

## The Gift and Ethical Responsibility within Society

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### Abstract

The following research aims to explore the semantics of the gift as a foundation for ethical responsibility within society from the perspective of Christian faith. Using the descriptive and analytical approach, this study examines the words associated with the experience of the gift. The guiding question to be elaborated is what the gift means and how it may ground ethical concern. The results of the study show that the word —gift is polysemous and functions as a moral category of relation, expressed through generosity, recognition, and communion. The noun —gift, rooted in the verb —to give, corresponds to the ideas of *donum*, *munus*, and *charis*. As a relational category, the gift is constituted by the giver, the receiver and the given object, but ultimately reflects God's grace that sustains human acts of living generously in *koinonia*. This research suggests that the gift, rooted in God's own self-giving love, provides a foundation for the ethical concern as persons called to communion and discipleship in Christ. Acknowledging that gift is not a private possession but a relational reality, this study contributes to moral responsibility and social commitment.

**Keywords:** Gift; *Charis-Agape*; *Munus-Donum*; Relationality; Christian Faith.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bermaksud menguraikan semantik pemberian sebagai basis bagi tanggung jawab etis dalam hidup masyarakat dari perspektif iman Kristiani. Dengan memakai pendekatan deskriptif dan analitis, penelitian ini mencoba untuk meninjau beberapa kata yang dikaitkan dengan konsep pemberian. Pertanyaan penuntun penelitian adalah: apa yang dimaksud dengan pemberian dan bagaimana pemberian itu dapat menjadi dasar bagi kehidupan etis. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pemberian merupakan kata yang mengandung polisemi dan kategori moral dalam relasi, yang diekspresikan melalui

kemurahan hati, pengakuan dan persekutuan. Kata benda —pemberian, berasal dari kata kerja —memberi, mengandung makna *donum*, *munus* dan *charis*. Sebagai suatu konsep relasional, konsep pemberian melibatkan pemberi, penerima dan objek yang diberikan, namun pada intinya menyingkapkan rahmat Allah yang menguatkan praksis untuk bersikap murah hati dalam suatu *koinonia*. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pemberian, yang berakar dalam kasih Allah yang hakekatnya memberikan dirinya sendiri, menyediakan dasar untuk kepedulian etis bagi pribadi yang dipanggil kepada persekutuan dan kemuridan dalam Kristus. Kontribusi yang disumbangkan penelitian menekankan bahwa pemberian itu bukanlah milik pribadi melainkan suatu kenyataan sosial yang bermuara pada tanggung jawab moral dan komitmen sosial.

**Kata Kunci:** pemberian; *Charis-Agape*; *Munus-donum*; Relasionalitas; Iman Kristiani.

## 1. Introduction

That —gift is an important issue for various subjects of inquiry is clear from the amount of published writings on the topic. Marcel Mauss's classic text, *Essai sur le don*, first published in 1924 in French, continues to stand as one of the authoritative works in understanding the gift.<sup>1</sup> Central to that text is Mauss's presentation of gift-giving as a kind of exchange in the archaic societies. According to him, the act of giving creates obligations and binds individuals into multiple forms of relations. The gift, understood as both a paradigm and a gesture, is ruled by the threefold obligations of giving, receiving, and reciprocating. The tripartite framework is viewed as a set of relations and become preconditions for various forms of social bonds between individuals and groups in society. Mary Douglas in the foreword of the Mauss's book wrote as follows, —The cycling gift system is the society.<sup>2</sup>

Since the work of Mauss, the term gift is considered as one of the key concepts used some by scholars. The interdisciplinary collection of essays edited by Schrift is helpful in looking at the use of the gift as an alternative paradigm in anthropology, sociology and philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Various authors in that collection describe the gift as an essential component of being human. What we have in the spirit of the gift is a truth that the fulfillment of our life within society can be realized through nurturing our communal bonds and respecting the social contract.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the gift is not simply a paradigm; it is, above all, an ethical experience.

Catholic theologians also employ the nature and function of the gift. In *Caritas in veritate*<sup>5</sup>, Pope Benedict XVI considers the —gift as an evaluative framework for our world characterized by an anthropological crisis.<sup>6</sup> For Benedict, the logic of gift begins by

<sup>1</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Douglas, —Foreword: No Free Gifts, in *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 1990), ix–xxii.

<sup>3</sup> Alan D. Schrift, *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Marshall Sahlins, —The Spirit of the Gift, in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 70–99.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate: On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html). (accessed November 20, 2025). Henceforth: *CiV*.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI points out that anthropological crisis we face is a crisis related to the —destiny of man ( *CiV* 21). Basically, anthropological crisis is a crisis in the relations that each of us has with God, with others fellow human being, with creation or nature and with ourselves. It includes a —cultural and moral crisis of man ( *CiV* 32).

recognizing that —Love is God’s greatest gift to humanity. Everything has its origin in God’s love<sup>7</sup>. In other words, the life as a gift is the fruit of God’s love for us. The gift is a key principle for —Fraternity, economic development and civil society<sup>8</sup> and for our care to —the natural environment<sup>9</sup>. In line with Pope Benedict XVI, another theologians such as Aristide Gnada and Brian V Johnstone affirm the gift as a foundational aspect of moral life. Johnstone argues that —gift-giving is always in relationship, and to another<sup>10</sup>. Gnada states that —human action is morally good when it is an act of gift<sup>11</sup>. In other words, the logic of the gift, if it is rightly understood, is against any forms of violations to the dignity of the human person such as abortion, hostility, racial prejudice, human trafficking, etc.

Although the gift is widely recognized as an essential dimension of human existence, its meanings are complex and multifaceted. The purpose of this research is to explore the notion of gift by answering the question: what the gift means and how it may ground ethical responsibility. This research starts by examining how dictionaries and some scholars try to trace the term gift in their fields of research. A further dimension that merits attention here is the fact that the gift is a social phenomeon. Finally, we present briefly how the logic of gift can provide framework for a realization of Christian moral vocation.

## 2. Research Method

This research adopted the way of interpretation as it is employed by Bernard Lonergan.<sup>12</sup> The study analyzes, compares and evaluates the ways in which the concept of gift is elaborated. The terminology —gift<sup>13</sup> is examined by presenting its etymological, biblical and theological aspects. Furthermore, the gift is also approached by delineating the thoughts of some scholars in sociology and cultural anthropology. The aim is to provide a context for understanding the nature and the function of gift.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1. Gift as a dynamic concept

A common definition of the gift can be read in the dictionaries. The term —gift<sup>14</sup> is defined by *Meriam-Webster Dictionary* as —an endowment, talent, a notable capacity; something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation; the act, right, or power of giving; present<sup>15</sup>. The *Dictionary.com* defines gift as —something given voluntarily without payment in return, as to show favor toward someone, honor an occasion, or make a gesture of assistance; the act of giving; something bestowed or acquired without any particular effort by the recipient or without its being earned<sup>14</sup>. The *Oxford English Dictionary* conceives of gift as —something acquired without compensation; the act of giving; give as a present<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *CiV*, art. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Chapter Three of *CiV*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *CiV*, art. 48-51.

<sup>10</sup> Brian V. Johnstone, —The Self as Receiver and Giver: A Critique of the Modern and Postmodern Self, *Australian EJournal of Theology* 7 (June 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Aristide Gnada, —The Gift as Principle of Moral Action,*l in Contemplating the Future of Moral Theology*, ed. Robert C. Koerpel and Vimal Tirimanna (Oregon: Pickwick, 2017), 55-70.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 153-173.

<sup>13</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dictionary> (accessed October 30, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> *Dictionary.com*, <https://www.dictionary.com/> (accessed October 30, 2025)

<sup>15</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed October 30, 2025).

Émile Benveniste made a detailed study on the etymology of the gift.<sup>16</sup> He found five distinct Greek words for the idea of a gift. These words are δῶς (*dôs*); δόζις (*dósis*); δῶρον (*dôron*); δωρεά (*dôrea*); Δωρίνη (*dôtinê*). The δῶς is used to express a simple act of giving as a good one. The δόζις is —an act of giving susceptible of being realized in a gift|. The δόζις also refers to a medical act. The δῶρον is used for gifts given to express —generosity, gratitude, or homagel|. The δωρεά means —the providing of presents| and —totality of presents|. The Δωρίνη is —the obligatory gift offered to a chief whom one wishes to honor or the gift that is due one as a guest|. The Δωρίνη implies a reciprocal element because it is —a gift which calls a return|.

Biblical scholar Andrzej Wodka shows that the basic Greek word for —to give| is δίδωμι which is translated in Latin: *dare*.<sup>17</sup> In the New Testament, the word δίδωμι or *dare* appears approximately in 378 verses and 419 times. Wodka affirms that δίδωμι is one of the biblical words that used frequently to describe the rich and complex phenomenon of giving. The δίδωμι as —giving| is a relational process and thus, involves four components: the giver, the receiver, the gift and the transfer of gift. By adding the fourth component, Wodka wants to emphasize that to give means to open and to move toward the other as other. A relationship with each other is not about a locked giving, getting or receiving something, but firstly, a movement, a going out of oneself toward others in love and respect for others. As a result, the idea of gift implies a continual affirmation of bonds, appreciation and communion. In short, the —giving| as a biblical word generates and confirms the life, its nourishment, the interhuman relationships, and the salvation. Wodka finds in the Bible that the act of giving is, in fact, practiced as a form of relationship nourished by grace and charity.<sup>18</sup>

Peperzak noted that the concept of gift involves someone who gives, the gift given, and someone who receives and reciprocates gift.<sup>19</sup> The gift cannot only be something that the giver has to share but also be many things that one has already received: life, world, time, language, environment, friends, etc. Nobody can claim that he or she is the owner of time, life, language, etc. This simple logic of gift begins by acknowledging that prior to give or offer a gift we have already received gifts. Thus, a transfer is inherent in giving. At this point, theologians speak of God as the First Giver, the Source of our existence. Phenomenologists think of primordial giving or ‘donation’ or givenness. Peperzak also emphasizes that gift-giving enables us to be recognized as a giver and at the same time to appreciate the value or dignity of the others.<sup>20</sup> It is the reason that although gift is associated with generosity, goodwill, and grace, it is undeniable some sort of payback such as a reward, a price, a giving thanks or a gratitude. Gift-giving is reciprocal and not an isolated act. In gift-giving, there is a classical tension of the relation between the self-interest and interest for another.

To sum up, gift is a dynamic concept. The noun —gift| basically denotes the practice of gift giving, originating from the verb —to give|. The gift as an act is structured by three basic components: the giver, the receiver and the object given. In addition to this threefold elements, a gift is characterized by its gratuitous and voluntary nature, offered for the benefit and well-being of the others. Gift giving is thus understood as an act that is unconditional,

<sup>16</sup> Émile Benveniste, —Gift and Exchange in the Indo-European Vocabulary,| in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. A.D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 33–42.

<sup>17</sup> Andrzej Wodka, *Una Teologia Biblica Del Dare Nel Contesto Della Colletta Paolina (2Cor. 8-9)* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Wodka.

<sup>19</sup> Adriaan Peperzak, —Giving,| in *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice*, ed. Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Eric Boynton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 161-175.

<sup>20</sup> Peperzak.

free of charge and without any obligation of repayment. And the gift the dictionaries define also includes presents, talents, skills, innate abilities and other natural qualities.

### 3.2 The Gift as *Charis* and *Agape*

In the Bible, —grace and —love are the two words used to indicate the rich meaning of the gift. The first word is grace (Greek: χάρις, Latin: *gratia*). Gnada describes grace as a divine gift and it is bestowed gratuitously to all human beings.<sup>21</sup> The English word —grace is derived from the Greek χάρις which biblically means: —favour, benevolence, salvation, sanctification, free gift, the unmerited kindness of God toward human beings.<sup>22</sup> As cited Johnstone, St Thomas Aquinas linked gift to —grace in its three meanings: *dilectio*, *donum* and *gratitude*.<sup>23</sup> Grace as *dilectio* means the love that allows us to —enjoy the good will (grace) of another and then wish her well.<sup>24</sup> Grace as *donum* refers to —a gratuitous gift given to someone (*donum gratis datum*). Grace as *gratitude* refers to —the recompense given for a gratuitous gift or a giving thanks (grace) for a gift. The grace designates the God's loving and forgiving mission incarnated in the Person of Christ for human beings. The grace refers to the kenotic dimension of God's giving in Jesus. The act of God's self-emptying in Christ is present for us as a total gift and a blessing. Here the giving describes profoundly the salvific event of Christ at Cross. Jesus gives himself totally for our salvation. Grace, at this point, is understood as a divine gift, capable of transforming those who receive it and moving them from within to participate in communion through faith. As a consequence, our appropriate disposition as Christ's follower should be marked as —kenotic'.

Drawing on the Pauline theology of giving, Wodka formulates the logic of gift as follows: —I can exist because I have been given, I give then I can live.<sup>25</sup> By this logic, Wodka wants to stress that God's grace is what makes us human beings and as a result, to be human means to become a part of the divine gift in Christ. The *charis* is the God's grace and his salvific presence for our humanity. God's grace in Christ makes us capable of giving ourselves and allows us to live in *koinonia*, in communion with God, our divine Origin and with others. God's grace also makes us participants in *diakonia* in service with gratitude. Therefore, we are created to give and our giving should be based on and similar to that of God in Christ. The grace as divine gift is a token of God's generosity and kindness. One can give because one has received before, and through gift-giving on develops and nurtures relationships.

The second word is love or charity (Greek: ἀγάπη, Latin: *caritas*). Both Gnada and Palumberi put *agape* in relation to *eros* and *philia*. Gnada (2019) relates charity to love and sees it as a universal and human common value. The Latin word *caritas* is associated with the ideas of altruism, philanthropism, fraternity and recognition. There is no *caritas* without entering into loving relationship to others. The gift is intentional and never be an isolated act. What motivates one to give is the goodness of others. To love means to give, to sacrifice by losing oneself for the good of the other. Gnada (2019) notes that —the charity, based on the God's love, is an openness to other by self-denial, self-sacrifice. In other words, *caritas*

<sup>21</sup> Aristide Gnada, *L'universalismo Morale Nella Prospettiva Del Dono. Una Sfida Teologica e Antropologica Di Fronte Al Relativismo Morale Contemporaneo* (Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Gnada.

<sup>23</sup> Brian V Johnstone, —The Ethics of the Gift : According to Aquinas , Derrida and Marion, *Australian EJournal of Theology* 3, no. August (2004): 1–16.

<sup>24</sup> Johnstone.

<sup>25</sup> Andrzej Wodka, —L'oblatività Neotestamentaria e Il Discorso Etico-Morale. Il Dono Del Dare (2Cor 8-9), *Dono per Un Giusto Comportamento Morale. Giustizia e Misericordia*, ed. A. Gnada – G. Witaszek (Roma: Lateran University Press and Editiones Academiae Alfonsianae, 2016), 49–70.

reveals the logic of gift: we can give because we have received from others, and we become our true selves only by sincerely giving of our selves. Gnada (2019) rightly underscores that the inability to give is a tantamount to a refusal to love and to recognize the others.<sup>26</sup> That is why the act of giving creates a relationship characterized by love between the giver and receiver. The gift demands a mutual appreciation and acceptance of the others.

Furthermore, Palumberi (2016) defines *eros* as —*amore-bisognoll*, namely, the love for others motivated by the fulfilment of own need, personal affection or individualistic desires. *Philia* is —*amore-amicizia*”, that is, the mutual and reciprocal love as usually occurred in friendship. *Agape* is defined as “*amore-dono*”, that is, the gift-love, love for others by giving or sacrificing ourselves for the good of others and ultimately, for the sake of God. Although *agape* or the self-giving love is the ideal type of Christian love, the *eros* and *philia* remain essential for love to be truly and fully expressed. All three are the dimensions of love and should thus be accepted as complementary. Palumberi (2016) states that the love has radically threefold elements: —a living affection, a flourishing guidance, and a fruitful behaviour.<sup>27</sup> The development of our humanity consists in the acts of receiving and giving and living in relation with others.

### 3.3 The Gift as *Munus*

Benveniste presented *munus* and *donum* as the two different Latin words for describing gift and he relates the meaning of both words to the —constitution of human community.<sup>28</sup> The concept of *munus* underscores how gift giving connects individuals into communal ties. Therefore, the notion of community (Latin: *communitas*) is traceable to the word *munus*, which derived from the root *mei-* and the suffix-*nes*. The *munus* itself is translated as —function, office, obligation, task, favor, or public spectacle, gladiatorial contest.<sup>29</sup> Noticeable here is the fact that in etymology, at least, the definition of community is deeply tied to an exchange, a reciprocal action, a circulation, an obligation to give and to reciprocate..

Drawing on Benveniste’s study, Roberto Esposito elaborates the term *munus* to trace the origin of community.<sup>29</sup> In Esposito’s observation, the term *munus* is understood in three interrelated senses: *onus*, *officium*, and *donum*. The first two, *onus* and *officium*, can be translated as —duty, obligation, office, official, position and role.<sup>30</sup> Esposito defines *munus* as a particular, a specific kind of gift because of its obligatory character and it requires an exchange of goods and service. The *donum* refers to a general use of the concept of gift and denotes a voluntary, generous and spontaneous gift. The *donum* is unilateral because —it does not require an equal return or remuneration.<sup>31</sup> The *munus* is the gift that one must give and offer to community. The *munus* is marked by a contractual obligation. The subjects of community are tied by a duty to fulfill their obligations. There is no *communitas* without disponibility to offer a *munus*.

Inspired by Esposito, Peter Langford states that to be part a *communitas* means living in *koinonia*.<sup>30</sup> Langford found in Esposito’s elaboration of the Latin *communitas* through the term ‘gift’ a helpful analysis in understanding the community as both a sense of belonging

<sup>26</sup> Gnada, *L’universalismo Morale Nella Prospettiva Del Dono. Una Sfida Teologica e Antropologica Di Fronte Al Relativismo Morale Contemporaneo*.

<sup>27</sup> S. Palumberi, —Un Binomio Costitutivo Eros e Agape, Tra Dono e Impegno,<sup>31</sup> in *Dono per Un Giusto Comportamento Morale. Giustizia e Misericordia*, ed. A. Gnada – G. Witaszek (Roma: Lateran University Press and Editiones Academiae Alfonsianae, 2016), 89–111.

<sup>28</sup> Benveniste, —Gift and Exchange in the Indo-European Vocabulary.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Roberto. Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community (Cultural Memory in the Present)* (Stanford: University Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Peter. Langford, *Roberto Esposito: Law, Community and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

and an experience of being-in-common and being with others. The ‘gift’ as *donum* and *munus* obtains its meaning, value and strength in and through a social communion. It is the reason to affirm that the gift-giving is essential to establish ties among individuals in a community. A person who refuses to offer a role is an anomaly in the *communitas*. It is a *munus* or a duty to participate in the life of *communitas* or *koinonia*. It should be clear from this semantic analysis that the gift is a precondition of social relation and it functions as a basis for establishing and maintaining a bond in a community.

Furthermore, Janet E. Smith (1991) gives a greater importance to the *munus* and takes it as a theological concept for her defense to the Catholic teaching concerning the sexual morality, marriage and family. In her view, *munus* describes well —how we are best to live a Christ-centered life. As a theological term, *munus* carries twofold aspects: a gift-given and a role to be fulfilled (Smith, 1991).<sup>31</sup> As a gift, *munus* is not a —man-made but God-given. The fact that *munus* is given by the giver, it shows a trust, an appreciation and a honor to the recipient. As a role to be fulfilled, *munus* means duty, task, mission, office and function. The status of *munus* as a task includes responsibility, vocation, ministry and service that every Christian is called to do in the context of *communion*. It is apparent here that *munus* refers both to gifts that men consecrate to God and to gifts and graces that men receive from God.

Smith indicates some magisterial documents where the *munus* is appeared both as a gift and a role. To take some examples: in *Lumen gentium* (LG) art. 21 *munus* means —power, office, special duty, mission; in LG art. 53, 56 & 60: concerning the role of Mary as mother of God, *munus* is translated as —office, role, function and duty. In *Gaudium et spes* (GS) art. 48-51, *munus* refers to the role, the duty and the vocation that married people must do as members of the Church. In *Humanae vitae* (HV) art. 1 & 8, *munus* is mentioned to describe the transmitting human life as an important duty and a service chosen by God the Creator for spouses. Being a mother and father, transmitting human life or procreational act, educating children are viewed as *munus* of the Christian family.

### 3.4 The Gift as *Datum-Donum* and *Communio*

Kenneth L Schmitz (1982), in his book *The Gift: Creation*, thinks of creation in terms of gift. The gift as a theological category is foundational for a proper understanding of the essence of things, including the origin of humanity. In his view, the Christian doctrine of creation informs that things are not only the *given* (Latin: *datum, data*; French: *donnée*), but that they are the *gift* (Latin: *donum*; French: *le don*). Schmitz contrasts the use of two terms: the *given* and the *gift*. He sees that the *given* serves as a —starting-point for scientific discourse, for technological advance, and for more general forms of progressive action.<sup>32</sup> Recognizing the things as a set of the *given facts* or *data* excludes —any reference to a giver and —does not permit the knower to go —behind or —beneath the *given* in search of an ontological cause”. The *donum* “points beyond itself to its source, to a more or less definitely apprehended giver. The concept of *donum* reveals the —creational structure of creature and the —absolute dependence. The being of things has been offered as *donum*, a gift to be received and lived out in a real relationship.

Schmitz, faithful to biblical faith and making reference to St Thomas Aquinas, argues that the gift as a category helps explaining the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. The universe is a fruit of God’s creative act. The world that comes to us is not something we earn, but a gift freely and gratuitously given by God. Recognizing the status of things as created, gifted, as

<sup>31</sup> Janet, E. Smith, *Humanae Vitae. A Generation Later*, The Catholic University Of (Washington, D.C.: America Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982).

*donum*, opens our minds to the ontological truth, namely the interiority, integrity, intrinsic value, giftedness and divine origin of things. It is the reason to assert that a call to care, to be grateful and to be responsible belongs to our spiritual and human identity. Schmitz (1982:127) explains that the Christian teaching of creation *ex nihilo* has ethical content and it —directs us to take up our own lives responsibly and with the confidence that the interiority and the depth of beings shine with the benison and the risk of an original and final level.

Another scholar, Jaroslaw Kupczak (2014), offers a theological vision of the terms: gift (Latin: *donum*) and communion (Latin: *communio*, Greek: *koinonia*).<sup>33</sup> He found in St John Paul II's theology of the body the intimate connection between the concepts of gift and communion. The two terms gift and communion reveal the essence of God. God, who is a communion of love, created human beings in His image. Thus, the true dignity of each person derives from their grateful response given to the Triune God. Similarly, the mission of the Church consists fundamentally in being a gift for others and living in communion with God and others. The concept of gift reflects a communion as dimension of relationality. Regarding the gift as *donum*, Kupczak (2014:96) states that:

giving oneself belongs to the essence of God; therefore in their nature each one of the three Persons of the Trinity is a gift. The gift (*donum*) is the proper name that Christian theology, on the basis of biblical revelation and following its great teachers, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, attributed to the Holy Spirit.

Following St John Paul II and faithful to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, Kupczak (2014: 102-105) affirms that *communio* describes the nature of the Church better than the word society. The Church is a *communio* because her members are united in love with each other and with Christ by the Holy Spirit. The *communio* indicates both a unity and diversity of persons. A *communio* can be possible only through a reciprocal love and a mutual self-gift. According to Kupczak, the close connection between gift and communion can be found in the expressions such as: the human community of persons (*communio personarum*); the divine communion of persons in the Trinity (*communio Sanctissime Trinitatis*); the community of the ministries in the Church (*communio munerum*); the community of local churches (*communio ecclesiarum*). The important thing to note here is that the terms —gift and communion— express convincingly God's self-giving to humanity as well as a man's self-giving to God and to others (Kupczak, 2014:130).

### 3.5 The Gift as a Social Phenomenon

The idea of gift can be found in the works of Jacques Godbout and Alan Caille (1998). Godbout (1998) defines the gift as —any exchange of goods or services with no guarantee of recompense in order to create, nourish, or recreate social bonds between people—. It is —a form of circulation of goods that promotes social bonding, represents a key element in any society—. Godbout (1998) states that —the gift is not a thing but a social connection *par excellence*—. The gift serves as a way to establish social cohesion and various forms of bond in society.<sup>34</sup>

We note two aspects in Godbout's accounts of gift and its function. *First*, following Hirschman, Godbout (1998) identifies three basic forms of social bonds: the market (*exit*), the state (*voice*), and the domestic sphere (*loyalty*). In the *market*, the act of gift-giving is motivated by the self-interest, that is, the intention of returning, repayment. Here, gift-giving

<sup>33</sup> Jaroslaw. Kupczak, *Gift and Communion. John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Godbout, *The World of the Gift. In Collaboration with Alain Caille* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

is a kind of economic transaction and calculation; one gives because he or she wants to receive something from others in exchange. In the *state*, the act of gift-giving is ruled by a duty or constraint. One gives because it is a social norm and commanded by a legitimate authority. In the *domestic* sphere, the gift-giving is a voluntary act and it is motivated by benevolence and mutuality. One gives because, having received, he or she want to recognize the good beyond himself/herself. Market and state represent the *second sociality*, “a sociality that relies on status and roles that are defined, for the most part, institutionally”. The *primary sociality* refers to the relationships within the family, with neighbors and friends, and person to person.

The following table can summarize the elements of three logic of action:

<b>Elements</b>	<b>Logic of exchange</b>	<b>Logic of duty</b>	<b>Logic of gift</b>
<i>Intention of giving</i>	Give to receive, for the intention of returning. A self-interest intention.	Give to fulfill a duty, for the sake of obligation	Give to participate, contribute and flourishing life
<i>Characteristics of giving</i>	Transaction, calculation, commodity: give to receive from others an equivalent price or value of exchange.	Obligation, duty, responsibility: give because it is a social norm and the right thing to do.	Grateful, kindness, benevolence: give to recognize the good of others.
<i>Kind of person</i>	Calculable and economic man	Socio-political man	Reciprocal and generous man
<i>Proper places</i>	Marketplace, contractual economics.	State, public sector	Family, friendship, informal relations.

The *second* aspect is about gift to strangers (Godbout, 1998). Godbout lists some examples: giving blood, alms for the poor or charitable gifts and organ donation. Here, gift-giving is marked by unilaterality because —they are completely voluntary and spontaneous (Godbout, 1998). What is given up is one’s own, something proper to oneself. In relation to others especially to foreigners or needy persons, a hospitable person shows not an exploitative or manipulative attitude but a respect, recognition and solidarity. Gift to strangers is freely generous without any expected return or repayment. In this respect, giving to strangers is viewed as a concrete affirmation that we are part of and coexist in this world. It is also a kind of recognition to the presence of the other, a real love for our neighbour. It is motivated not by the law of exchange as it happens in the market but by a law of hospitality

to fellow human beings. It is important to note that the hospitality is a highly appreciated as a cultural norm. The act of giving gift transforms strangers into neighbors. Here, the gift is offered without a motive of return.

As we presented above, Godbout and Caille perceives the gift as a social phenomenon. Gift is the embodiment of a system of relationships and cannot be reduced to factors of power or economic interest. As a consequence, living and feeling a mutual sense of belonging cannot be separated from human identity as a relational creature. Social ties, solidarity, fidelity and various kinds of human act in society can be explained well through the gift-paradigm.

### **3.6 The Gift as an Ethical Responsibility**

This section addresses the following question: what actions should be done by individuals from the perspective of the gift? We identify several modalities of action in which the paradigm of the gift functions as a crucial principle for ethical responsibility.

### **3.7. Called to be Grateful and Generous**

By giving gift, one shows oneself as generous, grateful and friendly. By receiving gift, one expresses a grateful recognition to the giver, and concomitantly shows one's own hospitality. The object given contains meaning, message and intention to foster relation with others. In other words, the concept of gift facilitates expression of sentiments and reactions about a relationship between the self and the other. In considering the kind of relation present in the gift, Gnada distinguishes a transfer from an exchange (Gnada, 2019). A transfer is interpreted as a gift when one gives without setting a price and thus the receiver is not obliged to give back or to make a repayment. Whereas, in an exchange, one gives because he or she wants to receive. The parties involved in an exchange are bound by obligation to give and to repay. Furthermore, the kind of person in the gift-giving is a reciprocal or generous man, while in the act of exchange is a calculated or economic man. The exchange is operative in economy and in business transactions. The gift is operative in family, friendship, interpersonal relationship, and community.

The recognition of alterity or otherness is inherent in logic of the gift. As Gnada pointed out, alterity is at the basis of the moral vocation.<sup>35</sup> We respond to the otherness in the call of conscience and in the face of our neighbor (Gnada, 2019). Therefore, a person is one always in the evocation of a response to givenness or donation. The presence of the other person evokes a response from each of us. The presence of other before us is an ethical experience. When our capacity of giving oneself to others and receiving others as gift is lost, there is a real danger of treating others in terms of commodity. Our moral actions should be characterized by charity. At this point, charity is a generous sharing (Riyanto, 2024).<sup>36</sup> Gift giving entails entering in and walking with others. The other is seen as a reminder in the definition of who we are.

### **3.8. Creating a Peaceful Society**

The gift constitutes a fundamental way of living well in society. It is true to claim that there is no gift unless it bears communion. Accordingly, the call to construct a peaceful society arises from the theological fact that human existence is intrinsically relational and communal. Relationality signifies that we are created in dependence upon one another living from, through, and for each other-and this interdependence lies at the very heart of our being.

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<sup>35</sup> Aristide Gnada, *Le Concept de Don. Ce Qui Dit l'être Personnel et l'agir Moral* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Armada Riyanto, *Relasionalitas. Filsafat Fondasi Interpretasi: Aku, Teks, Liyan, Fenomen* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2024).

At the same time, human life is communal, for we are made for communion, called into fellowship, and oriented toward shared participation in the life of others. The capacity for *communio* forms the most basic criterion for what it means to be a person.

*Gaudium et spes* art. 32 articulates the importance of society as a social unity with the following words: —As God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity, so also \_it has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals, without bond or link between them, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness|. Living in communion with another is constitutive of who we are and what we can become.

In terms of gift, human life is experienced as the mutual exchange of the gift of selves. Treating other as a person implies recognition, protection and respect. The concept of gift can be a way to respond the question of how to engage others without perpetuating bias and causing violence. A peaceful living together can be understood as a concrete expression of our love to another. It assumes a positive appreciation to both the difference and the sameness we have all in common. A need for, and sense of community is part of what makes us human. We must create an inclusive relationship with all, especially the —other|, the different, the excluded and the other species on earth. As Benedict XVI showed in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, — interpersonal relations| are essential in understanding human beings as a spiritual being. He notes that —the development of peoples depends, above all, on the recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side| (art. 53).

As a consequence, it is a kind of *munus* to live into harmony with our neighbor, a vocation that we can manifest only by entering into profound dialogue and solidarity with others, not in isolation. To say it with Armada Riyanto (2024), relationality is a framework and inner duty to put oneself in dialogue with other. Our fellow human beings gives us horizon of our identity and our life is lived in response to the other. It is the reason why racism and cultural prejudice are always against the humanity. In terms of gift, it can be said that racism and cultural prejudice are a refusal to live peacefully.

### 3.9. Concern for the most Vulnerable

The biblical faith teaches us that every person is a gift since man and woman are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; CIV art. 34). It means that every life is a *donum Dei*. All people are worthy of respect, especially disabled person and human embryo. Moreover, in the Bible, those who are vulnerable also include the poor such as widow, woman, orphan and stranger. We are called to care for all human life. Showing respect for human life in its most vulnerable is a fundamental and essential way in which we manifest respect for human dignity. Concern for the most vulnerable is a concrete expression of the principle that we are beings for others.

Concern for the most vulnerable is a kind of *caritas* and *munus*. It is constitutive of who we are and what we can become. We are one family and then, being neighbor for all is an integral part of our *munus* (*GS* art. 27). In giving care for the others we express our love for them. Here love is practiced not for reward and calculation of return, but for well-being of others. *Caritas* as a divine gift requires a loving response to God and at the same time a work for justice, peace and integrity of creation. It is the reason to affirm that the moral worth of a society depends on how it treats its vulnerable members. In that lens, we are indeed the —brother's keepers|.

We should not be indifferent to the presence of others, especially in the face of the most vulnerable. The believer lives only for others and not for himself considering nothing except

the need and flourishing of the neighbor. We are mutually responsible for life; care for others and for environment guided by compassion and sustainability. A boundlessness of Christian *caritas* is evident in the parable of Good Samaritan as we read in the Gospel Luke 10, 25-37.

### 3.10. Service for the Common Good

Through gift we find a way to participate and to be responsible with others in a society, expressed in service for the common good. The —common good is a term that is used in many ways in public and political discourse. The Catholic tradition as we read in GS art. 26 describes the common good as —the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment [...] Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family.¶

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nn. 1905-1912 underscores three essential elements of the common good: respect for the dignity of the human person; social well-being and development; peace and justice. Therefore, the common good underlines both a *quality of human life* and a *norm for life together*. The common good is a vision for a peaceful and sustainable community that can be applied inside and outside the Church. Hollenbach defines common good as —the good realized in the mutual relationships in and through which human beings achieve their well-being¶.<sup>37</sup> Concern for the common good is the Church vocation and her mission.

We are responsible for the world we live in, for the well-being of the people with whom we share this planet, and for the way we organize society. It is imperative to work together for the common good, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. The Christian faith contains social dimension. Our participation in social and political realm, to be truly meaningful, must be rooted in concrete encounter with the poor. The parable of final judgment in the Gospel Matthew 25, 31-46 can be a guide for concrete application and contextualization of gift in the world. We will be judged by our social service to the needy persons. The presence of other is so important for any engagement in Christian witnessing.

## 4. Conclusion

As a summary of this research we note some affirmations concerning the nature and function of gift. First of all, the gift is connected with the origin of human beings and community or society. The terms *donum*, *munus*, and *charis* refers to the ontological fact that our life is given to us by our parents, ultimately by God himself. Our existence is constituted by the presence of other. We are gifted creatures. It is an obligation to live in communion. As a consequence, the purpose of our existence is basically to be part of a community. To live in the spirit of gift implies constitutively a commitment for removing any kinds of exclusion to the other such as oppression, violence, harming and demonizing others, and killing the thousands of infants.

The gift is also perceived as both a kind of social relation and moral category. The conception of the gift denotes human relations and social duty to build a community. Gift as the principle of social relation becomes a norm for our life together. Gift nourishes the quality of human life. The gift constitutes the foundation of our togetherness. At this point, the gift-giving becomes a moral category; it is a gesture of human solidarity and social connection. From the theological point of view, human beings are created for self-giving love and they will find their fulfillment only when they give themselves in communion with and in service

<sup>37</sup> David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82.

to others. The third, gift is linked with sustainability. Logic of gift is that of conservation for the future generation of human beings and the protection of environment. Here, gift is about recognizing the other and caring the future as an integral part of life. Recognizing that all life is a gift entails special responsibilities for care, which can be exercised in many ways, such as accepting moral responsibility for others who put their lives in our hands and engaging in protecting the natural environment.

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