (2) promote unity and equality in the long term; to assist with the provision of access to socio-economic services like education; and (3) change mindsets for better decision making.

The tool Paul used to promote his collection was patronage. The South African consideration suggests that churches developing job-creation programmes in today's context would achieve similar outcomes concerning poverty alleviation, unity, grace and relative equality as to what Paul had in mind with the Jerusalem Collection.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

A.M.M. contributed to conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation and original first draft. S.J. was the supervisor and contributed to reviewing and editing of the original first draft.

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Data availability

Raw data of interviews conducted can be made available by the corresponding author, A.M.M., upon reasonable request.

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