

Gratitude

Gratitude can be given to God or it can be directed to other human persons. In this final chapter, we shall consider in detail the role that each of these two “kinds” of gratitude should play in our lives.¹²

Gratitude to God

Gratitude to God is one of the fundamental, basic characteristics of the religious life. The words “Who are you and who am I?” found in St. Francis’s prayer reveal the basic confrontation of the creature, mere “dust and ashes,”¹³ with the unattainable, absolute majesty of God revealed in the sacred humanity of Christ: “The mystery of the Incarnation illuminates to our spiritual eyes the new light of your splendor in such a way that while we perceive

¹²This chapter first appeared posthumously as a booklet entitled *Über die Dankbarkeit* (1980: EOS Verlag Erzabtei St. Ottilien).

¹³Gen. 18:27.

The Art of Living

God with our eyes, He may enkindle in us the love of invisible blessings.”¹⁴

Gratitude for our existence as a person is also a part of our fundamental bearing toward God, as is gratitude for all the natural goods and, above all, for His great wonders (*magnalia Dei*), for His graces, and for His infinite mercy. Thus prayers of gratitude should be the centerpiece of the life of prayer.

Balduin Schwarz had profound insights on the matter of gratitude to God.¹⁵ Specifically, he showed how giving thanks in response to a favorable outcome of events or for that happiness which is not due to other people’s actions, can only mean thanking God, which implicitly presupposes the existence of a good God and His Providence. Like hope, the affective response of gratitude implies a tacit reliance on the existence of a benevolent and all-powerful God, even by those who have not yet found Him.

Gratitude is a basic response to God, profoundly connected with ultimate subordination to Him — the absolute Lord — and with adoring love for Him, the infinitely holy one, the quintessence of all beauty and majesty. However, gratitude itself is something *sui generis*, reducible to nothing else, an ultimate, irreplaceable *word* in the relation of man to God.

Gratitude presupposes apprehension of values

Included in this primary *word* of man to God is apprehension and full understanding of the values which inhere in beneficial

¹⁴“*Per incarnati Verbi mysterium nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuae claritatis infulsit: ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur*” (Preface of Christmas).

¹⁵“Über die Dankbarkeit” in Balduin Schwarz, *Wirklichkeit der Mitte, Beiträge zu einer Strukturanthropologie: Festgabe für August Vetter* (Freiburg und München: Karl Alber, 1968), 679-704.

goods for us, with which God's love continually overwhelms us. Values constitute the true dynamism of being, which does not at all contradict the inherent greatness of being. All the enthusiasm for the "dynamic" that is found in Hegel and Heidegger, the idolizing of motion as opposed to "static" being, completely misses the true dynamic that is present in value-filled being as opposed to naked and indifferent being.

In several of our works we have previously pointed out the fundamental importance of the full apprehension of values.¹⁶ The breadth, the spiritual stature, and the richness of a person's spirit actually depends on his grasp of values. The fundamental ontological importance of values, of the being that is the bearer of a value, of the valuable as opposed to the indifferent, becomes apparent if we consider what is meant by grasping values in contrast to being value-blind. We have a premonition of what the fiery being of values — this highest dimension of being — means; we sense that we have brushed against a primary mystery.¹⁷

¹⁶What would the world be if there were only the distinction between the means and the end, and nothing to raise these concepts above their gray neutrality? In that case, an answer about the ultimate meaning and the *raison d'être* of the universe would only be possible if the whole world could be shown to be a network of final causality. For the importance of *the end* compared with *the means* does not reveal the true *raison d'être* of the end. What is more, while the *raison d'être* of an existing being as a means to an end only has the character of something indispensable and essential for the end, the very reason for its existence depends on the importance of the end. And if the true *raison d'être* of the end is not clear to us, then all that which is grounded only in indispensability also remains without a true *raison d'être*.

¹⁷The abyss of nothingness awakens in us the *horror vacui* (the terror of the void) as soon as we pretend that objective being is totally neutral and indifferent and that every value is only a subjective illusion. The inconceivable barrenness, the absurdity and nothingness of a world in which there is no objective value and disvalue, can hardly be imagined. We venture to assert that the legion of those who attempt to deny the existence

The Art of Living

The vital importance of the capacity to apprehend values becomes clear in light of the fact that value is the core of being. A person incapable of grasping values and understanding them as values is no real person. Without the grasp of values, the core of the dialogue between subject and object becomes impossible and the full transcendence of knowledge becomes nonexistent. If the capacity for apprehending objective values were to be taken from man, he would be cut off from the innermost life of the cosmos and especially from God. St Augustine's words "You have made us for Yourself"¹⁸ would no longer have validity.

Gratitude is a specific response to beneficial goods

Gratitude toward God presupposes the perception and understanding of the values of all of God's gifts, but it also presupposes the perception and understanding of the nature of beneficial goods for the person.¹⁹ Gratitude is a specific response to beneficial goods for the person.²⁰

For example, in gratitude for the gift of knowledge, I must grasp not only the value of knowledge itself, but also the gift that

of objective values — the relativists, immanentists, and subjectivists — can never existentially and consistently conceive of an entirely indifferent world, a world that is filled with the icy breath of absolute neutrality and indifference. They can no more do this than the gainsayers of an absolute truth can consistently construct a world without something existing objectively — without, that is, absolute truth.

¹⁸St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. 1, Ch. 1.

¹⁹I have spoken in detail concerning beneficial goods in other places. See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1953), Ch. 5, "The Primacy of Value," 72-74, and Ch. 7, "The Categories of Importance as Properties of Being," 79-94.

²⁰Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, *Moralia*, Ch. 5 (Regensburg: Habel, 1980), 105-116.

knowledge represents *for me*. With this gift I grasp the *pro*, the gesture of the gift *qua* gift which is friendly and affirming for me. The comprehension of this *pro* is inextricably linked with the personal God, with His goodness and love which are personally directed at me.

Gratitude is intimately related to God

Thus we are touched by a blissful, intimate dimension of the religious life, the awareness of the primary source of all happiness, which is that we are loved by God. Gratitude is a specific response to God's love manifested to us by His wonderful gifts. Gratitude includes our understanding, first of all, of the value of this good; second, of the objective good for me inherent in this gift; third, of the goodness of God in its inconceivably sacred beauty; and finally, that the goodness is intended for me, that His love touches me personally. We can then surmise what a central factor gratitude is in our relationship with God and what a high value it bears as a response to all these great gifts.

In genuine gratitude toward God man becomes beautiful. He emerges from immanence, from the confines of ego-relatedness and enters into the blissful giving of himself to God, the quintessence of all glory, into the realm of goodness and true kindness. In gratitude, man becomes great and expansive. Blessed and victorious freedom blooms in his soul.

Gratitude is also deeply linked to humility. The thankful person is conscious of the fact that he is a beggar before God and possesses no right in relation to God on which he can insist, that all is a gift of the goodness of God and that he can make no claim against God.

Kierkegaard speaks wonderfully about gratitude and its intimate relation to God:

The Art of Living

And now that I must talk about my God-relationship — about what every day is repeated in my prayer of thanksgiving for the indescribable things He has done for me, so infinitely much more than ever I could have expected — I must speak about the experience which has taught me to be amazed, amazed at God, at His love and at what a man's impotence is capable of with His aid, about what has taught me to long for eternity and not to fear that I might find it tiresome, since it is exactly the situation I need so as to have nothing else to do but to give thanks.²¹

The person who is filled with gratitude toward God, whose life is permeated by this primary attitude of gratitude, is also the only person who is truly awake. He is the opposite of the apathetic, obtuse person, who remains in that state of half-wakefulness which suffices for the fulfillment of life's practical necessities. He is the opposite of the person who remains on the periphery and takes everything for granted.

Here there is a decided analogy to the sphere of knowledge. *Homo sapiens* differs from *homo faber* not only because he does not take the reality around him for granted, investigating it only for pragmatic reasons, but is full of astonishment, awake to the question of the essence and meaning of things, and possesses an understanding of values. (Both Plato and Aristotle refer to *wonder* as the beginning of all philosophy.)

Something analogous to this awakening, this emerging from a solely pragmatic outlook, occurs in the man whose life is permeated by true gratitude to God. He is awakened from the apathy and superficiality of taking things for granted to astonishment at the

²¹Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 66-67.

gifts of God and the inexhaustibly blissful mystery of the infinite love and mercy of God.

The feeling of gratitude urges the person toward expression in an act of thanksgiving. There is a general tendency in man to give expression to what fills his heart. “For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks,” says Christ.²² However, this general tendency is actualized in very different ways.

Acts of expression differ from declarations and social acts

For example, in our *Metaphysics of Community*, we described the difference between a pure, spontaneous expression of that which fills our heart and a meaningful, intentional declaration of love.²³

The tendency which urges us to give expression to what intensely fills our heart becomes most apparent in those social acts in which this manifestation essentially belongs to the accomplishment of the inner act, to its interpersonal character. Different from such acts of expression are social acts such as promising, informing, questioning, and judging.

But when it is not a question of such social acts, the urge for expression stands out clearly. This expression is more dynamic than intentional, but it belongs to man’s very nature. The deep link between body and soul reveals itself in this act. Expression typically involves the body, whether it be in *words* like “I gladly carved it on the bark of every tree”²⁴ or in *singing* (“Singing is the

²²Luke 6:45.

²³Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Metaphysik der Gemeinschaft* in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, ch. 2 (Regensburg: Habel, 1975), 21-30.

²⁴“Ich schnitt’ es gern in alle Rinden ein” in Franz Schubert, *Die schöne Müllerin*, Op. 25, 7. “Ungeduld” in Wilhelm Mueller’s song series.

The Art of Living

act of lovers”),²⁵ whether in laughing, weeping, kneeling, or standing. This pure form of expression is clearly different from meaningfully intentional declarations (such as, for example, of love). For such a declaration not only has an interpersonal function, but is a unique, meaningful intention to send the beam of love into the consciousness of the beloved, an important step in the process of union with him, a fulfillment of love’s intention of union (*intentio unionis*).

But such an intentional declaration can also, and at the same time be an *expression*, without the essential distinction of the two categories being compromised. On the one hand, the act of thanking is first of all a *declaration* of gratitude. Like the declaration of love, it can only be rendered in relation to the one to whom it is directed, in relation to the one to whom one feels gratitude. On the other hand, thanking also has the character of a *social act*; for it is not only the declaration of our attitude of gratitude to which we give expression, but it is also directed toward the gift for which I give thanks. In this respect, thanking resembles promising or informing. Not only does another person constitute the theme (in that he is the partner whom I address), but the gift for which I give thanks is also part of that theme.

Finally, there is in thanking also the expression of an *overflowing affectivity*, which St. Augustine refers to when he says that to sing is typical of the lover.

Expression of gratitude brings about wholeness

There is a new solemnity when the spoken word is transformed into song. This sublime, totally unpragmatic note originates in the

²⁵“*Cantare autem . . . negotium esse solet amantium.*” St. Augustine, *Sermon* 33.1.

longing to give expression to our feelings. It comes not only from the aforementioned dynamic character of expression; it springs as well from that wholeness which is achieved when something is meaningfully completed. This wholeness is missing when deeply-rooted spiritual attitudes and value-responses go unexpressed, but it is achieved when they are revealed by being expressed through the body.

It is no accident that prayers of gratitude occupy such an important place in the Liturgy. Let us only consider the three unique hymns: the *Benedictus*, the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc Dimittis*, which celebrate the transition from the Old to the New Testament. The reverently expectant, hopeful attitude of the Old Testament merges into the overflowing, grateful attitude of the New. Indeed, both attitudes are united in a unique way. When St. Augustine says at the end of *The City of God*, “There we shall have leisure and we shall see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise,”²⁶ the word *praise* — together with the statement “we shall praise” — refers to that dimension of expression which belongs to the consummation, to that “which will be in the end without end.”²⁷

Even in eternity, in which there will be only a transfigured reality, praise (and with it and in it also the explicit giving of thanks) retains its full importance.

Gratitude yearns for expression in thanksgiving

Can we imagine a person whose heart is overflowing with gratitude toward God but who never feels compelled to give it

²⁶St Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. 22, Ch. 30: “*Ibi vacabimus, et videbimus; videbimus, et amabimus; amabimus, et laudabimus.*”

²⁷*Ibid.*

The Art of Living

expression in his own prayer of gratitude? Of course not! Such a lack of an inner impulse to thank God in spoken prayer for the reception of His gifts and graces would be a clear indication that gratitude toward God does not yet occupy the rightful place in his heart. The above-mentioned hymns express the overflowing gratitude for the receiving of a great and fateful gift: Zacharias gives thanks for the miracle of the birth of John the Baptist; the Most Blessed Virgin for the incomprehensible, unique grace of being selected as the Virgin mother of the Redeemer; Simeon for the grace of being allowed before his death to see and to hold the promised Redeemer in his arms. How essential, how crucial for true gratitude is this explicit act of thanking, this prayer of thanksgiving expressed in words.

We shall return to this connection between genuine gratitude and the specific act of thanksgiving in still more detail when we analyze gratitude to human persons. But at this time we need to bring out several other aspects of gratitude to God.

Profound happiness comes to the truly grateful person

First of all, we want to discuss the profound relationship between true happiness and gratitude. Certainly, acknowledging the values on which gratitude is based is a primary source of happiness. Above all, the consciousness of God's love and mercy toward us, which is, indeed, included in our understanding of a gift of God and of its character as a beneficial good for us, is plainly the primary source of all true, imperishable happiness.

But we should also stress the happiness that is inherent in feeling grateful and in the resulting act of gratitude. This is the happiness of inner freedom and of the humility inherently linked to it which belongs to the thankful person. We only need to distinguish clearly between the man who takes for granted his

existence as a person, the gifts that God has bestowed on him, as well as the love and friendship of others which have been given to him, and the man who takes nothing for granted, but who acknowledges that everything is an unmerited gift. The latter stands within the truth, while the former is blindly imprisoned in his obtuse indifference. Clearly desolation marks the life of the person who neither understands the abundance and value of the gifts he has received, nor knows that they are unmerited gifts, nor recognizes that in them shines the goodness, mercy, and love of God! This comparison illustrates the profound happiness that can only be known by the thankful person.

Each person receives a range of beneficial goods

A many-tiered hierarchy is to be found within the beneficial goods for us, both with regard to their inherent value as well as with regard to the role that they play in our life. Thus God's gift of an extraordinary talent (whether it be intellectual or artistic, creative or reproductive) has a continuous importance which resonates through our whole life, in contradistinction to, for example, the gift of a single beautiful journey. Even more fundamental gifts from God include our capacity for the knowledge of values, our potential to love, and even our free will; these are greater gifts than even the precious gift of a great friendship. Oddly enough, we become all the less aware that a beneficial good for us is a gift from God the more fundamental and formal it is. We are more easily filled with gratitude toward God for the loving union with another person than for our existence as a person, although the latter is the primary presupposition for everything else, for all happiness and for eternal bliss.

How many of us are conscious of our existence as an inconceivable gift? How many of us take this fundamental gift for granted?

The Art of Living

Hand in hand with our transformation in Christ goes a continuous growing awareness of God's gifts, both the appreciation of their value and the recognition of their formal importance. Possessing any beneficial good becomes less a matter of course. Everything is ever more seen to be an unmerited gift; everything is perceived as a reason for unlimited gratitude toward God and the urge to thank Him expressly for everything becomes stronger and stronger.

Goods and evils call, respectively, for a different response

Of course, man's life is not only filled with the gifts of God, but also contains objective evils for him, crosses of every kind. In this respect, there are great differences in people's lives. Often there is a richly blessed life right next to a ruined life or one burdened with suffering such as deformities or illnesses. Furthermore, we must remember not only that there is a distinction between a happy life and a life full of suffering, but also that every life contains both great gifts on the one hand and hard suffering and crosses to bear on the other.²⁸

In contrast to the unfathomable gift of personal existence and of life on earth stands the terrible cross of death. Hand in hand with the great gift of unity with the beloved goes worry about his life, the fear of separation through death, indeed, even the possibility that he could cease requiting our love. Although we sing "heaven and earth are full of Your glory," the life of man, in spite of all the gifts of God, is a *vallis lacrimarum*, a vale of tears.

Then the question arises: what kind of response to crosses and suffering does God require of us? Should our response to them

²⁸When we examine whether something is a positive gift from God or a cross, we will restrict ourselves to the dispensations of God, and omit the consideration of sufferings that issue from our guilt and sinfulness.

likewise be one of gratitude, because we know that even the crosses and suffering are imposed or permitted by the infinite love of God?

It has been frequently asserted that he who truly loves Christ and is transformed in Him, gives thanks even for suffering and crosses because they represent a special communion with Christ — the bearing of the Cross with Him. Indeed, some say there should be no difference in our response of gratitude whether God bestows joy or imposes suffering.

Nonetheless, however true and profound may be the view that sees in suffering, in grateful resignation, and in self-sacrificing love imposed on us by God the gift of being allowed to share the Cross of Christ, it cannot be denied that there is a profound difference between gratitude for a great good and submissive, resigned acceptance of a great evil. The *Magnificat* of the most Blessed Virgin is obviously a different response than the attitude of the Mother of God standing at the Cross.

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.²⁹

The essence of gratitude includes joy. The resigned acceptance of a cross in itself contains no joy. If it amounts to an heroic joy in the sense of gratitude at being allowed to share the Cross of Christ, this does not change the fact that the joy inherent in gratitude is intimately linked to the positive character of a gift.

²⁹*Stabat mater dolorosa / Juxta crucem lacrimosa / Dum pependit filius.* From the *Stabat Mater* by Jacopone da Todi in the Sequence of the Mass of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. English translation in the *Daily Missal of the Mystical Body*, ed. Maryknoll Fathers (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1956), 1262.

The Art of Living

Sufferings exist for the sake of joy

In order to understand that the responses to a positive gift and to a cross should be different, we have to be conscious that happiness has priority over suffering. The mystery that the redemption of man occurred through Christ's passion and death on the Cross must not permit us to forget (as Father Heribert Holzappel, O.F.M. noted) that sufferings are only there for the sake of joy.

The mystery of the unfathomable suffering of Christ, which constitutes a mysterious unfolding of the infinite love of the God-man Jesus Christ for God the Father and for mankind, must not cloak the fact that the redemption constitutes the way to sanctification of the individual person and to the resulting glorification of God, and also opens the gate to our eternal happiness. The greatness and depth of the passion of Christ causes us to pray in adoration:

Wounded with His every wound,
Steep my soul till it hath swooned
In His very blood away.³⁰

But this fact must not be allowed to obscure our knowledge that the passion of Christ is the way to eternal happiness for those redeemed and transformed in Christ. The sufferings of Christ, which move us to our very marrow, and His love, in which He pours out His blood for us, intoxicating our heart and causing us to pray "Blood of Christ, inebriate me,"³¹ must not allow us to forget that the eternal goal is not participation in the Cross, but rather the blessed face-to-face vision of the God-man Jesus Christ

³⁰Ibid., 1263: *Fac me plagis vulnerari / Fac me cruce inebriari / Et cruore Filii.*

³¹"*Sanguis Christi, inebria me*" from the medieval prayer *Anima Christi*.

reigning in transfigured glory in eternity. We pray for this face-to-face vision with the words:

Beholding Your fair face revealed,
Your glory shall I be blessed to see.³²

Objective distinctions should not be blurred

There is a general danger for the deeply religious person of falling into a certain nihilism, which first seems to be the fruit of a special religious zeal but in reality, like every blurring of objective distinctions, has disastrous consequences. Instead of *nihilism* one could also say *uniformity*.

On the one hand, a disordered (or mistaken) desire for unity underlies this tendency — a need to ignore basic, outspoken differences in order to reduce everything to a common denominator. This urge has led to countless errors in philosophy. Some believe that discovery of an important fact means that the philosopher's stone has been found whereby everything can be explained. Others stretch analogies in different fields to such an extent that the essence of that field is seen in a false light or is even completely misunderstood in its very nature. This general tendency comes to the fore especially when a thinker aims at constructing a "system." We must avoid that temptation, especially in the religious realm.

The theologian Ockham, for example, believes that he enhances the absolute greatness and glory of God when he abolishes the decisive distinction between God's positive commandments and His moral commandments of God. In reality, by denying the

³²"*Ut, te revelata cernens facie, / Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae.*" From St. Thomas Aquinas's hymn "*Adoro Te Devote.*" English translation by Robert Anderson and Johann Moser in *Devoutly I Adore Thee* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1993), 71.

The Art of Living

primary distinction of good and indifferent (or even of good and evil), the idea of God's nature is undermined, and the infinitely good, holy God is changed into an arbitrary, absolute lord; indeed, the most central and essential quality of God is denied. This is why we describe these attempts as *nihilism*.

Acceptance (not gratitude) is the right response to crosses

Nihilism also underlies the attempt, perceived as the highest heroism, to equate the response to a cross that has been imposed on us with the response to a great and wonderful gift of God. Some people say, for example,

Everything is an emanation of the infinite love of God, the answering of which is the important thing. Therefore we must thank God in the same way for a cross imposed upon us as for a profoundly wonderful beneficial good for us. We ought to transcend the question of what makes us happy or of what deeply distresses us and press forward to the love of God. Does His love not manifest itself in both? Isn't the love of God for us, His merciful will to draw us to Himself and to prepare us for the eternal union with Him, the most important thing in all that is imposed on us by God?

Certainly! But it is precisely in this merciful love, which has called us to eternal blessedness, that the primacy of blessedness in comparison to all suffering is fully expressed. In approaching the merciful love of God we see clearly that the reality and the absolute distinction between bliss and sorrow is included in that love. Furthermore it is in accord with God's decrees for us to make a clear distinction between a beneficial gift and a cross. For although everything is an emanation of the infinite love of God — even the permitting of incomprehensible, terrible crosses such

as the death of a beloved person — the distinction between a wonderful gift and a cross is not set aside. This radical difference belongs essentially to the meaning and function of God's Providence. Therefore, gratitude is the response to all the positive gifts and submissive, loving acceptance is the response to the crosses.

We should not ignore the different “faces” of God's Providence, as it were; we should not pass over them and respond to them as though there were no fundamental difference between them. Let us not forget that in the positive gifts and especially in grace, there shines forth a distant reflection of eternity, which points to eternal beatitude and even contains a kind of promise of eternal beatitude. All sufferings and crosses, on the other hand, point to the vale of tears and the transitory condition of earthly pilgrimage. The submissive acceptance of this should purify us and unite us with the suffering Christ.³³ But this is only possible if the crosses are fully suffered, if we do not force a joyful response to them.

³³When we say that sorrows are limited to the *status viae*, this may appear to be a serious neglect of Purgatory and Hell. But we are here discussing sorrows and crosses that are a test of human beings, an opportunity to achieve a final surrender to God, and the abandonment of all inappropriate attachments. The nature of the temporary is inherent in these sorrows and in the preparation for eternal bliss. The same is also true of Purgatory, which is concerned with atonement for sin and with purgation with a view to eternal bliss. The relativity of these sufferings appears clearly in their essential relationship to eternal bliss. As for eternal punishment in Hell, this suffering is certainly neither temporary nor a way to eternal bliss. It is concerned with punishment, the divine response to the fearful disharmony of sin, the final rejection of God, and rebellion against Him. The essence and intent of this suffering are radically different from all the crosses God imposes on us on earth, which we know are a result of His merciful love. Hell's sufferings are a result of God's justice. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante adds love to justice in the words appearing as an inscription above the gate of Hell in Canto 3 of the *Inferno*: *Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore; / fecemi la divina potestate, / la somma sapienza e 'l primo amore.* (Justice moved my lofty creator; / I was made by the divine power, / by the highest wisdom and the primal love.)

The Art of Living

The distinction between gratitude and submissive acceptance also becomes clear in its profundity when we bear in mind that we are permitted to ask God in the same way for His positive gifts and for the averting of sufferings and crosses, whereas we are only permitted to ask to suffer crosses if a special vocation is present. We thereby touch upon another great danger that threatens the religious life: eccentricity and artificiality. Things that are genuine, impressive, and beautiful when a special vocation is present are, without such a vocation, eccentric and artificial.

But transformation in Christ, to which all are called, includes the fact that we are permitted to ask for gifts and graces as well as for the averting of crosses and sufferings. "Save us from disease, hunger and war, O Lord," prays the holy Church in the Litany of All Saints. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is the model for transformation in Christ. First our Lord prays for the averting of the cup of the most profound sorrow; then, in the final words ("Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"³⁴) He shows His ultimate submission to the will of God, His unconditional resignation.

Yet, only in light of the ultimate abandonment to God embodied in the final words, "Not my will, but Thine be done," does the foregoing petition assume its full impact; and only through the earlier petition do the final words assume their full, authentic reality and their glorious truth.³⁵

For this reason, gratitude as the response to all positive gifts must be grounded in the same attitude as the submissive acceptance of all sufferings and crosses: in readiness for the unconditional acceptance of that which God imposes on us. But this

³⁴Luke 22:42.

³⁵Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Sacred Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1965), 154-155.

ultimate word, “Thy will be done,” still does not erase the distinctions between gratitude, loving acceptance, and full suffering of the cross, even when it leads to the cry of dereliction: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”³⁶

It is of the greatest significance for the relationship of man to God, as He intended it, that the positive gifts not be forgotten among the trials and sorrows. Gratitude and thanksgiving for all positive gifts must live on together with the humble, loving acceptance of the crosses in the light of the Passion of Christ.

There are special cases when acts of Providence that are painful later result in a good for us. This change of aspect, in which something which is in itself an evil later proves to bring about felicitous results, is a special mystery in the course of our lives. Most people can list numerous examples of events in which consequences changed the character of the objective good or evil.

Good consequences do not transform evil into good

But we first must add that such a change does not mean that the positive consequences of the imposed trial revoke its status as an objective evil for us. The change in aspect proceeds from consequences — and they are not necessarily connected to the evil. These consequences are not something that necessarily flows from the trial as such, but are rather a part of that mysterious chain of causality that permeates our life. Therefore, it is fully appropriate when our immediate response to the trial is not gratitude, but a submissive, humble “Thy will be done” accompanied by the belief that this trial will turn out to be a special manifestation of God’s love. If, later, happy consequences come to pass, we can give thanks for the trials.

³⁶Matt. 27:46.

The Art of Living

Gratitude could never be appropriate for some crosses

Secondly, it must be emphasized that there are trials, sufferings, and crosses that are so terrible, so profound, that they can never because of their consequences appear to be positive — for example, the death of the most beloved person, a spouse loved more than anyone else. Even if later, after this trial, a very happy new marriage becomes possible, it would certainly be terrible to give thanks for the death of the first beloved spouse. Even ignoring the fact that such an evil affects not only the survivor but the most beloved, the cross is so severe that it can never be viewed in the light of happy consequences.³⁷

We should have particular gratitude for the *magnalia Dei*

We cannot conclude the investigation of gratitude toward God in the life of the person transformed in Christ without referring to gratitude for the *magnalia Dei* in the special sense of this expression (that is, for the supernatural gifts of God).

We have already spoken of the primary gift of our natural life, of our existence as a human person. Now we must consider the still more sublime gift of sanctifying grace, of being born again in Christ. In gratitude for these *magnalia Dei*, a prayer of the Tridentine Mass says “God, Thou hast wonderfully established the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully renewed it.” These special divine gifts extend from the revelation of the Old

³⁷There are many cases in which crosses that are not so clear-cut as the ones described above later prove to be manifestations of God’s love, so that the concerned person may even thank God for them. But this kind of gratitude is quite different from the normal joyful gratitude that is a reply to God’s beneficial gifts. It is a reply to God’s love that is manifest in His divine Providence, not a reply to the cross or trial as such.

Testament to God's self-revelation in the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ; they include the most central mystery of the Incarnation and the redemption of mankind through Christ's death on the Cross. They also include the gift of the implanting of supernatural life into the soul of the person in the sacrament of Baptism, the Eucharist, and all the sacraments. Through these gifts, we arrive at an entirely new kind of gratitude. Gratitude for the *magnalia Dei* stands at the central point of the official thanksgiving of the holy Church. This finds its special expression in the prefaces of the holy Mass.

But gratitude for the *magnalia Dei* should also have first place in the private life of the person transformed in Christ. Thanksgiving for them should permeate his life. Let us not forget that through the *magnalia Dei* even our natural life and all natural goods gain a new meaning, a new glory, and that a transfigured light falls upon them. Through the establishment of all things in Christ,³⁸ entirely new possibilities come into being for man: not only all-pervading hope, but also the capacity to love in God and in Jesus, which first gives to the love of created beings the chance to realize its deepest genius, its ultimate *intentio unionis* (intention of union) and *intentio benevolentiae* (intention of benevolence). The words of Jesus in the book of Revelation, "Behold, I make all things new,"³⁹ hold true for all of human life and for the transfiguration of all high natural goods in Christ.

Gratitude to other persons is essential for holiness

Having pointed out the fundamental significance of gratitude toward God and shown that the person transformed in Christ is

³⁸Eph. 1:10.

³⁹Rev. 21:5.

The Art of Living

one who gives thanks, that his heart must be filled by this primary attitude of gratitude toward God and toward the God-man Jesus Christ, we now turn to the question: what is the role of gratitude in a person transformed in Christ toward those people to whom he owes much in many ways?

The person transformed in Christ must also be grateful toward all those to whom he is indebted. He must have no hesitation about explicitly giving thanks for all kinds of benefits. Gratitude toward men in whom there is an objective reason for gratitude is the bearer of a high moral value. It is a consequence of humility, goodness, and true freedom. This virtue is indispensable for the one transformed in Christ, not only because it is the bearer of a high moral value, but also because it is a necessary component of holiness.

A man who is reluctant to be grateful to others, feeling this to be a burdensome dependence, is still a slave of his pride. Whoever is so imprisoned in himself that he takes all favors for granted lacks true awareness and freedom. His disregard of the obligation to give thanks, his insensitivity to the generosity contained in every gift, also shows that he himself has not yet fully entered into the kingdom of goodness.

Gratitude differs according to the relationship of persons

In order to see all of this clearly we must begin by distinguishing entirely different cases. The first concerns gratitude toward a person with whom no special friendship or mutual love unites me, who nevertheless renders a great, tangible benefit to me, whether it be moral support in a difficult inner sorrow or a defense against unjust accusations and defamations.

It is interesting that within this first case the nature of the benefit is also a factor. It is more difficult to be grateful for certain

benefits than for others. Someone may feel gratitude for financial help, but have difficulty acknowledging his indebtedness toward others in a spiritual respect or even feeling genuine gratitude for that reason.

The second case raises the question: how deep is our gratitude for gifts of all kinds within the framework of a reciprocal, deep relationship, whatever the category of this love? How deeply do each of the partners value the help and gifts of the other?

At this point gratitude demands a different kind of awareness because the danger of taking things for granted, of a failure to realize one's obligation to give explicit thanks for a gift, is greater. This is particularly so in marriage, but it also applies when friends, brothers and sisters, or children and parents, live together. In short, to be alert to the obligation to express gratitude becomes more difficult whenever people are united by a deep mutual love and also live together sharing everyday life. Furthermore, our resistance to gratitude and to explicit thanksgiving will vary according to the nature of the benefits bestowed.

Finally, the third case involves relationships in which, in the love of the one, gratitude toward the other is a constitutive element. Such relationships are shaped from the very beginning by the grateful upward glance of the grateful person toward the one to whom he is grateful.

Pride may yield resentment rather than gratitude for gifts

Let us now consider the first case, namely: gratitude toward someone with whom we are not linked by an intimate relationship. An example would be receiving financial assistance or help in a dangerous situation or being defended by someone when we are wrongly accused. If someone refuses to acknowledge such a debt of gratitude and finds it difficult to admit this dependence on

The Art of Living

another, it indicates an alarming degree of pride. If the generosity of the other does not move and gratify the recipient, then his heart is still hardened and imprisoned in pride.

Pride struggles against the bond that is implied in being indebted to another. The notion that one owes something to another, that one might even have to reciprocate if a similar situation would arise for the other, is felt as a restriction of freedom and independence. The situation of the helper in relation to the one he helps clearly includes a form of ascendancy on the part of the helper. It is deeply characteristic of pride that the beauty of the helper's generosity is ignored and only a resentment against his formal superiority is felt.

There are still other distinctions to be made. For example, the worst kind of ingratitude exists when the very generosity of the helper incurs resentment. The help is indeed accepted, because there is no other way out of the difficult situation, but one already takes offense at the superiority implied by the moral value of the benefactor. This is followed by the desire to misinterpret, to repress, or to deny the generosity involved.

In another case, the recipient does not feel resentment against the benefactor's generosity, but finds it unbearable to be indebted to him. As long as the man's generosity manifests itself in kindness toward others, he will take no offense at it and will perhaps even extol it. But as soon as he is confronted by the superior position of the benefactor, his pride will put up his defenses.

A third, less proud, person would "swallow" this formal superiority if it did not put him under obligation to the other. This person is not so ungrateful that he cannot grasp the debt of gratitude arising from his acceptance of the benefit. He feels the reality of this bond. But in his perverted urge for freedom, in his need for unconditional independence, his primary perception of the debt of gratitude is that it is oppressive. A Hindu saying clearly

expresses this form of resistance against gratitude: “Why are you persecuting me? I have never done you a favor.”⁴⁰

Fourthly, a person can avoid the consequences of the debt of gratitude out of laziness. He imagines that in a corresponding case he would have to assist the benefactor who, should the need arise, could justifiably demand something from him. The bond is not so much felt to be humiliating or confining but, above all, to be burdensome.

This type will prefer to get out of difficulty any other way, without help from anyone. He is not as amoral as the one enslaved by pride. He even understands that a debt of gratitude has arisen from the favor and does not try to repress it. But it depresses him to have to accept the help of a benefactor because he wants to evade the onerous and troublesome bond.

Humility delights both in gifts and the giver

In contrast to all these who are caught up in pride, who make an idol of independence, or who are mired in egotistical laziness, the person transformed in Christ gratefully accepts the help of the benefactor. He sees the beauty of the other person’s kindness and rejoices over it, finding that this generosity is in itself, independently of his being freed from his difficulty, a source of joy and

⁴⁰ We could also cite other classical references: Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.18: “*Nam beneficia eo usque laeta sunt, dum videntur exsolvi posse: ubi multum antevenere, pro gratia odium redditur.*” (“Benefits are agreeable as long as we hope to be able to repay them. If they greatly exceed this point, gratitude is changed into hate.”) See also Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 81.32: “*Nam quia putat turpe non reddere, non vult esse cui, reddat. . . . Nullum est odium perniciosius quam a beneficii violati pudore.*” (“Since he thinks it shameful not to return a favor, he would not like to have to deal with someone to whom he ought to return a favor. . . . There is no more dangerous hate than that of a man who is offended because of a benefit that puts him to shame.”)

The Art of Living

happiness. He does not perceive being in someone's debt to be a burden. Quite the contrary, the formal superiority of the other is a joy to him, and he considers his life to be enriched by the bond of gratitude. He experiences a profound happiness and a wonderful freedom in being grateful and in the bond that comes into being through the goodness of the other.

The person transformed in Christ would rather receive a beneficial good through the goodness of another than assert his claim to possess it. As long as he receives something which it is his right to demand, the wonderful element of generosity and kindness by the benefactor is lacking. The receiving of a pure gift, which we have no right to demand, is similar to the previously mentioned gifts of God. For we can never assert a right before God; everything that we receive from Him is pure gift.

But even the person transformed in Christ has a justifiable aversion to falling into the bond of an obligation of gratitude toward another, if the "benefactor" is only helping him in order to bring him under his control. Some people use favors to make others dependent on them; then the element of goodness is completely absent. The favor is only rendered in order to force the other to comply with the wishes of the "benefactor" through the dependency of gratitude. If the "benefactor" is of such a kind, then we are obliged to avoid this dependency. If this is impossible, then we may accept the favor, but we must not concede any sort of power to him that would induce us to do something against our conscience. We must never pay the price of surrendering a right bestowed by God. We cannot really be grateful to such a "benefactor" because, instead of kindness, there is only guile and deceit. We cannot accept any sort of obligation, even if we have to accept the benefit, because the latter is the fruit of an evil disposition, not of kindness, and thus does not bear an objectively true obligation for gratitude.

A characteristic of the moral-religious stance of a person is whether he understands that he is indebted to another, and whether he rejoices at the debt. It is a sign of spiritual wakefulness — so crucial in religious life — that he understands and sees the beauty of the benevolence of the other as a gift, and accepts the demand for gratitude growing out of the favor. At the moment when he no longer takes the charitable act for granted and consciously grasps the goodness inherent in it, he takes an important step in his moral-religious development.

In gratitude there is both a submission *sui generis* (of one's own kind) and a specific magnanimity. Aversion to this submission, the grudging of giving thanks is, to a degree, analogous to avarice.

Love relies on the benevolence of the beloved

To return to the case of gifts within the framework of a lasting relationship grounded in mutual friendship or love: we find that in these relationships a still greater wakefulness is required in order to grasp the obligation for gratitude and to feel the urge to give explicit thanks. The fundamental gift of love shown us by the other, on which the entire relationship is founded, is a boon that cannot be compared with the greatest of benefits. This love is another kind of gift. It is not an effusion of compassion as is the case in an act of help shown to a stranger in need. It is not a manifestation of special generosity, not something that establishes an obligation for gratitude or an indebtedness. This love is in one respect far more than a benefit, while, on the other hand, it is more a gift of God than a gift of the other. For this love, no matter what its category, we primarily thank God who has placed it in our beloved's heart, rather than the beloved, if only because this love does not flow from the latter's free will, like a favor for a stranger or like that love which springs from love of neighbor.

The Art of Living

This is another example of the unique *coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of opposites). Inherent in all kinds of human relationships built upon mutual love is our knowledge of and belief in the benevolent disposition of the other toward us. We do not expect such a disposition from a stranger; but in every mutual love relationship, we count on the other's readiness to assist us if we need it. Indeed, it is an essential part of our loving concern for the other person that we believe in his readiness to help. This is a necessary element in the love for our partner, and we are hurt and pained when our friend, our sister, our child does not rely on it.

Gratitude is due for the beloved and for his benevolence

How is such a matter-of-course reliance upon the readiness of the beloved to help united with explicit gratitude for every assistance rendered? The paradox between our expectation of benevolent acts as a matter of course and our gratitude for them, which precisely excludes taking them for granted, only appears to be contradictory. We have seen that in all these relationships gratitude primarily refers to the loving disposition of the other toward me. I am grateful that someone is my friend and that I am permitted to be his friend. I am grateful to him for his love, just as I am grateful to my parents, my brother, and my sister for loving me.

Therefore, I am already grateful that I am permitted to expect help in time of need, that I may count on their readiness to help, in contrast to what I may expect from strangers. Genuine gratitude for every assistance, every benefit, flows organically from the benefits received that confirm this wonderful state of reliance on the beloved.

However, taking the act of kindness for granted in no way involves failing to honor our obligation to be grateful for a favor received. It is also not an assertion of a right to the act of kindness.

There is obviously a radical difference between the person who exclaims “What is so special about that after all? True, he helped me, but that is his duty!” and the one who says: “I never doubted that he would help me — he is so good and he loves me.” Counting on this assistance as a matter of course is counting on him without hesitation because we have complete faith in him. It is the opposite of the colorless matter-of-factness appropriate for unimportant things. Reliance on the readiness of the other to help includes a value-response to his person and to his love for us. It is the opposite of a neutral calculation; it is a special indication of how highly we value this relationship.

The gift of love calls for profound gratitude

Therefore, such love produces a differently constituted but still deeper obligation. We are still much more profoundly indebted to the beloved, although in another sense. For example, we cannot thank someone who has saved us from a mortal danger enough, and we also cannot reciprocate equally unless God places us in the extraordinary situation in which we can repay like with like. This beneficent act, so clearly defined as such, creates a typical debt of gratitude but one that is entirely different from the obligation arising from personal love. Nevertheless, we should also feel profound gratitude for the unique gift of love. It is a special touchstone for the moral-religious state of man whether he responds with gratitude to the love and fidelity shown toward him. Certainly, he loves the other in the same way. He tenders the same extraordinary surrender of his heart to the other. Of course, we are speaking of a mutual love, whether it be a friendship, love for brothers and sisters, or spousal love. Although we give our heart to the other in the same way that he gives his to us, nevertheless, as a response to his love, a deep form of gratitude should fill our heart.

The Art of Living

On the one hand, in an existing mutual relationship of love, there is a kind of right to the love of the other within my surrender to him. The fact that I myself have the same inner attitude toward him and that the attitude is grounded, indeed required, by the nature of the relationship, makes it plain that I have a claim to his love. I expect it; I build upon it; it becomes a foundation of my life. It is the meaningful response to my love. On the other hand, each of the two lovers should regard the love of the other as a gift for which he can never sufficiently give thanks.

In the ideal case, both feel this gratitude, and each knows of the unique form of gratitude in the soul of the other because of the love with which they embrace each other. But this mutual gratitude then leads to the predominant joint gratitude toward God for the reciprocal love, for the mutual relationship, which is His gift.

We perceive the love bestowed on us by the other as a wonderful gift, an acceptance and understanding, a profound comprehension of our true self. We feel that the other has understood our true being and is not wrapped in illusions. At the same time, we feel that we do not deserve this love, that it is an unmerited gift. As is so often the case in the realm of the person transformed in Christ, we again run into a paradox, a coincidence of opposites.

The humble, good, and spiritually free person will feel this special, profound gratitude for the love of the other and know that the demand of this love is the requital of this love. Such a person is aware that no sort of benefit would ever suffice as a response to this call except his similar love, that is, the return of the love of the other.

Charity must permeate love for the beloved

What is the God-willed response for the countless individual gifts rendered by one to the other out of this love? The extent to

which our love reveals itself and the way in which our good will takes effect in countless gifts, in loving concern for the other, in our considerateness, in our awareness of his needs and of the degree of his receptivity — all these considerations are extremely revealing of the moral-religious life of a person.

Will the one who loves restrain himself from demanding too much from the other? There is the danger, out of a loving desire to give to the other special joys — to reveal something beautiful to him, to show him a magnificent landscape or piece of architecture — of demanding more than the beloved, according to his physical or spiritual strength, can take in at this moment. The alert, awakened lover will avoid this.

All of this — not only special assistance, gifts, and considerations, but also the desire to bestow beneficial goods on the beloved, from the truly important to the most insignificant attention to his convenience (such as food and the like) — is an indication of the extent to which this love for the other is permeated by *caritas* (charity).⁴¹

As was stated before, the extent to which love for another manifests itself in these proofs of his good will is very characteristic of a person. This permeation of love by *caritas* is expressed not only in the readiness to accept any sacrifice in order to render a benefit to the beloved, but also in the renunciation of this rendering because the other at the moment needs rest.

Habit and indifference threaten gratitude for love

It is of special significance for our particular problem to understand that one should also be grateful for all these individual

⁴¹Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Das Wesen der Liebe*, Ch. 11 (Regensburg: Habel, 1971), 313-363.

The Art of Living

benevolent acts. As already mentioned, it is much more difficult to appreciate the many gifts and assistances of the lover than the extraordinary gifts or benefits on the part of strangers. One is much more inclined to overlook the former.

First of all, one becomes used to them and takes them for granted out of habit. Habit is the one great danger in our moral-religious life: the danger of becoming deadened, of no longer appreciating a gift after a length of time.⁴² How dearly we value something that we have not possessed for a long time or that we ardently desired before it was obtained!

Secondly, there is the danger of taking all these benefits for granted and of feeling no obligation for special gratitude because of the attitude which says: "Of course, he loves me, he is so devoted to me; therefore, it is a matter of course that he wants to do me every kind of favor."

Since the love of the other is no longer understood as an extraordinary gift and has, as it were, been fitted into the ordinary components of one's own life, much is expected from this person as a matter of course. In such cases, one may say: "Surely, that is nothing special, as it would be from a stranger; it's the obvious consequence of his love. It gives him joy. I can't be particularly grateful for that." Soon all benevolent actions are seen in this light and thus one feels no obligation for gratitude. Indeed, these proofs of love are eventually overlooked and are no longer even experienced as such.

⁴²Kierkegaard has a most appropriate comment on this point: "Let the thunder of a hundred cannon remind you three times daily to resist the force of habit . . . but be careful that this also does not become a habit! For you can become accustomed to hearing the thunder of a hundred cannon so that you can sit at table and hear the most trivial, insignificant things far more clearly than the thunder of the hundred cannon — which you have become accustomed to hearing." Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 51.

Gratitude in love presupposes more than other forms

Such ingratitude arises, then, for reasons other than those discussed above. It is motivated neither by pride and resentment against the moral value of the benefactor (which in itself already blocks the value-response to the beauty of his generosity) nor by that pride which abhors being indebted to another, nor by the resistance against the superiority conceded to the other. Neither is it caused by the perverted craving for freedom that denies the obligation of gratitude toward another, nor even by the aversion, resulting from laziness or egotism, to having one's peace disturbed in the future through this dependency.

No, ingratitude for the individual proofs of the love of my friend, my brother, father or mother, or even of my spouse, is first grounded in the universal danger of a developing indifference. It is especially a lack of wakefulness that leads to taking for granted and even overlooking these proofs of generosity and love. It is, furthermore, a lack of love on our part — not only a general lack of wakefulness, but also a “falling asleep” of our love. Since we are no longer awake in our love, the whole image of the other person no longer stands before us so radiantly, and we no longer fully appreciate the gift of his love.

In this form of taking for granted all the beautiful and precious demonstrations of love toward us there also lies a hardening of heart, an offense against the fundamental virtue of goodness. We no longer appreciate the beauty of our partner's loving kindness in all his individual caring acts. We take them for granted, almost as if we had a right to them. This comes out clearly when a person who has grown callous to the loving acts of his partner yet fully appreciates the benefits received from strangers.

We see therefore that full gratitude in a deep, mutual union of hearts presupposes more than does gratitude for the charitable acts

The Art of Living

of strangers. The former requires a higher moral-religious attitude, a greater wakefulness and goodness, a heart that is more deeply softened. This condition of the heart is only possible in a life in *conspetu Dei* (in the sight of God), which is illuminated by the *lumen Christi* (light of Christ).

Gratitude to others is part of our spiritual transformation

It seems apparent that gratitude toward persons belongs to our transformation in Christ. To be sure, gratitude for the kindnesses of strangers, which can be undercut by pride, is also possible as a natural virtue. But holiness excludes all ingratitude, just as it excludes every other morally negative behavior. Like all natural virtues transformed through Christ, supernatural gratitude receives a completely new radiance and character compared with purely natural gratitude.

Full gratitude in deeper human relationships is only possible in and through Christ. It presupposes a heart formed and softened by gratitude toward God. It is a fruit of transformation in Christ.

How great, how inexhaustible are the goods for which we can be indebted to other men! What truths, what values they can reveal to us! Obviously, we owe special thanks for great gifts that we receive from a friend, from a beloved spouse, and from our parents. The higher the objective good we owe, the more a response of gratitude is morally demanded. Furthermore, more gratitude is due for an act of decisive moral assistance or for profound intellectual encouragement than for an act that saved our life. We should also be grateful for all that we receive through the works and books of those we do not know personally, who may have lived long before us. How much we owe to Plato, St. Augustine, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Bach, and Beethoven! How glorious are Kierkegaard's words about Mozart and everything that he owes to

him!⁴³ All the goods that we receive from great figures and geniuses belong in a separate chapter. On a much higher level, the gifts that the saints have given and imparted to the people of their society (and even more to their disciples) are also part of this category.

This brings us to the third type of gratitude, namely, to relationships in which the grateful upward glance of one person to another is an element constitutive of the relationship. To be sure, every relationship has within it a mutual receptivity; there is no relationship in which the person primarily receiving and looking up to the giver does not also bestow something on the latter. To be met with trusting acceptance is already an incomprehensible gift. What a gift is the blossoming of the soul of a beloved person, the bearing fruit of all that the giver, by God's grace, can disclose and impart to him! Truly, this giving, in which what is bestowed is fully received and bears glorious fruits, is at the same time the receiving of a gift.

In addition, there is all that which the receiver gives from his own personality, from the beauty of his unique individuality and, above all, from his love.

These relationships, in which one person looks up to the other, are, in fact, fully mutual, with a full convergence and, above all, a mutual love — although there is a difference in the direction of the affections of the two partners. This difference of direction does not hinder the full synergy and harmony of the mutual love; rather it is complementary. In the person looking up, gratitude is an essential component of his love. He must and ought to be conscious of all that he owes to the donor.

⁴³Sören Kierkegaard, "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic or the Musical Erotic." In *Either/Or*, Part 1, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

The Art of Living

Of course, a person who is hindered by pride is not capable of such an upward glance. Those who have not been transformed in Christ may in the beginning of the relationship be capable of such an upward glance. However, with the passage of time, a resistance against this respectful upward glance and grateful receiving — or even a rivalry — may develop. Whoever does not have true humility can fall into a certain rebellion and thereby lose true gratitude.

Through gratitude man grows spiritually richer

Man is a receptive being. He has not only received all gifts from God (from his very existence to his free will and his capacity to know and to love); he also receives in a still newer sense all that he can know, all which God reveals to him and men can give to him.

We have often said that a person is as rich as his grasp of values is comprehensive. But we want to stress that it is not only receiving, but also giving that enriches us. In every full value-response we become richer, although our whole attitude is one of giving. This mysterious law finds its supreme expression in the words of Christ: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.”⁴⁴ This is also the primary mystery of love: the more someone loves, the more he abandons himself, the richer and deeper he becomes, the more he lives his full personal being.

The same holds true for gratitude, which is a full self-abandonment, a self-donation which in a certain manner constitutes the antithesis to receiving. In it the person becomes richer, in it he grows. “And his riches indeed increase with every time he prays and gives thanks,” says Kierkegaard; and shortly before, “How poor

⁴⁴Matt. 10:39.

not to be able to pray; how poor not to be able to give thanks; how poor to have to receive everything with ingratitude!”⁴⁵

How right Kierkegaard is, when he emphasizes that it is decisive for man to stand in the right place in the cosmos. Man does this when he gives thanks. Within gratitude lives truth, freedom, humility, goodness, and generosity.

Even in its natural form, gratitude constitutes an essential part of natural morality. But in its transfigured Christian form, in the soul of a person transformed in Christ, it is one of the central virtues and one of the pillars in the relationship of man to God.

Even in its natural form, gratitude leads into the realm of goodness. As long as the person’s heart actually overflows with gratitude, there is no room in his soul for evil attitudes like envy, vengefulness, or hatred. But for the person transformed in Christ, this holds true in an entirely new manner in his gratitude toward God and in his gratitude toward man. In true gratitude, the soul shines forth in unparalleled beauty. Like loving, praising, and exalting, giving thanks, belongs to that “which will be in the end without end.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵Sören Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 20.

⁴⁶St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. 22, Ch. 30.