'Accessible, engaging, and informative . . . With its concentration on the attitudes and practices of gratitude, the book deals with an important theme strangely neglected in theological writing. A particular strength is its interaction with recent psychological studies of gratitude; these are drawn into conversation with the historical traditions of both Christianity and Islam. The volume includes several distinguished scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, and its audience will include students of Christian and Islamic thought – especially those interested in recent comparative theology.'

– David Fergusson, Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge

‘This pioneering comparative study in Christian and Muslim understandings of gratitude sets out to reconceptualize something often seen as a self-evident virtue into both ‘a burden and a blessing’ in human and societal relationships. The topic is one underexplored in the theological traditions of either religion beyond its fundamental role in the human relationship with the divine. The book makes an important and original contribution to comparative theology in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and also to the wider humanities – especially in their dialogue with the social sciences.’

– William F. Storrar, Director, Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton
A THEOLOGY OF GRATITUDE

How, from a theological standpoint, should we make sense of gratitude? This rich interdisciplinary volume is the first concertedely to explore theologies of gratitude from both Christian and Muslim perspectives. While the available literature has tended to rhapsodize gratitude to God and others as both a virtue and an obligation, this book by contrast offers something new by detailing ways in which gratitude is complicated by inequality; even to the point of becoming a vice. Gratitude now emerges as something more than a virtue and other than merely transactional. It can be a burden, bringing about indebtedness and an imbalance of power; but it may also be a resonant source of reconciliation and belonging. Topics discussed cover the personal and political dimensions of gratitude, including such issues as justice, multiculturalism, racism, imperialism, grief, memory, and hope. The book assembles, from different traditions, some of the leading thinkers of our times.

MONA SIDDIQUI is Professor of Islamic and Interreligious Studies at the University of Edinburgh. In 2011 she was awarded an OBE for services to interfaith relations. She is the author of many celebrated titles in religion, including – most recently – Christians, Muslims and Jesus (Yale University Press, 2013), My Way (I. B. Tauris, 2014), and Human Struggle (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

A THEOLOGY OF GRATITUDE

Christian and Muslim Perspectives

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Foreword

Rowan Williams

‘Thank God it’s Friday!’ Phrases like this litter our everyday language. We are not just ‘glad’ about certain things, we are ‘thankful’ (i.e. ‘thankfully, the growth turned out not to be malignant’). The proverbial Martian listening in to our conversation might well be slightly puzzled by the use of this kind of speech, especially in a culture where other signs of connection to a transcendent and benevolent presence were a bit sparse. The essays in this welcome book suggest that we would do well to pause and think through that kind of puzzlement. Why do we still act and speak as though it were natural and good for us to respond to our lives and our environment in this kind of register?

A variety of writers, from Heidegger to W. H. Auden, have riffed on the closeness of ‘thinking’ and ‘thanking’ (in German as well as English); it seems that there is something about how our minds explore the reality we encounter that instinctively reaches for words expressing a sense of something being offered, bestowed. Reality unfolds itself to us, it does not simply sit there waiting for us to analyse, manipulate, and exploit. We turn a corner, breast a hill, catch a sound, recognize a face, and the first reaction is what C. S. Lewis famously called being ‘surprised by joy’. What we have experienced is something we could not generate for ourselves. We cannot feel or say that we are grateful to ourselves; we may be pleased with ourselves, we may congratulate ourselves, but not even an ego of Trumpian proportions could intelligibly be grateful to itself. Gratitude is about what we have neither earned nor expected, about life beyond our control. This out-of-control dimension is indeed an understandable source of anxiety; we suffer because of what we cannot foresee or cannot avoid, and there is no credibility in a Pollyanna-ish denial of the intolerable harshness of so much human life. Yet that is never the whole picture: when this life beyond our control impacts on us in a way that creates wonder and delight, an enlarged space for our minds and hearts, we acknowledge it as if it were genuinely given to us, not just an accident.
The most hard-nosed of sceptics will from time to time admit the power of the urge to give thanks – not just to celebrate or enjoy but to be grateful. Thinking adequately about our world in the fullest sense of the word seems inevitably to include this diffused and perhaps even confused acknowledgement of surprise and joyous novelty. And this is reflected most vividly in the German idiom *es gibt . . .*, meaning ‘there is [something or other]’: literally, ‘it gives’.

Religious believers in most traditions naturally make sense of this in terms of an unbounded agency of creative love which does indeed ‘bestow’, which graces us with life, joy, beauty. Even in a tradition such as Buddhism that is not committed to any doctrines about a ‘personal’ divine agency, the mindful and thankful acknowledgement of all that is received from the interwoven structure of the universe we experience is understood as the appropriate attitude to adopt. And both for the believer and the unbeliever, the point is – as perhaps the Buddhist instance confirms – that the language of gratitude is salutary and humanizing. It radically undermines some of the most dangerous and poisonous habits of the human heart – the hunger for control and the desire to know that we have earned what we enjoy. To be thankful recognizes our lack of control because it allows for our capacity to be surprised; and it reminds us as sharply as could be that joy is not a thing that can be earned. Turning the corner, breasting the hill and so on have nothing to do with either a plan that is being put into operation or a reward commensurate with effort. The philological resonance between gratefulness and grace is no accident.

Cultures like Western modernity which so prize ‘mastery’ and are so insistently moralistic about economies of merit and reward are bound to be disrupted in some measure by this language. If we think about the last twelve months in the UK, one of the recurrent themes in public discussion has been the discovery of deep appreciation for a lot of what might be thought ‘routine’ things – devoted medical attention, carefully maintained public services, family intimacies. We have been prompted to think about what it is in us that gives rise to the sense of receiving gratuitous benefits.

I think that the popular outpouring of thanks to the National Health Service in particular was a recognition not only of contracted work well done but of a generosity and humanity in the doing of it that went well beyond anything we could purchase or deserve – though it was equally right to raise the question of whether the actual rewards of workers in the NHS and other public services for doing what they are contracted to do are at all adequate. A season of pressure, loneliness, confusion and frustration had at least one or two positive results to the extent that individuals began
to acknowledge the inadequacy of ‘mastery and merit’ – based ideas of how we manage our human life together.

And this is one of the things that make this volume so timely. If the pandemic leads to some re-setting of the coordinates of our value system, as many hope, the place of thankfulness will be a prominent theme in the process. Gratitude is not an indifferent extra in the human repertoire of behaviour; thankfulness towards our whole environment is not a ghostly remnant of vanished belief. Without the recognition of amazement and joy at receiving what we have not earned, without that disturbing suspicion that the abundant reality we do not control might in some unfathomable sense be enriching and enabling us, we should be much less than human – and much less than free – when we look at the individual and collective slaveries that result from the culture of mastery and merit.
Preface

Mona Siddiqui and Nathanael Vette

When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude. — G. K. Chesterton

In 2018, I was awarded a grant by the Issachar Fund to explore the topic of gratitude. I was given full freedom to explore gratitude as a scholarly subject while also creating public awareness of this topic. I knew from the outset that despite the dominant sentiment which sees gratitude as a virtue, a scholarly and intellectual enterprise would need to problematize the concept as both a blessing and a burden. I was fortunate enough to appoint Nathanael Vette who at the time was a PhD student in New Testament Studies in the Divinity School at the University of Edinburgh. Nathanael has helped me oversee the whole project but more importantly, he has been a gracious intellectual partner in all aspects of our work, especially in compiling the chapters for this volume; I am deeply grateful to him for his dedication and support. — Mona Siddiqui

In recent years, gratitude has become a popular subject in fields as diverse as moral philosophy and positive psychology, so much so that Professor Robert A. Emmons, from the University of California, Davis, can speak of an emerging ‘global gratitude movement’. Emmons, acknowledged by many as the leading expert on the psychology of gratitude, writes that ‘Gratitude is a way of seeing that alters our gaze.’ He writes that ‘Gratitude can be distilled into the simple premise that life owes me nothing, that all the good that I have is a blessing and that nothing should be taken for granted.’ Despite the fact that gratitude occupies a central place in Christian and Islamic thought, theological literature has rarely dwelt with the topic beyond the divine–human matrix. Beyond acknowledging gratitude as a virtue, where God is its proper object, most theologians tend to limit the discussion to divine gift-giving whilst overlooking...
the role of gratitude in society and between persons. In Islam, gratitude is often spoken of via human ingratitude, arguably tantamount to unbelief itself. However, this theological centrality has meant that less attention has been paid to other more burdensome aspects of gratitude; namely, feelings of indebtedness and the imbalance of power gratitude can often create between peoples, communities, and nations.

This present collection is the first to gather leading Christian and Muslim voices, from multiple disciplines, to critically examine the role of gratitude along three axes: the theological, the personal, and the political. Over the course of eighteen months and three workshops, a range of scholars were invited, not necessarily as experts in the field, but as people who were interested in communicating their ideas within a dialogical framework. This structure where Christian and Islamic perspectives can engage in a mutually rewarding intellectual exercise gives these conversations a deeper texture. These voices did not come together to agree on any principles or create any grand narratives, but simply to have different conversations about why gratitude matters. It would be fair to say that most of the scholars invited did not consider gratitude as their primary research area, but they recognized the centrality of gratitude in their respective faiths. Furthermore, they were keen to be part of a scholarly project which was set in a comparative context, recognizing that our conversations and our thinking are not reduced but enlarged in dialogical settings. The integrity of the scholars and their contributions was evident in all the venues.

Our first workshop was held at the University of Edinburgh in 2018, followed by two further gatherings at the Yale Center for Faith & Culture in 2019 and the British University in Dubai in 2020. Our thanks to our colleagues for their warm generosity in welcoming us and hosting the workshops. We are well aware of the importance of food in fostering collegiality and friendship and would like to thank in particular Sanctuary Kitchen in Connecticut. Their work reflects the essence of gratitude as they partner with immigrants and refugees to create economic opportunities and connections through food.

This volume explores gratitude within three themes: gratitude and God, gratitude and humanity, and gratitude and society. Rowan Williams introduces the volume by reflecting on the timeliness of gratitude amidst the compounded crises of the present. Following this, Part I examines relationships of gratitude between God and humankind. Whereas theological literature has tended to rhapsodize gratitude to God as both a virtue and an obligation, these essays offer fresh perspectives by detailing ways in which divine-oriented gratitude is complicated by creatureliness, even to
the point of becoming a vice. The section opens with Miroslav Volf and
Ryan McAnnally-Linz on whether the obligation of the Christian to be
grateful to God should be construed as a burden. By placing Martin
Luther and Anthony Kronman in dialogue with each other, Volf and
McAnnally-Linz take issue with the debt-creating view of gratitude as
repayment, proposing in its place an account of gratitude as a joyful
recognition of the divine gift-giver. Martin Nguyen follows by showing
how the Qur’anic understanding of gratitude to God spills out into other
relationships, so that all ethics is founded on the response to divine
benefaction: as righteous deeds are incomplete without gratitude to God,
gratitude to God is incomplete without righteous deeds. Tom Greggs
examines how creaturely gratitude has been disrupted by the Fall, but is
restored by grace. Rather than accepting the Thomist or Calvinist account
of gratitude as an obligation, stemming from the Fall, Greggs sees true
creaturely gratitude as a movement within grace, in anticipation of
redemption; an outpouring of thankfulness into all areas of life. Concluding
the section is Atif Khalil, who evaluates the discourse of
gratitude in positive psychology through the Sufi understanding of divine
benefaction and gratitude (shukr). Building on the work of Ibn ‘Arabi,
Khalil disputes the uncritical account of gratitude as a universal good.
Rather, if exercised for the wrong reasons, or towards the wrong benefac-
tors, gratitude can become a vice.

Part II examines relationships of gratitude along a horizontal axis by
analysing how structures, social and relational, affect expressions of grati-
tude between persons. Robert A. Emmons opens the section by exploring
how a virtue ethics account of gratitude may address ways in which people
experience negative effects of gratitude. On the one hand, virtue ethics
would question whether harmful expressions of gratitude could be consid-
ered gratitude in the first place. But on the other hand, aligning gratitude
indiscriminately with the good strips it of meaning and power. To resolve
this dilemma, Emmons argues, a more careful understanding of gratitude
is needed. Peter J. Leithart takes Thomas Aquinas to Starbucks to illustrate
how gratitude between persons is complicated by commercial transactions.
But rather than eliminating gratitude, Leithart finds a place for gratitude in
a money economy, when it is subordinated to the divine economy of love,
which is founded on the notion of God as giver. Linn Marie Tonstad
follows by asking whether a person’s experience of gratitude is determined
internally or externally; put otherwise, do we choose to be grateful for the
good that it will do us, or is gratitude a spontaneous response to the good
outside of our control? Tonstad faults the popular effort–reward and
cause–effect accounts of gratitude, which cultivate gratitude for its own sake, for failing to acknowledge the gratuity of gratitude, with its basis in the undeserved and uncontrollable nature of the gift, whilst ignoring the conditions of injustice that allow for one’s experience of gratitude. Joshua Ralston concludes the section by comparing Schleiermacher and al-Ghazali on the relationship of gratitude with divine providence. Ralston illustrates the utter dependency of gratitude with Schleiermacher’s own reflections at the death of his young son, Nathanael.

Part III casts a wider net by assessing the role of gratitude in the socio-political sphere, particularly the ways in which gratitude, as an emotion and expression, can both challenge and inscribe modes of injustice. Mona Siddiqui opens the section by detailing how British multiculturalism has ceded to a politics of resentment, fuelled by anti-immigrant and often anti-Muslim sentiment. She draws on the writings of Georg Simmel for whom gratitude fosters emotional and social bonds, countering a narrative of resentment with one of recognition. Rather than seeking an answer in abstract theories of multiculturalism, Siddiqui argues for a refocusing on emotional well-being through gratitude rooted in empathy. Anthony Reddie offers a history and indictment of anti-Blackness in British Christianity and politics, from its imperial origins to the Brexit referendum and the Windrush scandal. Through the act of truth-telling, Black Theology aims to dismantle the veneration of Whiteness at the heart of British Christianity. To counter the narrative of exclusion with belonging, reparations must be made, for which the biblical example of Zacchaeus serves as a model. But as long as the apparatus of Empire remains operative in British Christianity, Reddie wonders whether gratitude is possible for Black people of the Windrush generation. Continuing the focus on Empire, Nathanael Vette traces the anti-Semitic image of the ‘ungrateful Jew’ through its Christian usage to its origin in the imperial rhetoric of the first-century CE. Vette describes how imperial rhetoric employs racial stereotypes to demarcate dominator and dominated, thereby inscribing hierarchy and difference. Then, as now, gratitude can become weaponized in the service of Empire; but as the first-century CE Jewish author, Josephus, explains, gratitude can also disrupt imperial discourse. Joshua Forstenzer follows by giving an account of Cornel West’s prophetic understanding of gratitude, itself a distillation of West’s existentialist world-view. As Forstenzer shows, gratitude is the foundation upon which West builds the conditions for overcoming the injustices of racism and inequality which are achieved through the mobilization of social movements. Westian gratitude is, above all, a recognition of those who came
before, as well as a hope that sustains the long road to justice. And finally, in her afterword, Anna Rowlands responds to the volume’s focus on the politics of (in)gratitude, showing how refugee regimes have weaponized gratitude to maintain inequality and injustice, but also how gratitude – as recounted by refugees themselves – has been a powerful vehicle for hope through acts of remembrance.

In addition to the scholarly enterprise, our project on gratitude also focused on public engagement throughout 2018–2022. Through a series of competitions, prizes, and podcasts, we have raised awareness of our research in collaboration with other institutions, both educational and religious, in an effort to encourage new social ventures and create public impact. We offer just two examples of our outreach work. The first of these was the Issachar Fund Community Prize, awarded in partnership with the Christian Muslim Forum, the Bradford: Stronger Communities Partnership and the Bishop of Bradford. For the award, not-for-profit organizations in the Bradford–Leeds area in West Yorkshire submitted 500-word descriptions of how the concept of gratitude featured in their work in the community. Of these, two were selected for a prize of £500 in recognition of their community work. The awards were presented at the ‘Gratitude in Community’ event at Bradford Cathedral, 5 December 2019. The event was hosted by Mona Siddiqui, Bishop Toby Howarth, and Catriona Robertson of the Christian Muslim Forum. The Issachar Fund Community Prize recognized two charities: Touchstone, a Methodist initiative bringing women of different faiths into community; and BIASAN, the Bradford Immigration and Asylum Seekers Support and Advice Network.

The second public project was an art competition in collaboration with the internationally renowned Glasgow School of Art. Graduate students of fine arts were invited to propose artworks that reflected the ‘concept of gratitude in any one of its spiritual, personal, socio-political or environmental dimensions [and] what it means to be grateful, to whom one should be grateful, and the tensions in approaching gratitude as a human virtue’. On the strength of the proposal, the prize-winning candidate would be commissioned to produce the proposed artwork. The Issachar Fund Art Prize (worth £1000) was awarded to Soniya Ahmed, an Iraqi-Kurdish student working towards an MLitt in Fine Art Practice at the Glasgow School of Art. The winning artwork was unveiled in Dubai at the ‘Gratitude: Inclusion or Privilege?’ workshop at the British University in Dubai on 12 January 2020. The outreach aspect of the project recognizes the sense of hope and community which gratitude invokes.
This project on gratitude has been immensely enjoyable and humbling. We hope that this volume provides a faithful insight into the many ways in which gratitude can be construed and realized in all aspects of human life. We are thankful and indebted to our friends and colleagues who have made this volume possible and to the Issachar Fund for their trust and generous award. From March 2020, the world began to gradually shut down owing to the spread of the COVID-19 virus and its variants. This collection of essays reflects the polyvalent meanings of gratitude, set against the pandemic which continues to be traumatic for many. Yet, the events of the last two years have also led to new ways of expressing hope and individual and societal thankfulness.
Abbreviations

2 Bar. 2 Baruch
2 Esdr. 2 Esdras
3 Macc 3 Maccabees
Alleg. Interp. Philo, Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis
Ant. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities
Ben. Seneca, De Beneficiis
CT Comparative Theology
Dial. Justin, Dialogue with Trypho
Disc. Epictetus, Discourses
DLT Darton, Longman & Todd
Enarrat. Ps. Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos
Ep. Traj. Pliny the Younger, Epistulae ad Trajanum
FDES Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher
Gos. Nic. The Gospel of Nicodemus
Hist. Tacitus, Histories
Hom. Chrysostom, Homilies
HTR Harvard Theological Review
HUCA Hebrew Union College Annual
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| JBL | *Journal of Biblical Literature* |
| JTS | *Journal of Theological Studies* |
| J.W. | Josephus, *The Jewish War* |
| KEK | Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament |
| LCL | *Loeb Classical Library* |
| Lev. Rab. | Leviticus Rabbah |
| Lives | Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* |
| NICNT | New International Commentary on the New Testament |
| Off. | Cicero, *De officiis* |
| Or. | Gregory Nazianzus, *Orationes* |
| Pat. | Cyprian, *De bono patientiae* |
| Pat. | Tertullian, *De patientia* |
| Q. | Qur’ān |
| Ques. Exod. | Philo, *Questions and Answers on Exodus* |
| Rom. Ant. | Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* |
| Rom. Hist. | Dio Cassius, *Roman History* |
| SNTSMS | Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series |
| SPCK | Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge |
| WBC | Westminster Bible Companion |