

“God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity”

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ABSTRACT: This study contributes to a renewed interest in the Christian Deity by employing the cultural model of benefactor-client relations. What is fresh here is an enlarged model of this pattern of social relations and fresh, apt, and plentiful illustrations of it in antiquity. The patron-client model is expanded by concern for types of reciprocity and classification of what is exchanged. Typical titles of God-as-benefactor are examined in light of media of exchange, especially power, knowledge, and material benefaction. Then several leading questions are asked: Why does God indeed give benefaction? What kind of reciprocity is in view? What kind of debt is incurred? Finally, what do clients return to God? Elites in antiquity state that God wants nothing and needs nothing. Yet mortals have offered sacrifice, a form of inducement, which practice Christians and philosophers rejected.

1.0 State of the Question, Thesis and Plan of Development

Nils Dahl published a short article in a small journal on a major topic, “The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology,” namely God.¹ Since then, only occasional studies have appeared, leaving the “neglected factor” still quite neglected. Scholars who took up Dahl’s challenge tended to go about their task in an impressionistic manner, with little fresh data or appropriate models for interpretation. Most recent studies of God in early Christianity have tended to ignore cultural and social materials.

This study, however, takes up the consideration of the Deity in antiquity by means of the cultural model of benefactor- client relations. Scholarship of course already provides a rich body of anthropological materials on patron-client relations,² as well as historical investigations of benefactor/patron and client relationships in Greece and Rome.³ But we will make three significant contributions to the study of God as benefactor-patron in antiquity. First, we supplement the prevailing model of patron-client relations with materials about types of reciprocity and classification of benefits bestowed and returned.. Second, this study contains a fresh cache of primary material from antiquity illustrative of the benefaction model. Thus, readers have access to a rich database of ancient discourse about gods. Finally, whereas most studies of benefaction treat only the relationship of mortal benefactor and mortal client, we focus on the discourse about a divine Benefactor with mortal clients.⁴ Therefore this study enlarges our cultural model of benefaction, illustrates it with fresh data, and surfaces pertinent ancient discourse about God-Benefactor and mortal clients. The materials presented here mostly come from Greco-Roman sources about the gods of antiquity. While we do not suggest that Israelite materials were unimportant for interpreting New Testament and early church discourse on the God of Israel, this study focuses on the Greco-Roman influence on and contribution to God-talk in Christianity.

2.0 Model of Benefactor/Patron - Client Relations

Social historians of ancient benefactor- client relations as well as modern anthropologists provide the basis for our model. In fact, many social historians have themselves made extensive use of the work of the anthropologists, with the result that the current consensus on the topic represents a confluence of precise historical data and exact theoretical interpretation. The model informs the historian of what data is likely to appear and how to interpret it when discovered. Our presentation of the model of benefactor - client relations contains three major components: 1. characteristics of patron - client relationship, 2. types of reciprocity which characterize the exchange between patron and client, and 3. classification of what is exchanged in the relationship.

2.1 Patronage. The following definition broadly describes patronage as an interpretative model which explains and interprets a wide spectrum of relationships.

Patronage is a model or analytical construct which the social scientist applies in order to understand and explain a range of apparent different social relationships: God - man, saint - devotee, godfather - godchild, lord - vassal, landlord - tenant, politician - voter, professor - student, and so forth..⁵

Anthropologists and historians agree upon the following elements characteristic of benefactor–client relations. This list, based on the classic exposition in Eisenstadt and Roniger,⁶ contains suggestions and clarifications made by other scholars.⁷

1. Asymmetrical relationship, i.e. between parties of different status, thus representing a vertical dimension of superior and inferior relationships.⁸

2. Simultaneous exchange of different types of resources, above all instrumental, economic and political ones by the benefactor, in response to which the client promises reciprocity, solidarity and loyalty..

3 Interpersonal obligation is prevalent, couched in terms of personal loyalty or attachment between patrons and clients.⁹

4. Favoritism is frequently present.¹⁰

5. Reciprocity: as basic goods and services are exchanged, clear notions of reciprocity arise; the client who incurs a debt has obligations to the patron.¹¹

6. “Kinship glaze” over the relationship reduces the crassness of the exchange; the patron is “father” to the client.¹²

7. Honor, both given and received, is a significant feature of these relationships.¹³

Human benefactor-client relationships tend to be asymmetrical, reciprocal, voluntary, often including favoritism, focused on honor and respect, and held together by “good will” or faithfulness. As we shall see, changes will occur when this scheme is applied to the relationship of gods and mortals.

2.2 Reciprocity, Types of. To understand what patrons and clients exchange, let us first consider the very phenomenon of reciprocity: what types are there and between what kinds of partners is each type practiced? Bruce Malina¹⁴ mediates to biblical scholarship cultural theories of exchange, especially that of Marshall Sahlins.¹⁵ Theorists identify three types of reciprocity pertinent to the ancient Mediterranean:

1. generalized reciprocity, the solidarity extreme
2. balanced reciprocity, the midpoint
3. negative reciprocity, the unsocial extreme.¹⁶

Generalized reciprocity describes "altruistic" interactions whereby the interests of "the other are primary"(i.e., "solidarity extreme"). It is generally extended to kin-group members (i.e., "charity begins at home") and is illustrated in Matt 7:11. Balanced reciprocity looks to mutual interests, in a balanced fashion (i.e., quid-pro-quo exchange). It has one's neighbors and villagers in view; illustrations of it include 1 Cor 9:3-12; Matt 10:10. Negative reciprocity seeks self- interest at the expense of "the other," who probably is a stranger or an enemy; hence it is the "unsocial extreme." Parables such as Luke 10:30 and 19:22 illustrate it.

Philo describes these three abstract types of reciprocity when he asks the question: "Why did God create?" Philo begins with a text, "Noah found grace with the Lord God" (Gen 6:8), then asks about this "grace," whether it was something earned or deserved, and thus expressive of a balanced reciprocity between God and Noah. He rejected any notion of "balance" here, and offered another explanation.

The second explanation ("he was thought worthy of grace") is founded on a not unreasonable idea, that the Cause judges those worthy of His gifts, who do not deface with base practices the coin within them which bears the stamp of God, even the sacred mind. And yet perhaps that explanation is not the true one.¹⁷

Since no balanced reciprocity whatsoever is appropriate, Philo offers a third explanation, which turns to a different form of reciprocity, not balanced, but generalized:

[Moses] . . . found this to be the highest truth, that all things are the grace or gift of God – earth, water, air, fire, sun, stars, heaven, all plants and animals. . . But God has given His good things in abundance, not because He judged anything worthy of grace, but looking to His eternal goodness, and thinking that to be beneficent was incumbent upon His blessed and happy nature. So that if anyone should ask me what was the motive for the creation of the world, I will answer that it was the goodness of the Existent, that goodness which is the oldest of His bounties and itself the source of others (Unchangeableness of God 107-108).

Thus creation was a singular act of generalized reciprocity, which most appropriately suits God: “to be beneficent was incumbent upon His blessed and happy nature.” To be God means to bestow unmerited blessings and to act according to the “solidarity extreme.”

2.3 What Is Exchanged? Our last critical task is to finish our model by considering what kinds of favors are bestowed or exchanged in generalized and balanced reciprocity in benefactor- client relations. One could attempt a comprehensive compilation of things for which mortals petition the gods and for which benefactor are praised. Comprehensive, yes; but helter-skelter. What is needed is a way to classify the materials in these exchanges. Fortunately theorists provide us with a model for classifying the various items in our ancient lists so as to bring greater clarity and understanding to them. The primary architect of this model is Talcott Parsons, whose work has been digested for biblical scholars by Bruce Malina.¹⁸

When people seek to have an effect on others, their general means of achieving that can be abstracted into four "general symbolic media," 1. power,¹⁹ 2. commitment,²⁰ 3. material goods and 4. influence.²¹ Because of their power, kings and generals can protect and deliver their subjects. Gifts of seed, food, dowries for daughters, and hospitality illustrate inducement. As regards influence, teachers give instruction to students; people who consult the sybils, the oracles or the prophets are seeking both influence-as-knowledge and influence-as-access. Finally commitment refers to faithfulness, loyalty, obedience, as well as to fictive-kin bonds, grants of honor and respect (i.e., doxologies and hymns to the gods), as well as the language of “friends” and friendship. Consider one example: Rome’s legions risk their lives for it (commitment) and so participate in extending Rome’s power, in recompense for which Rome

grants them pensions or lands in a colony (inducement) and perhaps public honoring, such as a Roman triumph (commitment).

3.0 God as Benefactor/Patron.

While there is a technical Greek term for “benefactor” (εὐεργετης), it would be a mistake to collect instances of it alone and to conduct our examination of god as “benefactor” based only on that term.²²

Three observations are in order: 1) the ancients used many synonyms for “benefactor”; 2) they combined certain titles apropos of “benefactor,” such as “savior and benefactor”; and 3) they strung together many titles of a deity. Εὐεργετης, then, is neither the only nor even the most significant title when considering god as Benefactor. Thus we shall examine individually the six most frequent, significant names expressive of benefaction, and then consider a deity adorned with many or all of them.

1. “King”(Βασιλεύς). When Dio calls Zeus “king,” he refers to the positive results of his rule: “In like manner do the gods act, and especially the great King of Kings (βασιλεὺς βασιλέων), Zeus, who is the common protector and father (κηδεμῶν και πατήρ) of men and gods” (Oration 2.75). Often “king” and “father” are found in combination, suggesting the positive governance by a benefactor: “Yet all these poets . . . call the first and greatest god Father of the whole rational family collectively, yes, and King besides. . . men erect altars to Zeus the King and, what is more, some do not hesitate even to call him Father in their prayers” (Dio Chrysostom, Oration 36.35-36).

2. “Father” (Πατήρ). Greeks and Semites frequently call god “Father.” For example, Dio Chrysostom states: “At that time, the Creator and Father (δημιουργὶς και πατήρ) of the World, beholding the work of his hands. . .” (Oration 36.60). Cicero comments: “. . . the poets call him ‘father of gods and men,’ and our ancestors entitled him ‘best and greatest,’ putting the title ‘best,’ that is most beneficent, before that of ‘greatest,’ because universal beneficence is greater, or at least more loveable, than the possession of great wealth” (Nature of the Gods 1.64). The meaning of this title, however, must be derived from examination of the paternal role, that is, the rights and duties of earthly fathers. The duties of a father include socialization of his children, protection and nurture of them, and the like.²³ It is his right that his children acknowledge him, as in “Honor your father and your mother.” In time Caesar described himself as

the Pater Patriae, clearly extending the notion of domestic benefactor to the political arena.²⁴ “Father,” then, was a term most suitable to a Benefactor.

3. “Savior (Σωτήρ)” The various studies of “savior” indicate that it enjoyed a wide range of meaning.²⁵ A savior is one who: 1) rescues another from danger and peril, such as war, illness, judicial condemnation, floods and famines; 2) protects and preserves the polis and its citizens; 3) inaugurates a golden age;²⁶ and 4) benefits others.²⁷ In this vein Foerster cites an inscription how on the annual feast of Zeus σωσίπολις the priests of Magnesia prayed for “the σωτηρία of the city, country, citizens, wives, children and other residents, for peace, for wealth, for the growth of the grain and other fruits and cattle.”²⁸ Thus without specification, it will be difficult to know just what nuance of “savior” an author has in mind. If it refers to rescue, then the deity’s power is in view; if maintenance of good status or general benefaction, then inducement.

4. “Benefactor (Εὐεργέτης)” Like “Savior,” this is a term of many meanings. As one scholar noted, “Gods and heroes, kings and statesmen, philosophers, inventors and physicians are hailed as benefactors because of their contributions to the development of the race.”²⁹ While kings exercise power benevolently and philosophers provide wisdom, most benefactors bestowed material benefits, that is, inducement. Finally, although he is by no means the only one to say so, Philo calls attention to the benefaction of commitment which God cultivates:

He [God] shall no longer exhibit toward me the masterfulness that characterizes the rule of an autocrat, but the readiness to bless that marks the power that is in every way kindly, and bent on the welfare of men. He shall do away with the fear we feel before Him as Master, and implant in the soul the loyalty and affection that goes out to Him as Benefactor (εὐεργέτης)” (Noah as Planter 90, emphasis added).

In addition, we commonly find εὐεργετης in combination with other titles, often with σωτηρ, a pattern common among mortals³⁰ and immortals.³¹

5. “Creator (Δημιουργός)” Whereas δημιουργός served as the a common Greek description of the deity’s creative activity, the LXX totally avoided it and chose instead κτίστης.³² Although δημιουργός

ripened in meaning over the years, it never lost its sense of builder or workman (i.e., “God builds the city,” Heb 11:10).³³ In terms of general symbolic media, “creator” contains power (to order and maintain the cosmos), inducement (foods and animals for human use), commitment (faithfulness in maintaining a world fit for god’s offspring), and influence (wisdom which is imbedded in creation). Like other synonyms of benefactor, δημιουργός appears in combination. For example, “All of these things did the great Creator and Master of the universe (Ὁ μέγας δημιουργὶς καὶ δεσπότης) ordain to be in peace” (1 Clement 20.11); also, “At that time, the Creator and Father (δημιουργὶς καὶ πατήρ) of the World, beholding the work of his hands. . .” (Dio Chrysostom, Oration 36.60).

6. “Sovereign” (Δεσπότης). This is an unusual term for a benefactor for it often describes the relation of master to slave (e.g., Philo, Moses 1.201). It expresses above all power, and fear (see Philo, Heir 22-23). Yet it is frequently found in Hellenistic prayers, perhaps because it emphasizes the dependence of the person petitioning the deity.³⁴ Some writers used it in combination with other benefactor terms, thus softening its hard edges.³⁵ Christian usage, however, generally connotes divine benevolence and power. For example, Simeon prays after blessing Jesus, “Lord (δέσποτα), now let your servant depart in peace. . .for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:29; see Acts 4:24). The clearest use of the benevolent connotation of this name occurs in 1 Clement: “Let us learn that in generation after generation the Master (δεσπότης) has given a place of repentance to those who turn to him” (7:5); and “Through Noah the Master (δεσπότης) saved the living creatures which entered in concord into the Ark (9:4; see also 11:1; 36:2).

Benefactor titles are not just paired, but often strung together. For example, Plutarch quotes a Stoic about God: “Zeus the Savior and Sire, the Father of Right, of Order and of Peace” (Stoic Self-Contradictions 1049A) and “Savior, Gracious, Averter of Evil” (Common Conceptions 1076B). We find formal reflection on this piling up of titles in still another title, “many-named” (πολυωνμός).³⁶ Finally, Seneca provides the perfect illustration:

You may address this being who is the author of this world of ours by different names; it will be right for you to call him Jupiter Best and Greatest, and the Thunderer and the Stayer. . .Any name you choose will

be properly applied to him if it connotes some force that operates in the domain of heaven – his titles may be as countless as are his benefits (Benefits 4.7.1).³⁷

Although we focus here on the role of patron in the ancient system of patronage and clientelism, another figure needs be mentioned, even if briefly, namely, the “broker,” whom the ancients understood according to a variety of names and functions. Patrons and/or clients frequently used forms of brokerage and mediation, which we examine to see where and how a broker intercedes, brokers, and serves as go-between for heavenly Patron or earthly clients.³⁸

Greco-Roman deities often employed intermediaries to communicate with and effect mortals, such as Hermes/Mercury³⁹ or oracles/prophets or sybils.⁴⁰ Mortals in turn employed persons whom we call “priests” to sacrifice, petition, and consult the deity; the Romans had a colleges of priests in charge of civic religion, whose head was known as the pontifex maximus. On the strictly human level, mortals used mediators and go-betweens for purposes of trade, politics, legal matters, and the like.⁴¹

Who made a good broker? Why be a broker? The best broker was a person trusted by both patron and client. He had a foot in both worlds, so that he appreciated the interests of both parties and strove to bridge them effectively. Why be a broker? If typical patrons expected some return for patronage, so too the broker received a tariff for services rendered. Why are brokers necessary at all? If the ancient deities were inaccessible, so too earthly monarchs; then some go-between was necessary safely and honorably to approach the one who lives “in unapproachable light.” Similarly the blessed gods might be thought to be above direct involvement in human affairs, for which purpose they employed angels, minor gods and the like.

The place where brokerage material effects New Testament scholarship is the interpretation of Jesus as the unique and necessary mediator. He is formally honored as the “one mediator” (1 Tim 2:5), as well as the consummate priest, who not only has made purification for sins (Heb 1:3) but lives forever to make intercession on our behalf (Heb 7:25). The etic term, “mediator,” includes emic functions such as Prophet, King, Messiah, Priest and the like. Moreover, Jesus bridges the heavenly and earthly worlds. God, the heavenly benefactor, has bestowed on us all benefaction through Jesus (e.g. Eph 1:3-10). Similar, all mortal

prayers are made to God through Jesus, either petitionary prayers (Rom 1 :8, 7:25; 1 Cor 15:57) or doxologies (Heb 13:20-21; Jude 25). Jesus, then, mediates the heavenly patronage of God to us, even as he functions to mediate earthly petition and praise to the heavenly patron. Moreover, not only is the first creation said to be achieved through Jesus (John 1:13), but especially the new creation (1 Cor 8:6). Likewise at the great assize, God will “through Jesus bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thess 4:14) and “. . . judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ “ (Rom 2:16). But since our focus is on God as broker, we return to that central topic.

4.0 What Does a Benefactor God Bestow?

We could compile a database of benefaction from two sources: 1) petitions made to the deity and 2) virtues for which benefactor-deities are praised. For example, Norman Johnson catalogues the “aims of the prayers” found in the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, and so provides the following list of potential benefactions: 1) help in warfare, 2) deliverance from enemies outside of war, 3) safe journey, 4) rain, 5) food and drink, 6) health, 7) demon riddance, 8) procreation, 9) establishing/restoring the nation, 10) the Temple and its sacrifices, and 11) righteousness and justice.⁴² Similarly, Jon Mikalson⁴³ undertook the same task for Greek prayers and lists the following: 1) “good will” of the god, 2) success in battle, 3) “information,” 4) agriculture, 5) health and healing, 6) wealth,⁴⁴ and 7) ripe old age. Whether petition or praise, mortals consistently credit their gods with the ability to grant certain benefactions.

We have a many composite statements illustrative of the benefactions which deities bestow on mortals. The following prayer represents a compendium of the petitions/benefactions for which Greeks might petition their deity.

I start cultivating the good will of the gods. And I try to behave so that it may be right for me when I pray, to acquire good health (ὑγείας), physical strength (ὁῶμης), distinction in the city (τιμς ἰν πόλει), good will among friends (εὐνοίας ἰν φίλοις), survival with honour in war (ἰν πολέμῳ σωτηρίας), and wealth (πλούτου) that has been increased by honest means (Xenophon, Oec 11.8; see Seneca Benefits 3.9.2).

Three symbolic media are in view: commitment (“distinction in the city” and “good will”), power (“survival in war”), and inducement (“good health,” “physical strength” and “wealth”).

Besides composite petitions to the Deity, scrutiny of God’s praises also enriches our database. Diodorus of Sicily praises the god Uranus for the following benefactions; we have added the numbering and emphasis to facilitate the grasp of the benefactions:

Their first king was Uranus, and he [1] gathered the human beings within the shelter of a walled city and [2] caused his subjects to cease lawless ways and bestial manner of living, discovering for them the uses of cultivated fruits, how to store them up, and not a few other things of benefit to man; [3] he subdued the larger part of the inhabited earth. . . [4] And since he was a careful observer of the stars he foretold many things which would take place throughout the world; [5] and for the common people he introduced the year on the basis of the movement of the sun and the months on that of the moon (3.56.3-5).

The Deity, therefore, bestowed on mortals an orderly life: inducement (dwelling in cities, agriculture, possession of habitable land); influence (ability to read the patterns of stars and the sky, and a calendar which regulated annual and monthly life); power (shelter and protection of a walled city); commitment (benevolent, overarching reason for doing any of this)..

Similarly, Dio Chrysostom comprehensively praises Zeus. After praising him as “many-named,”⁴⁵ Dio then explains each title, formally linking it with its corresponding benefaction.

He is addressed as “King” because of his dominion and power; as “Father,” on account of his solicitude and gentleness; as “Protector of Cities” in that he upholds the law and the commonweal; as “Guardian of the Race” on account of the tie of kinship which unites gods and men; as “Lord of Friends and Comrades” because he brings all men together and wills that they be friendly. . . as “Protector of Suppliants” since he inclines his ear and is gracious to men when they pray; as “God of Refuge” because he gives refuge from evil; as “God of Hospitality” because it is the very beginning of friendship not to be unmindful of strangers. . . and as “God of Wealth and Increase” since he causes all fruitage and is the giver of wealth and sustenance (Oration 1.40-41; see Oration 39.8)

Using the classification of power, commitment, inducement, and influence, let us

abstract Dio's remarks about Zeus and classify them appropriately.⁴⁶

| Medium of Exchange | Title of Zeus | Reasons for the Title |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Power | 1. "King" | 1. He has dominion and power |
| | 2. "Protector of Cities" | 2. He upholds the law and commonweal |
| | 3. "God of Refuge" | 3. He gives refuge from evil |
| Commitment | 1. "Father" | 1. He shows solicitousness and gentleness |
| | 2. "Lord of Friends" | 2. He brings all men together and wills that they be friendly to one another and never enemy or foe |
| | 3. "Protector of Suppliants" | 3. He inclines his ear and is gracious to men when they pray |
| Inducement | 1. "God of Hospitality" | 1. It is the very beginning of friendship not to be unmindful of strangers or to regard any human being as an alien |
| | 2. "God of Wealth and Increase" | 2. He causes all fruitage and is the giver of wealth and sustenance, not of poverty and want. |
| Influence | oddly absent | |

Moreover, in their treatment of epideictic rhetoric, rhetorical handbooks instruct authors on how to praise a god, which praise is based on the benefactions of the deity. For example, Quintilian first specifies that attention be focused on "the special power of the individual god and the discoveries whereby he has benefitted the human race" (*Inst. Orat.* 3.7.6) which he then illustrates:

In the case of Jupiter, we extol his power as manifested in the governance of all things, with Mars we praise his power in war, with Neptune his power over the sea; as regards inventions, we celebrate Minerva's

discovery of the arts, Mercury's discovery of letters, Apollo's of medicine, Ceres' of the fruits of the earth, Bacchus' of wine (Inst. Orat. 3.7.6-9).⁴⁷

Thus, processing the “powers” and “discoveries” which benefitted humanity, we learn:

| General Symbolic Media | Deity | Description of Benefit |
|------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Power | 1. Jupiter | - governance of all |
| | 2. Mars | - power in war |
| | 3. Neptune | - power over the sea |
| Influence | 1. Minerva | - arts |
| | 2. Mercury | - letters |
| | 3. Apollo | - medicine |
| Inducement | 1. Ceres | - fruits of the earth |
| | 2. Bacchus | - wine |
| Commitment | oddly absent | |

Because attempts were made to rank benefactions in terms of worth, further observations seem warranted.

Plutarch provides a classification in which he touts “virtue” as the superior benefaction. Benefits are neither good nor bad, such as “wealth and health and bodily strength,” because they can be put to good use or bad; “consequently none of these things is good.” Hence

...if god does not give men virtue ...and does give wealth and health without virtue, he gives these to men who will put them not to good use but to bad. ... Yet if the gods are able to grant virtue, they are not benignant if they do not grant it; and if they are not able to make men virtuous, they are not able to benefit them either, if in fact anything else is good or beneficial (Plutarch, Stoic Self-Contradictions 1048D; see Seneca, Benefits 1.11.1-4).

Thus philosophical discussion of benefaction adds a new dimension to our investigation of what God or the gods bestow. Benefactions may be ranked and even devalued vis-B-vis virtue which the deity should bestow above all other benefactions.

5.0 Why Do Gods Give Benefaction? What Kind of Reciprocity Is in View?

Our model considers “reciprocity” a fixed, ubiquitous element of benefactor-client relationships.⁴⁸ Some evidence points to a contest of benefaction: who can give the most and best benefits.⁴⁹ Winners receive rewards. Even those obliged to perform “liturgies” could expect many returns for their benefactions.⁵⁰ We know how clients disliked being in any debt to their benefactors, for this “debt” implies an expected recompense to the benefactor.⁵¹ Moreover, many benefactors bestowed their largesse with the clear expectation of some return, as we learn from Cicero (Duties 1.15.47-48) and Pliny (Letters 9.30.1-4). For example, the inscriptions collected by Danker and others regularly attest that benefactors were awarded public honoring,⁵² which if withheld would insult the benefactor. Surviving benefactor inscriptions themselves give evidence of this reciprocity.

Yet we find a debate among Greco-Roman philosophers on the proper motive for giving benefaction, and so the ideal type of reciprocity. Seneca, for example, insists that the motive of bestowing benefaction must be altruistic; no reciprocity is envisioned.

When a man bestows a benefit, what does he aim at? To be of service and to give pleasure to the one to whom he gives. If his intention is conveyed to me and stirs in me a joyful response, he gets what he sought. For he had no wish that I should give him anything in exchange. Otherwise, it would have been, not a benefaction, but a bargaining (Benefits, 2.31.2).

Insisting that benefaction is not “bargaining,” Seneca then contrasts his ideal benefaction with commerce: “No one enters his benefactions in his account-book, or like a greedy tax-collector calls for payment upon a set day, at a set hour. The good man never thinks of them unless he is reminded of them by having them returned; otherwise, they transform themselves into a loan” (Benefits, 1.2.3). A benefactor is not a money-lender (Benefits, 4.2.3), nor does keep track of his benefactions: “In benefaction 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 the giving”(Benefits 1.2.2-3).

When this model of benefaction is projected on the gods, much ink is spilt about the “motive” for God’s benefaction. Seneca, for example, insists that divine favor is altruistic and so generalized reciprocity best characterizes God. For example, he voices Stoic belief that to give benefaction is an essential characteristic of the nature of god.

God seeks no servants. He himself does service to mankind, everywhere and to all he is at hand to help. . . a man will never make sufficient progress until he has conceived a right idea of God, – regarding Him as one who possesses all things, and allots all things, and bestows them without price. And what reason have the gods for doing deeds of kindness? It is their nature (Ep. 95.48-49; see Philo, Plaxter 130).

Since no “motive” prompts God’s benefaction, God does not engage in any type of reciprocity: “God can hope for no advantage from us, then no motive is found for God’s giving a benefit” (Benefits, 4.3.3).⁵³ “God,” he says, “bestows on us very many and very great benefits, with no thought for any return, since he has no need of having anything bestowed, nor are we capable of bestowing anything on him” (Benefits, 4.9.1). The ideal earthly benefaction is to “follow the example of the gods” who show kindness “without any motive of reward and without attaining any advantage for themselves” (4.25.3). Among elite thinkers, then, divine benefaction is ideally described as altruistic, which we label as “generalized reciprocity.”

6.0 What Do Clients Return to God, Benefactor and Patron?

Mortal patrons and clients accepted the reciprocal nature of their relationship. Thus clients knew what patrons expected of them in return. Contrary to what we just saw in Seneca, Suzanne Dixon argues that typical patrons in the Roman world bestowed benefits for the expressed purpose of some return, normally understood as praise and honor.⁵⁴ In this regard, she cites Cicero’s critique of patronage: “A great many people do many things that seem to be inspired more by a spirit of ostentation (gloria) than by heart-felt kindness; for such people are not really generous but are rather influenced by a sort of ambition to make a show of being open-handed” (Duties 1.44). Thus patrons tend to act out of some form of balanced

reciprocity, expecting a return of praise and respect from their clients. Moreover, ingratitude ranked as one of the worst interpersonal evils. For example, on Seneca's "axis of evil" he argues that ingrates are the worst of a very bad lot: "Homicides, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, robbers, sacrilegious men, and traitors there always will be; but worse than all these is the crime of ingratitude" (Benefits 1.10.4).⁵⁵ Earthly patrons and clients understand that this is how the game is played, and so project this sense of duty and debt to heavenly benefactors and mortal clients. Mortals adept at the earthly game of patronage could not help but presume that the same rules applied to the heavenly version. Such, indeed, was the view of most ancients, with the exception of a few elites who engaged in a philosophical critique of popular religion. Clients, then, owe the Deity honor and praise.

Although popular piety presumes that God wants or needs a return such as sacrifice, honor and gratitude, the critics of popular religion shout a resounding "Nothing!" God and the gods "need nothing" (•προσδεής). This statement, found as early as Euripides ("God wants for nothing if he's truly god," Hercules Furens 1345) and the product of Greco-Roman philosophical god-talk (Plutarch, Stoic Self-Contradictions 1052E),⁵⁶ seems to have become widely accepted, especially by Israelite and early Christian authors.

Israelite use of this expression honors God as being so perfect and superior to mortals that "God does not want anything" (Ep. Aristeas 211), which becomes part of the praise of God in prayer. But if God needs nothing, God's clients do: "O Lord of all, who has need of nothing (•προσδεής). . . keep undefiled for ever this house, so recently purified" (2 Macc 14:35-36).⁵⁷ Philo states that one way of honoring God's benefaction is to stress that as Giver, God gave "all" to mortals but himself needs nothing: "But God has bestowed no gift of grace on Himself, for He does not need it, but He has given the world to the world" (Unchangeableness 107; see Moses 1.157). Josephus's remark explicitly comes in the context of reciprocity to the deity for benefaction: "Not by deeds is it possible for men to return thanks to God, for the Deity stands in need of nothing (•προσδεής) and is above all such recompense" (Josephus, Ant. 8.111).

Although the New Testament contains no instances of “needs nothing,” we find it often in Christian authors with evident Greco-Roman background. Irenaeus, for example, four times insists that God “needs nothing,” although he mandates as a response a “sacrifice” of praise.

The prophets indicate that God stood in no need of their slavish obedience. . . God needed not their oblation, but [demanded it], on account of man himself who offers it. Because God stands in need of nothing. . . reject those things by which sinners imagined they could propitiate God, and show that He does Himself stand in need of nothing. (Adv Her. 4.17.1, emphasis added).⁵⁸

Irenaeus strove to protect the deity from being propitiated and thus manipulated. Finally, Justin provides a summary of the materials we have been studying: “But we have received by tradition that God does not need the material offerings which men can give, seeing, indeed, that He Himself is the provider of all things” (Justin, 1st Apology 10).

7.0 Again, What Do Clients Render to God-Benefactor and Why?

Most earthly clients thought that they must make a response, but what do they render to God-Benefactor? What do they think the heavenly Benefactor wishes? First, what folly to think that mortals could give the deity power; who is himself “almighty” (παντοκράτωρ). But inducement was universally thought of as an appropriate response to the Deity. Bruce Malina’s definition of inducement serves us well here, for it includes sacrifice.

If subordinates sought to have effect on their superiors, they had recourse to inducement and influence. Inducement included all sorts of gifts, services, presents, while influence entailed reasons for doing what one wanted, hence requests, petitions, entreaties and the like. In language of embedded religion, inducement is called sacrifice, influence is called prayer. Sacrifice of any sort is a form of inducement directed to the deity.⁵⁹

When we speak of sacrifice, we mean inducement. Then why do earthly clients offer sacrifice?

Theophrastus classifies sacrifice according to three formal ends: “There are three reasons to sacrifice to the gods: either to honor them, or to thank them or to ask them for good things.”⁶⁰ This reduces to either

praise/gratitude or petition. Thus clients might activate the relationship by offering a sacrifice in petition of benefaction or respond to benefaction with a sacrifice of praise for favors received. Given the ubiquity and duration of sacrifice in the ancient world, earthly clients considered it proper and necessary to offer inducement to their heavenly patrons.

Nevertheless, some thinkers began to critique the propriety of offering sacrifice. The two most telling arguments against sacrifice focus on the unseemliness of thinking that the gods 1) wanted blood and flesh or 2) bartered with mortals, a form of balanced reciprocity. Lucian provides a grand satire of this aspect of sacrifice.

So nothing that they [the gods] do is done without compensation. They sell men their blessings, and one can buy from them health, it may be, for a calf, wealth for four oxen, a royal throne for a hundred, a safe return from Troy to Pylos for nine bulls, and a fair voyage from Aulis to Troy for a king's daughter! Hecuba, you know, purchased temporary immunity for Troy from Athena for twelve oxen and a frock. One may imagine, too, that they have many things on sale for the price of a cock or a wreath or nothing more than incense (Lucian, On Sacrifices 2).

The gods, he mocks, do nothing "without compensation," suggesting that, whether they are needy or greedy, they engage in some form of barter or exchange. Moreover, according to Lucian's satire, mortals are by far the better trading partners, obtaining things of significant worth for mere bagatelles. Alas, he implies, the gods can be controlled and manipulated.

Authors with philosophical backgrounds, such as Philo and Seneca, offered important critiques of sacrifice. Philo, for example, contrasts God's nature with that of mortals: "God alone is the giver; we do not give. . . I know that God can be conceived of as 'giving' and 'bestowing,' but 'being given' – this I cannot even conceive of. . . it is absolutely necessary for the Truly Existing One to be active, not passive" (Worse Attacks 161-62). Thus mortals, even when making some response to the deity, do not "give" anything to God-who-alone-is-Giver. Mortal clients, then, should not attempt to have an impact on their Immortal Patron by means of inducement. But of course they did, and they were in the majority.

It is widely attested that the only proper response that mortals can render to God is some form of praise, honor and gratitude, which we classify as commitment. Josephus, who claims that “Thanksgiving is a natural duty” (Ant. 4.212), also says of gratitude: “But with that (gift of speech), O Lord, we cannot but praise Thy greatness and give thanks for Thy kindnesses to our house and the Hebrew people. . . And so with my voice I render thanks to Thee” (Ant 8.111). Philo goes further in his discussion of offering honor and gratitude to God by elevating “thanksgiving” to “pre-eminent” status among the virtues:

Each of the virtues is a holy matter, but thanksgiving is pre-eminently so. But it is not possible to express our gratitude to God by means of buildings and oblations and sacrifices. . . for even the whole world were not a temple adequate to yield the honour due to Him. Nay, it must be expressed by means of hymns of praise. . .” (Philo, Planter 126).

Temples and sacrificial systems, Philo argues, are inadequate to express requisite “gratitude,” which can only be done by “hymns of praise.” Thus no inducement is proper, only commitment, praise and gratitude. Philo later rephrases the exchange between God-benefactor and mortals-clients:

. . . the work most appropriate to God is conferring boons, that most fitting to creation giving thanks, seeing that it has no power to render in return anything beyond this; for, whatever else it may have thought of giving in requital, this it will find to be the property of the Maker of all things, and not of the being that brings it. . . in all that has to do with shewing honour to God, one work only is incumbent upon us, namely thanksgiving” (Planter 130-31).

Gods “give,” but mortals “give thanks.” For, mortals have “no power to render in return anything beyond it” and “the property” (inducement-as-sacrifice) already belongs to God. All that is left is commitment, that is, “thanksgiving” (praise and gratitude).

We saw above that according to Seneca the worst possible action of a client was ingratitude (Benefits 1.10.4). Patrons expected some from of commitment, an expectation clear to all clients. However, let us not confuse praise and gratitude with “thanks,” as J. H. Quincey warns us not to do:

The Greek habit in accepting an offer, service, etc., was to confer praise and not thanks. The Englishman with his "Thank you!" is content to express his feelings, the Greeks. . .saw an obligation created by a favour received and sought, in their practical way, to discharge it. And since praise was a commodity of which all men had an infinite supply and which all men valued, the obligation could always be discharged immediately.⁶¹

The mortal-to-mortal exchange was consciously "discharged" as quickly as possible. Obligation incurred was repaid by praise and honor,⁶² a commodity more precious than gold. Some mortals surely dealt with their benefactor gods in this fashion, but others were more sensitive to cultivate and maintain the relationship by means of commitment, that is expressions of gratitude or "sacrifices of praise."⁶³

For example, Justin Martyr argues that the Maker neither needs nor wants sacrifices (inducement), for the only honor worthy of God is gratitude (commitment):

What man will not acknowledge that we are not atheists, but declare that He has no need of streams of blood and libations and incense; whom we praise to the utmost of our power by the exercise of prayer and thanksgiving for all things wherewith we are supplied, as we have been taught that the only honour that is worthy of Him is not to consume by fire what He has brought into being for our sustenance, but to use it for ourselves and those who need, and with gratitude to Him to offer thanks by invocations and hymns for our creation (1st Apology 13).

But "honor," "gratitude" and "thanksgiving" are all prayers of commitment, which acknowledge God's worth; they are not grants of something God lacks or needs. Moreover, Justin envisions a cycle in which benefaction (creation) is constantly received from the Benefactor and enjoyed by the clients. And since "ourselves and those who need" will always want benefaction, the "prayer and thanksgiving for all things wherewith we are supplied" will be a constant response to God. Thus commitment is understood here: God gives, we return honor and gratitude to the Benefactor who continues his benefaction – thus loyalty and faithfulness are shown by both parties, that is, commitment. But is this now balanced reciprocity on our part?

Finally, it would seem that influence also plays a role in the response of clients to their heavenly benefactors when we consider the reasons why clients honor benefactors and give gratitude for benefits. Some authors cited above consider their “sacrifice of praise” to be disinterested honoring of God, such that there seems to be little exchange expressed by this commitment. But other authors state that testimonials of honor and gratitude also serve as motives, reasons and reminders to the heavenly Patrons to maintain their benefaction, which we call influence. Thus commitment offered in this manner contains a strong element of balanced reciprocity. Concerning influence, we recall how Malina contrasted it with inducement. Inducement refers to material offerings, such as sacrifices, gifts, and presents, whereas influence describes reasons for doing what is wanted, hence requests, petitions and entreaties. In terms of worship, sacrifice is inducement, but influence is prayer.⁶⁴

We find evidence that the ancients appreciated how commitment contains influence and so is offered to secure future benefaction. For example, Josephus illustrates this nexus:

Twice each day, at the dawn and when the hour comes for turning to repose, let all acknowledge before God the bounties which He has bestowed on them through his deliverance from the land of Egypt: thanksgiving is a natural duty, and is rendered alike in gratitude for past mercies and to incline the giver to others yet to come (Ant. 4.212).

While “twice daily” likely refers to temple sacrifices (inducement), they are infused with “thanksgiving” (commitment), which functions “in gratitude for past mercies” but also for the purpose of “inclining the giver to [give] others yet to come” (influence). Thus commitment (“thanksgiving”) is joined with influence (petition), that is, reasons to continue benefaction. The deity, while being honored, is also challenged by praise to act anew.

What, then, do mortals return to their heavenly Benefactor? Of the four classifications of things exchanged, mortals offer to god inducement (sacrifice), commitment (praise, gratitude, loyalty and faithfulness) and influence (motives and reasons for benefaction). Moreover, the materials surveyed indicate that mortals offer honor and praise in two different modes, either as a true acknowledgment of the patron’s goodness or in the expectation that they will excite the patron to renewed benefaction. The former

resembles generalized reciprocity, the latter balanced exchange. Philo is obviously aware of this as he makes the same distinction:

My first prizes will be set apart for those who honour Me for Myself alone, the second to those who honour Me for their own sakes, either hoping to win blessings or expecting to obtain remission of punishments. . .The prizes set aside for those who honour Me for Myself will be gifts of friendship; to those whose motive is self-interest they do not show friendship but that I do not count them as aliens” (Abraham 128-29; see Unchange-ableness of God 69).

Those who “honour Me for Myself alone” relate to God with commitment, which is altruistic in that it is utterly God-centered. To them God extends “gifts of friendship,” which is both God’s inducement and especially commitment. But those who “honour Me for their own sakes” return a kind of commitment diluted by anticipation of balanced reciprocity. For, failing to relate to the Deity in terms of “friendship” they do not receive it from God.

8.0 What Do We Know If We Know This?

Inasmuch as there are few studies of god in terms of the benefactor-client model, we hope to have filled that lacuna and brought fresh insight into Greco-Roman god-talk. The model of benefactor-client relations used here is basically that found in classical studies, now expanded by consideration of two topics taken from the social sciences, types of reciprocity (generalized, balanced and negative) and general symbolic media (power, commitment, inducement and influence). The basic model, then, is productively expanded. This expanded model allowed for a harvest of primary data, as it both identified materials generally ignored and facilitated in classifying and so interpreting them more accurately. The data simply would not have been visible without the expanded model to provide the needed perspective. Thus, readers should benefit both from a fresh study of the Deity and from a new, improved model of patron-client relations. But something is missing.

This article necessarily operates at a high level of abstraction, which might leave New Testament readers wondering about the utility and suitability of this material for understanding the Christian

scriptures. The following comments are intended to suggest where the contents of this study impact critical interpretation of the New Testament. Suggestions, alas, not full discourse. Semantic word fields are often valuable to identifying technical terms and their synonyms. Although the term “benefactor” occurs in Luke 22:25, it does not refer to God; but as we shall see, “benefactor” is known by other names. Moreover, the terms for benefaction are many and rich. Bruce Malina identifies, at least in Paul, the dominant terms for patronage: “Of course the vocabulary of “grace” (charizomai, charis, charisma) belongs to the favoritism of patronage. I suggest that charizomai refers to showing patronage, charis to willingness to be a patron, and charisma to the outcomes of patronage.”⁶⁵

1. God as Benefactor and Patron. Like many Greco-Roman deities, the God of Jesus Christ is “many named.” Not all names of God reflect a relationship of patron to clients, but the following six names do. All of these names directly communicate that God shows various types of favor, blessing, benefaction and patronage to mortals.

Creator: Acts 17:24; Rom 1:19-22; 1 Cor 8:6

Father: Matt 6:9-12; Eph 1:3; 3:14-16; Gal 4:6

King: 1 Tim 1:17; Rev 15:3; 19:16

Lord: Luke 1:32, 68; Acts 3:22; 17:14; Rev 4:8, 11

Master: Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24

Savior: Luke 1:47; 1 Tim 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jude 24

2. What Benefactions Does God Give: The following diagram focuses only on Matthew, but it provides a suitable example of the range of benefaction God gives. It can server as a model for retrieval of divine benefaction in other gospels and letters.

Power:

– rescue of Jesus in Matt 2

– Spirit of power descends upon Jesus at Jordan

– all miracles of Jesus = God’s power,

Commitment

– covenant of promises: “Son of Abraham,
Son of

David” (1:1)

– election of Jesus and support of him:

especially

- when evil spirits are silenced & expelled
- power to raise the dead (22:23-33)
- 12 legions of God’s angels available (26:53)
- vindication of Jesus (21:42ff; 22:44; 27:50-54)

Baptism and

- 12:18-21; Transfiguration, Death, Resurrection
- clients worth more than sparrows (10:32-33)
- "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (9:13; 12:8// Hos 6:6)
- forgiveness by God (6:13-14; 9:2-8; 18:22-35)
- praise and honor from God (5:1-12); reward of honor
- from God (6:1, 4, 6, 14, 18)
- recipients of God’s benefaction: Magi, “Galilee

of the Gentiles,” Syro-Phoenician woman,

“all nations”

Inducement

- daily bread (“Our Father” 6:9-13)
- seek first the kingdom, food and clothing will be provided (6:25-33)
- multiplication of loaves & fishes (14:13-21; 15:32-39)
- promise of “hundred fold” (19:29)
- eating at the table of God (22:1-10)

Influence

- knowledge and secrets revealed (11:25-27; 13:10-17; 16:17; 24:36)
- dreams (1:18-25; 2:12,13,19; 27:19)
- stars (2:1ff, 9)
- hidden prophetic meaning of the Scriptures, esp. Isaiah (1:22-23; 2:6,17,23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:18-21; 13:14, 35; 21:4-5; 27:9)
- special speech revealed (10:19-20)
- parables (13:3-9, 31-32, 33, 44-50)

3. Types of Reciprocity. As one would expect, God acts out of altruistic generosity, as parent do to their children (e.g. Matt 5:45-48). The premier expression of divine altruism is surely “God so loved the world that he gave his only son” (John 3:16; see Rom 5:8; 8:31-33 and Luke 14:12-14). Despite the fact

that Jesus is called a “thief,” neither he nor God practice negative reciprocity. Balanced reciprocity, however, is another matter. We suggest that Paul understands the debate over “faith” vs “law” as the insistence by some on a form of balanced reciprocity between mortals and God. After citing Gen 15:6 (“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness”), Paul contrasts what is earned (balanced reciprocity) with what is given as gift (altruistic reciprocity): “Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Rom 4:4-5). In fact, it would utterly dishonorable for a mortal to make a claim on God or to consider God in one’s debt, which is what happens when mortals interpret their interaction with God in terms of balanced reciprocity (see Gal 2:16-4:31; Phil 3:2-20). Finally, a recent book on God treats many gospels, Acts and Pauline letters in the light of patron-client relations. Hence that very study may serve as an indicator of the importance of the patron-client model and a model for investigation of other New Testament documents.⁶⁶

NOTES

1. ["The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology,"](#) *Reflections* 73 (1975) 5-8.

2. [For a survey of the literature on patron-client relations, see John H. Elliott,](#) "Patronage and Clientage," in [The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation](#), (ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 142-56; see also Steffen W. Schmidt, James C. Scott, Carl Landé and Laura Guasti, eds., [Friends, Followers and Factions. A Reader in Political Clientelism](#) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977; S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, [Patrons, Clients and Friends. Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society](#) (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1984); and Ernst Gellner and John Waterbury, eds., [Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies](#) (London: Duckworth, 1977).

3. [See Richard P. Saller,](#) [Personal Patronage under the Early Empire](#) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Paul Veyne, [Bread and Circuses. Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism](#) (London: Penguin Press 1990); and Frederick W. Danker, [Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field](#) (St. Louis, MO: Clayton Publishing House, 1982).

4. [Previous study of God-as-Benefactor is quite limited. See Stephen C. Mott,](#) [The Greek Benefactor and Deliverance from Moral Distress](#) (unpublished dissertation: Harvard University, 1971) 74-82 and 345-53 and "Greek Ethics and Christian Conversion: The Philonic Background of Titus II 10-14 and III 3-7," [NovT](#) 20 (1978) 36-46; Bruce J. Malina, "Patron and Client. The Analogy behind Synoptic Theology," pp. 143-75 in his [The Social World of Jesus](#) (London: Routledge, 1996).

5. [A. Blok,](#) "Variations in Patronage," [Sociologische Gids](#) 16 (1969) 366; see also Gellner, [Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies](#), 1-7.

6. [S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger,](#) [Patrons, Clients and Friends](#), 43-64, esp. 48-49.

[7. For authors who list formal characteristics of the relationship, see Bruce J. Malina,](#) “Patron and Client. The Analogy behind Synoptic Theology,” 143-45, and Halvor Moxnes, The Economy of the Kingdom (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988) 40-47; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Patronage in Ancient Society (London: Routledge, 1990) 1-8.

[8. See Gellner and Waterbury,](#) Patrons and Clients, 4; Saller, Personal Patronage under the Early Empire, 1-2. Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ description of Roman patron-client relations, begins with acknowledgment of the unequal status of the two members: “After Romulus had distinguished those of superior rank from their inferiors, he next established laws by which the duties of each were prescribed” (2.9.10).

[9. John Rich](#) (“Patronage and Interstate Relations in the Roman Republic,” in Patronage in Ancient Society [ed., Andrew Wallace-Hadrill; London: Routledge, 1990] 128) describes the importance of loyalty/faithfulness in the patron-client relation: “In one of the most important of its many uses fides means ‘protection.’ The weaker party is said ‘to be in the fides’ of the stronger. At the formation of such a relationship, the weaker party is said to give himself into or entrust himself to the fides of the stronger and the stronger to receive the weaker into his fides.”

[10. Richard Saller,](#) “Patronage and Friendship in Early Imperial Rome: Drawing the Distinction,” in Patronage in Ancient Society (ed., Andrew Wallace-Hadrill; London: Routledge, 1990) 52-53. Plutarch states: “There are favors that involve causing no offence, such as giving a friend preferential help in obtaining a post, putting some prestigious administrative function into his hands, or a friendly embassy” (Precepts for Politicians 19-20).

[11. Richard Saller,](#) Personal Patronage under the Early Empire, 21 and 27-29.

[12. Dionysius of Halicarnassus](#) narrates that Romulus wished patron-client relations in Rome not to resemble the harshness shown by the Greeks: “The Athenians called their clients ‘thetes’ or ‘hirelings,’ because they served for hire, and the Thessalians called theirs ‘penestai’ or ‘toilers,’ by the very name reproaching them with their condition” (2.9). So he recommended that the poor and lowly be described by a “handsome designation,” namely “patronage.”

[13. Veyne](#), Bread and Circuses, 124-30.

[14. Bruce J. Malina](#), Cultural Anthropology and Christian Origins (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1986) 98-106.

[15. Marshall Sahlins](#), Stone-Age Economics (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton Press, 1972) 185-230.

[16. Sahlins](#), Stone-Age Economics, 193-96.

[17. Unchangeableness of God](#), 105. All texts and translations are from the Loeb Classical Library.

[18. Talcott Parsons](#), Politics and Social Structure (New York: The Free Press, 1969); see Terence S.

Turner, "Parsons' Concept of 'Generalized Media of Social Interaction' and its Relevance for Social Anthropology," Sociological Inquiry 39 (1968) 121-34. See also Malina, Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology, 77-87.

[19. Parsons](#), Politics and Social Structure, 352-404, originally published as "On the Concept of Political Power," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 107 (1963) 232-62.

[20. Parsons](#), Politics and Social Structure, 439-72.

[21. Parsons](#), Politics and Social Structure, 405-29, originally published as "On the Concept of Influence," Public Opinion Quarterly 27 (1963) 37-62.

[22](#) The semantic word field for benefactor/patron is very rich, and includes most notably the following terms: 1. technical terms for "benefactor" (εὐεργετης, προστατης, προξενος, δεσποτης, |πικουρος| προστατια, προστατεια, εὐεργεσια, |πικουρια; 2. synonyms for "benefactor" (Πατηρ, Σωτηρ, Κτιστης, Φιλος; Patronus, patrocinium, amicus, praeses, clientela; praesidium, beneficum); and 3. related attributes (φιλανθρωπος/φιλανθρωπια; μεγαλοψυχος, μεγαλοπρεπος; liberalis, benignus, beneficus).

[23](#) See Jerome Neyrey, "Father," The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology (ed. Carroll Stuhlmuller; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1996) 315-19. See also John J. Pilch, "'Beat His Ribs While He is Young' (Sir 30:12): A Window on the Mediterranean World," BTB 23 (1993) 101-13.

[24](#) See Mary Rose D'Angelo, "'Abba and 'Father': Imperial Theology and the Jesus Traditions," JBL 111 (1992) 611-30.

[25](#) Paul Wendland, “Σωτηρ,” ZNW 5 (1904) 335-53; Georg Fohrer, “σωτηρ,” TDNT 7.1003-23; F. F. Bruce, ““Our God and Saviour”: A Recurring Biblical Pattern,” in The Savior God (ed. S.G.B. Brandon; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963) 51-66.

[26](#) Fohrer, “σωτηρ,” 1012.

[27](#) Arthur Darby Nock (“Soter and Euergetes,” Essays on Religion and the Ancient World [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972] 2.721) notes gods acted as saviors: “Zeus as father of men and gods, was strong to aid; Artemis protected women in childbirth; Athena guarded the Acropolis. . .In fact, any deity was credited with powers which men lacked, and could aid as humanity could not.”

[28](#) Werner Foerster, “σωζω, κτλ,” TDNT 7.967; the original citation is found in Ditt. Syll3 II.589, 26-31.

[29](#) Georg Bertram, “εὐεργέτης,” TDNT 2.654.

[30](#) Plutarch describes how some men vainly present themselves: “Yet other persons publicly styled themselves Benefactors (Εὐεργέτας), Conquerors (Καλλινίκους), Saviors (Σωτράς) or the Great (Μεγάλους)” (Plutarch, On the Fortune of Alexander 338C; see also Polybius, Hist. 9.36.5).

[31](#) Again, Philo, Allegorical Laws 2.57; 3.137; Special Laws 1.300; Embassy to Gaius 118; and Decalogue 41.

[32](#) Werner Foerster, “δημιουργός,” TDNT 3.1024. Foerster (p. 1026) notes that Philo makes the same distinction: “God, when He gave birth to all things, not only brought them into sight, but also made things which before were not, not just handling material as an artificer (δημιουργῆς) but being Himself its creator (κτίστης)” (Dreams 1.76).

[33](#) Harry A. Wolfson comments on Philo’s use of δημιουργός: “Since God alone is a creator, he applied to Him exclusively the Platonic terms Demiurge (Leg. All. 2.3.1), that is Craftsman, Maker (ποιητής, Spec 1.30), Planter (φυτουργός, Conf. 38, 196), Parent (γεννητής, Spec. 2.198), Father (πατήρ, Opif. 24, 74) and Cause (αἰτίας, Somn. 1.67). Some of these terms, such as Father, Maker, Parent, Planter are also to be found in Scripture” (Philo [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948] 1.211).

[34](#) Karl Rengstorf, “δεσπότης,” TDNT 2.44-45. This is Josephus’ favorite title for praying to God: “Lord (δΰσποτα) of all the ages and Creator of universal being. . .confirm these promises” (Ant 1.272; see also 4.40; 5.41; 11.64; 11.162; 20.90).

[35](#) Philo reflects Greco-Roman usage when he speaks about reverence for the emperor as “ Master and Benefactor and Saviour and the like (δεσπότην καὶ εὐεργέτην καὶ σωτῆρα)” (Flaccus 126).

[36](#) An inscription concerning Klarian Apollo reads: “self-existent, untaught, without a mother, undisturbed, of many names (πολυωνυμὸν) although not spreading abroad his name, dwelling in fire. . .” in G.H.R. Horsley, NDIEC 2 (1982) 39. Moreover, a poem describes Artemis as a little girl on her father’s lap, asking for a gift that would put her on a par with her brother; she asked “Give me many-namedness” (πολυωνυμιῶν) cited by J. M. Bremer,” Greek Hymns,” in Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World (ed. H. S. Versnel; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 194-95.

[37](#) Philosophical critique of popular god-talk argued that god is “un-nameable” (•κατονόμαστικός). See Harry A. Wolfson, “The Knowability and Describability of God in Plato and Aristotle,” HSCP 57 (1947) 233-47 and “Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes,” HTR 45 (1952) 115-16.

[38](#) On the place of brokerage in patron-client relations, see Eisenstadt and Roniger, Patrons, Clients and Friends, 228-45; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Patronage in Ancient Society, 81-84, 226.

[39](#) John N. Collins, Diakonia.. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 90-92. Pliny’s comment on the mediating role of Fate/Fortune is worth noting:

“Nevertheless mortality has rendered our guesses about God even more obscure by inventing for itself a deity intermediate between these two conceptions. Everywhere in the whole world at every hour by all men’s voices Fortune alone is invoked and named, alone accused, alone impeached, alone pondered, alone applauded, alone rebuked and visited with reproaches. . .To her is debited all that is spent and credited all that is received, she alone fills both pages in the whole of mortals’ account” (N. H 2.5.22).

[40](#) David E. Aune, Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983) 23-79.

[41](#) A. Oepke, “μεσιτης,” TDNT IV 599-601 and 609-11. Collins, (Diakonia, 96-132, 133-49) has two chapters on “words” and “deeds” of the go-betweens which serve as excellent summaries of the types of brokerage found in the ancient world.

[42](#) Norman B. Johnson, Prayer in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. A Study of the Jewish Concept of God JBL Monograph Series II (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1948) 7-34.

[43](#) John D. Mikalson, Athenian Popular Religion (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1985) 18-26 and 39-49.

[44](#) See Aristophanes, Birds, 591-601.

[45](#)

Zeus alone of the gods has the epithets of “Father” and “King,” “Protector of Cities,” “Lord of Friends and Comrades,” “Guardian of the Race,” and also “protector of Suppliants,” “God of Refuge,” and “God of Hospitality,” these and his countless other titles signifying goodness and the fount of goodness (Oration 1.39)

[46](#) In Benefits 4.5.1– 6.6, Seneca provides a useful list of divine benefaction: 1. various foods, 2. creatures on land, in sea and in air, 3. land, 4. vast deposits of gold, silver, copper, iron, 5. a mansion (the sky), and 6. breath, life, blood, and freedom).

[47](#)

In his instructions on how to praise a benefactor deity, Alexander, son of Numenius, says: “You should consider his power, what it is and what works prove it; then the sovereignty of the god and the subjects of his rule, heavenly, marine, and earthly. Then his relation to art should be mentioned, as Athena is over all the arts, and Zeus and Apollo over divination. Then what discoveries the god has made. Then whatever works he has done among the gods or for the gods, as Zeus has primacy of power and Hermes heraldry.

Then his philanthropy.” (Rhetores Graeci III.4-6); see F. C. Grant, Hellenistic Religions (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1953) 166-67.

[48](#) A. R. Hands, “Giving for a Return” in his Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968) 26-48; Saller, Personal Patronage under the Early Empire, 15-25.

[49](#) Seneca speaks of a “most honorable rivalry in outdoing benefits by benefits” (Benefits 1.4.4; see Isocrates 1.26); see Hands, Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome, 31.

[50](#) See S. R. Llewlyn, “The Development of the System of Liturgies,” NDIEC 7 (1994) 93-111.

[51](#) “They who consider themselves wealthy, honored, the favorites of fortune, do not wish ever to be put under obligations by our kind services. They suspect that a claim is thereby set up against them or that something is expected in return. It is bitter death to them to have accepted a patron or to be called clients” (Cicero, Duties 2.20.69).

[52](#) Danker, Benefactor; see also Hands, Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome, 175-209. Note the following benefaction inscription: “. . . the king’s most important reward (μισθὶς μέγιστος) is praise, universal fame, reverence for his benefactions, statues and temples and shrines bestowed on him by his subjects – all these are payment (μισθοὶ) for the thought and care which such men evidence in their continual watch over the common weal and its improvement” (Lucian, Apology 13), cited in J. R. Harrison, “Benefaction Ideology and Christian Responsibility for Widows,” NDIEC 8 (1998) 110-111.

[53](#) Seneca compares types of reciprocity: “If it were only self-interest that moved us to help others, those who could most easily dispense benefits, such as the rich and powerful and kings, would not be under the least obligation to bestow them; nor indeed would the gods bestow countless gifts, for their own nature is sufficient to them. . . if the only reason for giving a benefit is the advantage of the giver, and if God can hope for no advantage from us, then no motive is found for God’s giving a benefit” (Benefits, 4.3.2-3).

[54](#) Suzanne Dixon, “The Meaning of Gift and Debt in the Roman Elite,” Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views 12 (1993) 451-64. Lucian (Apology 13) states that “no one does anything without pay.”

[55](#)

See Suzanne Dixon, “‘A Lousy Ingrate’: Honour and Patronage in the American Mafia and Ancient Rome,” International Journal of Moral and Social Studies 8 (1993) 61-64. Cicero says: “No duty is more imperative than that of proving one’s gratitude” (Duties 1.15.47); see Seneca, Benefits 4.20.3; 7.31.1-3.

[56](#) Again Seneca: “Whoever teaches men to be grateful, pleads the cause both of men and of the gods, to whom, although there is no thing that they have need of since they have been placed beyond all desire, we can nevertheless offer our gratitude” (Benefits 2.30.2).

[57](#) Similarly: “You, O King. . .you have no need of anything (•προσδεει)” (3 Macc 2:9).

[58](#) See 1 Clement 52:1-4 and Philo, Spec. Laws 271.

[59](#) Bruce J. Malina, “Mediterranean Sacrifice: Dimensions of Domestic and Political Religion,” BTB 26 (1996) 29 (emphasis added).

[60](#) Cited by Simon Pulleyn, Prayer in Greek Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 55. Philo says: “If anyone examines the motives which led men to resort to sacrifices as a medium of prayer and thanksgiving, he will find that two hold the highest place. One is the rendering of honour to God for the sake of Him only and with no other motive. . .The other is the benefit which is twofold, on one side directed to obtaining a share in blessings, on the other to release from evils” (Spec. Laws 1.195).

[61](#) J. H. Quincey, “Greek Expressions of Thanks,” JHS 86 (1966) 157. On this point, see John J. Pilch, “No Thank You!” Bible Today 40 (2002) 49-53.

[62](#) On the prevalence of “praise/honor” over “thanks” in Greek religion, see H. S. Versnel, Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer, 43-53; J. H. Quincey, “Greek Expressions of Thanks,” 133-58

[63](#) In addition to “sacrifices of thanksgiving,” i.e., animal sacrifices (Versnel, Faith, Hope and Worship, 42-47), we find mention of “sacrifice of praise”; see Everett Ferguson, “Spiritual Sacrifice in Early Christianity and Its Environment,” ANRW 2.23.2. 1151-89.

[64](#) Malina, “Mediterranean Sacrifice: Dimensions of Domestic and Political Religion,” 29.

[65](#) Malina, “Patron and Client,” 171-73.

[66](#) Jerome H. Neyrey, Render to God. New Testament Understandings of the Divine (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004).