

Gratitude

“In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich” (Dietrich Bonhöffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1967, p. 370).

I. Definition

What is gratitude? The Oxford English Dictionary defined gratitude as “the quality or condition of being thankful; the appreciation of an inclination to return kindness”. The word gratitude is derived from the Latin *gratia*, meaning favor, and *gratus*, meaning pleasing. All derivatives from this Latin root have to do with kindness, generousness, gifts, the beauty of giving and receiving, or getting something for nothing.

II. History of the Reflection on Gratitude: a brief Overview

The idea of gratitude was an important topic taken up in times by philosophers as diverse as Cicero, Seneca, Thomas Aquinas, Samuel Pufendorf, Adam Smith, to name but a few, and remained an important idea throughout the Middle Ages.

II.1 Ancient Times

Gratitude has been described focusing on two different aspects: interpersonal relation on the one hand, and social and political relation on the other. These two components had been considered over the centuries in different way: firstly, the economic and political side was privileged; the interpersonal one, however, was neglected at the beginning and only later became more important. In ancient times only in Cicero and Seneca we can find the prevalence of the sentimental component of gratitude. Before that, gratitude had been intended as actual restitution of a received benefit. Cicero and Seneca, on the contrary, resorted to the concept of gratitude to solve political problems, convinced that it was a necessary component of the political dimension.

In ancient times, whoever gave a benefit considered as a duty to receive gratitude from the part of the beneficiary. In a society that considered as a benefit what was a basic right, moral obligation of reciprocation was perceived as a legal duty. Hesiod (VII century B.C.) considered benefit a social bond and thought at gratitude as a form of justice and political solidarity. He also explained the reason for the generosity in paying the benefits back: “Take fair measure from your

neighbor and pay him back fairly with the same measure, or better, if you can; so that if you are in need afterwards, you may find him sure.”

Democritus even put the acceptance of a gift under the expectation of being able to return the gift received with a larger one: “it is fine to receive benefits, but just when you expect to be able to reciprocate it with one greater”. Democritus considered the benefit-gratitude-benefit sequence a fundamental bond of social life. Aristotle believed that only the return of the actual benefit could satisfy the political need for justice and in a certain way could release the benefited from the state of dependence from his/her benefactor. In the benefit-return-benefit sequence he gave primacy to benefit, because the benefactor loves whom receives his benefit more than the benefited loves who has benefited him. Aristotle considered this attitude typical of human beings, as “most people, who are prone to forgetting, tends to receive the good rather than doing it.”. All these examples represent a clear choice in the direction of the economical-political component of gratitude, namely its external side connected to the category of justice. To return a benefit was considered by those thinkers as a duty imposed by a principle of commutative justice.

Cicero and Seneca were the first thinkers to realize that any political reform would not have succeeded if it had not started from reforming moral life. They understood that any law that is not reflected in our hearts could probably force us, but would not be able to convince us, being able to act on our behavior just in a superficial and temporary way. They focused then on the importance of gratitude as a moral quality, rather than as a legal obligation.

II.2 Cicero (106 B.C. - 43 B.C.)

In one of his most important works, *De Officiis*, Cicero admonished us to remember that: “But since, as Plato has admirably expressed it, we are not born for ourselves alone, but our country claims a share of our being, and our friends a share; and since, as the Stoics hold, everything that the earth produces is created for man’s use; and as men, too, are born for the sake of men, that they may be able mutually to help one another; *in this direction we ought to follow Nature as our guide, to contribute to the general good by an interchange of acts of kindness, by giving and receiving*, and thus by our skill, our industry, and our talents to cement human society more closely together, man to man.” (*De Officiis*, I.7.22)

At the base of social relationship there must be therefore kindness and gratitude: “But if, as Hesiod bids, one is to repay with interest, if possible, what one has borrowed in time of need, what, pray, ought we to do when challenged by an unsought kindness? *Shall we not imitate the fruitful fields, which return more than they receive? For if we do not hesitate to confer favors upon those*

who we hope will be of help to us, how ought we to deal with those who have already helped us? For generosity is of two kinds: doing a kindness and requiting one. *Whether we do the kindness or not is optional; but to fail to requite one is not allowable to a good man, provided he can make the requital without violating the rights of others” (De Officiis, I.15.48).*

Cicerone is also convinced that the reciprocal exchange of benefits will generate social and mutual human coexistence: “Another strong bond of fellowship is effected by mutual interchange of kind services; and as long as these kindnesses are mutual and acceptable, those between whom they are interchanged are united by the ties of an enduring intimacy.” (*De Officiis*, I.17.56) Thus, benevolence and gratitude offer a fundamental help to the law, as the law alone could be effective without being helped by those important moral qualities.

II.3 Seneca (4 B.C. - 65 A.D.)

The first (and for many centuries, the only) great treatise on gratitude in Western thought was *On Benefits*, written by the Roman philosopher Seneca. Addressed to a friend, Liberalis of Lyons, the work raises many of the concerns that would define how later thinkers conceptualized the problem of gratitude. The importance of understanding the place of gratitude in human society was stated clearly in the first paragraph: “Among the many and diverse errors of those who live reckless and thoughtless lives, almost nothing that I can mention, excellent Liberalis, is more disgraceful than the fact that we do not know how either to give or to receive benefits. For it follows that, if they are ill placed, they are ill acknowledged, and when we complain of their not being returned, it is too late; for they were lost at the time they were given. Nor is it surprising that among all our many and great vices, none is so common as ingratitude”.

Seneca devotes his entire treatise to the question of how one should benefit others, and how one should receive benefits. Seneca discusses good deeds and badly performed favors, graceful and ungraceful receiving, the joy or burden of returning favors, as well as gratitude and envy. Throughout the treatise, Seneca tried to provide a perspective for sorting out the complexity underlying the problem of gratitude. He began his inquiry into gratitude by noting that gratitude must be understood as part of a dyadic relationship between a giver of benefits and a receiver of benefits. To understand gratitude, one must grasp both sides of the relationship fully. In regard to giving, Seneca posed a series of questions that must be addressed: What exactly is a benefit? To whom should benefits be given? What is the proper way to give a benefit? One of Seneca’s major arguments was that for gratitude to be properly expressed in the world, a gift must be properly given. Similar questions were raised in regard to the actions of a person who receives a benefit from

another: How does one properly show gratitude for a benefit given? Are there different forms of gratitude? Is gratitude more than just being grateful for a benefit provided? Does gratitude involve something more substantial than just thanks under certain conditions, such as an equal or greater return of benefits given for those received? Is gratitude only a relationship that can exist between equals, or can a master be grateful to a slave for benefits provided?

A number of general ideas that emerged from Seneca's inquiry are worth highlighting. First, he argued that the intentions of both the givers and the receivers of benefits are of the utmost importance in understanding gratitude. Good consequences devoid of good intentions do not create a debt of gratitude. If the intention of a giver is not to help another individual, but to bind the receiver or to make that person feel bad, then a benefit has not been given, and gratitude is not required. Similarly, a debt of gratitude has not been fulfilled if the receiver of the benefit does not truly feel thanks to the giver but responds to the benefit merely out of a sense of duty or guilt or anger. Rules join together providers and receivers of benefits, and these are the foundation on which gratitude rests.

According to Seneca, for something to count as a benefit it must not be given slowly, grudgingly, or in some other reluctant way; it must be given freely. To be rightly received, the good deed should not be perceived by the recipient as a burden; it must be accepted freely. Indeed, the kind of emotion that reflects the appropriate attitudes on both parts is joy. Anything else would be suggestive of hesitations, concerns about undesired ties, and so on. Seneca sharply distinguished thus debts in the marketplace and debts of gratitude. Gratitude does not arise as a result of an exchange in which one individual gives another a gift with the expectation that something of equal value will be given in return. On the contrary, gratitude arises in response to a gift freely given by another. A person does not provide another with a benefit because he or she expects something in return. That would be an exchange in the marketplace, subject to different sorts of sanctions. A gift is given freely because of a desire, in and of itself, to assist another person.

Similarly, a person does not simply respond to a benefit with an equal benefit, not more, not less, in return. That would be to treat gratitude as a commodity exchanged between individuals for an equal benefit. As Seneca explained, "Although to repay gratitude is a most praiseworthy act, it ceases to be praiseworthy if it is made obligatory; for in that case no one will any more praise a man for being grateful than he will praise one who has returned a deposit of money, or paid a debt without being summoned before a judge. So we spoil the two most beautiful things in human life: a man's gratitude and a man's benefit. For what nobility does either one show, the one if, instead of giving, he lends a benefit, the other if he makes return, not because he wishes, but because he is

forced?”. Lurking in the background of this line of argument is the idea that a free gift should touch off a feeling of gratitude in the recipient that, in turn, sparks additional actions of benevolence and feelings of gratitude.

Ingratitude in Seneca

According to Seneca, *gratitude also makes one a better person, a more virtuous person. It builds bonds of harmony and community in the world.* Ingratitude, on the other hand, is our most common vice and has to be avoided, being a *vice that destroys the individual and society by disrupting the harmony that ties us to one another.* Seneca suggests that *ingratitude is the worst of vices, and nothing is more “harmful to society” than ingratitude (De Beneficiis, I.1).* Later in Book I, he lists a series of moral ills that plague society, “homicides, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, ravishers, sacrilegious, traitors”, but concludes that “worse than all these is the ungrateful man” (*De Beneficiis* I.10). The only things that might be worse are the crimes that flow from ingratitude, “without which hardly any great wickedness has ever grown to full stature” (*De Beneficiis* I.10).

Yet, *the possibility of ingratitude should not deter generosity.* Seneca gives two principle reasons for continuing to give even when there is the possibility, even probability, that some of the recipients of our benefits will be ungrateful. First, generosity can soften and improve a person – as kindness to a wild animal makes the animal docile (*De Beneficiis*, I.2). Second, in giving without expectation of return we are conforming our generosity to the generosity of the gods. Benefits should be bestowed, “not put [...] out at interest” (*De Beneficiis*, I.1). The man who refuses to give because he does not expect a return is justifying ingratitude, since he is making the gift dependent on return, as the ungrateful man does not return when he is able to do so. The virtue of generosity is manifested in “bestowing benefits for which we are not certain of meeting with any return, but whose fruit is at once enjoyed by noble minds” (*De Beneficiis*, I.1). We should bestow carefully, but also recognizing that we will bestow gifts on the unworthy; but one well-bestowed gift makes amends for many ill-considered gifts (*De Beneficiis*, I.2). If we believe that benefits bestowed are wasted, then they are; but if we give in spite of having no return, we “force out gratitude” from even “a hard and forgetful beast” (*De Beneficiis*, I.3).

II.4 Middle Age

During the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance notions of gratitude and fealty became closely linked together, as did those of ingratitude and treason. To be ungrateful in the feudal world could be tantamount to engaging in treasonable actions against one’s lord. Along a different line of

thought, theologians throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance considered the problem of gratitude and ingratitude in terms of one's relationship to God. *Ingratitude to God was condemned as being worse than ingratitude to one's fellow human beings. Not only was it a rejection of God's infinite love and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but it was an enemy of the soul's salvation.*

II.5 Samuel Pufendorf (1632 - 1694)

Samuel Pufendorf, a philosopher whose political thought was written in response to Thomas Hobbes, provided a central place in his thought for gratitude. Unlike Hobbes, however, Pufendorf returned to the idea that gratitude is based on a dyadic relationship between a giver and a receiver of benefits. According to Pufendorf, our first two duties in society are not harming others and recognizing the equality of others with ourselves. The third duty is being useful to others, so far as one conveniently can. *Providing charity and gifts to others was, for Pufendorf, one of the best ways individuals can promote commodious living, particularly when the response to such beneficence is gratitude.* Echoing Seneca, Pufendorf noted how complex the entire problem of gratitude is. Intentions must be taken into account. Debts of gratitude must not be confused with debts of exchange. Neither the giver nor the receiver of benefits must be harmed by either the original gift or the gratitude in response.

For Pufendorf as for Seneca, it was essential to master the particular situation in which gift giving was taking place, to understand gratitude. Although he did link his discussion of gratitude to a general theory of moral judgment, he offered little more than very abstract guidelines as to how one might go about mastering that situation outside the existing manners found in a particular society at a particular time.

II.6 Adam Smith (1723 - 1790)

According to Smith, gratitude is the passion or sentiment that prompts us to reward others for the good that they have done us. Like the passions of love, esteem, and resentment, gratitude takes us beyond ourselves and interests us in the happiness or misery of others. Smith thus took the existence of the passion of gratitude as a given. His problem was not so much to account for this passion as to analyze the implications that it has for human society. More specifically, he wanted to provide an account of three dimensions of the phenomena of gratitude in the world: first, under what circumstances do individuals feel gratitude? Second, when is the feeling of gratitude proper

and when is it not? Third, how is an individual's sense of gratitude channeled in directions that are socially beneficial?

Gratitude for Smith is a natural response to a particular situation when good things happen to an individual, but it also may be an incorrect response. We may be so biased by good things that happen to us that we respond incorrectly to a particular situation. For example, we may feel gratitude toward an individual whose intentions do not deserve such a response. We may credit inanimate objects for saving our lives or bringing us luck, to the point that we feel gratitude to the objects. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we should be grateful to things.

III. Gratitude in the Bible and in Jewish Tradition

Judaism takes it for granted that we owe a debt of gratitude to benefactors, whereas it debates some of the specifics of this obligation. Although several theological and rational grounds for the obligation of interpersonal gratitude are invoked in Jewish religious literature, perhaps that obligation is best subsumed under *the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself*. Just as you would want to be appreciated, thanked, and in some cases rewarded for the efforts and resources you expended on someone else, you in turn have the same obligation of gratitude toward others.

Premise:

Even though gratitude has a clear religious connotation, a distinction can be made between transpersonal gratitude and theistic gratitude. Transpersonal gratitude may be gratefulness to God, or to a higher power, but may also be directed toward the cosmos more generally. It is the gratitude that one feels when contemplating a starry sky or a majestic mountain peak. Such a vast thankfulness cannot be directed toward a person or even to a supernatural agent and occurs in the absence of a belief that a favor has been intentionally conferred upon a person by a benefactor.

III.1 Gratitude in Jewish Liturgy

In his gratitude to God, Israel feels an obligation to praise and thank him. In the Passover Seder ceremony, after concluding the recounting of the story of the redemption from slavery in Egypt, there is a recitation of the Hallel, psalms of praise and thanksgiving to God. The following passage acts as the transition from the recapitulation of redemptive history to the Hallel: "*Therefore it is our duty to thank, to praise, to laud, to glorify, to exalt, to honor, to bless, to extol and give respect to Him who performed all these miracles for our fathers and for us. He has brought us from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to bright light,*

and from bondage to redemption! Therefore let us recite a new song before Him. Hallelujah!” (*Passover Haggadah*).

Another manifestation of the importance of specificity in thanking a benefactor for his or her gifts is in the rabbinic formulations of blessings of thanks to God that are to be recited before partaking of food. These blessings, known as *birkhot ha-nehenin* (blessings for things that we enjoy in life) include separate ones for bread, pastries, fruits, vegetables, wine, water, and other drinks and foods. Instead of formulating a single generic blessing to be recited before partaking of any food, the rabbis formulated different blessings for several different categories of food.

Perhaps an idea implicit here is that the pleasures or benefits derived from drinking wine or eating a fruit, a piece of bread, and so on are not identical; therefore each gift is unique, and gratitude and thanksgiving should acknowledge this uniqueness. Although these notions about how gratitude should be expressed refer to human gratitude to God, they are applicable as well to interpersonal gratitude.

Being grateful over misfortunes: Rabbi Akiva

The rabbinic sages also taught that “One blesses over misfortune just as one blesses over good, for it is said ‘Love the Lord your God [...] with all your soul’ (Deuteronomy 6:5), even if he takes your soul” (Mishnah, Berakhot 9:5). The blessing one recites over misfortune may not be an expression of gratitude, but rather an acceptance of the divine judgment as being just. However, it might also be interpreted as an expression of gratitude, because what may appear tragic to the limited understanding of a human might, from an omniscient divine perspective, actually be for the ultimate benefit of the person who suffers.

An extreme example of this attitude is the story about Rabbi Akiva, who laughed joyously as he was being tortured to death by Romans who had caught him studying Torah in violation of their decree forbidding it. His disciples asked him how he could rejoice while in such excruciating pain. Rabbi Akiva said to them that all of his life he had been troubled that he might not be able to fulfill the commandment to love God with all of his soul. Now that the opportunity presented itself to him, he rejoiced in it. Rabbi Akiva did not seek opportunities to die as a martyr, but when he found himself in such a situation, he was grateful for it.

The story of Rabbi Akiva is enlightening insofar as it could be an example connected to the examination of gratitude in the lives of people coping with major adversities. An attitude of gratitude may be one means by which tragedies are transformed into opportunities for growth, being

thankful not so much for the circumstances but rather for the skills that will come from dealing with it. The ability to discern blessings in the face of tragedy is a magnificent human strength.

III.2 The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

Linguistic note

The Hebrew language does not have a single term to express concepts of gratitude and thankfulness. Thus, it recurs to verbs such as “to praise”, “to celebrate”, “to glorify”, “to exalt”. In the Hebrew Bible many times we find authors expressing the fact of being grateful to God through their praises. “To praise God” for the benefits that he bestowed upon us is thus a form of thanking him. All the Hebrew expressions and formulae we can trace in the Hebrew Bible, and in particular in the Books of Psalms, can be divided in two categories: the category of *berakha* (benediction-thanksgiving), coming from the root *brk* (ברך), and the category of *hodaya* (praise-thanksgiving), coming from the root *ydh* (יָדָה).

The participle *barukh*, which appears 17 times in the Psalms, belongs for example to the first category; it is always associated to God and generally to the reason why the Lord is praised and thanked. Terms belonging to the second category recur also many times in the Psalms (67) and might be translated in English either with “to thank” or with “to celebrate”, being difficult very often to choose between the two translations and giving priority to one semantical nuance.

Examples of interpersonal gratitude in the Hebrew Bible

Grace and Gratitude constitute in the Hebrew Bible two opposed movements that nevertheless end up meeting together. Grace comes from the above (from whom can bestow it: God, a king, etc.), while Gratitude, the act of being grateful, comes from below, from whom receives benefits and grace.

Although the Hebrew Bible is mostly concerned with the gratitude to God owed by the people of Israel and by individual Israelites, several biblical stories reflect gratitude to humans for favors bestowed or for good deeds that are appreciated.

Joshua for example rewarded Rahab of Jericho (for assisting the spies he sent to the city) by saving her and her family from destruction when he conquered and destroyed Jericho (Joshua 2:12, 6:25).

Ruth the Moabite, daughter-in-law of Naomi the Israelite, returned with Naomi to Judea after both were widowed. Ruth could have returned to the safety and security of her native home and homeland, but (notwithstanding Naomi’s encouraging her to do so) chose to cast her lot with

Naomi and Israel. She also decided to follow the custom in Israel of giving to a kinsman of the deceased husband first marriage rights to his widow. She sought out the kinsman Boaz rather than putting herself on the free market, so to speak, where she might have made out quite well for herself. Boaz appreciatively told her, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. [...] I will do for you all that you ask” (Ruth 3:10–11). He took her as his wife, and she bore Obed, the grandfather of King David.

Boaz was grateful to Ruth not so much because she chose him, although he might have appreciated that as well, but because she followed Naomi to Judea and was faithful to the Israelite custom of perpetuating the name of a deceased husband by marrying his kin, so that the first child born of this marriage was considered the legal heir and descendant of her first husband. The author of the book of Ruth appreciated Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi, to Israel, and to Israel’s customs, all the more so because she was a foreigner with other options. He explained that God rewarded her with the honor of becoming the great-grandmother of Israel’s greatest king. Gratitude here is not for a personal favor rendered, but for noble deeds performed.

Gratitude in the Book of Psalms

The all book of Psalms can be interpreted as a form of thanking God for all the good that he gave to his creatures. Here are some examples in which this attitude can be seen:

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High
(Psalm 50.14)

The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to the one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!” (Psalm 50.23)

Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.” Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man (Psalm 66.1-20)

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the

Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 101.1-5)

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's (Psalm 103.1-5)

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Let those who fear the Lord say, "His steadfast love endures forever." Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free (Psalm 118.1-18)

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! (Psalm 107.1)

III.2 New Testament

Gospel

One interesting example of gratitude can be found in the Gospel (Lk 17-11,19)

11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance 13 and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." 14 When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; 16 and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. 17 Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

The Samaritan approached Jesus reverently and gave praise to God. If we do not recognize and appreciate the mercy shown us we will be ungrateful. This passage from the Gospel shows us that ingratitude is forgetfulness or a poor return for kindness received. Ingratitude easily leads to lack of charity and intolerance towards others.

Paul's Letters

In the Pauline corpus we find 46 occurrences referring to the semantic area of thanksgiving/gratefulness/gratitude (*eucharistein, eucharistia, eucharistos*). Thus, we can assume from this high number of terms connected to gratitude that the importance of being grateful to God constitutes one of the most important theme of Paul's thought. Very often it is the same Paul that thanks God, expressing his gratefulness for what God has done in his life or, more frequently, for the benefits that God has bestowed upon the recipients of Paul's letters. In many cases Paul invites his readers to being grateful to God for the same reasons, but also - and more important - he ask them to take gratitude as the base of their behavior.

At the center of man's relationship with God Paul sees gratitude for what the Lord has done for the existence of man, from His great work of salvation to particular circumstances he referred in his letters: the virtues operating in the communities he founded, as well as individual episodes. He also thanks God using formulas and procedures he takes directly from his Jewish education. It is a form of thanksgiving that is expressed through praises and that comes from gratitude. Similarly, Paul invites believers to take the same attitude of praise/gratitude, which they must never forget, both when they thank God for something, as well as when they pray and invoke their Creator. The use of rhetorical devices, which is very important in Paul's letters, is nevertheless always directed to express a content that Paul considered essential: thanksgiving, through praise, as an expression of gratitude.

IV. Other religious texts

St Francis' *Canticle of the Sun* is a good example in which the subject of the poet is put apart, setting at the center of the stage the greatness of the Creator with his creatures. The author of the *Canticle* is grateful, happy, and he praises God for all the benefits and the good that he gave to human beings. The poet looks at the "objects" of creation, from the most humble to the biggest, with the same attitude of benevolence that can be found in the book of Genesis when God declared that everything was "good". Here is the text of the *Canticle*, that can be interpreted also in the sense that we must respect nature and all the work and the products of creation as a sign of gratitude toward God and his immense and infinite benevolence.

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!

All praise is yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing.

To you, alone, Most High, do they belong.
No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.
Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and beautiful.
Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
through which you give your creatures sustenance.
Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.
Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.
Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us,
and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you;
through those who endure sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace,
for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.
Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Happy those she finds doing your most holy will.
The second death can do no harm to them.
Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks,
and serve him with great humility.

The same idea can be found, in the Hebrew Bible, in the “Song of the three children in the furnace”, where Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael sing the following text (see Book of Daniel, 3.51-89):

May you be blessed, Lord, God of our ancestors, be praised and extolled for ever. Blessed be your glorious and holy name, praised and extolled for ever. May you be blessed in the Temple of your sacred glory, exalted and glorified above all for ever: blessed on the throne of your kingdom, exalted above all, glorified for ever: blessed are you who fathom the abyss, enthroned on the winged creatures, praised and exalted above all for ever: blessed in the expanse of the heavens, exalted and glorified for ever.

Bless the Lord, all the Lord's creation: praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, angels of the Lord, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, heavens, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, all the waters above the heavens, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, powers of the Lord, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, sun and moon, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, stars of heaven, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, all rain and dew, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, every wind, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, fire and heat, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, cold and warmth, praise and glorify him for ever!

Bless the Lord, dew and snow-storm, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, frost and cold, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, ice and snow, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, nights and days, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, light and darkness, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, lightning and cloud, praise and glorify him for ever! Let the earth bless the Lord: praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, mountains and hills, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, every plant that grows, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, springs of water, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, seas and rivers, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, whales, and everything that moves in the waters, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, every kind of bird, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, all animals wild and tame, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, all the human race: praise and glorify him for ever!

Bless the Lord, O Israel, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, priests, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, his servants, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the upright, praise and glorify him for ever! Bless the Lord, faithful, humble-hearted people, praise and glorify him for ever!

Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael, bless the Lord, praise and glorify him for ever! For he has rescued us from the Underworld, he has saved us from the hand of Death, he has snatched us from the burning fiery furnace, he has drawn us from the heart of the flame! Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his love is everlasting. Bless the Lord, the God of gods, all who fear him, give praise and thanks to him, for his love is everlasting!

Gratitude (II part)

I. Jewish Tradition (II part)

A. *Hakarat Ha-tov*

Sages in Talmud and Midrash mention that major catastrophes happened along timeline of Jewish history because of *kfiy tovah*. The mitzvah of *kivud av va'em* (“Honour thy father and thy mother”) can also related to a debt of gratitude we have towards our parents. In fact, kids, who exists because of their parents, have also to thank them.

A Midrash notes that in the description of the first 3 of the 10 plagues in Exodus (the blood, frogs, and lice), it was Aaron rather than Mosès who struck the Nile River and the sand, the sources of these plagues. Why so? Moshe didn't hit the Nile because of *Hakarat Ha-tov*. In fact the Nile, where Mosès had been hidden in a basket by his mother, had protected him from Pharaoh's decree that all male Israelite infants be drowned at birth. Similarly, the sand (which had concealed the body of the Egyptian Mosès had killed in his righteous indignation at seeing him mercilessly beating a Hebrew slave) had saved Moses from Pharaoh's wrath and from persecution and death. In gratitude to the Nile and to the sand, Moses did not want to be the one to smite them with his staff, and Aaron was delegated by God to do so. From that the rabbis say that if one has to show gratitude even to inanimate objects, how much more must we show gratitude to humans who have benefited us.

A second Midrash on Dt. 23:7 («You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land») says that, although the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites after the death of Joseph, while he was alive they invited Joseph and his family to reside in Goshen and provided them with a haven from famine. Thus, whatever wicked deeds the Egyptians later did, they did not entirely cancel the debt of gratitude owed to them for the benefits they had earlier conferred. According to another interpretation, even as the Israelites were oppressed strangers in that land, they did receive some benefits from the Egyptians, a place to live and a foot to eat. Therefore the Israelites should be grateful to them.

According to another Midrash, on Ex. 1:8 («There arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph»), it is asked why does Scripture severely chastise ungrateful individuals? The sages answer: because ingratitude is similar to disavowal of God. The atheist is also an ingrate. An individual man begin by manifesting ingratitude for the kindness shown to him by his fellow man; it is not long before he disavows the kindness of his Creator. So, too, it says concerning Pharaoh, «he knew not Joseph» (Ex. 1:8). Yet surely, even today, Egypt recalls the kindness of Joseph. This

must mean, rather, that Pharaoh surely knew [Joseph], but he took no need of him, and he disavowed his kindness. Subsequently, he disavowed the kindness of the Almighty, as he said, «I know not God» (Ex. 5:2). From here, argue the sages, it can be derived that ingratitude may be likened to denial of God.

B. Bahya Ibn Pakuda (first half of XI century): *The Duties of the Heart*

The idea that gratitude to other human beings is one pathway to developing an attitude of gratitude toward God, was elaborated at length by Bahya Ibn Pakuda, tenth-century Spanish Jewish author who wrote one of the most influential of Jewish devotional treatises, the *Duties of the Heart*. Bahya analyzed the psychology of gratitude in interpersonal relationships, not for its own sake but to provide grounds for our obligation to be thankful and obedient to God. He wrote for example:

It is a known and accepted fact that our obligation to thank our benefactor should be according to his good intention towards us. Although he may fail in his deed for some reason or because of some obstacle, we must nevertheless be grateful to him once we have ascertained his favorable conduct and beneficial intention toward us. On the other hand, when a favor is done for us unintentionally, we have no obligation of gratitude to anybody. When we consider the favors men do for each other we find them all falling under one of the five following categories: first, the favors done by parent for child; second, those done by a master for a slave; third, favors by the wealthy for the poor, for the sake of heavenly rewards; fourth, favors done by one man for another for the sake of praise, honor, and earthly rewards, and fifth, those done by the powerful for the sake of the weak, out of pity and compassion.

Bahya went on to analyze the motives for each of these five categories of benefactors. He asserted, «It is clear that the parent's intention is to benefit himself through the child, for the child is part of the parent, who places great hopes in him». Moreover, he said that parents are motivated by their nature to protect and nurture their children, and as «the parent is forced to it by his nature, he is only a medium, and the grace belongs to God». Yet notwithstanding the fact that the parent cares for and nurtures the child out of self-interest and instinct, «both the Torah and the Reason oblige the children to obey, honor, and fear their parents». The favors done by a master for a slave are also motivated by self-interest, because «his intention is to enlarge his wealth by improving his property. In addition, he need the slave's services, so his only intention is to improve himself. Nevertheless, God has obliged the slave to thank his master and obey him, as it is said "A son honors his father, and a servant his master; If then I am the Father, where is my honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the Lord of hosts to you!"(Malakhi 1:6)».

The wealthy man does favors for the poor man only because he is seeking «the adornment of his own soul in the next world». Even so, «it is generally accepted that he should be greatly thanked and praised for it». Why do people do favors for one another? Here, too, self-interest is the motive. «Their only intention in doing them is to adorn their own souls in this world with the praise and honor they expect to get in it, or a reward in the next world». Yet here as well it is incumbent upon us to thank and praise those who do us favors. Finally, «whoever does a favor for the weak and suffering, out of compassion, does it only in order to save himself the pain of being sorry for the object of his compassion, in the same way as a man would treat his own pain». Still, such a benefactor deserves gratitude from the beneficiary. Bahya was not interested in explaining why we should feel gratitude toward these five types of benefactors. He took it for granted (on the basis of scriptures that he cited, reason, or accepted social convention) that the beneficiary is under such an obligation.

The argument he was leading up to is that if we are obligated to feel gratitude toward, to thank, and in some relationships to be obedient to our benefactors, even though they are acting out of self-interest, how much more are we under an obligation to feel gratitude toward, to thank and be obedient to, God:

How much, then, should a man obey, praise and thank the Creator of all benefaction and benefactors, whose beneficence is infinite, permanent and perpetual, done neither for His own benefit nor for driving away misfortunes, but his all-loving kindness and grace towards men.

In his attempt to convince his audience as to why they should be grateful to God, Bahya argued that even when we act in ways that confer benefits on us, it is really God who is the benefactor, with people acting as the medium through which he implements his will to do us good. «It is not in the power of the wealthy to pay even one coin to anyone unless it has been predetermined by God». Once people realize this, «they would not put their hope in anybody but God, and would not honor anybody but those men to whom He has given praiseworthy virtues, for they deserve God's honor». The point Bahya wanted to make is that we should not be fawning and obsequious to the wealthy or the powerful. As he elaborated:

When a man is driven by necessity to ask a favor of somebody above or below him, he should rely on God to grant him the favor, while making the other person the means of getting it, as one cultivates the soil and sows it as a means of getting one's livelihood. If God so wishes, He makes the seeds grow, prosper, and thrive, so it is not the soil that should be thanked, but God alone, for if He does not wish to give man his sustenance by it, the soil grows nothing, or, if it does grow, it is later afflicted with some misfortune, and the soil is not to blame.

It is important to note that, in his zeal to see God alone as the ultimate source of the good we receive in life, Bahya, in effect, weakened the claim on us for gratitude to the humans who bestow favors on us, because they are mere instruments of God's benevolence. Bahya sensed this problem, because he said, «It is made clear that in doing favors for others, men's only intention is first of all to benefit themselves, then to adorn their own souls in this world or the next, or to save themselves from suffering, or to increase their wealth. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they should not be thanked, feared, loved and rewarded accordingly». In a later section of the book, Bahya noted

If his request [for a favor of somebody] is answered he should thank God, who fulfilled his need, and he should also thank the man through whom it was done, for his good intention and benevolent heart, and because God chose him to be the means of his welfare. It is known that God does good most of the time through pious men.

What most concerned Bahya in this latter section of his treatise (entitled "On the Reliance Upon God Alone") was getting us to put our trust exclusively in God and not in mortals. Our natural tendency is to thank the human benefactor, to be grateful to him or her, to perhaps act toward that person in a fawning manner, and to forget God's role in the causal chain of benefaction. Therefore, Bahya emphasized God's will behind all acts of human benevolence. In concluding the analysis of the thought of Bahya, we should bear in mind that, for him, gratitude to God had multiple implications, such as love for God, humility, and obedience.

II. Psychology

A. Melanie Klein (1882-1960): *Envy and Gratitude*

In her essay *Envy and Gratitude* Melanie Klein considered gratitude from a psychoanalytic point of view. She held that envy is the most powerful factor in disturbing feelings of love and gratitude at their root, because it originates in the earliest relation of a child to its mother. This relationship has a fundamental importance for the individual's whole later emotional life. The quality of the mother's earliest breast contact with the child and, more symbolically, of her capacity to represent a "good object" to the child that it can identify with, is of great importance for laying the foundations for hope, trust, and belief in goodness. Any deprivation in this respect (not only the breast's literal failure to provide enough milk, but also the mother's withholding of emotional nourishment) may cause the child to develop a serious emotional impairment in the form of hate, envy, jealousy, or greed.

The most significant consequence of this emotional impairment is that the child is deprived of the opportunity to experience enjoyment as a result of being satisfied by the good object. Envy tends to become such a persistent characteristic because it spoils the capacity for enjoyment; enjoyment gives rise to gratitude, and only gratitude can mitigate destructive impulses such as envy and greed. Only children who have been able to develop a deep-rooted relationship with a good maternal object can build up a strong and permanent capacity for love and gratitude, which can withstand temporary states of envy and hatred. In Melanie Klein's words:

One major derivative of the capacity for love is the feeling of gratitude. Gratitude is essential in building up the relation to the good object and underlies also the appreciation of goodness in others and in oneself. Gratitude is rooted in the emotions and attitudes that arise in the earliest stage of infancy, when for the baby the mother is the one and only object.

Just as Freud described the infant's bliss in being suckled as the prototype of sexual gratification, Klein considered these experiences as constitutive for all later happiness. The full gratification of the maternal breast brings about the experience of having received a unique gift from the loved object, a gift that the child wants to keep. This first gift, according to Melanie Klein, is the basis of gratitude. The gratitude of being satisfied enables a child to accept and assimilate to the loved primal object, not only as a source of food, but also as a whole person.

This is the first sign of basic trust in other people. The more regular the gratification and the more fully it is accepted, the more often the child will experience enjoyment, and gratitude and the wish to return pleasure in its wake. This recurrent experience plays an important role in the capacity to return goodness. Here we can see how gratitude and generosity become connected. Inner wealth

makes one able to share gifts with others. As Klein said, «If this gratitude is deeply felt it includes the wish to return goodness received and is thus the basis of generosity. There is always a close connection between being able to accept and to give, and both are part of the relation to the good object».

B. Fritz Heider (1896-1988)

Social psychologist Fritz Heider was related to the *Gestalt* school. In his most important work, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (1958) Heider argues that people feel grateful when they have received a benefit from someone who (the beneficiary believes) intended to benefit them. Heider claims that the perceived intentionality of the benefit was the most important factor in determining whether someone felt grateful after receiving a benefit. He also predicted that situations in which a benefactor calls on the beneficiary's duty to be grateful would produce the opposite effect. Heider noted also that beneficiaries prefer to have their gratitude attributed to internal motivations rather than extrinsic ones (e.g. duty or social norm).

3. Philosophy

A. Introduction

The study of moral development and emotion has signaled an emerging focus on the role of moral emotions. Modern philosophers posit three essential prerequisites for gratitude to qualify as a moral emotion. Briefly stated, gratitude functions as A. a moral barometer that tells a person he or she has personally benefited from another's kindness; B. a moral motivation that fosters the inclination to behave socially; C. a moral reinforcer that, when expressed by the beneficiary, increases moral behavior on the part of the benefactor. Gathering together a wealth of available literature, these philosophers show how gratitude meets all three requirements, thereby qualifying as a moral emotion. It seems thus obvious that gratitude is prominently involved, indeed vital, for living a good life.

For centuries, learned individuals and scholars have extolled gratitude's merits and viewed its lack as a human deficiency. A small sampling of various thoughts on gratitude includes the following statements:

1. "Gratitude, as it were, is the moral memory of mankind" (Georg Simmel)

2. “Blow, blow, thou winter wind! / Thou art not so unkind / As man’s ingratitude” (William Shakespeare)
3. “Ingratitude is the essence of vileness” (Immanuel Kant)
4. “I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious minds, praised most, while cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least.” (Lewis)
5. “The modern cynic says ‘Blessed is he who expects nothing for he shall be satisfied.’ Francis of Assisi says ‘Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall appreciate everything.’” (G. K. Chesterton)

B. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

In Kant’s system, Gratitude is by all accounts a key feature of morality with a distinctive importance in the “common moral knowledge”, which Kant’s moral theory should vindicate, according to its project of a critical examination of foundations and contents of the common moral understanding. In his theory of virtues, Kant divides our duty of practical love into the specific duties of beneficence, gratitude, and sympathy. As regards gratitude, Kant claims that it is a duty of love we have toward others in return for their kindness or charity. Gratitude, in other words, involves properly honoring a person who has bestowed upon me some benefit or favor. The grateful disposition is appreciativeness, where such appreciation shows respect for one’s benefactor. Though gratitude generally presupposes that one has actually benefited from another’s generosity, Kant insists that even mere heartfelt benevolence that does not produce any “physical results” warrants an expression of gratitude in kind.

As for the scope of our duty of gratitude, Kant claims that we should be grateful not only to our contemporaries, but also to our predecessors, from whom we have benefited at least indirectly. Kant explains that is precisely due to the large scope of gratitude that it is sometimes thought to be improper not to defend the ancients, whom he suggests we can regard as our teachers. The intensity of gratitude, in contrast to its scope, depends on how useful was the favor that put the beneficiary of another’s charity under obligation, as well as how unselfishly this favor was given.

Kant explicitly warns against conceiving of gratitude as a “merely prudential maxim”, which would make it instrumental for some pragmatic purpose. On the contrary, the maxim of gratitude, according to Kant, is “rather, direct constraint in accordance with the moral law, that is, a duty”, and so the idea is that we ought to cultivate an appreciative disposition for its own sake, because it is the morally appropriate attitude to have in response to another’s demonstrations of

practical love. Moreover, Kant maintains that we should not think of a debt of gratitude as a burden to be discharged. An occasion for gratitude is rather a “moral kindness”, one that gives us a chance to cultivate love of humanity in general. We should thus welcome an occasion for gratitude as:

an opportunity given to unite the virtue of gratitude with love of man, to combine the *cordiality* of a benevolent disposition with *sensitivity* to benevolence and so to cultivate one’s love of human beings.

Kant claims, furthermore, that gratitude is a “sacred” duty, one whose violation can “destroy the moral incentive to beneficence in its very principle”, which suggests that gratitude is not only a morally good disposition to cultivate on its own, but also serviceable for morality, in the sense that it encourages people to be beneficent (even if that is not its aim). It is precisely because gratitude holds a special place as a sacred virtue that Kant thinks the vice of ingratitude toward one’s benefactor is rightly judged to be “one of the most detestable vices”. In sum, gratitude, for Kant, is a virtue, where this particular virtue of love amounts to a disposition to express one’s genuine appreciation in response to the beneficence of others. As a moral attitude affected by the will, gratitude adds moral value to the world, because it demonstrated proper respect for our benefactors, it cultivates in us a love of humanity in general, and it further promotes a culture of active benevolence.

C. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger was fond of the seventeenth century Pietist phrase, “*Denken ist Danken*, (to think is to thank)”. In this respect Heidegger writes, “Pure thanks lies in this, that we simply think that what is solely and properly to-be-thought”. But what is it that properly ought to be thought? For Heidegger, it is Being-Itself, and *thinking of* this being is itself a *thanking for* being. Much of Heidegger’s later work is a poetic exploration of the common etymology between thinking and thanking.

D. Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995)

Emmanuel Lévinas attempts to break philosophically with the economy of being by breaking with the reciprocity of gift-given and the giving of thanks. Opposing to Heidegger’s view of belonging together, in Lévinas we find the idea of the proximity in separation of the face to face and filiation

beyond the face. If the primary response of responsibility before the obligations of my station and its duties is an expression of gratitude, it is called by Lévinas an expression of «proto-gratitude»:

Men have been able to be thankful for the very fact of finding themselves able to thank; the present gratitude is grafted onto itself as onto an already antecedent gratitude. In a prayer in which the believer asks that his prayer be heard, the prayer as it were precedes or follows itself.

The antecedent gratitude could not be gratitude for the Other's gratitude without entering into a system and symmetry. This is why, on pain of returning to return, the giving of thanks or the giving of oneself has to be a response to ingratitude. Antecedent gratitude makes the everyday giving and receiving of thanks possible by saving it from being only possibility or power.

Thus, according to Lévinas, my gift awakes in the other originally not an obligation to give another gift in return, but a feeling of gratitude, which eventually moves the other (but from within, so to speak) to reciprocate, even if I have no right to expect the return of the gift. In other words, the loving response of the other is not enforceable, since it must remain free as my gift was, and since there is, indeed, no contract or law obliging the other to respond positively to my gift. The other's choice to reciprocate is an autonomous act, an expression of his or her self-determination. It is fully up to the other whether to reciprocate or not. The binding of gratitude is soft enough to respect the other's freedom and self-governance, even though, of course, it orients him or her towards the good, exerting admittedly a certain moral pressure.

If the other decides to reciprocate the gift, he or she does so not only to do justice, but, like me, out of love (though justice is also included in love). The return of the gift is not a mechanical result of the other's automatic reaction, but of his or her conscious and responsible ethical commitment. Hence, mutuality is rather a matter of responsiveness than of mere reversibility. Briefly, the other's giving is not a simple repetition of my giving, but the other's original act, his or her unique contribution to the development of our relationship. And even if the other's gift had hypothetically exactly the same "economic" value as mine, it would still remain, in an ethical sense, incomparable because of (or, better, thanks to) the other's irreducible alterity. To conclude, according to Lévinas only if the other enters the realms of reciprocity, I am and can feel wholly recognized, accepted, and appreciated in my uniqueness. And in addition Lévinas argues that I gain benefit and enrichment from the other's gift, which is always, in some measure, a surprising presence of something new in my life. Once I have this experience, I understand that I should cherish and promote the unique otherness of the other not only for the other's sake, but also for the sake of my own uniqueness and growth (and thus for the sake of my very identity and authenticity),

which I discover fully possible only in an atmosphere of communion and mutual acknowledgement, where gifts are freely shared and joyfully welcomed.

E. Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005)

In *The Course of Recognition* Paul Ricoeur looks for circumstances, which would reveal the possibility of genuine recognition in a particularly convincing manner. Ricoeur looks for actual experiences of “states of peace” to get confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory. In particular, Ricoeur takes practices of giving and receiving gifts to be such an exemplary contexts. Ricoeur’s main point in discussing gift-giving is to stress the role of *gratitude* as a response to a gift. Giving a gift in return is not the first response, nor is there a mechanic need to reciprocate: gratitude is as such an adequate way of establishing mutuality.

As a central meaning of the French word *reconnaissance* is gratitude, Ricoeur’s observations about gift-giving and gratitude are among the highlights of his book. The problem that Ricoeur relentlessly puts forth in his final chapter is that of the asymmetry of agents in the process of recognition. Like the making of a promise, one party is in debt, while the other is in demand. And contrary to appearances, neither the act of recognizing nor the act of promising end once the demand or the promise is fulfilled. Ricoeur insists on the moral motivations that bring together the recognizing and the recognized party.

At the end of the book, these moral motivations are analyzed under the triple heading of states of peace, gift exchange, and mutual recognition. Here, recognition takes the form of “gratitude,” as exemplified by festive undertakings of recognition. The virtues of giving and of receiving are real, and they express, in the eyes of Ricoeur, the limits of an always asymmetrical recognition bounded by peace and gratitude.

4. Non-Jewish Theology

Christianity

Gratitude has always been central among Christian virtues and appears in classical and modern devotional writings as well as in the Old and New Testaments. In Christian gratitude, God is the giver of all gifts and the ultimate foundation for thankfulness. There is a feeling of indebtedness to the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. God’s generosity provides the model for how

Christians are to deal with their own children and with each other. In response to questions from Pharisees about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: «“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets» (Matthew 22:37-40). These statements indicate both gratitude to our Creator and thankfulness to others demonstrated by our loving actions toward them.

The centrality of the virtue of gratitude is evident subsequently in all Christian traditions and across all denominations. St Augustine in writing his Confessions is focused superficially on all his faults and failings, but it is a misreading of it to think that these are his ultimate concern. In fact the over-riding sense that comes across from a careful reading is of thankfulness to God who, despite his ignorance, evil intentions and gross misbehavior, never deprived him of his God - given delight in friendship, and desire for truth. He may only have become aware of these later and then been able to put them to the creative use for which they were intended, but God was present with him all the time.

St Thomas Aquinas affirmed gratitude to be a virtue since it was an aspect of justice in respect of the gifts of all benefactors - above all God whose huge range of unmerited gifts he understood to flow from his commitment of himself to the love of his creation. Martin Luther claimed that gratitude was «the basic Christian attitude».

Islam

As regards Islam, the Koran repeatedly asserts the necessity for gratitude and thankfulness to God. For example, in Sura XIV it is written: «If you are grateful, I will give you more» (14:7). A traditional Islamic saying states «The first who will be summoned to paradise are those who have praised God in every circumstance». Muhammad also said: «Gratitude for the abundance you have received is the best insurance that the abundance will continue». True gratitude, it is taught, draws more abundant graces upon the believer.

In Sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam, entire book chapters have been devoted to developing gratitude. Different stages of gratitude are explained: the first is gratitude for the gifts received from God, as we would be grateful for any gift; a higher state is attained when one becomes grateful for not receiving gifts or for being delayed in having a hope fulfilled. In this state one sees the blessings that are veiled in affliction. The final state of gratitude is recognizing that no

amount of worship is sufficient to express gratitude to the Creator and that even feelings of gratitude are a gift from God. There is gratitude for the capacity to feel grateful.

A. Etty Hillesum (1914-1943): gratefulness against all odds

Little is known of the external life of Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman who lived in Amsterdam during the Nazi occupation and who died as one of the millions of victims of the Holocaust. This obscurity is in contrast with her well-documented internal life. From the day when Dutch Jews were ordered to wear a yellow star up to the day she boarded a cattle car bound for Poland, Etty consecrated herself to an ambitious task. In the face of her impending death, she endeavored to bear witness to the inviolable power of love and to reconcile her keen sensitivity to human suffering with her appreciation for the beauty and meaning of existence. For the last two years of her life Etty kept a meticulous diary, recording her daily experiences and the unfolding of her interior response. Published four decades after her death, this book was quickly recognized as one of the great moral documents of our time.

The problem of Etty Hillesum was: why talk of God nowadays? Etty suggests that God helps us transcend fear by faith, listening to the inner life within ourselves and within others. God gives us a reason for living, and encourages us to preserve harmony in our inner households, filled as they are with so many conflicting, disparate elements. The presence of God encourages us to be grateful in relation to the others:

I thank You, God, peace and quiet now reign in my great inner Domain, thanks to the strong central authority You exert. The furthest flung boundaries sense Your authority and Your love and allow themselves to be guided by You (Diary, 9 January 1942).

Etty Hillesum was convinced that God helps us to keep believing in humanity, to find the strength to live in the present moment and the courage to trust in it, to live in a spirit of praise and gratitude for life, which is beautiful despite everything. When she was deported, she kept writing her diary from which we can read a moving desire to celebrate life and love beyond all the difficulties:

Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on earth, my eyes raised towards heaven, tears run down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude.

The camp she speaks of is a Nazi death camp. What Etty Hillesum stands for is gratefulness against all the odds. This makes her shine as an example for all, a witness to sheer enthusiasm for life.

B. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945): How to be grateful while in prison?

Is it possible to remain grateful and joyful even in the worst of circumstances, such as when your rights are taken away from you, or when you are imprisoned for what you believe in? What if you were condemned to die for a wrong you did not do? Could gratitude still be an option? For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the answer was a resounding yes. He said, “In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich”.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Resistance Fighter during World War II. He was a brilliant student. Bonhoeffer was also a musician, writer, pastor and one of the most influential movers of his time. When Hitler came to power, the church began to be infiltrated by Nazi theology and many welcomed the rise of Nazism. Bonhoeffer wrote about the problems that the evangelical church faced under the Nazi dictatorship. He rose to voice his opposition to the Nazification of the church and to the persecution of the Jews. He called on the church to make their stand against these threats to Christian values and in 1935 he established an anti-Nazi underground seminary. In 1937 Bonhoeffer was arrested and taken to the Tegel Prison in Berlin, and later he was deported to the Flossenburg concentration camp, where he was executed. In 1943, he wrote a letter to his parents, the first of his letters collected in *Letters and Papers from Prison*:

My dear parents, I do want you to be quite sure that I am all right. To my surprise, the discomforts you usually associate with prison life such as its physical hardships don't seem to trouble me at all. I can even make a good breakfast each morning of dry bread... I can still hear the hymns we sang this morning. 'Praise ye the Lord, the almighty, King of creation. Shelters thee under his wings, yea, so gently sustained.' How true it is! And may it ever be so... Spring is on its way now with a vengeance. In the prison court yard there is a thrush which sings a beautiful little song every morning, and now has started in the evening, too. One is grateful for little things, that also is a gain.

Not too long after he was taken in the concentration camp, Bonhoeffer was implicated in the attempt on Hitler's life by the resistance group and was condemned for treason. Bonhoeffer's unbelievable sense of gratitude and cheerful disposition in even the worst situations were remembered fondly by his friends and impressed even his jailers. A British officer who was one of the camp survivors said: «Bonhoeffer was different, his soul really shone in the dark desperation of

prison. He always seemed to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive. He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near».