



Conceptual key: Gratuity

Fragment of documents linked to the Social Doctrine of the Church to understand the nature of gratuitousness, unconditional and free.

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It is the character of what is born, unconditionally and freely, of an overflowing initiative. It is the free love of God (creation, choice), fully revealed in Christ (redemption) and also of Christians (cf. → charity). There is also a possible perversion of gratuitousness.

In the biblical and Christian tradition, the first act of gratuitousness on the part of God is the creation itself. The *creatio ex nihilo* is due only to the desire to communicate generously the goodness itself (cf. 2 M 7.28; Rm 4.17; Council Laterano IV, DS 800). The creative act happens with a sovereignly free decision ("Liberrimo council", according to the expression of Vatican Council I, DS 3025). The gratuitousness of creation is the encounter between the fullness of the goodness of God omnipotent and the radical contingency of the creature. Another manifestation of total gratuitousness, according to the Scriptures, is the whole history of Israel: their choice, their redemption from slavery, the gift of the Torah and the entrance into the Promised Land. The book of Deuteronomy does not tire of stressing the disproportion between the gift granted by Yhwh and the human beneficiary (cf. Dt 7.7; 6.11; 9.5).

In the NT it shines with even more force the gratuitousness of the divine initiative. Free is the revelation of God and his mysteries (cf. Mt 11,26-27; Lc 11.32), as well as the election of the first Apostles (cf. MC 3.13; Jn 15.16), and then the Passover of Jesus (cf. Rm 1.1). It is God who loved us first (1 Jn 4.19), delivering his Son (rm 8.32), whose love is to die for us, wicked and sinful (RM 5, 6-8).

Such is the → Gospel of the gratuitousness of → salvation and justification (cf. Rm 3.24; 2 Tm 1.9). All the chosen witnesses are entrusted with the treasure of the Gospel, of which no one can ever be called worthy (cf. 2 Co 4, 1.7). Rather: the two "pillars" of the history of the Church, Peter, and Paul, are personally marked by the

experience of the free mercy of Christ (cf. P.E. Jn 21, 15ss E 1 Co 15.10; UUS 91). The faithful and gratuitous testimony is transformed into a natural concern for the Apostles (cf. Mt 10.8; 1 Co 9.18; 11.7).

-To the experience of God's free love (cf. LC 6.35) and preferentially by sinners (cf. LC 15; 19.1-10) must respond to the human gratitude of the knowledge benefited from an unmerited gift (cf. the forgiven sinner LC 7,36-50). Such recognition is disseminated to the conversion and reparation of the ill-made (cf. Zechariah, Lc 19.8). The most serious sin is precisely the lack of perception of the gift received (cf. the ruthless servant, Mt 18,23-35).

On the contrary, if the AT had already intuited the beauty of gratuity: (cf. If 7,33-34: "The grace (cháris) of your gift reaches every living, not even the dead refuse your grace. Do not lag to those who weep and with the afflicted show themselves afflicted"), the more the NT will advocate unconditional love: "If you love those who loved you, what merit do you have (cháris)? For sinners also love those who love them. If you do good to those who do to you what merit do you have? Sinners do the same! If lend those you expect to receive, what merit do you have? Sinners also lend to sinners to receive the corresponding.

Rather, love your enemies; do good and lend without waiting for anything in return (mêden apelpízontes); and your reward shall be great, and you shall be children of the Highest because he is good with the ungrateful and the wicked "(Lk 6,32-35). In particular, this manifests itself → in forgiving as it has been forgiven and benefiting all, without distinction, without any meaning of person (cf. St 2, 1SS). It is part of the free evangelical also to "squander" the most precious things for the Lord, as did the woman of Bethany (cf. MC 14.4) and as in the uninterrupted tradition of the Church the consecrated people do (cf. VC 104).

-Love for truth requires that the dark side of gratuity be mentioned as well. Corruptio optimi pessima. Just as gratuity evokes freedom, initiative, and overabundance in good, so gratuitousness of evil, hatred, cruelty, sadism are a tragic response to the perverse turn of the greatest love. There is in this an unmistakable sign of the existence of the demon ("I have been hated without reason [dôrêan]", Jn 12.25).