



*One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to LIVE FULLY Right Where You Are*, Ann Voskamp, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, 237 pp; *Radical Gratitude*, Mary Jo Leddy, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002, 182 pp; *The Gift of Thanks: The Roots, Persistence, and Paradoxical Meanings of a Social Ritual*, Margaret Visser, Toronto: HarperCollins, 2010, 458 pp.

These three publications all contain gratitude as central theme.

The first is by an evangelical author, the other two by Catholic authors, one a theologian and activist, the other by a retired Classics professor and full-time author.

Voskamp's book is sustained lyrical prose, including the very layout. It is mainly a personal journey of discovery of *eucharisteo*: thanksgiving rooted in *charis* (grace) and *chara* (joy) (pp. 32 and 33). The author begins with tragedy: the accidental death of her younger sister when the author was 5 years old. Later we learn of two further deaths from congenital conditions of her in-laws' newborns.

The book is full of nuggets of wisdom, both from others and from the author. She cites for instance Albert Schweizer: "The greatest thing is to give thanks for everything. He who has learned this knows what it means to live... He has penetrated the whole mystery of life: giving thanks for everything (p. 34)". Or "The only real fall of man is his noneucharistic life in a noneucharistic world (p. 35).", citing Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann.

The title comes from a dare by a friend: To name one thousand blessings. She begins. She smiles: "it is sort of like ... unwrapping love (p. 45)." And she continues doing so throughout. "Practice, practice, practice (p. 56)." is her watchword. Thanks for all things in each moment, however... whatever...

As in all the books, the author's is a politics of gratitude too.

Rejecting joy to stand in solidarity with the suffering doesn't rescue the suffering. The converse does. The brave who focus on all things good and all things beautiful and all things true, even in the small, who give thanks for it and discover joy even in the here and now, they are the change agents who bring fullest Light to all the world (p. 58.)

Who can deny it?

In Chapter Four, "a sanctuary of time", she observes that time is not the lack, thanksgiving is. "Thanksgiving creates abundance; and the miracle of multiplying happens when I give thanks – ... (p. 72)"

The next on grace. The book pulsates with a sense of awestruck grace. And yes, she discusses the problem of evil in the context of *perspective*. She reflects on joy and pain: “they are but two arteries of the one heart that pumps through all those who don’t numb themselves to really living... Yet I know it in the vein and in the visceral: *life is loss*. Every day, the gnawing... (p. 84).”

She gives liberty to cry out at God, in the end to accept God’s ways. “Without God’s Word as a lens, the world warps (p. 91).”, she writes and I concur. She pictures Satan as graffiti artist scribbling all over creation’s beauty. And against the graffiti, “suffering nourishes grace, and pain and joy are arteries of the same heart – and mourning and dancing are but movements in His unfinished symphony of beauty (p. 100).” And again: *Everything* is eucharisteo (p. 100).”

In the next chapter, she thrills to the sight of a full moon, writing, “The art of deep seeing makes gratitude possible. And it is the art of gratitude that makes joy possible. Isn’t joy the art of God? (p. 118).”

She repeatedly draws on outstanding insights of others. For instance: “The only way to fight a feeling is with a feeling (p. 136)”, writes Rollin McCraty in “The Grateful heart”, in a book entitled *The Psychology of Gratitude*. “In the absence of conscious efforts to engage, build, and sustain positive perceptions and emotions, we all too automatically fall prey to feelings such as irritation, anxiety, worry, frustration, self-doubt and blame (p. 235)”, from a longer citation in note 5 of Chapter 7. We *must* practise gratitude every minute of every day, in all situations, in all circumstances. Only then will the feeling of gratitude “overaccept” the graffiti of the evil one. “Overaccept” in the theatre “indicates an improvised reframing of the action of a drama in light of a larger story one wants to tell (*Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*, William T. Cavanaugh, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011, p. 65).” Of course that larger story is the Gospel story that “overaccepts” all the evil in Creation. This insight is drawn from Samuel Wells’ book *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Baker Publishing Group, 2011). Wow!

In response to worry, to anxiety, to stress: *trust*. And “*Thanks is what builds trust* (p. 150, emphasis in original).” Again: “Trust is the bridge from yesterday to tomorrow, built with planks of thanks (pp. 151 & 152).” And “Remembering frames up gratitude (p. 152).” Again: “*gratitude is what births trust... the true belief* (p. 153).”

“In Christ, the answer to the questions of every moment is always Yes (p. 159).”, drawing on the Scripture, 2 Corinthians 1:20. Dag Hammarskjöld wrote:

For all that has been – Thanks!

To all that shall be – Yes! (*Markings*, Trans. Leif Sjöberg and W.H. Auden, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965, p. 89).”

The other two books reviewed below cite this very piece.

But “Stress can be an addiction and worry can be our lunge for control and we forget the answer to this moment is always yes because of Christ (pp. 159 & 160).”

In Chapter 9, “Go Lower”, we read, through the experience of a young daughter, the perspective of a child and camera makes the ordinary change just through diminutive lens gaze. The author writes: “If the heights of our joy are measured by the depths of our gratitude, and gratitude is but a way of seeing, a spiritual perspective of smallness might offer a vital way of seeing especially conducive to gratitude (p. 166).” Again: “This, *this* is like a child happily capturing pixels... – the perspective of smallness that cultivates surprised wonder, that grows gratitude, that yields joy (p. 168).”

Humility is the ticket: “*Humility* is that good humus that grows gratitude that yields abundant joy (p. 170).”

Her constant refrain: *eucharisteo precedes the miracle* (p. 172). But: “I hadn’t known that joy meant dying. What did I think that hard *eucharisteo* and the table of the Last Supper meant?... I know it deeper now: This *eucharisteo* is no game of Polyanna but the hard edge of blade. Only self can kill joy (p. 179).” Citing Peter Kreeft: “No one who ever said to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and meant it with his heart, ever failed to find joy... (p. 180)”

In Chapter 10, “Empty to Fill”, Voskamp urges that *eucharisteo* also means giving thanks away to others. “Communion, by necessity, always leads us into community (p. 193).” In a rare instance, she lists some of the serving she and family are about. It is impressive but not to impress. “In an endless cycle of grace, He gives us gifts to serve the world (p. 195).” Again: “It’s the astonishing truth that while I serve Christ, it is He who serves me (p. 196)”. The family reads Isaiah 58 together every day for a month. “It’s the fundamental, lavish, radical nature of the upside-down economy of God. Empty to fill (p. 197)”.

She cites: “I slept and dreamt life was joy, I awoke and saw life was service, I acted and, behold, *service was joy* (p. 200 – Rabinranath Tagore).”

The final chapter, “The Joy of Intimacy”, tells of a trip to Paris entwined with pure joy in God. She writes: Love is the face at the center of our universe (p. 203).” She contrasts with past failure that Love now endlessly pursues *her*. She cites Henri Nouwen: “Gratitude is the most fruitful way of deepening your consciousness that you are... a divine choice (p. 205).” And *eucharisteo*, “*always eucharisteo* (p. 208).” “*Eucharisteo* has been *exactly* this for me, opening my eyes to a way of seeing, to a realization that belief is, in essence, a way of the eyes (p. 209).” Yet again, citing Ronald Rolheiser, “To be a saint is to be fueled by gratitude, nothing more and nothing less (p. 2120).”

“Mystical union... This is where *eucharisteo* leads (p. 213).” She uses the image of “making love”, with *eucharisteo* the expression, to God. “*Eucharisteo* – communion – that hound of heaven. He won’t relent, *always, everywhere, eucharisteo*, opening the eyes to God (p. 216).”

Her “Afterward” sings as well. *All is grace, Ann* (p. 226).

This is a profoundly authentic book of one person’s journey out of great loss to great discovery of abundant grace through the simplicity of giving thanks. In turn, that giving is to imitate God’s, who “so loved the world”. Amen!

In *Radical Gratitude*, a very different kind of writing, both philosophical and more prosaic, is encountered. Mary Jo Leddy has a Ph.D. in philosophy, and has spent many years working with refugees in Toronto.

She begins in Chapter One, “Beginnings”, by asserting that words are far less important than lives authentically lived. That we each have a singularity of significance. And gratitude plays a significant role in that. “Gratitude is how I weigh-in on the world. It is the spirit that shapes me and folds me into faith (p. 2).” And radical gratitude “begins when we stop taking life for granted (p. 7).”

In Chapter Two, she discusses our culture of “Perpetual Dissatisfaction”. She writes, In other words, the economically induced dissatisfaction in the culture of money not only drives us to shop, it also produces a profound dissatisfaction with one’s very self, one’s very soul, the core of one’s being (p. 25).

Chapter Three is entitled “Radical Gratitude”. She calls us to the liberation of gratitude by stopping taking life for granted. She says, “A given life is different from a driven life (p. 66).” She points to Jesus as exemplar of radical gratitude.

Chapter Four, “Creative Power”, considers the question of power from many vantage points. She argues that “Gratitude is the source of power and the point of any exercise of creative power (p. 95).”

Chapter Five, “The Point of Our Being”, looks to God as that very source of all being. The author suggests that “Patience is the attentiveness of gratitude (p. 135).” She quotes former United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, “For all that has been, Thanks; for all that shall be, Yes.” (p. 139) This same quotation appears in all three books under review.

Chapter Six, “Living With Spirit”, completes the book. The author gives several points about living this way. They are:

1. Begin before You Are Ready
2. Practice Gratitude
3. Gather with Like-Spirited People
4. Live More Simply
5. Look for Good Examples
6. Think with the Mind of Your Heart
7. See from the Center and the Edge
8. Be Connected to a Longer Tradition, a Wider Community
9. Find a Beloved Community
10. Contemplate the Face of the World

Leddy comments that “Gratitude can liberate us in this culture, but we must consciously choose the practices that will liberate gratitude (p. 143).” She comments,

Throughout this book I have been situating gratitude as an all-encompassing attitude toward life and the world (p. 162).

This book was not easy to summarize, for it is a poetic call to gratitude above all. And poetry must be experienced above all. It is well worth taking up that experience!

Margaret Visser's *The Gift of Thanks* demonstrates a consummate researcher, multilingual, and ever scintillating style that engages and draws one in. The author is a brilliant classicist and communicator whose writing and speaking style is utterly infectious and captivating.

In the Introduction, she writes,

George Simmel claimed that gratitude is what in fact holds all society together. He called it "the moral memory of mankind." (p. 3)

At the end of the Introduction she writes:

In the end I found myself agreeing with Simmel that gratitude is of inestimable importance to all of society. I would go further and claim that it also contributes to the spiritual well-being of every person, but especially of those who are thankful – in the true meaning of the word. These days we have a new and particular take on gratitude, and an urgency about rediscovering deep sources for it that is all our own. Our modern society stands in special need of the gift of thanks (p. 4)

The final words of the Introduction are: "*Deo gratias* [To God be thanks]" (p. 4) The author is a deeply committed Christian who tells her conversion story (in a gym exercise class at the University of Toronto) in a documentary called *The Geometry of Love*, about which you may find out here: <http://www.filmwest.com/Catalogue/itemdetail/3314/>. (The book by the same title is an amazing read!) You can hear various pieces of interviews with her on a CBC retrospective here: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/Rewind/2012/ID/2314604508/>.

There is no possible way of summarizing the insights of this book. They abound and are not given to summary.

I shall instead cherry-pick various insights.

In Chapter 10, Visser states that

The lowest and most terrible level of reciprocity is that of total chaos and civil war, a generalized outbreak of what René Girard calls "mimetic violence,"... The second level is war: us against them... The third level is talion, or revenge limited by law to strict retaliation:... Next and higher comes the Silver Rule: "Do to no one what you would not want done to you." The Golden Rule makes the Silver Rule positive: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." The highest level is "When people hurt you, your return shall be to continue loving them"... The final rule – "Love your enemies" – goes beyond reciprocity altogether (p. 136).

In Chapter 12, "Unpacking Gratitude", Visser writes:

What became in Israel the best way of praising God – that is, telling the story of his blessings – operated a transformation in Israel's view of human nature

and of God. This transformation in turn was to influence greatly the formation of the worldview and attitudes of Western civilization. Certainly, praise, narrative, and remembering remain for us today an essential part of anything that could be called gratitude (p. 164).

Again, from the same chapter:

Yet it is perfectly well understood that “giving” to God is impossible: everything that exists belongs to God already, since he has brought us into being. What God really wants is the one thing he has deprived himself of the right to force from us – namely, a human person’s desire to change his ways and choose righteousness:... (p. 166)

And yet again:

This last was made prominent for Christians because of their belief that God had come to live among human beings, had made himself their brother in Jesus, and so given human beings a new, previously unheard-of intimacy with himself. This closeness makes it possible not only to praise but also to thank God. Grace is believed to be unmerited (the irruption of Jesus into human history is read as both a once-for-all and an ongoing grace) and given *gratis*. But gratitude will make those who receive grace and accept it long to give something back, and they have been told how to do so: at God’s request we should give back to God by loving other people and giving to them. Ideally, one will not expect a return from them; a gift to another person is at the deepest level a response to grace, which is a gift already received. The Christian notion of grace has in its turn influenced the concept of gratitude, greatly increasing its scope and its emotional charge (p. 173).

In Chapter 16, “Freedom and Equality”, we read:

It is reasonable to claim that this internalization of morality came to us in large part through Christianity. Gratitude, like guilt and forgiveness, is a key concept in the Christian worldview (p. 215).

In Chapter 18, we again encounter sociologist George Simmel, who claims that faithfulness and gratitude most help hold societies together.

Again:

Our personalities, then, are embedded in a web of memories, to the point where to be deprived of memory is to lose one’s identity. Gratitude is deliberate memory, and expression of it a proof of openness to others. And being able to be grateful is an early sign of the possibility of deliverance when we have lost our way, when our very identity is under threat: gratitude points forward.

Finally, in the biblical story of the Ten Lepers cured, Visser writes simply:

And the man who remembers and is grateful is not only cured, but also saved. (p. 249).

In Chapter 19, “Emotions”, she writes that “Awe and appreciation, on the other hand, give a highly ordered, smooth heart rhythm (p. 269).”

Further:

And increased coherence in the heart’s rhythms actually improves our ability to think. It is not enough, therefore, to think sensitively; we must also feel wisely. And the more we do the latter, scientists are telling us (as writers on virtue have told us for centuries), the easier it becomes (p. 270).

In Chapter 20, “Feeling Grateful”, Visser writes that “Humility is often a prerequisite for the joy of gratitude... (p. 281)”

In Chapter 21, “Learning and Lasting”, we read:

Human beings think; and thankfulness is both deeply emotional and a form of thought. Since it is not a purely natural and automatic response, gratitude has to be taught – first that it exists and is possible, then how to recognize it and the occasions for it, and finally that one is capable of it oneself (p. 287).

She writes further in the chapter:

Failure to *feel* grateful is not a dereliction of duty but a moral flaw, and as such related to a person’s character in general... Gratitude does entail an obligation, which is anterior both to feeling thankful for a particular favour and to the action of returning a benefit: it consists of a responsibility to cultivate in oneself a disposition to be grateful.

So gratitude depends upon education, and specifically education of the character, as parents acknowledge when they spend so much effort teaching it to their children. (p. 293).

*Ingratitude* comes under consideration in Chapter 22, “The Marble-Hearted Fiend”. Shakespeare so abhorred it, she writes, that

He seems to have had a premonition that the new imperial and commercial era was bringing with it a vastly increased and uncontrolled greed and selfishness, which relied on wanton heedlessness of the traditional virtues of community and personal interrelationship (p. 311).

Chapter 23, “We Are Not Grateful”, begins with a line from a personal acquaintance: “I don’t need to be grateful: I can buy whatever I want.” (p. 313) Reflecting on that, Visser writes:

When individualism rejects giving, receiving, and gratitude as burdens to be avoided, it ends up further subjecting the weak: it ensures that those who have, keep, and those who have not, never get. Finally this person assumed that she wanted and needed nothing that could not be bought.

Her assumptions conform to modern commodity culture as a coin fits into a slot machine. Modernity has produced her and is set up to accommodate her...

Modernity, in the West, is prone to begrudge gratitude and to indulge its opposite. (p. 314).

But, Visser contends, we should not therefore reject individualism altogether.

We have fought for more than two thousand years to achieve it, and its benefits are manifest. . . . The point is that the freedom and equality that are, as we have seen, conditions for gratitude are also ideals without which individualism would die. Four basic goals and demands condition one another, in a constellation specific to our society: Freedom, equality, individualism, and giving-and-gratitude. If one of these falls away, the rest become difficult to achieve and quite soon impossible to maintain (p. 315).

Visser asserts:

The world of commodities and cash, then, has an opposite – both a corrective and a supplement – which is essential to our well-being and in fact holds society together; it is the underappreciated but vital and persistent world of gifts and gratitude (p. 315).

She also explains that “Gratitude, like giving, is about regard and respect (p. 316).” “Ingratitude, on the other hand, is disregard – paying no attention and so slighting – and disrespect. . . . Gratitude recalls goodness, and [ingrates] execrate what they remember (pp. 317 & 318).”

In Chapter 24, “The Poisoned Gift”, Visser explains:

Gifts and gratitude hold society together and help them to go on working; they create links. Bribery and corruption make for unwanted ties that constrain; they simultaneously gum up the works and rend the social fabric apart (p. 341).

In the same chapter:

Gratitude in action, being partial, is not always either morally right or appropriate. It cannot stand on its own, but needs to grow from other virtues, principally love and justice, that must come first. Without these preceding virtues and the awareness they supply, gratitude can blight our understanding, prevent us from seeing injustice in ourselves and others, induce us to do wicked things. It can make us so preferential towards “our own” that we ignore both moral principles and the common good (p. 345).

In Chapter 25, “Gratitude Instead”, we read:

Gratitude is a relatively calm emotion, intense but happy and peaceful, and not a matter of simple arousal, even though it often begins to be felt at once. Laboratory experiments have shown that deep appreciation enormously decreases stress. It is therefore good for one’s physical health (p. 353).

In relation to the ecological crisis, she writes:

Gratitude, replacing selfishness, greed, disregard, will in my opinion have to be called upon to help us surmount the ecological crisis that now threatens our very existence. Fears of disaster and the laws we make to protect the environment will certainly be necessary as both pressure to act and restraint from further abuse. But fear and the law will not be enough. What is required is nothing less than a conversion: a turning-around of our ideas, a change of



heart, an agreement to see things from a new point of view. Fear can cause rather than avert abuses, and there are infinite numbers of ways to get away with selfish convenience or greed if people care only for their own personal interests (p. 360).

Further on this theme:

To be ecologically aware we shall need to be thankful for what we so continually and lavishly receive, and feel the need to “give back” and restore the earth’s ravaged bounty. It is an attitude to nature that our most “primitive” forebears intensely understood. We should also remember that we inherited a rich and beautiful earth, which it is “only fair” to hand on to our children.

G. K. Chesterton speaks of “the ancient instinct of astonishment”: the surprise and wonder that turns quickly into gratitude. A cultivated disposition to be grateful encourages awe in us. Gratitude for the earth arises from a profound belief, an agreement with God, that the world is “very good,” as the Book of Genesis puts it in the story of Creation. And every one of us, in person, is responsible for its well-being... If we truly appreciated the earth, we would be able to find, as Chesterton writes, that “the greatest of poems is an inventory.” Gratitude occurs when people receive good things which they do not feel are theirs by right, or that they have deserved. And “there is no way in which a man can earn a star or deserve a sunset [St. Francis of Assisi].” Believing that the gifts of the earth are of inestimable value would convince people never to destroy them or waste them heedlessly (p. 361).

She observes that “Gratitude is perhaps most malignantly opposed by envy, and is also perhaps the most total reversal of this fundamental vice (p. 362).”

Further from that chapter:

Superiority, narcissism, a sense of entitlement, and selfishness are all opposites of gratitude. And so are thoughtlessness and forgetfulness. “One squeezes the orange and at once discards it” went the hard-hearted utilitarian maxim of Gracián, with its implicit understanding that this is no way to treat a human being.

When we consider how many evil options gratitude “turns down,” we begin to see how desirable a virtue it is. And the monstrosity of ingratitude for Shakespeare and his contemporaries comes much closer home (p. 365).

In the second last Chapter (26). “Partiality and Transcendence”, Visser writes:

We ended the last section with the advisability of replacing vengeance, regret, pride, envy, avarice, anger, and greed with gratitude, the opposite of them all. But there is also a requirement to “rise above” the partiality inherent in gratitude itself (p. 370).

Further:

Gratitude is always a matter of paying attention, deliberately beholding and appreciating the other (p. 374).

Further again:

The word *gratitude* stands for the process – freely undertaken and therefore hard to pin down with definitions and generalized explanations – by which a person’s attitude changes... From the smallest event that elicits a felt “thanks” to an appreciation of kindness that totally opens someone’s heart to another, gratitude is a transcending movement, one that “rises to the occasion.” (p. 375).

She writes a little later:

Giving and gratitude, on the other hand, are the beginning and stuff of transcendence: a free response in love to another person, to the group to which one belongs, to all groups in society including one’s own, to humankind as a whole, to the earth, to the universe, and – both finally and first – to God. In 1953, during a moment when he was reflecting on the inevitable coming of death, Dag Hammarskjöld wrote:

“– Night is drawing nigh –”

For all that has been – Thanks!

To all that shall be – Yes!

Willing acceptance of everything to come – as for all of his past – is his thankful and trusting response to God for the givenness of his life (p. 376).

We saw this cited in the first two books reviewed as well.

Visser then turns to the Christian understanding of “grace”, writing, “I mentioned earlier that one of the concepts that contributed to the notion we call ‘gratitude’ was what Christians designate as ‘grace.’ ”(p. 376). She goes on for the next while to explicate grace. “Gratitude, from a Christian point of view, is most importantly a freely rendered and living response to grace (p. 377).”

She also discusses “pardon”:

Pardon is a gift from the person wronged who can find it in himself to forgive; Christians see grace as the mysterious strength that enables someone to perform this difficult letting-go, an act that nobody can demand and only the giver can give, the absolute opposite of vengeance. Grace is essential to conversion, the soul’s turning-away from pride, envy, anger, and the rest, and replacing them with gratitude – in the first instance, gratitude to God for the grace received.

Grace is generosity that goes beyond “just deserts.” (p. 377.)

Under the Conservative government’s watch in Canada, “Pardon” was eradicated from the Criminal Code in 2010 in favour of “record suspension”. Not only did this initiate for the first time in Canadian history the embrace of fascism, whereby one class of repeat offender forever is banned from full citizenship in Canada, it was flagrant contradiction of grace and gratitude. This by a government whom the vast majority of conservative Christians embrace as “Christian”. The eradication of “pardon” from the Criminal Code on the contrary is contradiction of what is fundamental to Christian conversion: grace and gratitude.

Visser writes yet again that

God is invariably the first giver, of our lives, talents, opportunities, and faith, as well as of his grace. This means that every gift we choose to give is already counter-gift...

But love [not gratitude] is the central Christian virtue. Love is prior to giving and the reason for giving in the first place. Gratitude is important because it is born of love (p. 378).

A further observation:

The Letters of the New Testament tell the early Christians to “thank God at all times” – that is even when life is painful – because nothing can alter God’s love for them (p. 378).

She goes on to describe similar concepts of grace in other religions, and indeed in secular societies in general.

Visser also writes:

People who love God do God’s will and love to do so, even when it is painful. “All is grace” is the mystical insight achieved in those who reach full realization that, no matter what happens to them, they are creatures – children – of an all-giving, all-loving God. Such people are grateful even in hardship and sorrow – freely and profoundly grateful, incredible as it can seem to ordinary people who have not travelled the distance. “The love of God is pure when joy and suffering inspire an *equal* gratitude,” writes Simone Weil (pp. 379 & 380).

The author proceeds to tell the story of Etty Hillesum, a Jewish concentration camp prisoner, later murdered by the Nazis at Auschwitz. “Etty said she wanted to be the ‘thinking heart’ of the death camp. Gratefulness is perfectly captured in her phrase ‘the thinking heart’ ”. (p. 380)

Wow!, is this reader’s response.

In the final chapter (27), Recognition”, Visser writes that “Saint Paul reminds his readers of the giftedness of human existence: What do you possess that was not given to you?” [I Corinthians 4:7] (p. 383) She continues a little later:

“Freely give what you have freely received” [Matthew 10:8]: where freedom is an essential part of the gift, an imitation of it must itself include freedom.

People who feel gifted by God, as we saw and as this saying means, always think of themselves as making gifts out of already being receivers; they often feel no need to get anything back (p. 383).

Another observation:

Delight (Greek *charis*) is one of the component meanings of “gratitude”. It is specifically a pleasure shared between giver and receiver; mutuality is essential to it (p. 384).

Further,

Gratitude, like awe, is a matter of looking, and ultimately of insight (p. 385).

Yet again,

Profound thankfulness makes people happy... “The test of all happiness is gratitude [G. K. Chesterton] (p. 386).”

Chesterton expresses gratitude to God this way:

*Evening*

Here dies another day,  
During which I have had eyes, ears, hands  
And the great world around me;  
And tomorrow begins another.  
Why am I allowed two? (p. 386)

A little later we read:

Love’s insight turns, through the pivotal feeling of gratitude, into love’s action... This is the language of gratitude as grace: *acceptance* of the gift of grace is what a human being has in her gift; God himself cannot force her to receive grace or to respond by giving to others. Both gratitude and grace are freely given, and a joy that is shared. God being eternal, this joy is shared forever (p. 389).

We read again:

Gratitude’s humility and acknowledgement of dependence are part of its strength, its “thinking heart” the secret of its ability to replace many of the causes of misery so readily grouped at the time of Shakespeare under the heading “Ingratitude.” Disrespect and violence can and must yield to giving and gratitude. We have to learn to give and to let give.

Gift-giving is the opposite of commodification. It has what we might call an “anti-economy,” because its condition is one of surplus, not scarcity (p. 391).

She concludes the chapter and the book thus:

This is, for example, the original meaning of giving presents at Christmas. The significance of the festival is that the baby Jesus is the first Christmas gift, inspiring everybody else to give to one another out of joyful gratitude. The Christmas story and its celebration demonstrate God’s love and express his desire that we should now “turn around” and give to others, wherever an opportunity for giving arises, and especially where people are most in need. If we all do this, there will be enough to go around. We ourselves shall satisfy our need to give, the source of which is not merely the result of social pressure, but arises out of recognition and the desire to be recognized, out of the gratitude that unites the two, and the wish to imitate goodness we have known. We shall also be rewarded, in ways we cannot foresee. “At the end of the day,” writes Saint John of the Cross, “you will be examined in love.” And the fruits of our loving, our giving, and our gratitude will provide the evidence: “Only

what you have given, be it only in the gratitude of acceptance, is salvaged from the nothing which some day will have been your life [Dag Hammarskjöld]. (p. 393).

All three books point to the *sine qua non* of gratitude. May we all learn and practise gratitude to our dying day – and then beyond! Amen.