

# Gratitude as a Christian lifestyle: An Afro-reformed theological perspective

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31 October 2017 marked the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Reformation in Germany, West Europe. One of the most important legacies of the Reformation is the teaching concerning God's gracious salvation, received and appropriated only through faith in Christ Jesus our Saviour. The current article seeks to focus on reflection on gratitude as a Christian lifestyle in response to God's redemption. The article reflects on gratitude as recognition account, highlighting the importance of gratitude as a Christian virtue, as a socioreligious phenomenon, and its importance in human happiness and well-being. This, as it shaped the life of Christians, is found especially in the African continent, in whose traditional life, gratitude was ubiquitous, known and practised even before conversion to the Protestant religion. The article also briefly highlights the fact that a relaxed attitude regarding the teaching on gratitude could result in Sunday or nominal Christianity and the demise of prophetic Christianity. Some concluding thoughts regarding gratitude are shared.

## Introduction

31 October 2017 marked the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Reformation movement in Germany, West Europe. One of important legacies of the Reformation is the teaching concerning God's gracious salvation, received and appropriated only through faith in Christ Jesus our Saviour. The current article describes the last of the three necessary issues, highlighted by the Heidelberg Catechism, that a Christian has to know in order that while enjoying comfort in Christ he or she may live and die happily, according to Reformation theology, namely: (1) how great my sins and misery are, (2) how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries and (3) how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance. All of these are said to take place at the same time as a constant experience (Hoeksema 1972:4). Hoeksema (1972) avers:

As long as he [*sic*] is in this life, the Christian experiences his [*sic*] sin and misery, his [*sic*] redemption and deliverance as well as his [*sic*] thankfulness to God, all at the same time. Always he [*sic*] is the sinful, redeemed and thankful Christian. (p. 4)

However, the focus of this article is on the question, 'how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance?'

The article acknowledges that such gratitude can only stem from genuine acknowledgement and appreciation of God's undeserved gift of salvation. Question 86 (Lord's Day 32, Heidelberg Catechism) asks: 'Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of our [*own*], why must we still do good works?' Answer 86:

Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; so that we may testify by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings and that he may be praised by us; also that everyone may be assured in himself [*sic*] of his [*sic*] faith by its fruit and so that by our godly living our neighbour may be won over to Christ.

This explicitly explains the main title of this article. Christians' conduct and speech should be such that God is glorified thereby on account of the free redemption, deliverance and sanctification offered us by God through the sacrifice of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe it was for this reason that Emmons and Kneezel (2005) stated, citing John Baillie:

A true Christian is one who never for a moment forgets what God has done for him [*sic*] in Christ, and whose whole comportment and whole activity have their root in the sentiment of gratitude. (p. 140)

Gratitude is therefore an essential component of the Christian response to God's mercy.

We were, in this article, unavoidably required to recognise redemption, deliverance or salvation and sanctification as unmerited gifts for which the redeemed should be profusely and eternally

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grateful. This article will define and reflect on the concepts of 'gift', especially as a catalyst for true gratitude, and 'gratitude' and will continue to discuss gratitude from an African perspective and to examine African expressions of gratitude. From there, Christian worship as a lifelong expression of gratitude will be discussed. The article proceeds to highlight the importance of gratitude and to provide some conclusions.

## Definition and reflection on concepts of 'gift' and 'gratitude'

### Gift

According to Camenisch (1981:2) a 'gift' is an 'unearned benefit received from a donor'. Expanding on this definition, Camenisch (1981:2) states that a gift must thus be understood as (1) something of value (2) intentionally bestowed by a donor (who gives it primarily to benefit the recipient) upon (3) a recipient who (a) accepts it, knowing that it is a benefit, (b) who has no right to or claim upon it, and (c) who is not expected to pay for it in the future in any usual way (i.e. in no specific way in which roughly the equivalent value is returned); and (4) which brings into being a new moral relationship to the donor and the acceptance of limits upon the use of the gift. Salvation or redemption is what God gave to redeemed individuals and groups *sola gratia*, that is, by God's grace alone, and was received *sola fide*, meaning by faith alone.

The gift of salvation gives the recipient a second chance to once more be joined to God, the source of life and blessings. Godfrey Wainwright (Greggs 2017:157) states the importance, and how to relate to the gift of salvation, thus: 'The gratuity of worship expresses the character of salvation as gift: a gift to be actively enjoyed'. This gift to be actively enjoyed is, without doubt, the gift that only God, the only source of redemption and joyous life, can give. Greggs (2017) rightly asserts in this regard:

Only the grace of God can save, and the life of faith is a life that responds and in this response participates in the movement of God's grace towards the creature. (p. 155)

The gift of the once-and-for-all salvation and sanctification by grace alone (*sola gratia*) inexorably brings into existence the relationship between the gracious God and the thankful human recipient. This life-giving gift is stated clearly in John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son in order that whoever believes in him shall not perish but will gain eternal life'. Wilson (2015:14) is right when he states: 'In my opinion, it is insufficient to simply appreciate a benefaction; in so doing, one depersonalizes and objectifies what is implicitly a personal relationship'. Wilson points out that the beneficiary has the imperative of not only concentrating on the gift but also being aware of the benefactor as a deity or person to whom recognition must be given.

Wilson (2015:14) rightly states further: 'The personal relationship of the beneficiary and the benefactor encourages

their physical and mental health and helps each experience what it means to be a grateful person'. Gratitude thus creates a positive relationship between the beneficiary and the benefactor.

### Gratitude

Though Krause (2006:164), citing Emmons, McCullough and Tsang's research, pointed out the difficulty of defining the concept of 'gratitude', useful insights from some scholars, especially regarding its value, make it possible and necessary to grapple with explicating the concept. People like Martin Luther, the pioneer reformer, and the 20th century theologian Karl Barth are said to have commented favourably and usefully about gratitude. Emmons and Kneezel (2005:140) provide us with the following comments from Luther and Barth: it is 'the basic Christian attitude' (Luther) and 'grace and gratitude go together like heaven and Earth; grace evokes gratitude like the voice and echo' (Barth). Such comments point to the centrality of gratitude in the Christian religion and in general human life. This fact is increasingly confirmed by research; for example, Watkins et al. (2003) point out:

... gratitude is important to people and 'grateful' appears to be a highly valued trait. In a recent study of over 800 descriptive trait words, 'grateful' was rated in the top four percent in terms of likeability. (p. 432)

Such research findings encourage further reflection on the concept of gratitude as an important virtue for religious and other people. Worthen and Isakson (2007:34) rightly refer to gratitude as '... a universally desired virtue at personal, interpersonal, organizational and community levels'. This means that gratitude is a virtue desired by all or most human beings.

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New Advent), the word 'virtue' means, in its widest sense, 'the excellence of perfection of a thing', while in its strictest meaning, as used by moral philosophers and theologians, 'it signifies a habit superadded to a faculty of the soul, disposing it to elicit with readiness acts conformable to our rational nature'. Augustine, according to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, cited above, says virtue 'is a good habit consonant with our nature', while for Thomas Aquinas, it is a *habitus 'operativus bonus'*, 'an operative habit essentially good'. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, gratitude, which resides under the moral virtue 'justice', 'inclines one to recognition of benefits received'. According to these descriptions, the word 'gratitude' thus represents a very positive, highly required and useful habit.

The word 'gratitude' itself is derived from the Latin *gratia*, meaning 'favour', and *gratus*, meaning 'pleasing' (Emmons & Stern 2013:846). All derivatives from this Latin root have to do with kindness, generosity, gifts, the beauty of giving, receiving, and repaying benefits and kindness. In this sense, gratitude functions to help regulate relationships by solidifying, affirming and strengthening them. In this regard, Emmons and Kneezel (2005) say:

Gratitude, the affirmation of a bond between giver and receiver, is central to the human–divine relationship. ... Gratitude is thus, a universal religious sentiment, evident in the thank offerings described in ancient scriptures to contemporary praise and worship music. (p. 140)

Gratitude is thus recommended to all human beings, as humanity with its social nature requires nurtured relationships and gratitude is, as stated above, central to all relationships – both divine-human and human-human. If, indeed, gratitude has to do with kindness, generosity, gifts, the beauty of giving, receiving and repaying benefits and kindness, it is not right to link it to obligation. Rambe and Mawere (2012:9) state this fact clearly, saying: ‘... the application of benevolence does not necessarily carry compulsive notion of reciprocity, but rather internal desire to do good for the other’.

The four biblical principles referred to later in this article emphasise that tokens of gratitude are to be given or expressed voluntarily, freely, never begrudgingly, and are to be given or expressed as spontaneous expressions of gratitude. My understanding is that gratitude is not obligatory. Wellman (1999:284) can therefore state: ‘I simply believe that gratitude is better understood as a virtue than as a source of obligations’. Substantiating this position, Wellman (1999) says further:

Following Hart’s general observation, I claim in particular that a benefactor’s benevolent expression of goodwill can give a beneficiary moral reasons to respond with similar goodwill, but that these moral reasons do not leave this beneficiary bound by duty. (p. 286)

This is, indeed, also what Thomas Aquinas emphasises when, according to Kilcline (2015:7), he avers: ‘... because the due is a moral debt, and repayment therefore must occur voluntarily and spontaneously, rather than by obligation as in a contractual agreement’. Kilcline (2015:7) points to the seriousness of Thomas Aquinas on this point, when she refers to his use of the following quotation from the Roman philosopher, Seneca: ‘Thanksgiving is less thankful when compelled’. Gratitude therefore does not enslave the recipient, though it fosters a closer relationship.

In that sense, gratitude:

refers to the expected and appropriate, but not in the fullest sense, obligatory attitudinal response of the recipient to the gift which is rightly expected to be manifested in the recipient’s subsequent conduct toward the donor, toward the gift and in some cases, toward relevant third parties. (Camenisch 1981:2)

It is clear therefore that gratitude has the power to change the recipient’s attitude toward the giver. The recipient’s view of the giver is radically transformed either from neutral or negative to an ultrapositive one that brings the recipient into a closer relationship with the giver. It is not surprising that Wilson (2015:14) avers that ‘[g]ratitude is the virtue that engenders a positive emotion in response to a gift or benefaction from another’. The recipient’s attitude and conduct become those of continual appreciation and gratitude.

As expressed in the principles of sacrifice in the Old Testament, gratitude has to be expressed voluntarily. This is clearly articulated in Leviticus 22:29 as well as in New Testament text by the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:6–8, having the effect that sacrifices or offerings were:

1. to be given voluntarily, that is, given of one’s free will and given in privacy
2. to be given freely to express gratitude to the Lord for the blessings one received
3. never to be given in a begrudging attitude or of necessity (see Cooper Abrams, Bibletruth.org: sermon ‘What is True Thanksgiving?’)
4. to be given as a spontaneous expression of gratitude to the Lord.

Cooper Abrams, in the Bibletruth.org website cited above, also rightly points to the fact that gratitude is a conduct and an act of faith (see also Worthen & Isakson 2007:34). The grateful person must, indeed, first believe in God and accept that all things come from God. Confirming this relationship between faith and gratitude, Wilson (2015) states the following:

The Christian faith is characterized by gratitude, a feeling of delight and intellectual excitement that our world is not only created by God but nourished by his gracious presence. God encourages us to reflect on what this means for our attitude toward creation, toward one another, and toward ourselves and inspires us to take risks in order to grow as grateful persons in relation to him. (p. 13)

According to the above insight, gratitude is a central virtue of the Christian faith. It is therefore not surprising that the reformers pointed out that the lives of Christians must be to the glory of God. Christians should, because of God’s gracious, merciful and thus unmerited salvation, express gratitude to God in word and deed. The Roman philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero was indeed not exaggerating when he said: ‘Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others’.<sup>1</sup> Gratitude, therefore, forms, in the Reformed tradition, the foundation of Christian piety or ethical conduct aimed at glorifying God for God’s undeserved favour and acknowledging the good deeds of others.

According to Emmons and Stern gratitude has a worldly and a transcendent meaning. They then define ‘gratitude’ in its worldly sense as:

... a feeling that occurs in interpersonal exchanges when one person acknowledges receiving a valuable benefit from another. Gratitude is a cognitive-affective state that is typically associated with the perception that one has received a personal benefit that was not intentionally sought after, deserved, or earned but rather because of the good intentions of another person. (Emmons & Stern 2013: 846)

Feelings of gratitude are anchored in two essential pieces of information processed by an individual: (a) an affirming of goodness or ‘good things’ in one’s life and (b) the recognition that the sources of this goodness lie at least partially outside the self. It is a natural emotional reaction and quite likely a universal

1. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/marcustull122152.html>; accessed on 17 August 2017.

tendency to respond to another's benevolence, or at least in violation of the law of reciprocity, not responding to kindness with harm. There is a potent, vitalizing energy that accompanies both the affirmation and recognition components of gratitude and helps account for its transformational healing power in human functioning. (2013:846–847)

In its transcendental meaning, Emmons and Stern (2013) state:

The transcendent meaning of gratitude is widely recognized in the major spiritual traditions in which thanksgiving is a worldwide response to life. ... True gratefulness rejoices in the other. Its ultimate goal is to reflect back the goodness that one has received by creatively seeking opportunity for giving. The motivation for doing so resides in the grateful appreciation that one has lived by the grace of others. In this sense, the spirituality of gratitude is opposed to a self-serving belief that one deserves or is entitled to the blessings that he or she enjoys. Rather, it is knowing the grace by which one lives that is itself a profound spiritual realization. Authentic gratitude leads people to experience life situations in ways that call forth from them an openness to engage with the world to share and increase the very goodness they have received. It is the feeling of connection with humanity emerging from a sense of wonder and joy that participating in an intricate network of existence brings. (p. 847)

In both the worldly and transcendental meanings of gratitude, there is a sense in which gratitude is a bridge builder and relationship facilitator, both vertically and horizontally. The aforementioned statement is an inference to an underlying covenantal relationship in the concept of gratitude. Emmons and Stern (2013) state an important point when they aver:

[i]n many world ethical systems, gratitude is the shaping and compelling force behind acts of compassion because life is seen as a vast network of interdependence, interpenetration, and mutuality that constitutes being. (p. 847)

At the centre of such a network of relationships, there is a covenant, which Torrance (1970:54) defines as 'a promise binding two people or two parties to love one another *unconditionally*'.

## Gratitude from the African perspective

We have learnt in the preceding discussion that gratitude is a universal virtue. It is also the central value among Africans. Thanksgiving is, according to Rambe and Mawere (2012:3), 'the act of giving thanks as a gesture of gratitude towards God, god or chief'. At the social level, especially from the African perspective, the relationship is one in which reciprocity is the goal. Of such relationships, Parsons, Fox and Lidz (1972) have this to say:

It will be remembered that Mauss stressed not only the ubiquity of gift but also how this giving creates, for the recipients of gifts, an obligation to reciprocate which on occasion can be onerous indeed. (p. 371)

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the term 'reciprocate' thus: 'to give and take mutually' and 'to return in kind or

degree'.<sup>2</sup> It means there should be expected response from the recipient to engender mutuality, even though not obligatory, in the process of giving and receiving. There is indeed no particular price tag representing or as expression of gratitude.

There are various ways in which Africans express gratitude and for various benefits. For example, Mbiti (2012) points out:

A number of African peoples offer individual, family, or Communal thanksgiving to God. They may do this, in some cases, indirectly through the living-dead, spirits, or national heroes, and some divinities, which convey the sentiment to God. (p. 345)

Mbiti (2012:345) further quantifies events that prompt thanksgiving, among which are 'harvest, birth of children, cure from illness and barrenness, success in hunting or raid, and the supply of rain, especially after a drought' (see also Rambe & Mawere 2012:9, 10). All these contribute to human well-being and thus liberation from hunger, enemies, childlessness, ill health, drought, barrenness and so forth. For these events of success, made possible by the Lord God or ancestors, according to some African beliefs, the people of Africa readily give thanks.

## African expressions of gratitude

Africans are not only very grateful people but also express their gratitude in various meaningful ways. In this article, I only focus on a brief reflection on a thanksgiving gesture, song and giving names to children.

### Expression of gratitude in the knee-bending gesture

Africans also teach their children to show gratitude through some gestures when they are given gifts. For example, at my home village of Bakenberg in Mokopane, children are taught to bend their knees halfway and receive gifts with both hands, expressing gratitude verbally as well. This is done by other peoples as well, as Mbiti (2012:348) attests, citing the Vugusu tribe's proverb: 'What God offers you with one hand, you should take with both hands'. The meaning here is not only literal but further means that God's gifts must be received and accepted eagerly and with deep appreciation. Adults as well, especially women, show gratitude in a similar way. According to this insight, all received benefits are seen by Africans as an expression of God's goodwill (Mbiti 2012:438). In the gesture, there radiates appreciation of the gift and respect to the giver. Both appreciation and respect are here, expressed in words and actions. This is to say, gratitude is not a passive phenomenon but an active engagement (sometimes in exaggerated ways) by the African recipient of benefits.

### Expression of gratitude in song

Indigenous songs are among the important African ways of expressing appreciation and gratitude in words and actions.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reciprocate>; accessed on 18 August 2017.



Lebaka (2012:174) is right when he says, 'Songs as expression of appreciation and thanksgiving prevail in Pedi society to this day'. This despite concerted efforts by Western missionaries to stamp out African singing as abominable to the Christian God. Many years back, Pobe (1976) said about the African habit of singing:

*Singing*, now as in the past, is central to the lives of most Africans. When an African works on his [*sic*] farm, he [*sic*] sings; when he [*sic*] goes fishing, he [*sic*] sings. When a carpenter or a mason hammers away, he [*sic*] sings. In song are laid bare *homo africanus* in his [*sic*] hopes and fears, his [*sic*] joys and sorrows. (p. 3)

It is not surprising that song is, among Africans, seen as the heart of life, as Lebaka (2012:174) emphasises, citing Walker, the fact that '... in many cultures, music and its associated educational practices are seen as more integral to the total life style, not something intrinsic'. The main message conveyed by African songs is appreciation and gratitude to God, for good health, the ability to work and protection against injuries and misfortunes (cf. Wood 1985:17). Lebaka (2012) further points out that:

[a]ppreciation is indeed an important part of the tribe's act in general. Music serves as an adjunct to religion, and is used for happy and sad occasions, for expressing ideals and emotions... (p. 174)

In terms of its use in Africa, to express joy, van Wyk (2013:8) has this to say: 'Hopefully, the younger, predominantly African congregants and churches would help the predominantly European section of the church to rediscover the joy and importance of singing ...' Singing is meant to soothe people's emotions and restore hope. Song in Africa is therefore always accompanied by matching acts of dance suitable for expression of appreciation and gratitude. It is done in a way that is evidence of great dedication.

### Giving names to children

One other way in which Africans, especially those of South African origin, express gratitude is by giving names that express gratitude to their children. This is reminiscent of what Hanna did according to the narrative of 1 Samuel 1:20 after God blessed her with a son, Samuel. She gave him that name, saying, 'because I have asked the Lord for him'. By so naming the child, Hannah was acknowledging God's intervention in her troubled, childless marriage. Hannah's expression of gratitude is eloquently stated in 1 Samuel 2:1: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord, my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance' (NIV). In the same vein, many Africans, especially South Africans, give their children names that express their appreciation and gratitude to God. In the African naming ceremony, the child is incorporated into both the spirit-world and the world of men (see Pobe 1976:14). A number of names can be mentioned, for example *Bongi'Nkosi* ['thanking the Lord'], *Tebogo* ['thanksgiving' in Sepedi and Setswana], *Malebo* ['gratitude' in Sesotho], *Siyabonga* ['we are thankful' in IsiZulu], *Mbulelo* ['thanksgiving' in Xhosa], *Nombulelo* ['thanksgiving' in IsiXhosa – the name given to

a female child]. There are many others, for which there is unfortunately too little space; these few names should, however, suffice. These names serve to keep alive parents' memory of God's special blessings upon them. In this sense, the expression of gratitude is continual and regular. The children are also, in a special way, dedicated to the Lord. The names are also meant to 'inculcate moral life and living from a very early age' (Pobe 1976:14). From the Reformed perspective, gratitude is best expressed in worship as life itself.

## Christian worship as a lifelong expression of gratitude

For a clear understanding of the notion of worship as life, it is essential to listen attentively to the insightful words of Beauchesne (1990):

What primarily defines the Church is Christian life in Christ through the Spirit, which means, as this essay will develop, a life of thanksgiving to God and of service to neighbour. This is worship as life, from which worship as liturgy springs forth. (p. 83)

This refers to the life that acknowledges God as the creator and preserver of all life and the love of and service to the other, which is the life of justice. Manala (2012:223) points out about Christian worship: 'Christian worship is [without doubt] expected to express worshippers' gratitude in a way that pleases God, for God's self-giving to them in the form of Christ'. It is indeed meant to express worshippers' divine will-compliant gratitude for God's gracious self-giving through Christ's life, work, death, resurrection and ascension. In this regard Kelly (1998:262) asserts quite aptly: 'Liturgy is the Christian community's consciousness of grace'. This consciousness of God's grace and its value, expressed in their redemption, both individually and corporately, moves Christian communities and individuals to act in gratitude toward God.

According to Guroian (1997:372), the Christian memory of the central salvific events forms the source and motivation for justice, which is as central to Christian worship as gratitude. It is indeed for this reason that John Baillie could, according to Emmons and Kneezel (2005), state that:

[a] true Christian is one who never for a moment forgets what God has done for him [*or her*] in Christ, and whose whole comportment and whole activity have their root in the sentiment of gratitude. (p. 140)

That is a mouthful, meaning that the whole or entirety of the Christian's being and doing need to be directed by and toward gratitude. The word 'comportment' is pregnant with positive meaning, namely, conduct, demeanour, attitude, style, manner. In its positive meaning, the word refers to the totality of the Christian life and conduct. Christ's redemption, life, death and resurrection as well as his second glorious coming truly inspire, in the Christian, the requisite virtuous life as conduct of gratitude.

This is articulated profoundly by Greggs (2017) in the following assertion:

The Christian life is one marked by a covenant of grace and gratitude in which human creature responds to the superabundant merciful grace of God in thanksgiving, and in so doing participates in the merciful grace offered to the creature by God: in other words, the response of gratitude is a participating in the grace offered by God, and as such, is a full recognition of the ways of grace which flow from the divine life to creation. (p. 147)

This interaction is perfectly expressed in Christian worship, which provides an environment in which there is a lively meeting between God and human beings, which is initiated by the gracious and merciful God and responded to by human being in gratitude.

Saliers (1979:175) proffers the following explication of the concept of worship, in line with Gurioan's aforementioned insight: 'Worship is something Christians do together, not just because of religious duty, but because it is their way of remembering and expressing their life unto God'. Worship is thus about the offering of one's own life, in full, unto God as a result of the human memory of what God had done and continues to do presently and in the future. It is for this reason, that the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Roman congregation urges readers of his letter, saying:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. (Rm 12:1, NIV)

Offering one's total self to God in gratitude is the least one can offer to God in acknowledgement of and gratitude for God's gracious mercy. Calvin, according to Wiley (2014), citing Gerrish, articulates his theology of the Lord's Supper thus:

At the table, the relation of God and humanity is exhibited. God calls us to the table and feeds us on Christ himself, and we are sent forth in gratitude for God's gracious movement toward us. The relationship, broken by sin is restored at God's initiative – we offer our thanks with our whole lives. (p. 18)

This is exactly what Part 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism says is a fitting response to God's superabundant grace and mercy, that is, self-offering. It is not an easy thing to do, but it is what God enables Christians to do in gratitude, as something that they want to accomplish in response to what God has done for, and is, to them. Karl Barth is cited by Greggs (2017) as having said:

There is no creaturely possibility of gratitude prior to the moment of recognising in faith that the world depends on the grace of its creator for its existence and preservation. (p. 150)

Gratitude is therefore an acknowledgement of this total dependence on God. Our human life after redemption can indeed not be anything rather than an obedient life of gratitude. Citing Yves Congar on this important matter, Beauchesne (1990) states:

Our entire moral life, that is, all of human life, may and must become worship [*un culte*], inasmuch as life expresses faith, hope and charity through which we fundamentally orient ourselves

toward God. Only then are the forms of exterior and social worship (sacramental worship) to be considered. However, there is no break (*coupure*) between the exterior social forms of worship and the reality of personal Christian life: anthropology is isolated from neither theology nor doxological acts. (p. 79)

Beauchesne (1990:81) demonstrates in this cited article that as far as Congar is concerned, worship is emphatically related to life rather than to liturgy. Such life should be led in accordance with God's inspiration through Christ and his spirit, which is why Kibble (1985) says:

Christian worship is therefore a human activity insofar as it is a human being who worships in public or in private. But Christian worship is a divine activity insofar as the Christian is seen to worship only in and through Christ and his worship. (p. 26)

God is the one who graciously, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, enables Christians to worship properly.

The requisite worship that God prefers is one that is holy and pleasing to God, as the Apostle Paul points out. It means that God expects and demands humble and obedient human reflection and action in gratitude for his mercies. It was Peterson (1993:280) who emphasised this point, saying: 'Christian obedience is an expression of gratitude for the blessings received from believing the gospel. "God has redeemed us, therefore let us serve him!"' The main reason for Paul's call to his addressees to worship is the redemptive initiative of God, as pointed out also in Exodus 19:4–6; 20:1–3; Deuteronomy 10:14–22. This was meant to be in response to God's mercies as stated in Romans 12:1, through their self-presentation to God as a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice.

## The importance of gratitude

From the preceding discussions of gratitude, one already senses the great importance that goes with the practice of gratitude. Some renowned theologians, like Martin Luther, Karl Barth (according to Emmons & Kneezel 2005:140) and K Wilson (2015:13, 14), to name but three, philosophers like Cicero and recently, a number of positive psychology scholars like R. A. Emmons, T. T. Kneezel and McCullough attest to the importance of gratitude. This ensemble of witnesses' theological, philosophical and psychological research findings are convincing as to the health-inspiring and life-giving influence of gratitude. Recent research shows, for example, that people who demonstrate gratitude are not only happier but are also healthier (Birnbaum & Friedman 2014:6). Gratitude thus inspires and generates holistic health, in that it covers spiritual, psychological and cultural aspects of human life, as shown in the testimonies of the aforementioned scholars from different fields of knowledge.

Without proper and emphatic teaching on gratitude, the church risks losing true committed membership. Signs of these are evident in some mainline churches, where it has become common for confirmed young people to disappear from active church life immediately after confirmation. This brings to light what is known as Sunday Christianity.

## Sunday Christianity

There exists a dualistic experience and understanding of the practical existence of a Christian. This gives rise to the understanding of life as divided between one dedicated to God and one amenable to the world. Richard Sennett (Sheldrake 2003) blames this situation on Christian theology as espoused and interpreted from the Western perspective, blame that is articulated thus:

... blames Christian theology for the deep division between interiority and exteriority that he believes pollutes Western culture: 'It is a divide between subjective experience and worldly experience, self and city'. (p. 20)

This is, according to my observation in my Christian environment, what turns many Christians into what may be termed 'Sunday Christians'. Sunday Christianity is the phenomenon in which people act like Christians only on Sunday when they are participating in the Sunday worship services but act differently or even contrary to the good conduct displayed on Sunday at church, during the week. Entrenched Sunday Christianity inexorably produces the so-called Sunday Christians. Sunday Christians are accordingly:

- Those who use the Christian religion to hide their lack of faith, immoral actions and societal misdeeds under the guise that Jesus died for their sins.
- Those who will take anything said about their religion personally, and sometimes as an attack on 'their' god. This gives them a false cause and a reason to feel righteous about themselves.
- Sunday Christians are rarely moral or honourable people. They assume that they are good people solely based on their religion, rather than their actions. Sunday Christians are frauds to the religion's bedrock of actual do-gooders.<sup>3</sup>

These people do not acknowledge their total dependence upon God's unmerited mercy and gracious blessings. They live with a sense of compartmentalised life as a norm for being and do not acknowledge that at all times and in everything their lives and actions should be dedicated to God, the owner and giver of all good things. Such people often appear and act extremely religious but are capable of, instead of loving and caring for others, oppressing them despite the biblical teaching of active love toward others as expressed in Matthew 7:12. No surprise, then, that so-called Christians in the pre-democratic South African situation could legislate and mercilessly implement apartheid laws that separated, discriminated against and oppressed other Christians on the basis of racial differences. This is characteristic of people who are not Christians in both confession and actions; their confession sounds Christian or moral but their actions are a direct contradiction. Such life is contrary to what the life of gratitude is about – their worship is not also expressed in their lifestyle, which is representative of true Christian prophetic functioning.

In acknowledgement of God as the creator, redeemer, saviour and sanctifier, Christians need to adopt a holistic approach, instead of a compartmentalised one, in their relationship

<sup>3</sup><https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Sunday%20Christian>

with their giver of life and everything. Sheldrake (2003) rightly described spirituality thus:

Spirituality here fundamentally means a way of life, or life in the spirit, in contrast to living in ways opposed to the Spirit of God. It is founded on the practice of a common human everyday life rather than on private experiences or on purely devotional or ascetical exercises. (p. 20)

This is also in accordance with Augustine's spiritual tradition that emphasises the act of teaching by word and example (Sheldrake 2003:22). The implication is that a life of gratitude, which can be described as Christian spirituality, should be expressed both verbally and actively within the community throughout the days of one's earthly life.

## Concluding remarks

In this article, it has emerged that Christian gratitude for the gift of salvation and promise of eternal life is supposed to be a lifestyle. It has also become clear that the life of gratitude promotes good health and a joyous existence. For this reason, it was discovered, teaching on gratitude as a Christian lifestyle should become the heart of the church's teaching if it is to successfully counter the emergence of nominal Christianity.

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## Competing interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests with regard to the writing of this article.

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